

Community Asset Transfer in England 2010 to 2018 -  
enabling innovation for positive social change or perpetuating  
entrenched social inequalities?

A summary of findings and conclusions

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## Introduction

This research was undertaken towards a PhD at the University of Manchester. It aimed to establish whether Community Asset Transfer (CAT) could work as a tool for the empowerment of local communities by enabling them to provide facilities and services, on a neighbourhood level, that local authorities and other official bodies were unable to offer.

The study focused on West Yorkshire. The initial phase involved an analysis of the relevant policies and other publicly available documents from each of the five authorities in the county, and an attempt to compile as comprehensive a list as possible of the transferred assets in each. This task proved difficult, however, as Community Asset Transfer is not a statutory requirement and each local authority interprets the term slightly differently. Nor do they all publish (or have available) accurate lists of the transfers completed. An element of detective work was therefore required to conclude that 57 transfers had taken place in West Yorkshire as at the end of November 2017. The primary uses of these assets is shown in table 1, below.

Community centre	22
Open land	11
Enterprise hub/training centre	7
Library	7
Sports and leisure facilities*	5
Public conveniences	3
Museum	1
Land for housing development	1

*Table 1: Primary uses of transferred assets in West Yorkshire*

*\*The Piece Hall in Halifax has been included in the 'sports and leisure' category, even though strictly speaking it is a mixed-use space, incorporating commercial, retail and leisure uses.*

The second phase of the research was to conduct interviews with council officers and councillors from the local authorities of West Yorkshire, and with members of community groups who had gone through (or were in the process of going through) asset transfers. In total, 30 people were interviewed, representing all five authorities and community groups from each one, as well as a representative from Locality, who gave an overview of how the organisation sees Community Asset Transfer working in the region and across England.

The interviews were analysed to look for recurring themes and the most significant of these were then mapped against previously discovered frameworks for measuring empowerment and social capital. This led to the creation of a new model, the Community Asset Transfer Framework, which seeks to make sense of the new findings from the study.

**The Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF): a model for understanding and evaluating those factors most important in empowering community groups to achieve a transfer**

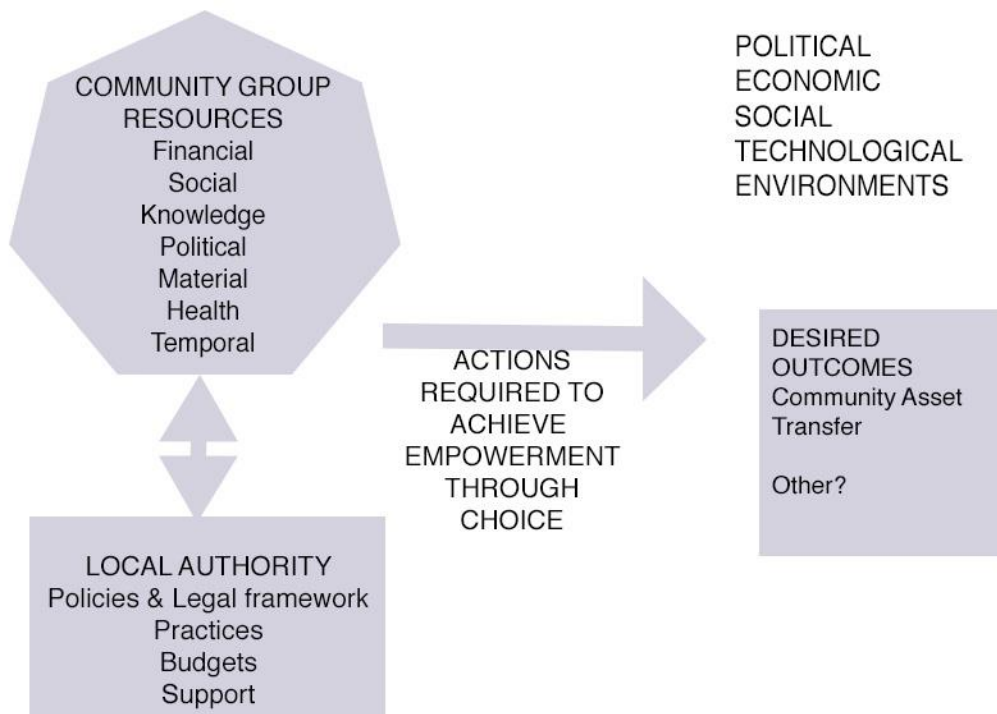


Figure 1: Community Asset Transfer Framework

The Community Asset Transfer Framework (CATF) is an adaptation of several earlier frameworks and models, developed and utilised largely in research in the field of international development. The principal framework underlying the CATF is Kleine’s Choice Framework (2010)<sup>1</sup>, which sought to understand how differing factors worked together (or against one another) to empower people in socio-economic circumstances to make decisions to improve their lives.

The idea of a ‘choice framework’ is to map out the resources that an individual would need, given the structures in which they operated and the ability they had to make meaningful choices about their life, to achieve the outcomes they most desired at a given point. The CATF takes the primary desired outcome to be the asset transfer itself, although the model leaves the door open to the possibility of other outcomes being preferred, in which case the question will arise of whether Community Asset Transfer is the best way to achieve that outcome.

In the CATF, the ability of community groups is recognised to be constrained by factors external to the organisation. Table 2 sets out how these external environments impinge on the activities of community groups, and the centrality of the local authority as an intermediary

<sup>1</sup> Kleine, D. (2010), ICT4what? Using the choice framework to operationalise the capability approach to development, *Journal of International Development*, vol. 22, pp. 674-692

between the community organisation and the wider political, economic, social and technological environment.

Area of external environment	Ways this impinges on CAT groups
The policies and practices of the local authority regarding asset transfers	Differences in policy and practice directly affect whether a group will be able to take over an asset, and on what terms. This varies from authority to authority.
The attitude of the local authority to Community Asset Transfer as a benefit to communities and an appropriate means to deploy council resources	Some authorities push CATs as a way to reduce their overheads without losing community assets, others show little interest in CATs and their response when approached by community groups varies from positive to suspicious.
The help and support available to the group from both local authority and other agencies	Different authorities offer different levels and types of support to groups. This ranges from advice and consultancy services from external agencies, to Q&A events with the local council, to financial help with grants and loans.
The availability of buildings or land assets suitable for the use the group intends within their local area	The assets available for disposal vary substantially; even where there are properties available, they may not be suitable for the purpose desired.
The legal framework of the Local Government Act, 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 and the Localism Act of 2011	This is the legal framework within which CATs occur.
The impact of austerity economic policies on local government finances and service provision	A local authority's willingness to embrace CAT as a tool depends partly on whether it believes it can afford either to maintain the asset itself, or to forego the capital revenue from disposal.
The extent of a belief in the power and appropriateness of local people taking control of aspects of service provision in political and wider circles	There are mixed perceptions among councillors as to the ability of community groups to succeed in managing assets and delivering services previously offered by the authority.

*Table 2: How external environments impinge on community groups*

*Source: Author*

## The Community Group Perspective

Analysis of the interviews conducted for this research uncovered seven broad resource types needed by community organisations looking to go through the Community Asset Transfer process:

- **Financial resources:** the means to sustain the organisation and the asset;
- **Material resources:** typically, the property asset itself plus any equipment used;
- **Social resources:** strong and enduring bonds within the group and networks, relationships, and the ability to form new contacts with people and organisations of interest outside it;

- **Knowledge resources**, broken down into informational and educational resources: access to information and the ability to integrate; filter and analyse that information to make it useful to the organisation;
- **Organisational Health resources**: good governance; the ability to manage internal conflicts; having a large enough pool of members/volunteers to make it sustainable;
- **Political resources**: access to power and ability to influence decision-making; and
- **Temporal resources**: time availability.

These seven resources identified in the Community Asset Transfer Framework have all been found to be significant to the successful transfer and sustainable future of organisations undertaking asset transfers. The precise degree to which one resource may be more important than another will depend on the circumstances of the group, the nature of the asset being acquired and broader external factors, of which the attitude of the local authority is often the most influential.

The role of each of the seven resources is considered in depth.

**Financial resources** are crucial to the success of a CAT project at every stage of its life. ‘Finance and funding’ was the most talked about subject in interviews conducted for this study. All interviewees discussed concerns and strategies for covering costs, and sustaining assets and services at some length.

It is not surprising that all interviewees mentioned finances, given the centrality of providing a business plan in order for a CAT request to be approved. Raising and spending money usually occupies more time and thought than any other aspect of Community Asset Transfer. Financial resources are critical to the possibility of a group being able to make the choices necessary to acquire and maintain a community asset and provide a service to their local area.

*“Raising and spending money usually occupies more time and thought than any other aspect of Community Asset Transfer.”*

The importance of financial resources may not automatically disadvantage poorer or more deprived neighbourhoods. Certain forms of grant funding give added weighting to applications from such communities. It does, however, limit their potential for fund-raising within the local population, and may also imply less knowledge in these places of how and where to apply for funds that is available. One community group secretary working with a group in a deprived neighbourhood, related a conversation she had had with a fund-raising body. She had queried why no local grants had been made in favour of this poor neighbourhood and was told that no-one from the area had applied. Applicants from around the more affluent parts of town had put in bids for various projects but none had come from the more deprived areas where, arguably, the resources could have been used to greater effect.

For this reason, **knowledge resources**, made up of access to information and ability to interpret and use the information effectively, are also critical factors.

Many groups have complex capital, development or strategic requirements in order to achieve the mission of the group or to improve the asset they are acquiring. The application process for CATs involves business planning, fund-raising and forming a body with a robust and appropriate governance structure. All of these need a level of knowledge within the group or an ability to acquire that knowledge. Temporal resources (below), i.e. the time needed to gather and process information, are also key.

Knowledge resources like these can be bought in, if the group has funds, or may be offered as part of a support package by an external organisation. Providers of knowledge resources include the local authority, bodies such as Locality, or community groups who have gone through the process themselves, and can offer guidance to groups now undertaking the process. The director of one charitable community organisation suggested that a mentoring programme, using the knowledge acquired by previous CAT groups could be one way of sharing such knowledge resources more widely.

Accessing this kind of support requires the organisation to know that help may be there for them. They need at least a general idea that it exists and where to go, in the first instance, to find out how to access it. Communities or groups with fewer networks into local infrastructure may find themselves disadvantaged in being able to find that support. Access to informational resources is thus partly dependent on social resources.

**Social resources** include both internal social reinforcements within the group - the bonds that give it strength and resilience, and the external networks it has and can sustain. These external contacts need to be with the local community, for whom the group is acquiring the asset, and with broader networks such as relevant departments within the local authority, local councillors and politicians, or funding bodies, banks and so on. The ability to generate publicity, either through local media or, increasingly, via social media, is key to attracting new group members, asset users and potential funders to the project. Having a large membership, so that not all responsibility falls on just a few individuals, both shares the workload and increases the sense of ownership felt by the local community in the asset.

A group's access to local politicians was frequently mentioned as having benefitted them in achieving their asset transfer. The influence this gives such groups is an instance of the **political resources** at their disposal. It is unfortunate that applications for asset transfers are frequently the result of a council announcing the closure of a local service or the disposal of a property for redevelopment, as this can set up an antagonistic dynamic between the authority and the community group from the outset. And yet, as community interviewees repeatedly commented, connections on the council or in council offices made a considerable, favourable difference to the progress of their transfer bid.

*“connections on the council or in council offices made a considerable, favourable difference to the progress of their transfer bid”*

There are other ways in which community groups can deploy political resources, such as mobilising local people to support their efforts; lobbying their councillors or Members of Parliament; placing stories in the local news media or social media seeking to put pressure on politicians; and attending events held by local authorities or by other bodies like Locality.

At a CAT event hosted by Bradford Council (BMDC) in 2018, for example, community organisations at different stages of their CAT journeys were able to meet councillors and council officials to ask questions and raise concerns about the process and its problems. Having held a number of these events, BDMC was revising its policy and increasing the levels of support it offered to groups undertaking CATs.

The most important **organisational health resources** of community groups emerged as proper systems of governance, a sufficient number of engaged people willing to share the workload, and alignment with the culture and values of its local community. In order for a community-based organisation to flourish, other parts of that community must feel that it in some way belongs to them, that it is somewhere they are welcome and that it serves their interests in some way. In addition, the health of a community group can be considered to include whether its financial model is robust and sustainable; and whether it has mechanisms and goodwill enough in place to resolve internal conflicts.

Conflict and tensions on their boards were seen to be having a negative impact on two of the community groups studied in this research; in one case, leading to the resignation of a number of board members at a crucial stage of the CAT process. Interviewees from this group talked about how tensions had arisen initially because the form of governance that had been chosen by the board was felt to be undemocratic by certain of its members.

Proper governance, along with financial credibility of community groups are key characteristics sought by local authorities when making transfers. Councillors from Leeds and Bradford stressed the importance of only allowing transfers to groups that met appropriate governance requirements, and that had a large enough membership to look sustainable in the long term. This study uncovered a wide variation in organisation types among CAT groups but all conformed to a recognised model for some form of community or social enterprise, with appropriate governance structures to match.

*“Proper governance, along with financial credibility of community groups are key characteristics sought by local authorities when making transfers”*

The most significant **material resources** of community groups are the transferred assets themselves. These assets, however, represent a double-edged sword for groups, and the important thing, as was advised by a representative of Community Action Bradford is to “make sure you’re taking on an asset rather than a liability”. Where the asset allows the group to generate revenue and be self-sustaining it makes a positive contribution to the group’s financial resources. Buildings can, however, be a drain on both finances and time, as evidenced by many of the interviewees in this study. Typically, though, a group could not achieve its broader aims without premises to operate from, so the materiality of the built and

land assets involved is significant as a resource type in its own right as well as by the effects it has on financial and temporal resources.

**Temporal resources** are often overlooked, but should not be. They came sharply into focus in the present study. Community group interviewees emphasised the time they had personally devoted to the CAT process. In many cases, community Boards included people at or past the age of retirement, with time available.

Respondents also talked about the length and complexity of documents that needed to be completed both to satisfy the local authority of their competence to run the asset, and to apply for grant funding. One community group secretary showed this researcher bulging folders of correspondence, statistics, cash flow projections and funding applications, which spoke volumes about the time required in order to create a successful CAT.

### **Different resources**

The need for different resources may come into focus at different times. As has been suggested, the skills and organisational qualities needed to complete the transfer process are likely to be different from those needed to engage local community support, generate continuing revenue or provide local social value. This may mean that the nature of the group itself has to change through time, and this in turn may necessitate changes of personnel. This process of change can be uncomfortable for the group, and conflict can arise. This is a normal pattern of organisational development and, as long as the group is healthy, with robust governance structures and internal social bonds capable of dealing with those stresses, it can come through this 'storming' phase of its development without losing its focus on its mission (Huczynski and Buchanan, 1991, p.175)<sup>2</sup>.

*“the nature of the group itself [may have to] change through time, and this in turn may necessitate changes of personnel. This process of change can be uncomfortable for the group”*

Community groups considering undertaking the CAT process may find the Community Asset Transfer Framework useful as a tool to assess whether they are ready to do so. Having established what their desired outcomes are, a brief audit of the external environment and of their local authority's attitude to CATs can tell them whether the situation they are in is favourable. From there they should ascertain whether they possess the range of resources necessary to succeed in achieving their outcomes and, should there be gaps, they can think about how to plug those. As an early planning tool, the Framework then prompts them to set out possible actions they might take in order to move through their choices to achieve those outcomes. The feedback mechanism enables plans to be revised and refined as needed.

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<sup>2</sup> Huczynski, A. & Buchanan, D., 1991. *Organisational Behaviour: an introductory text, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Prentice Hall International (UK) Limited



## **The Local Authority Perspective**

Local authorities are key to the operations of Community Asset Transfer. Because CAT policies are set at local level, rather than at national level, it is these local policies and practices that determine the number and nature of asset transfers that take place in an area. The attitude of a council towards CATs was mentioned in all but one of the interviews conducted for this study, with over a hundred separate references made. Although the perceptions of their attitude by individuals within councils may differ from that of those in community groups, respondents to this study considered it to be one of the most important matters to talk about. It is clear, therefore, that councillors need to be aware of their own significance in determining whether their authority will support CATs, and what provision they are willing to make to do that.

All five West Yorkshire authorities have policies relating to CATs and, as of November 2017, there were 57 examples of completed CATs across the county, making it one of the most active regions in England for such transfers, according to Locality. Both the policies and the ways in which they are implemented, however, show substantial variation from authority to authority.

The extent to which the local authorities of West Yorkshire make use of CATs in order to transfer service provision (as opposed to land or property assets only) varies considerably. This research has found that in the West Yorkshire authorities, CATs tend to be primarily about buildings, and the need to reduce costs to the council (either the maintenance, insurance and other costs of the building itself, or the cost of providing the services that were delivered from the premises).

In addition to more pragmatic, financially based reasons for the use of CATs, the authorities in West Yorkshire all assert their belief in the value of the transfers for improving the nature of service provision to local communities. Interviewees were broadly in agreement that managing their own local amenities enabled community groups to make better use of the assets, tailoring service offerings more closely to local needs and benefitting from access to alternative streams of funding and resource that local authorities are unable to draw down themselves.

None of the council officers interviewed had yet encountered 'failed' CATs: instances where community groups had had to hand back or walk away from assets that they had taken on asset transfer. The view expressed is that it was too early in the lifecycle of these projects for that to have become an issue. There were instances, however, where groups had needed additional local authority support in order to complete the CAT process or to sustain it, once the lease had been granted. At two transferred assets in Calderdale, for example, the council had taken out long-term tenancies, moving members of council staff into the properties, to ensure that the community group had a steady, reliable income stream for the foreseeable future.

There was a consensus among council officers interviewed that CATs progressed better and reached completion faster in areas where there was already a strong sense of community and existing local groups with suitable governance structures in place. This is the reason Bradford Council offer assets to parish councils in the first instance, and why Kirklees first started transferring properties to existing tenants. This preference for transferring assets to existing groups, with prior experience of dealing with the local authority also helps speed up the transfer process somewhat. Interviewees from both the local authority side and the community side stressed that getting through the process takes considerable time, especially for newly formed community groups. This explains why, although most authorities have quite extensive pipelines for CATs in different stages of development, there are still relatively few completed transfers across the county.

*“CATs progressed better and reached completion faster in areas where there was already a strong sense of community and existing local groups with suitable governance structures in place”*

Table 3 summarises some of the differences between the five local authorities in West Yorkshire, in their approach to CATs. As well as the clear difference in absolute numbers of assets transferred between the different authorities, perhaps the most striking feature of table 3 is the difference in the length of lease offered by the various councils. Although all the policy documents of the local authorities speak of leases being up to 50 years, Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees have found it necessary to increase this for CATs in their districts, in order for the acquiring groups to stand a better chance of raising capital funding for their projects. That Wakefield council offers much shorter lease periods than the rest may simply be a reflection of the fact that it had only undertaken three transfers to the end of 2017.

The table also discloses some variation in the support the councils offer to groups wishing to embark on the Community Asset Transfer process. Calderdale and Kirklees commission Locality to work with CATs in their areas while Bradford refers CAT groups to Locality and other community development services within the area. Similarly, Leeds refers groups needing help to local third sector community organisations. Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield also make small grants available to groups who successfully apply for CATs, in order that they can cover expenses incurred in the first instance, when they have yet to generate revenue from their building. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) setting out responsibilities the groups have with regard to maintenance of premises are commonly drawn up to accompany leases for CATs. Sometimes these SLAs will also include a clause, detailing aspects of maintenance or service provision that the council itself will commit to providing, such as running a library service or mowing grass verges in front of a building.

Local authorities are shown in the CATF as bodies in reciprocal relation to the community groups they work with, as this reflects the importance of the choices and resources a council makes in either enabling CATs or hindering them. At the same time, the authorities are fulfilling their own agendas. They have other outcomes they seeking to achieve, making choices and taking actions to achieve them. The Community Asset Framework reflects this reality.

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
Number of completed CATs across the authority (as at end 2017)	18	11 + approx. 12 sports facilities	15	10	3
Freehold vs leasehold	All leasehold to date	All but one leasehold	Mostly freehold	All leasehold	All leasehold
Typical length of lease	99 years	99-125 years but 30 years for sports facilities	125 years	50 years	25 years
Support offered	New team in place to progress CATs with simplification of leases, and grants to access legal support. Refers to Locality and Community Action Bradford. Hosts information events for would-be CAT groups.	Hires Locality to offer support to groups. Makes available grants to help with working capital. Publishes guidance for CAT groups.	Hires Locality to offer support to groups. Makes available grants to help with working capital and loans for capital expenditure.	Refers to established 3 <sup>rd</sup> sector community organisations.	Makes available small grants to help with start-up. Provides some services to CAT groups (eg grass cutting).
Types of acquiring organisation	Prefers existing groups with good governance (eg parish councils)	Mostly newly formed groups	Initially existing tenants, moving to newly formed groups	Mix of newly formed and existing (charitable) groups	Mix of newly formed and existing (charitable) groups
Types of asset transferred	Village halls, toilets, libraries, some open spaces	Community centres, enterprise centres, leisure and sports facilities, a local landmark	Community centres, public halls, toilets, libraries	Enterprise centres, community centres, leisure and sports facilities	Community centres, leisure and sports facilities
Proactive vs reactive CATs	Proactive	Reactive	Proactive	Mixed	Reactive

*Table 3: Different approaches to Community Asset Transfer taken by local authorities in West Yorkshire*

## Conclusions

### Recommendations for Local Authorities

There is a recognition among local authorities that top-down, centralised administration is not the only – or necessarily the best - way to deliver services to local communities. Services, such as local libraries, community halls, and children’s centres have frequently been the objects of disposal notices, removing those facilities, and the services they delivered, from the reach of previous users. Supporters of Community Asset Transfer argue that Community Asset Transfer provides an optimum solution to retain those facilities for the common good, but this view is not universally accepted. A counter-argument is that this form of disposal privileges more affluent communities over their more deprived neighbours.

Although this study shows CATs occurring across a spread of areas, interviews conducted in poorer places found that there was a level of reliance on people from beyond the neighbourhood to undertake those aspects of the transfer that the locals were either unable or unwilling to do themselves. There is a clear ethical tension here: between the responsibility to offer quality services and suitable provision for all, regardless of circumstances, and the possibility that by returning facilities to community hands, scarce local government resources may then be focused on more needy groups in society. The choice of whether to follow a community-led path and push for local groups to take over the running of their own assets, to achieve whatever goals they believe best serve the people of the area; or whether to ensure that all public services and buildings are available to all at all times in order to ensure a level of fairness in society, is ultimately a political one.

The relationship between local authorities and community groups seeking asset transfers is complex. The council is often cited as a source of frustration by community group interviewees but is also acknowledged to be, in many cases, a primary source of information, funding and other support. Community interviewees made the observation that there is a mismatch between the process-driven, budget cycle-dependent behaviour of governmental bodies and the more spontaneous nature of life in a small organisation, with short-term goals and requirements as well as long-term ambitions. It is appreciated that local councils are acting within difficult resource constraints, but interviewees in community organisations offered a number of suggestions to improve their experience:

- Slim down processes to make them faster and more responsive;
- Offer more support with unfamiliar aspects of the transfer such as business planning and fund-raising;
- Ensure that, as far as possible, a group’s point of contact within the council remained the same and was an individual with sufficient knowledge and authority to keep the project progressing or to cut it off before too much time had been wasted;
- Have all salient information about the asset (running costs, fire and electricity safety certificates, etc.) pulled together for acquiring groups to use when creating their business plans;
- Possibly introduce first-time CAT groups to others with experience who could offer guidance.

Given repeated mentions by council officers about how much time it took for the council to process CAT applications through their various phases, this latter approach, of creating local CAT networks, perhaps with designated CAT mentors, would provide support for community groups seeking CATs, without over-burdening stretched council resources any further than need be.

As well as the operational types of support mentioned above, some financial support for the early period of the transfer would be most appreciated by community groups – especially those with little or no existing revenue stream and immediate bills to pay. It may seem counter-intuitive to suggest offering money to a group taking over an asset, when the very reason for disposing of that building is that the council could no longer afford to maintain it, but there is a logic to ensuring that a group taking over an asset will be able to afford at least to get the project started.

*“some financial support for the early period of the transfer would be most appreciated by community groups”*

Given that ultimately all but a handful of the assets transferred are done so on a leasehold basis, the council would be using the money to invest in its own property and avoiding the loss of public amenities, which are otherwise unlikely to return to the area. A small community centre studied in this research continues to survive today, in part because the local authority gave them a loan of a few hundred pounds in their first year as a CAT, in order to pay for their building’s insurance. The offer of three or six months running costs for a building could provide a small organisation with the cushion it needs to set up and start to generate funds from other sources (it would literally buy them time), and the council concerned would still be making an overall saving on the annual budget for the property. Kirklees Council does make available small grants of this type, offering both 15 percent of the average previous two years running costs of the site and development grants of up to £5,000 to help groups with upfront capital requirements.

The deployment of a checklist or resource planning framework such as the CATF may be helpful. Although the CATF is developed from the findings of a relatively small-scale piece of research, it highlights the complex web of factors and resources that need to be in play, and working in alignment, for a community group to successfully go through the Community Asset Transfer process.

### **Recommendations for CAT groups**

Possession of all seven resources, in varying amounts, at different times, in a supportive environment, with an ‘on-side’ local authority and the ability to freely exercise the choices available to them in order to achieve their desired outcomes, is a tall order, and one many groups will struggle to fill. CATF does, however, offer a tool community groups can use to help them recognise any gaps in their resource profile, enabling them to seek relevant help and support from external bodies in order to plug those gaps and improve their likelihood of

success in using asset transfer to add social value to their communities and reduce inequalities between local areas.

Community groups hoping to achieve successful, long-term asset transfers will need to consider each of the following:

1. Do they have the support of their local authority, or at least a champion within it?
2. The physical condition of the asset – are they taking on a long-term liability?
3. Do they have the finances in place to undertake all the work they need to do? Is the asset already revenue generating? What will it take in order to make it so, and does the group have funds to cover the interim period?
4. The structure and governance models for the group. It is important to get these right early in the process so that local authority and fund-granting bodies are satisfied with the appropriateness of the organisation, and that opportunities for future investment and development are not lost.
5. Does the group fully understand the process they will be going through to achieve the asset transfer, including how long it will take to complete and how much time they may need to commit personally to making it happen?
6. Can the group link up with other community organisations, which have gone through the Cat process in order to learn from their experiences?
7. Is the local community supportive of what the group is trying to do? Are local people willing to join the group and spread the workload? Do they feel ownership of the asset? If the initial group is small, do they have ways to attract new members, say through the use of social or local media?
8. Is Community Asset Transfer really the best way to achieve the goals the group is aiming for? Are there alternative routes for achieving their desired outcomes that maybe will prove easier or less costly?

Community Asset Transfer does work to give local people a say over the facilities in their own areas. It is a challenging, sometimes infuriating, process and groups do need to consider whether it is the best option for them. But participants in this study were generally in agreement that it was fulfilling, interesting and worthwhile, and that it contributes something real and important for a local community.