

Feedback on the Community Asset Transfer consultation

Introduction

Consultation on the draft Community Asset Transfer Strategy and toolkit ran for 12 weeks from 25th Feb to 19th May 2013. This summary captures all the feedback received.

Consultation methods

All current tenants of the 16 council community centres and 2 community buildings were sent a letter before the consultation started introducing the concept of Community Asset Transfer. All contacts, approximately 1750, (both internal and external) on the Communities and Improvement contacts database were notified by email informing them of the consultation. The consultation questionnaire was available to submit electronically or through downloading. Documents available to download were the draft strategy, toolkit and application forms. These were available on the Southampton Online website from 25th Feb 2013 to 19th May 2013. At a later date draft appraisal forms were added, as well as Microsoft Word documents to allow MAC users to download.

Three workshop sessions were held – Monday 04 March 2013, 6am to 8pm, Friday 19 April 2013, 2pm to 4pm and Thursday 02 May 2013, 10am-12noon – with council officers delivering presentations and available to answer queries about the draft strategy and toolkit.

After a recommendation by attendees at the first workshop session, it was agreed that a final wash-up session would take place on Wednesday 12 June, 6pm- 8pm, open to all who had taken part in the consultation.

For those that had queries but were unable to attend any of the drop-in sessions the council had a single point of contact so that queries could be answered. Individual meetings were held with organisations who expressed an interest in finding out more about CAT and where applicable to discuss specific issues.

Key themes

A number of key themes emerged from both the online and face-to-face consultation:

- The need for the process to be transparent throughout. Particular issues highlighted included disclosure of competing interests; ensuring appraisers declared any conflicts of interests; advertising assets that the council has declared as surplus with a time limit for applications; ensuring that liabilities associated with an asset are made clear and that the council provides any information it has about an asset with a building information pack covering issues like running costs, need for repairs and maintenance. This is to enable a group to be able to have upfront costs; recent condition surveys (where available), floor plans and if possible the cost of the freehold or leasehold that the council is expecting, before considering whether to submit an expression of interest.
- Organisations felt that the council should consider creating guidance notes to accompany applications at all stages of the process. In addition, the need for the process and application forms to be able to cater for both existing organisations and those formed solely for the purposes of taking on an asset was raised.

- Some of the smaller community organisations have recognised that they would need assistance in creating business plans and to apply for funding. Particular areas of support mentioned were business planning, setting up a social enterprise, creating a trading arm and applying for funding.
- Various community organisations have commented that applying for CAT would involve a lot of work and could put a strain on small organisations. There is a clear need for the council to ensure that it signposts effectively to help smaller community organisations in the city wishing to explore CAT.
- In the case of competing bids, where appropriate, organisations would welcome the council playing a brokering role to explore collaborative bids.
- There was interest in the idea of investigating whether an umbrella organisation for managing community buildings could be set up to help reduce the burden of building management on smaller organisations and provide networking opportunities.
- Making the process as easy to understand as possible, with guidance notes and a business plan template.
- A long lease of 25 to 99 years to be decided on a case by case basis was generally agreed to be the right length of time. It was also mentioned that any lease should clearly highlight the responsibilities of the council and the tenant and breach agreements should also be made clear.
- The need to protect the transferred asset for community use through asset locks, buy back rights was supported.
- A comment was received relating to the need for the council to review clauses, subletting and social enterprises.
- Recognition that community, voluntary and faith groups could access funding streams that the council cannot access and could bring additional creativity and innovation.
- Details of the appraisal process – how will the council measure/determine social, economic and environmental wellbeing? How important is it for an organisation to have a kite mark? It was felt by some responders that an organisation's track record should provide sufficient evidence.
- The need to include sufficient time within the process for applicants to consider making a submission and for the council to have an ongoing dialogue with applicants. Comments on the timeframe suggest the need for this to be extended, in order for committees to meet. This will also allow time for brokering with partners wishing to collaborate.
- Throughout the consultation period it has been mentioned that there is a need to have an assigned officer to manage the applications and any queries an organisation might have. Consultees also felt that this is good customer service.
- A number of organisations have expressed interest in exploring community asset transfer in relation to a specific asset; a number have also expressed interest in the concept of an umbrella body.
- The need to distinguish between Community Asset Transfer and Community Right to Bid.
- A comment was made that the council need to emphasise that a charity has a duty under law to take professional advice and take care of their assets.
- The online survey, despite being promoted through routes below, has not received many responses. The council received 11 completed online surveys, one of which was incorrectly completed through misunderstanding the nature of the survey.

Those who did complete the questionnaire all said that their organisation would need assistance with business planning, assistance in applying for funding and risk management. One organisation left a comment stating that 'too much is passed on to voluntary members' and another stating that they would like the council to retain the 'management of community assets, so that they [the assets] will always be available for the people of the city'.

- Due to the complexity of the subject the face to face meetings and consultation workshops have proven to be a more popular form of communication and have allowed the council to get some useful feedback.
- For the council to create a 'You said, we did' type document providing full feedback on consultation.

Organisations that provided feedback

Existing SCC tenants	Other organisations wanting to explore CAT	Others (internal/external)
Black Heritage Association (St Albans)	Age UK	Day Services, SCC
Coxford Community Association	City Life Church	Early Years, SCC
Freemantle and Shirley Community Association	Just Centres	Estate Regeneration
Kutchi Association (St Albans)	Local residents interested in reopening Harefield Community Centre	Health DMT
Lordshill Community Association	Local residents interested in inner city youth buildings 12 th February	Members via briefing
Lordswood Community Association	Pakistani Welfare Association	Parklife
Northam Community Association	Red Lodge Community Pool	Property Services, SCC/ Capita
Swaythling Neighbourhood Association	RISE	Swaythling Ward Councillors
St Denys Community Association	Royal British Legion	Unison and Unite
Townhill Park Community Association	Second Chance Animal Welfare Charity	Community Matters
Workers Education Association (Clovelly Centre)	Southampton Wood Recycling Project	Locality
	University of Southampton	S.C.O.F & Solent Business Growth Network
	West Itchen Community Trust	Riverside Family church
	Creative Options	Football Association
	Society of St James	
	Harefield Residents	

Consultation

Date/s	What	Who
Online/ Email/ Social Media		
25/02/2013	Email promoting the opening of CAT consultation	1750 contacts (internal/ external) on Communities and Improvement contacts database
12/03/2013	Facebook and Twitter promotion of CAT consultation	Facebook friends and Twitter followers
25/03/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Mike Tucker, Mark Wood and Hayley Garner
26/02/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Steve Smith (SCC), Paul Mansbridge (Capita), Victoria Westhorpe (Cabinet Office), Andrew Elliot (Capita)
26/02/2013	Emailed Community Centre Newsletter, included link to CAT consultation	Community Centre Chairpersons
27/02/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Tony Montague (Stockton – upon- tees CAT unit) and Stephen Rolph – (Locality)
14/04/2013	Email reminding and promoting the CAT consultation	1750 contacts (internal/ external) on Communities and Improvement contacts database
12/04/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Stephenie Linham (Community Matters)
25/04/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Jo Ash (SVS)
25/04/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Various local Voluntary sector orgs/ Housing Assocs
25/04/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Community Development Networkers meeting
25/04/2013	Facebook and Twitter promotion of CAT consultation	Facebook friends and Twitter followers
26/04/2013	Promoted consultation	Communities Newsletter
01/05/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation	Palmerston House RA
15/05/2013	Emailed link to CAT consultation, reminder of closing date	1750 contacts (internal/ external) on Communities and Improvement contacts database
17/05/2013	Facebook and Twitter promotion of CAT consultation	Facebook friends and Twitter followers
17/05/2013	Promoted consultation	Communities Newsletter

Letters		
07/02/2013	Introducing CAT	Sitting tenants (16 community centres and 2 resource centres)
Face to face meetings with organisations		
25/02/2013	CAT briefing	West Itchen Community Trust
25/02/2013	CAT briefing	Southampton University
26/02/2013	CAT briefing	Royal British Legion
27/02/2013	CAT briefing	Black Heritage Assoc
07/03/2013	CAT briefing	Lordshill Community Assoc
19/03/2013	CAT briefing	Kutchi Group
20/03/2013	CAT briefing	Just Centres
27/03/2013	CAT briefing	Coxford Community Assoc
04/04/2013	CAT briefing	City Life Church
26/02/2013 and 05/04/2013	CAT briefing	Workers Education Assoc
08/04/2013	CAT briefing	Pakistani Welfare Assoc
19/04/2013	CAT briefing	Lordswood Community Assoc
24/04/2013	CAT briefing	RISE
24/04/2013	CAT briefing	Second Chance Animal Rescue
25/04/2013	CAT briefing and exploring ideas	Harefield Residents
30/04/2013	CAT briefing	Northam Community Link (Association)
16/05/2013	CAT briefing	S.C.O.F & S.B.G.N
Public Meetings		
04/03/2013	CAT Consultation workshop	Open to public
19/04/2013	CAT Consultation workshop	Open to public
02/05/2013	CAT Consultation workshop	Open to public
SCC face-to-face briefings		
22/02/2013	CAT briefing	Unison and Unite Union reps
26/03/2103	CAT briefing	Steve Smith, SCC
25/02/2013	CAT briefing	John Connelly, SCC
26/02/2013	CAT briefing	Pat Hoyes, SCC
28/02/2013	CAT briefing	Simon Dennison, SCC
28/02/2013	CAT briefing	Health DMT
08/03/2013	CAT briefing	Housing DMT

08/03/2013	Ward member briefing	Swaythling Ward Councillors
18/03/2013	Member briefing	Members
20/03/2013	CAT briefing	Emma Aldred (Estate Regen, SCC)
22/03/2013	CAT briefing	Anne Downie (Early Years, SCC)
09/04/2013	CAT briefing	Communities and Improvement team and Robin McDonald (Economic Development)

Other date

Date/s	What	Who
12/06/2013	CAT Consultation workshop –wash up (feedback session)	Invitation sent to all those who were responded during the consultation period