

Report of The Director of City Development and The Director of Children's Services

Report to North West (Inner) Area Committee

Date: 13th December 2012

Subject: 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

1. 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 an update on progress since the Area Committee meeting on 14th November, it outlines the actions taken to ensure users are supported to identify alternative temporary accommodation and it sets out the way forward to be taken with regard to the centre's future.

Recommendations

The Area Committee is asked to:

- Note the report and discuss its content.

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 an update on progress since the Area Committee meeting on 14th November, and outlines the action being taken by Children's Services and Corporate Property 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 buildings internal electrics.
- 2.2 The West Park Centre is a former school located on the Eastern side of Spen Lane which forms part of the border between Weetwood and Kirkstall wards.
- 2.3 The centre has been home to the school 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 basis and recurring lettings.
- 2.4 On 2nd November 2012 the building was closed due to concerns with the building's electrical installation.

3 Main issues

Building Issues

- 3.1 Electrical Installation Condition Report testing has taken place and has deemed the electrical installation to be unsatisfactory. The report can only find that an installation is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. An unsatisfactory assessment indicates that dangerous and/or potentially dangerous conditions have been identified.
- 3.2 An independent report has been produced by the private consultancy firm Arup. The report has highlighted costs of £931k for urgent works to facilitate reopening of the centre (exclusive of fees, contingencies and inflation or any desirable works that are required). The majority of these works are for electrical and mechanical services.
- 3.3 The Arup report states that it would be feasible to close off part of the building and re-open a portion. This would save around 30% of the costs. It also comments that "The absence of compliant building services installations present a potential health and safety risk and in our opinion justify the decision to close the facility to public occupation appears justified".
- 3.4 The report was not a detailed feasibility study, but it does state that the costs of bringing the building into what might be considered a satisfactory environment for the various activities that were housed there is significant and could even exceed those identified in the 2009 condition survey, once the full scale of dilapidation is known. The 2009 condition survey estimated backlog maintenance to be £2.2m.

Building Users

- 3.5 Council services that were based in the centre have temporarily relocated. The office function is now located in Merrion House and the music service delivery is taking place from City of Leeds school.
- 3.6 Assistance has been provided to regular hirers to help them find suitable temporary alternative venues. They have mainly been relocated in nearby schools or community centres, although a number have been able to find their own alternative venues. Some groups stored items in the centre and have either collected them or they have been moved to Council storage in Holbeck.
- 3.7 Those organisation that had their office bases within the West Park Centre have been more difficult to relocate. One organisation has been able to move to Meanwood Community Centre, one has moved to shared office space at the Heart Centre, two are temporarily working from home while they seek premises and one is out on tour. All of these have been offered help in locating alternative premises through the Council's Locate in Leeds service as well as being signposted to organisations that specialise in providing space to registered charities.

Way forward

- 3.8 Given the level of works necessary to bring the building back into use, any decision on its future will be taken by Executive Board. The current intention is to present a report to Executive Board in February 2013.

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 An independent report has been produced which shows a significant amount of money would need to be spent to bring the building back into use and that the building is currently unsafe. Accordingly work is currently being undertaken to consider the options available and it is intended to take a report to Executive Board in February 2013.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The Area Committee is asked to:

- Note the report and discuss its content.

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.