



DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER (CAT)

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

1. Introduction

This is the third Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Annual Report for Dumfries and Galloway Council.

Our CAT Strategy is about empowering local people to make use of their assets to provide services to help our communities thrive. Community groups across Dumfries and Galloway have embraced the opportunity to manage and acquire land and buildings and CATs continue to be a popular method of supporting empowerment.

The Strategy Objectives are about the Council putting the customer first, minimising bureaucracy and supporting communities to develop their creative local aspirations. They are about responding to customer feedback and developing supports and systems that respond to customers' needs. Councillors enthusiastically endorsed the Strategy back in March 2017 and the challenge for the three years has been to put these very sound and progressive Objectives into practice and sustain this approach.

Our Council continues to work on changing its culture to become more engaging and empowering with its local communities. It has reshaped to be in a better position to work alongside communities to enable them to thrive at a time of fiscal restraint. CAT is part of that empowerment. We are having conversations with our communities about their priorities and inviting them to a more participative, community led relationship. CAT is part of that process.

During the year 2019/20 we undertook our first Review of the Strategy and Procedure to ensure that it reflected our experience over the last three years. A number of clarifications and improvements were agreed. One of the key areas of development has been about how we evidence the social value a CAT brings to their local area and the introduction of an internally recognised Social Value tool will add that information to our reports. Another development now well embedded is that Community Transfer Bodies that have been through the Council's CAT Procedure are now helping other groups embarking on the journey. Peer learning is becoming a more common feature of the CAT landscape.

The CAT Procedure continues to involve learning for our Council and its partners. We have worked closely with Third Sector partners to develop ways of working that are complementary and we have all embraced this different way of doing things. Our Council continues to learn much from the communities themselves.

The Council's capacity and speed of response can be challenging as the number of CATs grow – particularly for Legal Services and Property and Architectural Services. However, enhancements have been made to the CAT Procedure that improve cross departmental working when processing and managing CATs; and we have introduced a six-month review for supporting Expressions of Interest, in recognition of the Council's limited capacity.

Elected Members have again supported a wide range of Business Plans for community use of assets - everything from a Community Hub in Lockerbie to a Men's Shed in Dumfries to a Caravan Park in Kirkcudbright. Communities are becoming increasingly more confident and creative in their aspirations, visions and use of local assets, many of which support the longer-term aspirations of communities.

2. Legislative Requirements

Section 95 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires the Council to set out, in a published annual report, how it has promoted and supported Community Asset Transfer, numbers of community asset transfer requests received and the outcomes of these requests. Specifically:

- Promotion of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) - anything the relevant authority has done to promote the use of asset transfer requests and support community transfer bodies to make requests.
- Number of CATs received and those agreed/ refused/ appealed with reasons.

3. Council CAT Strategy

The Council continues to support community groups to take on the ownership of land and buildings to benefit their local communities. Support has been built into the process from its inception three years ago. The following details the support currently provided by Dumfries and Galloway Council:

3.1 Proactive Support for CAT

The Council agreed its Community Asset Transfer Strategy and Procedure on 7 March 2017. Promotion of Community Asset Transfer and support to community bodies to make asset transfers was considered to be very important by the Council throughout the development of the CAT Strategy and Procedure.

The Strategy states:

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is not just about the transfer of land, buildings and structures; rather it is part of a wider picture in helping communities meet their shared aspirations and visions. It is about helping and empowering communities make best use of their local assets to become resilient, entrepreneurial; and thriving in a fiscal climate where the capacity for councils to continue to deliver services in the traditional manner becomes challenging.

Our Council values local empowerment, respects our communities, works in partnership and with communities to sustain services. We do not want to do things "to" communities but rather want to "work with" them so they can 'do it for themselves'.

3.2 Listening to Community Groups and Stakeholders

The Council continues to reflect on its CAT process by working with Third Sector expert advisers such as Community Ownership Support Service (COSS), Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) and other councils; this has proved extremely important particularly where complex CATs are being progressed.

Through the CAT process officers and managers meet with Community Transfer Bodies to evaluate the effectiveness of CAT and the CAT Procedure. Learning from these meetings is analysed and improvement actions planned and implemented. In formulating our CAT strategy and Procedure we listened to stakeholders who told us that good practice would address the following issues:

1. Making it easier and clearer how to go about having a pre-application discussion and making a request for an asset - the Council's decision-making process (including the role of Committees) in relation to transfers; more visible web information about available assets and the process; funding routes; easy read style guidance and application forms including a Business Plan template (Plain English Crystal Mark would be the ideal);
2. A single point of contact for communities, Elected Members, partner organisations and staff to go to about potential asset transfers;
3. Procedures to deal with disputes/mediation and an appeal process;
4. Training for relevant staff about supporting organisations to apply for an asset transfer;
5. Clear timescales for each stage of an application (the Guidance and Regulations to be issued by the Scottish Government was expected to define the maximum number of days for each stage);
6. Clear criteria about how the Council will assess an application (including for example the engagement with the wider community that an applicant is expected to undertake/evidence; sustainability of the applicant organisation; the viability of the Business Plan; environmental and financial sustainability of the asset);
7. Clarity about considering and allocating capital investment to assets of interest to organisations;
8. Improved advertising of assets, which may be available for transfer;
9. Clearer criteria for any conditions to be included in the transfer agreement - for example in the event an asset ceases operation once transferred to community ownership/management; or prohibiting resale within a certain period; unsustainability of the community organisation.

We have adopted these approaches over the past three years and continue to refine and improve. We are beginning to see the fruits of some of the CATs, however some of the more complex plans will take several more years to become fully manifest and begin delivering results for their communities.

3.3 Peer Learning

The CAT Procedure has been live now for three years and during that time officers, Members and community groups have been on a learning curve. We now have many groups that have been through the process and as a result have built new capacities and increased their confidence in designing their Business Plans, consulting their communities and navigating the process. They have begun informally to share learning with each other and officers are keen to help facilitate that process. Groups are now also more familiar with national organisations such as COSS and DTAS and have found them helpful for guidance and advice:

COSS – Community Ownership Support Service
DTAS – Development Trusts Association Scotland

3.4 Review of the CAT Strategy and Procedure

A formal Review of our arrangements was undertaken in 2019 and the improvements to our Procedure were agreed by the Communities Committee on 10 December 2019 ([click here](#)) and the Finance, Procurement and Transformation Committee on 11 February 2020 ([click here](#))

3.5 CAT Objectives to support and empower communities

The Council agreed 4 Objectives for CAT which are both about promotion of CAT and supporting community groups through the process:

Objective 1

To promote CAT as a key aspect of community empowerment.

Objective 2

To support community groups throughout the CAT process

Objective 3

To ensure transparency and fairness in our decision-making

Objective 4

To put the customer first and respond to what our service users (CAT) groups and people supporting them are telling us about future improvements

3.6 Actions to Support Community Groups

The resultant action plan to develop the Strategy included:

- the development of clear procedures
- training and development of key officers from other departments and ward officers to support communities.
- a website and easy- read guidance to assist applicants, training for ward officers to support communities through the community asset transfer process,
- signposting groups to other sources of support including Third Sector Interface and national organisations such as COSS and DTAS
- the setting up of an appeals panel comprising elected members not involved in the original decision making committee.

All of these Actions have been completed.

4. Support in 2019/20 for community groups

4.1 Clear Procedure

In developing our original Procedure, we engaged with groups that had previously undergone CAT to seek their views on how we could improve the historic process. In summary applicants wanted: a conversation and a local point of contact they could talk to. They wanted a simplified, less bureaucratic process for applying for asset transfer. These views were included in the design of the procedure and accompanying materials in the website. They were also reflected in the approach the Council takes to CAT which is based around dialogue and face to face support, building confidence and community capacity to take on challenges. There is a willingness to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. These approaches build community confidence in the process and help promote CAT.

The Review and updating of the Procedure at the end of 2019 picked up on areas where CTBs had identified different wording would be helpful; and about our expectation that CTBs would seek to maximise external funding and offer/contribution for the asset.

4.2 The Community Asset Transfer website.

Feedback from service users tells us that community groups value the website as it is engaging, invites applicants to a discussion, minimises use of jargon and bureaucracy and offers a single point of contact. The site lists all property in Council ownership so that community groups can see what might be available for CAT. It contains all required advice and proforma for making an application. It also invites community groups to have a conversation and offers a single point of contact via their local Ward Officers.

4.3 A single point of contact

Support from Ward Officers Community Transfer Bodies tell us that they value the support provided by Ward Officers. In particular, they appreciate having a source of support to help them navigate the Council so that they do not have to contact several individual Services for information. All Ward Officers have received sound training in the process and ways to support communities. In addition, link officers from other Directorates have received training in CAT and provide support to community groups to assist with their Business Plan development.

4.4 Promotion

4.4.1 The Council's CAT Procedure continues to be promoted on social media links to the CAT website are promoted through the Council's Facebook and Twitter pages. Word of mouth is perhaps the greatest PR tool in our region and the success of a number of CAT groups is well known and inspires other groups to take the CAT journey. The CAT film the Council is currently producing contains the voices of these groups and will appear on the CAT website as examples of good practice and to allow others to learn from these groups' experiences.

4.4.2 Ward Officers are in each Council Ward. The Ward Officer actively promotes CAT and builds the confidence of local groups in accessing and going through the CAT Procedure.

4.4.3 Information to Community Councils. All Community Councils received information on CAT and the website link. Community Councils are consulted as part of the CAT Procedure.

4.4.4 Support from Third Sector Partners.

Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway was actively involved in updating the Council's Procedure, works closely with the Ward Officers, trains in the Council's CAT Procedure and promotes CAT to community groups.

4.4.5 Support from Elected Members

Elected Members are increasingly familiar with CAT, take a very active interest and are informed of every application in their Ward.

4.4.6 Engagement and Listening.

Our Council has active discussion with all applicants and improved the information available on our website based on customer feedback. Word of mouth is particularly important in rural communities and potential applicants gain confidence from hearing of other groups' experiences.

4.4.7 Liaison across Council Services

There is ongoing training and active coaching for Ward Officers and Community Asset Managers. All Ward Officers and Community Asset Managers were trained extensively in the CAT Strategy and Procedure in order to maximise local support to groups with aspirations to take on land or buildings.

All these officers involved in CAT meet regularly to ensure that their support to community groups and the CAT process is joined up.

There is also liaison with Property and Architectural Services and Legal Services including attendance at officer training sessions and dialogue in a Strategic Assets Board Working Group. This will be further developed over the coming year.

5. Community groups views on the support offered

52 community groups which have undergone asset transfer or are currently in the process were asked three specific questions: 10 responses were received.

Q1 Please comment on the support you have received to work through the Community Asset Transfer process?

Excellent:	20%
Very Good:	30%
Good:	30%
Satisfactory:	0%
Weak:	20%

Comments:

- *Our Ward Officer has been excellent*
- *Our Ward Officer and Community Assets Manager have been great and helped us through the process.*

Q2 If you used the website, was it useful and easy?

Excellent:	10%
Very Good:	40%
Good:	10%
Satisfactory:	20%
Weak:	0%
Didn't Use	20%

Comments:

- *We had trouble filling in the on-line form.*
- *Once we got used to the webpage it had a lot of information that helped us.*
- *The links to other organisations was very helpful.*

Q3 Did you get a timely response to your request for Community Asset Transfer?

Excellent:	40%
Very Good:	10%
Good:	20%
Satisfactory:	10%
Weak:	20%

Comments:

- *The local Ward Officer and his team were excellent and always responds very quickly.*
- *Getting information from other parts of the Council can be time consuming.*
- *The COVID Pandemic has slowed things down, but I am sure they will pick up pace.*

General Comments:

- *It has been really helpful that we were able to progress at our own pace.*
- *We found the whole process really slow and time consuming.*
- *The Council has been really supportive not only of our Request, but our overall community objectives and aspirations.*
- *The Development Trust Association Scotland have been really helpful and provided us with a lot of advice.*

6. Number of Community Asset Transfers

The Council's CAT Procedure works on a Stage 1 and Stage 2 process. Stage 1 is simply an expression of interest. It signals to the Council a community interest which allows us to check title and collate information which is of use to the community transfer body in developing its business plan. This information includes such items as condition surveys, running costs, planned repairs etc. It also triggers allocation of officer support to the group for six months, with a review after that time to check the viability of the Application and assess necessary support.

Not all Stage 1 applications progress to CAT. Applicants may decide to withdraw for a variety of reasons. There are no prohibitions on the Council selling or leasing the asset during the Stage 1 period.

Stage 2 is a formal application for a CAT, accompanied by a business case, an indication of social return on investment and a financial plan demonstrating how the CTB will sustain responsibility for the asset.

Once a Stage Two application has been validated, the Council cannot sell or lease the asset. Council officers, mainly the Ward Officer work with the CTB to access funding and encourage them to make a financial contribution to the Council for the asset. A Social Return on Investment is also now undertaken on all CAT applications to provide full financial information on the benefits to the Council and community.

The Finance, Procurement and Transformation Committee makes the final decision after a recommendation from the Area Committee.

Summary of Community Asset Transfers Received, in Progress and Completed for the year 2019/20 (52)

Applications in Progress

No. of Stage 1 applications in progress: **33**

No. of Stage 1 applications withdrawn: **5**

No. of Stage 2 applications in progress: **14** (inc Agreed, Refused & Request for Review)

Application Decisions

Long term Leases (>20 years) 3

No. of long term leases requested: 3

No. of long term leases agreed 3

No. of long term leases refused 0

No. of appeals to decision 0

Full Community Asset Transfer 5

No. of applications for full Community Asset Transfer 7

No. of Community Asset transfers agreed 5

No. of Community Asset Transfers refused 2

No. of appeals to decision 1

Community Asset Transfers by Ward as at 31 March 2020

No. of Stage 1 applications in progress: (33)

Ward 1 - Stranraer & the Rhins (5)

Enterprise House
 Enterprise Workshop Hillside Drive Stranraer (x2)
 Stranraer Clock Tower
 Playing Fields Stranraer

Ward 2 - Mid Galloway & Wigtown West (7)

Blairmount Park Newton Stewart (x2);
 Penninghame Centre (x3)
 Wigtown bowling Club
 Kirkcowan Hall

Ward 3 - Dee & Glenkens (4)

Kirkcudbright Tennis Club
 Gartshore Park (Allotments)
 Dalry Multi Use Games Area
 Land at Underhill Dalry

Ward 4 - Castle Douglas & Crocketford (1)

Carlingwark Outdoor Centre.

Ward 6 – North West Dumfries (4)

North West Resources Centre & Lincluden House (4)

Ward 9 – Nith (7)

Noblehill Community Centre (2)
 Land at Kingholm Quay
 Midsteeple (2)
 116-118 English Street
 Loreburn Hall

Ward 11- Annandale North (2)

Land between D.S Smith & the 3G Pitch Lockerbie.
 Former Caravan Park

Ward 12 – Annandale East & Eskdale (3)

Changing Rooms attached to Springfield Primary School
 Former Gretna Registrars Officer

Meikleholm Playing fields.

No. of Stage 2 applications in progress: (4)Ward One Stranraer & Rhins (1)

Kirkcolm Village Hall Carpark

Ward 2 - Mid Galloway & Wigtown West (2)

Woodside Industrial Units Glen Luce
 Lorry Park Glen Luce

Ward 9 – Nith (1)

Land at Kingholm Quay

Applications Decided (10)Ward 1 Stranraer & Rhins (2)

Portpatrick Village Hall (2)

Ward 2 Mid Galloway & Wigtown West (1)

Former Glentroll Primary School

Ward 3 Dee & Glenkens

Kirkcudbright / Silvercraigs Caravan Park

Ward 5 Abbey (1)

Former St Peters Primary School

Ward 9 Nith (4)

1 Cresswell Gardens

Lochvale House Georgetown

Land at Catherine Street

Kingholm Pavilion

Ward 11 Annandale North (1)

Lockerbie Old School / Dryfe Road

RefusalsWard One Stranraer and Rhins (2)

Portpatrick Village Hall

Requests for ReviewWard One Stranraer and Rhins (1)

Portpatrick Village Hall

Financial and Social Impact

In total 8 assets have been transferred to communities through ownership or long-term lease. These assets were historically surplus to DGC requirement or already being leased to the community. The level of savings generated to the Council from the transfer of assets to the Community varies and is linked to the size and nature of the asset in question. Over the period 2019/20, and for assets that had revenue budget attached, an average maintenance budget saving of £2,500 per asset has been generated for the Council.

Social Value

Value is not measured by financial figures alone and when deciding on CAT applications our Elected Members consider the social value brought to local communities by the delivery of the benefits proposed within the CAT Request and Business Plan. This involves consideration of how the plans assist the delivery of Council Priorities e.g. for Social Inclusion, improving the local economy, supporting anti-poverty objectives, helping our children get the best start in life and supporting local skills, learning and employability. All of these things help our communities thrive and bring added value to the community and residents.

From January 2020, the social value of all new CAT Requests will be assessed and presented to Elected Members as part of the decision-making process. The level of social value created by CATs and the delivery of the CTB's Business Plan varies and is very much linked to the outcomes the CTB are looking to improve upon. From the start of 2020 an average of £3.47 for every £1 of discount, requested by the CTB on the value of the asset, is returned to the local community in social value.

7. Monitoring and Reporting

In addition to this Annual Report, the CATs are reported to the four Area Committees in the six monthly and End of Year Communities Business Plan Performance Monitoring Report, so that Elected Members and residents know of these developments in their locality.

CATs featured in the annual Ward Visits undertaken by the Director and supported by Ward Members; and there has been good publicity in local print media for CATs.

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