



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre/ Connswater Community and Leisure Ltd lease extension
Date:	14 January 2009
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Catherine Taggart Community Services Area Manager John Nelson Community Services Area Manager (East)

Relevant Background Information

In 2004 the former Client Services Committee agreed the recommendation of the strategic review of Council-owned Indoor Leisure Facilities that the Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre be transferred to the community sector. In January 2005 the Committee agreed to hand over management of the facility to Connswater Community and Leisure Ltd (CC&L), a company formed by Mersy Street Area residents (MARA) and other local interests to manage the Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre. Following refurbishment CC&L took over the management of Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre in February 2006 on a basis of a 3 year lease to February 2009.

The Council has provided regular Community Development Worker and Community Services Area Manager support to this group to ease and enable the process of managing the Leisure Centre.

A preliminary 6 month review (see appendix 1) was undertaken concentrating on the area of governance and looking specifically at

- Accountability
- Management Structures and Processes
- Financial management
- Centre usage
- Complaints received
- Wider Community links
- Difficulties experienced

The result showed that CC&L had made improvements but that further work was required in order to provide a high quality public service.

One of the group's strengths was that they had a highly committed and motivated manager supported by a strong team of volunteers.

The balance between running the facility as a business and still addressing community need became an issue for the Board of Directors.

The resultant conflict led to several resignations from the Board, notably the Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer which further eroded the management capacity of the group, an issue brought into question at the start of the lease.

CSAM and CDW support was again put in place to help the group overcome the difficulties and resulted in the issues being addressed and new Directors being appointed.

The group have continued to meet their monitoring requirements and since the summer of 2008 they have increased their community development activities, this is beginning to balance what had initially been a largely leisure based programme.

Sadly in December 2008 the centre manager Mr John Cochrane unexpectedly died.

His departure will severely impact on the day to day running and management of the centre. The organisation, coordination and vision for the centre was largely led by him and the Connswater group will have significant adjustments to make if they are to continue to develop the capacity that Mr Cochrane contributed to the organisation.

Key Issues

Therefore the issues are:

- The centre's programme has only in the last 6 months begun to meet the required standard in terms of both in centre services, programmes and wider community development support and outreach. MARA, the group carrying out the Community Development work, are based in the centre and are heavily represented on the board of CC&L.
- The initial concerns over CC&L's management capacity were compounded when internal difficulties led to the resignations of the Board's office bearers. The death of the centre manager highlights that the group's initial management and leadership capacity has been further weakened.
- CC&L initially required substantial officer support to enable them to get established and comply with their contractual requirements. This was further required to assist in overcoming the internal conflict at Board level. It is anticipated that officer support will again be required to help overcome the difficulties caused by the vacant centre manager's post.
- Lease Arrangements options:
 1. The Lease could be extended for a further three years
 2. An initial extension of six months could be offered, followed by a review to assess CC&L's performance and capacity
 3. The lease would not be renewed and Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre returned to the Parks and Leisure Department. A report on the future use of the building would then be submitted to the Parks and Leisure Committee. MARA could be re-housed in Dee Street Community Centre.

Resource Implications

The renewal of the lease would be within revenue estimates but would require officer input for monitoring and support.

If the lease was not renewed there would be an annual saving for the Development Department not exceeding £81,045. This would be comprised of £53,045 grant aid and £28,000 internal costs.

Officers would need to consider the need for financial support to MARA to continue to provide community development services in the area.

Recommendations

Committee are asked to note the report and agree the most appropriate option.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Six month review on Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre September 2006
Appendix 2 – Strategic Review

Abbreviations

CC&L – Connswater Community and Leisure Ltd
MARA – Mersey Street Area Residents
CSAM – Community Services Area Manager
CDW – Community Development Worker

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