Community Assets Framework

'To deliver a better integrated public service across the borough by creating efficient and fit for purpose community assets.'

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Foreword – Councillor Louise Gittins Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing

I would like everyone to have the opportunity to have access to services and provision in their communities. Community assets, the services delivered from them and the opportunities they provide sit at the heart of this, allowing local residents to become empowered and thrive. It is important that the Council continuously identifies ways in which to deliver services more efficiently but without losing sight of supporting local residents and ensuring their needs are met. With significant reductions in the Council budget and its resources it is even more important to ensure that our resources are well managed and reflect the priorities of our communities.

The property portfolio of the Council is immensely diverse and community assets form part of this portfolio. Our community assets are hugely important to the day-to-day life of our local residents and contribute to the social fabric of our communities, whether through activity targeting social isolation, health and wellbeing or supporting the best start in life for our children and young people. It is therefore important that within these times of change we identify new modern ways of working and consider how our community provision is best delivered, collaboratively and thinking beyond the 'four walls' of a building.

The Council's Community Assets Framework sets out the way forward for our community assets by stipulating a:

- Vision for our community assets
- Core principles
- Criteria for reviewing our assets
- And, how and what will be achieved through reviewing our assets

I believe that this framework will provide considerable support for our community assets and provision - now and in their future delivery - ensuring that they are at the heart of communities.

1. Introduction and Context

Cheshire West and Chester Council is committed to ensuring that our communities and local residents thrive through access to support and services they need. This Community Assets Framework sets out the Council's approach for its community assets and how it works with and supports these assets both now and in the future, ensuring they are at the heart of the community.

1.1. What is the vision?

'To deliver a better integrated public service across the borough by creating efficient and fit for purpose community assets.'

The Council recognises the vital role that community assets play at the 'heart' of their local communities and the invaluable role they have in achieving the Council's corporate priorities set out in the Council Plan. The aim of the Community Assets Framework is to set out an approach to support these priorities and building greener, fairer and stronger communities through making better use of our community assets and delivery of provision at a local level.

1.2. Background

Within the Council's property portfolio, there are hundreds of assets, buildings, public open space, parks etc that are used by the community. This framework focuses on the Council's approach to alternative delivery of Council owned assets which the community value and may wish to manage themselves.

The Council is setting out to address a range of issues including providing a clear vision of the Council's role in supporting community assets. This includes promoting opportunities for community asset transfer, and long lease to ensure that assets which are important to communities can be managed by them to support local delivery of services that are valued within that community (*Link to Community Asset Guidance – when live*).

1.3. What do we mean by 'community assets'?

Community assets could be a building, a piece of land or provision that is used and is beneficial to our residents and contribute to their quality of community life. Each asset is unique in its makeup and what it contributes to a community. This framework identifies the following as Council-owned community assets:

1.3.1. Community Centres & Community Buildings

- We own and manage a number of community centres and buildings across the borough.
- Hireable space - Monday to Sunday, 9am-10pm.
- They provide a wide range of activities from keep fit classes to luncheon clubs, pre-school groups and youth clubs.

1.3.2. Libraries

- Twenty-two public libraries, and one mobile library service, across the borough.
- Our library service offers the following, and more, supported by the national Universal Library Offers[1]:
  - **Information and Digital** – Through the Information and Digital Offer libraries provide quality information and digital support. Libraries enable individuals and communities to develop learning skills to find answers and to inform life choices.
  - **Reading** - Through the Reading Offer, libraries support the growth of a literate, empathetic and confident society. The offer provides diverse and inclusive reading resources, support programmes and experiences for children and adults to create excitement around reading.
  - **Health and Wellbeing** – Through the Health and Wellbeing Offer, libraries promote healthy living, provide self-management support and engagement opportunities for children and adults supported by welcoming spaces; effective signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities.
  - **Culture and Creativity** – Through the Culture and Creativity Offer, libraries work with cultural providers to spark curiosity, imagination and fun.

1.3.3. Play Areas

- We are responsible for many outdoor play and youth areas.
- Our play areas are supported by a Play Strategy (inc link)
- Play areas support the health and wellbeing of our children and young people across the borough.

[1] Libraries Connected: Universal Library Offers | Libraries Connected

1.3.4. Managed Land & Greenspaces

- We manage hundreds of pieces of land – including, but not limited to: parks, verges, village greens, allotments etc.
- Our greenspaces make a huge contribution towards the health and wellbeing of our local residents, and visitors to the borough, also offering access to cultural, leisure and heritage activities.

1.3.5. Public Conveniences

- We manage some public conveniences across the borough.
- This includes a mixture of internal and external management and cleansing of our facilities.
- The review of public conveniences is a cross-cutting review supported by a framework[2] setting out the criteria for review.

2. Understanding our Community Assets

2.1. Reviewing our community assets

To support delivery of the framework we need to review our assets and provision against the following criteria:

- Community based approach
- Mapping assets and provision
- Understanding the issues and needs of our communities
- Community value and the performance of our assets
- Community engagement at a local level

The Council has an Asset Management Plan for how it will manage all of its property portfolio and will develop a service asset management plan which describes how community assets will be managed and developed over the next 5 years. This includes information about the legal and planning obligations on our properties and land such as covenants and analysing the requirements of both our assets and our communities to support a community-by-community approach to service delivery.

2.2. The Community Approach

Due to the unique character of our community assets and the communities in which they are located it is important to take a community-by-community approach. We will work with our Ward Councillors, partners and community groups. This work will be led by the Councils Community Team.

[2] Appendix 1: Public Conveniences Framework

2.2.1 Cheshire West and Chester Communities Team

The Communities team are committed to working with residents and community partners to support delivery and ownership at a local level.

The Council's community working programme is split across four areas:

- Chester
- Ellesmere Port
- Rural
- Northwich and Winsford

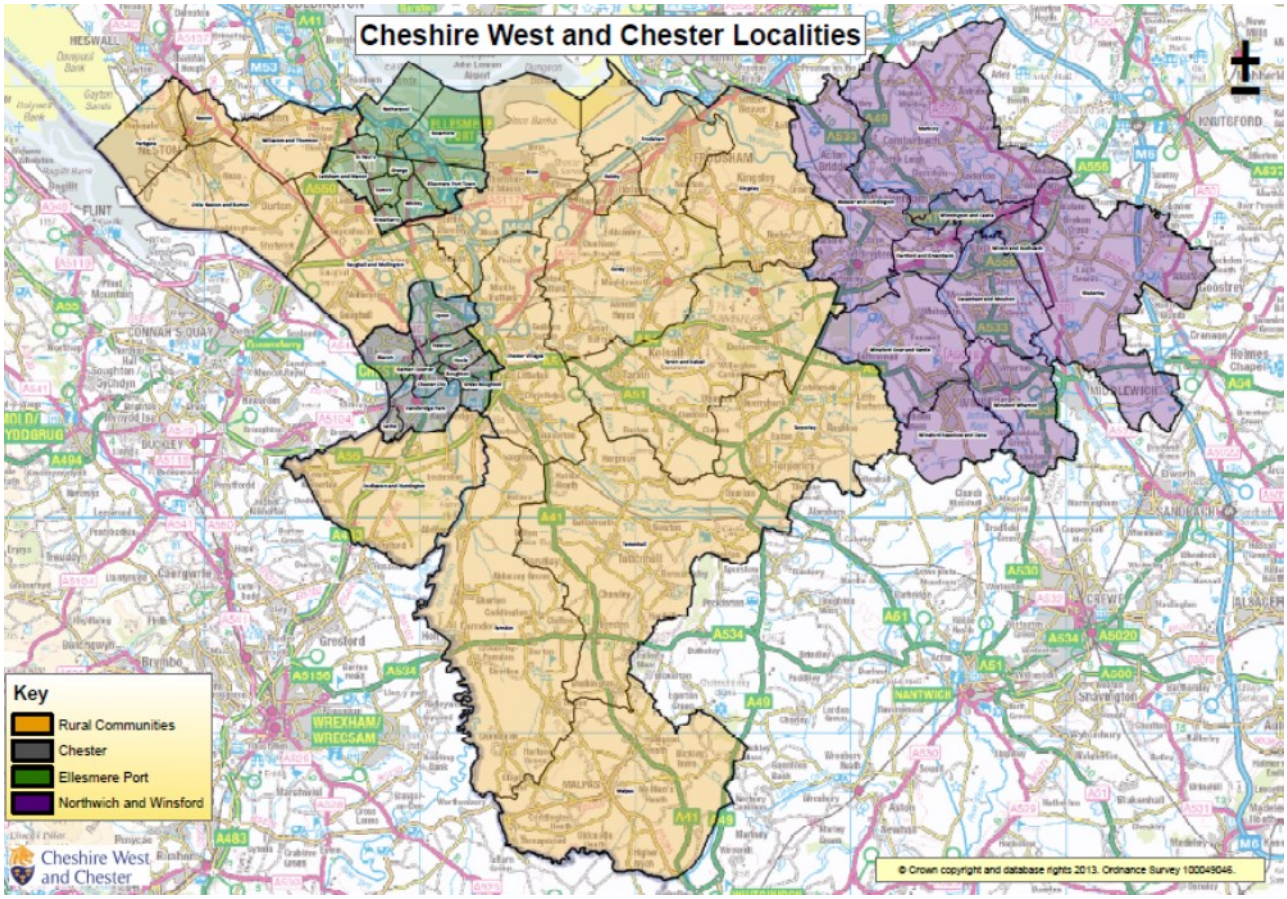


Fig. 1. Map of Cheshire West and Chester Localities/Communities

2.3 Mapping assets and provision

Data has been gathered to map community assets and provision across communities. Through this research mapping can:

- act as a visual aid plotting both Council and non-council provision in different wards and communities
- highlight clusters and gaps in provision

- indicate duplication of provision
- display the distance between provision

2.4 Understanding the issues and needs of our communities

Community assets have an important role in supporting the needs of all Cheshire West communities. The Coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on our lives and has highlighted and widened existing inequalities across our borough. As we recover from the pandemic and return to business-as-usual activities the Council need to re-evaluate the way it works with communities and uses community assets within the context of the Councils seven priorities:

- ✓ Tackle the climate emergency
- ✓ A Fairer Future; tackling the poverty emergency
- ✓ Grow our local economy and deliver good jobs with fair wages for our residents
- ✓ Support children and young people to make the best start in life and achieve their full potential
- ✓ Enable more adults to live longer, healthier and happier lives
- ✓ Make our neighbourhoods even better places to call home
- ✓ An efficient and empowering Council

We can do this by analysing our community assets in terms of community value and their performance.

2.5 Community value and the performance of our assets

Understanding how our communities use assets and the type of provision they offer is important, combined with an understanding of how and if assets are valued by our communities. Gathering statistical evidence can help to build up a picture of community value.

2.6 Community Engagement

Community engagement is vital in understanding the value of our assets, and the needs and aspirations of our local residents. The Council will work with communities, local ward councillors and partner organisations local to communities in which the assets are located to help shape and influence opportunities for the delivery and investment of community assets.

In summary, with mapping, considering community issues and Council priorities, analysing datasets of what provision is available, statistical evidence around usage and finances, and qualitative data gathered from stakeholder and community engagement we can use this evidence to help shape and support options that can be aligned to the framework's principles.

3. Community Assets Framework Principles

Using the information gathered we can use the framework to create options to allow us to make decisions. Details are outlined below:

3.1 Community Asset Principles

The Council undertook a full Consultation exercise in 2018 to understand residents' views about community assets in their area, and from that consultation a set of six clear principles were agreed which underpin all Community Asset opportunities.

The agreed principles are below:

Principle 1:	Supporting Communities: Ensuring our community assets are well managed and support the needs of our communities
Principle 2:	Regeneration: Supporting place-based regeneration to deliver the right services in the right location, based upon community need

Principle 3:	Partnership: Working with local partners to integrate or co-locate services to provide a better offer or approach to communities, and to maximise income and opportunities
Principle 4:	Releasing: Releasing assets that no longer provide the best value for our communities and meet Council Outcomes
Principle 5:	Transferring: Empowering communities to influence the use of assets in their area through asset transfers
Principle 6:	Equality: Supporting equality across the borough, ensuring our assets, where possible, are all-inclusive and accessible

3.1.1 For all assets we will apply the following actions

- Work with our ward members to understand the opportunities in their ward
- Assess property and planning legal obligations and covenants on our assets that will influence any changes in delivery
- Assess asset conditions and liabilities, externally and internally and advise of standard and condition in an honest way
- Establish robust management plans and work with those who are using our assets to maximise potential
- Raise awareness of community assets and their role in the heart of the community to increase their use
- Where possible support the development of a local network of support for those local people who use our community assets to encourage best practice, promotional activities and community engagement
- Undertake local engagement on services required to improve the ability of people to access community assets – taking into account user experience at every stage of any new developments
- Work with representative bodies to understand requirements, and what would be beneficial to our communities
- Adhere to national policies such as the Equality Act 2010 that aims to ensure that all those who are disabled have the same access to public services as those who are not disabled
- Undertake regular inspections of our assets to ensure they meet accessibility standards through monitoring and evaluation

3.1.2 When working in partnership we will:

- Analyse the community need for integration/co-location of services through research and consultation

- Assess what services could integrate/co-locate – space, resources, accessibility - and provide support mechanisms to achieve this

- Estimate the cost benefit of co-location of services

3.1.3 When releasing assets, we will:

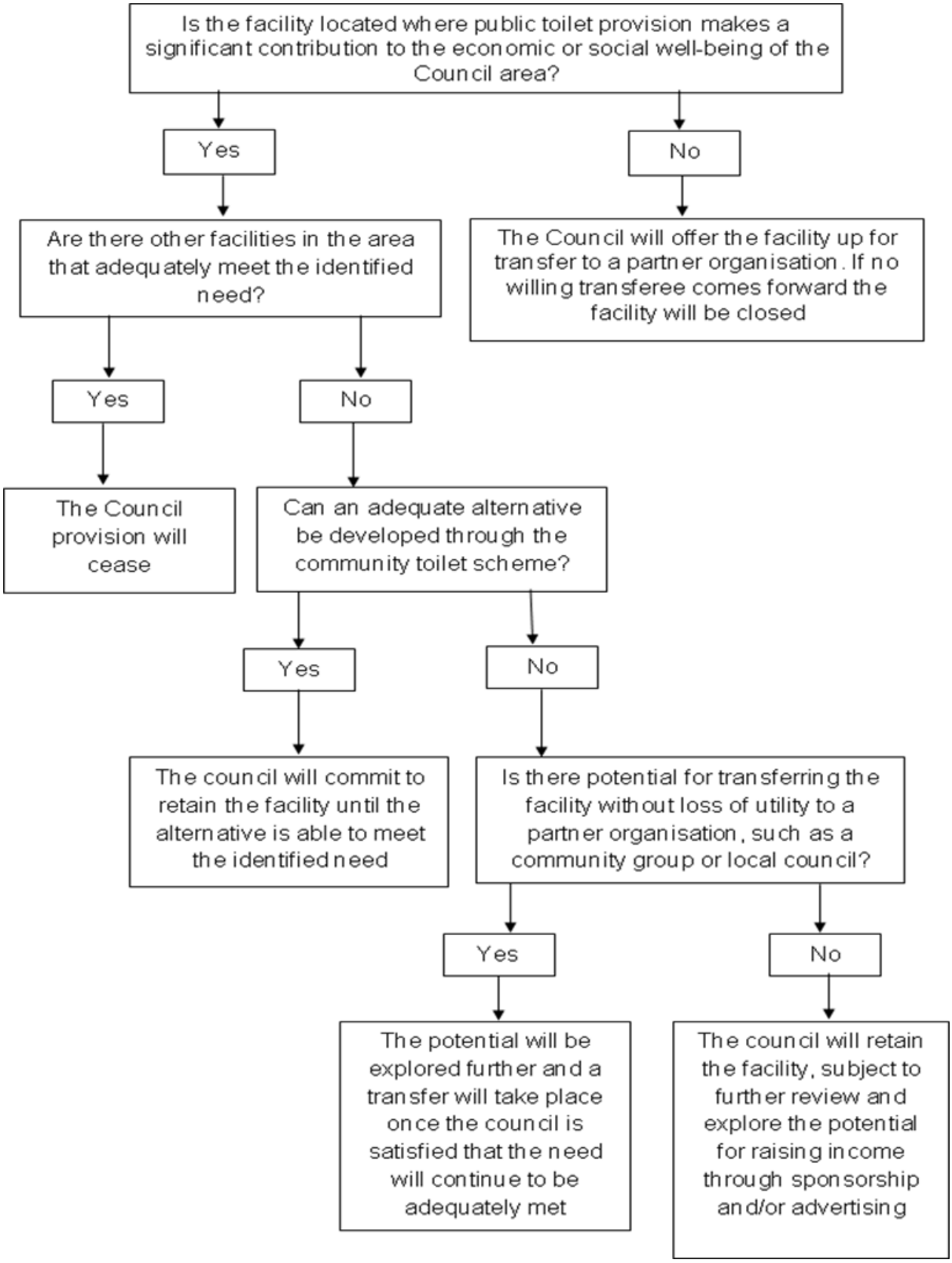
- Do a community value assessment and whether there is potential to improve the asset or services it delivers (is the asset fit for the proposed purpose?)
- Analyse the needs of the community and what provision is already on offer
- Do an assessment of commercial potential of land and/or asset

3.1.4 When transferring leasing or offering a management agreement we will:

- Put in place support mechanisms to allow communities to achieve their vision of taking on their community assets or provision
- Only pursue asset transfer where there is a well-run and well supported community organisation with appropriate governance in place to sustain delivery
- Ensure that the community asset is viable
- Apply the principles of our Asset Transfer Guidance

4 Appendices

4.1 Appendix 1: Public Conveniences Framework – Criteria for review



Appendix 4.2: Cheshire West and Chester Council Priorities