

Extract from draft minutes of the Place and Resources Overview Committee held on 23 January 2024

Community Asset Transfer Policy Review

The committee received and considered a report of the Service Manager Business Operations with regard to a review of the Dorset Council Community Asset Transfer Policy. The policy sought to recognise and maximise the benefit of devolution of assets to local communities, particularly to town and parish councils and provide clear guidance and support for applicants.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion, points were raised in the following areas:

- The need for an appropriate councillor to have oversight and input on the decisions to transfer assets to the community
- A request was made for an additional step in the process to invite ward councillors to comment on applications (once an expression of interest had been confirmed) rather than just being informed
- The Monitoring Officer noted the importance of the proposed consultation role for ward councillors and confirmed that formal decision making was the responsibility of the relevant portfolio holder or officer with delegated powers
- Recognition that some wards had more than one ward councillor which would need to be taken account of within the process
- A discussion around the condition of an asset upon transfer and responsibility for undertaking a structural survey, which had to be the responsibility of the applicant organisation, with the council ensuring the organisation sought appropriate advice
- The committee opposed the proposal that the council in transferring an asset should retain the right to use the asset at no cost and asked that this should be reviewed
- Resources available for the process
- An officer discussion would take place on the timing for the implementation of the policy in case of any concerns about an implementation during the sensitive pre-election period
- A discussion was held around the risks and liabilities of the asset transfer process
- Councillors did not agree that a charge should be made to applicants for the expression of interest stage.

The Chairman summed up the recommendations of the committee as set out below.

Recommendation to Cabinet

That the revised policy and processes for assessing and determining Community Asset Transfer applications be agreed subject to the following recommendations from the Place and Resources Overview Committee:

Appendix 1

- a) That the requirement for an organisation to provide free access to the asset to Dorset Council following transfer, be removed
- b) That relevant ward councillors are consulted on an asset transfer application, after an expression of interest is confirmed as valid
- c) That a mechanism for the appropriate councillor involvement in the community asset transfer policy decision-making process be explored
- d) That Dorset Council provides relevant information held in respect of an asset, to an organisation as part of the asset transfer process.