

Issue G - Transfer of community assets and support to community groups and facilities

1. Central government see the transfer of assets as part of the package of empowering local communities and enabling residents to play a greater role in shaping local public services. This forms a strong part of the Local Government White Paper, which has continued with the Quirk Review 'Making Assets Work' (March 2007). The Quirk review was set up in September 2006 by DCLG to investigate future options of increased community management and ownership of assets, in particular looking at the ways to overcome the barriers taking into account the need to manage risk.
2. On the 23rd October the Executive considered and approved recommendations contained within a Report of the Corporate Landlord 'Community Management and Ownership of Council Property Assets'. The report summarised the contents of the Quirk Review, detailed the work already done to encourage community management of assets, provided options to continue progress and provided details on the Community Asset Fund.
3. The Executive resolved to:
 - *'In appropriate cases, where community groups wish to take a greater responsibility for maintaining, improving and managing publicly owned buildings that they may occupy, they be offered a lease, of up to 99 years depending on the needs of the community group, on a nil rent basis, and with full responsibility for repairs, management and payments for all outgoings, including business rates and utility costs.'*

Thus maximising the benefits of community asset transfer whilst retaining strategic control to ensure benefits are realised to the local community.

- *'That community groups be subject to a test of public acceptability for their management constitution e.g. charitable status.'*

Thus ensuring transfers only occur in appropriate circumstances.

4. The report identified risks to this approach as including the inability of the group to maintain the asset, the group being unrepresentative and non-inclusive, and conflict between groups to use the asset. It is recognised that to minimise these risks and make this successful that the local authority and community groups will need to work closely to ensure the long term future of the asset in public use.
5. To facilitate transfer the government has made £30m available for schemes to bring the asset to a position where it is 'fit for purpose', via

the Community Asset Fund. At the Executive it was resolved that a bid could be made to this fund for St Clements Church Hall as this facility had the best potential to meet the criteria.

6. In order to qualify for an asset transfer the groups need to meet criteria such as servicing the whole community and not single issue groups, that the asset should remain open for a minimum number of hours per annum, and that the group be properly constituted and have the capability and capacity to manage the asset in line with the terms of the agreement. The report also recognised that one possible option for risk minimisation was the possible representation of council officers on the Community Group Management Boards.
7. The formation of the NMU in 2004 passed responsibility to the NMU to either directly manage or provide support to management committees of other community centres across the city. However, the demand this placed on the NMU was significantly underestimated. There has been considerable pressure on the NMU to support local community and management groups to either sustain weak or non-viable committees, and increasing demand to develop further facilities in the city. The NMU is currently not resourced to sustain the current level of support needed in this area, nor any expansion of this work which may result from the Executive decision of the 23rd October and the Quirk Review.
8. With the Executive approval on the 23rd October 2007, of the Report of the Corporate Landlord, it is envisaged that more facilities and assets will transfer. To facilitate this work effectively, officers within the NMU could have 3 possible additional work streams. Firstly, in terms of the assistance and development of community groups in becoming able to apply for asset transfer. Thus enabling them to have the capacity to the point where they can form arms length management committees. This could involve training, capacity building, assistance with the running of meetings, funding awareness, business planning and assistance in forming constitutions. Secondly, the NMU could also play a role in working with the Corporate Landlord to develop eligibility criteria against which the community groups application for asset transfer be assessed. Thirdly officers within the NMU have considerable experience both with the development and support of existing management committees. An officer from the NMU could sit on the community Group Management Board to ensure the continued longevity of the asset transfer. This would ensure that the Community Group could benefit from training and development opportunities, funding advice etc.
9. The NMU are struggling to meet the existing demand on officers from this work stream area. There would be no resources available, based on the current staffing establishment, to provide any of the roles identified within paragraph 8 above.

Indicative Financial Impacts

The NMU are struggling to meet the existing demand on officers from this work stream area. Should members wish for this area to be supported then a full time post of Community Development Worker would be required, initially on a 2-year temporary contract Scale 5/6 within the NMU structure. The role of this post would be to capacity build, support management committees of current facilities and work with newly constituted groups. The success of this role will be assessed and reported back to Executive with a view of reviewing the contract length. The cost of the provision of this post would be £29k per annum based on 07/08 costs. Members should note that the budget savings 2008/09 is proposing a £23k cut the in NMU staffing budget. If the cut is not taken, such a post could be funded from within existing resources.