



BARN斯LEY
Metropolitan Borough Council



Commissioning case study

Area-based commissioning in Barnsley

co-production # neighbourhood management # volunteering # social value # public realm

The headlines

- Barnsley Council has devolved commissioning to six area-based councils comprising local councillors. They have used a robust evidence base to identify local priorities and to commission services to meet local needs. The model builds on the assets already available in local communities and encourages local residents to become partners of the council in order to improve their communities.
- The greatest impact has been on community wellbeing, empowerment and resilience by involving and engaging people at a very local level in making a difference to the things that matter most to them. Evidence is beginning to emerge of reductions in or diversion of demand resulting in potentially significant cost avoidance. For example, in the first six months of a local information and advice project, six cases of homelessness were averted, suggesting avoided costs of at least £144,000 compared with overall project costs of £72,500 per year.
- Inevitably, there have been tensions with service departments given that area council funding was achieved by top slicing their budgets. Good communication and dialogue has been key in working through these tensions.

‘ It seems to have motivated more people to volunteer. For me it’s all about improving where I live and socialising. ’

78-year-old volunteer

What is the context?

Located in South Yorkshire, Barnsley is a former industrial town that, with the decline of coal-mining and other traditional industries, now faces a number of economic challenges. There is an under-sized economy too small for the working age population with consequent high levels of unemployment, particularly among young people. Many residents have low skills, are dependent on benefits, and rely heavily on council and other public services. There is an imbalance in the local economy, characterised by a significant proportion of public sector jobs, and a reliance on private sector jobs that are low-paid or seasonal, in industries such as retail or construction.

The council had been involved in local integrated services and neighbourhood management pilots, and wanted to use the learning from these to help it achieve its three priorities:

- to grow the economy;
- to change the relationship between the council and community; and
- to improve residents’ potential and achievement

In particular it wanted to unlock the capacity within communities by building on people’s willingness to help each other.

What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

In 2013 the council set up a new model of commissioning services through six area councils each of which was given a commissioning budget equating to £100,000 per ward. This case study focuses on the work of the South Area Council, which covers the wards of Darfield, Hoyland Milton, Rockingham and Wombwell, with a population of approximately 45,000 (19.5 per cent of the borough’s population). The council is made up of 12 elected members from the four wards and a clinical commissioning group representative, supported by a manager and small team of staff.

The first six months were spent identifying priorities for the area through a rigorous analysis of data and evidence, including consultation with local people. Following confirmation of the priorities in September 2013, a number of working groups supported by specialist advice from a range of partners were set up. Their aim was to develop projects to address the priorities which were:

- improving the local environment;
- providing local and accessible advice services;
- supporting business and the local economy; and
- supporting young people into work and employment

Councillors were involved in the development of service specifications for procurement through a series of in-depth workshops, where they worked alongside professionals to pull together outlines for services which would be highly responsive to identified local needs and priorities. The South Area Council has so far initiated three commissions with a further two under development.

The importance of social value has been highlighted as part of each procurement and all successful organisations have effectively demonstrated how they will create local jobs, use local supply chains, ensure local spend, use volunteers, and create new volunteering and work experience opportunities.

Environmental issues and the desire for a liveable environment, coupled with concerns about the impact of reductions in the council budget for environmental maintenance, were the top concerns identified through the priorities exercise. The small project working group put together a tender specification for a 'Tidy Team' to carry out small-scale environmental projects across the south area, with a strong emphasis on developing joint working with community groups, schools and local businesses. The project tender, worth £150,000 a year, was awarded to Forge Community Partnership/Anvil CIC, a community organisation well respected in the area and with strong local links. To form the Tidy Team, Anvil recruited six local people who had previously been long-term unemployed. Work is allocated through a Tidy Team steering group, which comprises local elected members, ward alliance members and representatives from neighbourhood policing, enforcement and social housing.

The focus is very much on encouraging local communities to take responsibility, with the Tidy Team assisting and facilitating. Early successes have included a week of volunteering in which young people, supported by youth workers, worked alongside Tidy Team members to clear up local environmental hotspots. A group of older residents in Darfield wanted to adopt a roundabout but were unable to do the initial heavy digging. Once the roundabout had been cleared by the Tidy Team, the community volunteers were able to plant and maintain it. In other areas residents are maintaining grass verges using equipment provided by the Tidy Team. In addition to having recruited a number of local volunteers to work alongside paid Tidy Team staff, the provider is also moving towards acting as a placement for restorative



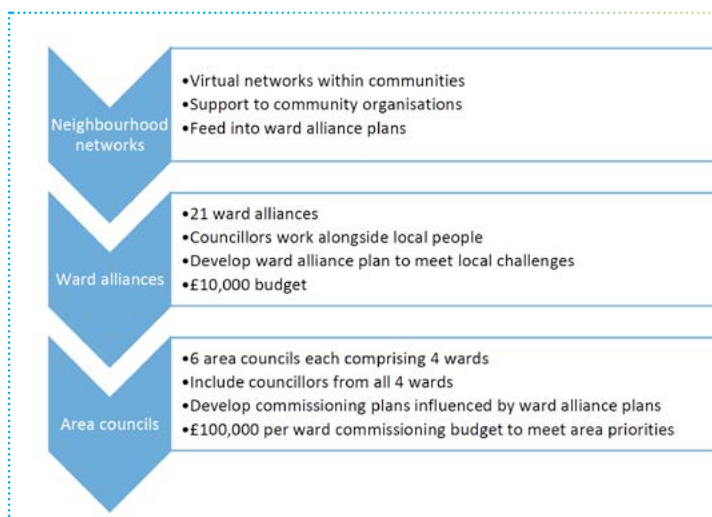
justice, working with prisoners released on licence, taking on apprentices and offering non-mandated work placements to unemployed adults who are ineligible for the Work Programme. The next step is to promote the Tidy Team more widely to the general public with a strong steer of 'would you like some help with...?' rather than 'what can we do for you?'

In response to statistics showing a 300 per cent increase in unmanageable debt, South Area Council awarded a further contract worth £145,000 over two years to the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Welfare Advice Service, to deliver advice sessions in locally-known and accessible venues.

The South Area team has also been working with Tesco which opened a new store in September 2014, creating 140 job opportunities. Recognising that lack of IT equipment could be a barrier to local people accessing Tesco's online recruitment process, the team worked with the manager of the store to organise two 'pop up' recruitment days in local venues. Store staff and Jobclub staff from Forge Community Partnership were on hand to assist. The events were attended by 100 local residents as a result of which 85 per cent of jobs have gone to people living within a two to three mile radius of the store.

Who are the key partners?

While there is no direct resident input to the area councils, there are 21 'ward alliances' in which councillors in their role as community leaders work alongside community representatives to mobilise and enable community responses to local challenges. Each ward alliance has a small budget of £10,000 over and above the area council budget. The third level of area governance in Barnsley comprises 'neighbourhood networks' – 'virtual networks' of community organisations, committed individuals, businesses, faith groups, residents associations and others. The ward alliances and neighbourhood networks provide the area councils with useful intelligence to inform their priorities through the production of a ward alliance plan, against which their £10,000 budgets are also spent.



What has been the impact?

The greatest impact has been on community wellbeing, empowerment and resilience by involving and engaging people at a very local level in making a difference to the things that matter most to them. Barnsley describes this in terms of “doing with, rather than being done to”, and acknowledges that this approach is beginning to enhance its own credibility with local residents. In particular, there has been a clear focus on building the capacity of the community sector and in encouraging collaboration between community organisations. Ultimately it is hoped that these increasingly strong cross-sector partnerships will lead to greater innovation and new delivery models.



In the longer term, the aspiration is to see more people actively engaged in their community or as volunteers. To complement National Volunteers' Week in June, the council and Voluntary Action Barnsley launched the Love Where You Live campaign to celebrate and promote volunteering across the borough to address community priorities. Projects varied from community clean-ups, improving the Trans Pennine trail, the development of community gardens and allotments, and events with young people. Barnsley calculates that the 945 volunteers who took part clocked up 2,249 volunteer hours with a social action value of £24,941.

Evidence is beginning to emerge of reductions in or diversion of demand resulting in potentially significant cost avoidance. The debt advice and guidance scheme referred to above, for example, has had some demonstrable success in averting homelessness. The application of a social return on investment model to develop proxy costs would suggest that each case of homelessness averted saves between £24,000 and £30,000 per year depending on individual circumstances. In the first six months of the project, six cases of homelessness were averted, suggesting avoided costs of between £144,000 and £180,000 compared with overall project costs of £72,500 per year.

Case study, Eddie

Eddie is working full time, in receipt of Working Tax Credit and lives in social housing. He sought advice when he received a notice of eviction for rent arrears of £1,500. On further exploration, it transpired that Eddie had first fallen into difficulties when unemployed and had resumed gambling in an attempt to solve his debt problems. He did not receive any help for his addiction because he did not disclose it to anyone. The adviser helped Eddie to put together an offer to clear his debt and supported him to apply to court for his eviction to be suspended. His application was successful and he is now paying off his debt on a weekly basis. He was also referred to an organisation to help him with his gambling addiction.

What have been the key elements of success?

One of the critical factors enabling Barnsley's success has been robust business analysis, making use of data from a variety of partners, including health and JobCentre Plus, as well as from the council. This has allowed objective and evidence-based priorities to emerge for each area.

The engagement of councillors in the area councils and ward alliances has been key, although Barnsley acknowledges that some have found it easier to adjust to their new role than others. Councillors were actively engaged in the priority-setting exercises using the evidence base and business analysis.

Importantly, underpinning the whole approach has been a different perspective on what the business of a local council is. For Barnsley this has meant a journey from the traditional model of council as provider of 'one-size-fits-all' services, to a model that sees the council as an enabler that brings people together, removes barriers and puts in well-targeted money and effort to facilitate localised solutions.

While the evidence base on which the area councils have been able to develop their priorities for commissioning is sound, it has proved difficult on occasion to gather data that is sufficiently nuanced for very localised commissioning.

In terms of encouraging active engagement by local people in their communities, Barnsley has found it is important to look at what gets in the way of volunteering or participation. For example, people may be worried that they will be personally liable if something goes wrong, putting them at risk of being sued, for instance, if someone slips on snow they have cleared in the street or if a neighbour is ill after eating a casserole they have cooked. Dispelling these kinds of myths has been an important feature of enabling engagement.

Who can I contact?

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What has been learnt?

Inevitably, there have been tensions with service departments given that area council funding was achieved by top slicing their budgets. Similarly, there have been times when service departments may have felt that area councils were encroaching on their territory or stepping on their toes. Such sensitivities have been made more acute by the backdrop of continuing austerity, with rounds of redundancies and restructuring. Barnsley is honest in saying that such tensions are still being worked through and that good communication and dialogue is key to doing so successfully.

Other useful information

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/community-and-living/where-i-live/my-local-area/south-barnsley-area>

www.lwylbarnsley.co.uk