Social Return on Local Council Provision

Creating an effective measurement tool

Woughton Cares

nalc
Star Council Awards winner

Creating Connections, Supporting Communities
Woughton Community Council

Co-operative Councils
Innovation Network

Policy Prototype

People-centred councils driving social innovation putting people first

The Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network (CCIN) is a collaboration between local authorities who are committed to finding better ways of working for, and with, local people for the benefit of their local community.

The Network recognises the need to define a new model for local government built on civic leadership, with councils working in equal partnership with local people to shape and strengthen communities. The network is open to all UK councils regardless of political affiliation who can demonstrate innovation and a willingness to drive forward the Co-operative Councils agenda. At the time of writing, it has 33 full member councils as well as additional associated and affiliated members.

Cooperatives are based on the values of:
- self-help
- self-responsibility
- democracy
- equality
- equity

For more information visit www.councils.coop.

In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Our Values are what we believe in and our Principles guide the way we, and our members, put our Values into action.

The Values of the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network

Below are the ten values of CCIN, they provide a helpful framework to guide the approach local places can take to jointly tackle a whole range of issues.

1 **Social partnership:** We will strengthen the co-operative partnership between citizens, communities, enterprises, and Councils, based on a shared sense of responsibility for wellbeing and mutual benefit — Social Partnership

2 **Democratic engagement:** We will support the active engagement of the full range of residents in decision making and priority setting — Democratic Engagement

3 **Co-production:** We will develop systems that enable citizens to be equal partners in designing and commissioning public services and in determining the use of public resources — Co-production

4 **Enterprise and social economy:** We will promote community-based approaches to economic development that focus on supporting the creation of jobs, social enterprises and other businesses and providing an environment for co-operative and mutual enterprises to thrive — Enterprise and social economy

5 **Maximising social value:** We will support the development of a framework and criteria for social value, giving substance to the concept and supporting Councils with the tools to ensure better local social and economic outcomes — Maximising social value

6 **Community leadership and a new role for councillors:** We will explore ways for councils to act as a platform for helping the community to contribute to local outcomes, and to re-think the role of councillors as community connectors, brokers and leaders — Community leadership and a new role for councillors

7	**New models of meeting priority needs:** In exploring new ways of meeting the priority needs of our communities we will encourage models, such as co-operatives and mutuals, which give greater influence and voice to staff and users	New models of meeting priority needs
8	**Innovation:** We will embrace innovation in how we work with local communities to drive positive change	Innovation
9	**Learning:** We will capture and 'expand' the experience and learning from individual projects and approaches in order to encourage broader application of co-operative principles within individual member Councils and across the Network	Learning
10	**Walking the talk:** As a membership organisation we will make this statement of our principles operational by; co-operation among members, openness of membership: co-production of the Network's work, being action-focused, being membership-based, being non-party-political	Walking the talk

This policy prototype has taken an approach that looks at where the values of coops can be embedded, both in the design of the approach, but also more widely within the delivery of our services, support and the development of our communities.

In the long term, the project will have all ten values clearly embedded within - part of the benefit of this early work has been in seeing where the CCiN and these underpinning ideals can help in ensuring success. Democratic engagement, co-production, community leadership - these are the essential elements of a local council truly representing their residents. Whilst this often happens organically within WCC, a review and reminder of this importance has been welcome.

To create an accessible tool to enable evaluation of Social Return for local council services- a technological solution to allow tailored approaches for individual services or projects.

Aims of the Policy Prototype

This paper looks at how Woughton Community Council are working to find a simple, technology driven solution to assessing the wider social value of their services, addressing purpose, challenges and the achievements so far.

Local councils (town, parish and community councils) are the tier of government closest to the people. With over 10,000 local councils in England and around 100,000 councillors elected, the sector is a significant and increasing player in the delivery of essential local services and support.

Traditionally, this tier of government has been responsible for things such as allotments, dog bins and churchyards. As principal authorities have faced reductions in funding and in turn, cuts to frontline services, we have seen the local council sector step in to provide a far wider range of support. In Woughton, a wide range of services are provided that would fall under the umbrella of 'social' services or support; youth, community food projects, a wellbeing service.

This CCiN supported policy prototype aimed to develop ways of gathering data and then creating a technology based tool to deliver social values for services, with a longer term aim to 'personalise' this, to allow other local councils to tweak the tool to evaluate their services.

Organisational background

Woughton Community Council is a mid-sized local council, covering a parish in south central Milton Keynes. With 19 elected representatives, an officer team of around 18FTE and a budget approaching £1million annually, the council is well known within the sector, having been awarded 'Council of the Year' in 2019 / 2020, by the National Association.

One reason for the award was the depth and breadth of the services offered by the council. With a significant youth service, advice, wellbeing, community food, environmental officers, community centres and delivering devolved landscaping services, the council provides support that has been subject to significant reductions at unitary level over the past decade (and beyond).

Woughton as a parish is unusual in Milton Keynes, a city known for being wealthy, growing and being 'one to watch' in terms of investment and growth. The parish contains the oldest parts of the new city, having been built during the early 70's to mid 80's. With the majority of properties having been built by the Development Corporation and then becoming MK Council properties, the parish continues to have one of the highest levels of social housing in the borough. Many of these properties were built using 'non traditional' methods and this, combined with under-investment in the properties by a series of administrations and a housing allocations policy that saw Woughton estates as somewhere to place people with additional needs, means some parts of the parish have significant housing, health and social care challenges.

Despite this, the parish benefits from communities that have been established for long enough to feel embedded, unlike many newer parts of the city. The parish houses the general hospital, MK College and is bordered by developments such as the MK Bowl and Stadium MK. Geographically, the parish sits firmly between the city centre, with the shopping and entertainment elements and Bletchley, the largest 'town' that was subsumed by the creation of Milton Keynes.

Social Value background

The main legislation that put 'social value' on the map, was the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2021. This was, in the words of the legislators

'An Act to require public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts; and for connected purposes.'

Before this law was enacted, social value was something that was discussed and covered mainly by third sector organisations; those that needed to show potential funders of the impact of donations, especially. But 'social value' is a broad term that covers a wide range of definitions. Social Value UK suggests that

'Social value is the quantification of the relative importance that people place on the changes they experience in their lives.'

thereby linking social value to individuals and their experiences – what is the value of feeling happier? Of feeling connected? Of having access to green spaces?

Social Value Portal takes a broader view;

'Increasingly, organisations are considering their activities holistically, taking account of the wider economic, social and environmental effects of their actions.

Social Value serves as an umbrella term for these broader effects, and organisations which make a conscious effort to ensure that these effects are positive can be seen as adding social value by contributing to the long-term wellbeing and resilience of individuals, communities and society in general.'.

This definition is closer to the approach imagined by WCC and fits more closely with the legislation above – as a local authority, WCC has a duty (legal or otherwise) to consider 'social value' when commissioning services, delivering services, or supporting other organisations or individuals, (whether financially or with other resources or expertise).

This approach would enable both the conceptual (the value of feelings), but also embraced more practical elements, such as the likely costs savings to the wider economy through our approaches. This would enable local councils to show their value more effectively, their worth and their importance within the government hierarchy. With the local council sector (town, parish and community councils) still seen by many as a bit 'Vicar of Dibley', the sectors growth, improvement and wider societal reach should be acknowledged and understood.

Example – should local councils provide dog waste bins? What is the value of them?

One example of this is where local councils provide dog waste bins. With many principal authorities no longer providing these bins, local councils have stepped in. And what is the 'social value' of these bins?

There is a clear financial benefit to having cleaner streets – savings in terms of street cleansing (assuming a reduction of 25%, the value may be as simple as 25% of street cleansing costs).

Fewer piles also mean fewer incidents of treading in and unhappy citizens as a result – finding a 'value' of being happier is harder to quantify. From a personal viewpoint, the author would like to cite an example where he was unfortunate enough to tread in a pile that had been left on his drive, which he didn't notice until already in the car, heading to work. The impact was;

- stopped to try and clean up, taking time and being late for work (lost productivity).

- Huge annoyance (some would say raging anger) about the owner who allowed this pile to be left (negative impact on mental health, blood pressure, etc. with potential impacts on NHS, life expectancy, happiness quotient, etc.)

- Cleaning costs for the car and shoe – whilst negative for the author, meant more money within the local economy and much valued work at the local car wash – should this be considered within any social value sum?

Assuming an impact of £10 for productivity, an amount for health impact (unclear, so let's say £5 for ease) and £15 for cleaning of the car, this is a £30 cost for one incident. If this is replicated across a parish, or a town, a county or indeed the whole country, the costs add up significantly*

But there is a dog waste bin 50 metres from the driveway. So is spending money on bins going to save all these £30 costs? In simple terms, no. But it will probably reduce them. And would more bins mean the owner of the dog in this example was more responsible? Or would it have had no effect?

As you can see, this is an imperfect science, with huge variables and significant work to undertake to understand the process and create a suitable framework to fairly assess.

*Assuming 1 in every 10,000 people experiences this each day nationally, that equates to almost £75million each year (the author suspects this is much lower than the reality but has been unable to find any evidence relating to this issue).

If it happens to one person within the Woughton parish daily (population = 15,000), over £10,000 per year (which is more than the parish spends on provision of dog waste bins). Again, there is no evidence to support this assumption, other than social media. If we were to use this as a barometer of number of incidents, the costs would be significantly higher.

Principles of Social Value evaluation

As part of the project, the WCC Lead, Steve McNay undertook both desktop research and a refresher course with NEF Consulting, covering social value in the broadest sense. Having previously undertaken work around social value within the charity sector, Steve was relatively au fait with the process, but was eager to consider how this might alter within the new, local government world which, whilst offering some of the same types of support, is delivered and managed in a very different way.

The issues remain the same, whichever sector is providing:

- That social return is a more inclusive tool than simply economics – GDP is one measure, but environment and people are just as (if not more) important and impact on them MUST be

considered alongside any economic benefit

- That identifying the change wanted, measuring the change that your work brings, identifying and 'claiming' that impact and then placing a value on it gives you the 'social value' – what was the impact of what YOU did

- Outputs can be useful – they show that something has taken place (e.g. 100 young people have attended a youth club). Outcomes are important too (e.g. 20 young people reported increased confidence as a result of attending a youth club). Outputs = something happened. Outcomes = the changes that have taken place as a result. It is also important to remember that outputs don't necessarily mean outcomes – if 20 people attended a workshop but learned nothing, great for outputs but the outcomes simply aren't there.

- That it is much, much easier to build social return reporting into projects from the start than working backwards to try and measure what is already being done! This is one area where there have been significant challenges – part of the process is looking, with stakeholders, at what a project might aim to achieve, what outcomes are being worked t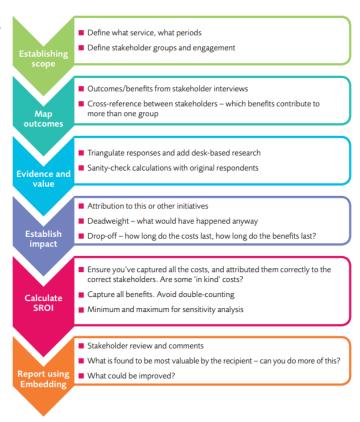owards. This ensures that the beneficiaries have a voice, ensures that the outcomes are sensible, realistic and what is wanted and helps embed these within the project plan / delivery. Working backwards (i.e. trying to embed SROI into existing services and, in the longer term, try and provide some semblance of fixed 'sums' for regularly provided services across the sector). The importance of 'co-production' in terms of defining the methodology and outcomes / outputs expected cannot be understated.

In extremely simple terms, the Social Value equation is intended to provide a tangible amount of value for outcomes and activities provided. However, the process is much more complex, as shown in this diagram from APM in 2016.

As can be seen, the first stages are around designing the evaluation *prior* to any delivery. As noted above, this makes working on existing services more difficult.

The involvement of 'stakeholders' is also cited as being essential. This is a step that was not considered within the planning of the prototype, mainly as the services being evaluated are already up and running. The intention was less to define the outcomes and more to evaluate those that already exist.

Alongside these issues, the need for a more effective data collection route was also clear - whilst there are 'work arounds' with regard to the issues noted above, data was key for whatever we wanted to assess and as such, recording needed embedding across delivery.

Co-production

Establishing scope
- Define what service, what periods
- Define stakeholder groups and engagement

Map outcomes
- Outcomes/benefits from stakeholder interviews
- Cross-reference between stakeholders – which benefits contribute to more than one group

Evidence and value
- Triangulate responses and add desk-based research
- Sanity-check calculations with original respondents

Establish impact
- Attribution to this or other initiatives
- Deadweight – what would have happened anyway
- Drop-off – how long do the costs last, how long do the benefits last?

Calculate SROI
- Ensure you've captured all the costs, and attributed them correctly to the correct stakeholders. Are some 'in kind' costs?
- Capture all benefits. Avoid double-counting
- Minimum and maximum for sensitivity analysis

Report using Embedding
- Stakeholder review and comments
- What is found to be most valuable by the recipient – can you do more of this?
- What could be improved?

Services for inclusion

The council provides a wide range of services, as noted above. However, for the purposes of this project, the focus was around the 'people' services – youth and community. Whilst there is undoubtedly social value in landscaping and management of dog waste bins (see above), this project aimed to create a tool that would be suitable for a wider variety of services. WCC was awarded the NALC 'Council of the Year' in 2019, primarily due to the social aspects of our delivery and this was the driver for providing evidence of value for both WCC and, in the longer term, the sector as a whole.

For the purposes of this Policy Prototype, we selected 6 different projects of focus. These projects were selected due to their varied nature; the both very specific and very broad nature and the fact that some are common within the sector, with others likely to only be provided by a small number. Additionally, some of these services have an evidence base from which to build upon, with others having very little, if any, social return evidence or foundation.

Youth [Innovation] [Social Partnership] [New models of meeting priority needs]

Sexual Health Drop In. This is a service provided in partnership with Terrence Higgins Trust and MK College, offering easy access, non-judgemental support with practical

services running alongside. These include anonymous STI testing, access to contraceptives, including the 'C Card' - a card enabling free condoms across the city and LARC (longer lasting, reversible contraceptives), healthy relationship advice and signposting to other support.

Specialist LGBTQ+ Sessions. Provision of safe spaces, support, advocacy and signposting for young people who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as their families and other allies.

Open access Youth Club(s). This was included as a type of project that is more likely to be offered by others within the local council sector - a more traditional session, providing a range of activities within a safe environment with suitably experienced and qualified staff.

Community -

Community Fridge. Whilst this originally sat under the Environment Team, as it is principally a waste reduction project, there is additional benefit for residents in terms of access to free food. Due to this, alongside links to other 'food' elements, this now sits within the Community Team and provides several weekly sessions, working with charities and local food outlets to redistribute food that would otherwise be wasted.

Woughton Advice Service (WAS). This is a directly provided 'Citizens Advice Bureaux' type service, with initial advice provided by an officer employed by WCC. Sessions are offered across the parish, utilising

family centres, community venues and our offices, with a specific 'wellbeing room' where sessions can happen. Focus around finances, housing, immigration, employment but covers a wider range of issues, referring onwards where more specialist advice is needed.

Annual Festival (one day event). This is again a project that would be replicated in other local councils and therefore included as an example of where this prototype may be transferable into other areas. Our festival is a largish event, with between 2—5000 attendees and includes music, inflatables, stalls, etc.

Social Value - initial thoughts

New models of meeting priority needs	Innovation	Learning	Co-production	Maximising social value	Social Partnership

This was the point in this project where the difficulties in embedding within existing services became more difficult. As noted above, the process involves engaging with stakeholders to find the changes that are wanted / needed, from which social value can be assessed. With existing services, we took a different approach and looked to see what we thought were the outcomes; positive changes for individuals, for communities, for the environment.

Sexual health drop in is potentially one of the easiest to develop. Provision of contraceptives helps reduce unwanted pregnancies which has numerous benefits; savings to health services, benefits to mental health and wellbeing of young people (be this due to not being unplanned parents OR by not experiencing loss, via abortion), improvements in educational attainment, improved life chances, increased taxation due to better employment chances - the list is long and complex, but with some identified 'wins'.

From a community viewpoint, the *Community Fridge* has an existing evidence base from which to work - volunteering is identified within the National TOMS social value register at a value of £16.09 per hour[1], the value of carbon savings is detailed as £70.43 per ton of carbon and then further value placed upon the impact of access to food for residents.

The Advice Service equally has some 'quick wins' - access to advice has been assessed by the CAB as shown below. Our own assessment that looks purely at financial benefits (i.e. how much income we

£13.36 in wider economic and social benefits (public value)	£1.94 in savings to government and public services (fiscal benefits)	£8.35 in value to people we help (financial outcomes following advice)
Solving problems, improves lives – and this means better wellbeing, participation and productivity for the people we help	By helping stop problems occurring or escalating, we reduce pressure on public services like health, housing or out-of-work benefits	As part of our advice, we can increase people's income, through debts written-off, taking up benefits and solving consumer problems
Total: £4.3 billion	**Total: £618 million**	**Total: £2.7 billion**

helped bring in for residents accessing the service), suggested that in 2019—2020 financial year, additional income to the tune of £123,462 came into the parish, as a result of advice and support provided. This assessment doesn't include the 'public value' or 'fiscal benefits' noted to the left and is purely the third box.

As the full cost of this provision is around £45,000 per year, this very simple measure suggests a return of £3 for every £1 invested. If we were to also be able to fully assess the other areas (e.g. Fiscal savings for prevention of a family becoming home-less), then this sum increases significantly. THAT is the aim of this prototype and is where the difficulties and complexities have really become apparent.

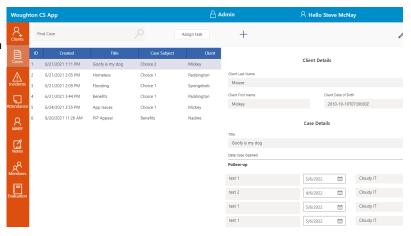1 - NT29 - Social: Healthier, Safer and more Resilient Communities

What has happened and what are the next steps?

The project so far has seen:

- training with New Economics Foundation,

- registration and assessment with the Social Value Portal,

- basic understanding training sessions with service leads for Youth and Community and

- considerable work on creating a usable, relevant and secure data management and evaluation system

- Development of 'values' that can be attributed to key elements of what we do.

The biggest challenge has been around data collection and this has caused the significant delays in the progression of this policy prototype. Working with the charity arm of our IT company, we have begun this work and have developed a basic CRM type system that will work with the services that we want to use. However, at time of writing (Feb 2022), this is on version 8 and remains glitchy. Work continues to ensure that this tool can be the one to build upon as the foundation from which to work.

The positives are that social value is being discussed, is being considered and is being embedded within the councils project planning. Having the agreed 'pilot' projects for assessment (the six different services), the service leads and others are investigating the options for social value. And there is an increasing body of evidence to support this process - what value should be attributed to key delivery? Where possible, we will use the existing evidence, rather than creating our own. As noted above, things like value of volunteers, cost of carbon reduction, key health and social care indicators, etc are in the public realm, with some coming via partner organisations and others via the National TOMS scheme.

Work around this will continue. We will continue to develop the software and build upon this, so we can add the evaluation elements of social value. In the longer term, we aim to have a tool that addresses some of the more common elements of local council delivery - allotments, dog bins, graveyards and so on. The overall aim for this project is to have a piece of software (in 'app' form, preferably) where a service / project can be added, with outcomes and evaluation is undertaken, to provide details that can then be used to evidence the value of local councils actions.

Conclusion

This has been a challenging process which has provided a good foundation from which to work, whilst equally showing just how much work is needed! Embedding this focus from the planning part of any activity is essential and getting the full 'buy in' from your council is extremely helpful. Equally, having officers who have an understanding, at least at a basic level, of social value and the way this is assessed, makes the process much easier.

We anticipate this project building gradually over time. The pressures of fitting in around the competing demands on councils is tricky - this won't change, but having this project sitting there means that when issues are considered, it is included. Evidence and evaluation tools are being gathered as they are seen and the underlying ethos of 'social value' is now within the thought processes of officers and members.

Whilst no formal outcome has yet arrived, the process to this point has brought considerable value. Updating CCIN as things develop further, sharing and listening to others and building a consensus across the sector will continue and, we hope, mean that there will be tools that enable smaller and large councils to consider these issues on an ongoing and constant basis. The value of the sector is considerable and this will, we hope, enable that to be seen and shared more widely.

Working with the CCiN

The values and considerations of the cooperative movement have been a strong part of the work done to this point, with significant evidence to support the cooperative approaches being essential to build truly effective, engaged and co-produced services and outcomes / outputs.

Maximising social value

When considering the 10 values, the project, at it's heart, is around not only maximising social value, but evidencing that value and enabling local councils of all sizes to be able to do this quickly, efficiently and affordably. Whilst the project has yet to reach these outcomes, the initial work suggest this may be possible.

The benefits and values that were perhaps not considered but have become apparent are perhaps more important at this point;

Community leadership and a new role for councillors

Community Leadership and engaging councillors (and officers) in new ways of thinking - social value as a concept becoming part of everyday discussions, consideration of how this might be used to more effectively plan, procure and deliver services.

New models of meeting priority needs

Being able to use the evidence gathered to look at effectiveness, innovation and how we can meet the growing needs of our residents. Having the evidentiary base, including the impact on the wider economies (health, social care, etc) means we can use our resources to best effect.

Innovation

The proposal that we use technology to enable these 'sums' to be done takes social return on investment to a different place - accessible and affordable 'apps', with minimal knowledge needed to use, opens this up to local councils of all sizes

Learning

And most importantly, learning - this early work has shown us so much about what we know and what we don't. Continuing this learning journey, sharing as we go and the ongoing exploration of what is possible is an exciting prospect.

Thanks go to all within the network and our partners at the Cloudy IT Trust for their support to this point and the potential for ongoing work in the future.

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