

GOOD PRACTICE IN ONWARD DEVOLUTION TO COMMUNITIES: GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S 'ENABLING ACTIVE COMMUNITIES' INITIATIVE

What is onward devolution?

Ministers have said that where feasible, devolution of decision-making and service delivery should be extended to community level: town and parish councils, voluntary organisations, residents' associations, faith groups etc. By accelerating existing policy approaches designed to encourage neighbourhood-level working, the Devolution Deals presently being negotiated should help deliver improved outcomes for local people through better coordination of activity and better tailoring of services to suit local needs – reducing demand on services by allowing problems to be tackled early and building community resilience. Evidence also shows that devolution to neighbourhoods delivers better value for money: cost benefit analysis of projects financed by DCLG support packages showed that for every pound spent implementing local service models, the financial return was over £3. Exemplars in worklessness and health and social care show even higher average returns.

A. Introduction

1. This paper has been written with the agreement and cooperation of the NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and Gloucestershire County Council, which have led on developing the imaginative proposals being included in the county's Devolution Deal bid. We believe this exemplar will be of value to anyone seeking to encourage onward devolution or supporting Deal areas to make it happen, including:

- BIS Local negotiators
- Individuals within Devolution Deal design teams
- Office of Civil Society Local Intelligence Team colleagues working to build the capacity of VCSE sector organisations to get involved in Deal agreements
- VCSE umbrella bodies with an interest in the Devolution agenda

2. Partner organisations in Gloucestershire are committed to supporting more engaged and empowered local communities. This will include a step change in engagement with the voluntary and community sector, ensuring that demand on public services is reduced and sustainability is increased. A wide range of innovative and effective initiatives involving communities had already been developed and led by different organisations in the county; many of these are listed in this paper. The work on the Gloucestershire Devolution Deal and the planning for the establishment of the Combined Authority has led to a more joined up approach across parties. There is a commitment to ensure acceleration of existing work, with a focus on devolving decision-making and provision of services through a place based approach. This will enable neighbourhood level working and ensure that partners such as town and parish councils, neighbourhood fora and voluntary and community groups have greater ability to impact on outcomes at local level.

3. The material is drawn from 'Enabling Active Communities' (EAC), a policy document ratified by the Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board and Leadership Gloucestershire (the Devolution Deal negotiating body), which details the current position and aspirations relating to community-led health and wellbeing provision in the county. Leadership Gloucestershire includes representatives from the County Council, District Councils, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership. Section D below explains how the new approaches and improved outcomes that have been achieved in the area of health and wellbeing will be consolidated under the aegis of the Gloucestershire Combined Authority under the Devolution proposals.

4. In Gloucestershire, not only is a culture of neighbourhood-level working (building on community strengths and local commissioning) well engrained in current practice, but detailed thought is being given to how this will be captured in the agreed Deal. Others are encouraged to adopt this good practice and to draw inspiration from the approaches and proposals set out below.

B. Background

5. Two key strengths of Gloucestershire, as of many counties, are its wide and diverse range of communities and the wealth of community activity that already takes place across the county in neighbourhoods, villages and through clubs, interest groups and community organisations. Some of these activities happen with the support and involvement of public sector agencies but they all thrive through the enthusiasm and commitment of their own members and the creativity and drive of local people. Gloucestershire's Devolution commitment is to build on these existing strengths, taking a local grassroots approach that allows local people to take control of the process, helps them to decide which outcomes matter most and finds solutions that suit the local circumstances. This approach supports communities to take ownership of their own local interests and encourages participation.

6. In the area of health and wellbeing, a wide range of programmes contribute to the objectives of the Gloucestershire Health and Well Being Board. The Board aims to ensure that this activity is joined up and learning is shared from community to community across the county. Its Enabling Active Communities objectives are designed to build community appetite and capacity for neighbourhood-level working, through three separate strands:

- Using existing assets e.g. workforce, buildings and community hubs;
- Building knowledge and resilience within individuals and communities and ensuring effective provision of advice and information;
- Developing local solutions – working with communities to identify local needs and how these might be better met using new or existing partnerships.

C. Examples of current activity

7. Some examples of current work in support of these objectives are set out in the following section. **We hope these will inspire those in Devolution Deal consortia looking for practical options for delivering onward devolution in practice.**

Using existing assets

- Since 2006 a Gloucestershire Charter has been in place to improve relationships between the three tiers of local government, improving consultation and communications about policies and decisions that affect communities. Senior council 'Liaison Officers' act as a first point of contact for help, information or concerns a local council may have.
- The Gloucestershire VCS Alliance is commissioned by the County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group to act as a conduit for information across VCSE organisations and public sector agencies. It collects and represents the views of the VCSE to create a more proactive sector capable of influencing policy and decision making.
- 'Involve Gloucestershire' encourages a culture of volunteering by providing a brokerage service, connecting community need to time and skills available through workplace volunteering. Many organisations have workplace volunteering schemes so that staff can support good causes within their communities.
- County Council staff can volunteer to act as Local Engagement Officers, who liaise with neighbourhood panels and groups to support community activity, building local knowledge and making connections. Staff also support the development of volunteer led physical and wellbeing activities, e.g. health walks and park runs.
- Councils support the development of 'Friends of...' groups to steward and manage public assets such as parks, sports pavilions and allotments, and also encourages the establishment and development of service user led organisations e.g. Gloucestershire Voices.
- Community based assets such as village halls are developed into Hubs: spaces where older and vulnerable people can meet and take part in a range of activities that promote social inclusion, health & well-being and lifelong learning. The Big Community Offer supports asset transfer through funding and support for community groups to run a community facility, e.g. youth activities and community libraries.
- Districts work locally with parish councils and VCSE organisations to support commissioning processes, understand local needs and working with elected members and partners to find innovative solutions.

Partnership working

Over the past year, the CCG and County Council have jointly led a piece of work to better connect staff in the four Integrated Community Teams in Stroud and Berkeley Vale to their colleagues in the NHS Foundation Trust and to VCS professionals. VCS colleagues now sit with ICT staff, and NHS Foundation Trust and Gloucestershire Care Services staff formally work shadow each other. NHS Trust staff attend ICT team meetings and joint visits are encouraged. A coaching programme has been promoting a strengths-based approach, active listening and positive risk taking.

The CCG has led 'Health and Wellbeing in your Community' workshops for elected members, in partnership with the Association of Parish and Town Councils, Rural Communities Council, County Council, District Councils and others. The objectives were to help elected members look at the demographics of the area and the resources that currently exist in communities, and to discuss any barriers or gaps that exist and any potential solutions, including possible partnership working. Feedback from these sessions was extremely positive and highlighted that effective two-way communication is key to enabling active communities as well as supporting what currently exists.

Building knowledge and resilience

- Cheltenham BC and Stroud DC both hold quarterly meetings with the Parish and Town Councils located in their areas, to share knowledge and best practice.
- Community champions are supported through training and co-ordination to encourage others to address issues they themselves have experienced, e.g. dementia and parent champions.
- A number of Community Connector Services have been commissioned by the County Council, some providing one to one support. These connect vulnerable people to community based support and activities, helping them to increase their knowledge and resilience so that they may live independently and participate in their communities. Some examples follow:
- Village and Community Agents work with the over 50s, providing access to information that enables them to make informed choices. The aim is to help older people feel more independent and secure and to have a better quality of life. Every community in the county has access to one of 39 part-time Agents. As trusted members of their communities they can build networks, understand local needs and provide tailored support. Five of the Agents work with BME communities and 11 have special training to work with people affected by cancer.
- Community Based Support services provide housing-related intensive support to enable people to live independently. The service can be delivered through 1-to-1 home visits, at drop in sessions at local community venues and through group work activities – allowing staff to identify further local community support, support the creation of peer support models and connect people to opportunities to build longer term relationships and social support networks.
- 'You're Welcome' is a 10 year programme provided by the Barnwood Trust to make places across Gloucestershire more inclusive of all who live there and welcoming to newcomers. People come together in small groups, telling stories, attending local events or working on projects, building on strengths they have and involving people who usually get left out.

Social Prescribing

In partnership with local authorities and the VCSE sector, the CCG has led the development of Social Prescribing, a non-medical model of care aimed at frequent attenders in primary care (e.g. those who are socially isolated or have other psychological/emotional needs); vulnerable and at-risk groups (e.g. low income single parents and recently bereaved older people); and people with chronic physical illness or mild to moderate depression/anxiety. Patients are signposted to volunteers who are trained to provide friendly, non-judgmental support and who have time to listen. Headline benefits include improved wellbeing, positive impact on capacity in primary care, and reduce use of secondary care. Hub coordinators based in localities are currently accepting referrals from 76 of 82 GP practices, and 5 of 21 ICTs. By the end of March 2016 the scheme will be open to staff in all ICTs, practices and community hospitals in the county. The coordinators offer signposting and/or 1-to-1 support for all people aged 18 or over who are registered with a Gloucestershire GP. To date over 1,000 referrals have been received.

Developing local solutions

- Town and Parish Councils across the county, with the support of District Councils, are shaping local development through the Neighbourhood Planning process.
- District, Town and Parish Councils are working together to identify individuals who can act as community flood wardens, building community resilience and capacity at a local level to respond in an emergency.
- Community Building Improvement Grants are helping groups to improve their local infrastructure and so improve services to better support the local community.
- The Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner's Fund gives grants to public sector and VCSE groups to deliver local crime reduction and community safety solutions under the six priorities of the Police & Crime Plan. Grants can cover a range of costs such as practical work; group or partnership development; awareness raising; training; equipment and materials; and marketing and promotion. As of October 2015 funds had been awarded to 240 projects across Gloucestershire, including the Keep Safe Scheme that offers support for people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, autism and dementia; and Fair Shares, that enables people to share their skills and experience within their local area in order to build stronger communities.
- In Cheltenham traders who are open beyond midnight pay a Late Night Levy. Community groups, organisations and businesses bid to the resulting fund for projects designed to reduce the demand on policing and manage the night time economy. £70,136 has been allocated so far to 7 local projects, including St Paul's Streetwatch: a joint project between local residents, university students and the police whereby bi-weekly volunteer patrols address issues of antisocial behaviour and discourage crime.
- Local councils allocate over £600k of community grants to parish councils and VCSE organisations to deliver a range of projects and events, including investment in infrastructure organisations to support resilience in organisations.
- Districts are working with colleagues in the County Council and local VCSE partners to support the design and implementation of Early Help Hubs that provide signposting and targeted support and intervention to children and their families – a collaborative approach that best meets local needs.

Active Together

In June 2014, Active Together was established to allow local communities to create their own opportunities to help residents get active and healthy. Each County Councillor was allocated a budget of £40,000 to spend in their local area during 2014/15 and 2015/16 (a total investment of £2.2m). The majority of the 300 grants awarded as of October 2015 have been between £1,000 and £5,000. In more rural areas Town and Parish Councils have been amongst the organisations accessing the Active Together funding, providing an important community leadership role. The Council has commissioned the University of Gloucestershire to evaluate the programme's impact; the interim findings confirm that community spaces have been transformed; mental and physical health improved; and new and better opportunities to be active and learn skills created. The process is simple, visible and accessible to community groups.

Healthy Together

The Healthy Together grant scheme awarded £530,000 in 2015 to groups in local communities to help tackle a range of health related issues, including reducing diabetes; helping to teach people to cook and eat healthily; improving mental health; reducing loneliness and isolation; and supporting carers. The scheme pools £10,000 of funding per electoral division into one pot per district to support specific local health and wellbeing priorities, as identified by the area's county councillors. Final awards are agreed by a panel of elected members in each district and 42 grants were awarded to 28 organisations – VCS groups, charities, parish and town councils, schools, pre-schools and faith groups. Reports on all projects will be submitted by May 2016.

D. Devolution action plan

8. As part of its Devolution Deal proposals Gloucestershire has identified a number of areas for immediate joint working. These are designed to make the best use of the Combined Authority's combined resources to increase community appetite and capability for neighbourhood-level service design and delivery.

9. An early priority will be online access to community support. There is potential for a single web-based portal containing relevant information about local VCSE services, assets and volunteering opportunities across Gloucestershire. The portal will highlight the places and opportunities where people can come together, and advertise examples of best practice to inspire action. A recent discussion paper has been developed to look at the various options of consolidating and making it easier for the public to access online information.

10. Gloucestershire also intended to develop, in readiness for the new financial year, stronger collaborative commissioning arrangements, not only to maximise benefits to the public but to build the capacity of the VCSE sector in a more joined-up and effective way. Alongside this they will align the various employed community capacity builder/connector roles described above (e.g. village agents, social prescribing community hub co-ordinators, Local Engagement Officers etc.) This piece of work has commenced, with new commissioning arrangements expected from June 2017.

Governance

11. To progress and oversee the work described above, Gloucestershire have established an Enabling Active Communities Commissioning Group. The form of activity taking place in individual districts will be up to local partners but will be developed in partnership between district councils, town and parish councils and local voluntary and community sector organisations. Districts will report back up to the Enabling Active Communities Commissioning Group.

E. Conclusion

12. We hope you find these precedents and principles useful and are able to bring them into play as other Devolution Deals are considered. Not all Deal areas will opt to include onward devolution proposals as developed as those of Gloucestershire, but the inclusion of an in-principle commitment to neighbourhood-level working on the face of new Deals will send a clear signal of intent and a basis for the development of detailed proposals in the Implementation phase.

DCLG
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