

Active Communities

A Policy Paper for Community Capacity Building

1. Background

Gloucestershire County Council's 'Together We Can' consultation signalled our desire to work with partners to create a different sort of relationship with its communities.

We know that being part of an active, supportive community makes a huge difference to people's quality of life and helps people to be more resilient when faced with an emergency or hardship. In short, without communities playing a vital role in providing day-to-day support, the Council would be completely overwhelmed.

The Council recognises it has an important role to play in supporting communities.

Supporting Active Communities has long been the focus of elected members as democratically elected champions of their residents. Elected members help to decide what is in the public interest, and spend time dealing with the concerns and issues of their residents.

Other roles of the Council include planning and providing the County's infrastructure, helping prevent and respond to emergencies, giving access to information and advice, protecting vulnerable people and providing social care. Some of these require the specialist professional skills and support that the Council can bring. However, we recognise that sometimes the way we work gets in the way of our communities helping themselves, rather than supporting them.

As a result, the Council has found itself taking on an ever increasing role and more responsibility for meeting people's needs. Faced with continually growing demand for our services and the prospect that we might not be able to continue to meet that demand; we believe that the time is right to redress that balance.

Earlier in the year we launched a consultation and subsequent discussion paper to test out our ideas about working with partners to help communities to take on a bigger role in helping to meet the needs of local people.

This policy has been developed in light of the feedback we have received. It describes ways in which the Council will continue to, and expand on, work with communities and community groups to help them find local solutions and support each other.

We will continue to work with partners to identify and share best practice, learning from each other and seeking wherever possible to have a common approach. We will also take every opportunity to use each others' strengths and resources so that we may respond to local opportunities for supporting Active Communities.

2. What you have told us

Our 'Together We Can' consultation provided overwhelming support for the idea of communities taking on a bigger role. 91% of respondents agreed that the Council should signpost families and individuals to community support where appropriate, so the Council can focus our resources on those who really need it. Similarly, 88% of respondents supported our approach of focussing our specialist support where it's most needed, and work with communities to do more for themselves.

Many people also commented that families and communities will need funding, support and training to enable them to take on the more active roles of supporting themselves and their community. They suggested that the Council could support volunteering to help people know what opportunities there are and where help is needed.

People also reminded us about some of the challenges of modern life, with families living further apart and more people working. These things make it more difficult to get involved in community life or caring for others.

Finally, people told us that communities would need time and support to take on more responsibility, and that it is important that the Council doesn't step back until communities are ready to step forward.

Our discussion paper setting out our proposed approach received both the same strength of support and range of challenges being identified. People wanted to better understand how the principles we described can and do work in practice and what practical steps the council would take to support this. There was concern raised about what the council might expect of community groups, would the burden be too great? There was agreement that Active Communities does not mean the community delivering the same services as the council but for free, but is about being supported and involved, with people coming together to work towards a common goal. That it is about developing a new relationship with the Council, with more power and decision making going to the community so that they may develop their own solutions to issues that are important to them. People wanted the Council to listen and be more open to the ideas that the community had about what works best for them.

Many were concerned that 'community spirit' was not strong in some places and that 'red tape' can prevent people from organising local activity. They felt that the council was well positioned to advertise examples of other communities that were active and also promote relevant information, advice, and support, for people to participate in such activities and/or develop their own. Such assistance would also include supporting the provision of places for people of all ages to come together.

It was highlighted that community capacity building activity could not always be undertaken for 'free' and at no cost to, or need of investment from, the Council.

The Council itself was recognised to have a significant number of assets that

could support communities to create strong groups, including service user led organisations, to deliver local activities. Such assets include buildings; information sources; publicity mechanisms and a large workforce that would actively get involved in local community activity and/or provide specific skills to support groups.

In short, there is overwhelming support for communities to take on a greater role extending from neighbourliness to wider activity including community activities and formal volunteering. We understand that not all communities will be equally ready and able to do this.

The Council accepts that we have a shared responsibility to work with partners to help communities develop the skills, the structures, the knowledge and the support to be able to take on a role. We describe this activity as community capacity building.

Gloucestershire's Communities

A key strength of Gloucestershire is its wide and diverse range of communities. This includes geographical communities, communities of faith, gender and interest.

The action plan at Annexe 1 should be seen as a starting point and recognise that the nature of communities and Community Capacity Building is an ongoing, ever changing process and therefore the action plan will provide a broad framework which can be tailored for the different needs and aspirations in different communities.

We recognise that different communities will require different levels of support with some communities that already show strong indicators of activity requiring light touch support whilst others will require investment (advice, guidance and direct support) to stimulate capacity.

The very nature of the diverse communities and the ethos of Community Capacity Building means that 'one size doesn't fit all' is truly applicable to this policy.

3. Examples of where community capacity building is already happening

We know we are not starting from scratch. There is already a wealth of community activity taking place across Gloucestershire in neighbourhoods, villages and through clubs, interest groups and community organisations. Some of these activities take place with the support and involvement of the Council and other public sector partners. Even more thrive through the enthusiasm and commitment of their own members and the creativity and drive of local people. This policy builds on the experiences and learning already gleaned from these activities. The action plan creates a framework whereby we can harness the strengths of our communities and maximise the potential for creating further opportunities.

Elected members already play a key role in supporting and stimulating active communities. We aim to provide elected members with a range of tools, information and training, if required to further enhance their role as active community champions.

In the original discussion paper we described some examples of the ways in which the Council and partners are already supporting community capacity building, and some of the lessons we can draw on to develop our approach further.

Attached to this paper (annexe 2) is a list of some of the other activity we are aware of; but even this is far from being a complete list. It simply illustrates the wealth of ideas and initiatives that Gloucestershire communities are delivering

What does emerge are some overall themes of activities that various parts of the Council and partners are engaged with. These include:

- Give Grants – to enable groups to develop their own relevant solutions to achieve a positive outcome, e.g. getting people to be physically active.
- Community champions – championing a local or community of interest and promoting opportunities to further advance positive outcomes for such communities, e.g. parent and dementia champions.
- Community Navigators & Connectors – helping people to find and make contact with the people, places and/or activities that will help them achieve their goals and aspirations. E.g. Village and Community agents, community support services, Local Area Co-ordinators
- Supporting Volunteering & Peer support – connecting people with a shared experience or interest to access, or provide mutual, support. Such as peer networks and volunteer befrienders.
- Supporting development of Service User Led Organisations (ULO's)/ management organisations to inform and influence decision making, work alone or in partnership to design and/or deliver services.
- Community hubs - aim is to create community spaces, 'hubs', where people can meet and take part in a range of activities to promote social inclusion, independent living, health & well-being and lifelong learning.
- Community asset mapping - which identifies the places, people, services and skills that are available to support people to find or create their own solutions.
- Supporting individuals develop personal skills – through one to one support and connecting to other people, programmes and opportunities to acquire and extend their own skills.

4. How can we take this further forward?

We recognise that the Council needs to help communities without trying to take charge – this needs communities to be willing and able to work with us. Similarly, we want to make sure that we are working in a joined-up, coherent way with other public sector partners to avoid making it unnecessarily complicated for communities to interact and work with us.

Through the engagement, local residents and communities were asked about our suggested approach to help us to understand what things the Council can do and how the Council needs to work, act and behave to help build community capacity.

There was strong support for these principles with a request to describe how they may be translated into action.

Taking the feedback on board and recognising the need for communities to determine what community capacity means to them, the Action Plan at annex 1 is seen as an initial starting point which will grow and evolve as communities identify their own strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to engage in Active Communities

The action plan will remain aligned to the principles of this policy and the ethos of community capacity building.

- An asset based approach: recognising and building on the strengths that exist within each local community including the people, facilities, places and environments.
- A needs-based approach: The Council should prioritise *its* support for those communities where need is greatest
- A shared approach: Looking for shared priorities and co-producing shared solutions so that plans take account of what is important to *and what* works in each community.
- A local approach that allows people to take control of the process, helps them to decide which outcomes matter most and finds solutions that suit the local circumstances. This means that solutions will look different in different communities
- An empowering approach that recognises the legitimacy of different voices within the community and give local people the opportunity to express their views, develop consensus and take action. As a council, we will be willing to participate without taking charge.
- A partnership approach: We will work with other parts of the public sector, voluntary and community groups to develop common approaches to building capacity.
- An inclusive approach: Ensuring that the voice of under-represented groups is heard within communities and that communities include all views and backgrounds.

5. What will this mean in practice

We believe family, friends, neighbours and communities are the first port of call for most events in people's lives and that the Council's role is to support this.

When a community wants to engage with the Council because they have a concern, an idea, a question about something the Council is doing, or need our support it will be easy for them to do so and they will get a timely and consistent response.

While we will not be able to meet every request for community support, we will be clear and straightforward about what support we can offer and when. Where possible we will identify alternative organisations or local groups that may be able to help.

We recognise that where we are changing or withdrawing a local service, we have a particular responsibility to engage early with that community, to work with them to seek to mitigate the impact of such changes.

We will review those activities we currently do to support community capacity building in light of the feedback we receive to ensure that they support the principles of Active Communities, and ensure we are taking a coherent, co-ordinated approach that makes the best use of our limited resources.

We will work together with other partners so that communities receive joined up support and will involve communities in commissioning and designing services so that they make the most of the skills that already exist amongst service users and communities.

The process of building capacity in communities is intrinsically linked with having active individuals in that community. By supporting and developing active individuals, we create an environment that encourages and nurtures community capacity. This in turn encourages, promotes and supports more active individuals. Both the active individuals and active communities policies and action plans seek to draw on the cyclical nature of this and the critical interdependencies between the two policies/action plans.

The principals and practices of the Active Communities policy will also be referenced to other Council programmes including Building Better Lives; Supporting People; Transport; Older People's programme; Early Help, Children and Young People Partnership Plan etc to ensure that Community Capacity Building is embedded in all other key activity.

Creating a Common Language

Some definitions

When we say	We mean
-------------	---------

Asset Based Community Development	Community Development (see definition below) that starts from the point of view of identifying the strengths and assets within a community
Co-production	Working together with communities as equal partners to identify priorities and develop solutions
Community Assets	Skills, knowledge, abilities, capabilities and resources that exist within a community and can be used for the common good of that community
Community Capacity Building	Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities.
Community Development	A process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems
Community Engagement	Activities the Council (or another agency) undertakes to involve communities and community groups in shaping it's thinking in order to influence the direction it takes
Communities	A group of people with a common interest or identity or who share a common place.
Social Capital	The collective values, confidence and capability that exists within a community or group with a common interest or purpose. It can be described as the "glue" that holds individuals together in a community.
Commissioning	Commissioning within public services simply means understanding what is needed and deciding on the best ways of meeting those needs, that make a positive difference to people's lives through the use of all available resources.
Social Value	A concept which seeks to maximise the additional benefit that can be created by procuring or commissioning goods and services, above and beyond the benefit of merely the goods and services themselves.

Annex 1

ACTION PLAN

(Separate attachment)

Annex 2 – Examples of Community Capacity Building Activities

Existing sources of funding for Community Capacity Building from Gloucestershire County Council and partners:

- Active Together Grants - giving communities the opportunity to get active and healthy together;
- Community Building Improvement Grants - helping community groups to improve their local infrastructure and so improve services to better support the local community;
- Armed Forces Community Covenant - funds projects that encourage mutual support between the armed forces and community and encourage integration;
- Voluntary and Community Sector community capacity grants;
- Police and Crime Community Grants - supporting local organisations with the aim of reducing crime and creating more peace and good order in their communities
- You're Welcome - Small Sparks Grants, supporting small groups of people to come together and do something they enjoy and make a difference to where they live;
- Big Community Offer - funding and support for community groups to run their own community facility;

The following are examples of local activities that contribute to Community Capacity Building. Some of these involve or are supported by Gloucestershire County Council, others are led by communities themselves or one or more of our partners:

- Vulnerable Adults: Living Well; Local Area Co-ordinators; Village Agents; Community Hubs; Dementia leads and Champions; Supporting People Community Based Support; Community Drug and Alcohol Services; Mental Health First Aid Trainers; Memory Cafes; ATLAS .
- Vulnerable Children and Families: Families First (FF) key workers, FF Community Connectors; Youth Support; Children Centres; Parent Champions; Growing Great Futures; Take Part; Inspiring Families.
- Disabilities: Key Ring; Kingfisher Treasure Seekers; Bus Buddies.
- Carers: Positive Caring Programme; Local support groups; Peer support.
- Universal: Library activities, Local engagement officers; Grants to the Voluntary and Community Sector; Community Transport Grants and Contracts; Making Every Contact Count; Social Prescribing; Community Health Champions; Health Trainers; Community Builders; School Governors; Apprenticeships; IT skills; Adult Education Programmes.
- Neighbourhood based: neighbourhood projects, parish plans; neighbourhood plans groups; community development and regeneration; Community Asset Mapping.
- Volunteering – Fairshares Timebanks; SAAFA volunteer case workers. Skillzone and Community Fire Fighters.