

Community Asset Transfer Case Study

Organisation Name: Levenshulme Old Library CIO
Please give a brief introduction your organisation and it's work/purpose: To be a centre for community art and culture and to act as a catalyst for community activities and groups.
Name the MCC asset transferred to your organisation and the area it is located in: Levenshulme (old) municipal Library, Cromwell Grove, Levenshulme
State the approximate start date of the asset transfer process: At least three years ago when the community started to discuss and organise around the idea – unsure when it started from MCCs perspective, & we got the keys in Jan 2018.
State the date of the actual asset transfer: 22 nd Jan 2018 – although from the CIO trustees view the process will not be complete until we have a long term lease.
*Estimated number of hours/cost of asset transfer process to your organisation? *If known: <p>These are really hard to calculate but one of our core trustees has estimated that to get to this point over 3 years he has probably spent a day a week on average on the project. That is over 150 days of volunteer time , and maybe contributed another 50 days in the preceding two years as we worked up our initial ideas and business model. So 200 days in total.</p> <p>If we average another 10 trustees/volunteers spending an average of a day a month each, in meetings, training, setting up and running the charity, visiting other projects, fundraising activities and the like, over 3 years that might be estimated as another 360 days. A total of around 560 days of volunteer time to get the building open functioning. We note that the national lottery value one hour of volunteer time as over £10 in kind (match funding). So 560 days of volunteer time equals 560 x8 x10 = £44,800.</p> <p>On top of this we have fundraised to pay our project manager. We might estimate that has cost £10,000 to date and is ongoing. Plus £600 so far to legal fees, though we expect it to be much more before the process is complete. So at least £55,000 direct and in kind.</p> <p>Separating out what is the asset transfer process costs, and what are the overall project costs is tricky of course. But remembering the building has only be re-opened for less than 8 months the figures above would probably reflect essential paid and unpaid commitment made towards the asset transfer of a surplus council building by just this one community group, in terms of their work needed to simply occupy and get the building running reasonably sustainably.</p>
Why was asset transfer necessary and important for your organisation? This 1904 Carnegie building is seen as a community heritage asset and there is a widespread fondness for it, the idea of losing it was regarded with some dread.

When the CIO consulted, the community were very clear what they wanted for the building and expressed quite passionately that they did not want to lose it.

What was your experience of the asset transfer process?

Think about:

-What went well?

The active involvement of local councillors, the commitment of the lead MCC Officer, the professional advice from our advisors and infrastructure organisations (such as Steve Conway and MACC), and in particular from One Manchester Housing, has been invaluable in bringing a complex and difficult process together. Asset transfers are not easy, and require flexibility on all sides, and very time consuming, especially for volunteer led organisations. Every building is unique and needs a bespoke arrangement. Without being able to raise seed funding to employ our project manager we wouldn't have got this far.

When crucial decisions were needed the council officers we engage with have done what they can to facilitate the process. But we are aware how time poor they are, and that adds huge pressures on our side too. The process isn't complete by any means yet. We still don't have the long term lease we need to secure external funds. But progress has been made and a much loved, supremely functional building has been given a new lease of life. Activities are happening in it, with the building reopened after two years standing empty and we remain confident, despite the many years of hard work to get to this point.

-What could have been better?

Understanding the internal structures of the council with different responsibilities and roles is a problem for community groups seeking asset transfers. So, for example, when the building was transferred from Leisure to Estates after it ceased operating as a library meant both a lack of continuity, a new set of relationships to build and delay and uncertainty for our group. Communication and dedicated officers with sufficient time to manage and support the process is essential, as is advice from infrastructure organisations or access to impartial technical advice. Around, for example lease agreements, governance, fundraising or structural surveys.

For example, accessing accurate running costs for heating and lighting was a problem, and made it harder to develop our business plan. So the council collecting together a package of core technical information on the building, including architectural drawings, maintenance schedules, staffing roles and requirements, past condition surveys would all be really helpful. As would being able to network or partner more with other organisations going through this process. The council could improve is the internal coordination between the original department holding the asset (Leisure and libraries in our case), the estates department, the planning department, the CAT team and the legal department (the later which we understand has been outsourced, and not easy to engage with.) But that requires a dedicated resource for asset transfer.

-What support did you receive and from whom?

This has been listed above. Of course we have also had great support from our community. We also brought quite a lot of internal experience of how to do

community building management and what is involved in asset transfers, and drew on some external pro-bono advice from architects and the like where we could. But this can only take us so far. Having the advisors named above, plus more dedicated architectural support and technical buildings advice would have been very helpful, and especially additional support and information on legal matters. Overall a lot is around good project management and brokering, and this is a problem with asset transfer generally (not just within MCC's estate).

-What difference (if any) did the support make to your experience of the asset transfer process?

We couldn't have achieved what we have without access to support, both within and external to the council. Asset transfer should be seen as a long term endeavour, with considerable risks on either side. Benefits and sustainability will take time to show and achieve, and it should be remembered that community leaders making this happen are not paid, and commit significant time, and have to learn many new skills to deal with both the short and long term complexities of asset transfer.

-How could the process of asset transfer be improved further?

Transfer needs resourcing to work, both internally within the council and to prepare the community to be able to take on such responsibilities. Otherwise there is a risk that the process becomes less about transferring assets and more about getting rid of liabilities, and hoping the community can step up. Access to free or brokered technical advice and a clear framework or policy for supporting asset transfers over the longer period is crucial. As is maintaining a partnership approach to asset transfer connections with the council (and its partners in Health, Housing, Education and Regeneration etc) over the long term.

For example being able to buy into council maintenance, caretaking, security and other contracts in a flexible way, for perhaps 2-3 years after the building was transferred, would have helped us.

Ultimately it's the quality of relationships, backed by a clear policy and resource for asset transfer, and the commitment of individual public servants, working with community volunteers, that make asset transfer exciting and possible.

Are there any other comments you would like to make?

The absence of a long term lease is adversely affecting our ability to raise further funds, this negatively impacts our ability to improve the building and this in turn affects our financial sustainability and raises our organisational risk levels. Occupying under a Tenancy at Will is conveyed to our tenant-partner stakeholders who also do not have the security of a proper lease.

Also the time it is taking to carry out two major repairs (the boiler and the unstable arch) is seriously affecting operational capabilities (the crack in the wall cordoned off area) and raises a very serious risk of losing the ability to heat the building through next winter – this would be catastrophic and halt all activities placing all stakeholder organisations at high risk.

Case study provided by: Group Name:

Levenshulme Old Library CIO

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