

In depth scrutiny project – ‘Connecting communities to avoid isolation’

**Witness Session 2 & project team meeting**

**Friday 12th January 2018 - 14.00 – 16.30**

**Committee Room 5, Civic Suite, Southend-on-Sea**

### **In attendance:-**

#### Project Team

Cllr Cheryl Nevin (Chairman), Cllr Helen Boyd, Cllr Steve Buckley, Cllr Caroline Endersby Cllr David Garston and Cllr Chris Walker

#### Officer support

Rob Walters, Fiona Abbott and Tobias Hartley

#### Facilitators

Sarah Baker, Nick Constantine, Maxine Nutkins, Kamil Pachalko, Mark Carrigher and Catherine Benford

#### Invited guests

Traci Dixon and Stuart Long (South Essex Homes), Alison Semmence (SAVS), Matt King (Trust Links), Reverend Hannah Bucke, Councillor Lesley Salter (Chair Southend Health & Wellbeing Board), Maurice Sweeting (Chair Education Board), Gert Sheepers (University of Essex), Karen Bayliss (EPUT) and Verbena Barker-Newyear (EPUT)

Apologies were received from Cllr Margaret Borton, Cllr Mo Bulter and Cllr Lawrence Davies, Sharon Houlden and Mousumi Basu (EPUT)

### **Notes from feedback discussion**

The questions which were explored at the session were:-

1. *How can we build sustainability (and also flexibility)*
2. *How can we put information out and draw people in and have conversations about their lives ('give and get')*
3. *What might be the obstacles involved and how can they be avoided?*
4. *How can we identify and use those willing to be active, connecting to others (community leaders)?*
5. *How you see as the Council role – within existing assets and personal role (using our networks)*

The following key points were highlighted:-

#### ***How can we build sustainability (and also flexibility)***

- Communities have changed – our role – adapt to it
- Co-production – different narrative needed
- Move from deficit to asset / strengths approach
- Be bold and honest about prevention
- Physical / subtle barriers too – some people need skills / confidence to go to groups etc
- Grants process should be sustainable / long term
- Start early! E.g. Kindness Club

- Ensure that we do things with people, not just for people

***How can we put information out and draw people in and have conversations about their lives ('give and get')***

- Community Champions – Use people already in the public eye, such as postmen, hairdressers and car mechanics that may be able to help in a less intrusive way
- Reach out – use underutilised spaces / methods
- Hear stories and learn from 3<sup>rd</sup> sector
- Use a range of mediums to reach everyone that may be suffering. Use the typical mediums such as posters, leaflets and events but also try add things such as radio advertisements
- Use video diaries to show people's stories and their journey to loneliness. This can help show people it is not an isolated incident but is a wide-range issue
- Utilise the student community in Southend

***What might be the obstacles involved and how can they be avoided?***

- Obstacle of bureaucracy sometimes e.g. DBS checks
- Accessing grants / funding can be complicated process and could be simplified and introduce levels of access such as a more simply application process for smaller amounts of money
- Can't do things to people – need to be co-produced
- Embed community ethos when young (start young!)
- People might not enjoy the typical events such as coffee mornings – Include a diverse range of activities that everyone can be part of – be creative
- Some isolated people might lack confidence or suffer from anxiety. Cater for this accordingly and maybe run events that do not necessarily involve lots of other people – need to meet people 'where they are'
- Stigma of isolation/loneliness an issue
- Gender tailoring needed?
- Some isolated people might not have means of transport – Run a transport system to help people get to certain events or places
- Isolation is usually stereotyped to older people – Include younger adults and even children in all campaigning and show that this stereotype is not true

***How can we identify and use those willing to be active, connecting to others (community leaders)?***

- Have strong asset base already – issue is how they are mobilised
- Use community champions and utilise the infrastructure that is already in place e.g. GPs, milkman, school teachers etc.
- Listen to needs of each community / locality – ask what they want to focus on
- 'bottom up' approach
- Can technology make us more isolated?

***How you see as the Council role – within existing assets and personal role (using our networks)***

- Council is facilitator and enabler. – need light touch, partner approach instead
- Its around building trust – both ways - don't come with an agenda
- Can use its wide reaching media team and influence to spread the word
- The council could start a PR campaign to build this trust. This should be approachable, easy and simple. Encourage connectivity