

Date of issue: Monday, 18 March 2024

MEETING:	CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Councillors Shaik (Chair), Khawar (Vice Chair), Escott, Hulme, Iftakhar, Mann, Matloob, Mohindra, O'Kelly and Stedmond)
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 26TH MARCH, 2024 AT 7.00 PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	MANIZE TALUKDAR 07871 982 919

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Councillors named above are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



STEPHEN BROWN
Chief Executive

AGENDA

PART I

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1. Declarations of Interest

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 9 and Appendix B of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.

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|----|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| 2. | Minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 22 February 2024 | 1 - 8 | |
| 3. | Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 13 March 2024 | To Follow | |

SCRUTINY CHALLENGE ITEMS

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----|
| 4. | Launch of a Task and Finish Group: Children's services and SCF Engagement with Children, families, and faith and community groups | 9 - 16 | All |
| 5. | Shaping proposals for a policy on Community Asset Transfers | 17 - 34 | All |

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------|---------|--|
| 6. | Attendance Report | 35 - 36 | |
| 7. | Date of Next Meeting | | |

The date of the next meeting is 23 April 2024.

Key items on the agenda are:

- The work of the Safer Slough Partnership
- The report of the task group on Resident engagement and building trust
- The Annual Scrutiny report 2023-24



Press and Public

Attendance and accessibility: You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before any items in the Part II agenda are considered. For those hard of hearing an Induction Loop System is available in the Council Chamber.

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In addition, the law allows members of the public to take photographs, film, audio-record or tweet the proceedings at public meetings. Anyone proposing to do so is requested to advise the Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting. Filming or recording must be overt and persons filming should not move around the meeting room whilst filming nor should they obstruct proceedings or the public from viewing the meeting. The use of flash photography, additional lighting or any non-hand-held devices, including tripods, will not be allowed unless this has been discussed with the Democratic Services Officer.

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Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 22nd February, 2024.

Present:- Councillors Shaik (Chair), Khawar (Vice-Chair), Hulme, Iftakhar, Matloob, Mohindra, O’Kelly and Stedmond

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Bedi

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Escott and Mann

PART 1

39. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

40. Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment below. Page 5, paragraph 8 to read:

‘The Lead Member for Community Cohesion, Public Health, Public Protection, Leisure and Planning was asked if savings identified in his area were on track to being achieved?’

41. SEND statutory services update

The Chair welcomed the Lead Member for Education and Children’s Services at Slough and Councillor Barry Anderson, from Leeds City Council to the meeting.

He advised that, at their pre-meeting, Members had agreed the following four key lines of enquiry regarding the SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disability) report: partners & stakeholders; processes; data; workforce, learning & training. He invited the Lead Member to introduce the report.

The Lead Member Education and Children’s Services stated that her administration was committed to supporting children’s services and driving forward improvements in SEND provision. SEND services had achieved significant improvements recently, for example:

- interim education psychologists had been appointed to help tackle the significant backlogs in processing EHCPs (Education, Health & Care Plans). This had enabled the completion of a large number of EHCPs in the second half of 2023 – which was a significant achievement, and the team were now focusing on new cases;

Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee - 22.02.24

- improvements in overall quality had been achieved by dint of a stronger SEND team, targeted training programmes and streamlining SEND statutory processes;
- quarterly progress reviews provided comprehensive data on progress to date and efforts were focussed on translating improvements into tangible outcomes for children.

The Lead Member added that she was committed to supporting the service to monitor progress, sustain the pace of improvements while remaining adaptive to challenges. She praised staff at the service for their commitment and hard work.

Members questions focussed on the following areas:

- Whether there were there any agreed data sets used by partners to assess the effectiveness of SEND provision and to hold partners to account;
- The considerable backlogs and waiting lists in EHCP and other assessments, the reasons for these and whether cases were being appropriately prioritized;
- How such delays could be justified when the national average was 20 weeks, but this figure was 12 months in Slough;
- To what extent the delays and complaints were attributable to poor internal systems and processes, lack of resources and high staff turnover;
- Whether the current level of resources, IT systems, staff capacity and procedures were sufficient to deal with the backlogs and complaints;
- The currently high level of complaints, especially long-running ones, the timescales for resolution and processes for escalation;
- Risks associated with the use of interims, particularly interim education psychologists;
- How the issue of poor communication with residents, which had been highlighted by the DfE, was being addressed.

With regard to accountability, the Lead Member advised that there were regular joint meetings where staff and partners could discuss and raise any concerns.

The SBC Executive Director People, Children, advised that the written statement of action, the statutory directions, the SEND Board and the 'Getting to Good Board' were each helping to develop the partnerships and have oversight of them.

With regard to data, this made was available and included information on social care, SEND, CMEs (children missing education), complaints & mediation, appraisals, tribunals, etc. However, this information needed refinement. This data was shared across the partnership to help inform next actions and ensure deadlines were being met. A benchmarking exercise was in process. Further improvements in data provision would enable the service

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to become more robust, help monitor the team's performance and allow evidence-based reporting. She added that the Special Needs & Inclusion Board engaged in mutual challenge and scrutiny of each other's work.

The Lead Member stated that poor communications with families and partners had been flagged up by the DfE as an area of concern and work to improve this was underway.

The Executive Director advised that improving communications with families and partners was an area of concern and priority – measures included the use of digital communication tools, improving the quality and accessibility of information on the website, providing staff contact details and an FAQ section regarding how allocations were made, the appeals process etc. Work to develop schools' partnerships and use them to disseminate information to the community was ongoing.

She added that a previously unidentified backlog of two hundred cases had come to light and the interim education psychologists had focused their efforts on clearing these, however, these had been superseded by new cases, leading to new backlogs. The principal educational psychologist had implemented improved processes and allocated cases, prioritizing the most urgent. However, depending on resources available and levels of new demand, it may take up to a year to clear the current batch. This was a continuous juggling act and would require the proper allocation of staff and resources to resolve it. She accepted that some children and their families were not currently well served by the service, however, it was important to remember that the service had begun from a very low base.

She added that complaints were reviewed weekly and were dealt with by herself and members of her team, supported by the Council's complaints officer and a project manager who also supported the SEND Board. She, the Council's complaints officer and a project officer monitored the complaints tracker and aimed to respond to complaints within 10 days wherever possible. However, some complaints required detailed investigation, and may take longer to resolve. She asked Members to inform her of any long-standing unresolved complaints reported to them by parents, so these could be investigated.

She further added that the tracking software used by the team was not particularly robust. There was software available that would enable live data analysis on a daily basis and would help to resolve many of the issues currently being experienced by the team. However, for now, there was a need to manage the service within limited resources.

Lead Member concurred that the service would benefit greatly from increased resources, improved IT systems and software to support and enable its work.

- Following a question, the Executive Director clarified that the SEND dashboard provided benchmark figures across a year. Extrapolating Slough specific data was currently difficult.

With regard to delays in completing assessments, she advised that the quality of input from social care had been poor, a matter which would take time to rectify. Current delays stemmed from mainly from the Education service. Systems to monitor the quality of EHCPs had been introduced, which in turn would prompt further improvements.

She added that the main delays related to writing the plans and collating the necessary information, questions about how to meet a child's needs, capacity issues in the team and parents not accepting some aspects of the final EHCP.

The interim educational psychologist was highly experienced and his expertise would save resources in the long-term. Some SEND case officers had left and these posts were proving difficult to recruit to. Currently there was a mix of permanent and interim staff. There had been some issues around the hybrid working of the interim staff. Recruitment of permanent SEND staff was ongoing and once appointed, they would be required to work from the office three days per week – which would be more productive in terms of collaboration, training and staff development. A fully staffed team would restore stability to the team. The interims were aware of the permanent posts being recruited to but had chosen to move to longer interim contracts elsewhere. It was important that the permanent appointees be of a high calibre.

- Members then asked about access to any additional sports and leisure facilities outside school for SEND children;
- The use of trainee educational psychologists to carry out assessments by some schools and whether they were sufficiently qualified to undertake these;
- Alternative SEND provision and whether schools were accommodating SEND pupils; How EHCPs were being quality assured;
- The current shortage of SEND places in schools and some schools were seeking to increase this provision.

The Lead Member advised that the 'Breakaway' programme provided respite care for children with special needs and their families in Slough. Going forward there would be additional provision at the community and family hubs. Slough schools were becoming more inclusive, a local charity, 'Together as one', was dedicated to working with young people and further opportunities for activities jointly provided by local community and faith groups would be explored.

Executive Director advised that schools could commission their own education psychologists, however, the SEND service was not obliged to accept these. There were three stages to the assessment process, one of these being a panel chaired by the principal educational psychologist, who would assess whether the child's level of need met the threshold or if the child's needs could be met elsewhere.

She added that the current INMSS (Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools) provision was being reviewed. Places were full and the service was

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stretched. Some pupils had been attending on a non-statutory basis, and the service could not continue to pay for them from statutory funding as alternative provision existed for these pupils. Places should be allocated on the basis of need rather than want. Additional funding had been approved to increase the capacity of Specialist Resource Provision (SRP/DU) Designated Units. There were plans to bid for additional capital funding to increase special school provision.

The Lead Member stated that all schools were now on board with inclusion policies and were applying processes correctly, adding that a recent inclusion conference had been well attended by schools. The Executive Director added that the autumn schools' visits would be undertaken by a consultant head teacher, who would evaluate how well the inclusivity agenda had been embedded at each school.

With regard to complaints and casework relating to SEND, the Lead Member emphasised that Councillors should in the first instance, log these through the casework system (rather than approach the head of service for a resolution) and then escalate the matter if no response was forthcoming.

The Executive Director advised that there was a need to take a strategic, planned approach to SEND places at Slough schools and that there was in place a commissioning strategy which would ensure adequate provision. Schools wanting to increase their SEND provision should contact the Council direct.

- Following questions about how the progress of assessments for Looked after Children (LACs) was tracked and arrangements for their transition to adulthood, the Executive Director clarified that not all LACs needed EHCPs, although some may receive additional support in schools. She added that there was also a virtual school which had responsibility for ensuring that arrangements to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of LACs, including those placed out-of-borough, were in place. A new staff 'preparing for adulthood', learning from the lived experience from LACs. Every EHCP was reviewed annually and trackers were used to monitor the transition process.

She added that an EHCP must reflect the child's needs and be of good quality. A quality assurance mechanism was being developed to this end. The involvement of the principal education psychologist, the DfE advisors; the Director of Education and the Director of Operations attending the Children's Improvement Group meetings; SIG board meetings where heads of service were held to account for the quality of their work; the SEND quality assurance processes being aligned with those in social care; all of these would form part of the assurance mechanism. The improvement journey had begun from a low base. Notable improvements had been achieved in some areas, however, overall, the service could not be described as good.

- Following a question regarding the complaints process, the Executive Director confirmed that the corporate complaints procedure was separate

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from the one for social care, which was specified by the Children Act. It provided process maps, was available on the Council's website, where the google translate facility was available.

Action 1: The Executive Director undertook to request that complaints be made a standing agenda item at future SEND boards. She added that this item would be scrutinised by partners and parents' representatives could provide feedback to the Board.

- Following a question regarding the number of home-educated children and those missing education, the Executive Director advised that this figure had not been queried at the SEND board under exception reporting and it was rated green, which to her indicated that the figure was acceptable. There could be several reasons why children missed school, and it was not always a case of truancy.

Action 2: Following a question about the SEND & Inclusion strategy, the Executive Director confirmed that it had been updated and she would ensure that the latest version was uploaded to the website.

- Members then asked about the SEND written statement of action, associated timescales and when the Directions could be expected to end.

The Executive Director confirmed that the statement of action was a comprehensive document that had seven areas of focus, with ninety-four actions attached. Only twenty of the actions had been completed by the summer of 2023, nine of which were health related. To date, less than a quarter of the total number of actions had been completed, but the remainder were on track to be completed this year. The partnership could not sign off any actions, only the DfE, could do so and would require significant evidence to support this.

She confirmed that the service was scrutinised by both NHS England and the DfE. The DfE Commissioner would be sending a SEND and Social care report to the Minister in April 2024.

The service was on a positive trajectory with improvements being embedded and would be in a better position in twelve months' time, however, she could not predict whether this would be sufficient to achieve a 'good' rating and an end to the statutory intervention.

Following a suggestion that Members and SEND officers work jointly to resolve long-standing complaints and issues with residents, the Lead Member re-iterated the importance of using the casework system, which would ensure issues were correctly logged, documented and followed up. The Member could then escalate the matter if needed.

Action 3: It was agreed that further training for Councillors on SEND and its complaints process would be provided at a future date.

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Resolved – That the report be noted.

42. Attendance Report

Resolved – That the attendance report be noted.

43. Date of Next Meeting

26 March 2024.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.20 pm)

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Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC)
Date:	26 th March 2024
Subject:	Launching a Task and Finish Group with the aim of developing community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups
Chief Officer:	Sue Butcher , Chief Executive of Slough Children First and Executive Director of People (Children)
Contact Officers:	Ben Short , Director of Operations Slough Children First Fanny Jacob , Head of Referral and Assessment, Slough Children First Alexander Polak , Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	Appendix A – Draft Scope: ‘Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups’

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report recommends launching the committee’s next Task and Finish Group immediately, as per the committee’s forward plan. Appendix A sets out the draft scope. The topic is ‘Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups’ This contributes directly towards the Council’s improvement & recovery, being linked to the Council’s corporate plan.

Recommendations:

- a. That a Task and Finish Group be launched as per the draft scope at Appendix A, including appointment of its chair and, if possible, its membership.**

Commissioner Review

DLUCH Commissioner:

The Commissioners support the establishment of this group. It would be helpful if the group could include in its enquiries the extent to which the Council and SCF combine their efforts in engaging with faith and community groups. This is important to ensure that residents do not experience a fragmented and disjointed approach.

DFE Commissioner

The Commissioner has passed on comments to the author which have been incorporated in this report.

2. Report

- 2.1 In accordance with this committee's work programme considered by the committee on 3 January 2024, this paper proposes to launch a 'Task and Finish Group' on the topic of 'Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups'. However, it should be noted that the Task and Finish Group will also have implications for the work of the People (Children) directorate which provides educational support services including support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. (SEND).
- 2.2 This topic was originally recommended for the Corporate Improvement and Scrutiny Committee (CISC) forward plan due to identification of a need for Children's Services as a whole, i.e. People (Children) and Slough Children First, to work more closely with local community and faith groups. This issue has importance in terms of the overall improvement and recovery of the Council.
- 2.3 The Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan 23-26 was approved by Cabinet on 18 September 2023 and sets out the shared vision between Slough Children First and Slough Borough Council where every child will be '**Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**'. To achieve this, it has been identified that Children's Services as a whole, needs to strengthen its links and collaboration with community and faith groups.
- 2.4 [Slough Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2023-27](#) sets out five principles (below), four of which relate to the interaction between residents many of which will be members of community and faith groups. This reflects the findings from the 2023 resident survey. Delivery of the Corporate Plan is a key driver of the Council's improvement and recovery journey, and effective resident engagement has been identified as key to successful delivery of the plan.



RESIDENT
FOCUSED



PROVIDING
FINANCIAL
SUSTAINABILITY



ENABLING
RESIDENTS AND
COMMUNITIES



STRENGTHENING
PARTNERSHIPS



BUILDING TRUST

- 2.5 This Task and Finish Group will explore the engagement of residents through the lens of community and faith groups. If the committee wishes to commission this group to commence now, it must elect one of the councillors, from its 'pool of chairs', to lead the work. The most important criterion for this choice is: "which councillor is most enthusiastically interested in the subject matter?" Experience has shown that this is by far the greatest determinant of a Task and Finish group's success.
- 2.6 Ideally, the committee would also agree membership of the Task and Finish group at this meeting. There must be a minimum of three to proceed. These do not have to be CISC Members – Task and Finish members may be drawn from any councillor except members of the Cabinet. Again, enthusiasm should be the

strongest criterion for inclusion in the group, however it is also desirable to ensure a degree of political proportionality i.e. members of at least two Groups being on the Task and Finish group. If Group Leaders have provided the Chair with any suggested volunteers from outside the committee, the Chair will announce their names in the meeting.

- 2.7 The constitution allows for Task and Finish Groups to run for a maximum of 4 months but the Task and Finish group can determine its own timescales within that if it wishes to conclude more quickly – subject only to the availability of officer and member resource to support a faster exercise. Extension beyond 4 months is possible with the approval of the chair of the parent committee.

3. Implications of the Recommendations

Financial implications

- 3.1 This is not a decision-making report so there are no direct financial implications. Where further work is required to respond to the issues identified, any recommendations from CISC will be made to the Cabinet by Slough Children First where relevant.

Legal implications

- 3.2 The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new political management system for local councils in England and Wales, requiring them to have a separate 'executive' in the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and cabinet. To provide a counterweight for this, the Act also introduced the concept of 'overview and scrutiny' – sometimes referred to simply as 'scrutiny' – whereby every council with an executive management structure is required to have an overview and scrutiny committee. This enables the rest of the council to scrutinise the executive by investigating their decisions and policies, and issuing reports and recommendations where any shortcomings are identified.

Risk management implications

- 3.3 Overview and Scrutiny, commonly referred to as Scrutiny, is a statutory function and is currently subject to government direction in Slough. It is important that topics selected by the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee clearly contribute to the overall improvement drivers for the council, to demonstrate that the conditions of the government intervention are being met.

Equality implications

- 3.4 There are no specific equalities implications arising at this stage, however it is intended that the work will identify ways to engage Community and Faith Groups representing all backgrounds and so ultimately should improve equalities outcomes. A detailed assessment will be done on the Task and Finish group's final recommendations.

Corporate Parenting Implications

3.5 Some of the members of Community and Faith Groups may be children who are looked after by Slough Borough Council or care experienced young people. This means that members have a specific statutory responsibility towards them as corporate parents. Although this Task and Finish Group is not intended to focus on these children and young people, members of the group should be aware the likelihood of these children and young people being members of these groups and should not seek to identify them without their age-appropriate permission or from an adult with parental responsibility for a specific child. However, any suggestions for the increased involvement of looked after children and young people and care experienced young people would be welcomed.

4. **Appendices**

Appendix A: Draft Scope for 'Developing community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups

APPENDIX A: SCRUTINY TASK GROUP: SCOPE & PROGRESS REPORTING



TOPIC	Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups based in Slough	UPDATED	11 March 2024
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SUMMARY:

Scrutiny Officer	Michael Edley	Task Group members	
Project Leads	Fanny Jacob: Head of Referral and Assessment Slough Children First Ben Short: Director of Operations Slough Children First		
Strategic Lead	Sue Butcher: Chief Executive of Slough Children First, Director of People (Children).	Other stakeholders	

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Desired Outcomes arising from scrutiny	Objectives	Outputs
<p>That staff in Slough Children First (SCF) develop an increased knowledge of, and purposeful involvement with, Community and Faith Groups across the borough working with children and families to support joint working with the aim of improving outcomes for Slough's Children in Need.</p> <p>It should be noted that the Task and Finish Group will have implications for the work of the People (Children) directorate which provides educational support services including support for children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish an overview of SCF's involvement with Community and Faith groups across the Borough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 'map' of Community and Faith groups, and their remit which can be built upon as information becomes available. (Faith groups are already part of the Early Help implementation group) Shared information between SCF and community and faith groups. (regular 'touch points' between leaders in SCF, SBC and community and faith groups) Increased presence of partnership working across social media and Websites

APPENDIX A: SCRUTINY TASK GROUP: SCOPE & PROGRESS REPORTING



TOPIC	Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups based in Slough	UPDATED	11 March 2024
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Desired Outcomes arising from scrutiny	Objectives	Outputs
with special educational needs and disabilities. (SEND). This will be assumed throughout the document.		
That Community and Faith groups have a wider understanding of the remit of Slough Children First and where joint working will add mutual value to each other's work and values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve, where appropriate, working relationships and trust between these groups and SCF with the intention of gaining their trust and establishing joint working relationships. 	
The engagement of Community and Faith groups where there is limited or no engagement at present and to improve involvement where there are already existing relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify Community and Faith Groups where there is currently no involvement with SCF and contact these groups to improve the overall involvement and support of children in need. 	
In Scope	Out of Scope	Critical Success Factors
Community and Faith groups based in Slough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community and Faith groups that relate solely to adults Organisations based outside of the Borough (unless they have an 'in-Borough' remit Schools National and regional organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active engagement by staff in SCF including the capacity to do so – 'named community champions' Willingness of Community and Faith groups to engage with SCF. Establishing trust between SCF and agencies/organisations involved in this exercise. Understanding of the different languages used by Community and Faith groups

APPENDIX A: SCRUTINY TASK GROUP: SCOPE & PROGRESS REPORTING



TOPIC	Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups based in Slough	UPDATED	11 March 2024
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Desired Outcomes arising from scrutiny	Objectives	Outputs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that the work of this Task and Finish group keeps to its objectives and does not become unwieldy. Buy-in of SCF's Company Board

Outcome (above)	Work streams	Objectives	Outputs/milestones	Target Date / Completed
That staff in Slough Children First (SCF) have an increased knowledge and purposeful involvement with Community and Faith Groups across the borough working with children and families to support joint working with the aim of improving outcomes for Slough's Children in Need.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish a baseline of current involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A map of community and faith groups, and their remit, where there is already some involvement with SCF 	April 2024
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To update the map and ensure that there is a system to update it on a regular basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A map that is updated at regular intervals to ensure it remains fit for purpose 	July 2024
That Community and Faith groups have a wider understanding of Slough Children First's remit and where joint working will add mutual value to each other's work.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An event bringing together staff in SCF and colleagues in Community and Faith groups to share and develop the results of the Task and Finish group and set aims for ongoing joint working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event held and forward plan to take place at agreed intervals 	July 2024

APPENDIX A: SCRUTINY TASK GROUP: SCOPE & PROGRESS REPORTING



TOPIC	Developing Community Involvement between Slough Children First and Community and Faith Groups based in Slough	UPDATED	11 March 2024
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Outcome (above)	Work streams	Objectives	Outputs/milestones	Target Date / Completed
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hosted event such as 'speed dating' to provide an overview of the different type of work undertaken by SCF Faith and Community groups 'market stalls' open event to Children's Services to increase community awareness 		
Increased presence of partnership working across social media and Websites		Shared communication opportunities to celebrate 'good news', resources and promote key events	Enhanced communication plan	July 24
Active engagement by relevant staff in SCF including the capacity to do so – 'named community champions'		Named SCF staff or teams to act as key contacts or champions identified to keep ongoing awareness	Improved relationships Children and families benefit from staff who can support them to access their community	July 24

Slough Borough Council

Information needed	Details
Report To:	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
Date:	26 March 2024
Subject:	Shaping proposals for a policy on Community Asset Transfers
Chief Officer:	Pat Hayes – Executive Director (Regeneration, Housing & Environment)
Contact Officer:	Mark Halligan – Associate Director (Property)
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	NO
Appendices:	Community Asset Transfer Briefing Document

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides the background and context for inviting the Committee to provide input into the potential development of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy, as an element of the emerging Estate Strategy.

Recommendations:

The Committee is invited to provide input into the potential formation of CAT policy, by responding to questions posed in the report. The report and appendix, together with earlier briefings (e.g. 22nd February meeting), seek to provide the Committee with the information needed to enable them to provide an informed response.

Commissioner Review

Delivery of the agreed capital receipts target associated to the Asset Disposal Programme is of paramount importance to the Council's financial sustainability and 'minded to' Capitalisation Direction. All disposals should be subject to legal and financial due diligence and demonstrably evidence that the disposal is for best consideration (achieving maximum value) reasonably obtainable. Each site will be unique and any decision to dispose of an asset for less than best consideration, except for disposals to comply with statutory obligations, will require evidence-based justification.

2. Report

Introduction

- 2.1 A fundamental strand in the approach set out in the Corporate Plan (2023-2027), is the need to *'provide financial sustainability'*. Property assets have a key role in this, as they have the potential to generate capital receipts, as well as revenue benefits (i.e. savings in running costs, or generation of income). A CAT Policy has the potential to support the Council in achieving these financial benefits, but also, to limit financial benefits, if not carefully managed. It's very important to consider both the risks and opportunities of a CAT Policy and the approach that is likely to work best for the Council and the residents of Slough.
- 2.2 *'Enabling residents and communities'* is also very prominent in the Corporate Plan. Transferring property assets to community organisations is potentially a mechanism for supporting this objective. Such an approach has to be very carefully considered and needs to, for example, give due consideration to the capacity and capability of community organisations to successfully and safely manage the resultant liabilities.

Options

- 2.3 To enable Committee to provide useful input into the development of a CAT policy, a number of key questions are posed below, which they are requested to respond to. Potential options are set out for these questions to help facilitate debate and feedback.
- 2.4 Six key questions are posed and are set out below (2.5 to 2.10).
- 2.5 What does the Committee consider should be the primary objective of a potential CAT policy? The options might include:
- Reducing property revenue costs and liabilities for the Council.
 - Enabling communities to be more resilient and self-sufficient.
 - Enabling the transfer of Council services to community organisations, resulting potentially in non-property related revenue savings.
 - Enabling additional investment in properties where under investment is a particular issue to local communities – e.g. heritage assets.
 - Enabling community-led housing development – e.g. by transferring land.
- 2.6 Which asset types does the Committee think should be the initial focus for a potential CAT policy/programme? The options might include:
- Assets that have an estimated capital value below £500k.
 - Assets that have high levels of property revenue costs and liabilities.
 - Assets that are already leased to community organisations.

- Assets that are currently used primarily by community organisations, where the use is on a less formal basis (e.g. via license/bookings, rather than leases).
 - Assets that are used to deliver Council services from – e.g. Libraries.
 - Land that could be used for housing development.
- 2.7 What are the size and nature of the community organisations that the Committee believe have the capability, capacity and motivation to pursue CAT opportunities and successfully manage the resultant liabilities? How should the suitability of a community organisation for CAT be assessed and what conditions should the council place on the transfers of these assets?
- 2.8 If there are currently capability gaps etc with community organisations, that would currently hinder successful CAT transfers, what are the key gaps and does the Committee believe that they are gaps that could feasibly be closed in the short to medium term?
- 2.9 Should there be a competitive process for each transfer?
- 2.10 How should the Council deal with competing interests in respect of a particular asset?

Background

- 2.11 Members are aware the Council received a formal direction from DLUHC made under s.15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999, including a direction that prescribed functions are to be exercised by Commissioners; and the appointment of Commissioners from 1 December 2021.
- 2.12 A key component of the Directions is the need for the Council to demonstrate it is able to achieve financial sustainability. Maximising the financial benefit that can be achieved from the property portfolio is a significant element of this.
- 2.13 A paper was brought to Cabinet (21 June 2021) which outlined the principles and process for disposing of surplus General Fund land and property assets to reduce borrowing costs, termed 'The Asset Disposal Programme'. The report highlighted that the Council will seek to dispose of surplus assets to support the following objectives:
- Provide capital receipts to contribute to the 2022/23 budget
 - Provide capital receipts to meet Capitalisation Directive commitments and align with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
 - To reduce overall borrowing costs

- 2.14 On 20 September 2021 Cabinet approved a Debt Repayment Strategy and instructed officers to procure the support of an external organisation to assist the Council with a programme of asset disposals to generate capital receipts over the next five years. The report stated that “an orderly programme of asset disposals will improve the Council’s financial position by realising capital receipts which can be used firstly to finance any Capitalisation Directions, and secondly to repay existing external debt”. The report identified that “if capital receipts of up to £600m were realised over the next five years and used to finance Capitalisation Directions and repay other external loans, borrowing could be reduced from its current level of £760m down to circa £335m by 1 April 2027”.
- 2.15 The Council approved a Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27 on 10 March 2022 covering borrowing and debt reduction strategy, prudential indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).
- 2.16 Commercial property advisors Avison Young were appointed to support the early delivery of the Asset Disposal Programme. The focus of the initial stage (now termed Phase I) was a review of the Investment and Development sub-portfolios, together with a strategy for disposing of surplus assets within these portfolios. This has enabled the disposal of a significant number of assets, which has generated capital receipts to date (31/1/2024) of c£225m.
- 2.17 Some good progress has been made in delivering Phase I of the Asset Disposal Programme. However, it has become clear that the Capital Receipts Target is unlikely to be met through the sale of the assets identified for the first phase of the programme. There is a need and opportunity to develop a Phase II to add further assets to the Disposal Programme. In broadening the scope of the Asset Disposal Programme, a more strategic approach has been required. An Estate Strategy is being developed; in part to identify further assets, primarily from the Operational sub-portfolio, that can be added to the Asset Disposal Programme, as Phase II of the programme. In addition to identifying further disposal opportunities, the strategy will help identify other benefits beyond capital receipts – e.g. revenue, social value, green initiatives, etc
- 2.18 Strong progress has been made in developing the Estate Strategy. Specialist consultants, Montagu Evans, have been commissioned to support this work. Cabinet were updated (December 2023) on the initial discovery phase of the exercise.
- 2.19 Cabinet approved (December 2023) a conceptual model for the Operational sub-portfolio, which categorises these assets into five groups. This model better enables opportunities (e.g. disposals) to be identified and assessed.
- 2.20 The key decision in finalising the proposed Estate Strategy, is the amount of consolidation to adopt and the extent to which the Council needs (and can afford) property assets, beyond the Single Public Service Centre contained in the model. This will be the subject of further and wider Member debate.

- 2.21 The background and ongoing work around the Asset Disposal Programme and the Estate Strategy was explained to members of this Committee at a briefing meeting on 22nd February 2024. This answered the queries that had been raised ahead of the briefing meeting.
- 2.22 The Committee agreed at the 22nd February briefing meeting, to focus their attention on one particular element of the proposed Estate Strategy, in order to maximise the value that they could add. The element that was chosen, was the potential creation of a Community Asset Transfer Policy and Programme.
- 2.23 There are significant opportunities and risks associated with a CAT policy, which need to be very carefully considered. Members are well placed to provide insights into the capacity, capability and motivations for community organisations within their wards, to take on CAT transfers.
- 2.24 A background briefing document (Appendix A) provides further information on this subject and outlines the considerations in shaping a CAT Policy. It is hoped that this information enables the Committee to provide well informed responses to the questions posed above (2.5 to 2.10).
- 2.25 A chronological summary of Cabinet decisions relating to asset disposals is outlined below:
- June 2021 – approved the commencement of the Asset Disposal Project
 - September 2021— approval to commence a procurement exercise to appoint an organisation to support the Council with asset disposals
 - October 2022 – approved an Asset Disposal Strategy
 - September 2023
 - Asset Disposal Programme – approved a new (amended) Asset Disposal Strategy
 - Estate Strategy – approved the guiding principles to inform the development of this strategy
 - December 2023 – approval of a conceptual model (Estate Strategy)

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 *Financial implications*

- 3.1.1 This report asks Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee to consider a proposed approach for potentially transferring assets to local organisations under a Community Asset Transfer policy. At this juncture it is purely a consultative document.
- 3.1.2 Any property disposals need to be considered in the context of the Council’s current financial position and need to maximise capital receipts to finance the capitalisation

directives and reduce the level of external debt and align to the wider strategy for asset disposals.

3.1.3 Disposing of assets to local third sector agencies and groups can have significant benefits to those organisations and communities and ensure their long-term security as community assets, providing, for example, new opportunities for mixed community and business use - but there are also risks, including financial, health and safety and reputational. If the asset requires investment and/or the organisation does not have the financial resources to maintain its upkeep, provide for capital investment and keep it safe, then it risks its closure and insolvency of the organisation. Costs and other liabilities could come back on the Council so proper due diligence of any counterparty is essential, in terms of their corporate governance arrangements and financial standing. Sufficient safeguards are also required to ensure any property is not subsequently disposed of for private gain. Each potential transfer would require a full financial and risk appraisal.

3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess legal implications against.

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess risks against.

3.4 *Environmental implications*

3.4.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess environmental implications against.

3.5 *Equality implications*

3.5.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess equalities implications against.

3.6 *Corporate Parenting Implications*

3.6.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess Corporate Parenting implications against.

3.7 *Procurement implications*

3.7.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess procurement implications against.

3.8 *Workforce implications*

3.8.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess workforce implications against.

3.9 *Property implications*

3.9.1 There is not a proposal in this report to assess property implications against.

4. **Background Papers**

Appendix A: CAT briefing note

In 2022,
49.63% of
adults in the
UK reported
feeling **lonely**
occasionally,
sometimes or
often

Page 23

Research shows
that third spaces
provide
opportunities for
social interaction
& empower
communities to
be more **resilient**
and **better-**
connected

How do we
prioritise
protecting
third spaces
for **future**
generations
?

Executive Summary

Communities play a vital role in improving local outcomes. For some assets, “best value” will be to safeguard community service delivery by transferring an asset to a community group, rather than an open market disposal or maintaining it on a peppercorn rent. Transferring the asset typically allows the community group to attract better funding and grants, invest in the asset, and collaborate with other groups.

CAT’s are not a quick fix to save money.

CAT’s should be considered as part of a wider Asset Strategy and Service Delivery Plans, and not seen as a route to dispose of low value, poor condition assets to community groups even less able to fund them than the Council, often resulting in collapsed groups and hidden liabilities for the Council. The best outcomes come from longer term, partnership planning, and often community groups need to be convened by the Council where one does not already exist.

Rather than targeting CAT’s, treating all assets like an ACV, and following a similar process, can help reduce risk and accelerate delivery. In any case, a clear strategy, evaluation framework, support package and governance is required.

What Is A Community Asset Transfer (CAT)

CAT is the transfer of land or building ownership from a statutory body to community organisations for a price below full market value

The main goal for CAT is

- To achieve public benefit
- To remove surplus assets and maintenance pressures on the local authority
- A CAT can be asset only, or is increasingly accompanied with a service transfer, with or without a grant

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Why is there a need for this procedure?

- When a number of public assets are either diminished in service or futile, creating pressures on the public finances via maintenance costs EG Town Halls, Schools, Courts
- This results from reduction in local budgets and public structure changes - local government reorganisation/demographic shifts
- Often these buildings are in prime central neighbourhood locations or listed buildings, inhibiting redevelopment of space

What does this mean for the community?

- Transferring assets to local community organisations enables utilisation of an alternative business model that encourages community enterprise, volunteer commitment, utilising local intelligence
- Community action can create safe spaces and a thriving community hub that attracts social investment

CATs vs ACVs

An ACV is an Asset of Community Value. It is important to differentiate ACVs from CATs. The Localism Act allows community groups to nominate buildings or land to their local authority as an asset of community value. These are building or land that can be owned outside of the local authority. If the local authority agrees that the nomination meets the test of being land of community value, the council would place the asset on a list of assets of community value for a period of 5 years.

ACVs introduced a community right to bid, and thus if the owner of a listed asset decided that they wish to sell the asset during the 5-year period of listing, then they must notify the local authority who would inform the nominating community group. The group then has a right to trigger a moratorium of up to 6 months to raise the purchase price. At the end of moratorium period the asset owner is free to sell to whoever they choose. Which differs from a CAT where the local authority remain the asset owner.

Multiple Asset Transfer

Multiple asset transfer to local communities is increasingly in demand as local authorities prioritise efficient asset ownership, reducing excess expenditure and reconfiguring current service provisions

Cross-subsidy is one solution, where one income generating asset is used to subsidise costs of a community facility that would otherwise be unsustainable if simply transferred under CAT

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Multiple asset transfer categories:

Place-based

Transfer of mixed assets within a local authority to underpin new community enterprises

Service-led

Transfer of specific services (library) that are costly or inefficient. Including service redesign and modernisation

Asset type

Identifying multiple transfer options for specific types of asset (community centres or sports facilities)

Case Study - Multiple Asset Transfer and Library

Glendale Gateway Trust, Northumberland



The local community set up the trust and decided a community resource centre was required. The trust bought a derelict building via CAT from the council and raised £750,000 for the conversion works.

Once the Cheviot Centre opened in 2001 it provided a tourist hub, meeting exhibition and office space for a range of voluntary and community organisations.

The trust currently hold £1.4 million in assets. It stimulates local economic growth by generating annual income of £143,000 from assets and employs 10 people

Next steps: Completing an asset transfer of the former library and transforming it into two affordable housing units

Crofton Park Library, Lewisham



Social enterprise Eco Computer Systems saved three libraries that were threatened with closure in 2010 via an open procurement process.

Crofton Park Library was essential for families with young children and for those who required free internet access.

Eco Computer Systems opens the library for 40 hours per week with 35 volunteers. They created a community hub via provisions of book loans, children's reading initiatives and activities. New additional services like community café, computer recycling and hire rooms generate more income streams.

Next steps: Plans to hire a part-time manager, run pre-employment and IT support sessions, "pop-up" cinema and community radio station

Case Study - Community Centres

St John's Community Centre, Mildenhall, Suffolk



The ST John's estate is becoming uneconomical to operate, due to high social housing and an ageing population

Partnership between Keystone Development Trust and district council have agreed to build and new centre and 20+ homes , with Keystone owning and operating.

The development utilises a counterweight cross subsidising strategy, where the homes are all social housing, except three which are rented. The rent income generated will support the costs of running the centre. This means the local authority does not fund the maintenance of additional services

Hay-on-Wye Cheese Market, Wales



This grade II listed building was council surplus and needed repairs. A CAT was granted under the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The building was renovated using sustainable methods and materials to preserve the building. Creating short term jobs for the local economy and long term growth though a thriving community

The building now has a community space on the ground floor and holiday rentals on the first floor that provide vital income

This scheme enables community engagements, utilisation of unused space and job creation. However, the grade listed building had many legal constraints thus the project took four years to complete

Friends of Jubilee Pool, Bristol



In December 2021 the FoJP was established as a not-for-profit company to bid and manage the pool and gym via CAT. They had five directors and 15 local Bristolian volunteers

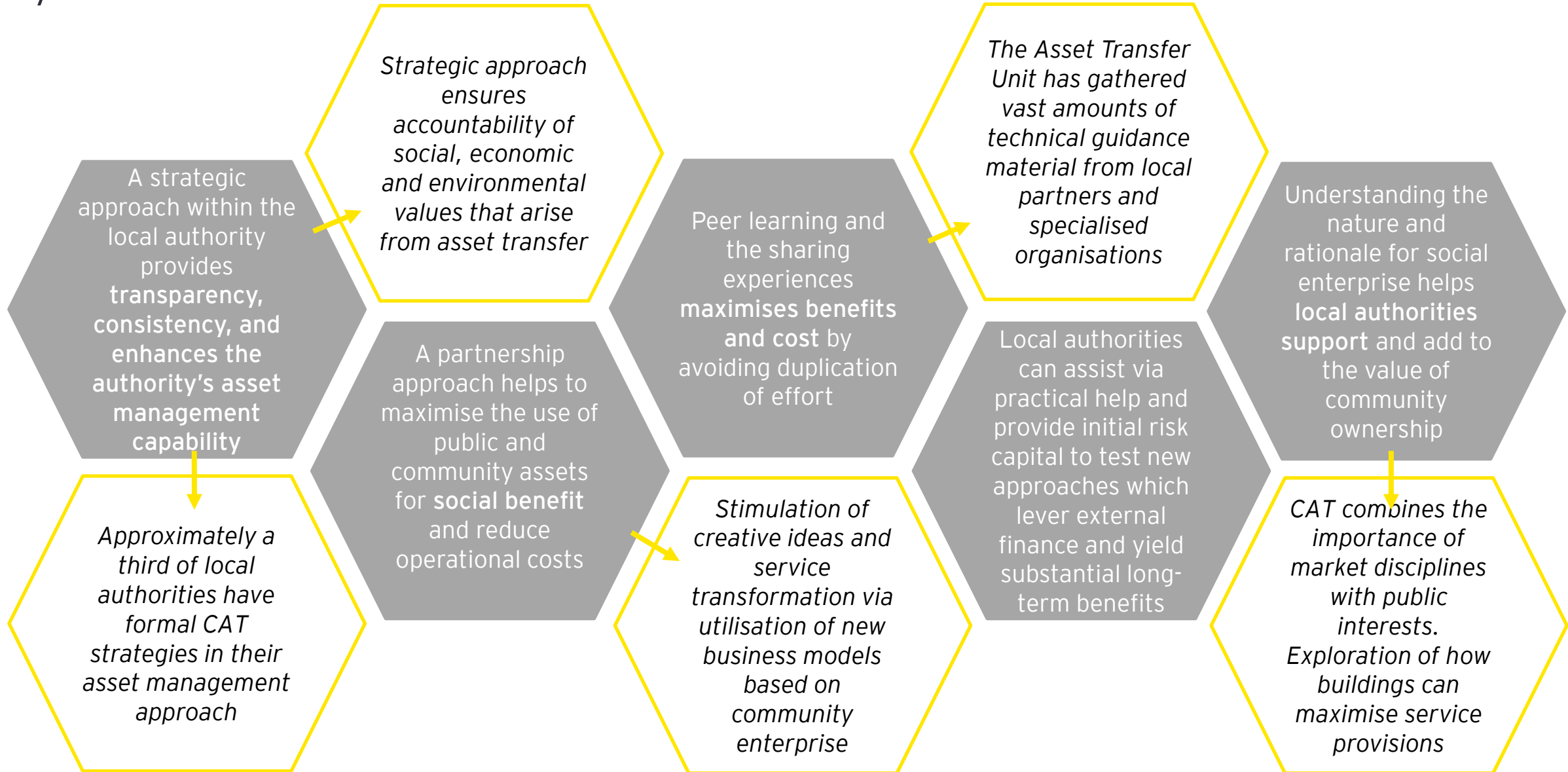
The goal was to provide a leisure centre that was good quality, sustainable, local and accessible. They was also emphasis on commemorating the rich intergenerational history of the pool.

Thus far the FoJP have begun the CAT bid process, generated a business plan, have a quote for the maintenance costs and conducted a 24 hour swim to begin offsetting the costs

The next step is to gather community opinions and to understand what the local community would like to see in their leisure centre

Key Lessons

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Key Considerations

Local Authorities Support

- Support via access to property management and accounting expertise within the council
- Offering short licenses and leases in the early stages of a transfer during a “testing” period
- Offering sale or lease terms that are proportionate to the social nature of the organisation instead of profit-based
- Recognising the value of initial investing capital can reassure potential social and private investments



Community Rights

- This gives Parish councils and local community groups and neighbourhood forums the ability to nominate assets which will be of community benefit
- Neighbourhood forums require 21 members on the electorate register to have input
- All participating bodies must show they are holistically concerned with the asset benefit to the local authority area



Building Quality

- Ensuring provision of full information for maintenance requirements and costs of the building in question



Sustainability

- Choosing locations of community value that are not in use currently, but can be useful in the long-term
- Buying assets with non-ancillary value IE a potential constant main usage. *Example; not agricultural fields that are used for festivals annually*



How can a local authority ensure a successful CAT?



1

Securing high level support of the Council

Assign a dedicated team responsible for the liaising with potential community groups & access to inhouse expertise such as property management.



2

Preparation

Provide clear signposting to useful business planning materials that will help the community to write their business plan



3

Securing support of the Councillors

Ensure that the relevant Councillor is engaged with the business plan and has provided insight and feedback



4

Engage with Community Stakeholders

Connect community stakeholders that may be interested in the CAT and keen to be involved/offer support



5

Convening & Supporting

Convene with all key stakeholders to support them to collaborate and develop a plan suitable for all parties. Provide signposting to opportunities for relevant business planning upskilling



6

Launch CAT Bidding Process

Prepare an opportunity to scrutinise the business plans, providing helpful insight into potential challenges as well as relevant solutions



7

Financing

Create a small investment pot to kick start applications. In addition, provide clear signposting for grant funding and relevant loans.



8

Reporting

Offer a feedback loop in the form of a monthly stakeholder update to offer support and share learning opportunities as well as key contacts for further support.

A Local Authority Strategy for CATs

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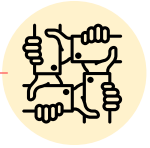
Create a community engagement and needs assessment framework that will enable:

- The identification of underutilised assets and prioritise based on community needs and capacity
- Support effective engagement with the community to identify community groups that would be interested in taking over the asset to understand the support they would require



Establish a robust governance framework which considers the full design making process providing:

- Defined roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders
- A collaborative decision making body
- A cadence for governance meetings and actions



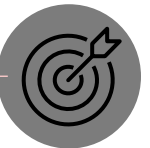
Create a knowledge and support platform, that will:

- Provide dedicated training and upskilling opportunities
- Identify relevant resources to support the community groups
- Support the community groups to collaboratively develop their business plans
- Provide consideration of the financial support and initiatives that the community groups may be eligible for
- Provide regular opportunities for reviewing and feeding back on plans



Establish performance metrics and evaluation criteria to determine what success looks like, clarifying:

- A catalogue of examples and scenarios as a basis for 'successful' operations and decision making opportunities
- A timeline for planning with specific goals/reflection points with regular opportunities for review and an indication of supportive resources relevant to each point in time
- A support process for business plans that are struggling at each point in their lifecycle with a dedicated plan for how the local authority and the relevant network can support them



A celebration framework, to:

- Celebrate successful community-led initiatives
- Highlight positive stories
- Support policymakers to streamline the transfer process and encourage future CATs

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD 2023/24
CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

	COUNCILLOR	27 June 2023	25 July 2023	26 Sept 2023	24 Oct 2023	28 Nov 2023	4 Jan 2024	30 Jan 2024	22 Feb 2024	13 March 2024 (Ext)
	Manku	P	P	P	P					
1.	Shaik	P	P	P	Ap	P	P	P	P	P
2.	Escott	AP	P	P	P	P	P	P	Ap	P
3.	Hulme	P	P	P	P	P	P	Ap	P	Ap
4.	Iftakhar	P	P	P	P	P	Ap	P	P	P
5.	Khawar						P	P	P	P
6.	Mann	P	P	P	Ap	P	P	P	Ap	Ap
7.	Matloob	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
8.	Mohindra	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
9.	O'Kelly	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
10.	Stedmond	P	P	AP	AP	P	P	P	P	Ap

P = Present for whole meeting
P* = Present for part of meeting
Ap = Apologies given
Ab = Absent, no apologies given

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