

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES IN WEST CHESHIRE:

A DRAFT DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

A well-attended event at the Civic Hall in Ellesmere Port on 7 March 2011 brought partners of the community, voluntary and public sectors to discuss issues and identify priorities for building stronger communities. Using a technique called "pin point" , participants were asked to consider four priority areas in the Sustainable Communities Strategy, in order to support the determination what needed to be addressed if stronger communities were to be built in West Cheshire. The findings from the day are presented at appendix 1.

Since this event further work has been undertaken by the Stronger Communities Working Group. The Group has considered the findings from the day and sought to refine the framework in order to identify common themes from each of the workshops. These themes, it is proposed, would then provide the foundations for identifying a manageable number of targeted priority actions. This recognises that a lot of activity is already taking place. The issues identified during the event fall into 6 key areas detailed below. It is suggested that these action areas should form the work programme for the Stronger Communities Group moving forward.

INFORMATION SHARING

If we are to ensure that the processes of engaging with, empowering and supporting all our communities happens in a consistent way then we must ensure that we present information clearly: accessible to all, using a range of media, without jargon and without information overload. If this basic principle is not followed then the effectiveness of all other aspects of this work could be compromised.

Potential actions to take this forward:

- Promote the Compact and seek re-affirmation of the Compact principles from partners
- Review current methods of communication between public and community/voluntary sector and identify ways of improving communication using a range of media. (Consideration should be given to making fun!)

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

We must ensure that our consultation and engagement activities are broad enough to reach all of our diverse communities. A commitment to ensuring that the decision making processes, and the degree of influence communities can have on them are clearly explained and understood is a key element of ensuring effective engagement.

Potential actions to take this forward:

- Key partners to work together to develop, implement and evaluate a Consultation/Engagement Strategy which embraces innovative engagement techniques

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

We must aim to ensure the effective deployment of a range of resources to support the voluntary, community and faith sectors. Opportunities to share accommodation and other facilities should be identified and promoted. The possibility of skill banking so that volunteers can be best matched to volunteering opportunities should also be explored.

Potential actions to take this forward:

- Support skill banking pilot work
- Support opportunities for joint use of facilities

COMMISSIONING AND PROCUREMENT

The culture change required across all sectors to understanding of how best to commission service delivery from local groups and social enterprises is huge and must be heavily supported. A range of awareness raising actions and training opportunities must be introduced.

Potential actions to take this forward:

- Take forward actions identified in the CWaC Social Enterprise Action Plan
- A number of awareness raising and training events to be delivered by the Third Sector Assembly and members of the Third Sector Consortium

CAPACITY BUILDING

If the potential within our communities to support local activities it to be harnessed then effective support activities must be in place. This includes training and development activities, and also providing opportunities to share ideas and experiences across communities.

Potential actions to take this forward:

- Work together to identify and plug gaps/opportunities in training/development activities.
- Work to identify the training capacity building needs of local groups and communities that can be built into Adult and Community Learning Commissioning framework

VOLUNTEERING

Opportunities to coordinate and promote the benefits of volunteering should be developed. This includes introducing clear role descriptions, developing a strong brand that everyone is aware of and also more formal reward and recognition mechanisms.

Potential actions to take this forward:

- Build on existing systems across Borough, working with public sector partners, to promote volunteering opportunities
- Build upon existing systems and develop proposals for promoting the recognition and celebration of volunteering in CW&C

These six areas and the potential actions within each of these areas, are for discussion. Members of the Stronger Group are asked to consider these proposals in advance of the meeting. They are asked to consider whether there are other common themes and whether they can identify other actions which could contribute towards building a stronger society in CW&C.

Partners should note that there is only a very small budget for delivery, so any proposals should be no cost/low cost/offers in kind!

DRAFT FRAMEWORK FOR BIG SOCIETY ACTION PLAN

The Commitment: Developing and promoting appropriate and accessible ways to increase peoples ability to influence decision-making		
What needs to happen achieve this commitment	What is already happening	What are the gaps
<p>Understanding our communities: we need to use the information and structures we have already, and which communities are familiar with.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish Plans and Area Profiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate community consultation with clearer information and no jargon
<p>Valuing and respecting each others contribution: everyone needs to feel that their opinions are valued.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic accountability improving through Community Forums and ‘You Said, We Did’ and local newsletters. • Community planning through Neighbourhood/Area and Parish Plans • Participatory budgeting exercises • Local Integrated Services Pilot in Ellesmere Port • Activities and events to raise awareness of different cultures and engagement needs. • Community Networks (geographic and interest) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision makers are not seen as being receptive. • People need to have the time and support to take part • Feedback on outcomes must be given
<p>Accessible systems and processes: supported by encouragement to participate through inspiring tools and clear protocols with action and feedback.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that local decision making can work with examples of quick wins already. • A variety of methods of engagement are currently in use – new media, pubic meetings, planning activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for awareness raising around the variety of opportunities to get involved – meeting the varying needs of different target audiences. • Use technology effectively and creatively –

		make it fun.
Effective information and communication: provided in the right place at the right time.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for clarity about what the engagement is for.

The Commitment: Recognising, celebrating and engaging with our diverse communities		
What needs to happen achieve this commitment	What is already happening	What are the gaps
Communication: to reach all elements of our diverse communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of different forms of communication are available which are used regularly – website, email, newsletters, local media, local events etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible format (language etc) • Effective interpreters • Recognising different priorities
Raising awareness: and valuing the diversity in our communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some active people sit on a number of groups/orgs • Some well established events and activities eg 'giant parade' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of cultural diversity within our communities – this is a real barrier • Organisational ignorance of cultural differences
Involvement and engagement: widening opportunities for our minority communities to get involved in local activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events in localities, support groups, campaign groups, clubs and societies • Engagement tracker • Taking services into communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for wider community engagement – make it count
Support and resources: to enable targeted engagement to take place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed data collection around demographics which is shared • Some evidence of sharing resources within organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Limited capacity within community groups and organisations • Resources not targeted to meet needs • Getting the right volunteers

The Commitment: Building and developing the role of the third sector

What needs to happen achieve this commitment	What is already happening	What are the gaps
<p>Effective cross sector collaboration: to improve coordination of activity and better use of resources, recognising the skills, experience and knowledge of the third sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social clauses beginning to be inserted into tender documents • Consortia delivering in a range of areas eg. extra care housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be proactive not reactive – actions thought through, coordinated and prioritised • Need to use technology for better communication • Avoid duplication, promote synergies • Ensure that the third sector is connected to all opportunities – info, policy, activities etc. • Skill database of all organisations volunteers • Professional support • Clear goals
<p>Public sector leadership: to improve consistency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset transfers have happened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of consistency within public sector • Public sector needs to use its new freedoms • Need to ensure that consultations are compact compliant • Public sector culture change from delivery to facilitation
<p>Sustainability and resources: planning for continuity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough planning for continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of services already being delivered • Sharing best practice • Effective and recognised performance measures
<p>Communication and engagement:</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage members of the public in addition to groups • Avoid using jargon • Avoid simplification/information overload

The Commitment: To increase volunteering by supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity

What needs to happen achieve this commitment	What is already happening	What are the gaps
<p>Communication and information: publicise the great variety of opportunities for volunteering, and the possibility that this could be a pathway to employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publicity by volunteer bureaus and action groups, through events and web-based communications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for common approach to signposting, linked up websites, list of up to date volunteer vacancies Improved links eg linking GP referrals to volunteering, better links with private sector and faith sectors Outreach for specific communities eg. Rural, young people Too much reliance on IT, need to use other media Strong Brand that everyone is aware of Recognition of the value of inkind support eg providing meeting facilities and prof advice
<p>Value and celebrate: nurturing and culture of self belief and potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and local award schemes Socials, days out Good news stories in the press Staff development days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politically seen as a cheap option/labour Lack of media recognition Clearly defined role descriptions More updates about what is going on more widely
<p>Ongoing support for volunteers: recognising volunteers as individuals. Includes support from organisations to their staff to volunteer.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need enough capacity to work (initially) with volunteers Recognise training needs for specific skills
<p>Coordinate opportunities and access: helping to match volunteers to roles</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People banking
<p>Evaluate impact</p>		

