

Report of The Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)

Report to The Executive Board

Date: 7th September 2011

Subject: Response to the Deputation from the Lingfields and Firtrees Residents Association on the Provision of Community Facilities – Open House

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Alwoodley Moortown
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input 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 report provides the Executive Board with additional information requested as a consequence of a deputation by the Lingfields and Firtrees residents group to the full Council meeting on 13th July relating to Open House Community Association.
2. Open House Community Association is in the process of being dissolved.
3. The Area Leader, East North East Leeds and local ward councillors are in the process of putting an interim package together aimed at securing the continued operation of the Open House community centre serving the communities of Lingfields, Firtrees and Queenshills.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that the Area Leader, East North East Leeds in consultation with the ward members, develops an interim package to ensure the continued operation of the Open House community centre until the end of March 2012.

5. It is further recommended to explore the options for the future, long term management arrangements for the Open House community centre, involving and including a consultation with the local residents.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Executive Board with information about the Open House community centre, its background and role in the local community.
- 1.2 The report also responds to the deputation to the 13th July 2011 full Council meeting by the Lingfields and Firtrees residents group. (Appendix A)

2 Background information

- 2.1 The original voluntary organisation operating in the area was established in June 1985 and was known as Moor Allerton Community Association. The primary aim of the organisation was to work in partnership with the public, private, community and voluntary sectors, in order to improve the quality of life of residents in Outer North East Leeds estates of Lingfield, Firtree, Queenshill and the surrounding neighbourhood. These communities suffer consistent social, economic and physical deprivation as evidenced by Leeds Neighbourhood Index (NI). The relevant information from NI is presented in Appendix B.
- 2.2 Until 2003 the organisation operated as a charity registered with the Charities Commission. In 2003 it became a limited company, with the Memorandum and Articles adopted on 29th January 2003 and formal registration date, 11th April 2003. At this point it became known as Open House Community Association. Its objects were described as “general charitable purposes for the benefit of the community (...) in particular, but not exclusively, through the provision of community facilities supplying support, advice, information and recreational resources for the relief of poverty, sickness and distress, the advancement of educational and other charitable purposes” (Memorandum of Association).
- 2.3 The Association has variously run activity groups / interest groups for people of all ages, a café, English language classes and similar. At present, the weekly programme includes a computer pop-in, Over 50's Club, Women Together group, LCC run youth club and a play session for 3-8 year olds. Moreover, the centre is available for rent to community and residents groups.
- 2.4 Since July 2004, the organisation has leased its current premises at 79/81 Lingfield Drive, Leeds, LS17 (two shops) from LCC, on a peppercorn rent basis. The rental costs are covered by the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods.
- 2.5 The organisation has been in receipt of LCC, Outer North East Area Committee Wellbeing grants on a regular basis: 2005/6 - £19,500; 2007/8 - £22,000; 2008/9 - £15,000; 2009/10 – £15,000. The Wellbeing grants cannot be used for staffing or running costs of organisations. The money can be used to fund staff on a sessional / temporary basis to deliver a specific project or task, deliver an activity or procure means to deliver a project. Organisations apply annually for Wellbeing grants and a process is in place to monitor and evaluate the use of such grants.

- 2.6 The Association is managed by a group of Trustees. There are currently four Trustees. There is also a management committee which was created 2 years ago at the AGM. From then up to the present time, concerted efforts have been made by all three ward councillors to encourage local residents to become involved in the management and running of the centre. Meetings have been held in the locality and the entire area leafleted. Ultimately, these endeavours have not been wholly successful.
- 2.7 The Lingfields and Firtrees residents group was established in 2003. The group are affiliated to the Leeds Tenants Federation which means that they have a constitution but the Federation has no up to date record of the organisation's membership list, officers, records of meetings or AGM. The residents' group are not registered with East North East Homes Leeds.

3 Main issues

Lingfields and Firtrees residents group:

- 3.1 The residents group has expressed a number of complaints with regards to the running of the centre and the group of trustees. The main issues relate to the group's perceptions about:
- the day to day running of the centre,
 - the levels of transparency in running of the centre,
 - the fact that the trustees do not live in the area and as such do not understand the local community,
 - the employment of sessional staff without proper recruitment process.
- 3.2 The residents group sent a letter of complaint to Fabian Hamilton MP covering the same points as it did in its deputation to the Council. A response has been sent to Fabian Hamilton MP and it is included as Appendix C.

Open House Community Association:

- 3.3 A meeting to discuss the situation and find a way forward for Open House Community Association took place on 8th March 2011. It was chaired by Cllr P. Harrand and attended by representatives of the residents group, Open House trustees and an officer from the Area Management Team. A follow up meeting was arranged for May 2011. The residents group failed to attend the second meeting.
- 3.4 As a consequence of this and further meetings of the trustees, the trustees decided to dissolve the Open House Community Association. A letter to this effect was received by the Area Leader, East North East Leeds in May 2011. The manner of dissolution is prescribed in the organisation's Memorandum and Articles of Association and must happen at their AGM or EGM. The provisional date of the dissolution is 31st August 2011. Until then, the trustees remain responsible for all aspects of running of the Open House community centre.

Involvement of the Area Leader, East North East Leeds and the Ward Councillors:

- 3.5 The ward councillors determined to keep the Open House community centre open for the benefit of the local community. At present there is no local, strong organisation with a suitable track record able to take on full responsibility for the running of the centre. That is why the Area Leader, East North East Leeds is in the process of putting into place interim procedures, which will be in force until the end of the financial year 2011-12, to enable the centre to remain open.
- 3.6 Finances: A financial package is being developed to request funding from the wellbeing budget, Outer North East Area Committee, Alwoodley ward. Additionally, the Area Committee will claw back any unspent grant awarded to Open House in 2010-11. The association's treasurer is currently disaggregating the organisation's finances in preparation for the final audit of the accounts.
- 3.7 Building: Discussions are proceeding with the Commercial Asset Management to return the responsibility for the building to the Council. The running costs of the centre are being ascertained. According to 2009-10 accounts, the "Premises" costs are £4,600 and "Insurance" costs are £1,500. Adequate pro rata funding is being secured.
- 3.8 Use of the venue: Discussions are taking place with a number of partners to make sure that the centre remains open and activities are based there. It is envisaged that until the end of March 2012 the use of the venue will be free to entice people to use it. Statutory partners' experience is that holding "surgeries" in community centres is not effective. So far, East North East Homes Leeds have agreed to have a presence there half a day per week. PCSOs will use it as a base on the day/s of their work on the estates. The current activities will continue until the end of their funding. A space has been offered to Citizen Advice Bureau who, alongside their advice services want to do community development work on the estates. Further discussions are in progress with the Head of Allerton High School to offer them the use of the venue for some off site provision for children who cannot be in school. Local voluntary groups (Northcall and Maecare) have been made an offer of a free use of the centre and this will depend on the success of their funding applications. It is hoped that Feel Good Factor's play sessions will continue, subject to funding. Alwoodley Children's Centre has been offered a free use, however, at present they have no need for it.
- 3.9 Arrangements will be put in place to allow organisations to book rooms on an ad hoc basis subject to agreeing suitable caretaking arrangements. This provision will respond to the needs of groups such as Lingfields and Firtrees residents group.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation and discussions have taken place with statutory and voluntary partners as well as ward councillors in order to arrive at the best possible interim solution to ensure the centre remains open. A community consultation to determine the long term future of Open House will be organised in the autumn 2011.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The community centre serves the entire community on an equal basis. The surrounding estates have a varied population both, in terms of ethnic background and age. Presently, the centre offers a broad range of activities to attract members from different sections of the community.
- 4.2.2 There are also two other thriving voluntary organisations in the wider area, based in Cranmer Bank. Maecare provides services and activities for older people and Northcall works with younger people and families. There may be some possibility for an extension of those services.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The continued availability to the local residents of Open House supports the agreed priorities of the Outer North East Area Committee approved at the March 2011 committee meeting. These are: "Priorities for Communities" - Provide support and funding to volunteers working to improve their environment; Support local community events and activities which bring people together.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

- 4.4.1 The financial implications are presented in paragraph 3.6 above.
- 4.4.2 Staffing resources for the management of the centre will be provided by the Area Leader, East North East Leeds on a temporary basis.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 Legal advice was sought from a Principal Legal Officer, Corporate Governance (Legal Licensing and Registration Services, Property and Finance) on the steps necessary to wind up an organisation.
- 4.5.2 This matter was referred to the Executive Board for consideration by full Council on 13th July 2011.
- 4.5.3 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information and is available for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 It would not be viable for the Council and the Area Committee to take a long term responsibility for the running of the Open House community centre. A risk of closure has been identified in a situation when suitable alternative and sustainable management arrangements cannot be put into place.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The Open House community centre is a valuable resource in a deprived community. Efforts should be made to ensure its continued availability to that community.

5.2 In the short term, the Area Leader, East North East Leeds can oversee the running of the centre while work takes place to secure its long term future.

6 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the Area Leader, East North East Leeds in consultation with the ward members, develops an interim package to ensure the continued operation of the Open House community centre until end of March 2012.

6.2 It is further recommended to explore the options for the future, long term management arrangements for the Open House community centre, involving and including a consultation with local residents.

7 Background documents

7.1 Deputation to Council, 13th July 2011.

7.2 Leeds Neighbourhood Index

7.3 Response to the letter to Fabian Hamilton MP