

## Update on the peer review of Community Partnerships in 2021 and subsequent actions taken.

### 1. A brief reminder of the Peer Challenge Process:

#### 1.1 Who:

The Peer Challenge Team ('the Team') consisted of:

- Steven Pleasant (Lead Officer Peer), Chief Executive, Tameside Council & Accountable Officer at Tameside and Glossop CCG
- Cllr Isobel Darby, Buckinghamshire Council
- Rachel Joyce, Director of Corporate Affairs, Harrogate Borough Council
- Rob Gregory, Assistant Director Communities and Neighbourhoods, Stevenage Borough Council

Supported by:

- James Mehmed, LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Rachel Stevens, LGA Project Support Officer

#### 1.2 When:

The challenge took place over three days 12 – 14 October 2021 – just under two years after the Community Partnerships were launched.

#### 1.3 What:

East Suffolk Council asked the Team *"What can we do to enhance the Community Partnerships and what changes might be required to make them more effective in the future?"*

The Team structured the review around three themes:

#### 1. People

- Do we have the right people around the table?
- Are they representative of their communities?
- Are they fully engaged and are they playing their part in ensuring that existing local connections are being maintained and local priorities being addressed?
- Are the Community Partnerships missing any opportunities in terms of community engagement?
- We would also welcome comments on the role of the Chair.

#### 2. Process

- Are the Community Partnerships and the Board being run in a way that encourages collaboration, problem solving and the collective powers of influence (albeit in the context of meeting virtually over the last 15 months)?
- Do our processes allow people to contribute in the most effective and meaningful way?
- Are the governance arrangements conducive to ensuring that maximum benefit is achieved?

#### 3. Outcomes

- Is the model we have achieving our vision or are there more effective models worth considering?
- Is this an effective use of taxpayers' money?
- How might the Community Partnerships be supported by the Council to operate better in an increasingly data led environment?
- Do we know if the Community Partnerships and the Board are delivering the outcomes that we set them up to deliver?
- Do we understand which projects are effective and which are not?

#### **1.4 How:**

The review was carried out virtually. Having firstly received a wide range of background documents, the Team embarked on a programme of engagement which included:

- 22 virtual MS Teams meetings
- Circa 60 people engaged
- Internal colleagues, community, partners & business community

## **2. RESULTS:**

At the conclusion of the challenge the Team shared insights they had gained through the process and gave recommendations for East Suffolk Council and the Community Partnership Board to consider.

### **2.1 Insights:**

- Significant variation in stages of development between CPs.
- Communication across the CPs - Quick win.
- Some processes getting in the way.
- Impact of Covid.
- Criticality of Chairs, Vice Chairs and Communities Officers.
- Views from your staff.
- Community leadership – Critical role of CP Chairs.
- Meeting format.
- Need to get out more.
- Grant giving process.
- Scale of opportunity.

### **2.2 Recommendations:**

1. Take time to reflect, review and reset the compass for Community Partnerships.
2. Celebrate what you have achieved.
3. Manage the transition from virtual meetings to an increased face-to-face format to support relationship building.
4. More effective communication within and across the CPs and the CP Board
5. Further engage with communities of interest e.g. young people
6. Invest in creating increased capacity and capability in the wider system.
7. Create a learning and development plan to support the next phase of delivery. (Chairs, Vice Chairs and Officers)
8. Quick win – Improve communication between CPs and outwards with localities
9. Consider strategic sponsorship of CPs from across the organisation
10. Build stronger linkages through locality teams e.g. economic development and health
11. Ensure all related processes and commissioned support are congruent with your vision for CPs
12. Review grant and funding processes
13. Move away from traditional meeting style
14. Understand how you identify success, impact, and ROI
15. Make the shift to more facilitative problem solving
16. Develop a robust evaluation framework.
17. Strengthen oversight – ensure grip.
18. Engage all stakeholders internal and external on the next steps for Community Partnerships.

## **3. RESPONSE**

A Community Partnerships Visioning Event was organised at Trinity Park Conference Centre on behalf of the Community Partnership Board and approximately 40 invited delegates attended, comprising Community Partnership Board members, Community Partnership Vice Chairs, key representatives from partner organisation and East Suffolk Council officers. The challenge posed to everyone at the event was:

***‘How can we learn from and respond to the recommendations identified through the Peer Challenge?’***

A workshop was facilitated to help delegates identify top priorities for action against each Peer Challenge recommendation and these were recorded and pulled together after the event to form the *Community Partnership Peer Challenge 2021 Action Plan*.

## **4. ACTION TO DATE**

### **4.1 People**

- Role descriptions for Chairs, Vice Chairs and ESC Officers reviewed and revised
- CP Chairs/Vice Chairs Learning and Development Plan implemented
- More external people with specific knowledge/skills/resources built into projects
- All Councillors (ESC, SCC and T&P Councils) encouraged to participate fully in their CP
- Built resilience by preparing, developing and supporting newly appointed/future Chairs/Vice Chairs
- Bespoke training and development for individual ESC Officers
- Event at Trinity Park engaged partners in next steps
- Some progress but more to do to ensure we hear underrepresented voices - especially young people who can shape CP priorities and activities

### **4.2 Process**

- Reduced the number of formal CP meetings in favour of less formal workshops
- More Task and Finish Groups organised to increase engagement between meetings
- Each CP held a second workshop to engage wider stakeholders, consider refreshed data and restate/adjust priorities
- Progress to ensure CPs are transparent – held in public and anyone can join if the CP/they see benefit in them being there
- Equipped CPs with skills/capacity to map assets in their area and build a supportive network of people who share priorities
- Some progress but more to do to communicate more widely what CPs do
- Gradual move away from focussing on the funding to promote the wider impact of the CPs
- Processes in place to capture and share pipeline of activity, learning and best practice between CPs to increase collaboration and maximise impact
- CPs have demonstrated that they work well when they have the right people round the table who work collaboratively to problem solve one priority at a time.
- Funding Team share information with CPs weekly about various external funding opportunities
- Progress being made on designing governance processes to be transparent but as light touch as possible to free up CPs to innovate

### **4.3 Outcomes**

- Quarterly monitoring of activity funded by CP Board – each meeting starts with an overview of the funding position

- Monitoring of all CP Small Grant Scheme funded projects – but often significant challenge to obtaining the information from grant recipients
- End of project reports required for all CP funded projects – Some are excellent, but others can be difficult / impossible to obtain and the impact measures can be missing. Processes have recently been reviewed to improve this.
- Board periodically revisits and resets original vision, aims and aspirations for CPs
- All eight CPs review their priorities annually and there has been a significant push to make them SMARTer and more targeted – this is improving but still variable
- Introduced a central project register of all CP projects
- Introduced quarterly and annual impact reports for the Board

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

The actions above show that good progress has already been made to address the recommendations made by the peer review team. However, there are several outstanding actions where more needs to be done:

### **5.1 People**

- Support CP Chairs/Vice Chairs to deliver their individual CP action plans
- Support CP Chairs and officers to increase the number of external people with specific knowledge / skills / resources that will help to deliver their priorities
- Do more to ensure we hear underrepresented voices - especially young people who can shape CP priorities and activities

### **5.2 Process**

- Do more to communicate more widely what CPs do
- Move further away from focussing on the funding to promote the wider impact of the CPs

### **5.3 Outcomes**

- Ensure that all CPs develop more targeted priorities and SMARTer outcomes
- Significantly improve to quantity and quality of the impact measures that all CPs obtained from their projects

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