

Victoria ward, Hartlepool – briefing on partnership work to address community challenges

Overview Hartlepool's Victoria ward has around 4.5K dwellings – mostly terraced housing with small back yards; a population just below 10K, including around 1.5K over-65's; in 2011 it was the 322nd (of 7,500) most deprived ward nationally; unemployment during 2018 varied between 12-13% (around 1 in 8) – now it will be higher. The greater proportion of Hartlepool's ethnic minorities live in the ward, including long settled Bangladeshi & Pakistani communities and increasing numbers of asylum seekers & refugees.

Community strengths Most residents are hard-working, community-minded and bound together by the ties of mutuality and friendship. Children are full of hope, energy, optimism and playfulness. Many residents are longstanding community members who care about their neighbourhood and value a felt sense of place. Some have been involved previously in associations that sought to address blight, criminality and anti-social behaviour. Only two such associations remain – one being dedicated to community safety but with only a handful of members. Amongst the area's residents will undoubtedly be some people who are willing once again to become more involved in advancing community interests and representing collective views & aspirations.

Demands on social care Victoria ward consistently has the highest number of Hartlepool children who are "looked after" – a very sizeable 34% of the town's total. A formula using the multiple deprivation index and social care "intensity factors" determines that if 0 means 'never' and 10 means 'definitely', a child in the Victoria ward scores 7 on the scale of "likely to become looked after". Typically, c. 16% of all referrals into HBC social care come from the Victoria ward. However, the level of need collectively represented by these referrals requires more intense intervention over longer time periods.

The proposal

Funding is sought to enable engagement with residents of the Victoria ward – to ensure that people's concerns, experiences, aspirations & priorities are heard; and thereby to enable resident-led involvement, influence and control in responses to whatever emerges from the process of community engagement. Employment of a community development worker (CDW) is proposed to lead this work. This worker would be employed initially by Hartlepower and managed within its Development Team (Juli Simons & Julian Penton) – up until such time as a more appropriate employing body emerges, ideally resident-led. Accountability for the CDW's work would be to a semi-formal partnership of VCS organisations & statutory agencies formed for the purpose of ensuring that institutions, agencies & organisations that serve Victoria residents become more responsive to their aspirations; and that such resources being allocated become increasingly aligned with expressed community needs and interests.

The Partnership: Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) initiated collaborative work by inviting Hartlepower & Changing Futures North East to discussions about how the impact of its Victoria ward "Community Support Team"(CST) – a social work-focussed group of staff – could be enhanced by addressing the hitherto absence of resident involvement, this deficit arising by virtue of the extreme demands of the CST's casework-driven approach. The need for community engagement and perceived, formal independence from HBC being recognised, the ideas for this proposal were jointly developed. The Partnership is now being expanded.

Membership is/will consist of Changing Futures North East, Hartlepower, Council departments concerned with physical activities/sports, employment & adult skills as well as the originating Children's Services and Hartlepool Carers, Hartlepool Baby Bank & the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The most local school, Lynnfield Primary and police have been invited to join. As soon as possible resident representation will be sought. A written Partnership agreement is in preparation.

Initial work programme: The first 2-3 months of community engagement will consist of:

- (i) where possible, working with HBC's CST to talk to their social work "clients" through listening without an agenda and discussing what might make a difference to the challenges in clients' lives that have led to statutory service involvement – e.g. perhaps by encouraging involvement with local VCS services & activities or developing new activities & initiatives themselves.
- (ii) talking to parents & children at Lynnfield primary school.
- (iii) door knocking and street conversations.
- (iv) meeting the existing resident groups.

Through feedback to the Victoria Partnership about the outcomes of resident engagement (which will be ongoing) Partnership members will collaborate to align resources, respond to residents' views & priorities and extend collaborative working to relevant agencies and organisations.

Likely issues: Based on feedback from the CST, local knowledge of the ward, family connections with individual & former residents and prior work (for New Deal for Communities) by Partnership members, the following issues are likely to figure: **Food, fuel, financial & digital hardship** – ward demographics indicate that these issues will figure prominently. **Poor housing** – poor housing conditions, insecure tenancies and some unscrupulous landlords have figured in the ward over many years. **Green space & play areas** – the grid-style pattern of streets of small, terraced housing & parades of shops occupying most the ward have a conspicuous lack of trees, greenery and open, accessible green space – apart from the school field of Lynnfield Primary school. There is an absence of safe play space for children. **Social isolation** – families with whom the CST work have often moved from distant places (e.g. fleeing from domestic violence or unsustainable housing expenses) and have no family locally or any social networks. **Parenting skills/trauma** – the parenting/coping skills of families involved with the CST are usually compromised – through some combination of trauma, lack of family support, welfare benefit problems, housing issues.

Cause for hopes: Changing Futures North East are designing a proposal for family work, specifically (but not exclusively) for those being supported by the CST – which will involve training and supporting volunteers to support parents & family members. They would nurture individuals' strengths, identify their priorities and support connections with new social networks and resources from the VCS and statutory sector.

Other relevant, town-wide initiatives that can be aligned with and direct resources to the Victoria ward include: **Hartlepool Food Council** – for directing food-aid. **Hartlepool Financial Inclusion Partnership** – to address financial hardship. **Hartlepool Healthy Communities Network** – a nascent network of health & wellbeing providers from the VCS & statutory sector, including areas such as the arts, physical activity, health & care, the environment/green space & financial inclusion.

Project costs for 12 months

Salary & on costs – £20K p.a. salary + 3% pension (£0.6K) + 13.8% NI after first £8.7K of salary (£1.56K) = **£22.16K**; **Essentials** – Laptop, office costs, transport & expenses = **£1K**; **Management cost** – 5% of salary = **£1K**

Total cost for 12 months = £24.16K

Contributions to costs

The Ballinger Trust have indicated they may contribute £15K, subject to a satisfactory proposal. Hartlepool Borough Council will contribute up to £10K (currently awaiting formal approval).