

## Unlocking Assets Project Group Meeting

17.01.14 at London Funders

**Caroline Forster** (chair of the meeting) welcomed participants to the meeting.

### Transferring the Library Assets

**Darren Taylor, Eco Communities and Antonio Rizzo, Lewisham Council**

Antonio opened the discussion with some [slides](#) to give a background behind the Lewisham libraries, the public and media attention, and the approach to the asset transfer process. When the government's Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010 impacted on local authority funding for libraries, Lewisham used previous experiences and knowledge to make the asset transfer decisions:

- In 2006 the planning and opening of a large leisure centre in Downham saw services provided by private sector partners, PCT and the council. The leisure centre had extended opening hours, the introduction of self-service terminals and it was stripped down to a flat structure, improving service delivery and producing cost savings.
- The Quirk review in 2007 gave an outline of asset transfer protocol and a framework to manage asset transfers.
- The Mayor's Commission gave the political and corporate vision.

Following the 2010 changes, there was a complete reorganisation with community engagement, council savings of £60m and there will soon be the highest ever number of libraries in Lewisham. The key to this success was to have different solutions for the different communities, and partnerships were sought locally that made sense to that community. The consultation was extensive, perhaps even too rigorous, including 3 public meetings per library, online consultation, roadshows and separate meetings. This process resulted in 3 partnerships:

1. Eco Computer Systems (now Eco Communities) were successful in the transfer of 3 buildings on a long term lease (at no cost to them) while taking over the commitment of maintaining and repairing the buildings. The contract required the delivery of community benefits including accessing library services.
2. Age Exchange took over Blackheath, an area which required a lot of cross-generational work. The council invested £200k in a reminiscence centre to facilitate redevelopment of their site and they in turn agreed to raise £700k to refurbish the building. Therefore, the council received space at no cost to them for 10 years, meaning an annual saving of £80k for 10 years.
3. Bold Vision and the New Cross People's Library were successful in the transfer of New Cross which was owned by Lewisham Council and Lewisham Homes.

The link with the community brings in more resources and engagement. All these had formal contracts and arrangements as an umbrella link between the council and the anchor/ post organisation including a service agreement to outline the expectations. The statutory duty and responsibility though, remained with the councils.

Antonio did accept that communication at times could be disjointed and imperfect, but that both sides had learnt and grown during the process. There had initially been a lot of public outcry over the loss of jobs and the closing of the libraries, but Antonio emphasized the difference between the library closing and a new and different service opening. The community library service did not have library staff based in the libraries and had a flattened structure. This meant that there were no TUPE issues related to the asset transfers and no issue with public spending. Data confidentiality was agreed through specific signed agreements.

Darren Taylor outlined the asset transfer from the perspective of Eco Communities. Darren described his own personal influences and his experiences 4 years previous to the Lewisham asset transfer where he reopened a library in Deptford. Following his conversation with the library services and his offer, he took over the library building for yearly sum of £36. After purchasing a library management system, he launched the library, which grew and became sustainable. When Darren saw the 5 Lewisham libraries, he gathered all his knowledge and experiences into a formal business plan, with support from Tony Rich from Rich Regeneration, eventually gaining 3 of the libraries. One of the essential parts of the transfer was the involvement of and consultation with local people and Darren formed a 'friends of...' group for each library, to enable public involvement.

The libraries were re-opened the day after they closed, and although initially figures went down slightly (the press had reported the closing of the library and so it took time to bring people back) they became a success. The maintenance and repair of the buildings required spending of £120k and the organisation of the leases took nearly a year, but the use of pro-bono legal advisors helped to cut costs. Previous employment experience gave Darren good knowledge about the public sector and an understanding of the restrictions and delays that can happen.

The spaces were now being used to maximum capacity, including cafes offering training and work placements, and also renting out extra space for local activities and groups. A large amount of space was also freed up from the change to self-service machines. The libraries and areas are all very different and so the ways they become sustainable vary- some make more money on the training and employability and others on renting space for groups and activities.

Eco Communities have grown a lot and have won a bid for 3 more buildings. They also work hard to help social enterprises to start up.

Information about the asset transfer is available for interested parties, and most of the London Boroughs have already been to visit and to enquire about the financial modelling. Antonio emphasized how the Lewisham model is not only replicable, but scaleable. [This report](#) contains the most up to date information about the Lewisham model and its performance to date, and an [RSA study](#) also puts the Lewisham approach into the context of local authorities. Antonio emphasized that Lewisham would be happy to provide further details to people interested in the approach.

## **Infrastructure Planning in London**

### **Lorraine Hart, Community Landuse**

Community Land Use (CLU) is run in order to promote and support community led development and regeneration. Lorraine Hart leads on the research and development activities of CLU which are

focused on policy research for funders and statutory authorities, and practical support for voluntary and community organisations who are developing a land or building project. CLU is familiar with the policy context in which local government and the voluntary and community sector operate, having conducted research into the potential for, and impact of, the use of land and buildings by voluntary and community organisations to improve their resilience and provide wider community benefits.

Lorraine used [slides](#) to outline Community Landuse's plans for a new research project. They intend to collate evidence on planning investment into community infrastructure in London in response to several problems within this sector in London. Firstly, London presents some particular problems for revenue viability for buildings in community ownership and use. Secondly, green spaces particularly pose problems for viable revenue business models. Additionally, sources of investment for community infrastructure are dominated by special programmes of grant support. Therefore, the research objective is to identify potential improvements to practice and policy for local government, investors and also community organisations that are involved in community asset management and ownership in London.

Lorraine explained how the research would focus on four aspects:

- London
- Community Managed/ Owned buildings
- Community Managed/ Owned Green spaces
- Registered "Assets of Community Value"

The strategic data on the London Boroughs would centre on the current status of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) policy and implementation, Infrastructure Development Plans and also the nominations for ACVs. The local data though, would focus on Community Buildings data and the green spaces with community ownership and management arrangements. The effectiveness of the business models used to underpin ten community asset acquisitions in London will be important in forming some business model case studies.

The analysis methods were outlined by Lorraine and discussed by the group. There would be analysis on the progress of policy making in London and the proposed investment and also analysis of the business models to identify what does and doesn't work.

The outcomes from this research will be shared with London planners, asset managers, civic organisations and also social enterprises. This is in addition to funders, investors and housing developers.

Lorraine was open to feedback from the group and happy to have follow-up conversations about gaps in the research project, experience that may improve its methodology and also to identify relevant work and projects being undertaken by others. [Contact Lorraine](#) if there are any case studies in particular that are known about or people/organisations interested in the issues.

### **Next meeting**

6 May 2014, 10 am - 12 noon, London Funders

**Participants**

Andrew Croft, CAN

Joanna Eve, London Borough of Islington

Caroline Forster, The Social Investment Business **(Chair)**

Stephen Frost, London Borough of Hounslow

Zoe Garbett, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Grace Gbadamosi, London Borough of Lambeth

Lorraine Hart, Community Land Use **(Speaker)**

Jeffrey Hopwood, London Borough of Camden

Jennifer Layne, London Borough of Haringey

Caroline MacFarland, Big Lottery Fund

Petra Marshall, London Borough of Lewisham

Jaishree Mistry, Charity Bank

Candice Motran, Big Society Capital

Antonio Rizzo, London Borough of Lewisham **(Speaker)**

Kirstin Ross, CAN

Darren Taylor, Eco Communities **(Speaker)**

Neil Webster, London Borough of Enfield

Claire Witney, London Borough of Waltham Forest

**In attendance**

David Warner and Becky Green, London Funders

**Apologies for absence**

Ruth Thompson, Ethical Property Foundation

Kashmir Takhar, London Borough of Harrow