



City of London Corporation

Department of Community and  
Children's Services

Housing Service

# Contents

Introduction	3
Scope	4
Methodology	4
Our Aims	6
How Does this Strategy Fit in to the Corporate Plan?	9
Our Community Centres	11
Current Position	16
Making Positive Changes	17

# Appendices

One: Condition Rating System and Setting of Charges	19
Two: Action Plan – Our Aims and Measuring Progress	21

# Introduction

The City of London Corporation's Housing Service, part of the Department for Community and Children's Services, has seven community centres across its housing estates. The community centres differ in size, management model, usage levels and physical condition. With one exception, the centres are managed by housing staff as part of their duties in running our estates.

The centres are valuable assets and they have the potential to be used more effectively than they currently are, to deliver activities that benefit our residents and the wider communities around our estates.

In 2018, an internal audit of our community centre activity made several recommendations for improvements to current procedures for managing the use and hire of our facilities. This led to a project that looked in more detail at how our community centres are used and how they could be employed more creatively to meet corporate aims and the priorities of residents.

The centres can be better used in order to contribute towards the aims of the City of London Corporation's Corporate Plan for 2018-23, by supporting outcomes around social inclusion, resident engagement and residents' health and wellbeing.

Increasing use of the facilities will also have the benefit of boosting income, which will reduce current reliance on the Housing Revenue Account. This strategy will provide a clear basis for the setting and reviewing of hiring charges, in accordance with City financial regulations.

This strategy is intended to outline how our community centres can contribute towards our wider corporate aims and it sets out how we intend to make the required improvements. It will look at the current position in relation to how the centres are managed, before outlining our aims for the next five years, with clear objectives and indicators to help us monitor our progress.

## Scope

This strategy relates to the seven community centres currently managed by the City's Housing Service and forming part of the Housing Revenue Account, namely:

- ❑ Avondale Square Community Centre, Old Kent Road (Southwark)
- ❑ Dron House Community Centre, Whitechapel (Tower Hamlets)
- ❑ Golden Lane Community Centre (City of London)
- ❑ Holloway Estate Community Centre, Parkhurst Road (Islington)
- ❑ Lammas Green Community Hall, Sydenham Hill (Lewisham)
- ❑ Windsor House Community Centre, Wenlock Road (Hackney)
- ❑ York Way Community Centre, Market Road (Islington)

This is a live document and will be reviewed at regular intervals. The aims and objectives in the Action Plan (appendix two) will be monitored by the Head of Housing Management.

## Methodology

This strategy was developed from the recommendations of an audit conducted by the City's internal audit team in June 2018.

To give appropriate priority to the project, a consultant with extensive experience of managing and supporting community centres and engagement initiatives was appointed to lead the work.

The following methods were used:

- ❑ Visits to each site and interviews with staff currently involved in running the facilities
- ❑ Consultant-led interviews with local stakeholders (the people or groups who had used the spaces, and those who had an existing or potential interest in them)
- ❑ A desktop review of current policies and procedures in relation to community centres managed by the Housing Services
- ❑ A review of current corporate and departmental plans, plus any relevant aims and priorities relating to community engagement

A series of consultation sessions were arranged with residents of estates with the larger community centres. These were designed to be as flexible as possible, run in an informal 'drop-in' format to enable attendance and participation. The offer of speaking to other interested parties locally to gather their opinions as well as those of residents was also made.

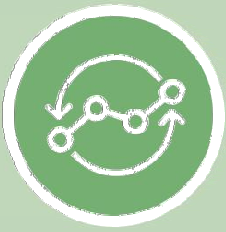
The purpose was to gather residents' views and opinions about current and future use of community centres.

Finally, internet-based research was conducted into strategic plans of other local authorities, social housing providers and community and voluntary organisations.

This strategy has been subject to further consultation with City officers and residents.

# Our Aims

Our aims for our community centres fall into three broad categories. These are discussed in more detail in the Action Plan later in the strategy.



## Aim One: Sustainable Management

### Objective One: Formulate a clear plan for managing revenue

To achieve this objective, we will:

- ☐ Create a clear pricing system for hire of our facilities
- ☐ Ensure standard processes are in place for administering charges
- ☐ Consider opportunities for enhancing income at specific locations
- ☐ Review community centre income, fees and charges regularly in accordance with financial regulations

### Objective Two: Create appropriate policies to enable better management

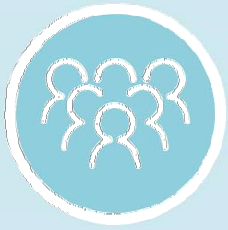
To meet this objective, we will:

- ☐ Put in place a Community Centres Policy that describes how we will manage the facilities
- ☐ Have clear procedures for community centre management, which staff know how to use
- ☐ Publicise these policies appropriately to users

### Objective Three: Long-term arrangements are appropriately managed

We will:

- ☐ Ensure that any long-term arrangements are reviewed at regular intervals and income is reconciled appropriately
- ☐ Make decisions on long-term arrangements which safeguard the City's and residents' interests
- ☐ Involve residents in decisions around entering into such arrangements



## Aim Two: Community Benefit

### Objective Four: Promote the use of the centres

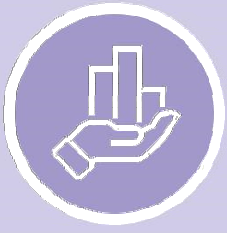
We will:

- ☐ Improve the information available online about our centres and what activities are being held there
- ☐ Promote the use of the centres on our estates and to potential hirers

### Objective Five: Use our centres to benefit our communities

We will:

- ☐ Use our community centres deliver activities that promote social inclusion, personal wellbeing and community cohesion
- ☐ Support resident groups to deliver activities and events in the centres
- ☐ Use our centres as bases from which to deliver community engagement activities and consult residents on housing management
- ☐ Support the use of volunteering through our community centres
- ☐ Consult with residents to ensure that their priorities for the centres are reflected in what happens there



## Aim Three: Better Facilities

Objective Six: Ensure our facilities are clean, safe and welcoming spaces

We will:

- ☐ Survey our buildings and develop an asset management plan for the community centres, covering minor repairs and more extensive works
- ☐ Ensure our centres are included in routine estate inspections
- ☐ Put in place appropriate cleaning arrangements, including contracts at centres with heavier use



# How does this strategy fit in to the Corporate Plan?

The Corporate Plan for 2018-2023 is the City's key policy statement and this strategy supports the following aims and outcomes of the Corporate Plan:

## 1. Contribute to a flourishing society

### Outcome 1: People are safe and feel safe

We will ensure that our facilities are safe spaces for people to come together and places through which they can feel like part of their community. We will use our centres to deliver commissioned services aimed at target groups, for example young people, which promote our safeguarding and inclusion aims.

### Outcome 2: People enjoy good health and wellbeing

Through activities and services delivered in our community centres, we aim to promote social inclusion, reduce isolation, raise awareness of issues around mental and physical wellbeing and provide inclusive access to facilities for activity and recreation.

### Outcome 3: People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential

The strategy will emphasise the need for a range of activities in the community centres and the promotion of equal access, to ensure that the spaces are used in an open and transparent way that can benefit everyone, not just small groups.

It will ensure booking is open and accessible to all and that there are a range of booking options that can cater to the diversity of communities living on or around our estates.

## Outcome 4: Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need

We will use our community centres as bases to deliver our community engagement work, which aims to build up sustainable community activities and promote inclusion and social cohesion.

We aim to promote inclusion, wellbeing and mutual respect by bringing people together in our community centres.


## 2. Shape outstanding environments

### Outcome 12: Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained


This strategy supports our aims of ensuring that our community centres are well-managed and fit for purpose, and that they provide welcoming venues for community activity.

## Our Community Centres

### Avondale Square Community Centre

<b>Description</b>	<p>A community centre that is integrated within the Avondale Square Estate just off the Old Kent Road. Built in 2016, it has a large hall, smaller 'mezzanine' hall and a small meeting room.</p> <p>It has a large kitchen and full disabled access to both ground and first floors (lift and fully accessible toilets). Tables and chairs are also available for use.</p>
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	<p>The hall is currently used a few times per week. Due to the proximity of the Harman Close sheltered housing scheme and other residential properties, there is a limit to the time and type of activities that can be provided. Limited Parking.</p>
<b>Future use and any specific recommendations</b>	<p>Directions and signage to the community centre need improvement.</p> <p>Consultation raised the issue of being able to isolate different parts of the centre for use, e.g. lights cannot be independently controlled. Cosmetic improvement will be needed in the next 3 years.</p> <p>Avondale has great potential, suited to a wide range of activities and would benefit from either a dedicated staff member or licensing to another organisation to manage the facility and realise this potential.</p>
<b>Current Star Rating</b>	

## Dron House Community Centre

<b>Description</b>	<p>Dron House Community Centre is an open room with a capacity of 12/15 which also serves as the Estate Office. It has a kitchenette. It is located minutes from the busy high street in Whitechapel.</p> <p>Its potential is limited due to its small size and dual function, but it is in good condition, having been redecorated within the past 2-3 years.</p>
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	<p>The facility is mainly used for residents' family events and children's parties. It is used approximately once a week at the current time.</p>
<b>Future use and specific recommendations</b>	<p>Accessibility suited to small group sessions, e.g. book clubs, discussion groups, mentoring sessions, meetings for committees, residents' groups, local community organisation events.</p> <p>The venue could be better promoted locally.</p> <p>The 'information area' could be improved and maximized. Open booking system required.</p>
<b>Current Star Rating</b>	

## Golden Lane Estate Community Centre

<b>Description</b>	A recently refurbished community centre within the Golden Lane Estate. A selection of rooms, halls and flexible spaces with a capacity of 4 up to 75 people. Full disability access to both floors and good kitchen facilities.
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	Since opening, the centre has seen a steady increase in the number and range of activities on offer. Golden Lane has been used to pilot several new ideas, e.g. an online booking management system and a new suite of policies and procedures.
<b>Future use and any specific recommendations</b>	Maintain and expand current range of activities on offer to the community. Learning from the best practice example of Golden Lane to be implemented across the range of community centres where appropriate. Improve signs and directions to the centre and online presence.
<b>Current Star Rate</b>	★ ★ ★

## Holloway Estate Community Centre

<b>Description</b>	Versatile space comprising a large hall with kitchenette off the main space. On the main road in central location. Additional office space currently used as storage.
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	Light use approximately once or twice per week during the hours of 9am and 5pm. In addition, there have been allotment spaces developed on the estate that could be tied to and connected to the centre use.
<b>Future use and specific recommendations</b>	Suitable for a wide range of activities that require open space, e.g. physical activities (Zumba, Pilates, and yoga). Suitable for activities and uses aimed at children and young people, as the space is safely contained for safeguarding purposes. This venue is large enough to merit considering having dedicated staff to manage the facility outside the existing hours of use to maximize its potential.  This venue would benefit from minor cosmetic improvements.
<b>Current Star Rating</b>	★ ★

## Lammas Green Community Hall

<b>Description</b>	The hall is set within the Sydenham Hill Estate in South East London. It consists of a small hall with stage, small outside play area and kitchen facility. The hall is in a generally good state of repair.
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	This facility is currently used as a nursery between the hours of 9 am and 3pm, 5 days per week. Due to the nursery use and the location being off the main road, within a residential area, there is a limit to the range of additional activities that will be suitable to take place here.
<b>Future use and specific recommendations</b>	The space is well used. To increase use, consider storage provision to enable some space to be cleared which would enable fuller use in the school holidays. Alternatively, other child and baby orientated activities would complement the current use. Decoration will be needed within the next 3 to 5 years.
<b>Current Star Rating</b>	★ ★

## Windsor House Community Centre

<b>Description</b>	Windsor House has a stand-alone community centre in a residential area. This is a versatile space with a great deal of potential. There is a main hall/room space with a capacity of 40 people. A kitchen and side room has storage for tables and chairs. There is a ramp to access the building. The condition of the space is basic at the current time and it needs cosmetic improvements to its appearance.
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	An agreement was signed with a nursery to use it on weekdays during term times. Before this, use was very light.
<b>Future use and specific recommendations</b>	The centre has been enhanced internally, with new toilet and kitchen facilities added recently.  This space would be suitable for a diverse range of activities, e.g. community meetings, afterschool clubs or fitness sessions.
<b>Current Star Rating</b>	★ ★

## York Way Community Centre

<b>Description</b>	Self-contained community room to accommodate up to 20/30 people with open plan reception. There is also a small garden space that is securely fenced off.
<b>Current use and factors to consider</b>	Current use of the space averages once or twice per week. The nature of the room size and layout, along with the outside contained space, lends itself to smaller groups of people – perhaps parent and carer's groups with under 5's where the space is contained. The condition of the venue at the current time needs improvement to ensure that it is suitable for open hire. The layout of the space is open which again lends itself to small groups and use by children and young people.
<b>Future use and specific recommendations</b>	This facility, in the short term, may well be best used by licensing to a single purpose provision such as a play group or nursery due to the size, layout and addition of outside contained space. Decoration would improve the atmosphere and look of the space significantly.
<b>Current Star Rating</b>	★ ★

## Current Position

- ❑ The tasks of bookings, hire, cleaning, and maintenance at most of the community centres are part of the running of the estates and so fall under the responsibility of the estate teams employed by Housing Services
- ❑ Local decisions have resulted in a variety of procedures and ways of working, not all of them effective
- ❑ Except for a few centres, most of the use is ad-hoc and confined to one-off bookings by residents
- ❑ There is currently no framework for monitoring performance and no agreed measures of activity that will allow us to judge whether the centres are meeting local needs
- ❑ Some of the community centres require maintenance to bring them up to a better standard, in some cases the cost might be significant
- ❑ There are some informal arrangements through which resident-led groups manage the community hall or have unrestricted access to it. This has business risk implications
- ❑ As of 2018/19, none of the community centres makes a profit, so all seven are subsidised by the Housing Revenue Account. While it is not necessary for a profit to be made, the Housing Service should examine ways of reducing reliance on the Housing Revenue Account where this is achievable and where it can bring benefits to the community
- ❑ Some centres have relatively high demand, but resource limitations mean that the potential cannot be realised
- ❑ Some community centres have relatively low demand and, even with further promotion, may struggle to attract more use



# Making Positive Changes

## Centre Management

The current culture of hire and management can be described as 'informal' or relaxed. Through this strategy, we will introduce a change of culture, to promote more professional and efficient management of the facilities. This is not a criticism of staff but a recognition that the community centres' potential is more than can be managed within the current staff roles and task descriptions in some of the facilities.

We will explore increased staffing option for the bigger centres where there is more potential, so that they can be open more consistently for longer hours and offer a wide and increased range of activities.

The issue of future staffing requirements can be considered either by looking at each space individually, or alternatively, spaces could be grouped where they are geographically close together, when assessing staffing options.

## Charges and pricing

Currently, there are inconsistencies between locations for the venue hiring charges, payment methods, and the advertising or promotion of the facilities.

We will consider how we can improve our procedures and implement a more transparent pricing structure. We will also consider ways of reducing the administrative burden on staff around handling cash payments for hall hire.

## Income

At present, the community centres managed by the Housing Service cost more to run than they generate in income. Income increased significantly in 2018/19 with the improvements made at Golden Lane Community Centre.

Most centres are used only occasionally, averaging one or two bookings per week.

While it is not necessary for community assets such as these to make a profit, increasing income would reduce the cost to the Housing Revenue Account and reduce the amount charged back to leaseholders.

## Range of activities

There is no rationale about the nature, types, or range of activities being offered through the community centres and what purpose they serve. The use is predominantly reactive and consists of children's parties by the residents or a small number of social and leisure activity booking.

Community spaces could be used more proactively and strategically to fulfil different elements of our Corporate Plan.

The range of activities should better reflect the priorities of residents living on the estates and link to our community engagement strategy.

## Promotion and Online Presence

We will consider ways in which we can promote the use of our centres by residents and local charities or businesses, including by making relevant information available online and enabling online booking at busier centres.

## Community Benefit/Priorities

As part of our community engagement work, we will involve residents in the running of their local centre where possible.

The Advisory Board model used at Golden Lane is one example of successful resident engagement in this area. Other centres, such as Avondale Square, may benefit from a similar model.

## Alternative Management Arrangements

In some circumstances, it may be sensible to hand over a centre (or part of a centre) to a third party, under a lease, tenancy or licence.

This model has been successful at Lammis Green, where a private nursery has a licence to use the facility between certain hours, assuring an income to the Housing Revenue Account while meaning the hall is still available outside those hours.

We will consider the suitability of similar arrangements, or more formal lease agreements, as necessary.

A lease or licence for a centre could be granted to a limited company, a registered charity, a social enterprise or social business company (Charitable Incorporated Organisation or Community Interest Company).




# Appendices

## Appendix One

### Community Space Condition Rating System

In order to make consideration of future hire rates easier, and to prioritize the relative importance of any refurbishment required, a system of star ratings is to be introduced.

The star rating is based on a first visual impression of each centre and can be reviewed following any changes at each site.

-  The resource has very good facilities, good accessibility and is decorated to a good or very good standard
-  The resource is in an acceptable condition and state of repair, but it may be less well equipped than a 3-star space
-  The resource is of acceptable standard to use but it needs decoration, and/or it has limited facilities and disabled access. Could benefit from improvement

### Setting Charges for Hire

A rationale for setting hiring charges for the centres has been developed. It is intended to be flexible and will form the basis of our charges, which can then be adjusted according to local circumstances and demand.

The charges for any given community centre will consider:

- ☐ **Market rates and the cost of similar hire in the local area**
- ☐ **Location (ease of access/possible footfall and demand)**
- ☐ **Condition of the centre and the facilities available**

The hourly charge will be calculated from a **standard rate**, which is arrived at by looking at the factors above. The 'cost if similar hire' may be taken from a comparable City of London facility if no local comparison can be made.

This standard rate is then increased or decreased according to the star rating of the facility and special factors such as accessibility.

The charges will be reviewed annually by the Housing Service and reasoning given for the identified standard rate, plus any departure from that figure.

Other special factors may be considered when setting the rates, including the popularity or frequency of hire and whether the facility is making a profit.

## **Discounts**

Discounts may be applied in some circumstances. Current practice varies by location and will be reviewed.

At present, discounts are generally offered to residents, local constituted community groups and local charities.

Some free use is also given, for instance when an activity brings benefit to the estate or a resident-led event is organised.

We will update our Community Centres Policy once this review is complete.

## Appendix Two

### Action Plan

Our aims and how we will measure success

#### Aim One: Sustainable Management

OBJECTIVE	MILESTONES	TARGET DATE	MEASURE
1. Formulate a clear plan for managing revenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a clear pricing system for hire of our facilities</li><li>• Ensure standard processes are in place for administering Charges, including discounts</li><li>• Consider opportunities for enhancing revenue at specific locations</li><li>• Review community centre income, fees and charges regularly in accordance with financial regulations</li></ul>	July 2019  December 2019  March 2020  Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Production of pricing schedule and rationale</li><li>• Production of process for revenue collection</li><li>• Housing Service to review options and consult as required</li><li>• Evidence of annual review of charges, with report to relevant Committee</li></ul>
2. Create appropriate policies to enable better management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Put in place a Community Centres Policy that describes how we will manage the facilities</li><li>• Have clear procedures for community centre management, which staff know how to use</li><li>• Publicise policies and terms to users</li></ul>	Complete  September 2019  Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community Centres Policy approved by Committee March 2019</li><li>• Procedures drafted and training delivered</li><li>• Policy online and available at estate offices</li></ul>

3. Long-term arrangements are appropriately managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that any long-term arrangements are reviewed at regular intervals and income is reconciled appropriately</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of regular reviews held by Housing Service senior management</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make decisions on long-term arrangements which safeguard the City's and residents' interests</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of decisions or approval by relevant officers/committee(s)</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve residents in decisions around entering into such arrangements</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that residents have been involved or consulted as required</li> </ul>	

## Aim Two: Community Benefit

OBJECTIVE	MILESTONES	TARGET DATE	MEASURE
4. Promote the use of the centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the information available online about our centres and what activities are being held there</li> </ul>	March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include page, or pages, on improved corporate website</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicise facilities in resident publications</li> </ul>	March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articles appear in publications or on social media</li> <li>Evidence of advertising, promotion or publicity</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the use of the centres on our estates and to potential hirers</li> </ul>	March 2020	
5. Use our centres to benefit our communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use our community centres to deliver activities that promote social inclusion, personal wellbeing and community cohesion</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of delivery of Community Engagement Strategy</li> <li>Inclusion of these aims in Community Engagement Strategy and evidence of delivery</li> <li>Completion of consultation on resident priorities for spaces</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support resident groups to deliver activities and events in the centres</li> </ul>	Ongoing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use our centres as bases from which to deliver community engagement activities and consult residents on housing management</li> </ul>	Ongoing	
		Ongoing	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the use of volunteering through our community centres</li> <li>• Consult with residents to ensure that their priorities for the centres are reflected in what happens there</li> </ul>	July 2020	
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## Aim Three: Better Facilities

OBJECTIVE	MILESTONES	TARGET DATE	MEASURE
6. Ensure our facilities are clean, safe and welcoming spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey our buildings and create an asset management plan for the community centres, covering minor repairs and more extensive works</li> <li>Put in place appropriate cleaning arrangements, including contracts at centres with heavier use</li> </ul>	<p>March 2020</p> <p>Complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Production of an asset management plan</li> <li>Evidence of contract monitoring and estate inspections</li> </ul>

