

LINK UP



Background

Within some communities in Scotland people are facing multiple levels of deprivation and many are unable to create sustainable livelihoods for themselves. Within these vulnerable communities, people are less resilient to shocks and stresses and individuals' expectations of what they are able to do and achieve can be low.

Predominant models of support are expensive, don't build the capacity of the individual and can lead to a reliance on someone else to provide a solution to their problems. As such people and communities are being characterised by the problems they face, are defined as 'in need', and despite large levels of investment remain dependent on external support (statutory & voluntary).

In response, Inspiring Scotland has designed an asset based programme which will focus on individuals' capacities rather than on their deficits and explore how this starting point can improve a community's effectiveness in addressing its own needs.

The Link Up programme will look at how strengthening social networks and facilitating opportunities for people to help each other through an activity, builds trust. It will also explore how supporting others through these activities increases the confidence and capacity of individuals to seek solutions to their own problems instead of outsourcing their needs to external organisations.

Rationale

An assets v's deficit approach - A recent report by the Improvement and Development Agency¹ claims that a deficit approach to service delivery and community development which 'focuses on the problems, needs and deficiencies in a community' is prevalent among professional staff. Whilst it is not denied that some communities face a wide range of issues, this focus on needs that must be addressed, can lead to feelings of disempowerment and 'people can become passive recipients of expensive services'.

In contrast, a key principle behind an asset-based approach is valuing what works well in an area, and identifying the skills, capacity, knowledge and connections in a community as the starting point. By enhancing existing assets rather than focussing on a community's needs the efficacy of that community to address its own needs will develop.

Individuals and communities as solutions not problems – Problems with existing deficit approaches have been highlighted in a number of reports, including the recent review of public services undertaken by the Christie Commission². Christie points to 'outdated attitudes and approaches' which result in services that 'often impair individual incentives and foster dependencies that create demand'. Short-term deficit focused programmes which tackle different problems in isolation 'fail to build personal capacity or support independent living'.

The emphasis of an assets based approach to community development is to build on 'the positive aspects of communities ... and on supporting individuals and communities to have more control over their circumstances'³. A key enabler for this is the creation of diverse and strong social networks where individuals in the community engage with and help each other through some form of activity. A corollary of this is that the individuals see themselves as contributors to the communities they live in.

This experience of 'doing things together' rather than having things 'done to you' by external agencies can be transformative, improving self-esteem, resilience and self-efficacy. In turn, this creates the conditions in which an empowered and mobilised community can emerge; one that has the capacity to tackle some of its own problems and engage more effectively with external service providers.

Vertical models of intervention - Historic delivery models to 'help' individuals in need have generally moved to increased specialisation, and a narrower spectrum of delivery. Services tend to be focused on one aspect on an individual's life: housing, mental health, substance abuse, literacy etc.

Services have developed in a linear and vertical way. Funding from a variety of sources is funnelled in to topic specific agencies that then employ workers, who work directly with those in need. This model may be good at solving unique problems in isolation, but it does not provide a holistic response – the model is simply repeated for each issue. The model is not only expensive but has limitations for scaling as usually the greatest cost is salaries and efficiencies are limited by the maximum client load.

Sustainability – As stated above, despite large levels of investment over several generations, the issues faced by some of Scotland’s communities have proven intractable. Seeing people as active participants and part of the solution to their own and local issues is central to establishing a more sustainable approach to building resilience and breaking cycles of deprivation. An asset-based approach supports this in a number of ways.

For the individual, the transformative nature of being involved in community activity has already been discussed. However, a number of studies have also shown that certain types of behaviour can contribute to long-term improvements in health and well-being for individuals. For example, the New Economics Foundation identified the following as being important: ‘Connect’, ‘Be active’, ‘Take Notice’, ‘Keep Learning’ and ‘Give’⁴. It is these types of behaviour that Link Up is seeking to promote and develop.

At a community level, asset based working helps to build social capital and promote face-to-face community networks. In turn, these social networks serve to build trust in a community and crucially, can ‘engender pro-social, co-operative behaviour’⁵. This increases the ‘community’s efficacy in addressing its own needs’ and ‘its capacity to lever external support’¹. Put simply, the community is able to utilise its own strengths and resources to develop sustainable solutions to the problems it faces rather than relying solely upon external funding.

Link Up

Link Up is exploring the understanding that in order to improve resilience to tackle the long-term issues faced in communities it is necessary that local residents are part of the solution and able to start to address some of their own needs.

To be able to do this, to be part of the solution, Link Up recognises that opportunities to get involved on a non-intimidating level and start to build some of the ‘softer’ more intangible skills such as self-esteem, confidence and efficacy are required first. In practice this means facilitating opportunities where residents can participate and contribute on whatever level they can and by doing so increase the number of people they know and trust locally.

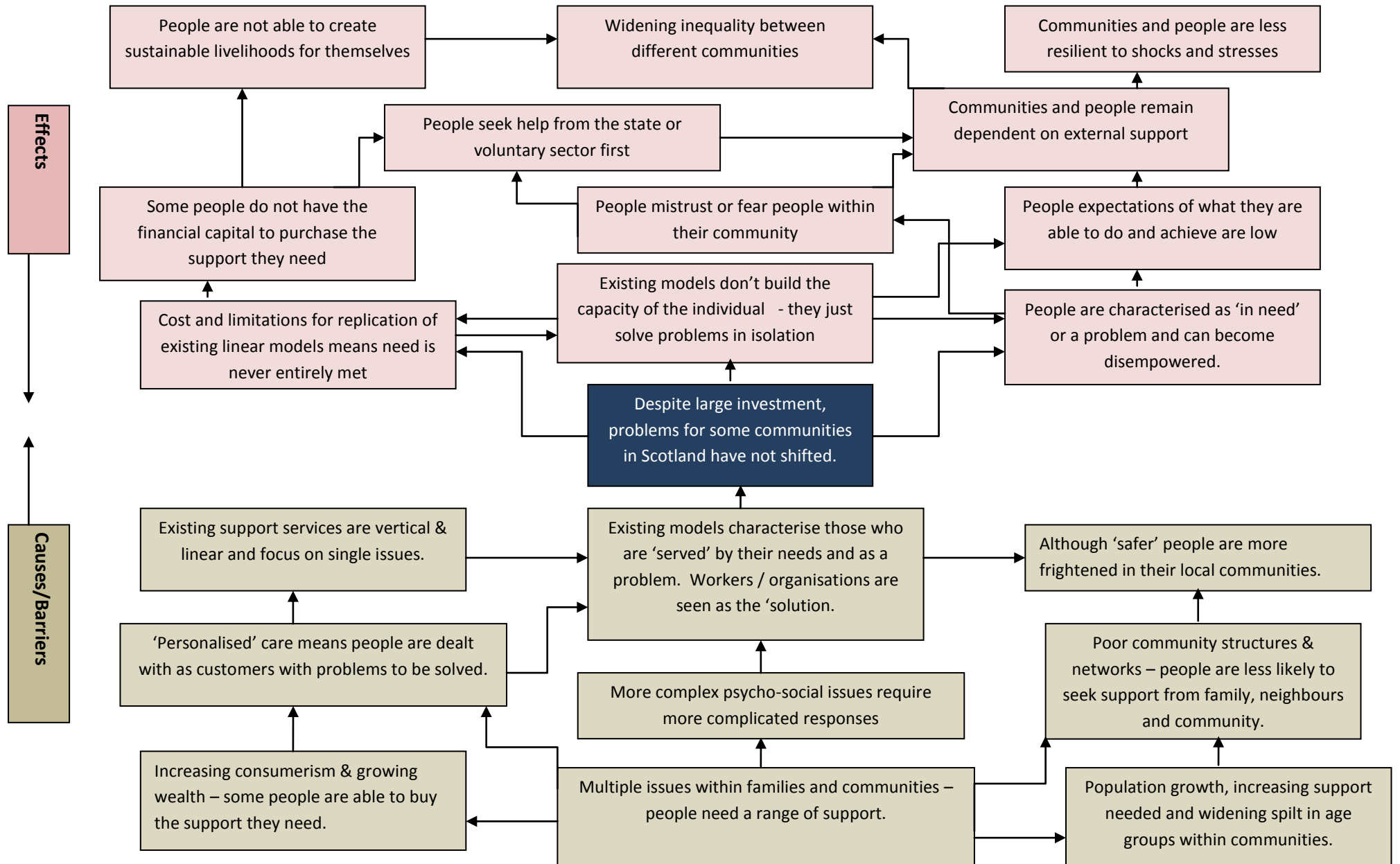
A starting point which focuses on what individuals and communities can do and have rather than what deficiencies they face is required to do this.

Appendix 1 summarises the main causes and effects behind the rationale for establishing the Link Up programme. Additionally, the logic model in Appendix 2 outlines how the Link Up programme will deliver activities against a background of need in local communities.

References

1. J. Foot, T. Hopkins - Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) (March 2010), ‘*A glass half full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being*’, ISBN: 978-0-7488-9080-4.
2. Dr Campbell Christie: Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (June 2011), ISBN: 978-1-78045-214-2.
3. Scottish Community Development Centre and Long-term Conditions Alliance Scotland (March 2011), ‘*Self Management Fund – Special Report – Communities and Community Assets*’.
4. J.Aked & S.Thompson – New Economics Foundation (July 2011), ‘*Five ways to wellbeing*’, ISBN 978-1-908506-02-3.
5. Jonathan Rowson, Steve Broome and Alasdair Jones (Sept 2010), ‘*Connected Communities – How social networks power and sustain the Big Society*’. RSA Projects.

APPENDIX 1 – LINK UP RATIONALE BEHIND PROGRAMME



APPENDIX 2: LINK UP LOGIC MODEL

