

# 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