

MAYOR AND CABINET (CONTRACTS)			
<b>Report Title</b>	Voluntary Sector Accommodation		
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes	Item No.	
<b>Ward</b>	All		
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director for Community Services		
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date:	22 April 2015

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide feedback on the recent consultation into how the Council proposes to use its assets to support the voluntary and community sectors and to seek approval for the recommended approach.

## 2. Recommendations

Mayor and Cabinet (Contracts) is recommended to:

- 2.1 note the consultation process into how the Council proposes to use its assets to support the voluntary and community sectors and the outcome of that consultation as set out in sections 5-7 and Appendices A and B of this report;
- 2.2 approve the proposed approach for using Council assets to support the voluntary and community sector as outlined at paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of this report; and
- 2.3 agree the development of an implementation plan to be brought back to Mayor and Cabinet (Contracts) for approval within 6 months.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1 Lewisham has a long history of working with the third sector and empowering residents and communities. The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the Local Strategic Partnership's commitment to creating a borough that is:

**Empowered and Responsible:** where people are actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities.

- 3.2 This is reflected in Lewisham's Corporate Priorities:

**Community Leadership and empowerment:** developing opportunities for the active participation and engagement of people in the life of the community.

- 3.3 Lewisham is fortunate to have a diverse third sector which ranges from very small organisations with no paid staff through to local branches of national charities. As well as being directly involved in delivering services to citizens in the borough, third sector organisations also provide the essential

infrastructure to allow the sector as a whole to develop and support individual citizens to be able to play an active role within their local communities.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1 Currently the Council supports a number of VCS organisations to access certain facilities (i.e. Council owned assets). There are currently 41 Council assets within the community premises portfolio including 23 community centres, 3 sports grounds and 15 buildings housing VCS organisations. In addition there are other properties that are used as community libraries and early years provision, as well as a range of other services commissioned from VCS organisations that are not part of the community premises portfolio but are within the Council's estate.
- 4.2 Across these assets occupancy levels vary greatly, though the average of approximately 30% occupancy within the community centres portfolio, shows that there is real potential to manage usage more effectively. Additionally there are currently a wide range of different lease and management agreements for occupants. This situation is potentially inequitable for organisations and makes the management and maintenance of these assets more complicated.
- 4.3 As part of the Council's fundamental review of all its budgets, it has been looking at the costs of maintaining its range of assets and the potential income that these assets could generate for the Council that could be used to fund other services. In order to release substantial revenues savings and therefore safeguard frontline service delivery, the Council is in the process of reducing its public buildings. This work has already commenced with the transfer of staff working in the Catford complex into Laurence House, and the changed use of the Town Hall.

#### **5 Content of Consultation**

- 5.1 In November 2014 Mayor and Cabinet agreed to consult on a proposed new approach to using Council assets to support the voluntary and community sector. The consultation document is attached at Appendix A.
- 5.2 The Council recognises that being able to access property at affordable rates is very important to the continued success of VCS organisations. This needs to be balanced with the need to make the best use of the Council's assets, and ensure an open and transparent allocation of limited resources.
- 5.3 In considering how best to use Council assets to support the voluntary and community sector we have developed the following principles:
  - It is recognised that the demand for subsidised space will always outstrip the available resources and it is therefore essential to have a process for allocating support that is open and transparent.
  - Lease and hire arrangements should be equitable.
  - Council Assets used by VCS organisations need to be fully optimised to ensure the Council is achieving best value for its residents.
  - The overall cost to the Council of assets used by VCS organisations should be reduced in order to release savings.
  - The model for the use of Council assets to support VCS organisations in the future should allow some flexibility for changing needs.

- The model should support the Council's partnership approach
- Enabling VCS organisations to access Council assets is a way of supporting the sector.
- The model should help the sector to help themselves by optimising the use of their resources.

5.4 The consultation document looked at three possible options two of which were not considered suitable as they did not meet the principles outlined in section 5.3 above. The first of these options was to continue with the existing arrangements. Although this would have the advantage of causing no disruption it would not address underutilisation of assets, release any savings or address the issue of transparency and flexibility in allocating assets. The second option was to adopt a full cost recovery model for use of assets. Although this option would release savings and be equitable it did not meet the objective of providing some affordable premises.

5.5 The final option that was proposed was rationalisation with a transparent allocation system. This option would see the Council adopt a set of four categories that would inform the allocation of space within a reduced number of Council assets to VCS organisations. The proposed categories are set out below.

- **Sole occupancy of a building (not at full market rate)** – This would be a building, wholly utilised by one VCS organisation. In order for an organisation to have sole occupancy of a building it would need to demonstrate a need for specialist facilities that could not be provided elsewhere and/or within a shared facility. The organisation would need to demonstrate that it can't afford full market rate. The organisation would also need to be delivering services that meet our priorities.
- **Voluntary and Community Sector Hub** – This would be a shared building with all inclusive affordable rents. This would be the preferred category for organisations that are providing services that meet our priorities (and cannot demonstrate the need for specialist facilities above). The Hubs will provide office and meeting space. Activity space where appropriate and possible may also be provided, otherwise this would need to be hired elsewhere.
- **Community Centre** – This would be a neighbourhood based facility with activity space that is predominantly geared towards providing services at a neighbourhood level. Community Centres currently have a range of different terms and conditions, some are on full repairing leases, some directly provided and others managed by Premises Management Organisations (PMOs) but with Repairs & Maintenance provided by the Council. Many community centres are currently underutilised and we would be looking to rationalise the number of centres taking into account what other community facilities are available in the area. As the number of centres is reduced we would work to reduce the overall financial burden to the Council and put in place equitable arrangements across the portfolio.
- **Sole occupancy of a building at full market rate** – This would be for larger VCS organisations that can afford to pay full market rates or for those that are not delivering services that meet our priorities. These organisations would still be able to access buildings (where available) on the Council's standard letting terms and conditions.

- 5.6 The advantages of this approach are that it should ensure optimal usage of facilities, help increase collaborative working between organisations and assist with the Council's wider asset rationalisation programme. It would also provide an open and transparent way of allocating resources and the hubs would be designed to offer flexibility. The disadvantages are that there would be disruption for organisations that needed to relocate as a result of moving to the new model. Some underutilised community centres would close. This approach was set out as the Council's preferred option and was the main focus of the consultation.

## **6. Consultation Process**

- 6.1 Following agreement by Mayor and Cabinet to consult on a new approach to using Council assets to support the voluntary and community sectors, a consultation pack was made available on the Council website and widely publicised through local networks. A consultation event was held on 4th February 2015 and the consultation was discussed at the meeting of the Stronger Communities Partnership Board on 11th February 2015.
- 6.2 There were 28 attendees at the consultation event and eleven written responses (which are included at appendix B).

## **7. Consultation Outcome**

- 7.1 The overall outcome of the consultation was a recognition for the need for change and support for the proposed approach. However one organisation supported the option of no change and keeping current arrangements and a number of organisations expressed their opposition to any building closures. One respondent felt that the consultation process was flawed and that insufficient information had been provided for respondents to make an informed response. Most respondents agreed that the third option was the best way forward and did not have any other suggested options that the Council should consider. However, there were numerous comments on how the policy should be implemented.
- 7.2 A key area of concern was the future arrangements for repairs and maintenance of buildings with organisations reporting increasing difficulties with current arrangements. It was accepted that reducing the number of buildings within the community premises portfolio would make it more sustainable to maintain the remaining assets. It is clear that the agreements around repairs and maintenance and responsibility for compliance with statutory requirements relating to buildings will be a crucial element of the implementation plan.
- 7.3 A number of respondents raised the need to ensure that there was a geographical spread with the assets that are retained and that the plan would need to consider the longer term needs rather than just respond to a short term financial imperative. The implementation plan will take these comments into account.
- 7.4 There were comments about the period of notice that would be required to enable organisations to be able to plan and prepare for change. There was a strong call from a number of respondents to encourage organisations to bid to take on buildings that they were currently occupying through community asset transfers. There was a request for further information about the running costs

of buildings to be provided and support to be made available to organisations that wished to pursue an asset transfer. It is proposed to take a phased approach to the implementation and this will be detailed in the implementation plan. In relation to community asset transfer this would not be ruled out but would need to be considered alongside the overall strategic assets plan for the borough including the urgent need for space for housing and schools places. The ability of the organisation to be able to maintain the asset and for it not to become a liability would also need careful consideration. The role of community asset transfer will be further explored within the implementation plan.

- 7.5 The idea of creating VCS hubs bringing a number of organisations together to share office space, was supported. One respondent commented that encouraging these organisations to hire activity space in other buildings would help with financial sustainability. A suggestion was made that protocols for sharing space and resolving disputes would be needed.
- 7.6 Some organisations used the consultation process to make the case for the continued use of the asset that they currently occupy. A number of factors were raised including listed building status, the current cost to the Council of the asset, levels of usage etc. These comments will be taken into consideration in developing the implementation plan.
- 7.7 One respondent requested that the Council provide more assistance to organisations wishing to attract external funding from other sources.
- 7.8 A number of respondents raised concern over the impact on low income families and residents of any reduction to the amount of community space available in the borough. In developing the implementation plan this will need to be carefully considered and the availability of other spaces in schools and non Council facilities will be factored in.
- 7.9 One respondent suggested that the refurbishment of premises could be linked to youth employment projects and offering apprenticeship opportunities. Linking to the newly established construction training academy and existing apprenticeship programmes will be considered where possible.
- 7.10 At the consultation event there was a discussion about the changing role of community centres and what type of facility was needed. There was some discussion about the appropriate size of space and the need for digital access. It was also suggested that the role of social housing landlords in the delivery of community centres should be further explored. One of the written respondents also raised the need to ensure involvement of local residents in the management of community centres.
- 7.11 A number of respondents queried the occupation levels quoted in the consultation document. This was a valid point as the 30% occupancy only relates to hireable space not ongoing office accommodation. It was pointed out that there is in fact a waiting list for office accommodation. This is the case and one of the aims of the proposed approach is to establish community hubs to offer more affordable shared office accommodation rather than organisations having their own premises.
- 7.12 Although affordability of space was a key concern for respondents there was also concern expressed about the Council not always achieving the best level

of income from assets and one respondent listed a number of buildings that they felt had underachieved on rental income.

- 7.13 One respondent felt that the consultation was being considered in isolation from other council policies. This is not the case. The proposals have been developed alongside the council's main grants programme and will form part of the Council's strategic asset management plan. The same respondent made the assumption that if it was decided that premises would no longer be used for their current purpose then the council would seek to dispose of them. This is not necessarily the case. Each asset would be looked at individually and there are a range of possible options including using sites for key priorities such as school places and housing.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 This report describes the proposed approach to using Council assets to support the voluntary and community sector. It is anticipated that this will include a rationalisation of the current portfolio of buildings which will in turn contribute towards the agreed savings target for Corporate Asset Services. Details of any savings will be included in the implementation Plan that will be brought to Mayor and Cabinet within 6 months.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1 Under S1 of the Localism Act 2011 the Council has a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do unless it is expressly prohibited.
- 9.2 The giving of support to voluntary organisations is a discretionary power which must be exercised reasonably taking into account all relevant considerations and ignoring irrelevant considerations.
- 9.3 Under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council is required to obtain best consideration for the disposal of its assets. Any disposal at less than best consideration requires Secretary of State's consent. This includes the grant of any lease for longer than 7 years. The requirement does not apply to the grant of a lease for less than 7 years. However, the Council is still required to act reasonably in agreeing lease terms and to have regard to its fiduciary duty to the Council Tax payers. The proposed approach is designed to ensure that where a building is let other than at a market rate, this will be justified by the delivery of services that meet the Council's priorities.
- 9.4 The Council will only be able to require existing organisations in Council assets to be moved to the new model or relocated where the Council is legally entitled to terminate the existing occupancy arrangements or agreement is reached on a voluntary basis.
- 9.3 In relation to any consultation exercise sufficient reasons must be given for any proposal, adequate time must be given for consideration and response and the outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account by the decision maker.

## **10. Equalities Legislation**

- 10.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 10.2 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 10.3 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.
- 10.4 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:  
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

## **11. Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 11.1.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **12. Equality Implications**

- 12.1 There were concerns raised by a number of respondents about the potential impact of the implementation of the proposed approach on some communities in particular African and Caribbean communities. It was raised that consideration would need to be given to the impact on different protected characteristics as part of the implementation plan. Particular concern was raised about the impact on older people by Lewisham Pensioners Forum.
- 12.2 An Equalities Impact Analysis will be produced as part of the Implementation Plan and the impact on individual protected characteristics of the implementation of the new policy approach to using Council assets to support the voluntary and community sectors will be further assessed at that time.

### **13. Environmental Implications**

- 13.1 Many of the current portfolio of community premises are not energy efficient and the environmental implications of rationalising these assets will be further considered as part of the implementation plan.

#### **Background Documents**

**None**

For further information please contact Liz Dart, Head of Culture and Community Development on 020 9314 8637 or [liz.dart@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:liz.dart@lewisham.gov.uk)





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# London Borough of Lewisham

## **Consultation: Future support of the Council's Community Assets to the Voluntary and Community Sector.**

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January 2015

Cultural and Community Development Service  
2nd Floor, Laurence House  
1 Catford Road, London SE6 4RU  
Community.Enterprise@lewisham.gov.uk

## Part 1 – About this Consultation

### Topic of this consultation

1. This consultation is asking for your views on the way in which council assets, such as community centres, sports grounds and other buildings, will provide support to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the future.

### Audience

2. The consultation is aimed at voluntary and community organisations that provide services in London Borough of Lewisham, particularly those that currently use Council facilities or have an interest in using Council facilities in the future. We would also welcome the views of other public or private sector partners who work with the voluntary and community sector in Lewisham.

### Duration

3. The consultation will be open for until 30 March 2015, this is the deadline for responses.

### How to Respond

4. There are several ways to respond to this consultation:
  - By e-mail to:  
Community.Enterprise@lewisham.gov.uk
  - By post to: Grants and Information Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Laurence House, 1 Catford Road, London SE6 4RU
  - By attending the consultation event

There will be consultation meetings on:

4 February 2015 at 7pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Suite, Catford SE6 4RU

Places at this consultation event must be booked in advance by emailing [Community.Enterprise@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:Community.Enterprise@lewisham.gov.uk) . Due to the size of the venue places may need to be limited to one person per organisation.

### After the Consultation

5. Once the consultation has closed all responses will be considered and a summary of responses included in a report going to the meeting of Mayor and Cabinet Contracts in April/May 2015. This report will seek approval for the proposed approach to using council assets to support the voluntary and community sector. There would then be additional individual consultation with organisations that are directly impacted by any of the recommended changes.

## Part 2 – Background

### Background

6. Currently the Council supports a number of VCS organisations to access certain facilities (i.e. Council owned assets).
7. Since May 2010 the council has cut £82 million from its budget. Lewisham Council needs to make a further £85 million reduction to its controllable budget over the next 3 years. This equates to approximately a 30% reduction of the controllable budget. For this reason the council has been undertaking a fundamental review of all its budgets. This includes looking at the costs of maintaining its range of assets and the potential income that these assets could generate for the council that could be used to fund other services.
8. In order to release substantial revenues savings and therefore safeguard frontline service delivery, the council is in the process of reducing its public buildings. This work has already commenced with the transfer of staff working in the Catford complex into Laurence House, and the closure of the Town Hall.
9. There are currently 41 Council assets within the community premises portfolio including 23 community centres, 3 sports grounds and 15 buildings housing VCS organisations. In addition there are other properties that are used as community libraries and early years provision, as well as a range of other services commissioned from VCS organisations that are not part of the community premises portfolio but are within the Council's estate.
10. Across these assets occupancy levels vary greatly, though the average of approximately 30% occupancy within the community premises portfolio, shows that there is real potential to manage usage more effectively. Additionally there are currently a wide range of different lease and management agreements for occupants. This situation is potentially inequitable for organisations and makes the management and maintenance of these assets more complicated.

### Rationale for using council assets to support VCS

11. The council recognises that being able to access property at affordable rates is very important to the continued success of VCS organisations. This needs to be balanced with the need to make the best use of the Council's assets, and ensure an open and transparent allocation of limited resources.
12. In considering how best to use council assets to support the voluntary and community sector we have developed the following principles:
  - It is recognised that the demand for subsidised space will always outstrip the available resources it is therefore essential to have a process for allocating support that is open and transparent.
  - Lease and hire arrangements should be equitable.
  - Council Assets used by VCS organisations need to be fully optimised to ensure the council is achieving best value for its residents.
  - The overall cost to the council of assets used by VCS organisations should be reduced in order to release savings.
  - The model for the use of council assets to support VCS organisations in the future should allow some flexibility for changing needs.
  - The model should support the council's partnership approach

- Enabling VCS organisations to access council assets is a way of supporting the sector.
- The model should help the sector to help themselves by optimising the use of their resources.

## Part 3 – The Proposed Methodology

13. In considering how to use council assets to support the Voluntary and Community Sector in the future, the council has looked at a number of options:
14. **We could retain the current arrangements** - Continue with the current arrangements and agreements with those organisations that are already hiring or leasing council assets. Seek to encourage increased usage of these assets whilst working around the current arrangements.

**Pros:** Minimal disruption for current occupants.

**Cons:** The ability to address underutilisation would be limited if needing to work around existing agreements. This option would have limited ability to release savings as the number of buildings would remain the same. It does not address the lack of transparency in allocating council asset support or offer any future flexibility.

Given the lack of transparency, difficulty to maximise usage and limited ability to release savings this option has been dismissed.

15. **We could ensure ‘Full Cost Recovery’ on any assets that were leased/hired** – A number of councils have started to implement a process of full cost recovery on assets. This would move all VCS organisations onto lease and hire agreements paying full market rents and covering the full costs of the asset.

**Pros:** Equitable arrangement with all organisations being treated the same. Would release savings for the council. Would not require the closure of any existing assets.

**Cons:** Would not meet the objective of providing some affordable space for VCS and as a result could increase pressure on the grant aid budget and/or cause organisations to cease operating. This option does not address the underutilisation of some assets.

Whilst equitable this option would not help support VCS organisations to access affordable space, and could have a negative impact on the sector with organisations folding or struggling to be able to effectively deliver their services. It also may not ensure that all assets are effectively utilised. As such this option has also been dismissed as it doesn’t meet our rationale outlined above.

16. **Rationalisation with a transparent allocation system** - With this option we would adopt a set of four categories that would inform the allocation of space within a reduced number of Council assets to VCS

organisations.

The four proposed categories are as follows;

- 1) Sole occupancy of a building (not at full market rate) – This would be a building, wholly utilised by one VCS organisation. In order for an organisation to have sole occupancy of a building it would need to demonstrate a need for specialist facilities that could not be provided elsewhere and/or within a shared facility. The organisations would need to demonstrate that they can't afford full market rate. The organisations would also need to be delivering services that meet our priorities.
- 2) Voluntary and Community Sector Hub – This would be a shared building with all inclusive affordable rents. This would be the preferred category for organisations that are providing services that meet our priorities (and cannot demonstrate the need for specialist facilities above). The Hubs will provide office and meeting space. Activity space where appropriate and possible may also be provided, otherwise this would need to be hired elsewhere.
- 3) Community Centre – This would be a neighbourhood based facility with activity space that is predominantly geared towards providing services at a neighbourhood level. Community Centres currently have a range of different terms and conditions, some are on full repairing leases, some directly provided and others managed by Premises Management Organisations (PMOs) but with Repairs & Maintenance provided by the council. Many community centres are currently underutilised and we would be looking to rationalise the number of centres taking into account what other community facilities are available in the area. As the number of centres is reduced we would work to reduce the overall financial burden to the council and put in place equitable arrangements across the portfolio.
- 4) Sole occupancy of a building at full market rate – This would be for larger VCS organisations that can afford to pay full market rates or for those that are not delivering services that meet our priorities. These organisations would still be able to access buildings (where available) on the council's standard terms and conditions.

**Pros:** This approach should ensure optimal usage of facilities, help increase collaborative working between organisations and assist with the Council's wider asset rationalisation programme. It would also provide an open and transparent way of allocating resources and the hubs would be designed to offer flexibility.

**Cons:** There would be disruption for organisations that needed to relocate as a result of moving to the new model. Some underutilised community centres would close.

On balance we believe that this categorised approach is the best way in which we can achieve our rationale in a transparent fashion whilst also helping to play a part in the wider council asset rationalisation programme. As such it is upon this approach that we seek your views.

## Part 4 – Key Dates

### 17. Key dates:

16 January 2015	consultation opens
30 March 2015	consultation closes
April/May 2015	Mayor and Cabinet approval of proposed Community Asset Support methodology.
May/June 2015	Consultation with individual organisations on the impact of the agreed Community Assets Methodology.

## Part 5 – Consultation Questions

18. We are happy to receive responses to this consultation in any format and we are particularly keen to hear your views on the following:
- a. The council wishes to retain its commitment to supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector through utilisation of its buildings. Our rationale for this is laid out in paragraphs 11 and 12 above. Do you agree that access to Council buildings for VCS organisations is important? Is there anything missing from the rationale?
  - b. Within this document you can see that we have discussed and then dismissed two approaches (paragraphs 14 and 15 above), do you agree with our reasoning? Are there any other options that we should have considered?
  - c. Our categorised approach (paragraph 16) is our proposed way forwards. Do you feel the suggested categories are the right ones, will they work for the VCS? Do you have any suggestions about how this might be done differently?
  - d. Do you think that the proposed methodology of reducing the number of buildings, and bringing organisations together to share space/buildings where possible is appropriate and fair? If not, why not? How else could this be done?
  - e. Regarding Community Centres, how should the council look to operate these? Should they be Council run? Should they be operated by a VCS organisation on a lease? Somewhere in between?
  - f. We are undertaking an equalities assessment of the proposed methodology. Do you feel that the proposed changes would have a negative or positive impact on Lewisham residents on the basis of their race, gender, faith/religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender assignment or marital status? Please provide comments on the impact you feel the proposed methodology could have, which groups you

feel may be affected and any action you feel we could take to mitigate any potentially negative impact.

- g. Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper, not covered by the above?

## Appendix B – Consultation Responses

Written responses were received from the following organisations:

1. Ackroyd Community Association
2. Action for Community Development (with 17 other organisations)
3. Community Revival Evelyn
4. Grove Park Community Group
5. Happy Days Nursery
6. IRIE!
7. Lewisham Irish Centre
8. Lewisham Pensioners Forum
9. Lewisham Sports Consortium
10. Lochaber Hall Management Committee
11. The Midi Music Company
12. Olivespring

### 1. Ackroyd Community Association

Questions taken as in Part 5.

18a. Yes, it is very important. Nothing to add to Paras 11 & 12.

18b. Agree with reasoning. No further options are available. The chosen option already allows the flexibility that will be needed.

18c. The categorisation is fine and does not need to be changed.

18d. The proposed methodology is both appropriate and fair in all the circumstances.

18e. As the managers of a Community Centre we have a particular interest here. However there is no one size solution that will fit all Community Centres. If there is, or there is the real prospect of, a viable VCS organisation available to run a Centre, then they should be encouraged to get on with it. Where there is not, the Council will need to run it direct and it is doubtful that the money available will stretch to running them all. Some support should still be given to VCS run Centres by promoting collaboration. Access to Council commissioned premises repairs services is actually a must with the VCS organisation paying the bills.

18f. The proposed methodology need not have any equalities impact. But the next stage, where you have to build some kind of assessment criteria will and it will be complex.

18g. No.

Alan Bailey for Ackroyd Community Association

### 2. Action for Community Development

AfCD lead Consultation on the paper: **London Borough of Lewisham Future Support of the Council's Community Assets to the Voluntary and Community Sector. January 2015.**



Held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2015 @ Parker House 144, Evelyn Street Deptford  
London SE8 5DD

**The organisations & projects listed below met to discuss the paper and  
can respond to**

**Part 5 – Consultation Questions in the following way.**

- a) The council wishes to retain its commitment to supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector through utilisation of its buildings. Our rationale for this is laid out in paragraphs 11 and 12 above. Do you agree that access to Council buildings for VCS organisations is important? Is there anything missing from the rationale?

**Yes, we absolutely agree with the Council that buildings for VCS organisations is important. We do however need clarity about the Council's priorities as this should not have a great influence on the decisions today as the priorities are not stagnant, they change in response to national agendas and the needs of an ever changing population.**

**The third sector has a definitive role, it bridges the gap between the statutory and public sector services. This has always been the role of the third sector, organisations develop out of a recognised need within our communities and organisations are set up to meet those needs at a local level. An example of this is Carers Lewisham, 20 years ago no one knew what a carer was, however, are in a very different position of understanding about Carers today.**

- b) Within this document you can see that we have discussed and then dismissed two approaches (paragraphs 14 and 15 above), do you agree with our reasoning? Are there any other options that we should have considered?

**There is currently a waiting list at the council for organisations looking for premises, some agencies have been told the waiting list is up to two years. However your rationale behind the decisions being made is that community or council owned buildings are significantly under occupied, there is clearly a conflict of the rationale and the reality of how these buildings are being managed and the information available.**

***Examples of these are (the examples have been removed to protect confidentiality but included 6 examples of buildings which have been vacant or where rents have not been collected).***

**These are a fraction of the buildings which appear to be ineffectively managed, where third sector organisations could have occupied and the council collecting revenue.**

- c) Our categorised approach (paragraph 16) is our proposed way forwards. Do you feel the suggested categories are the right ones, will they work for the VCS? Do you have any suggestions about how this might be done differently?

**There only appears to be three options here, as options one and four are more or less the same, on offering subsidised rent, and the other offering commercial rent. These two options are very limited as they offer sole occupancy by an organisation, there is the potential for more than one organisations to jointly occupy a building, e.g. floors, or consideration could be given to organisations delivering specific services; e.g. training organisations, carers, children and families or on equality.**

- d) Do you think that the proposed methodology of reducing the number of buildings, and bringing organisations together to share space/buildings where possible is appropriate and fair? If not, why not? How else could this be done?

**The indicators for fairness is not clear, for example is the rationale about how much income the organisation has annually or is it about the number of staff it employs?**

**Is the sharing of facilities to support the organisations to reduce their outgoings / make savings? As an option this should be by free will with the foundation of the decisions being made clear as to why these organisations are being allocated a shared space.**

**Who will be doing the allocation of the shared space? The management of the current buildings will need to be reviewed before more decisions about closing community centres. Income generation options could be considered to prevent the buildings running at a loss (under occupancy). Whilst the Deptford Lounge is a lovely building, consideration of maintaining the old buildings should have been a priority instead of a building which really has only the capacity to support a minimal number of third sector organisations.**

- e) Regarding Community Centres, how should the council look to operate these? Should they be Council run? Should they be operated by a VCS organisation on a lease? Somewhere in between?

**Community Asset Transfer indicates that the assets being transferred should be owned by the not for profit organisation or a collaboration of organisations coming together to run the buildings. Long term leases are not equitable nor what the sector prefers.**

- f) We are undertaking an equalities assessment of the proposed methodology. Do you feel that the proposed changes would have a negative or positive impact on Lewisham residents on the basis of their race, gender, faith/religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender assignment or marital status? Please provide comments on the impact you feel the proposed methodology could have, which groups you feel may be affected and any action you feel we could take to mitigate any potentially negative impact.

**The group which will be affected the most by these building closures is the African and Caribbean communities. The closure of community buildings will relative to our population, disproportionately affect African and Caribbean communities. This is the only groups that also covers all the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010.**

- g) Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper, not covered by the above?

**Yes, The document is vague, the 2010 legislation on Community Asset Transfer is missing from this paper; as is the Locality Act 2011; these must be mechanism used when these decisions are made.**

**The timings for the future consultation events are proposed appear to be in the wrong order: It should read consultation with individual organisations on the impact of the agreed Community Assets Methodology. Then the Mayor and Cabinet approval of proposed Community Asset Support methodology. Otherwise how will we know if our responses have been taken into account?**

**We are concerned that the document talks about the agreed community asset methodology, actually agreements comes when the consultation process has been completed not in the middle of the consultation. We trust the process will continue to be open and transparent throughout this process.**

- 1). Action for Community Development
- 2). Olivespring Consultancy CIC
- 3). Lewisham Sport Consortium
- 4). Capital Training Development Network
- 5). Blackfairs Settlement
- 6). Lewisham Way Community Centre
- 7). Community Legal Centre
- 8). Lewisham Ethnic Minority Partnership
- 9). Sankore Educational Trust
- 10) Lewisham Legal Advice Centre

- 11). Community Volunteering Project
- 12). Inner Genus
- 13). Community Health Project
- 14). Pepys Supplementary School
- 15). Centre for Multi Cultural Development
- 16). Reconcilers Evangelical Ministries
- 17). Multi Sport Academy London
- 18). REM Educational Centre

### 3. Community Revival Evelyn

Community Revival-Evelyn, supports the option to continue with the current arrangement for LBL community centres and assets for the following reasons.

1. We need our community resources. In this community, they are notably 2000 Community Action Centre, Trinity Tenants Hall and Riverside Youth Club. Our community has lost many resources over the years. It is noted Trinity Tenants Hall has a 'to let' sign on it. At present 2000 Community Action Centre appears to prioritise 'for-profit' activities above the needs of the local community such as parties and for-profit café. This has marginalised our community and we are hopeful this will change. However, any further movement from LBL in changing the 'ownership' of the community centre can only further distance the community from what are meant to be our resources.
2. It would be a huge struggle for local grass roots organisations, rooted in the needs of their communities, to find funding for community resources. Mostly we are low income and time poor parents but committed to our communities. If not under the LBL umbrella the risk of 'empire building' by other groups is inevitable. Our community resources will be further taken away.
3. Ongoing developments/gentrifications risk marginalising our communities. For example, with impacts on our community resources and green spaces. Our children already face numerous challenges in feeling poor and squeezed out of opportunities. We need to hold onto and build our community resources, prioritising their services to support our children. For example through homework clubs, health drop-ins (mental, food and physical health) and local mentoring schemes. These community centres also provide essential support for families, in hard times, through food and companionship. For example, community lunches for families and the elderly.
4. Given points 2 and 3 above our voluntary resources are small and would be impossible to take greater responsibility for running our community resources than we already do. Any further change would inevitably move resources from providing our community support to each other to administration. No doubt our community will lose out.

To end, we are a new group bringing together community based groups committed to community development principles. The issue to us is not about disruption caused to existing arrangement through change as the 'pros' state. The issue is about enabling transparent and open access to the community to their resources. The issues of what works locally is of funding and the rights of our communities, families and children to community centres and services.

It is also about having effective resident led management committees with their finger on the pulse of community issues and needs supported by LBL to work with the community to make the community centres and their projects: food, education, health, older people sustainable.

For example: In our centre our community cafe was rented to a private individual without advertising in the local community, without a tender process, without community consultation thereby denying an equal opportunity to the community it serves.

We would agree that LBL needs to scrutinise "non resident "caretaker" management committees" under - utilising buildings, happy to "endeavour" to do a range of activities, spend main grants "community development funding" on consultants to produce reports and no community engagement activities follow on from it .

The key to this is not change of ownership but democratic and effective management committees supported by LBL.

We hope you consider our collective views and make no change to the existing ownership structure of 2000 Community Action Centre.

#### 4. Grove Park Community Group

Please find below the response by Grove Park Community Group to point 18 in the Council's Community Assets Consultation:

- a) We do agree that VCS organisations should have access to Council buildings. We do not feel there is anything missing from the rationale.
- b) We agree with your reasoning for dismissing 14 and 15, and we cannot think of any other options that could have been considered.
- c) We feel that the suggested categories are the right ones for the VCS, however, we wish to point out that in the case of Grove Park Community Group managing the Ringway Centre as well as the nearby Children and Family Centre, does not benefit from any repair or maintenance provided by the Council.

- d) We think that the proposed methodology of reducing the number of buildings, and bringing organisations to share space/buildings where possible is appropriate and fair. We have no other suggestions.
- e) We do not think all Community Centres can necessarily be operated in a similar way. We believe all three options may be necessary.
- f) Provided all facilities are accessible to all people, there should be no impact by the proposed methodology.
- g) We have nothing to add.

### **5. Happy Days Nursery**

My name is Julie St Hilaire and I represent Happy Days child care and we run from Sedgehill community centre. we operate from 7.30am - 6 pm each day throughout the year.

We are worried that reforms may make a negative impact on our organisation and may cause us to fold or struggle to be able to effectively deliver our service.

We would therefore ask you to consult with us re any reforms and consider the service we are offering at present.

We are and would hope to continue to provide a local, well renowned service that provides for 7 local schools, to 2, 3 & 4 year old children who are entitled to the government free funded nursery hours. Additionally to this we also employ people from the local community and offer apprenticeships and training to them whilst in our employment. We support local charities ie St Dunstons in Bellingham and Homeless charities.

We would be grateful if you would keep us updated re any developments

kind regards

Julie St Hilaire  
Senior Manager

### **6. IRIE!**

IRIE! agree that access to council buildings for VCS organisations are vital. Particularly, where organisations' are working successfully within their communities. While, we agree in principal with the consultations reasoning for rejecting 14 and 15 we need to be mindful that there will be a number of organisations and individuals who will need a great deal of support moving forward.

The 4 proposed categories outlined in 16 are positive ways forward. Nevertheless, there will be a number of organisations that are more equipped to consider the move towards one or more of the proposed areas. Clarity is key to making the above work. Grassroots groups who deliver a great service and can see the benefits of asset transfer could easily become overwhelmed with both the transfer and management process.

We are not aware of how many organisations have undergone the asset transfer process in the borough. A useful approach would be to provide access to models of good practice and models that have proved more challenging giving examples of how to avoid the pitfalls and lessons learnt, both positive and negative.

Bringing organisations together will have its benefits and challenges. The organisations and services they deliver have to be complementary, with partnership an agreement that will need to be agreed by all concerned.

Wherever possible organisations should be empowered to manage their own business. Community Centres will have their own set of unique challenges, due to the diversity of needs. Several models may have to be tried before finding the one that best fits all involved.

Once again, careful negotiations will have to be entered into. Also, there must be honest consideration for the views and concerns of smaller groups in relation to organisations that are bigger and better resourced.

The main benefit as we see it for community assets transfer is to empower local people and their community. From IRIE!'s perspective, an equalities assessment of the proposed methodology is critical. Lewisham has the largest BME groups of Black African and Black Caribbean in London. Black ethnic groups are estimated to comprise 30% of the total population of Lewisham, which will become larger in the coming years. With a supportive, transparent and equitable process this can only be a positive way forward to assess the needs of the African & Caribbean community in relation to community assets.

Community Asset to the Voluntary and Community Sector is both an exciting and daunting prospect. There are organisations and/or individuals that believe it an automatic right with little understanding of the process. The process could also compromise organisations with great service delivery.

Robust and clear structures with strong governance have to be implemented to support all 4 proposed areas. An important element of the structure has to be about nurturing. This process should carefully guide successful applicants through, what could be a complex and complicated system. Done well, it would lessen the risk of the project or organisation failing and ultimately council take-back.

Beverley Glean  
Artistic Director  
IRIE!

## 7. Lewisham Irish Centre

- a. The council wishes to retain its commitment to supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector through utilisation of its buildings. Our rationale for this is laid out in paragraphs 11 and 12 above. Do you agree that access to Council buildings for VCS organisations is important? Is there anything missing from the rationale?  
**We believe that the council's commitment to the voluntary and community sector is extremely important especially during these very difficult economic times where many services have been cut from the most vulnerable members of our society. Community Centres such as Lewisham Irish Community centre provide direct services to vulnerable older adults, the Irish Community, the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community , children and young people as well as facilitating a number of local groups to provide services to older adults, adults with learning difficulties, childminder networks , cultural and social activities and classes.**
- b. Within this document you can see that we have discussed and then dismissed two approaches (paragraphs 14 and 15 above), do you agree with our reasoning? Are there any other options that we should have considered? **We accept that changes need to be made to the way community centres/buildings are supported by the Council.**
- c. Our categorised approach (paragraph 16) is our proposed way forwards. Do you feel the suggested categories are the right ones; will they work for the VCS? Do you have any suggestions about how this might be done differently? **We believe that although there needs to be a fair /transparent form of support across all community buildings , each organisation needs to be assessed individually based on the size of the organisation, the configuration of the building and its potential to generate income , use of individual buildings/spaces and the type of community activities carried out.**
- d. Do you think that the proposed methodology of reducing the number of buildings, and bringing organisations together to share space/buildings where possible is appropriate and fair? If not, why not? How else could this be done? **We think this is fair in theory as it allows for the max use of spaces/buildings and may at one level reduce pressure on some individual organisations however it will also have the opposite effect. Sharing of space will depend on many factors including the size and layout of the space, what the building is currently used for, the type of work carried out in the building. If for example a building is shared it may reduce the capacity to hire space to community groups and result in loss of income particularly for community centres.**
- e. Regarding Community Centres, how should the council look to operate these? Should they be Council run? Should they be operated by a VCS organisation on a lease? Somewhere in between? **We believe that if a premises is well used , carries out valuable community work that meets the councils priorities then VCS should run their buildings , however community centre groups need to be financially equipped**



**to run the buildings so there may need to be a staging process whereby organisations are supported to run the buildings for example where the council provided a rent grant and provided maintenance / repairs , there could be a commitment to continue to carry out repairs/maintenance but the community centre would pay an affordable rent . This would then be reviewed at stage 2. There needs to be individual meetings arranged with each of the voluntary and community sector groups to assess .**

- f. We are undertaking an equalities assessment of the proposed methodology. Do you feel that the proposed changes would have a negative or positive impact on Lewisham residents on the basis of their race, gender, faith/religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender assignment or marital status? Please provide comments on the impact you feel the proposed methodology could have, which groups you feel may be affected and any action you feel we could take to mitigate any potentially negative impact.
- Reducing community spaces/buildings is likely to have a negative impact on all those using these buildings, if for example in the case of the Lewisham Irish Community Centre, there would be a negative impact on all user groups but particularly those who have used the building as a longstanding source of support, advice, advocacy i.e. the Older Irish Community and the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community.**
- g. Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper, not covered by the above?

## 8. Lewisham Pensioners Forum

### RESPONSE From Lewisham Pensioners Forum to Lewisham Council's - COMMUNITY CENTRE CONSULTATION

#### Part 5 – Consultation Questions

- a. **The council wishes to retain its commitment to supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector through utilisation of its buildings. Our rationale for this is laid out in paragraphs 11 and 12 above. Do you agree that access to Council buildings for VCS organisations is important? Is there anything missing from the rationale?**

*LPF Response: Agree 11 and all bar one on 12 (bullet point 4) which is selling off or mothballing costs in another. Assets which may release savings now but deliver greater costs in years to come when places to meet will be badly needed and could increase costs in other budgets as social isolation has knock on health impact. We fear a cut in one area leading to greater spending in another.*

- b. **Within this document you can see that we have discussed and then dismissed two approaches (paragraphs 14 and 15 above), do you agree with our reasoning? Are there any other options that we should have considered?**

*LPF Response: Agree with LBL's reasoning – we cannot see any other options that you should have considered.*

- c. **Our categorised approach (paragraph 16) is our proposed way forwards. Do you feel the suggested categories are the right ones; will they work for the VCS? Do you have any suggestions about how this might be done differently?**

*LPF Response: Here at the Saville Centre, an initial suggestion would be a category that is a combination of one and two. Offices remain upstairs for groups who do not have wider accessibility issues. Accessible activities and Forum offices remain down stairs keeping the kitchen.*

**Do you think that the proposed methodology of reducing the number of buildings, and bringing organisations together to share space/buildings where possible is appropriate and fair? If not, why not? How else could this be done?**

*LPF Response: Despite the caveat about reducing buildings if that goes ahead there will be a need to support orgs to work together and have protocols for dispute resolution etc. Delivering for competing needs not always easy bedfellows – need for understanding and tolerance.*

- d. **Regarding Community Centres, how should the council look to operate these? Should they be Council run? Should they be operated by a VCS organisation on a lease? Somewhere in between?**

*LPF Response: A definition of 'what is', and 'what is not', a Community Centre would facilitate a more informed response to this question.*

- e. We are undertaking an equalities assessment of the proposed methodology. Do you feel that the proposed changes would have a negative or positive impact on Lewisham residents on the basis of their race, gender, faith/religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender assignment or marital status? Please provide comments on the impact you feel the proposed methodology could have, which groups you feel may be affected and any action you feel we could take to mitigate any potentially negative impact.**

*LPF Response: In terms of EIA if the Saville Centre no longer provided a meeting and activity point for older people from across Lewisham then we would consider that there would be:-*

- Direct impact on older people both locally and across Lewisham with the loss of what is regarded as a recognised accessible central resource here at the Saville Centre.*
- Direct impact on those older people who might no longer be able to, or be encouraged to, attend wellbeing and social activities that help combat loneliness and isolation*
- Loss of the resource of older people who contribute to the community in the delivery of voluntary and other innovative projects that bring older people together and also serve the wider community.*
- Loss of opportunity to run popular community events, such as community Book Sales*
- Loss of a valuable resource that has the potential to respond to the challenges faced by older people who are often excluded because of age but also doubly marginalised because of other circumstances and impairments including: hearing and visual impairment, caring responsibilities, and the impact of loneliness on lesbian, gay older people, those dealing with dementia and seeing friends drop away, bereavement, poverty, race. There are other transition points too that can make people vulnerable to becoming lonely, retirement, relationship changes, decline in health, redundancy.*

*We would therefore urge the Council to have regard to how the loss of established and accessible community resources could potentially impact on older people.*

- g. Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper, not covered by the above?**

*LPF Response: If the Council is of the view that groups in the voluntary community sector should be invited to indicate their interest, or assess the reality of sole occupancy of a building or involvement in a Hub, then core data covering running and maintenance costs should be made available in advance to interested groups so that they in turn can make informed decisions. For example what is the Lewisham market rent for such buildings? What are the current costs to keep buildings open etc including water/heating/lighting/security repairs etc.*

## 9. Lewisham Sports Consortium

### **RE: Consultation on the future support of the Council's Community Assets to the Voluntary and Community Sector.**

This is a response from the Lewisham Sports Consortium to the consultation on the Future Support of the Council's Community Assets to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

The Sports Consortium endorses and supports the collective response to the consultation from Action for Community Development (AfCD) which will be sent to you separately via that organisation. This feedback is in addition and reflects our own position as a community group.

The Lewisham Sports Consortium is based at Firhill Road sports ground which was formally a disused area of land that the organisation has over several years cleared of rubbish. It is now used as a community sports ground. The site is maintained and run by local volunteers and provides and hosts sports, education, training, cultural and social activities for all age groups but particularly focusing on the young. Our experience has demonstrated that given the opportunity, encouragement and support, volunteers can make a difference. We therefore strongly support the Council continuing its commitment to VCS and urge that this remains a priority particularly at this time when a growing number of residents in the Borough are experiencing disadvantage and hardships.

The majority of our users are from low income families for whom the opportunity to participate in sport, develop skills for employment, have social interaction and opportunities to share their time and talents has become an important part of their lives. We believe that any closures of community centres will have a negative social impact particularly for the young and most vulnerable. It will further compound existing disadvantage and marginalise some sections of the local community particularly African and Caribbean communities who are already suffering, disproportionately, economic and social deprivation. Whilst fully appreciating the need for review, and perhaps rationalisation, we believe that very careful consideration needs to be given to the impact over time for the people most affected by any decisions to move relocate or close existing centres and buildings.

Having clear and equitable processes should not preclude the ability to respond to particular needs as they arise. We do feel that community asset transfers/ownership is a way forward in terms of long-term planning, sustainability and increased capacity for some voluntary and community organisations. We do believe that the Council should provide more help to secure external funding from the commercial, private sectors, central government and other funders to strengthen the infrastructure and sustainability of the VCS in the Borough.

We urge the Council, in its decision making, not to impose a one size fits all solution but to consider the needs of individual areas, communities and organisations and to show courage and leadership by including asset transfer to the VCS as a strand of policy.

Yours Faithfully

M Garrick

## **10. Lochaber Hall Management Committee**

### **Response to the Consultation on the Future support of the Council's Community Assets to the Voluntary and Community Sector**

#### **Lochaber Hall, Manor Lane Terrace SE13 5QL**

**Lochaber Hall**, a Grade 2 listed building, is a vitally important venue for local organisations who run classes for diverse groups in the local community. It has a high usage rate throughout the week with regular classes and one off bookings for parties and community groups.

There are two halls, one large and one small, to suit the needs of the people who use the facility.

**Occupancy/Usage:** the average occupation rate (9am - 10pm Monday - Saturday) is 70% each week. Given the high levels of use of both Halls there is limited scope for more groups to use the Halls. We receive enquiries from potential new users on a regular basis but often are not able to accommodate them due to the Halls already being used at the required times. The large Hall is also used as a polling station at local and national elections.

**Diversity:** Lochaber Hall is used by a wide variety of people. There are many classes and activities throughout the week for children of all ages, along with educational and sport and fitness classes for children and adults. The hall is used on a regular basis by older members of our community, for social gatherings and ballroom dancing. The Mangalopathy Temple group use it for their weekly service and their annual festival. It has recently been used on many occasions by Remark Community (a support group for deaf teenagers) and by a support group for Afghan women. The Hall is also used most Saturdays for children's parties or table sales etc and for many other social and community purposes.

Lochaber Hall is self funding and does not rely on Council resources for anything other than external and statutory maintenance. All other maintenance and expenses are paid for out of the income received by the Lochaber Management Committee from booking fees. It has been run successfully for the last 34 years by a dedicated committee of local volunteers.

The consultation questions (Part 5 of the consultation document) are largely addressed above. However please note the following points.

The occupancy rates for both Halls would give limited scope for further use but this would not be significant given the current high usage rates. Such added occupancy would be more feasible outside of term time when some of the classes do not take place but that would not work for people who require regular slots.

A key positive for Lochaber Hall is that it is an important facility for the area in that it ensures that the balance of commercial use and non profit use is in favour of the non profit use. This enables disadvantaged and low paid people to be able to take advantage of the wide range of classes and events that take place there.

The above submission is made by the Management Committee of Lochaber Hall.

## **11. The Midi Music Company**

### **The Midi Music Company Response**

#### **LBL Consultation: Future support of the Council's Community Assets to the Voluntary and Community Sector – January 2015**

The Midi Music Company has reviewed the consultation document with specific feedback from the Executive Director, Wozzy Brewster OBE, Chair, Gordon Williams, and Premises Coordinator, including input from staff, volunteers and clients.

In relation to the Council's rationale for supporting the Voluntary & Community Sector through the use of its buildings we agree with the overall principles, but feel that the Council does have a responsibility to maintain the fabric of its buildings; bricks, mortar, windows, boilers, alarm systems, fire systems and other statutory requirements; PAT testing, Legionnaires testing etc.

Any withdrawal of maintenance expenditure should be negotiated with each building and tapered, giving organisations sufficient time [up to 1 year] to assess the cost implications to their budgets and create options for future-proofing affordability of the maintenance costs.

The Corporate Assets Team has already issued a notice that any maintenance above the statutory requirements would cease with effect from 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015, prior to completion of this consultation – this is unrealistic considering that there are quite a few buildings with outstanding repairs, including our site in Watsons Street.

It is understandable that the Council needs to reduce its budget and buildings cost money, but it should not be to the detriment of the ability of the Voluntary & Community Sector to deliver their services in a clean, safe and healthy environment because just doing the 'minimum' does not always meet the requirements of partnership.

In order for VCS organisations to help themselves to optimise their resources, particularly premises, any changes should be planned over a specific timescale to give them the best chance of success.

The geographic location of resources must also be considered when looking at any potential closures of sites, ensuring that there are sufficient community resources across the borough.

We agree with the Council's reasoning for not retaining the current arrangements for community and voluntary use of building assets in the long-term, but believe that short-term arrangements should be put in place so that VCS organisations can consider their options.

We agree with the Council's reasoning for not proceeding with full cost recovery for any assets that were leased or hired because this would have a detrimental impact on their affordability for VCS organisations, thereby impacting on the level of provision for the community in the borough. A similar approach taken with the Creekside development has meant that some of our most outstanding creative and cultural industries organisations have re-located outside of the borough, impacting on the level of opportunities for work placements, internships, apprenticeships, employment options and enterprise development within the borough.

The rationalisation with a transparent allocation system is a logical approach. The four categories will cover a range of VCS organisations:

Sole Occupancy: non-market rate

Voluntary and Community Sector Hub

Community Centre

Sole Occupancy: market rate

With regards to Sole Occupancy non-market rate consideration needs to be given to the possibility of changing priorities for the Council in the future and how this may impact in the long term. If the VCS organisation is still making a positive contribution to the local community it will still add value and bring benefits to the local area.

The development of Voluntary and Community Sector Hubs is a good idea, but needs to be considered geographically so that access to resource is fair across the borough, plus encouraging VCS organisations to utilise external activity spaces, where necessary, will contribute towards the local economy for sustaining other community premises managed or used by VCS organisations and utilise spaces in their 'downtime' when other programmes are not delivered on site in these external spaces outside of the Hubs.

If there is identified need from the local communities surrounding under-utilised Community Centres then they should be given the opportunity to bid and raise funds to take over assets of community value, which would enable local communities to keep sites in public use and contribute to the local need and economy, as outlined in the Localism Act – this would require a re-think of the proposed schedule for changes in community asset support.

The Council should run the Community Centres that have not been taken over by local residents, where appropriate.

The Sole Occupancy at full market rate could be quite extortionate for VCS organisations, and the charges need to reflect the scale of the organisation – will it be implemented at a particular budget level i.e. £500k+, or start at £1million+ or will cost be determined by staffing structure, or both.

The Voluntary & Community Sector has already been hit quite severely over the past seven years, with avenues for financial investment heavily oversubscribed. Careful consideration needs to be given to how 'larger' VCS organisations are classified as 'larger', and rental charges determined, with clear and transparent methodologies.

The future of the VCS should also impact on the reasoning of charging full market rates, otherwise we will hinder growth and development of our organisations, affecting future employment and service delivery, losing the Council's original investment, if relevant, to outside of the borough.

Community Asset Transfer has not been mentioned in the consultation document, and although time is limited, this should be offered as an option under the Localism Act. Perhaps, there could be a way of tapering off the support for community buildings over a period of three years so that sufficient time is given to VCS organisations to develop strategies and partnerships.

It is hard to determine what impact any future changes will have in relation to the Council's equality assessment without reviewing a full list of the buildings, target service users and programme – a comparison document would need to be circulated for comment.

## **12. Olivespring – Dyslexia Matters**

### **Methodology**

Despite the attempts to outline proposals there is in fact no evidence of an underpinning methodology driving the options given.

In the final analysis it appears that the proposed options are reactionary and a reflection of historically poor management decisions and a poorly assigned asset management policy: the communities within the London borough of Lewisham shouldn't be held to ransom for this historical deficit.

## The Proposals

### **Retaining current arrangements**

No respondent is in a position to assess the efficacy of the current arrangement in the absence of a schedule of current asset management utilisation, detailed evaluation of the occupancy profile and financial return.

If, as it appears, this information is not available or made available to this consultation process, then this consultation process itself is fatally flawed because all stakeholders, including the council, will be making uninformed decisions. This is not acceptable. Further, there is no financial assessment of the current losses to the council in respect of the underutilised premises.

It's not clear why would the council would be considering proposals without a clear measure of the current financial impact of underutilisation, an explanation of how this has come about and why, as we understand it from our own experience, enquirers to the council are told that there is a waiting list for premises.

**We would disagree with disposal of any premises and would vociferously challenge any attempts to pursue this option, particularly given the lack of financial analysis.**

Fundamentally, this proposal is unsound as it is being considered in isolation. Instead it should be considered alongside the third sector service policies, plans and provision across all strategic policy areas, e.g. Children, families and education; adult social services; housing, health, etc. Whilst selling council assets may be an attractive option for the council to meet the budget deficit; this proposal does not consider the medium and long term impact on the agencies, its service users, the wider community and ultimately the council budget affected by the potential demise of third sector provision in this borough because of this decision.

Indeed it may indicate that the historical asset management strategy has substantially undermined the scope and impact of the third sector by under-managing or poorly managing valuable assets over several years. Neither does the deficit specify the losses to the council budget over the many years due to mismanagement. It's is not acceptable to dispose of valuable assets simply because the council has not yet taken responsibility to consider more intelligently creative solutions. If the council is unable to do this we suggest that specialists are appointed to consider solutions that achieve substantial savings whilst optimising existing provision within the community domain.

We are all too aware that decision taking within local government are often only based on the length of office for local politicians and anything outside of that term doesn't merit consideration. This is not acceptable. The residents and the needs of Lewisham are here for the long term. The council needs to step up and see the long term picture and take serious steps to put in place a responsible plan. The option to 'cut the losses' and start again is an unformed approach and is not an option that is afforded a government agency that has a constituency of nearly 300,000 lives in their hands. 'Slash and burn' doesn't work.

We propose that this option is removed, the underlying methodology is reviewed, and if necessary specialist logistics experts are brought in to work alongside those responsible for social policy across the council as well as those who are skilled in working intelligently with local communities. This can be done and of course needs to be done quickly.

We are confident that if the councillors and executive officers made the decision to follow this approach, swift projections could be made to optimise council provision, including radical incentivising schemes to put existing



council premises back into the public domain. We would expect that the authority works with the various economic partnerships to consider options that satisfy the realisation of substantial savings within the short and medium term as well as satisfy the ever growing needs of vulnerable people in the borough.

### **Recommendations**

Perhaps for example, combining the refurbishment of premises to existing policies within the authority or local strategic partnership that are in receipt of substantial capital funds and pursue key policy needs. For example, addressing the economic issues for young people:

- link these funds to creating employment and business opportunities for young people in the borough;
- better support the options for NEET young people by having the spaces refurbished through temporary and long term apprenticeship programmes or
- the creation or support of small companies owned by young business owners who can refurbish premises and undertake facilities management under the direction of skilled facilities managers

There are numerous other schemes that could be deployed to realise savings whilst meeting the need of the local community in terms of, education, mental health, family breakdown and parenting, etc.

We recommend that you put together a multi-disciplinary task force with paid officers to action the proposals, to come up solutions whilst meeting the ubiquitous policy needs of the local population.

We recommend you also evidence strategic consideration of the third sector capacity building strategy in the process of develop new approaches to community asset management. It begs the question where does this specific option fit with the general policy option for the transfer of community assets to the community? Further, if this whole proposal is an attempt to rationalise community assets in order then to consider the readiness of the community to move towards community ownership, it has started from the wrong position. You cannot sell off community assets because of poor management and then give the community what is left. It is not ethical for the council to do this; it would be failing in its overall duty to optimise existing resources. The remedy is not to reduce the resources to manage this, the remedy is to make fuller use of the resources and optimise the savings from a substantial and currently wasted resource, without penalising the community in the process.

### **Overall assessment of the proposed four categories**

There is insufficient information outlining the expected projections and implications of the four categories offered, in particular the community hubs. The document doesn't specify the types of organisations expected to use each of the four proposed categories. More specifically, how feasible is it that third sector organisations are in a position to take up sole occupancy where is the projected take-up? Further what is the sole occupancy criteria, e.g. number of staff, income, type and number of services?

There are also other more practical questions; for example, in the case of sole occupancy does this mean that the organisation is required to be solely responsible for maintenance and utilities?

### **Consultation**

Whilst we appreciate that it's difficult to maintain a comprehensive record of local third sector organisations we would ask that you consider that it may well not be sufficient to rely on the umbrella organisations to circulate information of this nature.

**After consultation**

We request that a summary of the consultation responses is circulated to all contributors in advance of formal discussion with the Mayor and Cabinet, regardless of whether the council considers they are impacted by the proposals. Further, and we suggest that this summary is more widely summarised in the local press, etc.

We would be happy to continue these discussions with the council and contribute to any stakeholder action.

Please contact Juliet Campbell, Dyslexia Matters, in response to this email.