



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Designing an outcomes approach for asset management at the neighbourhood level
Date:	26 June 2012
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	At both a national and regional level, there is heightened policy interest in community ownership and the management of assets. The 2007 Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets signalled that the transfer of public assets to community-based organisations should become a mainstream rather than an exceptional activity and in England this policy has been developed through the Localism agenda. Regionally, through the Concordat agreement between Local and Central Government and the Voluntary & Community Sectors, there is a commitment to 'investigate the potential for community asset management and ownership in NI'.
1.2	Practice across the UK and Republic of Ireland demonstrates the real opportunity for community empowerment offered by asset transfer and experience shows that it works best as part of a wider strategy of good partnership working between communities, the third sector and the public sector. The underlying premise of such transfers is that in delivering sustainable local outcomes it is important to have communities fully involved in the design and delivery of services and that asset ownership and/or management is a vehicle to support community empowerment.
1.3	In summary, communities can be supported to become stronger and more sustainable by assisting them to obtain and develop assets such as land or buildings. These enterprising community organisations actively involve and benefit the communities they serve by working towards improving the services and/or facilities for their community and by demonstrating their proposals are sustainable in the long-term, taking into account the environmental, social and economic impacts of their work.
1.4	This notion of enterprise and associated culture change regarding the interaction between the community sector and funders, customers and service users can be at the heart of any Asset Transfer programme. It can contribute to a new understanding regarding the balance between public and VCS delivery of community based services. Close community involvement in the asset based

	<p>project should also be expected to contribute to a move away from a dependency culture. Any associated programme will support a more strategic engagement between council and the sector and will require us to work closely with the sector to support them and increase their skill levels to work towards organisational sustainability</p>
1.5	<p>Here in the Council the development of any policy for committee consideration around community asset transfer is likely to be our own practice to date and will be further influenced by a number of internal emerging and interlocked pieces of work.</p>
1.6	<p>We've noted some of the main strands below and the lead service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) <u>Assets Management strategy</u> (Assets Board) – putting in place a strategy for the council's entire estate under which any community transfer policy would sit. (ii) <u>Community Development strategy</u> (Development) – which has the potential to describe and measure the social outcomes we want to achieve and some of the approaches to working with communities in trying to achieve them. To an extent the CD strategy should be answering the broader question of 'why we would want to transfer assets to communities?' (iii) <u>Neighbourhood assets framework</u> (Development) – This would sit under the Assets strategy but with the specific focus of determining the best use of our assets in achieving outcomes at the local level (in relation to the assets of other stakeholders in each area)
1.7	<p>The inter-departmental Neighbourhood Assets group will design and implement an outcomes-focused framework for the management of council's land and property assets at the neighbourhood level. The framework will fall within the context of the emerging corporate Assets strategy which is concerned with the wider strategic management of the entire council estate. The framework will be focussed on the subset of the council's estate – that is, those land and property assets that have a local importance within a small geographical area or within specific communities. Such assets might include such assets as community centres, playgrounds and small parks but will not include strategic or citywide assets.</p>
1.8	<p>The ambition is to seek opportunities to improve the management and programming of the council's physical assets and to collaborate with our partners who have their own local assets. As outlined, the model would be developed with reference to other corporate strategies such as the new Investment programme, the Asset Management strategy, Active Belfast, Open Spaces and the Community Development strategy. It would also reflect developments in the external environment including, for example, the emerging Social Investment Fund and the DSD/Council Service delivery pilot.</p>
1.9	<p>Any emerging plans will be presented for Member consideration and agreement.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>As noted, the Asset Management Board now provides a strategic oversight to the implementation of an assets strategy which would include the development and implementation of the proposed model. The inter-departmental task and finish group will be required to deliver the various work packages associated with</p>

	the development of the model.
2.2	This group reports directly to the Assets Management Board and is chaired by the director of Development with representatives from relevant departments across council.
2.3	<p>There are a number of key elements required in the development of a model and a detailed project plan will be developed to manage the work but will include the following broad areas of work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Best practice research for the model ii. Management information system for local assets: iii. Outcomes framework: iv. A criterion-based decision-making framework: v. Piloting activity
2.4	The Community Foundation Northern Ireland (CFNI) is an independent grant making charity committed to supporting projects that engage local people in making communities and the region a better place to live and enabling communities to work collectively to help themselves. CFNI has been exploring the opportunities and models for co-operation and collaboration between voluntary and community sector organisations including the sharing of premises and overhead costs and sharing of staff, particularly back office staff. In doing so, they are also exploring the scope, potential and feasibility of Asset Transfer and Ethical Property Development in Northern Ireland.
2.5	In doing so CFNI propose the commissioning of a robust consultancy study to frame opportunities and related risks and recommend how the issue could be taken forward.
2.6	They suggest any study should be progressed in partnership and therefore jointed commissioned by DSD, the Council and CFNI given the current and planned future responsibilities for urban regeneration and community development.
2.7	<p>The terms of reference, would be jointly agreed, but could be drafted to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A review of best practice in ethical investment property in the UK and elsewhere to draw out lessons and implications of that best practice for potential ethical investments in property in Northern Ireland – To develop a financial model of a Northern Ireland ethical property investment fund and to apply the model to a range of at least 6 actual potential ethical property investments in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland to draw out in each case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The financial return on investment ✓ The social return on investment ✓ The regeneration return on investment – To develop an indicative priority list of potential projects for an ethical property investment fund for Northern Ireland taking account of financial, social and regeneration returns. – To assess the main barriers and constraints to the establishment of an ethical property investment fund in Northern Ireland and how they might be addressed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To consider a range of organisational forms and structures for an ethical property investment fund in Northern Ireland and to recommend a preferred structure, taking into account inter alia regulatory compliance and taxation issues - To identify potential Third Sector, Public Sector and private investors in an ethical property investment fund for Northern Ireland, in each case detailing their requirements for returns and other criteria for investment
2.8	To make recommendations to CFNI, DSD and the Council on their respective roles in carrying forward an initiative to establish a sustainable ethical property investment fund for Northern Ireland
2.9	CFNI suggest this joint approach with DSD and the Council, in whose area most of the identified opportunities for investment are located, will offer a opportunity to test the model which it has identified against best practice in ethical investment in property and to test the model in relation to a range of potential real investment properties in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	CFNI estimate a maximum cost of £50,000 + VAT for a three month study split equally across the partners. DSD have already indicated their support for the proposal.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	At the conceptual stage of the project there are no equality implications. However these will be considered at the design and implementation stage.

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Members are asked to agree to jointly commission and fund a robust consultancy study to frame opportunities and related risks of Asset Transfer and Ethical Property Development in Northern Ireland.

6	Decision Tracking
<p>Further to Committees consideration of the report:</p> <p>Time line: Reporting Officer: Director of Development</p>	