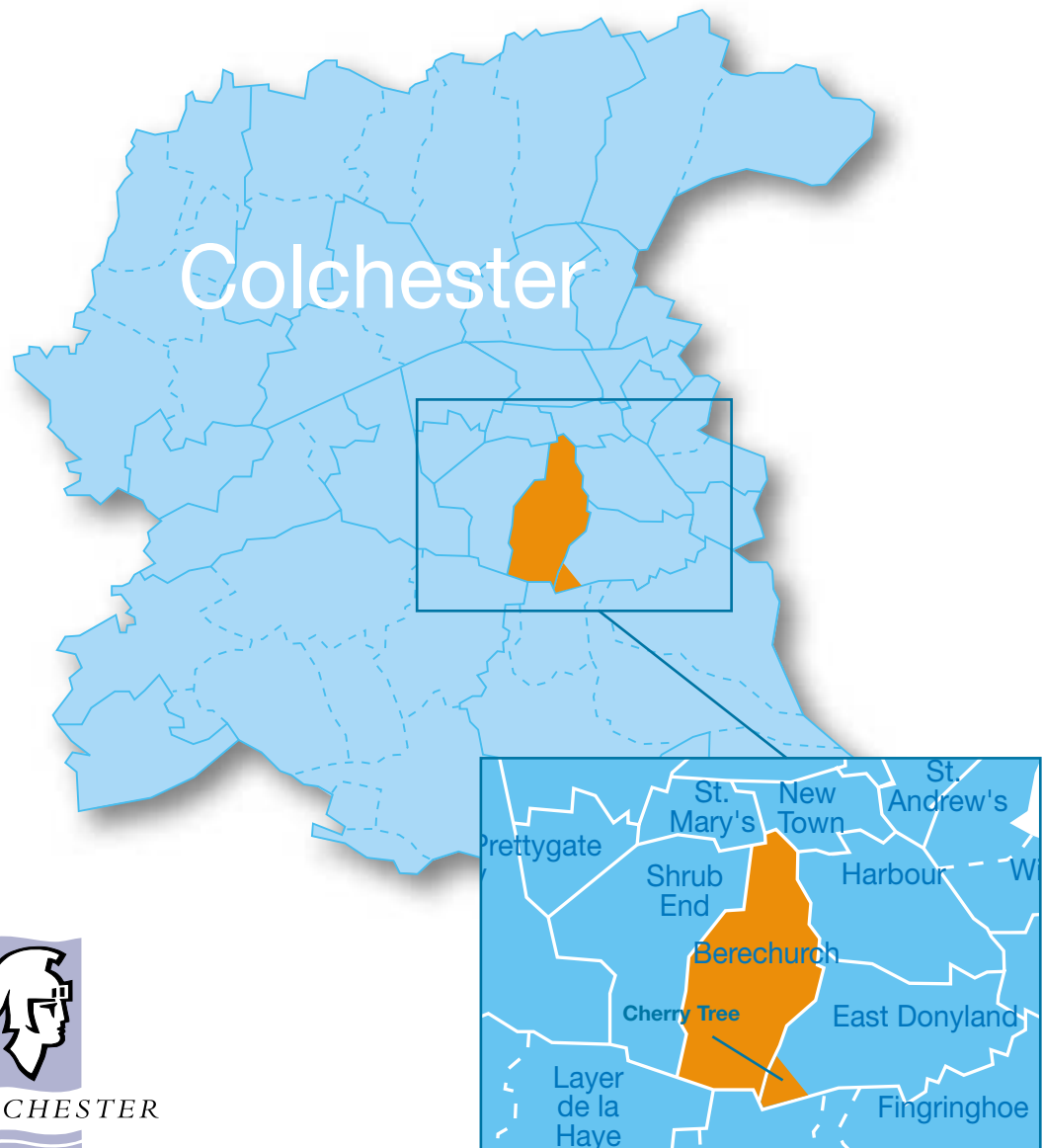


Discovering Need, Developing Solutions

Berechurch Ward Community Strengths Assessment



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BERECHURCH WARD COMMUNITY STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT

GENERAL INFORMATION

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Background to the research

- 1.1.1 This is the second of four community assessments that the Social and Economic Regeneration Group at Colchester Borough Council are undertaking in local authority wards that have been identified as 'deprived' in the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 (IMD 2000). The completed report for Harbour ward is currently available online at www.colchester.gov.uk. Assessments will soon take place for St Andrew's and St Anne's. It is estimated that all four community assessments will be completed by April/May 2004.
- 1.1.2 The purpose of this report is to increase local knowledge about characteristics and needs in these wards. These needs have been established from consultation with residents about their neighbourhood and community. This is accompanied by analysis from interviews with community and voluntary groups about the strengths and needs of their organisations and interviews about the support that these groups receive.
- 1.1.3 Research has shown that a vibrant community and voluntary sector and increased community involvement can have a significant and positive impact on social exclusion in areas of deprivation. Future community development work will be planned largely around the findings of this research.

1.2 Structure of the report

This report is divided into five main chapters:

Part 1: Introduction and methodology

Part 2: Executive summary of main findings

Part 3: Recommendations

Part 4: Community Needs: results of household survey and qualitative interviews

Part 5: Results of community and voluntary groups interviews

Part 6: Results of support organisations interviews

1.3 Geography and boundaries used

1.3.1 This report looks at community needs in Berechurch ward. The Cherry Tree community¹ were also incorporated into this research although outside the Berechurch ward boundaries. This community is technically part of East Donyland, however it is in fact physically closer to residential areas of Berechurch. Details of the ward boundary can be viewed on the map on page 3.

1.3.2 As mentioned above, Berechurch ward was initially selected along with four other wards as the target area for this research on the basis of its score on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (ID 2000). This highlighted that Berechurch ward is the fourth most deprived ward in the borough. It was selected as the second area for this community assessment because it was felt that along with Harbour, it was in Berechurch that we had most to learn.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 This research involved four separate parts:

- a) A household survey
- b) Qualitative interviews about community needs with local key workers
- c) Interviews with community and voluntary groups
- d) Interviews with support organisations

The details of each of these methods are outlined below.

a) Household survey

1.4.2 A household survey was carried out in July/August 2003. This involved face to face interviews with over 200 residents in Berechurch ward. This amounts to a survey of just over 6% of all the households in the ward. This is the standard sample size for each of the four wards where this research will take place.

1.4.3 The survey asked people about their level of involvement in the community. It also explored the issues that they felt need addressing, in terms of community needs and gaps in the delivery of services to Berechurch. A copy of the survey that was used is included in Appendix 2.

b) Qualitative interviews about community needs

¹The Cherry Tree community is a small residential area off Mersea Road, and is just beyond Berechurch ward boundaries (Location on map p.3: lower right hand corner).

1.4.4 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six professionals working in Berechurch. The aim of these interviews was to gain additional qualitative information about community needs that would complement the household survey.

c) Interviews with community and voluntary groups

1.4.5 A total of 10 interviews were conducted. The list of organisations interviewed is included in Appendix 1.

1.4.6 These interviews look at the strengths, level of organisation and needs of these community and voluntary groups. A copy of the interview form that was used is contained in Appendix 3.

d) Interviews with support organisations

1.4.7 A total of 12 interviews were conducted with organisations that provide support to community and voluntary groups in Berechurch to achieve their objectives. These interviews looked at support currently delivered in Berechurch, as well as support available. The list of organisations interviewed is included in Appendix One and a copy of the interview form that was used is contained in Appendix 3.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section contains a summary of the findings from each of the methodologies used (see Chapter 1 for a description of these methodologies). Recommendations for tackling the issues that have been raised as a result of this research are in Chapter 3 of this report.

2.2 Funding and resource issues

2.2.1 Funding emerged as the most prominent issue facing the groups interviewed in Berechurch. Almost half of the groups in this area currently receive no funding, or less than £1,000 per year.

2.2.2 Only one group had sought funding advice and nearly half of all groups did not know where they could get advice about funding should they need it.

2.2.3 Interviews with support organisations revealed that although advice is available to community and voluntary groups on a wide range of topics, one area where it seems to be more limited is on the subject of funding.

2.2.4 Although groups appear to be well equipped on the whole, resources that emerged as minor frustrations are transport and storage space.

2.3 Community participation

2.3.1 Almost one third of people interviewed for the household survey (29%) indicated that they do not feel part of their community.

2.3.2 This lack of community involvement was reflected in several other questions that were asked, e.g.:

- 86% rarely or never attend local social club
- only 36% felt satisfied with ability to influence neighbourhood decisions
- 75% have not taken practical action to resolve issues affecting neighbourhood in last two years
- just four of all 200 people had volunteered for local groups
- 64% were not willing to become more involved in local groups

2.3.3 Interviews with community groups revealed that recruiting and retaining volunteers seems to be a common problem for groups in Berechurch.

Reaching the target population and increasing general participation were also important issues for many groups.

- 2.3.4 This difficulty with community participation is reflected in low active membership in many groups in Berechurch. There is a notable contrast between the three groups that have a relatively large active membership (10+), and the five groups that have between just 2-4 active members.

2.4 Ministry of Defence and civilian populations

- 2.4.1 Berechurch is unlike many other wards in Colchester, in that it has a large Ministry of Defence (MOD) presence. Almost half of the 18 community and voluntary groups that were identified in Berechurch primarily serve army families. Several people interviewed commented that the MOD and civilian communities are not well integrated. The extent of this is difficult to measure.

2.5 Contacting groups

- 2.5.1 Difficulty was experienced in contacting a number of groups in Berechurch. This means that many groups may not be receiving the support, volunteers and funding that is available to them.

2.6 Joint working and support

- 2.6.1 There has been very little joint working between the Council and community groups in this area. Only one out of the 10 groups interviewed had been involved in joint working with the Council over the last year.
- 2.6.2 Some of the locally based support organisations and professionals working in the area said they would welcome better communication between organisations in the area.
- 2.6.3 The general message from the organisations that serve a wider geographical area was that the support that they offer in Berechurch could be improved with better local knowledge and contacts.

2.7 Building equality

- 2.7.1 Many of the groups interviewed have been actively involved in challenging discrimination within their communities, for example, through awareness raising events.
- 2.7.2 Nearly half of the groups interviewed have neither a written equal opportunities policy nor a statement of equality within their constitution. None of these groups felt that they would be interested in receiving help to develop their practices regarding equality.

2.7.3 Support to community and voluntary groups in promoting diversity is limited in all aspects, and provision of translators or interpreters is particularly scarce.

2.8 Training

2.8.1 Support in the form of helping groups to identify their training needs currently appears to be limited and does not tend to be offered on a proactive basis. Rather, this kind of help tends to be delivered to groups that are already connected to, or specifically approach the support organisations.

2.8.2 A number of support organisations said that they could potentially deliver advice on identifying training needs, however, they do not know that groups need this advice unless they are approached.

2.8.3 The Ormiston centre appears to be the main focus of training for groups in the Berechurch area. This is a valuable local source of support for local groups.

2.9 Community needs

a) Feelings of safety

2.9.1 The majority of people living in Berechurch generally feel safe in their neighbourhood during the day (91%) and at night (63%).

2.9.2 The problems that were seen as 'serious or very serious' in relation to people's neighbourhoods, included litter and rubbish (37%), anti-social behaviour (34%) and vandalism and graffiti (33%).

b) Services for young people (teenagers)

2.9.3 Facilities for young people repeatedly came out of both the qualitative interviews and the household survey as a major problem for the whole community.

2.9.4 Of those that were interviewed for the household survey:

- 52% felt existing services for young people are poor or very poor
- 47% said that more activities are needed for teenagers after school
- facilities for young people was the most widely prioritised of all the local services as an area needing improvement (47%)

2.9.5 This emphasis on services for young people was also reinforced through the qualitative interviews. It was felt that young people have not been integrated into the wider community. Anti-social behaviour from bored and frustrated young people in the area is seen as a direct

consequence of the poor facilities and insufficient affordable activities for young people in Berechurch.

- 2.9.6 These difficulties around young people in the Monkwick estate area have been recognised by the Colchester Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, who have set up a multi-agency problem solving group to tackle the issues.

c) Services for younger children

- 2.9.7 Services for younger children, i.e. play and play-school facilities was also felt to be an area in need of improvement according to the responses to the household survey and qualitative interviews.

- 2.9.8 The household survey revealed that:

- 49% rated play facilities in their neighbourhood as poor or very poor
- 40% prioritised play facilities as a local service most in need of improvement
- 18% would welcome play-school facilities in their neighbourhood

- 2.9.9 Similarly, qualitative interviews indicate that there are insufficient services for children under five years. Children from these deprived areas are felt to be further disadvantaged by the absence of play school facilities. One commentator observed that this service gap has a 'rolling effect' on already overburdened feeder schools, since children's development can be delayed as a result. This also has an impact on local secondary schools according to one commentator, which 'pick up' teenagers years later who are 'just unmanageable'.

- 2.9.10 Essex County Council have recognised that there is a childcare gap in Berechurch and are in the process of establishing new pre-school groups in the area.

d) Local meeting places

- 2.9.11 Many people felt that the community would benefit from having improved local meeting places. The household survey found that:

- 48% rated local meeting places as poor or very poor
- 27% prioritised local meeting places as a service most in need of improvement

- 2.9.12 For one commentator, the lack of a central meeting place has resulted in isolation and a sense that there is no community focus for people in the Cherry Tree area.

- 2.9.13 A wide range of resources are available to community and voluntary groups in the Berechurch area, provided that the groups know who to approach when these are needed.
- 2.9.14 According to the support organisations that were interviewed, a number of meeting places are available, some free of charge, whilst others incur a charge.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Below is a short list of recommendations from issues that have emerged from, and during the course of, the research. These recommendations are intended as a starting point for the Berechurch Task Group to begin tackling some of the issues and are by no means an exhaustive list.

3.2 Increasing support

3.2.1 Many people felt that although Berechurch has received resources in the past, the community has had minimal support in building the skills and capacity of existing groups.

3.2.2 Support of community and voluntary groups in Berechurch should be increased and delivered proactively. For example, by ensuring groups have access to funding advice, training advice and guidance in developing organisational policies. The research highlighted particular support needs in relation to Berechurch. These are listed below:

a) Funding advice

3.2.3 The majority of local community and voluntary groups operate on little, if any, funding. Support organisations need to ensure that groups are aware of the funding advice that is available and offer this support on a proactive basis.

b) Community participation

3.2.4 The household survey showed that a large proportion of people in Berechurch feel they are not part of their community. Additionally, very few people are active members of local community groups.

3.2.5 Support should be offered to foster community participation through community events or celebrations. This is especially an issue where the community is divided around MOD and civilian populations. This issue needs to be addressed in relation to any strategy to encourage community participation.

c) Joint working

- 3.2.6 Many local professionals interviewed felt that the community would benefit from strategic planning and better communication.
- 3.2.7 Support organisations felt that they could improve the service they offer to Berechurch with more localised knowledge, both in terms of community contacts and local needs.
- 3.2.8 Research has shown that there would be wide support for a Task Group to tackle some of these issues that have arisen in Berechurch.

3.3 Including young people and children

- 3.3.1 Anti-social behaviour of young people urgently needs to be addressed in Berechurch. The household survey and qualitative interviews have highlighted this issue.
- 3.3.2 More work needs to be focussed on integrating young people into the current activities in Berechurch. Work should also look at providing community and possibly leisure facilities for young people in the ward. The United Solution Problem Solving Group^{*} may be the best vehicle for this.
- 3.3.3 This research has also found that local people feel that there is a gap in Berechurch in terms of childcare and play facilities. In fact, this childcare gap has already been identified as an issue for this area by Essex County Council Learning Services. As a result, two new pre-schools are expected to be opening in January 2004.

3.4 Community meeting places

- 3.4.1 The lack of places for groups to meet has been identified as a problem in Berechurch ward. Potential meeting places need to be explored in Berechurch itself and imaginative use of existing venues could be suggested for groups to use. Groups need to be encouraged to use existing meeting spaces as well as assisted in finding new community facilities.

^{*}United Solutions Problem Solving groups are multi-agency, time-limited teams that try to tackle long-term anti-social behaviour and crime problems.