Colchester Borough Council

Community Enabling Strategy

Promoting self-help throughout the borough

Colchester

2015 onwards

Contents

Introduction

Colchester Borough Council has adopted a new Strategic Plan for 2015-18 which will express the ambitions of our administration for the whole borough. This will focus on Colchester as an ambitious and welcoming place.

However, these ambitions come during a prolonged financial contraction for the public sector as a whole. The Council funding from central government has reduced significantly during recent years and looks set to continue doing so.

The Council is implementing a series of major changes to how we serve customers to enable us to protect services and achieve our wider ambitions.

These changes include:

- managing the demand for some of our services
- making some services more commercial
- encouraging customers to "self-serve", using new technology wherever possible.

We are also seeking to use "behaviour change" techniques to enable some of these changes.

The Council has a long tradition as a local funder of the voluntary sector, of working with community groups, and of community development work. The Council has done much to support and develop the social fabric of the borough. This community enabling strategy aligns this work with our ambitions to manage demand and change behaviour.

This strategy shows how we will achieve the ambitions of local groups, and encourage self-help and self-reliance to reduce cost and protect services.

Context

Colchester's communities are complex and overlapping. Communities may include small geographic neighbourhoods, allegiances based on shared characteristics or associations based on common interests. Some communities are long-term, while others may rise up in response to a particular issue or concern. Residents are likely to be members of many different communities with varying degrees of commitment.

Colchester has a particularly diverse community sector. This is characterised by a high number of organisations covering a wide range of issues. These include small informal community groupings through to large, staffed service providers, but many have limited resources and capacities.

According to the Cabinet Office, volunteering has increased in the East of England by 7% between 2010 and 2013.

The Council provides a great deal of support for community groups from reliable core funding for some of the borough's key charities, as well as shorter term funding for initiatives led by the community and capital funding for community facilities. This funding has been used to achieve our ambitions for the borough and to fund services beyond those we provide directly.

As part of its Localism agenda, the government has introduced several new powers to encourage community action. These include the "Our Place" programme which is designed to empower communities to design and manage local services.

"You can do what
I cannot do.
I can do what
you cannot do.
Together we can
do great things"

Track record: successes

The Council has a long track-record of working with community groups to achieve our common goals. Some examples of this include the Council:

- Bringing people together from the borough's most deprived communities to identify and deliver local priorities through the "Community Strengths Assessment" process.

- Transferring assets to charitable organisations where they are able to deliver better outcomes. These have included community centres and housing for homeless people.

- Working with the statutory and voluntary sectors to agree a "local compact" to improve practice in consultations and funding.

- Providing reliable core funding for some of the borough's most prominent welfare and arts organisations.

- Co-instigating community initiatives. For example, we helped project manage and fund the town's SOS Bus before handing it to a local charity to own and manage.

- Galvanising the efforts of partners to improve people's life chances in the borough's areas of highest need through our "Life Opportunities" initiative.

- Working with Parish and Community Councils to help them write Neighbourhood Plans to give them more influence in their communities.

- Giving people a chance to protect buildings and assets in their neighbourhoods through the Local List and the register of community assets.

PARTNER SHIP

Track record: challenges

Despite the successes we have achieved with residents of Colchester, we have also found many challenges which highlight the need for tenacity, patience and imagination.

These include:

Engaging with the majority

Residents involved with campaigns or pressure groups will invariably ensure their voices are heard, but it has proved much harder to reach the "silent majority" Despite their numbers, their voices in communities are often muted as they are unlikely to attend public meetings and will often be away from home during the day and juggling the demands of work and family life.

Finding everyone

No one approach will reach everyone, and engaging with some groups, such as young people, requires particular imagination. Approaches such as "street consultations" have worked but the pace of change can also put this group off as its membership is, by its nature, time-limited.

Building confidence and skills

While some community groups will already be operating effectively, many individuals and new groups will need assistance to build their capacity to help themselves. This will require classic Community Development work, helping people to find their voices, achieve confidence-building quick wins, and developing specialist skills in areas such as communication, fundraising, or managing charities.

"helping people to find their voices, and achieve confidence-building quick wins"

New powers for communities

Standing for election (existing power)	Becoming a Borough, Parish or Town Councillor
More say on how a neighbourhood develops	Neighbourhood Planning Community Right to Build
Protecting local facilities such as pubs, shops and village halls	Community Right to Bid Community Asset Transfer
Bringing people together to address local problems or priorities	Our Place
Taking over local public services	Community Right to Challenge
Re-claiming unused land	Right to Reclaim Land

Volunteering

19.8 million
adults take part in formal volunteering at least once a year*

25%
of adults volunteer at least once a month*

£23.9 billion
is the annual "output" for volunteers according to the Office for National Statistics

62% of volunteers said they started to
"improve things and help people" *

* Department for Communities and Local Government

A new strategic approach

The need to protect services at a time of falling public sector funding creates a new impetus to promote self-help. This is underpinned by

- **Colchester's strong community sector, and**
- **The Council's community track record**

Our objective is to increase community resilience across the borough by encouraging more self-help.

We can do this while enabling the Council to achieve efficiencies, protecting valuable services and helping communities to achieve their ambitions. This will involve identifying opportunities to collaborate where three outcomes can be achieved together:
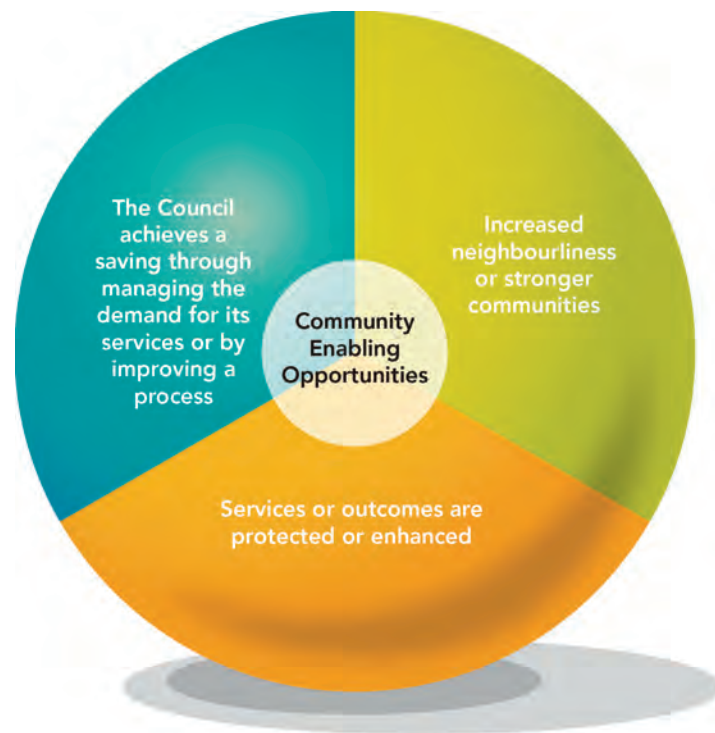
1. Services or outcomes are protected or enhanced

2. Communities are strengthened or neighbourliness is increased

3. The Council is able to better manage demand and make savings

In addition to these outcomes, this approach has the potential to have real social benefit. By galvanising volunteering and community activity, the borough gains more "social capital" This is defined as more citizenship, neighbourliness, social networks and civic participation. The Office for National Statistics says that greater social capital is "associated with better health, higher educational achievement, better employment outcomes, and lower crime rates"

This approach may be able to save public money in the medium and long term but it will require investment to achieve. In addition, it will be undermined if the various investments the Council makes in the fabric of our communities is withdrawn.

Where we want to be

The Council achieves a saving through managing the demand for its services or by improving a process

Increased neighbourliness or stronger communities

Services or outcomes are protected or enhanced

Community Enabling Opportunities

How we will get there

This new approach will require:

- **The Council and its public sector partners working together with community groups as equals.**
- **The involvement and engagement of ward and parish councilors. They have an important role as champions, and can bring the right people together to make things happen.**
- **Bringing together officers from front-line services with community development workers and community representatives to help people look at opportunities in new ways.**
- **An enabling approach included within our strategies and policies for the future.**
- **Having patience: the bigger gains will take time and tenacity to deliver.**

This approach is not intended to replace local problem-solving approaches.
To maximise the gains we make, we will start by prioritising borough-wide initiatives.

These larger initiatives would benefit from being championed by Councillors from across the borough.

Initial opportunities

Work is already underway.

Alongside ongoing activities in services there are some key projects and activities that will practically aide with the delivery of this strategic approach and which will form the basis of our delivery plan.

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Schools Education Programme
Enabling schools to support us with behaviour change and making our resources go further

Old Heath Recreation Ground Community Café
Enterprise pump priming to enable community ownership

Hythe Forward
Essex's first Community Land Trust

Community Days of Action
Refresh of our approach to improve community input, engagement and legacy…..

Tackling dog fouling
'Help Us Help You' and 'Watching Eyes' campaign in Zones

Community Event Organisers Support Tools
Working with partners to enable and empower local people with the tools they need to run their own events and activites…

Community Litter Warriors
Providing the tools communities need to get the job done themselves

Go Online support

For residents, community volunteers and Zones staff to give online advice, organise surgeries and online events and build partnerships with other agencies doing similar work with the aim of assisting online transactions and access to online information and advice.

Essex Community Agents scheme

Closer working and better use of resources to maximise outcomes…

Junior Wardens scheme

Educate, inspire and enable our younger residents

Increased Neighbourliness for Assisted Collections….

Closer working and better use of resources to maximise outcomes…

BIG Garden, High Woods Country Park

A unique community, educational and therapeutic resource lead by community volunteers

Community Tree Warden scheme

Volunteers, trained to help look after Colchester's trees

Next steps

The implementation of this strategy will require the engagement of local councillors, staff from the Council and other public sector organisations, and community groups.

Together we will:

1. **Identify and explore new opportunities that best meet the three outcomes, highlighted on page 7.**
2. **Ask each Service to look at their strategies and policies to ensure 'enabling' becomes embedded within them.**
3. **Bring together key activities already underway into a Delivery Plan and monitor progress.**
4. **Agree new activities for 2016/17 New Homes Bonus Allocation and include them in the Delivery Plan.**

It is likely some seed-corn funding will be required for some opportunities. Sources will be explored for each opportunity, but the Council's Cabinet has identified a desire to use New Homes Bonus funding to achieve community benefits and to enable savings. These "self-reliance" opportunities would meet both criteria.

Implementation and Monitoring of the Strategy

This strategy represents a challenging vision for the Council.

To ensure that the key priorities are delivered a delivery plan will be developed outlining actions to be carried out in the coming years.

The Strategy will be reviewed and progress against the delivery plan will be monitored.

The Strategy will be communicated as widely as possible to encourage engagement and achieve maximum benefit. Some of the ways in which we will do this are:

- **Through Communication Plans for projects within the delivery plan**
- **Align internal strategies when under review**
- **Involve partners to align actions with their work and strategies**

Find out more online about our work enabling communities

www.colchester.gov.uk including:

www.colchester.gov.uk/community
www.colchester.gov.uk/ZoneTeams
www.colchester.gov.uk/volunteering
www.colchester.gov.uk/backtowork
www.colchester.gov.uk/go-online

www.cbhomes.org.uk