

MAYOR AND CABINET			
Report Title	Voluntary Sector Accommodation Implementation Plan Update		
Key Decision	Yes	Item No.	
Ward	All		
Contributors	Executive Director for Community Services		
Class	Part 1	Date:	11 November 2015

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide details of the outcome of consultation on proposed closures and redevelopment of community centres and to seek approval to proceed with plans to rationalise community centres as detailed in the report.

2. Recommendations

Mayor and Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 note the consultation feedback as summarised in section 6 of the report and the full submissions in appendix B.
- 2.2 agree the recommendations for each of the 16 community centres in section 6 of the report and instruct officers to proceed to the next stage of implementation.

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 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.

4.2 In April 2015 Mayor and Cabinet considered the outcome of a three month consultation with the voluntary and community sector on a new framework for the council's use of assets to support the sector. This framework was agreed by Mayor and Cabinet and sets out four categories for VCS assets as follows:

- **Sole occupancy of a building (not at full market rate)** – This would be a building, wholly or predominantly 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, for those that are not delivering services that meet our priorities or for organisations that are delivering services that meet our priorities but that do not wish to be housed within one of the VCS hubs. These organisations would still be able to access buildings (where available) on the Council's standard letting terms and conditions.

4.3 Following the adoption of the framework the next step was to develop an implementation plan to demonstrate the impact of the framework on the existing portfolio of community premises. The following principles that were

agreed as part of the framework were used to guide the development of the implementation plan:

- 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.

In addition the following factors have been considered in developing the implementation plan:

- Usage levels
- Other facilities in the locality
- Impact on council's ability to meet its statutory duties
- Existing lease arrangements
- Potential for redevelopment
- Potential for shared use
- Condition of the asset

- 4.4 The Implementation Plan was taken to Mayor and Cabinet in July 2015 and contained outline proposals for how each of fifty assets fitted into the framework. There were 24 buildings within the community centres category and there were 16 centres that where the proposal was to close or redevelop. It was agreed that further consultation should be undertaken for these and the outcome of this reported back to Mayor and Cabinet before implementation could proceed. The plans set out in this report propose a way forward for the 16 community centres following this consultation.
- 4.5 The plans set out in this report reflect in part a response to the requirement to ensure childcare and school places. Local authorities are under a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare provision in their areas. The provision must be "sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in the local authority's area who require childcare in order to enable them to take up, or remain in, work, or undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.
- 4.6 Ensuring that the supply of school places meets demand remains a statutory duty of local authorities. In terms of meeting demand, local authorities are also subject to constraints under the Education Act 2011. The 2011 Act requires that this demand for school places be met through the building of new free schools and academies, and the expansion of existing schools where possible.
- 4.7 The plans set out in this report also reflect in part a response to the massive housing challenges in Lewisham and London more broadly. A combination of

population growth and an acute shortage in the supply of new homes has led to an affordability crisis in every sector of the local housing economy. This is reflected in the fact that the average house price in Lewisham is now more than 12 times the median local income, and that rents in the private rental market have increased by a third in the past three years. It is expressed most clearly however in the rise in homeless households living in temporary accommodation, a number which now stands at more than 550, representing a ten-fold increase in just over two years.

The Council has initiated a wide range of responses to this crisis, principal amongst which is a return to Council house building in order to increase the rate at which new affordable homes are made available to residents. The Council has committed to delivering at least 500 new Council homes by 2018 as part of a mixed-tenure development programme. Sites for new homes are generally identified with the following criteria:

- Preference for sites with a capacity of more than 10 homes
- Underused and or redundant land
- Locations which are popular for both rented and homes for sale
- Places which may benefit existing as well as new residents

In a number of cases the community centres under consideration in this report have the capacity to contribute towards the delivery of the house building programme by reconfiguring the layout of a site, to deliver both new homes and improved community facilities. A sample timeline for redevelopment can be found in Appendix D.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 There are 16 assets where further consultation has been undertaken. Meetings were held with the management committees and users of these centres. A list of these meetings is contained at appendix A. Management committees and users were invited to make written submissions to the consultation and these are summarised in section 6 of this report and provided in full in appendix B

6. Outcome of Consultation

- 6.1 The original proposal, summary of consultation feedback, response to issues raised in consultation and proposed way forward for each of the 16 assets is detailed in this section of the report.

6.2 Barnes Wallis Community Centre: Telegraph Hill Ward

Original Proposal: To redevelop the site of the community centre for housing and reprovide community space within the new development.

Consultation Feedback: The consultation meeting was well attended with representatives of the management committee, user groups and local residents. Attendees were overwhelmingly opposed to the proposal. The main reasons given were the importance of the centre to enabling local community activity to take place, the hard work and commitment of local residents who have kept the centre operating and a view that additional housing and associated increase in the local population could bring with it social problems and place a strain on local public infrastructure. Concern

was raised about the level of disruption to centre users that redevelopment would bring in particular with reference to the newly established nursery. People also spoke about a deep personal attachment to the building and a fear that whatever replaced it would not meet the needs of the community in the same way. A number of other potential sites for housing were suggested and the council was urged to look elsewhere and leave the community centre as it is.

Response: The council recognises the need to ensure that community activity is able to continue on the Somerville Estate and the role that community and voluntary organisations and the individuals who give their time to deliver these activities play. It is for this reason that the council will ensure that any redevelopment of the site makes provision for community space. The council acknowledges that any redevelopment is likely to cause disruption both to centre users and neighbouring properties and detailed planning will be done to try and minimise this disruption. The redevelopment of the centre would be part of a wider estate development with a number of sites being developed. It is unknown at this stage how many new homes could be provided on the community centre site, but the council feels that the potential to provide new homes and a new community space and the benefits these will bring would outweigh the short term disruption that would be caused.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Barnes Wallis community centre site be included within the wider development of housing on the Somerville Estate. This would be subject to detailed design work to include the provision of community space that complements other facilities in the locality and that the views and needs of users and residents are used to inform the design. Barnes Wallis community centre to be retained until such time as any housing development is agreed.

6.3 Brandram Rd Community Hall: Blackheath Ward

Original Proposal: To close Brandram Rd Community Hall.

Consultation Feedback: The management committee and users of Brandram Rd are strongly opposed to the closure of the centre. A petition with 1400 signatures at time of writing has been submitted alongside the consultation response. The management committee recognise the need for the council to make savings but feel that the Hall provides a valuable community resource and gives additional capacity as other community buildings in the locality are well used. They have made an alternative proposal that they take on a full repairing and maintaining lease and pay any surplus income over expenditure as rent.

Response: The council recognises the value of the community activities that take place at Brandram Rd Hall but feel that there are a number of possible alternative venues in the locality. Lochaber Hall which is just across the ward boundary has a main hall, small hall and crèche and could accommodate some users from Brandram Road. There is also St Margaret's Church nearby that can be hired out for up to 50 users in the crypt and a maximum of 300 seated; and Kingswood Halls which has a large hall (130 seated) and annexe (40 seated), available at £20-£40ph. Manor House Library offers five meeting rooms, ranging from small (10 seated) to large (30 seated); prices range from £12ph to £38ph as a subsidised rate. The Brandram Road site has been assessed as having the potential for nine housing units. Any change of use

of the site would take some time to plan and implement and therefore it would be possible to consider continuing the community use of the site until it was required for development.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the council commences negotiations with Brandram Rd Management Association for a short-term lease in order to support community use while further consideration is given to development needs.

6.4 Champion Hall: Bellingham Ward

Original Proposal: To close the hall and re-designate solely for childcare use.

Consultation Feedback: The management committee recognised that the council needs to make savings but felt that although the hall provides valuable childcare facilities it should still accommodate other users. The committee presented an alternative proposal to take on a full repairing lease for the Hall and pay rent but to still accommodate other community uses alongside the childcare provision.

Response: The proposal put forward by the management committee may yield less income than could be achieved by marketing the hall as a commercial nursery. However the additional community benefits that continuing to operate as a community centre and the saving that would be achieved through the management committee paying rent and taking on repairs and maintenance liabilities may provide a good value use of the asset.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the council commences negotiations with the Champion Hall management committee that would safeguard the childcare offer at the hall, provide continued community benefits and achieve a saving for the council.

6.5 Clare Hall: Brockley Ward

Original Proposal: To designate the hall as a nursery.

Consultation feedback: The hall is solely occupied by Little Gems nursery although it is occasionally used for councillor surgeries and meetings of the Tenants and Residents Association. The nursery management are happy to take on a lease for the building as a nursery and have commenced negotiations. They have indicated that they would be happy to continue to accommodate the other occasional uses.

Response: the consultation feedback was in agreement with the original proposal.

Recommendation: negotiations have commenced for a lease with Little Gems nursery on similar terms to other nurseries in council buildings.

6.6 Evelyn Community Centre: Evelyn Ward

Original Proposal: To redevelop the site of the community centre for housing and reprovide community space within the new development.

Consultation feedback: The consultation meeting was attended by the TRA chair and members of the various user groups, including a nursery, a number of church members and Vietnamese women's group. There was consensus

amongst the attendees that the centre was well used and was the heart of the community; particularly from the nursery that had been established for over 20 years and served a number of children with additional needs and from vulnerable homes. The centre is also used by the TRA for resident meetings and they did not want these links with the community to be broken. Some users did highlight the repairs required at the centre and the lack of storage available and felt that redevelopment could provide an opportunity to look into these issues. However, there were concerns raised about the loss of greenspace cause by another housing development and that re-providing a smaller centre on this site would not be able to accommodate all of the current users.

Response: The council recognises the need for community activity on the Evelyn Estate. It is for that reason that the original proposal was to redevelop the site and re-provide community space as part of the development. Looking at the site in more detail there is concern that it would not be financially viable to provide both housing and community space on the site due to the very close proximity of designated open space surrounding the centre. It may only be feasible to develop along with other sites nearby and currently no such sites have been identified.

Recommendation: It is recommended to retain Evelyn Community Centre but that the site be earmarked for possible housing development with community space should other sites that could be developed alongside it be identified at a later date.

6.7 Ewart Rd Club Room: Crofton Park Ward

Original Proposal: To close the club room and develop housing on the site.

Consultation Feedback: A meeting was held at the club room which was attended by members of the management committee, a representative from the Housing Co-op, users and residents. Attendees were opposed to the closure of the centre and put forward an alternative proposal that the club room be transferred to the Housing Co-op to remove repairs and maintenance costs from the council. They also raised reservations about the suitability of the site for housing given its very close proximity to the surrounding buildings. Ewart Road Housing Co-operative (ERHC) is a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) which manages the Ewart Road housing estate of 253 dwellings. The co-op is a Mutual Society, controlled by its members who all live on the estate, and acts as the managing agent of the estate on behalf of Lewisham Council via Lewisham Homes.

Response: In looking at the site further it is felt that it would not be suitable for development and the only housing option would be a simple conversion to a single flat. This would be insufficient benefit to warrant the loss of the community space and the alternative proposal of a transfer to the housing co-op would achieve the required reduction to the council's revenue budget.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Ewart Rd Club Room be transferred to the Housing Co-op either as a freehold transfer or on a full repairing lease for community use.

6.8 Goldsmiths Community Centre: Whitefoot Ward

Original Proposal: To retain community space on Goldsmiths Community Centre site either by retaining the current building or through developing the site for housing and re-providing community space.

Consultation feedback: the Goldsmiths Community Association who hold a lease for the building which expires in 2038 wish to make the necessary repairs to the building to continue to operate the centre and are currently opposed to the idea of redevelopment. They have requested an extension to their lease to assist with capital fundraising.

Response: Given that the current lease has a further 23 years before it expires any plans for the site need to be developed in collaboration with the current leaseholders. The council is sympathetic to Goldsmiths Community Association's desire to raise funds to repair the centre but are not in a position to make capital funding available. If the association are not able to raise the capital funds needed within a reasonable time period then further discussions about redevelopment may be required. The council would be willing to discuss a lease extension with any potential funders at a suitable point in any funding negotiations.

Recommendation: It is recommended to retain Goldsmiths Community Centre; and to revisit the future use of the site dependent on progress on raising the capital from other sources required for the works to the building.

6.9 Honor Oak Community Centre: Telegraph Hill Ward

Original Proposal: to redevelop the community centre site for housing and re-provide community space as part of the development.

Consultation feedback: A meeting was held at Honor Oak Community Centre that was hosted by the Honor Oak Community Association and attended by centre users and residents. An additional meeting was held with the management committee of the community association. A petition of 670 signatures, at the time of writing, opposing the proposed redevelopment has been submitted. The community association and attendees at the public meeting were strongly opposed to the proposal. They were concerned that any replacement community space would not meet the community's needs and they expressed fear that the council would not provide any space at all. They were concerned about the impact on the youth centre that adjoins the community centre and the need to ensure that youth activity on the estate did not suffer as a result of the proposal. Concerns were also voiced about the impact of more housing on the Honor Oak Estate in relation to the strain on public infrastructure and the potential for increased social problems. An application to add the Honor Oak Community Centre and Youth Centre to Lewisham's register of assets of community value was received and accepted. The Honor Oak Community Association has also made a request for a community asset transfer.

Response: The council recognises the need to ensure that community and youth activities are able to continue on the Honor Oak Estate. The council will ensure that any redevelopment of the site makes provision for youth and community space. At present it is not certain how many new homes could be delivered, although for the purposes of modelling the programme the current assumption is 57 units. This is only an indication, detailed design work and further consultation about what youth and community space was needed

would be undertaken before the development could be taken through the planning process. Although the council recognises that development would cause some disruption the benefits of more social housing and new community facilities outweigh the short-term disruption that would be caused. It is unlikely that the council would wish to consider an asset transfer as this would not allow for any housing development.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Honor Oak Community and Youth Centre site be earmarked for housing development with youth and community space re-provided but that the position of the development within the housing programme be reviewed to allow more time for further consultation and detailed design work to be undertaken.

6.10 Lethbridge Club Room: Blackheath Ward

Original Proposal: to close the Lethbridge Club room when the new community centre that is being provided as part of the redevelopment of the Heathside and Lethbridge Estate is completed.

Consultation feedback: this has been planned for several years and there has been a great deal of engagement locally on the provision of the new centre. Interest has been shown in the plans for the site once it is closed by users being displaced from other centres.

Response: The Lethbridge Club Room site is included within the plans for the redevelopment of the estate and is not available for other community use. The new community centre is planned to be completed for March 2016.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the planned closure of Lethbridge Club Room takes place once the new centre on Heathside and Lethbridge is ready for occupation and that the site continues to be earmarked as part of the estate redevelopment.

6.11 Saville Centre: Rushey Green Ward

Original Proposal: to close the Saville Centre and relocate users to other centres where possible.

Consultation feedback: the user groups at the Saville Centre were disappointed that the centre was proposed for closure as a number of them have used the centre for many years. The compact nature of the building, on site drop-off and parking space and close proximity to several bus routes make it particularly well suited to the vulnerable and older adults who are the main users of the centre. Some concern was expressed about how well other centres may be able to accommodate users with additional needs such as the Social Eyes visually impaired group and one user explained that their funding required them to remain within one of two super output areas.

Response: the council recognises that a number of the user groups at the Saville centre have particular needs that will have to be taken into account when looking for alternative spaces. However, there are a number of spaces in the area with spare capacity some of which are used to accommodating vulnerable adults. These include the Point community centre on Rushey Green which has a main room with seated capacity for 30. Calabash Day Centre with a community hall for hire and fully equipped kitchen (Hall A - capacity 200, Hall B - capacity 200), Lewisham Irish centre with a main Hall with capacity for 150 standing and three offices, open 8:30am - 10:30 pm 7

days a week, Mecca Bingo Ltd, Unit 4, Plassy Road, have a meeting room for hire in the mornings before 11:30 and lounge area with capacity for 70 users and the St Laurence Centre. In addition several of the user groups indicated that they did not need to be located in Rushey Green ward as they serve the whole borough. An application to add the Saville Centre to Lewisham's register of assets of community value was received and accepted.

Recommendation: It is recommended to close the Saville Centre, assist users to relocate to alternative premises where possible and release the site for redevelopment.

6.12 Scotney Hall: New Cross Ward

Original Proposal: To close the Hall and redevelop the site for housing.

Consultation Feedback: The current users of the Hall, REMEC, acknowledged that the building is not well used but stressed that this is largely due to the poor state of repair. They expressed concern about the lack of any other facilities in the area for community activity to take place and felt that the Winslade Estate is geographically isolated from other parts of the borough and generally not well provided for. REMEC provide a range of activities, including worship, homework club, holiday and summer activities, youth club, online IT centre and language classes.

Response: The proposal to close Scotney Hall was largely due to the very low usage and poor condition of the building. However the council acknowledges that there is little current community premises provision on or near the Winslade Estate. The proposed redevelopment of Scotney Hall would need to form part of a wider scheme taking in other sites in the area and this is not likely to take place for a number of years. It is proposed to consider some temporary repairs to Scotney Hall to extend its life for a further 3-5 years. The cost of these repairs is estimated as £20,000. The community premises needs of the neighbourhood would then be reviewed again prior to any redevelopment and consideration given to re-providing some community space as part of the new scheme. An application to add Scotney Hall to Lewisham's register of assets of community value was received and accepted.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Scotney Hall site be designated for future housing development but that it be retained in the meantime subject to the affordability of necessary repairs. Consideration will also be given to re-providing some community space as part of any future housing scheme.

6.13 Sedgehill Community Centre: Bellingham Ward

Original Proposal: redevelopment of the site for additional school places and a community use agreement.

Consultation feedback: Happy Days nursery who are based at Sedgehill Community Centre and provide breakfast and after school clubs for seven local schools as well as pre-school childcare, were very concerned about the potential impact of the proposal on their business and the families they serve. They have asked the council to consider selling a part of the site to them to enable the continuation of the nursery. The Greater Faith ministries also expressed concerns about the proposal and wanted an undertaking to involve them in the planning for any redevelopment. Sharon Abraham Dance school

who have been using the hall since just after it first opened were disappointed that they would need to move but understood the council's rationale and felt that space within a secondary school could potentially meet their needs.

Response: It is anticipated that the school places being considered for this site will be for a school expansion. Any development will be subject to consultation on school expansion and a detailed feasibility study including a financial viability assessment. There is specific design guidance for schools that any new building would need to adhere to and affordability will be a key consideration. These two factors will limit the flexibility to incorporate any specific requirements linked to the community use of the school but engagement would take place to ensure that the best use of the space could be achieved given these constraints. It is unclear at this stage whether the current nursery provision could be accommodated as part of the expanded school. However, as part of the feasibility work for the school expansion an audit of pre-school childcare provision in the ward will be undertaken and opportunities to expand the number of registered childminders and other nurseries will be considered. Sedgehill School currently opens for community use after school hours until 7pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 6pm on Sundays and could be considered as an alternative venue for Greater Faith ministries and/ or Sharon Abraham dance school.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Sedgehill Community Centre site be earmarked for potential school places subject to a detailed feasibility study, school expansion consultation and planning permission. Consideration also to be given to different ways to use the site in order to provide for school expansion and the different impact options would have on community uses.

6.14 Silverdale Hall: Sydenham Ward

Original Proposal: to close Silverdale Hall and seek to relocate users to the Sydenham Centre where possible.

Consultation Feedback: Silverdale Hall is managed by the Venner Road Community Association. The Venner Rd Management Committee felt that current activities at Silverdale could be relocated and the main user who provides Pilates classes has visited the Sydenham Centre.

Response: A housing capacity study for the Silverdale site indicates that five flats could be provided, with a total of 13 units using some adjacent land. In addition to the Sydenham Centre there is also alternative community premises provision at Here for Good-Community Centre which has a hall for 30 to 40 people. TNG Youth and Community Centre offers meeting and event space with a main hall which has capacity for up to 100 people and is equipped with a sprung floor and blackout blinds; and the Golden Lion Pub, 116 Sydenham Rd, has a function room for hire for up to 50 people. The availability of alternative spaces in the area combined with the capacity of the site to offer much needed housing confirms the original proposal to close the centre.

Recommendation: It is recommended to close Silverdale Hall, seek to relocate users to other local provision where possible and release the site for redevelopment.

6.15 Venner Rd Hall: Sydenham Ward

Original Proposal: to re-designate the site for childcare use.

Consultation feedback: The Venner Rd Management Association recognised that the council needs to make savings but felt that although the hall provides valuable childcare facilities it should still accommodate other users. The committee presented an alternative proposal to take on a full repairing lease for the Hall and pay rent but to still accommodate other community uses alongside the childcare provision.

Response: The proposal put forward by the management committee may yield less income than could be achieved by marketing the hall as a commercial nursery. However the additional community benefits that continuing to operate as a community centre and the saving that would be achieved through the management committee paying rent and taking on repairs and maintenance liabilities may provide a good value use of the asset.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Council commences negotiations with the Venner Road management Association that would safeguard the childcare offer at the hall, provide continued community benefits and achieve a saving for the council.

6.16 Wesley Halls: Downham Ward

Original Proposal: To redevelop Wesley Halls for housing and reprovide community space as part of the new development.

Consultation feedback: The management committee and current users of Wesley Halls are opposed to the proposed redevelopment of the Halls. They highlighted the history of the building and the wide range of users. They recognise the need for additional housing in the borough and would not be opposed to houses being built on the vacant adjacent plot on Bankfoot Rd but wish the Halls to remain untouched. A petition has been received in support of retaining the community centre and opposing any redevelopment, with a total of 1769 signatures.

Response: A detailed capacity study of the site is required to identify the housing options that would be possible alongside Wesley Halls or any redeveloped community space which could accommodate the level of local community activity. This proposal would be subject to considerable design and space allocation which would require detailed feasibility work and further community consultation. The Downham Community Association currently has a lease that does not expire until 2021 and this would need to be taken into consideration in planning any future development. An application to add Wesley Halls to Lewisham's register of assets of community value has been received and accepted.

Recommendation: It is recommended to undertake more consultation with the Downham Community Association, users and residents on the best way to provide both housing and community space on the site and adjoining land.

6.17 Woodpecker Community Centre: New Cross Ward

Original proposal: to close Woodpecker Community Centre and redevelop the site for housing.

Consultation feedback: Milton Court TRA and the current users of the Woodpecker Community Centre are opposed to the proposal. They feel that the community centre needs to be a hub for the local community and that

other community facilities in the area would not be sufficient. A number of other potential sites for housing were suggested and the council was urged to look elsewhere and leave the community centre as it is.

Response: The following alternative provision is within a mile of the Woodpecker Community Centre: St Michaels Community Centre has a large hall (capacity up to 200), kitchen and outside space for hire for £30ph (with a £250 refundable deposit). The Samaritans of Lewisham Greenwich and Southwark have a small seminar and large seminar room for hire for up to 40 seated; available 9am to 11pm for a minimum charge of £30 per session. Deptford Green School have classrooms and dance/drama studios for hire on Saturdays between 10am and 5pm, prices range between £15ph and £25ph depending on number of users and size of classroom/ studio. Moonshot Centre offers an atrium, two dance studios, lecture room, library, two offices, drama room and three activity rooms for hire. Woodpecker Community Centre is currently used 5 days a week by a private school providing education for 20 children. This limits other uses of the building. Casual usage for private hires and resident meetings has been very low for the last two years and could be accommodated in the alternative venues. There is significant potential to develop the area around the Woodpecker Community Centre including some of the sites suggested during the consultation. As well as providing much needed housing the redevelopment would also significantly improve the quality of the public realm.

Recommendation: It is recommended to close the Woodpecker Community Centre in August 2016 and that the site is designated for housing as part of a wider development. It is further recommended that the current user be allowed to remain in the centre in the interim period until the site is developed subject to suitable terms being negotiated.

7. Summary of Proposed Community Centre Provision

- 7.1 Of the current twenty four community centres it is proposed to ensure that subsidised community space continues to be provided for sixteen of these, either in the current buildings or in new builds as part of redevelopments to provide a spread of core community centre provision across the borough. This will be supplemented by a further four centres where community provision will continue in the medium term but where some rent will be payable. One centre will be re-designated for dedicated childcare use and three will close. The geographical spread of these centres can be found in a map in appendix C.

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 Regeneration and Asset Management. The overall financial impact will be complex and specific financial implications of each scheme will be assessed as detailed plans are developed.
- 8.2 Budgets for community sector premises are split between directorates. Where proposals result in reduced expenditure in one area and reduced income in a different area budgets will be adjusted accordingly.

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 In respect of those properties which have been registered as assets of community value, the Council will be required to comply with its obligations under the Localism Act 2011 if it subsequently decides to enter into a relevant disposal of the site. A relevant disposal is the sale of the freehold or the grant of a lease for more than 25 years. Any proposal to make a relevant disposal will need to be advertised and eligible community interest groups will have the right to be treated as a potential bidder. If this happens this will then trigger a 6 month full moratorium period during which the Council will not be able to dispose of the property whilst the community group prepares its bid.
- 9.5 There are no obligations under the 2011 Act that apply where a decision is taken to change or cease the use of an asset of community value where no disposal is taking place. However, the fact that a property is listed as an asset of community value is a relevant consideration for the Mayor when taking any decision that affects its future use and the Mayor should have regard to this and all other relevant considerations at the time of making any decision. In particular, where a property is being closed, it is relevant that alternative premises in the locality are available.
- 9.6 Having consulted on proposals in respect of the community centres, the Mayor is required to consider the outcome of that consultation carefully before making any decision.

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 The provision of community activities can assist with reducing crime by providing diversionary activities, increasing a sense of belonging and pride within communities and fostering good relations.

12. Equality Implications

- 12.1 An equalities analysis assessment was presented to Mayor and Cabinet in July 2015 which assessed 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. This focused on the two main areas of concern – the impact on older and younger people and those from the BME community.
- 12.2 Following a further period of consultation the update in appendix E looks at the protective characteristics of the current users of the 16 centres that are proposed to close or redevelop, and the mitigation the council has in place to reduce the negative impact on these users.
- 12.3 Overall, the centres which are proposed to close have a spread of alternative provision nearby, and where there is a clear need for community space in a particular area, the proposals have been to reprovide community space as part of a redevelopment.
- 12.4 The council is making further attempts to reduce the impact of this implementation plan on community groups by promoting community use of schools. It is becoming increasingly important to optimise the use of all the

assets the council has and there is recognition that the majority of schools have facilities that could be utilised by the wider community, including groups which have been displaced by community centres being closed or redeveloped. The council has tried to resolve this situation previously and some schools have begun to encourage community use of their facilities in recent years, however uptake has been limited and there is still a lot of work to be done, particularly around rates charged to community groups.

13. Environmental Implications

- 13.1 Many of the current portfolio of community premises are not energy efficient. Where new premises are being provided higher levels of energy efficiency will be achieved.

Background Documents

Report to Mayor and Cabinet 22 April 2015 – Voluntary Sector Accommodation
Report to Mayor and Cabinet 15 July 2015 – Voluntary Sector Accommodation
Implementation Plan

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