

Design in Social Care Programme

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Project Summary

Improving access to community hubs across Southend

Context

Across the country local councils are both working with and also seeking to enable stronger and more integrated local communities.

In Southend the existing work with local communities is also seeking to develop and enhance local relationships and networks. The aspiration is that people can consider the local networks and connections they have to help them live well and independently for as long as possible.

The community hub project is one mechanism that has been developed in Southend to support this approach and in 2018 the Southend team applied to the Design in Social Care programme to look at specific ways that an enhanced approach to their hub programme could help tackle some of the specific pressures in the area of social care.

The challenge

Southend have, over the last few years, developed a series of 'community hubs' which are community spaces that residents can get support with a wide range of areas such as financial, health or social care, family support and where they can in turn develop skills, volunteer or find other ways to contribute back to the community.

A number of physical hubs provide a focal point for the community and are considered an enabling platform at the heart of the ambition for Southend 2050¹.

The approach that Southend took to the Design in Social Care programme was slightly different to other local areas. Southend had a preferred existing service in the community hubs and were looking to improve the experience of residents accessing information and support.

South Essex Community Hub
Your local centre for support

the HUB

- Advice and support from local services
- Learn how to confidently use computers
- Guidance on using the internet
- Finding a job, CV writing
- Debt Support
- Volunteering opportunities
- Housing advice
- Health and wellbeing
- English skills & support

Find your local hub:
www.hubproject.co.uk

SECH

Email us on: info@hubproject.co.uk

¹ Southend 2050: <http://www.southend.gov.uk/southend2050/>

What they did

Southend bought together a team of individuals from a variety of different services within the council including the transformation team, social care staff and students as well as coordinators for the community hubs themselves.

The team used the training and resources (based on the Design Council's 'Double Diamond') to begin by understanding the usage of the hubs by individual residents across Southend. The discovery involved both a mixture of semi-structured in-depth interviews with around 10 people who had accessed services from the hub and looked at available hub use data and demographics.

It proved easier for the team to engage with people who had used the hubs than those that hadn't but nonetheless provided an angle from which to explore people's experiences.

What they found

The team heard from people about their experiences of using the community hubs – most obvious were positive stories impact that they were having on people's immediate problems. A more surprising aspect but frequently highlighted by residents was the welcoming space created by the community members, volunteers and staff at various hubs helping people feel accepted, increasing opportunities for socialising and allowing people to contribute back and become part of a supportive community.

Based on the insights the team started asking the following questions for the next stages of our inquiry:

- "How do we improve awareness and frequency of use of the Hubs?"
- "How do we enable greater community involvement and ownership of the Hubs?"
- "How do we improve communication and consistency between the Hubs"?"

There was no particular way in which people found out about the community hubs but improving awareness of the hubs by local residents was confirmed as a key area. The team had to narrow down the focus though in the time available and it felt that by answering the question around enabling greater community ownership they could increase the awareness of the hubs as well as.

One of the aspects of work undertaken by the team focused on mapping various stakeholders with connections to the hub. They thought about the community widely and that led to a range of ideas developing about how the council could foster business engagement with the hubs – both in enabling local businesses to feel a greater sense of ownership and giving them an opportunity to signpost people to the hubs for support and advice.

Prototyping solutions and next steps

The Southend team used the ideation sessions as a means of developing ideas that could foster business engagement in the community hubs. This centred on a business support pledge for the local community hubs. In practice this would allow local businesses to make a support pledge to the community hub in return for advertising for the local business.

- Alongside this opportunities emerged to complement this work with businesses including:
- Developing materials for local business about the community hubs that could be made available for residents

- Widening the definition of 'businesses' to include local public sector and voluntary sector organisations such as GP practices
- Holding 'friends of the hub' community workshops and evenings that are open to local businesses to present their offer or run sessions ie. a local baker could do a themed sandwich making sessions.

Early prototyping of this work has taken place with 4-5 local businesses and the feedback was positive and informative. The businesses were in need of factual and simple information of where locally to direct customers who seemed distressed or lost. The team was glad they spent the minimal amount of time on producing materials and proceeded quickly to reach out to a small sample of businesses. This provided useful feedback which will help simplify the process in the next iterations. The intention is to continue this with a potential to focus initially on rolling out the prototype with one of the community hubs in Southend. This approach is also feeding into the development of Social Prescribing in Southend.

As the work continues the team is committed to reviewing progress and measuring the impact of this – for example, looking at whether a shift towards business engagement leads towards a greater number of referrals from local businesses as well as increase in overall engagement levels by residents with the hubs across Southend-on-Sea. Overall Southend have been keen to explore opportunities to use the design methodology not just within social care and the community hubs but across the council as a whole. As part of the programme the team presented to a wide group of people from across the council on service design. The council have recently recruited to new service design roles. This way of working is being used to form the basis of work being taken forward on the Southend 2050 programme.