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| **Statutory Guidance on Working with People and Communities 2022****Case study**  |
| **Details** |
| **Title of the case study** | **Vibrant Communities Partnership Board** |
| **Organisation** | Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council  |
| **Synopsis** | BCP Council is passionate about creating vibrant communities, with an outstanding quality of life, where everyone can play an active role and feel part of their local community. While BCP Council does have a strong track record of working with communities, we do acknowledge that to be better, we must involve communities and voluntary organisations into decision making positions within the council.To do this, we have set up the Vibrant Communities Partnership Board, which is a partnership between the council and the voluntary sector. The broad overall objective is to deliver strength-based approaches and interventions that focus on the inherent strengths of individuals, communities, and organisations.  |
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| **Content** |
| **Background** | BCP council is one the UK’s newest local authorities, which was created following the merger of two unitary council’s (Bournemouth and Poole) and one district council (Christchurch). It is the 10th largest local authority in the country in terms of population, serving over 400,000 people.While progress was made in the initial harmonisation of services in 2019, this work was severely disrupted by the sudden impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the initial stages of the pandemic, BCP Council set up the Together We Can initiative, which worked in close partnership with many other public, private and voluntary sector organisations as well as community groups and residents who offered to help and support the vulnerable people to get through the coronavirus crisis. At its peak, the initiative had over 1900 volunteers, delivering food, medicine and providing other support.Following the success of the Together We Can initiative, many council staff acknowledged that they simply would not have been able to deliver services for the most vulnerable without the flexibility, availability, and passion of community assets. It began a conversation about how the council could involve the community and its assets in the decision making and organising of council and community services. |
| **The need** | The vast majority of public sector organisations work using traditional, deficit-based approaches. This means they are set up to focus on perceived issues or weaknesses of a particular community that, it is believed, require a professional approach to solving. While there are some reasons why this approach may be useful, it can inadvertently take power and responsibility away from the community. In order to reverse deficit-based public service, BCP Council has developed the ‘vibrant communities’ approach which focuses on developing strength-based ways of working within individual communities and within council services. The Vibrant Communities Board oversees this. |
| **The solution** | The Vibrant Communities Partnership Board oversees the four workstreams that forms the Vibrant Communities approach and is hosted by BCP’s Communities team. Its membership consists of council officers, other public sector partners (such as police, health and fire) and local voluntary and community organisations.There are no limits on the number of Board members and is encouraged to be fluid dependent on the topic discussed. It is chaired by two co-chairs, one elected by the council and the other by the voluntary sector, this is to ensure topics discussed are a mixture of community and council priorities and to empower non-public sector partners by devolving responsibility. The Board avoids discussing strategic priorities of Board members, but instead focuses solely on operational needs of the community. This is deliberate as a key objective of the Board was to avoid it becoming a smaller ‘health and wellbeing Board’.Following each Board meeting, the action log is updated, and process monitored by the BCP communities’ team. The Board first met in October 2021 and have met three times since. The topics discussed so far have been:* Hidden hunger and the access to food partnership
* Results from BCP residents’ survey
* Update on ICB People and Communities strategy

In April 2022, the Board will receive a presentation from Health and Nature Dorset (HAND), who will ask Board members to consider how to improve the use of and connection with the natural environment to support and enhance physical and mental wellbeing across Dorset.We will also have a presentation from Public Health Dorset on health checks, and how to reach under-represented communities in the BCP area.  |
| **Costs** | Nil – the Vibrant Communities Board does not have an allocated budget.  |
| **Challenges** | One of the main challenges for this project has been the restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The inability to meet as a group meant that developing an identify and as a Board was challenging. As a council, we’ve had to constantly challenge ourselves that we are not imposing or using deficit models, particularly amongst services who are not part of the Communities Department.  |
| **Impact** | The impact of the Vibrant Communities Partnership Board in the early stages can be judged both through specifics, actionable outcomes of each presentation and through the cultural shift of the organisations participating in the Board.  |
| **Lessons** | In order to empower and develop strength based approaches, public sector organisations need to recognise and be honest about the impact of their intervention and the risk they have in developing community involvement and for it to be sustainable. One of the ways it can do this is to disrupt and remove the traditional structures that ????? |
| **Next steps, sustainability and scaling** | The Board has only been in existence since December 2021, so more Board meetings are required until a review of the next steps will be conducted. The Vibrant Communities Partnership is in close contact with the Place Based Partnership workstream of the ICS, and further discussions to see how each can compliment each other.  |
| **Find out more** | *Jack Blankley –* *jack.blankley@bcpcouncil.gov.uk* |
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