


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p><b>Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee</b></p> <p>Tuesday, 17 December 2019</p>	
<p><b>Report of:</b> Debbie Jones, Corporate Director, Children and Culture</p>	<p><b>Classification:</b> Open (Unrestricted)</p>
<p><b>Victoria Park One o'Clock Club</b></p>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Christine McInnes
<b>Wards affected</b>	Bow East

### Executive Summary

This report is for the consideration of the Children and Education scrutiny sub-committee, in response to a number of Member's Enquiries relating to the closure of the Victoria Park One o'Clock Club building and the scope for continued use of the building and activities provided for early years children within Victoria Park.

The report outlines the history of the use of the building; provides the rationale for the decisions made; and provides a collated record of the decision-making process including information provided through responses to Members' Enquiries on this matter.

### Recommendations:

The Children and Education sub-committee is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of the report and appendices

#### 1. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 This is a report containing information about the decision to close the Victoria Park One o'Clock Club. This report does not require a decision to be taken.

#### 2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 There are no alternative options.

### 3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

#### History

- 3.1 One o’Clock Clubs, a stay and play service for children under the age of five and their parents, were operated by the Parks Department until the restructure of children’s centres in 2011. At that point, the management of the building was passed to the then, “Children’s Centre Service” for the continued delivery of stay and play sessions.
- 3.2 In 2005, the Department for Education (DfE) commenced a national programme of funding for the creation of more “Sure Start Children’s Centres”. Locally, many buildings were considered for conversion, amongst which were the three One o’Clock Club buildings at the following locations: Victoria Park, Wapping Park and White Horse Park. Over time, the Wapping and White Horse One o’Clock Clubs were converted to children’s centres with the agreement of the DfE. Because of its small size, restrictions on extending the footprint of the building and location in the centre of Victoria Park, the Victoria Park One o’Clock Club building did not meet the criteria and could not be converted.

#### Restructure and consultation

- 3.3 From 2011, the Children’s Centre Service operated “stay and play” sessions from the Victoria Park One o’Clock Club (VPOOCC) building. This provision continued until the subsequent second restructure of all early years services in 2016.
- 3.4 The restructure was partially driven by concerns over the large number of venues across the borough offering a limited number of sessions for early years children from a narrow range of options, mainly stay and play. The staff time spent travelling between sites limited the time available to run sessions. There were also concerns that the service model was not effective in encouraging vulnerable, hard to reach families to access provision and this was clear from the data.
- 3.5 An Integrated Early Years Transformation Project and Board were established **“to oversee the restructure, with the objective of establishing a fully integrated management, staffing, commissioning and service delivery structure for families with children aged birth to eleven through service transformation to secure a good service for families and achieve the required savings”**.
- 3.6 The intention was to strategically improve and consolidate the early years offer to provide strengthened multi-agency universal services and pathways into targeted services for those families who need them. The model pre-dated the borough’s Early Help strategy, but children’s centres are now seen as a

key delivery point for Early Help. Alongside these service improvements, elected members had agreed a £4.3million saving to be made in 2017.

- 3.7 A full report on the Integrated Early Years Transformation Project is attached (Appendix 1). This was written upon completion of the Project, which occurred in March 2017.
- 3.8 The new service model was dependent on a reduction of early years' delivery sites from 30 to 12. This would enable the development of a full day offer of sessions in each of the 12 children's centres, whilst reducing staffing by 50%. The then Director of Learning and Achievement (Terry Parkin) asked the Children's Centre Service to assess the suitability of each building for the new children's centre delivery model. The VPOOCC building scored very low on this assessment owing to the size of the building and the fact it could not be extended due to the regulations governing buildings in parks. These assessments then helped form the proposal on how to realign funding and make efficiencies in Early Years services.
- 3.9 On 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016, the lead Member, Cllr Rachael Saunders, was briefed by Terry Parkin as to the suggested changes. A copy of this presentation is attached (Appendix 2). This briefing will have been shared with the Labour Group.
- 3.10 A 31 day public consultation began on July 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 and was conducted through public meetings whilst an electronic consultation ran in tandem. This met the council's statutory duty under section 5D (1) (b) of the 2006 Childcare Act to consult when making changes to children centre provision. It followed a previous public consultation in 2015, which consulted on savings needing to be made in early years, and which helped to inform the required savings target agreed by members.
- 3.11 Eight public meetings were held in children's centres, advertised in advance and were well-attended:
- 25<sup>th</sup> July: Isle of Dogs and Around Poplar (one at each centre)
  - 26<sup>th</sup> July: Meath Gardens and Overland (one at each centre)
  - 27<sup>th</sup> July: John Smith and Collingwood (one at each centre)
  - 28<sup>th</sup> July: Mile End/Marner and Wapping (one at each centre)
- Meetings were held for partners on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at the PDC in Bethnal Green.
- Meetings were held with residents on 1<sup>st</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> August 2016, at the PDC and at Smart Street.
- 3.12 As part of the public consultation, families had an opportunity to choose their preferred centres. The intention was for the Council to review residents' preferences and then select the 12 buildings which were most able to deliver the new children's centre offer. This new offer required specialised provision, for example, a health room, a training room, disabled toilets etc.

- 3.13 At each meeting, it was reiterated that, ***“Delivery sites for universal services may reduce to support better targeting, but the universal offer will remain as an integral part of the delivery plan”***. The PowerPoint used for the public consultation and therefore in the public domain from July 2016 is attached (Appendix 3).
- 3.14 Following the public consultation, feedback was compiled and analysed (Appendix 4) and used to form part of the Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix 5).
- 3.15 In August 2016, the Integrated Early Years Board signed off on the proposed model of children’s centres and satellite hubs, which, because of the low score under the suitability assessment and as a consequence of the feedback from the public consultation, did not include the VPOOCC building. This was recorded in the PID included in Appendix 1 and was reported to CMT (now CLT) on 14th September 2016. The Mayor and Cabinet were briefed in October 2016 (Appendix 6).
- 3.16 However, discussions amongst elected members over the continuation of stay and play in the VPOOCC buildings continued. The early years restructure had taken place reducing staff by 50%. By January 2017 the position was reached that stay and play sessions could only continue to be provided at the VPOOCC building, if they were stopped at another setting, and that was the Olga Centre. A choice therefore had to be made between the two delivery sites. A briefing was prepared for the then lead member, Cllr Saunders (Appendices 7&8), who agreed the in principle case for retaining Olga as it was much stronger.
- 3.17 A delay in completing significant building works at Olga Primary School meant that the Olga Centre could not open and so sessions continued to be provided in the VPOOCC building.

### **Extension of use**

- 3.18 However, by 2018 the condition of the VPOOCC building was extremely poor. Many sessions had to be cancelled due to a leaking roof and the failure of the electricity supply. Parents were informed in early 2018 that service delivery would move back to the Olga Centre. Staff then returned to the children’s centre and re-commenced the full children’s centre service delivery from the Olga Centre.
- 3.19 Tower Hamlets was cognisant of the views of elected members that other opportunities to use the VPOOCC building should be explored. In July 2018, a condition survey of the building was undertaken (Appendix 9) and identified a roof replacement was needed. The cost for this was estimated to be £54,000 inclusive of fees and contingency sums and would be essential if the building was to be brought back into use.
- 3.20 However, if the building was to be used to facilitate delivery of childcare by any provider, additional works, including an increase in the number of toilets,

would be needed. The internal works were estimated to cost in the region of £30,000 and would result in a space that could provide fulltime childcare for 16 children (with 4 staff). For stay and play, there would be sufficient space for 10 children, 10 parents and two staff. Therefore the total costs of bringing the building back into use for limited childcare activities would be circa £84,000 (Appendix 10). Whilst funding had been made available through the Mayor's fund it was insufficient to meet the full capital costs of refurbishment and would need to be topped up by the Council's capital programme if it were to proceed.

- 3.21 In order to meet parental requests for sessions in parks, the opportunity to offer stay and play sessions elsewhere was offered to external organisations. Limited interest was received owing to various reasons, which were conveyed to the Cabinet Member in November 2018 and outlined in the attached briefing (Appendix 11).

### **Current Day**

- 3.22 The new Early Years delivery model as a whole has proved very effective, with significantly more families than ever accessing early years and other services, including health and employment, through the children's centres. There is no evidence that the closure of the VPOOCC building has had a detrimental effect on the take-up of parents accessing services as the graph in Appendix 15 illustrates – the reach of the Overland Children's Centre (under which the Olga and VPOOCC were considered) is continuing to grow. There have been no recorded complaints from residents relating to the closure of the building, and an online petition started several years ago failed to reach the required 200 signatures to proceed.
- 3.23 At present, the VPOOCC Club building is in a state of disrepair. Basic repairs are needed to make it useable for any purpose. This means the building fails to meet the legal requirements for duty of care for any employer due to the lack of staff facilities. Any refurbishment would, under legislation, require the building to be brought up to the present day standards and requirements. It would also need to address staff safety and access to the site, e.g. secure safe areas in an emergency, panic buttons and alarms.
- 3.24 Owing to the cost of the repairs, the fact that alternative provision is available in the local area and that if the building was to be converted, only a handful of places could be created (refurbishments would reduce the size of internal space considerably), the Early Years Team indicated they no longer required the building. This was agreed by the Cabinet Member, Cllr Danny Hassell. The report that was submitted and log of this decision, as well as Terms of Reference for the Board at which it was made, is attached (Appendices 10, 12 & 13).
- 3.25 The Council proposed to use the building as the Victoria Park Horticultural Centre at the Asset Management and Capital Delivery Working Group, 30th July 2019 (Appendix 14). As identified in the aforementioned briefing (Appendix 11), this will also provide access to the Early Years sector. There

are possibilities to run gardening clubs for under 5s and schools, as well as pilot projects for the Born Well Growing Well subgroup of Tower Hamlets Together.

- 3.26 Whilst various options have been explored, Overland Children's Centre has continued to provide pop up stay and play sessions in Victoria Park, including during winter months.
- 3.27 This detailed report has been provided to reassure O&S that there has been a clear decision making process followed over the historic use of this building and the potential for future use, which will in part be dependent on whether or not the capital investment is considered to provide value for money.

#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 As this is not a proposal, but a report covering the history of a building, there are no equalities implications. An EA was completed, and is included, when the decision was taken in 2016 as to the proposed changes to children's centres.

#### **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
  - Consultations,
  - Environmental (including air quality),
  - Risk Management,
  - Crime Reduction,
  - Safeguarding.
  - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

#### **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 This report is intended to provide a history of the use of the building and information and rationale on decisions made.
- 6.2 This report does not require the Children and Education sub-committee to make any decisions and therefore has no financial impact on the councils accounts.

#### **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- 13.1. The decision-making around the closure of the Victoria Park One o'Clock Club building were consistent with a number of general duties of the Council. The Council has a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination

of economy, efficiency and effectiveness by virtue of section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. This is known as its Best Value Duty.

- 13.2. The general duty contained in section 1 of the Childcare Act 2006 (“the 2006 Act”) is for the Council to (a) improve the well-being of young children in the area; and (b) reduce inequalities between young children in the area in respect of various matters. By section 3 of the 2006 Act, a local authority must make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in its area are provided in an integrated manner, which is calculated to facilitate access to those services, and to maximize the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children.
- 13.3. The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-committee to be provided with information in respect of decision-making around the closure of the Victoria Park One o’Clock Club building.
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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- NONE

### **Appendices**

- **Appendix 1: IEYS 2016 Project Report**
- **Appendix 2: EYS Presentation to Members**
- **Appendix 3: IEYS Consultation Presentation**
- **Appendix 4: End of Consultation Analysis**
- **Appendix 5: EYS Equalities Impact Assessment**
- **Appendix 6: MAB report Early Years**
- **Appendix 7: Early Years Briefing RS**
- **Appendix 8: Olga vs Victoria Park Business Case**
- **Appendix 9: Site report**
- **Appendix 10: Under fives provision**
- **Appendix 11: Update on VP building**
- **Appendix 12: CS Project Board Action Log**
- **Appendix 13: Terms of Reference**
- **Appendix 14 AMCDWG Report - Victoria Park**
- **Appendix 15: Reach of Overland**

### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

#### **List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- These must be sent to Democratic Services with the report
- State NONE if none.

**Officer contact details for documents:**

Or state N/A