

**REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL**
**PROPOSED LEASE OF NORTH WORKSOP CHILDREN'S CENTRE  
(RHODESIA SITE)**
**Purpose of the Report**

1. To approve the proposed changes to the use of the North Worksop Children's Centre (Rhodesia site) and approve a lease of the property to Nottingham and Southwell Diocese Multi Academy Trust.

**Information**

2. At its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 Children and Young People's Committee supported a proposal for change of use of North Worksop Children's Centre (Rhodesia site) for use by Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School and referred this matter to Policy Committee for consideration and decision on the future of the property. The attached plan indicates the current Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School hatched and the North Worksop Children's Centre (Rhodesia site) edged black to the south eastern corner.
3. North Worksop Children's Centre is made up of two dedicated buildings, one in Gateford and the other in Rhodesia on the site of Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School. While the Gateford property is well used, the Rhodesia building is under used and more so since a private nursery which operated on the site closed in 2019. The property is owned by the Council with a budget of £14,014 for its property operating costs in 2020/21.
4. Historically there has been low footfall at the Rhodesia site and it has been consistently hard to encourage parents to attend. Although the footfall exercise for 2020 was abandoned due to the start of Covid-19, data from the 2 previous years shows this site as being the least used in the district. The following table shows the findings of two footfall exercises carried out during 2017 and 2018.
- 5.

Children's Centre Sites in Bassetlaw	Year	Footfall (one month)	Year	Footfall (one month)
North Worksop CC Rhodesia site	2017	35 parents 31 children 36 professionals Total: 102*	2018	44 parents 50 children 20 professionals Total: 114*
North Worksop CC Gateford site		440 parents 258 children 173 professionals Total: 871*		347 parents 403 children 321 professionals Total: 1071*
Manton CC		Total: 728*		Total: 1238*

Prospect Kilton CC		Total: 1950*		Total: 714*
West Bassetlaw CC		Total: 430*		Total: 428*
(*) Individuals counted each time they came – so there will be double counting				

- Prior to the pandemic, this property in Rhodesia only operated for one 2-hour session per week as the service struggled to encourage parents to attend so the timetable was reduced; it has become evident that a better use of the building would be beneficial for local children, since the Children's Centre Service's more targeted approach is delivered in family homes and through virtual platforms.

### **Proposals for the Rhodesia Children's Centre property**

- Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School was approached several years ago to encourage greater use of the property by the school. Meetings were carried out following Committee instruction to maximise the use of the Children's Centre Service's property portfolio and reduce building expenditure. The School's Governing Body was unable to contribute towards the building costs at the time so there was no further action.
- Haggonfields is a school within the The Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham Academy Trust (SNMAT). The primary academy is committed to providing a high quality education which ensures every child reaches his or her potential, supporting children to be both curious and resilient. This small rural primary academy has the capacity to meet the demand generated locally for the foreseeable future. The primary academy has already expressed a commitment to creating a community hub and also plans to provide a nurture unit for children who may require additional support. This will clearly enhance further the quality of education provided. The opportunity to use space more flexibly will also enrich the education offer to the children. The Trust is also exploring the possibility of providing 2 year old provision in the near future.
- Local consultation took place on the Council's online Consultation Hub for 6 weeks, from 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021. 4 responses were received from local parents (1 via the NCC Online Consultation Hub and 3 via a hard copy questionnaire, disseminated via the school). No responses to the consultation were received from community leaders or professionals. All 4 responses were in favour of the building being taken over by Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School, who remain keen to do so.
- If the proposal is approved, the Children's Centre Service will continue to be provided but not from this dedicated Children's Centre Service building. Instead it will continue from a range of accessible community venues, such as the school and in family homes. Increasingly, as a response to Covid 19 many elements of the Children's Centre Service are delivered virtually, with positive feedback from many parents as to how accessible this makes them. Face to face services will continue to be available at the other Children's Centre Service buildings in Worksop, namely the main hub at Manton, Prospect Kilton and North Worksop – Gateford site. There is no planned reduction to service delivery.
- If the building is used for alternative early years provision this will result in a cost saving of £14,014 in a full year, to the Children's Centre property budget held by Place Department. This will alleviate some of the pressure on that budget which is currently forecast to overspend by approximately £32,000 in 2020/21.
- It is therefore proposed that in support of the service changes outlined that the property be leased to the academy for the same term remaining on their academy lease which

runs for 125 years from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020. Under the terms of this lease the Trust will be responsible for all running costs, including repairs, therefore releasing the annual budget savings outlined above.

13. The proposed disposal of this property by leasing to Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School means that this transaction has been subject to a negotiation with a single party rather than through full marketing and there is no consideration proposed. The Council has an obligation under s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable for the disposal of assets. The asset has a current asset valuation of £331,000 in the Council's accounts, this valuation being dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 and being valued on a depreciated replacement cost basis due to the specific use of the property and the lack of comparable sales evidence on the open market.
14. Under the General Disposal Consent 2003 Councils may dispose of land and property for less than best consideration when the Council considers that such disposal will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area. When the difference between the unrestricted value of the interest to be disposed of and the consideration accepted ('the undervalue') is over £2 million the specific consent of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is required, which is not the case in this case. The case promoting the social well being of the area has been made within this report at para 8 but in summary these are;
  - Expanding education provision at the school;
  - Meeting the needs of local children;
  - Releasing space in the school to improve learning outcomes
  - Greater use of the property; and
  - Reducing the building expenditure
15. The Council also needs to comply with the requirements of its own constitution. Since this would be a lease negotiated with one party on the basis of their adjoining linked service the Council needs to ensure that this is consistent with the requirements of section 17.5.5 of the Council's Financial Regulations. The group Manager Legal Services and Section 151 Officer have been consulted in respect of this transaction and whether it is appropriate to proceed. They are satisfied that the decision is one which Members may determine provided careful consideration is given to the issues including the financial impacts as well as the anticipated benefits to the social and environmental well being of the Council's area evidenced from the retained and increased usage of the building in accordance with its original objectives to the benefit of the local community.

### **Other Options Considered**

16. The following options have been considered:
  - Continue with existing service. This would continue with a significant under use of the building as currently experienced.
  - Use for other County Council services. Other uses such as for contact centre use in Children's social care have been considered. The property was not big enough for this use and not readily accessible by public transport.
  - Lease to other early years provider. Discounted as a past provider at the site pulled out as not financially sustainable.
  - Sale or lease on open market. Not favoured in view of interest from the adjoining school and ability this gives for a purpose built facility to be retained in beneficial

use for local community.

- Lease to Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School on shorter lease term. This is not acceptable to the School as they wish to make long term changes to delivery and how the school operates with the addition of this building, embedding it into their operation and would not want such changes based on different, shorter tenure from the remainder of the school.

## **Reasons for Recommendation**

17. The Children's Centre Service is currently provided in dedicated Children's Centre premises, community venues and people's homes. Some Children's Centres do not evidence value for money. In order to deliver the targeted approach introduced several years ago, engaging with the most vulnerable families and increasing opportunities for enhancing home learning, it is recommended that this property is no longer required as the service can be delivered in alternative ways.
18. An increased targeted approach is in place, as nearly 50% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds have not secured the essential skills and understanding expected for their age by the time they finish Reception Year. Many have reduced opportunities for home learning and parental engagement (Ofsted 2016). It is important therefore to carry out additional outreach work to engage these families and not assume that they will access a Children's Centre building. Evidence from this site confirms this view.
19. Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School (part of the Nottingham and Southwell Diocese Multi Academy Trust) are keen to expand provision at the school from September 2021, to meet the needs of local children, through re-configuring their provision for early years foundation stage and nurture group activities within a modern, purpose built property designed specifically to create a positive early learning environment.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

20. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Financial Implications**

21. The Children's Centre property budget is managed by the Place Department at £1.1 million per annum and this will remain unchanged.
22. The vacation of this property by the Children's Centre will result in a cost saving of £14,014, in a full year, to the Children's Centre property budget held by Place Department. Under the terms of this lease the Trust will be responsible for all running costs, including repairs, therefore releasing the annual budget savings. This will alleviate some of the pressure on that budget which is currently forecasting an overspend of approximately £32,000. Renting rooms in community venues to deliver sessions will be funded through the core Children's Centre Service budget and will only be booked when rooms are needed by the service. This transfer will enhance the development of

relationships with Haggonfields Primary and Nursery School, which have been limited to date and it is anticipated that any use of space on an ad-hoc basis to respond to requests from the school for Family Support appointments will be facilitated free of charge.

23. Changing the use of a Children's Centre property funded from the Department for Education Sure Start Children's Centre Capital Grant may carry a clawback risk, however the risk is mitigated if the property is used for early years provision which the school will provide. As part of the proposed transfer, an indemnity from the Academy Trust will be obtained with a requirement to provide early years provision from the site to prevent clawback.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) That Committee approve the grant of a lease running to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2145 of the North Worksop Children's Centre to Nottingham and Southwell Diocese Multi Academy Trust as indicated edged black on the attached plan.

**Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts**  
**Leader of the County Council**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:** Matthew Neal, Service Director – Investment and Growth Tel: 0115 977 3498

### **Constitutional Comments (CEH 19/02/2021)**

24. The recommendation to grant a lease of the North Worksop Children's Centre (Rhodesia site) falls within the remit of Policy Committee under its terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 11/02/2021)**

25. The Children's Centre property budget is managed by the Place Department at £1.1 million per annum and this will remain unchanged.
26. The vacation of this property by the Children's Centre will result in a cost saving of £14,014, in a full year, to the Children's Centre property budget held by Place Department. Under the terms of this lease the Trust will be responsible for all running costs, including repairs, therefore releasing the annual budget savings. This will alleviate some of the pressure on that budget which is currently forecasting an overspend of approximately £32,000. Renting rooms in community venues to deliver sessions will be funded through the core Children's Centre Service budget.
27. Changing the use of a Children's Centre property funded from the Department for Education Sure Start Children's Centre Capital Grant may carry a clawback risk, however the risk is mitigated if the property is used for early years provision which the school will provide. As part of the proposed transfer, an indemnity from the Academy Trust will be obtained with a requirement to provide early years provision from the site to prevent clawback.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Maximising the value of Nottinghamshire's Children's Centre Services – report to Children](#)

[and Young People's Committee on 19th March 2018](#)

[Early Years provision in Nottinghamshire County Council owned properties – occupational costs – report to Policy Committee on 16th May 2018](#)

[Children's Centre Property Proposals Equality Impact Assessment 2020](#)

<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/jobs-and-working/equality/completed-equality-impact-assessments-eqias>

- Report to Children and Young People's Committee dated 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021.  
[Proposed Changes to North Worksop Children's Centre - Rhodesia Site.pdf](#)

**Electoral Division and Member Affected**

- Councillor Sybil Fielding      Worksop West