

Empowered Citizens: Networked Communities

Update on progress and lessons to date

Scrutiny Board 4

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What we set out to achieve

We wanted to

- Test different approaches to bring residents into conversations about decisions affecting their area
- Find ways of linking up community networks
- Understand how we could build a different sort of city-wide network for participation

We did

- Ran new engagement conversations in 4 very different areas, using different methods:
- Grew a network of support from organisations and people who are active in their neighbourhoods
- Explored how to keep networks connected and alive



What we set out to achieve (2)

- We learned
 - The task of co-ordination across partners and places is huge, a point person is essential but the burden on them is heavy
 - The most productive interactions are on shared issues, where both community and council want to talk
 - Network knowledge is already there – but it is dispersed and held by individuals or organisations or teams – we collectively hold pieces of the jigsaw, but there's no way of knowing who holds which pieces
 - Partner organisations are already investing lots of time in community engagement – Police, Whitefriars, Universities and community based organisations – there is scope to pool our efforts

Four Neighbourhoods, Four Approaches

- Foleshill
- Hillfields
- Wood End, Henley Green & Manor Farm
- Cheylesmore

Foleshill

We wanted to

- Test face to face network building, based on identifying a community aspiration that also had the potential to save money for the Council

We did

- Five network meetings in Foleshill, under the banner "Friends of Foleshill"
- A network mailing going out from the Council to a group of participants
- Worked hard to encourage already active residents to 'bring a friend'
- First conversations about how the neighbourhood network can work longer-term
- Identified a topic for collaboration – Getting more to actively use local parks-potential to bring people from different backgrounds together around topics (light, sport, food etc.)
- Lottery funding application submitted for community festivals in 2017

Foleshill (2)

We learned

- Tight and clear framing of the purpose of engagement is needed to get away from a "list of demands of the Council" interaction, focusing on common challenges and how people can help meet them
- The Council has convening power, but has to allow the group to form its own priorities and way of working – community anticipates that the Council will do most of the running and it is all too easy for officers to slip into supporting mode, which perpetuates a paternalistic relationship
- Equality of treatment between residents, organisational representatives and public sector partners is important. There should be no distinction between "real residents" and those who are resident but representing organisations

Community Voices = Community Choices #happyhillfields

wanted to:

run a larger scale participative Appreciative Inquiry, working in partnership with the police who took the lead and pooled resources

we did:



We learned:

- Going wide at the start of the process sets the right tone for inclusivity and equal participation
- Manage expectations on how long the process will take
- Incentives are necessary for effective recruitment, beyond offering food and drink
- Play to organisational strengths – Police are excellent organisers / coordinators
- Public sector 'rules' can drain energy (childcare, incentives, food etc.)

Wood End, Henley Green & Manor Farm

wanted to:

best ways of involving people in service
change decisions and unlocking community
resource

did:

'Cards on the Table'

honest' conversation about impact of
cuts, with senior leaders in key service
areas offering detailed information and
attendance on the day to discuss
potential partnerships

4 areas of collaboration identified,
including a network, including: a local
V/EHM network, co-production of a
family hub, collaboration to connect
isolated vulnerable people into the
community



We learned

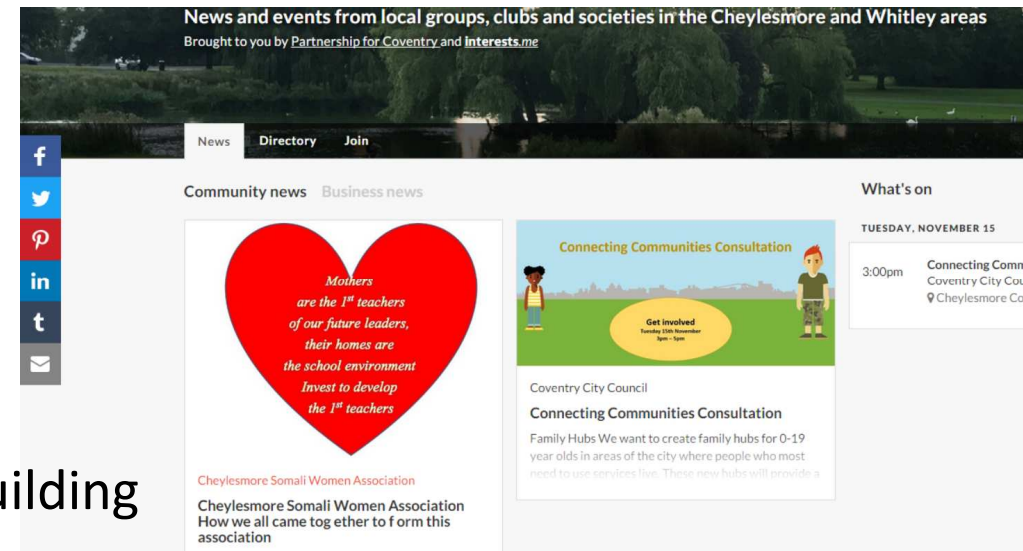
- Non-council facilitators build bridges, provide constructive challenge and bring expertise in creative engagement techniques, but their role is complex and there is a risk they are seen as "outsiders coming to fix things" rather than supporters of good discussions
- A significant commitment of time is required of council and they need the right skills to engage productively in conversation
- Getting community participants to the level of confidence and knowledge where they were willing to participate took more time than expected
- Brokering terms of engagement very useful
- Sharing problems / information helps trust
- Community partners are keen to collaborate but must be seen as valued, equal partners
- This exercise is one where it is particularly important to have a wider range of voices in the room
- Public sector need to follow through to maintain trust

Cheylesmore

- We wanted to
 - Test a digital tool for network finding and building

We did (but still in early stages)

- Work with the community on benefits and difficulties of digital approaches
- Identify different tools and approaches that could be used to engage people
- Select and prepare for launch of an Interests.me website for the neighbourhood
- We learned
 - Networks don't last long without support or incentive to stay together
 - Digital versus non-digital is a false choice, digital needs to support and enhance non-digital
 - Digital tools are not well accepted if imposed, they need to be selected with user and community support



Understanding networks

- We wanted to
 - Find a consistent way of mapping neighbourhood relationships and networks
- We did
 - Explored the work that the Council had already done on understanding local networks
 - Tested automated mapping on the basis of social media tools, producing test maps
 - Talked to projects at the university who were already trying to create network maps for relationships in particular areas of the city
- We learned
 - The knowledge already held in the Council and its partners was extensive, but not centralised. Some had been written down but it often depended on personal relationships
 - None of the available technological tools proved successful in creating a living map (rather than a static one)
 - We are using interests.me in the Cheylesmore pilot which will be a test of an approach that could be used in a more networked way

Citywide

- The approaches we tested were designed for neighbourhood working but with the intention that they could be rolled out more widely, eventually to cover the city scale
- The city-wide anchor event (on the model of the WMCA Citizens' Panel) did not take place as, despite interest from the cultural strategy team, it was difficult to make timelines for the event and the strategy align
- However, our experiences at neighbourhood level suggest that connecting the different neighbourhood networks may be a better route for building citywide connections in the immediate term
- Building links between these different networks now can then be the basis for a citywide conversation when the right issue emerges

Broader learning 1

- To have impact at scale, these experiments will need to be adopted as routine ways of working, after which community networks are the main route for two-way conversations on a range of issues including future service provision. The networks as they stand are not ready for that role but it should be the goal for the next phase of work that the most advanced networks are able to fulfil that role
- The spreading of knowledge of participation methods and techniques through the organisation and its partners needs more consistent effort and senior commitment from the partnership (not just Council)
- The Partnership for Coventry role could become more prominent, perhaps by having lead partners for particular communities

Broader learning 2

- Before the working methods extend to other neighbourhoods, there should be a run-up period in which key local voices are engaged and involved in how the initial work is rolled out
- The support within the council and other partners has to be broader based and not rely on a small team, which is not sustainable as the scope of work expands
- A new narrative that describes what has been done and what is happening next, in neighbourhoods and citywide, would help bring clarity to conversations