

## **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - GROSVENOR BALLROOM AND LISCARD COMMUNITY CENTRE, WALLASEY**

---

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for a transfer by lease of The Grosvenor Ballrooms Community Centre, Wallasey in accordance with the Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Cabinet, at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009 identified a number of facilities that should be transferred to community management, where the community expresses an interest.
- 2.2 Cabinet, at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2009, approved the Community Asset Transfer policy. The policy is used to pass over the ownership and control of assets to community based groups and explains in detail the key principles and basis for transfer. The minute also resolved that Community Centres first be offered to the established and viable Joint Management Committees.

### **3. GROSVENOR BALLROOMS**

- 3.1 The Grosvenor Ballrooms were opened in 1906, constructed in red pressed brick with ornate detailing. Purpose built as a ballroom, this two storey building has been operated latterly as a community hall. It is identified on plan A.
- 3.2 The ground floor consists of a large ballroom with capacity to accommodate 300 people, and there is a licensed bar facility and a buffet room. There is also a small office, based at the front of the building and a small storage area on the ground floor. There is a large training kitchen which can deliver commercial catering.
- 3.3 This facility is currently in operation seven days a week and provides activities which include: Pensioners Luncheon Club, ballroom dancing, line dancing, tai chi, tea dances, keep fit, church group, children's dance groups, weddings, parties, theatre group, concerts, blood donors, conferences and educational training. Upstairs, at the front of the building, there is a dance studio and the rear of the building there is a recording studio.

### **4. LISCARD COMMUNITY CENTRE**

- 4.1 The centre was originally built circa 1970 as a sports hall / gymnasium and was constructed in brick under a flat roof. It is identified on plan B.

- 4.2 Liscard Community Centre comprises one large main hall, a smaller upstairs meeting room, kitchen facilities and a small office with limited storage space.
- 4.3 There is an environmentally friendly garden area to the rear which has recently been improved through a Fairshare grant. Activities provided are Pre-School, Out of School Club, Holiday Club, Tai Chi, Tae-Kwon-Do, dancing, children's parties, keep fit, theatre group and limited private hire. The garden area is held on a 25 lease by the Joint Management Committee granted in 2006 at a peppercorn rental which was created to enable access to funding.

## **5. PROPOSAL**

- 5.1 Both premises are operated by the Joint Management Committee for the Liscard Community Facilities Complex and in accordance with the Community Asset Transfer policy the group was invited to submit a proposal for Community Asset Transfer. The group has established Grosvenor Community Associates Ltd to go forward with the transfer and it originally considered the potential to take a transfer of both buildings. However, for the reasons outlined later in this report, its preferred option is now to incorporate all its activities at one site, the Grosvenor Ballroom.
- 5.2 In order for the organisation to relocate to one site and maintain the same level of activity and income, it would need to replace the space lost at Liscard and re-provide it at the Grosvenor Ballroom. To achieve this, the proposal assumes the construction of an extension at Grosvenor Ballroom to be funded through the asset transfer process from the Community Fund.
- 5.3 In arriving at its decision to deliver its community activities from one location, the group has identified the following benefits:
- Achieve a sustainable transfer of community facilities to a credible, established community organisation.
  - Remove ongoing local authority capital, revenue and management commitments for two community facilities.
  - Ensure community services continue to be offered in the long term in the Liscard area.
  - Ensure high quality child care provision is enhanced by high quality facilities in the area.
  - Develop a partner to work with the local authority and other service providers to localise services and provision to vulnerable and hard to reach communities (a key priority in Big Society).
  - Preserve a significant local building with cultural and historical significance.
  - Enhance Grosvenor as an anchor organisation for the area, providing facilities and space for smaller community groups and support to small organisations and individual citizens (a key priority in Big Society).

The group has also provided a value for money case for the transfer which is outlined as follows:

- Grosvenor Ballroom is a successful local community facility with the capacity to generate sufficient income to be self sustaining. This means that services can continue to be offered to the local community without the Council having the cost

of staffing, running costs and management – a significant long term saving, especially in the current economic climate.

- The plan involves reducing from two community buildings to one building. Whilst initial capital outlay is required, the re-siting to one facility means that the local authority is no longer meeting the staffing, revenue, repairs, maintenance and management costs of the Liscard Centre.
- The vacant site created by the demolition of Liscard Community Centre will have a residual value which can be recovered by the Council should it proceed to sale. (The future of this building has not yet been determined and demolition may not necessarily be the outcome).
- The cost of the extension to the Grosvenor Centre can be seen as an investment. The additional space will ensure that the facilities at Liscard are properly relocated, but the additional space will also provide an additional revenue income opportunity for Grosvenor, further ensuring sustainability.
- The existing childcare facilities at Liscard are poor. Although the service has received an excellent Ofsted report, the ongoing suitability of the building has been called into question. The re-siting to Grosvenor ensures that high quality childcare provision continues, but within a high quality environment, rather than a 'make do' environment. This contributes fully to the Council's priorities for high quality childcare and pre school learning (previously key elements of Every Child Matters).
- Investment in Grosvenor is not anti competitive. Whilst it is true that private operators may question public sector investment in this childcare facility, it is also true that a private operator would make private gain from the investment. As a social enterprise and a charity, the trustees of Grosvenor will not receive any dividend or profit. Any profit generated as a result of the investment will in fact be reinvested into the charity, and can be used to increase the benefits to the local community, either through enhanced childcare facilities, or through the provision of other charitable services.
- The transfer of the Big Lottery funded garden will be completed at a cost to the Grosvenor Centre, and not the local authority. (The funders have advised the group that the grant will not need to be repaid if the garden is re-sited)

5.4 Within the Grosvenor complex are eight lock up garages, four of which are occupied by individuals on monthly licence agreements. These have been in place for some time, the earliest dating back to 1981. One of the garages is vacant and the other three are used by the Joint Management Committee for the Liscard Community Facilities Complex. The proposed extension to the Grosvenor Ballroom would require the vacation and demolition of the garages which would necessitate the Council serving notice to obtain possession of the four properties currently on licences.

## **6. COMMUNITY BENEFITS**

6.1 The Liscard and Grosvenor facilities currently offer a wide range of activities and functions for the community. Many of the benefits of a transfer of the Grosvenor Ballroom with the proposed extension have previously been described. The group has, however, advised, within its business plan, that after transfer it proposes to offer community benefit by expanding the business in the following ways:

- *To widen participation in and by the community*
- *To develop the commercial opportunities for the catering facilities at the Grosvenor Ballroom.*

- *To provide vocational/non vocational accredited courses within the local community*
- *To enhance local residents employability*
- *To build on relationships with the PCT*
- *To enhance the services provided in the luncheon club*
- *By identifying down time and marketing new opportunity created*
- *Exploring new opportunities both within and outside the established buildings*

## **7. TRANSFER PROPOSAL**

7.1 The business plan, which covers a five year period, has been assessed and is considered to show a viable and sustainable opportunity for Community Asset Transfer towards the end of the business plan period. In order to achieve this, support is required in for the first two years of the plan, which the proposal requires the Council to meet from the Community Fund.

7.2 The Community Asset Transfer Policy advises that the Council will, subject to the availability of funding and the anticipated economic life of the building, carry out essential repairs to the main elements of the building. Such repairs are identified through an independent condition survey. The proposal requires that the repairs are funded by the Council from the Community Fund.

7.3 The Joint Management Committee for the Liscard Community Facilities Complex has submitted the proposal on the basis of a transfer of Grosvenor Ballroom in accordance with the Community Asset Transfer policy which would involve a transfer by lease on the following terms:

- Term: 99 years
- Rent: Peppercorn
- Liabilities: The lessee to be responsible for all outgoing and maintenance.
- User clause: For use as a community centre.

The group would also be required to vacate Liscard Community Centre and to surrender its lease of the play area to the rear at no cost to the Council.

7.4 The retention of Liscard Community Centre will require its security or demolition. However, as can be seen from the attached plan, the centre is located adjacent to the Liscard Municipal Offices and would enable significantly improved flexibility should the municipal complex require remodelling or developing.

7.5 Members will be aware of the Council's obligation to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable on the disposal of its land and property. However, under the General Consent, the Council does have the power to restrict the value of land by imposing restrictions as to its use on the grounds that to do so is in the interest of the economic and / or environmental and / or social well being of the inhabitants of the Borough and provided also that any such restriction in value does not exceed two million pounds, per transaction. Members should be aware that the Grosvenor Ballroom, if offered for sale without restrictions, would produce a capital receipt.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

8.1 The proposal submitted by the Joint Management Committee for the Liscard Community Facilities Complex centres on its preference for locating all its activities on one site, the Grosvenor Ballroom. This requires repair and extension to the building, as described, that will provide an upgraded, high quality, community facility. The cost of providing the extension is substantial, however, given the savings to the Council and the opportunities offered by the return of the Liscard Community Centre, transfer and extension of Grosvenor Ballroom is considered to be the best means of achieving a viable and sustainable community facility.

## **9. Financial implications**

9.1 The council will support use of Community Fund monies for a grant for the following items:

- The repairs described in the report, which relate predominantly to the need for a heating system and new windows have an estimated cost of £155,000 plus fees and contingencies.
- The cost of the extension has been estimated at between £300,000 and £350,000.
- The business plan identifies a deficit in year one in the sum of £43,272 and a deficit in year two in the sum of £18,946.

9.2 The transfer of this asset on the terms described will result in savings relating to running costs of approximately £30,000 per annum for Grosvenor and £12,700 per annum for Liscard.

9.3 If the Council retained Grosvenor Ballroom it would have to address the Backlog maintenance estimated at £155,000.

9.4 Future life cycle maintenance costs are estimated at £164,000 over the next 10 years. The Council will no longer have responsibility to meet these costs after transfer.

9.5 If the Council were to sell the property it could achieve a significant capital receipt. The actual amount would be determined by a marketing exercise, but would not be expected to be less than £350,000.

9.6 The return of Liscard Community Centre to the Council would enable it to determine future options whether it should be retained or sold. If it was agreed that it was sold the value, which would be determined by a marketing exercise, would not be expected to be less than £100,000.

9.7 Relocation of the Big Lottery funded garden at the rear of Liscard Community Centre would be funded by the Joint Management Committee at considerable expense.

9.8 The lock up garages currently produce an income of £1,300 per annum which would end once they become vacant.

## **10. Staffing implications**

- 10.1 The Council employs two part time janitors at the centres. Post transfer Grosvenor Community Associates Ltd will make their own arrangements for janitorial services and the Council will manage the staff under existing HR policies.

## **11. Equal Opportunities implications/Equality Impact Implications**

- 11.1 The transfer lease will require the group to adhere to current legislation including equal opportunities.
- 11.2 An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of the wider Community Asset Transfer process.

## **12. Community Safety implications**

- 12.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **13. Local Agenda 21 implications**

- 13.1 In undertaking work to Grosvenor Ballroom consideration will be given to energy savings.

## **14. Planning implications**

- 14.1 The proposed extension to the Grosvenor Ballroom will require planning permission. The site is a location designated as a Primarily Residential Area and any future application would be assessed against Policies HS15 and RE10 in the Unitary Development Plan.

## **15. Anti-poverty implications**

- 15.1 None arising directly from this report

## **16. Human Rights implications**

- 16.1 None arising directly from this report

## **17. Social Inclusion implications**

- 17.1 The building is used by a wide cross section of the community.

## **18. Local Member Support implications**

- 18.1 The properties are located within the Liscard Ward.

## **19. Background Papers**

- 19.1 Cabinet reports:

15 January 2009 – Transforming Wirral  
19 March 2009 – Asset Management Update

## **20. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 20.1 That a transfer by lease of the Grosvenor Ballroom be agreed and the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be authorised to complete the necessary lease on the terms set out in this report.
- 20.2 That, following vacation by the group, the Council accepts a surrender of the existing interests in Liscard Community Centre and the adjacent garden area.
- 20.3 That the agreed works and extension to the property, together with the transitional costs for the first two years of the business plan, be funded from the Community Fund.
- 20.4 The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be authorised to obtain possession of the garages as described in the report.

**Bill Norman**

Director of Law HR & Asset Management.