

NEW REALITIES

A 'CAN-DO' COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENT FOR SEFTON COUNCIL & SEFTON'S VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY & FAITH SECTOR

Local government and local communities are changing.

At the heart of the changes that are under way is a 're-imagining' of local relationships, within which the development of new, better, more equal and more productive partnerships between local authorities and local communities is key.



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Our aim in Sefton

Our overall aim is to help to make Sefton a great place to be and to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in our communities. To help to achieve this, we will establish an operational framework that strengthens working relationships between the local authority and the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector in the Borough.

Why are we doing this?

Because...

- **It is crucial we make the most of ALL available resources.** Not losing sight of this as the ultimate aim is vital.
- **The role of the local authority is changing** in its nature, form and function and we recognise the dramatic impact this is having in communities.
- **The importance of being involved** - recognising the changing realities and possibilities in local communities, improving involvement by communities, including local leadership through joint design and delivery of local services.
- **Resources are scarce...**The need to pool resources and think differently about how they are utilised, demands better ways of working together strategically and operationally.
- **...And yet there are untapped assets in all of our communities.** At times of resource scarcity, identifying untapped assets is critical – the buildings, networks, ‘below the radar’ services and support, the finances, skills, energy and the goodwill. These assets must be recognised and more effectively mobilised in the years ahead.
- **Creative solutions are needed.** The core assumptions underpinning the ‘status quo’ have been challenged and the changes that we all face are sweeping. If we are to make a difference in our communities, we need solutions that reflect the growing importance of collaboration and partnership, and challenge practices that prevent this from happening.
- **More resilient communities will be needed in the years ahead.** Communities will need to be capable of organising, mobilising and responding to the long term changes that are now under way. All partners must come together to enable this to happen.

What are the underlying principles?

- **Common purpose** – if changes are to be constructive and enduring, the way forward must involve the strengthening of goodwill and trust between all parties in pursuit of common goals.
- **Solutions focused** – if change is to be effective, all parties must be focused on the development of collective solutions as the starting point for working and interacting – a ‘can do’ attitude. We need to establish ‘reasons to do things’ as the norm – rather than ‘reasons why we can’t’.
- **Mutual respect** – relationships and roles are changing; the importance of demonstrating mutual respect, acknowledging the contributions made by all parties and recognising the need to adapt and change together underpins our approach.
- **Risk ‘aware’** – A shift is needed within the local authorities away from a norm that is ‘risk averse’, to one in which risks are identified, analysed and managed in partnership with communities. Moving from ‘Gatekeeper’ to ‘Facilitator’ cannot happen without this shift.

What are we trying to achieve?

An Enabling Culture – What does this mean in practice?

- **Systems** - developing constructive ways to improve systems and procedures, improve consistency, reflect the needs of communities and remove barriers.
- **Relationships** - developing measures that challenge negative / deficit attitudes, which often underpin procedural barriers, and promote positive and constructive approaches.
- **Collaboration** and co-produced solutions must become the norm – and the added social value they bring must be recognised. This must become a shared approach.
- **Expectations** – communicating and planning together more effectively will enable us to develop realistic and informed expectations for the future. The Voluntary, Community and Faith sector offer vital, local support and services but cannot always be expected to ‘pick up the pieces’, and communities need to recognise that it is not ‘business as usual’ for local authorities.
- **Creative solutions** - the ways in which we combine and adapt existing approaches will HAVE to be imaginative and ingenious. Promoting a culture of creativity and identifying what creative solutions look like in practice will be a priority.

An Empowering Culture - What does this mean in practice?

- Sharing skills
- Sharing expertise
- Sharing costs
- Sharing learning
- Sharing risks

How are we going to do this?

- Local authority and the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector **meeting regularly** to measure how far the local authority has changed and moved towards an enabling culture as a 2 year goal.
- **Use of case studies** – how do you highlight what effective partnership working might look like and how do you disseminate this for impact? Recognising that good practice exists all around us – capturing examples of this so that people can see what ‘success’ looks like as well as highlighting challenges that remain.
- **What if...** - would asking the question ‘what if it had been done differently’ be a useful method for addressing problems or system failures? What might ‘differently’ look like?
- **Collaborative Learning Programme** working with all parties – ‘changing together’. This will provide learning for both good and poor practice and will include local authority officers, the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector and elected members. This will be linked to annual events to review progress and celebrate success.
- **Solutions Framework** – establishing mechanisms through which system failures or cultural blockages may be challenged and dealt with quickly and effectively to produce constructive outcomes as well as providing important lessons for all involved

What will success look like?

Success measures for improved partnership working need to be tangible and need to reflect wider aspirations to make Sefton an 'enabling authority'. Specifically these will be:

Increased investment in the Sefton economy

- Successful joint investment programmes that access external funding, based on
 - *Pooling of knowledge and skills – models and impact.*
 - *Use of other funds to bring in additional investment.*
- Employment opportunities for local people in the Sefton economy arising from improved collaborative working.

An engaged community working effectively in partnership

- Collaboration in action - combining the human, social, technical and financial resources of the local authority and communities to produce tangible, beneficial outcomes, for example;
 - Bring a redundant building or space back into use.
 - Delivery of joint events or actions making a difference at a local level e.g. activities to improve community spirit, 'fun days' or seasonal events, actions to restore community pride, such as litter picks, 'grotspot' clean ups, planting and renovation.
 - Develop a new facility based on joint investment.
 - Launch a service that is jointly managed and delivered (public/VCF partnership)
 - Embark on a new way of working – co-location, shared services.
- Effective and timely solutions are achieved when 'system blockages' are identified, for example;
 - Issues identified quickly and acknowledged.
 - Steps taken to address.
 - Resolution and positive outcomes achieved.
 - Learning identified and effectively disseminated.

Improved health and wellbeing for residents and communities

- Build on mobilised, local and thematic networks.
- Evidence of improved referral and signposting between community, statutory and other services.
- Evidence of improved, ongoing joint planning and resource allocation at local levels.
- Common endeavour - effective, combined planning and action to address specific issue or event, for example; winter, emergency, flood.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Partners responding to the impacts of Welfare Reform in Sefton

The Challenge

With the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act it was apparent that the legislation would present significant challenges to Sefton residents during a period of deep economic recession, associated unemployment and a national austerity programme impacting substantially on the Local Government sector.

These changes have had a disproportionate impact on Sefton's most deprived communities. Sefton has already been forced to make £110 million of cuts to local services because of Government reductions – and have to make another £55 million of further cuts over the next 2 years. The Council has tried to mitigate the impact of the cuts on our most vulnerable residents, but given the scale of reductions the impact has been felt across Sefton as a whole.

The Opportunity

The Council recognised that a strong partnership approach was essential. Through the formation of the Welfare Reform Reference Group, reporting to Cabinet, and a supporting Welfare Reform Partnership Group, comprising the Deputy Chief Executive of the local authority, representatives from One Vision Housing, Sefton CAB, Sefton CVS and DWP, a joined up strategy and action plan was devised. The focus was on:

- Avoiding gaps in support for vulnerable customers.
- Concentrating on those facing the greatest difficulty managing their income.
- Reflecting the needs of the local community.
- Providing a flexible response to unavoidable need.
- Enabling more joined up delivery; connecting services more effectively to make this easier for people to use.

A series of well-attended themed workshops, with representatives from public and VCF sectors, have focused on gathering evidence of presenting and anticipated need and identifying priorities for action in the short, medium and long term. It has been underpinned by a common purpose to act for the benefit of our most vulnerable residents and remove obstacles and barriers, wherever possible, to progress implementation.

The Outcomes

- 4 Trussell Trust food banks had been developed from start up to implementation from May 2013 – one each in Southport, South Sefton, Crosby and Maghull – supported by a lead VCF organisation and volunteers, which to date have helped 4,162 adults and 2,760 children to eat with demand increasing for the services week on week.
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has been supported to increase capacity within the service to cope with increased demand, extend opening hours and train more volunteers to deliver services through the Council's Community Support Fund and the Emergency Limited Assistance Fund. 9,579 clients with 31,485 problems were supported during 2014/15.
- CAB has successfully secured over £300,000 of Lottery funding. Key elements include training frontline staff in public, private and not for profit organisations to be able to effectively signpost people to relevant services, the creation of a new central advice website with online referrals facility and a single telephone number for advice. A strategic multi-agency partnership has been established to support referrals and consistency for residents.

- Catalyst grants from the local authority have assisted frontline VCF organisations to respond to demand working closely with local authority staff administering the Emergency Limited Assistance Fund. 402 referrals were made to the Sefton Helping Hand Services for emergency provision of equipment, bedding and cooking facilities.
- Production of two Films by Sefton Young Advisers entitled 'On the Frontline' charting the work of volunteers and presenting need in Sefton Foodbanks and Sefton CAB. The second, 'One Year On' considers service impacts provided by voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, such as the Salvation Army, Seaforth Community Shop and conducts interviews with service recipients.
- Development of a School Uniform Bank by Parenting 2000 to recycle uniforms to families needing support.
- One Vision Housing recycling pre-loved furniture to Sefton Helping Hand Services to provide furniture to residents in crisis.
- Sessions and workshops on loan sharks and illegal money lending delivered in the community and schools to raise awareness and promote the work of the Illegal Money Lending Team.
- Production of a Charity Shops and Clothes Directory by Sefton CVS to assist in signposting for additional furniture, equipment and clothes for residents in need.
- Production of a comprehensive Welfare Reform Report providing statistical analysis of need and response, joint working impact and outcomes (*available at www.seftoncv.org.uk/reform*).

The Learning

Positive

- Energy and commitment of partners to come together focused on a common endeavour to support vulnerable residents, brigading resources and people to develop a coordinated response.
- Partners improving knowledge and understanding of each other's services for referral and signposting with better outcomes for residents.
- Through joint working, recognising the social and added value of the VCF sector, volunteers and the readiness of local residents to respond to changing need.
- Through building communications and relationships between partners, seeing opportunities for joint responses to tackle other priorities.

Negative

- The scale and complexity of support required and level of demand on partner agencies to respond.
- Continuing implications of the Welfare Reform Act and roll out on both service users and services at a time of continued severe financial restraint affecting all partners.



Case Study 2: Procurement of a 'park rejuvenation' pilot project

The Opportunity

A 'friends of the park' group persuaded the local authority to invest £20,000 in a pilot project to restore a specific area in one of their parks. The restoration met the strategic and operational needs of the authority as well as being driven by the vision of the Friends group and both parties agreed that the pilot could lay the foundations for a much bigger funding bid. The friends group have identified a local community organisation that will undertake most of the restoration and ensure the project is sustainable. They will provide volunteers and help to pursue further, relevant investment.

The Challenge

Some of the £20,000 was used for the local authority contractor to bring in heavy machinery to clear the site; the rest was due to be invested in the work of the community organisation. In the end, the contractor's costs were much higher than expected leaving insufficient funding for the community group proposals. The local authority officers have worked hard to identify additional resources to keep the community group involved, recognising the critical added value and social impact that they bring.

The Outcome

Despite facing an unexpected overspend on the project, the local authority officers have managed to retain the involvement of the community organisation bringing their skills, expertise and labour to the project. All parties have worked in partnership to secure additional financial resources in the longer term.

The Learning

Positives

- Excellent working relationship between the friends group and council officers.
- Local authority officers recognise the added value of community support - the £20,000 will go a lot further and also bringing the skills, time and potential further investment associated with the community group.

Negatives

- The community organisation has had to identify other ways of funding their involvement in the project in the short-term.
- The bidding process (for the Friends group to access support) was complex and lacked clear guidelines.
- Rules about how the investment funding can be spent were never clear to the officers.



Case study 3: Community Asset Transfer

The Opportunity

A much loved, though under-developed community building was at risk of closure by the local authority. A group of local residents (little experience of community activity) expressed an interest in taking on the building

The Challenge

The local authority had a strategic commitment to 'asset transfer' but no formal or consistent mechanisms for dealing with asset transfer. The building required modest investment to make it safe and usable, and substantial investment to restore it fully. The group of residents required support to ensure they were aware of what they were taking on and that their proposals were viable.

The Outcome

A senior local authority officer carried out a rapid but comprehensive benchmarking exercise, looking at asset transfer strategies and procedures elsewhere. Her proposals were adopted despite some internal resistance (with effective support from elected members). The officer linked the group to a VCF organisation that offered support for 'asset transfers'. In due course, the resident's group accessed specialist support, and developed a robust business case whilst developing its own capacity.

The asset transfer went through successfully, despite complications as two key departments introduced blockages based primarily on a misunderstanding of the intentions involved in asset transfer and a belief that 'boiler plate' solutions could be applied to legal proceedings in the process. A refurbishment grant (charitable funding) was secured seven months later and the cost of the works was lower than the authority estimated due to 'in-kind' support and locally sourced contractors.

The Learning

Positive

- A 'can-do' attitude can prevail – a process was established that was facilitative, not a barrier.
- With a small amount of support at the right time, communities can be dynamic, resilient and efficient.
- The absence of a long and 'proven' track record was not viewed as an insurmountable risk by the authority – they managed this by putting in place light touch support before, during and after the process that combined their own expertise with that of a voluntary sector support agency.

Negative

- The whole process took 24 months.
- Processes that involve multiple departments are often problematic and benefit from a local authority 'champion'.
- The group of residents publicly expressed their frustration at the timeframes involved – unhelpful in light of the obvious efforts of officers to 'make this happen'.



Case Study 4: Championing Sefton's residents and their communities

The Opportunity

Sefton Care Leavers Centre – working together to create a dedicated service for one of Sefton's most vulnerable service user groups. This project originated from discussions at the Corporate Parenting Board where partners in Sefton Council, along with VCF organisations Venus, Parenting 2000, Sefton CVS and a user group of young care leavers (MAD) identified the need for a dedicated resource to support vulnerable care leavers.

The Challenge

Through partnership work, Venus supported by Sefton CVS submitted a proposal to the Big Lottery Youth in Focus Programme to develop a dedicated centre. Although unsuccessful in a highly competitive process, the Big Lottery fed back that they were impressed by the partnership - particularly the commitment from the council - and suggested a further proposal be submitted to the Reaching Communities Programme.

The Outcome

This time the proposal was successful. Working with the Council's Corporate Parenting Teams and Estates, Sefton Council agreed that the Esplanade, a single storey building in Waterloo could be released to Venus on a peppercorn rent. Project planning was taken through a multi-agency steering group of partners chaired by an independent person from another VCF organisation. Planning focused on addressing service gaps; working with young care leavers who would be central to the design and purpose of the new centre based on their experience and needs and those identified by the Corporate Parenting Teams. Sefton CVS provided the technical assistance in working with Venus in preparing the bid. Sefton Council supported the funding package by committing Corporate Parenting staff time to delivery from the centre and by releasing a redundant building for a new purpose. The Council's Community Support Fund prioritises 'one off' catalytic investment, to stimulate new sustainable services and supported the 'kitting out' and the necessary renovations of the centre.

The Learning

Positive

- The bid to Reaching Communities was successful in generating £277,000 from the Big Lottery to fund Venus to lead and manage the project on a user-led model with assistance from the stated partners.
- A building, which faced an uncertain future has been transformed, resourced and designed to create a dedicated space and much needed service with service users at the heart.
- Energetic commitment from all partners to listen to service users and place them at the heart of designing a new innovative service addressing a clear gap to provide support to young people in care and care leavers in their transition from care to independence.
- Combining expertise from partners and users putting technical, financial, project and service expertise to work on a common purpose to address and meet a need expressed by the community.
- Two former care leavers have been employed on the project.

Negative

- The restricted length of the lease (5 years) could have made capital costs to renovate the centre difficult to raise had we not been able to access the Community Support Fund.
- The length of time to deal with the council processes i.e. fitting IT and communications equipment has delayed co-location and partnered delivery.



Case Study 5: 'Communitrees' – when the system lets residents down

The Opportunity

Following the withdrawal of funding for the annual Christmas Trees in the Crosby area, a proposal was made to plant 3 conifers that would act as 'living Christmas trees'. These trees would then be decorated and lit at Christmas, but also be used for other annual events and operate as 'community notice boards'. Seemingly a cheap and sustainable solution to a problem which represented an improvement on previous arrangements. Much of the work required to make this happen was being offered for free by local businesses.

The Challenge

The concept and proposal seemed straightforward and positive and received political backing. However, the challenges that emerged were many;

- Complications associated with working across several public departments and involving a number of officers.
- Issues with defining ownership of 2 of the sites.
- Role-based boundaries between officers.
- The need to identify all costs and charges associated with planting, set-up and maintenance.
- The need to have all work done by council-licensed contractors, even where this would result in costs (when others were offering free services).

The Outcome

Sadly for the residents of Sefton, the outcomes were largely negative:

- Long delays resulting in frustration.
- Partners walked away from the process and withdrew offers of support.
- A potentially constructive community project was thwarted.

The Learning

Positive

- One 'Communitree' was planted in Seaforth, but in the park rather than the prominent pavement location of the usual Christmas tree.

Negative

- The whole process wasted significant amounts of time for all involved.
- Processes that involve multiple departments are often problematic – the absence of a local authority 'champion' is critical.
- Finding smart ways to respond quickly to opportunities is impossible when systems and frameworks become 'ends' rather than 'means'.



Case Study 6: Equalities in action

The Opportunity

An urgent multi-agency approach was required to ensure that a single parent family in Sefton were protected from harm and avoided homelessness. The mother is a European national who has two children of primary school age and is employed during school hours.

The local school became aware of problems the family were facing in paying their rent after a member of staff noted that the mother appeared worried and agitated. A range of public and voluntary sector services came together quickly to enable the family to stabilise a potentially disastrous situation.

The Challenge

The parent had been struggling to meet her contractual rent due to her taking time off work with depression, which had resulted in her receiving an official warning from her employer. This was compounded by her property having a major disrepair - raw sewage was leaking into the toilet and wash hand basins.

The family were compelled to use the bathroom facilities of a friend because the private landlord refused to carry out any repairs. He informed her that responsibility to undertake the repairs rested with the water company and that he would evict her if she continued to 'pester' him.

United Utilities were contacted by a family friend but could not attend till January due to a back log. It was now December 17 and the friend who was allowing her to use her bathroom facilities was returning home for Christmas and would not be returning to England until early January.

The Outcome

The school initiated a CAF (a multi-agency assessment process to deal with families facing severe problems – led by the local authority) and it was agreed that the family should be supported to find temporary accommodation for the Christmas period. The family were referred to the BME Community Development Worker (CDW) project at Sefton CVS, who, in turn, referred the family to a local foodbank and arranged urgent housing advice and support. This resulted in an application being made to the Property Pool rehousing service facilitated by the local authority. Following representation the family were provided with temporary accommodation (along with a parking pass) and further representation by the CDW resulted in United Utilities attending on the 22nd December to repair the main drain and providing evidence of the internal problem that the landlord was obliged to repair. The family were able to move back into the property and subsequently re-housed in the local area through the Property Pool. The employer was contacted regarding the reasons for the absence, resulting in the warning being rescinded. The woman was able to return to work and a complaint was submitted by Solicitors to the landlord regarding his failure to carry out his statutory duties. It has since been reported that the property was sold and the landlord left the area.

During the process it was recognised that one of the children has a learning disability and the woman was successfully supported by the CDW to make an application for additional financial help. This, in turn, has enabled the mother to place the children in a Breakfast Club at the school, enabling her to take on extra work hours and improve the household income.

The Learning

Positive

- A multi-agency approach was both rapid and effective in dealing with the immediate risks faced by a vulnerable family – housing, environmental health, food, advice and advocacy.
- A series of other, contributory problems were also addressed through this process (the relationship with the employer, the quality of the service provided by the private water company, the clarification of the obligations of a private landlord).
- The family was finally re-housed in a safer and more suitable environment.

Negative

- The changing nature of the local economy seems likely to lead to further situations like this; support agencies facing reduced capacity need to continue to innovate and to provide 'more for less'.

