



## **Report on the NWTWC Learning Exchange Seminar Communities in Control: Asset Transfer. Heywood – 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009.**

### Introduction

This learning exchange seminar was attended by 19 people including 4 local people involved with the NDC. It was designed to inform from a national, regional and local perspective the rationale and challenges around asset transfer and provide a case study from the locality. This would be followed by discussion with an opportunity to share experience, knowledge and understanding and also question the speakers more closely on specific elements of the process.

### The seminar

Each person introduced themselves and briefly said what they wanted out of the seminar. While many participants came with a general interest in other peoples experiences and/or to find out about best practice, some had specific interest for example in relation to Parish Councils, running assets, self employment possibilities, exit strategies and taking over NDC assets. Eve Davidson then welcomed everyone on behalf of NWTWC and Penny Sharp, Head of Regeneration Service, on behalf of Rochdale Metropolitan Council. Penny said that Rochdale were proud of what they have achieved in terms of Asset Transfer and still had lots to learn.

### **Knowing your Assets from your Elbow.**

Steve Conway from Community Matters gave an overview of the national context (see [http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/The\\_National\\_Context.pdf](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/The_National_Context.pdf) for powerpoints) and Debbie Lamb, N. E. Regional Development Manager, Development Trusts Association (DTA) considered the local authority perspective (see [http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/The\\_Local\\_Authority\\_Perspective.pdf](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/The_Local_Authority_Perspective.pdf))

### **Case Study: Norden Library, Asset Transfer : Lessons Learned**

Stephanie Thornton, Community Affairs Manager, Regeneration Service, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council then presented a case study from Rochdale where several assets have been transferred and others are at various stages of development.

The library service relocated from a building which was important to local people. (Many asset transfers are based on passion for a building.) A local philanthropist offered £150,000 on condition that it was use for facilities for older and young residents.

Stephanie said that none of the transfers had been easy. In this case a particular challenge with this one was that during the process, there were 2 interested community groups aligned to different political parties. The resolution was that one lost interest and the other obtained community trust status. The DTA gave an advancing assets award, 50% to the Local Authority and 50% to the community Trust for advice. The council

eventually sold the Community Trust the building for £55,000 (market value £180k), the rest of the money could be used for rehabilitating the building.

GP's are currently negotiating to get a tenancy which would ensure secure income.

Some of the challenges could happen again but there were lessons learned. These included

- Involving councillors but avoiding politics – professional and political judgements may be different
- Have a robust process
- Be pro-active, identify surplus building and land
- Work closely with Property services
- Single gateway for interest in Asset transfer
- A simple questionnaire
- A sponsoring service
- Buy in at senior level

Rochdale's strategy is in development.

## **Discussion**

Steve Conway facilitated a discussion which is summarised below.

- There was concern about how communities with more deprived communities might access asset transfer and the need for community workers in such areas to support asset transfer. Few deprived communities have Parish Councils which have resources which could help
- Organisations need to be aware of massive workload and time commitment
- Partnerships can work well bringing in complementary resources
- The Heywood NDC requested help to have a dialogue with the council about handing over NDC assets. They were advised to get more specialist help with this
- The Public Request for Disposal (PROD - legislation from the 1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act requiring sale of derelict assets ) could be useful to mention in negotiations
- Ideas for publicising a single gateway included via a website, infrastructural meetings and all places the third sector meets including LA meetings with the third sector via the LSP
- COMPACT can be useful
- Community Matters is developing a Guide to Asset Transfer for community workers
- It can be hard to ensure whole community accessibility; it can be white dominated
- Good to go and see a group who have done it( DTA and Community Matters have funding for this)
- There are a wide range of organisations from different social and economic backgrounds involved
- A local community running a building makes a real difference. It gives people an anchor and focus and makes things happen.

## **Summary and concluding remarks**

Jeff Scales, N W Regional Development Manager , DTA referred to the Third Sector perspective in his presentation (see [http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/The\\_Third\\_Sector\\_Perspective.pdf](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/The_Third_Sector_Perspective.pdf) ) He said there were a number of challenges especially concerning financial issue which need to be dealt with creatively.

He recommended people to look at the community Matters and DTA Websites. See link <http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/events/recent-events.php> for both websites

## Feedback

Eight people completed evaluation forms

The table below shows which speaker attendees found most useful. Some individuals noted more than one in their response:

Speaker	Community Matters – S Conway	D T A – Jeff Scales	D T A Debbie Lamb	Rochdale MBC – Stephanie Thornton
Number	3	3	2	4

The table below shows which aspects of the seminar were most useful. Some individuals noted more than one in their response:

Aspect	Presentations	Networking	Idea Sharing	Group Discussion
Number	5	3	3	4

With regard to individuals changing aspects of their practice as a result of learning on the day, intended actions identified were:

- Speak to Community Matters and DTA and Rochdale MBC.
- Look at legal sides of asset transfer.
- Relay information to clients.
- Continue to try and involve Local County Councils (Town & Parish) in this agenda.

Seven individuals made new contacts at the event.

## Conclusions

Although this event generated fewer numbers than our previous seminars given the quality of the speakers, information presented and opportunity to share information and network it proved to be a worthwhile for those who attended.

There was good opportunity for people to address specific areas of concern and problems in a more in depth way. Links between the attendees and both Development Trust Association and Community Matters were made and ongoing support was offered to progress the asset transfer agenda in the region.