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## Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

To: Inner North West Area Committee

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2010

Subject: Woodhouse Community Centre Asset Transfer

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### Electoral Wards Affected:

**Hyde Park & Woodhouse**

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council  
Function

Delegated Executive  
Function available  
for Call In

Delegated Executive  
Function not available for  
Call In Details set out in the  
report

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## Executive Summary

The Woodhouse based registered charity Oblong has submitted a community asset transfer request for the Woodhouse Community Centre. Their proposal will see £400,000 invested in the centre and changes to its management including a streamlined booking procedure. Oblong has requested a 50 year peppercorn lease.

Transfer of the centre will not only see improved community access and facilities, but will also enable the Council to achieve revenue budget savings.

Sites valued at greater than £100,000 require a decision by Executive Board for an asset transfer. However, the views of the Area Committee are an important deciding factor. As such, this report seeks the Area Committee's support for the community asset transfer of the Woodhouse Community Centre.

### 1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Regeneration Management Team's support for community asset transfer of the Woodhouse Community Centre to Oblong.

### 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Woodhouse Community Centre is located on Woodhouse Street, Leeds 6. The centre is a former church built around 1890. In its current layout the building has a large hall with stage, six offices, six storage rooms, two meeting rooms, a kitchen and a café. The gross internal floor area is approximately 6,920ft<sup>2</sup>.

- 2.2 The centre is used by a number of local groups for a variety of activities. The centre is used as an office base for some groups as well as being available to the wider community for lettings.
- 2.3 Oblong is a registered charity established in 1996. It operates a user led resource centre with four staff and around 70 volunteers which aims to support people to create active and flourishing communities. Current services include:
- Three volunteering programmes;
  - A range of volunteer led services including IT training, free ESOL classes and a graphic design and video production service for voluntary sector organisations;
  - An accredited 20 week course in community development;
  - An environmental programme which aims to establish five community gardens in Woodhouse;
  - Advice, guidance and support for individuals or groups looking to undertake community activity;
  - A seven week course focused on mental health well-being.

### **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 Oblong has been based at the centre since January 2010, renting one of the office spaces. As a consequence of being based on site they have identified that, in their opinion, the centre is not utilised to its full potential. They also believe that taking over the centre would present them with an opportunity to expand.
- 3.2 Oblong has applied to the DCLG funded Community Builders programme for funding towards refurbishments at the centre. The layout of the centre will be changed to include a mezzanine floor above the main hall to increase floor space. Interior improvements will improve the 'flow' of the building, linking different areas together. There will also be investment in making the building more accessible. At present disabled access is through the back of the main hall as this is the nearest part of the building to street level. Oblong will install a ramp and platform lift to enable disabled visitors to use the main entrance (which will be relocated to allow access) and to be able to access the whole building.
- 3.3 A staffed reception area will also be created. The receptionist will inform, assist and engage visitors and enable them to book rooms easily. The receptionist will also take phone enquiries using a streamlined booking procedure.
- 3.4 The centre will continue to offer office space and community lettings. Oblong aims to make the centre an accessible, sustainable and thriving community hub that provides a wide range of learning, recreational, cultural, social and health activities. The centre will provide a wide range of activities for all members of the community. They will provide activities themselves and work with current users of the centre and other voluntary and statutory bodies to ensure the provision of services in these areas:
- Healthy living;
  - Learning and employment;
  - Community involvement and volunteering;

- Local democracy;
- Children and young people's services;
- Elderly people;
- Art and culture;
- Environment;
- Celebrations and social events.

3.5 Oblong has 17 targets it aims to achieve through management of the centre:

- To improve access to the centre by facilitating events and activities seven days a week upon transfer completion;
- To staff a reception area when the building is in use;
- To increase Oblong's unrestricted income by the end of 2012 to a level that will provide four months running costs;
- To support a variety of local wealth generating activities within the centre on 200 days a year by the end of 2015;
- To donate 5% of annual profits, above £5,000, to the Can Do Fund by the end of 2015;
- To establish regular healthy eating activities within 6 months of transfer completion;
- To improve the range, volume and diversity of classes/events/activities seven days a week by 100% by the end of 2012, whilst working with existing tenants to ensure that, whenever possible, current services at the centre are maintained;
- To develop a range of accredited training generating income of £10k annually by the end of 2015;
- To explore partnerships for delivery of training and resources for music production on a weekly basis within six months of transfer completion;
- To research licensing of events required within six months of completion of transfer;
- To increase use of the centre for family events by two per month within a year of transfer completion;
- To improve physical access to the building;
- To implement a green audit within three months of transfer completion and to implement its recommendations by 2015;
- To develop IT drop in facilities five days a week by the end of 2011;
- To establish five community gardens, including one at Woodhouse Community Centre, in Woodhouse by the end of 2012;
- To demonstrate increased engagement of community members with local activity and democracy by the end of 2015.

3.6 Oblong will implement an equitable and transparent charging scheme. Voluntary sector and not for profit activities will be charged at 60% of the rate charged to commercial and statutory organisations. This will mean that some current users who currently receive free lettings will begin to be charged. However, in these circumstances Oblong will work with current users to help them to find alternative sources of funding wherever practical. They will develop an action plan of how groups can work towards full payment. Oblong has no intention of asking current users to vacate or cease to use the building if they cannot pay the proposed

charges. However, increased income is vital to the revenue affordability of the business plan.

- 3.7 The Council's Youth Services are regular users of the centre. At present this represents no cost to the council. As part of the agreement for transfer Oblong will not charge Youth Services for use of the centre, up to 10.5 hrs, representing the current level of need from the service.
- 3.8 A detailed five year business plan has been produced and assessed by officers. Although there are some challenging targets to be met the plan is considered viable. However, funding for the capital works is subject to funding approval from Community Builders, so this request must be conditional on Oblong receiving the necessary funding from Community Builders.

#### **4.0 Implications For Council Policy and Governance**

4.1 The transfer will contribute towards achieving the following outcomes outlined in the Leeds Strategic Plan:

- Increased entrepreneurship and innovation through effective support to achieve the full potential of people, business and the economy;
- More inclusive, varied and vibrant communities through empowering people to contribute to decision making and delivering local services

4.2 The transfer will also contribute to the current Neighbourhood Improvement Plan in the following areas:

- To increase to 33% the number of residents satisfied with the delivery of local services and believing service providers are more responsive to their needs;
- To increase to 18% the number of residents who feel their neighbourhood has improved or at least stayed the same.

4.3 The following LAA Outcomes will also be contributed to:

- Local people feel that they have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and the delivery of services in their area;
- There is a greater sense of belonging and pride in local neighbourhoods.

#### **5.0 Legal and Resource Implications**

5.1 Woodhouse Community Centre has an unrestricted open market value of £275,000 and therefore exceeds the level of £100,000 for which Area Committee can exercise delegated authority for asset transfers. Any decision taken by Executive Board on these matters will be influenced by the Area Committee's recommendation.

5.2 The centre is currently part of the community centre portfolio delegated to Inner North West Area Committee. Running costs for 2009/10 were £76,490 with total income generated of £9,490, resulting in net costs of £67,000. The revenue forecast for 2011/12 shows budgeted net costs of £82,270. The transfer proposed by Oblong

is for a 50 year full repairing and insuring lease. Transfer of the site will therefore result in revenue costs savings for the same period.

- 5.3 By increasing activity and saving some costs Oblong believe they can operate the centre and make a reasonable annual profit.
- 5.4 Improvement works totaling approximately £60,000 took place last year to improve the building's accessibility, such as accessible toilets. Outstanding backlog maintenance stands at £20k essential, £14,130 desirable and £3,222 long term. These works will take place as part of Oblong's investment.
- 5.5 Oblong has applied for funding of £400,000 from the Community Builders fund. This will be a maximum of 40% loan and minimum of 60% grant. Community Builders have requested a 50 year lease be granted.
- 5.6 Oblong has requested that the lease be granted on a peppercorn rent basis.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 Oblong have presented a viable proposal to take responsibility for the Woodhouse Community Centre that will result in an improved building and increased provision for the local community.
- 6.2 The organisation has secured funding to achieve their proposal that will also result in a net saving for Leeds City Council.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

- 7.1 The Area Committee is requested to note the contents of this report and;
  - (i) Support the proposal for community asset transfer of the Woodhouse Community Centre on a 50 year peppercorn lease to Oblong, on the condition that capital funding is obtained as indicated in section 5.5 and agreement is reached regarding the usage required by Youth Services.

Background Papers: None