

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Report by Acting Executive Director of Housing, Environment and Economic Development (Land & Environment)**

**Council: 26 September 2007**

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**Subject: The impact of reducing weekend opening hours at the Play Drome, Clydebank**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To advise Members of the impact that reducing weekend opening hours at the Play Drome has had on the service, staff and customers; this following a request for such information at the Council meeting of 29 August 2007.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1** As part of the Best Value Review of Leisure Services undertaken in 2004/05, a 16 point Improvement Action Plan was developed. One of the actions was to undertake a review of weekend opening hours at the Play Drome. This Improvement Action Plan was included within a report on the Leisure Services Best Value Review which was agreed by Members of the Community Safety and Environmental Services Committee in November 2005.
- 2.2** At the time of the review the Play Drome was open to the public until 9.30pm on a Saturday and until 10.00pm on a Sunday and it was acknowledged within the review that usage was consistently low on both evenings despite a variety of efforts to promote usage.
- 2.3** As part of the process to implement the Improvement Action Plan a review of the weekend evening usage of the Play Drome was undertaken and identified that usage of the centre was low after 5.00pm on both weekend days. It was also highlighted that staff costs are high at weekends due to enhanced rate payments.
- 2.4** The findings of the weekend opening hours review were reported to the Director for consideration in 2006 and the option to close the Play Drome at 5.00pm on both weekend days and save approximately £19,000 was included as one of a number of proposed budget savings for the Housing, Regeneration & Environmental Services Department for 2007/08. This saving was subsequently included within the final budget proposals which were agreed at the Council Meeting of 8 February 2007.
- 2.5** The savings option resulted in the loss of several vacant part time posts and a negotiation process between management, Play Drome staff and their Trades Union representatives began in March 2007 to alter the working patterns of permanent employees.

**2.6** Staff agreed to the introduction of shift changes with effect from 7 July 2007. Initially there was some resistance from employees whose work patterns were affected by the changes however staff have adjusted well to the revised shifts and have indicated that they would be unwilling to negotiate further changes.

### **3.0 Main Issues**

**3.1** There were three clubs which used the centre after 5.00pm at the weekend on Sundays, two Karate clubs and the Clydebank Amateur Swimming Club. There were no club bookings for Saturday evenings. The two Karate clubs were successfully relocated into other timeslots in the Play Drome programme. The Swimming Club has been offered a variety of other booking slots in the programme including both weekend mornings, Sunday late afternoon, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and weekday early mornings. These times are in addition to a current booking on a Thursday evening.

**3.2** One frequent casual five-a-side booking from Sunday evening was offered alternative times however chose to take their booking to another centre in neighbouring East Dunbartonshire. It should be noted that, when Leisure Services completed a benchmarking exercise on weekend opening hours, East Dunbartonshire were one of very few local authorities to open their centres late evenings at weekends. During the benchmarking exercise East Dunbartonshire did however report that they intended to review opening hours for weekends within the next year as weekend evening usage was low.

**3.3** Since the implementation date of the reduced weekend opening hours on 7 July 2007 two Cosmopolitan fitness memberships were cancelled by customers who indicated that the reason for cancellation was the change in opening hours. On analysis of the usage patterns of these customers in the months before the change to opening hours it was evident that these members had actually used the centre predominately at times unaffected by the changes.

**3.4** Analysis of attendance figures at the Play Drome has been undertaken for the period 07 July – 26 August for both 2006 when full opening hours were in place and 2007 once early closing at weekends had been implemented.

There is evidence of increased attendance figures for this 7 week period in 2007 as compared to the same period in 2006.

### **4. Personnel Issues**

**4.1** Employees were initially reluctant to change their shift patterns however, agreement was reached following negotiation and staff have adjusted well to the new shift patterns which commenced on 7 July 2007. The majority of staff have stated that they are enjoying their new shifts and would be extremely reluctant to return to working weekend evenings.

**4.2** A number of measures were agreed and implemented to minimise any loss in income for staff as a result of a reduction in enhanced payments and some staff actually gained. The majority of savings made in this exercise were from the deletion of vacant posts from the structure.

## **5. Financial Implications**

**5.1** When costing the savings related to this exercise it was estimated that the total annual saving in wage costs would be approx. £26,000; this being achieved through savings in weekend enhancement payments and the reduction of a small number of posts. Lost income was estimated at approx. £7,000 per annum therefore a saving of **£19,000** was anticipated from implementing this change.

**5.2** There are also energy cost savings from reduced weekend lighting and general electricity usage as a result of the early closing and this has been estimated to be in the region of £2,000 per year.

**5.3** A comparison of weekend income and usage for 2006 and 2007 for the period 07 July to 26 August has been undertaken and demonstrates that there has not been a reduction in income or usage following the reduced opening hours as the table below illustrates.

	Income (VAT Ex.)	Usage
Total Weekend income and usage 07 July – 26 August <b>2007</b>	£19,536	9,210
Total Weekend income and usage 08 July – 27 August <b>2006</b>	£17,402	8,520
Difference from 06 to 07	+ £2,134	+ 690

There has actually been an increase in income from 2006 to 2007 (notwithstanding a 5% annual price increase in 2007) which demonstrates that the reduction in weekend opening hours has not had a detrimental effect on income. The usage figures have also increased which would indicate that the reduction in hours has not had a negative impact on usage.

## **6. Risk Analysis**

**6.1** During 2007/08 there is a risk that the full savings anticipated will not be made as the new shifts did not start until 07 July 2007 and this may impact negatively on the Leisure Services Trading Account as the 19k was removed from the service's revenue budget from April 2007.

**6.2** Given the increase in income and usage outlined in section 4.3 above, it is likely that savings will be achieved in full during future years.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1** It is believed that the reduction of opening hours has not resulted in a negative impact on the majority of Play Drome customers and has not adversely affected either income or usage for the centre. A saving of 19k per annum from the Leisure Services budget has been made and this ongoing saving has been taken account of in the overall Council budget setting process.
- 7.2** The negotiation process with Play Drome staff to implement new shift patterns took four months to complete and reached a successful conclusion. It is unlikely that a further negotiation process to alter shifts in the reverse will be successful and may take a considerably longer time to implement.
- 7.3** Further negotiation with the swimming club is required to accommodate their training requirements within the current opening hours.

## **8. Recommendations**

### **8.1 It is requested that Members:**

- (a) note the contents of this report; and**
- (b) agree to maintain the current early closing of the Play Drome at weekends.**

**Ronald M Dinnie**  
**Acting Executive Director of Housing, Environment and Economic**  
**Development (Land & Environment)**

**Date: September 2007**

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**Person to Contact:** Lynda McLaughlin – Manager of Commercial  
Operations, Elm Road, Dumbarton  
Telephone: 01389 772097  
E-mail: [lynda.mclaughlin@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:lynda.mclaughlin@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

Fiona McIntyre – Section Head Leisure Services

Meadow Centre, Dumbarton  
Telephone: 01389 738427  
E-mail: [fiona.mcintyre@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:fiona.mcintyre@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** All