



Gloucestershire County Council

'Meeting the Challenge' Consultation Part 2: Active Communities / Active Individuals / Older People

Focus Group Report

Final

June 2015

Enventure Research

Thornhill Brigg Mill, Thornhill Beck Lane, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 4AH
t: 01484 404797 W: www.enventure.co.uk



Enventure Research

Dr Joanne Harvatt
Research Manager

Kayleigh Haigh
Research Project Support Officer

Report reviewed by:

Mark Robinson
Managing Director

Head Office:

Thornhill Brigg Mill, Thornhill Beck Lane, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 4AH
T: 01484 404797

London Office:

Smithfield Business Centre, 5 St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4BH
T: 0207 549 1616

W: www.enventure.co.uk E: info@enventure.co.uk





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Executive Summary

Background and Methodology

This report details the findings from the seven focus groups designed and conducted in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) by the independent market research agency, Enventure Research as the second phase of its 'Meeting the Challenge' consultation. The groups were conducted with a representative sample of residents, carers, community group representatives and Parish Council representatives.

The overall aim of the second part of the consultation was to conduct further engagement to help shape the ideas developed in the Council's three draft policies ('Active Individuals', 'Active Communities' and 'Growing Older in Gloucestershire') and their implementation, accomplishing a clear direction of travel of GCC in the way it supports individuals and communities.

This qualitative research is designed to be illustrative, detailed and exploratory, providing insight into perceptions, attitudes and intended behaviours of participants rather than conclusions from a quantifiable sample. With that in mind, the focus groups do not allow statistical conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views are held across the county.

Main Conclusions

The following key findings can be drawn from the research.

Common overall themes:

- The draft policies were generally well-received, as was the general shift towards promoting a culture of responsibility – but there were concerns about how these could realistically be put into action
- Most felt it was a positive thing to encourage people to have a voice and get involved in their local communities
- Some ways in which the barriers to volunteering could be overcome were suggested, with participants recommending that particular needs within a community should be more clearly communicated, to encourage people to become more involved
- Participants emphasised the importance of being able to access clear information and advice, with many suggesting that central information hubs should be provided within the community
- Whilst increased community involvement was seen as a typically positive thing, participants discussed how there was a need to be clear about what was expected from Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sector and to support them appropriately

Active Individuals:

- There was a generally positive response to the policy aims and principles, but some concerns about how this could realistically be put into action and about the wording of the policy
- Some felt that individuals were no longer expected or taught to be self-reliant. This was perceived as a general cultural shift and differences were identified between generations



- There were splits in opinion about whether or not individuals already take responsibility for their own outcomes and about whose responsibility it is to encourage a healthy lifestyle
- Education was felt to be key in helping people to become 'active individuals' and make healthy lifestyle choices. Participants felt it was most useful to target education at the younger generation
- Participants felt that 'digital by default' was not appropriate for everyone – particularly for the older generations
- Changes to the Council's website – including key word search facilities – should be considered
- The increasing use of technology and internet-based services needs to be supported by a level of face-to-face contact
- The wider community could help to encourage individuals to lead a healthy and active lifestyle, for example by promotion of health-related services and inspiring individuals to volunteer and play an active role
- Volunteers have an important role to play
- Where volunteers are used, they need to be well-supported and nurtured by the Council. For example, there needs to be appropriate financial support and advice in place, and volunteers should have the opportunity to have their say and express their views
- Members of the public need to have confidence that services can be delivered to a high standard when voluntary organisations are involved
- The Council should facilitate the bringing together of individuals in a community setting, for example, by providing physical locations for meetings, information hubs and signposting

Active Communities:

- The general response to the policy was positive, but perceived as difficult to put into action
- It was strongly felt that an active community should be inclusive of all demographic groups
- Volunteers were seen as essential for an active community, but barriers such as limits on time and concerns about the financial implications for individuals were discussed
- Participants felt there was a general lack of funding for community activities. Where funding was available, it was seen to be a short-term fix rather than a long-term investment
- Motivating factors for individuals to become more actively involved in a community were discussed. Personal experience of negative life situations, awareness of a need within the community and a feeling of responsibility were all suggested
- Some participants (younger participants in particular) found it difficult to identify examples of an 'active community'. Parish Council representatives, on the other hand, were more aware and gave useful examples
- Most groups describe the difficulties in encouraging people to come together as typical family dynamics have changed over recent years and that the population has become more transient
- The Council could provide the starting point to help bring communities together – for example, by providing meeting points. The same level of involvement may not be required to remain ongoing after support with initial set-up
- The Council could support communities by advertising and promoting community-led activities and groups via a range of different mediums
- The Active Communities principles and values could be simplified and any overlap removed to help make the policy accessible and easy to understand. Participants commented on the 'wordiness' of the policy, suggesting that the principles should be written in plain and simple English
- As well as recognising and building on strengths within the community, the Council needs to focus on tackling weaknesses



- There was some debate about prioritisation of support for those communities where need is greatest. Some felt that only focusing on those most in need would lead to smaller problems becoming larger ones in the long-term
- Participants felt that the Council needs to empower local people to express their views and take actions by finding out what the need is within local communities
- Under-represented groups within communities need to have faith that they will be heard
- Some felt there should be a more active dialogue between the Council and local communities, with an increase in communication and a more realistic view about what local groups can do and achieve

Growing Older in Gloucestershire:

- There was a general perception that Gloucestershire is a good place to grow older in comparison to other areas of the country
- Many participants, even those from the younger age ranges, were concerned about remaining active, healthy and independent as they aged
- Most agreed that it is difficult to change longstanding attitudes and behaviours, but felt that communities have a key role to play in supporting individuals to lead healthy and active lifestyles, supported by the Council. Examples provided included making efforts to help older people in the community, such as neighbours, and promotion of existing services and groups within the community
- Interestingly, participants felt that the notion of supporting individuals in getting back to independence was relevant to people of all ages, not just the ageing population
- There was a concern that some groups would remain 'under the radar', not receiving the help they need from social services
- Participants felt that it was sometimes difficult to locate accessible, clear information and advice, particularly considering the move towards providing more services online. They felt it would be useful to have central information hubs within the community where individuals could go to seek further help and advice
- All services need to work together to ensure that the needs of individuals and communities are met
- Several participants expressed concerns about growing older whilst being a primary carer for a loved one. Respite care provision and financial support were suggested as potential ways of helping to take the strain off those acting as carers



The Research Programme

Introduction

During June and August 2014, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) consulted its communities and partners to test proposals in relation to changing the way the Council supports people. A total of 2,790 people engaged in this process. Positively, the results from the consultation revealed clear and consistent support for the Council's proposed approach and a willingness to work with GCC to make it happen. The feedback received was used by GCC to further develop and refine the proposals, and three policies were subsequently developed:

- **Active Individuals:** Making sure people can access clear information, advice and guidance that will help them make good choices that help them and their families to help themselves, reducing the reliance on the state for support.
- **Active Communities:** Working with partners to help communities take on a bigger role in meeting the needs of local people.
- **Growing Older in Gloucestershire:** Working with communities and partners to make Gloucestershire a place where people are able to enjoy fulfilling lives as they grow older.

The key consultation messages related to:

- Changing the way GCC works, and through working in partnership, helping communities to help themselves
- Helping people become more independent and less reliant on Council support by providing more ways of getting the right help and advice
- Helping GCC ensure it involves and continues to work alongside its partners, including its communities, to deliver this new approach

As part of the Council's ongoing engagement process, Enventure Research was appointed to plan and deliver Part 2 of the consultation.

Research Objectives

The overall aim of the second phase of the consultation was to conduct further engagement to help shape the ideas developed in the three policies and their implementation in Gloucestershire, accomplishing a clear direction of travel for GCC in the way it supports individuals and communities.

Within this aim, the research objectives were to:

- Develop a robust consultation methodology, including the questions and topic guides for the consultation
- Gather high quality evidence of the views of a cross-section of Gloucestershire residents, Parish Councils, voluntary and community organisations and service users
- Inform the development and implementation of the three draft policies developed by GCC



The Council specifically wished to find out the answers to the following questions from the research:

- Are the individual aims of the policies appropriate – i.e. do people agree with them?
- Are the principles in the policies the right ones to deliver the proposed change in approach?
- What role should the Council play in helping communities to use what they already have, to secure what they need and to build safer, healthier and more inclusive communities?
- What does GCC need to change in the way it works and behave, in order to make it easier for communities and partners to work with it?
- How can the Council support the community and carers to play their vital role in supporting its ageing population?

Methodology

Overview of approach

A qualitative, participatory approach was employed to meet the aims and objectives of the consultation. Seven focus groups were conducted with a representative sample of residents, carers, community group representatives and Parish Council representatives.

Focus groups

Focus groups are an excellent means of gaining 'below the surface' feedback, by delving into participants' attitudes, behaviours and experiences to better understand their perceptions of the policies and reasons behind these perceptions. They also create useful discussion between participants, allowing us not only to hear the views of individuals but also to benefit from the interactions between them as issues are discussed.

A series of seven focus groups was held with a representative sample of residents, community group representatives and Parish Council representatives between 19 November 2014 and 8 January 2015. Attendance at the focus groups ranged from six to 14 participants, with each group lasting for 90 minutes.

The composition and location of each focus group is shown below in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Focus group composition

Group number	Target group attending	Location	Number of attendees
1	Young People	Cheltenham	6
2	Residents	Stroud	12
3	Residents	Tewkesbury	9
4	Community Groups	Gloucester	11
5	Residents and Carers	Gloucester	9
6	Residents	Forest of Dean	8
7	Parish Council Representatives	Gloucester	14

Participants for the residents' groups (Groups 2, 3, 5 and 6) were recruited by Enventure Research from GCC's People's Panel. Participants for the young people's group (Group 1) were also recruited by Enventure Research, from the People's Panel and from GCC's Youth Ambassador contacts.



Where possible, the residents that were recruited to cover a range of geographical location, gender, and working status subgroups.

GCC recruited the participants for the community and Parish Council representatives groups (Groups 4 and 7).

A community group focus group was also organised by GCC to take place in the Cotswolds, but due to lack of interest and lead in time had to be cancelled.

Moderation and analysis

All focus groups were moderated by experienced researchers from Enventure Research, who followed a specifically designed discussion guide to allow all relevant topics to be covered. A slightly different discussion guide was used for Group 7 (Parish Council representatives group). Copies of both discussion guides can be found in **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**. Participants were sent a copy of the three draft policies to be read in advance of attending, to give them some insight into the background and purpose of the focus groups.

The format of the focus groups comprised of a series of discussions based around the three draft policies developed by GCC, designed to stimulate interesting debate about what is important to residents, community groups and Councillors, their thoughts about the policies, and important considerations for the Council to be made before implementing the policies.

All discussions were digitally recorded (with participants' permission) and key comments recorded on flipcharts. Notes were then written up by the focus group facilitator by listening back to the recordings and analysing the comments on the flipcharts. The notes were written around the discussion guide to allow an analysis framework to take shape, grouping relevant points of discussion together. Further analysis involved reflectively moving back and forth through the focus group notes, breaking down the information into the themes of the research. Through this organisation of data, key patterns and themes were identified and are detailed in the next section of this report.

Interpreting Qualitative Data

Qualitative data is designed to be illustrative, detailed and exploratory, providing insight into the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of people rather than conclusions from a quantifiable valid sample. Therefore, the focus groups do not allow statistical conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views are held across the county. This said, the recruitment by Enventure Research was designed to elicit as representative a range of individual as possible.

Throughout this report, verbatim comments from focus group participants have been used to illustrate common themes raised by the group. Participants are referred to in terms of which group they attended. Where this is the case, it is important to note that the views expressed do not always represent the views of the group as a whole, but are illustrative of the issues raised during the focus group.

Participants' perceptions make up a considerable proportion of the evidence in this report and it is important to remember that although such perceptions may not always be factually accurate, they represent the truth to those who relate them.



Research Findings

This section of the report details the main research findings from the focus groups only. Direct quotations from focus group participants have been included where appropriate to support the findings, and are referenced to the group they attended.

Choosing the Policy to Discuss

Participants in Groups 1 to 6 were given the opportunity to choose which of the three draft policies (Active Individuals, Active Communities and Growing Older in Gloucestershire) they were most interested in discussing. Some groups managed to discuss two of the three policies during the allocated time, whilst others discussed one policy in more depth.

Those who attended Group 7 (the Parish Council representatives group) did not choose the policies to be discussed, as a slightly different discussion guide was used.

The policies discussed by each group are shown below in **Table 2**.

Table 2 – Policies discussed by each focus group

Policy	Policy chosen to discuss by:
Active Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 2 – Residents, Stroud Group 3 – Residents, Tewkesbury Group 4 – Community Groups, Gloucestershire
Active Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 1 – Young People, Cheltenham Group 6 – Residents, Forest of Dean Group 7 – Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester
Growing Older in Gloucestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 1 – Young People, Cheltenham Group 2 – Residents, Stroud Group 3 – Residents, Tewkesbury Group 5 – Residents and Carers, Gloucester



Active Individuals

The Active Individuals policy was discussed by Group 2 (Residents, Stroud), Group 3 (Residents, Tewkesbury) and Group 4 (Community Groups, Gloucester).

Participants discussing this topic were first asked to consider which words and phrases initially came to mind when thinking about 'active individuals'. Initial comments related to health (including fitness, diet and mobility) and personal responsibility/individual capability.

"Being mobile, fit and healthy." (Group 2, Young People, Cheltenham)

"An 'active individual' consciously looks after their wellbeing from a young age – diet, exercise, spirituality – it's a whole-person view." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"Self-motivated individuals." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Active Individuals - Overall Aim

Participants were given a show card outlining the overall aim of the Active Individuals policy to read and consider. This is reproduced below in **Figure 1**. Participants were then asked about their perception of the aim and to what extent they agreed with it.

Figure 1 – Aim of the draft Active Individuals policy

<u>Aim of the draft Active Individuals policy</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals and families can make informed choices that will improve their lives without over-reliance on the state. • People can easily find out about advice and support available to them within their communities. • When people need to contact the Council, they get a timely and accurate response in the most appropriate and straightforward way.

General positive response to Active Individuals policy aim but some concerns about how this will be put into action

For the most part, participants felt that the aim of the draft Active Individuals policy was appropriate, however some expressed concerns about how it could realistically be put into action.

"A lovely sentiment." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"There are a lot of people who are self-motivated individuals, it's about HOW we help people move to become self-reliant." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"My thought was 'how will this be done?' How will it be delivered?" (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"The question is how this should be done. How do you physically get people to be 'active'?" (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)



Some concern was also raised about the wording of the policy aim, with one participant commenting on how the phrase 'over-reliance on the state' potentially shifted too much responsibility away from the Council onto the individual.

"People don't go out of their way to be reliant on the state. It seems that we're always putting the onus on the individual and that things are their fault...The vast majority of people dependent on the state would not be if they had a choice." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Recent cultural changes mean that individuals are no longer expected or taught to be self-reliant

Some focus group participants commented on how recent cultural changes mean that individuals are no longer expected or taught how they can take on more individual responsibility – i.e. how they can become more 'self-reliant'.

"Whilst the policy is probably very worthwhile, what we're talking about is a major attempt to change culture, to where people are taking increasing responsibility for their own outcomes...We have developed a culture where we expect that these things will be done for us." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"People are not being taught how to become self-sufficient and find out how to access these services." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

One participant linked this to technological advances, suggesting that because so much information is instantly available via the internet, young people no longer need to learn and remember information in a more traditional manner.

"They [young people] are so reliant on the internet that they don't learn things. They don't know things like our generation." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

The wording of the policy aim need to be closely adhered to

Participants generally agreed that the aims of the policy were appropriate, but several commented on how the Council needed to ensure it adhered to the wording used in the policy when implementing it.

"Picking out the words they use – 'easily', 'timely', 'appropriate', 'straightforward' – they need to make sure that these are adhered to." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"They [the words used] have to be the benchmark for all their decisions – do they meet that criteria?" (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)



Active Individuals - The Principles

The Council's approach to encouraging more individuals to be active is guided by a set of principles, which are shown below in **Figure 2**. Focus group participants were next asked to consider these principles, discussing whether they felt this was the right approach for the Council in helping people to make good choices for themselves and their families.

Figure 2 – Active Individuals - principles/values

<u>Active Individuals – principles/values</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals should take as much responsibility for their own outcomes as they can. 2. Wherever possible, people should be encouraged to help themselves with well targeted information and appropriate support. 3. It is worth taking preventative action in order to avoid their needs escalating. 4. People should be able to access an increasing range of information, advice and services online. 5. Understanding that digital isn't available to everyone or suitable for every circumstance, we will work with communities and partners to provide face-to-face contact to those who need it. 6. Providing training, support and access are some of the ways of helping people to help themselves. 7. People should not have to worry about finding the right organisation or department. Information and advice should be clearly signposted, high quality, easy to access and as joined up as possible regardless of who runs the building. 8. People will get a clear, accurate, timely and consistent response, reducing the need for repeat contact and avoiding un-necessary referrals to specialist professional services.

General positive response to the principles overall

Again, the majority of group members generally agreed with the principles outlined in the draft Active Individuals policy.

"I think the default position should be that, whenever possible, people take responsibility for their own outcomes...so that we can provide a service to the really needy." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Some discussion about whether or not individuals already take responsibility for their own outcomes

There was a split in opinion with regard to the extent to which individuals already take responsibility for their own outcomes. Some group participants felt that many people are already responsible and self-reliant, whereas others felt that the majority expected others to take responsibility.

"A lot of people are independent." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I think the problem has been the inability for people to take responsibility." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"Nowadays the younger generation is a 'give-me' generation." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)



There was further discussion about the difficulties involved in motivating individuals to do more things for themselves. One respondent acknowledged the challenges associated with changing attitudes and encouraging more individual responsibility.

"You find that people have skills - a wide range of skills - but if they are not motivated to use them and find out how they could best be used, and don't have the ambition, they're therefore not being 'active individuals'. But how do you teach self-motivation?...It's a baseline attitude. The mindset has got to be changed, but the problem is ingrained." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Debate about whether encouraging a healthy lifestyle is the responsibility of the Council or of the individual

The groups also discussed whether or not encouraging a healthy lifestyle *should* be the responsibility of the Council. Discussions around this topic focused largely on how individuals were already taking responsibility and health promotion and health education; for example, encouraging healthy eating and promoting exercise. Those who felt that the Council did have a responsibility to its residents in promoting a healthy lifestyle suggested that spending money on health promotion now would help to save money in the long-term.

"I'm active. I don't go running but I have a workshop and I can make and repair furniture for people. That's what I look at as an active." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I think they already do [take individual responsibility for their own lives]." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"People always complain about the 'nanny state', but this is an area where the government has responsibility – for example, 'five a day'." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"Food and alcohol impact hugely on the NHS – they are fundamental problems that could be addressed by better licensing and education." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"The best thing we've done with our play area is getting the children involved in planning it. A couple of boys have been made responsible for the trees, so people don't climb them whilst they're growing. That has really helped." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Where group participants felt that the responsibility for living a healthy lifestyle lay with the individual, a number commented on how there were already numerous sources of information available to those who had the motivation to seek it out for themselves. For example, participants discussed how lots of information could be found online and how there were many television programmes about how to live healthily.

"They already are bombarded with information in all subjects." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Another felt that the availability of information and promotion of a healthy and active lifestyle was not the only factor to consider, suggesting that household income was also an important consideration.

"Money can be a problem – eating 'five a day' is very expensive. The poorer you are, the less likely you are to do so. It's about more than just providing information." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)



Education is key in helping people to become 'active individuals' and make healthy lifestyle choices

Although there was some debate about whether or not promoting a healthy lifestyle should remain the responsibility of the Council, generally participants did agree that the Council should play a part in encouraging individuals to be 'active'. It was commonly suggested that promotion of a healthy lifestyle should begin from an early age, to encourage maximum benefit throughout an individual's lifetime.

"It should start right from education, when a child is very young in school – more emphasis should be placed on healthy lifestyles." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"It needs to be followed through at home – it should be parents' responsibility." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Older participants in particular tended to suggest that targeting such promotion to the younger generation, starting in schools, would produce the greatest benefit.

"It's probably too late to talk about 'active individuals' when you get to our age – it's about encouraging youngsters." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"This policy needs to run all the way through the education system. We have a limited ability to impact the older generation, but we can influence the younger generation." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

One participant felt that education also had a key role to play in encouraging individuals to be active members of their society; for example, taking an interest in politics and local governance.

"I think German societies are much better at this...children from primary school are taught civics, they know how the system works...We have a very different society." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Although education was felt to be of key importance, one respondent also noted that ensuring individuals took notice of information provided could be of some difficulty.

"It's about getting people to take notice of events." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Potential difficulties with encouraging individuals to take more responsibility for seeking out information

Participants identified potential difficulties with encouraging individuals to take more responsibility for seeking out more information for themselves as a first port of call. Whilst most agreed that in principle this was a good idea and would help to reduce the burden on the Council, some commented on how many people were unaware of where to go to seek out such information.

"It's [self-service] is a good idea. They could have a key word search." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"Having choices is okay if you know what the choices are, but I work with many people who simply don't know about the choices...This can really lead to vulnerability." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)



Others suggested that being able to seek out information was only part of the problem, since individuals could also struggle with understanding what that information means and how to apply it to their own circumstances.

"The Council is hoping that people will...totally understand what they are seeing without having someone there to say what it means." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Digital by default is not appropriate for everyone – particularly for older generations

The groups discussed how the move towards considering digital by default (i.e. accessing an increasing range of information, advice and services online) is not appropriate for everyone. Some described their personal experience of being unable to, or knowing someone who is unable to access information in this way.

"I don't use the internet at all. I'm possibly an under-represented group in my age range, but I'm certainly not the only one." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"[She] had her benefits cut and had no money to live on...because she...didn't have the facility to read her emails." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Participants commented on how not everyone has the ability to access the internet, or may lack the skills to be able to seek out information for themselves in this way.

"We're assuming that everyone is computer-literate, but that's not the case." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"You're making great assumptions that everyone has these facilities and can access them." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

There was particular concern with regard to the older generation, with many participants concerned about how they would struggle should more services and information be provided online rather than face-to-face and in other formats. Participants felt that a move towards providing more services online by default would act as a potential barrier to those with limited IT skills and a lack of support at home.

"The main problem is with people aged 50+ who aren't necessarily IT-literate, when now everything is online." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"I've got a mother who's 86, she can't use the computer...not everyone is mentally well enough to be taught...they don't want to, they are afraid of new technology." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Ensure the Council's website is user-friendly to enable more individuals to access information and services online

Focus group participants suggested that the Council could help enable more people to access information and services online by ensuring the website is user-friendly, with published material up to date, accurate and easy to find. A number commented on how information could be difficult to locate and a common complaint was that the search function did not always direct users to the appropriate information they sought.

"One of the drawbacks is the County Council website – it's not user-friendly." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"It [the website] has information, but finding it is very difficult for those who are not experienced." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)



A common suggestion as to how the website could be improved and made more user-friendly was to improve the search function, ensuring that it always picks up on 'key words'.

"They could have a key word search. Often the services you need are contracted out and not the responsibility of the Council...you need to know the name of the company to find out information about the service." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

The increasing use of technology and internet-based services needs to be supported by a level of face-to-face contact

Participants discussed how, with the general trend towards more services and information being provided online, the Council needs to ensure that there is appropriate provision to support this. Many felt that other methods of contacting the Council should be available to those who are unable to find what they need online.

"It's about accessibility – if you do manage to find something on the computer and it's wrong, then where do you go?" (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"There is too much reliance on computers – a computer cannot answer everything." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

A number felt that additional support should be provided face-to-face, or via telephone helplines. Whilst the younger people's group found internet-based services to be common and appropriate.

"I guess that by knowing so many people are online and with so many people connected through social media, I think that if you push certain events through social media then you would get more of a response." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"We can communicate with people through our phones, we can Skype them, we can Facebook them, so technically, what's the point of going to a social club or something if we can do it from the comfort of our own home." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"For me, technology is just a single dimension – the answer is either there or not there. We need people to speak to on a 24 hour shift basis [like] NHS Direct." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"You need face-to-face interaction. If an individual finds it difficult to sort things out for themselves, they need...help." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Dealing with enquiries at the first point of contact

Where it is appropriate to have telephone helplines, participants discussed how the staff operating those helplines need to be well-trained to ensure that people are given or directed to the information they need.

"Provide knowledgeable people who can support you." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"When you ring up, make sure the person you speak to is well-trained...so they can direct you to the right person or answer your question immediately." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)



Active Individuals – Working Together

In this part of the discussion, participants were asked to consider how the Council could maximise its opportunities to work more closely with its communities and partners to improve its collective approach. Discussion topics included examples of what works well currently within the local community, and what could be improved.

Individuals are part of a wider community, which could be used to help encourage a healthy and active lifestyle

The groups discussed how individuals are a part of a wider community, and how there is scope for encouraging people to be more active within these communities.

"It's a matter of actual community not organisations." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Some were able to provide examples of what worked well within their local area, such as community based health groups which they were aware of.

"My doctor's surgery is very good at promoting...they run courses and teach you how to have a healthy, balanced lifestyle." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"The local Tesco has a diabetes service." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

Some participants felt that the main issue to tackle would be in encouraging individuals to play a more active role within their community, to volunteer their time and support the running of such groups. Positively, some felt that individuals were simply unaware of where the need was in their local communities.

"I think what really needs to happen is that people become more aware of what's going on and get out there...Everyone has some time that they can give." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"It's amazing how many are actually willing to do something...It's about capturing that enthusiasm. I don't think the County Council knows the value of these [informal] networks and groups. There's passion out there, and it needs tapping into." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Volunteers have a part to play

Many participants agreed that individual volunteers and voluntary organisations could and do play a valuable role in supporting the delivery of some services. However, some expressed concern that volunteers were being asked to do too much, feeling that some services were best left to professionals to deliver.

"If we changed the context and asked for help for children...you would pay for a service. But when it comes to older people you ask for volunteers. We need professionals to come in and develop these aspects." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"The County Council should employ enough people with the knowledge to do those things." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"With the Get Active funding we're going to invest in terms of some bike racks...we're going to put them by the village hall...That's just a small thing that the Parish Council has done." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)



Where the use of volunteers is appropriate, they need to be well-supported and nurtured by the Council

Some focus group participants who were personally involved in voluntary organisations discussed how they felt the Council needed to invest more in volunteers to ensure that a high level of service is delivered. They discussed how volunteers need to feel that their contributions are valued and their suggestions will be listened to, and that there needs to be a partnership between the Council and the voluntary organisations delivering services.

"The County Council...has to build trust and relationships with us, the voluntary sector, to enable these policies to work." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"The more the County Council works with the voluntary sector, the more it needs to allow the sector to express its values." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

One participant highlighted that those volunteering their time within the community have local knowledge and expertise.

"The bottom line is that the voluntary community sector will pick things up, will do things for people...but they [the Council] need to be focused on how it will be done practically...They've got to realise this and support us." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Many commented on how financial support was also important in supporting volunteers to deliver services to a high standard. One described how their service had become more successful, but that the consequence of this was that the funding was in fact reduced.

"All funding for the voluntary sector was removed some years ago – there's a real struggle in how you access this funding. There's been no joined up thinking at all." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"This time of year is our busiest time so we double up on staff so we can provide one-to-one support and as a result we are more successful...so as a result we've had a funding cut. If we'd had half as many staff, twice as many admissions to hospital, we would have received twice the level of funding we get now. That is a really frustrating position to be in." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Members of the public need to have confidence that services can be delivered to a high standard when voluntary organisations are involved

Whilst agreeing that there was a role for voluntary organisations to become involved in the delivery of some services where appropriate training and support is provided, participants also discussed how service users need to have confidence that a quality service will be maintained. One suggestion as to how this could be achieved was to provide a place where individuals could seek additional advice, should they so desire.

"The trouble with some volunteers is that they can be very willing but not necessarily competent." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"The bottom line is the voluntary and community sector will pick things up. We will do things for people...We're the ones who know the area, the people and what's going on." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"As a community organisation, we knock on doors asking individuals how they want services and how they want things to change, and what the individual can do to make things change, so there is interaction taking place, under the big society banner." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)



The groups discussed how any handing over of responsibility to voluntary organisations needs to be a slow process, to ensure that quality is maintained.

"It seems that the state has run out of cash, but we can't just stop things immediately. We need to gradually change things, otherwise there will be problems." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

The Council needs to facilitate the bringing together of individuals in a community setting

Some participants commented on how there were a number of community groups available which could help individuals lead an active lifestyle, but that many people were simply unaware of them. It was felt that the Council could do more to promote such groups, for example, by signposting via its website.

"If 'active' means 'proactive', as in helping yourself, then access to advice." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"Signposting is extremely difficult and has been for years. There's new groups popping up but we don't know about them." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

One suggestion was that more physical 'hubs' should be provided within communities, which individuals are able to visit and seek out further information about services for themselves.

"An information hub that anyone can go into and find information." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"The town needs a central co-ordinating point for organisations." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Others felt that the Council could help different groups to work together more effectively by co-ordinating and facilitating the sharing of information.

"The use and sharing of data is a problem – it's really difficult working with a family that needs support from different departments and organisations." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

"We need to get all departments involved, including schools and health." (Group 4, Community Groups, Gloucester)

Careful planning needs to be exercised by the Council in order to encourage individuals to be more active

Some participants commented that the Council should exercise more care and consideration in their planning to encourage individuals to be more active and make healthy lifestyle choices.

"The big Tesco by the motorway encourages individuals to drive and takes business away from the town. A lot of the planning doesn't encourage people to be active." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"If you want people to remain active you have to provide the right facilities in the right place." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)



Active Communities

Groups 1 (Young People, Cheltenham), 6 (Residents, Forest of Dean) and 7 (Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester) chose to discuss the 'Active Communities' policy.

Active Communities – The Community

'Active communities' associated with shared goals and working together

When considering the words and phrases they associated with 'active communities', comments related to voluntary work, engagement with the local community, a diverse mixture of people working together, shared goals, an understanding of local issues, community centres, libraries, and being physically healthy.

"For me, I'd say that 'community' means someone I can share interests with. For me it's the sporting community - the basketball team - we all share the same goals and we all get along with each other socially as well." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"People working together." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Some participants suggested that community was more related to a particular geographical location than to a set of shared beliefs and goals.

"We used to live in Charlton Kings...and we'd meet people out every day...so there was more of a community, and you'd make relationships with people." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

A number expressed the opinion that a community could only be represented by a face-to-face gathering of people. One participant commented on how they felt that social media connections such as Facebook could not constitute a community, since it was an impersonal form of communication.

"In order to do anything you have to bring people together into one place." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"There are people you've potentially only met once...and you haven't associated since with. So I don't think I would call it a 'community' at all, I'd just class it as acquaintances. If you were going to town and just walked past people then I think that's what it could potentially be like on Facebook – you're just 'passing' as people." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

An active community should be inclusive of people from all segments of the community

Participants commonly suggested that an active community should comprise of a range of different people, of different ages, although some felt that actually encouraging different people to come together could be difficult. In particular, those from the young people's group felt that there was a divide between the old and the young, suggesting that sometimes the younger generation could be excluded from participating in some community activities.

"If there is something going on then it's only for one part of the neighbourhood... 'Community' should be for everyone but sometimes it's not." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



"So many of these types of people, they don't mix, and I think that's what a community should be. You need a mixture of people...it's difficult to pull them together." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

One participant from the Parish Council representatives group described how the implications of an ageing population were complex. On the one hand, the older generation tend to require more support, but at the same time there are voluntary activities which are much more likely to be taken on by the older generation than the younger generation.

"Although you've got a younger generation who have to get out and do things to support the elderly, who take it but can't necessarily give back the help, you've also got young mums who have never run a raffle or a cake stall...but you've got grandmas down the road who will make six sponge cakes!" (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Volunteers are essential for an active community, but there are barriers to volunteering

Particularly in the Parish Council Representatives group, participants discussed how community activities are essentially reliant on having a loyal and dedicated bank of volunteers. Often, the same individuals are called upon to get involved.

"The only active communities that work are the ones where you've got a regular supply of volunteers". (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"We are short-funded and all rely heavily on volunteers to work free of charge." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"You've got a core body of volunteers that are continually the ones on the committee." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

A number described how they had experienced difficulties in retaining volunteers in the long-term.

"You can always find initial capital, but the problem is maintaining it once you've got it". (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"One of the major problems [is that if]...you look at the people representing the local parishes, most of us are at the retirement level or are semi-retired, as I am...I cannot get anyone who is working to become involved, because they haven't got the time." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

This was also a common theme running through the other focus groups, with some participants explaining that they simply did not have the time to commit to a regular volunteering position. One described how they had considered becoming a 'befriender' within their local community, but did not have the capacity to volunteer with this service every week.

"I looked at the befriending service to help out, but you needed to basically be there every week and I just couldn't commit to that." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)



Some were concerned about the potential financial implications of volunteering (such as having to pay for Disclosure and Baring Service (DBS) background checks) whilst others were worried that they would be held responsible should something go wrong whilst they were volunteering.

"You've got to jump through so many hoops to volunteer, it's just ridiculous. Some places won't even pay for the checks, so you have to pay for it yourself to be a volunteer! The other thing is what happens if something goes wrong, you're in deep trouble and it just discourages people." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

"If I was confident that with all the H&S things going on that I would not be held personally liable then I would get involved – there's too much risk." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

One participant made the suggestion that there should be some form of insurance in place to help protect and reassure individuals.

"There needs to be some sort of cheap insurance for people to be able to volunteer." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

A lack of funding for community activities

One group described how a lack of external funding could also be a barrier to the successful maintenance of ongoing community-led initiatives. Whilst some felt that there were opportunities for securing funding for setting up such initiatives, it was suggested that finding the funds to continue was more difficult.

"Often funding is available short-term...we find that things have started up but suddenly the cost to cover training and support stops." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"With every initiative you try you're struggling with the twin issues of initial funding then ongoing funding, and the management challenges in meeting that." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Motivating factors for individuals to become more actively involved in a community

Participants discussed how the opportunity to help others would be a motivating factor for becoming more involved in their local community. Some explained how they had personal experience of negative life circumstances, and would welcome the chance of helping others to avoid similar situations.

"It's passion as well – to help people that are about to be in the same situation you went through, and you want to help them to prevent it." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"I think if I was aware of a particular need then I'd get more involved." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)



In the Parish Council representatives group, one participant suggested that people could be encouraged to participate more in activities within their local community if they were to be given more responsibility, which would help them feel like they are making a more valued contribution. Others felt that encouraging children to volunteer from a younger age would also help to create a general shift in perception about the benefits of volunteering, for example, through school-based activities.

"Make them more responsible. The best thing we've done with our play area is getting the children involved in planning it...That has really helped." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"Children are our future...We've just done a litter competition...the children not only picked up litter...but they got their photo taken and did some art with it as well." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Active Communities – The Council

Difficulty in identifying examples of an 'active community'

Many participants found it difficult to come up with examples of active communities, or of examples where the Council had been involved in a community project, but the community had taken the lead. Two examples provided related to church activities.

"The only community I can think of at the moment [is] the...café which is run by volunteers from the church...I haven't seen anything kind of 'active' happening." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"We do a lot through the church – a lot of work around loneliness, house-to-house visits, coffee mornings and things like that." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

Where examples were given, participants described how these commonly suffered from a lack of participation.

"There's been the community awards where people can nominate, but there seems to be a lot of apathy. There was a good neighbour award, volunteer of the year award...but there were only two nominations for the award." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

The notable exception to this was in the Parish Council representatives group, where participants were able to give several examples of things that were working well in local communities. One participant described how there were a number of locations in which community-led activities took place, whilst another gave an example of a specific scheme which worked well.

"It [the social centre] can be hired for local and outside village use. There's all sorts of communities that use that as a hub, and it's a fantastic resource. I would say the church as well. We also have a sports centre... In those three places they manage to get most aspects of the village – from the young people to the older people – doing something." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"We run a taxi voucher scheme...That is very successful, it really helps the older people in getting about. Even just having the vouchers in their drawer gives them tremendous comfort." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)



Difficulties in encouraging people to come together

One proposed reason for the difficulties to encourage people to come together was that family compositions have changed over recent years. For example, women are now more likely to be in full time work and therefore have less time to commit to being an active part of the local community.

"It's harder to get to know neighbours now – particularly when you're leaving for work early and getting back late." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

"It's changed – the women who would have traditionally stayed at home and been part of the community – they're now at work." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

Others felt that the populations are now more transient, with people moving in and out of the area without developing a sense of connection to it.

"People from London come in and buy the houses, and they don't want to know the community." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

"People don't live in communities anymore, they live in isolation – it's changed a lot over the last few decades." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

Technological advances mean that people are less likely to become active members of their local community

Continuing the theme of a lack of community spirit, the suggestion was made that whilst social media can be a useful tool in helping to promote community activities, the ability to contact people instantly online could be a potential barrier to people coming together in person.

"I think we are at a stage...where being outside with community isn't as important...We can communicate with people through our phones, we can Skype them, we can Facebook them...we can do it from the comfort of our own home." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"I think that technology took over what used to be good, like just before I came here for me, community used to be everything...There is no sort of connection where people made the extra effort to make friends." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

The Council could provide the starting point to help bring communities together

Some ways in which the Council could help tackle the problems arising from this perceived lack of community spirit were discussed by participants. Many felt that the Council should act as the 'starting point' in helping to bring communities together. This starting point could involve providing a physical location for individuals to come together, perhaps by facilitating community meetings to help make people more aware of what is going on within their local community.

"Maybe more meetings and things going on the community...so you know what's going on." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

It was suggested that the Council would not necessarily need to have much involvement with community-led projects having provided this initial starting point, since volunteers would be in place to provide most of the work.

"If the Council step away after starting it up...if there has been a positive outcome...you would already have a group that would do most of the work themselves." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



In fact, two participants expressed the opinion that the Council should not try and interfere too much in community-led initiatives that are currently working well, instead focusing on reinforcing the message that they are there to provide support.

"If the Council came in and took control then people might not like it...they still need to feel like they're in control but just know they have help." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

The Council could support communities by advertising and promoting community-led activities and groups

One participant suggested that the Council's role could in large part be reduced to promoting and advertising community activities. Another echoed this, suggesting that if they personally were more aware of activities taking place in the local community, they would be more likely to take part.

"If there was something happening and there was a meeting point...then people might be more inclined to go along, to meet new people and then maybe branch off from there themselves." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

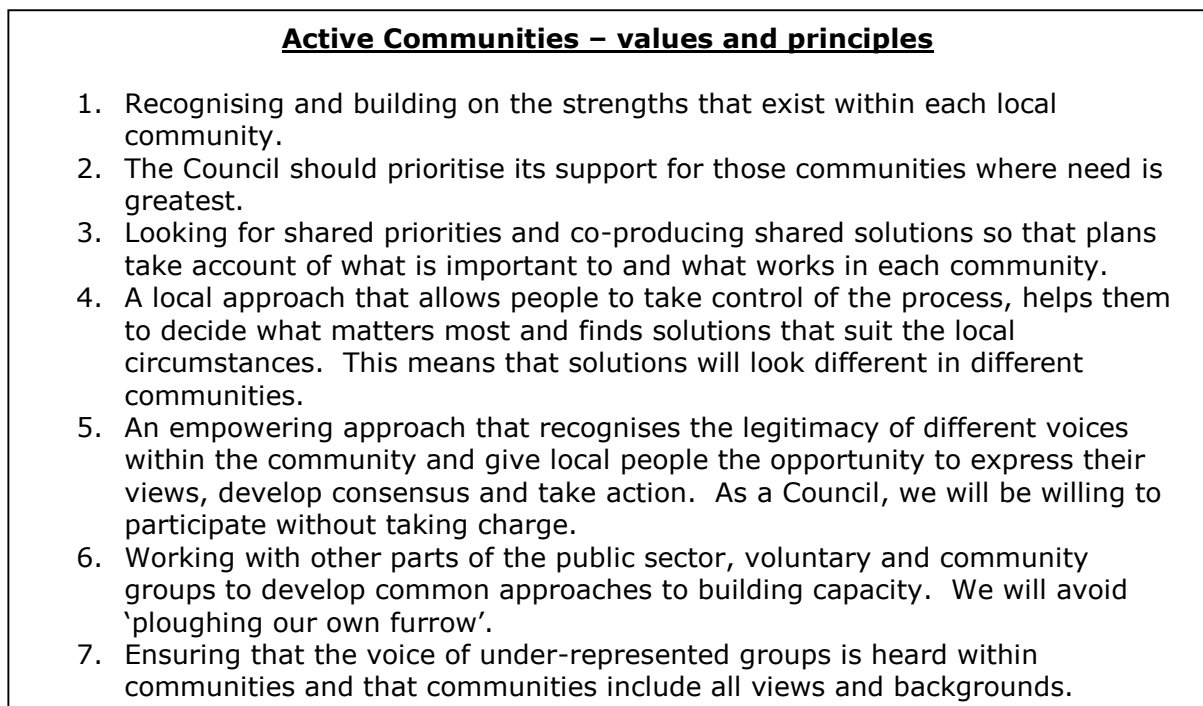
One participant commented on how any advertising of community events would have to be delivered through a variety of different methods in order to successfully reach all age groups.

"You need to have...a range of mechanisms to communicate, all the way from social media for the younger groups through to flyers, posters and notice boards for the older population." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Active Communities – Values and Principles

Participants discussing the Active Communities policy were next asked to consider and discuss the values and principles outlined within the policy. These are shown in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3 – Active Communities – values and principles





The Active Communities principles and values could be simplified and any overlap removed

A common topic of debate was that the principles were overly 'wordy' and should be simplified so that people of all ages and from all backgrounds can understand them.

"It's all very wordy." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"You should look at the people who are going to read it...[Some people] will be able to read it but they won't understand it." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Some participants picked out certain words and phrases which they felt were difficult to understand, in some cases making suggestions as to how they felt they could be simplified.

"We will avoid ploughing our own furrow' – what does that mean?" (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Point number 5 is a really wordy statement – that could read 'allow people to express their views and the Council will listen to what you have to say'. It could be as easy as that." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Participants agreed that the wording used in this and similar Council policies should be simple, clear and easy to understand, to ensure that people are able to take in the messages being expressed.

"The moment something becomes over-complicated, the moment you see a very big word, I just switch off. I just move on." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"I think they should just be more generic, simple English...it's about the community, it's about bringing them together." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

In addition to simplifying the wording used in the values and principles of the Active Communities policy, participants recommended that there was significant overlap between some of the principles and suggested reducing these down to provide further clarity.

"They all just link into each other really." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"It's all one rather than seven different ones." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

As well as recognising and building on strengths within the community, the Council needs to focus on tackling weaknesses

There was general agreement with the first principle outlined in the Active Communities policy ('Recognising and building on the strengths that exist within each local community'). However, some participants commented on how the Council also needs to focus on tackling the weaknesses that may exist within that community.

"I support it, but I think as well as building on the strengths you should recognise the weaknesses as well...you need to attack the weaknesses whilst also supporting the strengths, otherwise it just won't work." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



Debate about prioritisation of support for those communities where need is greatest

Most participants agreed that support should be in place for those communities where the need is greatest. Others commented on how they felt that support should be equally allocated for all segments of the community. These participants argued that focusing only on those sections of the community which are most in need isolates other groups, meaning that their need will only increase and become more of a problem in the future.

"They should also offer help to those who in the future might need it because they didn't get the support in the beginning." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Focus on a community, not just individual groups." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Focusing on all of the problems equally would probably solve more of the problems." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"People that have just come out of hospital will have lost their confidence, so need support for a few weeks." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

On the other hand, one participant felt strongly that all cases needed to be considered on an individual basis, and that a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate.

"It depends on the situation – you can't put all people in one category because everyone has individual needs...bringing the community together, disability, homelessness – you can't put it all in one." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

The Council needs to empower local people to express their views and take actions by finding out what the need is within local communities

Participants discussed how the Council could help to empower local communities by first making attempts to find out what communities already have in terms of resources and what they would need to encourage more people to become involved in community initiatives.

"They should get involved with people, ask what they want." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Some also discussed how people could be deterred from participating in community activities because of a perceived lack of safety in the local area, suggesting that this is something the Council may need to tackle.

"We were talking about getting people involved in the community...Kids can't be kids because you don't get parks in towns any more...it's a safety issue." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



Under-represented groups within communities need to have faith that they will be heard

The groups agreed with the principle which stated that the Council should ensure that the voices of under-represented groups are heard within communities and that all views and backgrounds are included. One participant described how she simplified feedback forms for young people to understand them to encourage them to give their views.

"I spend a lot of time simplifying feedback forms so young people can understand them, but you still don't get a lot of young people filling them in and saying what they want from the services...it's easier said than done." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Concern was expressed that this would be difficult to put this principle into action, since some groups would always have a stronger voice.

"They're always going to hear the person who shouts the loudest." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"The reason Foresters don't like the County Council is that there's hardly any Foresters on it! There's no-one representing us." (Group 6, Residents, Forest of Dean)

To help tackle these potential barriers, participants discussed how all segments of the community needed to have faith that the Council would listen and respond to their views appropriately, within a reasonable timescale.

"Some people don't have any faith in the County Council...Trying to get the voices of these people, it's not going to happen because they don't have the faith in the services." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Why would someone come forward if they haven't been shown that something is going to happen?" (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

To help achieve this, some suggested that there should be more transparency in how the Council provides information to communities. One participant described how the explosion of social media had meant that people were becoming more aware of service failures. It was suggested that the Council should be aware of this, and take steps to ensure that communities maintain faith in it.

"It's almost like something bad has to happen for something good to come and replace it. We shouldn't have to get to that stage." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Response to the Active Communities values and principles generally positive, but perceived as difficult to put into action

Whilst the response to the values and principles set out in the Active Communities policy was generally positive, some participants questioned how easy they would be to put into practice. Participants felt that the main barrier to achieving the desired outcomes was that it remained difficult to bring communities together. One described how individuals and groups would continue to have different priorities and hold their own separate sets of values.

"I think the Council is actually doing a very good job doing those things...I am on the side of actually receiving some those services. I've found they're all interlinked anyway." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



"Everyone has their own beliefs and own set of values...that's what makes their personality and you can't say that people are not going to judge each other because it's not going to happen." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Others, however, suggested that the way to overcome this barrier was for the Council to make attempts to remove distinctions between different groups and build on existing projects within the community.

"They're all part of the community – you shouldn't separate them into 'public sector', 'voluntary', 'community groups' if you want an active community." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Obviously there are good things within a community - like Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, things like that - which will get people involved, so they could build on those things." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Active Communities - Working Together

Participants were able to make some useful suggestions about ways in which the Council and local communities could work more effectively together. Some of the main points from the discussions are outlined below.

More active dialogue required between the Council and local communities

When asked how communities and the Council could work better together to ensure that communities are able to do more for themselves, the main theme arising from the discussion was that the Council needs to listen to its communities and respond to ideas from within it. Participants emphasised how there needs to be a dialogue between the Council and local communities, to ensure that communities are empowered to take action.

"Be more open to people coming forward with their own ideas...Have more of a discussion about what can be done." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

The creation and maintenance of an active dialogue was perceived not only to be the responsibility of the Council, but also of the community itself.

"They are not always on the front line...if something bad is going on and no-one reports it, then the Council doesn't know." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

The Parish Council representatives focus group participants tended to agree that there was a lack of communication between the three different levels of Council (Parish, Borough and County). Some felt disillusioned that they were able to make a difference in their local communities as a result of this lack of communication.

"One of the other problems is that there's no cohesion between Parish Councils, Borough Councils and County Councils." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Others discussed how the County Council needs to be more responsive, giving regular feedback to local groups and Parish Councils about how it is working with communities to achieve its aims. This would also help to develop trust in the Council.

"It's about honesty, and when you build on that you build trust as well." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)



"You don't feel valued. One of the reasons Parish Councils struggle to get Councillors is that often you can sit for twelve months in meetings...At the end of the day, you're achieving nothing, because you don't get the level of backup you need." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

As well as communicating via active dialogue with Parish Councils and community groups, this group also felt that the Council needed to clearly communicate with its residents about how they are working to develop and refine services, to achieve best value for money.

"I think one of the problems the County Council and NHS have...is that out there in the local community, what people see is cuts. They don't see redesigning of services...so I think there is an opportunity for the County Council to start looking at how they better communicate that." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Have a realistic vision of what local communities can do

The group discussed how many of the suggestions made about how local communities can help to support the Council appeared to be actions which were not possible to undertake at a Parish Council level; for example, in communities helping to run cultural services such as libraries. It was felt that the Council should have more of a realistic idea about the services which local communities and Parish Councils are able to undertake.

"We're all active communities in that we provide a whole range of social services. But over 80% of the County Council funding is in really skilled professional services which deal with difficult people – the ageing population, troubled families, children in care ...Realistically, I don't see that we can transfer those sorts of activities into our limited community activities...There are very severe limits on what individual communities can do." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"People are being asked to take over the libraries altogether, which is a big, big undertaking." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"I can't see how you could possibly meet these demands. With the first phase of 'Meeting the Challenge' you could see how savings were going to be made... I'm not really clear as to what you actually want from Parish Councils and where we're going with all this." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Seek feedback from individual community groups

One suggestion made by a number of participants was that the Council needs to listen to the comments of individual groups within its local communities, to ensure that the voices of all groups are well-represented.

"Somehow we've got to have a mechanism where the Council is talking to each of these communities – to do it on a broad brush approach won't work." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"I would like to see you come to the communities as individuals and recognise what a diverse county we are and all our individual needs." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)



In the Parish Council representatives group, there was debate about what works well within local communities already, with some suggesting that the Council could also take some lessons from the community.

"That's just a small thing that the Parish Council has done [installation of bicycle racks to encourage communities to be more active]...What we're looking for tonight are some practical examples of how it can happen. If those small things can happen at that level, then I expect they can also happen at a higher level as well." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

Some described community-led initiatives which they felt were working well but which could work even better with additional support from the Council.

"There are things that we could do and are willing to do. We fund quite a lot of things...But we cannot know where are the troubled families...where are the physically disadvantaged people. That is a professional issue that we can't deal with." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

More joined up working required within the Council itself

Continuing the theme of better dialogue, some participants extended their discussion to the way in which separate Council departments work with each other.

"Communication – and not just us, but within the departments, within GCC itself." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"In the Borough Council offices, they've got police, they've got the DWP, they've got social workers, children's services, fire services, and they're talking to each other and becoming much more effective." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"Each of the activities were in different buildings. They're now all in one building. So they can now sell the buildings that they were in and reduce the time it takes...for that particular person because they're all together, they can have one meeting." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

The Council could support the voluntary and community sector by sharing its professional skills base and providing expertise

Where communities are able to take on responsibility, it was suggested that the Council could further support this by sharing its professional skills.

"The County Council could help us to understand our communities...we need more expertise." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)

"I think the Council has a professional skills base that if we could tap into would be quite useful. For example, we're having to replace our community library with a purpose-build building...Skills maybe in project management would be extremely helpful in moving things forward." (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)



One participant suggested that the Council could move some providers directly into the local community which they serve, meaning that they would be better placed to help support that community.

"We probably have enough social services clients to require a social worker...Could the County Council pay the District Council for the office space, to be closer and more in touch with their clients?" (Group 7, Parish Council Representatives, Gloucester)



Growing Older in Gloucestershire

The 'Growing Older in Gloucestershire' policy was discussed by Group 1 (Young People, Cheltenham), Group 2 (Residents, Stroud), Group 3 (Residents, Tewkesbury) and Group 5 (Residents and Carers, Gloucester).

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – Your View

When asked to consider which words and phrases they associated with growing older, participants' initial comments related to retirement, knowledge, health, mobility, finance, independence and care.

'Growing older' is a matter of perception – depends on personal circumstances

Particularly with regard to the concept of 'independence', there was a split in opinion as to what this meant for the ageing individual. Some participants suggested that growing older was associated with increasing independence, such as being able to do more things for yourself and having more financial security. Notably, these views were more commonly expressed by those in Group 1 (the young people's group). Others however associated growing older with becoming more dependent on others, for example, due to health problems and a reduced quality of life.

"Inability to get up the stairs, lack of mobility." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"A lack of independence...I think with my injury I'd rather be young and able to push myself. When I get older I won't have the strength to do that." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

There was also discussion about how growing older meant different things to different people, and how it was difficult to quantify what 'being old' meant. Participants generally agreed that the way in which individuals approached becoming older was largely dependent on their personal circumstances, since people 'aged' in different ways.

"It depends on the situation they're in. If people are disabled they will look towards the future in a more negative way." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"It's very difficult to say what is old, it's about perception...If you are physically fit, then it's difficult...Your mind still thinks you can do the things you did 30 years ago...There are an awful lot of people older than me who are physically fit." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Growing older and planning for the future should be a consideration for people of all ages

There was widespread agreement that individuals of all ages should think carefully about their future, since everyone will age. Participants discussed how the younger generation would one day become the older generation, and therefore should already be thinking about how they will manage as they grow older.

"Everyone is going to get older, that is a fact." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"All those things that are going on for older people will apply to younger people down the line." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



One participant felt that some individuals tended to isolate themselves in old age as a result of their earlier decisions, suggesting that people needed to be more considerate of how they would manage should their circumstances change in the future.

"I was talking to someone the other day who wanted to join one of the social groups here but was restricted because she couldn't drive and the buses aren't very good...putting yourself in a village like that – unless you're very mobile – you're limiting yourself. So you need to think about where you're actually placing yourself." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Encouragingly, a number of participants in the young people's group explained how they were already making considerations for the future.

"I'm only three months into my gap year, and I'm already thinking about what I'm going to do at university, what job I'm going to do, where I want to live." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"I've just been told to start my pension. I spoke to the ladies at the Red Cross, and they explained it all to me." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Concerns about remaining active, healthy and independent

Almost all participants were concerned to at least some extent about remaining active, healthy and independent well into their more advanced years. Some described their hopes for the future, whilst others expressed fears about how they would manage should they become less able to look after themselves in the future.

"I'm active at the moment and I want to remain that way." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"Most of us naively aspire to thinking we'll all of a sudden go out like a light. We don't think about being semi-infirm or how we would actually cope with that – we hope we'll never get there." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

One participant from the young people's group described how she felt there was a lack of support even for those of her own age, expressing concern about how this may decrease even further in the future.

"I feel like as I do get older, if I get ill, there is not much support now...If I was...dependent on other people, then I would not be happy with an increased life expectancy." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

General perception that Gloucestershire is a good place to grow older

A number of participants suggested that, in comparison to other parts of the country, they felt Gloucestershire was a good place to live for those who are growing older.

"I am delighted that I live in Gloucestershire – I know that help is at hand." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"As someone who has lived here only a short time, I feel that we should realise we are particularly lucky in this area." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I think that we are quite privileged that we live where we live. I look forward more to growing older in Gloucestershire than I would in many other areas of the country." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)



Growing Older in Gloucestershire – Steps to Supporting People as they Age in Gloucestershire

In their changing approach to the experience of growing older in Gloucestershire, the Council has outlined four key steps in supporting the ageing population to have greater social connectivity and an increased sense of purpose. The four steps are shown in **Figure 4**. Focus group participants discussing the Growing Older in Gloucestershire policy were shown a card outlining these steps and asked a series of questions about each of them.

Figure 4 – Steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire

Steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire

Active Individuals: The Council wants to help people to stay healthy for longer so they can enjoy remaining independent and active into older age.

Active Communities: Being part of an active community can play a huge part in helping people stay independent for longer.

Getting People Back to Independence: Social services has a responsibility to help people who have been assessed as having a need to get back on their feet, for example following a stay in hospital so they can carry on living at home safely.

Being There When We're Needed Most: However much help is available from families, friends, neighbours and communities, the Council knows there will always be some people who will also require social care services.

General agreement that individuals should be encouraged to remain active, but perception that it is difficult to change longstanding attitudes and behaviours

Focus group participants largely agreed that encouraging individuals to be more active, lead healthy lives and remain independent for as long as possible was a positive thing, and should be advocated.

"People do need to be fit, they do need to look after themselves, they do need to be encouraged to do that." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Many however felt that this would represent a significant cultural shift in perception, necessitating the changing of attitudes and behaviours which individuals may have held and engaged in for a long time. These participants felt that, whilst a suitable ambition, implementing such changes would be difficult to put into practice.

"You can't necessarily legislate – it's an attitude of mind." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Communities have a key role to play in supporting the ageing population to lead healthy and active lifestyles

Participants tended to agree that being part of an active community could play a part in helping people stay independent for longer, although again some felt that actually achieving this would be a difficult task.

"Sadly, the life that people lead now is not one which brings them out into the community." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)



Others, however, were able to provide positive examples of existing community and voluntary organisations which they were aware of.

"Did you know there's a wheelchair service in Tewkesbury? They take people shopping from residential homes." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"My next door neighbour has joined a dog-walking group – that's something which anyone can do." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"There are huge amounts going on in Gloucestershire, such as the choir. There are classes in meditation, gardening. You can often pay according to your means...Some of these also have funding, for example, for those who are disabled and those with mental health problems." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

A number of participants also made suggestions about additional ways in which they felt local communities could help to support individuals as they grow older. One suggested that they could personally make more of an effort to help their own neighbours. Another described how it would have been helpful to have someone available to just sit and talk with their elderly mother from time to time, to help prevent her from being lonely when none of her family members were available.

"Thinking about it, it might be nice for me to knock on the door of some of those elderly people and ask if they need a lift at all. It wouldn't cost me any extra, it's no hassle to me." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"The main thing was her loneliness. She wanted me there all the time. So someone there to sit with her, and just have a cup of tea with her to break the day up." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

The Council needs to support local communities in being more 'active'

Many participants agreed that, whilst there was scope for voluntary and community groups to do more in encouraging individuals to remain active for longer, there needs to be adequate support in place from the Council. A number expressed the opinion that the Council did not currently do enough to support communities in achieving this aim.

"Tewkesbury has experienced this situation in the past, and there have been a number of volunteer groups working well, supported by the Council, and now you're asking us to consider the same options. We've done it all in Tewkesbury, and you've closed them all." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

One participant felt that the Council expected volunteers and community organisations to do too much, suggesting that it was relying on people to be willing and able to continue providing many services for free.

"The white elephant in the room is the third sector, and the fact that successive governments have wanted normal people to do these things, and do them for nothing...all the policies we are talking about are relying on people to do these things for generations to come." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)



People of all ages need to be supported in getting back to independence, not just the ageing population

Participants agreed that those who have been assessed as having a need should be supported in getting back on their feet, for example following a stay in hospital. However, a number expressed the opinion that this should be the case for people of all ages, and not just the ageing population. Some participants from the young people's group gave examples of how they had felt unsupported in the past, and were concerned about how they would be supported in future years.

"When I was 11 and I came out of hospital I was bound in a wheelchair. It took three years before they offered me help, and I couldn't get around my own house...My parents had to take so much time off work, but if someone is at that stage where they don't have parents, then who is going to do that?" (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Concern that some individuals will be failed by the social care system

There was widespread agreement that some individuals would always need support from social care services, but concern was expressed that some people would 'fall through the net'. There was a suggestion that some people would become "invisible", with their needs going unmet. Examples included those who had no family to help act as an advocate and those who were unable to contribute financially to their care.

"Some people will remain invisible." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"There are a lot of people in Gloucestershire who have nobody – they have no-one to talk to, to help. I have children...but there's a lot of people who don't know what services are out there because no-one tells them." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Another perceived difficulty was that some people would struggle to ask for and accept help, meaning that their needs would not be recognised. One participant related this difficulty not just to those requiring social care services, but also to the carers taking on responsibility for family and friends.

"As an elderly person, knowing there was a 23 year old down the road, would you go and ask for help?...It would be scary for anyone I didn't know to come into my home" (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"One of the issues is that even if you do offer help, people don't always want to take it...[My friend] has this guilt about it and feels that she should be there to care for [her husband]. Getting her to accept that she's not being selfish is very difficult." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)



Growing Older in Gloucestershire – Values and Principles

Focus group participants discussing the Growing Older in Gloucestershire policy were next asked to consider the principles outlined within it, designed to help individuals lead fulfilling lives as they become older. These principles are replicated below in **Figure 5**.

Figure 5 – Growing older in Gloucestershire – values and principles

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – values and principles

Promoting well informed self-help: Older people need accessible, clear information and advice for them, their families and their communities to help them make good choices and improve their own outcomes.

Maximising independence: The best solutions are those that enable people's independence and connect them to their communities.

Prevention and early intervention: The Council will work with communities and partners so that, together, the Council is able to notice and respond quickly to the signs that someone needs help. Where the Council can, they will take quick action to prevent people's needs getting worse.

Choice and control: People should be able to decide for themselves the support that would best address their needs and how it should be provided. The Council will listen to what older people want and build our plans around that.

Doing the right thing: The Council will focus on making a real difference for people and our plans and solutions will be based on what the Council know helps people stay safe and promotes their independence.

Quality care that keeps people safe and promotes dignity: The Council will work with care providers who recognise that the quality of care that people receive matters and who provide safe services for older people that promotes their dignity.

It can be difficult for individuals to locate accessible, clear information and advice

There was general agreement that there should be promotion of "well informed self-help" to enable people to help themselves, but participants felt that useful information about services and events could be difficult to locate.

"We're talking about 'active communities' and 'active individuals', but do we know what's out there, what's actually happening? Is it made known what's available?" (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

"You need information from people to be able to make informed decisions." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)



The increasing move towards providing more information and services online was seen to be partially responsible for some of this difficulty, as not everyone is able to use a computer or access the internet. Some participants suggested that the Council could make it easier for those who cannot access information online by providing alternate methods of finding out information, such as via telephone or post.

"I'm hearing about things now I've never heard of, and it all comes back to communication. How do you communicate about the 'what', 'where' and 'when' that people need to know?" (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"The main struggle is that we're moving into a very technological world...The Council has to accept that not everyone has a computer. They need to use traditional methods, such as letters. Even as a regular internet user I don't always check my emails." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"Maybe a central telephone or something...Even if there was an automated telephone line for elderly people which says what is available." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Clear information should be provided from an earlier age

Particularly in the younger age groups, participants expressed the opinion that they would like to receive information about the services available for those who are growing older from a much earlier age, to help them remain active throughout their lifetime.

"Better advice and advocacy, earlier on." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Make sure all the information that may be needed is easily accessible to everyone, of any age." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Some participants felt that more education about remaining healthy (for example, related to diet and exercise) was needed.

"I think what the Council needs to do is actually educate people...say 'this is how you go about it'...I don't think people fully accept responsibility for how they are and how they behave. We need to saturate the market with information saying 'this is the consequence of Lifestyle A or Lifestyle B'. We don't tell people enough – we find out when we're ill." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

In contrast however, some felt that there was already lots of information available out there to those with the initiative to seek it out, and that the bigger problem was in how to make people actually take notice.

"My husband is a bit overweight, and he just doesn't think it [diabetes] will happen to him." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I think people are told an awful lot. There are so many problems on the television about dealing with the consequences [of an unhealthy lifestyle]." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)



Suggestion that there should be a central physical 'hub' or information point within local communities where people can go to access information

Part of the problem in accessing information was perceived to be the lack of any physical location where people could go and find out information for themselves. Some participants cited examples where such facilities had previously existed but had now closed down, whilst others suggested that information had to be tracked down from several different sources rather than from one convenient location.

"There's no central point to get information about what is happening...There's no one place. It's very fragmented." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"You do perhaps need somewhere in the community which is open all the time that is the 'hub' of the community, where all manner of information and support is available." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Community and voluntary organisations could help maintain central information points, but would need to be appropriately supported

Participants discussed how the community could help to support the running of such information hubs.

"My understanding is that the Council can no longer afford to do what it has been doing, so it's dependent on us. The money isn't there. What we've got to think of is ways we can make it work better now." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"It's about getting that community spirit going. We need to get back to where there wasn't all this technology to help people come together and get back to the community." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

It was suggested that the Council would need to help set up and maintain such projects, for example through providing the location, funding and helping to advertise and promote the services to its residents.

"You have a lot of empty premises in Tewkesbury where you could have a central hub." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I think it should be Council-initiated, but not necessarily Council-led, because you don't really want Gloucestershire County Council to be telling you how to do it. But it could be Council-initiated, i.e. funded." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I just don't know enough. The Council should publicise more information." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

Although volunteers have a significant role to play, they should not be expected to do too much

Whilst it was acknowledged that volunteers can play an important role in supporting individuals within their local community, some felt it was important for the Council not to expect volunteers to do too much and to recognise what volunteers actually do.

"What astounds me is how much people do, how much they give." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

"I'm just so concerned about this, we're all working incredibly hard, giving and giving. We keep being asked for more and more, but we just don't have any more to give." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)



Some expressed concern that the same people were always being approached to give their time.

"It concerns me that in all walks of life, it's always the same people doing everything, and many just sit on the side and watch." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

"Most of us, when we retire, have retired because we don't want that responsibility. You get the same people again and again...getting somebody to do something is a major issue." (Group 2, Residents, Stroud)

Positive response to the principle of 'maximising independence'

Generally, participants agreed that seeking to enable people's independence and connect them with their communities was a good thing, although it was noted that careful consideration needed to be given to individual circumstances.

"It all depends on the individual. If someone has a disability, then life becomes harder as you get older." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"There's not enough variety of living accommodation – where you could have your own room and kitchen, which isn't quite a care home – it's all or nothing...More and more now, as people are living longer, people are going into care homes as older people, so there's more problems." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

Some participants gave examples of how independence could realistically be maximised. For example, one participant explained how they had been well-supported with regard to taking responsibility for some aspects of their personal healthcare. Another example discussed was the provision of community health workers.

"I get feeding tubes sent to me at home. It's cheaper than being in hospital, and I have more independence because I can do it myself...It makes me more independent." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Enabling people's independence – there are community nurses and doctors who can come around...if I was at home without that support I would have to go into hospital." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

It was felt to be important that individuals and carers are provided with enough advice and support to help them make clear and informed decisions. Suggestions included providing an advocate person and a general enquiries helpline.

"It's not only for people who have a disability, but also for people who are caring for someone with a disability, because surely you would want to know all of the information as well." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"Someone you can talk to about anything – there are too many companies out there...a general helpline." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)



All services to work together to ensure needs are met

Some participants felt that services should work more closely together in order to best meet the needs of those who are growing older. Examples were discussed of where different services had failed to take responsibility for providing aspects of care, leading to shortcomings in care provision.

"If all the separate units worked together and listened to each other it would be more seamless." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"The government is now...looking at the principle of whose right it is to look after people when they're older. The system is flawed because the Council will say it's the NHS's responsibility because they have dementia, and the NHS will say it's a social care need." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

"The old person gets stuck in the middle." (Group 1, Young People, Cheltenham)

Concerns about growing older whilst being a primary carer

A number of participants who were themselves primary carers for family members expressed concern about how they would continue to care for their loved ones as they grew older. Some felt unsupported by the social care services.

"The carers need looking after as they do an important job." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

"People look at my husband and wonder why he's in a wheelchair and don't see the reasons. We're becoming more and more isolated. I broke my arm earlier this year so really struggled looking after my husband. I did have help to care for him, which was great, but no-one helped me and I felt invisible." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)

A number of participants felt that the best way to better support carers would be to provide more respite care and financial assistance.

"When I was looking after my mother – and working in the caring profession and looking after my family...the main thing would have been respite care." (Group 3, Residents, Tewkesbury)

"My son was quoted £674 a day to go away for a few days, as he needs two carers. He can't afford this." (Group 5, Residents and Carers, Gloucester)



Recommendations

Common Themes

The discussions around the three draft policies elicited a number of common themes and recommendations, which are outlined below.

Provide central information hubs to enable individuals to seek out information and advice for themselves

In the majority of focus groups a number of participants recommended that central information hubs should be provided within the local community, to enable residents to seek out support and advice about services for themselves. Some suggestions as to suitable locations included libraries and community centres, but participants felt that any central and easily accessible location would be suitable. Some participants suggested that the community itself could help to maintain these information hubs, with appropriate support from the Council.

Although the idea of community information hubs was well-received by most participants, a small number indicated that some vulnerable people would struggle with seeking out information for themselves and may require additional support in interpreting the information they are able to access.

Ensure that the Council website is user-friendly so that individuals can access the information they need quickly and easily

A number of comments were received which related to the quality of the Council website, with participants suggesting that it was difficult to locate the right information online in the website's current format. Practical suggestions for improvements related to the search engine function, with participants indicating that users should be able to search for key words and be directed straight to the correct information without having to know the name of the particular company that delivers the service.

Other comments referred to inaccurate or out of date information on the website. Participants felt it was important to ensure that all website content was monitored and updated on a regular basis to ensure it remains as current as possible.

Although there is a general move towards placing more information online, participants felt it important to maintain some level of telephone or face-to-face support, particularly for the older generation of residents in Gloucestershire and those who are less computer-literate.

Make sure that community-led services and Council departments work together effectively to best support the local community

Whilst it was acknowledged that there are a lot of community-led and Council run services that provide support to residents, some participants felt that these groups did not work together as well as they could. One potential explanation provided for this was that community-led groups in particular are often under-promoted and therefore awareness about these services might be low.

The Council could help to support a more joined up method of working together by ensuring that community groups and volunteering activities are well-promoted in a range of different ways.



Encourage volunteering by removing barriers and advertising opportunities

Almost all focus group participants felt that encouraging volunteering was a positive step, with most agreeing that some services could be delivered effectively by a dedicated group of volunteers from within the community. At the same time however, participants commented on how it was difficult to recruit and then maintain a committed group of individuals able to give their time on a regular basis. Some, who were regular volunteers, discussed how it tended to be the same people volunteering their time over and over again, whilst others felt that volunteers tended to be older, retired individuals, who perhaps had fewer constraints on their time.

A potential way to encourage more people to volunteer in their local community might be to ensure that a wide range of volunteering opportunities are extensively promoted. Advertising of opportunities could focus not only on regular and long-term positions, but could also promote shorter-term and one-off volunteering opportunities.

Another perceived barrier to volunteering was that individuals might face financial implications, for example, having to pay for DSB background checks. One way to overcome this might be to secure funding to cover payments for such checks.

A common motivating factor for volunteering discussed was the potential to help change lives for the better. It is recommended that any advertising of opportunities should also focus on tapping into this passion and promote the positive outcomes volunteering can lead to.

Simplify the language used in the draft policies to ensure they can be understood by a wider range of people

Particularly from younger participants, recommendations were made that the language used in the three draft policies developed by the Council should be simplified to ensure they can be understood by a wide range of people. Participants felt that unnecessary and unclear wording should be removed and that the principles should be 'streamlined', with any overlap removed to ensure clarity.

Understand that 'one size does not fit all'

A central theme running through the focus group discussions was that 'one size does not fit all', meaning that there will always be some members of the community who need additional support or advice. For example, a number highlighted the potential for 'digital by default' to exclude older or less IT-literate residents from accessing the information they need. It is therefore recommended that other methods of contacting the Council should be maintained to some extent.

Similarly, some people will always require a greater level of support for services in maintaining their independence than others, and participants recommended that this should be an important consideration for the Council.

Further recommendations which were more specific each of the three draft policies are described overleaf.



Active Individuals

Individual responsibility for leading a healthy lifestyle – to be supported by the Council and community

The principles outlined in the Active Individuals policy are centred around individuals taking as much responsibility for their own outcomes as possible. Whilst most focus group participants agreed that this was a sensible and positive approach, there was some discussion about how the Council and community could help to support individuals in doing so. Some felt that this would require a significant change in cultural perception, suggesting that individuals are not necessarily taught how to be self-reliant any more.

Target health education at younger people in schools and encourage self-reliance through appropriate signposting

Many participants suggested that healthy lifestyle choices should be promoted to individuals from an early age with a number expressing the opinion that healthy living should be encouraged throughout the education system; for example through promotion of the benefits of a healthy diet and regular exercise. Where participants felt that schools should be more involved in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, they generally expressed the opinion that encouraging healthy behaviours from an early age would help to save money and prevent negative outcomes in the long-term.

Participants discussed how there were already numerous sources of free information related to health available to those individuals willing to seek it out. Examples provided included websites and television programmes about health. It is therefore recommended that the Council should have more of a signposting role in directing individuals to information about remaining healthy and active. This signposting could begin in schools and be maintained throughout the education system, in order that individuals are taught how best to seek out information for themselves.

Deal with enquiries at the first port of call

In the event that an individual needs to contact the Council directly to find out information about its services (for example, via a helpline telephone number), participants recommended that staff members should be able to direct residents to the information they need and should work in a more joined-up manner, to ensure that residents enquiries are dealt with at the first port of call.

Active Communities

Recognise the contribution of voluntary and community organisations and support them appropriately

The majority of focus group participants were very positive about voluntary and community organisations taking more of an active role in helping to deliver services and encouraging individuals to lead more active and healthy lifestyles. However, participants emphasised that volunteers need to be well-trained and supported by the Council in order to deliver services effectively.

It was noted that volunteers often have a greater insight into the communities they serve and are therefore a valuable resource for the Council. Participants recommended that a more collaborate approach should be taken, with volunteers able to express their views and utilise their local expertise.



In particular, participants felt that appropriate financial support was essential to help with the cost of training volunteer in order to deliver a high quality service. Another suggestion was that the Council could support the running of such groups by sharing its professional skills base; for example, in providing assistance with project management.

Providing appropriate support for such groups would help to assure communities and the individuals accessing support from such services that they will receive a high quality service, even in cases where professional involvement is at a minimal level. Where services are being taken over by community or voluntary groups, participants recommended that there should be a slow handover process.

Participants also highlighted that the Council should also be aware that some services will always be required to be delivered by professionals rather than the voluntary or community sector, and that volunteers should not be expected to do too much.

Empower people to have a voice and get involved in their local community

Participants felt that it was important to actively engage in dialogue with local communities and find out what their needs are when setting up new community and voluntary-led services. A number commented on how it was important to ensure all voices within a community are heard, particularly the voices of under-represented groups, in order to help develop faith that the Council is willing to listen to the voices of residents and support the volunteers delivering these services. Importantly, participants felt it was essential to recognise what local communities already have in terms of resources.

One way of engaging with the community recommended by focus group participants was to hold regular community meetings in easily accessible locations. Participants suggested that should the Council provide the initial starting point for individuals to meet and discuss the needs of the community, then new groups of volunteers were likely to independently form and develop.

Growing Older in Gloucestershire

Make sure individuals are aware from an earlier age what services and support are available

Participants from all groups tended to agree that individuals should be made more aware of the services available to support those growing older in Gloucestershire from an earlier age, and not just as and when they have a need for those services. This was evident even in the young people's group, with participants expressing the opinion that they would like to have the information now to enable them to start making plans for their future.

Some suggested that this could be achieved by ensuring that information is easily accessible, either via a local community hub or via the Council website. Participants felt that targeting information at individuals from a younger age would help to change potentially longstanding attitudes and encourage positive steps in making plans for the future.

Be aware that some people will always need more support than others

Whilst participants were generally positive about individuals doing more to help support themselves as they grew older, they felt it was important to recognise that some people would always require additional support, particularly those who with disabilities.



Ensure that carers also receive appropriate support

Concern was raised that primary carers often felt unsupported by local services, particularly when trying to meet their own needs as well as the needs of the people they cared for. Some participants who were themselves primary carers were apprehensive about how they would continue to manage as a carer whilst growing older should their needs change in the future.

One practical method of better supporting carers suggested was to provide more financial assistance for respite care, in order to allow carers to take a break from their responsibilities and focus on their own needs from time to time.

Final Considerations

Continue to engage with residents and local communities

The second phase of Gloucestershire County Council's 'Meeting the Challenge' consultation has highlighted that residents, carers, community group representatives and Parish Council representatives were very keen to share their views and help shape the ideas developed in the Council's three draft policies and their implementation in Gloucestershire.

Interest in participating in the series of focus groups was high, and the insightful attitudes and opinions explored in the groups demonstrated that participants were enthusiastic about being able to contribute to the further development of the Council's long-term policies. It is therefore recommended that the Council continues its good work in engaging with its residents and local communities.

Acknowledgements

Enventure Research would also like to express its gratitude to everyone who took part in the focus groups. We would also like to thank all GCC colleagues; in particular, Dawn Thompson, Emma Burchell, Hester Hunt, Sidgoree Nelson and Amy Davies for their help with design and delivery.



Appendices

Appendix 1 – Focus Groups 1-6 Discussion Guide

[Focus Group Discussion Guide](#)

Please note this discussion guide is intended as a guide to the moderator only. Sections may be subject to change. Times shown are based on a 90 minute focus group.

[Introduction \(5 minutes\)](#)

My name is Joanne Harvatt/Mark Robinson and I work for a research agency called Enventure Research. Firstly, I will give you a bit of background and explain the aims of the consultation. During June-August this year, Gloucestershire County Council consulted its communities to test the proposals they have in relation to changing the way the Council supports people. Nearly 3,000 people were engaged in the process. **The feedback received has been used by the Council to further develop and refine the proposal and subsequently policies have been written. We are now here to discuss these policies to gain a deeper understanding of your views.**

Following feedback from these focus groups, the Council will be consulting on its corporate strategy and Council budget. If you would like to be involved in this, you can indicate this on the feedback form at the end of the session.

IMPORTANT: Please be assured that everything you say during this session is confidential, so please be as open and honest as possible. There is no right or wrong answer. Enventure Research is an independent research agency. We simply want to know what you think based on your own personal experiences. Please ensure that any views you give us are your own views, not those of an organisation. Gloucestershire County Council will be consulting with community groups and voluntary sector organisations, as well as partners separately to this.

Enventure Research works to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, which means that anything you say this morning/afternoon/evening will be treated in the strictest confidence, and your comments will remain anonymous with nothing being linked to your name.

All views and opinions of all present are valid and will help shape the policies and plan into the future.

I will be recording the session so I do not need to take notes as you are talking. However, the recording is only used to help write the report and is deleted once it has been used. I want to hear all your opinions, but please try to talk one at a time. The session will last for about one hour and a half. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Location of fire exit, laptops away and mobile phones switched off/to silent.



Respondent introductions (5 minutes)

- Can you please introduce yourselves? Can you tell me first your name?
- Tell me a bit about yourself:
 - Where do you live?
 - What do you do for a living (if working)? What have you done in the past?
 - How would you describe yourself?

Choosing the policy to discuss (5 minutes)

- There are three main policy areas and we will only be able to discuss two of them today. So we will start with the one that most of you want to discuss first (*hand out **show card 1***). Looking at the three policy areas please choose one that you would like to discuss first.

Ask people to put their hands up and choose the one with the most votes to discuss first, and then the ones with the second most votes second.

SHOW CARD 1
Three main policy areas

Active Communities: working with partners to help communities to take on a bigger role in helping to meet the needs of local people.

Active Individuals: making sure people can access clear information, advice and guidance that will help them make good choices that help them and their families to help themselves, reducing the reliance on the state for support.

Growing Older in Gloucestershire: working with communities and partners to make Gloucestershire a place where people are able to enjoy fulfilling lives as they grow

Active Communities (30 minutes)

Background: There is a wealth of community activity taking place across Gloucestershire in neighbourhoods and villages. Some of these activities take place with the support of the Council and other public sector partners and even more thrive through the commitment, creativity and drive of local people. In the policies that were emailed/posted out there are some examples of where community capacity is already happening in Gloucestershire.

Active Communities – The community

- We are now going to talk about active communities. When you heard the words ‘active communities’, what words or phrases come to mind?
- What makes you say those words? / Where do you get those perceptions from?

Flipchart word association exercise – Moderator to write suggested words onto a flipchart.

- What does an active community look like?
- How can a community become more active?
- What good things are happening within your community / What works well within your community?
- What motivates you to be involved in your community?



Active Communities – The Council

We now want you to think about the Council's role in supporting active communities – that is to think about the support and advice needed to help communities take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities. The Council recognises that they need to help communities but they want to understand how this can best be achieved.

- What role do you think the Council should play in helping communities to use what they already have, to secure what they need and to build safer, healthier and more inclusive communities?
 - Probes:
 - Do you have any examples of where the Council has been involved in community projects, but where the community has taken the lead?
 - What made these projects successful?
 - Where should the Council focus its support most? (this could be geographically, or with particular demographic or community groups)

Active Communities – values and principles

Within the draft active communities policy there are a set of principles (*hand out **show card 2***).

- Do you think that the principles/values below are the right ones to encourage more active communities?
 - Probes
 - Is there anything missing?
 - How as part of the community do you think you can help take forward these values/principles?



Active Communities - working together

SHOW CARD 2 **Active Communities – values and principles**

1. Recognising and building on the strengths that exist within each local community.
2. The Council should prioritise its support for those communities where need is greatest.
3. Looking for shared priorities and co-producing shared solutions so that plans take account of what is important to and what works in each community.
4. A local approach that allows people to take control of the process, helps them to decide what matters most and finds solutions that suit the local circumstances. This means that solutions will look different in different communities.
5. An empowering approach that recognises the legitimacy of different voices within the community and give local people the opportunity to express their views, develop consensus and take action. As a Council, we will be willing to participate without taking charge.
6. Working with other parts of the public sector, voluntary and community groups to develop common approaches to building capacity. We will avoid 'ploughing our own furrow'.
7. Ensuring that the voice of under-represented groups is heard within communities and that communities include all views and backgrounds.

- How can communities and the Council work better together, to ensure communities are able to do more for themselves?
- What does the Council need to change in the way they behave, in order to make it easier for communities to work with the Council?

Active Individuals (30 minutes)

Background: The Council wants people to have the best chance at living an active, healthy and independent life. Everyone can take steps to cut the chances that they will need to rely on Council support in future by making healthy lifestyle choices, keeping active and planning for the future. The Council believes they have a role in making sure people can access clear information, advice and guidance that will help you to make good choices that help you and their families to help themselves, reducing their reliance on the state for support.

The Council want to make sure that people are signposted to the full range of help and support available to them. They know that it can be difficult for people to navigate the range of public and voluntary sector services available to them. The Council wants people to be able to get through to the right person easily and at a time that is convenient to them.

Finally, while the Council thinks that guiding people to information and advice is vital in supporting active individuals, it doesn't have to be the Council that provides that advice. Modern technology makes it easier for us to work flexibly to share buildings and information.



- When you heard the words ‘active individuals’, what words or phrases come to mind?
 - Probes:
 - What makes you say those words? / Where do you get those perceptions from?

Flipchart word association exercise – Moderator to write suggested words onto a flipchart.

Active Individuals - overall aim

*(hand out **show card 3**)* The show card I have just given you shows the aims of the Active Individuals policy. Please could you read these aims and then I will ask you a question.

- To what extent do you agree with the aims of the policy?
 - Probes:
 - What are your perceptions of these aims? / Does it cover your impression of an active individual? / Is anything missing?

SHOW CARD 3
Aim of the draft Active Individuals policy

- Individuals and families can make informed choices that will improve their lives without over-reliance on the state.
- People can easily find out about advice and support available to them within their communities.
- When people need to contact the Council, they get a timely and accurate response in the most appropriate and straightforward way.



Active Individuals - the principles

The Council's approach to encouraging more Active Individuals is guided by a series of principles (hand out **show card 5**). Please read these and then I will ask for your feedback on these principles.

SHOW CARD 5
Active Individuals – principles/values

1. Individuals should take as much responsibility for their own outcomes as they can.
2. Wherever possible, people should be encouraged to help themselves with well targeted information and appropriate support.
3. It is worth taking preventative action in order to avoid their needs escalating.
4. People should be able to access an increasing range of information, advice and services online.
5. Understanding that digital isn't available to everyone or suitable for every circumstance, we will work with communities and partners to provide face-to-face contact to those who need it.
6. Providing training, support and access are some of the ways of helping people to help themselves.
7. People should not have to worry about finding the right organisation or department. Information and advice should be clearly signposted, high quality, easy to access and as joined up as possible regardless of who runs the building.
8. People will get a clear, accurate, timely and consistent response, reducing the need for repeat contact and avoiding unnecessary referrals to specialist professional services

- Is this the right approach in helping people to make good choices that help them and their families to help themselves?
 - Probes:
 - Is there anything missing?
 - Do you feel these are important?
 - Are there any other principles which you believe the Council should use, in order to achieve the aims?
 - 1. **Considering individual responsibility** (i.e. individuals should take as much responsibility for their own lives as they can) - How can this be encouraged?
 - What would the Council need or have to do differently to achieve this?
 - 2. **Considering self-service** (i.e. wherever possible, people should be encouraged to help themselves with well targeted information and appropriate support) – How can this be encouraged?
 - How will we improve the awareness and knowledge of people who do not currently use the internet, and improve internet access in our community?
 - Is the Council's website accessible and useful to people?
 - What would the Council need or have to do differently to achieve this?



3. **Considering prevention wherever possible / healthy eating** (i.e. it is worth taking preventative action in order to avoid their needs escalating) – How can this be encouraged?
 - What information do you need to make healthier lifestyle choices?
 - How would you like to access healthy lifestyle services?

4. **Considering digital by default** (i.e. people should be able to access an increasing range of information, advice and services online) - What experiences do you have with using the Council’s website?
 - What are the issues in making information and advice accessible? / How do we overcome issues?

5. **Considering face to face access when it is really needed** (i.e. understanding that digital isn’t available to everyone or suitable for every circumstance, we will work with communities and partners to provide face-to-face contact to those who need it) – Where do you think face to face contact is needed most?

6. **Considering digital assistance** (i.e. providing training, support and access are some of the ways of helping people to help themselves) – What do you think about this?
 - What would the Council need to do differently to encourage people to help themselves?

7. **Considering joined up access** (i.e. customers should not have to worry about finding the right organisation or department. Information and advice should be clearly signposted, high quality, easy to access and as joined up as possible regardless of who runs the building) - When working with others to provide information, what matters most to you?
 - What would the Council need or have to do differently to make it easier to find the right department or organisation?

8. **Considering right first time** (i.e. people will get a clear, accurate, timely and consistent response, reducing the need for repeat contact and avoiding unnecessary referrals to specialist professional services) – How can this be achieved?
 - What would the Council need or have to do differently to achieve this?

Active Individuals – working together

This approach cannot be successful through working alone. Where there are opportunities to work more closely with communities and partners to improve our collective approach, the Council will develop and enhance these.

- How important is it for people to be able to find the range of information they need to lead active lives, in one place, at a time that suits them and in a way that suits them?
 - What factors are important in achieving this?
 - Do you have any real examples of where this currently works well or could work better? Please talk about these examples.



Growing Older in Gloucestershire (30 minutes)

Next we are going to think about your views of growing older and consider the council’s draft policy statement which sets out Gloucestershire County Council’s views about growing older in Gloucestershire. This sets out the Council’s ambitions to make Gloucestershire a place where people are able to enjoy fulfilling lives as they grow older. People are living longer and the term ‘older person’ is one that many people do not recognise as applying to themselves, instead thinking of someone else they know who is older than them. Using chronological age is not helpful as people age differently, sometimes as a result of unplanned life circumstances or choices made earlier in life.

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – your view

- When you heard the words ‘growing older’, what words or phrases come to mind?
 - Probes:
 - How do you feel about growing older in Gloucestershire?
 - What do you want as you get older?
 - How can you best be supported as you get older?
 - Are you planning for the future?

Flipchart word association exercise – Moderator to write suggested words onto a flipchart.

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire

The Council believes they need to change their thinking and approach and start to support our ageing population to have greater social connectivity and a greater sense of purpose. The Council has to do this with less money than previously. The Council believes they can do this with the support of local communities if we increase our ambition and change in the way we provide support. The Council think that there are four steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire (hand out **show card 6**)

- What do you think about the four steps in supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire?
- How could older people be better helped in their communities?
- **Do you have any ideas/suggestions on how we can support the community, and carers to play their vital role in supporting our ageing population?**

SHOW CARD 6
Steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire

Active Individuals: The Council wants to help people to stay healthy for longer so they can enjoy remaining independent and active into older age.

Active Communities: Being part of an active community can play a huge part in helping people stay independent for longer.

Getting People Back to Independence: Social services has a responsibility to help people who have been assessed as having a need to get back on their feet, for example following a stay in hospital, so they can carry on living at home safely.

Being There When We’re Needed Most: However much help is available from families, friends, neighbours and communities, the Council knows there will always be some people who will also require social care services.



Growing Older in Gloucestershire - the principles / values

There are already some excellent examples of initiatives where people are starting to think differently about ageing and people living fulfilling lives as they grow older, such as dementia-friendly communities (where the Council is working with communities to help make them places where people with dementia can live more independently and safely). This involves awareness raising and training so that people recognise and understand the needs of people with dementia and have confidence in interacting with them.

- When thinking about growing older in Gloucestershire, do you think that the principles/values below will support you to lead fulfilling lives?
 - Probes:
 - Is there anything missing?
 - Do you feel these are important?

SHOW CARD 7

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – principles/values

Promoting well informed self-help: Older people need accessible, clear information and advice for them, their families and their communities to help them make good choices and improve their own outcomes.

Maximising independence: The best solutions are those that enable people's independence and connect them to their communities.

Prevention and early intervention: The Council will work with communities and partners so that, together, the council is able to notice and respond quickly to the signs that someone needs help. Where the council can, they will take quick action to prevent people's needs getting worse.

Choice and control: People should be able to decide for themselves the support that would best address their needs and how it should be provided. The Council will listen to what older people want and build our plans around that.

Doing the right thing: The Council will focus on making a real difference for people and our plans and solutions will be based on what the council know helps people stay safe and promotes their independence.

Quality care that keeps people safe and promotes dignity: The Council will work with care providers who recognise that the quality of care that people receive matters and who provide safe services for older people that promotes their dignity.

Summary of discussion (5 minutes)

- What do you believe are the most important issues we have discussed today?
- Is there anything else which we have not discussed which you think is important to mention? If so, what?

Feedback questionnaire (5 minutes)

Please could you take a few minutes to complete your feedback questionnaire and hand them back to me.



Other consultations

You will also find copies of other consultations currently being run by Gloucestershire County Council and their partners on the table. Please help yourself to these and they can be returned using a freepost address.

Close

Thank participants, distribute incentives and close group. Mention they will all receive personal feedback.



Appendix 2 – Focus Group 7 Discussion Guide

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Please note this discussion guide is intended as a guide to the moderator only. Sections may be subject to change. Times shown are based on 90 minute focus group.

Introduction (5 minutes)

My name is Joanne Harvatt and I work for a research agency called Enventure Research.

Firstly, I will give you a bit of background and explain the aims of the consultation. During June-August this year, Gloucestershire County Council consulted its communities to test the proposals they have in relation to changing the way the Council supports people. Nearly 3,000 people were engaged in the process, including some of you, and the County Council thanks you for participating. The feedback received has been used by the Council to further develop and refine the proposal and subsequently policies have been written. We are now here to discuss these policies to gain a deeper understanding of your views.

The Council is also currently consulting on its corporate strategy and Council budget. If you would like to be involved in this, you can indicate this on the feedback form at the end of the session.

IMPORTANT: Please be assured that everything you say during this session is confidential, so please be as open and honest as possible. There is no right or wrong answer. Enventure Research is an independent research agency. We simply want to know what you think based on your own personal experiences. Please ensure that any views you give us are your own views. Tomorrow, Gloucestershire County Council will be consulting with community groups and voluntary sector organisations, as well as partners separately to this.

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All views and opinions of all present are valid and will help shape the policies and plan into the future.

I will be recording the session so I do not need to take notes as you are talking. However, the recording is only used to help write the report and is deleted once it has been used. I want to hear all your opinions, but please try to talk one at a time.

The session will last for about one hour and a half. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Location of fire exit, laptops away and mobile phones switched off/to silent.

Respondent introduction (10 minutes)

- Can you please introduce yourselves? Can you tell me first your name?
- What area do you cover?
- Tell me a bit about yourself:
 - Where do you live?
 - What do you do for a living (if working)? What have you done in the past?



Active Communities

Background: There is a wealth of community activity taking place across Gloucestershire in neighbourhoods and villages. Some of these activities take place with the support of the Council and other public sector partners, even more thrive through the commitment, creativity and drive of local people. In the policies that were emailed/posted out there are some examples of where community capacity is already happening in Gloucestershire.

Active Communities – the community (20 minutes)

- We are now going to talk about active communities. When you heard the words 'active communities', what words or phrases come to mind?
- What makes you say those words? / Where do you get those perceptions from?

Flipchart word association exercise – Moderator to write suggested words onto a flipchart.

- What does an active community look like?
- How can a community become more active?
- What good things are happening within your community / What works well within your community?
- What motivates you to be involved in your community?
- Do you have any examples of where the Council has been involved in community projects, but where the community has taken the lead?
 - What made these projects successful?

Active Communities – The Council

We now want you to think about the Council's role in supporting active communities – that is to think about the support and advice needed to help communities to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities. The Council recognises that they need to help communities but they want to understand what and how this can best be achieved.

- What role do you think the Council should play in helping communities to use what they already have, to secure what they need, to build safer, healthier and more inclusive communities?
 - Probes:
 - Where should the Council focus its support most? (this could be geographically, or with particular demographic or community groups)

Active Communities – values and principles (20 minutes)

Within the draft active communities policy there are a set of principles (*hand out **show card 2***).

- Do you think that the principles/values below are the right ones to encourage more active communities?
 - Probes:
 - Is there anything missing?
 - Do you feel these are important in how the Council work with communities?
 - How can you think you can help take forward these values/principles?



SHOW CARD 2

Active Communities – values and principles

1. Recognising and building on the strengths that exist within each local community.
2. The Council should prioritise its support for those communities where need is greatest.
3. Looking for shared priorities and co-producing shared solutions so that plans take account of what is important to and what works in each community.
4. A local approach that allows people to take control of the process, helps them to decide what matters most and finds solutions that suit the local circumstances. This means that solutions will look different in different communities.
5. An empowering approach that recognises the legitimacy of different voices within the community and give local people the opportunity to express their views, develop consensus and take action. As a Council, we will be willing to participate without taking charge.
6. Working with other parts of the public sector, voluntary and community groups to develop common approaches to building capacity. We will avoid 'ploughing our own furrow'.
7. Ensuring that the voice of under-represented groups is heard within communities and that communities include all views and backgrounds.

Active Communities – working together (20 minutes)

In order for this new way of working to be successful, the Council will have to work in a joined up way – with communities and their partners.

- How can Parish Councils support their communities to become more active?

Moderator to record on flipchart.

- How can this policy be implemented in practice?
- How can you contribute to implementing this policy?
- How can Parish Councils and the Council work better together, to ensure communities are able to do more for themselves?
- What does the Council need to change in the way they behave, in order to make it easier for communities to work with the Council?

Summary of discussion (10 minutes)

- What do you believe are the most important issues we have discussed today?
- Is there anything else which we have not discussed tonight which you think is important to mention? If so, what?

Feedback questionnaire (5 minutes)

Please could you take a few minutes to complete your feedback questionnaire and hand them back to me.



Council strategy and budget survey

Please take a copy of the Council strategy and budget survey, which can be completed and returned using the freepost address on the back.

Close

Thank participants and close group. Mention they will all receive personal feedback.

Appendix - Growing Older in Gloucestershire

Next we are going to think about your views of growing older and consider the Council's draft policy statement which sets out Gloucestershire County Council's views about growing older in Gloucestershire. This sets the Council's ambitions to make Gloucestershire a place where people are able to enjoy fulfilling lives as they grow older.

People are living longer and the term 'older person' is one that many people do not recognise as applying to themselves, instead thinking of someone else they know who is older than them. Using chronological age is not helpful as people age differently, sometimes as a result of unplanned life circumstances or choices made earlier in life.

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – your view

- When you heard the words 'growing older', what words or phrases come to mind?
 - Probe:
 - How do you feel about growing older in Gloucestershire?
 - What do you want as you get older?
 - How can you best be supported as you get older?
 - Are you planning for the future?

Flipchart word association exercise – moderator to write suggested words onto a flipchart.

Growing Older in Gloucestershire – steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire

The Council believes they need to change their thinking and approach and start to support our ageing population to have greater social connectivity and a greater sense of purpose. The Council has to do this with less money than previously. The Council believes they can do this with the support of local communities if we increase our ambition and change in the way we provide support. The Council think that there are four steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire (hand out **show card 6**)

- What do you think about the four steps in supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire?
- How could older people be better helped in their communities?
- Do you have any ideas/suggestions on how we can support the community and carers to play their vital role in supporting our ageing population?



Growing Older in Gloucestershire - the principles /values

SHOW CARD 6

Steps to supporting people as they age in Gloucestershire

Active Individuals: The Council wants to help people to stay healthy for longer so they can enjoy remaining independent and active into older age.

Active Communities: Being part of an active community can play a huge part in helping people stay independent for longer.

Getting People Back to Independence: Social services has a responsibility to help people who have been assessed as having a need to get back on their feet, for example following a stay in hospital so they can carry on living at home safely.

Being There When We're Needed Most: However much help is available from families, friends, neighbours and communities, the Council knows there will always be some people who will also require social care services.

There are already some excellent examples of initiatives where people are starting to think differently about ageing and living fulfilling lives as they grow older. Such as: dementia Friendly Communities – Where the Council is working with communities to help make them places where people with dementia can live more independently and safely. This involves awareness raising and training so that people recognise and understand the needs of people with dementia and have confidence in interacting with them.

- When thinking about growing older in Gloucestershire, do you think that the principles/values below will support you to lead fulfilling lives?
 - Probes:
 - Is there anything missing?
 - Do you feel these are important?

**SHOW CARD 7****Growing Older in Gloucestershire – principles/values**

Promoting well informed self-help: Older people need accessible, clear information and advice for them, their families and their communities to help them make good choices and improve their own outcomes.

Maximising independence: The best solutions are those that enable people's independence and connect them to their communities.

Prevention and early intervention: The Council will work with communities and partners so that, together, the Council is able to notice and respond quickly to the signs that someone needs help. Where the Council can, they will take quick action to prevent people's needs getting worse.

Choice and control: People should be able to decide for themselves the support that would best address their needs and how it should be provided. The Council will listen to what older people want and build our plans around that.

Doing the right thing: The Council will focus on making a real difference for people and our plans and solutions will be based on what the council know helps people stay safe and promotes their independence.

Quality care that keeps people safe and promotes dignity: The Council will work with care providers who recognise that the quality of care that people receive matters and who provide safe services for older people that promotes their dignity.