

OPTION: REMOVAL OF SUBSIDY - OAKLANDS OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

BUDGET SAVING: £23,000

DESCRIPTION OF OPTION

The Council currently delivers the Oaklands Outdoor Education Centre service. The service has for many years received a small subsidy from the Council.

The option in this area is to remove the subsidy and ensure that it brings in enough income to break even. This will be done through increased marketing and seeking sponsorship.

Alternative options would be to:

- ***Close the provision with a view to renting or selling the centre;***
- ***Enter into a formal procurement process to seek a preferred provider who could deliver at a further reduced cost;***
- ***Enter into a formal agreement with another interested 3rd party to provide a shared service.***

The Oaklands Outdoor Education Centre has a budget of £434,000. This is largely covered by income generated from schools and other users (£370,000).

The Centre has a successful 28 year history of providing high quality outdoor education and is well supported by schools. Its vision is to encourage learning about self, others and the environment through a wide range of adventurous experiences and activities such as canoeing, climbing, expeditions, gorge walking, mine exploration, sea level traversing and orienteering.

The Centre has had a significant new build extension (2006, Lottery Funding, £448,000) and a major refurbishment (2009, local authority funding in excess of £350,000).

The centre is staffed as follows and equates to 4.7 FTE:

▪ Head of Centre (2)	Full time (job share)	52 weeks per year
▪ Deputy Head of Centre (1)	Full time	43 weeks per year
▪ Site Manager (1)	Full time	52 weeks per year
▪ Administrator (1)	Part time (16 hours)	43 weeks per year
▪ Instructors (2)	Full time & 0.7	43 weeks per year
▪ Cooks (2)	50 hours per week	43 weeks per year

In addition to the above permanent staff there is a panel of freelance instructors that the centre accesses as and when the need arises.

RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS

In previous years the Centre has reduced expenditure and increased its income. A subsidy in excess of £261,000 in 1993 has been reduced year on year to £64,000 in 2012-2013 (including an asset rentals charge of £21,800). Following previous public consultation, the centre was tasked to reduce the reliance on council subsidy to zero by 2014. The Centre is on track to achieve this target of which the saving of £23,000 is part.

The savings proposal is based on retaining the service in house and continuing current arrangements whilst generating additional income. The alternative options with regard to working with others to provide the service would potentially provide the opportunity to creatively sustain and develop the provision.

If the Centre were to close the following risks would need to be considered:

- It would have an impact on the level of access to education provision for Wirral children and young people and in the potential value offered to the education sector in terms of specialist outdoor provision;
- Whilst closure of the centre would potentially generate a capital receipt or rent, the level of receipt or rent could be adversely affected by issues relating to condition and the current economic climate;
- There is a risk of potential claw back for facilities which have been built with grant monies. The Centre has had lottery funding which would have to be deducted from sale of site or rental;
- All staff would have to be either redeployed, which might not be possible because of their skills and/or their physical location, or be made redundant;
- Until the centre was sold or leased they would have to be maintained and secured, therefore some of the total premises related costs would still be incurred.

National benchmarking data is not available for this type of service.

IMPACT

The option in this area is to remove the subsidy and ensure that it brings in enough income to break even.

The Centre has an excellent reputation of working with vulnerable groups of young people with emotional, physical and behavioural issues. A potential negative impact of alternative options would be a reduction in provision for disabled children, children with complex learning needs and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children receiving this service will live in all wards.

MITIGATION

This would potentially increase costs to schools. This may be mitigated for vulnerable children by the increase in Pupil Premium allocation to schools.