

## **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER**

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### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report advises Members of the current status of the Community Asset Transfer programme and seeks authority to make budgetary adjustments for those centres which do not wish to pursue transfer.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009, Cabinet endorsed the proposed approach to Community Asset Transfer. It agreed a list of assets to be transferred and resolved that the two year time frame for Community Asset Transfer would expire on 16 January 2011.
- 2.2 On 19 March 2009, Cabinet agreed a Community Asset Transfer Policy and the mechanism for financial support for transfers to community groups through an application to the Community Fund.
- 2.3 Earlier this year, the Council's bid for £4.5million funding from the Community Fund to support the CAT programme was approved by WPH and the Community Fund Joint Working Group. This bid covers the financial years 2009/10 to 2011/12, inclusive. Accordingly it runs until 31 March 2012.

### **3. Current Position**

- 3.1 Cabinet, at its meeting on 24th June 2010, considered a report by the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management on the Community Asset Transfer ('CAT') programme. The report identified issues that would be raised by a change to the previously agreed deadline, by which all transfers were to have been completed, and sought Cabinet's guidance on the way forward.
- 3.2 Cabinet resolved as follows:
- (1) the date for completion of Community Asset Transfer be extended until 31 March 2012 to align with the deadline for the availability of the Community Fund;
  - (2) it be emphasised to local community groups that financial support to transfer Assets from the Council to the Community beyond 31 March 2012 cannot be guaranteed and that access to the £4.5 million Community Fund will not be available after that date;
  - (3) the Council supports local community groups with asset transfer by assigning a named Council officer to assist them through the process who will report back to Cabinet members each month with an update on progress. This officer will also assist in the identification of suitable voluntary sector / faith based organisations with which community groups might wish to enter into partnership arrangements;

(4) Community Assets where communities are unwilling or unable to proceed with Asset Transfer are identified as a matter of urgency and removed from the programme, in order to enable a greater level of support to those groups willing and able to move forward with transfer and to enable the Council to budget more accurately for future levels of support;

(5) decisions on the future of the community centres or halls that cannot transfer by the revised 2012 date via the process outlined above be deferred until the Governance Commission has reported its findings and the extent of future delegation has been determined.

- 3.3 In response to resolution (4) each group involved with a building identified for CAT has been contacted to determine whether it wishes to proceed with the transfer, or whether it is unable or unwilling to proceed. The responses are summarised as follows:

**Centres which have transferred:**

- 3.4 Pensby Community Centre, Windsor Close and Moreton Community Centre. The Turntable Building is now occupied by the Merseyside Model Railway Society.

**Centres for which transfer has previously been approved by Cabinet:**

- 3.5 Bromborough Social Centre and Grange Road West Recreation Centre.

**Centres where groups wish to continue with CAT are as follows:**

- 3.6 Beechwood Community Recreation Centre, Beechwood Community Centre, Kylemore Community Centre, Greasby Community Centre, Noctorum Community Centre, Woodchurch Community Centre, Liscard Community Centre, Grosvenor Ballroom, Hoylake Community Centre, Westbourne Community Centre, Overton Community Centre, Vale House, New Ferry Village Hall, Delamere Community Centre, New Brighton Community Centre, Leasowe Lighthouse, Heswall Hall, Mayer Hall, Alexander Hall and Victoria Hall.

**Centres where groups are unwilling or unable to proceed with the transfer:**

- 3.7 Gautby Road Play and Community Centre, Livingstone Street Play and Community Centre, Seacombe Community Centre and Leasowe Community Centre.

**Centres with no groups currently identified for transfer:**

- 3.8 The Grange, Ivy Farm and 65 The Village.

**4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 In accordance with resolution (4) included at item 3.2, those centres where the groups have confirmed that they are unwilling or unable to proceed with CAT are to be removed from the process. Additionally, those centres with groups which wish to proceed with transfer be encouraged and assisted in doing so.
- 4.2 Of the centres identified as having no groups, two have been advertised for CAT in accordance with the policy and have generated no suitable interest. The other, Ivy

Farm, was an operational building until March this year and its future will now be considered in conjunction with adjoining assets in Arrowe Park. In all four cases, the properties present challenges and opportunities which require more detailed consideration as to their future requirements or uses. It is therefore recommended that these properties also be removed from the Community Asset Transfer process in order that they may be subject to property review and option appraisal.

## **5. Financial implications**

5.1 Revenue savings to be achieved by vacating assets primarily relate to the actual running costs of buildings (e.g. rates, energy, water, insurance) and from the savings in staff costs that arise when direct service delivery ceases.

5.2 The budgets will need to be re-instated for the running costs of those buildings to be removed from the process:

	£
Gautby Road Play and Community Centre	13,100
Livingstone Street Play and community Centre	14,700
Leasowe Community Centre	6,500
The Grange	<u>13,100</u>
	<u>47,400</u>

Costs for Ivy Farm, 65 The Village and Seacombe Community Centre are currently met from budgets that are not specific to those facilities.

5.3 Retention of these seven assets will require the examination of the provision for expenditure on backlog repair and maintenance, together with future 'life cycle' maintenance costs.

5.4 The approved bid to the Community Fund for £4.5 million to support the CAT programme has a deadline for expenditure of 31 March 2012. There is no guarantee that if this funding is unused by 31 March 2012 that it will remain available.

## **6. Staffing implications**

6.1 A mixture of community development staff and caretakers work as part of the Community Services Team. They will be directly affected by the Community Asset Transfer process as they will not have functions once the proposed number of community buildings is transferred.

6.2 These staffing issues will be managed through the Council's existing Human Resources policies and processes with reports being brought to the relevant Committee in due course.

## **7. Equal Opportunities implications/Equality Impact Implications**

7.1 Transferring properties will be required within the terms of the lease to comply with all current legislation, including equal opportunities.

## **8. Community Safety implications**

8.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **9. Local Agenda 21 implications**

9.1 In undertaking works to properties as part of the transfer process, consideration will be given to energy savings.

## **10. Planning implications**

10.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **11. Anti-poverty implications**

11.1 None arising directly from this report

## **12. Human Rights implications**

12.1 None arising directly from this report

## **13. Social Inclusion implications**

13.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **14. Local Member Support implications**

14.1 This report will be of interest to all members.

## **15. Background Papers**

15.1 Cabinet reports:

15 January 2009 – Transforming Wirral – Strategic Asset Review

19 March 2009 – Asset Management Update

24 June 2010 – Community Asset Transfer

## **16. RECOMMENDATIONS**

16.1 That properties with groups which have expressed an interest in proceeding with Community Asset Transfer, remain within the transfer process.

16.2 That those properties with groups unwilling or unable to proceed, or without existing groups, be removed from the transfer process.

16.3 That such groups which are unwilling or unable to proceed at present are reminded;

(i) that financial support to transfer assets from the Council to the Community beyond 31 March 2012 cannot be guaranteed and that access to the £4.5m Community Fund will not be available after that date, and;

(ii) decisions on the future of facilities that do not transfer by 31 March 2012 will be deferred until the Governance Commission has reported its findings and the extent of future delegation has been determined.

16.4 The Director of Finance be authorised to make the necessary budgetary adjustments as identified in 5.2 totalling £47,400 funds to be reinstated from balances in 2010/11 and a permanent increase in budget from 2011/12.

**Bill Norman**

Director of Law HR & Asset Management