

## Unlocking Assets Project Group Meeting

16.01.15 at London Funders

**Caroline Forster** (chair of the meeting) welcomed participants to the meeting. Attendees confirmed that there were no comments further to the notes from the previous meeting.

### DCLG's Future Plans

**Hayley Johnson-Hurst and Camilla Sheldon, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)**

Presentation available [here](#)

Q&A document available [here](#)

Hayley and Camilla from the Community Rights Division came to provide attendees with an outline of their work and future plans in relation to the community ownership and management of assets.

Camilla noted that as current programme contracts were coming to an end in March 2016, this had presented a good opportunity to reflect. She explained that DCLG would like to achieve increasing numbers of communities more in control of their physical, social and economic environments; a relationship with public services which includes interaction and engagement; locally led housing growth; and supporting deprived areas.

The feedback from the DCLG Communities Partnership Board suggest that they should do more to target specific communities, to be more holistic and align processes and also to look at using existing networks. From this, they have developed what is currently called the **My Community Network**. The network aims to enable peer to peer support and build the evidence base for neighbourhood working. The support planned for 2015/16 should lead to the outcomes in green.



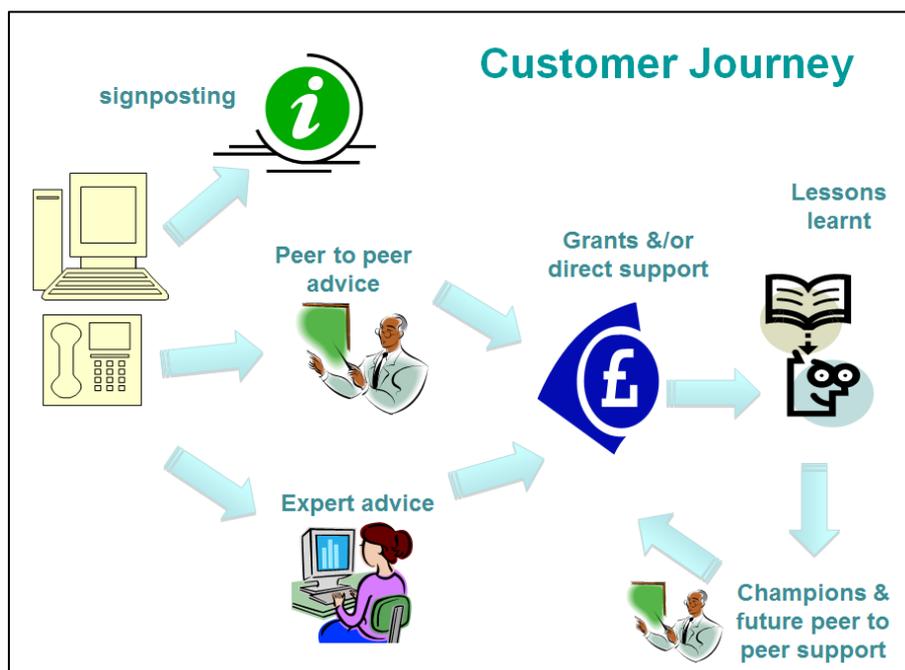
The **First Steps** programme would be live from April 2015, which follows on from feedback on the Our Place programme, suggesting there was a need for organisations who were not yet at the stage of being ready to engage with the Our Place programme, to receive earlier intervention. First Steps allows communities to start to link in with network in order to begin the journey. DCLG are also planning another round of the **Our Place programme**. This programme has expanded the pool of Neighbourhood working and has encouraged parishes and town councils, promoting neighbourhood level service delivery. More than 100 new Our Place areas are planned for 2015/16 from April 2015.

DCLG plan to run a pilot programme under **Community Economic Development** which aims to enable communities to develop a coordinated approach that will allow them to be an active part of the solution to tackling negative economic cycles. This pilot programme will support 50 neighbourhoods where intensive support will be provided to them to grow their understanding of local economic issues and to help them develop “community economic plans”.

Camilla recognised the amount of community appetite for the **Delivering Differently** programme. The Community Right to Challenge allows voluntary and community groups, charities, social enterprises, parish councils, local and fire and rescue authority staff to bid to run authority services where they believe they can do so differently and better. Delivering Differently aims to gather evidence and learning from this, giving direct support in up to 12 areas in 2014/15 and a further 12 in 2015/16 leading to more services being delivered at a neighbourhood level. This will help local authorities to be able to pinpoint successful examples which work and can be transferred and replicated.

**Neighbourhood Planning**, including Community Right to Build allow local people to get the right type of development for their community, but the plans must still meet the needs of the wider area. This aims to support planning in deprived neighbourhoods and Camilla confirmed that people can apply for additional grants if needed.

The customer journey can be seen below and an important part of this is that lessons will be learnt and that those who have benefited from the support will champion it.



Finally, Hayley introduced the **Community Ownership and Management of Assets (COMA) programme**. DCLG has been providing support to community groups wishing to take on local assets since 2012 and has given £19m in a mixture of grant funding and direct support, both of which have been very heavily oversubscribed. In 2015-2016, there will be a reduced available spend of £1.5m (£1 million for direct support and £500,000 for pre-feasibility grants). The programme will support 50 partnerships between local public bodies and community groups, around multiple asset transfer plans or single, ground-breaking asset projects. The programme will help local authorities to examine their asset portfolios in a strategic way – measuring short-term capital gain with longer term community investment. They are currently looking for 50 areas where there has been a commitment to partnership working demonstrated, particularly in deprived communities, whether that be urban, rural or coastal. A contractor would then support the partnerships in their journey to transfer the ownership or management of assets to the local community organisations. For the pre-feasibility grants, these are available to community organisations and parish councils. The programme is expected to produce a range of outcomes including the promotion of community-owned assets and a partnership way of working, and a final report will detail the learning. Applications for the programme will open on 1 April..

#### **Questions and comments:**

- Bridging the gap between the potential value of land when sold privately versus land/buildings for the community. There has been thinking about how to bridge this gap, however while DCLG do look after housing and public sector land, and how to release it for housing, the Land and Development Directorate does this work and thinking. There are increased connections between the teams and some good examples can be seen in positive use of Right to Challenge.
- There has been direct support through Locality on Right to Bid, however in 2015/16, DCLG will look to the advice sector for support. This will be quite a flexible programme and the lead contractor will have an idea of requirements on the ground.
- There will be an announcement later in January. DCLG have been working with the advice service for some time, although it does take time to get things mobilised. The relationship is very close and it is hoped they will be able to step in and support.
- This is a very interesting time for property times in councils, as budgets are reducing in 2015/16 and so this is very timely. Councils have fewer and fewer resources so can be difficult to find time to support voluntary organisations with these, even if they have funding. However others emphasized the need to be strategic, and then can try and control the use of buildings.
- This issue fits well within the Fairness Commission in London. David Warner will raise this issue with the commission as a consideration for their agenda.
- It's important to be more sophisticated in how we talk about value, and considering the value of the community.
- Some boroughs are not perceived to be as deprived as others, however we shouldn't always be looking at wider deprivation. DCLG confirmed that they are aware of this and that partnerships with a pocket of deprivation in one ward in Harrow, for example, would be regarded as equally valuable.

## Community use of public buildings

Zoe O'Hare and Jackie Staples, London Borough of Waltham Forest

Presentation available [here](#)

A review of libraries in 2011 introduced a change of service offer, where 10 libraries was decreased to 8 - 4 Library pluses (also offering council services e.g. housing benefits, and 4 Library Locals (reduced hours and more community based). In addition, where 2 libraries closed, 2 new libraries have been opened, one of which has become a community library and, completely community led, offers lots of events and is very successful.

The challenge lay in how to make the library locals useful community assets, without cost to the council. The model of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) was used, and a community organisation was commissioned to explore the appetite for community use of a Library Local when closed to the public and then how this could be sustained with minimal resources. This has required a means of managing access to the community room, whilst maintaining flexibility and without requiring residents to be 'organised' groups.

The practical solutions to this problem were:

- A steering group of local residents to determine priorities and oversee allocation of time
- Local key holders, and a group leader
- Understanding of the Council's insurance
- Clear discussions with Legal Services, and Health and Safety team
- A letter of permission from the Property Team for Steering Group
- A clear set of procedures for anyone using the room and a system of monitoring.

The below table details what documentation is needed by which party:

Document	Council	The Bridge	User Groups
User agreement for community room (Property)	√	√	
Key holder agreement (Customer Services)	√	√	
Terms and Conditions of Use (Customer Services)	√		√
User Group acceptance form		√	√
User Group signing in sheet		√	√
User Group room use information		√	√
Opening and closing procedures		√	√
Health and Safety checklist and PEEP		√	√

Practicalities of how this worked were discussed with the group:

- **The Steering Group** is a group of local residents who are responsible for the users of the building, the council is not. One difficulty has been that although initially there was a lot of interest, this group has now decreased to only 2 people who both work full time. Although they meet monthly and email regularly this has perhaps led to an increased involvement with the local authority staff. The steering group should ideally be strong enough to deal with problems themselves and so require less time from the local authority.
- **Logistics of the library.** This particular library has a separate room and so this means that when it is used out of hours then there is no access to the actual library, which would be different in other buildings. As it is such a large room, it is often occupied by groups who would be too large to use other local rooms, and so it has not caused conflict with other local spaces. Also, many of these groups would not be able to pay anyway and so not taking away business from others.
- **Selection criteria for the groups.** They would ideally like as many different activities as possible and longer term are preferred. There are also noise limitation restrictions which is a factor. They allow the community groups to approach them directly with what they want to do, and it can be very varied. The choice is down to the steering group. The groups don't have to prove how useful they are to the community, it is about ensuring that the space is being used. Currently there is no waiting list for the room.
- **Practicalities for the groups.** The designated key holder completes the Health and Safety forms etc. There are very specific ground rules such as no tailgating. If the rules are not fulfilled then the agreement can be terminated. There are generally no issues or complaints with sharing the room, and requests to leave belongings or equipment in the room are refused, as there is just not enough room to allow all groups to do this. However the steering group have received some funding and so have bought certain things which can be used by all e.g. projector. The library doesn't take revenue, as they want the groups themselves to be free for the community and don't allow the group to charge.
- **Possibility for other libraries to have a similar system.** It was suggested by the group that local authorities could audit their libraries to assess their use and then ensure they are used for communal activities where possible and not closed. However, this library is particular in that there is a separate entrance to the room and so the library itself is not left open. In another library a member of staff would come in to oversee, which could lead to more time commitment by the local authority, or however the responsibility could go to the steering group.
- **Impact of the community library.** The group discussed how some people who had never visited the library, now know it exists and are using the facilities.
- **Challenges.** The main challenge at the start was accepted to be organisation the legal side. Open conversations with the legal and property departments was very important. However,

now that it is running, the main focus is the running of the groups. There will be an evaluation on the project done after 6 months and 1 year.

### **Next meeting**

21<sup>st</sup> April 2015, 10 am - 12 noon, London Funders

### **Participants**

Candice Motran, Big Society Capital  
Kirstin Ross, CAN  
Lorraine Hart, Community Land Use  
Hayley Johnson-Hurst, DCLG (**Speaker**)  
Camilla Sheldon, DCLG (**Speaker**)  
Alice Kershaw, Heritage Lottery Fund  
Stephen Rolph, Locality  
Judith Ellis London, Borough of Barnet  
Elissa Rospigliosi, London Borough of Barnet  
Chris Smith, London Borough of Barnet  
Jeffrey Hopwood, London Borough of Camden  
Mohammed Lais, London Borough of Enfield  
Lucy Matheson, London Borough of Haringey  
Kashmir Takhar, London Borough of Harrow  
Joanna Eve, London Borough of Islington  
Wilf Langridge, London Borough of Islington  
Leila Nicholas, London Borough of Newham  
Katrina Ffrench, London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames  
Zoe O'Hare, London Borough of Waltham Forest (**Speaker**)  
Jackie Staples, London Borough of Waltham Forest (**Speaker**)  
Caroline Forster, The Social Investment Business (**Chair**)

### **In attendance**

Becky Green, London Funders  
David Warner, London Funders

### **Apologies for absence**

Ian Parker, Ethical Property Foundation  
Ruth Thompson, Ethical Property Foundation  
Jennifer Layne, London Borough of Haringey  
Grace Gbadamosi, London Borough of Lambeth  
Matthew Henaughan, London Borough of Lewisham  
Nasim Ahmed, London Borough of Tower Hamlets