

Macc Report on Community Asset Transfer

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 11 October 2018

Subject: Community Asset Transfer

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Summary

- This paper provides the Scrutiny Committee with information on the Community Asset Transfer support and engagement process with reference to Macc's learning.
 - The paper also provides initial recommendations for improving and supporting Community Asset Transfer in the City of Manchester and with reference to good practice in other parts of the country.
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Background documents (available for public inspection)

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution/Information

Bradford City Council: Community Asset Transfer <https://bit.ly/2NyZYvQ>

Bradford Council: Register of Community Asset Transfers <https://bit.ly/2PoDIXg>

Macc's guide to Community Asset Transfer <https://bit.ly/2x4cHR4>

Manchester Community Assets Pilot (MCAP) Report (available on request)

Observations:

The ensuing observations are put forward from:

- Macc's experience of working closely with the Community Asset Transfer Manager at Manchester City Council
- Macc's experience of supporting groups with Community Asset Transfer
- Macc's experience of delivering Community Asset Transfer training and learning from the Manchester Community Assets Pilot (MCAP) Partnership work
- Initial analysis of approaches to Community Asset Transfer adopted elsewhere in the UK and most notably in Bradford

1.0 Both the Estates Team and Macc are inundated with requests from groups to find an asset for transfer or as a request for a particular asset. It is difficult to field the high number of requests within the current process and to manage expectations of groups.

2.0 Many groups who make requests for an asset transfer are not ready to manage an asset and usually require considerable capacity building support.

3.0 Stronger groups that are closer to readiness for successful asset transfer still require capacity building support to get through the process.

4.0 The Community Asset Transfer process is set out in the paper Manchester City Council Report for Resolution/Information along with Macc's support offer. These processes help to manage the approach to Community Asset Transfer but there is room for improvement which would help to manage the demand, improve the support process and the application process and provide a better experience for the groups.

5.0 Asset transfers arise as follows: a group requests a particular asset or a group requests any asset that meets their stated requirements.

6.0 Groups have to contact the Community Asset Transfer Manager to ascertain what assets are available which increases workload.

7.0 However, experience of the ensuing process can vary considerably due to a number of factors: how long the asset has been and will remain available for transfer; how much interest there is in the asset from community groups; whether other parts of the Council have intentions for an asset/needs that have to be met by that asset; whether realistic costs are available for the asset; finding funding to meet some of the outlay costs that are necessary in ascertaining viability of an asset transfer.

8.0 For most assets, availability is not predetermined publicly and is subject to whether groups are already engaged in support from Macc and/or the Community Asset Manager. Where more than one group is interested in an asset, there is encouragement for groups to work together rather than in competition.

9.0 For some assets, details of the asset are published and a timescale is set for groups to express an interest. This is referred to as an 'open process' and

effectively, all groups expressing an interest have the same amount of time to prepare their business plan and register their interest.

- 10.0 Once interest has been expressed in an asset and a business plan submitted and accepted, lease negotiations begin. This can vary from short-term leases to actual asset transfer. Full repair and insuring terms mean that groups must be able to cover the costs of repair, maintenance and any alterations to the asset. In order to secure funding for works of this nature, capital funders stipulate that groups must have a minimum lease of 25 years. In effect, a group needs a minimum of a 26/27 year lease as by the time the funding bid is submitted, processed and if successful, awarded, a 25 year lease is diminished and only 23-24 years remain.

Recommendations

- 11.0 Having one single entry point for groups interested in asset transfer would help manage the demand and filter out groups who are not ready or not suitable for asset transfer. The first and only point of entry in Bradford for Community Asset Transfer is through Bradford City Council's Community Asset Transfer Team which health checks the groups and if eligible, refers them to infrastructure support for help to create a business plan. In Manchester, point of entry could either be the City Council or the local infrastructure support organisation for the City (currently Macc).
- 12.0 Increasing the number of open processes for asset transfer would be beneficial: it would help to manage the demand from groups; help to inform the decision making process; help to create a fairer process for groups applying and could be better aligned with other strategies and policies.
- 13.0 Longer leases for asset transfer, with a minimum of 30 years would be helpful where a group is assessed successfully as being ready and able for asset transfer. This does not erase the need or suitability of short term leases in some cases. Bradford City Council offers leases of up to 100 years.
- 14.0 An updateable, published list of available assets may assist the transparency of the asset transfer process in Manchester and assist in managing the number of enquiries made and the transparency of Community Asset Transfer.
- 15.0 There is a strong and valuable training offer in place in Manchester and bespoke one-to-one support. This could be complemented and supported by a clearer Community Asset Transfer process and better resources.
- 16.0 The Community Asset Transfer training programme would benefit from regular, secured funding to enable quicker responses to the need in Manchester and in order to ensure groups are well supported and informed with regard to undertaking Community Asset Transfer.
- 17.0 There would be considerable benefit to Manchester City Council exploring other good practice currently in operation in other parts of the country, e.g. Bradford.

18.0 Macc recently visited Bradford City Council (BCC) and met their CAT team; CBAD (the equivalent infrastructure support organisation in Bradford) and Locality. Bradford's approach is similar to Wigan's and contains some really useful learning. There would be great benefit in having a wider conversation between Macc, Manchester City Council and Bradford City Council's CAT Team.

19.0 BCC have invested quite significantly (both in terms of capacity and resources) in their efforts to ensure that CAT is as successful as it can be. There is a strong and successful partnership approach to CAT between the council and the infrastructure support which includes the imminent transfer of five town hall premises into community ownership. The Community Asset Transfer legal team are currently assessing these and all are close to CAT completion.

20.0 Bradford City Council has a dedicated Community Asset Transfer team of three surveyors and a programme co-ordinator. The team has plans to recruit a fourth surveyor as soon as possible. The Council has invested resources into this team and also provides additional Community Asset Transfer specific funding for groups to cover costs such as legal fees and basic building repairs. This funding overcomes the hurdle many groups face in finding funds to carry out condition reports, feasibility studies, etc.

21.0 Bradford does not yet have a comprehensive training programme in place for asset transfer (and is interested in learning from Manchester's example). However, Bradford does offer Community Asset Transfer information and learning events through a partnership approach of the Council and the local infrastructure support.

22.0 Cllr Alex Ross-Shaw, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Transport at Bradford City Council, has expressed a sincere interest in connecting with his relevant counterpart/s in Manchester to share some of Bradford's experiences and learning on CAT and Bradford City Council have also kindly offered Manchester three tickets for their upcoming CAT learning and information event on 30th October (5.00-7.00pm) for a member of Macc, a member of the Estates Team and an Exec Member of Manchester City Council to attend.