



COUNCIL

8TH NOVEMBER 2004

DARLASTON MULTI PURPOSE CENTRE

Summary of report:

This report has been prepared as factual information for the Council meeting, in order that Council can fully consider the notice of motion before Council on the 8th November 2004 relating to the Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre. It provides information on: the background to the decision to revise operations of the facility; the current situation; and future use in relation to this site.

Background Papers:

Report to Cabinet 19th February 2003 – Corporate Revenue Budget 2003/4 to 2007/8
Report to Council 3rd March 2003 – Recommendations of Cabinet
Report to Cabinet 26th November 2003 – Modernising Day Services for Adults with Physical Disabilities

Recommendations

Report for information.

Signed

Executive Director: David McNulty

Date: 29th October 2004

Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared as background information for the Council meeting on Monday 8th November 2004, in view of the notice of motion relating to Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre.

Revisions to the “dry side” operation of Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre were included as part of the approval for the Corporate Revenue Budget for 2003/04.

2. Background

Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre occupies a site on Victoria Road which was originally a school site constructed in the early 19th century.

It has been subject to a number of different uses over the years including theatre venue, social services day centre, garage mechanic training venue, and sports centre.

The site as it is currently defined opened officially in 1986 but was trading for some twelve months prior to this. The site has been occupied by a number of different agencies all contributing to the utilisation of a large sprawling complex.

The complex itself comprises three distinct areas;

Victoria Road – Multi Purpose Hall/Activity Rooms (Lower Site)

This area contains sporting facilities - a three court sports hall, snooker room, aerobics room and fitness suite – and activity rooms. This was also previously the Day Centre area. It is now occupied temporarily by St Catherine’s Nursery until their premises are completed. These premises are now due to be available by February 2005.

Building/Fabric Condition

Whilst apparently structurally sound, there are concerns relating to: the original roofing of the complex; its compliance with Disability Discrimination Act requirements; and the modernisation of provisions. The heating is provided in the building by a single large special boiler which is very old and consideration needs to be given to its remaining operational life. Sports hall heating is provided via a high level gas heating system, which is approximately five years old. Although generally sound in covering, the sports hall flooring is in need of minor repairs.

The lower site is both building and fire alarmed and is connected to the systems of the new swimming pool site.

Upon this basis, some level of investment is therefore required to ensure the premises and facilities continue to be provided to an acceptable standard. Within the next 2 – 3 years, it is envisaged that the level of financial investment required would include approximately £5k for the repairs to the sports hall floor, £10k for repairs to the roof and £15k for Disability Discrimination Act compliance and required modernising of facilities.

Current Usage

Since the opening of the new swimming pool across the road in November 2001, specific user groups have progressively withdrawn from the building.

Darlaston Day Centre closed in December 2003 to release resources to develop more suitable and modern care services. This decision was based upon: the significant cost of investment required in the day centre building; to deliver upon the policy of adopting a more modern approach to day services; to reduce the investment in day centre buildings; and instead aim to facilitate access to mainstream services.

The majority of users of the fitness centre facility on the Victoria Road site have re-located to the fitness centre located in the new swimming pool. This is evidenced through the level of fitness centre attendances recorded for the Multi Purpose Centre (1,935 in 2002/03) and those recorded for the new swimming pool (14,873 in 2002/03).

Furthermore, the overall attendances for the Multi Purpose Centre have continued to reduce over the past couple of years, 24,356 recorded visits in 2001/02, in comparison with 15,595 visits recorded in 2003/04.

Due to a trend in falling attendance numbers, it was necessary to reduce the opening hours of the Multi Purpose Centre. The facility is now open between Monday to Friday from 4pm to 10pm and closed at weekends. The sports hall is booked between 7pm and 10pm by a range of groups including football for junior and adult, as well as badminton for clubs, groups and individual bookings.

Slater Street - Community Block (Middle Site)

This is a stand alone two storey building. Both the ground floor and first floor house large classroom size rooms.

Building/Fabric Condition

It is recognised that this building requires significant modernisation. It is not in good repair and therefore would require significant investment. It also does not provide for modern, fit for purpose facilities and is indeed not covered by a building or fire alarm system. Heating is adequate and is provided via a separate boiler. This was installed just over five years ago but which also serves as the heating provision for the bottom buildings of the upper end of the site.

Current/Future Usage

The ground floor provides for meetings, training activities, table tennis and occasionally aerobics. Bookings are taken on an ad-hoc basis.

The first floor is occupied by an arts dance group and currently there are no hire/lease charges made to this group. Discussions have taken place with this group regarding the vacation of this facility with the intention for this action to be implemented by the end of March 2004.

Slater Street – Activity Rooms (Upper Site)

The area contains a large number of vacant rooms and buildings which are subject to widespread vandalism. Significant portions of the building are boarded up as they have been left vacant by previous user groups.

Building/Fabric Condition

The general condition of the buildings is one of poor maintenance with poor amenity provisions. A significant amount of work and investment is required to bring the building up to an acceptable state of repair, from a user, health and safety and Disability Discrimination Act perspective. No intruder alarm system is in operation and only one of the offices is covered by a fire alarm.

Current/Future Usage

Rooms are currently occupied in part by Sport & Leisure Development services, Parents In Partnership and Foster & Three Bells Residents Association.

Sport and Leisure Development are due to vacate the premises during December 2004, as are Parents In Partnership. Foster & Three Bells could be relocated to alternative premises by the end of March 2004.

3. Council Policy on the utilisation of Capital Receipts

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (approved November 2003) states that up to 10% of any newly identified capital receipts can be recycled to projects either within the geographical area or service area from which the receipt arises. No other earmarking or underwriting of capital receipts can be permitted in the interests of prudent corporate financial management. This strategy framework is updated annually during November and Cabinet is shortly to review the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy document at its next meeting.

It is estimated that 10% of the capital receipt generated from the disposal of parts of the Darlaston Multi Purpose Centre site would be in the region of £37.5k. As identified within this report, this would be sufficient to cover the financial investment required of the Victoria Road area on the site.

David McNulty
Executive Director
29th October 2004