

Cabinet

29th February, 2012



**Community Buildings:
Consultation Feedback and Proposed
Strategy**

Key Decision: CORP/A/05/11/3

**Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive
Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships**

Purpose of the Report

1. To outline the results of the consultation carried out on the Community Buildings Review and to seek agreement for a Community Buildings Strategy.

Executive Summary

2. On 14th September, 2011, Cabinet gave approval to consult on the findings of a Community Buildings Review. The report had considered the potential future approach to the Council's stock of 120 community buildings as well as the grant aid it provides to 129 community buildings (38 of which are owned by the Council).
3. The consultation took place from 19th September to 12th December, 2011 and involved over 3,600 people (including over 400 young people) as well as a joint Member/Officer Working Group. Given the scale of the service users affected by the review, a range of consultation methods was used to seek responses. These included an online questionnaire, a number of stakeholder presentations, use of the Council's Citizens' Panel, attendance at all 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and critically, interviews with individual community building management committees.
4. As a result of this consultation, the Council has gathered an extensive resource to help inform the development of a Community Buildings Strategy. Respondents to the consultation were offered the opportunity to comment on a broad range of issues relating to community buildings, with particular focus on four key issues. These were
 - The proposal (known as 'Option 5') to target £2.15 million of capital investment on priority Council owned community buildings on the condition of asset transfer and to selectively withdraw from lower priority buildings after also providing them the opportunity for an asset transfer.

- The proposed prioritisation criteria, based on deprivation levels, settlement size, cost and proximity to other community buildings used to target the £2.15 million of capital investment.
 - The accuracy of the data held on the Council owned community buildings that had been used in the review to help prioritise facilities for potential investment.
 - The proposal to put in place a transparent allocation process for the Council's Community Buildings Grant Aid Scheme, based on range of suggested criteria, to be administered by AAPs.
5. The findings of the consultation established that there is clear support to target investment of £2.15 million on prioritised Council owned community buildings based on a principle of asset transfer. There was also general support for the criteria proposed to prioritise buildings.
6. Whilst there were a number of updates to the accuracy of data held on individual buildings, the resulting changes were of such a scale that they did not have a major impact on the priority ranking contained in the report to Cabinet in September. As a result of incorporating the new data, it is proposed that the Council's 120 community buildings are categorised into five categories as set out below:
- i. Invest from the current programme (36 buildings)
 - ii. Do not invest from the current programme unless resources become available (38 buildings)
 - iii. Do not invest and take immediate action to close or Asset Transfer (16 buildings)
 - iv. Confirm closure (14 buildings)
 - v. Do not invest as full repair and insurance leases already in place (16 buildings)
7. The incorporation of this updated information has resulted in 36 community buildings being prioritised for investment (subject to a number of conditions, including the ability to progress with an asset transfer), the same overall number proposed in the report to Cabinet in September. This however involved changes to the ranking within categories that has resulted in a number of buildings moving between the 'invest' and 'invest if resources become available' categories. These changes are:
- a. Bearpark Community Centre moved up 16 places into the invest category.
 - b. Framwellgate Community Centre moved up 10 places into the invest category.
 - c. Hunwick Community Centre moved up 3 places into the invest category.
 - d. Howden-le-Wear moved down 7 places out of the invest category.
 - e. Chester Moor Hut moved down 3 places out of the invest category.
 - f. Thornley Community centre moved down 8 places out of the invest category.

8. The proposed priority order of those buildings that will only receive investment if funding becomes available has also changed, details of which are outlined later in this report.
9. Whilst the new data provided by individual community buildings does not have a major impact on the priority ranking, the consultation with the key social housing providers may have a greater impact. These negotiations are still continuing at the time of preparing the report, but may provide the opportunity for the block asset transfer of some communal rooms. If this were to go ahead, it would result in more facilities receiving investment from the housing providers than those prioritised for investment from the Council's resource of £2.15 million as originally identified in the September report. In addition, if it were to proceed, it would effectively free up £90,000 from the £2.15 million allocation that could be used to invest in a greater number of the 66 community managed community buildings.
10. With regard to the proposals to amend the allocation process for the Council's Community Buildings Grant Aid fund, there was overwhelming support for change from the current system but no clear steer on what form the new process should take.
11. Based on the results of this consultation, the report seeks approval for a Community Buildings Strategy which recognises the vital role that community buildings play in the heart of their local communities and the valuable work carried out by the dedicated volunteers who manage these facilities. The proposed strategy has the vision to, **'Ensure that by 2014 the County has a network of sustainable, well placed, highly valued and well used community buildings which are controlled by local people.'**
12. To achieve this vision, the proposed strategy contains a clear set of actions based around the four objectives of:
 - (1) Developing strong and vibrant communities.
 - (2) Maximising the impact of available resources to invest in community buildings where they are most needed.
 - (3) Handing over control to local communities.
 - (4) Supporting the dedicated volunteers who run community buildings.
13. In line with the consultation results, core elements of the strategy incorporate the proposals outlined in the report to Cabinet in 2011. It is proposed that maximising the impact of available resources will be achieved by applying the proposed prioritisation criteria to target the Council's £2.15 million of capital investment on 36 buildings, in line with the categorisation set out in paragraph 6. Handing over control to local communities will entail the Council actively working with community buildings management committees to promote the option of asset transfer. The consultation established widespread support for the principle of asset transfer, with respondents recognising the advantages it offered to, 'Empower local communities, access additional resources and ultimately, to improve their long-term sustainability'.

14. The strategy recognises that the dedicated volunteers that run community buildings need support, such as advice and guidance, and the time to prepare for change. Indeed, the consultation process highlighted that it would be essential if the strategy is to be implemented by 2014. As a consequence, the strategy to invest £2.15 million into community buildings is underpinned by a targeted support package of a maximum of £600,000 (spread over the two year implementation period). This includes a dedicated support team for a time limited period with assistance from a range of partner agencies. The proposal to create this resource represents a significant opportunity over the next two years to create sustainable network of community buildings for Durham. However, a key message of the communications plan associated with the strategy will be the critical fact that this level of support represents a window of opportunity for a specified period and will not be available beyond 2014.
15. During this implementation stage of the strategy, it is proposed that the current moratorium on capital investment from the Council's resources (including Members' Neighbourhood Budgets) in the Council's community buildings remains in place unless they are aligned with an asset transfer of the building. Work required for health and safety reasons will be permitted during the implementation stage of the strategy up to a value of £5,000 for each building. Where this is exceeded, works will require the approval of the Head of Service and Portfolio Holder.
16. By April, 2014, at the end of the implementation stage of the attached Strategy, the aim is for as many council owned community buildings to have been subject to asset transfer as possible, for the temporary Support Team to step down and for ongoing support to be provided by permanent staff within the Council's Partnership and Community Engagement Service as well as VCS agencies.
17. At a time of severe financial challenges for the Council, it is in recognition of the role community buildings can play in developing strong and vibrant communities that the report proposes investing significant resources into the sector over the next two years. Progressing this strategy will require extensive negotiations with the management associations of community buildings, and in a number of instances, because of current contractual arrangements, it may be necessary to revisit the action plan and timeframe with regard to certain facilities. Where there is a strong demand within the local community for a facility to remain open and to be placed in local control, then the proposals set out in this report will ensure that the mechanisms are in place to try to make this possible. However, for those buildings that are currently closed, and the consultation has established little or no local appetite for them to reopen, the report is seeking to formally declare them surplus to requirements.

Background

18. The Council owns (or is trustee of) 120 community buildings – 54 Council managed facilities (usually referred to as Communal Rooms) and 66 community managed facilities (mainly referred to as Community Centres).

19. Where indicative valuations are available, it is estimated that the market value for the Council's community buildings is at least £7.8 million.
20. As a consequence of the organic way in which the Council's community buildings have come into its ownership, there is no consistency as to where community buildings are located and a number are within close proximity to each other. Although numerous, Council owned community buildings account for less than half of the total community building stock in the County. As a result, those areas with the smallest number of Council community buildings do not necessarily have the smallest overall concentrations of community buildings per resident. Appendix 2 shows the location of community buildings.
21. During 2010/11 a review of the Council's community buildings was carried out. Cabinet agreed that the review should focus on the Council's multi-use community centres and exclude other facilities such as leisure centres, dedicated children/youth centres and schools from the scope of this work. It was, however, acknowledged that the location of other community facilities would need to be taken into account when considering future investment.
22. The review of the Council's 120 community buildings considered:
 - (a) Condition, compliance and access;
 - (b) Leases and responsibilities;
 - (c) Management and governance;
 - (d) Usage;
 - (e) Costs.
23. This review showed that substantial capital investment is needed in the Council's community buildings (£11.25 million) over the next ten years, while over the period of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) the figure will be in the region of £7.4 million. It also showed a wide variation in the nature of the legal relationships (leases) with the Council; the large number of dedicated volunteers involved in supporting community buildings; and a significant variation in the level of use of each community building.
24. In September 2011 Cabinet considered the findings of a comprehensive review of its community buildings and agreed that consultation on the following six possible options for future investment in its 120 community buildings should be carried out between 19 September and 12 December 2011.
 - (1) Status quo
 - (2) Withdraw from provision
 - (3) Fully invest in all properties
 - (4) Fulfil minimum contractual requirements
 - (5) Target investment on priority community buildings on the condition of asset transfer and selectively withdraw from lower priority community buildings
 - (6) Partially invest in all properties
25. As part of this consultation it was agreed that 'option 5' – to prioritise investment into targeted community buildings on the condition that the building is the subject of an asset transfer, should be highlighted as the

Council's preferred option, as it is considered to provide the greatest opportunity to ensure a sustainable network of affordable centres.

26. Cabinet also agreed that a set of five principles should be applied to reduce the potential investment required to £4 million and criteria for prioritisation based on cost, need, size, settlement type and proximity to other buildings should be applied to this option to enable investment to remain within the Council's current indicative allocation of £2.15 million. It was agreed that the principles and criteria for prioritisation (outlined above) should also be the subject of consultation.
27. Cabinet noted that applying option 5 would result in the Council's 120 community buildings being placed into one of five categories:
 1. Invest from the current programme (36 buildings)
 2. Do not invest from the current programme unless resources become available (41 buildings)
 3. Do not invest and take immediate action to close or Asset Transfer (12 buildings)
 4. Confirm closure (15 buildings)
 5. Do not invest as full repair and insurance leases already in place (16 buildings)
28. Cabinet also agreed in September 2011 that the consultation should include gathering views on its present Community Buildings Grant Aid Scheme. The review had found that there are inconsistencies as to which community building management committees are grant aided by the Council. This grant aid totals circa £280,000 per annum and has remained largely unchanged for a considerable period.
29. Government policy regarding community buildings and facilities, promoted by both the previous and present Governments, has been to encourage asset transfer. Successful transfers are seen as a means for more innovative use of facilities and an opportunity to open up new funding opportunities. However, to succeed, support is required for building management committees, as without it there is the prospect that the facilities will be unsustainable. In September Cabinet therefore, also agreed to develop proposals for asset transfer during the consultation period.
30. Throughout the community buildings review and consultation stages, it was agreed that there should be a moratorium on capital spending on the Council's community buildings, unless work is required for health and safety reasons.

Consultation – Methodology and Key Findings

31. The consultation on the Community Buildings Review took place between the 19th September and the 12th December, 2011. Given the complexity of the issue, the fact that the Council's current approach had remained unchanged for many years and the large number of community buildings affected by the review, co-ordinating the consultation has required significant effort and a large degree of input from members of the public.

32. In total, more than 3,600 people took part in the consultation process through a range of techniques involving a number of targeted groups. Details of the various methods used, the number of respondees as well as the key responses are outlined in Appendix 3. Some of the activities included in the Appendix include:
- 102 interviews with community building management committees/user groups (or local Town and Parish Councils where a facility is currently closed). These meetings involved 729 people.
 - Responses from 415 young people recruited through the Investors in Children and AAP Youth Groups.
 - 157 completed on-line questionnaires.
 - 108 people attended three Stakeholder Launch Events.
 - 1,038 attended AAP Forums when Community Building Grant Aid was discussed.
 - 102 people attended three Grant Aid Stakeholder meetings.
 - 882 members of the Citizens' Panel responded to questions on the future of community buildings.
33. In addition to these large-scale events, meetings have also been held as part of the consultation process with key voluntary sector partners, potential providers of community building matched funding and the main social housing providers in whose area of operation the 54 communal rooms included in the review are located i.e. East Durham Homes, Dale and Valley Homes, Cestria and Durham City Homes.
34. Individual letters and petitions (signed by 440 people) have been received for particular buildings. These buildings include Sanders Memorial Home Community Building, Earl House, Burnopfield Community Centre and Silver Court Hall and were submitted in response to the proposed categorisation included in the consultation document. Individual responses have also been received from the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership, Durham Rural Community Council, CAVOS and the Chester le Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau
35. There is a large degree of consistency in the consultation findings. Those areas with the greatest agreement included support for:
- Progressing with Option 5, to target capital investment of £2.15 million on prioritised Council owned community buildings on the condition that the building is subject to asset transfer.
 - The proposed criteria for prioritising which Council owned building should receive funding, although the majority of individual management committees wanted the Council to take account of revised data pertaining to their own buildings.

- The need for support to community buildings management committees and sufficient time to adapt and become ready for change.
 - The need for improved publicity to increase the numbers of community building users.
 - The need to review the allocation of the Council's Community Building Grant Fund.
36. In addition to gaining these clear views on aspects of the Council's proposed approach to developing a Community Buildings Strategy, the consultation also gave some useful pointers towards what type of activities might attract more people to use community buildings. These included a clear demand for more exercise classes to attract adults to use the centres whilst younger people expressed a greater desire for more games and 'fun' activities.
37. Whilst there was a large degree of consistency around those issues highlighted above, there was less clarity on how the allocation of the Community Building Grant Fund should be revised. As highlighted, there is a clear acceptance that the current system needs to change but little consensus on how. When the wider community was asked to comment i.e. through the online questionnaire and the AAP Forum, there is majority support for local distribution through AAPs. However, when community buildings themselves were asked to comment at the stakeholder meetings, more supported a central distribution and alternative criteria to that proposed in the consultation. In short, the consultation has not provided a clear view steer for the future of this funding, but a strong desire for change.
38. As highlighted above, in addition to management committees and users of community buildings, meetings were also held with partner agencies, with potential funders of community buildings and the key providers of social housing in areas with Council owned communal rooms. The meetings with all three groups of partners supported the overall approach being proposed by the Council, however they also highlighted a number of additional issues (which are detailed in Appendix 3).
39. The meeting held with funders was primarily focussed at establishing the potential level of additional resources to support the Council's strategy. As highlighted in the Key Proposals section of this report, the proposed strategy does place an expectation on community building management committees to raise match resources. The main conclusion from this meeting was the view of the funders that, disappointingly, groups in Durham had attracted less funding than expected, but reassuringly, there is a range of potential funding available to groups. However, this needs to be tempered with the view expressed by local management committees that although there may be available sources of funding, they will need help to prepare funding applications.
40. Meetings were held with housing providers, to determine if the proposals contained in the consultation to progress asset transfer of community buildings might cause difficulties for their landlord function. The particular focus was on the 54 communal rooms, because although these function as

community buildings, they tend to be smaller than locally managed centres and are strongly associated with neighbouring housing - usually older people's housing. The need for these meetings was particularly important, as not surprisingly given their current position of being Council managed; the consultation with users of these facilities had shown less support compared to other buildings for the asset transfer.

41. Although there is extensive evidence in the County that asset transfer of communal rooms to individual management committees is viable, given some of the concerns expressed, further work is currently being undertaken on a potential alternative proposal to transfer a block of these buildings to the social housing providers. This proposal (suggested by the housing sector) has been made on the basis that potentially a larger number of buildings are supported in their use as community buildings than those proposed to receive direct investment from the capital investment resource of £2.15 million as part of the consultation. Further work is required to explore this option, whilst this is being undertaken, the proposals in the attached Community Buildings Strategy assume communal rooms will be dealt with on an individual basis and in line with the report to Cabinet in September, 2011. However, should these discussions develop as a viable alternative, this would be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet.
42. Finally, before moving on to outline how the consultation events have helped shape the key proposals in the attached Community Building Strategy, thanks need to be given to the many members of the community that found the time to respond and support the process. Gathering the views of over 3,600 people, although complex, has been a rewarding and informative process for the officers involved and has provided the Council with a rich source of data to inform how it takes its approach to community buildings forward.

Asset Transfer Working Group

43. As highlighted above, the asset transfer of community buildings forms an integral element of the proposals agreed for consultation by Cabinet in September, 2011. In addition to agreeing to consult on this approach, which was supported by the majority of respondents to the consultation, Cabinet also recognised that further work would be needed to put in place a robust and effective process that could lead to successful asset transfers.
44. The report to Cabinet acknowledged that although there were many advantages of asset transfer, there are a number of potential difficulties that would need to be addressed when developing the associated processes. As a consequence, it was agreed to establish a joint Member/Officer Working Group to advise on how the asset transfer of community buildings might be progressed in Durham. It was also agreed that the group would include external advisors from Durham Rural Community Council (DRCC) and the Asset Transfer Unit (ATU). The ATU is a Government supported agency established with the remit to encourage and support asset transfers.
45. The cross party working group was chaired by the Deputy Leader and met on four occasions. During this period, the Working Group has considered a broad range of issues associated with asset transfer, such as the advantages asset transfer can offer, and the detail of what safeguards and support

arrangements should be put in place to make this a feasible option for community building management committees. Recommendations from the Working Group have provided a valuable contribution to the development of the Community Building Strategy.

Community Buildings Strategy: Key Proposals

46. At the outset of the consultation on the Community Buildings Review, it was highlighted that a driver for change has been the inconsistencies in service provision as a consequence of the organic way in which it has developed. In order to provide greater consistency in the future, it is proposed that the Community Buildings Strategy as outlined in Appendix 2 is developed around a vision and set of core objectives that clearly state:

- Why the Council should allocate resources to community buildings, particularly at a time of extreme financial constraint.
- What the Council hopes to achieve through supporting community buildings.
- How action will be taken to deliver the vision and objectives.

47. The Strategy clarifies ‘**why**’ the Council should invest in and support community buildings as they can play a vital role in achieving the Council’s (and its partners) overarching vision for an Altogether Better Durham. This vision provides the context for all partners’ working. At its simplest is about the two aims of Altogether Better Place and Altogether Better for People, which are driven forward through five priority themes. The proposals for community buildings have an impact on all of these as follows:

- **Altogether Wealthier** – The economic benefits are often indirect but can be significant. For example, education and training activities can improve the ability of local people to access employment and volunteering within community buildings can also help to increase confidence, improve skills and build capacity.
- **Altogether Better for Children and Young People** – The type and range of education and training available through community buildings can be diverse. The Council’s consultation has clearly shown that young people are interested in what happens to their local community buildings.
- **Altogether Healthier** – Community buildings traditionally provide a range of activities which are beneficial to health, including fitness classes and smoking cessation sessions. Many of the activities held within community buildings also contribute towards reducing social isolation.
- **Altogether Safer** – Crime and anti-social behaviour can be addressed by activities carried out within community buildings. Community buildings can help to facilitate cross generational work, promote understanding and help to achieve strong community cohesion.
- **Altogether Greener** – Community buildings can represent a flagship building in the local area, promoting the value of energy efficiency and demonstrating renewable energy options. They can also act as the focus for local community pride initiatives.

48. The evidence gathered on usage of the Council's community buildings, while it varies significantly across the County, has highlighted that the activities within well utilised buildings can play a vital role of making things Altogether Better in terms of both 'Place' and 'People'. As there are over 21,000 visits per week amongst the 120 buildings, offering a broad range of activities from adult education to leisure pursuits, there is little doubt that a vibrant and attractive community centre can help improve quality of life in local communities.

49. In terms of **'what'** the Council would aim to achieve through its support to community buildings, the Strategy sets a Vision to:

'Ensure that by 2014 the County has a network of sustainable, well placed, highly valued and well used community buildings, which are controlled by local people.'

50. As explained in the report to Cabinet in September, 2011, the reality of current provision is some way from this vision, and in order to establish a clear framework for **'how'** this might be achieved, the Strategy sets out four objectives;

Objective 1: Developing strong and vibrant communities

Objective 2: Maximising the impact of resources available to invest in community buildings where they are most needed

Objective 3: Handing over control to local communities

Objective 4: Supporting the dedicated volunteers who run community buildings

51. Under each objective, the Strategy sets out the associated responses from the consultation process along with the relevant national and local factors that have been taken into consideration when developing proposed activities. Actions are set out for each objective, which are then detailed further in the Strategy's Action Plan.

52. Key actions for each of the objectives are set out below:

Objective 1: Developing strong and vibrant communities

53. This objective focuses on the role an active building (Council owned or not) that is at the heart of its local town or village can play in developing a strong and vibrant community. It also acknowledges that to do this, there is a need for community buildings to act as a community themselves, to take action together to support each other, spread best practice and, wherever possible, share resources. In order to achieve this objective, the strategy proposes a number of actions including:

- The promotion of activities available in community buildings by AAPs to the local community.

- The encouragement of community buildings to be used as a base for the delivery of local services through the provision of a directory of available space to Council Service Groupings and its partner agencies.
- The provision, wherever possible, of procurement support and advice.
- The nomination of a link officer for each community building during the implementation of the Strategy.

Objective 2: Maximising the impact of resources available to invest in community buildings where they are most needed

54. This objective focuses on how the Council should invest in its 120 community buildings.
55. The consultation widely supported the principle that the Council should go ahead with the investment of £2.15 million to improve its community buildings, and that this should be targeted on priority buildings identified by criteria based on deprivation levels, settlement size, proximity to other facilities and cost.
56. Since the completion of the consultation, a significant amount of work has been undertaken to update the 'cost' element of the criteria, which is based on cost to repair and usage of a facility. This, has resulted in a revised prioritisation of Council's community buildings into the five categories of:
- (1) Invest from the current programme (36 buildings)
 - (2) Do not invest from the current programme unless resources become available (38 buildings)
 - (3) Do not invest and take immediate action to close or Asset Transfer (16 buildings)
 - (4) Confirm closure (14 buildings)
 - (5) Do not invest as full repair and insurance leases already in place (16 buildings)
57. The Strategy clarifies that there are a number of conditions to this categorisation and these include:
- The need for groups in the invest category to contribute 30% of the refurbishment costs.
 - The need for buildings in the invest category to be capable of progressing with asset transfer in line with the procedures set out in Objective 3.
 - The acknowledgement that because of current contractual arrangements there will be a need to negotiate with, and provide support for, community building management committees to progress this approach. As a consequence, in certain circumstances, it may be necessary to revisit the action plan and timeframe for certain buildings.

- As set out above in paragraph 41, negotiations are currently ongoing with housing providers that could result in an alternative approach being presented to Cabinet at a future date for its communal rooms.
- Every effort will be made to secure investment for those buildings not prioritised for investment from alternative sources, subject to them progressing with asset transfer.
- Every building will be offered the opportunity to pursue an asset transfer, with the exception of those currently closed buildings where the consultation found no support for them to be re-opened, in which case, it is recommended they are declared surplus to requirements.
- Where the Council is a trustee of a building but does not own the building or have a responsibility to carry out repairs or capital improvements, then they do not receive investment from the £2.15 million capital investment fund.

58. With reference to the caveat regarding trust status set out above, investigations are still ongoing to fully understand the complex nature of these relationships. Those buildings where the Council is currently aware that it has a role as a trustee, and further clarification is being sought, are set out below:

- Fencehouses and District Community Centre
- Hesleden Community Centre
- Thornley Community Centre
- Chester-le-Street Community Centre (Newcastle Bank)
- Sherburn Hill Community Centre
- Plawsworth and Kimblesworth Memorial Hall
- Great Lumley Community Centre

59. Whilst these caveats need to be taken into consideration, it was formally accepted during the consultation that the investment of £2.15 million into community buildings, along with the proposed support package set out under Objective 4, marks a significant commitment by the Council to the sector. The revised priority list as contained in the Strategy is set out below.

Community Buildings Identified for Investment (Invest)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
1	East Durham	Parkside Community Centre, Seaham	Invest 1
2	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Henknowle Community Centre, Bishop Auckland	Invest 2
3	Stanley	Stanley Community Centre	Invest 3
4	East Durham	Pride House, Eden Hill, Peterlee	Invest 4
5	Three Towns	Sunnybrow Community Centre, Crook	Invest 5
6	East Durham	Horden Youth & Community Centre	Invest 6
7	East Durham	Shotton Community Centre, Shotton Colliery	Invest 7
8	Three Towns	Rosedale Community Centre, Willington	Invest 8
9	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Coundon & Leeholme Community Centre	Invest 9

10	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Selby Close, West Auckland	Invest 10
11	Stanley	Tanfield Lea Community Centre	Invest 11
12	Chester-le-Street	Great Lumley Community Centre, Chester le Street	Invest 12
13	Mid Durham Rural	Brandon Community Centre	Invest 13
14	Mid Durham Rural	Langley Park Community Centre	Invest 15
15	Stanley	Annfield Plain Community Centre	Invest 14
16	Teesdale	Middleton-In-Teesdale Village Hall	Invest 16
17	Durham	Newton Hall Community Centre, Pity Me	Invest 17
18	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Shildon Centre	Invest 19
19	Derwent Valley	Citizens House, Consett	Invest 18
20	Chester-le-Street	Bullion Hall, Chester le Street	Invest 22
21	Chester-le-Street	Brockwell Centre (Pelton Fell Community Centre)	Invest 21
22	Chester-le-Street	Newcastle Bank (Ch-le-St) Community Centre,	Invest 25
23	EDRC	Trimdon Grange Community Centre	Invest 20
24	EDRC	Quarrington Hill Community Centre	Invest 23
25	Great Aycliffe & Middridge	Great Aycliffe Village Hall,	Invest 26
26	EDRC	Trimdon Station Community Centre	Invest 24
27	Durham	Bearpark Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 43
28	Chester-le-Street	Pelton Community Centre	Invest 27
29	Durham	Ludworth Village Hall	Invest 30
30	Derwent Valley	Blackhill Community Centre	Invest 28
31	EDRC	Fishburn Youth & Community Centre	Invest 29
32	Durham	Framwellgate Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 42
33	East Durham	Seaham: Seaton Community Centre	Invest 31
34	Durham	34 Broomside Lane, Belmont	Invest 32
35	Three Towns	Hunwick Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 38
36	Mid Durham Rural	Harry Carr House, Meadowfield	Invest 33

Do Not Invest from the Current Programme unless Resources become Available (Unlikely to invest)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
37	Chester-le-Street	Fencehouses & District Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 39
38	Chester-le-Street	Chester Moor Hut	Invest 35
39	Three Towns	20 Wheatbottom	Unlikely to Invest 41
40	East Durham	Fairclough Court, Peterlee	Unlikely to Invest 37
41	East Durham	Heselden Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 40
42	East Durham	Thornley Community Centre	Invest 34
43	Three Towns	Howden le Wear Community Centre	Invest 36
44	Durham	Pittington Village Hall	Unlikely to Invest 48
45	Chester-le-Street	Plawsworth & Kimblesworth Memorial Hall	Unlikely to Invest 45
46	Derwent Valley	Shotley Bridge Village Hall	Unlikely to Invest 44
47	EDRC	Holmside, Bowburn	Unlikely to Invest 46
48	East Durham	Earl House Community Centre, Seaham	Unlikely to Invest 47

49	Derwent Valley	Burnopfield Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 49
50	East Durham	Hawthorn Community Centre, Seaham	Unlikely to Invest 50
51	Weardale	Witton le Wear Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 52
52	Durham	Sherburn Hill Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 53
53	Chester-le-Street	Jubilee Close, Edmondsley	Unlikely to Invest 54
54	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Toronto Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 55
55	Three Towns	Bankfoot Grove, Crook	Unlikely to Invest 51
56	East Durham	Charlton House, Wingate	Unlikely to Invest 56
57	Durham	Arden House, West Rainton	Unlikely to Invest 57
58	Mid Durham Rural	Woodland Hall, Esh Winning	Unlikely to Invest 60
59	Three Towns	Hargill Haven, Howden le Wear	Unlikely to Invest 69
60	East Durham	McCrae House, Murton	Unlikely to Invest 61
61	East Durham	Resource & Social Centre, Seaham	Unlikely to Invest 62
62	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Monteith Close, West Auckland	Unlikely to Invest 76
63	Durham	Attlee Sq Sherburn Communal Room, Sherburn Village	Unlikely to Invest 64
64	Stanley	Burnside Resource Centre, Stanley	Unlikely to Invest 63
65	EDRC	64 Lansdown Road, Coxhoe	Unlikely to Invest 65
66	Teesdale	Stainton Grove Community Centre, Barnard Castle	Unlikely to Invest 70
67	East Durham	Wheatley House, Wheatley Hill	Unlikely to Invest 66
68	Three Towns	Stanley Way, Crook	Unlikely to Invest 71
69	Durham	Fyndoune House, Witton Gilbert	Unlikely to Invest 68
70	Durham	Southbrook House, Pitlington	Unlikely to Invest 73
71	East Durham Rural	9 Browns Close, Coxhoe	Unlikely to Invest 72
72	Weardale	Stanhope Town Hall	Unlikely to Invest 75
73	Chester-le-Street	Cedarwood, Fencehouses	Unlikely to Invest 77
74	East Durham	Murton Community Centre	Unlikely to Invest 74

Do Not Invest and Take Immediate Action to Close or Asset Transfer (Do Not Invest)

This category previously only included buildings that were within 800m of a community building that the Council had proposed should receive investment. Following the consultation interest was expressed in the Asset Transfer of community buildings that had previously been closed. Following the consultation, these building have therefore moved into this category.

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
75	Durham	Beaurepaire Community Centre, Bearpark	Unlikely to Invest 58
76	Durham	Woodbine House, Pity Me	Unlikely to Invest 59
77	East Durham	Byron House, Seaham	Do Not Invest 78
78	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Mickle Grove, Coundon	Do Not Invest 79
79	Mid Durham Rural	19-20 Sycamore Park, Brandon	Do Not Invest 80
80	Three Towns	23 Holme Dene, Hunwick	Unlikely to Invest 67
81	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Cornwall Place, Henknowle	Do Not Invest 81
82	Mid Durham Rural	Silver Courts Hall, Brandon	Do Not Invest 82
83	Chester-le-Street	Sanders Memorial Home, Chester le Street	Do Not Invest 83
84	East Durham	Alcote House, Shotton Colliery	Do Not Invest 84
85	Chester-le-Street	Fell Rose Court, Pelton Fell	Do Not Invest 85
86	East Durham	Parkside Peoples Centre, Seaham	Do Not Invest 86

87	East Durham	Roseby Road, Horden	Do Not Invest 87
88	Durham	Hawthorns Malcolm Ave, Co Durham	Do Not Invest 89
89	Three Towns	25a Hall Lane Estate, Willington	Confirm Closure 91
90	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Dorset Place, Henknowle	Confirm Closure 97

Confirm Closure (Confirm Closure)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
91	EDRC	80 Bede Terrace, Bowburn	Confirm Closure 92
92	Three Towns	Bedburn Close, Durham	Confirm Closure 93
93	Three Towns	Collier House	Confirm Closure 94
94	Derwent Valley	Crookgate Communal Room, Burnopfield	Confirm Closure 95
95	Derwent Valley	Dipton, Front St Communal Room, Stanley	Confirm Closure 96
96	Three Towns	Elite Hall, Crook	Confirm Closure 98
97	Chester-le-Street	Gairloch Drive Communal Room, Pelton	Do Not Invest 88
98	Three Towns	Grasmere Grove	Confirm Closure 90
99	Chester-le-Street	Hambledon Hut, Chester le Steet	Confirm Closure 99
100	Three Towns	Millfield, Crook	Confirm Closure 100
101	East Durham	Shakespeare Centre, Seaham	Confirm Closure 101
102	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Sycamore Grove, West Auckland	Confirm Closure 102
103	Chester-le-Street	Wood Street, Chester le Street	Confirm Closure 103
104	EDRC	Woodland House, Kelloe	Confirm Closure 104

* Shaded buildings are Communal Rooms

Full Repair and Insurance Lease (FR&I)

Rank	AAP Area	Building	Previous Category and Rank
105	Stanley	Activity Den, Tanfield Lea	FR&I 105
106	Derwent Valley	Bridgehill Communal Room, Consett	FR&I 106
107	Stanley	Clavering YC (formerly Annfield Plain Boys Club), Stanley	FR&I 107
108	Stanley	Communal Room - Annfield Plain, Stanley	FR&I 108
109	Stanley	Communal Room - Shield Row, Stanley	FR&I 109
110	Spennymoor	Croxdale Community Centre & Hall	FR&I 110
111	Derwent Valley	Dene Court Hamsterley Newcastle	FR&I 111
112	Bishop Auckland & Shildon	Escomb Community Centre	FR&I 112
113	East Durham	Gully House, Wingate	FR&I 113
114	Derwent Valley	Leadgate Community Centre, Consett	FR&I 114
115	Stanley	South Moor Comm Rm - The Haven	FR&I 115
116	Derwent Valley	The Hut Burnopfield, Newcastle	FR&I 116
117	EDRC	Trimdon Village Hall	FR&I 117
118	Four Together	West Cornforth & District Com Centre	FR&I 118
119	East Durham	Wheatley Hill (Greenhills) Community Centre	FR&I 119
120	East Durham	Wingate & District Community Centre	FR&I 120

It should be noted that during the preparation of this report discussions have been progressing with regard to an additional resource of £568k originally allocated by the former Wear Valley District Council to invest in the Elite Hall, Crook. These discussions have established that due to recent deterioration significantly more than £568k would be required to bring the building back into use and a separate report on this agenda is proposing the resource is earmarked for community facilities in Crook. Subject to the decision of Cabinet on this proposal, this may provide an additional source of funding for the community centres in Crook listed above.

Objective 3: Handing over control to local communities

60. This objective, to hand over control to local communities for community buildings clarifies the action and processes that will be put in place to progress asset transfer.
61. As with the proposed approach to targeting investment on priority buildings set out in Objective 2, the principle of asset transfer was found to be widely supported during the consultation. This section of the report sets out how the asset transfers should be implemented and the advantages these would achieve in improving the long term sustainability of the County's network of community buildings. In line with the approach taken in Objective 2, the actions set out under this objective are conditional on a number of issues. These include:
- The Council will not be progressing the large-scale block transfer of its community buildings, with the possible exception of its communal rooms, given the lack of proven track record nationally,
 - Asset transfers will be offered on the basis of a long-term Full Repairing and Insuring Lease.
 - Any asset transfer must not undermine the proposals within the County Durham Plan.
 - The organisation to which the building is transferred must be incorporated, open to the whole community, operating effectively and with evidence of community support.
 - Asset transfer requires there to be a business plan for the future use of the centre that provides some assurance of its long-term viability.
 - Support will be provided during the implementation stage of this strategy to assist groups to pursue the option of asset transfer.
62. Taking into account these conditions, the Strategy goes on to set out an Asset Transfer Application and Assessment process. With the support outlined through Objectives 2 and 4 of the Strategy, it is hoped that the majority of the 120 community buildings will successfully progress with asset transfers over the two year implementation period of the Strategy's Action Plan. However, for those buildings that are unable to progress with an asset transfer, it is

proposed that based on the current economic climate, and as a last resort, action would be taken to close the facility. For these circumstances, the Strategy also sets out an Exit Strategy that would seek to relocate users of the building to an alternative facility.

Objective 4: Supporting the dedicated volunteers who run community buildings

63. The consultation and the Asset Transfer Working Group recognised that volunteers require support.
64. The County Council has for a number of decades provided revenue support, of up to £3,500 to 129 community building management committees. Whilst there was an overwhelming acknowledgement in the consultation that this needed to change, there was no consensus. Given these results, the Strategy recommends that the existing recipients of grant support are informed that 2012/13 will be the last year in which the current arrangements are in place and that AAPs are tasked with carrying out joint work to develop proposals for new arrangements by September, 2012 for introduction in April, 2013.
65. Comments generated during the consultation have highlighted a desire from Management Groups to receive support, particularly funding and financial advice in order to progress the Council's proposals for community buildings. This requirement was also mirrored in the comments received from partner agencies, who in general supported the proposed approach but emphasised the importance of providing timely advice to management groups to ensure that they have the ability to progress with asset transfer.
66. The Strategy recognises that requirement and outlines a comprehensive support package, the majority of which will be concentrated on the two year period of the Strategy's Implementation Plan. It is proposed that there will be four main categories of support:
 - Temporary (two-year) in-house Community Buildings Team. It is proposed that this will be made up of six staff (including a Community Buildings Project Officer, Capital Investment Officer, two Community Building Support Officers, a Training and Information Officer and an Advice, Liaison and Administration Officer) who will be based in the Assistant Chief Executive's Service Grouping to progress the implementation of the Strategy. It is estimated the team will cost £226,000 per annum and that this will be funded from resources held by the Assistant Chief Executive within its MTFP cash limits. As at April, 2014, it is proposed this Team will cease to operate by which time the aim is to have completed the programme of asset transfers.
 - Independent Asset Transfer Advice. It is recognised that whilst the Community Buildings Team will be able to provide much of the support for groups to move towards asset transfer, at the final stage in the process they will require independent surveying and legal advice. It is proposed funding of £140,000 is set aside to help support groups to receive that advice and this will be funded from resources held by the Assistant Chief Executive within its MTFP.

- Voluntary and Community Section Advice Agencies. Community buildings already have access to advice and guidance from existing voluntary and community sector organisations operating in Durham. As part of this support, the Council currently fund an element of this advice as part of its funding agreement with the Principal Infrastructure Organisations (PIOs). It is proposed that support for community buildings through this mechanism continues at least for the next two years. However, the consultation has also highlighted that there are more agencies providing advice to the sector than Council funded agencies and work will be carried out to ensure in the future that advice is well co-ordinated and more consistent across the County.
- New sources of advice. Throughout the review and consultation, efforts have been made to identify and secure additional support and advice for community buildings. Although sources of additional capital funding have been identified, these will not be secured until further work is carried out with management committees to progress individual funding bids. This work will be a focus for the proposed Community Buildings Team. However, there has been some progress in attempts to secure additional support for advice and guidance to groups. This includes a research project to be carried out by the Institute of Local Government to identify best practice in the field of asset transfer and to potentially identify and support mentors for management committees in Durham.

Next Steps – Implementation of the Community Buildings Strategy

67. Completion of the community buildings review and the associated consultation has taken a significant effort given the scale of the buildings concerned, the number of people involved in these buildings and the complex relationship that has developed between these buildings and the Council. Although the attached strategy aims to provide greater clarity in the future, as well as a much more sustainable network of buildings, there can be no illusions that its implementation over the next two years will be complex and require significant effort on behalf of Members, officers and critically, the volunteers that support community buildings.
68. Given the complex nature of the project and its significance for local communities, the implementation of the project will be overseen and monitored as part of the Council's project assurance framework. Progress on the detailed Action Plan that accompanies the Strategy will be reported through the project assurance framework and where necessary, for example to provide updates to Members on the negotiations with housing providers with regard to communal rooms, further reports will be presented to Cabinet.
69. The detailed Action Plan contains the steps to be carried out over the next two years aimed at achieving the vision of a sustainable network of community buildings. As set out in this report, whilst it may be necessary to revisit this timeframe for certain buildings following negotiations over current contractual arrangements, it is considered that for the majority of buildings, this would be sufficient time to determine if they are able to progress with asset transfer. Given the significant amount of support proposed for the sector under Objective 3 of the strategy, this period is felt to be a reasonable balance

between the needs of management committees to prepare for asset transfer and the need for action to improve the current inconsistencies.

70. The provision of this time will be particularly relevant for those 41 buildings that have been categorised as 'unlikely to invest unless resources become available'. By the very nature of this category, there needs to be time built into the process to allow those in the 'invest' category to consider whether they are capable of taking up the offer of investment with its associated conditions. Where this offer is not taken up, time will then be needed for those offered the resource to consider if they wish to progress with the investment.
71. The Community Buildings Support Team will be working with partner agencies to offer support to groups however they have been prioritised within the Strategy. Every effort will be made to support buildings to secure additional resources in order that as many as possible are transferred to local control as viable facilities over the next two years. Key milestones in that process include:
- a. February/March 2012 - Communication of the Strategy
 - b. April 2012 - Establishment of the Community Buildings Support Team
 - c. May 2012 - Conclusion of negotiations with housing providers regarding the option of block asset transfer of communal rooms.
 - d. May 2012 - Distribution of 'Expression of Interest' applications to community buildings ready for Asset Transfer
 - e. July 2012 - First round of expression of interest applications progress to detailed application
 - f. September 2012 - Joint AAP Panel agree arrangements for distribution of Community Buildings Support Grant from April 2013.
 - g. January 2013 - Capital work commences on first round of asset transfers from the £2.15 million investment fund.
 - h. March 2013 - Progress update on Strategy presented to Cabinet
 - i. March 2014 - Revised Community Building Strategy agreed by Cabinet.
72. Throughout this period, as the Community Building Support Team work with management committees, it is proposed that an Asset Transfer Panel will be established to be made up of:
- The Head of Service for Partnerships and Community Engagement
 - Senior officer representation from assets, planning, legal and neighbourhoods (capital programme team)
73. It is proposed that the Panel will act as an advisory group for the Support Team. It is proposed that the decision to agree asset transfers, the allocation of funding from the £2.15 million investment fund and the closure of buildings is delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships. It is also proposed that the decision on the new criteria and process for Grant Aid to community buildings, as referenced in paragraph 64, be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.
74. In addition to working with local management committees to help them prepare for asset transfer, and to advise the Asset Transfer Panel, it is also

proposed that the Team, oversee the non-staff Council revenue budgets for the community buildings highlighted in the report. As reported to Cabinet in September 2011, because of the organic way in which responsibility for community buildings had evolved, exacerbated by issues over the transfer of budgets from former district councils, there is a lack of clarity as to the ongoing costs of supporting the 120 Council owned community buildings. To provide greater clarity, it is proposed all non-staffing spend on the buildings is overseen by the team from 2012 on the basis that costs are redistributed to the relevant Service Groupings or met from a temporary allocation of £180,000 that has been requested as part of the MTFP process for the two year period of the Strategy. If, as at March 2014, there are on going revenue implications for the Council with regard to community buildings over and above the provision of grant support, consideration as to how this will be met will be taken into account as part of the budget setting process.

75. During this implementation stage of the strategy, it is proposed that the current moratorium on capital investment from the Council's resources in the Council's community buildings remains in place unless they are aligned with an asset transfer of the building. This moratorium also applies to use of Members' Neighbourhood Budgets which, in line with the current funding criteria, should not be used for ongoing investment in buildings. In terms of works required for health and safety reasons, it is proposed these will be permitted during the implementation stage of the strategy up to a value of £5,000 for buildings in categories 1, 2 and 3 as set out in paragraph 56. Where this is exceeded, works will require the approval of the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships. At this point, depending on the individual circumstances of the building, including progress towards asset transfer and the building's prioritisation for investment, a decision may be taken to close the building either temporarily or permanently.

Equality Impact Assessments

76. Assessing the potential impact of change to the Council's current approach to community buildings has been a key part of the process taken to date. An overall impact assessment on the review was presented to Cabinet in September 2011 and this was followed by an assessment of the subsequent consultation process, the findings of which form a major part of this report and have influenced the development of the attached strategy.
77. As part of the consultation process set out in this report, appraisal meetings with community building management groups and users sought information on the potential impact on community groups with protected characteristics. A copy of the updated impact assessment is set out in Appendix 4.
78. The assessment highlights that the potential closures would impact on all of the community in some way. Alternative facilities and activities may not be available locally which has a higher likelihood of impacting on older people, young people and women, as well as disabled people and their carers who may have limited access to transport or other venues. In addition, there are some faith/belief groups using buildings who may be affected.

79. Proposals for investment will allow for the involvement and engagement of the wider community in the developments and potential to significantly improve a number of community buildings including improvements to access. Asset transfer may also strengthen local communities and offer greater opportunities for participation, including disabled people and younger people.
80. There are also potential impacts where some groups, for example older people, disabled people and women, may feel less confident or able to take over a community building as part of the asset transfer process.
81. There are mitigating actions to provide tailored support as each building is considered, specific equalities issues for individual communities will also be considered for each transfer proposal. As highlighted previously, the proposed Strategy includes proposals for the provision of extensive support arrangements.
82. The potential impacts relate to risk of closure for some buildings or changes to activities if responsibility for the building is transferred. Loss of or limited access to local activities is more likely to affect older or younger people, women or disabled people as they may be less likely to have private transport or rely on others for care and support. Community buildings are often seen as 'safe' spaces which provide opportunities for social activities as well as health, learning and participation in wider community life. Losing local facilities could have a negative effect on health, wellbeing, independence and involvement unless appropriate alternatives are identified. Supporting the asset transfer process would mitigate this to an extent by aiming to retain local provision and encourage wider participation.
83. As detailed in the previous section, it is proposed that the final decision on the potential asset transfer or closure of a community building will be delegated to Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, advised by an Asset Transfer Panel. As part of this decision making process, individual equality impact assessments will be carried out for each building and these will be taken into consideration before making a final decisions.

Conclusion

84. The proposal to invest £2.15 million over the next two years to improve the condition of the Council's community buildings, and to provide a further £600,000 of support and advice to help groups take up this and other funding, if agreed, represents a major commitment by the authority in the current economic climate. This report has highlighted that community buildings have the potential to play a key role in the achievement of the Council and its partners' vision, but if this is to be fully realised, management committees need to have greater control of their facilities.
85. The consultation has clearly shown widespread support for the vast majority of the proposals set out in the report to Cabinet in September, and where issues have been raised, with usage for example, these have been taken into account when preparing the attached strategy. In addition, in order to implement the proposed strategy, the Council has listened to consultees and is proposing to establish comprehensive time limited support mechanisms for the sector.

86. Through the investment and support proposed in this report, where there is the appetite in a local community to take responsibility for a community building, then they will be offered every chance to do so. This level of investment clearly highlights the Council's commitment to making its vision reality, and that by 2014 the County has a network of sustainable, well placed, highly valued and well used community buildings which are controlled by local people.

Recommendations and Reasons

87. Cabinet is asked to agree the Community Building Strategy and its associated Action Plan as set out in Appendix 2 of this report that builds on the results of the extensive consultation process that was carried out from the 19th September to the 12th December, 2011.

88. To progress the implementation of this strategy, it is recommended that:

- i. The time limited support package as set out in paragraph 66 of this report is put in place to assist community building management committees.
- ii. The Assistant Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Local Neighbourhoods and Partnerships, is delegated to agree the asset transfer of community buildings, the management of the capital investment fund of £2.15 million and the closure of community buildings where they are unable to progress with asset transfer.
- iii. Implementation of the strategy is overseen by the Council's project assurance framework.
- iv. The Assistant Chief Executive Service's Grouping take on responsibility for managing the non-staffing revenue budgets for the 120 community buildings in line with the approach set out in paragraph 74 of this report.
- v. Discussions continue with the relevant social housing providers, and if this leads to an alternative approach to one set out in the attached strategy, this is presented to a future meeting of Cabinet for consideration.
- vi. Investigations continue to determine the requirements placed upon the Council where it is a trustee or a community building and to note the outcome of these discussions may impact on whether the building receives investment from the Council.
- vii. The current moratorium on capital investment from the Council's resources (including Members Neighbourhood Budgets) in the Council's community buildings remains in place unless the works are aligned with an asset transfer of the building in line with the process set out in paragraph 75 of the report.
- viii. The decision to progress with health and safety improvements in excess of £5,000, in line with the process set out in paragraph 75, is delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Local Neighbourhoods and Partnerships.
- ix. The following closed community buildings are declared surplus to requirement:

80 Bede Terrace, Bowburn
Bedburn Close, Durham
Collier House, Sunnybrow
Crookgate Communal Room, Burnopfield

Dipton, Front Street Communal Room, Stanley
Elite Hall, Crook
Gairloch Drive Communal Room, Pelton
Grasmere Grove, Crook
Hambledon Hut, Chester le Street
Millfield, Crook
Shakespeare Centre, Seaham
Sycamore Grove, West Auckland
Wood Street, Chester-le-Street
Woodland House, Kelloe

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The report describes proposals to establish a £2.15m Capital investment programme in Council owned community buildings on the condition that the building is the subject of Asset Transfer to the community. This will potentially involve the transfer of assets, through Full Repair and Insurance leases, valued at around £7.8m over the next two years.

In order to ensure community building management committees receive the support required to implement the strategy, the report contains proposals to establish a time limited Community Building Support Team for two years at a maximum cost of £226,000 per annum and an associated one – off Asset Transfer support fund of £140,000. The cost of the Team and the Support Fund will be met from within the ACE Service Group MTFP cash limit.

During this process ACE will manage non-staffing revenue budgets associated with community buildings (utility costs and some repairs and maintenance costs). This work will involve the redistribution of costs to those services with which the budgets were originally aligned.

Staffing

A new time limited Community Buildings Support Team will be established to take this work forward over the next two years. The need for this team is in line with the findings of the recently completed consultation exercise and will involve internal recruitment in the first instance.

There are staff employed within some of the community buildings included in this report, primarily as caretakers and cleaners. Adults, Health and Wellbeing have consulted on this and have reduced funding for these services by 25%. If the investment proposal outlined in this report is agreed, the long-term future of all community buildings will be dependent on Asset Transfer and Management Groups taking responsibility for any future staffing within the building. This will have an impact on caretakers and cleaners presently employed. Furthermore, where Asset Transfer is not viable, some community buildings will be closed. This would also put at risk any posts employed within them.

Risk

A risk assessment has been carried out on the Council's approach to dealing with Asset Transfer of community buildings. This highlights a number of risks to the Council and indicates how these can be mitigated. These are set out in annex 3 of the Community Buildings Strategy. In addition, the Key Decision Risk Assessment has highlighted one reportable risk (not all community buildings will receive investment) however, it does note that there are proposals to mitigate the risk through the establishment of a time limited support team to assist community buildings.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out at all stages of the community building review. An Equality Impact Assessment related to the proposal to prioritise investment in targeted community buildings is attached. An individual Equality Impact Assessment will also be carried out on each individual building prior to Asset Transfer or closure.

Accommodation

The proposals set out in this report would reduce the amount of community accommodation in the County, some of which is used by the Council and partners to provide services. However, the investment proposals would also result in improvements in a number of centres and improve their sustainability.

Crime and Disorder

Some community buildings are used for PACT meetings and other community safety advice sessions. Where Council owned buildings are used for such purposes then support will be given to help in relocation to other suitable premises. Consideration also needs to be given to the potential for vandalism when consideration is given to disposal options. The Council's disposal policies and procedures have been designed to reduce potential for vandalism and other anti-social behaviour. Investment in buildings will raise the general well-being of an area and provide additional diversionary activities.

Human rights

None.

Consultation

A full programme of consultation has been carried out on possible options for the future of community buildings. This involved over 3,600 people, including almost all community building Management Groups. This report sets out proposals based on the consultation findings.

Procurement

There may be a range of procurement issues to resolve in relation to the buildings set out in this report. These will be considered in detail following the decision by Cabinet in February 2012 regarding the future of each building.

Disability Issues

A disability access survey has been completed for each community building to identify suitability and/or deficiencies in respect of access with reference to the Disability Discrimination Act and Part M of the Building Regulations and relevant British Standards. The findings of these assessments form a key element of this report.

Legal Implications

An initial overview of the legal implications of the various lease arrangements for community buildings was presented to Cabinet in September 2011. However, a more detailed review of the specific legal responsibilities and implications for each community building will form a key element of the work required to implement the Community Buildings Strategy. This will involve negotiations with Management Groups that have existing long term leases. The outcome of these negotiations may have an impact on the strategy's action plan.