

Community Buildings Consultation

Introduction

The Council's Community Buildings consultation was carried out to gather the views of local people and community building management groups to enable the Council to make key decisions regarding the future of its 120 multi-use community buildings and future provision of Community Building Grant Aid. It followed a comprehensive review which looked at the condition of the stock, leases and responsibilities, usage, management and costs.

The consultation was carried out between 19 September 2011 and 12 December 2011.

Summary

Overview and Key Messages

Overview

- More than 3,600 people engaged in the Community Buildings Consultation process.
- 729 users or management committee members attended 102 face to face consultation visits.
- Only two community building management groups chose not to engage in the consultation.
- 415 young people engaged in the consultation and a further two reports were received from Investors in Children which involved a further 32 young people.
- 157 people completed the on-line questionnaire.
- 225 people attended special consultation events.
- 1038 attended AAP Forums when Community Buildings Grant Aid was discussed.
- 882 members of the Council's Citizen's Panel responded to questions on the future of community buildings.
- 4 petitions were sent to the Council.
- 138 enquiries were dealt with.

Investment

- The majority of respondents agreed that the Council should invest £2.15m in its community buildings and agreed that prioritising investment on the condition that the asset is transferred to the community (Option 5) was the best way forward.
- The majority of respondents also agreed with the Council's proposed principles and criteria for prioritisation, although many suggestions were made on other factors that could be taken into account.
- A number of respondents wanted the Council to maintain an overview of each locality to ensure that no community loses access to its only facilities through this process.
- Many respondents stressed the need for the timing and process for investment to be clarified.

Position on Investment List

- The majority of community building management groups thought they were placed in the correct category for investment.
- Most community building management groups wanted to see the Council invest in their building.
- The community buildings priority investment list was considered to be appropriate although some of those consulted wanted to see the list revised to take account of:
 - The confirmed usage figures gathered as part of the consultation process.
 - Changes to investment costs where these are significant following works being carried out.
 - Restrictions to usage caused by closed rooms awaiting the Council to carry out significant works.
 - High costs per visit due to significant works required.

Asset Transfer

- Most respondents considered Asset Transfer to be an appropriate option to ensure the sustainability of community buildings but many suggested that it should only be taken forward if:
 - The building has a viable and sustainable future.
 - The management groups are give support to understand their present lease and what the impact of change would be.
 - The management group are fully aware of what this means and have the capacity to take this on.
 - Management groups are given support to work together.
 - A clear process with timescales for change is set out.

Support

- To pursue the proposals set out by the Council respondents wanted a comprehensive range of support to be provided. It was suggested that this should be appropriate to individual needs/capacity and be provided through the Council working with the VCS and other independent advisors.
- Many respondents also highlighted the potential role that Town and Parish Council could play.

Grant Aid

- The majority of respondents wanted the Council to continue to provide Grant Aid.
- Mixed responses were received to the Council's proposals for change and future administration by AAPs. However there was general consensus that change was needed and that the new system should be fair, simple, linked to need and available to all buildings.
- Some respondents wanted more information on this before they could express an opinion.

Housing

- The consultation highlighted the many differences between community managed community buildings and council managed communal rooms which tend to be used by local residents and tenants. Further discussions are needed with housing

providers to consider the most appropriate way forward for the Council's communal rooms.

Further Information

Further information and copies of the appendices and annexes referred to within this report are available from the Council's Assistant Chief Executives Service (Tel.: 0191 383 3209).

Aim of the Consultation

The consultation aimed to gather views on a range of proposals regarding the future of Council owned community buildings and the Grant Aid support given to council and non-council owned community buildings.

This consultation also sought to ensure that the information on each individual building, previously gathered during the community buildings review, was accurate and up-to-date.

Consultation Scope and Key Questions

The consultation sought views on:

- Plans to invest £2.15m in a network of community buildings;
- Proposed options for future investment in Council owned community buildings, including gathering views on any alternative options;
- Prioritisation for capital investment of £2.15m and proposals to put buildings into one of the following five groups:
 - Invest
 - Unlikely to invest
 - No investment
 - Close
 - No investment due to full repair and insurance lease.
- Plans to seek 30% matched funding for investment from community building management groups;
- Proposals to transfer community buildings to communities (Asset Transfer);
- Proposed options for the development of new criteria for the allocation of the £279,595 p/a Grant Aid to council and non-council owned community buildings, including gathering views on any alternative options;
- The potential impact of proposals.

Consultation Methodology

Engagement methods were developed by the Engagement and Training Team working alongside the Research and Information Team within the Assistant Chief Executives Service Grouping. The consultation involved the following:

- Information provided via the website, press releases and Durham County News.
- Launch events for community building representatives, Town and Parish Councils, Members, Grant Aid recipients and AAP chairs.

- Individual meetings with the management group and/or users of each council owned community building.
- Countywide stakeholder meeting for key partners.
- Meetings with young people via Investors in Children and AAP Task and Finish Groups.
- Discussions with the wider community via AAP Forums.
- Discussions with the County Durham LGBT Steering Group.
- An on-line questionnaire for members of the public and any interested party. Paper copies of this questionnaire were also available at events and on request (Appendix 1¹).
- Specific meetings with management groups of council and non-council owned community buildings regarding the future of Grant Aid.
- Discussions with the County Durham Community Buildings Partnership.
- Discussions with the County Durham Disability Partnership.
- Views, opinions and concerns expressed in petitions and other correspondence.

During the consultation period discussions were also held with the following:

- Registered social landlords in County Durham, where communal rooms are located amongst their housing stock.
- Those organisations that provide funding to support community buildings or to support the type of activities held within community buildings.
- National bodies with expertise linked to community buildings and asset transfer.
- County Councillors via Members' Seminars.

Key information gathered through each of these methods is set out below.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment prepared for the Community Buildings Review process highlighted that the proposed changes in support to Council owned community buildings would have a greater impact on older people currently using the Council run community buildings (Communal Rooms). Additional support for this group has been incorporated into the consultation process.

A second EIA has been carried out to ensure the consultation process reaches all relevant and affected groups in an appropriate way (Appendix 2²).

Further equality impact assessments will be carried out at other points within the process. (This is covered within the Community Buildings Strategy & Action Plan document).

¹ Appendices and annexes to this document are available from the Council's Assistant Chief Executive's Service (Tel.: 0191 383 3209).

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Consultation Feedback

Launch Events:

Three launch events were held for community building representatives, Town and Parish Councils, Members, Grant Aid recipients and AAP chairs.

Glebe Centre , Murton 20 th September 2011 6pm – 8pm	37 people attended: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Buildings members – 34• AAP chairs - 1
Jubilee Fields Community Centre , Shildon 21 st September 2011 1:30pm – 3:30pm	37 people attended: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councillors - 8• Community Buildings Members - 18• AAP chair - 1
Craghead Community Centre , Stanley 22 nd September 2011 1:30pm – 3:30pm	34 people attended: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councillors – 5• Community Buildings members - 25• AAP Chair – 1

The purpose of these events was to launch the consultation process and raise awareness of the community buildings review and the range of methods and events through which people could get involved and have their say. The events involved four informative presentations outlining each key element of the process, each followed by round table questions/discussions. (Annex A - The Community Buildings Consultation Launch presentation)

The Launch events brought together 108 key stakeholders, including Community Building management committee members, AAP representatives and local councillors. Attendees worked in groups to respond to the following questions. Their comments and views were also captured.

Session 1

Q1 – Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to proceed with option 5?

29 groups clearly agreed and 11 disagreed.

Of those who agreed, the main issues stressed (by over 20% of respondents) related to the importance of the sustainability of community buildings, good targeting of resources and setting clear criteria for change. They also noted that the status quo was not an option and a fair, transparent and viable way forward was important.

Q2 – If you disagree what option would you prefer and how would you overcome any obstacles?

Of those who disagreed with the proposal to proceed with option 5, five said that they would prefer option 4 – for the council to fulfil minimum contractual requirements. A further two said that they would prefer option 6 – partial investment of approximately 19% for all buildings.

Q1 & Q2 – Other comments

Discussions regarding the Council's proposal to proceed with option 5 raised the following key comments:

- a) Each centre has different needs, some community buildings may be the heart of the community providing local provision for all. Some of these communities may already be affected by other efficiency savings. And although there may be other centres within the vicinity they may lack of spare capacity for the wider community (9 groups).
- b) It is important to consider the capacity/ability of management groups and/or user groups to take on asset transfer and ongoing support will be needed for those buildings that do not receive capital investment (6 groups).
- c) There is an opportunity for management groups to work in partnerships with local organisations and/or develop a consortium approach. Support and mentoring could be provided by independent Community Buildings and others (6 groups).
- d) The current building condition was seen to be a major contributing factor in the placement on the prioritisation table based on cost per visit (5 groups).
- e) Cost saving options such as improved energy provision or the use of local tradesmen to carry out repairs, should be explored (5 groups).
- f) Option 5 is focused on Capital investment. Revenue funding is important if community buildings are to be sustainable (3 groups).

Session 2

Q1 – Do you think that targeting investment using the criteria described to rank community buildings is fair?

23 groups responded to this question, with 87% (20 groups) stating that they think the proposed criteria are fair.

A range of comments were made by all groups regarding the proposed criteria, the majority (50% - 13 groups) wanted to stress that all activities/services in each community/village should be considered. Some areas, not within the most deprived LSOAs, are also deprived in terms of range of services and transport and cater for the whole community and are viewed as the heart of the community.

Other comments are summarised as follows:

- a) Accessibility to and availability of existing and future funding streams which a community centre can access should be taken into account (6 groups).
- b) Community buildings should demonstrate viability first (5 groups).
- c) Emphasis should be on need rather than cost, i.e. percentage of the population using centre (2 groups).

Session 3

Q1 – Do you agree with the proposed approach for Community Buildings Grant Aid?

19 groups agreed with the proposed approach and 25 groups disagreed.

Groups also suggested that the following factors should be taken into account:

- a) The needs of the community (5 groups).
- b) The viability of the Centre (2 groups).
- c) The size of the building (1 group).

It was also suggested that:

- a) The Council should be flexible in its approach (3 groups).
- b) Grant Aid should only be available to those not getting Capital investment (1 group).
- f) The status quo should be maintained (1 group)

The reasons given for disagreeing with the proposed criteria were as follows:

- a) It does not meet need (12 groups).
- b) It is a complicated process that will exclude some groups (3 groups).
- c) It penalises well run and energy efficient buildings and may also duplicate existing energy efficiency funding (2 groups).

When asked who should administer the grant, the following responses were received:

- a) Central administration, i.e. no change (14 groups).
- b) Other e.g. Parish Councils, CVSs Consortiums, etc (11 groups).
- c) AAPs (5 groups).

Other comments regarding Grant Aid

The following comments were also received regarding the approach to Community Building Grant Aid:

- a) It should be retained as revenue/core costs grants, as it is a lifeline for some community buildings (4 groups).
- b) Applying for Grant Aid relies heavily on volunteers having the time and skills to apply and administer (3 groups).
- c) The Council needs to provide good notice of changes or phase change for existing recipients (2 groups).
- d) There should be an opportunity for all to bid (1 group).
- e) The Grant should be available annually for 3-5 years from one application (1 group).

f) The Hallmarks scheme could be used to help all management groups to improve (1 group).

Session 4

Q 1 – What support would you like from the Community Buildings Support Team?

In response to this question the following suggestions were put forward:

- a) Dedicated team ensuring good communications (19 groups).
- b) Funding & Support (14 groups).
- c) An online resource hub providing information on policies, procedures, health & safety, etc (13 groups).
- d) Technical/Legal Advice, including advice on leases (11 groups).
- e) Mentoring / consortium approach (11 groups).
- f) Guidance on running a cost effective community building, including advice on income and service development (9 groups).
- g) Training (4 groups).
- h) Marketing & Promotion (3 groups).
- i) Accounts & Financial Management (2 groups).
- j) Asset Transfer (2 groups).
- k) Business Plan advice (1 group).
- l) Encourage co-location and partnership working (1 group).
- m) External mediation (1 group).

(Annex B - The consultation responses collected from the launch events).

Key messages from the Community Buildings Consultation Launch events:

The following key messages can be drawn from the launch event consultation:

- 1) The majority agreed with the Council's proposal target investment on priority buildings (option 5).
- 2) The majority believed that the proposed criteria to rank buildings are fair, although they also put forward other factors that should be taken into account.
- 3) Groups raised a range of other issues that they thought should be taken into account when prioritising community buildings for investment, such as whether the building is 'the heart of the community', local need (percentage of the local population using the facility), what is available in the locality and the capacity of the management group.
- 4) The majority did not agree with the Council's proposal for Grant Aid.

- 5) The main reason for not agreeing with the Council's proposal for Grant Aid was that it does not take need into account.
- 6) The majority thought that Grant Aid should be administered centrally.
- 7) A wide range of support requirements for community building management groups were put forward.

Community Building Management Groups:

Individual meetings were held with the management group and/or users of each council owned community building between 19 September and 12 December 2011. If the building was closed meetings were held with local residents, the local Town or Parish Council and other interested parties, wherever possible.

The procedure for Community Buildings' interviews is available (Appendix 3³). The questions asked at individual meetings were:

- Is the information held by the Council an accurate reflection of your centre?
- Is there anything that has changed or that we have missed?
- Looking at the criteria for priority and what we know about your building, do you think you are in the right category?
- Are there any groups or users of the centre who would be more affected than others?
- Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for allocation of grant aid?
- What advice and support would help you in the future?
- Is there anything else we have missed or that you would like to add?

These meeting also gave staff the opportunity to assess each Management Group's enthusiasm for Asset Transfer.

The impact of each community building on the quality of life and wellbeing of local residents was raised by local groups and their views and comments were captured. During these meetings staff were also made aware of each management group's passion, drive and commitment as well as their worries and concerns.

120 Council owned community buildings are being considered as part of this consultation. 54 of these are Council managed and 66 are community managed. At the start of the consultation 16 buildings were already on Full Repair and Insurance (FRI) leases and 15 community buildings were closed.

As part of the Community Buildings Consultation the Council sought to consult with the management group or users of all 120 Council owned community buildings.

During the consultation period 104 community buildings were open. Of these full consultation meetings were held with 102 management/user groups. Only two Community Building management groups chose not to engage in the consultation (Tanfield Lea Community Centre and Chester Moor Hut Community Centre).

15 community buildings were closed prior to the consultation period and a further building, Gairloch Drive Communal Room, closed as the consultation began giving a total of 16 closed buildings. In order to gauge interest in the potential future use of these buildings, elected members, AAPs and Parish Councils were contacted to find out if they were aware of any interested parties. Notices were also placed on buildings to encourage communities

³ Appendices and annexes to this document are available from the Council's Assistant Chief Executive's Service (Tel.: 0191 383 3209).

to contact the team. This resulted in meetings regarding five closed community buildings to discuss future use.

The results, of the consultation with the 102 community buildings, provides the following information:

Proposed Category for Capital investment

55 groups thought they were placed in the correct category for Capital investment, 39 groups thought they were not placed in the correct category and 8 groups did not know.

Of those groups who thought they were in the wrong category or did not know 42 (89%) thought they should be in the category for investment. 12 thought that rural issues needed to be taken into account, 12 thought the capacity of nearby facilities should be assessed and 6 thought the capacity of their building needed to be taken into consideration.

Accuracy of information used to categorise community buildings

Each group was asked if the information that had been used to place their community building into one of five investment/no investment categories was accurate.

27 groups thought the information was accurate whilst 72 groups did not and 3 didn't know.

When asked why they thought the information was not accurate 72 groups said the usage of the building had changed (26 groups thought that less frequent usage i.e. monthly/annual events should be included), 43 groups said the condition of the building had changed (35 improved, 5 deteriorated and 3 stated that information had been omitted).

15 groups stated that condition (12) or capacity (3) of the building limited its usage.

83 groups wanted to change the usage figures for their building and 75 groups challenged the repairs and maintenance information set out in the conditions survey report.

Other issues which need to be taken into account

When asked if there are other issues that should be taken into account the following were raised:

- a) The conditions of the lease (33 groups).
- b) Adjoining residential property (31 groups) or other adjoining facilities, such as play areas (13 groups).
- c) Other partners use the facility to provide services e.g. Legacy Gyms (15 groups).
- d) The building is used for emergencies, as a polling station or by public sector staff (10 groups).
- e) Part of the building is sub-let (6 groups).
- f) Trusteeship and/or links to CISWO (5 groups).
- g) Caretaker or other staff linked to the building (5 groups).
- h) All buildings in the area are within the 'unlikely to invest' category which could leave the locality with nothing if they all close (4 groups).
- i) A listed building in a conservation area (1 group).

Interest in Asset Transfer or taking greater control

101 groups made their views known on Asset Transfer/taking greater control. 40 said they were interested (40%), 25 said they were not interested (25%) and 36 did not know (36%).

The issues raised during discussions on Asset Transfer covered:

- a) The need for more information (62 groups).

b) Funding/revenue (39 groups).

c) Capacity (17 groups).

Six groups said they were ready to pursue Asset Transfer, four groups stated an interest in multiple asset transfer and nine groups said they were happy to retain their existing FRI lease.

26 groups raised concerns about the proposal to encourage all groups to move towards Asset Transfer and a further seven groups thought it was not appropriate for them.

Future help and support needed

All except four groups said they would need help and support in the future. The following type of support was requested:

a) Funding and financial advice (70 groups).

b) Business models, plans and policies (52 groups).

c) Training, sharing good practice and capacity building (48 groups).

d) Consistent contact with the Council (43 groups).

e) Independent legal advice e.g. regarding leases (36 groups).

f) Marketing, publicity and advertising (35 groups).

g) Help to increase volunteers (32 groups).

h) Asset Transfer process (30 groups).

i) Signposting to other advice e.g. planning (30 groups).

Proposals for allocating Grant Aid

69 groups agreed with the Council's proposals to make changes to the allocation of Grant Aid, 15 did not agree and 18 did not know.

28% wanted the Grant to remain as a revenue grant that can be used to contribute to the running costs and a further 13% thought the Council should be flexible in its approach.

30% thought that Grant Aid should be shared equally between all community buildings whilst 20% agreed with the proposal for a bidding process. 4% were concerned about the additional burdens of a bidding system.

21% agreed with the Council's proposal to link the Grant Aid with the introduction of greater energy efficiency but 27% thought it should be allocated on a needs led basis and 5% suggested it should be linked to results and outcomes. One group thought it should be linked to the size of the building.

The majority (37%) wanted to maintain a centralised system of allocation, with 23% preferring allocation by AAPs.

(Annex C - A summary of the consultation responses collected from community building management groups).

Key messages from the consultation with community building management/user groups:

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) Almost all community building management groups were keen to engage in this consultation and valued this engagement with the Council.
- 2) 89% of those groups who thought they were not in the right investment category believed that the Council should invest in their building.
- 3) Some groups stressed the need look at broader issues such as rural issues, building capacities and what else is available in the locality to ensure that communities do not lose access to all community facilities in their area.
- 4) Some groups felt that lack of previous investment had reduced the capacity of their building and therefore had an impact on the category that they had been placed in.
- 5) 81% of groups wanted to change their usage figures.
- 6) 73% of groups challenged the repairs and maintenance requirements and/or costs set out in their conditions survey.
- 7) Each building has very specific, individual issues that will need to be taken into account before any final decision is made regarding their individual building.
- 8) The majority of groups would be willing to work with the Council towards Asset Transfer but a high proportion have concerns about this process and would need significant help and support to move towards this arrangement.
- 9) 40% of groups were interested in pursuing Asset Transfer although some thought it expected too much of volunteers.
- 10) A wide range of support requirements for community building management groups were put forward.
- 11) The majority of groups agreed with the Council's proposals for the future distribution of Grant Aid. However, a range of other considerations were suggested regarding the allocation suggesting that a flexible approach should be adopted.
- 12) A small majority of groups would prefer the Grant Aid system to remain centralised.

Countywide stakeholder meetings for key partners:

A stakeholder event was held on 23 September 2011 (2.00pm – 4.00pm). The aim of this event was to explain the background to the consultation, explain the possible options, to describe the Grant Aid scheme proposals, to encourage engagement in the consultation and to explain what will happen after the consultation. The following organisations were invited and 15 people attended:

- Asset Transfer Unit (1 attended)
- Durham City Homes (1 attended),
- Dale and Valley Homes,
- Cestria Housing Association,
- Age UK (1 attended),
- Durham City District CVS (1 attended),
- East Durham Homes (1 attended),
- East Durham Trust (1 attended),

- Cavos (1 attended),
- Durham Rural Community Council (1 attended),
- 2D
- Chester-le-street and District CVS
- Inspired North East (1 attended),
- Ground Work (1 attended),
- DCC Staff (5 attended).

This meeting provided the opportunity to ensure that the consultation was clear and addressed the most important issues. The aim was therefore to discuss the consultation questions rather than to seek answers to each question. The meeting involved four brief presentations followed by discussions around the following questions:

Section 1:

1. Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to proceed with Option 5?
2. If you disagree, what option would you prefer and how would you overcome any obstacles?

Section 2:

3. Do you think that targeting investment using the criteria described to rank community buildings is fair?
4. If not what would you prefer?

Section 3:

5. Do you agree with the proposed approach?
6. If not what would you suggest?

Section 4:

7. What sort of support would you like from the community buildings support team?
8. In relation to the consultation process, do you think we have missed anything?
9. What would you add and why?

Following the meeting all stakeholders were encouraged to provide their views via the on-line questionnaire and also to encourage others to do so.

Ten key stakeholders attended the meeting. The aim of this meeting was discuss key issues linked to the consultation rather than answer the specific consultation questions. The following points were raised and discussed:

Section 1

- a) It was confirmed that the £2.15m is Capital investment.
- b) The activities carried out in community buildings should influence decisions regarding investment.
- c) It is important to ensure that the management group has the capacity to take on Asset Transfer before this option is pursued.
- d) Clarification was sought on whether 'in kind' support can be included as part of the 30% match funding required.
- e) The difficulty faced by groups raising funds prior to Asset Transfer was raised, as many funders will not support properties not owned by the community.

- f) The existing 'Hallmark' scheme could help community groups to take a greater role in the running of a community building.
- g) Some buildings are adjacent to or below residential properties.
- h) The aging population in County Durham may lead to an increase in community building usage in the years ahead.

Section 2

- a) Transport is often a big issue in accessing community buildings. This should be taken into account.
- b) Community groups will need good support mechanisms to be established. There is already a lot of support available within the community and it is important that the Council enhances this rather than duplicating support.
- c) The overall role of the community building in the locality and access to other community facilities should be taken into account, with reference made to the Local Plan.
- d) Account will need to be taken of the diversity of community buildings and the idiosyncrasies of each building in making decisions.
- e) Some management groups do not presently have the capacity or the skills to take on Asset Transfer.
- f) Everyone needs to be clear what the term Asset Transfer means.
- g) Best practice on Asset Transfer should be considered.
- h) Management groups are made up of volunteers. They need to be able to see the benefits of taking on a community asset.

Section 3

- a) Community groups need access to independent advice during the Asset Transfer process.
- b) Residents in properties linked to community buildings should be contacted.
- c) The possibility of a community shuttle bus to community buildings should be considered.
- d) Buildings that are in close proximity to other community building should be encouraged not to duplicate services.
- e) Some groups are good at providing a range of activities, accessing funding and encouraging a wide range of uses. In contrast some have very low usage and no idea how to move on. There is a need for potential to be recognised and support and encouragement provided including peer support and sharing of best practice.
- f) Usage figures need to be checked.
- g) Town and Parish Councils may be able to play a key role.
- h) How the Capital investment will be administered and the timescales for this need to be clarified.
- i) Grant Aid allocation needs to be consistent across the County. If allocation moves to AAPs the number of buildings in each area will need to be taken into account.
- j) Consideration should be given to not allocating Grant Aid to those community buildings with a healthy bank balance or those able to access funding from elsewhere.

Section 4

- a) The Council should work with a range of organisations to ensure comprehensive support is available from a range of providers.

- b) Information and standard forms can be made available via the web.
 - c) Further discussions need to be held with housing providers regarding the Council's communal rooms, which often provide key facilities for tenants.
- (Annex D - A summary of the consultation responses collected from stakeholders).

Key messages from the consultation with stakeholders

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) The capacity of the management group and the activities carried out within a community building are important factors that need to be appropriate before Asset Transfer is pursued.
- 2) Clarity is needed regarding the timescale for Asset Transfer to ensure that management groups can maximise their opportunities to raise funds.
- 3) Clarity is needed regarding how and during what timescale the 30% match funding must be raised.
- 4) The full range of support mechanisms need to be explored including using independent support, peer support from groups that have already successfully taken on an Asset Transfer, input from a range of partners such as Town and Parish Councils and tools such as Hallmarks.
- 5) Further discussions need to be held with housing providers regarding communal rooms attached or adjacent to residential properties.
- 6) The potential future needs of the population need to be considered.
- 7) The role of the community building within the locality needs to be looked at in a holistic way, including the availability of transport.
- 8) Each building will need to be considered on its own merits before Asset Transfer is pursued ensuring that each management group is clear about what Asset Transfer will mean for them.
- 9) Grant Aid needs to be consistent across the County.

Meetings with Young People:

Discussions with stakeholders before the consultation highlighted the need to involve young people in the consultation via additional routes as they would not be members of community building management groups or AAP boards but may have strong views on this subject. It was also considered to be important that young people see community buildings as a resource available to them and to encourage them to be actively involved in their local community in the future.

Consultation with young people was therefore carried out via Investors in Children through 'Agenda Days' and via AAP Task and Finish Groups. All activities were carried out between October and November 2011. At each of the events via the AAP Task and Finish Groups, young people completed a questionnaire asking the following questions:

1. Do you know what community buildings there are in your area?
2. Do you use them?
3. If you don't use them why not?
4. What could they do to encourage young people to use them?

Over 400 young people responded to the questionnaire, as follows:

Area	Support Worker	Youth Organisation	Questionnaires Returned
Weardale	Robert Fothergill 2D	Youth Panel – Comprehensive School	23
Chester le Street AAP	Derek Snaith	C&YP Event	92
East Durham AAP	Barbara Williams	East Durham Forum Event x 2	26 13
Crook	Nicola Woodgate	Young Peoples Forum	7
Chester le Street, Mid Durham and Stanley AAPs	YMCA Julie Ingham	Young Peoples Events	11
Chester Moor	Liam Cairns /Robert Smith	Children and Young People's Agenda Day	Investors in Children Agenda Day (see next Section)
Newton Aycliffe	Litza Johnson N/A YC Dorothy Bowman	Comprehensive Schools	19
Bishop Auckland	Alison Gent	Bishop Auckland Youth Groups	32
Shildon	Tracey Bellis – Shildon Town Council	Jubilee Fields Community Centre Shildon Peoples Centre SCYPAN	40
Sherburn	Liam Cairns/Robert Smith	Children and Young People's Agenda Day	Investors in Children Agenda Day (see next Section)
Spennymoor	Wendy Minninet		46
4 Together AAP, Ferryhill		Cornforth Partnership Ladder Centre	7 14
East Durham Rural AAP	Jane Bellis	Youth Forums	48
Teesdale AAP	YMCA Youth Worker Resource	C&YP Task Group	37
Total			415

415 young people (162 male and 253 female) engaged in the Community Buildings consultation as follows:

78 aged 5 – 10

302 aged 11 – 15

27 aged 16 – 18

3 aged 19 – 25

5 – no age given

Do you know what community buildings there are in your area?

374 young people did know the community buildings in their area but 50 did not.

Do you use them?

408 young people responded to this question 222 (54%) said they did use their community building, 17 said they used their local community building occasionally, 49 (12%) said they use some but not others and 120 (29%) said they did not use their local community building.

If you don't use them, why not?

The main reasons for not using their local community building were given as follows:

Access:

- a) Young people are not allowed in (26)
- b) Don't know anymore [buildings] (26)
- c) Too Far to Travel (18)
- d) Costs too much (13)
- e) Don't Like the Building (12)
- f) Accessibility (12)
- g) People don't know its here (10)

Building:

- a) Too busy (14)
- b) Not a nice place to be (11)
- c) Sometimes don't have time (11)
- d) Generally for old people (10)
- e) People smoke and drink there (7)

Activities:

- a) Boring, rubbish, not interested, useless, nothing that interests me (24)
- b) Not much on, nothing on for us, not many games or clubs for kids (17)
- c) They don't do Martial Arts (11)

Staff:

- a) Staff are not nice (10)
- b) Management want to charge for everything (7)
- c) Unapproachable Management (7)

Awareness:

- a) Don't know (7)
- b) Don't know what's on for young people (6)

What could they do to encourage young people to use them?

The most common suggestions to encourage young people to use community buildings were:

Activities:

- a) Games, better activities (74)
- b) More activities for teenagers and young people (42)
- c) Make them more fun and have exciting and interesting activities (22)
- d) Put on family activities, have big family and friends part (12)
- e) Skate Park (11)
- f) More Sports (9)
- g) Trips away (8)
- h) Big Events sometimes (6)

Promotion:

- a) Advertise more (77)
- b) Letters, leaflet distribution (39)
- c) Get schools involved, tell people in schools about the centre (19)
- d) Open Days and taster sessions (11)
- e) Word of mouth (6)

Facilities:

- a) Not a nice place to be (11)
- b) Make them friendly places to be (11)
- c) More green spaces, plant trees (11)
- d) Hire out rooms (7)

Other:

- a) Ask young people what they want (18)
- b) Youth club (6)
- c) Transport to the building (6)
- d) Make it cheaper (7)
- e) Get a new committee (7)
- f) Open more often (6)

The type of activities that young people thought would encourage them to use community buildings.

The following activities were suggested:

- a) Arts and Crafts
- b) Young Children's Clubs and older Children's Clubs
- c) Sports
- d) Entertainment, discos, parties, shows, concerts and raves
- e) Nature Walks

- f) Working with animals and sick animals
- g) Internet
- h) Interactive activities - Games Consoles and games nights
- i) Spray Painting/Graffiti Wall
- j) Street Dancing
- k) Cake Baking
- l) Play Areas

(Annex E - A summary of the consultation responses collected from young people).

Key messages from the consultation with young people

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) Young people are interested in discussing what happens to community buildings in their area.
- 2) Most young people are aware of the community buildings in their area.
- 3) The majority of young people engaging in the consultation had used community buildings in their area.
- 4) Young people gave a wide range of reasons for not using community buildings in their area, including access, the buildings, the activities available, perceptions of staff and awareness.
- 5) To encourage young people to use community buildings more could be done to promote the facilities, to increase the range of activities and improving the building.
- 6) Young people suggested a wide range of activities to encourage them to use community buildings.

Investors in Children Agenda Days

The Investors in Children Team worked with young people to organise two 'Agenda Days' 32 young people took part, from Sherburn Road Estate and the surrounding areas of Chester-le-Street, 17 males and 15 females aged 8-17. A range of open-ended questions were used to gather the views of young people. These questions were:

- What makes a good community centre?
- What makes a bad one?
- How would you improve a community centre/building if you were given a sum of money to make it better for people to use?
- What are the best ways for the council to invest £2.15 million?
- What are the best ways to check if the money has been spent correctly?

Key messages from the Agenda Days

The best community buildings were those that genuinely included children and young people.

Many children and young people also thought it was very important that children and young people continued to be given opportunities at a local level to consider how money is spent by Durham County Council.

Children and young people wish to be involved in methods and approaches to monitor how community centres and buildings use this funding in the future.

Most of those who took part enjoyed the sessions, and seemed keen to continue to contribute to the debate.

AAP Forums

Discussions with the AAP Forums were held, as follows:

AAP Partnership	Forum Date	Time
Durham	8 th November	6pm
4-Together	9 th November	6pm
East Durham	10 th November	6pm
Chester-le-Street	14 th November	6pm
East Durham Rural Corridor	15 th November	5pm
Mid Durham	16 th November	6pm
Teesdale	16 th November	6pm
Three Towns	17 th November	5:30pm
Stanley	22 nd November	6pm
Great Aycliffe & Midcliffe	22 nd November	6pm
Spennymoor	23 rd November	6pm
Derwent Valley	23 rd November	6pm
Weardale	24 th November	6pm
Bishop Auckland & Shildon	24 th November	6pm

The specific questions focused on the future of Grant Aid were asked at each Forum meeting, as proposals regarding the future of Grant Aid specifically involve the role of the AAPs.

The following two questions were asked at Forum meetings:

- a) Should AAPs administer the Community Buildings Grant Aid Budget?
- b) If administered by AAPs, should each partnership be able to set its own funding criteria?

475 responses to the consultation were received.

293 responses (71%) thought that AAPs should administer the Community Buildings Grant Aid

107 (26%) thought they should not.

11 (3%) were undecided.

220 respondents (59%) thought AAPs should set their own criteria for Grant Aid funding, 111 (30%) thought they should not and 44 (12%) were undecided.

Should AAPs administer the Community Buildings Grant Aid Budget?

Key comments made were:

- a) People serving on the AAPs bring to the table a great knowledge/understanding/empathy with local needs (29 respondents)
- b) Concern regarding the capacity of AAPs (21 respondents).
- c) Local administration is preferred (19 respondents).
- d) More information is needed to consider this point (17 respondents)
- e) They know local needs better (12 respondents).
- f) Further information is needed on how it will be split (10 respondents).
- g) The system does need an overhaul and a review overdue (10 respondents).
- h) The proposals raise more questions than answers (9 respondents).
- i) AAPs are efficient and effective and have a clear understanding and objectives in their locality (7 respondents).
- j) Would AAPs include a more diverse range of people in the consultation process? (7 respondents)
- k) AAPs should not administer the Grant Aid but should be involved in setting the criteria (6 Respondents).
- l) Resources will be needed within the AAP (6 respondents).
- m) Allocation should take account of rural areas and transport (6 respondents).
- n) The budget should be shared between all buildings but the more urgent taking priority (6 respondents).
- o) Small communities could be excluded (6 respondents).
- p) AAPs focus resources on larger areas not smaller wards (6 respondents).
- q) More green ideas should be explored (6 respondents).
- r) Some AAPs are good and efficient but some are not so effective (6 respondents).

If administered by AAPs, should each partnership be able to set its own funding criteria?

Key comments made were:

- a) AAPs will know which criteria are most suitable in their own area (21 respondents).
- b) A countywide criteria would be much fairer and more transparent (15 respondents).
- c) Each AAP will know the areas they work in (11 respondents).
- d) Need more information to make a decision (10 respondents)
- e) It can vary from area to area as to buildings and what they do (10 respondents).

- f) It should be administered by AAPs but the criteria set centrally to ensure a level playing field (10 respondents).
 - g) An AAP should be able to set their own funding because the people who will run it are local and the money all stays in the local pot (8 respondents).
 - h) Allow people to make the decisions, keep funds equal for all, keep it local (8 respondents).
 - i) County framework is needed with guidelines (6 respondents).
 - j) Criteria should include: not to be used for running costs; need calendar of activities; multi functional; use by mix of groups; management structure of buildings (6 respondents).
 - k) If administered by the AAP, the criteria should allow some discretion to the AAP, if the AAP is not allowed discretion then the administration may as well remain central (6 respondents).
 - l) Every one requires access to the fund (6 respondents).
 - m) There is concern around the amount per AAP to give out (6 respondents).
 - n) Dilute the community buildings that have been working a long time (6 respondents).
 - o) More grants to be secured (6 respondents).
 - p) Need to know what the funding is to make a proper decision (6 respondents).
- (Annex F - A summary of the consultation responses collected from AAPs).

Key messages from the consultation with AAPs

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) The majority would like to see their AAP take responsibility for the administration of Grant Aid.
- 2) The majority would like AAPs to set the criteria for the distribution of Grant Aid in their area.
- 3) Local knowledge is very important.
- 4) There is concern regarding the capacity of AAPs to carry out this role.
- 5) Further information is needed on how this might work and what would be involved.

Questionnaire (on-line and paper copy)

An on-line questionnaire for members of the public and any interested party was available between 19 September and 12 December. Paper copies of this questionnaire were also available and distribution at events and on request (copy attached at appendix 1).

143 on-line responses were received and 14 paper copies.

Quantitative information was summarised by SurveyMonkey and the comments received were assessed by PACE staff and grouped as follows:

Q1. Do you agree or disagree with the Council investing 2.15m into council owned Community Buildings?

Please explain why:

- Invest in all DCC and non-DCC buildings;
- Heart of the Community/Lifeline/combats isolation;

- Community believes DCC has a statutory/lease duty to repair;
- Invest more than £2.15m;
- Do not invest;
- High cost of repair due to previous lack of investment;
- Other.

Q2b. Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to proceed with option 5?

Other options suggested, not including Options 1-6

- Usage;
- Explore new forms of partnership working;
- FRI/self-funding buildings should receive funding too;
- Other.

Q3b. Do you think that targeting investment using the above criteria is appropriate? If No, what alternative would you suggest?

- Target on real need not LSOAs;
- Don't penalise on age of building / on historic disrepair;
- Support all community buildings including FRI and non DCC owned;
- Base on other facilities/travelling distance;
- Other.

Q4. Do you agree or disagree with the council continuing to allocate £280,000 to its community building grant aid scheme?

Please explain why:

- Should include all community buildings;
- Need more investment;
- Community Buildings are the heart of the community and need support to be economically viable.

Q5. Please tell us what other criteria you would like us to include

- Revenue/Core Costs including basic energy efficiency actions;
- Avoid duplication of funding and/or support;
- Base on only building/isolation;
- Access & Disability;
- Business Plans/Marketing Promotion;
- Pump priming/innovations/Service Development;
- Based on need and use of the building.

Q5b. Do you agree or disagree with the Community building grant aid being allocated locally by AAPs. Please explain why:

- Central - central body is impartial/sees big picture;
- Central – AAPs not regulated and would add an extra layer of bureaucracy;
- AAP has local knowledge and links;
- Allocation by other local body;
- It doesn't matter who as long as it's fair.

Q6. Do you have any further comments to add?

- Community Buildings are good value for money;
- Rurality/isolation/transport issues are important;
- We don't feel that we can influence this decision;
- Agree with the proposals;
- Good Communication required;
- Buildings need revenue and capital;
- Consider needs of C of I.I.e.g. older people, people with disabilities, etc.;
- Consider all buildings in an area;
- Other.

157 people used the on-line consultation form to give their comments on the future of community buildings in County Durham.

Do you agree or disagree with the Council investing 2.15m into council owned Community Buildings?

61% (96 respondents) strongly agreed with the Council's proposal to invest £2.15m into council owned community buildings, with a further 16% (25 respondents) agreed slightly.

5% (8 respondents) strongly disagreed with this proposal.

The main reason stated for wanting the Council to invest in its community buildings was that they are 'the heart of the community', a lifeline for local people and key to combating isolation (46 respondents).

11 respondents wanted to see the Council invest in all Council and non-Council buildings and 9 respondents wanted to see the Council invest more than £2.15m.

Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to proceed with option 5?

70 respondents (56%) agreed with the Council's proposal to prioritise investment in its community buildings, whilst 50 respondents (40%) disagreed.

Of those who disagreed with option five 35% (17 respondents) wanted the Council to invest in all properties irrespective of levels of use or value for money and 25% (11 respondents) wanted things to be left as they are.

Do you think that targeting investment using the above criteria is appropriate?

66% (69 respondents) agreed that the Council's proposed criterion for targeting investment is appropriate.

Those who suggested an alternative stated that:

- a) Investment should be linked to real need not LSOAs (5 respondents)
- b) Support should be given to all community buildings including those on a Full Repair and Insurance lease and those not owned by the Council (5 respondents)
- c) Facilities and travelling should be taken into account (4 respondents)

Do you agree or disagree with the council continuing to allocate £280,000 to its Community Building Grant Aid scheme?

77% (81 respondents) agreed that the Council should continue to allocate £280,000 in Grant Aid whilst 11% disagreed (10 respondents).

The main comment made was to stress that community buildings are the heart of the community and need support to be economically viable (11 respondents). Others suggested that all buildings should have access to Grant Aid (5 respondents) and more investment is needed (3 respondents).

Do you agree with the proposed criteria for Community Building Grant Aid?

The majority (60%) agreed that a combination of the Council's proposed criteria for Grant Aid should be used. The numbers agreeing with individual proposals were very similar, as follows:

- a) 47% agreed with 'support for the installation of more suitable or efficient energy management/generation equipment'.
- b) 49% agreed with 'support for the development of management groups that will enable them to create more income generation activities'.
- c) 41% agreed with 'support for the strategic development of buildings through funding the development of business plans etc., which are an important aspect in creating a sustainable organisation'.

Please tell us what other criteria you would like us to include

Other criteria suggested covered:

- a) Meeting revenue or core costs including basic energy efficiency actions (9 respondents).
- b) Pump priming innovations or service developments (3 respondents).
- c) Improving access, including disability access (2 respondents).
- d) Business planning, marketing and promotion (2 respondents).

Other comments received suggested that the Grant should be based on need and use of the building and should not be used for things that other funding could cover.

Do you agree or disagree with the Community building grant aid being allocated locally by AAPs?

The majority 56% (56 respondents) agreed that Grant Aid should be allocated by AAPs whilst 23% (23 respondents) disagreed and 22% (22 respondents) need neither agreed or disagreed or did not know.

A large proportion of respondents (27) stated that a central approach ensures impartiality and looks at the bigger picture with some (5) stating that the AAPs are not regulated and would add a further layer of bureaucracy.

A similarly large proportion of respondents (24) highlighted the local knowledge and links the AAPs have.

Further comments

When asked to add any further comments a significant number (16 respondents) highlighted that community buildings are good value for money and 14 respondents stressed the fact that rurality, isolation and transport are all important issues.

(Annex G - A summary of the consultation responses collected from the on-line consultation).

Key messages from the questionnaire responses

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) The majority agree that the Council should invest £2.15m in its community buildings.
- 2) Community buildings are seen as being 'the heart of the community', a lifeline for local people and key to combating isolation.
- 3) The majority agreed with the Council's proposal to prioritise investment (take forward option 5).
- 4) The majority agreed that the Council's proposed criteria for targeting investment are appropriate.
- 5) The majority agreed that the Council should continue to allocate £280,000 in Grant Aid.
- 6) The majority agreed that a combination of the Council's proposed criteria for Grant Aid should be used.
- 7) The importance of Grant Aid for other core revenue costs should be taken into account.
- 8) A small majority agreed that Grant Aid should be administered by AAPs.
- 9) A range of concerns were set out regarding the proposals for the future allocation and administration of Grant Aid.
- 10) Rurality, isolation and transport are all issues that should be taken into account when decisions about the future of community buildings are made.

Citizens Panel

During November and December 2011 a questionnaire was sent to members of the Citizen's Panel, a consultative group of over 2,000 local residents. This questionnaire included questions regarding community buildings in order to ascertain current use of community centres in County Durham and to look into ways of ensuring the county has a network of sustainable community buildings. The questionnaire requested the respondent's opinion regarding current usage of council funded community buildings in County Durham, along with reasons for non-use and potential changes that would increase use.

Of the 2,244 questionnaires sent out 882 were returned, giving a response rate of 39.3%. The response rate for those contacted by email was 42.7%, with 424 returns from 992 emails sent. Those who responded by postal questionnaire had a response rate of 36.6%, with 458 returns from 1,252 surveys.

Major results emerging from the survey are:

- a) 26.9% of respondents currently use one or more community buildings in their area (this may include non-Council owned community buildings).
- b) The most common use of community buildings is for social events/leisure activities (27.8% of community buildings users).
- c) 65.4% of users of community buildings use them weekly or more often.
- d) Of those that don't use community buildings 30.9% have no interest in the services provided there.
- e) If exercise classes were held at community buildings 42.8% said they would then use it.
- f) The times that are most convenient to use community buildings are on the weekday evenings.
- g) There is a major contrast between the elderly, who much prefer to use community buildings during the weekday daytime.
- h) Over three quarters (76.7%) think that numbers can be increased attending community building activities by better advertising of what is available.
- i) One in nine (11.1%) said that community buildings could increase use by becoming a place for youth.

(Annex H - A summary of the consultation responses collected from the Citizen's Panel).

Key messages from the Citizen's Panel consultation

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) Almost a half of local residents use their community buildings frequently, with the biggest use being for sport or exercise.
- 2) More people would use community buildings if there were more opportunities for exercise, particularly during weekday evenings.
- 3) The majority of people think that the use of community buildings would be increased through better promotion and more activities for young people.

Grant Aid Meetings:

Special grant aid meetings were held for members of management groups of both Council owned and non-council owned community buildings. These groups were sent a letter of invitation to the meetings and DRCC forwarded the invitation to 150 groups and organisations on their distribution list for the Village E-Voice.

Three events were held in different parts of County Durham and over 100 people attended. At each event participants were divided into small facilitated discussion groups. There were a total of 17 groups across all events. Following a presentation, they were asked for the views on:

1. Should the council continue to give Grant Aid for Community Buildings?
2. The proposed approach
3. The criteria
4. Administration of the Grant Aid by AAPs

5. How to allocate locally by AAPs. For example, by population, by maintaining existing amounts in each AAP, by the number of Community Buildings in each AAP area or any other suggestions.

Details of the facilitated events are as follows:

Hamsterley Village Hall, Hamsterley 17 th October 2011 6pm – 8pm	27 people attended split into 2 facilitated groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Buildings Members – 25
Dales Centre, Stanhope 1 st November 2011 6pm – 8pm	25 people attended split into 3 facilitated groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Buildings Members – 21 Councillors – 2
Newcastle Bank Community Centre 3 rd November 2011 2:30pm – 4:30pm	50 people attended split into 12 facilitated groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Buildings Members – 45 Councillor – 1

102 people engaged in the Community Buildings Grant Aid Consultation Events and worked in groups to respond to the following questions. In most cases there was no consensus among the groups, so the responses are based on the number of responses received for each question. The majority of responses agreed that the Council should continue to provide Grant Aid to community building management groups, with only one response which stated that the Grant Aid should cease.

Do you agree with the proposed approach?

The majority of responses agreed with the proposed approach to allocate the grant aid using a set of clear criteria, some other points were raised and have been reflected below. 49 responses were recorded.

4 responses stated that they did not agree with the Council's proposed approach for Community Building Grant Aid, and 6 responses stated that Grant Aid should be shared equally amongst all Community Buildings.

The majority of responses stressed that it should be a simple and fair application process (10 responses).

13 responses expressed their concern that proposed changes to the system would penalise those groups that do not have the capacity or skills to bid for Grant Aid and 10 responses thought that Grant Aid should continue to be available for revenue costs.

Varying views were also expressed on eligibility for Grant Aid with 6 responses stating that it should be open to all, 3 suggesting that preference should be given to rural areas and 3 suggesting that the ability of the group to access other funding streams access should be taken into account.

Do you agree with the criteria?

There was a mixed response regarding the Council's proposed criteria for Grant Aid with 13 responses agreeing that it should be linked to reducing energy consumption but 12 responses did not agree with the proposed criteria. There were 47 responses in all. Other suggestions put forward linked the Grant to:

- a) Constitution.

- b) Activities provided.
- c) Marketing and promotion.
- d) The size of the building.
- e) Meeting identified community needs.

Other issues raised covered:

- a) The possibility that the proposed criteria excluded some centres.
- b) That the Grant should be available for revenue costs.

Do you agree that the Grant Aid should be administered by AAPs?

The results below are based on the number of responses in order to take all views into account. There were 50 responses to this question.

21 responses wanted the Grant to be administered centrally. Twelve responses wanted it to be administered by AAPs, but a further ten specifically stated that they did not want the Grant to be administered by AAPs. Five responses suggested that another local organisation could administer the Grant and two had no preference.

How should we allocate locally by AAPs?

The majority of responses (14) wanted the allocation of Grant Aid to be based on need or usage of the building. Others sought an even or equitable split (6). Only three responses suggested that it should be distributed according to population and only one suggested it should be distributed according to the number of buildings in the AAP area. There were a total of 29 responses to this question.

Other points raised were:

- a) That an emergency grant should be established (3 responses).
- b) That this Grant should not impact on the ability of the group to receive other funding from the AAP (3 responses).

(Annex I - A summary of the consultation responses collected from the Grant Aid meetings).

Key messages from the Community Building Grant Aid consultation events

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) A clear majority want the Community Building Grant Aid to continue.
- 2) The majority want this Grant Aid to be administered centrally.
- 3) Potential recipients of Grant Aid want a fair and simple process.
- 4) The majority of potential recipients would like to see Grant Aid available for a range of revenue costs.
- 5) A significant proportion of responses want Grant Aid to be linked to need or usage of the building.

Community Buildings Partnership

A Community Buildings Partnership was established in 2008 to provide support to community building management group. This Partnership is made up of representatives from each of County Durham's CVSS, DRCC, Community Matters, Teasdale Village Halls Consortium, the PCT and Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. It is chaired by

Cllr John Robinson and meets quarterly. The Council attends these meetings and invited the Community Buildings Partnership to engage in the Community Buildings consultation.

The partnership discussed the review at its meeting held on the 9th November 2011. The partnership was attended by a range of practitioners from across the sector and agreed the following comments:

- a) The partnership agreed that option 5 is the most sensible option however further clarification is needed relating to the timescales for change.
- b) The partnership would like to highlight that existing support for volunteer management groups already available within the VCS and that any new support provided by DCC should complement the existing provision.
- c) The partnership commented that support for buildings which are due to close should be handled sensitively, with additional support provided to the communities they serve in relation to the relocation of activities and the displacement of services.
- d) The partnership felt that any process or criteria for the grant aid scheme should be as simple and straight forward as possible, with minimal bureaucracy.
- e) The partnership felt that proposals to administer grant aid locally were a good idea.
- f) The partnership felt that management committees should be involved in establishing their own criteria for the grant aid scheme and that the grant aid should not set the different buildings up in competition.

The Partnership also highlighted the role it currently plays in bringing together support for management organisations and suggested that, to help to further develop its work, other groups such as AAPs and Town and Parish Councils could join the Partnership.

The Partnership also offered to take on a more significant role in the future and support in the administration of any grant aid distribution.

(Annex J - Letter from the Community Buildings Partnership).

Key messages from the Community Building Partnership

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) The County Durham Community Buildings Partnership supports the Council's proposal to prioritise investment but highlight the need for clarification regarding the timescales for change.
- 2) There is a range of support already available for community building management groups within the voluntary sector and that any additional support should complement this.
- 3) Support should be provided to communities where the community building is to close.
- 4) The Grant Aid process should be simple and straightforward.

Other Specific Responses:

Durham Rural Community Council (DRCC) and **Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau** provide specialist support services to support the volunteer management groups for community buildings across the County. They took the opportunity to respond to the consultation by writing to the Council.

Following a review of the proposals set out in the consultation, discussions with the community building management groups they support and further discussions with other voluntary sector colleagues **CAVOS** also sent a letter to the Council setting out their response.

Response from DRCC and Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau

The letter from DRCC and Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau set out the following key points:

- a) Option 5 appears to be the most reasonable option for future financial support to the buildings owned by DCC; however we would like to see more detailed development about the timescale for implementation of this option. This is particularly important with respect to allowing groups the time and opportunities to negotiate costs for works and to make plans for fund raising.
- b) If the £2.15 million capital fund is made available as a form of leverage, or grant, to kick start a larger bidding process, then there could be increased potential to secure significantly higher leverage from charitable trusts to boost the impact of DCC investment. The caveat to this approach would be a realistic time scale for investment packages to be developed and secured.
- c) Significant concerns have been raised regarding the ability to find the required 30% match funding. A commitment of support should be made, to help groups identify potential external funding opportunities.
- d) Concerns have been raised regarding the how the estimates for maintenance costs were established. Groups may feel more comfortable with the scale of estimated works and associated costs if they could be provided with a template or rationale for how costs have been estimated/ assessed.
- e) Management committees should be allowed options for seeking competitive pricing and sourcing local contractors to carry out this work. This could be through having the freedom to seek three competitive quotes, without any obligations to use Service Direct or other DCC preferred providers.
- f) A management group's ability to raise funds may be hampered by the fact that they currently have no written leases. Without a lease, it will be impossible for the groups to source external funding. Buildings currently without a lease will need an in principle/draft lease in place before they will be in any position to seek external funding.
- g) It is not apparent in the review, whether the Council aspires to retain any community buildings in the longer term. This should be clarified.
- h) Asset Transfers should only be made when it can be demonstrated that it is in the best interests of the recipient organisation/community. A Policy for Asset Transfer will need careful consideration, and any committees looking to take on the responsibility for buildings need to be made fully aware of their legal and personal liabilities, with objective legal advice, which can be sourced via the VCS. Volunteers will need to be fully briefed and supported throughout the process of asset transfer.
- i) It is vital that only buildings which are genuine assets and not liabilities are considered for Asset Transfer.
- j) The legal structures of the committees taking on any building also need to be considered i.e. community associations becoming companies limited by guarantee, in order to protect their trustees from personal liability.
- k) The Council and the voluntary sector should work together to provide comprehensive advice and support to minimise risks of duplication and/or confusion, and to ensure best value from the support services provided for groups. This should be supported by a clear communications framework.
- l) Management groups considering Asset Transfer should have access to impartial, independent advice on legal issues.

- m) Volunteers running many of these buildings are already vulnerable and under lots of pressure to meet increasing levels of legislative requirements. There is a risk that this process may lead to the loss of highly skilled and dedicated volunteers, if not handled in a sensitive and respectful manner.
- n) It may also be useful to involve CISWO in the consultation to establish their perspective and knowledge of the situation with individual former miner's welfare halls, and arriving at a consistent approach to the issue.
- o) Clarity is needed regarding community building insurance.
- p) The proposal that Community Building Grant Aid should be continued for community buildings is supported and this should be an open and transparent process, available to all community building groups.
- q) A clear definition of eligibility for Community Buildings Grant Aid is needed, focusing on those providing use for a wide section of the community.
- r) The criteria for Grant Aid should be left open for groups to identify their own immediate priorities and have access to Grant Aid to help them tackle them.
- s) A high level of support will be needed by committees in the proposed areas of energy efficiency, income generation and business planning. This could be done through one to one support or training courses. Individual consideration needs to be taken with each building as to what their governing document permits them to do particularly in terms of income generation and their constraints as charities. Currently many of the buildings use their grants to pay their insurance or utility costs.
- t) It would be best for the Grant Aid to be administered locally either by the AAPs or using another mechanism such as setting up local community buildings networks, several of which already exist across the county. There needs to be consistency in the process for administering grants, there also needs to be a degree of flexibility as each of the AAP area has a different numbers of community buildings, population and specific issues to be addressed.
- u) The bidding process proposed for the Grant Aid could result in some buildings receiving no Grant Aid. There needs to be a support mechanism in place for this and to ensure that the process does not lead to a more competitive environment for community buildings. To help this situation Community Building should be encouraged to act collaboratively.
- v) The development and implementation of pro-active and positive policies towards the use of community buildings for service delivery across the County, together with collaborative support to ensure they are fit for purpose needs the input of all members of the County Durham Partnership.
- w) A nationally recognised Quality Standard schemes, designed for community buildings, should be used as a benchmark for buildings to receive their Grant Aid. This is an excellent way of ensuring that management groups are meeting their legal and charitable requirements and would ensure a consistent approach across the county.

They also highlighted the fact that some buildings have a 99 year lease agreements with over 90 years still to run. These leases hold DCC responsible for items such as external repairs and buildings insurance, which is of high value to the groups managing the buildings and would exceed the value of Asset Transfer to them. Further, many of these buildings are in a comparatively good state of repair and as such, in the longer term, may not represent the drain on DCC resources.

Response from CAVOS

The letter from CAVOS set out the following key points:

- a) Option 5 does appear to be the best option, but more detail is needed on time scales and implementation.
- b) Funding required to be raised by community building management committees is very high at a time when funding sources for such projects are very difficult to access.
- c) Community Building Management groups need specialist support in areas such as governance and development.
- d) Support provided by the Council needs to avoid duplication of the support provided CVS. Clear remits would help to avoid duplication.
- e) Good communications are needed between the Council and VCS in providing support to Management Groups.
- f) Concerns and issues related to existing leases need to be addressed to enable management groups to access funding.
- g) Work is needed to ensure that management groups have the capacity to take on Asset Transfer and to support them to be proactive in developing thriving community centres including taking part in projects, partnerships and networks.
- h) The Grant Aid system must be a fair, open and transparent process.
- i) The buildings currently receiving grant aid should be offered a phased reduction in support to ensure they can financially plan for this reduction in funding (if not successful at attracting grant aid via the new system).
- j) A clear definition of what constitutes a community building should be devised.
- k) The detail of the Grant Aid application process and monitoring requirements should be balanced with the level of funding on offer. If the maximum grant available is a relatively small amount then the application process and information required from the buildings should be as straightforward as possible.
- l) Some criteria for Grant Aid should be in place, however this needs to be balanced with the maximum grant amount on offer. Consideration should be given for allowing the Grant to be spent on general running costs as this is often vital for the community building's ongoing survival.
- m) Careful consideration needs to be given to the implementation of any competitive bidding process to ensure that this does not damage the partnership of community buildings that has been established.

(Annex K - Letter from the DRCC and Chester-le-Street and District CVS and Volunteer Bureau)

(Annex L - Letter from CAVOS)

Key messages from consultation letters

The following key messages can be drawn from this consultation:

- 1) The Council's proposal to prioritise investment (option 5) is supported as the preferred way forward.
- 2) More information is needed regarding the development and implementation timetable for option 5.

- 3) Realistic timescale need to be set to allow groups to negotiate the costs for works and to make plans for fund raising.
- 4) The Council and the VCS should work together to provide support to help management groups to access funding and to help them to prepare for a new role in the future. Access to independent advice should also be made available.
- 5) Consideration should be given to allowing management groups to seek competitive prices for maintenance work.
- 6) Clarity is required regarding the current leases held by management groups and insurance arrangements.
- 7) An Asset Transfer policy is needed to ensure that unexpected liabilities are not transferred and management groups are fully aware of their responsibilities.
- 8) Further consideration should be given to what Grant Aid can be used for and the application process to ensure flexibility. Any changes should be introduced on a phased basis.
- 9) Consideration should be given to the introduction of a Quality Assurance Standard for community buildings.

Petitions

Four petitions were received during the consultation period and have been processed by the Council's Legal & Democratic Services and included within the consultation process.

Building	Concern/Issue	Number of petitioners
Sanders Memorial Homes Community Building	Raised a number of points which they wish to have considered as part of the consultation process including: 6 regular user groups, office base for Chester-le-Street & District Voluntary Welfare Committee, laundry room used daily and regular use for celebrations.	17
Earl House	Requesting that Earl House should remain open to allow activities and functions to continue.	139
Burnopfield Community Centre	Petition against removal of capital investment for the Community Centre	263
Silver Courts Hall	The Over 60s Bingo Club members are concerned about possible closure as they use the hall for social gatherings, parties and to organise outings for the community. The hall is accessible to members due to lack of transport. They requested that more thought is given to the needs of elderly members in Brandon.	21

Involvement

Overall more than 3,600 people engaged in the Community Buildings consultation.

- 102 visits undertaken
- 729 people involved in the visits
- 157 responses to the questionnaire

- 26 stakeholders participated in the consultation process
- 90 community buildings requesting additional advice and support

Compliments

The face to face interaction was appreciated greatly by Community Building Management Committees and local members participating in the process. These compliments were mainly verbal. The ability to discuss and offer clarity on the proposals, its impact on individual buildings and to listen to the circumstances, issues and concerns raised by the community was commented on at many community building interviews.

Consultation Feedback

Following the consultation information will be fed back via:

- Information via the website, Durham County News and press releases.
- Letters or visits to individual council owned community buildings.
- AAP Board meetings.
- Grant aid meetings for community building management groups.
- Meetings with Town and Parish Councils
- Discussions with key funders.

Further Information

Further information and copies of the appendices and annexes referred to within this report are available from the Council's Assistant Chief Executives Service (Tel.: 0191 383 3209).