Gloucester City Council
ABCD Policy

(Asset Based Community Development)

Gloucester City Council

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Contents

Foreword

"When I was elected to Council in 2010 it was actually the first time I had voted and I voted for myself. As a resident I had become tired of being told what we needed in our community when actually what we needed was something else. Asset based community development is fundamental to us understanding where we have a role to play in supporting our communities and where we need to allow them to lead the way and critically, why we need to listen and not assume that we know what is needed. I am proud that during the past 10 years Gloucester City council have pioneered this approach along with a small number of other authorities in the country. Our relationship with our residents is vitally important to us and this policy allows us to continue to develop our approach and support officers and councillors in working with their communities in a strengths-based way".

Cllr Jennie Watkins

Cabinet member for Communities and Neighbourhoods

Introduction

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is about growing sustainable communities, building connections between people that live in the area and empowering people to take action on things that are important to them – which will often be different to what statutory/public sector agencies perceive to be important. ABCD is not about setting up new services or groups, although people may come together informally as a result of building connections, but it can contribute to or complement the priorities of statutory partners. This is because building stronger communities supports people's feeling of safety, well-being and health more broadly. The focus of community building is not on providing specific outputs but about providing stronger community connections which, in turn, will provide increases in wellbeing and health. Whilst never a prime objective, it is likely to reduce demand on the State.

Gloucester City Council has been piloting this approach individually and with partners since 2012 and this policy has been developed as a result of several years of learning, practice and reflection.

This policy is intended to support officers and councillors to consider how more residents can be part of the solutions in their communities through utilising strengths and assets when working in their service areas, wards and communities. It sets out the key principles and gives examples of creative practices which have been born from this approach. This is an internal document, however, it may be of use to other local authorities who are working towards becoming more strength or asset based.

There have been many examples of the positive impact that taking an ABCD approach to our work can have on our communities. From devolving responsibility for maintaining green spaces to community groups, adding employment opportunities, to taking a relational approach to dealing with an overgrown garden and a dog barking complaint. More details of these successes can be found in appendix 1.

The council's commitment to ABCD is written into the council plan (2017-2021) with an aspiration to become a Local Authority Centre of Excellence for strengths-based approaches. Our commitment to ABCD is based on the belief that people live more fulfilling lives when they have the power to shape their own outcomes and change things that matter to them. For communities to thrive, they need to be given the tools and resources to find solutions that work for them and for the places where they live.

The Principles

The Asset-Based Community Development approach has a set of principles, which act like a compass not a map. The five core principles of ABCD are:

1. Citizen-led (or resident led)

2. Relationship oriented

3. Asset-Based

4. Placed-Based

5. Inclusion focused

Mainstreaming the approach across all we do

In order to align our practice with the principles of ABCD we want to equip staff and councillors with knowledge and skills to enable them to identify where the Councils support is required and critically, where it may be more sustainable to invite a community solution.
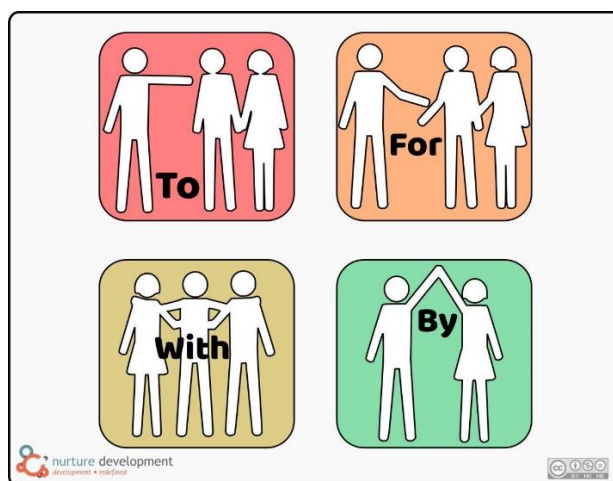
1. **Citizen-led (or resident led):** there are certain things that only residents, in association with one another and the assets around them, can do. ABCD is focused on the change from service led to empowering residents to take action on the things they care about.

To help us with this principle we will:

- Consider what it is that residents in communities are best placed to do together?
- Consider what it is that residents can best do, with some outside help?
- Consider what it is that communities need outside agencies to do for them?

The sequence in which the above questions are asked is critical; our role is one of supporting, enabling and empowering, where possible. The residents take the lead by using what they have, to secure what they need. In this way, residents also assume a powerful lead in directing outside helpers in how best they can be helpful.

We can use the to/for/with/by grid below to help us decide where our work sits:

Is this work something that we can do 'with' residents or allow it to be done 'by' residents? If so, we can take an asset or strengths-based approach to it. If it is something we need to do 'to' residents or communities or 'for' them, it is service delivery or enforcement which needs to be done by the Council or its partners.

2. Relationship oriented: Much of traditional service provision is focused on a transactional process which ensures consistency of delivery. This often overlooks the process of relationship building which is key to understanding what really matters to the resident and the individuals concerned. Through placing the relationship at the heart of the conversation, we learn about people's circumstances and their interests, which can enable more community connections.

To help us with this principle, we will:

- Consider what other 'people assets' are we aware of that could be mobilised here?
- Consider who else needs to be involved or can add value to this work/ decision/ practice?
- Consider what introductions could be made?

3. Asset-based: the starting point for ABCD is by considering 'what's strong?', not 'what's wrong?' Our communities are abundant with creative and talented individuals, who are often unconnected. Through taking an asset-based approach our role is to uncover these community assets and connect them to each other. The approach doesn't ignore the problems facing a community, but rather tries to help people focus on the possibilities that can help find solutions to the problems.   This principle also questions the practice of defining certain neighbourhoods by the sum of their deficits.

To help us with this principle we will employ techniques such as 'appreciative enquiry' which create conversations whereby we ask residents to ask themselves:

- What do I care about in the place that I live?
- What do I love about my neighbourhood?
- What would I like to help make even better?
- How can the great things about where I live help to overcome the challenges we have?

4. Place-based: for many people Neighbourhoods are centre stage to a good life. By focusing attention at neighbourhood level, local residents can connect all the strengths and assets available to them at a hyper-local level to come up with inventive solutions which are not within the reach of top-down institutions. By keeping the focus small local residents are more likely to feel empowered to be involved as they are able to see and understand the impact they can make.

To help us with this principle we will

- seek place-based solutions in how we design and commission services
- accept that often the conditions in neighbourhoods are different and require requisite variety.

5. Inclusion focused: As well as supporting local residents to discover and connect local assets, we need to actively engaging with those who may not yet be engaged on a local level. We need to be open to anyone new who cares about their community. There is nobody who's gifts are not needed, when it comes to creating an environment within which everyone's gift is given and received.

To help us with this principle we will ask ourselves:

- How can we be creative and seek new ways to engage with those we may not have engaged with before?
- Have we assessed the impact on what we are doing on communities with protected characteristics through an equality impact assessment?
- How could the Gloucester Community Building Collective or other local groups support us in engaging with audiences>?

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Appendix 1

Examples of using the asset-based approach in our work

Dog barking

'We have a case of a neighbour's dog barking; it has been on and off for approx. 1 year. There is a small dog which barks frequently and usually when no one is home next door. The complainant even went back to work to be out of the house more. Then Covid changed that.

We did the usual investigation following our noise complaint procedure of sending log sheets to the complainant and an informal letter to the premises of complaint informing them we have received a complaint and giving them a few suggestions of how they get the dog to stop barking. This worked for a while then the complainant came back and said it had started again. I explained that although we can serve an abatement notice the best way to solve dog barking complaints is informally. As the premises of complaint was aware of the issue and wanted to reduce the barking, the neighbour suggested that she would speak to them as she suggested taking in the dog while they were out of the house, they are currently discussing how this could work. Through this, neighbours are now communicating and the issue for the neighbour will be resolved.'

Help Hub- strength to get through the pandemic!

Mrs A was referred to the Help Hub by a concerned neighbour as she was an elderly lady and would be isolating during the lockdown. We contacted Mrs A and she was a fit, active 86-year-old that was very independent, still driving however had no family or friends locally and didn't really know her neighbours. We were able to connect her with a local lady that would support her with shopping once a week. Mrs A was grateful that she had been referred as she was wondering what she was going to do and felt awkward about asking for help, knowing that one of her neighbours had looked out for her encouraged her to break down barriers and when we spoke with Mrs A again she was chatting to neighbours on both sides which had really helped her feel less isolated. Mrs A said she wanted to give something back to the community that was helping her but didn't know what she could do as she was isolating. We had previously spoken to a single mother of one Miss B that was having to isolate due to health concerns and was worried how she was going to cope as she didn't have a wide circle of friends and couldn't work and socialise due to isolating. Having spoken to Mrs A and listened to lots of lovely stories about her life and how she loved to travel and meet new people, we suggested that she could help someone in her community by chatting to them over the phone, she loved the idea and it really gave her a sense of purpose and Miss B welcomed the idea of connecting with someone to chat to and she said she would also be happy to do the same thing for someone else. We have worked with the strengths of local people to connect them, create a relationship and combat social isolation during a difficult time.

Overgrown gardens

'I began working on improving the service last year with the Planning Enforcement Officer who was in post at the time. He made me aware of a lady with an overgrown garden who he considered to be in need of extra help. After I contacted her I discovered that she used to have help with maintaining garden but the family friend who helped her had since passed away and she couldn't afford to pay a company to take on the work. She was down to the last of the life savings and wasn't aware that she needed to claim her state pension. As well as being financially vulnerable she had been broken into twice and on both occasions seen the faces of the perpetrators in her windows, she was reluctant to have the garden cleared because it gave her the feeling of extra security. After I

helped with her finances, she found herself in a position to pay for the clearance work. If we had served noticed and sent her a fine, it could have pushed her over the edge. It made us realise that in most cases there is often a lot more to the story.

We are currently looking into ways we can support those residents who are unable to maintain their gardens by referring them into low cost gardening services. There are currently a couple of people in Matson who are being supported by the GEM Project towards their goals of being full time landscape gardeners. We have been able to pay them to complete some work on a couple of overgrown gardens. The results have been great but there is only 2 of them and we have a lot of residents in need of their help! We would like to have a proper process in place soon whereby residents or Councillors who report overgrown gardens approach the resident first to find out if they are in need of help and if so signpost them to an affordable garden maintenance service'.

Flooding and PCT

Podsmead Big Local have been working closely with the social enterprise Podsmead Clearance Team and did a lot of work in Milton Avenue to clear the flood storage pond which was in a mess. This has enhanced the work that the Glos Wildlife Trust have done in the area and as a result flood risk has been reduced, water quality has improved as has the number of fly tipping reports reduced due to the area being kept well maintained. Local people have been involved in consultations about wildflower seeding in the area and are very supportive and local people had expressed an interest in still being involved to help maintain the area with the PCT and PBL.