Community First Plan for St Michael’s Ward

Summary

St Michael’s Community First Plan will detail its method of involving the community it serves. It will identify the aspirations of the local community for example what sort of place they would like to live. It will identify the needs of the local community and it will recognise priorities of the Community First grant in the area, until March 2015. Resources within the local area will be utilized to help communities come together through existing community organisations and groups to identify their strengths and local priorities, plan for their future and become more resilient.

St. Michael’s Ward encompasses the area covering the city centre of Coventry and the priority neighbourhoods of Charterhouse and Hillfields. The ward has higher than average representation of ethnic minority groups and according to the census 2011 69% have no British identity.

The census 2011 also state that 75% of the population are from three ethnic groups: White British 39.6%; Asian sub-Continent 27.1% and Black African/Caribbean/ Black British is 12.9%. Hillfields is one of the areas that Coventry City Council house refugee and asylum seekers and over the years the influx of overseas people has been rising, thus Hillfields has a large immigrant population. Also the Eastern European community has grown substantially over the last 12 months growing to 3,500 and continuing to rise. The sex trade continues to be prevalent in the ward.

The number of households with only one English speaker is twice the city average. The large student population has skewed the education attainment figure, as they average attainment is level 2 or below. This ward is the second most deprived area in Coventry and in the top 100 of most deprived cities in the UK. It has higher levels of crime rates compared to the rest of the city and higher unemployment. It is not surprising therefore that the Household survey revealed that only 68% of people feel safe around the neighbourhood at night.

Half of the property is private rented which is also higher than city average. This may account for the transient population with almost half of the residents compared to the city average (60% compared to 31%) stated that they are likely to move house in the next four or five years (Household survey 2012).

Coventry Foodbank currently feeds around two thousand people a year from St Michael’s Ward. Yet the residents of the ward regard themselves as in ‘good’ health, however the ward is below the city average on eating ‘5 a day fruit & veg portions’. Two in five (43%) St Michael’s residents do not drink alcohol. In the Household survey 2012, 79% of residents stated that they feel their household income is sufficient yet the Foodbank research 2012 revealed that just under 75% of adults said they regularly missed 2 or more meals a week, with less than half stating that they regularly eat a balanced diet. The vast majority, 84% of people accessing food support in the ward were born in the UK, with over 50% of those
born in Coventry. 45% of clients revealed that they had had to resort to stealing to feed their family. Over half of the clients questioned stated they have used short term lender (pay day loans and pawn brokers), they also borrow from family and friends.

The Improving Sustainability Report, based in Hillfields, states that less than 40% are economically active with 60% economically inactive, compared to city average 70% economically active overall and 50% economically active from BME groups.

Within the next year Whitefriars Housing is due to build a 63-bedroom homeless hostel in Hillfields open for use 2014. Planning permission Cygnet Health Care is due to build a 54-bed independent hospital for women with mental health needs also in Hillfields open 2015.

*Source - Census 2011, The Household survey 2012, Coventry Foodbank 2012, St Peter’s Centre Improving Sustainability 2013 based on residents in Hillfields.*

**Consultation:**

In St Michaels Ward 2 consultations have taken place and working with partners on the panel it was agreed that it would not be a useful exercise to again consult when the residents have already been contacted therefore the St Michaels Community First Panel have used the information from Coventry Foodbank consultation, St Peters Centre consultation and the Household survey. Considerations have also been taken from the Household Survey.

**St Peters Centre:**

324 questionnaires were completed between October and December 2012 at a range of locations; family fun event in the park, school gates, streets and event on Village Square, and more generally with other members of community organisations, with friends, family and neighbours. The survey was asking what time of support, activities, and improvements they would like to see in St Michaels Ward and the following is a selection of the response.

- **Sport** - 80 people indicated an interest in exercise and sports facilities
  
  40 said exercise classes, keep fit or aerobics, these were mainly Bangladeshi women with children connected to BHJCA Bosnian community, Somalis Cultural Resource Centre or Eritrean women’s group, of these 10 requested women only classes. 8 people requested the use of a gym, these were men and women mainly aged 18-35 and 6 requests for football. 7 people requested yoga classes, mainly wanted at weekends, other requests were for ‘any sports’, swimming martial arts, rock climbing wall, zip wire, badminton.

- **Over 5’s activities**
  
  32 requests for activities for over 5’s; after school clubs, play etc. 2 for after school activities, 8 for weekends, 12 for after school and weekend.

  10 requests were for stay and play/playgroups etc.

- English language classes
  
  27 requests across all age groups but mainly 26 - 35, 11 daytime, 5 requested after 4 and 8 said weekends. 12 are on benefits, 10 work full time, 5 work part time. 18 of the requests are from people of Black African origin and many attend the Eritrean Community meetings.

- ESOL - An additional 12 people requested ESOL classes by name.

- Computer Courses
  
  26 requests for adult computing/IT courses.

- Cookery courses
  
  21 requests, mainly from women, predominately Indian or Black African origins.

- Zumba
  
  21 people requested Zumba Classes - mainly aged 36 - 45, many were Indian.

- Training course - job club
  
  9 requests for job club/employment training. A crèche was also requested for this.

  8 people requested hair and beauty courses.

Coventry Foodbank:

Coventry Foodbank currently feeds around 2000 people per year from St Michael’s Ward. 47% of these recipients are children. This ward creates the greatest demand on the Foodbank (followed by Foleshill and Binley/Willenhall). Between September and April 2013 the Foodbank commissioned a research student from Warwick University to study the need in more detail. Interview were conducted on a 1:1 basis with clients selected at random from many of the foodbank’s distribution points around the city. 84 families and individual were interviewed.

The findings are: findings can be summarised as:

- The overwhelming majority of clients are unemployed. 78% have been affected by rising food and fuel prices and 77% are struggling with debts. There is a direct correlation between debt and benefit delay for just under 50% of foodbank recipients.

- Just under 75% said they regularly missed more than 2 meals a week. The same is not true for children - parents will give up food for themselves in order to feed their family. Many of these clients said they survived on one meal a day, others said they had missed meals for many days at a time.

- Over 50% of our clients have used short term lenders (payday loans and pawn brokers. However 55% of these clients used family and friends as a source of borrowing.

- There was little evidence of any education at school on how to manage personal finances.
- 45% of clients revealed that they had had to resort to stealing to feed their family.
- The survey also reveals that less than half of our clients are eating a balanced diet (55% said they would welcome some training on this).
- 84% of people accessing food support were born in the UK. Nearly 60% of these were born in Coventry!

- Clients were asked what further support was required:
  - Toiletries / nappies and baby products
  - Debt counselling
  - Sign posting/ advice services (esp. welfare).
  - Clothes
  - Emergency gas/electric top ups
  - Job clubs/job search facilities

It is essential the voluntary and the public sector in the Ward position themselves correctly ahead of the Welfare Reform Act changes in April 2013 and the introduction of the Universal Credit (from October 2013). It would be very easy for community support organisations and grant makers to be railroaded by vociferous minority interests.

Projects supported by the Community Plan should be able to demonstrate that they act for community cohesion and fit within a joined up spectrum of support services for St Michael’s Ward. Furthermore community organisation must be able to demonstrate effective governance structures and financial integrity in order to mitigate the risk of investing in unsustainable short-term projects.

The big picture is:

1. The community needs to be supported through the imminent welfare and benefit changes. The overriding message here is that St Michaels Ward (and specifically Hillfields) must have local accessible advice services. This will require building effective links with the City Council to access Community Support Grants; with the Department of Work and Pensions to support people through benefit applications and appeals; and links to Citizens Advice Bureau and the Law Centre to back up the provision of local advice.

2. The community needs to be educated about health, and financial well being and this means bringing relevant education into schools and adult support groups throughout the ward. There is a clear need not only for debt advice but instruction on how to manage personal finances. A majority of clients also expressed a desire for better education on cooking and eating well.
3. the community requires an effective support network providing an “essential to live” failsafe of food, clothes, gas and electricity top up, white goods and furniture to be provided when local or national government is unable to do so.

4. the community needs support to empower people to improve their lives. Specifically mentioned in the survey is the need for local job clubs, but groups supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups within the community (e.g. street girls) should be prioritised.

The development of a cohesive community plan provides a proactive rather than reactive provision of service which can adapt to changes such as the establishment of a new Whitefriars Hostel close to Hillfields village.

Consultation throughout the area validate the priorities in the Neighbourhood Plan.

As a result of activities the local community decided upon the following priorities as the focus for Community First:

1. Improve the environment of St Michael’s Ward
2. Increase the range of activities for local people
3. Bring together communities within the ward
4. Improve the wellbeing and health of St Michaels Ward

From our allocation of £50,865 the following grant requests have been funded in the first 2 years of Community First:

The following projects have taken place:

1. Hillfields Sporting Futures
2. Getting to Know you
3. New Goals
4. Coventry Foodbank - Warehouse Racking Project
5. Hillfields Summer Youth Programme
6. Seeds of Co-operation
7. Creating Social Equity and Sporting Excellence
8. Across the Nations Project
9. Achievement celebration of the Somali Youth in Coventry Supplementary School
10. Women Beyond Colour Group
11. Health & Sports Awareness and Recognising Community Achievement Project

12. Women Building Bridges

13. Read More Project

The Future

Coventry Foodbank research states that 48% of recipients require support from the Foodbank because of benefit change/delay or crisis loan refused. The Improving Sustainability Report conducted by Community Matters on behalf of St Peter’s Centre sought to address community cohesion through seeking information on people’s social and educational requirements. Considering the Welfare Reform Act changes in April 2013 and the introduction of the Universal Credit (from October 2013), it is important that the panel factors this into our priorities for the project. Due to diverse nature of the ward it is worth noting that women only groups are frequently requested.

List of priorities:

- Facilities to access basic needs e.g. food, toiletries, clothes
- Training in a community/social environment:
  - Money management and debt counselling
  - Job clubs/job search facilities
  - ESOL and English language classes
  - Computer courses
  - Health including cookery courses, physical activity
  - Hair and beauty courses
- Social & development activities
  - Social activities for all aged groups (whilst being mindful of unaccompanied refugee young people who arrive in the Hillfields area from overseas).
  - Over 5’s activities e.g. after school clubs both evening and weekends
  - Under 5’s activities e.g. stay & play / playgroups
  - Community group development activities

In-kind resources:

- Panel members time from Starley Housing Co-operative, St Peter’s Centre, Hope Centre, Foleshillfields Vision, local resident, city council staff.
- Volunteer skills and local information from residents and community groups
- Community space – Primrose Hill Park & Hillfields Square

- Match funding from projects
- Meeting rooms at St Peter’s Centre