

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

16 October 2014

Report by Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Environment

AUCHENBACK COMMUNITY CENTRE – MAJOR REPAIRS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to bring forward the results of an independent assessment of the maintenance condition of Auchenback Community Centre and, on the grounds of the costs involved and proximity of other venues, a recommendation to move towards permanent closure of this facility.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees to work towards the permanent closure of Auchenback Community Centre by summer 2015 as a result of a major issue with the condition of the building.

BACKGROUND

3. Auchenback Community Centre is a prefabricated construction dating back to the 1950s. It is located in a residential area in Barrhead and investment in the last number of years has included a new roof; improved heating and lighting; flooring upgrade and internal redecoration.

4. Earlier in 2014 a problem was found with rot in the floor of the main hall at the Community Centre. Works in the region of £1700 were authorised to bring the floor back to a usable condition. This was deemed relatively urgent given the level of lets that were being temporarily accommodated due to the Foundry works and sports centre closure. However the property report that we received suggested there are other areas of rot which have not as yet shown any structural damage. The report states that the external walls are in a “very poor condition and putting all the timber floors at risk of fungal infection”. It goes on to detail the “very high risk” of fungal decay arising from lack of ventilation under the floors, drainage issues and the external walls not being watertight. There are issues of undulations in the floor and a high risk that the floor will drop further, bringing with it a health and safety issue that will have to be rectified.

5. The report suggests that the building itself does not have a long lifespan beyond a 3-5 year period and would be costly to repair. Works significantly in excess of £10,000 will be needed over the next 2 years to keep the facility viable with further repair and maintenance costs over the longer term. It concludes that “the more significantly expensive repairs to the external walls should be considered very carefully as it is highly likely that this building is not financially viable to repair given its poor design and the number of external defects”. Maintenance costs for recent years have represented a significantly higher rate per square meter than the average across the Council’s property stock (£27.20 per sqm in 2013/14 against Council average of £18.77 per sqm).

6. In addition, due to the construction of the building, power consumption is high as the walls have no insulating material (costs of £18.75 per sqm last year compared with a similarly sized property which averaged £10.58 per sq m).

7. In summary the energy and maintenance costs are disproportionate to other buildings and cannot reasonably be justified in the current economic climate. Taking all this into account, the professional advice is that the building should be closed and such a course of action accords with the principles of effective property asset management

8. Given the availability of other venues in the area and the estimated cost of repair works, the purpose of this report is to recommend we work towards the closure of this facility by summer 2015 with lets being redirected towards alternative venues.

9. Regular groups using the hall are: line and country dance classes; councillor surgery and the Golden Age Club. These activities take place across four days of the week, mainly in the afternoons/evenings. In a typical year visitor numbers are around 4,069 visits (equates to 82 per week based on 2012/13 figures). In 2013/14 the number of customers visiting Auchenback Community Centre was slightly higher at 5,484 visits (equates to 110 per week), due to relocations from Barrhead Sports Centre whilst the Foundry is developed. It is likely that all sports centre bookings will be clear of Auchenback Community Centre by November 2014.

10. The income for 2013/14 from Auchenback Community Centre was £3,500 as all groups fall into concession rate, however there was expenditure of £26,000 of which £12,500 was Facility Officer staffing.

Alternative Venues

11. The main alternative venues for groups from Auchenback Community Centre would be local high schools; Carlibar Primary School or Arthurlie House. Given that several of the users are line and country dance groups, it is important that venue(s) of an appropriate size can be found. These suggested venues are further away, but within a mile, and have limited storage potential for group needs – it is envisaged that hall users may be unhappy with these options and that they would prefer to stay directly in the Auchenback area.

12. There are also a range of further options for the groups' consideration:

- Potential capacity within Auchenback Resource Centre (ARC) which is closer and is operated by the third sector with the assistance of an annual financial contribution from the Council.
- The new Barrhead Foundry building is also being developed to support a range of activities for older people so this too could provide a suitable alternative.
- A new Early Years Centre is currently being developed and the expectation is that this may provide some community space with scope perhaps to relocate some of the smaller lets.
- There are a range of other local options in the form of churches etc. which may be suitable.

13. All of these options will be explored as part of service user engagement around the closure to determine which best suits the needs of the different users.

What Happens Next?

14. If Cabinet was minded to support closure of the facility, steps will then be taken to relocate existing lets in preparation for closure. Thereafter, the Council would secure the building pending demolition. . Subject to groups being suitably accommodated elsewhere, the aim would be to move forward with closure by summer 2015.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

15. It is anticipated that a saving of £16,250 would be made from the closure of the hall, based on 50% reduction in staffing time (as hours redeployed with bookings elsewhere) and 100% loss of income. If we managed to retain 50% of income then the saving could rise to £18,000.

16. However, as outlined above, the more significant driver for this report is the cost of ongoing repairs/ maintenance and energy for the building which is now considered to be disproportionate and unsustainable.

17. Costs may be incurred to demolish the building.

CONSULTATION

18. As outlined above, the priority will be to engage with affected groups to find alternative accommodation. To date no detailed work has been done with the groups, although they have been advised of this Cabinet paper.

19. Due to redeployment of Facility Officer hours elsewhere, no staff will be affected by this closure. Unison have been informed of this proposal.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

20. There are partnership working opportunities around use of the ARC; the Foundry; development of the new Early Years Centre if suitable intergenerational space is provided; and local churches.

IMPLICATIONS

21. A concern with this proposal is the potential impact on the older users of Auchenback given the upheaval of having to go to another place and the need for them to reconfigure travel arrangements. Past experience shows that elderly groups that are relocated can be more likely to disband at the end of their booking period. Care will need to be taken as part of the service user engagement on this proposal to ensure that alternative provision is found and that groups are supported.

CONCLUSION

22. Within the current economic climate given the low levels of use; the proximity of alternative accommodation within a mile of Auchenback Community Centre; the poor condition of the building and resulting unsustainable nature of maintenance and energy costs, closure of the facility is recommended. Everything possible will be done to minimise impact for current users.

RECOMMENDATION

23. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees to work towards the permanent closure of Auchenback Community Centre by summer 2015 as a result of a major maintenance issue.

REPORT AUTHOR

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

KEYWORDS

This report sets out information on the property condition at Auchenback Community Centre and recommends permanent closure of the facility. Keywords are: Auchenback; community centre; hall; property; asset management.