Collaborating with Communities:
a discussion tool for Commissioners

locality
the power of community

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Contents

Space to Connect was a partnership between the **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)** and Co-op's charity, the **Co-op Foundation**, to unlock the potential of community spaces where people can connect and co-operate. Between 2019 and 2021, 57 community organisations received grants totalling £1.6 million to help build social connections, address local challenges like loneliness or access to services, and expand activities.

Leeds Beckett University and **Locality** were the Space to Connect evaluation partners. The experience of Space to Connect projects, the ambitions of the funders and the learning from the programme is captured in a variety of tools, reports and briefings available at **leedsbeckett.ac.uk/spacetoconnect.**
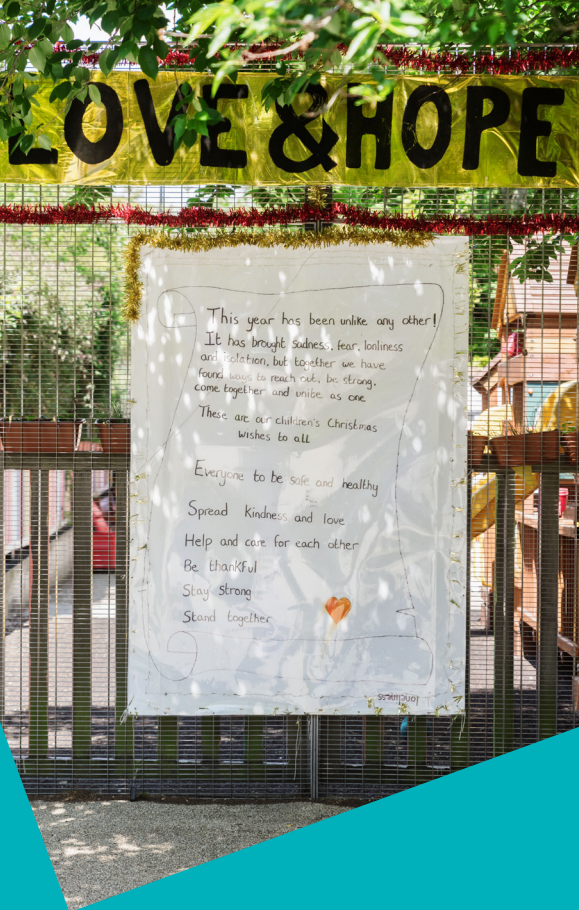
Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

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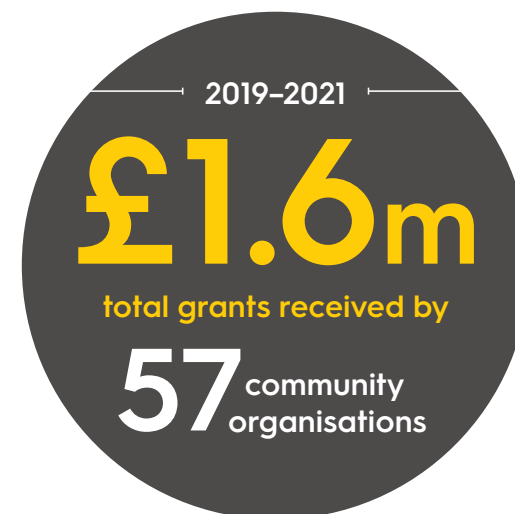
About this briefing and discussion tool

This briefing and discussion tool provides a format for a structured discussion at place level[1] to consider how the contribution of neighbourhood-based community organisations ('community anchors'[2]) in addressing the challenges communities face now and in the future as a result of Covid-19 can be strengthened.

It provides a specific input towards thinking and planning for building resilient infrastructure in communities, addressing inequalities, place-based development, and adding social value based on lessons learnt from 31 community anchor organisations funded by the Co-op Foundation/DCMS Space to Connect Programme responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Their responses, the challenges they face, and how commissioners and policy makers can work collectively with community anchors to address future challenges are summarised. (The full report, including a list of organisations interviewed, is available here)

1. We use the term 'place' here to mean local authority level - usually meaning unitary or second tier in the case of County Councils

2. "Community anchor organisations play an important role in local communities. Community anchor organisations are community led, independent of the council and other bodies and tend to be multi-purpose, often managing community buildings and other assets, operating as social enterprises and surviving through generating a diversity of income streams. Such organisations may be referred to as Community Associations, Community Centres, Development Trusts, Neighbourhood Trusts, City Farms, or Healthy Living Centres" https://quartetcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Quartet-Community-Anchor-Organisations.pdf

How to use this discussion tool

We suggest that this briefing is put on the agenda at a strategic place level meeting, such as a Health and Wellbeing Board meeting or other planning group responsible for working with the voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE).

Invite meeting attendees to read the briefing - giving them good time.

Use the questions on p. 9 to have an initial discussion about the role of community anchors in service design.

Communities and the pandemic

Community Anchors have a key role in addressing the challenges communities as a result of Covid-19, including, unemployment, food poverty, social isolation, and rising mental health problems.

Across the country the contribution of community anchors is being understood and steps taken to support community action. The Wigan Deal[3], for instance, and the asset-based community development (ABCD) approaches being implemented in Leeds[4] are two examples. However, this is still not the norm and more needs to be done.

Organisations including Locality[5], Big Local[6], Power to Change[7], Local Trust[8], and The People's Health Trust[9] have been growing the evidence base for greater community involvement and control to address local issues.

Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need to harness the power of community action and evidence has shown the potential for community anchors to do this.

> " In the aftermath of this crisis, central government must act urgently to shore up community policy. The manifestos of the 2020 election revealed a broad, cross- party commitment to the concept of local communities taking control of delivering social infrastructure. This must not be forgotten in the process of post-Covid recovery. In fact efforts to devise policy to aid community groups in the process must be redoubled.[10] "

> " The scale of community action in the UK since the start of Covid-19 pandemic has been significant. Community based organisations, national charities, mutual aid groups ... have stepped forward to support those made more vulnerable by the pandemic.[11] "

3. https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/The-Deal/The-Deal.aspx

4. https://www.abcdinleeds.com/

5. https://locality.org.uk/services-tools/resources/

6. https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/

7. https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/

8. https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/stronger-than-anyone-thought-communities-responding-to-covid-19/

9. https://www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk/impact

10. Newcombe, G. (2020). Local Delivery: Protecting social infrastructure. Localis. Available at: http://www.localis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/032_LocalDelivery_AWK.pdf

11. Tiratelli, L. & Kaye, S. (2020) Communities vs Coronavirus: The rise of mutual aid. NLGN, p30.

The example of the Space to Connect programme

Space to Connect[12] was a national joint initiative between The Co-op Foundation and UK Government. Since the Autumn of 2019, 46 'Explore' projects (of up to £10k each) have been funded to undertake community engagement and consultation to bring new spaces into existence and 11 'Enhance' projects have been funded (up to £80k each) to support the expansion of activities and make existing spaces more sustainable.

In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic (late March 2020) 31 Space to Connect projects were interviewed about the impact of Covid-19 on their organisations and their responses to emerging challenges.

46
'Explore' projects have been funded

up to £10k each

11
'Enhance' projects have been funded

up to £80k each

12. https://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/news/grants-awarded-from-space-to-connect/

Positive action

The Community Anchors involved with Space to Connect were among the quickest in their areas to respond to challenges presented by the pandemic. In many ways, they behaved as local strategic commissioners and providers.

A deep understanding and knowledge of their local community enabled community anchors to identify who might need emergency support. They acted to ensure the most vulnerable were supported urgently including food supplies and providing urgent information. They:

- **Took the risk of repurposing existing resources and funding to respond to local needs.**

- **Coordinated local volunteering responses providing an important interface between individual altruism and statutory provision.**

- **Developed new ways of communicating and connecting with local people and with other agencies creating hubs and points of connection.**

"Since lockdown, we've linked in with a lot more vulnerable people and at risk people than we would have done previously. People who never came near our lunch or exercise [classes] and who probably needed it more than the people who did come ... and I think ...it's been a blessing...we have found people who had slipped through the net..."

- Space to Connect project grantee

"We also offer support by phone...we will call people we know who are isolated once a week – just to check in they are ok and have a chat... they just want to speak to someone. We didn't do this before."

- Space to Connect project grantee

Challenges

Community Anchors rapid response to the pandemic has left many in a financially weakened position. Reasons for this included:

• **Their funding was only just sufficient prior to the pandemic;**

• **The funding base had been weakened because other revenue streams, such as community cafes or renting out business space, had reduced or disappeared completely.**

There was also a general concern about whether new ways of working were compounding existing inequalities, excluding the most vulnerable.

> ...Not sure if we will be here in 3 months time...our whole future is in the balance. We've been doing this for 30 years and had some hard times, but this has been very pressured."
>
> – Space to Connect project grantee

What do local systems need to be doing?

The 2019 report **'The Community Paradigm'**[13] calls for a shift away from market and state-orientated approaches to one that places a greater emphasis on community involvement. This is often called 'neo-localism'[14], and puts places at the centre of economic and political thinking and action.

The significant contribution of community anchors responding to the pandemic is an example of the positive impact these organisations can have. It could – and should – be used to better integrate the voluntary and community sector into place-based systems such as health and care.

There is risk is that the contribution of community anchor organisations will be forgotten and local systems will resume 'business as usual'. Currently, few local systems (especially health and care) recognises the strategic contribution made by community anchor organisations.

For there to be a shift in what we think a good local system looks like there needs to be:

- **A better understanding of the role and contribution that community anchor organisations make to statutory services such as health and care;**

- **A clear picture of the coverage and status of community anchor organisations with a particular focus on anchors led-by and/or serving marginalised communities.**

The offer of financial support will always be important to community anchors as are mechanisms to ensure that their experience, and that of the local people they serve, is brought to bear in local planning and decision making.

13. Lent A and Studdert J. The Community Paradigm - why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved. NLGN February 2019

14. http://localis.org.uk/neo-localism/

Discussion tool

Resettling the relationship between Community Anchor organisations and statutory services

The questions below can be used to structure a **short discussion** at a relevant place-level meeting. For example, a Health and Wellbeing Board, or a similar strategic planning group that recognises the role Community Anchor organisations can play.

1.

How are the voices of Community Anchor organisations heard at a strategic level?

2.

How is the role of Community Anchors understood at a strategic level?[15]

3.

How is funding to Community Anchors coordinated between key commissioners?

4.

What further actions should we take and who should be responsible for these?

15. For example how is their contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities experiencing inequality and disadvantage recognised in key system plans?

Further support and next steps

Leeds Beckett University and Locality were the Learning and Evaluation Partners for the Space to Connect programme. More information about the team is available here.

The Locality/Leeds Beckett team would be very happy to help facilitate any discussions you are thinking about having – just get in touch!

We are also very interested in how discussions went, what was considered, and any actions that were agreed.

Please give us some feedback - even if it is just the minutes of the meeting - with us using the following link.

We will gather this information together, summarise it and share this with local commissioners in order to help the development of action in this area.

Contact us

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Further reading

The following useful reports on the role of neighbourhood based community organisations have been produced recently:

'**We were built for this**'
Locality (2020)

'**Communities vs Coronavirus: The Rise of Mutual Aid**'
New Local Government Network (2020)

'**Towards Resilience: Redesigning our systems for a better future**'
New Local Government Network for Local Trust (2020)

'**What works for Community Wellbeing: a public debate**'
What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2019)

'**Impact of Covid-19 on BAME Led Businesses, Organisations & Communities**'
Black South West Network (2020)

'**The impact of Covid-19 on the BAME community and voluntary sector**'
The Ubele Initiative (2020)

'**UK BAME Charities: The Covid-19 Challenges**'
Kunle Olulode in KOL Social (2020)

'**Stronger than anyone thought: Communities responding to Covid-19**'
Local Trust (2020)