

The South Essex Commission of Enquiry into Co-operation between Housing, Health and Adult Social Care

Hearing 1 – 17 September, 2010, Wat Tyler Park, Pitsea

Summary of key points from Roundtable discussions

Question: How can we promote community cohesion: helping residents fulfil their potential and feel that they belong and can contribute to their local area?

Answers:

Learning

We need to learn from shining examples where we have evidence that community cohesion indicators are improving – eg Balsall Heath, Castle Vale. This involves identifying what works and then using the knowledge and data we have more effectively to identify gaps in need elsewhere. To achieve an understanding of what works, schemes/projects need to run for a period of time to build up momentum and encourage people to attend.

Leadership

It is important to identify community champions/leaders such as 'mini mayors'. We can encourage non-political civic leadership by elected members and officers to act as impartial local representatives. Turning Tides @ SAVS is a positive example of community led activities provided by the voluntary sector.

We need to find a mechanism to identify the key issues in a community, then find the spokespeople for that issue and use their passion and energy, facilitating this with appropriate resources.

Support from organizations

Councils should *support* community ideas or requests for help by providing *practical* support that enable the community to deliver it themselves - as opposed to the council delivering the request directly or rejecting the idea. One practical example is allowing some council buildings to be used for community meetings, free of charge, to enable groups to get off the ground. Another idea would be to give communities ownership of assets (ie buildings) supporting co-operative enterprises and enabling skill swap shops etc.

Councils can also provide financial and technical support and initial set up advice (ie performance, added-value monitoring and, tracking to evidence savings etc).

Another approach would be to provide everyone with a 'personal care account' so that you build up credits by caring for others. You can draw on the account when you need it.

Engagement

There is a need to engage in such a way that the agenda is focused on responsibility, not just entitlements. If we support communities in meeting their needs, communities will sort themselves. We must build cohesion between existing groups of interest such as the Rotary Club, church groups, scouts and guides, schools and sports clubs. There are vested interests, at present, but by engendering a greater sense of the whole picture you could enlarge the sense of civic responsibility.

We need a different kind of conversation, not reactive but as part of an on-going dialogue – a kind of ‘preventative consultation’. It is important to get the conversation right by not ‘talking at’ people and need to reduce the jargon for greater clarity. We must engage with individuals, not just organizations. It is a long-term issue about changing the culture around how we engage.

We should let the community ‘pull’ services out to themselves, rather than services being ‘pushed’ out to the community.

We must increase the understanding of what it means to live in your area, the power of museums and history and general community. The more locals know about where they live and who their neighbours are, the more it will increase their feeling of having more trust in their area.

Funding

Community budgets could be spent by smaller communities – allocated down to street level. We would have to accept that there would be more risks in the system – if communities ran out of money.

Funding streams need to be broken down, putting the funds into a pot and then concentrating on outcomes which will need a different mindset from commissioners. For example, Thurrock forums have allocated budgets of 10K and decisions are taken by local councillors. This is a good thing as there is accountability.

There is a need to recognize the importance of continuity of funding for the voluntary sector: a great deal of time is spent making efforts to secure funding for the forthcoming 1-2 years rather than providing the service.

Voluntary Sector

There is a diverse range within the Third Sector: very small local organisations as opposed to large organisations with large financial turnover. We need to recognize the value of the voluntary sector in reaching local people and providing appropriate forms of support. Organising volunteers is crucial – Cameron’s ‘community organisers’ who then feed into more formal service provision in statutory services.

For example, we could facilitate big lunch and street parties, making it easier to set up social events in communities. These are incentives for people to be part of the community - through street day events (social incentives – eg nicer place to live). People get different things – eg self esteem, feeling useful: individuals have to be

aware of their roles as citizens, communities can be galvanised when facing a challenge

There is a need to define the role, level of commitment and outcomes (barriers are different at different times in people's lives). Voluntary working mostly takes place between 9-5 which is a barrier to a lot of people. Need to be more flexible.

We should support ways to establish criteria to ensure that people are suitable to volunteer – references, skill set, CRB, training etc. Also, invest in volunteering infrastructure, eg: the staff volunteering scheme @ Rochford/Essex County Council. 'Give an hour' volunteering for businesses or strategic organizations should be promoted and encouraged.

We should support the establishment of voluntary groups – voluntary banks/a central volunteering hub – where individuals commit to donate time. A CVS type organisation would need to facilitate this.

Housing

We could promote a proper lettings plan for housing developments – aiming at mixed income households through the planning system.

Housing co-operatives and community action groups encourage community cohesion.

Question: How we can encourage citizens to be more supportive across the generations – getting residents to think more about using assets and time to assist younger and older people?

Answers:

Social Attitudes

We must develop expectations to help each other in society. We need to find ways to break down barriers and make links between potential helpers and those who are willing to help. How do we move from 'old person' to 'Gran'? For example, a working couple with a dog, who both work could match up with an older person who can't have a dog but who could look after it during the day. The older person gets social and pet interaction.

Perhaps we should stop talking about generations and focus on similarities. Do you see life differently at 50 or 60 than you did at 20? The concept of community is based on affinity and this should be promoted with a focus on diversity. We could work together with organisations who deal with both categories (young and old), looking at how we can involve them with each other.

Could we provide holistic support catering for general needs rather than maintain lots of different services for specialist needs?

Perhaps the nudge could be through personal budgeting, so individuals can purchase services from neighbours rather than official services.

Where do we draw the line in relation to the state providing safety and letting individuals take the responsibility/risk?

Across Generations

We could facilitate young people to support/befriend older people and older people to help younger people. Promotion of a time-bank would enable old/young people to exchange ideas. It would be productive to encourage older people to give back their knowledge and skills.

We can identify some good practice work, for example, engagement with schools:

- Schools could be more of a hub in the communities: 'take your granny to work day'.
- School dinners where older people are invited in for lunch.
- Schools to 'buddy up' with local homes: there is a successful school and elderly persons' complex working in Basildon.
- Start early – schools visiting and taking on projects: currently, this tends to focus on fundraising rather than active participation.
- Develop the concept of the 'junior warden' who would learn the ropes, interact with others in the community so be aware of needs/issues. It is a question of funding over such schemes.
- Targets for schools in community engagement.

Additional ideas

- The Older People's Planning Group in Chelmsford uniting generations.
- Tenants sign up to 'social contract' before moving in.
- Support community interest companies to be set up (Southwark Circle?) to bring older people together to run activities or help services, for a small fee.

Question: How can we overcome the social isolation that affects many older and disabled people?

Answers:

Design

We need to ensure that the design of extra care schemes is 'fit for purpose'. In addition, meeting points in communities need to be preserved and protected. Areas need to have planned spaces where there are opportunities for integration.

Provision of dropped kerbs etc and public seating should be targeted in areas of high elderly populations and on key routes.

Technology

This is the Internet generation so Facebook and Twitter are both means of communication to reduce isolation. Broadband, including Skype, can increase access and reduce social isolation. A scheme to sponsor or buddy an older person would be helpful: pay for IT Kit/training and then 'buddy' over email plus networking sites

Encourage CSR policy in large companies, for example, Proctor and Gamble go into facilities to encourage use of Skype and the Internet, targeting their community funds at our priorities.

Research

Identify the reasons why people are isolated, such as transport links. Find out who is out there and who is visiting or seeing people regularly. For example, postmen, wardens, PCSOs and village agents.

Ask them what they need and what they believe makes them isolated. Again this is about understanding your community's needs. Once we understand what they believe creates this isolation, that can be relayed back to the community to be addressed.

Additional ideas

- Establish community initiatives eg dementia friendly villages; community links forum; befriending schemes; skills donation for vulnerable residents.
- Focus on the extended family to prevent loneliness and isolation 'looking after friends and families'.
- Identify ways to recreate the 'Village Hall' – hub of the village.
- How do we tap into people in the 60-70 age group to get them active in the community?

Question: How can we encourage neighbourhoods to be more supportive of older and disabled people?

Answers:

Design

We should 'build for life', so influence new builds to incorporate conduits for new technology eg smart houses. Private sector housing should be designed to enable people to remain, for example, ramps fitted.

It is important to facilitate the right spaces so that people have an imperative to get together (the smoking room syndrome) providing common points of interaction.

Information

We need to provide information and advice for people to self-help/help others. There is a need to address concerns about engaging in a community where perceptions about the dangers of society prevent us engaging with others on any level.

We need to promote what can be done/what's needed in an area: target groups and individuals at specific times in their lives (kids at school, kids leaving home).

Organisations need to understand what is currently funded and how this makes a difference. This requires impact assessments and an outcomes focus. Some communities work, so this should be replicated and resources put in where it doesn't work.

Additional ideas

- Build on the parish council model where they take responsibility for a small area.
- Resource volunteer management at a local level.
- GPs can signpost and encourage people to engage in their community to promote health and well-being.
- Promoting 'handyperson schemes' improves support in people's homes.
- Organise street events to encourage knowledge of elderly/disabled neighbours.
- PATH for Disability – provides work experience and paid employment. Could target this at housing associations in the area.

Question: How can we overcome people's fear of crime and enable them to participate more?

Answers:

Change attitudes

We need to support people to live with risk. Risk uplifts our awareness and function. For some people living with risk may be more enabling than providing major adaptations/changes to eliminate risk.

More visible policing and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes make people feel more secure and PSOs have done much to address the fear of crime. In Basildon, the neighbourhood team (Housing) focuses on fear of crime and this helps to reduce social isolation.

We need to encourage people to get out in the community more (eg groups rather than individuals). Public realm improvements such as more intelligent lighting create a greater feeling of safety.

Groups of people/men/teenagers are stereotyped by the media. Intergenerational activities and educating young people could help to reduce the fear of crime and would help to change the older person's perception about young people.

Information

It is important to publicise any reduction in crime and we need better information around police engaging with communities. Local media reporting needs to improve – feeds fear around crime.

Question: How can we raise awareness about the need to prepare for old age?

Answers:

Work/ finance

People will probably need to work longer and the relaxation of retirement age will enable older people to play a more prominent role (Age Bill). Promoting flexible working and job sharing will facilitate involvement in paid employment.

Retirement induction programmes, online and in groups, are a useful vehicle to inform about and prepare people for retirement and later life.

There is a need to highlight the financial challenges and encourage private sector financial planning and information from insurance/pensions for individuals.

Employers should encourage pension take up in young people to reduce poverty after retirement.

We should look at trends as people age - what is the likelihood they will need support at home? One idea would be to set up an insurance policy that residents can pay into – something along the lines of Home Contents Insurance –where they can pay into the scheme and claim if they need adaptations.

Health

We need to recognize the role that public health improvements can make and promote them, encouraging keeping fit for as long as we can. We must raise post-40 health awareness and offer health checks after this age.

Could we offer a 'Health AA service' to fix people when they 'break down' at home – Norfolk telehealth equipment? Can we do this in other locations, eg sheltered housing, nursing homes etc

There is a tendency to focus on pensions not housing and health needs.

Information

There is a need to promote opportunities for retired persons to volunteer so that younger persons have awareness of the active role they can still play. To facilitate this, we need better signposting for finding voluntary organisations.

People need to know what choices we have to make in older age – a 'help yourself attitude' should to be promoted. Engage with younger people as part of 'life planning'.

More positive images of retirement in the media are needed.

The media can assist: public service announcements like the smoking and drink driving campaign could help to raise awareness. Drama programmes can also highlight the need to prepare for old age.

Should we scare people about isolation and no control to raise awareness of what it is like to be older and less able? Need to also consider how people without family are picked up and supported.

Question: How can organisations be better informed about the whole range of initiatives and services residents may need?

Answers:

Consultation and engagement

Organisations need to talk to residents and listen to their responses. However, there can be too many conversations, so these must be streamlined but have proper follow-through afterwards.

It is important to take services out to people:

- Community information events;
- Door knocking, S-o-S Bus, Circle Anglia Bus;
- Provision of a compendium of services.

Co-operation

We need better information sharing, for example, social issues noted by the LA provided to housing associations. Therefore, we need to address data sharing protocols. There is also a need to draw on current providers and provision more effectively.

Services could network, for example, through 'speed dating of services'.

Community development work should be audited to identify gaps or duplication. Provision is delivered across housing associations, district councils and voluntary organizations and we should audit the priorities being highlighted.

LA/CVS should undertake the information provision role.