

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE REPORT

The Future of Netherfields Community Centre

Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development: Charles Rooney

Executive Director of Neighbourhood and Communities: Kevin Parkes

19<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To formally propose the transfer of Netherfields Community Centre to Priory Woods School.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Executive Sub-Committee for Property:
  - a) approves the use of Netherfields Community Centre to facilitate an extension to Priory Woods School; and,
  - b) encourages Priory Woods School to work with the local community to accommodate their aspirations wherever possible.

### IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

It is over the financial threshold (£150,000)  
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards  
Non Key

X

### DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is:

Non-urgent  
Urgent report

X

## **BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION**

### **Background and Key Issues**

3. Netherfields Community Centre was identified as being surplus to Council requirements under the Council's Community Buildings Review, 2011/12, and was identified as a cost rationalisation as part of the 2013/14 Budget endorsed by the Council. As a result, alternative options for the future of building have been considered, including community asset transfer (CAT).
4. An approach has subsequently been received from Priory Woods School to utilise the centre as an extension to their existing facilities to enable an increased intake of pupils.

### **Priory Woods School**

5. The Council has a statutory requirement to provide sufficient school places for children with special educational needs (SEN), many of which are currently provided through facilities at Priory Woods School. As demand for places at the school is increasing, a need to expand the physical space within the school has been identified – hence the request to take on Netherfields Community Centre. Use of the space would allow the school to relocate some sixth form provision, which would free up space within the main school building to accommodate an increased intake of pupils from across Middlesbrough. The school has requested use of the facility from September 2014.
6. Several alternative options have previously been explored by the school, including hiring mobile class rooms, extending the existing building and using additional buildings in other locations across Middlesbrough. The opportunity to utilise Netherfields Community Centre is seen as the ideal solution to meet their requirements.
7. Making the building suitable for educational purposes would however require the internal layout of the building to be altered, and feasibility surveys and architectural design work is currently being undertaken to ensure that the requirements of the relocated sixth form would be met.
8. The school is also keen to use this process to develop greater links with the local community. The school see the opportunity to run a vocational 6<sup>th</sup> Form from the building as a way to enable their students to engage more with the local community, and develop their social skills. As part of the plans for additional capacity, the school also intends to develop an internet café where the local community could access computers and the internet, with students available to assist members of the community should they require support. At a time when household budgets are increasingly under pressure, this would provide a valuable resource to residents within what is a relatively deprived area.
9. The school will work with the community to identify ways in which they could provide further community use within their increased facilities. Where appropriate they would be willing to open up their existing facilities such as the outdoor football play area for local children to use. However it must be noted that given the education requirements they are obligated to provide, it is unlikely that all of the activities currently on offer in the community centre could be accommodated in the longer term. Any current activities that cannot be sustained could, however, be located to alternative Council venues. It

must also be noted that there is an opportunity for activities that are not able to be held within the Community Centre to be held in the schools wider facilities.

10. The play area located in the grounds of the Netherfields Community Centre and currently used by the local community would continue to remain available, although alternative arrangements for opening/locking the facility would need to be put in place.

### **Alternative Proposals**

11. A proposal was received for the CAT of Netherfields Community Centre from the existing Management Committee. This proposal was based on a three year tapered subsidy model, ultimately leading to independence from the Council. Unfortunately the business case submitted in support of this proposal did not meet the requirements of the Asset Transfer Group regarding ongoing viability, and was therefore not able to be taken forward. The Management Committee has been informed of this decision, and the intention to take forward the proposal from Priory Woods School.
12. The relevant Ward and Executive Members have been briefed on the conclusions of the Asset Transfer Group, and the opportunity for the local community to work with the school to address future aspirations.

### **Next Steps and Timescales**

13. If approved, the school would require immediate access to the Netherfields Community Centre to begin the necessary renovations to ensure the building is available for September 2014. The timescales are tight but it is believed that it is deliverable. Discussions will continue with the community to facilitate community use, and if any current community users cannot be accommodated within the building, assistance with relocation to a nearby alternative community facility will be provided.
14. In line with Government guidance, the school is required to undertake a statutory consultation over the enlargement of the school and the use of the community centre as additional space. This process has begun.

### **IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

15. An initial screening assessment found no evidence that the proposal to transfer the Netherfields Community Centre to Priory Woods School to which this report refers could have a disproportionate adverse impact on a group or individuals holding a protected characteristic.

### **OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT**

16. The following options are available in respect of the future of the Netherfields Community Centre:

#### **Option 1: Do not approve the use of Netherfield Community Centre to facilitate an extension to Priory Woods School**

17. This option would mean that the Council would have to consider alternative options to meet its statutory requirements to provide sufficient places for children with SEN. If the Council cannot supply sufficient places to meet the growing demand for SEN places, it must make alternative arrangements for pupils to be placed in other schools outside of

Middlesbrough. As the pressure on SEN schools is a national issue these places are becoming increasingly harder to secure, with pupils increasingly looking to travel long distances to access suitable provision.

18. As no other viable proposals have come forward, the Council would also be required to seek further alternative uses for the building.

**Option 2: Approve the use of the Netherfield Community Centre to facilitate an extension to Priory Woods School**

19. This option would ensure that the Council would meet its statutory requirements of providing sufficient places to children with SEN for September 2014. It also ensures that there will remain an element of community use available within the building or alternatively within the school grounds.

**FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial implications**

20. Priory Woods School would assume the running costs of the building. Currently the Council is responsible for all the running costs of the building which are £29,972 p.a. This saving would contribute towards the Council's overall revenue savings.
21. The capital cost of remodelling the building to meet the demands of the school is currently estimated to be in the region of £250,000. By comparison, it is estimated that providing suitable new-build accommodation could cost between, £750,000 - £1 million.
22. Whilst there would be no capital cost to consider, the revenue cost of securing SEN places in schools outside of Middlesbrough is generally higher than the cost of local places. The increase in travel costs alone would likely outstrip the capital cost of adapting the community centre in the medium to long term.
23. The transfer of the centre to Priory Woods involves the Council passing up the opportunity to rent to a commercial operator. For this centre, the Council has calculated a notional market rate for rent of £4,500 p.a. The building has been valued at £75,000, however, there is no guarantee that these figures would be achieved if the Council was to market the building for rent or sale. If the building is left vacant, the Council will be responsible for any ongoing liabilities.

**Legal implications**

24. As Priory Woods is a school currently under Council control, there is no requirement to set up a formal lease agreement for the building.

**Ward Implications**

25. This building is within the Beckfield Ward. However, the expansion of the school would be of benefit to children all across Middlesbrough. The continued offer of community use would also secure provision within Beckfield Ward. Ward Councillors have been informed throughout the process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

26. That the Executive Sub-Committee for Property:

- a) approves the use of Netherfields Community Centre to facilitate an extension to Priory Woods School; and,
- b) encourages Priory Woods School to work with the local community to accommodate their aspirations wherever possible.

## REASONS

27. This would provide the building with an appropriate use, and a sustainable future, as well as helping to ensure that there are sufficient places for children to attend Priory Woods from September 2014. The opportunity to potentially accommodate community activity within the wider facility, would also mitigate the loss of some of the existing provision.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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