

GROWTH, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No.6
10th January 2023	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Rob Hill, Service Director - Communities	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Steve Allen, Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Communications.	
Contact Officer(s):	Matt Oliver (Head of Think Communities) Felicity Paddick (Estates Manager)	07919213962

Community Asset Transfer Programme Update

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Rob Hill	Deadline date:
<p>It is recommended that Growth, Resources and Communities Scrutiny Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the current position of the Community Asset Transfer programme 2. Note the progress made toward the completion of the review 3. Note and comment on the approach and early findings of the review 4. Note the timescales set out in respect review of community assets and the community asset transfer programme. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is presented at the request of the Scrutiny Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the status of the Community Asset Transfer Programme, the activity being undertaken to support our community assets and to seek recommendations from members for next steps.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 The Council agreed a 5-year programme of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) in 2013 focused on building community capacity and empowerment, driving community development and focus on local provision. The approach was to achieve value for money and create financial sustainability for our community centres and other assets, having an effect of reducing council costs, liabilities and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of Council owned community assets through local management.

4.2 The approach of the programme was to offer long leases to local groups in order to transfer risk and responsibility of assets through offering full running, repair and maintenance leases at peppercorn rates. The programme was designed to fit with the council's asset management plan and assessed applications from groups for suitability, capability and for best fit with local

communities. To support groups in the initial phase of the programme, early works were undertaken by the council and grants offered to support transfers to be feasible.

4.3 Criteria for assessment of applications by groups are set out below:

- Community service is to be provided
- Demonstration of equality of access
- Good track record of governance, finance and performance management
- Should be not for profit only, with no commercial or individual interest
- Should be a clear operational plan

The programme was limited to Council owned assets and excluded schools or social care buildings and those with significant capital receipt potential and those where Council lose revenue as a result.

4.4 **Current Position**

The programme was placed on hold in June 2021 while the council reviewed its financial position in relation to the capital programme.

4.5 The current status of the programme is set out below and remains paused while work is undertaken to review the next steps for the CAT programme.

- Total community centres considered for CAT = 36
- Total transferred to date = 9
- Total held pending review = 10
- Historical lease in place and rejected for CAT = 2
- Centres with no proposal for CAT = 15

4.6 So far the team are around a third of the way through the work to review the 36 CAT centres, and are prioritising activity by the following criteria:

- Those with known health and safety compliance issues
- Those with known structural maintenance issues
- Those who have reached out for support

4.7 A picture is building of the complexity of lease arrangements, compliance issues, costs of ongoing maintenance, differing levels of management quality and capability, and alongside a paper based back office review the community team are offering practical support and when needed enforcement activity where centres are not complying with lease conditions as we progress through the process.

4.8 The impact of Covid 19 and the Cost-of-Living crisis upon our community centres cannot be understated and in undertaking our review we have found that even the most robust management organisations are struggling to maintain viability. The community team are aware of at least 4 community centres where there is the potential for a centre needing to be handed back to the authority and we must consider this additional pressure within our findings.

4.9 In conjunction with the ongoing review of assets in the scope of the CAT programme work is planned to audit all assets of community value in order to take a holistic approach to activity in any given community. This work is a significant undertaking and in recognition of the length of time that the CAT programme has been paused, additional resources have been made available from January 2023 to progress the work.

4.10 Both the CAT review and wider review of assets of community value (AOCV) understandably need to be undertaken in unison to consider the learning of the implementation and

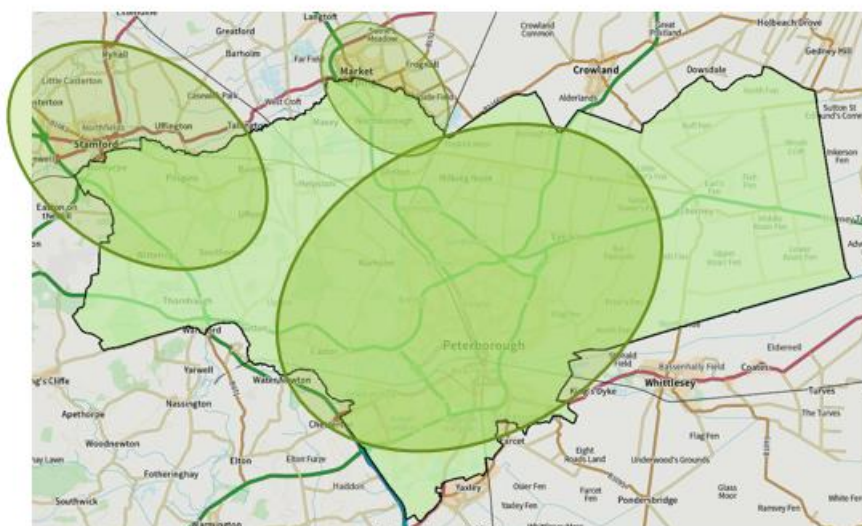
management of the programme over the last 9 years, the financial challenge for communities and the council, as well as Peterborough City Councils strategic priorities.

4.11 Therefore the approach of the review takes the opportunity to consider assets at a macro and micro community level with officers capturing information in respect of:

- Value for Money
- Accessibility
- Duplication of activity
- Sustainability
- Governance
- Activity against PCC priorities

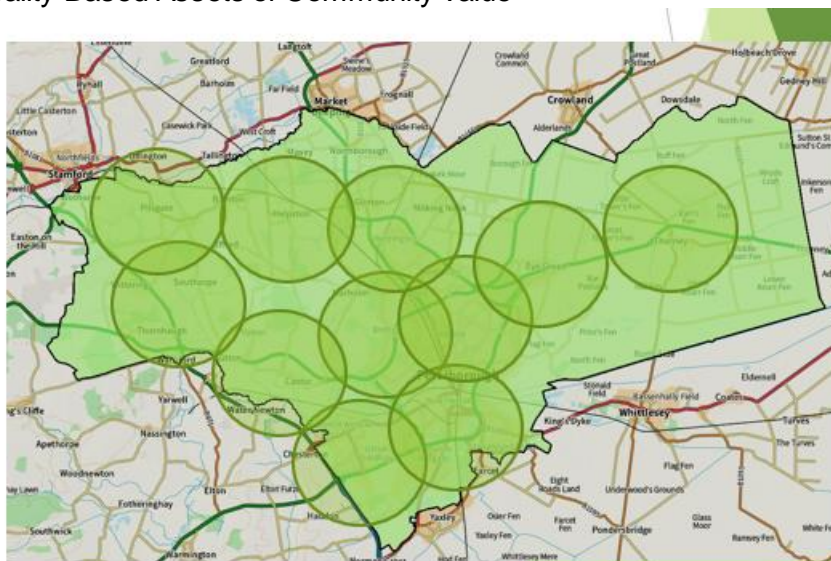
An illustration of how we are geographically approaching this work is set out in 4.12 and 4.13 below.

4.12 City Wide Assets of Community Value



Swimming Pools
Theatres
Museums
Central Library
Larger Parks

4.13 Locality Based Assets of Community Value



Local Libraries
Community Centres
Schools
Faith Venues
Smaller green spaces

4.14 Although the council has not fully completed the review of the CAT programme and wider assets of community value, some early findings are emerging which will help to shape recommendations for future policy and these can be broadly captured in the following areas:

- Need for a framework for local community assets to work together.
- Need for a regular programme of compliance oversight.
- The development of a consistent and standardised process and policy for asset transfer

4.15 **Framework for local community assets to work together**

In recent months community centres, amongst other local venues have been at the heart of the response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis, opening their doors as warm spaces, offering access to food, fuel and essential supplies support. Community officers have been working closely with those centres through this period and in undertaking the review our tenants have told us of the importance of being able to work together in a connected way, to be able to support residents in their communities at the earliest point and that the role of the council in this is important to them.

4.16 **Increased programme of compliance oversight**

Through the work that has been completed to date there have been a number of incidents where it has become apparent that our timescales for contact with community centres have been too infrequent, the financial impact of Covid 19 and now the cost of living crisis has exacerbated the effect of tenants struggling to comply with health and safety or maintenance requirements of lease conditions. Officers have already increased their visits to our CAT transferred centres to offer support to address immediate issues pending the completion of full review findings.

4.17 **The development of a consistent and standardised process and policy for asset transfer**

The unintended consequences of taking an individualised approach to each asset transfer, working on the strengths and unique position of each group as well as identifying certain assets for transfer has meant that there are some inconsistencies in historical terms and conditions across our estate, although this is not uncommon in most local authorities the development of a standardised offer to local groups based on short term rental, medium term occupancy arrangements and long term asset transfer should be considered alongside an open and transparent criteria for application.

4.18 As mentioned in 4.9 of the report it is the intention to complete the review of the CAT programme in before March 2023 alongside the audit of wider assets of community value which will be a longer piece of work. The result of this being the production of a single overview of local assets based on the criteria set out in this report which will support officers to set out recommendations to the council.

5. **CONSULTATION**

5.1 No consultation has been undertaken at this point due to being part way through the review, consultation will be undertaken with members and local stakeholders upon completion of the review as well as communication with tenants who may be affected by any recommendations from the review.

6. **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT**

6.1 As set out in the report a review of CAT is underway and the anticipated outcome is the production of a single overview of asset transferred centres in line with the criteria set out in this report. The ultimate impact of the review is yet to be determined.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 To update members on the progress of the CAT programme and review of assets of community value and to gain the views of members in respect of early findings and approach to the review.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 Option 1 – cease the review of CAT and AOCV with the result of no further progression of the programme or set policy to provide clarity on the councils approach to unlocking the potential of community assets or rationalising the councils capital assets.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no financial implications at this point – these will be set out in future reports as a result of the review and subsequent recommendations.

Legal Implications

- 9.2 There are no legal implications at this point – these will be set out in future reports as a result of the review and subsequent recommendations.

Equalities Implications

- 9.3 An equality impact assessment will be undertaken alongside further recommendations associated with the review.

Rural Implications

- 9.4 As in 9.3

Carbon Impact Assessment

- 9.5 The report contains no proposals for changes to service delivery and therefore there is no decision to take which may impact carbon emissions of the council or the city.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 None

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