

Taking forward the *Thriving Places* approach – learning from elsewhere



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Hosted by: Glasgow Centre for Population Health & Glasgow Community Planning Partnership

Chaired by: Jim Gray, Head of Democratic Services, Glasgow City Council and Helen Scammell, Director of Operations, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector

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Context

Background

Glasgow's new Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) will cover a ten-year period until 2024. It includes clear and formally agreed outcomes for which all partners within the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) are jointly accountable in line with their respective contributions. These outcomes will be expected to achieve 'transformational change' through enhanced partnership working and co-productive responses among all relevant partners, including the community.

The vision outlined in the SOA is of a *Glasgow that is a thriving, inclusive and resilient city – a city where all citizens can enjoy the best possible health and wellbeing, and have the best opportunities to meet their potential.*

The three priorities for Glasgow's SOA are:

- **Alcohol**
- **Youth employment**
- **Vulnerable people**

These will be complemented by a focus on particular neighbourhoods, also known as the 'Thriving Places' approach.

The Thriving Places approach

In recognition of persistent inequalities within and between communities, the SOA sets out an approach targeting specific neighbourhoods with more focused action. This approach will centre on CPP partners working collaboratively alongside communities to make better use of existing resources and assets, many of which are already embedded in communities themselves.

An asset-based approach focuses on the capacity, skills and strengths in a community rather than a 'needs'-based or 'deficit' approach which looks at the weaknesses and problematic issues within a given area. Asset-based approaches are based on the premise of 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' and supporting individuals who would not normally get involved to actively participate.

Asset-based approaches are normally specific to each neighbourhood in question and cannot be readily transferred to other areas without consideration for local circumstance. For the new SOA in Glasgow, it is anticipated that the approach taken within each thriving neighbourhood will reflect the circumstances and assets within each community. Distinct working groups of partners will be formed to take forward the approach in each neighbourhood.

Through undertaking locally specific asset-based approaches such as 'asset mapping', a community's own set of unique strengths and opportunities can be collaboratively identified and plans for future work can be prepared and progressed.

The SOA sets out a broad set of principles agreed by CPP partners about the approach that might be taken in these target areas, including:

- a long-term focus on partnership working (up to ten years if required)
- partners being willing and able to respond to local needs in a flexible way and change the way in which resources are allocated if required
- a focus on community capacity building and working with community anchors
- a focus on co-production between communities and organisations
- intensive activity to build social capital and empower communities, making the most of neighbourhood assets to do this, be they buildings, organisations or people.

The intended outcomes of this type of approach will include:

- more resilient, sustainable communities which are stable, thriving and growing, and in which people are proud to live
- communities with more aspiration and influence over the planning and commissioning of local services by CPP partners.

Where appropriate, the CPP is keen to identify and understand learning from elsewhere across the UK which might help inform the development of local proposals around asset-based approaches in city neighbourhoods.

Purpose of the day

The purpose of the day was to create a learning environment by drawing on the experiences of people working throughout the UK to deliver asset-based services. While there are several good examples of this type of work in Glasgow, we also wanted to gain insights into some of the work of other UK cities. Glasgow's strong links with other UK cities through the UK Healthy Cities Network (Glasgow has been a member of the WHO European Healthy Cities network since 1988) were used to identify the examples which were presented on the day. Invitations went out through this network to provide an opportunity to showcase examples of good practice regarding community engagement, community development and/or developing assets to address persistent inequalities.

Seventy-one people were in attendance, including those within CPP networks in Glasgow and others who had previously expressed an interest in asset-based approaches. The event was co-chaired by Jim Gray, Head of Democratic Services, Glasgow City Council and Helen Scammell, Director of Operations, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector.

Summary of presentations (all available at www.gcph.co.uk/events/141)

Alcohol Forum (Derry)



Eamon O’Kane, Director of Derry Healthy Cities, began by speaking about a “community-led, civically-endorsed” partnership approach to alcohol harm reduction. He advised that Derry’s culture of heavy drinking had been passed down through generations and perpetuated by the media. Eamon went on to describe the vision and aims for the alcohol harm reduction project. Objectives included:

- A collective approach harnessing the support, commitment and enthusiasm of all stakeholders
- Educating stakeholders on their role in tackling the alcohol culture
- Reducing and ultimately eradicating children’s access to alcohol
- Providing alternative non-alcohol focused entertainment
- Creating a safer, vibrant city centre and region
- Establishing, maintaining, monitoring and enforcing standards of good practice in the operation of premises selling alcohol.

They began by bringing people from a variety of sectors together into a room to discuss ways forward. He said, “Once you get them in the room, lock the doors because the conversation needs to be brutally honest and very focused on the issues.” After three to four initial “blood-letting” meetings, people stopped blaming each other and started identifying a variety of ways forward. Halloween (a large celebration in Derry which attracts up to 40,000 visitors) was used as a case study for the success of the project, as reflected in newspaper headlines from “Derry’s fight night” (in 2006) to “peaceful Halloween praised” (in 2008).

Eamon concluded by stating that ‘mobilisation’ on alcohol was key, demanding a comprehensive response to the issue which involved a wide range of individuals, agencies and organisations that come together to change the ‘environment’ of alcohol consumption and to challenge the ‘normalisation’ of alcohol misuse in the community.

My Community Matters (Stoke-on-Trent)



Marvin Molloy and Gill Jones spoke about ‘My Community Matters’, an asset-based community development approach to health improvement in Stoke-on-Trent, which has delivered a series of community-led interventions aimed at reducing health inequalities since 2009.

The project was commissioned by the City of Stoke-on-Trent Public Health, NHS Stoke, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent. It is managed by the Changes Health and Wellbeing voluntary sector organisation and works in association with Staffordshire University.

They spoke about how in their initial meetings with communities, they came away with a very small list of assets (about two positives and 53 negatives) and they started with the positives and eventually mindsets started to change.

The main lessons from this work are:

- The importance of being open and honest, with no false promises.
- Using a bottom-up, community-led approach aids development of trust in communities as it demonstrates that their views are valued. This is particularly important in times of austerity.
- The benefits of an asset-based approach, focusing on the positives, including the value of skills, experience and local knowledge.
- The value of partnership working to make health 'everybody's business'.
- Realising the power of individuals within communities to influence peers and recognising the importance of 'gatekeepers' in engaging communities.

Child Friendly Cities (Belfast)



Laura McDonald spoke about Belfast as a Child Friendly City. She advised that children are not always considered in the planning process for the built environment, as there are no mechanisms for engagement with them. As a result, children sometimes have little option but to play in poor conditions. The benefits of a child-friendly environment are the encouragement of physical activity which may help to reduce obesity and to support mental and social development, independence, healthy risk taking, and reduce antisocial behaviour, and so potentially helping towns and cities economically.

The schools project involved 100 children aged 9-11 from schools in the Suffolk and Lenadoon area of West Belfast and an afterschool club. Its four main aims were to:

- Offer children an opportunity to express their views and wishes (photography and art chosen to facilitate range of abilities)
- Identify ways of engaging children in the decision-making process
- Generate information to support policy and decision-making
- Create a model for engaging with children.

Findings have been published in a 'Children's Charter'. Also promoted was 'KidsSpace', a large scale demonstration event in different venues across the city, which was run to explore what a child-friendly space in a city centre could look like, and how it might work. Evaluation was positive in that it demonstrated what a child friendly space might look like and also that much could be done with existing spaces through creative approaches and different attitudes. A key ingredient for success is allowing communities permission to take ownership.

Neighbourhood Plan (Inner East Preston)



Grete Smith and Jennifer Carthy advised that Neighbourhood Planning (a planning initiative in England) gives communities the opportunity to have a major say and directly influence the development and growth within their local area. Inner East Preston has utilised the new powers that

Neighbourhood Planning provides by enabling local people to become the driving force behind processes and development of a new plan for the area.

The advantages of this approach in a developing a new neighbourhood plan are that:

- Local residents and organisations were involved early in the process
- It created a focus for a series of consultation events
- It created a slogan: 'Your Neighbourhood, Your Views Count'
- The consultation received a good response
- It was led by local residents
- The process was supported by local politicians
- Interest was generated nationally.

Some key lessons were:

- Developing good relationships between local authority staff and residents is essential and possible
- Gaining resident support for an official-sounding initiative can be challenging
- Realistic expectations are needed about the resident group's resources (time/skills)
- A flexible and adaptable approach is needed
- Aspirations must be addressed, and there is a need to be realistic about delivery, particularly in areas where schemes have failed to materialise
- Patience is required

Neighbourhood Forum and Golden Gates Housing Trust (Warrington)



Katie Donnelly, Hazel Smith and Cam Kinsella-Drew spoke about the Golden Gates Housing Trust Health Inequalities Project.

Golden Gates Housing Trust (GGHT), the largest housing provider in Warrington, has been working with Public Health and the Local Authority to target those most in need.

The development of the GGHT Health Inequalities Plan, co-ordinated and delivered by the Health Inequalities Team with the support of Public Health and GGHT staff, has enabled a range of health and lifestyle issues to be addressed for local residents.

Many outcomes have been achieved, including:

- Delivery of 'change 4 life' courses reaching over 200 residents
- Delivery of seven confidence courses and four positive thinking programmes for residents
- Wellbeing initiatives for staff
- Over 50% of people from 20% most deprived areas achieving all their goals in their wellbeing plan
- Roll out of the 'Women's Group' – Longford's women's group ran twice a week for ten weeks with 16 women in attendance
- Free training for 88 staff in areas such as basic mental health, suicide prevention and in 'Making every contact count'. Training will continue over the next 12 months
- An oral health project to educate younger children on the importance of oral health
- Five process maps/support sheets created in partnership with the 'expert' service to support staff in signposting people to the correct local services.



Small Sparks (Newcastle)

Karen Inglis, Ali Lamb and Carol Barclay described the journey that Newcastle residents, the workforce and voluntary and community sectors have been engaged in to improve inequalities in one area of the city. They showed how taking an asset-based approach had reshaped ways of working and how local people are coming together to begin the journey to make change. The initiative involved community capacity building, alongside making small grants available for individuals and groups to take action.

Learning points included:

- Lots of skills and assets in local communities if you know how to look
- Taking this type of journey takes time, but provides outcomes
- Participation resulted in an increased desire among residents to make a difference, shift from small thinking and take bigger steps, e.g. a group that developed to explore wider concerns such as poverty.

They cited John P Kretzmann and John L McKnight (founders of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute), who said that:

“Every single person has capabilities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capabilities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.”

Participatory Budgeting in Govanhill (Glasgow)



Chris Harkins, Senior Public Health Research Specialist at the Glasgow Centre for Population Health spoke about participatory budgeting. He stated that it directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget; transferring responsibility and

accountability from the state to communities in order to strengthen democracy. Having originated in South America, the UK approach to participatory budgeting is in the form of 'community grants' but a more 'radical' approach is 'top-slicing' or 'mainstream participatory budgeting' (as seen in Brazil).

In Govanhill, in the south of Glasgow, £200,000 of 'community engagement' resource was awarded to Govanhill Equally Well test site. Partners initiated the participatory budgeting pilot with newly formed Govanhill Community Action Group (GoCA) in summer 2010. The Community Health Partnership and City Property were key partners, Oxfam facilitated the participatory budgeting process and the local Community Planning Partnership endorsed the approach.

The resources were allocated to the Govanhill Addictions Family Support Group, the Govanhill Community Justice Partnership and to Govanhill Baths Trust.

Chris concluded by stating that:

- Like any democratic mechanism the process adopted in Govanhill was imperfect
- Participatory budgeting fits entirely with the principles of localism, community empowerment, devolved decision-making and the asset-based approach
- Participatory budgeting is a well-established and internationally-researched localised democratic process
- The current political and policy landscape is crying out for a practical tool which purports to achieve these goals yet widespread awareness and acceptance of participatory budgeting has been slow in Scotland
- This can only be achieved when the awareness that more can be achieved for less by working with communities is recognised, evidenced and accepted
- Leadership, building capacity, 'lead in time', front-loaded investment and essential cultural shifts are required.

Three Hills Community Garden (Glasgow)



Lara Calder, Health Improvement Lead, Glasgow Community Health Partnership – South Sector, spoke about the Three Hills Community Garden, which is based in the neighbourhoods of Priesthill and Househillwood in south Glasgow. She explained that these areas were selected as one of eight national pathfinder sites for the Scottish Government’s ‘Healthy Weight Communities’. The Three Hills Community Garden was created from this opportunity and focused on a model of co-production between partners and the community throughout its development. The garden has demonstrated that a coherent asset-based programme can have a greater impact on health outcomes than discrete interventions delivered in isolation. The formation of the garden has led to the development of a community of interest which has raised the aspirations of those directly involved and benefited the local community.

Summary of discussions



Building on success

Participants were keen to see community-led asset-based approaches taken forward to improve neighbourhoods. Appreciation was expressed regarding how the event provided an open learning space, rather than creating a defensive space, and those attending came with an open attitude to learning. A continuing willingness to learn is necessary for the approaches to be successfully implemented by Community Planning Partners in Glasgow.

Several participants stated that there was a strong base of experience regarding this approach in Glasgow, including among the voluntary sector. Existing assets include people already working to take similar approaches forward, although more support is required to maximise their potential. There is an opportunity to continue to meaningfully engage with communities where a relationship of trust has already been established. The physical environment, and in particular greenspace (e.g. community gardens), can often provide a basis to facilitate successful engagement between CPP partners and local communities.

Challenges

Partnership working can be challenging, and in some cases can actually slow progress. An asset-based approach can also be challenging because it requires doing things differently. A disconnect can sometimes exist between small-scale voluntary projects involved in this type of work and larger public bodies. Other barriers mentioned include issues over transferring control from one body to another, which can sometimes foster defensive attitudes between partners. Another challenge recognised was that engaging communities can raise aspirations but that these are not always supported by the level of resources needed to deliver change.

What is needed?

A significant amount of discussion involved the requirements for successfully implementing the approach. Important points that arose were:

Strong leadership, both political and from senior members of partnership organisations within Community Planning is required to ensure the delivery of community-led asset-based approaches. It would be useful to align this approach with other existing strategies, identifying shared agendas and priorities.

To ensure sustainability, strong leadership should be accompanied by a long-term commitment to the approach with appropriate resources (both in terms of finances and staff time) being in place to ensure delivery. This is not necessarily about identifying new resources, but is instead about finding ways to realign existing resources through redeployment and creative solutions in order to develop innovative, transformative initiatives.

A shift is required to recognise that communities themselves can often be the solution and not always the problem. A consensus about principles and values is necessary. It doesn't matter if it's badged as community development, community engagement or an asset-based approach as long as a common language is developed. Change is needed from all involved (strongly evidenced by the presentation from Derry on how they successfully changed the culture surrounding alcohol). There is also a need for open, honest and realistic engagement with communities from the start, with an acceptance that the approach is not just about involving the community, but instead about enabling the community to play an equal part in the process.

It is important to monitor and evaluate the initiatives so that outcomes can be tracked and a case can be built around whether or not the approach has the potential to deliver long-term positive changes. It is useful to develop an evaluation plan at the beginning of a project to understand and demonstrate what is working throughout the process.

Next steps

The aim of 'Thriving Places' is to develop and support thriving communities all throughout Glasgow. It will begin by focusing on a small number of neighbourhoods in each of the three CPP sectors in the initial phase. Working groups have been established, one for each of the three initial neighbourhoods.

This report will be made available to each of the Thriving Places working groups who now have the task of developing their approaches in the initial target neighbourhoods. Presentations were filmed and copies of both the presentation slides and films are available on GCPH's website (<http://www.gcph.co.uk/events/141>).

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