



**Report of the Convener of the
Community Assets Scrutiny Inquiry Panel 5 August 2024**

Community Assets Scrutiny Inquiry

FINDINGS REPORT

Purpose	The purpose of this report is to help the Panel to develop its conclusions and recommendations resulting from the scrutiny inquiry into Community Assets.
Content	This report provides a summary of the evidence from the review. The report also includes some themes for discussion by the Panel, which have been drawn up based the Terms of Reference.
Councillors are being asked to	To consider these findings and discuss possible conclusions and recommendations.
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1.0 Introduction

The Inquiry into Community Assets commenced on the 1 February 2024 and evidence has been gathered from a number of sources over following months. The Panel will now start the process of concluding their inquiry and agreeing recommendations that will be presented to Cabinet.

2.0 Findings and Emerging Conclusions

This report highlights some of the key themes to consider based on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and forms the basis for writing the final report.

The final report when written will answer the inquiry key question by using the findings from the inquiry to draw conclusions.

The Panel are asked to discuss their thoughts on the issues below and raise anything that they wish to add so that the Scrutiny Officer can gather views. The Scrutiny Officer will then write the final report based upon this and by referencing it to the evidence gathered as detailed in the pack attached.

The conclusions should answer the Inquiry Key Question, which is

How can the Council ensure that its community assets are working to provide the best outcomes for the people of Swansea.

What is not part of this inquiry...

Specific venues, only as examples of practice. The inquiry will have a strategic focus, with overview of roles and responsibilities, priorities, powers, current experience and trends, partnership activity and achievement, and how things can be improved.

3.0 Find below some of the key points and issues to consider. These have been highlighted by Stakeholders and Panel members throughout the inquiry. This is not an exhaustive list and they are in no particular order:

1. Thoughts about whether the council should do it at all...?

There were some differences in opinion at the onset of the inquiry about whether we should be doing Community Asset Transfer at all. Some Panel members and evidence givers felt that it was a useful tool to empower communities while others felt like it was plundering Swansea's resources. Given these varying views and what legislation in Wales allows, the Panel have looked at how the process could be improved whilst recognising that financial restraints play a significant factor in how we deliver this locally.

2. Consultation?

- Should the council require a certain basic level of consultation, who is responsible for it and how outcomes are considered in application process.
- Should that include for example guaranteed consultees i.e. Ward Councillors, Community Councils etc.

3. Support for applicants: before, during application and after application?

- Recognise that different support is needed at various stages of process.
- Filtering out those who are not able to take on a CAT early in process.
- Clear guidance for applicants which states the conditions and constraints - Idea of Toolkit for applicants.
- Website/pages...best use of to help filter, signpost and provide case studies and links.
- SCVC support for applicants – what support they can provide and how it links into our processes. Can we make more use of this?
- Should the ultimate vision be to provide more support with similarities to yellow license holders?

4. Mentoring, case studies, networking and signposting?

- Highlighted as a useful way of improving knowledge and support of/for applicants and leaseholders. Included external peer mentoring between organisations was mentioned along with network opportunities.

5. A single point of contact?

- This issue was highlighted several times through the consultation with stakeholders.
- Not necessary the single point being a specialist in all areas of CAT process but a facilitator and/or link into the authority and a signposter? Could it be shared on case-by-case basis...allocated across relevant services to reduce impact on one dept?

6. Risks and barriers associated with CAT?

- Are they being address or mitigated where possible, if not what can be done to do this?

7. Resources available across the council for CAT?

- There is not a specific team that works on CAT, it is spread across different departments. It is a reactive process; do not go out looking for potential CAT but respond when interest is shown.
- Are the resources available across the Council adequate to support the CAT process effectively...where are the pinch points? What can be done?

8. Process, probity and the Swansea Policy/vision/strategy?

- The Panel agreed the process is robust, with clear accountability and good probity. Follows regulatory framework.
- Experienced officers working hard to enable this process, praise received from those consulted as to the support the received, from particularly cultural services officers.
- Communication between departments an issue raised by stakeholders. Should there be regular CAT support meeting involving all officers associated to CAT, cross departmental to discuss and iron out any issues arising including support and timescale issues?
- Does the Swansea Policy support the Councils wider aims and objectives?
- The Swansea Policy document - some of the issues raised include its accessibility, clarity and useability.
- Should the process be reactive (as currently) vs proactive (other LA examples)? If proactive, one of the ideas given was transfer of LA assets/building that are empty/decaying as an example given. Proactive much more resource intensive. Should there be consultation about the Councils overall vision/strategy in relation to CAT?

9. Elected Councillors?

- Should there be training and information for elected Councillors. Should that be available to Community Councils.

10. Timescales?

- Comments saying it can be lengthy process. Complexity of lease and importance of ensuring due diligence highlighted.
- Legal aspects can take a long time.
- Staff shortages and resource issues across Council highlighted.
- Are there pinch points, if so, how can they be addressed, if at all.

11. Due diligence?

- Is due diligence completed effectively around for example financial resilience, governance, Welsh language, equalities, sustainability, maintenance requirements and positive effects on community (and ensuring no adverse effects).
- Sustainability checking form part of this (future generations)
- Assistance and information needed on the duty of care responsibilities the organisations will be taking on was highlighted.
- Providing information on utilities and how much things will cost at start of lease i.e.: gas or specialist things like Legionnaires advice etc.
- Are adherence to due diligence issues monitored post lease, should they be. Do we have adequate level of support and contact post lease.

12. Defects and issues found or arising following the lease being given?

- Including things the Council may do that affects the asset transferred, directly or indirectly, after issuing of lease (some examples were given of some of those negative impacts).

13. License vs transfer/lease or other option?

- Community Centre yellow license model very good but resource intensive to roll that kind of support more widely, should this type of support be the way forward...ideally.
- Lease vs other methods: Access to grants most often require the asset to have a lease to access them, therefore the driver for leases over license option for many.

14. Benefits to Council and to local Communities

- Do you as a Panel feel that this is generally the case in Swansea? For Council? For communities? – from the evidence you have gathered.
- Examples of success have included Coed Gwillim and Underhill Park, especially in drawing in funding.
- Financial benefits to the Council to transfer?
- What do you as a scrutiny Panel (from the evidence you have gathered) found works well and not so well in relation to CAT?

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no specific legal implications raised in this report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

Background papers: None