



Summary of H&F Buildings Consultation general responses

Key themes:

- Consultation document and process
- Financial / property and property ownership issues
- Impact on local residents
- Relocation issues
- Residents' access to Council staff

From consultation responses	LBHF comments
Consultation document and process	
<p>1. What are the criteria to determine that a building is “surplus to requirement” or “under-used”? It appears that such suggestions are ill-founded as the services provided in the various properties are well-used and supported by multiple communities.</p>	<p>The availability of other halls and venues for hire across the borough, and the significant reduction in the council’s own need for accommodation have been used to determine whether properties are considered as needed by the council. The council believes that there are sufficient alternative venues for activities and services locally that will ensure that local support can continue to be provided. Furthermore, in light of the current economic climate and the council’s level of debt, the council can no longer afford to keep and maintain its existing premises portfolio, and proposes a number of buildings should be released for disposal in order to preserve as much funding as possible for vital services for vulnerable residents.</p>
<p>2. The consultation process was poor. In the literature sent out there was no representation of counter arguments.</p>	<p>The council presented its reasons for considering the buildings in the consultation for disposal and believes that this was a reasonable approach. The council considers that it has complied with its legal obligations in relation to consultation.</p>
<p>3. More information is required to enable the public to give a considered answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed Income and Expenditure statement for each of the buildings under threat (actual for 2009/10 and budget 2010/11) • Other areas of cost savings which are being considered. • Figures regarding reductions in manpower, salary, travel costs, etc? 	<p>The council hopes to achieve capital savings through the disposal of buildings – not revenue savings. Therefore, costs of the running the buildings was not identified as required to enable residents to comment on the proposals. The consultation document provided sufficient information for the public to make an informed and considered response on the savings through the disposal of buildings.</p> <p>Other reports detail how savings are being achieved across the council.</p>

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<p>4. There may be a good case for closing one or more of the buildings listed in the consultation document, but their contribution towards debt reduction will be minimal. We should have been able to see the results of cost-benefit analyses and whether the indebtedness, which is presented here in abstract, is of real, material concern or not. Finally, since the budget is consolidated, one could argue that these buildings are being closed to fund the reduction in council tax, so is it really a straight choice between these buildings and frontline services?</p>	<p>Every £1m of debt costs the council approximately £100,000 a year – therefore, any reduction in the £133m debt will deliver direct benefits to local residents by maximising the funding available to deliver key services.</p> <p>The purpose of disposing of buildings is to reduce the corporate debt – not to reduce council tax.</p>
<p>5. "Irish" does not appear in the ethnic origin list for this survey, yet is one of the largest ethnic groups in the Borough. How thorough is your gathering of data for decision making if you overlook such information?</p>	<p>The borough profile is a key source of information in carrying out an equalities impact assessment of these proposals. The ethnicity list in the consultation document is the standard one used in all consultation exercises.</p>
<p>6. So far, the only figures produced show the possible realisation from the sale of property. The public needs to see what saving accrues from voluntary sector services, what the proposed retained services will cost (a) as 3rd sector services, with the help of volunteers or (b) private sector provisions. Thinking along these lines will give a much needed overview to enable all parties in the consultation to approach it intelligently.</p>	<p>The council hopes to achieve capital savings through the disposal of buildings – not revenue savings. Therefore, costs of the running the services was not considered pertinent to this consultation.</p>
<p>7. Where are the results of the impact assessments?</p>	<p>The equalities impact assessments are included electronically as appendices to the report.</p>
<p>8. The council needs to clearly show whether the buildings proposed for sale are a resource or a cost to the council. If they are resources which do not cost, then to sell them off is to dispose of assets which will be difficult to recover in better times. Facts about how the buildings are used, and about how much rent or other income the council receives from these buildings is required.</p>	<p>The council hopes to achieve capital savings through the disposal of buildings – and the cost of servicing the £133m corporate debt is a key priority the council is seeking to address.</p>
<p>9. The council's use of statistics to justify the under-use of buildings is worrying. The argument is that, if your particular facility is currently the least used of its type, then it should be sold. The trouble is that once the council has used up the cash from that sale, in say subsidising council tax cuts, then the next on the list becomes available for sale - 'It's now the least used, so it has to go' and so on until no local community facilities are left at all.</p>	<p>The capital receipt from the disposal of buildings will be used to reduce the council's corporate debt of £133m, not to offset reductions in council tax. The council believes that services can be delivered in smarter, more cost effective ways, that maximise the funding spent on service delivery, and minimise the needs for buildings.</p>
<p>10. There should be open, widespread and transparent consultation on each of the ear marked buildings as to whether these properties are "surplus to requirements" and not a single generalised online consultation questionnaire.</p>	<p>Officers did not feel that a separate consultation on each building would have been appropriate, reasonable or cost effective, and that residents would not consider this a helpful approach. By consulting on all of the buildings in one exercise, residents were able to both understand the broader position of the council in its</p>

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	asset management approach, and could elect to comment on any or all of the buildings that they had a particular view about.
11. The consultation document fails to offer projections of increased use as the housing density around the Chelsea Wharf area and old gasometers continues to expand.	The consultation document could not reasonably include such information, as this would have made the document lengthy and unwieldy. However, officers have considered population trends as part of their consideration of the future of buildings and local services.
12. The use of the library figures makes no reference to the size of the book stock so comparisons with other libraries are invalid.	The council has to ensure that its library stock is as appealing as possible to a wide audience, it will not always be possible to purchase specialist titles. However, the council does ensure that its stock is rotated throughout the borough's libraries. Stocks of resources are not restricted to individual libraries.
Financial / property issues	
13. How many of the properties have already been sold and what have services have been provided with the money generated from the sales?	None of the buildings listed in the consultation have been sold. The council has sold 58 buildings since 2006, achieving over £56million in capital receipts. These receipts have been used to finance new capital expenditure in the borough.
14. How much money is being spent on security for the empty council properties currently on the market?	Security costs differ for each building – with some needing security staff on site, and others not requiring any security presence.
15. Why would the council consider selling property in the current economic climate when it is unlikely that the full value of the properties would be realised?	The council is bound by S123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to achieve best consideration reasonably obtainable when disposing of its properties unless it has the specific or general consent of the Secretary of State to dispose of at an undervalue. The council has taken property advice on the sale of this property and believes it can obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable for this property within a reasonable period of time.
16. Why does the council not lease the properties rather than sell them for short-term gain? They could be used innovatively as cafes, office space or retail outlets.	The need to reduce the council's corporate debt of £133m means that capital receipts are preferred over rental income.
17. Has the council considered raising Council Tax to reduce the deficit rather than cut assets, services and funding to vulnerable sectors of society?	<p>Approximately 30% of the council's general fund budget requirement is funded from council tax with 70% coming from government grant. A freeze is planned for 2011/12 subject to approval by Budget Council in February 2011. This reflects local choice but also takes account of a government incentive to pay an additional grant to those authorities that freeze Council Tax in 2011/12. This is equivalent to a 2.5% increase and will be worth £1.6m to Hammersmith and Fulham. This is being used to help balance the 2011/12 budget.</p> <p>The Government have also announced that they will consider use of capping powers if authorities set council tax increases that are above low single figures.</p>

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	As part of the 2011/12 budget setting process the council has looked to protect front-line services.
18. Has the council considered ways to cut costs in its own staffing and resources, rather than cutting from vulnerable communities? For example, does the council need all its office space? Can flexible hours, desk-sharing, working-from-home and 10 – 12 hour days be introduced for its staff?	The council seeks to reduce costs wherever possible, with all services delivering savings each year. The programme of moving council services and staff into fewer, more cost-effective sites is well underway. The council has shrunk its use of space by 40 per cent already with asset sales of £42 million. Vacated properties include Riverview House offices and Stowe Road depot
19. An independent cost/benefit analysis needs to be carried out on the administrative costs of the council and these costs reduced before irreplaceable assets are sold.	The council undertakes thorough reviews of its spend and seeks to reduce costs wherever possible. The council has achieved significant reductions in costs over the last 4 years, resulting in reduced staffing costs, and a reduced need for office accommodation.
20. The council is the custodian of the borough, not its owner therefore are these buildings actually the council's to dispose of? Additionally were any of the properties gifted, and if so, what were the terms of the gift, and have any of the buildings been ear marked?	The council owns the legal title to these properties and is therefore legally able to sell them. We are not aware that any of these properties were gifted to the Council.
21. The council must stipulate how the money generated from the sales would be used, what the priorities would be and how accountable to the residents and tax payers these sales would be.	Capital receipts will be used to reduce the council's debt.
22. There are concerns as to whether the council would benefit personally from the sale of these buildings, and whether there are any interests of any council staff to be declared relating to the sale of the buildings or the purchasers of the property.	<p>The council is a legal entity and the owner of the properties. Sale proceeds will be held by the council and applied for the benefit of the council and not individuals.</p> <p>The council's constitution stipulates that an employee must not in his official or personal capacity allow his personal interests to conflict with the authority's requirements; or use his position improperly to confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person. All council employees must comply with any requirements of the authority to register or declare interests; and to declare hospitality, benefits or gifts received as a consequence of his employment.</p> <p>Councillors, must observe the statutory Code of Conduct for Members, as adopted by the council. This covers personal conduct, public duty and private interests, disclosure of interests, acceptance of gifts and hospitality, use of council facilities, and the basic principles of relationships between Councillors, officers, and others.</p> <p>All Councillors are required to register, and keep up to</p>

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	<p>date, a written declaration of their interests in a Register held by the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services).</p> <p>Detailed guidance on dealing with members' personal and prejudicial interests can be obtained from the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services) or the Assistant Head of Legal Services. The general tests for deciding whether a personal or prejudicial interest exists are set out in the Members' Code of Conduct.</p>
<p>23. Is the council sure they will actually sell any of these buildings? There is the possibility that many of these buildings will end up lying empty for years.</p>	<p>If the property is placed on the open market community based organisations are able to bid for the property .However, in order to raise sufficient funds to pay off council debt the council will be selling the site at full market value.</p>
<p>24. If we need to borrow again in the future we will have less assets against which to secure loans, this will raise the cost of borrowing.</p>	<p>Council borrowing does not usually involve loans secured on property.</p>
<p>25. It is acknowledged that the council needs to reduce debt, however it would seem that LBHF are looking for a short-term approach and disposing of assets that will be worth far more long term. Have other options been considered for the assets - for example, development partnerships, or leasing the properties out in the short and medium term?</p>	<p>Options of leasing buildings or entering into partnerships will not achieve the capital receipts needed to reduce the council's debt.</p>
<p>26. The council should look at controllable operating costs, such as Managers' and Councillors' salaries and pensions, as opposed to asset reduction.</p>	<p>The council is making every effort to reduce costs and the council's level of debt. The council's priority is to protect the quality of front-line services and will continue to achieve efficiencies wherever possible However, the size of the debt and the economic position we are in means that reducing revenue costs (salaries, the costs of services etc) will not be enough. It should be noted that the disposal of buildings is sought to reduce the council's £133m debt.</p>
<p>27. LBHF should lobby government to change FACS to provide less services overall.</p>	<p>The council is committed to ensuring the most vulnerable in our community are provided with the support and assistance that they need. The proposal to dispose of buildings is seeking to address the council's debt of £133m rather than to achieve savings in service costs.</p>
Impact on local residents and services	
<p>28. The reduction of debt is being given greater priority than the maintenance of service provision which, although it may assist the council in its ability to reduce Council Tax, will penalise the less fortunate members of the local community. This clearly contradicts the slogan that this is a borough of opportunity for all.</p>	<p>The reduction of debt is being prioritised in order to preserve funding for front line services. Every £1m of debt costs approximately £100,000. Money which would be far better spent on services for local residents, including vulnerable adults and children.</p>
<p>29. To reduce the councils debt mountain should not be at the expense of sustainable projects that</p>	<p>The council is committed to ensuring the most vulnerable in our community are provided with the</p>

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<p>give enormous benefit to the community. If such is the only way forward then the project or community should be given ample time to respond and have the ability to take over such premises so as to continue such activities.</p>	<p>support and assistance that they need. The proposal to dispose of buildings is seeking to address the council's debt of £133m rather than to achieve savings in service costs.</p>
<p>30. The services provided by some of these buildings are not necessarily easily measured by the income they generate. If these mostly free services were removed, by removing the buildings, you'd have an awful time trying to create these services elsewhere (and having to spend money on them). How does the council envisage relocating and centralising services will work?</p>	<p>In terms of council services, we are confident that relocating services into alternative buildings will have no negative impact on local residents, and in many cases will result in the service being delivered from a more accessible building. In terms of voluntary sector services, those which are commissioned by the council will be relocated and those receiving grant funding will be prioritised for available alternative council properties. The council believes there is a good level of halls and venues available in the borough for groups and communities to access, and we will provide details of these.</p>
<p>31. Rather than disposing of the buildings that are a valuable part of community life in Hammersmith why not make them more resourceful, for example why not combine one or two of them? I believe the Hammersmith Information Centre is situated in a particularly bad spot as far as visitors to Hammersmith are concerned. Why not combine the Irish Cultural Centre with the Hammersmith Information Centre therefore making more use of the building on Blacks Road and freeing up the other for a commercial business perhaps? Retaining the building on Blacks road for long term rent advertisement about what goes on in Hammersmith and profitability.</p>	<p>The need to reduce the council's corporate debt of £133m means that capital receipts are preferred over rental income.</p>
<p>32. It is not always easy to separate "buildings" from "front line services". The latter can often only be provided effectively, efficiently and in a value for money way thanks to the existence of premises to house those services.</p>	<p>We are confident that relocating council service into alternative buildings will have no negative impact on local residents, and in many cases will result in the service being delivered from a more accessible building. The council believes there is a good level of halls and venues available in the borough for groups and communities to access, and we will provide details of these.</p>
<p>33. The impact on the communities and groups who use the buildings must be taken into account. There are probably no 'surplus' buildings but rather buildings that do not bring in sufficient revenue. Can't the council be more creative in the way the buildings are promoted and used?</p>	<p>An equalities impact assessment has been conducted on each building to identify what communities may be impacted should the building no longer be available. The reduction of the council's debt (at a cost of £100,000 per £1m) is prioritised so that funding can be better used to deliver services to our residents. The council is already delivering significant improvements with regard to the use of its building through our Smart Working programme, and we believe that there is a good range of halls and venues available for community activities in the borough.</p>

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34. If there is no community provision south of Hammersmith Broadway, this will cut off half of the entire Borough, and this cannot be acceptable.	Hammersmith & Fulham is a geographically small borough, with excellent transport links which enable residents to easily access services located in other parts of the borough. More and more services are now being accessed on line or by telephone, reducing the need for duplicate services in different areas of the borough.
35. Most of the buildings which are on the list to be sold are places where the community meets and gathers and celebrates and their loss would have significant impacts on residents.	The council believes there is a good range of halls and venues available across the borough which communities can use for events and activities.
36. There is plenty of research which shows the good use of these types of buildings for the benefit of the residents. The council must seek expert advice on how to use the buildings profitably in every way for the community instead of getting rid of them to serve a political purpose.	The council's priority is to reduce its debt of £133m, in order to maximise the funding available for front line services.
Relocation issues	
37. Before any building is considered suitable for sale, a new site must be established for the services provided. Even if these services are moved to other sites, there may be transport problems for people wishing to access the new sites, and this should be taken into consideration. As these services still require a site, which will need to be paid for, will there be any real saving in selling the buildings?	Council services, and services commissioned from external providers will be found alternative locations. Groups which are not funded by the council will be provided with information on other venues and halls available in the borough. The borough has excellent transport links, and it is not felt that this would be a significant barrier for local residents. The purpose of disposing of buildings is to reduce the council's corporate debt, not to achieve savings in service budgets.
38. Consideration needs to be given to where the groups currently housed in these properties will go and whether services provided by them will be to the same standard, target the relevant communities and cost the same in the new locations.	Groups will be provided with information on other venues and halls available in the borough, but it will be up to each group to determine what alternative sites would be most suitable for them and their service users.
Residents' access to council staff	
39. Whilst staff may be able to hot-desk and work remotely residents need to know where they can be accessed.	Smart Working enables staff to work at different locations, but to still be available on the same telephone number, and access their IT system. Service provision is the key priority, and is not at risk from staff working in a different location.