



Coventry City Council

## Briefing note

---

To: **Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee**

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2014

Subject: **Evaluation of Approaches to Enabling Communities Through Asset Based Working, Including Evaluation of the Community Development Service**

---

### 1. Purpose of the Note

There is a strategic work programme aimed at enabling and empowering communities through using asset based approaches (as described in the first briefing note). The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of how the impact of this work programme can be evaluated.

For the council this work programme is embedded in the Council Plan and it is being integrated into the kickstart work streams, as appropriate. The work programme has got a number of different elements which together should collectively impact on community health and well-being and which should over time lead to a reduced dependency on public services. The key elements include:

- A learning and development programme for frontline council (and partner agency) staff to promote their understanding of asset based approaches and support their use. Staff and managers need to appreciate the benefits of working differently with communities (benefits to health and the potential for reduced demand on services) and work to deliver services in ways that enable communities to do as much for themselves as they can.
- Providing small levels of public health investment in community led projects that help promote mental well-being and community resilience. This should enable communities to engage more easily with public sector services and other agencies and ultimately create services and solutions that are co-produced by all parties.
- Establishing the Community Development Service (CDS) to work with Coventry's most challenged communities bringing together community members with public sector and other local agencies, to solve the issues most important to that community.

At a programme level evaluation needs to be undertaken to answer a number of different questions, for example the following:

- Does the programme lead to improved community health and well-being?
- Have the intended outcomes been achieved?
- Are there any unintended outcomes associated with the programme?
- Does the programme reach relevant communities?
- Are there indications of better connectedness within communities?

For each of the elements within the programme evaluation needs to be undertaken to help distinguish the separate contributions each is making to the overall outcomes. In this way we will have a better understanding of what works and therefore how we should invest in future.

Both the learning and development programme for front-line staff and the public health investment should provide important infrastructure to enable both the universal approaches and the CDS to have maximum impact. The way in which these elements are being evaluated is described in appendix 1, whilst the focus of this paper is on evaluation of the collective impact of asset-based approaches and on evaluation of the CDS.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:

- Approve the suggested approach to evaluation and receives regular progress reports.

## **1 Information/Background**

The Cabinet approved changes to Neighbourhood Working Services at its meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> July (see report at: <http://democraticservices.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s11838/Neighbourhood%20Working.pdf>). This approval included the introduction of the CDS together with the associated funding, on the understanding that individuals and communities should be at the heart of creating local solutions to the issues that they face. The CDS will play an important role in ensuring that communities in Coventry are able to take more pride and responsibility for their own neighbourhood and can engage with other public sector services in producing the solutions to the issues that are most important to them. The cabinet member asked that scrutiny be involved in agreeing how the CDS will be evaluated in the context of the wider approaches to promoting asset based working.

The CDS will comprise of a team of 12 community development workers, 2 team leaders and one business support officer. They will work with communities and individuals to identify and build on the assets within priority neighbourhoods or with communities of interest across the City. The aim will be to enable individuals to have greater influence and control over what happens in their lives and, where appropriate, the area in which they live. This will be achieved through active participation in community based working

and utilising a range of asset based approaches. More detail of how the service is intended to operate is included in appendix 2.

### **The Principles of Evaluation at a City Wide -Level**

The objectives of enabling and empowering communities through using and developing their assets include:

- Building community wellbeing and resilience
- Reducing inequalities in the social determinants of health.
- Enable communities and public sector agencies to work together in designing and implementing local solutions to problems and services where these are needed

The expected outcomes of taking this approach include:

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Increased connectedness within our communities eg. individuals within communities supporting each other
- Communities coming together around a common purpose and co-producing solutions and services
- Maximising existing assets within the community: individuals, places and spaces, local resources and services

Contributing to the wider determinants of health:

- Opportunities to learn new things and develop new skills
- Increased participation in local decision making and influencing
- Widening (and potentially creating new) employment opportunities and enterprise
- Better use of local services and increased access to those who need them most

In addition to the impact on the determinants of health it is expected that investing in communities through building their capacity and resilience will ultimately reduce demand on services: council, health services, police, etc

Evaluation at a city wide level needs to capture the extent to which these objectives and outcomes are achieved. To inform this judgement key data items need to be compared to reflect the 'before' and 'after' scenario using qualitative and quantitative data. The data items used will be a combination of routinely available existing data and the development of new data sets as described below.

### **Evaluation of the CDS**

The CDS will be expected to make a significant contribution in meeting the objectives and outcomes of asset based working for the residents of Coventry's most challenged communities. However, evaluation of community development approaches is complex because of the inter-connectivity and complexity of neighbourhoods. The approach adopted needs to reflect the specific challenges being tackled, which will differ by community. As such evaluation will require the use of diverse methodologies incorporating the use of locally sensitive data – including stories from communities

together with more formally structured data collection. In each instance evaluation will need to capture:

- The start point (baseline data reflecting relevant social outcomes eg. crime or educational statistics, measures reflecting health and wellbeing).
- Details of the intervention(s) and the context within which action is taken.
- The intended purpose of the action (what were the community hoping would be achieved?) General and specific outcome measures reflecting the impact on the community in general (for example changes in perceptions of ability to influence decisions and changes in measures that reflect the purpose of the intervention (for example to reduce crime locally).

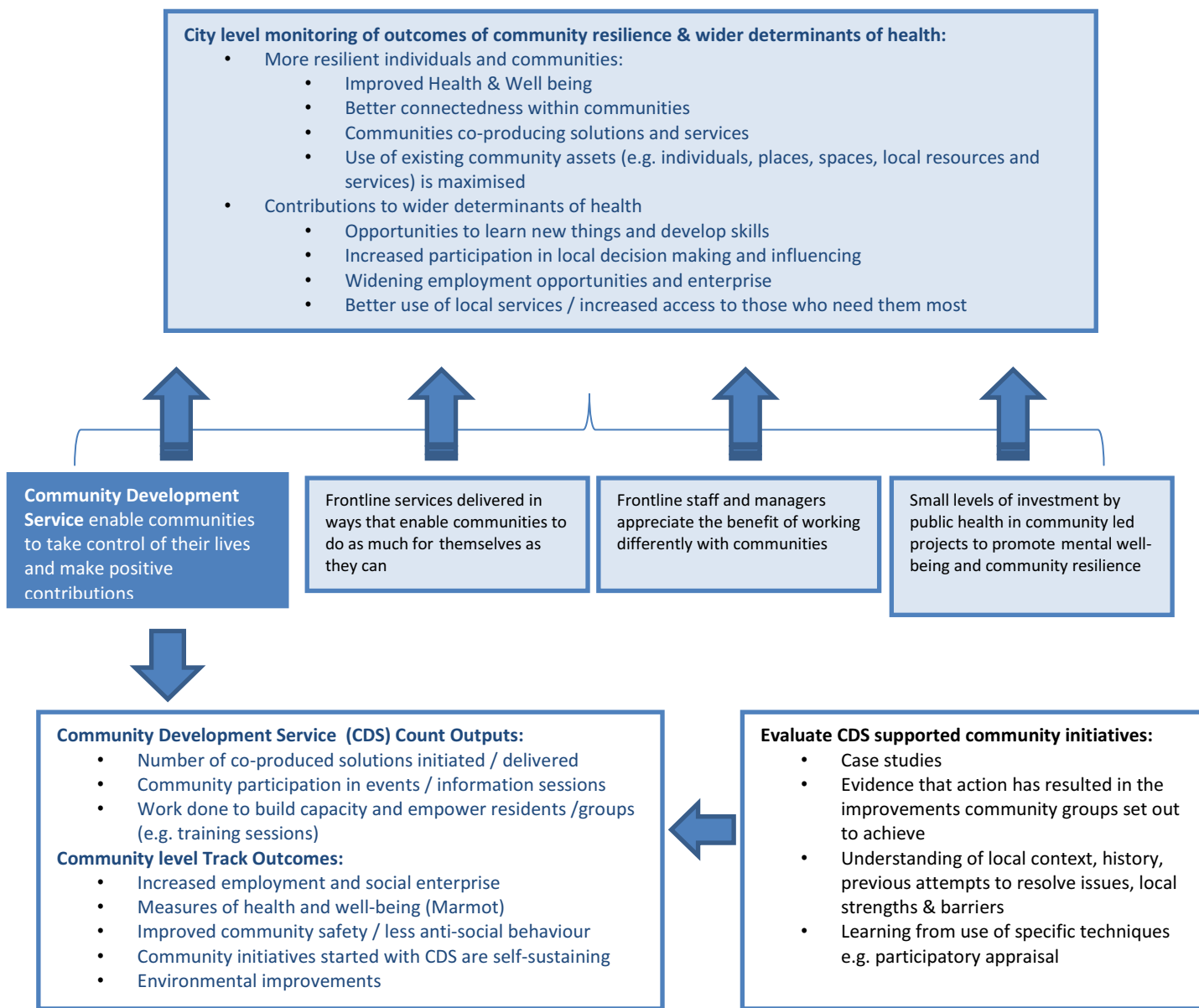
Each local action or development that the CDS is involved in supporting will firstly be agreed with the community who are going to benefit from it. The context will need to be captured so that learning can be maximised and relevant baseline measures will need to be recorded, so that comparison can be made between 'before' and 'after' action is taken.

Alongside the evaluation of outcomes described above a number of process measures and outputs will be routinely collated reflecting the day to day activities of the CDS – for example the number of individuals and groups worked with in specific communities, length of activities, number of action plans developed, number of issues successfully resolved, funding streams secured from external sources etc.

It is important to note that a balance needs to be struck in terms of gathering data to support evaluation versus the danger of over-burdening communities with demands for data and information that could lead to their disengagement. In this context more emphasis might be placed on the 'story telling' aspects of evaluation rather than on gathering more quantifiable data.

The overall approach to evaluation is summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Overall Evaluation Summary**



**Developing Data Sets to Support Evaluation**

It needs to be recognised that development of the data sets required to support the evaluation of asset based working will need to take place in tandem with the development of the monitoring mechanisms required for other key strategic programmes. For example monitoring the Council Plan ambition to grow active citizens and strong and involved communities will need to dovetail with the methods used to monitor the achievement this programme.

**City-wide Outcomes of Asset Based Working**

There are a number of data items that are already routinely collected that could be used to indicate the impact of empowering communities through asset based working. If people have increased control, feel more connected to each other and are more active

citizens within their communities, we would expect to see improved health and social outcomes. Ultimately successful universal approaches to asset based working would manifest themselves through improved performance in relation to all of the wider determinants of health, such as educational achievement and crime reduction. However, it would take many years for such impacts to become apparent.

In addition in the Coventry Household Survey specific questions are asked about:

- how people feel about their neighbourhood
- their sense of influence in relation to decisions affecting their local area
- the strength of neighbourhood and personal relationships
- their views on the quality of their environment

Over time it might be reasonable to anticipate that successful asset based working would be reflected through an increase in the proportion of positive responses to such questions.

### **Impact of the CDS**

There are broadly two sets of evaluation data required in relation to the CDS:

- Data to indicate the inputs and outputs associated with service delivery
- Data and information to describe the outcomes associated with service delivery

The inputs and outputs can be captured through routine recording of the day to day activities of the CDS service, as summarised in appendix 3.

However, the development of robust outcome measures will take more time to refine. For example if our aim is to give individuals greater influence and control over what happens in their lives and to promote greater connectedness within their communities we will firstly need to develop valid measures. We will need to develop and test questions that we can use to measure at baseline and at intervals during and after intervention by the CDS. Ideally the measures that we develop can be reconciled to the city-wide indicators available through the household survey.

Through the work of the CDS and through the information gathered to support evaluation of the service we will also strengthen our understanding of the assets within our communities. These can be included alongside needs in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, allowing us to draw on the assets within our communities, together with our investments targeted at meeting needs.

It needs to be recognised that the outcomes associated with community development tend to be long term and as such it may take a number of years for the full impact of current developments to be evident. There may therefore be a need to place more emphasis on process and output measures in the short term on the understanding that these should generate good outcomes in the longer term. The burden of data collection also needs to be considered in striking the right balance between justifying the investment of scarce resources against the danger of over-scrutinising communities.

### **Timeline for Evaluation**

Work on the development of evaluation data sets and processes are currently underway. It is now anticipated that the service will be operational from April 2014 and routine data

collection (reflecting the aspects of delivery shown in appendix 3) will commence at this time, with regular reporting thereafter. This data will ultimately inform evaluation of the service delivered. The methods used to support evaluation of the outcomes associated with the service are under development. They are likely to be more qualitative in nature and will need to be flexed to suit the particular issues being addressed by the service. The development of these outcome measures will also have to reflect the need to monitor achievement against other relevant corporate plan targets (eg council plan), so that as far as possible there is a unified approach to evaluation.

**AUTHOR'S NAME, DIRECTORATE AND TELEPHONE NUMBER**

**Berni Lee, Chief Executive's Directorate, Ext 1606**

**Cat Parker, People Directorate, Ext 3507**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Evaluation of Learning and Development Programme and the Well Being Fund**

#### **Learning and Development Programme**

Coventry University undertook a review of the initial steps taken in Coventry to empower communities through promoting Asset Based Working. They examined what had been learnt through partnership working to date, including learning and development opportunities, and made specific recommendations to inform the future work programme.

As learning and development sessions are provided we will evaluate the extent to which the development needs of those attending have been met.

Also in the 'early adopter services' where we are supporting individual services to embed asset based approaches we will monitor the impact of any new ways of working. For example we will look at well-being levels before and after service changes and also seek to identify where there is a resultant reduced reliance on public sector services and more connectedness into community support or provision.

#### **Evaluation of the Well Being Fund**

We have commissioned an independent evaluation of the extended Well Being Fund (the Community Wellbeing Development Project), seeking to answer the following evaluation questions in relation to each of the funded proposals:

- The effectiveness of the Community Wellbeing Development Project in embedding well-being into the community
- The effectiveness in accessing grass roots community groups to develop community-led ideas for health and well-being promotion
- The impact of the support provided to groups by the Community Well-Being Development Project in reducing reliance or use of mainstream public services.



## **Appendix 2**

### **Role of the Community Development Service**

In essence the service will:

- Work with local people and agencies to understand what assets/skills exist in an area including existing service provision from all sectors.
- Be open to requests and seek direction from individuals and the community on issues in their local neighbourhoods which they want to address. This might involve communities raising issues directly through Members, Officers and other agencies. The team will also be mindful of where there are wider issues that need to be addressed, such as low educational attainment, high mortality rates or high crime rates.
- The officers will assist local people in the development of a community action plan with the focus on the actions the community themselves will undertake to resolve the issue originally identified.
- The CDS will facilitate and identify opportunities to do this which may include supporting groups to access funding; supporting access to education/training opportunities; encouraging/supporting the setting up of groups with a common aim, etc. Use and share best practice tools and approaches with communities and ensure appropriate evidence bases are used.
- The CDS may also introduce and signpost the community to existing service providers where there are opportunities to work together.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Inputs and Outputs Routinely Recorded by CDS**

The number of active community groups in target communities

Evidence of community led action leading to co-produced solutions, programmes and services

Increased community participation in events and information sessions

Capacity Building and empowerment of residents and community groups

More employment and social enterprise in communities

Number of training sessions, education and skills linking to marmot outcomes

Evidence of improvements in community safety leading to a decrease in levels of anti-social behaviour

The number of community initiatives, supported by the Community Development Service, that are still in existence and functioning 6 months after the direct support and facilitation is withdrawn.

Evidence of improvements in environmental issues leading to an enhancement of the local environment