



Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: **Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee**

Date 19th February 2014

Subject: **Empowering Communities Through Asset Based Working**

1 Purpose of the Note

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide board members with information about how communities can be empowered through Asset Based Working (ABW). The note includes details of what ABW is and what can be achieved through adopting the approach, as illustrated by case studies of experience in Coventry and elsewhere.

The note clarifies how asset based approaches – which focus on the positive strengths within a community – complement the more traditional approaches of looking at the needs of community groups. The impact of ABW on health and health inequalities is summarised along with a description of the work being undertaken in the City to embed this approach to service delivery.

2 Recommendations

Board members are asked to:

- note the content of this report and comment on the approach being adopted
- advise on how elected members are best involved in this work on an ongoing basis
- consider how scrutiny boards can assist in embedding ABW through their respective work programmes

3 Information/Background

Empowering Communities Through Asset Based Working

Strategic commitment to asset based working

In Coventry there is a strategic commitment to enabling and empowering communities to take control over their own lives; giving people the opportunity to use and develop their own skills and potential. It is expected that through this approach health and wellbeing can be improved in turn reducing the demand on public services. For this reason there is support from a wide range of public and third sector organisations in Coventry to enabling and empowering communities through Asset Based Working (ABW).

Asset based working: what is it and what can it achieve?

The asset-based approach to health seeks to recognise and use a community's assets in order to improve local health and wellbeing. Assets have been defined as the existing "capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential" in a community, as well as physical assets such as buildings. The focus of the approach is to use and build on the local assets as a way of finding new potential solutions to the issues that are most important to a community (see Case Study 1 Bensham and Saltwell Alive and Case Study 2 Manton Estate in appendix 1).

Traditional approaches to improving people's lives through public services has been for 'experts' or 'providers' to implement a policy, intervention or programme and for the 'users' or 'recipients' to utilise the service provided. However, the asset-based approach changes this altogether, encouraging new relationships on a more equal footing. Those who benefit from the service or intervention are involved in all aspects of the project, from identifying the issues to be tackled, to commissioning and evaluating the solution to be applied (see Case Study 3 Lambeth Youth Council's Youth Offending Service and Case Study 4 a Coventry Example, in appendix 1). This changes the nature of the relationship from being done 'to' to being done 'with'. Empowering communities through co-production necessitates that professional staff are willing to share power and this can prove difficult and requires a change of culture that some may find challenging. (See Case Study 5 Made in Lambeth in appendix 1).

Needs and assets both/and not either/or

A focus on assets does not mean that the needs within a community can be overlooked. However, the risk of working exclusively with a needs-based approach is that people can feel disempowered and become dependent, as passive recipients of expensive service. While there has generally been insufficient value placed on assets as opposed to needs in general in public policy, the asset-based approach should not be seen as an alternative to a needs-based approach. Both are necessary to gain a full understanding of the best ways to improve health and wellbeing across communities. For example, we know that communities need jobs and decent housing, and this means that wider strategies to address these issues are also essential.

Asset based working and closing the Health Inequalities gap

The Marmot report published in 2010 provided evidence of the links between social networks and health outcomes and emphasized the way in which social capital (the things that connect people within communities) can produce resilience that buffers people against the risk of poor health. The report pointed out that the extent to which people participate in their community – and the added control that this brings – has the potential to contribute to their well-being and as a result to other health outcomes. The report documented the fact that communities facing multiple deprivation often have high levels of stress, isolation and depression and that involving communities in designing interventions would make the solutions more effective with the potential to reduce health inequalities.

Other research into the relative value of social support and social integration shows that social relationships were more important indicators in the odds of reduced mortality than smoking, excessive drinking and obesity, as shown in appendix 2. (Source: Holt-Lundstad et al 2010)

Summary of a Deficit versus an Asset Way of Thinking

Deficit Thinking (traditional approach)	An Asset way of Thinking
Start with deficiencies and needs often defined by external data.	Start with the assets in the community.
Respond to problems.	Identify opportunities and strengths.
Provide services to users.	Invest in people as citizens.
Emphasise the role of agencies	Emphasise the role of civil society
Focus on individuals.	Focus on communities/neighbourhoods and the common good.
See people as clients and consumers receiving services.	See people as citizens and co-producers with something to offer.
Treat people as passive and done to.	Help people take control of their lives.
Fix people.	Support people to develop their potential.
Implement programme as answer.	See people as the answer.

Progress on Empowering Communities in Coventry

Following publication of the Marmot Report on Health Inequalities a review of local action to meet the recommendations was undertaken. As a consequence it was jointly agreed between the Primary Care Trust and the City Council that a particular focus on Asset Based Approaches to empower communities should be jointly progressed. Alongside this, work was being undertaken to promote mental well-being among communities, funded through the Coventry Health Improvement Programme. Through this programme an evidenced-based tool ‘the 10 ways to feeling good and doing well’ was produced and this was used as an engagement tool with organisations and communities to both promote well-being and introduce Asset Based Working.

In order to provide direction and co-ordination of these developments a multi-agency partnership group - Coventry Asset Based Approaches (CABA) was established in December 2011. This group has overseen two pilots testing two different approaches to empowering communities in two different communities.

In Foleshill – the Connecting Communities (C2) approach has been piloted – working with residents on their priorities for their neighbourhood, with the aim of setting up an equal decision making partnership between local residents, agencies and services. ‘Foleshill moving Forward’ a mainly resident led group was established and constituted through the C2 process, reaching step 4 (of 7 steps). Although membership of this group has waned, new residents are currently being co-opted

In Bell Green an alternative approach to ABW was trialed using the 10 ways tool as a means of engaging with residents in conversations about wellbeing. The aim was to find out what is good about where people live and what they want to do to improve wellbeing working with their neighbours and community. Formal asset mapping was undertaken to uncover the community assets - the strengths that exist in people, groups and organisations to begin to join these up and build upon them.

Alongside these two pilots a Wellbeing Fund was established to support community members in the two pilot areas to turn their ideas for promoting well-being into action. This fund has helped to dispel the myth that communities are not interested in improving the wellbeing of their neighbours and community (also see Case Study 6 Community Freshview in appendix 1). From small beginnings it starts to bring out the assets, the people, groups and organisations and provides resources, to join these assets up, and develop activities and opportunities which will benefit and improve levels of wellbeing within the community. The Wellbeing Fund was subject to a Briefing (see report at <http://internaldemocraticservices.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s9510/Wellbeing%20Fund%20Report%20Appendices.pdf>) at the Wellness, Liveability and Public Health Scrutiny Board on 11th March 2013 where beneficiaries were able to relate the positive experience the fund was affording to participants. There was broad support for the approach and formal evaluation has been undertaken which shows that through the wellbeing fund new sets of relationships were formed, skills and confidence improved and participants felt a sense of agency, voice and presence in their respective groups.

In recognition of the contribution ABW could make in improving health it was identified as a priority in the Health and Well Being Strategy. It was also identified as a transformational priority for Public Health following its transition to the Local Authority in April 2013 because of its potential contribution to health and wellbeing and also because of its potential to assist the council and partner agencies in managing future demand on services.

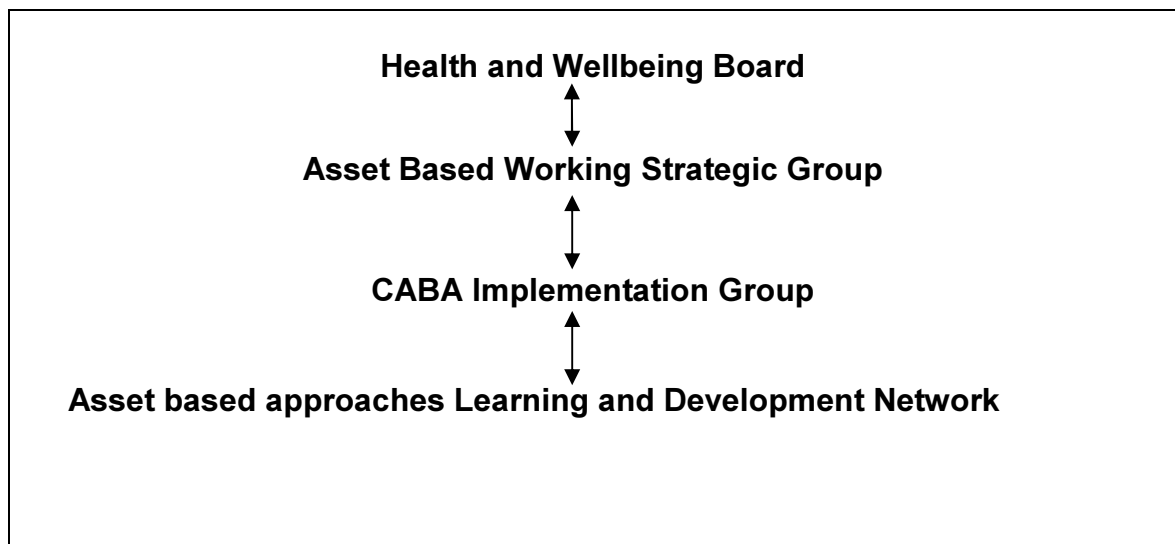
This ambition has now been expressed in the Council Plan where there is a commitment to promoting ‘active citizens’ and developing ‘strong and involved communities’. There is a commitment to having ‘new conversations with residents, communities and partners, enabling them to do more for themselves and engaging with communities to involve them in:

- uncovering and using their own assets to achieve their ambitions

- shaping and improving local services
- designing and implementing solutions that meet local need'

Through promoting a universal approach to community asset based working all frontline services are being encouraged to re-define the way in which they deliver services – changing the conversation so that the focus first and foremost is on what individuals can do for themselves and where services do need to be provided these are produced with residents. In this way the ability of the community to contribute is maximised and the need for public sector input is restricted to what is essential for the most vulnerable. Building on the strengths of communities – rather than focusing only on their deficiencies, builds their wellbeing, resilience and ability to deal with the challenges they face. In the Council this is also being embedded within the Kickstart programme, which is designed to embed the news ways of working required for the organisation of the future.

To support this universal approach to asset based working a strategic group has now been established that includes representation from each directorate in the Council, the Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group, police, fire service, Whitefriars housing, the universities and from the third sector. This is supported by the continuing multi-agency implementation group CABA.



Learning and Development Programme and Public Health Investment in Asset Based Approaches

It is recognised that in order to enable front-line services to engage more effectively with the communities they serve, a universal learning and development programme is required. A learning and development network (virtual and ‘face to face’) for staff from all agencies have been set up and plans are being developed to invest public health monies in building community resilience so residents can more easily work with public sector and other community facing services. This investment will complement the community wellbeing seed fund money which is targeted at grassroots community groups so they can implement their ideas to improve the wellbeing of their neighbours and community.

Public Health investment in these areas is considered a priority because as public services shrink, communities will have to do more for themselves. It is hoped that

through strengthening our most challenged communities they will be enabled to cope with the inevitable reductions in public services without suffering a negative impact on their health and well-being.

Further Development and Roll-out of the Programme

Further development of this programme will be influenced by the response of council staff, partner agencies and - critically – the response of communities - to the opportunities presented. An overall summary of key milestones is shown in appendix 3, although it is anticipated that this plan will evolve considerably over the coming weeks and months.

Elected members will have specific opportunities to engage in and direct this programme of work, in particular through:

- Participation in the learning and development programme (first session for elected members scheduled for 17th February)
- Supporting the new CDS and ‘early adopter’ sites – especially where these impact on their constituents (for example through providing feedback on how new ways of working are being received in communities)
- Promoting take-up of the Uplift programme (the extended Well- being Fund project) among their constituents

It is intended that as the approach to ABW further develops the links into the wider community engagement work of the council will be strengthened. It is also the case that new approaches in addition to asset based techniques will be used to assist the council in working with partners and the community. Essentially this is how can we create a new relationship and partnership with communities where they have greater involvement in the design, development, implementation and delivery of change.

AUTHOR'S NAME, DIRECTORATE AND TELEPHONE NUMBER

Berni Lee, Public Health, Chief Executives Directorate ext 1606

Appendix 1.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

Bensham and Saltwell Alive - creating get-together opportunities

Bensham and Saltwell Alive, a neighbourhood group in an area of Gateshead has continued with their assets and appreciative approach to building a resilient place. In 2010, the community asset mapping project found 145 people willing to share their skills, and showed that there were local skills and interests that could be connected. By creating 'get-together' opportunities for individuals such as creating an allotment, cooking classes, a film club and an over-50s singles club, they have increased the social networks and activities. A celebration of cultural interests – called 'K Alive Oscope' – saw residents of all ages acting, singing and dancing on the stage of a small neighbourhood theatre. Individuals have grown in confidence and in their willingness to participate and take on responsibilities for their community.

J Foot (2012) What makes us healthy? The asset based approach in Practice: evidence, action, evaluation

Case Study 2

Manton Estate

Manton is an estate in Nottinghamshire that is rebuilding itself in the wake of pit closures. The Manton Community Alliance has adopted a social capital model of neighbourhood renewal. Its focus is on changing behaviour and relationships rather than pump-priming projects that are not sustainable and do not lead to long-term changes. Their belief is that increased participation, building social cohesion, mutual respect and confidence leads to sustainable change. A critical outcome is "to move away from a culture of dependency to one of collective action and from blame to mutual awareness".

Differences between traditional area-based initiatives based on projects and Manton Community Alliance's social capital model	
Project model	Social (capital)model
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• emphasis on money• short-term solutions, not long-term change• limited influence beyond the project• not sustainable• can create dependency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• less dependency• long-term change• influence with responsibility• collective action• more social cohesion• customer service approach• community leadership

This approach appears to be working:

- 41 per cent of residents surveyed in Manton said that they influence what is happening compared with 30 per cent nationally and 25 per cent in the district.
- Crime is down by 18.9 per cent, which bucks the national trend, and fear of crime is down.
- Levels of trust with the police are the highest in generations, according to local surveys.
- 55 per cent of residents surveyed said that the estate was better because of the community alliance.

The evaluation commented that: “This approach is not just one of engagement, but empowerment. In this process it is important to make people see that change is possible, and raise their sense of worth and aspiration, particularly by highlighting the positives in the area and celebration of the good things.”

A Glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being (2010) IDeA

Case Study 3

Lambeth Council are working with asset based approaches in the context of becoming a co-operative Council through social value commission. Blume T and Randle A (201 13/14) Social Value: a commissioning framework Pt 1: Lessons from Lambeth . Collaborate London South Bank University

Lambeth Council’s Youth Offending Service Cooperative Commissioning

The commissioning process brought together commissioners and Youth Offending Service (YOS) practitioners with a group of young offenders to set the outcomes of a grant funded project and be involved at every stage including evaluating bids and assigning funding to the most appropriate project. An outcomes based approach was used so that the project group could focus on the change that would occur as a result of particular activities and interventions and to allow providers and young people to innovate. The commissioning team was made up of three young people, one council commissioner, two YOS practitioners and a psychiatrist.

The project used an asset-based approach to help the young people realise their own abilities and visualise a different future for themselves and other young people in Lambeth. This helped them to appreciate their potential and built their confidence for later in the process when they were responsible for allocating funding. The second part of the project involved the allocation of the grant. The young people prioritised the outcomes for the project and chaired the interviews of short-listed candidates. They worked in partnership with the professionals within the group to allocate funding. The process also called for the organisations who are applying for grant funding to co-produce all the activities delivered.

Learning from this project is now being scaled up via the Young Lambeth Cooperative – a commissioning organisation, co-designed with Lambeth residents that will be responsible for £8.8 million of play and youth services over the next 3 years. Source: Lambeth Council.

Case Study 4 Coventry Example

Brookstray Action Group (Brookstray is a large green space adjacent the River Sowe in Willenhall)

Neighbourhood Action Priority:

Projects that support local environment improvements

What Neighbourhood Action did – And Why:

The Brookstray was highlighted as a hotspot for vandalism and crime. There were incidents of arson, graffiti and vandalism in the play area, which meant the play area was not used. Windows of neighbouring properties were smashed. The local community did not take any kind of ownership for the area and there was no active resident group.

Neighbourhood Action worked with partners to set up a resident group. This group is now very active and have (with training and support) held a community event on the green, encouraging local use and engagement. They have also purchased suggestion boxes to gain local input on how the area can be improved and maintained – taking local “ownership” of the area.

Key Outcome / What was achieved:

- Vandalism and arson reduced on the play area and surrounding neighbourhood
- Play equipment replaced
- Neighbourhood Service Agreement (NSA) empowering the Brookstray Action Group to take an active role in engaging with partners over environmental issues on the green space.
- Local people work together to support use of the area as well as taking on board suggestions for improvements.

Brookstray is now a much more pleasant green space that the local community value and take more responsibility for.

The difference it made to local people:

- Improved local well-being (improved environment and engagement)
- The green space and park is now better used as it is better maintained
- Local people trained to do community events on the green space / increasing and enhancing community engagement
- New community information boxes encourage local people to post details of their issues for the action group to resolve

- The Action Group have taken ownership of reporting issues and directly report all issues Coventry Direct for swift remedy.
- Partners now work more closely together to achieve joint outcomes, pooling resources and capacity where needed
- Residents behaviour in the park is influenced by the Action Group in a positive manner
- The Action Group know how to move things forward if necessary, and are empowered to do so through the NSA.
- Play equipment has been replaced

The project was delivered in partnership with a range of voluntary and statutory providers. These agencies are now more aware of the community activists and passion from local people to tend/improve the local area.

Case Study 5 Made In Lambeth

This approach represents a fundamental shift in the way the Council operates and the relationship with residents, placing them at the heart of decision-making. Whilst the full extent of these changes are only starting to be seen there are already emerging examples of how Council officers, elected Councillors and local people can collaborate to deliver real social value.

Lambeth Council wanted to find a new way of working collaboratively with residents to solve social challenges in the borough and using the skills within the community to create a positive impact.

Made in Lambeth is a collective of people from a mix of backgrounds: from graphic designers and software developers, to those with legal and financial skills. All are united by a desire to use their skills to solve important social challenges in Lambeth. It is supported by the council with officer time and in-kind support, such as use of the Town Hall for events, but is an independent community and brand. Made In Lambeth uses a blend of online and face-to-face events to bring people together to tackle specific challenges.

Among the growing number of challenges that the Made in Lambeth community have tackled include:

- Launching a playstreets scheme where residents can close off their roads to traffic for 'play days'
- Created a website for a local youth group
- Designed a new logo for the local food partnership
- Created a new social media strategy for the local credit union and demonstrate the alternatives to high street lenders
- Developed branding and communications to support a new community network that will enable local people to take a stand against violence

- Created a new marketing plan, social media strategy and produced posters to revitalise a local city farm.

Their achievements were generated not by the council officers who led the event, but by Lambeth citizens, whose enthusiasm over the weekend goes to show the true potential of cooperative working. Blending the resources and expertise the Council has, with the knowledge and skills in the community to deliver positive outcomes in a radically different way of working. Source: Lambeth Council

Case Study 6

Lambeth – Community Freshview case study

Community Freshview is an award-winning scheme that sees residents join forces with the council to makeover their local areas. After being approached by and helping several community groups to do their own clean-ups, the council saw an increase in demand for the service from more and more residents who were keen to get involved.

Community Freshview offers local people the chance to make a difference to the environment in their local areas and is led by residents and supported by the council. Volunteers within the community can undertake any activity that helps to improve the quality of the environment in their local area, such as:

Clearing and tidying an area of woodland

Building on-street planters and window boxes

Removing debris from disused land

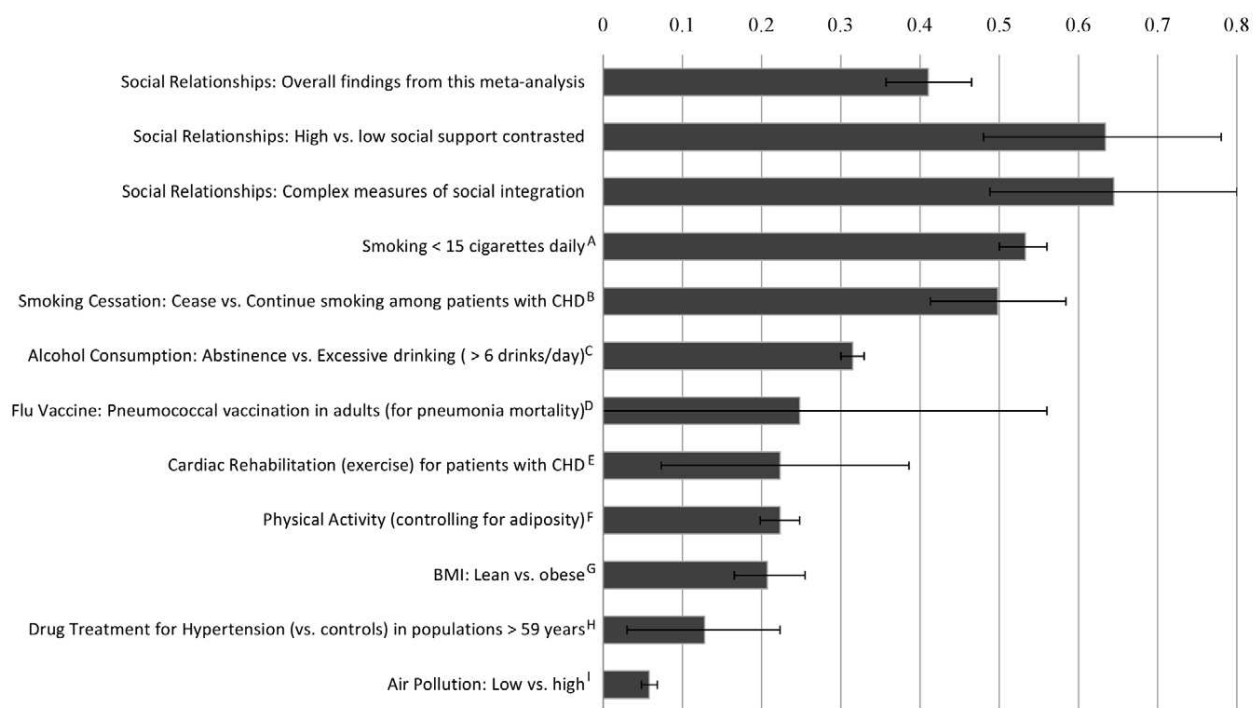
Cutting back overgrowth from alleyways and footpaths

Brightening up local areas to make them visible and safe

Appendix 2.

Impact of Social Relationships on Mortality

Meta-analysis: comparative odds of decreased mortality



Appendix 3

Key steps that are planned/need to happen over the next year (provisional)

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Aug
Learning and development programme Sharing learning and evidence of effective ABW	Elected member development session 18 th Feb	Uplift Project established extension of Wellbeing fund	Learning and development network meeting Vision into practice: what would our services and communities be like if we adopted ABW?			
New CDS			New CDS service established 2 week induction programme			
Early adopter Sites – creating the evidence of effective ABW in Coventry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Safety • NHS respiratory service Ripple 	Social Care ABW development session 18 th Feb Early adopter site ABW development session 17 th Feb	Developing and supporting new early adopter sites across the Council /partners				
Kick start	Conversations with key Kick Start programme leads to identify opportunities to embed principles and practice of ABW	Kick Start - customer journey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating better, creating 2 way communication flows between the council and residents • Developing and Knowledge community using insight and engagement • Use of behavioural insight (Nudge) in council communications starting with standard letters 				
Council plan involvement in budget setting	Discussions to bring together monitoring/evaluation of commitments made in council place re active citizens and strong and involved communities	Rationalising/ joining up separate conversations into the Big Conversation were ABW principles can be shared with residents				
H &WB B						