
Community Management of Assets

Asset Transfer Policy



Midlothian

1. SUMMARY

Midlothian comprises strong vibrant local communities with active citizens who are ready and willing to get involved in making a difference to their local area. We wish to encourage anyone with an interest in taking forward community management of relevant buildings or land through Community Management of Asset policy to promote local, social economic and environmental objectives.

The Community Management of Assets can take place at varying levels, and Asst Transfer is an ultimate outcome and this policy acknowledges that Community groups may seek differing levels of responsibility depending on the nature of their use, their capacity and resources available to them. A flexible approach is therefore important and differing forms of agreement will be required to reflect circumstances.

Community Asset transfer may take place through

- a management agreement.
- a licence to occupy
- a short lease or tenancy
- a long lease
- freehold transfer

The policy complements the following Council, Community Planning, Asset Management and Transformation programmes. These aim to ensure that Midlothian Council's land and property assets are fit for purpose, deliver value for money and enhance service delivery by:

- promoting a coherent organisational approach to the management of Council land and property assets.
- Optimising assets to meet current and future anticipated service requirements.
- Seeking to adopt a holistic approach to managing the estate and delivery arrangements.
- Involving communities in the design and delivery of services to meet local needs and aspirations.

Community Management of Assets must be balanced against other Council priorities and commitments to ensure that the resource required is proportionate compared to the benefits received.

The Community Management of Assets is a policy that sits alongside to the Council's Effective Working in Midlothian (EWiM), Programme, School Estate Management Plan and Housing Replacement Programme.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF ASSETS

The aims and objectives of Community Management of Assets are:

- Strengthening communities by contributing to the ongoing development of high impact community organisations.
- Improving and extending access to services within different localities, whether delivered by the Council other public agencies, or the third sector.
- Encouraging and supporting more community management of public assets where this is deemed in the best interests of local communities and the Council.
- Ensuring effective use of public assets,

3. PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF ASSETS POLICY

Three key principles underpin the Community Management of Assets Policy;

- a proactive and positive approach
- a clear, transparent ,effective and fair process
- a strategic response to asset management

A proactive and positive approach – Public assets owned by the Council are a strong and influential resource within Midlothian. They can be important tool in helping to meet the Council and its Community Planning Partners overall objectives in meeting local need. The Council is committed to involving residents in the planning, shaping and delivery of services supporting, and ensuring that residents can take responsibility for developing their own solutions to the challenges faced. The Council will through Neighbourhood Planning teams, support and encourage groups to consider managing an asset where it considers appropriate, and link them into the ongoing programmes of support available.

A clear, transparent, effective and fair process – information relating to Community Management of Assets will be available for access. Linked to this policy is a set of clear procedures for managing applications to manage community assets. This includes a specific point of contact, clear stages and timescales.

A strategic response to asset management - The Council will manage its assets through a periodic review of its asset register. This is especially important during times of financial constraint and changing service needs. Community Management of Assets will be considered as an option within the Councils overall aim to improve assets and facilities management and the Council will consider proposals and agree contractual terms on a case by case basis.

4. PROCESSES

Application - The process will be fair and robust with clear timescales for submission of information at different stages. Information on individual assets will be made available to allow not for profit community groups to understand the level of commitment and responsibility being taken on. The Council welcomes applications from all not for profit community groups that demonstrate the ability to proactively take the lead in the application and management process.

Support - throughout the process groups can access appropriate support from organisations such as Midlothian Voluntary Action (MVA), as well as a range of other organisations offering advice to the third sector. Meetings will be held with groups to allow them the opportunity to discuss their proposals with officers, from the Councils Education Communities and Economy directorate Neighbourhood Planning Teams who can offer honest, experienced, knowledgeable advice.

Assessment - a clear, robust and proportionate assessment will be undertaken through a Community Management Assessment Group (CMAG) whose membership will comprise officers from Corporate Resources, Education Communities and Economy, and Health and Social Care. The group will assess applications and if satisfied make a recommendation to Council to accept proposals. Community Groups will then be notified in writing of Council decision and if successful informed of the next stage of the process.

Operating Models - due to the specific nature of each asset and proposals presented, inevitably there will be a range of different options relating to finance, maintenance, lease / licence and Service Level Agreements which might be considered appropriate. Each case will be considered on its individual merits and an appropriate way forward agreed. This may include:

- a management agreement (daily let)
- a licence to occupy (periods up to 12 months)

- a short lease or tenancy (between 12 months and 3 years internal repairing responsibility)
- a long lease; or (over 3 years – full repair and insuring terms))
- freehold transfer or sale

Ongoing Monitoring - The Community Management Assessment Group (CMAG) will be responsible for putting in place appropriate monitoring arrangements to ensure that the performance and outcomes are in line with the original proposal and make provision to identify those groups requiring further advice guidance and management support are able to receive it.

5. EVALUATION ASSESMENT

All applications will be assessed against five criteria, which will result in a RAG (Red, Amber, and Green) rating based on professional knowledge and the experience of the officers undertaking the assessment.

The five criteria are

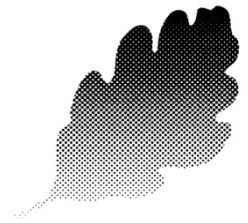
- A. The Community Group - capacity, skills, knowledge and experience.
- B. Impact on the wider community and Council objectives.
- C. The Asset – building or land appropriateness and viability.
- D. Risk Management.
- E. Financial assessment –robust, financially viable and well researched plans.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix 1 Community Management of Assets Procedure

Appendix 2 Route Maps (1,2a,2b,2c)

Appendix 3 Helping Prepare for Managing a Community Asset



Community Management of Assets

Procedure

2014-2018

The below table provides a guide to the types of management arrangements available. Due to the distinct nature of Council assets and proposals received; this list is not exhaustive and merely acts as a guide.

| Route Type | Type of Transfer | Description | Example | Level of Responsibility | Dealt with by |
|------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Route 1 | Hourly/Daily hire (at less than normal chargeable rate) | A community group hires part of a building or land owned by the Council for a specific purpose, for a limited amount of time | A group hire part of a library to hold a presentation to the local community | Very low | Individual Service |
| Route 1 | Licence (at less than normal chargeable rate) | A permission to use Council owned property or land for a specific period of time. | The Gorebridge Food Project to allow residents to use Council owned land to grow food on (growing season March-November) | Low | |
| Route 1 | Shorter term lease | A community group rents a part or the whole of a property or some land from the Council for a short period of time for more <u>simple</u> projects (use is restricted and interest cannot be transferred) | Third sector groups have leased office space in Council owned buildings to deliver their services to the community | Medium – Under normal circumstances the group would become directly responsible for internal maintenance and repair for the building, plus a service charge to cover the cost of the upkeep of common areas | Property Assets (Investment) |
| Route 2 | Longer term lease/long leasehold interest | A community group enters in to a longer term arrangements, which would normally be from 3 years upwards. Usually this is for a whole building or a more substantial area of land. The Council may impose some restrictions on what the Community Group can do with the asset | Ladywood Centre – a 20 year lease on Full repairing and insurance basis | Very high – All responsibility for the property transfers to the Community Group | CMAG (Community Management Assessment Group) |
| Route 2 | Freehold transfer/sale | The ownership of the property passes entirely to the Community Group. The Council will impose some restrictions on what the Community Group can do with the asset | Gorebridge former car park transferred for development of a new Community Hub | Very high - responsibility for the property transfers to the Community Group | |

1. Application process

1.1 Route 1:

This is a shorter process to recognise the lower level of responsibility being transferred to a Community Group. It relates to the hire of part of a building; a licence or shorter term lease.

A voluntary, community or faith group interested in using Council owned buildings or land at a negotiated rate should firstly contact Community Teams.

The Communities Teams will deal with the query and if necessary direct the group to the Community Management of Assets Policy and Procedure.

A record of all applications and decisions will be kept for monitoring purposes.

See for Route 1 process map.

1.2 Route 2:

Route 2 (a,b and c) is longer, more intensive procedure to recognise the level of responsibility transferred from the Council to the successful Community Group when entering into a longer term lease, freehold transfer or complex asset management project. It is important that groups do not underestimate the enormity of the work that is involved in taking an application through this route and the responsibilities once any transfer has taken place.

1.2.1 Eligibility

The groups eligible for arrangements that fall into route 2 include:-

- Charities
- Companies limited by guarantee
- Community amateur sports club
- Community interest companies
- Community benefit companies

It is expected that such Community Groups will in essence be social enterprises – that is businesses with primary social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders or owners.

1.2.2. The Process

A Community Group interested in managing a Council asset on a longer term lease or full transfer should firstly contact the Neighbourhood Communities Team. The Communities Team will assess eligibility and determine whether the group is a Community Group in line with paragraph 1.2.1 above and may involve other support organisations such as Midlothian Voluntary Action.

They will then be provided with advice regarding the proposal, procedure, timescales and next steps.

If the proposal seems suitable the Communities Neighbourhood Planning Team will contact colleagues from Resources, Property Assets (PA) to pass on the details of the group.

Property Assets Investment team will then contact the group to discuss the concept, group and asset in more depth and the group will be invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) in writing and be given a date for submission (normally targeted to be within 1 calendar month).

After submission, Council Officers from Community Management Assessment Group (CMAG)- comprising representatives from Corporate Resources, Education Communities and Economy, and Health and Social Care will undertake an initial assessment of their suitability for community management.

Ward Members will also be advised that the Council has received an EOI.

Applicants will be invited to attend a clarification meeting to present their outline ideas to CMAG and may be asked questions relating to the proposal, the group, uses of the asset, financial and legal matters. Applicants are able to bring a representative from any organisation they may have been working with such as Midlothian Voluntary Action or the Community Development Trust.

Following this clarification meeting the EOI will be assessed using the EOI Assessment Form and scored accordingly. Officers will write to the applicants to confirm whether the EOI has been accepted. If successful, groups will be advised the next steps to be taken to progress the application. This will include submitting an initial business case within a specified timescale and attending further meetings as required.

After submission of an initial business case, members of CMAG will evaluate the application using the Business Case Assessment Form and either reject the proposal or invite the group to submit a full business case. Groups will be advised what further work is needed to build their initial business case into a full business case.

After submission of a full business case, CMAG will either reject the proposal, or make a recommendation to Council to accept it.

Where appropriate, following the Council meeting, applications will be advised in writing of the decision and the Council's Legal Services will prepare the appropriate legal documentation to put into effect the transfer of the asset. .

See Route 2 Expression of Interest, Business Case Submission and Referral Process Maps 2a, 2b and 2c respectively.

2. Support

At all stages Council Neighbourhood Team officers will be in regular contact with the group to advise of the progress and next steps. Neighbourhood Teams are available to offer support to groups, albeit the group is fully responsible for the preparation and production of required documents within the stipulated timescales. Expressions of interests and Business Cases that are not received by the stipulated deadline where an extension has not been agreed in advance will not be considered. There is no appeal process available should a group be unhappy with a decision.

3. Monitoring

After completion of a transfer, colleagues from Communities Directorate , Communities and Performance Team will monitor the group, asset use and outcomes in line with an accompanying 'Joint Working Agreement' to ensure that the original proposal is being delivered and to ensure that groups requiring additional (non financial) support receive it.

4. Decision Making

Discretion over when it is most appropriate to consider an application by the shorter Route 1 or the longer and more intensive Route 2 procedure will be assessed by the members of CMAG. This is only likely to be necessary when an application for a lease of less than 25 years is requested on an asset with complex management issues that need consideration.

Expressions of interest will be assessed by adopting a standard format. This will be completed by members of CAMG using their professional knowledge and experience in order to reach a decision.

The initial and full Business Case(s) will be assessed by members of CMAG using an assessment form will be completed by members of CAMG using their professional knowledge and experience to reach a decision. Some of this form may be completed as part of the clarification meetings as required.

Members of CMAG are responsible for reaching decisions and the Chair of the CMAG is responsible for communicating, in writing the decision to Council Members. Following which a formal decision notice shall be issued . Any decisions to refuse an application will also contain reasoning behind the decision.

Any decision to refuse an application by CMAG at the Expression of Interest, Outline and Final Business Case stages can be referred to the Corporate Management Team for review. Any referral must be made in writing to the Director, Resources by a Council Member in whose ward the property is located, within two weeks of the written notification of the refusal. The

Corporate Management Team will refer to and take advice from the CMAG at the next available meeting and will inform the Ward Member and the applicant group of the decision within one week of the meeting.

Only one decision per asset will be permitted. If a decision is made to reject an application at any stage in the process, then there will not be any further opportunity for the same group or any other group to submit an Expression of Interest. This will not only ensure that competing groups work together where possible to submit one Expression of Interest, but also that there is a maximum defined timescale for a decision to be made.

5. Competing Applications

At any stage in this process, it may become apparent that there is more than one Community Group with an interest in a particular asset. Wherever possible, Community Groups will be strongly encouraged to work with other interested parties to meet all stakeholders' aspirations for the asset. Where this is not possible, all parties interested in the asset will be asked to submit their proposal to be assessed using the an approved style of assessment application form. The resulting assessments will be compared against each other, and a way forward agreed, following review.

Where one proposal has already been assessed, no action will be taken until the competing idea has also been fully assessed. The exception to this will be where a full consultation has already been carried out, and where there is evidence that there is majority support for one proposal. This will ensure that malicious or vexatious proposals will not be able to delay proposals that have genuine support from the wider community and users. For this reason, Community Groups will be encouraged to secure support from the wider community and interested parties at an early stage.

Where the assessment produces a similar result for both/all competing ideas, additional weighting will be given to financial impact and the impact on the wider community particularly around the proposed purpose of the asset and the service to be delivered.

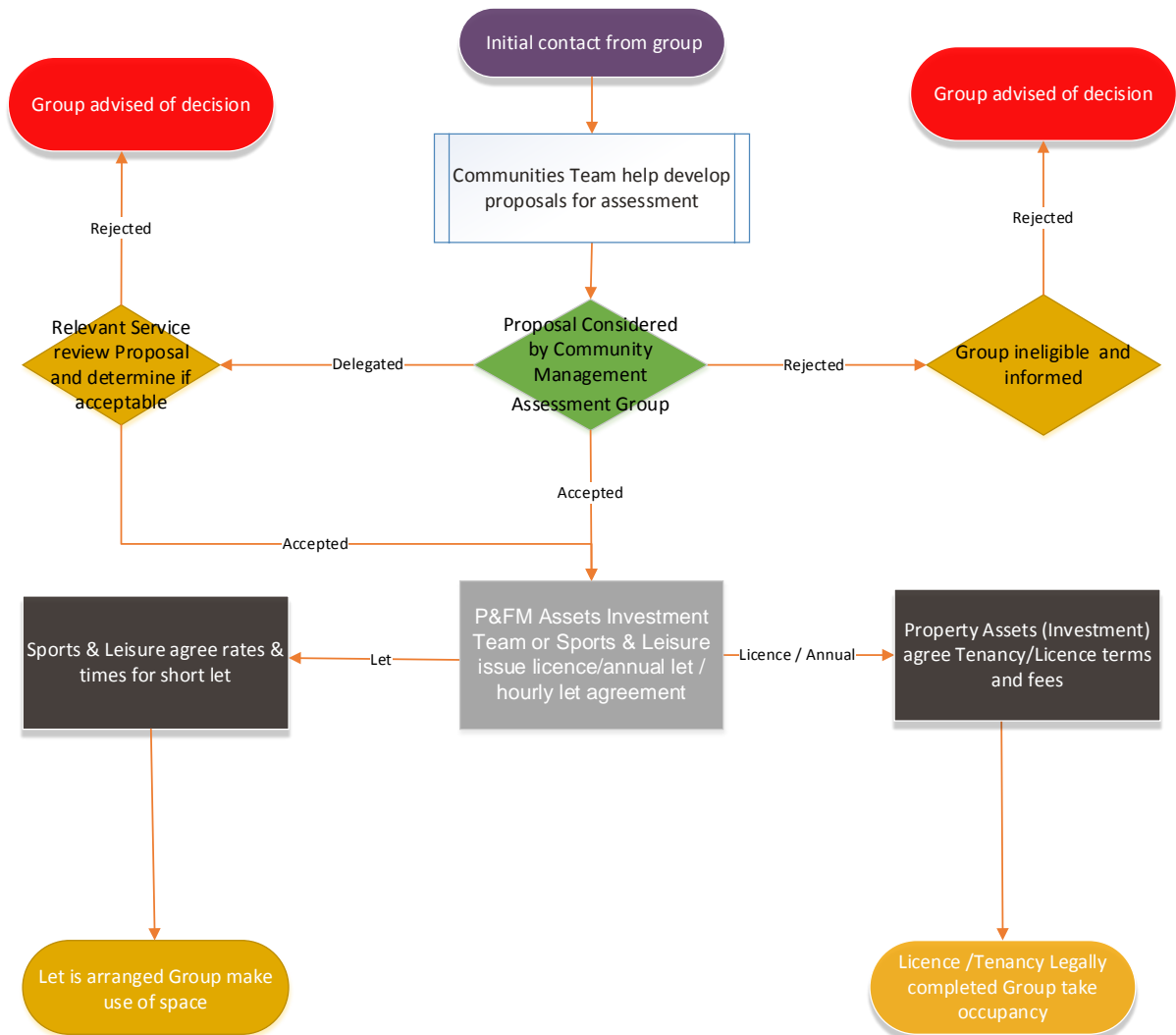
6. Evaluation Assessment

All applicants will be assessed against five criteria, which will result in a red, amber or green (RAG) rating based on the professional knowledge and experience of the completing officer.

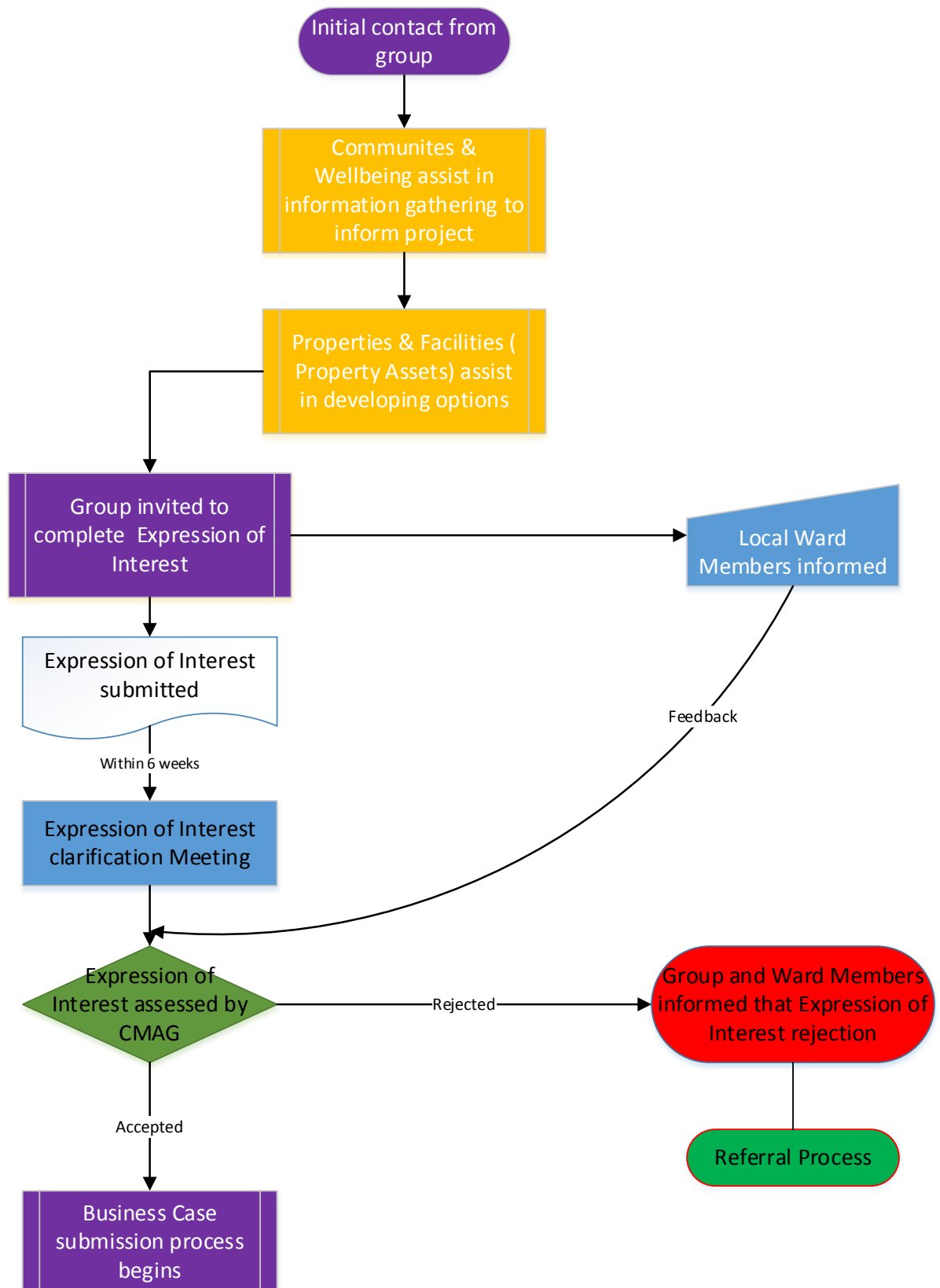
The five criteria are:

- A. the Community Groups – capacity, skills and knowledge and experience.
- B. the Impact on wider community and Council objectives.
- C. The Asset – building or land appropriateness and viability.
- D. Risk Management.
- E. Financial assessment –financially viable and well researched plans.

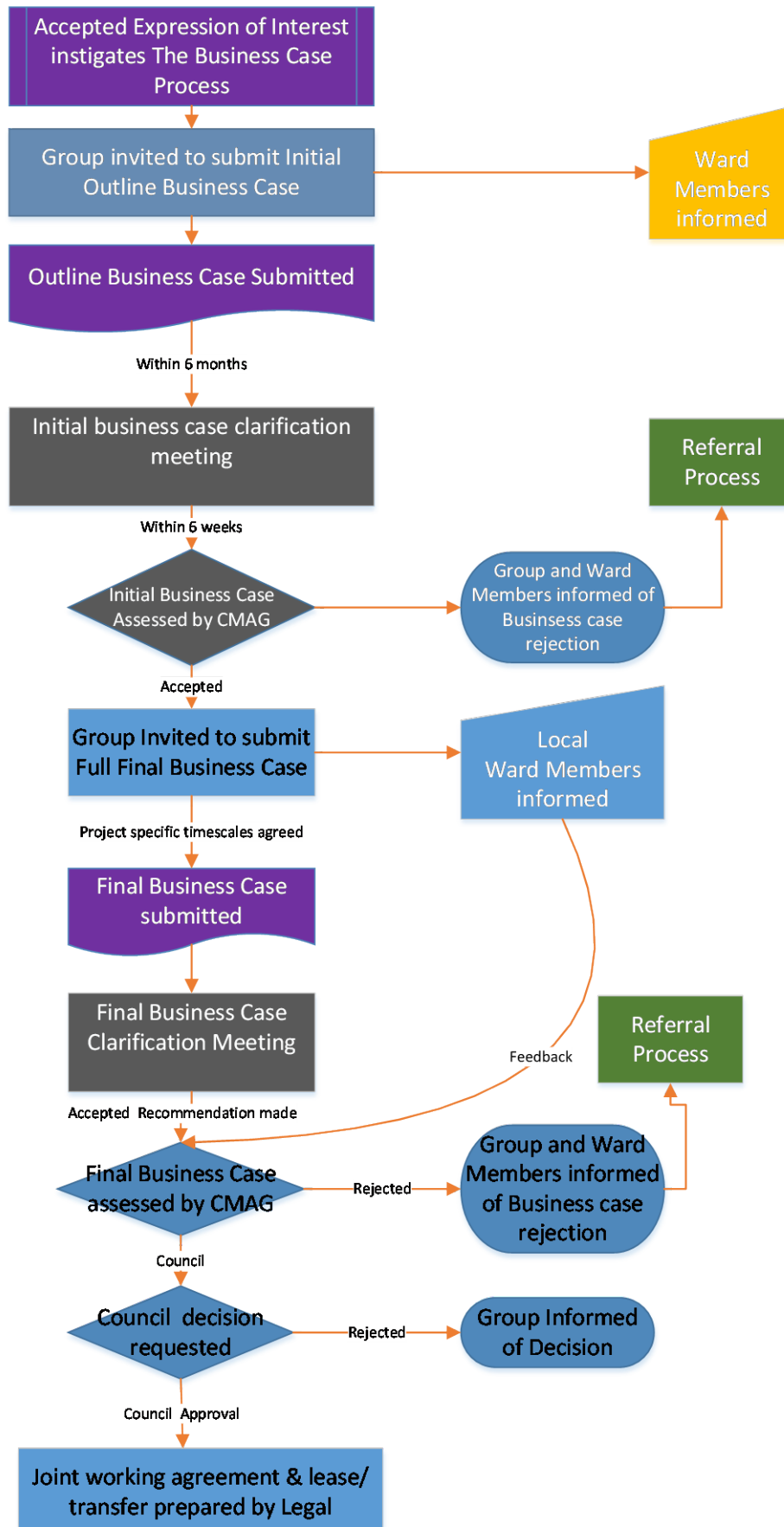
Route 1 Process Map



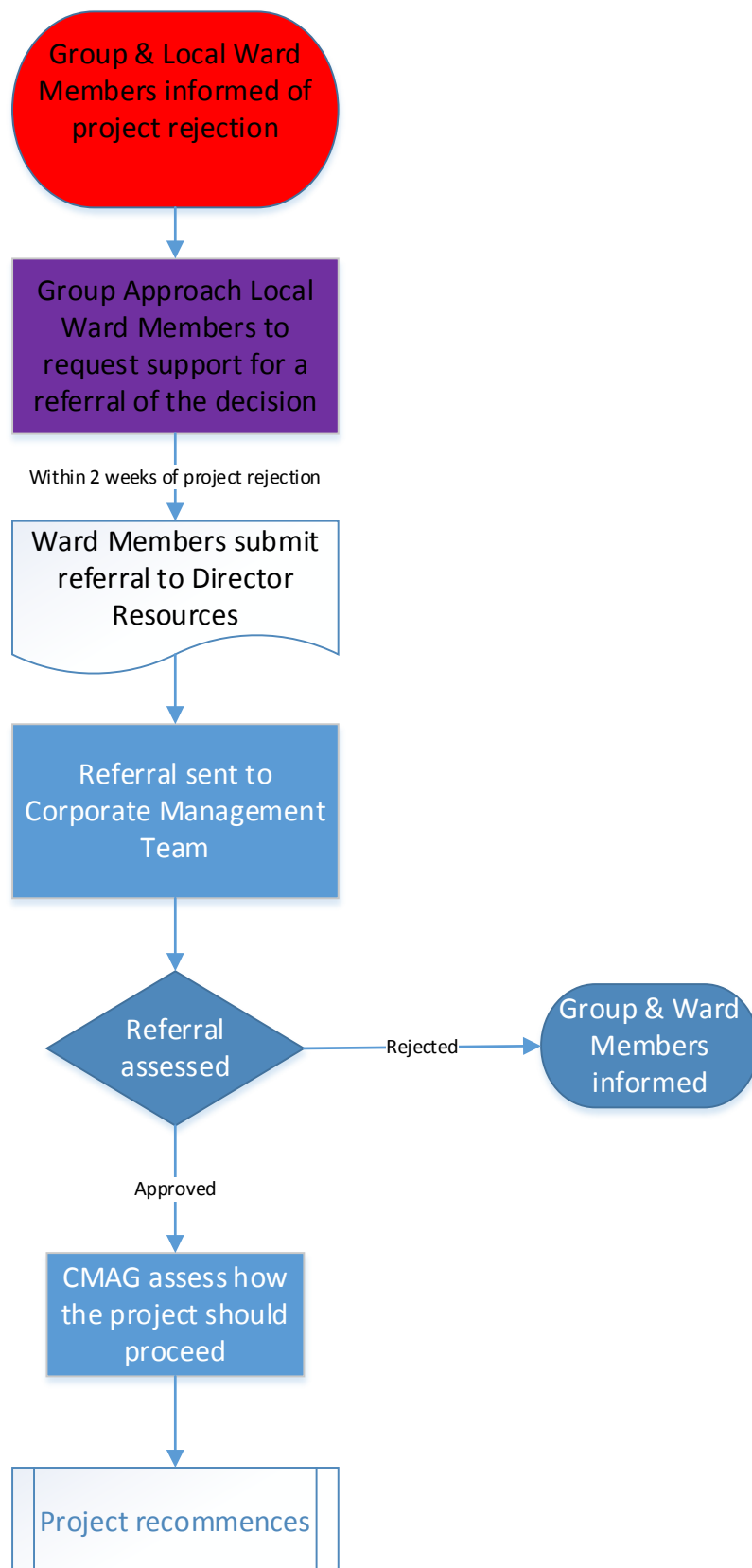
PROCESS MAP - ROUTE 2a - EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

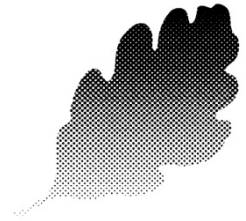


Route 2b Business Case Submission Process



Referral Process (2c)





DRAFT

HELPING YOU PREPARE FOR MANAGING A COMMUNITY ASSET (Asset Transfer)

Asset transfer is about giving local people and Community Groups greater control in the future of their community, and can bring opportunities for greater independence and financial sustainability which can lead to lasting change in local neighbourhoods.

Midlothian Council has made a commitment to looking favourably on applications from Community Groups where it is felt there would be community benefit in the transfer of an asset.

Midlothian Council is committed to working with Community Groups and local people to ensure such transfers are successful and sustainable in the long-term.

This guidance document should be read in conjunction with the Community Management of Assets Procedures.

What is an Asset?

It may be anything from access to a meeting place [at reduced cost], to taking on the management of community buildings, sports pavilion, owned by the Council. The Council recognises the value of local community partners taking more responsibility for local assets and services, and wishes to empower those organisations that may be best-placed to achieve this.

There are certain resources that will not be available for asset transfer, either because they are still required by the Council or represent a significant capital value that the Council wishes to realise in full. Community Groups may still choose to submit a bid for these assets when the asset is marketed.

This guidance addresses the following:

- Is your Group eligible to apply for a transfer?
- Do you have the right skills in your Group?
- What is community benefit?
- Is the asset suited to the needs of your Group and the service/activity you plan to deliver?
- What can you do to consult the community?
- Do your plans meet the community's needs?
- How can you find out if it meets the Council's priorities?
- Where can you get advice and assistance?

Is your Group eligible to apply for a transfer?

In order to be eligible you must demonstrate that your organisation:

- a) Is a voluntary, community or faith group which wishes to provide a service that furthers the Council's overall aims;
- b) Is properly constituted – in order to apply for a lease or freehold, the group must be legally incorporated either as:
 - A registered charity
 - A company limited by guarantee
 - A community amateur sports club (CASC)
 - A community interest company (CIC) or Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
 - Community benefit company

It is expected that such community organisations will in essence be social enterprises – that is organisations with primarily social objectives whose profits and surpluses are reinvested in the organisation or the community;

- c) Has a bank account in the name of the organisation;
- d) Is open and accessible to all in the community it serves;
- e) Has a planned approach to safeguarding issues essential, if you are working with children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- f) Has a clear agreed vision how acquiring this asset will benefit the local community and the wider Midlothian community.

Do you have the rights skills in your Group?

Once you have decided to consider an asset transfer, you will need to develop a business case. As an organisation do you have the necessary skills and experience to take on and successfully run the asset you wish to manage, in a way that will be sustainable?

Here are some management aspects you need to consider before making an application:

- **Experience**

Does your organisation have experience of previously running and managing similar assets and resources, or do you have a history of sustainable project management that would be transferrable?

Do you have staff and volunteers with the necessary financial, legal and fundraising experience as they will be vital to the project's success? If not, you need to attract these disciplines as well as those who offer practical support and experience to help to maintain the space.

Community Groups need to show they have access to the specific skills necessary to manage a public space, either already within the Group, through forming partnerships, or by buying in particular services.

- **Financial**

Transferring public spaces and buildings to Community Groups has the potential to bring in new sources of grant income unavailable to local authorities. While this might seem an attractive prospect, fundraising and income generation is time-consuming and challenging, and requires both knowledge and skills.

You may need to support and develop various options for income generating activity. You may need to conduct market research to find out if your proposed methods of income generation are realistic.

Volunteer involvement in itself is a source of income. Volunteers working for Community Groups contribute time and expertise to managing assets, and this may be able to be used as match funding.

The business case must set out how the management and maintenance of the transferred asset will be paid for. This must detail realistic costs and income generation and be financially sustainable. An accurate record of running costs and a prediction of future costs will be required as a baseline for business planning. Where will the money come from for improvements and ongoing maintenance; and for how long?

Any Group taking on an asset must take account of its infrastructure. Knowing its value, or replacement cost, will help establish a realistic estimate of the future maintenance costs, and it may also be useful when negotiating with possible investors and partner organisations. Taking a “whole-life costing” approach will provide information on the maintenance and replacement costs over the lifetime of the lease or ownership arrangement.

If capital investment is required to renovate the property, otherwise additional maintenance costs will increase the cost of running the property. Community organisations need to weigh up whether or not it will be viable to repair and make the asset fit for purpose.

Don't be too ambitious in your planned proposals. Try not to introduce things that will require expensive long term maintenance that might be difficult to fund or sustain. Better to have something simple that you can look after, rather than something complicated that falls into disrepair due to the cost of maintenance.

Investigate opportunities for alliances or partnership agreements with other organisations that may have an interest in the site, and explore all income generation opportunities that the site can offer, making sure that any commercial activities do not affect the accessibility of the space to the wider community.

- **Building or open space management**

Groups will need appropriate management skills like community development, fundraising, communications, event management, budgetary control, personnel management, contract management and partnership working. It is particularly important that there is at least one person on the governing board with experience of open space or building management appropriate to the asset you wish to apply for.

Whilst you may be able to find a variety of funding opportunities to pay for improvements and upgrades, finding grants to cover ongoing revenue costs year on year is much harder. Your Group will have to ensure that the asset is fully utilised and used by the community and that it is run in an affordable and self-sustainable manner.

Don't forget the day-to-day caretaking and maintenance. How will all the essential day-to-day running of the asset be carried out, and by whom?

- **Community engagement**

Have you consulted the local community and potential beneficiaries? You need to consider who needs to be informed and about what. What is the best way to get the message across?

Community assets should play a central role in the life of local communities, providing a hub for civic life and features that attract newcomers to an area, which can in turn help stimulate the local economy. Because of this, the people who use or value the space should be able to hold the people that run the space accountable, and get involved with what they do.

The success of an asset transfer often comes down to the quality of its communications. They govern whether relationships are positive or not; whether a representative cross-section of local people is involved; and whether fundraising activity is successful.

- **Administrative**

Your organisation needs to have strong governance (be well run) and the appropriate legal structure to take the transfer forward. Good governance is fundamental to the success of any asset transfer. The way your organisation manages its finances, assets and resources will depend on the size and complexity of the space itself, its ownership, who uses it, who else has an interest in it, and so on. In addition, the processes you have in place to allow access and protect and look after your users will help determine how well used your asset will be used.

How you administer and look after the asset should be devised to meet the long-term needs of the project. The Council will expect full legal compliance/good practice by any organisation taking over an asset and expect you to be able to demonstrate this.

- **Health & Safety**

Organisations need to prove that they are capable of dealing with any existing or potential hazards and risks in the buildings and property they might acquire through this process. This means proving that as an organisation you have procedures and policies in place, and appropriate risk assessments and processes would be carried out that address the appropriate health and safety regulations and the obligations it places on community organisations in relation to your employees and others who use community spaces or buildings.

- **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding is about your organisation having an ongoing process that seeks to prevent or reduce the harm that may be caused to vulnerable people (such as children, young people and adults). Apart of the asset transfer process you need to prove that your organisation is aware of local procedures and practices about safeguarding, and that you have a suitable Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Policy which builds on your procedures and covers the range of contact your organisation has with vulnerable people.

- **Time**

Asset transfers take time and require a great deal of work to put together a proper business plan and to consult with possible users and partners. The transfer process recognises this and provides adequate time to put your proposal together. However, even if successful that is only the start of the process and your organisation needs to be aware that most transfers will require a great deal of time and commitment potentially over a number of years to bring their vision for the asset to fruition.

Be realistic when you apply. If you are likely to only need a meeting room once a week, don't apply for a 125 year lease of a large community centre. If you want land for a community garden then an annual licence might be more appropriate than applying for a lease/transfer.

A Group currently on a short term lease can request a longer lease or freehold at a later stage. Requests to change arrangements are evaluated using the same process and criteria as new requests.

- **Resilience**

With an asset transfer, organisations must understand that they will need to be in it for the long haul. You need to be able to plan for the successful operation of the asset over the lifetime of the lease.

Those involved need to have an attitude of dogged determination. They need to carry on supporting the project in the face of possible setbacks.

Governing boards should wherever possible include “community connectors” – people with wide and deep links with the community. If the group is membership based it should be proactive in efforts to increase the numbers of members.

Community Groups should consider working with a wide range of partners both to ensure full use of any asset and to help share the running costs. This will help to reduce any reliance on the local authority to provide funding.

Consider how the wider community could contribute to the governance of your organisation. This could be through user groups, community forums, or as potential trustees, volunteers, consultees, participants, users, “critical friends” and communications.

Ensure the aims behind the asset transfer request have been designed to meet the specific needs of the community it aims to serve, such as the needs of minority ethnic groups, older people or disabled people rather than just a general “community hub” and make the space more attractive to a wider range of people.

- **Access to training and support**

You may not have all the skills you need initially, especially if as an organisation you haven’t managed a community space or building before. What is important is that you have identified agencies and organisation that can provide support, guidance and training and that as a group you have the capacity and enthusiasm necessary to learn new skills as needed. You need to ensure that you have identified your strengths as an organisation and have identified appropriate training and support to deal with any organisational weaknesses.

What is community benefit?

Each asset belonging to the Council has a financial value; many buildings and pieces of land are surplus to requirements. In selling off what we don’t need the money can go towards modernising buildings we still want to use and protecting important services we all value.

For the Council to transfer an asset, the group needs to show that the benefit to the community is greater than the financial value to the Council. There is not a formula for this and the onus is on you to demonstrate how your management will benefit the wider community.

- Why is the asset better off in your hands? What will you do that the Council couldn’t?
- How will the transfer benefit the wider community benefit – not just your existing group and/or group members?
- Will this result in additional services in the locality?
- Will there be more opportunities to get involved in community life than there are now?

- Who will benefit and how? The dictionary definition is “to gain an advantage or profit”; how does transferring an asset to your group profit or give additional advantages to the local community? Applying to manage a building or piece of land purely to prevent its sale is not a strong enough reason to transfer an asset.
- Will there be an increase in volunteering?
- Are you offering development opportunities for local people?
- Is the asset suited to the needs of your group and the service/activity you plan to deliver?

Where can I find out what is available?

A register of all land and properties owned by the Council is available through Property Assets email address MOCA@midlothian.gov.uk

What you can do to consult the community?

Ensure that you have a clear vision statement setting out what you want to see happen to the site in future. This will ensure that everyone understands the aims of the transfer from the start.

Engage with potential users as early and in as many ways as possible and establish what the levels of support are for transfer; setting this out will strengthen your business case. Consider and promote the different opportunities that the transfer could offer to new and marginalised groups of people to become involved.

Consider how to involve, inform and consult the people who live and work around the site on an ongoing basis, so that you stay in touch with their aspirations as the project evolves.

Regular and purposeful communication starts with putting time aside to prepare an influencing plan. This is a good way to focus and prioritise; clarify what it is you are trying to change and plan ahead and be proactive.

Different communication strategies will be needed at different stages of an asset transfer project. Initially communication is likely to be about raising awareness and getting wider support and interest in a project. Once a transfer has progressed, the focus may move to reaching out to the community to encourage volunteer support or talking to specific groups about providing activities on the site.

Do your plans meet the community's needs?

The building or land being transferred should be chosen for a specific reason; don't start with the building/land and then try and find a purpose for it. You also need to ensure that there is local support for the Community Asset Transfer.

Map out where the other organisations and facilities are in the area. Does your proposal compliment or compete with existing and proposed provision locally? How does your site relate to public transport links, available parking etc? Will it be easy to get to or not? How accessible will it be for the whole community? Have you consulted with local people and users about what they feel is missing in the area and what they would like to see brought in?

There are a number of documents and people you may wish to check with to see if your vision matches existing identified need. You may wish to consult:

- Midlothian Plan and Single Outcome Agreement
- Midlothian Profile
- Local Ward Councillors
- Consultations about local needs

- Potential partners
- Membership of your Group

Consultation should never be a one-off. You will need to show that you will maintain an open and honest dialogue with the community throughout the asset transfer process, any renovations and beyond.

How can you find out if it meets the Council's priorities?

You should initially contact the Communities Neighbourhood Planning Team for assistance to identify if your vision for the asset would meet Council priorities and there are also a number of documents that you can use to help identify local need. Documents that may be beneficial include:

- Midlothian Plan and Single Outcome Agreement
- Midlothian Profile
- The Local Plan
- Cabinet priorities
- It may also be helpful to talk with your Ward Councillors and Community Councils where appropriate.

Where can I get advice and support?

Neighbourhood Teams

Communities Neighbourhood Planning Teams can offer advice and information to organisations thinking about applying for an asset transfer. They should be your point of contact to discuss your ideas and to find out what you need to consider before applying. You can find out which team supports your area by going to: <http://www.midlothian.gov.uk> (Community Planning & Regeneration pages)