Evaluating the Hub and Spoke model

How can peer approaches support community groups in overcoming barriers to the use of asset transfer requests?

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings of the project, 'Evaluating the "Hub and Spoke" model: How can peer approaches support community groups in overcoming barriers to the use of asset transfer requests? The project was developed by the Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) and funded by The William Grant Foundation. COSS established two Hub and Spoke pilots in Barmulloch (North Glasgow) and Inverclyde in 2021 and 2023 respectively. These pilot areas were selected because of perceived limitations on community activity in these areas and low levels of organisations pursuing management and ownership of local assets through Community Asset Transfer (CAT) legislation. Based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of 'Hub' and 'Spoke' organisations, the findings outlined highlight the ways peer approaches can support community groups to overcome barriers in CAT requests and provide the basis for seven policy recommendations.

Key findings

1. Hub organisations were valued for their high quality, hyper-local and context-specific advice and support on CAT and were reported as crucial in supporting Spoke organisations to plan for CAT requests.

2. One-to-one 'handholding' provided through the Hub and Spoke model was reported as particularly valuable, and connected to increasing awareness of community rights, through bringing groups together and raising aspirations of what community groups could achieve.

3. The research found evidence of how participating in the Hub and Spoke pilot programmes, supported community organisations to enhance their internal capacity and strengthen their role within the community, recording how interviewees came to appreciate the level of work and commitment required to raise and submit a CAT request.

The central point of differentiation that characterises the support provided by Hub organisations is informal, personalised assistance based on high-quality, hyper-local knowledge of CAT. Peer-to-peer models reinforce community capacity building and appear especially important in generating a shift in community action from a service culture to a solidarity culture. This indicates avenues for asset-owning communities to contribute to the regeneration and civic life of their neighbourhoods and Community Empowerment policy more broadly.

Introduction

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 gives communities, of place and interest, the right to request the transfer of public assets into community ownership. Assets do not need to be surplus to requirements and there is a presumption in favour of community proposals unless there are sufficient grounds for refusal. This legislation can be used by communities to seek ownership of land or buildings, a lease, or a right to manage or occupy the asset.[1] The Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, funded by the Scottish Government, evaluated the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, Part 5 (Asset Transfer).[2] Published in 2020, one of the key recommendations from this evaluation was that:

> The Scottish Government should continue to work with its partners to identify actions that may help to overcome any barriers to the use of asset transfer requests by marginalised groups or disadvantaged communities.

Responding to this recommendation, the Community Ownership Support Service (COSS), in conjunction with Barmulloch Community Development Company (BCDC), developed the Hub and Spoke pilot programme funded by the Scottish Government. Running from 2021 to 2023 based in North and East Glasgow, with BCDC -the 'Hub'- supporting 11 community organisations -the 'Spokes'. A second pilot was established in Inverclyde in 2023, with Inverclyde Shed as the Hub organisation supporting 12 community organisations. The second pilot was funded by the William Grant Foundation. Both pilot programmes delivered free, proactive support and advice for community groups and organisations pursuing CAT request applications. COSS anticipated the following characteristics in successful Hub organisations:
- Well-connected locally in the community and with key stakeholders.
- Experience in developing community facilities, business planning, developing revenue streams, and funding.
- Demonstrable experience in the asset transfer process.
- Operational capacity within the organisation to enable key personnel to work with other early-stage groups – backfilling the post.

North Glasgow and Inverclyde were chosen for the pilot programmes based on high levels of deprivation and perceived limitations on community activity in those areas. However, it is

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[1] https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/rural-assets-policy-and-practice-insights-from-the-devolved-nations.
[2] https://www.gov.scot/publications/asset-transfer-requests-evaluation-part-5-community-empowerment-scotland-act-2015/.

important to note that the limitations in each area comprise different characteristics. In North and East Glasgow, there are many and varied community organisations with aspirations to play a more prominent role in the management and ownership of local assets, but research - undertaken by COSS-[3] has identified a lack of progress for many newer, smaller and less well-established groups in terms of community asset transfer. In Inverclyde, there is a limited network of local organisations with the capacity to push for and take advantage of opportunities for asset management and ownership. Therefore, it continues to be an area where funders and organisations such as DTAS/ COSS struggle to make traction. This report presents findings of an evaluation of these two pilots, detailing the ways peer approaches can support community groups to overcome barriers in CAT requests.

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[3] Asset Transfer in Glasgow, February 2020 – Community Ownership Support Service – internal report

Methods

In each pilot area, to explore experiences of CAT from multiple perspectives, a series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives of 'Hub' and 'Spoke' organisations, as well as relevant stakeholders from local authorities and the third sector (Table 1). Due to work commitments and busy schedules, some of the stakeholders provided written statements rather than being interviewed.

Table 1. Study sample

Stakeholder group	Inverclyde interviews	Barmulloch interviews
Hub Organisations	n=1	n=1
Spoke Organisations	n=3	n=2
Local Authority	n=1	
Third Sector	n=1	

The transcripts of the collected data were inductively coded to nine descriptive labels, facilitating the identification of patterns and themes in the data. The findings evaluated the differences the pilots made and focused on five areas:

1. Exploring practices driving community ownership groups;

2. Understanding community groups motivation to join the pilot;

3. Unpacking pilots' role in promoting community rights;

4. How pilots highlighted skills for community asset transfer;

5. Insights gained on asset transfer and community ownership.

Findings

1. *Exploring practices driving community ownership groups.*

Future security and planning

Interviewees reported a range of reasons why they were attracted to owning local assets. It was reported that, at times, community organisations had sought CAT because assets they were occupying were threatened with closure. Relatedly, groups also engaged with the CAT process to identify better quality premises, or premises that better accommodated their needs than their current facilities. For example, one sports-based organisation required space for specialist equipment and changing rooms (R7). Some interviewees associated ownership with future security, making it easier for them to maintain the activities they offered in their local communities and to consider expanding the range of activities they undertook:

> *We are trying to convince the council that we should create a grass park stadium … to create a changing room and a communal meeting place so that they [local sports team] can have an identity.* (R7)

> *We felt if we got this piece of land and actually owned it, it would give us security … and there wouldn't be any chance of us being booted off at any point in time.* (R2)

> *We felt that we needed a permanent hall so that we could serve all our activities [and at] the same time serve the community.* (R8)

Presented testimony reflects how the appeal of ownership combined practical considerations and intangible qualities; such as feelings of security and the creation of group identity. The data exposes how lack of access to suitable community spaces is connected to a sense of precarity and uncertainty in the interviewees' ability to maintain their community activities. In this context, community ownership appears to offer a secure base for future planning. This raises questions surrounding community preferences for the options available under CAT, and how they are identifying the right CAT process to fulfil their needs.

Legacy of COVID-19

Reports that community spaces had not re-opened following the COVID-19 pandemic were an important contextual factor in many of the interviews.

> *If we didn't do something like this [CAT] some of the premises would disappear from public use at a time when we least can afford it … The*

> *pandemic took an awful lot of people into isolation and if you take some of those buildings [out of public use], then the chance to be reintegrated into a community [is more] difficult.* (R7)

> *There has been a reduction of available space post-COVID. As organisations grow and develop there is a need for them to rent space and this is causing some difficulty at present.* (R6)

In this context, stakeholders discussed the potential for CAT to be a productive mechanism to bring assets, both buildings and land, back into use for the community. Where previous research identified that 'saving' assets from closure can be a primary motivating factor for engaging with Right to Buy and CAT processes,[4] the data in this study suggests a shift in emphasis towards reopening spaces that have already closed. This may bring further challenges to the CAT process, as vacant land and buildings deteriorate over time. However, since this is a very small-scale study, further research would be required to determine the parameters of this shift and how experiences compare across rural and urban communities. While stakeholders from a diverse range of perspectives agreed in principle that CAT could support making a broader range of community spaces available for community activity, it was also felt by interviewees that decision-making around CAT could be complex, involving lengthy discussion and negotiation. Interviewees stated that the process of matching a community organisation with an asset was not an easy one; only one out of the five organisations interviewed had completed a CAT request. The challenges faced in this matching process are discussed throughout the report.

Long-term effects of deindustrialisation

The formation of community organisations and interest in community ownership was frequently expressed in broader terms, related to concern for the preservation of local assets and/or the desire to participate in the regeneration of their area:

> *We cannot lose that building on the street; if you lose that building on the street the entire town kind of loses its character, that needs to be retained.* (R4)

> *When [heavy industry] disappeared, people were removed from a business environment … They used to say, 'That's our locomotive.' … We lost all of that; we need to get back pride of place. There's umpteen*

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[4] https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/resources/findings-from-the-community-ownership-hub/; https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/rural-assets-policy-and-practice-insights-from-the-devolved-nations.

> *ways you can do it, but one of the ways -one of the wee niches that*
> *can do it- is [supporting] people to take over land and property.* (R7)

The rationale for basing the pilot studies in North Glasgow and Inverclyde was that these areas experience high levels of deprivation and perceived limitations on community activity in those areas. The quotes above illuminate a connection between low levels of community activity and the long-term effects of deindustrialisation in the West of Scotland. At other times, community organisations looked into the possibility of a CAT because community facilities, such as a children's playpark, had been planned but not delivered by previous regeneration projects in their area (R5). The data collected demonstrates that community organisations in North Glasgow and Inverclyde are looking for ways to participate in tackling a wide range of issues in their areas, and the need to consider how and when CAT is an appropriate mechanism to support this activity.

Among the interviewees participating in the evaluation, some were part of long-established community organisations with proven track records of their activities (R5; R8). Whereas, some were relatively new organisations; formed to fulfil current community needs (R2; R4; R9). These community organisations could, with some support and guidance, develop credible CAT applications because their legal status and governance structures align with the current legislation. The interviews highlighted that several community councils have been interested in CAT, but as elected bodies they are not currently eligible. How the interest expressed by these groups should be managed is discussed in the conclusion.

2. *Understanding community groups' motivation to join the pilot.*

Understanding and planning

Once a community organisation had identified CAT as something they would like to pursue, their motivations for joining the pilot largely related to their need for support to understand what the CAT involved and how to plan their next steps:

> *We were asking questions about this, that, and the next thing. I think*
> *we often went off on tangents because we often saw another option*
> *possible … We were overwhelmed with information.* (R2)

> *He says [Hub representative], "You might not get away with doing it*
> *the way you want to do it in one phase. Get that [allotments] up and*
> *running and get it sort of finished, then apply again to whoever … for*
> *the other phases."* (R5)

You can always download a case study, but to meet a local case study … people you maybe know or recognise. It's powerful. [It's] a totem; a bit of hope. (R1)

Interviewees reported that they found information on CAT from a variety of sources; including local authorities and specialist third sector organisations (DTAS, COSS, local CVS/TSI). Since Hub organisations had recent experience of successfully completing CAT in their respective areas, their knowledge of how the process was being managed by their local authority was important to the Spoke organisations. Furthermore, the data collected suggests that having one-to-one conversations with the peer-support Hubs helped the Spoke organisations to make sense of the resources available and the implications for their organisations. Hub organisations supported Spoke organisations to think through their ambitions and missions and break them down into manageable phases of work so that they could focus on the activities that would best support their CAT requests. This helped demystify the CAT process for the interviewees so that they could make the most of other sources of information and support from local authorities and the third sector.

Identifying local authority contacts

Uncertainty about who to contact within the local authority was a common point of discussion among interviewees.

"Oh, we have to go there", "oh no", then again [they] say "no, you are in the wrong process; go to that door; do that way". So, so many different ways we had to go … like a jigsaw puzzle. (R8)

I think if it was possible to have some sort of schematic layout of "This is someone who could advise on this", and "This is someone that could advise on that"… Because we were never sure … a lot of the time we dotted about from one place to another. (R2)

While Hub organisations could not always identify the right person at the local authority to liaise with, they were able to help community organisations feel supported:

One of the departments in the council said, "Yes, you can go ahead and do that", then the legal department said, "No, you can't do that". But he [Hub representative] was providing a bit of a link between us and the council which was really helpful. (R2)

Learning how to establish and manage a working relationship with their local authority was a valuable point of learning for interviewees who engaged with the CAT request process. In addition, the evaluation did gather some evidence that local authorities were working on making CAT systems and points of contact more easily accessible to the public; making a generic email available, and updating web-based resources (R1, R3).

Routes to access

Based on the Hub organisation's experience of CAT, they were able to pass on their learning to Spoke organisations:

> *It's my lesson. You don't always want ownership. You don't always want long-term lease... Just design accordingly* (R1).

In this example, the Hub organisations described how they tailored their advice to Spoke organisations based on their knowledge of the community groups activities and aspirations and insight into completing CAT in their area. The combination of advice on both process and organisational planning made the support of Hub organisations particularly valuable to Spoke organisations.

When comparing the advice and support community organisations received from local authorities, third sector organisations, and Hub organisations, interviewees reported that they valued the friendly, informality of the support they received from Hub organisations:

> *It worked really well because he is such an approachable person, he is a very helpful person, and he has got all this knowledge as well.* (R2)

> *[After our first meeting] he went away and two days later, he had [drawn up] a big set of plans … Anything you ask of him, he's on the phone … He's a really nice guy.* (R5)

> *They [Hub organisation] gave us all the information … and they helped us to do the planning and they filled the form for us… step by step -so many procedures!* (R8)

What is also notable from the quotes above is that although Hub organisations were valued for their approachability, the advice community organisations received from them was of a high quality and context-specific; combining local knowledge and experience of CAT processes. However, it is also important to note that some of the particular skills of the Hub organisation, may not be easily replicable in other areas. Suggesting the need to consider how to make crucial professional skills more widely available. How the skills of individuals are best utilised in community processes, is picked up in Section 4 and the conclusion of this report.

The data collected also suggests that within a CAT support ecosystem specialist advice and skills training are available and valuable to community organisations. However, in addition, there is value in ensuring that peer-to-peer support is also available to help community organisations make the most of support from elsewhere and reduce feelings of overwhelm and frustration within, what at times can be, a lengthy and complex process.

3. Unpacking pilots' role in promoting community rights.

Public events

In the context of this evaluation, community rights are understood as the ability to pursue an asset transfer under Part 5 of CAT legislation, which enables communities to own, lease, or manage and occupy assets.

In Inverclyde a number of interviewees who participated in the pilot project had attended a public event jointly hosted by the local authority, The Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS), and the Hub organisation. In particular, interviewees attending the event valued the combination of talks outlining CAT processes, the opportunities and challenges raised by the different agencies present, and the opportunity to gain one-to-one advice:

> That was quite an interesting night that they done; some explaining of the ins and outs of asset transfer, leasing and what have you. As I say, I spoke to the guy after it for a wee while (R5).

> That was my first sort of lightbulb moment that, "Oh actually rather than begging them to use it, we can take ownership and then fulfil our plan." (R4)

From this event lasting connections were made between Hub and Spoke organisations (R1; R4; R5). The Hub organisation in North Glasgow described how they had hosted a comparable event; held online due to COVID-19 restrictions, which limited the ability to provide one-to-one advice to community organisations during the event. Despite these limitations, interviewees expressed that holding public events was important because it allowed Hub organisations to address any suspicions about their motivations for supporting smaller community organisations through CAT. In particular Hub organisations expressed that some smaller local organisations perceived the offer of support from the Hub as an attempt to take over their organisations (R7). Other interviewees commented the opportunity to present consistent messages on CAT to the public helped strengthen confidence in the process (R3).

"Hand-holding"

While public events provided important gateways to raising awareness of community rights related to CAT, interviewees reported that the one-to-one 'handholding' (R7) provided through the Hub and Spoke model was both necessary and valuable, because every community group is composed of a unique combination of personalities and skills:

> *[In each community organisation] the bits and pieces that are there to stick it together are totally different.* (R7)

As well as helping to bring the 'bits and pieces' of groups together, the handholding process was connected to increasing community organisations' awareness of their rights, because it raised aspirations of what it was possible to achieve in their local communities. One organisation reported that, since completing CAT, their volunteer numbers as well as active members on their Board increased, describing how it instilled 'blue-sky thinking' (R7):

> *Whereas before we were dealing with maybe three or four stalwarts, now we get this board which is so forward-looking; it's incredible. You've got to reign them in at times. I would say that's what going for property and getting local groups to take over property does. It opens their eyes to other opportunities, and it encourages them.* (R7)

This testimony connects one-to-one support with creating capacity in community organisations to take on new and broaden existing activities within their local area. This was connected to participants' views on how to address community activity 'cold spots':

> *It has to be done with the whole community involved, not just what I sometimes term as "the usual suspects" … it needs to be grassroots.* (R4)

> *There's a generational weakness of forming strong community groups. I think you often see down here with the third sector; there's a lot of what would describe themselves as services rather than community groups … That doesn't lead to strong communities –[as a service] you're supporting communities rather than building communities.* (R1)

In this context peer-to-peer models reinforcing community capacity building appear especially important in generating a cultural shift in how community action is organised and run in the pilot areas, generating solidarity rather than a service culture.

4. How pilots highlighted skills for community asset transfer.

Key Skills

Key skills identified as valuable by community organisations were (R2; R5; R8; R9):

- **Running Meetings:** Ability to organise, chair and take minutes.
- **Funding applications:** Ability to complete.
- **Fundraising:** Creative ways to raise money and awareness of organisations' activities.
- **Partnership working:** Skills in navigating relationships with other agencies and organisations.
- **Finance:** Ability to read spreadsheets; profit and loss accounts.
- **Analysing documents:** Ability to read documents and pick out pertinent information.
- **Communication:** Letter writing, networking, social media.
  Community work: Experience of partnership working; connecting with members of the community.

For relatively new community organisations, the research found evidence that participating in the pilot programme and developing a CAT request raised awareness of the need to strengthen their governance structures. For example, one group described how through conversations with the Hub organisation they were motivated to register as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), mentioning that they were supported by both the Hub organisation and DTAS in this case (R2). Within the groups who had successfully established a community organisation and prepared a CAT proposal, previous experience in the charity sector was regarded as valuable, because this provided knowledge of how to conduct meetings and record minutes. Relatedly, where members of community organisations had experience in the charity sector, they also brought skills in completing funding applications, fundraising and partnership working (R2; R9). This valuable combination of skills and experience was vital to the community organisations where the interviewees volunteered, meaning at times such individuals found it difficult to step back from their activities in the organisation:

> I have just got stuck with it … Sometimes I am sitting in the office and guys will come in … and some of them say to me, "If this wasn't here, I wouldn't be here. There wouldn't be any point in me living." And I think, "What do I do now? It's too much responsibility. I can't walk away from this now." (R9)

> *[We] started talking about this six years ago, and it has taken up a lot of my retirement time. But on the other hand, it has been useful. It keeps my brain active.* (R2)

In the data gathered, there were numerous discussions of how to help community organisations appreciate the level of work and commitment required to raise and submit a CAT request. The comments above highlight the amount of time volunteers put into CAT requests and the diverse effects this can have on them individually, revealing important issues around the role of the individual in community organisations. While there are careful checks and balances required to prove that community organisations have robust governance structures and capacity to undertake CAT, the research showed that beneath the surface this can be heavily reliant on one individual taking responsibility to drive the work forward. It is notable that in the instances recorded in this evaluation, the testimony came from people who were retired, who may have not had time to drive the CAT applications forward if they had still been in paid employment. The potential over-reliance on key individuals raises important questions for the definition of community that underpins CAT and further highlights the need to raise awareness that CAT is a process that community organisations need to work through over a period of time, rather than a transaction that can be swiftly managed.

Their engagement with the Hub organisations helped one group identify skills gaps among their members:

> *We identified skills gaps on the committee and have filled a lot of those gaps. There are maybe one or two skills gaps we have still got.* (R2)

This data suggests that even in instances where joining the Hub and Spoke pilot did not result in a successful CAT, it did support community groups to think about their structures, governance and collective skills; how they could put them to use, and where potential gaps existed. These outcomes are important to providing insight into developing community capacity in 'cold spot' areas and pathways to future CAT.

Community engagement

The interviews captured how the interviewees related their pursuit of CAT to residents in their local area. The Hub helped them to recognise that if their CAT were to be successful they would require the consent and support of local residents. This led one of the interviewees to describe how this had encouraged the development of further skills within their community organisation around community engagement:

We have learnt more about producing materials, as we are aware that we have got to keep engaging with the community because otherwise the community [engagement] will drop off the face of the earth. (R2)

These findings illustrate how the Hub and Spoke pilots supported community organisations by enhancing their internal capacity and strengthening their role within the wider community.

5. Insights gained on asset transfer and community ownership.

Perceptions of risk

A common point of discussion among the interviewees was perceptions of risk in CAT for both community groups and local authorities (R1; R3; R4; R5: R9). These comments were made in general terms, making it difficult to ascertain to what extent engagements with the Hub organisations changed Spoke organisations' views on this issue. At times these discussions arose when interviewees were describing frustrations with CAT processes, leading participants to question whether or not local authorities supported CAT:

It's like the Council kind of don't get this or they don't want to get it, you know? (R4)

I was told, "No, you have no chance. We are not going to even entertain [ownership]. Go for a lease." (R9)

However, even interviewees that revealed frustration with CAT and how local authorities handled the process, recognised the difficulties local authorities were currently facing. This prompted interviewees to acknowledge the need to consider the risk of community groups folding and assets being returned to the local authority:

What they're [local authorities] worried about… is that when that community group fails three/five/ten years into owning something, what happens to it? … Effectively it ends up being a council problem. It comes back onto their books. And they've given up budget already to maintain it … Particularly if their perception over generations has been that community groups here are weak … I can see how that feeds into how they [local authority] view these requests. (R1)

The last thing we want to see is communities taking on stuff and it failing 'cause it will affect us all. (R1)

To mitigate the risk of assets being returned to local authorities, an interviewee commented that it was the responsibility of the Scottish Government to establish processes to manage the withdrawal from assets transferred to communities (R1). Furthermore, there was evidence that making community organisations aware of the full range of options for accessing community assets -such as LTOs or long-term leases- sometimes met their needs while also reducing risks for local authorities. For example, a long-established community group in North Glasgow has taken over a local community centre, on a five-year lease to give them time to build skills and capacity and determine whether a twenty-five-year lease may be the right approach for them in the future (R8). In this context there was an emphasis on community groups having 'early conversations' (R3) with local authorities to identify what their options were before making a CAT application:

> *It is just about making sure of that early intervention, early conversation. What we don't want is groups going and just putting a full asset transfer in right away, 'cos as soon as that happens, it starts a legal process and it puts barriers up to certain loopholes we could go through or certain processes we can then help support that.* (R3)

> *There is perhaps some learning to be gained from the People Make Communities Projects in Glasgow, where organisations meet with mentors to decide on what support they require. This has managed to gel some of the sticking points in the CAT process together.* (R6)

When satisfactory solutions could not be identified, community organisations and local authorities ended up in a stalemate situation (R2; R8; R9), which increased frustrations directed at local authorities. Although not made in reference to any of the Spoke organisations taking part in the pilot, one interviewee discussed an example of a community organisation taking direct action and occupying an asset without leases or LTO in place (R3). This highlights the importance of finding routes for community groups to access the land and buildings they need to carry out their activities.

Misconceptions

The asset transfer legislation was found to be useful in highlighting community rights in this area, but for some interviewees there needed to be clarity that communities could access land and buildings without necessarily using the CAT process (R3). Similarly, for some, formal CAT processes were sometimes found to add further complexity:

> *We've brought a Community Asset Transfer process into a set of systems that don't function anyway … it's like bolting it [CAT] onto*

> *something that's broken, it [CAT] is now becomes broken, and I think*
> *that's kind of where we're at with the process. (R4)*

Some of these criticisms, while directed at the CAT processes, are perhaps informed by feelings of frustration over reduced access to community space more generally. As highlighted above, this was at times attributed to community spaces not reopening following their closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, or longer-term dissatisfaction with the lack of meaningful opportunities for community participation in local regeneration; further research would be needed to clarify these issues. The evaluation also evidenced confusion around accessing buildings and land for 'peppercorn rent' (e.g. £1 per year):

> *I know through experience they [local authority] don't like giving things*
> *for one pound. They're a bit -dare I say- frightened of community*
> *groups that are able 'cause frankly it shows them what they can't do.*
> (R1)

> *Some of the challenges we do get is groups will approach and say, "I*
> *heard [community organisation] got that for £1 a year." And you're*
> *going, "Okay, right. But that was that building, and every building and*
> *every piece of land is completely different." … And that's the challenge*
> *we've got often as well they query over how much groups need to pay*
> *for it, but every building's different.* (R3)

The testimony quoted here suggests that expectations of CAT can be somewhat disjointed from the reality of what local authorities are offering, suggesting the need for further clarification for community groups on the issue of 'peppercorn rents'. Addressing these misconceptions could help strengthen confidence around CAT processes locally. However, for some interviewees, questions of social value were among the most important considerations, that could add clarity on the value of CAT and when to engage with the process:

> *I know there's guidance in terms of the community asset transfer*
> *process but that's the bit I think is incredibly weak. How much is it*
> *worth giving a home to a community for 25 years as opposed to two*
> *and a half grand a year? It's not even comparable. It's not even in the*
> *same ball park of things. But they're either unwilling or unable to*
> *quantify that benefit.* (R1)

> *I just want to redevelop this whole community using all the ambition that the corporates and the public sector have around social value and corporate giving … The actual people that are on the ground doing the job desperately want it to work and be impactful and that's what I'm trying to harness* (R5).

For these interviewees, a robust and transparent system for considering social value would clarify issues around local authority rents and the debates between local authority departments, which, it was reported, had at times held up and frustrated CAT processes (R9; R2). It also indicates how the interviewees were observing the broader landscape of social policy and local economic development and drawing relevance from concepts like 'social value' for CAT. This highlights the need to think about how CAT relates to the broader policy of Community Empowerment, which CAT sits within, and these policy ambitions relate to newer policies, such as Community Wealth Building.

Areas of strength

Community ownership is perceived as a pathway to future security, enabling organisations to maintain and expand activities. The Hub and Spoke model strengthens this by reinforcing organisational identity, addressing gaps in skills and governance, and building resilience within community organisations to tackle cold spots of community activity. Peer-support Hubs can play a valuable role in the CAT support ecosystem, complementing support from specialist third sector organisations and local authorities and expanding on this support in unique ways.

1. The Hub and Spoke model has proven instrumental in guiding community organisations through the complexities of the CAT process. Hub organisations provide vital support, contextual insights, and practical advice that demystify CAT processes, enhance governance structures, and build organisational capacity. The central point of differentiation that characterises the support provided by Hub organisations is the informal, personalised assistance they were able to provide based on high-quality, hyper-local knowledge of CAT.

2. Peer-support Hubs supported Spoke organisations to make sense of the resources available, understand their relevance for their organisations and the implications for how they planned their next steps. Moreover, the evaluation highlights how the Hubs' support nurtures essential skills in areas like fundraising, partnership working, and governance. This skill-building is critical, especially for newer community organisations, as it ensures they are better equipped to handle the long-term responsibilities of ownership.

3. Hubs supported Spoke organisation to realise that CAT was a process rather than a swift transaction, and what they needed to address within their organisations to complete CAT requests. For example, addressing governance structures and/or skills gaps among their boards and volunteers.

4. Hubs, because of their awareness of CAT nuances at hyper-local levels, supported Spoke organisations to build relationships with their local authorities. Indeed, Hub organisations help Spoke organisations navigate the challenges of engaging with local authorities, such as identifying points of contact and understanding the range of

options (e.g., leases or Licenses to Occupy). However, systemic issues within local authorities, including delays and limited clarity around CAT processes, remain barriers.

5. Hubs brought a valuable perspective to public events promoting CAT, which led to lasting relationships between Hub and Spoke organisations. In addition, the Hub and Spoke model helped community groups develop realistic expectations of CAT processes and explore alternatives like long-term leases. This approach mitigates risks for both community organisations and local authorities, fostering trust and collaboration.

The one-to-one, personalised assistance, described in this report as 'hand-holding', was identified as a specific quality of Hub support; necessary, because of the unique qualities of individual community organisations and circumstances fuelling CAT aspirations in their local areas. Importantly, 'hand-holding' can be connected to raising awareness of community rights, and relatedly aspirations and confidence of community organisations. Over time, this could support community capacity building and a cultural shift in how community action is organised in the pilot areas, moving towards solidarity rather than a service culture.

*** Areas that could be developed further***

1. Developing further clarity on the role of Hub organisations and raising public awareness of the support they can offer community organisations, to address apprehensions that Hubs are looking to 'take-over' smaller community organisations.

2. While Hubs did help community organisations to build relationships with local authorities, further issues could be addressed in this area to provide greater clarity in process and points of contact. This would help address popular misconceptions about the CAT process by providing consistent messages.

3. Relatedly, agreeing and outlining a referral process between Hubs, third sector organisations and local authorities could also add clarity to roles in the CAT support ecosystem.

Broader context and considerations

The data collected demonstrates community organisations in North Glasgow and Inverclyde are looking for ways to participate in tackling a wide range of issues in their areas. There is a need to consider: how and when CAT is an appropriate mechanism to support this activity; how it fits with pre-existing mechanisms for communities to access assets; and aligns with wider social policy commitments to local economic development and community wealth building. Clarity on these connections is required urgently as 500 Church of Scotland churches are set to close in the next five years, expanding options for communities seeking to take ownership of local assets currently part of public and private church estates. Although Church of Scotland properties fall beyond CAT legislation, it is necessary to consider community views on the value of these buildings and their a role in maintaining crucial local social infrastructure assets.

The evaluation also suggests that even when a CAT request was not completed, Hubs helped strengthen local community organisations, building their potential to engage in the CAT process in the future. A further point of consideration is how to develop appropriate messaging for social entrepreneurs and elected groups -such as community councils- who express interest in making CAT requests but do not meet eligibility requirements, to direct their energies to, for example, Local Democracy Matters.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected, this report makes the following recommendations:

1. Scale up the Hub and Spoke model to other regions, prioritising areas with high deprivation or cold spots of community activity. Ensure Hubs are equipped with resources to provide tailored, high-quality support and share their expertise across diverse community contexts.
2. Encourage collaboration between Hubs and local authorities to streamline CAT processes. Develop shared frameworks for early conversations, clarifying roles, and expectations, and reducing delays in decision-making.
3. Encourage collaboration between Hubs and third sector organisations, to ensure Spoke organisations can access third sector training programmes to address skill gaps identified in the evaluation, such as governance, financial literacy, and fundraising.
4. Consider establishing regional networks of Hub organisations, in consultation with local CVS/TSI, to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration. Include opportunities

for Spoke organisations to exchange experiences, creating a broader ecosystem of mutual learning.

5. Develop accessible materials to clarify misconceptions around CAT, including the role of peppercorn rents, the availability of alternative mechanisms like Licenses to Occupy, and the relevance of social value. These should be co-created with Hubs to ensure relevance and usability.

6. Align CAT processes with broader community wealth-building initiatives and social value frameworks. This will help articulate the strategic significance of CAT in local development and regeneration, fostering greater alignment with local authorities and policymakers.

7. Conduct ongoing evaluations of the Hub and Spoke model to refine its approach and address emerging challenges and consider innovations such as embedding specialist advisors offering bespoke support.