

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE FOR
THE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

WORKING GROUP REPORT ON COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

**PASSIONATE ABOUT PEOPLE:
PASSIONATE ABOUT PLACES**

April 2007

Making a difference where you live



Culture & Leisure • Customer Services • Education • Environment • Senior Direct • Social Care & Health • Chief Executive's Office • Corporate Services • County Treasurer

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DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

WORKING GROUP REPORT ON COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

PASSIONATE ABOUT PEOPLE: PASSIONATE ABOUT PLACES

“Some communities will wish to go a step further in influencing community service delivery by taking over the management or ownership of a public asset such as a community centre, redundant school building, swimming pool or green space, to ensure that it is used in a way that best serves local interests.....

..... We (Government) are determined to ensure that existing powers and policies that support community management and ownership are effective; and that practical ways are found to overcome any remaining unnecessary barriers.....

..... We will take immediate steps to make it easier for communities and community groups to take on the management or ownership of local authority assets by establishing a fund to give local authorities capital support in refurbishing buildings to facilitate their transfer to community management or ownership.....”

Strong and Prosperous Communities –Local Government White Paper (October 2006.)

FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR KEITH HENDERSON



I am pleased that Overview and Scrutiny has ‘taken the bull by the horns’ and decided to review our investment in County Council owned community buildings. My scrutiny colleagues on the Working Group will agree with me, I’m sure, when I say that this review was never going to be easy but that through a systematic and structured approach with a clear focus on outcomes for local communities, I believe we have made good progress in looking at what we need to consider in developing and growing both our community buildings and the communities we serve.

The quote at the beginning of this report is very relevant, reflecting a policy shift by government with more emphasis on Communities owning local assets. What we have discovered is that you cannot separate buildings (the physical infrastructure where things happen) from consideration of the needs and support requirements for local communities to facilitate what happens in buildings.

I would like to thank my colleagues who have taken time out to work on this review, the community “Trustees” who enable community activity in our community buildings and the range of witnesses who took time out to share with us the issues and the challenges that need to be addressed in order to support sustainable communities.

I am sure this report will take us forward in thinking about what needs to be done to build “strong and prosperous communities”.

Keith Henderson
Chair Corporate Management Scrutiny Sub Committee
May 2007

PROJECT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The County Council's priorities for improvement set the context for this work with a focus upon outcomes that we want to achieve to improve the delivery of services to the people of County Durham. An important part of this approach is partnership working so that we are able to develop new approaches to service delivery and make a difference to the lives of local people.

With this in mind, the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group were keen to focus upon the investment the County Council contributes to its community buildings, recognising that they also needed to consider people-centred development in this process.

The terms of reference for the Working Group were agreed on the principle that they were outcome-focused and that they would contribute to a policy debate about a sustainable future for community buildings.

The Working Group agreed that the focus of the work was to consider:

- What is the County Council's Corporate responsibility for buildings and provision locally?
- How best can we establish a systematic and robust mechanism to ensure we monitor outcomes and performance within our Community Buildings and demonstrate that we achieving value for money?
- What Strategic approach do we have in place to support, grow and build capacity for 'Communities'?
- What benefits our Community Buildings deliver?
- Is there a role for Service Level Agreements (SLAs)?
- Do we distribute resources equitably or should we target resources to areas of greatest need to maintain our Community Building stock?
- What are the implications for Transfer of Assets?
- What are the policy drivers regarding Community Buildings and support for Communities?
- Ultimately to provide a clear strategic steer to give a sustainable future for community buildings

MEMBERSHIP OF THE WORKING GROUP

The membership of the Working Group was drawn from the Corporate Scrutiny Sub Committee. However, individual members of the sub-committee did not attend all the meetings of the Working Group.

Councillor Keith Henderson chaired the Working Group; Vice Chair was Cllr Tom Forster.

The following councillors and co-opted members were invited to meetings, Councillors Barker, Bowman, Carroll, Fergus, Forster, Graham, Henderson, Holroyd, Nicholls, O'Donnell, Porter, Priestley, Shuttleworth, Stradling, Tennant, Southwell and Wade.

APPROACH

The Working Group agreed to take evidence from key witnesses involved directly and indirectly with community buildings. They also agreed to receive correspondence, organise visits, meet with relevant parties to ensure members fully understood and received evidence on this matter before reaching any conclusions or making any recommendations.

The following people gave evidence to the working group:

Dave Emmerson	-	Education in the Community Manager
Ken Pearson	-	Head of Corporate Estates
James Parkinson	-	Project Officer (Looking into the issue of Community Buildings)
Craig Morgan	-	Senior Community Development Officer
Ann Armstrong	-	Corporate Policy Officer
Peter Brookes	-	Head of Community Support
Frank Firth	-	Strategic Officer (Children and Young People's Services)
Carl Chapman	-	One Voice Network
Jo Laverick	-	Durham Rural Community Council
Belinda Lewis and David McGrath	-	Chester –le - Street CVS and County Durham Community Buildings Consortium
Bill Pike	-	Community Development Officer (DCC)
Julia Bates	-	Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities Partnership Officer
Brian Robinson	-	Principal Strategy Officer (Corporate Services)
Christine Matkin	-	Solicitor (Corporate Services)
Kevin Oxley	-	Director of Estates County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Tracey Harding	-	Estates – County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Ian Rowney	-	NHS – County Durham PCT

Richard Walker	-	NHS - Mental Health - Priority Services
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Community Trustees:

Moira Wears	-	Stanley Community Centre
Ian Kitchin	-	Stanley Community Centre
Elizabeth Kitchin	-	Stanley Community Centre
Bill Wilkinson	-	Stanley Community Centre
Peter Hopkins	-	Great Lumley Community Association
Jennifer James	-	Great Lumley Community Association
David Smith	-	Witton-le-Wear Community Association
Clarice Smith	-	Witton-le-Wear Community Association
Irene Curry	-	Horden Youth & Community Association
Mary Molyneux	-	Horden Youth & Community Association
Karen Hyrons	-	Horden Youth & Community Association
Marie O'Brien	-	Shotley Bridge Association
Carol Clegam	-	Shotley Bridge Association
Mrs A Mackenzie	-	Blackhill Community Centre
Mrs A Hedley	-	Blackhill Community Centre
Denise Brooks	-	Shotton Colliery
Barbara Hind	-	Shotton Colliery
Irene Waller	-	Eastlea Community Centre
David McGrath	-	Chester-le-Street CVS
Keith Heartham	-	Langley Park Community Association
Chris Robinson	-	Langley Park Community Association
Margaret Smith	-	Wingate Community Association

REPORTING

The Working Group agreed to report, in the first instance, to the Corporate Scrutiny Sub-Committee on its findings, then to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet with its recommendations requesting Cabinet to respond to these recommendations via an action plan.

METHODOLOGY

A detailed project plan for all the Working Group meetings was developed. (See appendix1). The plan in effect is a scoping document that identifies who attended the meetings and the nature of the evidence they gave.

The Working Group held a total of nine meetings between September 2006 and January 2007. All these meetings were held in County Hall with 'expert' witnesses invited to give evidence in relation to the terms of reference.

A meeting also took place with Community Trustees (people who are involved in managing and running the community buildings) and staff working in

community buildings as appropriate. This meeting was facilitated by the Community Development Service (Adult and Community Services Directorate) and Adult Education Service (Children and Young People's Directorate).

Community Trustees were invited to comment on the following questions:

- What role should Durham County Council play in supporting community buildings? The County Council is one of many agencies that support the voluntary community sector. Should DCC be doing more? Should DCC be handing over more services to the voluntary and community centre?
- How can local community buildings in the same area work more effectively together at a local level. There are a number of 'community buildings' in neighbourhoods across the County. As well as the thirty County owned buildings, there are buildings owned by District/Borough Councils and buildings that are independently owned. There are schools and libraries, etc. How can we ensure that management committees and service providers are working effectively together to ensure co-ordinated value for money services for local people?
- How does Durham County Council effectively manage the assets it has tied up in its community buildings? It costs DCC £1.25 million every year to maintain the thirty community buildings it owns. Is this effective use of resources? Could resources be better targeted to have more effect? Could new and creative ways be developed to better use resources?

The Working Group also went on a visit to Trimdon Grange Community Centre and Wingate Community Centre to see first-hand community buildings in action, noting the potential, the opportunities and the challenges faced by Community Trustees who serve their local community through the community buildings they are involved with.

Total expenditure is in the region of £1.45m. This does not include technical and professional advice and assistance.

Finally an example of what can be achieved through a partnership approach that is community led is attached (**APPENDIX 2**).

This deals with the notion of "Community Anchors" which are independent community -led organisations. They are multi-purpose and provide a holistic solution to local issues. (Source: Community Alliance "Transforming through community anchors" publication 2007)

MAIN FINDINGS

Durham County Council owns thirty-three community buildings. These are:

Annfield Plain Community Centre
Blackhall Youth Club
Blackhill Community Centre
Bournmoor Community Centre
Burnopfield Community Centre
Castleside Youth Club
Chester le Street Youth Centre
Evenwood Community Centre
Fishburn Youth & Community Centre
Framwellgate Moor Community & Youth Centre
Great Aycliffe Village Hall
Great Lumley Community Centre
Hawthorn Community Centre
Horden Youth & Community Assoc
Howden le Wear Community Centre
Hunwick Community Centre
Langley Park Community Centre
Middleton in Teesdale Village Hall
Murton Community Centre
Newton Aycliffe Youth Centre (New provision)
Peterlee Central Youth Centre
Pittington Village Hall

Seaham Rock House Community Centre	
Seaham Youth Centre	
Shotley Bridge Village Hall Assoc	
Shotton Community Centre	
Spennymoor Youth & Community Assoc	
Stanley Community Centre	
Stanley Youth Centre	
Toronto Community Centre	
Trimdon Grange Community Centre	
Trimdon Village Hall	
Witton le Wear Community Centre	

With the exception of one new building, the remainder require maintenance improvements and adaptations ranging between £60,000 and £800,000 per building.

It was confirmed that from 2000, **Condition Surveys** were undertaken of all Local Authority buildings. It is estimated that, in terms of condition and suitability in relation to the thirty-two buildings, the cost would be in excess of £10m in order for them to be of an acceptable standard. When undertaking this exercise, comparisons are done in relation to the cost of replacement or upgrading to a reasonable standard. In a substantial number of cases, the cost of replacement is lower than that of upgrading.

1. **Community organisations** bring a wide range of activities and benefits to local people. To be effective, they often require well-managed, well-maintained premises from which to conduct their work. The County Council is the major provider of community group premises and is currently operating within both a tight fiscal environment and a need for continuing efficiency savings.

There is a very definite need for a strategic approach that needs to look at how we develop, support and manage our Community buildings. Such a strategy must take into account how best to provide equality and fairness to all neighbourhoods that will maximise local service delivery and make best use of limited resources. It will assist the County Council to be clear about its role and its co-ordination of DCC input into communities. The strategy should address issues of

'quality of service', community cohesion and be a focal point for community engagement.

2. **Community buildings** are a focal point for a wide range of activities, managed by small group of trustees through a lease or management agreement held by the Council.

Community Trustees were very clear that the local authority needs to strive to ensure community groups are supported throughout the leasing process so that their vital contribution to local communities is preserved.

3. Furthermore, **Trustees** also pointed out that: the need to support capacity building of the Management Committee through sustainable support (*a paid Manager's post for example with clear lines of accountability and reporting);training for Trustees on for example 'legal responsibilities' is necessary; to ensure that there are regular meetings of partners at a local level to provide opportunities for communication and the exchange of information; and there is a need for a resource handbook which can be used by smaller Community Associations as a source document to direct them to the various sources of advice, information and support currently available.
(*In part this resource already exist within the VCS infrastructure, in particular Durham Rural Community Council ,Teesdale Village Halls association and at varying levels within the CVS `s ,there is an opportunity to build upon and develop these services.)
4. It is important we recognise the role of community groups in helping to meet a number of **council objectives** as well as responding to local issues that are important for community groups and local residents.
5. **The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976** gives local authorities the power to lease premises at less than market rent for recreational purposes for any period. They may also grant aid or provide in-kind support to organisations managing the premises. Leases of up to seven years may be granted for non-recreational purposes under the Local Government Act 1972.
6. **In 2003, the Deputy Prime Minister** gave a new general consent to local authorities to enable them to dispose of assets at less than best consideration, within certain parameters, to organisations such as community trusts. This has been reinforced in the recent white paper on local government with reference to community ownership of assets.
7. **Local Area Agreements (LAAs)** are key mechanisms for future service delivery and offer a number of freedoms and flexibilities for local government and its partners. It is essential that the voluntary and community sector plays a role in this process. Community groups

could also play a key role in meeting the objectives of LAAs and receive funding to do so.

8. **ChangeUp**, the government's strategy for voluntary and community sector infrastructure and capacity building, was developed to ensure comprehensive support for front-line organisations delivering public services. Its funding was not intended to support neighbourhood or community level infrastructure directly and the majority of current and planned investment will go to district and sub-regional generic infrastructure organisations, (with the balance being for national programmes). In some instances, community organisations will benefit from non-financial support through this programme.
9. **Firm Foundations4**, the government's framework for community capacity building, identified the need for a network of strong 'community anchors' to engage, represent and service communities and support the community sector in their neighbourhood. Community anchors are defined as community based organisations which:
 - are controlled by local residents and/or representatives of local groups;
 - address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way;
 - are committed to the involvement of all sections of their community, including marginalised groups;
 - facilitate the development of communities in their area.
10. **Together we can**, produced by a number of government departments, aims to identify the benefits of strong, cohesive and engaged communities working together with government at every level. It identifies a number of key public policy areas which depend on the involvement of communities and community organisations.
11. **CPA 2005 - the harder test**. The new process takes a more holistic perspective of the role of the local authority within the local community. To score the top four-star rating, local authorities will need to show that they contribute to the achievement of the wider outcomes for the community. A better understanding of the local community and how the council delivers community priorities in partnership will also be central to this. The relationship local authorities have with community groups will therefore be crucial to the success of this. Having a local COMPACT in place and developing a 'compact way of working' will also help local authorities to work more constructively with community groups.

12. **ODPM's Local:Vision process (2005)**, a cross-sector work group was formed to 'identify ways in which an expansion in the ownership and/or management of physical assets by communities can be promoted and supported so as to further the objectives of the Neighbourhoods Agenda'. The work group has set out its findings and recommendations in the *Communities Taking Control* report. The report covers the benefits of community ownership/management of assets, different 'models' of ownership and management, issues concerning powers, opportunities and funding, and the capacity-building necessary to support asset transfer.

13. **Transfer of Assets** - there is a need for a managed transfer so that buildings are of a particular standard when they are transferred to community ownership. If the buildings are transferred in their current condition, they will be a liability, not an asset to the Community Association. Transfer should be spread over a period of four to five years with a strategic approach established in relation to the maintenance of Community Buildings. The legal implications of the transfer of assets must be addressed.

We need to see the outcome of the government's review looking into community ownership of assets. This is a review lead by Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham. This will examine the effectiveness of existing powers and policies and consider how they might be better promoted and also to consider what additional powers and policies would facilitate closer working between communities and local authorities in devolving responsibilities for local assets. The review will also consider any safeguards that would be necessary to prevent assets being taken over by unrepresentative groups who might not act in the interests of the local community.

a. Some Key issues regarding Asset Transfer:

- Planned and inclusive Asset Transfer
- Age and quality of buildings
- Geographical location – replication
- Cost of repair/replacement
- Competition for future resources
- Compliance with statutory requirements
- Inconsistent management capacity
- Image of the sector/owner
- Inconsistent understanding of community issues across DCC
- Asset transfer/sustainability/leasing
- Lack of a clear joint planning process between LAs and VCS.

b. Three Key Aspects of Asset Transfer:

- Assess the quality of current building stock
- Options appraisal for each building

Discussion with stakeholders

c. Other Considerations for Asset transfer:

The ability of the Community Group to develop a suitable business case to take on the asset and sustain operation.
The ability of the Community Group to secure funding for replacement or improvement of the facility where major investment is required.

The potential for inappropriate organisations to 'take over' the property either initially or over a period of time.

The ability of the Community Group to take on the responsibility/legal obligation for the property and operation of activities

To ensure that appropriate Service Level Agreements exist to assist both parties to be clear about the contract and as a tool to enable performance to be managed.

14. **Community Buildings Consortium and the 'health checks'** - the CBS undertook a health check (on behalf of partners using the DEFRA model) on 140 community buildings in County Durham. They found that there is a need to provide training/capacity building and support for Management Committees and a definite need to develop a strategic approach to community buildings in County Durham.

They also concluded that:

Physical condition of building need to be addressed

Transfer of Assets - some buildings in their current condition would be a liability not an Asset

Need for transfer to be phased over a period of four to five years

Redevelopment in many cases would cost less than upgrading the existing building

Target redevelopment carefully to those communities who want it (commitment on the communities' part)

The COMPACT used to strengthen Service Level Agreements with Associations

Look at various investment packages, with the Associations i.e. use the skills of the voluntary sector to access different funding sources

15. **The concept of Children's Centres** is to use 'joined up' thinking to provide services locally to parents and children but also to provide a location for the provision of services to the wider community, (their purpose is to 'add' to community life and extend the provision of services provided - it localises provision).

The Government see schools as being at the heart of the community and, therefore, the Extended School concept can be used to provide

services after school hours (including holiday periods) to children, parents, carers and the general community, thus providing the maximum optimum use of buildings.

The key is to look at how best a community buildings strategy is able to ensure that local community facilities are used for local communities, joining up activities and opportunities for local people: collaborating with each other through joint venture opportunities rather than competing for limited resource to do the same thing. This is about connecting communities.

16. **Service Level Agreements** – are an agreement between the Council and a Voluntary and Community sector organisation to develop and/or deliver a service. SLAs are a type of contract.

- a. What should a SLA contain?
 - A definition of the service to be provided
 - Outcomes/outputs expected
 - Responsibilities of both sides
 - Monitoring and evaluation process
 - Legal and other requirements e.g. public liability insurance
 - Amount and period of funding
- b. The SLA process
 - Commissioning
 - Based on what Council wants to be delivered
 - An open and equitable application procedure
 - COMPACT compliant
- c. Advantages for Durham County Council
 - Clarity of Council's service enhancement, community benefit
 - Opportunity to change/refocus service delivery in response to Council and/or community needs
 - Transparency
- d. Advantages to Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations
 - Clear and consistent application process
 - Clarity of service delivery expectations
 - Defined monitoring and evaluation system
 - Funding and timescales
- e. Current SLAs
 - Adult learning provision (Community Building)
 - Running costs support (Community Buildings)
 - Six CVSS

- Racial Equality Council/Gay Advice, Durham
- Durham Rural Community Council
- County Durham Foundation

17. **Partnerships** – there is a real opportunity to build on the work and the role of the Community Buildings Consortium. The opportunity is to engage a number of key public and voluntary sector bodies to work with the Consortium to further develop the work on Community buildings within the context of the countywide Sustainable Community Strategy.
18. **We need to look at** increasing/promoting partnership working. A community building strategy would assist in the development of the overall asset management strategy. This needs the Authority and Community Groups to jointly establish requirements and proposals. A clear statement of intent would be helpful.
19. **The NHS** - has an important role to play in this context as the emphasis for it is to look at how best to develop community based services and infrastructure in line with government's policy on keeping people out of hospital and supported in communities. The NHS notes a recognised need to look at multi-agency working and the need to establish further links with Durham County Council.

There is now a Community Hospitals programme looking at various areas for the location and development of Community based hospitals although there is also the need to retain the existing Acute hospital provision. It was emphasised that there are no 'concrete' plans as to how this new development will progress.

The Mental Health Priority Services currently have 130 sites throughout the County but will require another 30 to 40 sites to deliver mental health provision in local communities. The Mental Health Sector does have existing partnerships with other bodies and that there is a move to provide more services to individuals in the home via GP surgeries. However, there is a move to look at accommodation in local communities such as Community Associations to remove the stigma associated with mental health by accessing provision in a mental health establishment.

There is a need to do a 'here and now' review of the NHS estate within the county to establish which are the best locations to progress community based services.

20. **Consultation on the Community Assets Fund** (April 2007):- This consultation is aimed at those with an interest in the transfer of assets from local authorities to the third sector. This is a significant development for the County Council and we need to consider our position in responding to the challenge of transfer of assets in line with government thinking on the matter.

The consultation document spells out Government's commitment to expand the opportunities for communities to manage or own physical assets, with a £30 million Community Assets Fund announced on 6 December 2006. They suggest that this fund will facilitate the transfer of management or ownership of assets from local authorities in England to the third sector by offering capital to refurbish assets. The Big Lottery Fund will manage the Community Assets Fund on behalf of the Office of the Third Sector.

21. **Government suggest** that the Community Assets Fund will support partnerships between local authorities and community-led, third sector organisations to enable communities to have a greater stake in the buildings they use. Taking control of their own building can be an important step for third sector organisations, one which benefits the group itself, the community they serve and other local stakeholders. Having a greater stake in their own building gives third sector organisations more independence as they can develop financial and organisational sustainability. They are better placed to plan ahead, diversify their activities and skills and take on a new status in their community. By being embedded in the community, local organisations can reach marginalised and disadvantaged people and help those people take a bottom-up, self-help approach to improving their lives and their neighbourhood.

A community building can promote cohesion by bringing different people and groups together for a variety of purposes. The neighbourhood can benefit from investment, job creation and greater pride and confidence in its area. Public service providers benefit from stronger relationships with frontline organisations, which are well placed to tap into community networks and resources.

As well as being an investment in physical infrastructure, the Government suggests that the Community Assets Fund will raise the social value of under-used public buildings and that it will create spaces for community activity and service delivery. In addition, it will empower community organisations to be innovative in identifying and responding to local need, giving them a new place in the community, new skills, confidence and financial sustainability.

In addition to the new fund, a Review of community management and ownership of public assets, led by Barry Quirk (Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham), is expected to make further recommendations to Government shortly. The report of the Review will be published in May 2007 and will be followed soon after by the Government's implementation plan.

The issue of a Community Assets Fund, with a policy direction of transfer of assets from local authorities to voluntary and community organisations in line with Government's thinking and support for

'strong and prosperous communities', fits neatly with the main findings from the Working Group.

MAIN MESSAGES

1. **Durham County Council** owns thirty-three Community buildings. With the exception of one new building, the remainder require maintenance improvements and adaptations ranging between £60,000 and £800,000 per building.
2. **Financial support** per annum for our Community buildings (Centres) can be broken down thus: -
 - Grant Aid - £12K
 - Professional Staff - £87K
 - Caretaking and Cleaning - £361K
 - Repairs/Maintenance - £197K (including energy costs, water charges etc..)
 - Youth Work Development Grant - £50K
 - Supplementary Grants - £50K
 - Minor Repairs Grants - £25K
3. **What do our community buildings provide?**
 - Recreation/leisure
 - Playgroup, crèche, childcare
 - Residents and groups supporting hard to engage communities
 - Learning – accredited/non-accredited
 - Literary and health services
 - National and local organisations, e.g. CAB/Women’s Institute
 - Emergency Accommodation
 - Local meeting place
 - Elections and political meetings
 - Volunteer/training
 - Faith groups
 - Youth work
4. **Benefits of Community Buildings:**
 - Focal point for communities of all ages
 - Focal point for service delivery
 - Assist the delivery of DCC priorities
 - Network/infrastructure for consultation/dialogue
 - Promote volunteering citizenship
 - Promote community cohesion
 - Access to wider funding opportunities

5. Limitations:

- Age of buildings
- Management capacity
- Need to consider issues of sustainability
- Access to skills
- Different/conflicting needs of adults/young people

6. Pressure for change:

- Community leadership role of local authority.

The Local Government Act 2000 established the need for local authorities to adopt a community leadership role, including the integration and joining up of agencies (including the voluntary and community sector) in localities, usually associated with the development of Local Strategic Partnerships. The then ODPM report “Local Vision” went further by stating that local authorities should be providing strong community leadership.

7. Transfer of assets and best value consideration relaxed:

- In 2003, the Deputy Prime Minister gave a general consent, which enabled local authorities to dispose of assets at less than the best consideration to certain designations of organisation including community associations.
- The 2006 White Paper takes this further and encourages the transfer of assets, including buildings to community organisations, where the capacity to receive such transfers on the part of the community can be demonstrated.
- Capacity
- Resources

8. Opportunities to progress a strategic approach:

- a. We already have in place a County Durham Compact and Funding Code, we are developing a standard Service Level Agreement and looking to strengthen the role of the Community Buildings Consortium/Group (a partnership body with representation from key public and voluntary sector bodies).
- b. The COMPACT provides a framework to promote and support partnership between the voluntary and community sector and the local authorities and NHS agencies in County Durham.

- c. A review of the relevance of our Community Buildings within the context of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area.
- d. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) should provide impetus for a more joined up approach in supporting future investment in our communities and community facilities.
- e. The condition survey should give us a clear picture of the current state/strength of our community buildings. This will assist in thinking about our investment priorities and enable us to deal with any requests for asset transfer that request information on the condition of the building.
- f. A strategic approach will also help clear up the confusion that exists about ownership of buildings and the interpretation of lease arrangements, so for example who has responsibility for external and internal maintenance costs

9. Community Ownership/Transfer of Assets:

- a. We need to invest in a common approach. The Government's White Paper presents significant opportunities to consider how best to progress community ownership and transfer of assets for community benefits.
- b. We need to bear in mind to which body should the assets be transferred and the legal implications of the transfer of assets.
- c. Some key issues regarding asset transfer:
 - o Planned and inclusive Asset Transfer
 - o Age and quality of buildings
 - o Geographical location – replication
 - o Cost of repair/replacement
 - o Competition for future resources
 - o Compliance with statutory requirements
 - o Inconsistent management capacity
 - o Image of the sector/owner
 - o Inconsistent understanding of community issues across DCC
 - o Asset transfer/sustainability/leasing
 - o Lack of a clear joint planning process between LAs and VCS
- d. Three Key Aspects of Asset Transfer
 - o Assess the quality of current building stock
 - o Options appraisal for each building
 - o Discussion with stakeholders

10. Community 'Right to Buy'

- In October 2005, the Minister for Communities and Local Government indicated support for the implementation of the "Community Right To Buy" model for asset transfer. The initiative gives community groups first refusal on public or private land and buildings so long as a ballot of local people supports the plan. The initiative has been running in Scotland for several years.

11. CPA – The Harder Test

- In 2005, the Audit Commission introduced the 'harder test' concept within CPA assessments. To achieve the four star rating, local authorities must demonstrate that they work in partnership with local communities and contribute to the achievement of local community priorities. This relationship and a commitment to an authority community sector compact will be crucial in this respect.

12. How we (the County Council) can help:

- Adopt a strategic approach
- Work in a partnership context
- Consider resource allocation issues
- Build on the Community Compact
- Strengthen Capacity Building
- Promote a planned and inclusive asset transfer in line with government thinking on community ownership

13. Why we need a strategic approach:

- a. A strategic approach will deliver, equality and fairness to all neighbourhoods, it will ensure we maximise local service delivery, maximise best use of limited resources, provide co-ordination of DCC input, enable a clarity of role and input for all partners, ensure quality of service delivery, contribute to community cohesion and act as a focal point for community engagement.
- b. Such an approach should focus on neighbourhood/area service delivery needs - the direct contribution of our buildings to service delivery needs, the appropriateness of our buildings to meet these needs, consideration of alternative community resources in the area with the potential to establish alliances/collaborative opportunities to meet local need.
- c. A strategic approach would undoubtedly, improve quality of provision, improve management capacity, improve partnership in delivering national and local aims and objectives, act as a role model and ensure equality in relation to:

- Provision
 - Access
 - Assess the quality of the current building stock
 - Options appraisal for each building
 - Discussion with stakeholders
14. **A strategic approach** will deliver, equality and fairness to all neighbourhoods, it will ensure we maximise local service delivery, maximise best use of limited resources, provide co-ordination of DCC input, enable a clarity of role and input for all partners, ensure quality of service delivery, contribute to community cohesion and act a focal point for community engagement. Evidence from the Community Buildings Consortium, which facilitated a ‘health check’ on 140 Community Associations in the County, found issues relating to:
- Training/capacity building and support for Management Committees
 - Physical condition of buildings
 - The need for a strategic view/a countywide approach to Community Buildings (the physical condition of buildings and support to management committees - a consistent and fair approach)
 - With an acknowledgment that some buildings in their current condition would be a liability not an Asset, this will need to be borne in mind when dealing with Transfer of Assets,
15. **Service Level Agreements (SLAs):**
- SLAs are an agreement between the Council and a Voluntary and Community sector organisation to develop and/or deliver a service. They are a type of contract. SLA is the outcome of a commissioning process informed by what the Council wants to be delivered. SLAs are an important agreement between the commissioner and the provider. SLAs must be COMPACT compliant. SLAs make it easier for the community and voluntary sectors to work effectively with the statutory sector in providing services and facilities.
 - SLAs are a useful tool in that they are able to set out an agreement (contract) between the commissioner of services and the provider. SLAs can help providers to be clear about what is required of them within a framework set by the County Council’s Improvement priorities. They also assist the County Council to performance manage providers, looking at outcome focussed. delivery.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The potential benefits for local authorities of developing a proactive and strategic approach to the use of community buildings and to the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships with community-based organisations are fundamental.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should take the lead role in developing a strategy for Community Buildings.

This strategy should be developed within the context of the County Durham Sustainable Community Strategy and be a key priority for partner organisations in improving outcomes for local people. The issues identified in this report should be used to inform partners of the benefits community buildings can make to partner organisation priorities and in addressing quality of life issues.

2. It is not clear whether the complete transfer of assets into community ownership is either desired by communities or desirable for local authorities. Discussions with Community Trustees and the County Council, possibly facilitated by the Community Buildings Consortium, would be a useful way forward to determine the level of interest.

By working in partnership, local authorities and community organisations can help each other to meet key organisational objectives across a number of areas.

Despite the temptation to use asset transfer as a means of cutting costs, the County Council must reflect on the potential long-term damage that could be done in neighbourhoods should transfer schemes go on to fail. Asset transfer will entail some short-term costs. These costs need not be exorbitant and it is likely they can go on to generate considerable economic as well as social and environmental benefits. It is suggested that asset transfer should be dependent upon the preparation of a robust business plan and a local authority satisfying itself that a community organisation has sufficient funding to take an asset forward.

A wide range of benefits were identified for communities, external stakeholders, and for those organisations to which an asset may be transferred:

- Transferred assets can lead to jobs and activities which can create wealth and surpluses and which are retained in the community.
- Buildings restored to active use by communities can 'occupy iconic status' and give a boost to local communities, sometimes leading to

a local 'multiplier effect' by restoring confidence in places and increasing the viability of local business.

- Asset-based organisations can offer a base for neighbourhood-based service provision, making services more accessible and responsive to local needs, which can reduce pressures on statutory service provision.
- Local statutory providers may form relationships with community partners who can tap into resources that they, themselves, cannot (see below).
- Asset transfer can build the capacity of local organisations through transforming its management capacity, linking organisations into wider networks, giving them status and recognition, and providing collateral for further borrowing.
- A key benefit of asset transfer is the greater ability that exists on the part of community organisations to draw down such funds.

A consultation has been launched by government (April 07) on the Community Assets Fund. This is aimed at those organisations with an interest in the transfer of assets from local authorities to the third sector. This is an important development for the County Council and we need to consider our position in responding to the challenge of transfer of assets in line with government thinking on the matter.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should support the principle of “asset transfer” of community buildings to community ownership. This is in line with government thinking on assets being transferred to communities.

The County Council should ensure that the process of asset transfer is reflected in a Community Buildings Strategy that clearly takes into account a robust business plan that details:

- a. an assessment of the quality of current building stock;
- b. an options appraisal for each building and
- c. discussion with stakeholders

The County Council should ensure that the assessment of current buildings needs to be carried out against established criteria which can identify those buildings that are high priority, medium priority and low priority.

Following this exercise, discussions should be entered into regarding the possible transfer of the assets to the community. This should be based on a full risk and sustainability assessment.

The County Council should not consider off loading costly liabilities onto local communities.

The County Council should explore opportunities offered through the “Community Assets Fund” to make this real.

The Community Buildings Consortium should be invited to take a lead role in facilitating discussions with key stakeholders (Community Trustees and the County Council in the first instance), to determine the level of interest and associated challenges.

The Community Buildings Consortium should be commissioned by the Local Area Agreement Board as part of its Sustainable Communities Strategy to undertake this exercise.

3. Multi-purpose community centre organisations provide an effective means to support and engage the wider community.

They can make a significant contribution to the County Councils plans to:

- consult and inform local people on policy and local need;
- engage local people to help shape public services;
- build social capital and active, responsible citizenship;
- strengthen community cohesion through cross-community activity;
- provide the means for local people to volunteer for benefit of their community;
- provide informal services to enhance community well-being, and
- access hard-to-reach groups.

Community centres should reach out to a wide range of people in the community and, where possible, develop activities with a range of users of community buildings. They should aim to work together for the good of the communities they serve. Local authorities should adopt a consistent approach that is appropriate to the range of groups that are involved.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Durham Strategic Partnership Framework may wish to reflect in its Sustainable Community Strategy, informed by the County Councils Community Buildings Strategy, the benefits and support for one stop shop /multi purpose community centres in meeting the needs of local communities and responding to the shared vision of local partners.

Through the Partnership Framework opportunities could then be facilitated with partners to consider joining up “community based facilities” that reflect a one stop shop type arrangement making best use of resource to strategically meet the needs of the communities served.

4. Where community centre organisations have the required capacity or potential, to achieve it, local authorities should consider transferring community buildings or assets to that organisation either through disposal of freehold or long leases.
The County Council should ensure that the community centres in our area have access to practical guidance on the management of their activities and assets such as health and safety, need for DDA compliance and management of the building. Community organisations must be supported in managing the asset. The County Council should support relevant training and building the capacity of communities to manage and make full use of these vital local assets.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should invest in capacity building initiatives for local management committees (trustees) to support them manage and better understand for example their legal responsibilities, the need for DDA compliance and associated management issues.

The County Council should explore through a Community Buildings Strategy the need to have a dedicated resource within each of its community buildings that would support community trustees and help deliver the business of the organisation.

5. The County Council should ensure that community buildings within its portfolio are brought up to a good state of repair.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should identify resources that will help support a programme of repair and maintenance. A programme of repair should be considered as part of a Community Buildings Strategy.

A Community Buildings Strategy should reflect an assessment of the quality of the County Council's building stock and take into account the stock of partner agencies, with a view to "pooling" resources with partner organisations so that a strategic approach is adopted when investing in community based services delivered through "joined up" one stop shop arrangement that meets the needs of the community and makes best use of resource.

6. Service level agreements are generally helpful to both parties as a supplement to a lease. Care should be taken to avoid unnecessary restrictions and to specify achievable and jointly owned outcomes. This should be done within the context of the local COMPACT.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should agree a standard for Service Level Agreements (SLA) that provide for a contractual arrangement with Community providers.

The standard should be underpinned directly by the local COMPACT (that provides the framework for an SLA) and be COMPACT compliant.

It should be outcome focussed and people centred.

It should reflect principles of Equality and Diversity and taking into account a children and young persons centred perspective.

7. Community organisations bring a wide range of activities and benefits to local people. A community building can promote cohesion by bringing different people and groups together for a variety of purposes. The neighbourhood can benefit from investment, job creation and greater pride and confidence in its area. Public service providers benefit from stronger relationships with frontline organisations, which are well placed to tap into community networks and resources. The review of community management and ownership of public assets, led by Barry Quirk (Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham), is expected to make further recommendations to Government shortly. The report of the Review will be published in May 2007 and will be followed soon after by the Government's implementation plan.

RECOMMENDATION

The County Council should promote the benefits of its community buildings in promoting quality of life issues.

The County Council should support the dissemination of this report to a wide range of stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally with a view to celebrating the work of community organisations in promoting the quality of life of their community.

The County Council should extend an invitation to Barry Quirk, who is leading on a review of community management and ownership of public assets, to meet with the key stakeholders to share his views on the review and explore opportunities for how best the County Council and its partners may support community management and ownership of public assets.

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT PLAN FOR THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

TITLE:

COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

REMIT:

- What is the County Councils Corporate responsibility for buildings and provision locally?
- How best can we establish a systematic and robust mechanism to ensure we monitor outcomes and performance within our Community Buildings and demonstrate that we are achieving value for money;
- What Strategic approach do we have in place to support, grow and build capacity for “Communities”?
- What benefits our Community Buildings deliver?
- Is there a role for Service Level Agreements (SLA`s);?
- Do we distribute resources equitably or should we target resources to areas of greatest need to maintain our Community Building stock?
- What are the implications for Transfer of Assets?
- What are the policy drivers regarding Community Buildings and support for Communities
- Ultimately to provide a clear strategic steer to give a sustainable future for community buildings.

WHEN	WHO	WHAT	HOW	WHY
Dates/Time/Location	Key Witness	Evidence/Information	Meeting/Visit/ Correspondence /Briefing Paper/ Research	Focus on Remit
1 August	Dave Emmerson Craig Morgan Ken Pearson	Current Position	Meeting/ Presentation	Context setting/challenges / opportunities
7 September 11:00 am Council Chamber	Dave Emmerson Craig Morgan Ann Armstrong	Policy Drivers to include LAA. DCC responsibility for buildings and provision. (statutory and moral obligation) Examples of how it's working. CONCLUSIONS:- Need for a strategic Approach;	Meeting /Presentation	Understanding Moral/Statutory responsibility ;key drivers for change; nature of provision in Community buildings
3 October 10am Room 2	Dave Emmerson Ann Armstrong	Resource Implications:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical • Technical/ professional • Social Review of Partnerships –Community Hubs/hub and spoke approaches. CONCLUSIONS:- Need a community buildings policy-this must be outcomes focussed; asset management plan to be part of this strategy; need to engage partnerships;	Meeting/ Presentation	Are we achieving value for money? How best can we maximise public sector funding through joint venture/partnershi p working to improve our Community Buildings.

		must have an SLA with Community Organisations for accountability and performance monitoring purposes. LAA is an important vehicle to deliver this joined up agenda. Asset appraisal is an important next step.		
10 October 10am room 2	Peter Brookes Dave Emmerson	The need for a strategic approach to Communities and Community Buildings. Conclusions: Clearly a need for a strategic approach.	Meeting/ Presentation	Value for money; Responding in a co-ordinated way to the needs of our communities.
27 October 10am room 1b	Ann Armstrong NHS contact (Kevin Oxley/GT) County Durham network for Voluntary Services/ One Voice Network/DRCC Jo Laverick, Belinda Lewis, Fergus Arkley, Michele Armstrong, 01388 762220 or at m.armstrong@2d.org Carl Chapman .(TBC) Carl@onevoice.co.uk Ian Pillar (TBC) Frank Firth	Opportunities for partnership/joint ventures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NHS• Voluntary and Community Organisations• Children Centres;• Schools Conclusions: Need to join up opportunities	Meeting /Presentation	How best can we establish a systematic and robust mechanism to ensure we monitor outcomes and performance within our Community Buildings; Is there a role for Service Level Agreements (SLA`s);?
7 November 11am (venue tbc)	Dave Emmerson Ken Pearson Craig Morgan Dave Emmerson	Asset Considerations/Asset appraisal Service Level Agreements(SLA`s)	Meeting /Presentation	What are the implications for Transfer of Assets?

*Monday 27 November	Craig Morgan to arrange	Meeting with local Community Building Trustees to listen to their views /issues/ideas; Involve staff working in our buildings	Evening meeting in an appropriate venue	What Strategic approach do we have in place to support, grow and build capacity for "Communities"?
Tuesday 12 December at 10am room 1b	Kevin Oxley Tracy Hardy PCT?	NHS Input	Meeting	
Tuesday 2 January at 11am room 1b				
Wednesday 10 January at 11am room 1a		VISIT		
Friday 26 January at 11am room 1b	Craig Morgan County Durham Compact: Alanna Smith Alanna@onevoice.co.uk telephone 01429 823067.	Draft SLA Compact arrangements locally		
Monday 5 February at 10am room 2		Recap/ other Evidence needed Conclusions/ Recommendations		
Monday 19 February at 10am room 1a		Recap/ other Evidence needed Conclusions/ Recommendations		