

Strengthening Local Communities Programme Evaluation: Oakley Community Health and Wellbeing Project

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Michele Biddle, Mat Jones and Amy Beardmore

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This report is part of a series of evaluation reports on the Strengthening Local Communities Programme, and should be read in conjunction with the Summary and Synthesis Report.

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Further information

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Oakley Community Health and Wellbeing Project

1. Introduction

This document sets out the evaluation of the Oakley Community Health and Wellbeing Project, delivered as Cheltenham Borough Council's project for the Strengthening Local Communities (SLC) programme. It documents the development of the project model and the delivery of key project activities with attention to the context, rationale, perceived benefits, challenges and learning. The final section identifies themes that distinguish the project.

2. Profile of the project area

Oakley is one of 20 wards in Cheltenham, with a population of approximately 5,765¹. It is a mature, residential suburban area to the north east of Cheltenham Town centre, and includes the neighbourhoods of Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors².

Census data³ for Oakley includes the following information, which provides useful context for this project:

- It is in the top 10% most densely populated wards in the county.
- Nearly all data indicators for children and young people are in the highest 10%, which suggests that needs in this area are high. Indicators include aspects such as free school meals, emergency admissions and educational achievement.
- Many indicators that affect economy and enterprise of an area are ranked in the highest 10%, e.g. the number of lone parents and the number of carers are both high.
- Crime indicators suggest that crime levels are fairly high, with numbers for violence, victims under 20 and arson all being in the highest 10% for the county. All crime indicators are in top 35% of levels across the county.
- Needs relating to healthy living and older people are closer to county averages, but mental health assessments, occupational therapy assessments and uptake of day care services are all in the highest 35% of county levels.

Deprivation

Oakley is made up of four Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Of these, the two in the centre of the ward are in the highest quintile for deprivation while the other two are in the second-highest quintile. This indicates that the area features a fairly high level of multiple deprivation, with some households being very deprived.⁴

Educational Achievement

The number of working-age residents of Oakley with no qualifications is high (35%) when compared to borough (17%), regional (21%) and national (22%) figures. This is balanced out by the much lower number of people with a degree-level qualification (19% in Oakley, compared to 36% Cheltenham-wide).⁵

Health and healthcare in Oakley

Table 1 shows that the percentage of residents in Oakley rating their health as 'very good' was more than the national average. Also, the percentage of residents in Oakley rating their health as 'very bad' was less than the national average, suggesting that the residents of Oakley perceived themselves as having better health than the average person in England.

¹ MAIDeN mid-2013 population estimates.

² CBC Engaging Communities Project Report, Jan17. Part 2, Chapter 5 – Oakley.

³ MAIDeN Neighbourhood Profiles.

⁴ Gloucestershire County Council (2015) Understanding Cheltenham.

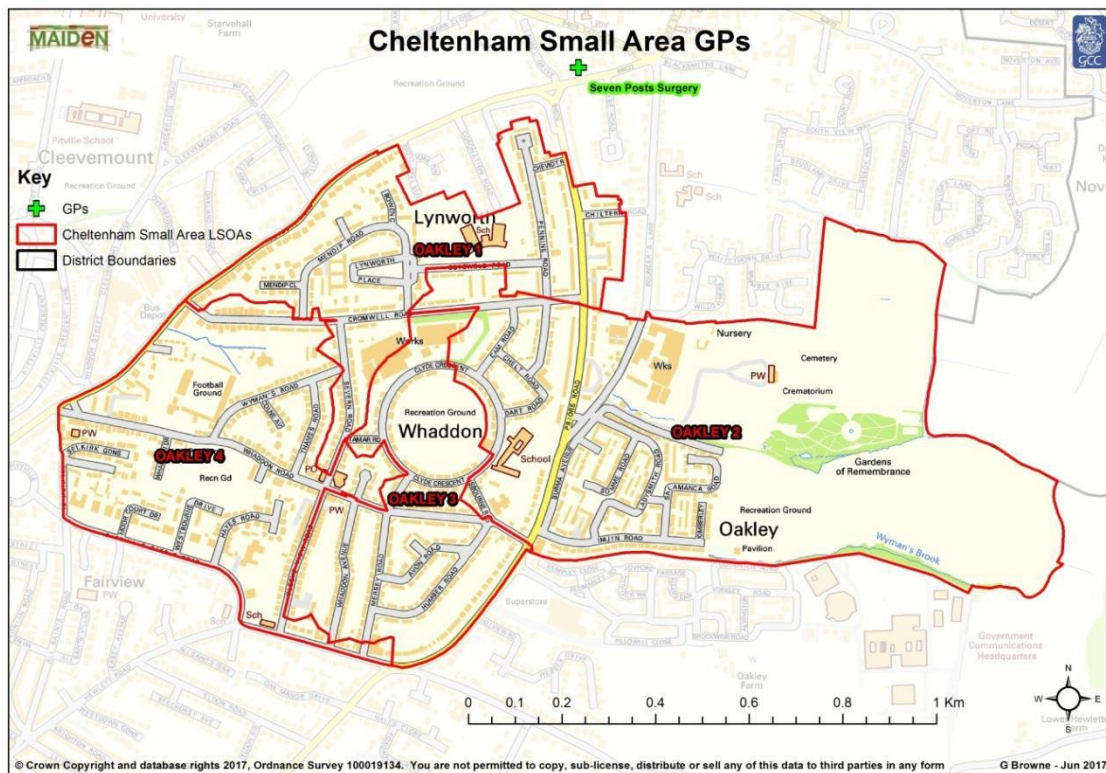
⁵ CBC Engaging Communities Project Report, Jan17.

Table 1: Personal health rated by Oakley residents in the 2011 Census⁶

Health	Oakley	Gloucestershire	England
Very Good	49.91%	47.56%	47.17%
Good	34.32%	35.21%	34.22%
Fair	11.78%	12.78%	13.12%
Bad	3.14%	3.48%	4.25%
Very Bad	0.85%	0.97%	1.25%

There is currently no GP surgery within Oakley. The closest practice is two bus stops away, in St Paul's, while it is only one bus stop to the A&E department. As a result, there is a high proportion of Oakley residents accessing Cheltenham General Hospital. The SLC project was expected to add capacity to tackle the health needs of Oakley residents, and had the support of GPs.⁷

Figure 1: Map of Cheltenham showing GP's within and nearby the area



Community spaces and facilities

There are three dedicated community centres in the area: Oakley Resource Centre (Clyde Crescent), Parklands Community Centre (Wyman's Road), and Cornerstone Centre⁸.

Results of an Oakley Community Survey carried out in Summer 2016, showed that social or community activities was top of the list of improvements suggested by residents. Related comments included the need for more meeting places for adults, such as pubs, social clubs, a gym, and a health centre, and more activities for children,

⁶ Census 2011. <https://www.ilivehere.co.uk/statistics-oakley-gloucestershire-28648.html>

⁷ Notes from ALS 1, Mar18.

⁸ CBC Engaging Communities Project Report, Jan17.

especially during the school holidays. Table 2 is an extract from the report and shows the themes that emerged from responses to the question on how to build a stronger community in Oakley.⁹

Table 2: Responses to the survey question, “How can we build a stronger community in our local area?”

Theme	No. of responses	Selection of comments
Community events/ activities	13	“With more community groups/gathering fetes, etc.” “More community days.” “Organise more events inviting all members of the community.” “More activities in the holidays.”
Communication	4	“More publicity.” “Need positive news articles. We’re stuck with a bad reputation even though it’s not as bad as what people say.”
Community involvement/ partnerships	5	“By encouraging people to invite friends or encourage others who could do with someone open a door to join in on days like today, and not being stuck indoors.” “If everyone mixed more.”
Meeting places	7	“Support Cornerstone.” “Lack of meeting places is a problem.” “Have more community buildings.”
Safer community	3	“Strong presence of PCSOs/police working with local children.” “There is a strong community but if we are not careful children could fall into crime/antisocial behaviour.”
Other	5	“Keep trying – the uninterested individuals may not thank you but keep trying.” “Already strong.”

The survey also asked what kind of place Oakley residents wanted it to be in five and twenty years’ time. Selected comments are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Selected comments on what kind of place residents wanted Oakley to be¹⁰

In five years’ time	In twenty years’ time
“Everybody feels welcome.” “Community is strong.” “People feel supported and valued.” “People feel safe and there are more facilities, e.g. based at the neighbourhood projects/parks.” “You feel safe and proud to live in.” “The services liaise regularly with each other.”	“Everyone is respected and valued.” “People would want to live.” “Everyone can feel safe and trust local friends, services and have the time when needed.” “Somewhere they can always go.” “People feel safe and have good communication between the authorities and local community.”

⁹ CBC Engaging Communities Project Report, Jan17.

¹⁰ CBC Engaging Communities Project Report, Jan17.

3. Project model and origins

CBC established a post for a Community Health and Wellbeing Coordinator (CHWC) in November 2017, and recruitment commenced in March 2018. A CHWC was appointed to the post in August 2018, on a 30-hour contract over 18 months.

The aim of the role was to:

- Identify local health needs and establish a baseline community health status;
- Work with local residents, including seldom heard groups, to identify and develop local health-promoting assets ;
- Work with local residents to evaluate the impact on demand for public services;
- Ensure key independencies are managed with other related community-based initiatives i.e. community connectors, community builders.

The outcomes for the project were to:

- Build the knowledge, skills and confidence of individuals from areas of high health needs to lead healthy lifestyles.
- Develop a social movement that promotes personal responsibility in the achievement of good health and wellbeing.
- Communities can benefit from easily accessible health and wellbeing support and advice.
- Evaluate the benefits to individual health and wellbeing and to the sustainability of the health and care system of community development approaches.

The CHWC's induction included meeting local partners and agencies, and neighbourhood walkabouts, to familiarise herself with the existing assets in the community. One of her aims was to help people start taking control of their health and wellbeing, and making the right choices about where they seek information from. Her biggest anticipated challenge was to reduce the inappropriate use of A&E. Despite a late start to the project, CBC and the CHWC were determined that it met all its targets, that it would be evaluated effectively, and that groups and activities set up would be sustainable.^{11, 12}

The methodology adopted by the CHWC was a strengths-based partnership working approach, in which she focussed on partnerships between organisations, as well as on relationships between the community (as a whole and as individuals) and the organisations that can support, facilitate and engage with them. She worked with residents and groups to discover and build on their strengths, social and community networks, and passions, and to work in partnership to bring together support and maximise local resources.

The CHWC works out of the Oakley Resource Centre (ORC), which was built just over a decade ago and run by two independent organisations – Oakley Regeneration Partnership and Oakley Neighbourhood Project. The ORC was valued in the Oakley community and had an estimated footfall of 7,500 visitors per year¹³. However, in September 2016, the joint trustees of both organisations announced their managed closure, citing financial reasons¹⁴. Since then, the Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) has had to step in to manage the building, which has been challenging¹⁵. When the SLC programme started, CBC had been working with key partners, Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) and P3 Charity, to review management of the ORC¹⁶. The new management commenced on 1st February 2018¹⁷. The ORC regularly hosts activities, as shown in Figure 2.

¹¹ Notes from ALS 3, Sept18.

¹² Project Status Report, Sept18.

¹³ CBC News article, Oct16. https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/news/article/1787/oakley_resource_centre_cheltenham

¹⁴ Notes from ALS 1, Mar18.

¹⁵ Notes from ALS 1, Mar18.

¹⁶ Project Status Report, Nov17.

¹⁷ Project Status Report, Jan18.

Figure 2: Oakley Resource Centre Timetable

Day	Dates	Time	Activity
Monday	All	10:30am-1pm	Maths and English
	All	11am-1pm	P3 Advice Drop in
	All (on hold)	2pm-4pm	Digi Cam Club
	First Tuesday of every month	12:30pm-2:30pm	P3 free parenting advice drop in.
	All	6:30pm-7:30pm	Yoga with suman
Tuesday	First Monday of the month.	7:30pm-9pm	Your Space- mental health support.
	All term times	9:15am-10:45am	Jigsaw Parents and Tots
	All	11am-1pm	CBH Job Club
	All	11am-1pm	P3 Advice Drop in
	18th September, 16h October, 20- November	12:30pm-2:30pm	P3 Free wellbeing sessions.
	11- September, 9- October, 13- November, 11- December,	12:30pm-2:30pm	P3 arts and crafts session.
Wednesday	All	4pm-9pm	Slimming World
	All	11am-1pm	P3 Advice Drop in
	All	7-8:30pm	3+ age fitness with Patrick Ansley £5
Thursday	All	11am-1pm	CBH Job Club
	All	11am-1pm	P3 Advice Drop in
	All	6pm-9pm	Share youth counselling
Friday	All	10am-11am	Community Fitness with Patrick- £5
	All	11am-1pm	P3 Advice Drop in
	All (until Christmas)	4:30pm-6:30pm	Youth Club 11-13 years. Dart road youth Centre.
	All (until Christmas)	7pm-9pm	Youth Club 14-18 years. Dart road youth centre.

To further support the aims of the project, CBC supported a bid made by Severn Wye Energy Agency for a place-based social action project based in Oakley¹⁸. The CHWC employs a ‘soft touch’ approach to improve the community’s physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. As the project developed, the CHWC became more focused on people’s mental wellness, believing that “physical wellness comes hand-in-hand with that”. The focus on mental wellness was based partly on observation and partly on facts and figures that she was sent when she started in her role that showed mental ill health as being a big problem in Oakley.¹⁹

“Tackling social isolation and getting people talking to each other, getting a bit more sense of community, will have a great benefit to people’s mental health. It also gives us options, like last week, I was talking to someone from the NHS – they said they’d usually do it for people working within organisations, but they would be more than happy to run Mental Health First Aid courses at Oakley however many times we want it, if there are residents who are interested in doing it.” [CHWC, Feb20 interview]

The CHWC keeps up to date with current public health issues through the Public Health England website and by talking to the coaches from Healthy Lifestyles Gloucestershire.²⁰

“I know at the moment, for example, they’re having a very big push on smoking in pregnancy and some of the Healthy Lifestyle coaches are specifically trained to coach pregnant mums who still smoke. It links up to what I’m trying to do to an extent [...]. If part of the reason that they’ve smoked is because they don’t have connections or friends, where they can go and have a very good moan about how appalling the day has been or something like that, I can try and get them along to something and to get that network going.” [CHWC, Apr19 interview]

¹⁸ Project Status Report, Nov17.

¹⁹ Feb20 interview.

²⁰ Apr19 interview.

The CHWC invites people to activities at the ORC using several ways: giving out copies of the timetable when door-knocking, word-of-mouth, posting on social media e.g. relevant Facebook groups, and online community notice boards e.g. Next Door Neighbour.²¹ The CHWC’s approach to engagement includes some door-knocking, but not as much as some of the other projects, as she focuses more on making connections at public places like bus stops and the post office.

“I think with door-knocking [...] the take-up is something like 1 in 90 where you actually get an ongoing commitment, so you’d have to knock on an awful lot of doors to get repeat surveys done. I’m prepared to try to do something like that and we’ll see what happens, but I would rather only have 20 and have really good ones where I know I’m going to get something meaningful back, whether it’s good or bad [...] than do loads and then not be able to follow them up.” [CHWC, Apr19 interview]

In November 2018, the CHWC reported that less people have been engaging with the project than hoped. However, the project had started to gather pace and two strands were emerging²²:

- i. Addressing the problem of people not being able to access information and services to improve their health and wellbeing easily.
- ii. Setting up and encouraging people to be involved in community activities in a sustainable way that will provide peer support and companionship, and nurture community spirit.

The CHWC likens her approach to community development to a triangle:

“It’s about getting the community or the people who are wanting whatever service, and the agency together, and the triangle bit is me trying to push them together. It’s so that people have the confidence and realise that they can actually go and talk to these people themselves – “Look, this is what we’d like. How are you going to facilitate that for us?” That seems to be working well at the moment.” [CHWC, Feb20 interview]

In 2020, the CHWC is employing a new strategy to engage the residents in Oakley. She has put together a survey asking residents what they would like to see happen in 2020. The way the estate is laid out makes the ORC almost at the centre, so she is going to start off from the inner circle around the park and then spiral out, to try and collect information, and also to get residents who are interested to pass that information on to someone else. This will essentially be door-knocking but in a much more targeted order.²³

4. Main activities and project developments

4.1 Overview

This section sets out the main elements of the project. Table 4 provides a summary timeline of key events for the project.

Table 4: Summary timeline of project events

Project timeline		
2017	November	CBC established a post for a Community Health and Wellbeing Coordinator (CHWC)
	December	
2018	January	
	February	New management of the Oakley Resource Centre (ORC). 3 new health and wellbeing sessions plus an existing Slimming World programme delivered at the ORC.

²¹ Apr19 interview.

²² Project Status Report, Nov18.

²³ Feb20 interview.

	March	
	April	
	May	Interviews for the CHWC post. First steering group meeting involving representatives from P3, Cheltenham Trust, CBH, CBC and local residents. 2 more health and wellbeing sessions delivered at the ORC, bringing the total to 6.
	June	
	July	
	August	CHWC appointed and started in post
	September	CHWC induction
	October	Organised a partnership meeting of key stakeholders. Start of a social group that meets on Monday afternoons. ²⁴
	November	
	December	Talk by a local fitness instructor, 'Motivation: a move towards health and happiness' attended by 16 people. Plans for a jointly organised Christmas event with the Community Association was unsuccessful. Problems with the ORC building security, IT and telephone system taking up a substantial amount of the CHWC's time to rectify. ²⁵
2019	January	Start of a Women's Group
	February	
	March	Healthy Lifestyles Gloucestershire started providing services from the ORC once a fortnight. Obtained permission to install a notice board on the railings of the ORC, facing the Children's Centre. ²⁶
	April	Easter community events at ORC
	May	The CHWC reports difficulties in engaging adults without children in the Oakley community, and poor uptake of services provided by Healthy Lifestyles Gloucestershire. End of CBH funding for the Woman's Group; 5-6 mums continue to meet informally. ²⁷
	June	Craft workshop started with initial input for 4 weeks (still running at the time of this report). ²⁸
	July	Oakley Family Picnic and Traditional Sports Day.
	August	Supported Cornerstones, CBH and Oakley Community Association Summer activities.
	September	Oakley Community Association Annual General Meeting voted in their new constitution. 'Couch to 5k' running or strolling group started in collaboration with Cornerstones. Garden at ORC landscaped and made safe (on request from one of the groups that has started using the centre regularly) to enable use by parents and children as well as other users. ²⁹
	October	All of Oakley stakeholder group meeting planned. One-off half-term craft event.
	November	
	December	Family film afternoon with healthy snacks. Supported the CBH's Christmas Hamper day. Original project end date.

²⁴ Project Status Report, Nov18.

²⁵ Project Status Report, Jan19.

²⁶ Project Status Report, Mar19.

²⁷ Project Status Report, May19.

²⁸ CBC input, Sept19.

²⁹ CHWC input, Oct19.

2020	January	Start of a Men's Fitness Group
	February	Start of an Edible Garden Project. Collaboration with the Community Association to start a new youth activity evening. With the CHWC's support, a diary of regular Community Association Trustee Meetings has been drawn up, with the first meeting taking place in February. New ORC timetable drawn up, with some days now at capacity. Revised project end date.
	March	Baby Massage sessions starting, with a free taster. ³⁰

4.2 Early engagement³¹

The CHWC organised a Partnership Meeting of key stakeholders in the area in autumn 2018, which was useful to open up opportunities for the project. She also met with the local Councillor and attended a 'cocooning' event during half term. The 'cocooning' event was jointly organised by the police, fire and rescue service and CBH to engage with the community around issues of antisocial behaviour in the area. This involved door-knocking, offering safeguarding advice, and listening to any concerns that people may have in the community.

Figure 3: Photos illustrating project activities



Clockwise from top: Community notice board at ORC; community gardening event led by the CHWC at ORC in April 2019; plants potted by the children at the community gardening event.

³⁰ CHWC input, Feb20.

³¹ Project Status Report, Nov18.

Other initiatives by the CHWC included,

- Starting a social group on a Monday to engage local residents – this was unsuccessful and had to be discontinued.
- Organising a free talk by a local fitness instructor – ‘Motivation: a move towards health and happiness’.
- Meeting with Gloucestershire Self-Management to discuss running their programme from the ORC for local residents. This may involve offering an incentive to recruit people for the programme.
- Attending the Oakley Community Association meeting to share the project with key local residents, and seek out opportunities to jointly organise events, e.g. for Christmas.
- Liaising with Ice Creates about running a health and wellbeing drop-in session.
- Collaborating with CBH to develop a self-sustaining women’s group using funding secured recently.

4.3 Community asset-mapping ³²

(a) Oakley Resource Centre (ORC)

See section 3 for the history of the centre. The ORC is owned by Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) and now managed jointly (since January 2018) by CBC (through the CHWC and building supervisor) and Cheltenham Borough Homes, to facilitate the programme of activities and use of the centre by agencies such as the Oakley Community Association, P3 Charity and the local community.³³ Most of the additional services, learning opportunities, and activities are delivered to the community free-of-charge or at a very low cost (see Figure 2).

In line with the project’s focus on mental wellness, the CHWC has been advocating to keep the mental health group and the young people’s counselling service running from the ORC. Both these services have been running from there since before the CHWC started her role. The mental health group is the only self-help group in Cheltenham, and this has been problematic.

“There were some quite dangerous, difficult situations occurring because the lady running [the group] isn’t a professional; it’s peer support. CBH wanted to close it because of that, but I’ve managed to get the group to amend their policy and we’ve changed from it being a drop-in to the fact that people have to contact by email or by phone first to talk to the lady that runs it. If they don’t disclose what’s wrong with them, they can’t go. So CBH can’t complain anymore about the fact that it shouldn’t be going on. Hopefully I’ve been able to give [the lady] support to carry on doing that because it’s just such an important service.” [CHWC, Feb20 interview]

The ORC recorded 878 people attending various groups over the period of July-September 2019. This figure does not include children visiting with their parents, people dropping in for advice and/or guidance, and people attending the Job Club.³⁴ Since the CHWC started her role, her combined efforts with CBH’s community investment officer have raised the number of visitors to the ORC, from an average of 500-600 every month to over 1,000.³⁵

(b) Cornerstones/ United Church of St Michael

Cornerstones is run by the vicar of the United Church of St Michael and is very popular, although space was an issue for them. The adjoining church was huge but was only used on Sundays and for events like weddings. The space was beautiful, light, and has a good floor. In early 2019, the vicar decided to sell all the pews. He used the money from the sale to buy some stacking chairs and got the floor polished. As a result, he now has a much bigger and more functional community space, which has made it much more viable for activities and events. For example, they are able to get more players in for their boccia afternoons, and have moved the fitness class over to this space.

³² Apr19 interview.

³³ CBC input, Sept19.

³⁴ CHWC input, Oct19.

³⁵ Feb20 interview.

Every summer, Cornerstones run a programme called 'Holiday at Home', which is for families that *"don't have a lot of money to do things"*. Normally, about 20-30 families sign up to it. Every day of the week during the programme, the families come to the church and are served a different type of cuisine from somewhere different in the world. This is followed by activities and games indoors, before having more games in the field, where more people can join them at that point. The selling of the pews meant that, the vicar was able to host more families because of the additional space for them to sit and eat together. The CHWC collaborated with Cornerstones to run 'Holiday at Home' in 2019.

(c) Lynworth Court Hub

Lynworth Court is retirement housing located on the *"nice[r]"* other side of Oakley and is managed by CBH. The Lynworth Court Hub is an older people community hub offering health and wellbeing services and social activities for the local residents. The aim of the activities is to bring residents, local business and smaller organisations together to promote healthy aging. Activities run at the hub include carpets curling, craft days, and teas where they get people to come in and sing for them. Residents here are perceived as having no reason to visit the ORC, since they already have so many activities set up for them by CBH. There are community investment officers in charge, one of whom sometimes works out of the same office as the CHWC. Although the CHWC has been able to *"bat ideas backwards and forwards"* with this officer, she has not had the opportunity to have a more active involvement in planning activities for the older people at Lynworth Court or to use the hub space. This is because she is seen as a facilitator rather than a provider, which does not fit the remit of the CBH, and also due to a fear by the officer of being made *"obsolete"*.

(d) Oakwood Primary School

Oakwood Primary School has been supportive of the CHWC's work, always open to her ideas and questions. For example, she went to them with an idea for a summer holiday activity and had a few questions: what time school started in the mornings, and whether there was any physical activity like 'The Daily Mile' or 'Wake and Shake' in their morning routine. In response, the school sent her links to the different things that they do with the various age groups. The school also helps her advertise activities by putting the flyers that she provides into students' school bags. Besides that, the school has given the vicar of Cornerstones an allotment, where he runs an after-school club for students who have a parent that would go with them. The students and parents are able to grow things and then cook together: *"some of the parents don't even know how to use a knife"*.

"The school basically, if it's a good idea and they've got the space and it benefits the children, they will accommodate you free of charge." [CHWC, Apr19 interview]

(e) Whaddon Youth Centre

Whaddon Youth Centre used to be a busy youth club. Historically, there were a few problems to do with abuse, and then the Council cut all funding for street-level youth workers. As a result, it no longer operates as a youth club but is now used during the day to help young people who are NEET i.e. 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' to try to upskill and get work experience. This means that it is not a *"usable asset"* during the day for confidentiality reasons. Besides, some of the young people are very troubled and would not go if they knew there were members of the public there. However, one evening a week, Cheltenham Trust uses the centre to run an event called 'Fuel Thursday' with the food charity, Wiggly Worm. This is where children go along to do some sport and can dip in and out of the kitchen to help with the cooking, and then they are provided with a hot meal. There is a coffee shop in the centre, which has been set up like an American diner, which the CHWC thought would be a good place for adults to meet. Unfortunately, she has to respect that that is not possible due to its current purpose.

More recently, however, an opportunity to engage some young people has come up as a result of an incident where some of those who attend Fuel Thursday were identified by CCTV, causing disruption at the ORC one

evening when a Slimming World session was happening. The CHWC thinks that part of the reason for this was because these young people had nothing to do outside of Thursday evenings. She has since spoken to the person who coordinates the youth work, and they are looking at a way of using their experience with the young people and those young people’s experiences, to try and justify the need for more provision of youth activities.³⁶

(f) Other assets

Parklands Community Centre buildings and grounds have been leased from CBC. It has a big space that is available for hire for an event or an activity class. Although the CHWC saw it as an asset with potential, the cost of hire was quite expensive and the facilities needed improving. Thus, she has yet to make any headway there.

The Cheltenham Town Football Club has also been difficult to engage. Although it has been doing a lot of community engagement work, it may be that it only selects schools, where it might gain a higher profile³⁷.

The CHWC has also yet to engage with the Buddhist Centre, partly due to its odd opening hours. Also, from perusing the timetable of events put on by the centre, apart from one meditation session, other events seem quite expensive and would probably only suit people who were “quite into Buddhism”.³⁸

5. Community engagement with the project: summary

The project did not use the formality of a participant registration system to avoid creating barriers to engagement. As consequence is that it is not straightforward to determine rates of participation and participant characteristics in the sense commonly used in more structured community interventions. Nevertheless, in line with the original project plan and the CHWC job description, the project team maintained monitoring, register, and diary notes to provide a record of activity delivery and engagement. The table below gives a summary of leading forms of quantitative data related to the project. There are some limitations to the information, given that the records overlap, sometimes under-record, and can only partially distinguish individual patterns of engagement.

Table 5: Summary of key projects and indications of community engagement³⁹

Activities led or supported by the project	Indication of community reach or engagement	Source/Note
Door-knocking	110 doors knocked; 15 answered	By altering the time of day for door-knocking, the CHWC has had a slightly higher success rate with quality conversations, since the interim report.
Initial neighbourhood meetings	30 residents	
Community garden project	14 participants	
Your Space – Support Group	10 participants	Existing group ran into problems; help given with GDPR, policy and safety. Group is now pre-booked only, and is still averaging 10 participants at each monthly meeting.
Healthy Lifestyles Drop-In	2 drop-in participants; 9 pre-booked	This drop-in has led to the ‘Healthy Me, Baby & Beyond’ drop-in run by Healthy Lifestyles Gloucestershire.

³⁶ Feb20 interview.

³⁷ Notes from ALS 3, Sept18.

³⁸ Feb20 interview.

³⁹ CHWC input, Oct19.

Wonder Women	10 participants	In collaboration with CBH. Still ongoing.
'Couch to 5k' Stroll and Run	7 participants	Started off being run in collaboration with Cornerstones; now handed over to Cornerstones.
Oakley Community Association (CA)	8 residents	Existing CA was having issues with governance and organisation; supported to seek assistance from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council.
P3 Foodbank	25 residents	Supporting P3 by signposting people, and occasionally giving out food parcels.
Yoga	12 participants + waiting list	Run by a local lady sourced by the CHWC. She is now at capacity having received advice and help with marketing, and has a waiting list.
Whaddon Art	8 participants	A Community Art Group facilitated by Purple Shoots with a view to become self-running. Numbers fluctuate between 8 and 2.
Mother's in Mind	20 participants	Brought in to the community by Sure Start to facilitate recovery and support for mothers with mental health problems.
Men's Fitness	4 participants	Four participants in the first 3 weeks.
One-off community events	60 residents	Events organised or supported by the CHWC.

6. Perceptions of the effects of the programme

6.1 Impacts on community assets and partners

There has been success in connecting different organisations and people, which is enhancing the services they offer to the community. For example, the person who delivers 3rd Age Fitness and Strength Training has been in talks with Healthy Lifestyles and the CHWC to create a package that will appeal to men, combining fitness and healthy living. Finally, at the end of January 2020, a Men's Fitness group was started. Two men attended that first session, which according to the CHWC, is a "miracle" for something in Oakley when it starts. Another two men have shown interest by ringing up the instructor to ask if they could still join the group even though they had missed the first session.

Another example was when the ORC needed a new yoga teacher – the CHWC encouraged them to invite an individual who had previously been on a CBH business course at the centre and had set up a yoga business. The benefit was that this person was already known to partners and to the community, and so was able to build great rapport with the community and her class grew quickly. This consequently benefits the wider community as the money she earns from her class is partially put back into the local economy.⁴⁰

More recently, the CHWC managed to introduce people working at the local library to community investment officers from CBH. This partnership has come up with several big ideas about what they want to do and they have also got the funds to do it. Therefore, the CHWC is anticipating a lot of work coming up with the library soon.⁴¹

6.2 Impacts for community members

The CHWC has noted an increase in community members' confidence to come into the ORC to ask for advice or for signposting to a different service. The CHWC has also seen an improvement in the self-esteem of community members who have been attending group activities, where they now play a central part in running their chosen groups. Community members who have been involved with the project activities have

⁴⁰ CHWC input, Oct19.

⁴¹ Feb20 interview.

recommended to friends and neighbours that they come and find out more. Frequently, these people then become involved with different opportunities that they did not know were available to them before.

Some community members have also become more proactive in looking for solutions to their problems, where previously they would not have done so. For example, the local church which ran the toddler group, decided that it needed to concentrate its time elsewhere and had to close the group even though it was very popular. The CHWC, along with the church, spoke to the women who were using this group about taking the group over themselves. They discussed issues like self-governance, and grants and loans that could be applied for to help them that first year with things like insurance. Initially, the women were quite interested in doing that, but they then decided that they did not want to run their own group. At the same time, they also did not want to be isolated. So the women approached the Children's Centre and managed to persuade them to run the toddler group for them there. Although this did not pan out the way the CHWC hoped it would, she was pleased to be able to give the women "that nugget of an idea" and they found a solution in the end.⁴²

Other community members have made significant improvements to their physical wellbeing. For example, the CHWC met a woman who was overweight, a chronic smoker, and used a walking frame to assist her mobility. They spoke about the CHWC's role over coffee. The woman has subsequently given up smoking, has tried to lose weight, and is now more mobile, able to walk without her frame. This woman was very aware that she needed moral support to continue that journey and remain active, so she went to the ORC to enquire about what was available. She now has support from one of Healthy Lifestyle's health coaches (and the CHWC) and has also joined the 'Couch to 5k' stroll, which is something she had previously not thought possible.

The CHWC has identified that there is huge value in supporting and enabling the community to change negative thoughts and words, so frequently and repeatedly used in their day-to-day lives. Small steps to change this attitude can boost the self-worth of people within the community and encourage them to take positive health and wellbeing actions.⁴³

6.3 Case studies

- (a) MQ is a woman in her mid-40's who has lived in Oakley for some time. She is a wheel chair user, and has suffered from anxiety, depression and low self-esteem for years. The CHWC knew MQ from her previous job as a trainer. She saw MQ waiting at a bus stop in Oakley and started a conversation with her. MQ told the CHWC that she did not get out much, and had reached a point where she really wanted to get out more but felt anxious about it. The CHWC suggested that she visit the resource centre for a cup of tea and a chat. When MQ came to the resource centre, the CP showed her all the different activities, sessions and classes available. The CHWC reassured her that she would be in the building, so could introduce her to any groups she may be interested in. MQ currently attends a craft group every Thursday and a social group on a Tuesday. She now feels more included and less isolated.
- (b) CH is a woman in her 50's who has lived in Oakley her whole life. She has profound mental health problems and when she was younger spent some time living in the mental hospital before it closed down. This was a time that she remembers fondly and often speaks about because she was well medicated and felt secure. Due to some traumatic experiences in recent years and falling in with the wrong crowd, CH had started to self-medicate using street drugs. At the same time, she has fallen off the mental health service's radar because of changes in the system.

CH had been regularly visiting the resource centre and the Cornerstone Centre, looking for a safe and quiet environment and someone to talk to. Eventually, she was introduced to a social group that uses the resource centre and has attended a couple of their sessions, which she has thoroughly enjoyed. This has

⁴² Feb20 interview.

⁴³ CHWC input, Oct19.

suited her very well since she has not had to make an ongoing commitment to regularly attend the group. Daily life is chaotic and difficult for CH because she is constantly fluxing in and out of a psychotic state, and struggling with paranoia and audible hallucinations (hearing noises and voices). The CHWC collaborated with the Cornerstone Centre to help CH get a face-to-face appointment with a mental health worker at her doctor’s surgery, and have been working with her to remember to go.

Whilst the objective is for CH to be more valued within the community, her mental health has meant that she has been on the periphery of the community for some time and even feared by some residents. However, it is hoped that with the correct care and medication from the mental health services as well as persistence and patience from the CHWC and the Cornerstone Centre, CH will become a welcomed and valued part of the community in Oakley.

7. Financial, resource, and social value aspects of the project

As with most SLC projects, staffing was the primary cost for the Oakley project. The funds were used to support the community practitioner on a 30-hour week contract over an 18-month period. Meeting rooms and desk space were hired for two half days a week, which consumed the next big part of the budget. Other direct project costs were for a small project budget to enable landscaping work on the garden to be done, which will enable community groups to further develop the space for use by the community, training, and events such as the Oakley Sports Day and Easter activities.⁴⁴ A breakdown of the project budget for different project aspects is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Breakdown of the Oakley SLC project finances⁴⁵

Project aspect	Details	Proportion of budget
Community networking, engagement, asset mapping	<i>Mainly at the start of the project</i>	15%
Training, facilitation and support of community members	<i>Mainly at the start of the project</i>	10%
Supporting community activity 1	<i>Community garden project</i>	10%
Supporting community activity 2	<i>Craft workshop</i>	10%
Supporting community activity 3	<i>‘Couch to 5k’ strolling group</i>	5%
Supporting community activity 4	<i>Community choir start-up</i>	5%
One-off events	<i>1 per month approx. with partner organisations, e.g. Community Gardening Day, Community Picnic, and Traditional Sports Day</i>	10%
Work with GP and other key partners	<i>Monthly meetings</i>	5%
Admin, evaluation, reflection, professional development	<i>Work with UWE evaluation and ALSs</i>	15%
Management and overheads		15%
Total		100%

The main areas of social value are likely to lie in the personal development support for community members leading or taking part in project activities. There is also value linked to each of the four main community activities listed in Table 6, which will benefit mainstream health and social care services.

⁴⁴ CBC input, Sept19.

⁴⁵ CHWC input, Oct19.

8. Engagement with the SLC programme Action Learning Sets (ALSs)

The CHWC had not yet been appointed when the first ALS took place in March 2018, so the first two ALSs were attended by the CBC Strategy and Engagement Manager, and the Participation and Engagement Team Leader. The CHWC had just started her role when the third ALS was held in September 2018, and she has attended every ALS since bar the last one. Cheltenham hosted the sixth ALS in January 2019 at the Oakley ORC.

The CHWC found the ALSs very helpful and interesting. It made her feel reassured that she was not the only one facing problems: “...all of us have been able to relate to other people’s problems because we’ve all had the same things.” The CHWC also felt that she would be able to take the learning from the ALSs to future community-based jobs as she expects the problems that she would encounter to be the same.⁴⁶

“There are these certain dynamics of people having power over people, or believing that they do, and other people just buckling. The ALS has been very good at showing us all that this is the situation.” [CHWC, Apr19 interview]

9. Sustainability and future project plans

While the Oakley project was not established with direct follow-on funding anticipated, it does form the basis for reviewing and planning for further community development-based health and wellbeing work in the area.

During the remainder of the funding period after the interim report, the CHWC’s plan was to prioritise getting more health services back into the ORC, such as a healthy lifestyle group for people with diabetes. Therefore, it was important to support the work of Healthy Lifestyles Gloucestershire who used the ORC every fortnight for services that include smoking cessation, lowering alcohol intake, weight management, and general wellbeing. The CHWC focused on improving and maintaining uptake of these services not only to ensure that they continue, but to build a case for getting other services, like the diabetic team, into the ORC.^{47,48}

At the time of writing, a case had been put forward to extend the CHWC’s contract for an additional year. CBC is hopeful that the extra funding secured would enable them to continue their commitment to investing time into community development and make a difference in Oakley. Given the opportunity, the CHWC would like to do more work on finding out how to make eating fruit and vegetables a viable and affordable thing for local residents on very low incomes. She is aware of other projects across Gloucestershire that do a great job of this and that Oakley would benefit from something similar, particularly if the community can be inspired to run it themselves. Nevertheless, the CHWC expressed her hope that connections made between different organisations working within the area would last, regardless of whether her contract gets extended or not.⁴⁹

10. Discussion of strengths and main areas of project success

There were several strengths to the project model in Oakley⁵⁰:

- The community seems to have no problems with the project being led by CBC. The CHWC has managed to make many connections and build trust within the community, whereby people feel comfortable going to her for information, knowing that she will be able to point them in the right direction. These people sometimes bring a friend to her who is looking for information, and she then makes a new connection.
- The CHWC has a good working relationship with the Participation and Engagement Team Leaders at CBC. They have been supportive of her suggestions, for example, by providing information on initiatives

⁴⁶ Apr19 interview.

⁴⁷ Apr19 interview.

⁴⁸ Project Status Report, May19.

⁴⁹ Feb20 interview.

⁵⁰ Apr19 interview.

that have been attempted before but have failed and the pitfalls associated with them, so that the CHWC can try to do it differently.

“There’s a lot to be said about learning for yourself, but in the very short timescale that we’ve got, if I can use someone else’s experience, then I will.” [CHWC, Apr19 interview]

The CHWC has also been able to talk regularly to the Team Leaders about the challenge of juggling her community development work with property management, which has led to vast improvements in the situation.

- Adopting a flexible approach meant that the CHWC is able to tailor her tactic to each specific individual, to try and integrate them into groups. She has also learned to “think on [her] feet” more to be able to take control and deal with the many different issues that have come against her.
- The CHWC has found it helpful working alongside other organisations. For example, working in the same office as CBH officers, she found it helpful to be able to exchange ideas and receive advice about how to approach certain people or situations, especially when she first started her role. She has also found the Cheltenham Trust useful in being able to signpost her to various organisations and people, due to its large remit. Developing this relationship is an important step improving local resident use of the ORC.
- The CHWC acknowledged the local councillor as being an enabler of the community development work in Oakley, through her regular engagement with the CHWC and the community investment officer from CBH. The councillor is also “very good at keeping her ear to the ground about what people are saying and what people want”.
- Having the ORC building to use as a base for the community development work has been helpful, especially with it being ideally situated next to the park, where the CHWC has been able to have conversations with local residents.

11. Discussion of challenges arising for the project

Some challenges that the project has encountered have been: ^{51,52}

- Lack of clarity on the Health and Social Care Commissioning agenda at times, makes it challenging to ensure that community development plans and efforts align properly.
- Lack of capacity to manage the ORC and its volunteers, and an expectation of the CHWC to handle issues related to maintenance of the building, has made it difficult for the CHWC to focus her energy and efforts solely on community development work.

“The CBC had to really acknowledge the issues that [the CHWC] was having with the building and look to support how we could make that change. We knew there was an aspect of building management, but I don’t think anyone really appreciated then, how much building management. [It] has just really made us realise about preparation for the role and with being more realistic with when we’re putting a role like that in place. We’ve been very much aware of the challenges that [the CHWC’s] had and we’ve tried to provide support and push for changes on our side. Unfortunately, it kinda is what falls into [the CHWC’s] role. Like she says, building management is annoying but it’s also quite an important part of the role in a way, because the residents feel like they have ownership over that building and [the CHWC] really understanding that building, and having that one-to-one relationship with the residents [through] conversations with [them] has helped with the relationships, but it has taken up a lot of [the CHWC’s] time, which we’ve acknowledged and adapted our thinking about what the project’s going to achieve

⁵¹ Apr19 interview.

⁵² Notes from ALS 6, Jan19 and ALS 7, Feb19.

and how we're going to achieve it in the timescales as well." [CBC Participation and Engagement Team Leader, Feb20 interview]

- Lack of progress in working collaboratively with other organisations, e.g. CBH and the Oakley Community Association, mainly due to different priorities, methods of working and targets. Some 'territory' issues with local agencies have made it more difficult to build links.

"I think a lot of it is that thing about people being very worried about other people [including community members] doing things that should be their role/remit." [CHWC, Apr19 interview]

"The staff of CBH have got their own [cubicle] at the Resource Centre [and] they run community events and all that. Then there's [the CHWC, who] works with the Council and helps with the community. Then there's the [Community] Association and we do a lot for the community. But we all tread on each other's toes. We should combine." [ORC volunteer, Apr19 interview]

- Lack of time – 18 months is not a sufficient amount of time to build relationships with the community, to enable them to engage with the project, especially given their apathy towards being involved and scepticism about new people coming in i.e. the CHWC.
- There is some evidence that loss of local capacity – such as closure of community spaces or projects – has generated a negative feedback loop with respect to creating opportunities for new initiatives.
- Some feedback from residents indicates that there are already existing community activities available and/or that there is weak interest in establishing new activities.

12. Conclusions

The project has engaged a wide variety of interest groups and tested multiple initiatives which, in turn, is helping new resident networks in the area. A key aspect of the project has been to re-energise an under-utilised and relatively new community centre as a key community asset. This has involved creating and re-making relationships between leading agencies, and reviving trust in the local commitments of CBC. An important goal has also been to find ways for better access and more appropriate use of NHS primary care and A&E services. However, CBC has acknowledged that it was unrealistic to have expected the project to be able to reduce the number of visits to A&E within the project's lifetime.

13. Sources of data

The evaluation is based upon a variety of sources of data collected from the inception of the project. These include:

- Cheltenham Borough Council Engaging Communities Project Report, January 2017; Part 2, Chapter 5 – Oakley. Report compiled by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council in partnership with Oakley Neighbourhood Project and Oakley Regeneration Partnership.
- Cheltenham Project Status Reports
- Notes from three locality meetings with the Oakley project delivery team (Apr18, Jul18, Nov18)
- Interview with the Cheltenham CHWC (Apr19, Feb20) and one of the Participation and Engagement Team Leaders (Feb20)
- Interview with the Chair of the Oakley Community Association, who also volunteers at the Oakley Resource Centre (Apr19)
- Notes from programme Action Learning Sets