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 3rd 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