

Chief Executives' Group – North Yorkshire and York

12 September 2013

Building capacity within communities

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 Enabling stronger local communities is a priority for partnership working in the North Yorkshire Community Plan 2011-14. One objective under this priority is to build capacity within communities to help them play a bigger role in shaping and delivering local services.
- 1.2 In November 2012 the Chief Executives Group set up a task and finish group to succinctly map key capacity building activity taking place within the county and outline affordable options for building capacity within communities to help them to play a bigger role in shaping and delivering local services.
- 1.3 The task and finish group did the bulk of its work via telephone and email, with one meeting. This report presents the group's findings and recommendations.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 The North Yorkshire Community Plan 2011-14 states that: *"In the next few years, the impact of public sector cuts will place considerable additional pressures on both service providers and communities, particularly in rural areas. It will be even more important for public, voluntary and community sector partners to help local communities to support themselves more, working in partnership to help shape local solutions where resources are scant but needs remain."*
- 2.2 Central government wants to develop the capacity of civil society, grow the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) and devolve more responsibility to local communities. Supportive policies include:
 - Encouraging and enabling people to play a more active role in society.
 - Giving people more power over what happens in their neighbourhood.
 - Making it easier to set up and run a charity, social enterprise or voluntary organisation.

3.0 What is community capacity building?

- 3.1 "Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building" published by the Home Office in 2004 defined community capacity building as:

“Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.”

- 3.2 Communities may be defined by geography or by shared characteristics, for example age, race, faith, gender, or by a shared interest or by a combination of these factors. Geographical communities are particularly significant in rural North Yorkshire although the Superfast North Yorkshire project provides an opportunity for people to create virtual communities of interest and reduce isolation.
- 3.3 Community capacity building can develop and empower individuals, but most impact will come from increasing collective capacity. Existing capacity, including parish councils and the wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations, provides a starting point.
- 3.4 The Community Plan identified three key partners for community capacity building:
- Public sector organisations.
 - Voluntary and community sector organisations.
 - Local communities.

4.0 Community capacity building within North Yorkshire

- 4.1 Appendix 1 lists a significant number of capacity building activities within North Yorkshire which receive funding or officer support from local public sector organisations. Input was sought from all partners but the list is illustrative rather than comprehensive.
- 4.2 The activities in Appendix 1 can be divided into four broad (and sometimes overlapping) categories:
- Small grants.
 - Developing VCSE infrastructure.
 - Building capacity to enable communities to deliver or influence services.
 - Supporting public sector use of volunteers to provide or extend services.

5.0 Small grants

- 5.1 The first category, funding for a community identified need, is probably the least complex. Community chest type grants sit here. As an example, in 2010/11 Harrogate BC funding went towards ball nets for a football club, ICT equipment for a community centre, and refurbishing community buildings.
- 5.2 Applicants must identify appropriate funders who will assess bids against set criteria often through a panel including local politicians to ensure democratic accountability. Officer guidance is usually available and possibly VCSE input. Applicants to Craven DC Community Grants 2012-13 had to score against at least 4 of 15 criteria

categories including local need, local community support, local district councillor support and financial viability.

6.0 Developing VCSE infrastructure

- 6.1 The VCSE is recognised as having the ability to develop both individual and community capacity. Funding VCSE organisations to deliver particular outcomes enables this proficiency to be used to mould community capacity to meet future challenges. For example, the PRG Innovation Fund is funding a range of VCSE organisations to pilot services for vulnerable adults receiving social care support. In addition, the organisations are developing the ability to operate in the new environment where individuals rather than public sector organisations purchase services.
- 6.2 A further example of this approach is the Single Funding Agreement between NYCC, Clinical Commissioning Groups and North Yorkshire and York Forum to support civil society front line organisations generally on issues such as governance, fund raising, financial management, volunteer and employee management, planning and evaluation. Volunteer centres also provide local expertise to broker and manage the volunteering process to the benefit of recruiting organisations and individual volunteers.

7.0 Building capacity to enable communities to deliver or influence services

- 7.1 A growing number of communities are starting to “plug the gaps” created by public sector funding cuts and the resulting reduction or withdrawal of services. Support, such as the PRG Active Communities project, can encourage and enable local communities to do this. For example, VCSE infrastructure organisations supported eight community groups considering taking on library buildings and services that the County Council proposed to close; seven of the groups now provide local library services with ongoing support from the County Council including book stock and training.
- 7.2 There are other examples of community groups providing services locally which the public sector might have undertaken previously. Community partnerships in several areas grit roads and pavements in winter. NYCC provides some guidance and groups can buy bins and grit from NYCC. These schemes worked well in Selby District where they were promoted through the Community Engagement Forums. Although many rural areas had already built local capacity to keep settlements mobile, urban communities had not developed the same capacity. Rural Action Yorkshire gave up to £250 to launch winter weather village agent schemes in rural areas to help vulnerable people isolated by bad weather. Some schemes bought equipment and materials for snow clearance and gritting with this money.
- 7.3 North Yorkshire has some examples of transfer of assets and a growing number of

buildings registered as community assets under the right to bid provisions in the Localism Act. Hambleton DC has supported a number of asset transfers: eight public toilets into parish council ownership; Thirsk tourist information centre is a not-for-profit company; and the Forum (Northallerton) Ltd is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

8.0 Supporting public sector use of volunteers to provide or extend services

- 8.1 Volunteers have been a feature of public sector service delivery for some time, with a general rule of thumb that volunteers should enhance or extend services, but not replace paid staff. North Yorkshire Police use volunteers in several support roles which don't require police powers and which complement but don't replace the work of paid police personnel. Roles include extending access to reception services at local stations, linking to local neighbourhood watch schemes and helping to train police officers.
- 8.2 Within the library service, volunteers take books to people unable to visit a library, perhaps because of age or disability. Although some local authorities deliver this function through paid staff this has never been the case in North Yorkshire where volunteers clearly provide an additional service. Volunteers also deliver activities in libraries e.g. supporting ICT use or holding story times.
- 8.3 Both the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Park Authorities use volunteers in roles including providing visitor information and advice, leading walks and repairing paths. NYCC's countryside volunteers support the authority's statutory duty to maintain public rights of way and to survey and manage sites of importance for nature conservation. York and North Yorkshire Waste Partnership volunteers, the North Yorkshire Rotters, deliver activities to encourage home composting and reduce waste. Volunteers for library and countryside/ environmental roles are relatively easy to recruit and retain, probably because of the value individuals place on the service and/or the pleasure they get from participating. Libraries are generally well regarded and seen as "nice" workplaces and many residents enjoy the county's natural beauty and want to share this with others.
- 8.4 In some circumstances, the general rule of thumb that volunteers should enhance or extend services, but not replace paid staff, is not always as clear-cut as sometimes claimed. The police have used special constables for almost 200 years. Specials are unpaid but do hold police powers and work in frontline policing. The HMIC report of July 2012 "Policing in austerity: one year on" describes the numbers of specials nationally increasing by 58% from 15,500 to 24,500 between March 2010 and March 2013. Specials make up 10% of the visible police presence at 3.00 am on Saturdays but only 4% on Wednesday evenings, showing use to meet peaks in demand. In reality specials, who often hold other jobs, have always been more visible at weekends but the increased use of these officers may be linked to the

reduction in police officers. PCSOs have always tended to stop work at midnight when their lack of police powers may make them less productive.

9.0 Community capacity building and co-production

- 9.1 Some current capacity building activity is moving towards co-production. Co-production builds on the insight that service delivery models in which expert or professional providers deliver to a “needy” recipient, repeatedly fail to move recipients out of dependency. In contrast a model in which both parties contribute to and gain from a reciprocal relationship with one another **and** with a wider community can deliver real change and progress. Co-production builds on what people can do and helps them to identify and meet their own needs and wants. Edgar Cahn, who was instrumental in developing the concept of co-production, saw it as taking place within the “core economy” of social networks – family, neighbourhood and community. In its 2008 publication “Co-production: A Manifesto for growing the core economy” the New Economics Foundation stated that:
“The idea of co-production points to ways we can rebuild and reinvigorate this core economy and realise its potential, and how public services can play a part in making it happen. This is not about consultation or participation – except in the broadest sense. The point is not to consult more, or involve people more in decisions; it is to encourage them to use the human skills and experience they have to help deliver public or voluntary services.”
- 9.2 The County Council’s “Talk to Us” community interpreting and translating service is co-produced. NYCC community cohesion workers link public bodies requesting interpretation or translation services to self-employed providers. The interpreters earn, public bodies access a local, competitively priced, service and the county grows capacity to meet local needs. It is hoped that the service will become a social enterprise.
- 9.3 The Arts Council England produced a report in January 2013 on Community Libraries entitled “Learning from experience: guiding principles for local authorities”. This report identified North Yorkshire as having examples of community managed libraries which are on the continuum of co-production. The report describes a range of approaches to community libraries, but points out that these initiatives are generally at a very early stage of development and will face challenges of long-term financial sustainability if they are to have a long-term future. Whilst the North Yorkshire approach is working well, co-production is not an easy option or a quick win for those devolving or commissioning services or those taking on the challenge of delivery.
- 9.4 Co-production is seen as a way forward in health and social care in particular. The introduction of personal budgets for adult social care offers an opportunity for co-production, but developing new social care services for customers who are vulnerable will clearly be the subject of intense scrutiny to ensure that services are

safe and well managed.

9.5 Several PRG Innovation Fund projects will deliver volunteering and employment opportunities for vulnerable adults including people with learning disabilities, mental health problems or receiving social care services. Examples are:

- Roll with It in Ryedale where people with learning disabilities will run a sandwich round and café.
- Creative Coffee in Whitby where 28 individuals will experience running a coffee cart service.

Other projects support people to use direct payments. “Here to Help” volunteers receiving direct payments will mentor others taking up direct payments. Rural Action Yorkshire is working with seven rural communities to develop community hubs offering preventative social care and early intervention through local activities e.g. social activity groups; allotments. Through Purple Hub in Harrogate people with learning difficulties will support one another to access mainstream activities and spaces.

10.0 Affordable capacity building for future needs

10.1 The brief did not quantify “affordable”, but it has been assumed that budgets will remain challenging for some time and that “affordable” should be interpreted as meaning within reducing resources and delivering some level of efficiency.

10.2 The funding identified in Appendix 1 comes from a variety of organisations and budgets within organisations. Significant amounts are from one-off funding, in particular from PRG and New Homes Bonus, and therefore temporary. There are examples of funding partners working together to support capacity building (such as the Single Funding Agreements funded by the County Council and the NHS) and there may be other opportunities to do this in future. But many funding streams are rightly tied into particular service budgets (allowing outcomes to be more clearly focussed) or have a strong, very local, geographical focus (which funders are likely to be reluctant to change). Other potential sources of funding for capacity building are being explored, including European Union Structural funds and a more strategic approach to the Big Lottery Fund.

10.3 The description of community capacity building in the brief “*to help communities play a bigger role in shaping and delivering local services*” prompts a move towards co-production of public services. However, there is still considerable value in continuing to support groups in communities pursuing their own interests and enjoyment e.g. local sports clubs, theatre groups etc. Anecdotal evidence suggests that such groups can reduce individual need for professional interventions, for example a widower who joins a local bowls club widens his social networks, becomes fitter and avoids becoming depressed and needing medical or social care input. Small grants and developing VCSE infrastructure are an effective and efficient way of supporting this key component of a civil society.

- 10.4 The models developed through the PRG Active Communities project and the PRG Innovation Fund model appear to be effective ways of enabling communities to develop and deliver new services that meet local needs and/or support people to remain as independent as possible in their local communities. However, both are ending shortly. The potential for similar activity is being explored, perhaps supported by the Big Lottery Fund and/or European Union structural funds (although European Union structural funds will require match funding).
- 10.5 “Think Local Act Personal” is a national, cross sector leadership partnership, working to ensure that the implementation of personalisation and personal budgets in social care benefits everyone involved. The partnership’s building community capacity workstream is developing projects to expand social capital and yield better health and wellbeing outcomes. Building social networks, promoting participation in groups, activities and volunteering can delay or reduce need for professional input, increase use of universal services, reduce crime and raise educational attainment.
- 10.6 The relative ease of getting volunteers for some services, for example tourist information, libraries and countryside activities, suggests some potential for expansion. It may be possible to reduce direct supervision and management of countryside volunteers and Rotters and support them to become community groups of the type running some libraries. However, it should be acknowledged that some form of officer support is likely to be required on an ongoing basis.
- 10.7 Sustaining any community co-production will require on-going work. Keeping volunteers engaged takes effort. Where a project has been driven by a key individual who subsequently pulls out, a community which seemed very active and independent may collapse. That said if a group, formed for a single purpose, achieves its end and disbands, the skills and confidence gained by the group or individuals within it may only lie dormant until triggered into action by a new challenge.

11.0 Other issues

- 11.1 Several issues emerged through the development of this paper which merit consideration as part of any move towards community delivery of services:
- Early talks with communities about any possibility of devolving services or offering them for local delivery are vital for the good relationships on which this agenda relies. Explaining challenges to communities and seeking a shared solution is likely to get a more positive response than saying “This is what we intend unless...” which can seem hostile. However, a group now providing library services felt that the shock announcement, as they saw it, of potential library closures energised the community into action in a way which a more gentle approach might not have done.
 - Both “sides” must gain from a service transfer. There is a suspicion that

some bodies will hand over expensive to run or loss-making assets or services and keep the income generators. A fairer approach could be to offer a group a package of e.g. managing a car park which makes money and toilets which lose money.

- The public sector must give communities offering or asked to take on a service the information they need to make an informed decision. Costs, legal implications and any support offer will be crucial concerns for a community group

12.0 Next steps

12.1 The Chief Executives Group is asked to consider what shared priorities and future challenges might be addressed by a more collective approach to capacity building and co-production, and how a more collective approach to accessing external resources and managing programmes might be developed.

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Appendix 1: Illustrative examples of community capacity building in North Yorkshire