



CABINET- 17TH APRIL 2012

SUBJECT: Fochriw Community Centre

REPORT BY: Deputy Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval, in principle, to lease the site of Fochriw Community Centre to the Management Committee on the basis of a 25 year Lease to enable the Committee to apply for external funding to extend the building to accommodate the youth service.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Due to building condition concerns, Fochriw Youth Centre was closed during the summer term 2011. Since this time, the Youth Centre has been relocated on a temporary basis within Fochriw Community Centre. This has meant a reorganisation of the Community Centre's timetable, which is not sustainable on a permanent basis.
- 2.2 A Task and Finish Group has been established to fully investigate the feasibility for a permanent location for the Youth Centre and possible funding routes. The Group concluded that the only viable option available is to extend the Community Centre to provide suitable accommodation for the youth service, thus alleviating the pressure on limited space and enabling the continuation for the service delivery in the long term.
- 2.3 A number of funding sources have been identified, including Heads of the Valley Fund and Community Facility Activity Programme (CFAP), but as yet, no funding has been confirmed.
- 2.4 In order to assist the Management Committee to move forward with their proposals, this report seeks an approval in principle to lease the site of Fochriw Community Centre on terms to be agreed. Should Cabinet agree to the principle, Fochriw Management Committee will have the necessary assurances in place to progress their funding application.
- 2.5 Should the funding application be successful and subject to the necessary approvals and Planning consent, a Lease will then be granted

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Area Review exercise was a key process in the Council's Asset Management Strategy. It was implemented to help support the council in its aim of delivering services effectively and ensuring value for money. The process identified opportunities to achieve shared use of buildings, potential disposal opportunities and joint development projects.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Youth provision in Fochriw has for many years been housed in an aging demountable classroom within the site of Fochriw Primary School. The Youth Centre operates two evenings per week and is extremely well attended with an average of 40 young people attending per evening.
- 4.2 In March 2011, Caerphilly Council received a petition from the young people of Fochriw via the Caerphilly Youth Forum, raising concerns regarding the poor state of the building. Subsequently, a health and safety survey and building survey were undertaken which identified substantial defects with the building. The building surveyor advised that although the building fulfilled an important function, in their opinion, it had surpassed its economic life expectancy and could be classed as physically obsolete. Estimated remedial costs to bring the building to a good standard of repair would be in the region of £87,000, excluding fees and contingency. The figure does not include any additional work that might be incurred whilst remedial work is being undertaken. Based on the evidence of both surveys, and the cost implications, it was decided to close the building from the end of the summer term 2011.
- 4.3 On a temporary basis, youth provision is being housed in the Community Centre two evenings per week, which has been accommodated by reorganising the Community Centre's timetable. This is not sustainable on a permanent basis due to the disruption and restricted use for existing users.
- 4.4 A Task and Finish Group consisting of officers from Communities First, Property Services, Heads of the Valley Co-ordinator, Community Education, the Local Member of Fochriw and the Chairman of the Fochriw Community Centre was established to investigate the feasibility and possible funding routes for a permanent location for the Youth Centre in Fochriw.
- 4.5 Having reviewed possible alternative sites, the Group concluded that the only feasible location was the existing Community Centre and an extension would be required to enable the Youth Centre to function without disrupting the regular users of the centre. This conclusion also fits with a community facility recommendation identified in the Caerphilly Local Development Plan 2010 – 2012 (LDP) regarding a new Youth Centre in Fochriw.
- 4.6 The plan for an extension is envisaged over two stages, dependent on funding. First stage includes toilets, kitchen, office, separate entrance, internal access to the main Community Centre building, estimated cost £252,000. The second stage consists of an activity hall/space linked to the first stage estimated cost £126,000. Costs associated with associated parking and providing additional parking have not yet been considered.
- 4.7 A future potential allocation of £126,000 has been identified in the Education and Leisure Capital programme 2013-14 as a contribution towards the Fochriw Community Centre extension.
- 4.8 Consultation has been carried out with the young people of Fochriw to involve them with the extension if funding can be secured.
- 4.9 The Task and Finish Group is currently exploring funding from a number of sources such as Heads of the Valley funding and Community Facility Activity Programme (CFAP). At present, no funding has been confirmed.
- 4.10 A report detailing the requirement for the extension was presented to the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee on the 8th November 2011. The Scrutiny Committee having fully considered the location and associated issues for youth provision in Fochriw noted the report.

- 4.11 The criterion for such funding includes a requirement for the applicant to have security of tenure. Currently, the Management Committee holds an annual Lease agreement, which is not sufficient to meet the funding requirement. Therefore, to facilitate any funding application, an in principle approval is being sought to grant a long Lease of approximately 25 years to satisfy the funding criteria.
- 4.12 Although the terms of the Lease are to be determined, it is proposed that the management arrangements for the Community Centre will reflect current arrangements. Therefore, Caerphilly Council will remain responsible for all associated repairs and maintenance.
- 4.13 The possibility of asset transfer has been discussed with the Management Committee; however, this was not considered a viable option due to the implications of taking on the liabilities and responsibilities associated with such a transfer. The Community Centre is located in a rural community with limited community resources. As such, the Centre is well patronised by the local residents. However, due to its location, there is little scope for the Management Committee to generate additional funds, which would be required to cover the additional costs associated with taking on the obligations of a fully repairing lease. The Management Committee does not believe it has the capacity to sustain the service in the long term, and would not be able to generate sufficient funds to cover the ongoing costs associated with the full management role.
- 4.14 For this reason, officers are minded to recommend retaining the repair obligations at this site in order to facilitate the funding application and support the provision of community facilities in this location in the long term. Should the funding be successful, the extension will benefit the young people and wider community.
- 4.15 Planning advice is that the proposed scheme accords with the general principles of the LDP. Planning permission would be required for the extension, however it is currently deemed acceptable in planning terms subject to compliance with standard development control criteria, including the provision of adequate car parking. Work is ongoing to develop an acceptable design and determine an appropriate number of spaces as this may affect the viability of the scheme.
- 4.16 Legal advice is that there is nothing that would prevent the grant of a 25-year Lease.
- 4.17 The additional land required to extend the Centre and provide additional parking is currently held within the HRA and, as such, it will need to be formally appropriated by Community Education. Housing Services has confirmed that they are in support of the proposal and the land can pass to the holding service along with associated maintenance obligations.
- 4.18 If the funding application is unsuccessful, the Management Committee will not require a lease agreement and the management of the Community Centre will continue on the current terms.
- 4.19 The general powers of the Council to dispose of land are contained in the Local Government Act 1972, sections 123 – 127. The Local Government Act 1972; General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003, allows a local authority to lease land at less than best consideration without specific consent of the National Assembly, provided:
- It contributes to the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area, or all or any persons resident or present in its area, and;
 - The undervalue does not exceed £2m.
- 4.20 This criteria is linked to the “well-being” powers contained in the Local Government Act 2000, which states that every local authority has the power to do anything that it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of well being in its area.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Consultation has been carried out with the young people of Fochriw to involve them with the extension if funding can be secured.
- 5.2 As part of ongoing consultation process, the plans will be presented to the Caerphilly Access Group for comment at the appropriate time.
- 5.3 Should the funding be successful, the extension will benefit the young people and wider community.
- 5.4 The extension will go beyond the current building regulations minimum requirements in relation to Part M accessibility requirements. The existing Community Centre has been DDA assessed and is reported to be reasonably accessible with adequate ramps, automatic door to the main entrance and accessible disabled toilet is also provided. Work is ongoing to undertake various improvements to include modification to disabled parking.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Work is ongoing to determine the cost of extending the Community Centre and works associated with providing additional parking. The costs reported to date are indicative budget costs.
- 6.2 As detailed above, a future potential allocation of £126,000 has been identified in the Education and Leisure Capital Programme 2013 –14 as a contribution towards Fochriw Community Centre extension.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Youth Centre staff have been transferred to the Fochriw Community Centre. There are no personnel issues associated with this transfer.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 There have been no views expressed that have not been incorporated into this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet agrees to the principle of leasing Fochriw Community Centre to Fochriw Management Committee on terms to be agreed by the Head of Performance and Property Services, including the power to lease the property for less than best price reasonably obtainable in the interests of the social and economic well being of Fochriw and the whole of the County Borough.
- 9.2 Should the extension proceed, land currently held by HRA to pass to Community Education along with associated maintenance obligations.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 An in principle approval to lease the site of Fochriw Community Centre will assist the Management Committee to move forward with their application and prepare further information in support of their proposals.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 1972, Local Government Act 2000 and general Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003. This is a Cabinet function.

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