Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee

Stronger Communities Task Group

June 2015

1.   Recommendations

The task group ask the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to endorse and action the recommendations below and to receive a progress update in 3 -6 months time.

Recommendation	why?	who?
Embedding a positive Asset Based Community Development approach[1] to unlock the potential within communities, starting with existing activity.	DCC needs to change its ideology to work with the positive levers in communities to effect change.	DCC
DCC to be more open to opportunities to work with and enhance the community and voluntary sectors and other partners including health and the police. This should include greater sharing of posts, work shadowing, secondments etc between organisations, more timely conversations, open information and publicising success stories and examples of great practice.	Great progress has been made in working better with partners but this needs to go much further to develop true co-production and co-delivery.	DCC/Health providers and commissioners / police/vol and comm sector
Redefine the DCC policy offer to its staff on the support and opportunities the council will help to facilitate in local communities.	Central government new policy to allow up to 3 days a year volunteering. DCC should lead by example on how this can support people contributing to their communities.	DCC HR
Increase understanding: Review the social value of asset disposal and look at attempts to quantify the social value beyond the market value of the property.	To get closer to understanding value for the authority to save money.	DCC perhaps with outside research?
Continue the work of Locality leads, further develop the programme and have one in all market towns.	To continue to provide informal links with communities	DCC
Support and encourage Parish to Parish peer mentoring/sharing of ideas and information	To create greater platforms for identifying and enacting local creative solutions.	Parish Councils
Further investigation with partners on social investment in Devon.	To identify if social investment could work in Devon and what the county Council's role could be.	DCC

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[1] What is Asset Based community development?
http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/What%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment(1).pdf

2.   Introduction

2.1.   Devon is a wonderful place to live. In 2013 there was a net increase of almost 4,000 people moving in to every part of the county2. Part of the attractiveness and desirability of the County lies in its idyllic rurality; the County is a network of hamlets and villages. By their very nature many of the settlements across Devon invoke the chocolate box notion of friendly, connected places to live and work. Now the resilience of neighbourliness is being called upon to support the transformation and ultimate reduction of the welfare state.

2.2.   This report explores the need for independent, strong communities, looks at the assets that help to make communities resilient and makes recommendations on how the County Council and its partners can work to support strength and independence.

2.3.   We know that greater connectedness in communities can help to increase social capital. However, we live in a fragmented society where families have more mobility than in previous generations. A resilient community requires a vibrant local economy, with real opportunities to work and live in the locality. Yet in Devon, house prices are far above the reach of most working people. Connectedness is very important; with cross-generational interaction helping to gel society. But mistrust and stereotypes can perpetuate the barriers.

2.4.   People (and communities) have different concepts of what is a strong community this could range from bastion to flexible. It could range from well-resourced in one or more areas: money, time, skills, assets, experience, and social capital. It could be described as homogenous or heterogeneous. It might be a well-integrated community that looks out for each other will demonstrate greater resilience than one which is just asset-rich.

2.5.   The Council may have a role in resolving some of these challenges to help support positive communities; however this needs to be in partnership with many other organisations. To truly get to a point of integration the official agencies and partners need to move away from a service based model of who provides which slice and how it is to be funded in each budget round. Authorities cannot be said to be promoting resilient communities if they work from the negative perspective of 'that's not our responsibility'. This requires a significant shift in what has been the dominant ideology of large public sector organisations, where services have in the main been tailored to meet a specific demand.

2.6.   An additional layer of complexity is that the communities that need assets are generally the ones that require more infrastructure support. This is where the County Council may have to intervene to proceed. But this is fraught with difficulty as the direction and identity of a community should be shaped by the community itself. It can be hard to see where support turns into determination by an outside agency.

2.7.   This is a timely discussion in light of the public spending costs. In the climate of austerity and budget reductions all organisations are asking how services can be delivered differently. The traditional style of local authority working is being challenged, and the County Council is contemplating the alteration of its DNA to meet these challenges. This sea change gives significant opportunities.

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http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/HTMLDocs/dvc25/#sty=true&flow=flow0&period=2&fix=E06000043&view=200,-40,650,635&tr=0,0&sc=1

2.8.   Austerity is enabling a different way of thinking, but fundamentally this is not about money, it's about changing the way organisations approach challenges. The Localism and devolution of decision making, what was referred to as 'the big society' marks the need for a culture shift in the way we envisage the fabric of society. These models can only work through involved citizens who are actively engaged with their communities.

2.9.   One thing is for certain, being part of a group of people can be good for the mental wellbeing of it participants. Connectivity is a key element in keeping healthy. Loneliness can raise blood pressure, lower immunity, increase depression and increase the stress hormone cortisol[3] The next extension of this line of thought is that contributing to a productive community is good for you.

> 'Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, **and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.'**
>
> **World Health Organisation**

3.   What makes a strong community?

3.1.   Central to an understanding of the role of communities must be a degree of clarity over what makes a strong community in the first place. Is it the conceptual aspects of connectedness that define a community or the geographical placement of boundaries? The task group has not dwelt upon the division of where a community begins and a town ends, or what the difference between a community and an interest group is. It has focused instead upon an appreciation of what conditions, support or interventions might make community more likely to flourish into strength.

3.2.   One approach to measure the resilience of communities lies in the flexibility and adaptability of their response to crises. Where circumstances demand a resilient approach we often find that communities come together. This does pose the question about whether the community was strong initially or by galvanising behind a common problem it became strong. This latent potential in communities is what many agencies in the public sector wish to develop. But is it possible to do this without the galvanising issue of cuts or closures of public services?

3.3.   The task group conducted primary research with Town and Parish Councils to ascertain what they believed were the aspects that made communities strong. The questions were open-ended with respondents free to write their own answer. The next part of this report will review the answers given from some 70 responses.

3.4.   The survey first asked: What makes a strong community? Respondents had a blank to fill in for themselves. The resulting answers have been collated into groupings,

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[3] 'Loneliness is Killing us - we must start treating this disease the guardian feb 2014

explained below. The largest segment with almost two thirds of respondents is connectedness.

What makes a strong community?
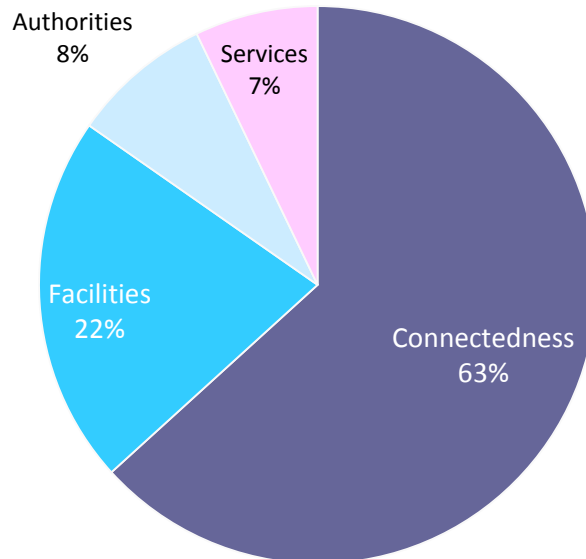
Connectedness includes a feeling of everyone pulling together to achieve common objectives, good communication, collaboration and leadership, but also friendliness with neighbours and a feeling of identity and trust.

❖ **Facilities** indicated a place to meet, with social events and groups.
❖ **Authorities** is in reference to an active Parish Council and being listened to
❖ **Services** include support for those in need, old, frail, disabled, low crime, affordable housing and high speed broadband.

The word map below demonstrates all of the answers to the question and shows the most repeated words by comparison as the largest.

What would improve the strength of your community?

3.5. Out of all of the questions in the survey the answers to this one were the most diverse. Some respondents felt that the community could not be stronger. The largest proportion believed that the dual aspects of a positive community that was taking action and not campaigning all the time, matched with authorities who empowered the local community and listened were most important. Many respondents talked about the need to involve people, to get beyond negative perspectives and stop expecting someone else to solve the problems. Some respondents listed practical changes such as affordable housing, broadband, road improvements, maintenance of services for the elderly and just generally more resources. Finally several respondents listed communication as key, including communication and links with other villages.

What are people's roles in creating a strong community?

3.6. The answers to this question were mainly variations on the same theme: that of people just being willing to get involved, to help each other and bring a positive attitude.

3.7. The answers to the short survey are illuminating, they indicate that there is a strong sense of community throughout Devon that people care about the places they live in. This can be extrapolated by the number, detail and content of the responses. The survey responses also demonstrate the nebulous nature of community resilience. Feeling a sense of belonging is a difficult emotion for a council to be engaged in trying to support. It is clear that there is a collective regard for the strong communities in Devon.

4. What is Devon County Council's role in creating strong communities?

4.1 As demonstrated in the previous section, If you ask people what attributes are necessary for strength in the community services are nowhere near the top of the list. If Devon County Council is predominantly a provider of services then there is a structural disconnect if we wish to develop strong communities. Delivering services will not create resilient communities. The task group does recognise the potential of resilient communities in supporting people beyond services. For local authorities, changing the focus of effort to help communities develop capacity along the lines of what makes a strong community might in turn reduce the pressure of increasing demand and decreasing resource. Most importantly a shift in focus might actually get to the root cause of supporting people living healthy happy lives.

4.2 To get to this place, Local Authorities must recognise the Importance of letting go of control and acknowledging that communities and localities often know best. The role of the authority therefore becomes to enable people to be resilient. To do this trust is an important pre-requisite.

4.3   Devon County Council does have resources, funding, assets, information/data, skills and time to help support communities in strengthening themselves. These are not exhaustive and are an ever diminishing pool. However to truly dedicate support to communities would require a move away from a service-centric model. Clearly, if the Council wants to build strong communities then we have to understand what a strong community is, what makes a strong community and then understand the role in supporting this journey.

4.4   There are two different ways that the county council is responding to this challenge. Firstly in a service-based way which reflects a more traditional structure of working, an example of this would be the snow warden scheme. The other approach is the growing programme of locality leads. Heather is the Vice President of the Association of Directors of Environment Economy Planning and Transportation (President from June) and reflects that Devon is ahead of the game in seeking new solutions to the challenges that all local authorities are facing. The delivering Differently Programme via DCLG is a great example of this. In Devon ten towns thus far are working as a part of the programme with OPM (note attached). A recent workshop focussed on three of those towns.

4.5   A practical example of this is the snow warden scheme, which developed in response to a reduced salting network. Currently there are 280 snow wardens. They also have significant, unplanned additional benefits to a county-led scheme. For a start they know the areas well, they know which roads and areas are slippery and therefore a problem. They also might be aware of people in their communities who are more vulnerable and in icy conditions need a helping hand. This is turn can lead to broader resilience where sections of the community look out for each other.

4.6   When asked in the survey what the role of Devon County Council was, almost 20% of respondents said that it didn't have a role at all! Double this number felt that the role was limited to providing finance or more general support, and the remainder talked about the need to balance priorities whilst at the same time continue to provide services but at all times to listen to communities. In contrast, the District Councils' role was seen much more as providing funding, support and advice, listening to communities and assisting in co-operation. This may reflect the view of the District in being far more connected to the town or parish council. The attitudes towards Town Councils are broadly concurrent with those of Districts.

4.7   This report talks about Local Authorities and their partners in health, the police and the community and voluntary sector. However this assumes that local authorities are homogenous bodies. The decision makers, the leaders and fundamentally the people who live and represent their community are Councillors. It is the Councillors who know the people of their community and are a vital asset in enabling communities to develop. As a local authority we must support and recognise the value of the local Councillor. However, developing resilience within the community cannot simply be the responsibility of one person. There is more work to be done in reviewing the relationship between officers and members to produce the most fruitful results.

Locality Leads

4.8   Evaluation of the locality leads programme has found success in the process of identifying commonalities in relationships and then removing barriers to community action. The localities leads have a significant role to play in the soft skills of relationship building, participating, sharing and connecting. This is the part of the iceberg that is below the water line, but supports the high visibility community activity.

4.9   A recent Delivering Differently event asked 'what difference locality leads have made?' the answer was that local people don't know where to go to get answers, that the County Council is impenetrable. By connecting and helping to navigate through the challenges things start to happen. Measuring this impact can be difficult as the success or failure depends upon diffuse and ethereal measurements, such as whether people feel supported locally, where the right idea was launched or even just a conversation was enabled to take place. The task group has however looked at case studies from some areas where there is a locality lead and these are presented below.

Case Study: Ottery St Mary

Ottery St Mary, like many communities across the County is at risk of losing or has already lost several key services and assets: library, youth centre, hospital, former social services building etc. There was a strong feeling within the community that these facilities needed to be retained in Ottery St Mary. Initially however the Town Council was sceptical about working with a Locality Lead from the County Council but effort and courage on both sides to create a more trusting relationship enabled a mutual and collaborative agenda to develop.

Much of the work to date has focused on retaining assets, including the Station Youth Centre building. A business case was been put forward to Devon County Council for the transfer of St Saviour's (former social services building) to develop into a 'community hub' as a base for a number of community groups and services.   The next step is to focus on securing volunteers and finance to support the project, facilitate networking between the Town Council and other community groups and form functional relationships with the district and county Councils.

Key aspects of this ' journey' were the development of trust: a critical pre-requisite for collaborative working. Effective networking of the local community and also the local government family (and agencies) both horizontally and vertically will be an important part of this process. An important lesson learned is that there can be too much focus on saving assets and buildings rather than looking beyond this at the outcome of service/facility provision and how people can be developed and supported into sustain them.

The challenge for the county council

4.10   For the County Council this means we have to be brave. Letting go is difficult. Enabling communities might mean that we get things wrong. This can be politically high risk. The essence of where we are is that we are still service led. It can be easier to view the landscape in a service-centric way, where the county council still holds control. We do, maintain statutory control and some things we do we are statutorily mandated to keep responsibility for. The need to still provide services for the most vulnerable, with the technical skills and expertise required jars with a central message to support the community. However there can be solutions to some of the most pressing issues.

4.11   There are great examples of local innovation when local people are motivated and appropriately supported by organisations such as the county council. Often the issue is not one of funding, just focussing on an outcome-based approach. In Hull a children's walking bus to school changed its route to walk past housing for vulnerable older people. The elderly people would put a sign in their window if they were up and ok. If there was no sign the children would report the house to their school when they arrived who would notify social services. In the first year, the scheme identified fourteen older people who had fallen, who otherwise might not have got help. This also helped to knit parts of the community together who might otherwise have been fearful or unsure about each other.

5. Stronger communities through collaboration

5.1   The future for public services lies in collaboration in more and more innovative ways than before. Previous generations visions of separated public functions can no longer be supported by the breadth of need and the diminishing of resources. Police, health and local authorities will have to share resources to achieve agree common goals.

5.2   There is evidence that some parts of the CC have changed their attitude and culture, however the task group has heard that there are still areas that don't know what other parts are doing. This leads to the potential of duplication and significant inconsistency in approach. There needs to be a unified approach, particularly in the current climate with rapidly diminishing resources. The potential that is identified in this report will be squandered if the opportunities to work with communities are mishandled.

Lessons from the community and voluntary sector:

5.3   The community and charitable sector has significantly changed in recent years in response to the change in funding streams. Compared to today, 2010/11 was a period of plenty; year on year growth has declined as public bodies have declined. This sea change in the structure of funding for the com and voluntary sector has fundamentally changed the integrity of its structure. There is a focus on more diverse activities such as lobbying, research and development of social policy. This has necessitated difficult conversations as charities find themselves actively in competition with each other for vital contracts. The question has been asked about whether charities rely too heavily on public income. As the pool of funding for the charitable sector dries, the relationship between the public and third sectors has altered.

Conditions for Collaboration

The Task Group explored some of the pre-requisite ingredients for collaboration:

❖ A sense of parity or equality between those collaborating. This might even extend to a sense of what advantages (strengths) each collaborator brings to the 'table

❖ A clear understanding of where each party is 'coming from' in terms of information, issues or challenges This might extend to a clear understanding what the limitation or envelope they are limited to working within

❖ A clear understanding what the mutual benefits are for working together

❖ A clear understanding of the motivation for working together (this might be different from above)

❖ Trust and transparency (which also requires effective communication)

❖ A clear sense of what the individual and collective roles are of each party.

5.4   Instead of clamouring for a race to the bottom, it can actually more innovative to work collaboratively. The ideology underpinning the provider-commissioner model is one where competition is healthy to get the best outcomes at the best price.

However the philanthropic nature of the charities combined with adaptability in some areas can provide different solutions to the existing problems.

5.5   One view is that commissioners are not adapted in how to design for this 'brave new world'. The traditional model is one in which the service spec is set, then passed to procurement which in turn opens a tender process, resulting in a contract being awarded. The task group has heard that this process is fairly locked down. In reaction to the need to do things differently and achieve social outcomes with less money there might be other ways.

5.6   The individuals who come together to inspire and enact transformational change will wax and wane over time as the issues change. This is to be expected and welcomed as part of a longer continuity. The communities that trail blazed are not always the ones that are always in front. Confidence building at a local level can be incredibly powerful. The work in Ottery has begun by having a focus on community facilities but it is anticipated that the issues will change over time. This may lead to different segments of the community being involved at different points. There are still questions about how the local members engage with the locality lead. This model only works if people genuinely work together.

5.7   Locally there are some great examples of innovation, when agencies look to do things differently. The Bishops Palace Garden in Exeter has been given over to a horticulture project in collaboration with Bicton College to grow a community food garden. There are opportunities for doing things differently, but it requires courage and fresh thinking to make them happen.

How might Social Investment work?

Alcohol is an area where spending on health and wider social impact is high. Looking at the possibility of using a social investment bond to tackle alcohol related spend analysis was done to identify the high spend groups:

1. Socially excluded, homeless people, usually known to authorities
2. Binge drinkers, students
3. 'oblivion drinkers' 40-50 years old middle income, high functioning
4. Repeat perpetrators and victims of domestic violence

Out of these groups only two (1 and 4) would be suitable for a social investment bond. The first and last groups are identifiable over time, and interventions can yield significant reductions in expensive treatments of behaviour patterns (for example criminal offenses or increased health need).

During one week in Oct 2009, 23 perpetrators of domestic violence were identified where alcohol was a factor, all were prosecuted and all but 5 went on to commit further crime. In one case the individual was responsible for 46 further incidents of domestic violence.

The investors would put up the money and potential providers work to identify interventions to meet the desired outcome. If the programme delivers the anticipated outcome the investors get a good return, payment is only upon results.

6. Conclusion:

This report has explored the changing relationship between local authorities, their partners and their collective role in supporting communities. Tension between providing services and supporting communities endure.

Despite the challenges there are some communities that are thriving, some excellent, innovative work that shows local people stepping forward to create the world in which they want to live. The council should not be afraid to help this to happen, whilst ensuring that those people who are vulnerable are suitably looked after. Much of this territory is new, unfathomed and requires a different ideology and approach to the one that local authorities have been used to.

This task group concludes with a view that there are many more questions to ask about the emerging communities' agenda, and this will be an ongoing area for further consideration and policy development.

7. Sources of evidence

Witnesses

The task group heard testimony from a number of sources and would like to express sincere thanks to the following for their involvement and the information that they have shared as well as to express a desire of continuation of joint work towards the fulfilment of the recommendations in this document.

Organisation	
Devon Community Foundation	Martha Wilkinson, Chief Executive
South Devon and Torbay CCG	Solveig Samson
Devon and Cornwall Police	Shaun Keneally
Public Health at Devon County Council	Kristian Tomblin,
Devon County Council	Louise Taylor
Exeter CVS	Simon Bowkett, Chief Executive
Devon County Council	Heather Barnes, Strategic Director, Place
Devon County Council	Lucy Knight
Devon County Council	Simon Kitchen
Devon County Council	Tony Parker
Devon County Council	Mark Lane
NEW Devon CCG	Nikki Kennelly
District Council	Libby Jarrett

The task group would also like to place on record Thanks to Victoria Church for her assistance in the set up and execution of the session looking at locality leads in Devon.

Bibliography

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- http://www.devon.gov.uk/operating-model.pdf
- What is Asset Based community development http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/What%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment(1).pdf
- 'Loneliness is Killing us - we must start treating this disease the guardian feb 2014 http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/17/loneliness-report-bigger-killer-obesity-lonely-people

8.   Task Group Membership

Membership of the Task Group was as follows:

Councillors Julian Brazil (Chair), Andrew Moulding, Rosemary Rowe, Kevin Ball, Robin Julian, and Andrew Eastman.

9.   Contact

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