

Appendix 1

Community Power Research

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 This report provides the research on Community Power for consideration by the Board.

2.0 Community Power

2.1 Community is defined as “any network of individuals collaborating more or less formally to achieve a shared socially beneficial goal”¹

2.2 Community Power is defined as the “belief that people should have a say over the places in which they live and the services they use”² by New Local, an independent Think Tank. New Local believe that community power has the potential to address significant and persistent challenges in society today through local communities having greater influence and control over plans, decisions and public services that affect their lives.

2.3 It is identified that public services would be stronger and sustainable with a ‘community-powered’ approach to service delivery as it is their belief that this approach is the best route to a preventative model, where services and communities working collaboratively to prevent people getting into health or other crisis before there is an acute need.

2.4 The fundamental concept for success is that communities are empowered to develop their own solutions to challenges. Empowered communities are argued to be more likely to flourish, be happier and healthier.

2.5 Alongside empowerment driving concepts include

- Equality – levelling up and achieving an equal economy can be achieved most successfully when the power to shape decisions lies in communities
- Equal partners – New Local propose that a significant shift in culture of public service workforces is required from a paternalistic mind set to a collaborative one where communities are equal partners.
- Resilience to challenges – such as environmental, cost of living and international conflict

¹ [What is Community Power? FAQs, answered - New Local](#)

² <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/research/community-power/>

- 2.6 Locality is a national membership network supporting local community organisations, they promote the ‘Power of Community’ and their ability to support improvements locally.
- 2.7 Locality recognise that the local community organisations are uniquely equipped to tackle the issues being faced as they have the best understanding of strengths and strains within the communities. Most importantly they also have the trust of local people.
- 2.8 Supporting communities to “thrive, with a strong and diverse informal and third sector, good levels of community participation, and a sense of having control and influence over the factors that matter most to them”³ leads to strong empowered communities that can then go further to deliver improvements for communities.
- 2.9 Such empowered communities are “key to achieving better health for all”⁴
- 2.10 Locality, identify the importance of community asset transfers also, in that the community ownership of assets can transform areas, and unlock the power of community.⁵ This is possible and can be successfully implemented once communities are thriving with strong community participation.
- 2.11 Community asset transfers play an important role in enabling communities to provide benefit and wellbeing to the community and have been successfully delivered in Cumbria. Examples include:
- Nenthead Mine to Nenthead Mines Conservation Society: This transfer allows the trust previously leasing the site from Cumbria County Council, caretaking the site and running tours for the public, to unlock more funding for development of the asset.
Nenthead Mines website: <https://www.nentheadmines.com/>
 - Green field to Penrith Town Council: This piece of land was put up for sale as part of a farm estate that Cumbria County Council owned the Town Council approached Cumbria County Council for a community asset transfer (CAT)* of the field as it was used by residents for recreation, and as Penrith is lacking in green space (as documented in the Eden Local Plan).
Thacka Beck Field website: <https://www.penrithtowncouncil.gov.uk/council-business/services-and-assets/parks-and-open-spaces/>

*A CAT to another Council is completed under ‘a disposal at under market value to a Partnership Organisation’

³ Cumbria Joint Public Health Strategy

⁴ World Health Organisation

⁵ Locality’s guide to community asset transfers: [Powerful Communities, Strong Economies report - Locality](#)

- Railway track to South Tynedale Railway (STR): STR society has preserved this site and run trains for tourism since 1984. Cumbria County Council leased the track it owned to them to do this, however in 2010 the asset was sold for £1 to the STR society under a CAT agreement. The organisation is still running successfully in Alston. South Tynedale Railway website: <https://www.south-tynedale-railway.org.uk/>

2.12 Strong resilient communities are the outcome of effective community power initiatives and models, that are rooted in “assets and strengths not deficits and needs.....People in communities, even in extreme situations can use their gifts to imagine ways to create change”⁶ and respond to emergencies. This was evident during the significant and effective role established community groups played in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 New Local identifies clearly why community power is growing as an idea and movement and identifies the significant elements needed for success which can be incorporated in to models of delivery to ensure communities and public services can thrive.
- 3.2 Locality articulates and promotes the power of community and their importance in supporting improvements locally. Including community asset transfers as a means of unlocking the power of community.
- 3.3 Once communities are empowered and thriving the role of mechanisms such as CATs can unlock community power to go further and provide significant roles in communities leading to effective prevention and support in response to emergencies.
- 3.4 Community Power as evidenced through this summary of research has the potential for significant impact.

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⁶ Asset Based Community Development Institute