Progress Update: Springhead Community Association Pilot Scheme

Overview & Scrutiny Safer and Stronger Communities Select Group

Capacity Building Officer (Asset Transfer)

15th February 2010
Crompton Suite

A PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform Overview and Scrutiny Safer and Stronger Communities Select Group of progress in work with Springhead Community Association, the pilot for asset transfer within Oldham.

B SUMMARY

1.1 The Capacity Building Officer (Asset Transfer) came into post on 7th December 2009.

1.2 The officer has attended a number of training sessions, workshops and contacts have been made with others working in the field of asset transfer including officers from Rochdale MBC, the Asset Transfer Unit and the Development Trust Association.

1.3 A meeting has been held with the Chair of Springhead Community Association where a number of issues were raised. A meeting with the full group is being arranged for February (confirmed for 10th February).

1.4 Blue Orchid, in partnership with Voluntary Action Oldham, met with the group on 13th January to discuss what would be the best legal entity for the group to take on as a precursor to asset transfer. The group are now considering the options put to them.

1.5 The Capacity Building officer is currently arranging visits for the management group to other organisations who have successfully completed asset transfer to help the group make this decision.

1.6 An application / expression of interest has been made to the Advancing Assets for Communities Demonstration Programme. This programme offers expert support to local authorities, elected members and their third sector partners to develop joint plans for community asset transfer. (Appendix 1 + 1a)
A Valuation of Springhead Community Centre and a 5 Year Maintenance Strategy Plan and Schedule of Repair for the centre has been produced by OMBC Asset Management Team. (available from the Asset Management Team)

A meeting has been held with officers from the Asset Management Team as a preliminary to pulling together a steering group and working group to work on the creation of an Asset Transfer Policy, Policy Framework and Strategy. The meeting also identified joint working on the asset transfer policy as part of the reviewing and updating of the Council’s property protocols as a means of improving borough performance in the area of asset management after the most recent Audit report.

Introductory meetings have been held with a further seven community organisations around capacity building. The first meeting of the community leadership network took place on 21st January (Appendix 2). A training programme for the sector is currently being arranged.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE

The proposals will support Springhead Community Association towards asset transfer and support the development of an asset transfer policy, policy framework and strategy. It is also hoped that community centres and community organisations within the leadership network will be strengthened, and will increase their effectiveness and capabilities.

The following performance indicators could be monitored:

- Completion of the Asset Transfer application form by Springhead Community Association
- Development of a robust business plan by Springhead Community Association
- Agreement on the terms of the lease by Springhead Community Association and Oldham Council

PROPOSALS FOR FOLLOW UP

A review of the impact of these proposals should be undertaken in September 2010. by officers from the Capacities and Asset Management Teams.

APPENDICES

See below.
Advancing Assets for Communities: Demonstration Programme
Expressions of Interest – Round 4 (2010-11)

The demonstration programme consortium led by the DTA and including Community Matters, ACRE and the Local Government Association will be delivering a third round of the CLG-funded programme - demonstrating in selected areas how local authorities and community-led third sector organisations can be supported to develop joint plans for community asset transfer. We aim to work in a further 30 local authority areas across England during 2010-11 to support the development of partnerships to explore individual opportunities for asset transfer, as well as demonstrate the kinds of support required to achieve ‘fair and accountable frameworks’ for asset transfers from local authorities to local communities.

If you are interested in registering your Local Authority for the selection process, we will require you to complete this form (boxes may be expanded) and return a paper and electronic copy to:

Jennifer Mathew - Asset Programmes Officer
Development Trusts Association
33 Corsham Street, London, N1 6DR
j.mathew@dta.org.uk

DEADLINE: 12 noon – Friday 22nd January 2010

Please address all the prompts and questions in each section in order for us to evaluate your interest comprehensively.

A decision will be made during February 2010. Please note that, if successful, CEO sign off prior to March 31st will be required to secure your place on the programme. NB: we cannot accept multiple expressions of interest from a Local Authority, so please ensure colleagues are aware of any submission you plan to make well in advance.

Contact details of person completing this form (if different from those details below)

Name:- Anne Fleming
Organisation:- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Address:- Meadowbank, Tweedale Way, Oldham, OL9 8EH
Telephone number:- 0161 770 8172
Email:- anne.fleming@oldham.gov.uk

Name of Local Authority: Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC)
(This must be a principal authority i.e. District, Borough, Unitary, or County Council)
Address:- Civic Centre, West St, Oldham, OL1 1UL
Lead Contact:- Anne Fleming
Job Title:- Capacity Building Co-ordinator (Asset Transfer)
Telephone number:- 0161 770 8172
Email:- anne.fleming@oldham.gov.uk

Please describe the area in which your Local Authority operates: - (tick all boxes which apply)
Inner City ☐ Coastal/resort area ☐ Former mining area ☐
Predominantly Urban ☒ Rural Villages ☐
Former textile industrial area ☒ Former heavy industrial area ☐
Market Towns ☐ Other ☐ Please specify

Have you identified NI4 as a key performance indicator in your Local Area Agreement (LAA)?
Yes ☒ No ☐

Have you identified NI7 as a key performance indicator in your LAA?
Yes ☒ No ☐

Are you one amongst the IDEA supported Network of Empowering Authorities?
Yes ☐ No ☒

Please state your local authority’s most recent asset management score:
One

Does your authority currently have an agreed policy in relation to asset transfer?
Yes ☐ No ☐
In development ☒

If yes, please append a copy of relevant documents to this application form.
Briefly describe how and why you are ready to prioritise partnership working around asset transfer.

- How advanced are your plans?
- Does the Local Authority have an identified lead officer/related cross-departmental working group?
- What elected member interest is there in the asset transfer agenda (if any)? How is/does the Local Authority envisage working with the community sector to progress this agenda locally?

Please append copies of any relevant documents to your electronic application to help us assess your application (e.g. corporate plan; asset management strategy and any accompanying protocols; compact agreement; LAA).

1. How advanced are your plans?

Oldham Council has been working on its asset transfer strategy since the publication of the Quirk Report. Initial discussions around asset transfer took place throughout 2008 / 2009 with officers from the Local Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Members, Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO) and our Strategic Third Sector Infrastructure Partner - Voluntary Action Oldham (VAO). After considerable consultation and engagement with community groups and community centre management committees (through a Third Sector Needs Assessment (Appendix 1) and representation on an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, the proposal was developed to introduce a Community Asset Transfer policy. The Councils’ Cabinet endorsed the proposal and agreed to pilot it with the newly emerging Springhead Community Association based at the Springhead Community Centre. The proposal was also supported by the Oldham Partnership who have allocated allocated Area Based Grant funding of £150,000 over 3 years to recruit a Community Capacity Officer to lead on the development and implementation of the policy framework. This will enable community groups with access to community facilities to explore a range of management options including Asset Transfer. This will also be linked to a Community Centre Options appraisal which is currently being carried out to develop the Councils Community Facilities Strategy which will focus not only on community centres, but also tenants halls, community rooms etc.

2. Lead Officer and cross departmental working group.

To meet some of the needs identified in the Third Sector Needs Assessment a programme officer has been recruited ( Job description Appendix 2) and is currently working with Springhead Community Association to identify training and support needs. Management Committee visits to other nearby authorities, who have successfully completed asset transfer, are being arranged.

Work has begun to organise a cross departmental steering group which will create a working group from within it to support Springhead Community Centre in its journey towards asset transfer, it will also create an asset transfer policy and strategy for the Local Authority.

3. Elected member interest.

Elected members have been kept fully informed of progress and have agreed to support the exploration of asset transfer as a means of supporting the Local Authority in the development of a consistent approach towards disposal of its property assets and also as a way of benefiting communities. An area based planning workshop involving elected members, officers and third sector representatives has been organised to discuss voluntary sector delivery, commissioning and future plans including asset transfer. Progress on asset transfer is also being monitored at a strategic level by the Councils’ Overview and Scrutiny Safer Stronger Communities Select Group.

4 Working with the community sector.

The Local Authority wishes to use asset transfer as another tool to build on its current work around community empowerment and community cohesion. Part of the role of the lead officer is to set up and develop a community centre leadership network which will inform and support community centres funded by OMBC through training, support with business planning, advice & networking. ( Appendix 3 for Terms of Reference of this
group). The network will also monitor progress towards asset transfer by Springhead Community Centre and may begin to identify organisations from within the network who also wish to explore asset transfer. In addition strong links are being built with VAO whose role is to support the development of a strong, cohesive and effective third sector.

Please describe the asset/s you are proposing as pilot projects for this programme and explain what value you think their transfer would add to the demonstration programme – with particular reference to their potential to engage with / empower local communities in keeping with the tenets of the 2008 White Paper ‘Communities in Control’ and any other programmes/related pilots operating in your locale. Please also reference any other statutory sector bodies that would be involved in any transfer of those assets.
NB: the programme can work with up to two pilot projects per local authority area. Please append a photograph of the assets you are proposing as pilot projects when you submit your electronic application.

1. Description of the asset.
Springhead Community Centre is a former Territorial Army centre situated in the Springhead area of Oldham. The building consists of a basement rifle range, a large hall, a bar area and kitchen, two main meeting rooms plus a number of smaller rooms and outbuildings. The centre is currently used by a number of groups (Appendix 4) and is managed and maintained by Springhead Community Association. The centre currently provides services for approximately 2000 dwellings in the Springhead area which has a population of approximately 5000 people. The management committee meets regularly to oversee the running of the building, repairs and maintenance, services delivered and support to volunteers.

2. Adding value to the programme.
Since Oldham is at the beginning of supporting organisations towards asset transfer and developing its asset transfer policy the demonstration programme has a chance to influence this policy right from the start, allowing all parties to build a policy and process based on good practice. The intention is to do this by building a partnership of officers, elected members and third sector organisations, participation in the Advancing Assets Demonstration Programme would help us to deliver this. It is probable that being part of the demonstration programme would increase the likelihood of Springhead Community Centre successfully completing their transfer. This will not only benefit Springhead Community Centre and the surrounding area but will also encourage the Council to offer this option to other organisations, leading to additional community and social benefits.

In terms of looking at asset transfer on a regional level, several nearby Local Authorities including Rochdale, Salford and Tameside have already developed policies and transferred assets. Accepting Springhead Community Centre onto the Advancing Assets Programme would help to fill a gap in representation within the North West and would allow Springhead to link in to the informal regional network already in place.
Please tell us about your proposed community sector partners and their capacity/suitability to be involved in this programme/the pilots outlined above.

- What relationship, if any, already exists between the Local Authority and those partners?
- How has the Local Authority supported/worked with those partners in the past?
- In what ways do you think that the transfer of the asset will add to the financial and organisational resilience of the community partner?
- How do you think the community partners you’d like to work with are going to add value to the demonstration programme and contribute to the Government’s empowerment agenda?
- Please describe what discussions have taken place with your community partners about this expression of interest to join the programme.

1. Proposed community sector partner.
In 2007 OMBC decided that, as a consequence of changes in funding rules within Lifelong Learning, Springhead Community Centre would close. This galvanised the community who did not want to lose the well used centre. A petition signed by 2000 local people (out of a total of around 5000) was sent to the Council asking for the centre to be kept open. The Community Association was created the same year and after discussion with elected members and officers was allowed to take on management and maintenance responsibilities of the centre.

2. Local Authority support.
Over the last 2 years the Association and the Council have developed a supportive working relationship which has culminated in the decision to recommend that Springhead Community Centre be the pilot for community centre asset transfer within Oldham. The group have been in regular contact with Council Officers and Voluntary Action Oldham (the local third sector infrastructure support agency) in looking at issues such as their legal entity as a necessary precursor to asset transfer.

The transfer of the asset will allow the Community Association to plan ahead for the long term, allowing their vision of the centre to become a reality and giving the centre and its users stability. In turn this will lead to more groups/individuals using the centre, increasing its viability and impact within the area. The organisation will also be able to meet local needs. The Association themselves wish the centre “to be a thriving hub of the community”, they wish it to act as a base for other voluntary groups in the area, as a resource for local businesses, as a health promoting facility and as a way of offsetting...
the social losses in the area due to the closure of local post offices. Once the group have a long term lease on the property they will be able to raise finance to carry out improvements such as insulating the roof and developing facilities if they wish.

Moving towards asset transfer will mean the management committee will undergo training and development, building skills and confidence of the group, allowing them to learn and grow, allowing them to identify gaps in their knowledge or capacity and giving them the means to fill the gaps, making the group much stronger and more resilient.

4. Adding value to the programme.

This will also contribute to the Governments empowerment agenda as a local organisation will have control of a major local asset which can be developed and tailored to meet local community needs and concerns. Since the group is led by an entirely voluntary management committee there might be the possibility for lessons to be learnt by Government in terms of comparison with groups which are led by staff. Also the group are thinking of developing beyond traditional community centre activities e.g. becoming a resource for local businesses and helping to offset losses in social capital through the closure of post offices, this could also add value to their inclusion in the programme.

As previously stated in terms of looking at asset transfer on a regional level, several nearby Local Authorities including Rochdale, Salford and Tameside have already developed policies and transferred assets. Accepting Springhead Community Centre onto the Advancing Assets Programme would help to fill a gap in representation within the North West and would allow Springhead to link in to the informal regional network already in place.

5. Discussions with the Community sector partner.

Discussions around the Advancing Assets Programme have taken place with the Chair of the Association who is in favour of expressing an interest in taking part and information has been passed on to the group.
Please tell us what support you think is needed and how could we add value to community asset transfer activity, the community sector and community empowerment in your locale - now and in the future.

1. Adding value
The transfer of Springhead Community Centre into the hands of a local grassroots community organisation is the first step in the development of an asset transfer policy and strategy for Oldham. If asset transfer is to be repeated the pilot transfer of Springhead Community Centre has to go well. Participation in the demonstration programme will make it more likely that the pilot asset transfer will succeed and a well designed, well supported policy be developed for Oldham. The development of the policy will ensure other organisations are given the chance to ask for and accept asset transfer with all its benefits in terms of community empowerment, building skills and confidence within communities and the development and strengthening of social capital in neighbourhoods. The Local Authority will also benefit by developing and implementing a policy which will help it to meet several of its National Indicators. In addition the most recent report of the Audit Commission identified policy and strategy development as areas which needed improvement within the Council's property management team, participation in the programme would link in to and support this work.

Building up a strong and effective partnership is a major focus of current and future work. Participation in a programme which benefits third sector organisations, local authority officers and elected members supporting the development of a joint approach to asset transfer would greatly help with this.

2. Support needed.
After reading through the support offered it is likely that we would like to make use of all aspects of the programme. Help with development of policy and strategy, training for third sector organisations which would take an organisation from the beginning of the process to the end and link them in to a source of independent advice and support and support for elected members would be particularly helpful.
Where did you hear about this programme?

DTA website: ☐
Community Matters website: ☐
Other: ☒ Please specify Conference and workshop

Thank you for taking the time to complete the application.
The Advancing Assets for Communities demonstration programme is funded by Communities & Local Government as part of implementing the conclusions of the Quirk Review ‘Making Assets Work’ [2007], and forms a key component of the work to be progressed by the Asset Transfer Unit. It is led by the Development Trusts Association and delivered in partnership with Community Matters, the Local Government Association and ACRE.

If you would like to discuss the programme in greater detail, or if you require any other information, advice or support in relation to community asset transfer in your area, please contact the ATU team:

http://www.atu.org.uk
0845 345 4564
info@atu.org.uk

Advancing Assets for Communities: Round four is now open for applications. Submission deadline: 22nd January 2010.

The ATU is offering an appraisal service for all applications, if you would like to take advantage of this service forms must be received no later than 22nd December 2009.
The Advancing Assets for Communities demonstration programme offers expert support to local authorities and their third sector partners to develop joint plans for community asset transfer.

It can help with the development of those strategies, policies and procedures Councils need to process requests made by communities to transfer land and buildings into third sector management and ownership. It can also provide practical support from community enterprise practitioners to demonstrate the feasibility of community asset transfer through pilot activity.

**Programme Objectives:**

1. To support and strengthen public-third sector partnerships concerned with progressing the transfer of assets from Local Authority ownership and control to communities.
2. To devise and disseminate messages, tools and guidance to embed the community asset transfer agenda in Local Authorities – in particular, to overcome the barriers identified in ‘Making Assets Work: The Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets [2007].’
3. To advance community asset transfer projects in different locations and build confidence in the feasibility of asset transfer through support for a partnership approach.

The programme offers a wide range of support tailored to the needs of different groups

**Elected Members**

- Briefings on the benefits of asset transfer
- Presentations on key features of community asset transfer strategies
- Peer learning events with councillors across the UK

**Local Authority Officers**

- Support with assessing the viability of business plans
- Advice on clawback, state aid, VAT, and other concerns
- Working with community partners - including conflict resolution
- Tools to assess community benefit of asset transfer against capital receipt
- Support in drafting Community Asset Transfer strategies and procedures
- Programme-wide events to share learning

**Third Sector Organisations**

- Investment readiness assessments
- Advice and training on developing governance boards / committees
- Common tools – community shares, risk management toolkit, Green Asset Guide
- Community Matters quality standards package VISIBLE
- Developing Your Community Building training package
- Conflict resolution between local authority and community partners
- Opportunity to participate in Community Sector Trading action learning sets

**Individual Assets**

- Viability assessments
- Strategic and business planning support
- Bespoke advice / training to community partners
- Small cash fund to meet preliminary design and costing needs
- Support for the ‘informed client’ in procuring specialist development services