

GAVO paper to Monmouthshire Local Service Board, 14 January 2016

Purpose

This paper has been prepared by GAVO for the Monmouthshire Local Service Board to provide an update on Third Sector Engagement and specifically to raise items for discussion with LSB members

1. Abergavenny Community Enterprise



Background/Service Outline

Abergavenny Community Enterprise Partnership (ACE) was established in January 2013. ACE is a needs-led, volunteer run, community resource centre offering a range of educational, training and recreational opportunities, in conjunction with partner organisations, in a deprived area of Monmouthshire.

ACE consists of a reception area, a small back room and three upstairs offices. Room hire is £5 per session, (free to start-up voluntary organisations.) Opening hours are currently Monday to Wednesday 9.30-5pm. The Centre is supported by a rota of volunteers, who work alongside the Receptionist, who is funded for 22.5 hours per week, until March 2016.

General services include access to a low cost food co-op, free IT/laptop use, food bank vouchers, recycling provisions, and mediation between tenants/housing associations. It holds community engagement events and collects monitoring data regarding community need. Volunteers offer practical support and a listening ear. It is well placed to signpost people to relevant services and information. Cycle marking, weekly advice sessions with the Community Support Officer plus Citizens Advice Bureau surgeries draw a diverse cross-section of the community.

Courses/classes have included Computers for the Terrified; Healthy Meals on a Budget; Next Steps in IT; meditation and wellbeing classes; work skills and CV writing workshops; budgeting and money wise courses plus a range of craft and art courses.

Geographical Position and Deprivation Indices

The ACE Partnership building is located in north Abergavenny and was part of a Communities First area 1997-2012, which covered parts of the Lansdown, Cantref and Croesonnen ward areas. Cantref 2 ward is ranked 409/1909 overall in the Country, putting it amongst the 20-30% most deprived wards in Wales, and the most deprived in Monmouthshire. It has the lowest income and the lowest rate of employment in the County. The Strategic Needs Assessment undertaken to inform the production of Monmouthshire's Single Integrated Plan singles out Cantref (Abergavenny) as a 'pocket of deprivation', whereby 26.2% of the population are in receipt of income related benefit.

Furthermore, the area has the highest percentage of people aged 25-64 with no formal qualifications. Acknowledging that poverty results in poorer educational and health outcomes for individuals, reduces life chances and prevents people from fulfilling their potential, it is clear that ACE operates in an area of critical strategic relevance.

Strategic Positioning

The Monmouthshire Single Integrated Plan has three key themes: Nobody is Left Behind; People are Confident, Capable & Involved and Our County Thrives. The first two aims have particular relevance in this area.

The majority of ACE users are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and/or people with physical disabilities; mental health problems; older people and those living in surrounding rural areas. Cohorts that are statistically more likely to suffer poverty, whether this is due to lack of access to services and/or related to low income or a lack of resources.

Information from an ACE Community Survey (2014) and a Community Engagement Day (held in August '15) evidences the need for increased access to basic level courses and training so people can increase their qualifications and their routes into work. Additional help is also required to ensure that people are maximising the income they have. People in the area are asking for job-related opportunities, CV writing & job search help, educational classes, benefits advice and parenting classes.

These needs correspond directly with the Welsh Government Tackling Poverty objectives and those set out in the Monmouthshire Anti-Poverty Statement of Intent 2015/17. As such, ACE is well positioned, geographically and strategically to deliver on the Performance Indicators in the Anti-Poverty Action Plan currently being drafted and can support Tackling Poverty Objectives to:

- Help break the link between socio-economic disadvantage, health inequalities, educational under-achievement and impaired life chances and remove barriers to employment;
- Mitigate the impact of poverty by targeting support to those disadvantaged by poverty and/or health inequalities;
- To help people to improve their skills, enhance the relevance of their qualifications and remove barriers to employment.

Management Arrangements and Support

ACE currently rents its premises at a cost of £325 per quarter from Monmouthshire County Council, who own the building. GAVO administers funds on behalf of the project. The ACE project is constituted and its Management Committee is supported by multi-agency partners, who offer development support and guidance. These include Melin, MHA, Charter Housing and GAVO. Over the past twelve months, the Committee has been actively supporting ACE to develop more robust systems for planning and monitoring work, developing a Business Plan and a short term action plan, to help the project

become more transparent, accountable and forward-facing. A number of internal policies and procedures have also been revised.

ACE intends to explore legal structures, with a view to becoming a CIO or similar in 2017. Presently, the Committee is working to secure greater community representation on the Committee, with a view to strengthening the voice of local people to inform future models of working.

GAVO has invested a large proportion of its available development resource to strengthen the ACE project over the last twelve months. GAVO has doubled its development provision for Monmouthshire (redirecting core monies, to reflect its commitment to the area) and appointed a lead development officer for ACE. GAVO has taken on line management responsibilities for the Receptionist Post, accepting the worker onto GAVO payroll under TUPE arrangements. The development officer has drafted various funding applications, in conjunction with the Committee and volunteers, which have been submitted to secure monies for next year. The development officer is currently based at ACE one day per week, to build relationships with volunteers, develop partnership networks and to help to secure the future of the Centre.

Due to ACE's financial situation, GAVO has invested both time and reputation, based upon the belief that it is ideally and uniquely placed to make a positive impact on the wellbeing of local residents. ACE strives to be recognised as a relevant and competent vehicle for delivering positive strategic outcomes.

GAVO and ACE are extremely keen to continue and expand upon the existing work in the local community. It is vital that we deliver tangible outcomes for the community past March 2016 and to this end, ACE desperately requires further investment and funding.

Financial Position

To date, ACE has been reliant upon local partner organisations and short-term grant monies from local and national funding bodies. Most significantly, Monmouthshire Housing Association, Monmouthshire County Council, Comic Relief and the BIG Lottery. Project funding has enabled a variety of initiatives such as the Gardening Project in conjunction with the Community Mental Health Team, cookery classes and the ongoing bicycle maintenance and media project. However, these projects are/have been time limited, due to the nature of the funding available.

Throughout 2015/16 ACE has been financed from underspend from previous years, plus a plethora of small fundraising initiatives undertaken by volunteers. ACE currently has sufficient monies to operate to the end of March 2016. Despite numerous grant funding applications, core monies have yet to be secured to take the project forward from April 2016.

Future Purposes

ACE wants to increase the range of support activities and services delivered from the Centre, to impact upon the everyday wellbeing of the residents of Abergavenny. ACE is a 'first step' in people engaging with support services, raising aspirations and ensuring people move forward positively from worklessness, mental health problems and issues exacerbated by low income and a lack of opportunities.

In particular, in line with local and National Strategies, and local evidence of need, ACE aims to get:

- More people accessing employment - to run more classes on CV writing, training in work-related skills and build upon relationships with local employers and Employment Services. To this end, we have approached PaCE, employment services plus housing associations/partners and are currently drafting a project bid to provide a job-search resource on a drop-in basis. PaCE are considering the use of ACE as a possible base, (alongside other facilities.) A GAVO training course on minute taking is scheduled for the end of January.
- More people living healthier lives – to nurture healthier lifestyles, working with the local Children's Centre, Adult Education (Mon CC) and Leisure services to promote 'healthy cooking on a budget' and gain access to more advanced training for participants. ACE also wants to repeat 'Managing your Budget' courses with greater numbers, introduce smoking cessation and more sport/active recreational classes.
- More people actively engaged in the place they live - to offer chances for individuals to strengthen their support networks. To offer quality volunteering opportunities, to increase confidence, improve work-related skills and encourage engagement with their local communities. To this end, GAVO has committed to providing a weekly drop-in session with Volunteer Centre staff, to support access and encourage local people to get involved in a variety of volunteering opportunities. This will link with the GAVO Volunteering Recognition and Certification Scheme.

ACE is working with Charter Housing staff regarding IT classes at the Centre. Monies from the People's Health Lottery has been secured for a young person's media project. In conjunction with Charter Housing, the project is due to commence in February 2016.

A project bid is underway to develop a regular opportunity for young people to meet at ACE. Mon CCs Youth Team will be approached for support and development advice. ACE is also in discussion with Arts Alive regarding a base at the Centre, which will expand upon the current arts/recreational classes available.

Risks and Challenges

At this point in time, it is likely that ACE will be forced to close its doors to the community in April 2016. ACE is the only resource of its kind in the area, offering a different platform

to that of Mardy Park and Park Street facilities. Whilst these Centres offer vital services, huge scope remains for ACE to provide a full timetable of complementary, yet altogether different services, serving different cohorts within the surrounding area.

Lack of opportunities have led to a lack of self-esteem for many residents. Those looking to take 'first steps' into gaining employment-related skills value ACE's familiar and unthreatening environment. Often people want signposting to services, emotional support and encouragement plus meaningful daytime opportunities; for many, aspirations are low.

Potential volunteers require nurturing and recognition, which is time intensive. Volunteers are time limited and many are shy of Committee work - these are issues of confidence, experience and training, rather than a lack of ability or skills. Whilst ACE volunteers are growing in skills and confidence, changes in personal circumstances have led to a fair turnover - stability and continuity is vital to growing the project.

Maintaining a varied and full timetable of activities and services has also proved a challenge. ACE would welcome help with this work. Partner organisations are welcome to use the Centre as a base for providing training/surgeries/groups etc. at negligible cost.

The closure of ACE would have a ripple effect that is difficult to quantify. Visitors to the Centre get involved in volunteering and engage with services, often as a direct result of using the general services ACE provides; popping in for recycling bags, using IT for job-search and/or asking ACE volunteers to help them with benefits queries, letters from Employment Services and the like. Signposting and information sharing is central to its function, with no similar service provided locally.

ACE is a visible, community-focussed resource, run by the community for the community; to lose volunteer driven activities from this deprived area, would exacerbate the challenges faced by an already disenfranchised community.

Moving Forward

ACE is a unique resource with an opportunity to promote healthier lifestyles, improve work/educational opportunities and nurture social cohesion across deprived wards in Abergavenny. It is well placed to contribute to the planning and delivery of services in the area, through the influence of Monmouthshire's Single Integrated Plan and related Strategies.

Investment from partners could help to realise the potential of ACE. With support it could become a visible, tangible testament to the abilities of local people and their efforts to change the future and fortunes of their communities, in a positive way. The challenges associated with low income and lack of expectation/positive activity can be used to galvanise people and communities. ACE is an ideal platform for encouraging the community to find a voice in the planning and delivery of local services. Harnessing and

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building upon their existing skills and using local social networks to realise the full potential of this grass roots project.

Activities in north Abergavenny need not be confined to the ACE Centre -there are a number of alternative venues which could also be utilised, by ACE volunteers, in order to reach the majority of the community. Partnerships with service providers are strong in many cases, but could be so much stronger with time and effort. ACE works with a myriad of local services e.g. Mon CC, housing associations, Mon Town Council, Melin, MHA, Charter Housing, GAVO, Citizens Advice Bureau, LA's Community Mental Health Team, Police but there remains huge potential for improving joint working and linking with many more organisations.

Gaps in local service provision, offer chances to work differently to tackle local problems; to be creative in response to challenges. Putting residents at the heart of decision-making, the design and delivery of local services, ensures needs-led resources that are better suited to meeting the needs of their communities. These chances exist and we urge local partners to help ACE grasp these opportunities.

For LSB Discussion

- How does the ACE initiative sit with local strategic plans? For example Monmouthshire's Single Integrated Plan; Monmouthshire Anti-Poverty Statement of Intent 2015/17; the Police and Crime Commissioners Plan / Aneurin Bevan Health Board Plans or other partners' Corporate plans?
- Given the current context of the Wellbeing of Future Generations and Social Services and Wellbeing Acts, how can we maximise ACE's contribution to implementation?
- How does ACE's aims/identified needs fit with the emerging evidence base from Abergavenny's Total Place Plan?
- What contribution can ACE make to local strategies and action plans? How can ACE be supported to achieve this?
- What is the LSBs vision for the future of ACE?
- Given the potential and the risks inherent to the ACE project, what positive contributions can LSB partners make to the initiative?
- What can LSB partners suggest in terms of sustainable solutions for ACE?

2. Monmouthshire Compact

The Welsh Government is currently drafting guidance likely to advocate a shift in language from local Compacts to local Third Sector Schemes. GAVO sits on the national working group preparing for this new guidance and consultation on these guidelines is planned through Welsh Government.

Handwritten notes:
 Raise
 generate some energy
 is Abergavenny
 big
 to serve community
 org.
 Exit strategy
 to generate reach

Other areas are reviewing their Compacts for a number of reasons, partly to bring them up to date and also in anticipating the request for monitoring of how WG's Third Sector Scheme is being delivered locally. The existing Monmouthshire Compact also requires refreshing and updating.

Additionally, it would be helpful if to reflect the wider legislative framework that sets the strategic context at the moment in addition to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Public Service Reform.

Other considerations include:

- The Welsh Government's new Principles for Working with Communities will need to be taken into account - <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2015/workingcommunities/?lang=en>
- A designated vehicle to implement and monitor the Compact / Third Sector Scheme (in other areas this is via a Voluntary/Third Sector Liaison Committee)
- Partner commitment and sign up to the Compact / Third Sector Scheme may need to be reviewed to reflect new members of Public Service Boards (such as NRW)
- It would be helpful to scope Third Sector Engagement in the existing Single Integrated Plan and in the transition to Wellbeing Plans – the mechanism for which will be via the soon to be established Third Sector Network

It is recommended that a Compact Review Working Group is set up to explore refreshing this policy framework for partnership working with the Third Sector.

3. Third Sector Network position

Following endorsement at the last LSB meeting, GAVO is establishing a Third Sector Network in Monmouthshire to support a co-ordinated approach to joint working. The following benefits are anticipated:

- the provision of one clearly structured Network to minimise confusion and fragmentation by bringing the Third Sector to one central point
- one consultation point for LSB member organisations to engage with the Third Sector
- maximising numbers of people that partner organisations are engaged with and reducing time wasted on organising meetings, venues and other associated costs

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- maximising engagement with hard to reach and vulnerable people, as well as a cross section of the voluntary sector
- strengthening links across voluntary and community groups
- building capacity to respond to commissioning demands
- providing an additional support structure to the strategic planning groups

The first meeting is planned for **8th February 2016.**