

CALL FOR A 6-MONTH EXTENSION TO CENTRAL YMCA CLUB OPENING

7th January 2025

Objective

Extend the opening of the Central YMCA Club for 6 months after the planned closure (7th February 2024) to allow time for interested parties to develop a rescue plan that enables Club facilities, services and community activities to continue in a sustainable way in the longer term.

Rationale

The Club is more than just a gym. It is a living, breathing community. If its doors close on 7th February, then it will be starved of oxygen and very difficult to revive. Continuing operations at the Great Russell Street site over the next few months is essential to the long-term survival of Club services.

More time is needed to develop a fully-thought-through rescue plan. The planned Club closure was announced with only two months' notice and no prior warning, just before Christmas. Central YMCA (CYMCA) has released minimal information about the sale of the site or the financial circumstances of the Club. It is simply not feasible to come up with a well thought through long-term rescue plan in such a short time and without access to necessary information.

Closure as soon as 7th February, whether temporary or permanent, would leave Club users and communities stranded, given that CYMCA's plans for service provision after the planned Club closure are not properly developed. Kier Starmer's office described these plans as: *'underwhelming – with many services still unsecured, future membership costs unconfirmed, and no recognition that for some members an alternative service in KX or Moorgate is not an alternative to the community hub that Great Russell Street provided.'*

Proposed actions

The Save the YMCA Club Campaign proposes convening CYMCA and Criterion Capital, with the support of interested parties, such as user groups, Camden, and constituency MP Kier Starmer's office, to enable the 6-month extension. It is our expectation that the following steps would be needed, with the details to be worked out by relevant parties.

1. Criterion Capital grants CYMCA a tenancy agreement for the period to 7th August 2025 at a fair price and relieves CYMCA of any obligations relating to handover of possession of the site prior to this date.
2. CYMCA immediately stands down contractors engaged to strip the Club of fixtures and fittings after the planned closure date.

3. CYMCA keeps on staff to enable Club operations to continue.
4. CYMCA continues contracts with suppliers, such as staffing agencies (e.g. cleaners, life guards), utilities and services.
5. Club management is undertaken by existing line managers with experience of day-to-day operations. Stakeholders explore the option of appointing an independent interim director to oversee / coordinate this activity. In order to reduce overheads, head office involvement is limited to essential functions (e.g. finance, customer relationship management).
6. Funding is arranged to cover essential repairs and equipment replacement, ensuring that the condition of Club facilities does not deteriorate further.
7. Funding is arranged to bridge any operational deficit during the 6-month extension. Stakeholders estimate the potential size of this deficit.
8. The Save the YMCA Club campaign, CYMCA, and Criterion Capital issue a joint statement about the extension and CYMCA contacts all current and recent members to inform them. The Campaign issues a statement about its intention to develop a rescue plan that enables Club facilities, services and community activities to continue in the longer term.