



onenortherndevon



# Internal evaluation report

## End of year 1: 2024-25

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## Acronyms

- CC - Community Connector (staff)
- CD - Community Developer (staff)
- CD/C - Community Developer and Connector (staff)
- CVS – Council for Voluntary services (Employer)
  - TTVS - Tav and Torrington CVS
  - NDVS – North Devon CVS
- CW&I – Community Wellbeing & Inclusion (strategic group)
- NDF – Northern Devon Futures (Economic partnership)
- OND – One Northern Devon (Local [health and] Care partnership)
- OC – One Community (Community partnership)
- VCSE – Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (third sector)

# Programme Overview

## **Aim**

To build a strong, vibrant, and connected VCSE sector, using community development as the primary tool.

## **Approach**

Supported by two Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), Community Developers and Connectors (CD/C) facilitating listening, engagement, collaboration, connected learning, community action and systems change. Listening to and supporting communities, learning and understanding, especially the gaps and hidden voices, influencing statutory organisations and institutions, and strengthening the VCSE sector are all core to this approach.

Narrative is key to illuminating the personal stories behind statistics. Case studies and reflections from Community Developers and Connectors are essential to capturing the lived experiences, challenges, and solutions emerging from the ground — and ensuring these are shared with relevant strategic partners and stakeholders.

The work is interested in what we are learning from the people and communities we work with, how this learning has informed our practice, and what changes we may make to our delivery plans as a result.

## **Outcomes**

1	ENGAGING people in communities of place or shared need to identify priorities, assets, strengths, and gaps — and to support them in taking collective relevant action [Short version - listening to & supporting communities]
2	Embedding LEARNING from community engagement to inform and adapt delivery, with a focus on the lived experiences, challenges, and solutions identified by Community Developers and Connectors. [Short version – Improving Practice]
3	STRENGTHENING the VCSE sector (including both CVS'S) through supporting third-sector organisations, staff, and volunteers; sharing best practice; supporting new networks, activities and organisations. [Short version – Strengthening the VCSE sector]
4	Using community intelligence to INFLUENCE system change and decision-making, whilst promoting the impact (including prevention) the sector makes. [Short version – influence statutory organisations, institutions and wider strategic partnerships]

## Activities overview

### Headline Stats

**Community Developers secured £7,901 funding, delivering work across 21 themes for 33 population groups. This included:**

- 46 projects
- 11 Events
- 9 Insight and engagement activities
- 9 Forums
- 10 additional support activities

**351 partners were involved, reaching 1048 participants.**

Click here to see [full table of activities](#) including outputs, outcomes and partners involved

### 8 themes of work

All reported Community Development activity fits into the categories below:

#### 1. Community Engagement, Insight & Participation

- Activism
- Engagement, Involvement and insight
- Volunteering
- Partnership forums

#### 2. Communication & Access

- Comms and marketing (Improve access to services, activities, opportunities)
- Funding
- VCSE support & organisational development

### **3. Social Support, Inclusion & safety**

- Cost-of-living support
- Family support
- Inclusive Communities
- Community Safety
- Peer support
- Loneliness and social isolation

### **4. Health & Wellbeing**

- Health
- Wellbeing (incl. Mental wellbeing)
- Physical activity

### **5. Education, Learning & Employment**

- Community learning
- Education, training and employment (incl. NEET)

### **6. Culture & Creativity**

- Cultural (Creative)
- Cultural (Heritage)

### **7. Environment & Sustainability**

- Nature-based
- Sustainable living

### **8. Community Spirit & Identity**

- Community Spirit

## **33 targeted population groups**

- **Age groups**
  - Age: Children (0-15)
  - Age: Young people (16-24)
  - Age: Adults (25-64)
  - Age: Older people (65+)
- **Community**
  - Community: workers / leaders
  - Community: Volunteers
- **Clinical populations**
  - Clinical: Addiction
  - Clinical: Cancer

- Clinical: Cardiovascular disease
- Clinical: Chronic (Long-term) health condition
- Clinical: Mental illness
- **Social**
  - Wellbeing: loneliness/social isolation
- **Family**
  - Parent/carer and child
- **Inclusion groups (Plus populations)**
  - Inclusion: Carers (unpaid)
  - Inclusion: NEET (16-24yrs)
  - Inclusion: Digital poverty
  - Inclusion: LGBTQ+
  - Inclusion: Disabled
  - Inclusion: Neurodiverse
  - Inclusion: Sex workers
  - Inclusion: Homeless
- **Ethnicities**
  - Ethnicity: Global majority (non-white, BAME, minority ethnic)
  - Ethnicity: Multi-cultural
- **General public**
- **Workers**
  - Farmers
- **Sex**
  - Men
  - Women
- **Deprivation / Socio-economic**
  - Deprivation: Core20 (IMD 1, IMD 2)
  - Deprivation: People experiencing Poverty/struggling financially
- **Cross-sector organisations/ groups**
  - Organisation/group (VCFSE)
  - Organisations (Private)
  - Organisations (Public)
  - Staff

## Summary of activities and outputs

### 1. Communication & Marketing

- Comms materials – distribution lists, leaflets, posters, flyers, display boards, exhibitions
- Marketing – website, newsletters, social media, word of mouth, local publications, community notice boards, directories
- Social tools – social media/text groups

### 2. Information & Signposting

- Signposting – opportunities for local people (groups, activities, services) and organisations (funding, resources)

### **3. Organisational Development & Capacity Building**

- Organisational development (VCFSE) – register with CVS, courses for staff and volunteers
- Funding – bid writing
- Reporting – work log, reflective practice, funder reports
- Evaluation – gather feedback (survey, informal interview)
- Safety – risk assessment, site visit, safeguarding

### **4. Volunteering Management**

- Volunteering – recruitment, training, coordination, publicise opportunities, add to Devon Connect platform, volunteer engagement, connect enquiries with opportunities

### **5. Event & Activity Coordination**

- Events – help plan and run, invites, administration, book speakers/workshops/stands/services/activity providers, refreshments
- Workshop / activity setup – book venues, tutors/staff, project management, order/create delivery materials

### **6. Community Engagement & Involvement**

- Engagement / research / insight – asset mapping, surveys, street outreach, analyse/share results, community knowledge generation, needs analysis
- Involvement – co-design and (co)facilitate, activities, group work

### **7. Partnership & Networking**

- Forums, meetings – support volunteer Chair, create agenda, minutes, invites to cross-sector partners
- Secure partners – find and support partners to deliver projects with
- Networking / relationships – with residents, civic/organisational leaders and staff, attend forums, meetings, events
- Supporting initiatives – ‘meet and greet’ role, coordinate partners

### **8. Advocacy & Representation**

- Advocacy – represent community voice (Council/OC meetings)

## **7 areas of outcomes**

### **1. Organisational Development & Capacity Building**

- VCSE organisation connected with organisational development resources and support

- Improved capability of local volunteers, particularly those working with vulnerable populations
- Empowered small businesses – to set up websites/booking systems
- Boost confidence, improve communication skills
- Increased corporate interest in volunteering and CSR initiatives
- Strengthening partnerships/relationships between corporate sponsors, public sector, and VCSE voluntary sector

## **2. Communication, Awareness & Information Sharing**

- Increased awareness and communication (VCSE, volunteers, partners) – local groups, activities, volunteer roles, training, funding, local needs/assets
- Community insight (generate and share) – corporates interested in speaking directly to VCSE organisations
- Community voice is heard

## **3. Volunteering & Community Participation**

- Volunteering
- Increased volunteering
- Secure volunteer placements
- Increased engagement – registration/sign-ups and participation/attendance
- Increased corporate interest in volunteering and CSR initiatives (also fits here)
- Empowering community members to take ownership/responsibility

## **4. Community Mobilisation & Action**

- Mobilising social community action
- Support community to identify and implement solutions which improve people's lives
- Kickstarted project opportunities
- Increased community action via networks and forums that act as a catalyst for local initiatives
- Increase, and support existing, community assets/provision

## **5. Social Inclusion, Wellbeing & Support**

- Reduced stigma (more inclusive)
- Increased inclusion/awareness of minority groups – foster empathy and understanding, build welcoming supportive communities
- Reduced social isolation/loneliness – increased social networks, safe social environments, increased social interactions
- Provide a safe space for sharing experiences and accessing emotional support
- Increased mental health resources (drop-in, peer support, resources)
- Increased support for those with health conditions (cancer, CVD)
- Improved mental wellbeing
- Improved access to support services
- Improves access to services/activities/opportunities

- Increased access to basic need support (food, clothing)
- Provide free support

## 6. Community Spirit, Pride & Recognition

- Celebrating communities – recognition of individuals and groups for outstanding contributions
- Increased community spirit / civic participation
- Sense of pride and connection (community)
- Increased peer support groups

## 7. Skill Development & Empowerment

- Attendees gain practical skills to improve their wellbeing and communities
- Increased agency, independence (to access local community)

# Objectives 1-4

## Objective 1

**Engaging people in communities, of place or shared need, to identify priorities, assets, strengths, and gaps — and to support them in taking collective relevant action [Short version - listening to & supporting communities]**

### Why we did it

Community Developers engaged people in communities, whether defined by place or shared need, to ensure that the work is grounded in lived experience and driven by what truly matters to them. By creating space for individuals to identify their own priorities, assets, strengths, and gaps, CDs aimed to build on local knowledge and foster genuine ownership. This approach enabled communities to lead collective, relevant action that responds to their unique contexts, strengthens resilience, and supports sustainable, long-term change.

### How we did it

To listen and involve people effectively, Community Developers have organised a range of engagement and involvement activities:

- **Mapping local priorities, and early themes**
- **Built trusted relationships and inclusive spaces** where community members felt heard, respected, and empowered to contribute.
- **Facilitated conversations, Community forums and themed networks, surveys, Collaborative ‘wellbeing’ events and asset-mapping activities.** CD/C supported people to reflect on their experiences, identify shared priorities, and recognise the strengths and resources already within their communities.

- o Community surveys to build an understanding of the priorities of local people and organisations
- o Asset Mapping to understand what's going on / resources available that provide community benefit, increasing the opportunities people have to thrive. (services, activities, opportunities)
- o Co-design to support funding bids and project development. Recognising that people's priorities and needs are best understood through direct, open conversations.
- o Conversations during activity delivery
- o Community forums and themed networks allow cross-sector conversations to share information, learning and explore opportunities to take action. These networks expand beyond the meetings and for relational networks that can be drawn on by a variety of community workers for local developments.
- o Collaborative 'wellbeing' events bring people and organisations together, building trust, encourage dialogue, and foster connections across different groups.

To take forward the actions they defined, CDs:

- **Helped connect people and organisations with tools, funding, and networks**, ensuring they remained in the lead.
- **Provided support, capacity-building, and encouragement** along the way.

## What difference has it made?

This approach made a meaningful difference to both individuals and communities. People reported feeling more confident, valued, and connected, with many developing new skills and taking on leadership roles for the first time. Communities became more cohesive and resilient, with stronger relationships, clearer shared goals, and increased capacity to take action on local issues. By focusing on what mattered most to them, communities were able to design and deliver solutions that were more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable leading to lasting change and a stronger sense of ownership and pride in what they had achieved together.

These approaches have led to:

### Individuals

- Feeling empowered to contribute and lead
- Access meaningful and accessible engagement opportunities
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Increased independence, more confidently accessing community resources

### Organisations / services

- A clearer understanding of shared challenges and assets
- stronger relationships between organisations
- supported more responsive and effective services
- reducing silo working
- fostering collaboration

- and most importantly building trust between partners and staff

### Wider Community

- increased community ownership of local issues
- experienced greater cohesion and collaboration

### System

Wider strategic partnerships can better understand local community priorities, strengthened the local system's ability to work collectively for lasting positive change.

## Challenges

While this community-led approach brought many benefits, it also came with risks and challenges.

- **Questions remain around representation and reach.** Who speaks for the One Communities? Are their members a fair sample? Demographic is not routinely collected which impacts insight. As Barnstaple Town Council rightly asked — 'Do we truly have the residents' voices? What do we still not know, and whose voices remain hidden?'
- **Limited resources** – CDs are not given a budget for engagement activities and so often rely on project budgets (events/activities) to create opportunities to meet people. Furthermore, working hours often exclude times when specific groups may be available
- **Varying levels of confidence with engagement methods** – CDs do not receive training in research methods
- **The potential for consultation fatigue or unmet expectations** if action doesn't align with community priorities
- **Finding 'quiet voices' takes considerable effort and time** to develop trust

To mitigate these risks, Community Developers have invested time in building trust with organisations and local people, including those with unheard, 'quiet voice'. They have been transparent about what they could offer and have ensured ongoing communication with many involved.

### Recommendations

- Provide training, budget and out of hours engagement opportunities
- Agree methods and delivery of engagement activities
- Gather demographic details to understand who has not been involved
- Visit and create safe, inclusive spaces where quiet/excluded people feel comfortable sharing their experiences and ideas.
- Provide inclusive facilitation, translation, and accessibility resources for groups and individuals as needed
- Regularly review approaches with community feedback, adapting where needed to ensure that momentum is maintained and that no one is left behind.
- Ensure ongoing communication with all involved

## Learning summary

Key learning points from this work include the importance of starting with relationships and trust, taking time to understand each community's unique context, and valuing lived experience as expertise. Community Developers learned that meaningful change happens when communities are in the lead, and that flexibility, patience, and long-term commitment are essential. Clear, honest communication helps manage expectations, and ongoing reflection ensures the approach stays responsive. Finally, Community Developers saw that even small actions can build confidence and spark wider change when communities feel supported and heard.

### Strategic learning

- Engagement must be inclusive, especially of quiet, hard-to-reach and hidden communities.
- Connectors have been valuable, but their roles should be refined based on year one learning.
- Feedback loops need strengthening to ensure insights lead to strategic decisions.
- Strategic partners are beginning to recognise the value of lived experience, thanks to the Poverty Truth Commission. This model should be embedded more widely.
- The Community Life Survey, targeted in North Devon and Torridge, is a direct outcome of this work and will support deeper engagement in year two.

## In depth learning – strengths and challenges

### Communication & Marketing

#### Current Knowledge: (Strengths)

- Parts of the Community are more aware of the services, activities and opportunities on offer
- CDs share information on behalf of organisations/services across a wide network via email, newsletters and forums. One Atlantic also use an online chat room (Devon Connect's free Team function)
- Feedback suggests, Devon Connect is slowly increasing in popularity as a directory for services, events, advertising paid & voluntary roles. CDs are increasingly supporting the Devon Connect platform to help create an online directory, this also supports social prescribing as it automatically populates the PCN funded 'Joy marketplace' app, allowing automated signposting and referrals to community activities/groups by Social prescribers

Challenges	Impact	Mitigations
Limited by reach of current networks	Low attendance; Hard to know if information is reaching target populations	CD employers/funders should note the argument for 'quality over quantity', especially if serving disadvantaged 'quiet voice' populations. Success criteria could be determined through co-design.
CD does not have enough time (part-time) to produce	Low attendance or not reaching target populations	Delegate work to community members, empowering them to take control

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and distribute comms materials

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## Surveys

### Strengths

- Data helps build cross-community understanding of what support exists and where, and what gaps might exist across Northern Devon, enabling leaders to push for further aid in Northern Devon.
- CDs are identifying local needs, priorities and assets
- CDs and Chairs often work together to create a list of local priorities via local engagement (surveys, events, forum feedback)

### Key Challenges:

Challenge	Impact	Recommendation
CDs are often asked to share partner surveys, but data is often not fed back to CDs	Unable to share with community and update priorities/plans based on emerging evidence	Request a copy of all engagement data from surveys shared by CD
Methods vary from 'straw poll' to surveys developed with professional support	Not clear which populations have taken part in engagement activities. Hard to compare data between communities	Agree methods and data requirements (incl. Demographic), providing training for staff

NICE guidelines [NG44/QS148](#) could be harnessed to ensure Community engagement improves health and wellbeing and reduces health inequalities (strategic priorities)

## Partnership work

### Strengths

- CDs are navigating tensions and building relationships
- Community forums (One Communities) promote partnership working

### Key Challenges:

Challenge	Impact	Mitigation
Anti-organisation rhetoric due to staff turnover / past negative impact of decisions	Partners not working together. Residents feeling 'done to' not 'with'.	CD taking a 'gentle appreciate inquiry approach' rather than formalising work. Listening to understand and exploring opportunities that promote

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(Do not have the relationship with these vocal residents)

partnership work that responds to local need.

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### *Co-designing*

- There is an increase in co-design with people with lived experience. Working with them as equals to design and deliver services, working particularly closely with specific communities that have been historically underserved. Methods include informal focus groups and conversation during activities.
- Some CDs involve staff in co-design (Social prescribers, activity providers) to improve access, experience and outcomes

### Key Challenges:

Challenge	Impact	Recommendation
Involving staff requires management permission	Staff do not partake in co-design (missing a vital perspective)	Employers and strategic partners to help create staff engagement opportunities by speaking with management to gain access to staff
Involving target groups during design stage	Initiative may not be well suited / reach target population	Involve people with lived experience (staff/target populations) as early as possible

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### *Empowering local action*

### Strengths:

- To support local action, CDs are helping Communities to understand local assets, gaps/needs and priorities. They often create (cross-sector) partnerships to help create action.
- CDs often 'pilot' ideas to empower locals to continue. 'This can be the only way to begin something' as energy / capacity can be low without leadership'. CDs often provide this leadership.
- CD work can 'attract energy' to continue their work, post setup, often in the form of volunteers that self-manage projects and use CDs for support (e.g. Holsworthy food bank). As a result, local volunteering increases.

### Key Challenges:

Challenge	Impact	Mitigation
People think an idea is good but there is not the local capacity to action – CD often has to setup initiatives	Can waste CD time if community are not able to continue work.	CDs to set up working groups, assigning roles and actions to people.

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Visible projects that appear and disappear, potentially lose trust of supportive partners.	If there is no local support then work should be discontinued.
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## Reaching under-represented populations

### Strengths

- CDs have attended Interwoven’s ‘Quiet Voice methodology’ training to better understand how to help excluded populations have a voice (incl. behaviour mapping and understanding time-poor communities).
- Since then, some CDs have reported working together to co-design/deliver engagement. This was first discussed by Community Developers at the North Devon Inclusive Community Framework taster day (on same table)
- Other CDs report reaching ‘quiet voices’ through the activities they run/support - building trust with attendees through informal conversations and inquiry.

Challenge	Impact	Recommendation
Unable to identify if target populations have been reached as demographic data missing	unaware of lack of representation; Survey predominantly completed by majority populations	Request demographic data (during events, activities, engagement)
Still need to go beyond the usual voices and engage those who are less visible / heard	Do not hear from a broader, more representative cross-section of our communities, especially those often excluded from traditional engagement methods	Engage organisations specialising in serving 'hidden/quiet' populations to explore best ways to reach target groups
Postcodes, as markers of deprivation, do not highlight ‘pockets of deprivation’ hidden within affluent postcode areas	Unable to effectively geographically target deprived populations	Harness local engagement strategies, alongside public health data, to identify target populations.
High expectations to engage ‘quiet voices’. 7% of the population create 64% service demand (RDUHT, 2025). Therefore, do Community Developers only need to reach the 7%?	CDs are often unsupported as many organisations are also unable to reach ‘quiet voice’ populations	CDs need to be provided with data and KPI’s, alongside reflection and partnerships with organisations that serve the 20% most deprived / quiet voice populations

## Next steps

In Year 2 of the programme, our focus will be on:

- deepening relationships with communities
- strengthening the capacity of local leaders, and
- supporting the delivery of community priorities identified in Year 1
- Moving from listening to inclusive, representative action.

We will build on the foundations already laid, offering tailored support, peer learning opportunities, and access to resources that help sustain momentum. We'll also enhance our learning approach - capturing impact, sharing stories, and using insights to refine our methods. Crucially, we'll continue to centre community voices in decision-making, ensuring the programme remains responsive, inclusive, and shaped by those it's meant to benefit.

## Objective 2

**Embedding learning from community engagement to inform and adapt delivery, with a focus on the lived experiences, challenges, and solutions identified by Community Developers and Connectors. (Short version – Improving Practice)**

### Why we did it

The Community Developers and Connectors are staff who have direct, ongoing relationships with communities and play key roles in understanding and communicating their needs. Through their insights, we focused on embedding learning from their work (community engagement and action) to help continually improve practice.

Component	Learning
Embedding learning	Making sure insights from staff are not just collected but meaningfully integrated into future planning and service delivery.
Community engagement	Actively listening to and collaborating with communities, especially through trusted intermediaries (Developers and Connectors).
Inform and adapt delivery	Using what is learned to shape how programs or services are designed and implemented.
Lived experiences	Valuing personal, on-the-ground experiences as legitimate and essential data (alongside public data sources).
Challenges and solutions	Learning not only what's not working but also what is — and why.

## How we did it

1. Reflective practice has been a central theme throughout year one
2. The project has transitioned from initial setup to strategic alignment, with simplified outcomes and a clear reporting template now in place.
3. Structures such as the Strategic Steering Group and the Inclusive Community Framework have been embedded within wider partnerships, creating a platform for shared learning and influence.
4. The Poverty Truth model has demonstrated the power of lived experience in driving change, with commissioners beginning to adapt processes in response to community stories. However, sustaining this approach requires consistent funding and commitment
5. Set up regular feedback loops to gather insights and share learning
  - o Monthly sessions with Community Developers and Connectors.
  - o Quarterly sessions with One Community Chairs (volunteers) and staff
  - o Quarterly sessions with Community workers from across Northern Devon
  - o Use structured tools like reflective logs, storytelling, and learning circles.
6. Ensure staff lived experiences shape decision-making
  - o Use case studies or anonymised community stories in planning meetings.
  - o Invite Developers/Connectors to co-design sessions.

## What difference has it made

### 1. Delivery Became More Responsive

- Regular feedback from Developers and Connectors led to faster identification of emerging issues. Line managers and peer support was enabled through regular meetings.
- Attendee feedback led to changes to better meet local needs, including changes to programme content, different opening times, and targeted support.

### 2. Voices from the Community Were Amplified

- Developers and Connectors listened to residents and organisational challenges, working with them to find solutions.
- These lived experiences were presented to decision-makers, helping shift priorities from assumptions to authentic, experience-based insights.

### 3. Stronger Relationships Built Across Partners

- Developers and Connectors became key knowledge holders, opening new collaboration opportunities
- Their role as bridges between communities and organisations has led to action relevant to local priorities

### 4. Refined Practice Through Reflection

- Reflection was introduced into reporting and regular meetings.
- Staff often shared ideas and supported each other through peer support

## Examples of Impact

Insert Case studies

- A social space (Wellbeing Wednesday) was redesigned after a Developer, Social prescribers and attendees highlighted that a dementia support activity (Memory Cafe) had outgrown the space. It is now offered as a separate service in a different location.
- A Connector identified barriers to access among farmers. This led to improved communications (harnessing radio advertising), to reach socially isolated individuals, a new start date after harvest, to make it more accessible. Volunteer training was also put in place to equip them with the ability to signpost.

## Challenges

1. Difficult to know how, who, and where to capture all learning. This has been a challenge across both operational and strategic levels. However, we now hopefully have the correct documentation, reporting templates, and feedback loops in place to ensure that learning reaches the right people — not just for reporting, but to inform meaningful change.
2. Understanding and defining change
  - Challenge: Understanding how insight has been used to inform change.
  - Why it happens: Lack of clear processes or accountability for turning feedback into decisions.
  - Impact: Communities may feel ignored or disillusioned; Staff become frustrated; Project leads do not have oversight over whether improvements have been made or not
  - Mitigation: Create a 'Community insight to action' feedback loop: A simple "You said / We did" communications back to communities and employers. Quantitatively log the change this made. E.g. % increase in engagement
3. Time and Capacity Pressures
  - Challenge: Community Developers and Connectors have limited time to capture, reflect on, and share insights.
  - Why it happens: High workloads, reactive work, and under-resourced.
  - Impact: Learning becomes informal or inconsistent; valuable insight is lost.
  - Mitigation: Protected reflection time to signal that learning is a priority, not a luxury. E.g. "Community Learning Hour"
4. Balancing Multiple Priorities
  - Challenge: Multiple community-defined priorities
  - Why it happens: Performance frameworks don't always allow space for flexible, responsive practice.
  - Impact: Pressure to target all priorities with limited capacity can undermine community-led solutions.
  - Mitigation: Emphasise 'Community-led action', where the Community Developer or Connector facilitates and supports. Empower Community members to take responsibility for the work undertaken.
5. Skills and Confidence Gaps
  - Challenge: Staff can lack confidence in reflective practice, facilitation and co-production methods
  - Why it happens: These skills aren't always prioritised in training or job design.
  - Impact: Missed opportunities for deeper engagement and learning.
  - Mitigation: Provide professional development for Developers/Connectors.
6. Emotional Burden on staff
  - Challenge: At times, Developers and Connectors carry emotional burden from dealing with partnership and community tensions and hearing difficult stories.

- Why it happens: Lack of structured support or supervision for those working closely with communities.
- Impact: Burnout, turnover, and loss of experienced staff.
- Mitigation: [Provide emotional support for Developers/Connectors.](#)

## Learning summary

- Year one was a learning year — embedding structures, testing approaches, and refining evaluation.
- The Steering Group has been a valuable but demanding process; its future role as a learning and influencing vehicle is promising.
- There's a need to go "deeper, darker, wider" — not just repeat what works, but explore gaps, unknowns, and uncomfortable truths.
- Reflective practice must now evolve into strategic action, informed by evidence and lived experience.
- The Community Life Survey, targeted in North Devon and Torridge, is a direct outcome of this work and will support deeper learning and engagement in year two.
- Listening is not enough – creating mechanisms to act on and evidence insight is what drives change.
- Frontline knowledge is strategic knowledge – Developers and Connectors offer real-time intelligence that improves planning and delivery.
- Flexibility is key – embedding learning means being prepared to adapt quickly and intentionally.

## Indepth learning - strengths and challenges

### *Building relationships within Community Partnerships (One Communities) and across other community forums*

#### Strengths

- Developers actively support local [One Community \(OC\)](#) partnerships as a key part of their role. Alongside a volunteer Chair, they support partners to create priorities, share updates and information across a variety of cross-sector organisations. Some Developers facilitate group discussions.
- The relationships and networks created through OC meetings, allow partnership projects to be developed outside of meetings (external working groups). Work tends to take place outside of forum spaces. CD/C meet online and in-person with key stakeholders to develop work.
- These relationships have allowed some OCs to become integrated within wider partnerships (E.g. Bideford's 'One Atlantic' is the 'Health & Community wellbeing subgroup' of the Bideford regeneration board; One Barnstaple are a member of Barnstaple place partnership – see [emerging governance diagrams](#))
- CD/C are involved across all OC meetings and other place-based forums as well as building relationships with residents and cross-sector organisations outside of forums (meetings, events and street engagement)
- There are many examples of partnership working at the local level because of the relationships built within OCs, see [full table of activities](#) that lists multiple categories, outputs, outcomes and partners involved.

Challenge	Impact	Mitigations
CD/C and Chair often take an active role in developing partnership work but it is unclear how other members of OCs are participating	Members of Community partnerships may be unclear about work undertaken, who are active partners and what progress is being made against shared priorities	Create a simple feedback loop to share the partnership work happening because of being part of the OC and the progress against shared goals.

### *CD/C take an asset-based approach to Community Development*

#### Strengths

- CD/C and OC members are building an understanding of assets of community value, including tangible physical assets, services and activities and intangible assets like social capital, knowledge and cultural heritage.
- Needs analysis is a continual process of picking up on gap from desk research (reports, research) and in-person (meetings, forums). These include the needs of residents and organisations.
- Volunteers help to unlock Community assets by connecting prospective volunteers with suitable roles/sector (E.g. Space youth service needed someone to volunteer their musical expertise so the studio can be fully utilised)

#### Key Challenges: (Risk, Issues)

Challenge	Impact	Mitigations
Assets are not being systematically recorded	OC members, wider community and employers may be unable to take full advantage of an asset-based approach	Systematically record assets of Community Value to ensure knowledge is accessible, shared and used

### *Building more inclusive communities*

#### Strengths

- CD/C identified a 'lack of understanding about complex individuals and trauma. A cross-community working group was setup (ND CD Inclusive framework), to work together to support communities to become more inclusive. Phase 1 focused on supporting local businesses and VCSE organisations

Challenge	Impact	Mitigations
Some community venues are not welcoming of people with complex needs	Diminishes trust between community members (social cohesion)	Educate and inform venues and activity providers in line with the emerging ND inclusive framework

## Variation in CD links with Community teams (Services)

### Strengths

- Some CD have strong links with Community health teams and co-design/co-deliver community/population-level interventions. Building good relationships with Social Prescribers (SP) has enabled socially prescribed activities to be setup for primary care patients. CDs draw on SP knowledge and have set up initiatives that those staff deliver with CD support (Wellbeing Wednesdays, Cancer Care hubs). SP will often refer people into activities/groups and identify gaps in provision.
  - In Ilfracombe CD attends the SP 'team meetings' which has really helped Mary gather relevant information. In South Molton, they have a monthly standing item on the OC agenda for SPs to provide feedback
  - In Bideford, the CD attends SP led wellness groups in the community to build relationships
  - In Holsworthy, the sole SP attends Forum meetings and CD is in regular contact

Challenge	Impact	Mitigations
PCN wellbeing teams not sharing health data with CDs	PCN data is not being used to support local priority setting.	Employers and strategic partners to build relationships with primary care to access social prescriber data and staff time to support priority setting / enable work
No/Poor relationships with social prescriber can negatively impact CD initiatives	CD/C unable to setup population/community approaches targeting primary care patients	

### Next steps

While much has been learned informally, the full depth of insight will emerge once internal and external reports are received. The upcoming team planning day, October presentations to the Strategic Board, and the Lottery Funding Officer's notes will be key in reviewing this outcome and shaping year two priorities

- Continue to invest in reflective practice and create opportunities to share changes made
- Develop a formal 'Community Insight to Action' model to guide future delivery. Track insights, credit sources, categorise themes and map to changes in delivery.
- Regularly review what's been implemented and what impact it's had against local priorities
- Build staff capacity for reflection and facilitation through training and reflection

## Objective 3

**STRENGTHENING the VCSE sector (including both CVS'S) through supporting third-sector organisations, staff, and volunteers; sharing best practice; supporting new networks, activities and organisations. [Short version – Strengthening the VCSE sector]**

### Why we did it

Developers, Connectors and the Councils for Voluntary Services undertook this work to help strengthen the VCSE sector and create a thriving environment for community action. By providing targeted support to third-sector organisations, staff, and volunteers, sharing best practices, encouraging collaboration and new initiatives, they aimed to build a more resilient and connected VCSE sector.

### How we did it

The VCSE sector was strengthened by supporting local organisations, volunteers, and the CD/C. This involved sharing resources, guidance, facilitating peer learning and the sharing of best practice, and creating opportunities for collaboration through funding, partnerships and the development of new activities, ensuring the sector is better equipped to respond to local needs and challenges.

#### 1. Capacity Building and Skills Development

- The CVS - played a vital role in sector development, from training and volunteer support to emergency planning and health inequality pilots. CVS lead, train, guide, recruit, educate, celebrate, and advocate, acting as a strategic bridge between the VCSE sector and local government, health systems, and other partners. Work includes: Annual subsidised training programme, shaped by a listening to those we serve and resourced through strategic funding. Annual Community Awards, a vital opportunity to celebrate the sector and its impact. In response to the national shortage of volunteers, we've run regular Revitalising Volunteering events, supporting our Devon Connect work and helping groups recruit and retain volunteers.
- VCSE organisations – CVS organisational development training programme
- Staff – received quiet voice methodology training, 1:1 line management support
- Volunteers – Many CD-led groups promote volunteers supporting the work, they can access CVS training and build confidence by supporting delivery, some going on to lead within initiatives

#### 2. Networking and Collaboration

- CVS - The Leadership Hub has supported wellbeing and strategic collaboration
- VCSE organisations – OCs provide a regular space for VCSE (and public/private) organisations to come together to discuss, be informed, share and work together
- Staff – Facilitated monthly peer support sessions and a knowledge-sharing forum NDVS supported the creation and growth of a new ND CD network, bringing together Community workers from across Northern Devon with cross-sector guest speakers.
- Volunteers – networking and celebration events to recognise value of volunteering

#### 3. Organisational Development and Innovation

- CVS - Devon Connect is emerging as a key platform
- VCSE organisations – CD/C and CVS supported the development of new and emerging VCSE organisations and delivery partners. Connecting them with training and development opportunities.

- Staff – Helped establish and develop new community-led activities and opportunities

#### **4. Inclusion and Community Engagement**

- Staff – Promoted inclusive approaches to community engagement and participation. Drawing on Quiet Voice training, some CD/C engaged quiet voices at street-level. Participants of community activities and staff from partner organisations were included in co-design of initiatives.
- CVS and CD/C partnership work with the North Devon Inclusive Community Framework is a key part of this outcome. To ensure VCSE organisations are more inclusive and actively listening, helping support VCSE groups working with community members who have complex needs and require tailored, sustained support.

## **What difference has it made?**

Our work made a meaningful difference by strengthening the foundations of the VCSE sector, increasing its resilience, and enhancing its ability to respond to community needs. Organisations reported improved confidence, stronger networks, and increased capacity to deliver services. Staff and volunteers developed new skills and felt more supported in their roles. By encouraging collaboration and sharing good practice, we helped create a more connected and informed sector, better equipped to tackle local challenges and support communities more effectively.

### **1. Increased Skills and Confidence**

- Staff and volunteers gained new knowledge and practical skills
- Organisations felt more confident in governance, funding, and service delivery

### **2. Stronger Collaboration and Networks**

- Improved cross-sector relationships and peer support
- New partnerships formed, enabling joint working and shared resources

### **3. Greater Organisational Resilience**

- Better equipped to manage change, growth, and funding challenges
- Strengthened internal systems and strategic planning

### **4. More Inclusive and Community-Responsive Services**

- Enhanced ability to engage diverse communities
- New activities and organisations emerged to meet identified local needs

## **Challenges**

### **1. Lack of ongoing support to embed training**

- Issue: Training partners often do not offer ongoing support to embed training. Staff have limited time, or resources to engage fully to implement training.
- Recommendation: Flexible post-training support options (e.g. online sessions, recorded materials, coaching) to embed learning and share processes and continual learning.

## 2. Inequity of Access Across the Sector

- Issue: Underrepresented organisations/populations risked missing out on opportunities and support.
- Recommendation: Proactively reach out to marginalised groups, collecting demographic data to help ensure diverse voices can be included.

## 3. Sustainability of Impact

- Issue: Risk that benefits are short-lived without ongoing support or funding for continued training opportunities.
- Recommendation: Focus on building lasting capacity, encouraging peer support models to sustain progress.

## 4. Changes in Policy or Funding Environment

- Issue: External changes impact sector stability. Whilst there is an emphasis on 'VCSE as partners', shifting sands of the public sector (e.g. funding cuts, policy shifts) can hamper effective partnership.
- Too much external noise from government, NHS initiatives, devolution and neighbourhood planning can feel overwhelming. The VCSE sector is mentioned in all strategies, including the NHS 10-Year Plan, but it can be extremely difficult to navigate.
- Recommendation: Keep partners informed and encourage diversification of funding and income streams.

## 5. Employment models

- While having more staff is positive for the CVS, it also places additional pressure on them.
- Shared employment models have tested capacity. Staff have felt pulled at times between competing demands and struggle to maintain two systems for HR, pay, booking leave etc
- Recommendation: Explore single employment model with agreement to deliver for both organisations

## 5. Recognition and support of CVS

- Recognition of the role of CVSs and what we do is not consistently understood or valued by funders, commissioners, strategic partners, or even those we serve.
- CVS have been doing this work for a long time but with reduced recognition and funding from the public sector
- Recommendation: Clearly demonstrate how CVS work meets strategic objectives and communicate these within partnerships. *'Use us or lose us, fund us and value us.'*

## Learning summary

- **Infrastructure support is essential but underfunded.** CVSs are connectors, enablers, and amplifiers.
- **Staff wellbeing must be prioritised**, especially given sector fragility and burnout.
- **Organic staffing changes** offer a chance to realign roles and focus on year two.
- CVS need to **scrutinise follow-up surveys** from the VCSE sector, including Leadership Hub feedback, to assess whether we are strengthening the sector or unintentionally adding pressure.
- The **North Devon Inclusive Community Framework** is supporting groups working with individuals with complex needs, ensuring inclusion and tailored support are embedded in our sector development work.

- **CVS subsidised training programme, Annual Community Awards, and Revitalising Volunteering events** build capacity, celebrate efforts, and boost recruitment — but they also highlight the need for sustained investment and recognition.
- **One size does not fit all:** VCSE organisations vary widely in size, focus, and capacity. Tailored, flexible support is essential to meet their diverse needs effectively.
- **Relationships are crucial:** Trust and strong local connections underpin engagement, collaboration, and lasting impact. Time invested in relationship-building pays off.
- **Peer support drives change:** Facilitating opportunities for staff, volunteers and organisations to learn from each is useful to accompany formal training.
- **Small organisations/forms need extra support:** Grassroots and volunteer-led groups often face the greatest challenges in accessing funding, training, and networks—but also play key roles in community resilience.
- **Sustainability requires planning:** Short-term support is valuable, but embedding knowledge, strengthening networks, and supporting long-term planning helps ensure continued impact beyond the project timeline.
- **Inclusive approaches make the sector stronger:** Actively involving underrepresented voices leads to more equitable support and a more responsive, representative VCSE sector.

## Indepth learning - strengths and challenges

### *Shared understanding of goals and KPIs*

#### **Strengths**

- Objectives have been simplified towards the end of year one to clarify understanding
- CD/C are asked to report on how their work is aligned to local priorities and project objectives

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Lack of shared understanding of aims/outcomes and no KPI/performance metrics	Hard to effectively monitor, report and evaluate – may negatively impact decision making / ability to learn effectively / improve	Use simplified outcomes to co-create meaningful KPIs and outcome measures with staff and potential funders to guide work and define success criteria / measurable change

### *Implementing standardised systems and processes*

#### **Strengths**

- CD/C are tasked to collate relevant data and documents are uploaded to a central drive for all project team to access (MS SharePoint). As such, Community priorities and membership of OCs are being collated.
- Some OCs are beginning to create a survey including demographic data thanks to peer support opportunities – a shared method is emerging for surveys

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Lack CD processes for staff/volunteers	Staff, partners and volunteers lack uniformity in approaches making it hard	Guidance could be taken from multiple pre-existing sources and adapted to suit Northern Devon as needed. (E.g

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to create improvements to methods / share learning

The [Red Cross manuals](#) for- Community assessment, mobilisation and behaviour change [Belong in Plymouth](#) tools and techniques.

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### *One Community systems and processes*

#### **Strengths**

- One Atlantic use an online booking system for meeting attendance and Devon Connect for chat function and file sharing in between meetings. This takes pressure of the CD.
- Some OCs can run hybrid meetings or in person every other meeting to increase ability to attend
- Active Chairs, with capacity, are also able to source venues and speakers to create a calendar of meetings

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<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Not all Chairs have capacity to support the CD	Can take a large amount of CD time to arrange regular forum meetings	Provide key operational infrastructure, resources and training for equity across community partnerships (equipment and staff time)

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### *Building relationships with/between staff and volunteers*

#### **Strengths**

- Relationships are being developed through regular monthly opportunities to meet with peers
- Volunteer Chairs are invited quarterly to meet with staff and volunteer Chairs from all eight OC areas
- CD/C both have good networks to draw on. CD/C recognise the importance of 'meeting others with good networks' so they can build their own network more efficiently - The new Connector roles have benefitted from linking with OCs and wider forums)
- Wider networks enable CD/C to develop initiatives that are supported by the community.
- Peer support within monthly meetings enables the spread of successful local (Wellbeing Wednesday, Cancer Hub) and national initiatives (Camerado's, Food pantry, Men's shed, Death Cafe)

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<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Volunteer Chairs vary in approach, some do not work collaboratively with CD (top-down approach)	Chair burnout, can affect relationship between Chair and CD	Clarify role and relationship between CD and Chair. Create shared role/agreement for members to share responsibility

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## *Building Understanding of systems & wider determinants*

### **Strengths**

- NDCD forum facilitated activity to consider, using a ‘window of the world’ (concentric circle model), the determinants of youth outcomes. Reflections on how factors can ‘restrict an individual's window’.
- Regular meetings enable richer conversations, including the effect of the wider system / determinants on community work. These include protective/risk factors population *needs* Over a lifespan (temporal)
- Increase in strategic leaders and objectives referring to sharing power with communities and embedding community insight into decision making and governance.

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Level of uncertainty, shifting sands of system, culture, wider events	CD/C often feel like they are struggling against wider changes	Enable CD/C to analyse wider situation and understand wider determinant to find the Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Encourage group and individual reflection.
Strategic language and approach differ to local language and approach	Can be hard for system leaders to understand/value grassroots action	Create a shared language / approach by drawing on system partner expertise to develop shared approach (e.g. inequalities, wider determinants, complexity, service design approach)

## *Reflective practitioners*

### **Strengths**

- CDNOS, Project Objectives and local priorities are used as reflective practice tools. CD/C are asked to highlight the relevant standard(s)/objectives and priorities that relate to their work.
- CD/C are reflective practitioners, they engage in self-reflection on their practice, analysing their actions, interactions, and outcomes within a community to identify areas for improvement, learn from experiences, and continuously develop their skills to better support community needs and goals.
- CD/C and line managers are beginning to use CDNOS language as a framework to understand role and work

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
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Using reflections to improve work	Reflections in report can feel arduous and disconnected from practice	Use a <a href="#">reflexive model/template</a> to promote 'in the moment' reflection
CD feedback states that CDNOS are 'too lengthy, duplicative and confusing'	CD/C unable to effectively use CDNOS as a useful framework to highlight strengths, define roles and identify CPD opportunities.	Work is needed to simplify this framework to enable reflection and reflexive practice and communication of the role of CDs.

### Defining the CD/C roles

#### Strengths

- It was identified that CD/C lacked confidence to work within scope of CD practice. Employers have focused on collating community priorities to build CD/C confidence in only taking on work that aligns with local priorities and a partnership approach. This is beginning to reduce the support CD/C offer to non-partnership (individual organisations) work which previously took up a lot of their time. It is now defined as outside of the scope of the CD role.
- Regular staff meetings promote peer support to ask questions about role and draw on the approaches of other staff.

Challenges	Impact	Mitigations
CD/C can be drawn to work out of scope of role due to 'loud voices' or pressure	Work may not align with local or project goals (only supports a single organisation)	Clearly define and communicate CD/C role and scope with staff and partners
Joint employment causing confusion	Confuses staff as they have competing instructions / opinions	

### CVS confidence of navigating partners

#### Strengths

- CVS involved in the alignment of two large regional partnerships, NDF and OND, has enabled their Community & Place groups to merge into the CW&I group. 'This feels like the right *alliance* vehicle to move CD work forward'. Lottery funding is enabling this merger due to increased staff capacity.
- NDICF partnership emerged from previous Encompass SW Lottery funding and has been able to continue
- People are engaging with CVS in more complimentary ways and developing more connectivity
- In Torridge, there are conversations focused on reducing health inequalities through British Red Cross Community Health and Wellbeing workers, a 2-year pilot launched in Spring 2025.

Challenges	Impact	Mitigations
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Networks are really complicated, multi-layered and partnered	Confusion and lack of clarity of partners objectives and shared goals	Map complexity to build understanding feeding back your impact against shared goals
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## Next steps

- **Sustain, grow and diversify networks:** Continue supporting the networks established, encouraging peer learning and shared problem-solving. Find ways to include ‘quiet and unheard voices’, tracking this process.
- **Embed good practice:** Develop accessible resources and toolkits to ensure that best practices are retained, shared, and built upon.
- **Target ongoing support:** Identify staff, volunteers, organisations or groups needing additional capacity-building support and offer support.
- **Foster leadership:** Continue to support leadership development to organisations and extend this support to volunteers and staff to ensure the sector remains resilient in the long term.
- **Secure further investment:** Explore funding opportunities and partnerships to extend the impact of this work and ensure continued sector growth and sustainability. Outline the requirements of potential funders to ensure work meets their requirements alongside community priorities.
- **Monitor performance and measure impact:** Establish simple quantitative mechanisms to monitor performance and track outcomes for conversion into impact measures (social return on investment).

## Objective 4

**Using community intelligence to INFLUENCE system change and decision-making, whilst promoting the impact (including prevention) the sector makes. (Short version – influence statutory organisations, institutions and wider strategic partnerships)**

### Why we did it

The work aims to harness the power of community intelligence to influence system change and inform decision-making across statutory organisations, institutions, and wider strategic partnerships. By elevating the voices, insights, and lived experiences within our communities, the project aims to demonstrate the value and impact of the sector and ensure that this contribution is recognised and embedded within strategic planning, governance and policy development.

### How we did it

We engaged directly with communities to gather meaningful insights that reflect real strengths, needs and priorities. This intelligence was collected through a range of inclusive methods such as community forums, surveys, partnership meetings and street engagement. A strategic sub-group has been setup (community wellbeing an inclusion) to translate this evidence into clear, actionable messages tailored for statutory organisations, institutions, and strategic partners. Through ongoing dialogue, collaborative

spaces, and trusted relationships, community voices are being positioned at the heart of decision-making processes.

- **Community Engagement** – Improved methods (inclusive and accessible) to gather insights from a diverse range of voices to build an evidence base for sharing
- **Strategic Communication** – Framing findings in a way that aligned with institutional priorities and language.
- **Partnership Working** – Building strong, trusted relationships with decision-makers to foster open dialogue at a District and local level (Some OCs are nested within wider strategic partnerships)
- **Influence and Integration** – Created opportunities for community perspectives to shape preventative approaches.
- **Align the outcomes of this project with strategic partnerships:** The remit of the CW&I Strategic Steering Group now sits within two key partnerships (OND/NDF). This alignment is a critical step toward ensuring that the learning from this project — both strategic and operational — can influence wider system change and unlock long-term investment and support.

## What difference has it made

This approach is leading to stronger recognition of the community sector's role in prevention and early intervention, influencing how statutory organisations and strategic partners design and deliver services. Community insights have informed funding decisions and helped reframe priorities to better reflect real-life needs. There is a growing culture of co-production, with institutions more open to collaboration and responsive to community-led solutions. Relationships across sectors have deepened, leading to more joined-up approaches, greater trust, and improved outcomes for the people and communities we serve.

- **Policy Influence** – Community intelligence directly informed strategies, service designs, and funding priorities.
- **System Change** – Helped shift mindsets within institutions towards more preventative, person-centred approaches.
- **Greater Collaboration** – Strengthened cross-sector relationships and increased opportunities for co-production.
- **Increased Visibility** – Elevated the value and impact of the community sector in strategic spaces.
- **Improved Outcomes** – Supported more responsive, relevant, and equitable services for communities.
- **Strategic partners are starting to recognise the value of lived experience** - (thanks in part to the Poverty Truth Commission), and there is growing interest in how community development can support prevention, inclusion, and resilience.

## Challenges

### Challenges, Impact, and Mitigations:

Challenges include resistance to change within statutory systems, difficulties in translating community intelligence into language that resonates with institutional priorities, and inconsistent levels of engagement across partners. These barriers delay progress or limited the depth of community influence. To mitigate these challenges, the work is enabling building long-term relationships, developing tailored messaging to bridge language gaps, and creating flexible, inclusive spaces that enabled ongoing participation.

### Challenges:

- Institutional resistance to change
- Language and cultural disconnect between sectors
- Inconsistent partner engagement
- Time and capacity constraints
- Securing Lottery-funding gave CVS a stronger voice and a seat at the table in strategic partnerships with a recognition of the strategic role CVSs can play in shaping local systems. However, as with Outcome 3, the question remains: *Is anyone truly listening or supporting?*

#### Impact:

- Greater recognition of community intelligence in decision-making
- Shift towards preventative, person-centred approaches
- Strengthened cross-sector trust and collaboration

#### Recommendations:

- Build trusted, long-term relationships with key stakeholders and strategic partnerships
- Develop shared language and tailored messaging
- Record engagement insights to demonstrate connection to local priorities and action
- Embrace a learning culture to adapt and improve continuously, understanding what potential funders value clearly demonstrating how this relates to grassroots work
- Develop simple ways to demonstrate how work meets wider strategic objectives

## Learning summary

A key learning from this work is that meaningful system change is only possible when community voices are not just heard but actively embedded in decision-making. Building trust takes time, consistency, and genuine collaboration—and it cannot be rushed or tokenistic. Work in the space between strategic partnerships and grassroots is highlighting the importance of translating community insights into language that resonates with institutions while staying true to lived experience. Flexibility, persistence, and a strong values base (provided by CD National occupational standards) are useful in navigating complex systems, maintaining momentum and creating a shared values base. Above all, co-production is not a one-off activity but a continuous, evolving process that requires shared ownership, mutual respect, and ongoing investment.

- **Trust is Foundational** – Relationships must be built over time through consistent, authentic engagement.
- **Language Matters** – Bridging communication gaps between communities and institutions is crucial.
- **Co-Production is Ongoing** – Influence requires continuous involvement, not one-off consultations.
- **Flexibility is Key** – Adapting approaches in response to feedback and context strengthens impact.
- **Value-Led Practice Works** – Staying rooted in community values ensures integrity and long-term change.
- **Securing a seat at the table is not the same as being heard** — influence requires persistence, evidence, and strategic alignment.
- **Aligning project outcomes with system-level priorities is essential** to demonstrate relevance and unlock future funding.

- **Translating learning into action and advocacy** is an important requirement as a vehicle for influence
- **Long-term investment in CVS infrastructure is critical** without it, the sector risks fragmentation, burnout, and missed opportunities for prevention and community-led solutions.
- **We must continue to frame our work in the language of system partners** — prevention, integration, cost-effectiveness — while staying rooted in community voice and values.

## In-depth learning – strengths and challenges

### *Influencing local and strategic priorities*

#### **Strengths**

- CD have collated local priorities, based on local engagement, and agreed with OC members
- CD/C are asked to report how their work aligns with local priorities
- The CW&I group have defined strategic objectives (aligned with ICB Objectives and Lottery funded work), working with the CVS to be able to clearly demonstrate the connection between work and priorities at the strategic and local levels
- Work is ongoing to identify wider strategic priorities & objectives of potential funders/partners in Northern Devon and Local Authorities (Town Councils) to understand how CD/C support organisational goals and how organisations can benefit communities.
- NDVS now chairs the CW&I strategic group and is a conduit to health & wellbeing (OND) and economic (NDF) strategic partnerships.
- Morth Devon District Council own an online engagement tool and are open to the CD/C using this new resource to reduce duplication and capture full data (incl. Demographics)
- CW&I strategic group has intention to amplify community voice and aims to build OC priorities into NDF/OND strategic planning to amplify community voices
- ICB/OND supports our objectives in their longer-term strategy documents ‘Local Care Partnerships intend, by 2028, to integrate the role of community partnerships into their planning and infrastructure to ensure the communities of Devon are an equal partner both at system and local level’

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Hard to match CD work with wider strategic objectives as they are still forming/unclear (ICB and regional partnerships)	Delay with alignment of grassroots and regional strategy	Clarify strategic objectives to enable CD/C to easily recognise how various interventions support overall goals (locally and regionally)
Not clear how Community voices are embedded within strategic decision making	Communities do not feel listened to ( <i>‘done to, not with’</i> )	Clearly agree and define the governance and process for how community voices inform decisions within the ICB / Local Care Partnership (See <a href="#">‘Community Development and Learning’ Objectives</a> ; and <a href="#">People and Communities Framework</a> ); and NICE guidelines for <a href="#">embedding shared decision making</a>

Regional strategy is not aligned with practice and 'still feels top down'	Communities cannot clearly see progress against objectives to include their voice	Hold the ICB/OND/NDF to account and request updates to share with Communities
CD/C work is often assigned reactively based on funding availability or the loudest voices in a OC	Funders setting priorities over local needs = Loss of community voice	Explicitly align funding bids with local priorities and seek to co-produce KPI's and outcome measures with funder

### *A shift to evidence-based CD work*

#### **Strengths**

- Increase in wider engagement using surveys, events and community conversations (during activities/street-based) to gather local data to inform priority setting. There is an increased value in local insight (vs public datasets)
- CD/C consult Public Health data to better understand their populations
- Some CD/C draw on knowledge and data from health and care professionals (incl. social prescribers, Community Mental Health Team, Fern centre) to evidence need and target populations:
  - Ilfracombe used data acquired from Fern Centre patients and feedback discussion with Health and Wellbeing Team Cancer Care calls to setup a Cancer Care hub and reach newly diagnosed patients (15-30 p/month). **Impact:** Expected the first session to have approx. 6 - 8 people attend (usual), however, 25-30 attended each session.

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
It is unclear if priority setting is inclusive and representative as most engagement activities lack demographic data and systematic data capture	Unable to identify who has inputted into priority forming. Data quality is compromised	Create simple shared process and request demographics to enable insight into representation and inequality
Public Health data is often out of date or not meaningful	Communities do not harness public datasets for insight	Connect with Public Health to share the types of questions communities want the data to answer (so they can provide in a suitable format). Training for staff to read/analyse data.

### *Not able to clearly demonstrate impact and outcomes*

#### **Strengths**

- Capturing quantitative feedback through CD/C reports, staff report changes observed or feedback
- Work has begun to understand the Social Return on Investment (SROI) software used by the Local Care Partnership and Devon Voluntary Action (DeVA)
- Work has begun to identify wider strategic priorities to guide the impact measured so that it is meaningful to both communities and potential funders
- Exploring the '[Community Spirit level](#)' as a framework for measuring and understanding change

Challenges	Impact	Mitigations
Not clear how well suited impact software is to the CD/C roles as value and outcome data does not easily link (Not a criticism of what CD/C currently collect or the reporting format (due for review in Sept 2025), but rather a reflection of the nature of their work, which makes data collection more complex. The outcomes and value of their work require interpretation and context, not just metrics	Partners and Communities are not clear on the (social) return on investment	Explore what existing impact software can/can't do with the data CD/C are able/already collect.  Enable a joined-up approach to impact assessment, a wider conversation needs to happen about the expectation of what tangible impact and value there is from the CD work, using methods and 'language' that are most helpful for future funding discussions/negotiations with stakeholders.
Operational definitions and measures are not used to capture baseline data or changes (outcomes)	Establish a more accurate local baseline for change indicators  Unable to compare with national trends	Decide together, with Communities and partners, a framework/measures that are the right fit to support effective measurement

### *Funding and Commissioning the VCSE / partnership work*

#### **Strengths**

- CVS are often approached by VCSE organisations and groups as they have demonstrated an ability to have successful funding bids.
- CVS will run 'Meet the Funder' events as conversation with several larger charities identified a 'limbo land' at the end of the financial year regarding funding decisions and cashflow problems with many VCSE organisations/groups coming to the CVS far too late (a 'you said, we did' approach)

Challenges	Impact	Mitigations
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Increasingly statutory funding is finite, and VCSE funding is highly competitive	Many VCSE projects are unable to get adequate funding	Promote and support joint-funding and co-commissioning (See <a href="#">Lottery co-commissioning toolkit</a> ). Take an asset-based approach to draw on local resources first, then seek funding for additional requirements
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## Securing Future Investment in CD

### Strengths

- There is appetite to ensure financial sustainability, by March 2027 (post Lottery funding), via continued investment in Community Development infrastructure (incl. workforce). Potential investor engagement is underway to understand the desired organisational and community benefits to measure change/progress against

Challenges	Impact	Mitigations
Partners that support CD work either have no access to funds or already fund CD activities within their own organisation	Loss of staff / experience due to short fixed-term contracts	Starting with existing partner interviews to explore opportunities and draw on existing networks

### Next steps

Building on the progress made, our next steps focus on deepening and sustaining the influence of community intelligence within systems and strategic decision-making. We will strengthen mechanisms for ongoing community engagement, ensuring that voices remain central and are reflected in both policy and practice. We aim to continue to formalise partnerships with statutory organisations through shared frameworks, co-produced strategies, and clearer accountability. Additionally, we will develop better ways to measure and communicate the impact of this work, reinforcing the value of prevention and the sector's ongoing contribution to system change.

### Recommendations

- **Strengthen Engagement** – Enhance and sustain inclusive methods for gathering and sharing community intelligence.
- **Formalise Partnerships** – Develop shared frameworks and co-produced strategies with statutory bodies.
- **Build Capacity** – Support skills development across sectors to improve collaboration and shared understanding.
- **Evidence Impact and value** – Improve ways of measuring, evaluating, and communicating the impact of community-led influence. Demonstrate how ‘smaller’ grassroots work fits into wider strategic goals
- **Champion Prevention** – Continue to advocate for the preventative role of the sector in system design and policy.

## Priorities for Year 2 (Next steps)

Year one supporting acting, learning and showcasing the impact of this work and the role of Community partnerships, Developers, Connectors and CVS. In year two we want to create:

- **Strategic Planning Document:** A comprehensive strategy is needed to consolidate learning, define outputs/outcomes, and guide future investment and alliance development.
- **Staffing and budget review;** with some organic staffing changes – we can look at the budget for year 2 – and ensure we have corrected staffing (strategically and operationally) in place
- **Evaluation Review:** Internal and external evaluation approaches should be reassessed to ensure they capture impact and inform strategic decisions.
- **Wellbeing Focus:** Staff and volunteer wellbeing must be embedded into organisational culture and planning.
- **Corporate Engagement Strategy:** Develop a targeted approach to engage corporate partners and secure long-term investment.
- **Feedback and Learning Systems:** Strengthen feedback loops across operational, strategic, and community levels to ensure alignment and responsiveness.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1 – List of project names and themes

Below is an overview of the work of the Community Developers nested within themes. The following work often span multiple categories but is shown within a single category

for ease of viewing. See [full table of activities](#) that lists multiple categories, outputs, outcomes and partners involved.

## **1. Community Engagement, Insight & Participation**

- Activism
  - Saving Combe Martin's red phone box
- Engagement, Involvement and insight
  - Community priorities survey (Torrington / South Molton)
  - Asset Mapping: various (Torrington / Rural & Youth Connectors / Lynton)
  - Heritage bid refurb project (Lottery)
  - 'What's going on?' Engagement @West Down (Ilfracombe)
  - Poverty Truth Commision (Ilfracombe)
- Volunteering
  - Devon Connect promotion (NDVS)
  - NDVS Volunteering training event
  - NDVS Corporate Breakfast
  - NDVS Community Awards 2024
  - NDVS Website Update & Relaunch
  - Connecting Young people to volunteering (Youth Connector)
  - Lyn Valley volunteer recruitment (Lynton)
- Partnership forums
  - One Communities
  - ND Youth Network / Forum (Youth Connector)
  - Setting up a new Community partnership (Lynton & Lynmouth)
  - Mycelium Mental Health Network (Ilfracombe)

## **2. Communication & Access**

- Comms and marketing (Improve access to services, activities, opportunities)
  - Community Notice Board / social media (South Molton / Lynton)
  - What is CD? Flyer for CDs (Youth Connector)
- Funding
- VCSE support & organisational development
  - NDVS Partnership promotion
  - Meet The Funders Workshop (NDVS)
  - Together Devon Drop in comms (South Molton)
  - Supporting rural projects and events (Rural Connector)
  - Supporting Youth projects, clubs, forums and events (Youth Connector)
  - Baby and toddler fundraising and volunteer recruitment (Lynton)

### **3. Social Support, Inclusion & safety**

- Cost-of-living support
  - Financial Inclusion Sessions (Torrington)
  - Foodbank outreach to North Molton (South Molton)
  - Prom shop / Uniform bank / Volunteer support (Ilfracombe)
  - Community Pantry/swap shop (Ilfracombe)
  - Navigate - finance workshops (Ilfracombe / Holsworthy)
  - Food Hub CIC (Holsowrthy)
- Family support
  - Youth club and play group volunteer recruitment and family/youth activities (Lynton)
- Inclusive Communities
  - Raising the Pride Flag (South Molton)
  - Memory cafe (Ilfracombe)
  - Rough sleeper cafe vouchers (Bideford)
  - Breakfasts: LGBTQ+ / Men (Bideford)
  - Carers lunches (Bideford)
- Community safety
  - Anti-Social Behaviour Information sharing (South Molton)
- Peer support
  - Carers Peer Support Group (Torrington / South Molton)
- Loneliness and social isolation
  - Youth Quiz night Event (Torrington)
  - Farmers breakfasts in South Molton (Rural Connector)

### **4. Health & Wellbeing**

- Health
  - Cancer Care Hub (Ilfracombe / Holsworthy)
  - World Heart Day Event (Ilfracombe)
  - HOPE: Helping Overcome Problems Effectively (Holsworthy)
  - Training courses to increase access to services incl. stop smoking, loan shark, mental health first aid, domestic abuse, addiction (Holsworthy)
- Wellbeing (incl. Mental wellbeing)
  - Winkleigh Wellbeing Event (Torrington)
  - Man Down - Men's Mental Health Peer Support (Torrington / Holsworthy)
  - Wellbeing Cafe Wednesday (Torrington / Ilfracombe / South Molton)
  - 'Thriving together' Health and Wellbeing Event (Holsworthy)

- Physical activity

## **5. Education, Learning & Employment**

- Community learning
  - Introduction to Website Construction (Torrington)
  - Techie Tea Party & follow on 1:1 support with more digital awareness workshops (Holsworthy)
  - Mental Health First aid training (Holsworthy)
  - Digital assist IT skills courses (Bideford)
- Education, training and employment (incl. NEET)
  - "How to write a CV" workshops (Youth Connector)

## **6. Culture & Creativity**

- Cultural (Creative)
  - Photography for Wellbeing group (Torrington)
  - Beginners Crochet Session (Torrington)
  - Running Dog Theatre Company, The Goat Show (Ilfracombe)
  - Creative Lives craft workshops and social groups (Holsworthy)
  - Women of Wellbeing craft and peer support (Holsworthy)
- Cultural (Heritage)
  - VJ Day resources (South Molton)

## **7. Environment & Sustainability**

- Nature-based
  - Outdoor education trips (Lynton)
  - Gardening club (Holsworthy)
- Sustainable living
  - NDVS & CAG Devon Skills Share Event
  - Repair Cafe (Torrington)

## **8. Community Spirit & Identity**

### Community Spirit

- T100 Brings Torrington Together Event (Torrington)
- Our Community heroes event (South Molton)

## Appendix 2 - Community priorities from Place based report

### **ILFRACOMBE**

- Increasing life expectancy
- Enabling older people to remain independent longer
- Helping our young people to reach their potential Increased growth of local business
- More Ilfracombe residents in work
- Improving town image
- More residents feeling proud

### **SOUTH MOLTON**

- To enable individuals and the South Molton Community to improve and promote their own health and well-being.
- To support families and vulnerable members of the community with the effects of the pandemic, including food support
- To work closely with the South Molton Social Prescriber to identify community need and develop projects and support to meet these needs
- Making Community Activities Accessible
- Inclusivity and Equal Opportunities
- Community Safety and Wellbeing
- Sustainable Growth and Development

### **HOLSWORTHY & DISTRICT COMMUNITY FORUM**

- Loneliness & isolation
- Young People
- Healthier Lifestyles
- Travel & Transport
- Unpaid carers
- Services in your home
- Fuel Poverty
- Mental Health
- Climate change & 'green' initiative
- LGBTQ+ Support
- Unpaid Carers

### **TORRINGTON 100**

- Create a forum that allows all local stakeholders to have a say in the continuing development of their community, related to wellbeing involving: Residents and the public, voluntary, community & private sectors
- Be part of the wider Devon Integrated Care System (ICS) and in particular One Northern Devon Build Community Capacity by delivering sustainable activities, projects and services to meet peoples' needs.
- Improve wellbeing (Individual and Community) and build a sense of community (belonging)

### **ONE ATLANTIC**

- Young Adults (17-25) Community Support Group
- Isolated Population
- Adult Mental Health
- LGBTQ+ Support
- Unpaid Carers

### **BARNSTAPLE**

- Increase the feeling of pride / worth people have in themselves and the town, starting with their environment.
- Provide a vibrant physical space which is a hub of activities, kindness and community, inclusive and visible in the heart of the town centre.
- Bring people together through free events and activities, accessible to everyone, for the community - include skills building.
- Encourage the community to get involved with volunteering

### **BRAUNTON**

- Make the village more connected
- Build social equity
- Support existing projects Identify gaps and coordinate respective projects
- Support social prescribing

## **Appendix 3 – Shared Community Themes**

### **1. Health & Wellbeing**

- Older People: Support independence and increase life expectancy.
- Mental Health: Expand access to mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Healthier Lifestyles: Promote physical and mental wellness.
- Living Well: Address food insecurity, fuel poverty, housing, and cost of living.

- Unpaid Carers: Provide targeted support and recognition.
- LGBTQ+ Support: Ensure inclusive health and wellbeing services.
- Pandemic Recovery: Support vulnerable individuals and families.

## **2. Children, Families & Young People**

- Youth Engagement: Involve young people in community life and decision-making. Amplify youth voices in local planning and services.
- Support for Families: Address the needs of children and families post-pandemic. Provide accessible family support services.
- Young Adults (17–25): Create peer support groups and personal development opportunities. Support transitions into adulthood, education, and employment.
- Education & School Life: Tackle school pressures and improve access to education. Strengthen the role of teachers in supporting wellbeing and learning.
- Mental Health & Wellbeing: Promote confidence, self-image, and trauma-informed care. Expand access to mental health support for young people.
- Social Connections & Community: Foster friendships, belonging, and positive social media use. Build inclusive, supportive community networks.
- Opportunities & Future Aspirations: Improve access to careers and training, especially in rural areas. Address financial pressures and limited local opportunities.
- Technology & Media Influence: Educate on the impact of social media and misinformation. Promote healthy online habits and digital literacy.
- Youth Identity & Belonging: Celebrate diversity, neurodivergence, and cultural identity. Support youth expression and evolving trends.
- Challenges & Barriers: Improve transport and access to services. Reduce crime and ensure youth representation in decision-making.

## **3. Community Empowerment & Inclusion**

- Volunteer Engagement: Encourage community involvement and volunteering.
- Community Forums: Enable all stakeholders to shape local wellbeing.
- Community Infrastructure: Develop hubs, safe spaces, and support networks.
- Social Prescribing: Collaborate to identify and meet community needs.
- Build Community Capacity: Deliver sustainable, people-focused projects.
- Engaging with and incorporating surrounding small communities – rural reach

## **4. Economic Development**

- Employment: Increase local job opportunities.
- Business Growth: Support and grow local enterprises.
- Social Equity: Ensure inclusive access to economic opportunities.

## **5. Environment & Sustainability**

- Climate Action: Promote green initiatives and sustainability.
- Green/Open Spaces: Enhance access to nature and outdoor wellbeing.

- Affordable Housing: Improve housing conditions and affordability.

## **6. Community Identity & Culture**

- Local Pride: Foster pride in self, place, and community.
- Cohesion: Strengthen community bonds and belonging.
- Culture & Creativity: Support arts, events, and creative expression.
- Public Spaces: Create vibrant, inclusive town centre hubs.

## **7. Accessibility & Infrastructure**

- Transport & Travel: Improve local transport and accessibility.
- Connected Communities: Strengthen village and town connectivity.
- Service Access: Ensure services are available in-home and locally.