

Client: Northampton Borough Council

Keith has been leading a Big Society programme to transfer 21 Local Authority Community Centres into the hands of voluntary organisations – empowering individuals and communities to take responsibility for community development.

While the primary objective for the authority was to improve the quality of the service by working in partnership with the third sector to move the delivery of these community services much closer to the local community, the programme will also deliver savings of over £250k in the first year and over £450k each year following a transition period. This represents a very high proportion of the current budget.

Our Role

Keith has been responsible for all aspects of the programme including:

- planning the whole implementation including programme governance
- developing a pro-forma long-term lease and management agreement
- providing direct offers and negotiating with existing organisations running half of the centres
- soft market testing of voluntary organisations to run the other half of the centres
- planning and running a successful Public Information Briefing for interested organisations
- running three public offers and application processes
- maintaining regular dialogue with all applicants during the preparation of their business plans
- providing template Business Plans and pro-forma financial forecasts
- providing ad-hoc coaching, support and guidance
- providing hands-on support in the development of some Business Plans and financial forecasts.

The politicians and senior management have been kept informed every step of the way through regular highlight reports, status schedules, programme plans, Programme Team and Programme Board meetings.

Keith has ensured that the programme has been transparent and inclusive by holding regular update meetings with community support organisations such as Community Matters, Volunteering Centre, Council for Voluntary Service, Locality (previously Development Trusts Association and BASSAC), Enterprise Solutions. In fact, a member of one of these bodies was on the evaluation panel.

Encouragement has been given to community organisations to work together as partners in their applications to run centres. This has resulted in two groups submitting a joint application to run seven centres, with additional services being provided to the consortia by three other local community groups. This application was approved by the Council's Cabinet and the new organisation has started running these seven centres. The national Asset

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Transfer Unit (ATU) supported the development of this new organisation with matched funding as it is the first such community consortia to manage multiple centres.

Appointments to run nineteen centres have now been approved through Cabinet and the keys for sixteen of these have been handed over to management organisations so far.

These transfers included an innovative freehold transfer of a centre to a Parish Council. The freehold of a brand new centre due to be constructed later this year is also likely to be transferred to another Parish Council. Negotiations for the remaining two centres are in progress and are likely to complete by the end of the financial year.

Outcome

Communities will benefit by having more local say in how centres are run and what services are provided from the centre – run by the community, for the community. This has the added benefit for the Council that the local community will have more empathy for the building and look after it, as well as using the centre to look after members of the community themselves – this will reduce the call on other Council services.

This is a ground-breaking, sector-leading initiative that is demonstrating the appetite of third sector organisations to take a leading role in delivering community development services. It is a tangible example of how power and responsibility can be shifted so that individuals and communities have more aspiration, power and capacity to take decisions and solve problems themselves.