

THCVS Premises Forum Report- Response from LBTH

Summary

- The Premises Forum was held online on 18 March 2024, chaired by THCVS. Attendance: 39
- Wayne Trevor Senior Strategy & Policy Officer (VCS & Assets) attended on behalf of LBTH.
- The full report: [Premises report \(thcvs.org.uk\)](https://thcvs.org.uk)

Ask of the Council

- The report contains several asks of the Council. These are listed below, with suggested responses and suggestions for future consideration.

Clarity about the future of all community premises in the current portfolio, once their current leases end.
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Current

<p>The council has a property portfolio which is let at commercial rates to provide valuable additional income towards meeting the cost of delivering services to residents.</p>
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<p>There are also council owned premises that are used primarily for delivering services to residents either directly by the council or by other organisations through service agreements or public service contracts.</p>
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<p>In addition, the council has identified premises whose primary function is supporting locally based voluntary and community sector organisations to provide facilities and services for the community, rather than to generate a commercial income. These premises, described as being in the council's Community Premises Portfolio, may be leased to recognised voluntary and community sector tenants at the council's standardised 'community rent', currently £14 per annum per square foot, and the tenant may be eligible to be considered for the council's community benefit rent reduction scheme (CBRR).</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The buildings in the current Community Premises Portfolio are listed at Appendix 8 of the VCS Premises Policy and Procedures.• There are currently 69 premises in the CPP, with a further 4 VCS occupied premises not in community premises portfolio.• Buildings in the CPP are expected to remain in the CPP- there is no mechanism in the Policy to remove a building from the CPP, although this could be achieved through the proper authority (e.g. via Cabinet approval)• As leases are ending, the council will review the situation and pursue one of several options including offering renewal to an existing tenant, taking the |
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property back for council use or redevelopment, and granting a lease to a new tenant.

Future

For discussion.

Provide a full list of properties in the community portfolio and their current occupants with a date when the lease expires

Current

- The buildings in the current Community Premises Portfolio are listed at Appendix 8 of the [VCS Premises Policy and Procedures](#).
- There are currently 69 premises in the CPP, with a further 4 VCS occupied premises not in community premises portfolio but occupied by VCS organisations.
- The published list in the document includes the occupiers. There have been a few amendments since 2021.

Future

- Explore a way of including the full, updated list on the TH website.

Ensure formal lease documents for all community premises

Current

- Part of the rationale for implementing the VCS Premises Policy and Procedure is to '*Formalise tenancy agreements based on standardised contractual models*'
- Since the policy was approved by Cabinet in 2021 we have worked to put community leases in place across the portfolio and this is continuing.

Future

For discussion.

Establish a central source of information about premises – how voluntary and community organisations apply for community premises, including a list of currently empty premises across the borough

Current

- The Council's website contains links to different sources of premises information: [Premises \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk). This includes:
 - Over 80 halls and other venues to hire: [Halls and venues for hire \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)
 - Affordable workspace and premises, including temporary use: [Affordable workspace and premises \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)
 - Over 200 shops and other premises that are owned by the Council and available for letting. These include properties which are in the Community Premises Portfolio (CPP) and therefore only available to let to VCS organisations. When these are available they can be found here: [Commercial lettings \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)

- For traditional rental enquiries a property search: [Commercial Property for Sale, to rent or auction in the UK | Propertylink \(estatesgazette.com\)](https://www.estatesgazette.com)
- All buildings available to let in the CPP are also promoted in the Council's monthly VCS newsletter. [VCS newsletter \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Future

- We will continue to ensure that any community buildings available for rent are promoted with the VCS via the Council's VCS newsletter and to THCVS and the Premises Forum (mechanism to be established but simply via email).
- We could present at the Premises Forum or other suitable group to explain the process for applying for Community Premises, and perhaps update the Council website page.
- Review the TH website to make information about opportunities for leasing community premises easier to find.

Negotiations with developers to include community spaces in new developments

Current

- When the council develops its own land, it sometimes includes community spaces either as replacement or new provision.
- The Tower Hamlets Local Plan (2020) sets out the Planning Policy framework for private and Council planning application requirements to retain and enhance existing community space, thereby controlling the loss of facilities for local residents.
- Proposals for new community space to add to or replace existing provision may result from the situations below. These could apply to council-led and third party-led developments.
 - Requirements to comply with TH planning policy;
 - Local resident needs assessment and consultation and/or
 - An obligation to re-provide for an existing tenant affected by a redevelopment project.
 - The Local Plan is presently under review to update the current planning policies. The draft community facility policies include a focus on meeting local needs and re-provision (where applicable), new provision in strategic (major developments) and premises affordability. The draft policies also require the demonstration by an applicant that new premises have been 'co-designed' with the communities needs in mind.
- Provision of new or replacement premises will not automatically result in being added to the CPP- the policy provides guidance on the process which will apply.
- The Council is currently undertaking a Community Facility Needs Assessment (CFNA) as part of the revision to the Local Plan. The CFNA is expected to be complete in the summer.

Future

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- Share the results of the CFNA with the VCS later in 2024.
- Consider VCS Premises as part of the forthcoming VCS Strategy review, including the provision of new community spaces as part of new developments.
- The draft Local Plan is under review and the next stage is a 'Regulation 19' public consultation. Following this it will be submitted to the Secretary of State where the policies will be examined to meet the legal requirements for plan-making.