

Case study

September 2016

Buckinghamshire County Council

Making better use of assets in the community to maintain independence

Buckinghamshire County Council has engaged in a range of community action activities, at different scales of investment. Key aspects of the approach to community action have included:

Devolving powers and funding

The county has 19 local community areas, each of which are able to set their own priorities and have devolved budgets. These are dependent upon population, ranging from £30,000-50,000, and total £780,000 for all 19 areas. The county also has 169 parishes, 44 of which took up a tranche 1 offer for devolved powers and budget transfer for their area. There will be a tranche 2, although less funding will be available. The intention was not for the county to make savings, as budgets are transferred across directly, but to enable local priorities to be determined/better met. This also reduces some demand for the county, eg receiving/responding to complaints. Examples of devolved powers include minor highways functions, eg hedges, grass cutting, but not statutory duties such as health and safety. The delivery model could involve social enterprises, individual parish councils and clusters of parish councils.

Prevention matters

This programme aims to delay access to adult social care, building on a referral system, rather than on direct support. The programme helps users to access frontline community services and groups. Fourteen community practice workers (CPWs) are aligned to the seven GP localities in Buckinghamshire, and lead on the referral process, from first contact with the users to final review and exit. The CPWs are supported by seven community links officers, who ensure that the necessary resources are available in the community to meet users' needs, including identification of opportunities to build new capacity. A wide network of frontline community services and groups provides direct face-to-face support to users, through activities such as befriending, transport, fitness, and lunch clubs. The council is investing approximately £1 million per year in the programme between 2013 and 2017 and there were 2,860 contacts with programme users recorded throughout the lifetime of the programme, up to the end of June 2015, of which 2,533 were unique contacts.

Chesham community wellbeing

In 2012, the county identified dataset trends showing increasing levels of deprivation in urban areas (Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Chesham) and took the decision to undertake a programme in Chesham, covering the whole population (20,000), in order to address issues such as youth unemployment, substance misuse, domestic violence and lone parent needs. This involves joined-up, multi-agency working (county, DWP, NHS) and engaging the community in terms of the way in which they would most like to access services and what services they need. Services are uniquely co-located in an area medical centre, rather than the traditional job centre approach, with this change in environment being perceived to have made a huge difference to hard to reach service users' attitudes and attendance levels. To date, the project has operated on a 'goodwill' basis and there has not been a budget involved. Moving forward for a larger area (High Wycombe – 80,000 population), a budget will need to be agreed (expected to be around £150,000). There was no formal business case for the project and the county took the view that it knew that addressing these areas would make residents more socially stable, financially robust, which would reduce demand.

Active Bucks

This programme is intended to make residents more physically active and change the way in which active living is perceived, with a particular focus upon residents who lead sedentary lifestyles. The first phase has been consultation with the community through local area forums, with 2,000 responses being received, identifying what types of physical activity people would like to engage with. The programme initially had a budget of £1.2 million from the public health budget underspend, although funding is currently being reviewed in the context of resource constraints. The second phase of the project will be to use Community Physical Activity Champions (volunteers) to undertake engagement activities, following on from training.

Healthy Living Centre (HLC)

The HLC acts as a physical community venue and community café and engages with a range of organisations and individuals, including hard to reach groups. This includes attracting individuals/groups into the HLC initially through leisure activities and subsequently providing further support/training, eg health and English classes. The HLC also undertakes consultation for organisations, eg a social housing provider, and is able to access wider funding sources than just from the county. The county has contributed around £190,000 of public health grant and agrees priorities with the HLC on a regular basis.

Community management of assets/services

The council has used volunteers to manage a number of council services, including libraries, youth clubs and day centres. The county has 14 community libraries, which are run on a purely voluntary basis or part voluntary basis in partnership with the county, with the community having flexibility over access times. The county still provides certain 'central' services, eg IT support, bookstock, with a three-year grant being provided. A similar approach takes place to youth clubs, where these are run by community/faith groups, based upon a three-year tapered grant being provided by the county. In some cases, buildings have also been transferred. For three day centres, community groups keep these operational, based on a peppercorn rent, and consideration is also being given to transferring buildings.

Community organising

The county is using the Citizens UK specific model, which involves the use of 'anchor organisations' as a route to engaging people, eg church, mosque, foodbank, housing association. The model is that these organisations identify key individuals in the community and build up networks, with Citizens UK

interviewing these individuals and providing them with skills, such as how to engage with decision makers. These community organisers collect information from the community and a Citizens UK democratic process is used to validate priorities through discussion with networks and communities. This is focused upon the three of the four most deprived wards in Wycombe. This process is just starting and stage 2 will involve developing solutions and identifying how the community can deliver itself, with county support, rather than the county necessarily delivering directly. In total, £50,000 of funding p.a. has been provided for a three-year period.



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