
**Report of the Director of City Development and Chief Officer Strategy,
Commissioning and Performance**

Report to North West (Inner) Area Committee

Date: 14th November 2012

Subject: Emergency Closure of West Park Centre

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Weetwood	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

The purpose of this report is to provide the North West (Inner) Area Committee with an update on the temporary closure of the West Park Centre, due to Health & Safety concerns. The report provides background to the reason for the temporary closure, it outlines the actions being taken to ensure users are supported to identify alternative temporary accommodation.

Recommendation

The Area Committee is asked to note this report.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides information about the temporary closure of the West Park Centre on Health & Safety grounds. It provides background to the reasons for this closure and outlines the action being taken by Children's Services and Asset Management to mitigate the impact on users.

2 Background information

- 2.1 On 2nd November 2011 a decision was taken to close the West Park Centre due to safety concerns with the building's electrical installation.
- 2.2 The West Park Centre is a former school located on Spen Lane in Weetwood ward.
- 2.3 The centre has been home to the schools music service for approximately twenty years. Over that time the building has also had many other users, both from the Council and the community on a full time or lettings basis.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 At Asset Management Board on 1st November, attended by the Acting Chief Asset Manager, the Deputy Director of Children's Services and the Head of Corporate Property Management, a reference was made to the current condition of the West Park Centre building and the findings of a health & safety assessment and included reference to the main switchgear being described as dangerous and a major health and safety risk. Asset Management Board agreed that immediate closure may be necessary while the matter was investigated and asked for the information to be substantiated.
- 3.2 The position was verified by CPM on 2nd November in a summary of the outcome of the health & safety inspections that had taken place, including the reference that the electrical installation was dangerous and a major health and safety risk. The Executive Member for City Development was consulted and following his comments the decision was taken by the Acting Chief Asset Management Officer to close the building immediately, as an emergency measure with the decision to be reviewed the following Monday. The decision was reviewed on Monday 5th November and it was decided that the building should remain closed pending further testing on the areas of concerns identified.
- 3.3 Further testing has been commissioned to ascertain the extent of the problem and what measures are necessary to rectify. Until the testing is completed the building is to remain temporarily closed. All essential items were cleared from the site on Monday.
- 3.4 One event did take place in the building on the Saturday following closure. This matter is being looked into separately. This took place in the context of extremely speedy action to address the immediate health and safety risk and work to relocate users. In this time officers returned from holiday (including one who interrupted their holiday) and came into work on Saturday to ensure that things went as smoothly as possible in the circumstances.

- 3.5 Since the closure of the centre, staff from both Children's Services and Corporate Property Management have been working closely with users to identify alternative accommodation for their temporary use.
- 3.6 Staff from the Artforms service have been relocated temporarily into Merrion House. Service delivery will take place in schools on a temporary basis, although no services were provided in the first week of closure.
- 3.7 Other organisations that use the centre have been contacted and where possible will be relocated into other accommodation. The Council will need to consider reimbursement of unavoidable costs from such a move.
- 3.8 Appropriate security measures have been taken to secure the site.
- 3.9 The background to the health & safety position is that a survey had taken place during the summer, as part of separate option appraisal work about the future of the centre. The report from that survey highlighted that the electrical systems are generally antiquated and will require complete replacement. It should be noted that this was not a detailed survey. However, on the basis of what was said the Cultural Lead Officer asked for a health and safety assessment of the building.
- 3.10 During this time responsibility for the building maintenance was transferring from Children's Services to Corporate Property Management and therefore the health & safety assessment, which took place during two separate site visits in October, was carried out by Corporate Property Management.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The building was closed as an emergency and temporary measure due to health & safety concerns and on that basis there has not been any consultation. However, ward members were advised on the day and users were advised as soon as possible.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 Due to the nature of the building and that of some of its user groups, the temporary closure of the West Park Centre will have an impact on equality and diversity issues. This will be particularly felt by those users who attend the Gordon Parry Centre or Musical Arc, which specialise in providing services to people with special needs. The needs of these users are being prioritised in terms of temporary relocation.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The decision to close the West Park Centre has been made in line with the Council's responsibilities under Health & Safety legislation.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The closure of the centre has a range of resource implications for the Council. The cost to repair the electrical system alone was estimated at c£200k in the last condition survey. As the health & safety report referred to the heating system being potentially dangerous too, this would need to be taken into account. In considering the way forward, the Council will need to weigh up the cost of repair and the value for money that this represents.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no legal implications or access to information issues to this report. The report is not subject to Call In.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 The decision to close the centre on a temporary basis was made for Health & Safety reasons and was made as an emergency measure to ensure that staff and building users were not placed at risk and to ensure that the Council fulfilled its legal health & safety responsibilities.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The West Park Centre was closed as an emergency measure on a temporary basis following a recent health & safety inspection which categorised the electrical system in particular as being dangerous.
- 5.2 The electrical system is being tested at present as is the heating system. The cost of repair to re-open the building will be considered when this information becomes available, with a decision taken at that time.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The Area Committee is asked to note the report.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.