

£1-sale plan for public buildings

Disused schools and swimming pools could be sold to community groups for as little as £1 under a government scheme to revive local facilities.



Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly wants to encourage "civic pride"

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly says the initiative will create "a new era of civic pride" by giving local people more say in how local assets are used.

Councils will be asked to identify unused sites, such as old hospitals, empty pubs and disused police stations.

Councils queried whether assets owned by taxpayers should be sold for £1.

The announcement comes after Chancellor Gordon Brown, the favourite to succeed Tony Blair as prime minister, called for more community involvement in local decision-making.

'Unused powers'

Ms Kelly, who will launch the initiative in Sheffield at a former Victorian school transformed into a community centre, will announce a £30m fund to support 20 pilot projects across the country.

It follows the publication of a report by Lewisham Council chief executive Barry Quirk, which argues that handing public assets to communities leads to better services and stronger communities.

Local authorities already have powers to sell or lease assets at prices below the market value, but the Quirk Report found that these powers were not often used.

Ms Kelly will argue that "if you give local people more power, you'll get a better result".

“ If you give local people more power, you'll get a better result ”

Ruth Kelly
Communities secretary

Old school becomes 'asset'

www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6657385.stm

OR

www.best-report/downloads/150507exschoolthrivingasset.pdf

The outcome is "better services, greater satisfaction with the neighbourhood, and greater satisfaction with the local authority", she will say.

Fund created

Under the scheme, councils will be given the go-ahead to sell assets for as little as £1 where it is clearly for the good of local people.

The Department for Communities and Local Government is to provide £400,000 to monitor the 20 pilot schemes.

And a £30m Cabinet Office community assets fund, managed by the Big Lottery Fund, will support the buildings' new community owners.

“ Serious questions must be asked as to whether a prime piece of real estate that is owned by taxpayers should be sold for as little as £1 ”

Local Government Association

The government believes up to 1,500 community organisations could benefit from the initiative.

A spokesman for the Local Government Association said councils were "committed to delivering an ever-better deal for the taxpayer".

But he added: "However, serious questions must be asked as to whether a prime piece of real estate that is owned by taxpayers should be sold for as little as £1.

"Local authorities are willing to realise community assets, but only when they can be sure that it will make a positive contribution to the local area and provide value for money for taxpayers."

Reproduced from BBC News website for backup purposes only