

# A Placed Based Approach

## Getting to know our Communities



### Our Learning so far:

Along the journey we sought to draw the learning and continually reflect on the approach that we took to help refine future work and contribute towards the national 'library' of understanding about working in this way with these communities. Our learning to date includes:

- **Defined Place:** Having a defined 'place' to work with as a hotspot, whether that is ward level or Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) does not necessarily mean anything in day-to-day life. The boundaries of the hotspot need to make sense to the community or communities within it.
- **Scale:** The size of the hotspot is important, both in terms of square km's and population number. Too big a place and limited capacity in terms of officer resource spreads the butter out too thinly and little true progress is made.
- **The Approach:** Delivering a true Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach is not easy, especially for a workforce used to tangible outputs for their efforts. The nature of a true ABCD approach means that a lot of time and effort could be spent in a hotspot without anything actually happening so progress can seem slow. Attending a resident meetings just to become familiar, have conversations, listen to people's concerns, build a rapport, can seem like time lost. It might take several meetings before you can bring up the topic of healthy lifestyles, activity, and even then just to find out the communities views on it.
- **Skills:** Taking the above into account the skills of the managers and officer tasked with working in these communities is critical. Without guidance it is easy to split into a standard community development role, doing things for the communities rather than enabling them to do things to help themselves.
- **Training:** Providing staff as well as partners with training support to provide them with the skills, mindset and confidence to work in an ABCD way is crucial.
- **Mission Creep:** It is easy to slip into the habit of just getting on and delivering projects for the communities in these areas. This is okay, but does not necessarily lead to change, improvements and embed sustainability in those communities in the long run.
- **Shift in Attitudes:** This approach requires a shift in attitudes and values by the organisations serving these communities. Working in this way is community-led, long-term, and open-ended and a mobilised and empowered community will not necessarily choose to act on the same issues that councils or health services see as the priorities.
- **Seed Funding:** Not essential but it's certainly helpful to have a small amount of funding to make things happen.
- **Physical Presence:** Having a regular physical presence in the community helps to break down the 'us' and 'them' barrier and the officer becomes more visible to those locally.
- **Diversity of Thinking:** However much we upskill our workforce in behaviour change, insight, ABCD approaches etc., there is still an empathy gap that exists. We need to improve our capability of handing over the reins to the local communities and empower them to do it themselves.
- **Sticking to Guns:** Evidence of progress is slower than normal and harder to prove. Trusting the principle is difficult but necessary.
- **Drawing in Others:** Some of our partners have shown increased interest in our place-based approach over the past two years, to a point where we feel we are now starting to influence and gain traction with key system leaders (e.g.: Public Health).
- **Whole System...?:** It's easier to tackle inactivity in the hotspots via the first three levels of the Whole System Approach (socio-ecological model) – individual; social environment; organisations & institutions. The upper two levels (physical environment & policy) are much harder and yet need to be tackled for true progress to be made.
- **Evaluation:** Measuring progress and the influence we have in these areas is difficult to measure. Sessions, courses and events can all be counted, but changes in attitudes, perceptions over a long period of time is harder to prove and record. Hardest of all is measuring the degree to which our influence has changed things at a policy level and if a policy has changed what effect has that had on people's physical activity levels. For example, how does the place look different after three years of working in it?