

## THE ASSEMBLY

19 MAY 2004

### REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

PETITION: REGARDING THE COUNCIL'S DECISION ON COMMUNITY HALLS		FOR DECISION
<p><i>The Constitution (Article 2, paragraph 15) requires petitions containing more than 50 signatories from separate households to be reported to the Assembly, together with details of action taken or proposed.</i></p> <p><b>Summary</b> To report the receipt of a petition containing 975 individual signatures asking the Council to reconsider the decision in relation to the future management of Community Halls.</p> <p>A meeting was held with the Lead Petitioners on 3 February 2004 at which the Portfolio Holder and Councillor Waker were present. The petitioners expressed concerns about the ability of the Community Associations to be able to take on the running of the halls given the costs involved and the fact that the Community Associations generally consist of volunteers, many of whom are past retirement age.</p> <p><b>Recommendation</b> The Assembly is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) note that a meeting was held with the Lead Petitioners</li><li>(ii) agree that Officers continue to work with the Associations with a view to implementing the Executive's decision of July 22 2003 with the aim of transferring community halls to full local management and the granting of 21 year leases by 31 March 2005.</li></ul> <p><b>Reason</b> To assist the Council in achieving its Community Priority of <i>"Developing Rights and Responsibilities with the Local Community"</i> and in achieving its Medium Term Financial plan.</p>		
<p><b>Wards Affected</b> – Community Halls are situated in 12 of the Borough's wards, however, the 17 Community Halls are available for use by all members of the community.</p>		
<b>Contact</b> Teresa Parish	Group Manager Leisure Community Services	Tel: 020 - 82273313 Fax: 020 – 8227 3129 Minicom: 020 – 8227 3034 E-mail: <a href="mailto:teresa.parish@lbbd.gov.uk">teresa.parish@lbbd.gov.uk</a>

## 1. Background

1.1 At its meeting on 22 July 2003 the Executive received a report from the Director of Corporate Strategy and agreed to the acceleration of the Community Halls Strategy which aims to pass the management and cost of running community halls to Community Associations. As a result, in order to achieve a £350,000 reduction in the Community Halls budget as part of the approved financial savings package for the next three years it was agreed that:

- The programme of transferring community halls to full local management and the granting of 21 year leases be accelerated;
- A one-off sum of £60,000 be made available for the legal work on leases and external support for self-management, to be funded by the savings;
- In the event that a Community Association cannot, or is unwilling to manage a hall and meet its running costs, the hall be taken over by the Council and run on a break-even basis, or closed down and disposed of; and
- To investigate, where appropriate, alternative management arrangements that would contribute to the savings target.

The Executive also noted that the savings in the report would be reduced to reflect the phasing-in over 18 months, but £350,000 is the required saving over three years.

It was requested that Community Matters, a national organisation for the development of Community Halls/Community Associations which could help the process by providing support and training to Community Associations, make a presentation to Councillors at the Assembly.

1.2 As a result of this decision a petition has been received containing 975 individual signatures, representing 686 individual addresses. Of those, there were 123 addresses with multiple names; 88 people gave no address just the group that they were with; 57 gave no full address. Although the petition was received from one Lead Petitioner some of the sheets had been completed by different Community Associations, as a result there is some duplication of names and addresses on some of the sheets. The Petition stated:

*“ BARKING AND DAGENHAM COMMUNITY HALLS*

*WE THE UNDERSIGNED DEPLORE THE ACTION TAKEN BY THIS COUNCIL BY DECIDING TO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THE RUNNING OF LOCAL COMMUNITY CENTRES, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT MEANS THAT LOCAL ORGANISATIONS WHICH CATER FOR THE TODDLERS, YOUTH AND THE ELDERLY OF THE AREA WILL HAVE TO DISBAND. THESE HALLS WERE BUILT WITH LOCAL MONEY AND MAINTAINED BY LOCAL MONEY, YET WE THE LOCAL TAXPAYERS HAVE NO SAY IN THIS MATTER. WE URGE THE COUNCIL TO THINK AGAIN.”*

- 1.3 A meeting was held with the Lead Petitioners on 3 February 2004 at which the Portfolio Holder and Councillor Waker were present. The petitioners expressed concerns about the ability of the Community Associations to be able to take on the running of the halls given the costs involved and the fact that the Community Associations generally consist of volunteers, many of whom are past retirement age.
- 1.4 The Petitioners felt that the 18 month accelerated programme would result in a number of Community Associations not being in a position to sign lease agreements, which could result in the halls being closed. They stated that they felt a more staged approach with the Associations directly paying some of the costs associated with running a hall (i.e. utility costs) as a first step before taking on the whole of the running costs would have given a better chance of the Associations succeeding in the long-term.
- 1.5 Another concern for the Community Associations is the responsibility of the maintenance of the building and their own personal liability should a major repair become necessary.
- 1.6 The reasons behind the Council's decision were explained to the Petitioners. They were also advised that the Council is not seeking to disassociate itself from Community Halls and that support in terms of the Community Development Officers would still be available to them. Discussions were also had regarding the possibility of halls working together with one management committee assisting with the running of one or more halls where there was the capacity within individual community associations.

## **2. Current Position**

- 2.1 Community Matters commenced work with Community Associations in January 2004. A number of training days have been made available to members of Community Associations, covering a range of topics. A consultant has also been attending Community Associations' committee meetings and advising the committees on development plans. This is to assist them in moving towards local management of their community halls.
- 2.2 Community Development Officers have continued to support the Community Associations and meet regularly with individual associations and the Community Association Federation, which was formed towards the end of 2003. The Group Manager Leisure Community Services also meets the Chair of the Federation on a six weekly basis to discuss issues relating to the work of the Federation and progress being made with associations in achieving the Council's policy.
- 2.3 Currently one Association has indicated that they do not feel they will be in a position to take on a lease for their community hall and alternative methods of managing the hall in partnership with this Association and other agencies/organisations are being explored.

### **3. The Future**

- 3.1 Work will continue with Community Associations and Officers will be able to assess by the end of this year which Community Associations will be in a position to take on a lease and the responsibility for their hall.
- 3.2 Where self-management will not be possible, Officers will develop an exit strategy to assist groups to find alternative accommodation.

### **3. Consultation**

Councillor Wade, Portfolio Holder for Developing Rights and Responsibilities with the Local Community and Promoting Equal Opportunities and Celebrating Diversity  
Councillor Waker, Village Ward  
Bob Cooper, Interim Head of Finance, LESD

<b>Background Papers</b>
Executive Report and Minute 57, 22 July 2003 Re: Community Halls - Savings Package
Petition