

Background

In 2003 the Sherborne Area Partnership (SAP) was created. It was set up to implement and action the community planning progress via an Area Action Plan and area forums. It was to be a community based organisation run by a committee whose members would represent a wide range of local charitable and voluntary organisations. The partnership was not exclusive to voluntary sector organisations, statutory organisations and local businesses were also involved in the partnership.

The partnership was officially dissolved in July 2017 due to a combination of factors, the Chair and key members of the Committee stood down, support from the Town Council and funding had substantially changed. However, many successes came out of the partnership a Sherborne community organisation directory, a tourism forum, Dementia Friendly Committee and Sherborne Matters to name but a few.

Discussions with stakeholders Dorset Community Action (DCA), Dorset Council's Partnership (DCP), Sherborne Town council and representatives from the partnership highlighted that despite the demise of the Partnership there was still a need in the area for a community forum based initiative. DCA with the support of the Community Development team of DCP developed a community consultation plan to determine how to take this forward.

Consultation

Hold a Community Event in collaboration with members of the local community, voluntary organisations, businesses and statutory providers working in Sherborne and outlying villages and those that work to support the voluntary sector.

The purpose of this event was to revisit Sherborne to see how the local community feels about life today. The first activity was to look at the priorities that had been focused on when the Local Area Partnership was set up as a baseline.

These priorities were:

- 1. Health, wellbeing and safety**
- 2. Transport and accessibility**
- 3. Housing**
- 4. Economy, training, volunteers and environment**
- 5. Community involvement**

6. Culture, heritage, tourism and leisure

Flip chart paper was placed on the walls and everyone was asked to write comments on post notes with their opinions about the list of priorities from 2003. Was this still relevant in 2018?

Their responses are below:

1. Health, wellbeing and safety

- More access to mental health facilities for young people
- Access to mental health support for all (including refugees)
- Mental Health – Dementia Awareness, Sherborne is a Dementia Friendly Community.
- Early local intervention services
- Social care joined up with primary care
- Increase medical infrastructure to meet increased demand from increasing population
- Retention of cottage/community hospitals to provide fluid transfers from general hospital, to ease up bed shortages and provide local medical care for respite and recuperation, more efficient transitions.
- Need to get people to take more responsibility for their own health.
- Health etc. very important, all other issues feed into this.
- Education – day and evening, adult education has almost disappeared.

2. Transport and Accessibility

- Transport is vital, especially for older people, work, school and college.
- Public transport is essential, it's a lifeline.
- Impact of cuts to public transport result in rural isolation.
- High cost of taxis stop people travelling.
- Lack of transport availability from surrounding villages to access facilities.
- Voluntary drivers needed for the voluntary bus service to access social activities across the area

3. Housing

- More social housing needed in this area.
- Require more social housing
- More affordable housing needed
- Affordable and social housing in a constant and ongoing need
- Housing support from CAB, first point, increases wellbeing and family unity.
- More social housing supporting housing association
- We need more social and affordable housing with greater attention to local infrastructure when developing
- Young people not enough affordable housing
- Very, very important, need more real affordable housing
- Very important, need more affordable and attention to existing empty accommodation
- Citizen's advice can help with issues such as landlords, tenants, homelessness, repairs, rent, mortgage costs, neighbourhood disputes, council tax etc.
- Sherborne Area Refugee Support would like to hear from private landlords with properties suitable for refugee families that are affordable.

4. Economy, training, volunteers and environment

- Young people volunteering
- Need more work on the environment
- Opportunities needed for older people to volunteer, cut isolation and loneliness
- Heavy reliance on volunteers to run services, possibly blocking employment
- High importance – environment, green awareness crucial
- Free and local advice on governance/setting up charities for the voluntary sector.
- Greater awareness of available funds and resources
- Support volunteering across Dorset, support both volunteers and organisations, and share good practice.
- Volunteering to support young adults and families
- There are opportunities to support Syrian Refugees through Sherborne Refugee Support

- Citizen's advice – our volunteers are the local community as are our clients. Manor house office, drop in service and appointments and foodbank referrals.
- RVS – yes, we do need more volunteers
- Volunteer litter picking team has a strong volunteering ethos.

5. Community Involvement

- Sherborne has well developed community spirit that needs protecting
- Citizens Advice – we have many volunteers from within the local community. Our client base is also the local community
- RVS feels regular contact with friends within the community is essential to combat loneliness
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Dementia awareness team, **all** traders to be aware. Wincanton has done it.
- Sherborne Town FC – we are part of it, use us!
- Sherborne Area Refugee Support supports the integration and resettlement of Syrian refugees in the Sherborne area and we consider them to be part of our community
- More involvement of young people in the wider community
- Education is the key!
- Very important for wellbeing
- Social media is a great tool in connecting organisations, promoting needs, promoting events, support etc.

6. Culture, heritage, tourism and leisure

- Sherborne is quite markedly short of tourist accommodation.
- The town's amazing historic reference and beauty is little publicised.
- High Importance – needs more support, heritage/tourism crucial to a town like Sherborne
- Sherborne Town FC encourage town involvement with the club
- Sherborne has a very strong cultural heritage and something centre of education.
- Tourism is vital to the town
- Older people do need leisure to socialise
- Very important, town is dependent on tourism, heritage is crucial to town's identity, need more tourist accommodation.

Two workshops were held after delegates had finished this task.

The first work shop focussed on what were the current priorities from each group's point of view. This was a table top exercise with people working in groups. This enabled them to discuss viewpoints as well as networking with one another.

The second workshop looked at whether a community focussed group would be able to make a difference to the priorities and if so, what would it do, who would be in it, and who would it feedback to.

Work Shop 1

1. Health, wellbeing and safety

The cost of social care is a concern to many. A lack of mental health support in the area with long waiting lists and lack of transport is causing isolation issues. Education/publicity/social media/local press were considered to be the best tools to help people manage their health except that in rural areas, broadband speeds and signal strengths are an issue, and not everyone knows how to use the internet

2. Transport and Accessibility

Public transport is very important, it is crucial to helping tackle rural isolation. Public transport isn't just needed during the day, it would be great in the evenings too! Public transport needs to be affordable; taxis are very expensive for someone on a low income. The buses that have been withdrawn from service are missed. Lunch clubs are finding it harder to transport their members to and from the event. Should people of a pensionable age start contributing to bus fares again? People can't access opportunities due to lack of public transport and cost of car parking. In South Somerset, most car parking is free. Due to dwindling public transport, people aren't going into Sherborne as often which in turn could affect businesses. A request was made to have a cycle route from Thornford to Sherborne.

3. Housing

The largest amount of comments focused on the lack of affordable housing in the Sherborne area. At the moment there seems to be a massive divide between housing provision and affordability. It is felt that new property

developments don't reflect current demand. There are more private developments for sale than public development i.e. housing associations' properties. Affordable housing doesn't exist in the new current development. It was felt there was a need to put pressure on planners to insist on affordable housing developments in the area and to take into account the environment or lack of infrastructure considerations in new development i.e. transport, doctor's surgery, post office, schools. Parents are often caught between looking after their children and grandchildren and elderly parents.

4. Economy, training, volunteers and environment

A priority that was missing; Adult Education and evening classes which are few and far between. There is social isolation for all age groups but more at aged 35 upwards. Sherborne is to be Dementia and Mental Health awareness friendly town; all traders are to have the basic one hour training. Youth Services offer support and education to young people although it doesn't seem clear what activities are available to different age groups. More younger community hubs are needed. Vulnerable individuals and older people's services aren't always very well signposted and lack of transport can prevent people from going. –Arts are well represented in Sherborne Citizens Advice offer benefits and welfare advice so people know what is available to them. Groups wanted to know where they could meet and about availability and cost of venues. What would be classed as a community asset?

5. Community Involvement

What is available to the different age groups in Sherborne? Inclusion of sports clubs/social hubs for all, Sherborne Town FC was keen to invite groups to use their premises to meet. Bridging inequality by being part of a community and social isolation can be a thing of the past by having a befriender or becoming one. Often groups are not aware of each other and information can be fragmented. Creating a profile about the voluntary sector in Sherborne and surrounding areas could bring better collaborative working and funding opportunities to the area.

Networking and building up working relationships is invaluable. Collaborative approaches using joined up/partnership working with different organisations/agencies e.g. DCA role. Many people have heard about

development trusts and wondered if this could work in Sherborne. Could the Town Council be involved and if so how?

6. Culture, heritage, tourism and leisure

Local businesses are closing down because of high rents which limit choices for older people and other residents. Advertise Sherborne, bring in footfall, keep motivation, have a tourist information centre, a tourism forum, Sherborne is unknown, underestimated, little gem, only known locally. These comments are particularly interesting as there is a tourism forum who have been out to other areas (for example companies who run cruise ships) to sell the idea of visiting Sherborne. Community members feel tourism is led politically, seen as a luxury. There is continuity of leadership, but it is not seen to be responding to changes/different expectations. Sherborne has a marvellous heritage and yet with less public transport, it can't be promoting Sherborne as a destination. There is a lack of accommodation for disabled/or additional needs for tourists and the local population. Positive publicity for what is available at a central hub – one stop shop to get the message out about what is available locally and what's on. It is important to raise awareness of issues in the wider world relevant to Sherborne e.g. refugees.

Work Shop 2

1. If there was to be a community focussed group, what would it be?

- Voluntary Partnership of organisations, residents, business, statutory organisations to bolster partnership.
- Community organisation centre – central place where people can go to get information or support, purely for their area, work alongside CAB
- Needs subdivided groups to take on the priorities, needs people/services to take actions forward, needs good facilitation, needs clear objectives, consultations, community engagement, needs funding/resources
- Need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, real voice of communication, action centred, representative, inclusive, consensus and test ideas before resources used, communication and feedback.
- Create Sherborne Development Trust

2. Who should be involved?

- Organisations, residents, businesses, other interested stakeholders, individuals who are linked to Sherborne and/or offer a service to the community of Sherborne and surrounding village communities.
- Key people in organisations – council, health, social housing, social care, transport services, charities, business interested in supporting their local community, commissioners, other services
- Community groups manage it in partnership with business, town council and local statutory services (health and education), volunteer centre (helping to recruit trustees, create volunteer opportunities and training)
- Needs a group of people/services who can take the actions forward e.g. VCS, council, schools, public, health, businesses, and equal representation from all sectors
- Professionals, Volunteers, statutory and CVS, less them, more community, heritage organisations, representatives from different areas, public consultations – feedback, users get ownership – stakeholder’s accountability.

3. How would your group be involved?

- Magna Housing would be happy to promote the group, its purpose, actions and achievements, attend and contribute to meetings, research within own policies how to support and facilitate the group, use of Magna facilities i.e. community rooms etc., possible funding donations, identify funding channels. Magna residents have awareness of local issues, community involvement and connections, local knowledge and perspective of concerns details of the area – positive and negative
- Regular updates/meetings to drive the group, charitable events, open days, key people in the group visiting and networking with the community
- Agreeing priorities, Joint funding bids, Advertising opportunities and venues, Community events, Community networking
- Can attend meetings, feed in with information and experience, take part in events.
- Have some power and reason for being – time is valuable – needs to be useful/worthwhile
- **Power**
- **Outcomes**
- **Purpose**

4. How should it feedback to the local community?

- Local media such as Sherborne Matters, Sherborne Times, Blackmore Vale magazines, parish magazines, free papers
- A website and links to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, E-bulletins or e-magazines,
- Local business and other organisations to help publicise,
- Community workshops and public meetings,
- Notice boards
- The group must make it is properly advertised and make it clear what its purpose is.
- Make sure it is discussing and acting on relevant priorities.
- The information relating to the group must easily accessible.
- Feedback, or any other communication must be fed back to the wider community in a timely manner
- As a group, targeting of resources to engage under represented to get as much inclusivity as possible.
- A website for Sherborne Connect with drop down menus for areas such as health and wellbeing, transport, older people, youth services etc. All information on services, voluntary or otherwise to be on the “Sherborne Connect” Site, information sent out on a regular basis and site kept updated, electronic email to signed up individuals, Sherborne news and views.

Summary

Sherborne has an active and well developed voluntary/community sector with a wide range of community organisations, public and private stakeholders. With the demise of the Local area Partnership a gap has been identified by Dorset Community Action and Dorset Council’s Partnership for a collaboration between all those groups/organisations/businesses/statutory delivering services across the key priority areas to work together and share information and best practice through networking and partnership working. Ensuring that those delivering support at the grassroots level and those at a more strategic level are better informed on who is doing what, where and how and that this

new forum is not just a talking shop but a co-ordinated, efficient and effective tool to advocate and mobilise across areas of need.

Community Focus Activities/Events

- West Country Embroiderers meet in Digby Hall (next to the library) every 2nd Monday
- Blackmore Vale Embroiderers meet in Bishops Caundle every 1st Saturday of the month
- Health and wellbeing, support from First Point help their needs improve wellbeing, e.g., benefits signposting to other medical professionals, social care and mental health
- Activities exist at two centres in town doctors, refer clients
- Citizens Advice employ a Mental health outreach worker, employed at the Sherborne office and have links with MacMillan worker, Health watch Worker, Benefits, Social care, dementia friends training, mental health, physical health.
- RVS (Royal Voluntary Service Lunch Club) our members would benefit from regular exercise, to meet people and to socialise.
- To provide access to the great outdoors, green care for men living with disabilities/illnesses, social isolation etc., the need to provide engaging services to men who would typically use other day services
- West Country Embroiderers meet in Digby Hall (next to the library) every 2nd Monday
- Blackmore Vale Embroiderers meet in Bishops Caundle every 1st Saturday of the month
- Sherborne Town Football Club – Recreation for All