

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee: 8 June 2011

Subject: Review of Community Facilities

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) provide feedback to Members on the consultation meetings which have taken place with groups affected by rationalisation proposals for specific under-utilised facilities; and
- (ii) outline options for future provision of community facilities.

2. Background

2.1 At the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on 3 March 2010 a report was presented to Members for consideration to shape the future provision of community facilities within West Dunbartonshire. This report was presented as a result of the Council's revenue budget proposals for 2009/2010 which agreed that the Housing, Environmental and Economic Development department should manage community education centres and that there would be a report brought to a future Council/Committee to streamline bureaucracy, maximise efficiencies within this service and increase income generation.

2.2 After discussion at the Committee and having heard explanations to Members questions the Committee agreed to support the review process and asked that a report outlining the feedback from community consultation meetings regarding the re-shaping of the community facilities service be submitted to the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee in December 2010.

2.3 A report was subsequently submitted to the meeting of the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on 08 December 2010.

The report:

- (i) provided an update on the progress of the integration of Halls and Community Learning and Development facilities;

- (ii) provided feedback on the consultation exercise that was carried out between August and November 2010 on the re-shaping of community facilities; and
- (iii) outlined options for provision of this service for the future including proposals for a community facility in Milton as agreed at the Council meeting on 25 June 2008.

2.4 After discussion and having heard the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development and the Head of Neighbourhood Services in elaboration and in answer to Members' questions the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to discontinue café provision in community facilities by no later than 31 March 2011 as they were not economically viable, do not provide healthy choices and conflicted with the Council's objectives for schools catering;
- (ii) to note that in respect of (1) above, kitchen facilities would still be available for use;
- (iii) to progress the creation of a community facility in Milton at a cost of no more than £90,000; and
- (iv) that detailed consultation takes place with groups affected on the rationalisation on specific under-utilised facilities, as outlined in paragraph 4.11 of the report, and that a report be submitted to the June 2011 meeting of the Committee in this regard.

3. Main Issues

Milton Facility

- 3.1** As part of this review, consideration has to be given to the Council decision to look at providing a community facility in Milton. A number of consultation events took place in Milton to identify if there was a need and a community interest in a community facility.
- 3.2** A survey was carried out which was issued to all members of the Milton community, 82% of the returns stated that the community was in favour of having a new community facility and the results of the survey were previously reported to this committee in December 2010.
- 3.3** The design of this facility has progressed and the planning application has been lodged and will be considered at the June Planning committee.
- 3.4** Should planning consent be obtained, the building would be procured and erected within a ten month period.

Rationalisation of under utilised facilities

3.5 The report presented to this committee on 3 March 2010 detailed a number of facilities that could be considered for community transfer, rationalisation or closure based on wage levels, levels of subsidy, the condition of properties/costs to bring to tolerable standards etc.

3.6 Following the general consultation exercise and at the December Committee applying the accepted principles of that consultation, Members agreed that detailed consultation should take place with groups affected on the rationalisation of specific under-utilised facilities. These facilities are:

- a) Howatshaws Hall
- b) Bowling Hall
- c) Phoenix CLD Centre
- d) Dalmonach CLD Centre
- e) Duntocher Hall
- f) Dumbarton Burgh Hall
- g) Clydebank East CLD Centre

3.7 Public meetings were held in Dumbarton and Clydebank to discuss future options for the facilities listed a) – g) in paragraph 3.8 above and to obtain community views on community transfer, merging with other local facilities or closure. The attendance at the consultation meetings in both Dumbarton and Clydebank was good and the general conclusion and consensus of the consultation can be noted as below:

- The general feeling of these meetings was disappointment and anger at the possible closure or transfer of the centres as those attending believed that the facilities were necessary within their communities and considered it the responsibility of the Council to operate such facilities.
- People were not against the principles of rationalisation of under utilised facilities.
- People agreed that there should be the opportunity for community management of facilities.
- There was a recognition that in the current economic climate it did not offer best value to have facilities lying partially empty and that merging of facilities was a suitable alternative option.
- People were concerned that access to facilities could be restricted if particular community groups took over operation of certain facilities.

It was explained that there was a requirement to undertake an operational review and rationalise the number of facilities to ensure ongoing sustainability of community facility provision and those present were asked to consider and discuss the potential for community group operation of centres.

3.8 The outcome of discussions and progress to date is summarised below for each facility:

3.8.1 Howatshaws Hall

Bellsmyre Community Renewal Group is keen to set up 'Bellsmyre Development Trust' to operate Howatshaws Hall on behalf of the community. The group has well developed proposals and is seeking lottery funding for the project. The group would prefer to take community ownership of the premises however would also consider a long term lease. There are a number of issues which the group has raised in relation to the condition of the property, the possibility of transfer of ownership for a nominal sum, the availability of any future revenue grant assistance from the Council, It is proposed that the Council engages in detailed negotiations with the group through relevant Council Officers in Estates and Legal Services to develop a report and recommendations for Members to consider. Any recommendations made in this report would require to consider all future developments.

3.8.2 Bowling Hall

A meeting took place with interested parties from the Bowling community and a number of community representatives have expressed an interest in forming a local Community Trust to take over operation of the facility. Discussions are at an early stage as the community representatives require to explore the necessary arrangements which would require to be put in place and consider their associated commitments. It is proposed that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers and CVS to pull together detailed proposals that will be presented to Members for consideration.

3.8.3 Phoenix CLD Centre

Representatives from one of the four groups who presently use the Phoenix Centre attended the public meeting which was held in Dumbarton. Disappointment was expressed at the possible closure of the centre however there appear to be no community groups or individuals interested in taking over operation of this centre. There are presently only 4 groups using the centre on a weekly basis and these lets could be accommodated at other facilities within the Dumbarton area. The recommendation for this facility is therefore that arrangements are made to find suitable alternative accommodation for the existing lets and the centre is discontinued from use as soon as possible thereafter.

3.8.4 Dalmonach CLD Centre

Individuals and representatives from a number of groups who presently use the Dalmonach Centre attended the public meeting which was held in Dumbarton.

The groups all expressed anger and disappointment at the possible closure of the centre and indicated that they would do everything possible to keep the centre open.

Dalmonach CLD Centre Management Advisory Committee has recently been formed and the group has expressed an interest taking over operation of the facility. Discussions with the group are at an early stage as the group require to explore the necessary arrangements which would require to be put in place and consider their associated commitments. It is proposed that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members. A meeting with community representatives is scheduled for week commencing 16 May.

3.8.5 Duntocher Hall

Individuals and representatives from a number of community groups in Duntocher attended a public meeting which was held in Duntocher Hall. The groups all expressed anger and disappointment at the possible closure of the centre and indicated that they would do everything possible to keep the centre open. A number of community representatives expressed an interest in forming a local Community Trust to take over operation of the facility. Discussions with the group are at an early stage as the group require to explore the necessary arrangements which would require to be put in place and consider their associated commitments. It is proposed that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members. A meeting with community representatives is scheduled for 11 May 2011.

3.8.6 Dumbarton Burgh Hall

Since submission of the original report to the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on 3 March 2010 the usage of Dumbarton Burgh Hall has increased significantly. This is due to ongoing increased usage by a number of Council departments and securing of additional external bookings. The increased usage of this facility has improved its ongoing viability and it is therefore considered to be a viable operational asset at this time. It is therefore proposed that operation of this facility continues at present and is subject to review at a future time.

3.8.7 Clydebank East CLD Centre

Individuals and representatives from a number of community groups in Whitecrook attended a public meeting which was held in Clydebank. The groups all expressed anger and disappointment at the possible closure of the centre and indicated that they would do everything possible to keep the centre open.

The Generation Gap group from Whitecrook presented proposals they had developed to operate the facility on behalf of the community.

The group has well developed proposals however there were objections from a number of other interested parties who stated that they had not been consulted or involved in the Generation Gap proposals and who are also keen to become involved in the future operation of the facility. It was therefore proposed that the Council hold more detailed discussions with all interested parties to establish whether one group could be formed to move the project forward. It is proposed that the Council engages in detailed negotiations with all interested parties through relevant Council Officers to develop a report and recommendations for Members to consider. A meeting with all interested parties is scheduled for the last week in May.

- 3.9** It can be seen from the information outlined above that there is genuine community interest in operation of a number of the specific facilities which were consulted upon. The interested group(s) are at varying stages in the process of developing proposals with the Bellsmyre Community Renewal Group being the furthest advanced and the majority of other groups at the early stages of creating action plans around their proposals. Given that each of the groups will proceed at slightly different timescales it is proposed that, if Members agree in principle to the transfer of operation of the facilities, a separate report be presented to Members for each facility detailing the specific proposals from the group and outlining recommendations.
- 3.10** It is proposed that groups are given until the last week in September to confirm their intention to officers of their detailed proposals for facilities.
- 3.11** If there is no viable proposals presented to transfer a facility to a community based organisation the facility would be declared surplus, demolished and the site marketed for disposal.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1** The detailed consultation exercise on the integration of this service has highlighted a number of opportunities to deliver significant change in providing community facilities within West Dunbartonshire. There is clearly an appetite from within the community to deliver this change and one of the aspirations coming from this change would be that some of the savings generated could be re-invested in upgrading the remaining facilities.
- 4.2** The provision of facilities would still require to meet the needs of community learning and development within Education and to ensure that any statutory obligations placed on them by HMIE were maintained and developed.

4.3 Following the consultation meetings which have taken place with community representatives and groups affected by the proposed rationalisation of specific under-utilised facilities, officer recommendations are as follows:

- a) Howatshaws Hall - It is proposed that the Council engages in detailed negotiations with the group through relevant Council Officers to develop a report and recommendations for Members to consider.
- b) Bowling Hall - It is proposed that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members.
- c) Phoenix CLD Centre – It is proposed that arrangements are made to find suitable alternative accommodation for the existing lets and that the centre is discontinued from use as soon as possible thereafter. There would be no staffing implications related to this closure as the member of staff from this facility has already been redeployed to an alternative location within the service and attends the premises to open and close them as necessary to facilitate the four lets per week.
- d) Dalmonach CLD Centre - It is proposed that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members.
- e) Duntocher Hall - It is proposed that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members.
- f) Dumbarton Burgh Hall – it is proposed that operation of this facility continues at present and is subject to review at a future time.
- g) Clydebank East CLD Centre - It is proposed that the Council engages in more detailed negotiations with all interested parties through relevant Council Officers to develop a report and recommendations for Members to consider.

5. People Implications

5.1 Following the Committee in March 2010 there have been ongoing discussions with Trade Unions in the shaping of this service.

5.2 Through discussions with staff and their Trade Unions the clear picture was obtained that there was an appetite for review however there was concern about future employment and the opportunity for voluntary severance.

- 5.3** The proposed closure of the Phoenix CLD Centre as outlined in paragraph 4.3 c) would not result in any staffing implications as the member of staff from this facility has already been redeployed to an alternative location within the service and only attends the premises to open and close them as necessary to facilitate the four lets per week.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** It is envisaged that completion of this review and the subsequent reports to Committee may identify options that would result in a reduction in the net cost of community facilities to the Council whilst maintaining local provision that will meet the needs of users. This is likely to be facilitated through rationalisation of community facilities within key areas, improved utilisation and community participation in managing facilities.

- 6.3** The details of the potential reduction in the net cost to the Council of operating community facilities cannot yet be identified. Individual costs would be included within the reports relating to each specific facility.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** There is a risk that, as detailed negotiations develop, consensus and agreement may not be reached with every community in meeting their aspiration for available community space.

This scenario could result in some resistance to change within a community area however the overriding consideration will be to optimise the use of Council assets to support the community activity effectively in the context of the Council's wider economic pressures and Asset Management Strategy.

- 7.2** There is a risk that, should facilities be transferred to community control, they could be returned to Council control if use was less than anticipated. However, the risks of this will be mitigated through robust lease agreements and investing in community capacity/skills to optimise the potential for successful and sustainable community management arrangements.

8. Equalities Impact, Health and Human Rights Impact Assessment (IEE)

- 8.1** Having reviewed the outcome of the consultation exercise the equalities impact assessment highlights the fact that there is the need to ensure access to suitably adapted facilities for all community user groups and that the proximity of facilities would require to be such that no specific group was being disadvantaged.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** As a result of the Committee decisions on 8 December 2011 café provision in community facilities was discontinued on 31 March 2011.

- 9.2** A detailed consultation exercise on the rationalisation of community facilities has highlighted a number of opportunities to deliver significant change in providing community facilities within West Dunbartonshire. There is clearly an appetite for community operation of a number of specific facilities however the respective groups require to be given adequate time and support to develop detailed plans.
- 9.3** It is proposed that community groups must have confirmed their intentions to officers by the end of September 2011 to allow this process to proceed.
- 9.4** If there is no viable proposals presented to transfer a facility to a community based organisation the facility would be declared surplus, demolished and the site marketed for disposal.
- 9.5** It is recommended that the committee agrees the following:
- i) Howatshaws Hall - that the Council engages in detailed negotiations with the group through relevant Council Officers to develop a report and recommendations for Members to consider.
 - ii) Bowling Hall - that the group is given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members.
 - iii) Phoenix CLD Centre – that arrangements are made to find suitable alternative accommodation for the existing lets and that the centre is discontinued from use as soon as possible. Thereafter the centre is demolished and the site is made available for sale.
 - iv) Dalmonach CLD Centre - that the group be given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members.
 - v) Duntocher Hall - that the group is given further time and assistance from relevant Council Officers to pull together detailed proposals for consideration by Members.
 - vi) Dumbarton Burgh Hall – that operation of this facility continues at present and is subject to review at a future time.

- vii) Clydebank East CLD Centre - that the Council engages in more detailed negotiations with all interested parties through relevant Council Officers to develop a report and recommendations for Members to consider.

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Date: 10 May 2011

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Appendix: None

Background Papers: Reports to HEED Committee 3 March 2010 & 8 Dec 2010
- Review of Community Facilities

Wards Affected: All