



AGENDA ITEM: 5(e)

CABINET: 18 MARCH 2014

Report of: Assistant Director Community Services

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (People and Places)

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor D Sudworth

**Contact for further information: Mrs. P.F.Campbell (Ext.5144)
(E-mail:paula.campbell@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: INSKIP MEETING ROOM

Wards affected: Birch Green

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider the future arrangements regarding Inskip Meeting Room.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That Inskip meeting room be added to the portfolio of commercial premises and advertised for commercial or community use by the Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Inskip along with the other meeting rooms were transferred to the Council by the former Commission for New Towns (now the Homes and Communities Agency) in 1989 as part of the Community Related Assets Transfer. The transfer had a restrictive user clause which allowed it to be used for 'community purposes only' and if let for such a use any lease over 5 years must be approved by the HCA.

3.2 There is also clawback provisions in favour of the HCA should the Council dispose of the property or the use of the premises changes from community use. The amount of clawback decreases by 2% p.a. and is currently 50%.

- 3.3 In 2001 Inskip Meeting Room was let to the Independent Community Enterprise group (I.C.E.) as part of the Council's service review of under-utilised meeting rooms in Skelmersdale.
- 3.4 Unfortunately the ICE group folded within the first year of occupation leaving the building vacant.
- 3.5 It was not possible to identify a sustainable local community group to take over the responsibility for the premises however; following discussions with LCC the Council secured a tenancy with Lancashire County Council who occupied the building by lease agreement for the purpose of providing a Resource Centre for adults with learning and physical disabilities.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The current lease is due to expire on 1st May 2014. Lancashire County Council has given notice that they will not be renewing their lease for Inskip Meeting Room. LCC have undertaken improvement work to the Whiteledge Centre in Skelmersdale and as part of their service rationalisation plans will no longer require the facilities at Inskip.
- 4.2 The building is in good condition, and has had some improvements to the internal layout and fixtures and benefited from routine maintenance whilst it was occupied by LCC.

5.0 ISSUES

- 5.1 Within the lease agreement with LCC a clause was inserted to allow the continued use of the Centre by the local Derby and Joan Club who had utilised the building on two afternoons each week by permission of the previous tenant. With the lease ending this arrangement will no longer exist and this group will no longer have the use of the building.
- 5.2 The group has been offered the use of Lambourne Residents Lounge by the Councils Housing and Regeneration Service Area, however several members have physical disabilities and have indicated that they would have difficulty relocating to Lambourne without the aid of transport.
- 5.3 The organisers of the Derby and Joan club have asked at the expiry of the LCC lease, if the Borough Council would manage the facility or find another community group to take over the operation of the building and allow them to continue to use the building.
- 5.4 The Council is in the process of transferring six community buildings to the community, five of which are located in Skelmersdale. Preferred partners have been identified for each of these buildings. The Council would not wish to take over the management of the Inskip Meeting Room.

- 5.5 I believe it is unlikely that a sustainable community organisation could, in any case, be found to take over the responsibility for this meeting room and also be able to accommodate the existing club on two afternoons each week.
- 5.6 However, the building is suitable for use as a commercial property providing accommodation space for closed and open plan offices with appropriate storage space.
- 5.7 Advertising the site as a commercial unit suitable for commercial or community use would not preclude community organisations registering an interest. Advertising the premises as a commercial property immediately rather than seeking only a community organisation would reduce the time when the property may be empty. Should a community organisation express an interest then an assessment would then be made on sustainability of the proposals and community gain.
- 5.8 The building has lease restrictions; Inskip transferred to the Council from the former Commission for New Towns (now the Homes and Communities Agency) in 1989 as part of the Community Related Assets Transfer. The transfer had a restrictive user clause which allowed it to be used for 'community purposes only' and if let for such a use any lease over 5 years must be approved by the HCA.

6.0 PROPOSALS

- 6.1 In order to progress matters and reduce the time when the premise may remain unoccupied, at a cost to the Borough Council, it is proposed Inskip Meeting Room be transferred to the Housing and Regeneration Services Area as a commercial property and advertised for commercial or community use.
- 6.2 The Estates and Valuation Manager believes that the site may attract a commercial tenant but would require a period of marketing to achieve this. If this was the chosen route there will need to be negotiations with the HCA about their share of any rental income.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 7.1 Inskip meeting room has been providing support and a resource for adults with learning and physical disabilities. The responsibility for this services and the support has been provided by LCC. Following investment in Whiteledge Centre LCC have determined that a combined site for the services to meet the need of the principal users of the facility can now be accommodated at this newly refurbished site.
- 7.2 The proposals to seek a new occupier for the site, either commercial or community is in keeping with the current Council commitment and within the scope of the community strategy towards seeking sustainable partnerships for the operation of Council premises.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no resources identified or available for the Council to continue to hold the building beyond the expiry of the lease.
- 8.2 The Council will incur building maintenance, security, and payment of service charges and rates for the premises beyond 1st May 2014, while a new tenant is being found.
- 8.3 There are clawback provisions in favour of the HCA should the Council dispose of the property or the use of the premises changes from community use. The amount of clawback decreases by 2% p.a. and is currently 50%. If the building is not let to a community based organisation then there will need to be negotiations with the HCA about their share of any rental income.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 There is a high risk of vandalism should the building remain vacant which would have financial implications to the Council. It is therefore in the interest of the Council to find a new occupier of the premises as soon as possible.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment

Date: 12/02/2014

Completed by : P.F.Campbell.

<p>1.</p>	<p>Using information that you have gathered from service monitoring, surveys, consultation, and other sources such as anecdotal information fed back by members of staff, in your opinion, could your service/policy/strategy/decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy) disadvantage, or have a potentially disproportionately negative effect on, any of the following groups of people: <i>People of different ages – including young and older people</i> <i>People with a disability;</i> <i>People of different races/ethnicities/ nationalities;</i> <i>Men; Women; People of different religions/beliefs;</i> <i>People of different sexual orientations;</i> <i>People who are or have identified as transgender;</i> <i>People who are married or in a civil partnership;</i> <i>Women who are pregnant or on maternity leave or men whose partners are pregnant or on maternity leave;</i> <i>People living in areas of deprivation or who are financially disadvantaged.</i></p>	<p>Inskip meeting room has been providing support and a resource for adults with learning and physical disabilities. The responsibility for this services and the support has been provided by LCC.</p> <p>Following investment in Whiteledge Centre LCC have determined that a combined site for the services to meet the need of the principal; users of the facility can now be accommodated at this newly refurbished site.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>What sources of information have you used to come to this decision?</p>	<p>Lease documents, information from LCC and meeting with a community group who use the facility. Discussion with Housing Officers</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>How have you tried to involve people/groups in developing your service/policy/strategy or in making your decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy)?</p>	<p>Consultation with user group.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p><i>Could your service/policy/strategy or decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy) help or hamper our ability to meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010? Duties are to:-</i> <i>Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;</i> <i>Advance equality of opportunity (removing or minimising disadvantage, meeting the needs of people);</i> <i>Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.</i></p>	<p>Consideration of the needs of all the community will be considered as part of the process of advertising the site for commercial or community use.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>What actions will you take to address any issues raised in your answers above</p>	<p>Consideration will be given towards sustainable community use</p>

