

Community asset transfer (CAT) of leisure facilities

Small volunteer-group management

- **Introduction and research questions**
- **Estimating the scale of transfer –
Power to Change research at SHU**
- **The experience of Sheffield Libraries**
- **Panel and audience discussion**

Existing research and emerging questions

- Lindsay Findlay-King: University of Northumbria.
- Geoff Nichols: University of Sheffield
- Deb Forbes: University of Newcastle
- Bethany Rex: University of the Arts, London
- Katrina Foxtton: University of York

Introduction and research questions

- Based on:
 - Review meeting of researchers and practitioners, February 2019
 - Research into CAT of sports centres / facilities, libraries, museums and heritage – from 2014.
 - Academic review



Defining Community asset transfer (CAT)

- transfer of ownership, and sometimes management, of public sector facilities to community groups. These groups normally involve volunteers in roles of governance and delivery.
- ‘Community’? Defined by place / by relationships. What is ‘local’
- Asset? - really? To whom?
- Euphemistic discourse... questionable!

An example



- Bramley Baths – Leeds, small pool and leisure centre - built 1904, hours reduced in September 2011 by City Council, Community group - February 2011 - re-opened in January 2013 as an IP Society - 25 year lease
- Volunteer steering group – 22 paid staff



Insights from leisure and volunteer theory

- New organisation driven by volunteer enthusiasms [contrast to public / private sector]
- Different motivations and ‘management’ and volunteers’ view of the organisation
- Great diversity reflecting local circumstances – but making measurement difficult

Questions

- How many CATS are there?
- What is a viable business model?
- What do CATs themselves regard as success, and how can they measure this?
- What are the implications of the language used by volunteers, policy makers and practitioners to describe CAT?

Questions

- How is the 'place' defined, both by the community group and the council? How does this determine what a CAT can do?
- What is lost and what is gained by a transfer from the public to the voluntary sector – in meeting social objectives?
- How does the unequal distribution of social capital of volunteers, and wealth of the community affect CAT?

Questions

- How does local government make a decision on which facility to close, which to stay open and which to transfer? What's the balance between government keeping control and empowering local groups?
- How can CAT groups best be helped during and after transfer? How can local government best be helped?

Questions

- How can CATs be sustainable – economically, and volunteer enthusiasms?
- All part of a transfer of work and responsibility from the public to the third sector

on to: measuring CAT, example of Sheffield Libraries, discussion

Selected references

- Gilbert, A. (2016) *A common interest: the role of asset transfer in developing the community business market*. Power to change.
- Locality (2018) *The great British sell off: how we are losing our vital publicly owned buildings and spaces*. Forever. Locality.org.uk
- Locality. (2018) *Building powerful communities through community asset transfer: a guide for councillors*. Power to change.
- Findlay-King L, Nichols G, Forbes D, and Macfadyen G (2018a) Localism and the Big Society: the asset transfer of leisure centres and libraries – fighting closures or empowering communities? *Leisure Studies*. 37. 158-170
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02614367.2017.1285954>

Assets in Community Ownership

Tom Archer and Ian Wilson, 23rd May 2019

About the study

Interim findings from a SHU project for Power to Change were presented at the seminar event

Slides have been removed preceding final report production

The Experience of Sheffield Libraries

Darrel Porter

Volunteer and community development officer

LIBRARIES SHEFFIELD
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My Role

- To support, train and advise volunteer and community organisations on the running of public libraries
- To act as a liaison between the above groups and the council

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Sheffield Libraries

- The library service suffered a reduction in budget of around 50% in 2012, this was compounded by additional reductions in previous years.
- It became apparent the 16 out of 28 service points would need to close or a very different running model be considered.

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Needs analysis and Models

- A needs analysis along with public consultation was conducted assessing the impact of potential closures
- Two volunteer run models were offered to the public for 16 branch libraries as an alternative to closure.
 - Associate Model
 - Co-delivered Model
- Expressions of interest were requested from local groups.

Finding associate groups

- In some cases there was a pre-established community organisation able to step into running the library.
- Groups that had initially been protest groups offered to take on libraries.
- A training and support package was developed for the groups

Cont...

- Groups were given extensive training on running libraries and voluntary organisations.
- Groups were given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the library they would be running and given training on library systems.
- Libraries were handed over in October 2014
- Most of the volunteer library groups are CIOs with around 400 volunteers

Leases

- Associate groups were to take out leases, initially 5 year but extendable to 25 years
- Extensive lease negotiations with close officer support
- Some libraries have now signed their lease, with some still awaiting signature

Community impact?

- Borrowing numbers are down on pre 2014 levels, but stabilising or increasing
- Community engagement and turnout for events and regular activities is higher
- Variety of events and activities is higher
- Opening hours have increased
- Community donations and local lending schemes allow people to feel a part of the library

Learning Points

- Start early negotiations on the leases
- Ensure that all departments understand the other's priorities
- Take learning points from other authorities
- Training and funding to potential takeover groups is vital
- Establish early and productive dialogue
- Council and groups need to work together
- A time to protest, but there is a time for constructive talks...

Discussion

- Small groups – big issues perspective
- Feedback/questions from the audience