



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre/ CC&L Ltd Lease extension
Date:	11 March 2009
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
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Relevant Background Information

In 2004 the Client Services Committee agreed to the recommendation contained within 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 this facility to Connswater Community and Leisure Ltd (CC&L). This company was formed by Mersey Street Area Residents Association (MARA) and other local interests in order to manage Ballymacarrett L.C.

Following refurbishment, CC&L took over the management of the Ballymacarrett Leisure Centre in February 2006 on a basis of a 3 year lease, that is for the period to Feb 2009. Community Services has provided regular Community Development Worker (CDW) and Community Services Area Manager (CSAM) support to the group to ease and enable the process of managing Ballymacarrett L.C.

A preliminary 6 month review 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 shown improvement 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 who had around him 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 resulting conflict led to several resignations notably the Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer. This has further eroded the management capacity of the group i.e. the issue that had been questioned 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 appointed.

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

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

- The centre's programme has only in the last 6 months begun to meet the required standard in terms of both in-centre services and programmes and wider community development support and outreach. MARA, the group who carry out the Community Development work, are based in the centre and are heavily represented on the board of CC&L Ltd.
- The initial concerns concerning the management capacity of CC&L 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.
- Under the terms of the original lease the Lessee has the option to extend the lease for a further period of three years, insofar as there is no breach or subsisting breach of covenant.
- Following advice from Legal Services, discussions have taken place with CC&L to test their openness to a time-limited lease extension during which a review of the centres performance and management capacity will take place. If the review is favourable, a further lease extension of 2 years may be granted. CC&L have received this option favourably.

Resource Implications

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

The review will be part of a wider review of the performance and management of the Independently managed BCC centres

Recommendations

It is recommended that the lease be extended for a further 12 month period with a review of performance taking place after 6 months. It is further recommended that if the review is successful a further lease extension of 2 years would be offered.

Abbreviations

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

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