

Feedback received on the Community Asset Transfer Strategy and process

Introduction

The Council provided an opportunity for organisations and individuals to provide feedback on the current Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Strategy and process from 20th February to 20th March 2015. This summary captures the feedback received.

Feedback method

All Community Centres and community buildings in scope for the CAT pilot phase and those who had first-hand experience of the strategy and process received an email inviting them to provide feedback through a short survey.

An opportunity was also provided to organisations/ individuals who took part in the initial consultation in 2013, inviting them to share ideas and provide feedback on the strategy and process. For example what they thought about the length of the process and whether existing tenants should get first refusal. Reminder emails were sent out on 5th March 2015 and 19th March 2015.

In addition, the Council's weekly Community News and Events e-bulletin also promoted the opportunity for organisations and individuals to provide feedback, an article was placed in each edition from w/c 23rd March for four editions. This newsletter is received by over 6,000 residents and organisations across the city.

Feedback - key themes

Ten organisations provided feedback and a number of key themes emerged. A summary has been provided below:

The Strategy

- There was a general consensus that existing tenants should have first refusal.
- One respondent explained that it is important for sitting tenants to get first refusal because they are already serving the local community and have the local knowledge.
- If tenants do not wish to have first refusal then they should have the opportunity to form partnerships with other potential applicants, and they could still have a say on the outcome.
- Where there is more than one existing tenant, it would be difficult to offer to first refusal.

The process

- The process is too slow and takes too long, the Council ask for irrelevant information.
- Anything that slims down the system is acceptable.
- Should be made simple, it is a very large piece of work.
- The current process is all far too complicated.
- Process is onerous and complex.
- CAT is just too scary and really not what most community groups want or indeed can deliver.

- Having the option of a lease term that is the same length of the DfE clawback would be useful.
- Costly for volunteers to undertake.
- Time scales are very-long winded.

Information and guidance provided by SCC

- Organisations were pleased with the information available and the support from the Link Officer.
- Provided enough information and guidance, however still needed further external support.
- Healthy feedback from the Panel has shown genuine concern for the success of Community Asset Transfer and the benefit to the local community.

Other feedback

- Heads of Terms should be available at the start of the process for each asset – groups can then make an informed decision.
- In general, community groups want to do things for communities and not manage property and worry how to pay the next bill.
- Through CAT, SCC are ensuring that Community Centres remain an asset to communities, but there is fear that rather than enabling communities to continue with community activities CAT will reduce community activities greatly in general and may mean higher rental charges that could result in community groups leaving or folding.
- One group have sought a partner for some time and this has not yet come to fruition.

Community Asset Transfer Appraisal Panel

It was also important to seek feedback from the CAT Appraisal Panel, this was done through short face-to-face interviews. The role of the Panel is to assess stage 1 and 2 applications and consists of a wide range of council officers from the following areas:

- CAT programme lead officer
- Transformation
- Regeneration (Grants)
- Risk and Assurance
- Property
- Legal and Finance (where necessary)
- Early Years Services (where necessary)

Panel feedback

- The role of the Link Officer could be more pro-active, go through application with applicant before being submitted.
- Stage 2 could be shorter, as there is a risk for groups to lose momentum if given too long - for information the council's large grants have an 8 week application deadline.
- Application forms need to be revised – the ordering of questions and some sections are repetitive.

- There is a good mix of officers present on the Panel, all bring their knowledge and experience when assessing applications.
- Beneficial to have face-to-face meeting with applying organisation at Stage 2.

Feedback was provided by the following organisations/ individuals:

Organisations with first-hand experience

- Black Heritage Association
- City Life Church
- Kutchi Cultural Association
- Woolston Community Association
- Moorlands Community Association
- Townhill Park Community Association

Other organisations who provided feedback

- Southampton Voluntary Services
- Training for Work In Communities (TWICS)
- Independent CAT consultant
- Block Rep