

Woolston Neighbourhood Hub – Full Evidence Pack

1. Executive Summary

This evidence pack sets out the social, financial, technical and legal case against the closure of Woolston Neighbourhood Hub. It demonstrates that the closure is not supported by robust evidence, disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, fails statutory duties, and risks long-term financial harm to the Council and community.

2. Community Usage and Demographics

Woolston Hub served tens of thousands of visits annually. Core users include older adults (55+), disabled residents, families, children, school groups, NHS-linked users via the adjacent GP surgery, and community organisations.

3. Education and Schools Impact

At least 12 local schools used Woolston Hub for swimming, with 30–60 pupils per school per week. Closure increases transport costs, reduces pool time, and jeopardises statutory swim competence outcomes.

4. Health, Wellbeing and Preventative Care

The Hub acts as preventative health infrastructure. Loss of access increases isolation, reduces mobility, and escalates long-term NHS and Adult Social Care costs.

5. Equality Act 2010 – Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Impact Assessment understates negative impacts on protected groups, misclassifying age and disability impacts as neutral contrary to evidence.

6. Consultation Law – Gunning Principles

Failure to publish accurate costings and technical reports prevents meaningful consultation.

7. Technical Assessment and Building Condition

Repair costs remain estimates without intrusive surveys. Phased and low-cost inspection options exist.

8. Legionella Management

Legionella risks are manageable through standard treatment. Dry-side reopening is feasible.

9. Financial Analysis and Revenue Loss

Closure removes income streams from lessons, memberships, schools, and hires.

10. Section 106 Funding Evidence

Over £250,000 of S106 leisure funding is ringfenced for Woolston Hub-related facilities.

11. Best Value Duty

Failure to deploy earmarked funds risks breach of the Local Government Act 1999.

12. Predetermination Risk

Budget decisions taken before consultation conclusions risk unlawful predetermination.

13. Monitoring Officer Issues

Issues include legality, transparency, consultation integrity and equality compliance.

14. Required Actions

Publish full reports, correct the EIA, reopen safe areas, and explore all funding options.

📖 FULL EVIDENCE PACK – WOOLSTON NEIGHBOURHOOD HUB

Updated January 2026 — Full Campaign Version

- Executive Summary

Woolston Neighbourhood Hub is a major community health, leisure, education, and wellbeing asset serving over 3,600 registered leisure users across every ward in Warrington, not only Woolston. Its closure in September 2025 due to Legionella and building concerns has removed key services for families, older people, disabled residents, young people, and patients registered at the GP practice next door.

This evidence pack demonstrates:

The Hub is safe to reopen partially now (gym, library, studios, dry areas).

Legionella remediation is low-cost and localised, not requiring full closure.

Council-reported costs (e.g., £85,000 for scaffolding) are technically implausible and unsupported by surveys.

No full condition surveys have been undertaken for over a decade, breaching good estate management practice.

The Council's reliance on estimates, not evidence, creates legal risks around predetermination.

The Council must publish all repair, reuse, rebuild, and partial reopening options as required by the unanimously passed Full Council motion (Dec 2025).

Closure disproportionately harms vulnerable groups and risks breaching the Equality Act 2010.

Ward-level data proves Woolston Hub is a borough-wide asset, not a local luxury.

Financial pressures cannot override the legal requirements of consultation, equality assessment, and Best Value.

The community is participating in the consultation in good faith. This pack provides the clear, data-driven evidence councillors need to make an informed, lawful, and community-led decision.

- Background: Importance of the Hub

Woolston Neighbourhood Hub has served residents for nearly 50 years

NHS services and Library

Original established services of Doctors surgery and Public library were integrated into the hub in 2011 to provide these services for obvious cost savings, Woolston East has always had its own GP surgery and library the only change is the population of Woolston has grown considerably

GP-adjacent preventative health services

Existing GP surgery relocated to hub from Dam lane/Manchester Rd Woolston and library located at Gorden Ave/Holes lane Woolston in 2011 as part of centralisation of public and NHS services for the East of Woolston Warrington

A public library

Existing library relocated from Holes Lane

A fitness suite, pool, sports halls, squash courts

Public green space, Football pitch

Community meeting space

Accessible exercise for older and disabled residents

Low-cost sport for children and families

Rehabilitation and NHS referral services

A social anchor for isolated residents

Footfall: 158,000 – 208,000 annual visits pre-closure.

Residents across Warrington rely on it for daily life, health, socialisation, and wellbeing.

- Closure Timeline & Emerging Concerns

February 2025 water leak from roof on squash courts and exercise suite building, due to delay in dealing with leaking roof by WBC extensive damage was caused to squash courts and exercise suite resulting in major on cost to reinstate Squash courts, courts out of use for 3 Months with regards to the exercise suite there was a small section of flooring with water damage further investigation in this area raised the concern of asbestos present in materials used in the flooring this was proven not to be the case after testing no attempt to reinstate this facility has been made and has not been used for 10 months to date

June 25 Pools Area closed to the public due to Air Vent malfunction over main pool no attempt to rectify problem by WBC and return pools to public use to date

Sept 2025: Temporary closure due to Legionella and “structural concerns.”

Oct–Dec 2025: No full survey undertaken.

Nov 2025: Protest attended by hundreds; thousands online.

Dec 2025: Full Council passes motion to protect the Hub unanimously.

Jan 2026: Cabinet emphasises “budget pressures” and “difficult decisions,” implying closure still likely.

Ongoing: No publication of costed options, alternatives, surveys, or inspection results.

- Ward-Level Data: Proof Woolston Hub Is A Borough-Wide Asset

Council data shows 3,645 registered leisure members use the Hub.

Top-Using Wards

Ward	Members	%
Rixton & Woolston	889	24.4%
Poulton North	458	12.6%
Poulton South	367	10.1%
Unknown/Outside Warrington	539	14.8%
Poplars & Hulme	150	4.1%
Fairfield & Howley	145	4.0%
Orford	112	3.1%
Culcheth, Glazebury & Croft	97	2.7%
Latchford East	138	3.8%

Key conclusion

Woolston Hub serves almost every ward in Warrington, making it a major borough asset. Closing it is not a local issue — it is a borough-wide service reduction.

- Legionella Evidence: Safe Areas Can Reopen

The Woolston Neighbourhood Hub Legionella Sample Tracker shows:

Legionella is present only in specific outlets (mainly showers).

Dry-side areas—gym, library, studios, corridors, reception—are not affected.

Standard remediation includes:

Treatment in line with best practice principles

Thermal disinfection

Chemical shock dosing

Remediation cost estimated by WBC: £150,000

Industry-standard treatments: £5,000–£35,000 for comparable sites.

Crucially:

Legionella does NOT require the entire building to remain shut.

Hospitals, hotels, schools, and leisure centres routinely manage isolated Legionella findings without full closure.

-
- Technical Challenges to the £3m Estimate

The Council states:

“£85,000 for scaffold access to inspect ducting.”

“Inspection would cost over £100,000.”

Independent professionals note:

- No full survey has been carried out

Yet figures are being presented as factual.

- £85,000 scaffold cost is technically implausible

Duct louvres are side-mounted, accessible via:

Mobile tower scaffold

MEWP (cherry picker)

Camera poles

Ceiling void access

Approx cost: £500–£1,500, not £85,000.

What this implies:

If one line item is this inflated, all estimates are unreliable.

-
- Lack of Maintenance Oversight (2012–2025)

Evidence suggests:

Reporting of problems to management via reception has been ignored over years by facility management on many occasions resulting in loss of facility in Gym, Sauna/Steam, showers, and general utilities for minor problems which required minor attention we are where we are due to senior management incompetence in dealing with everyday issues which eventually result in minor problems becoming major demonstrating their inability to facility manage

No regular condition surveys since ~2011/12

Long-term maintenance severely underfunded

Building lifecycle risks unmonitored

This contradicts:

CIPFA Property Management principles

RICS Good Practice for Public Sector Estate Management

WBC's own Asset Strategy commitments

Failure to maintain cannot justify demolition or permanent closure.

- Financial Context & Predetermination Risks

WBC faces:

£39m in-year overspend

£89m four-year gap

£48m remaining deficit

Insufficient reserves

Requirement to set a balanced budget by March

Predetermination risk

If the Medium-Term Financial Plan is set without provision for repairing or reopening the Hub, then:

The consultation outcome is predetermined

Gunning Principles are breached

Equality Act duties are breached

“Do nothing” becomes the default outcome

Legal challenge becomes viable

-
- Legal Duties Potentially Breached
 - Gunning Principles
 - Proposals must be at a formative stage
 - Consultation must be open-minded
 - Evidence must be published
 - Responses must be considered

- Equality Act 2010

Disproportionate harm to:

Education

Junior School curriculum, swimming is mandatory and this facility is the responsibility of WBC to provide in full

Woolston has 4 primary schools within walking distance of the hub and was used to full capacity since closure transferring these classes to other hubs has still to be implemented in full without problems due to preparation to travel and logistics in transporting these Junior pupils considerable time has been lost to teaching, disturbance to their routine, and stress to the pupils is immeasurable at this time and is a major concern to the school management and parents.

Elderly

Disabled

Low-income families

People without cars

Those with health inequalities

- Public Sector Health Duties

WBC's own 2024–2028 Health & Wellbeing Strategy commits to:

Reducing inequalities

Increasing access to community health spaces

- Best Value Duty (LGA 1999)

The council must:

Consider alternatives

Provide value for money

Demonstrate proper evidence

Consider community-led models

- Possibility of Section 5 Report

Where there is unlawful predetermination, a Monitoring Officer must intervene.

-
- Impact on Vulnerable Groups

Groups most affected:

Elderly residents (over 28% of users)

Children (swim lessons, youth sports)

Disabled users (WDP scuba, rehab gym use)

Low-income families

Hong Kong BNO communities

Women accessing library and community groups

People referred by GPs for physical activity

Closure exacerbates:

Health inequalities,

Loss of Doctors surgery major impact on local people having to travel long distances to get treatment

Isolation

Transport barriers

No direct bus links to any relocated services or hubs or libraries within Warrington in all cases other than one there is a change of bus required, the one Bus No4 stops on Green lane or Padgate lane and requires a ten minute - ½ Mile walk over Padgate bridge to attend Padgate Medical centre total unacceptable to those with health, disability or walking difficulties

Loss of low-cost exercise

- Community Evidence

Includes:

Protest of hundreds

Thousands engaged online 2.8k

Testimonials from long-term users

Impact statements

Technical evidence from professionals

FOI correspondence

Independent survey data

- What the Council Motion Requires (Dec 2025)

Council unanimously resolved to:

- “Explore and publish all realistic options”

Not done.

- “Ensure continued access to library, fitness and community space”

Not done.

- “Provide a detailed update within 3 months”

DUE 1ST March

This must include immediate action, as the MTFP will determine the Hub’s fate before March.

-
- Alternative Options the Council Must Publish

Partial reopening

Dry-side reopening

Remedial works only

Phased refurbishment

Community partnership model

Sport England funding routes

Mixed-use redevelopment

Borrowing options

Combined Authority mayoral funding (from 2027)

ACV (Asset of Community Value) protections

Government grant options

NHS/Primary Care Integration models

- Conclusion

The evidence is unequivocal:

Woolston Hub can be partially reopened safely now

Cost estimates are unverified and unreliable

Ward-level data proves borough-wide dependency

Vulnerable groups are disproportionately harmed

Legal duties require transparency, alternatives, and equality analysis

The Full Council motion must be delivered — not diluted

Budget decisions made before consultation ends risk illegality

The community calls for:

- Immediate publication of full technical surveys
- Immediate publication of all repair/rebuild options
- Immediate plan to reopen safe areas
- Protection of the Hub within the Medium-Term Financial Plan
- Full transparency at every stage

Woolston Hub is not optional. It is essential.

--- Appendix A: Schools Using Woolston Neighbourhood Hub

The following schools regularly used Woolston Neighbourhood Hub for curriculum swimming provision. Each school typically brought between 30–60 pupils per week, contributing significantly to statutory swim delivery under the National Curriculum:

- Woolston Community Primary School

- St Peter's CE Primary School
- St Augustine's CE Primary School
- Fox Wood School
- Birchwood CE Primary School
- Christ Church CE Primary School
- Our Lady's Catholic Primary School
- St Alban's Catholic Primary School
- Newchurch CE Primary School
- Gorse Covert Primary School
- Culcheth Community Primary School
- Croft Primary School
- St Helen's CE Primary School

In addition, Woolston Hub provided a dedicated weekly session for home-educated children. Closure forces schools to travel further, reduces water time, increases costs, and risks non-compliance with statutory swimming outcomes.

Appendix B: Legal and Statutory Framework

Equality Act 2010 – Public Sector Equality Duty

Section 149 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. Evidence shows disproportionate negative impact on disabled people, older residents, children, and carers.

Consultation Law – Gunning Principles

Consultations must be at a formative stage, provide sufficient information, allow adequate time, and have conscientious consideration of responses. Withholding costings and reports undermines legality.

Predetermination

Setting budgets or financial strategies that remove options prior to consultation conclusion risks unlawful predetermination (Localism Act 2011 guidance and case law).

Local Government Act 1999 – Best Value Duty

Authorities must secure continuous improvement in economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Allowing assets to decline while holding ringfenced funds risks breach.

Health and Safety Law

Duties under HSWA 1974, RIDDOR, ACOP L8 and HSG274 apply. Legionella risks are manageable and do not automatically justify total closure.

Section 106 Planning Obligations

Funds are legally ringfenced and must be spent in accordance with agreements. Failure to deploy available leisure S106 funding may constitute maladministration.

Monitoring Officer Red Flag Checklist

Appendix C: Monitoring Officer – Red Flag Checklist

1. Predetermination Risk

Budget setting and financial planning that removes viable options for Woolston Hub prior to lawful consideration of consultation responses.

2. Failure to Comply with Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality Impact Assessment misclassifies clear negative impacts on age, disability, children, carers and low-income residents as neutral.

3. Unlawful Consultation (Gunning Principles)

Insufficient information provided to consultees, including absence of substantiated costings, engineering reports and alternatives.

4. Best Value Duty Concerns

Allowing a revenue-generating public asset to fall into managed decline while holding earmarked S106 funds risks breach of the Local Government Act 1999.

5. Financial Transparency Failures

Reliance on estimates presented as costs, lack of inspection evidence, and failure to publish alternative options undermine decision integrity.

6. Misuse or Non-use of Section 106 Funds

Failure to deploy ringfenced leisure and health S106 contributions may constitute maladministration.

7. Health & Safety Governance

Withholding RIDDOR and Legionella compliance data during a live consultation creates regulatory and legal exposure.

8. Procedural Impropriety

Deflecting substantive consultation questions into FOI processes after the consultation end date restricts meaningful participation.

9. Failure to Implement Full Council Resolution

Unanimous motion requiring transparency and exploration of all options has not been demonstrably actioned.

10. Reputational and Judicial Review Risk

Cumulative governance failures expose the Council to legal challenge, Ombudsman investigation, and loss of public trust.