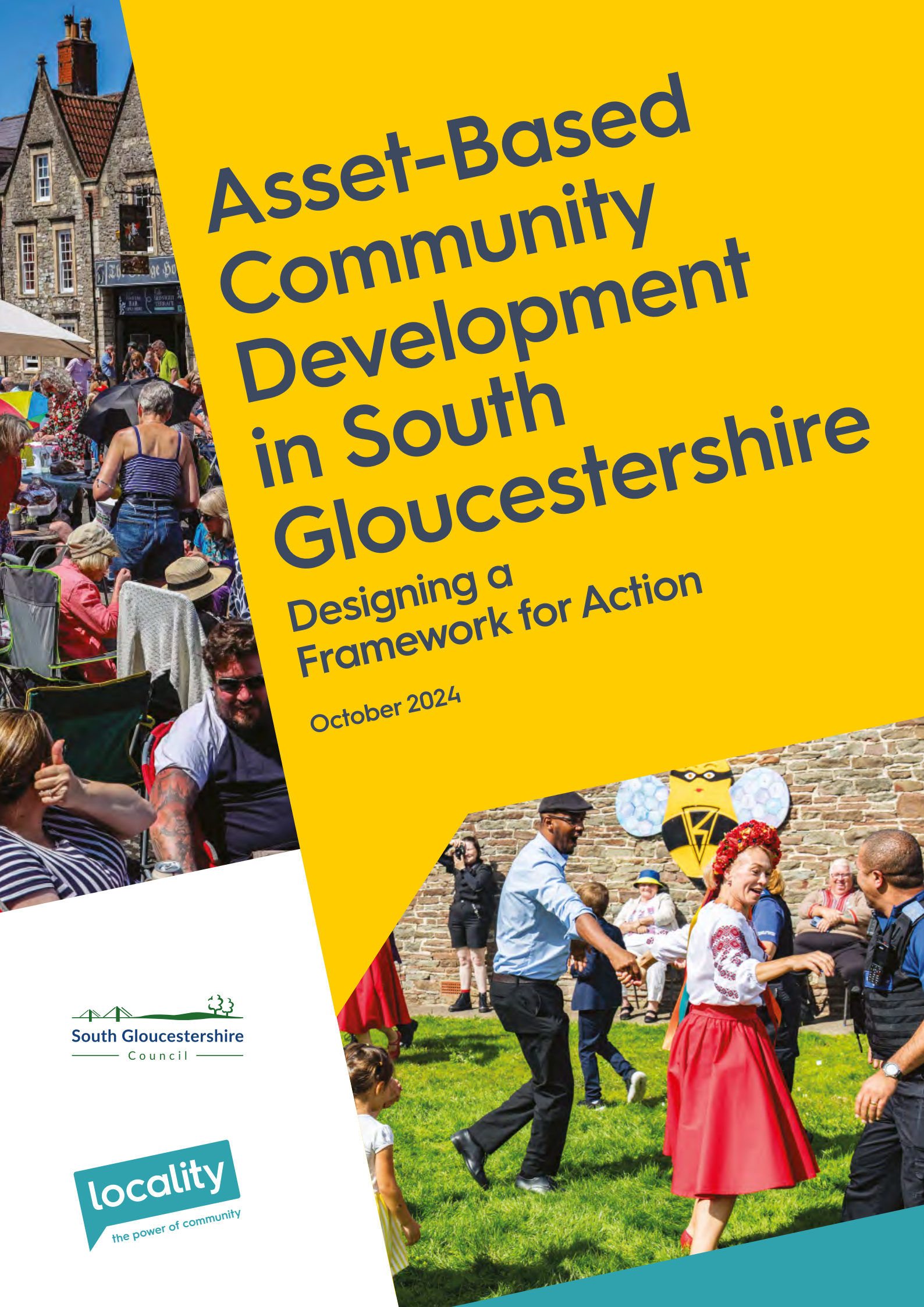


Asset-Based Community Development in South Gloucestershire

Designing a
Framework for Action

October 2024



Contents

Executive summary	04
<hr/>	
1. Introduction	11
Methodology	12
<hr/>	
2. What is ABCD?	14
<hr/>	
3. ABCD in practice	19
Community builders supporting local social action (Leeds)	20
Prevention of care needs through social networks (York)	21
Local people as physical activity champions (Essex)	22
<hr/>	
4. ABCD in the South Gloucestershire context	23
Existing principles for partnership working	24
Examples of current ABCD working in South Gloucestershire	26
The challenges and opportunities for ABCD	29
<hr/>	
5. A Framework for ABCD in South Gloucestershire	34
<hr/>	
6. Next steps – options to take ABCD forward in South Gloucestershire	38
<hr/>	
7. Process evaluation – lessons learnt from the creation of the Framework	43
<hr/>	
8. Resources and reading	52
ABCD theory and application	53
Examples of ABCD in places	53
Endnotes	53



Executive summary

Partners across South Gloucestershire have agreed to pursue an “Asset-Based Community Development” (ABCD) approach for the district.

Locality – the national network supporting community organisations to be strong and successful – were commissioned to co-produce an ABCD Framework with the partners. This serves to provide a set of shared principles, actions, outcomes, and indicators to help all parties in South Gloucestershire move to an ABCD approach together.

To do this, Locality conducted a four-stage process to discover the existing context in South Gloucestershire, define the issues to be resolved, develop the approach to doing so, and deliver the final Framework and related insight to support partners to implement an ABCD approach effectively.

This document provides in-depth context on the ABCD concept, what it looks like in practice, and its scope within South Gloucestershire. A takeaway version of the Framework and its forward-looking narrative has been produced for clear messaging for stakeholders in the day-to-day context.

What is ABCD?

ABCD seeks to create better places to live by focussing on “what’s strong, not what’s wrong”. It nurtures and maximises the skills, networks, institutions, spaces and stories of local people and places to create community-led change.

Taking this approach shifts the balance of support for communities towards the prevention of problems, while reducing the inequalities they face.

It is contrasted to a common “deficit” based approach; looking at what is missing from an area, or what people “lack”.

The deficit-based model is often the default model for local public services. Statutory bodies look for solutions to “fix” problems in communities, rather than working alongside them to understand what is needed and where they can play an enabling role rather than a controlling one.

As suggested by [Nurture Development](#), thought-leaders on the ABCD approach, there are three important questions for communities to ask themselves as part of the ABCD process:

1. What can residents do themselves in association?

2. What can they do with a little outside help?

3. What do they want outside agents to do for them?

It is the role of the local public sector to create a supportive environment for communities to address these questions and act on their findings.

ABCD in action

ABCD has been adopted as a way of working in many places across the UK. For example, over the last decade, Leeds has developed 14 “pathfinder” sites hosted by local VCSE organisations. They each employ a community builder to develop and asset-map their community, support joined-up working between residents and manage a small kick-start fund for people to use their strengths to bring their ideas to life.

Elsewhere, York City Council’s adult social care team has adopted the approach. Their new “community operating model” focuses on prevention and early intervention through ABCD. They look to tap into the power of local people to see what is strong within communities, seeing people as assets and putting emphasis on building social networks to keep people well.

And in Essex, ABCD has been key to tackling physical inactivity by using the existing strengths and passions within local communities to drive up activity levels and embed good practice. This has included making microgrants available to local communities to help them with their ideas for increasing physical activity locally, and identifying trusted community members who people would be more likely to listen to on this subject.

ABCD in the South Gloucestershire context

Commitments like the South Gloucestershire Compact and the Town and Parish Charter lay out how partners across the council, VCSE sector and Town and Parish Councils will collaborate for the benefit of the district’s residents. From the council’s perspective, these commitments have been underpinned since 2019 by the adoption of Locality’s [Keep it Local](#) principles. These aim to transform public services by prioritising local partnerships and investment.

ABCD in South Gloucestershire should not seek to rewrite or usurp these agreements and ways of working. Rather, it should be seen as an approach which all partners could take to put these principles into practice, while bringing on board other key partners like the Integrated Care System (aligning with its own strategy) and communities themselves.

Indeed, there are examples of ABCD approaches already taking place in South Gloucestershire. These include VCSE-led, volunteer-powered initiatives that help older and more isolated residents to get active in local green spaces.

But they also encompass council and health system commissioned services that embrace the knowledge and connecting power of local residents, including those in marginalised communities, to ensure their peers and neighbours receive the most effective health and wellbeing support.

Through the course of this work, local stakeholders revealed the opportunities and challenges for embedding ABCD more widely across the district.

Challenges included: awareness and understanding of the approach, investment and resourcing for it, fatigue and apathy for consultations and strategy, and concerns over ABCD's suitability for addressing inequalities.

On the other hand, common opportunities included: building on and developing parish and town plans, creating a strong and more meaningful relationship between the public and VCSE sectors, connecting residents and unlocking assets, aligning with fresh starts for the council and health system, and supporting people falling through the gaps of services.



Stronger Together – Asset-Based Community Development for South Gloucestershire

Below is the co-produced Framework itself – the set of shared principles, actions, outcomes, and indicators for all partners in South Gloucestershire to adopt.

Making this work in practice requires all parties to consider, for themselves and others, what practices to start, stop, and continue to mean that they are truly acting in an ABCD way.

	Principles	Actions
1	<p>We will work together</p> <p>Making collaboration the starting point: sharing power, listening to each other, building trust and making connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get key people from all sectors together in community spaces • Understand everyone's roles and what they bring to the table • Consider power – who has it, who doesn't, and how it can be shared so the already powerful don't dominate • Pool collective knowledge
2	<p>We will start small</p> <p>Working in communities at a hyper local level and piloting approaches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define our neighbourhood - where will we be working together? • Don't overreach - start with small pilots to test what works and build confidence in the approach
3	<p>We will unlock community strengths</p> <p>Understanding what assets already exist and how they can be developed further</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an initial asset map to understand our neighbourhood's strengths and where there are gaps • Consider what resources are necessary to harness these strengths and fill those gaps
4	<p>We will tackle inequalities</p> <p>Looking at everything through the lens of how it addresses – or risks furthering – disadvantage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about who isn't in the room but should be • Build new partnerships with grassroots organisations to expand our reach into the community • Assess our communications to ensure inclusion
5	<p>We will learn from what works</p> <p>Developing a learning culture, testing ideas and embracing failure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what's already working to avoid duplication • Share data as much as possible • Look outside our area to draw lessons from elsewhere • Analyse and evaluate, openly and honestly, whether or not we've been successful
6	<p>We will take our time</p> <p>Recognising that big changes don't happen quickly, having patience and long-term commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure we've listened before taking action • Set realistic outcomes • Be comfortable with slow progress
7	<p>We will invest</p> <p>Making a clear and realistic assessment of what resources exist across the partnership and how they might be most effectively deployed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand resources might be a range of different things, like finance, staff capacity, buildings, volunteering • Assess the different contributions everyone could make • Focus in on how existing resources can be best coordinated to support action • Consider how new resources might be brought in over the short, medium and longer term

Outcomes	Indicators
Buy-in to asset-based thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner organisations adopt ABCD principles in strategic plans • Partner organisations include measures to track implementation and success of this commitment
Identification and recognition of the strengths and assets within South Gloucestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared toolkit with methods to highlight strengths and assets in places and an 'ABCD insights hub' to share data amongst partner organisations and communities • Tracked information on additions to and use of hub
Residents provided with resources and support to be better connected and more active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and resources provided to active residents and community groups • Connected and active residents and their networks better connected to, listened to, and supported by strategic partners
Residents more motivated to bring positive change to their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number participating as volunteers in VSCE sector • Number participating in co-production activities • Number setting up new social action projects / groups
Improved public service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number reporting higher satisfaction with services where ABCD has played a role in its design • Services designed through ABCD delivering improved outcomes for the community
A more robust and sustainable local VCSE sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in the size of the VCSE sector • Number of new "community anchor organisations"
ABCD-influenced services leading to reduced health and social inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABCD-influenced services reaching the people who need services most • ABCD-influenced services reaching the people at the point of prevention rather than acute need • ABCD-influenced services reducing specific health inequalities
Increased morale in communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number reporting that they feel they can influence decisions affecting their community

Next steps – options to take ABCD forward in South Gloucestershire

In finalising the Framework with stakeholders across South Gloucestershire, the key question for everyone was – what's next? What is the process or mechanism through which the principles might be put into practice?

To support the next stage in the process for partners to decide the answer to this, Locality has provided some possible options based on the current local context and the direction taken in other places. These include:

The community builder approach – taking a similar approach as in Leeds, as referenced above, by identifying and resourcing VCSE organisations in key places to employ community builders with small pots of funding for resident-led action.

Weaving into current place-based practice – the ABCD approach could also be used to strengthen existing approaches to place-based working. For example, initiatives like Community Conversations and Bridging the Gap could provide the platform for facilitating further, even more asset-based working.

Piloting through specific service areas or themes – a third approach might be to apply the Framework in the first instance to discrete areas of work by statutory bodies. For example, there was interest in workshops for thinking of ABCD through a service commissioning lens.

There is a tension in all of these options that should be addressed head on. One of the key insights that has shaped our work is to make clear that ABCD isn't a council-led process. However, it is also likely that the next step on the journey does need to be, if not a council-led process, at least a council-enabled one. There is therefore a careful balance that needs to be struck.



Process evaluation – lessons learnt from the creation of the Framework

Finally, in order to help extract key learning from this work to inform the implementation of the Framework and further cross-sector initiatives in South Gloucestershire, Locality conducted a process evaluation gathering internal, participant, and wider stakeholder feedback.

A review of this found that, among other things:

- Extrapolating from the survey, the vast majority of participants came with a positive mindset about the potential for ABCD in South Gloucestershire.
- Participants were, on the whole, positive about their experience of being in sessions and their role in building up awareness and understanding of ABCD and supporting its deployment in the district.
- The co-produced ABCD framework is comprehensive in its ambition and relevant to a range of different sectors and stakeholders.
- A shorter, more accessible, takeaway document is required to support awareness and understanding for a broader audience.
- Throughout the whole process, it was challenging to move the perception of the ABCD Framework as solely focused on council action. However, it has a logical sequencing of principles, actions, outcomes and indicators and has received plenty of support from the different stakeholders.



1.

Introduction



As part of the South Gloucestershire Prevention Programme, partners from South Gloucestershire Council, the South Gloucestershire Locality Partnership (including Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board and Sirona Care & Health C.I.C), the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and Town and Parish Councils, agreed to promote and embed an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach across the district.

This strand of the Prevention Programme is known as “Community in Action” and is led by the introduction of a cross-sector ABCD Framework for South Gloucestershire. This aims to support an approach to ABCD that drives the behaviours of local people and partners towards the prevention of problems and self-sufficiency, strengthening the development and delivery of services “with” or “by” communities, not “for” or “to” them.

In September 2023, Locality were commissioned to support the local partners with the production of the ABCD Framework. As the national network supporting community organisations to be strong and successful, Locality is experienced in supporting partners in local places to take ABCD approaches.

This document provides in-depth context on the ABCD concept, what it looks like in practice, and its scope within South Gloucestershire. It also details the ABCD Framework itself; a set of principles, actions, outcomes and indicators co-produced with local partners to drive forward this way of working.

A takeaway version of the Framework and its forward-looking narrative has been produced for clear messaging for stakeholders in the day-to-day context.

Methodology

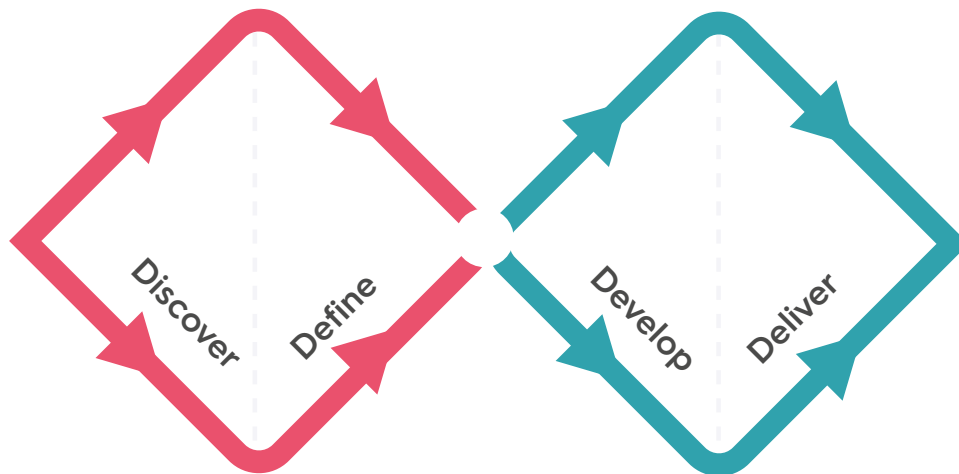
Locality was commissioned to carry out a multi-stage process to develop this ABCD Framework.

To do this, Locality used a process inspired by the Design Council’s double diamond approach (shown in [Figure 1](#)). This four-stage process is designed to fully consider an issue – in this case, what an ABCD approach could look like in South Gloucestershire – before then developing a solution.

This approach sought to create a robust Framework built and tested with a range of stakeholders in South Gloucestershire. The four stages took partners through a process where new and existing insights and information were interrogated, supporting work to then define the underlying principles for the design of the Framework.

The Framework was then co-designed and tested with partners from the local VCSE sector, health system, local authority, and town and parish councils to enable it to be adopted effectively.

Figure 1: the “Double Diamond” design process



- **“Discover” phase:** We carried out a review of insights collated by the council through different local engagement and partnership initiatives. These included, the “Community Conversations” project, the VCSE Compact, the Town and Parish Council Charter, and the consultations carried out during the pre-market engagement for this commission.
- **“Define” phase:** We carried out comprehensive cross-sector engagement through interviews and workshops to understand the environment locally for developing an ABCD Framework. This included the awareness and appetite for ABCD approaches, existing examples of prevention-focussed partnership working, alignment with local priorities, opportunities for further work, reservations, and training and development needs.
- **“Develop” phase:** We worked with a cross-sector group of stakeholders to co-produce a set of underlying principles and actions for ABCD approaches in South Gloucestershire through a series of workshops. The co-production group included colleagues from the local VCSE sector, South Gloucestershire Council, the local health system, and Town and Parish Councils.
- **“Deliver” phase:** We then honed the principles and actions, aligning them to an agreed set of outcomes for the Framework and indicators to monitor impact. We carried out a second round of engagement with a broad range of local partners to test the Framework.

Across the course of the process, we engaged a total of 100 people from 45 organisations across the public, private, and VCSE sectors. This included 15 people from Town and Parish Councils, 21 from the NHS and its providers, and 26 from local VCSE organisations. It also included 28 Council officers from six different departments and three Councillors.

The work we carried out was overseen throughout by the Keep it Local Steering Group of partners from the local VCSE sector, council, and health system.

2.

What is ABCD?



Asset-Based Community Development is about putting communities in control of how they want their neighbourhoods to function, and how that should be achieved.

Rather than a set list of activities or a prescriptive set of actions that every area should take, it is a general approach to working better together with communities and local partners. As such, the approach can be tailored to suit the needs of local communities in a particular area.

ABCD seeks to create better places to live – from health and care to ecology and community resilience. It seeks to understand what local people can do with their existing skills, networks, institutions, spaces and stories; what support they require from others; and what gaps they need to be plugged by partners.

Taking this approach shifts the balance of support for communities towards the prevention of problems. It puts a greater focus on helping residents to stay happy, healthy and independent for as long as possible and enabling them to play a supportive role in their communities, while reducing the inequalities they face in doing so.

[Nurture Development](#) describe the ABCD approach as having four essential elements: ¹



Resources

Thinking about resources means recognising who and what is present within communities and neighbourhoods. These are the contributions of residents, the organisations and associations within the area – both formal and informal – and the local institutions, whether those are community organisations, local authorities, the NHS etc.

ABCD is guided by the unique strengths of communities and recognises communities as contributors and not just recipients of help. In other words, communities are key partners in achieving the outcomes listed above, not just passively being given top-down solutions by statutory bodies. ABCD approaches remain responsive to the needs of the local population using the assets already in their communities.

Here, the word “assets” doesn’t just mean the wealth in the community, or the number of physical buildings, green spaces or community hubs. It is also the skills, organisations, resources (both realised and potential) within that community as well.

By looking at “assets”, ABCD focuses on “what’s strong, not what’s wrong”. It looks at the positives within a community which can be strengthened and sustained. This is contrasted to a common “deficit” based approach; looking at what is missing from an area, or what people “lack”.

This requires a different way of thinking about some of the elements of how partners work with each other and their communities:

	Deficit-based approach	Asset-based approach
Purpose	Changing community through increased services	Changing community through citizen involvement
Method	Institutional reform	Citizen-centred production
Accountability	Leaders are professional staff, accountable to institutional stakeholders	Widening the circle of leaders - accountable to communities
Significance of assets	Assets are seen for their practical value Asset mapping is just data collection	Assets are relationships - need to be discovered and connected Asset mapping is about discovering the potential of communities
Resources	Money is the key resource - approaches fall apart without money	Relationships are the key resource - falls apart when money becomes the focus
Challenge	How do we get citizens involved?	How do we channel and build on citizen participation? (Enabling participation)
Progression	Tends to spread itself thinner over time	Tends to snowball, growing over time
Evaluation	Success is service outcomes - measured by institutional stakeholders	Success is capacity - measured through relationships

Figure 2: Deficit vs. Asset Based Approaches. Based on “Asset Based Community Development”, TransForm Integrated Community Care.²

The deficit-based model is often the default model for local public services. Statutory bodies look for solutions to “fix” problems in communities, rather than working alongside them to understand what is needed and where they can play an enabling role rather than a controlling one.

The deficit approach tends to be led by big institutions like councils and focuses on service outcomes and budgets. The asset-based approach is more encompassing of communities, what they want, what they can do themselves and the role of others in supporting and enabling relationships to be built.

Resources can also include both the physical local spaces such as parks, gardens and community hubs and the skills which different organisations have and can share between them.

Methods

If the resources are all the things at the disposal of communities to co-create their own wellbeing and places, the methods are the things which communities can do to put those resources to use.

These methods can be about sharing and intentionally doing things together across different sectors or within certain communities. They can be about setting a shared vision or direction for their community.

They can also be about discovering and understanding different parts of communities so that assumptions aren't made and resources don't remain the preserve of only certain sections of a community.

There is a lot of focus in ABCD on the importance of building relationships – which is a crucial method for working in an asset-based way.

There are three important questions for communities to ask themselves as part of the ABCD approach:

1. What can residents do themselves in association?

2. What can they do with a little outside help?

3. What do they want outside agents to do for them?

These self-reflective questions are key for communities to understand how they can make best use of their assets to prevent problems arising and help them to thrive.

It will often feel like an unusual and uncomfortable shift for statutory bodies to act as enablers for their communities plans and priorities rather than “fixers” of problems they identify themselves.

This can be exacerbated by the traditional methods of funding and constituting these bodies, but they must reflect on the internal changes required to facilitate this ABCD approach.

Functions

Literature on communities and ABCD from Nurture Development suggests that there are seven essential functions which communities collectively hold. Within these, you may add or include current pressing issues of the local public sector and their communities, like housing and energy creation.

- **Enabling health**
- **Assuring security**
- **Stewarding ecology**
- **Shaping local economies**
- **Contributing to local food production**
- **Raising our children**
- **Co-creating care**

While traditionally, many of these functions have been handed over to institutions (like local authorities and the NHS), there is a role for wider communities in deciding how they want these functions to be delivered and what assets exist within communities to make this happen.

ABCD recognises that institutions like the local authority might not always be best placed to carry out these functions, and that there are assets and strengths within communities for things to be delivered differently.

In deficit-based approaches, the institutions take a lead on these functions and may impose things from the top down without recognising the assets which exist within a community to solve problems themselves or contribute to these functions.

Evaluation


The final element of ABCD is how you evaluate the process of carrying out this different way of working. There needs to be a central vision or primary goal which guides the whole process – usually about enhancing the power, capability and capacity of communities.

Evaluation is about how communities take stock of what they are doing and what they have done together. In general, ABCD encourages a move away from traditional top-down evaluation which puts an emphasis on achieving specific outcomes or outputs and towards a different form of learning.

While institutions may still need this type of evaluation, there are opportunities for more creative community learning. This may include how local people have maximised the sharing of gifts and assets, how relationships have developed within communities and between institutions, and the level of participation and power vested in citizens.

3.

ABCD in practice

A photograph showing the back of a person wearing a high-visibility yellow safety vest. The vest has the text 'Friends of Avon Valley Woodlands' printed on it in bold black letters. The person is wearing a dark jacket underneath. In the background, a red car is visible, and the setting appears to be outdoors with some foliage.

**Friends of
Avon Valley
Woodlands**

While ABCD can feel quite theoretical, it is necessary to understand the theory behind the practice. ABCD is about doing things in a way which often goes against the grain of how our institutions and communities currently function.

It is about making sure that assets within communities are understood and valued, that these resources are used in the best possible way according to the will of the community, and that local partners understand what their different roles will be in facilitating this.

Below are a few examples of different ABCD approaches and how they have been implemented in different places.

Community builders supporting local social action

Leeds has been taking asset-based approaches for over a decade. The local authority and partners in the local community have defined ABCD as:

“An approach to community building that supports people and communities to consider what they can resolve themselves, what they need support with and what is best delivered by the local authority and others.”³

As seen above, this considers the strengths and resources communities have, the methods they use to do things themselves and the different roles which partners play in a functioning community – to lead on something, or to support or enable someone else to do it.

Leeds follows five principles:

1. People-driven – people are the instigators and leaders of positive change

2. Relationship-oriented – relationships and friendships drive the approach not systems and processes

3. Asset-based – Focussing on people’s gifts and talents – harnessing what’s strong, not what’s wrong

4. Place-based – the person defines their neighbourhood or community of interest and is the leader in setting out what work through ABCD will have the biggest impact for change

5. Inclusion-focused – everyone has their own gifts, and everyone has the opportunity and is welcomed to make a positive contribution through ABCD

The overall aim of ABCD in Leeds is about shifting power to people and supporting communities to thrive. From a council perspective, this is written into the Leeds City Council ABCD plan and other council strategies. The ABCD approach is led by “Team Leeds”, a cross-sector partnership including the VCSE sector.

Over a number of years, Leeds has spread their pilot or “pathfinder” sites across the city, beginning with three and expanding to 14. Pathfinders are hosted by VCSE organisations who employ a community builder to develop and asset-map their community, support connectors to join up working, and manage a small kick-start fund for local ideas.

The impact of ABCD has been evaluated by Leeds Beckett University. The report includes a variety of evidence on the impact of ABCD including anecdotal evidence of friendships and bonds forming within communities and better working locally as people connect socially. Data showed that 68 new self-sustaining groups were set up in 11 pathfinders during an 18-month period between 2019 and 2021.⁴

Prevention of care needs through social networks

Similar to Leeds, York has seen the ABCD approach as an opportunity to shift power within the area and build “more connected, caring and compassionate communities”.⁵ York has built on strong foundations with investment in community development a priority over several decades.

While the ABCD approach extends beyond the local authority and is rooted in York’s communities, the approach has been taken on by the council who are supportive of its vision.

Since 2016, the Adult Social Care (ASC) department in the local authority has been taking a “strengths-based approach” – showing how, within councils, individual departments can take an ABCD approach to their work.

For ASC in York, this has meant recognising that their services had previously put too much of a focus on deficits and thresholds.

Their new “community operating model” focuses on prevention and early intervention through ABCD. They look to tap into the power of local people to what is strong within communities, seeing people as assets and putting emphasis on building social networks to keep people well.

This has required culture change within the local authority to change where and when interventions are made – moving further upstream and maximising the agency of individuals and communities to self-manage issues as a first option rather than the council directly intervene.

The council have also employed “Local Area Coordination” as a further tool to support its role in ABCD. They have a core team to facilitate and connect community-centred, strengths-based approaches to local issues, particularly loneliness and isolation.

York provides an example of the role which councils play in ABCD – helping to relocate power and support activities at the neighbourhood level to starting the long journey of system change.



Local people as physical activity champions

Essex has been chosen by Sport England as one of 12 pilot areas for a new approach to tackling population levels of physical inactivity. This “Local Delivery Pilot” (LDP) is led by Active Essex, the Physical Activity and Sports Partnership for Essex, Southend, and Thurrock.⁶

ABCD has been key to the LDP, with an aim to use the existing strengths and passions within local communities to drive up physical activity levels and embed good practice.⁷

Central to this is Active Essex’s approach to working with locally trusted organisations, committing to understand and respond to the issues communities face and enhance the strengths of residents.

Three ABCD-trained coordinators were set up to work at a local level in the target areas of Basildon, Colchester and Tendring. This included making microgrants available to local communities to help them with their ideas for increasing physical activity locally.

The coordinators identified “sticky” people – community members who others gravitated towards and would be more likely to listen to on this subject. Active Essex understood that local people were more likely to engage with them than otherwise unknown programme or system staff.

Free ABCD training through a physical activity lens was then offered to known practitioners and managers from varying systems with the aim of spreading the approach more widely.

Through the pilot, over 300 practitioners and system leaders across Essex have so far been trained in ABCD. The training has influenced a new 10-year physical activity strategy for Essex, “Fit for The Future”. Of the five strategic policies, strengthening communities is key.

The training has also had an influence on senior system leaders, such as the Chief Executive of Colchester Borough Council and the Director of the then North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group.

4.

ABCD in the South Gloucestershire context



Existing principles for partnership working

Across South Gloucestershire, various partners have already committed to principles setting out ways of working. Some of these are internal, agreed by statutory bodies or VCSE sector organisations. Others are set out commitments to joint working between different partners. All of these principles have the aim of enhancing collaboration and working better together for the benefit of South Gloucestershire residents.

Since 2019, iterations of these documents have been informed by South Gloucestershire Council's adoption of the Keep it Local principles. Developed by Locality, these principles support local authorities to work with local VCSE organisations to deliver services that respond to needs and transform lives, reduce long-term pressures on the public sector, and invest previous public resources in the local economy.

The six Keep it Local principles are:

1. Think about the whole system, not individual service silos

2. Co-ordinate services at neighbourhood level

3. Increase local spend to invest in the local economy

4. Focus on early intervention now to save costs tomorrow

5. Commit to your community and proactively support local organisations

6. Commission services simply and collaboratively so they are "local by default"

| South Gloucestershire Compact

The [South Gloucestershire Compact](#) is a written agreement between the council, other public bodies and VCSE organisations in the district. It seeks to strengthen the relationship between these bodies and sectors for the benefit of residents and communities.

The Compact represents a shared recognition that collaborating in partnership can more strongly serve, represent, develop and promote the wellbeing of local people and communities in the South Gloucestershire area.

It supports both the public and VCSE sectors to recognise and respect the various roles, accountabilities, and knowledge they bring in the service of their communities. It is intended to ensure that even the smallest local organisations, however informal, are recognised and valued for their work in the community.

It is based on the principles of:

1. A culture of respect

2. Working in partnership

3. Effective delivery

| The Town and Parish Charter for South Gloucestershire

The [Town and Parish Charter](#) is a framework which defines the relationship between South Gloucestershire's tiers of local government. It is part of a suite of agreements which sit under the framework of the Keep it Local pledge.

It promotes collaboration between the different tiers, as well as the local VCSE sector, with the aim to build strong and resilient communities together for the people they each serve.

It is based on the principles of:

1. Trust

2. Understanding

3. Partnership

ABCD in South Gloucestershire should not seek to rewrite or usurp the principles already produced by various partners. Rather, it should be seen as an approach which all partners could take to put these principles into practice, while bringing on board other key partners like the Integrated Care System (aligning with its own strategy) and communities themselves.

For example, the ABCD Framework can help to put in place a set of actions between partners which would enable the principle of "trust", put forward in the Town and Parish Council Charter, to be achieved. It could also underpin how "working in partnership" described in the Compact might happen on a day-to-day basis.

These existing principles and frameworks can help each of the partners in South Gloucestershire to understand what role they will need to play in ABCD. For example, a commitment on the part of the council to work towards the Keep it Local principles could help to break down service silos which partners (particularly the VCSE sector) have found to be a barrier to working effectively.

ABCD in action in South Gloucestershire

There are some good examples of where ABCD is already having an impact in South Gloucestershire. These include both pure ABCD happening within the local VCSE sector, and public services designed and delivered with elements of asset-based approaches.

Friends of Page Park's Walking Well group

Page Park, in Staple Hill, is home to a range of assets for the local community. As a green open space, the park itself provides access to the natural environment and various sports facilities, supporting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of residents.

As a group of volunteers, [Friends of Page Park](#) provide their time, skills, and resources to keep the park active and accessible through fundraising, organising events and activities, and caring for the park's ecology.

These assets have combined to create valuable services for local people that would not otherwise exist. For example, the park is home to a number of walking groups.

One of these, Walking Well, was inactive for two years following the Covid-19 lockdowns. It was resurrected by the Friends and had clearly been missed by previous participants, many of whom are older and often isolated.

It entails a walk around the park followed by tea, biscuits and a chat in the park's community space, The Nest. Local Facebook and email networks, other assets, have been used to recruit fifteen people who volunteer their time as Walk Leaders, and the initiative now has over 20 regular attendees.

The initiative is supported by an asset of the council; its ability to provide the necessary insurance under its Walking Well scheme to allow the group to gather safely.



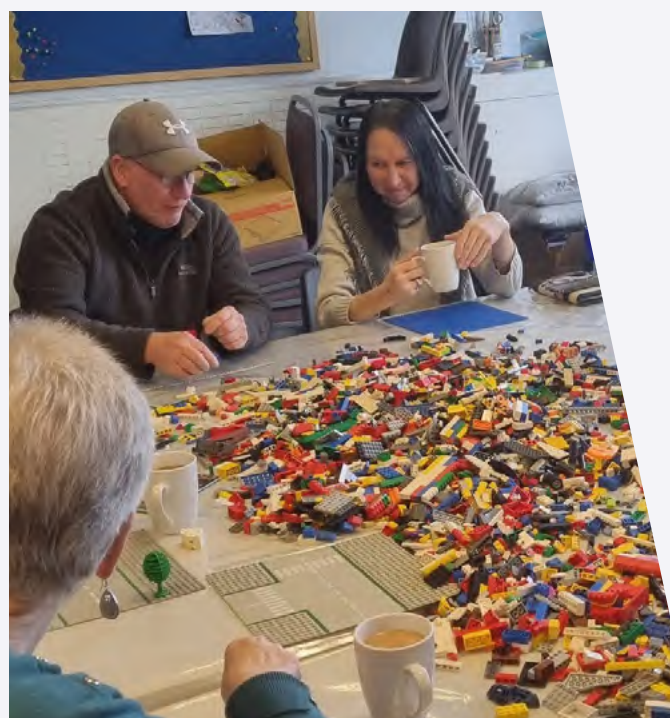
Juice Community Project

In Cadbury Heath, [Juice Community Project](#) is a “community anchor organisation” run by a team of trusted local people with first-hand understanding of the issues and problems faced by residents.

Juice started out in 2007, providing help and advice to the local community from a small office. In 2012, Juice moved to its current offices where it now acts as a community hub in the heart of the Cadbury Heath estate, “helping the community help themselves”.

Juice is a centre for advice and information, assisting people to access relevant services and take advantage of available opportunities, as well as supporting them to create new ones.

Juice stages courses and events, hosts drop-in sessions, and runs many other groups and activities in the local area tailored to the needs of the community. Juice has also built a close working relationship with the council, bringing together local organisations and service providers.



Village Agents

The “[Village Agents](#)” initiative, delivered by West of England Rural Network (WERN), has been funded under the “Age Well” strand of the South Gloucestershire Prevention Programme.

It takes an asset-based approach to supporting the growing older population in areas like Marshfield, Cotswold Edge, Severn Vale, and Pilning & Severn Beach, to stay healthy and independent for longer.

Local people with knowledge, trust and connections within the community are recruited to connect other residents, particularly those more vulnerable and isolated, to local activities and services to meet their support needs.



Sirona's culturally competent wellbeing support

Sirona Care & Health, a social enterprise delivering NHS and local authority funded healthcare services across Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, has a team of Wellbeing Leads trained in ABCD.

Their role includes close working with communities experiencing health inequalities. These include the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) and Chinese communities in South Gloucestershire.

Through the building of trusted relationships with the GRT community, for example, the team recognised a high level of health inequality in relation to breast cancer screening.

Because of a lack of a permanent address and lower literacy levels among the community, women were not able to either receive or understand letters inviting them to screening appointments.

To address this, Sirona's team has worked with the community to develop and roll out sessions to support them to access this care. The design of these has been led by the community, with Sirona acknowledging that members have the knowledge and ideas to make them as effective as possible.

Elsewhere, the team has worked with the Chinese Wellbeing Society – a local organisation led by and serving the Chinese community – to support their access to preventative services for issues such as falls and diabetes. Key to this has been collaboration with “community champions” within the Society who can interpret and communicate this support in a culturally competent way.



The challenges and opportunities for ABCD in South Gloucestershire

Through our comprehensive cross-sector engagement in the “Define” phase of the project, we heard a wide range of views from local stakeholders about what ABCD could mean for South Gloucestershire and the obstacles it could face. Here, we have collated the most common themes across both.

Challenges

● Awareness and understanding

Generally, there was a low baseline of awareness and understanding of the ABCD approach. There were pockets of familiarity among elements of the council, VCSE sector, and local health system. However, these tended to be among those already actively involved in the effort to introduce the approach more formally within South Gloucestershire.

In particular, there was a varied understanding of the term “assets”. Many people viewed it as referring purely to physical assets (buildings and spaces etc), rather than the broader range of “softer” assets described on [page 15](#), above.

This level of awareness and understanding is reasonable, and something we have sought to begin addressing through our engagement, co-production, and testing activities with stakeholders.

It will also be addressed by the cross-sector training to be delivered following the publication of the Framework. However, it is something that should continue to be monitored and addressed by those facilitating the ABCD approach into the future.

● Investment and resourcing

There was also concern over the demands the approach would place on resources of all partners and if and how this would be addressed by investment.

This was particularly true of the VCSE sector. Colleagues here were concerned that the approach would place extra pressure on them to facilitate action while already stretched. One commonly reported symptom of this was difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

It was also raised that “re-parishing” had tended to fragment areas, resulting in smaller Town and Parish Councils with fewer resources.

There was a prevailing sense that the council was looking to make budget cuts at present, rather than issuing new funds to address this resource gap. Relatedly, there was a concern that the approach would present a significant and potentially excessive workload for council officers to manage relationships with community groups.

To ensure this issue remains an ongoing areas of focus in implementing the ABCD Framework, we have included a specific principle and set of actions focussed on shared decision-making around investment.

● **Fatigue and apathy for consultations and strategy**

Stakeholders flagged an issue with apathy among communities who feel that their views are not always valued and acted upon by local statutory bodies. This has led to fatigue among residents towards consultations on new strategies, and an expectation that the council in particular will “do everything” but with little genuine engagement with communities.

This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to the ABCD Framework. If implemented well in a collaborative and intentional manner, it will facilitate much greater, genuine involvement in development and decision-making within communities. However, existing distrust and misconceptions must be tackled to allow this to happen.

Participants highlighted the importance of strong, clear, and open communication about the ABCD approach with local communities and stakeholders to achieve this.

The more recent “Community Conversations” initiative was seen as a good opportunity to do this. This aims to reach and meaningfully engage all local residents to change the way they feel about the council and grow understanding, knowledge, and trust.

● **Addressing inequality**

On several occasions, we heard concerns that large disparities in assets between different neighbourhoods and communities in South Gloucestershire could mean that an ABCD approach exacerbates inequalities.

This is a common and understandable concern within places starting their ABCD journey. However, there are measures baked into the approach that are designed to counter this issue.

For example, and relating to the “Awareness and understanding” points above, it is important for partners to understand what is meant by “assets”. It doesn’t simply refer to cash, buildings, or other tangible objects with monetary value. Networks, experience, and stories are all important forms of social capital that can support communities to develop, organise, and take control.

In addition, there are three important steps to implementing ABCD to ensure nuance and inequalities between communities are understood and addressed. These involve asking the following questions:

1. What can residents do themselves in association?

2. What can they do with a little outside help?

3. What do they want outside agents to do for them?

This means that there may be more onus on the local public sector to support and invest in local communities to bring their level of assets, skills and capacity in line with better resourced areas.

However, it remains true that success in this pursuit relies on the will and ability of statutory bodies and other partners in positions of power to adequately invest and resource these communities.

Opportunities

● Building on and developing Parish and Town Council plans

Participants saw an ABCD approach as potentially helpful for creating new Parish and Town Council plans or extending those already in place. It was seen as an opportunity to identify local priorities based on the views of residents and their collective ability to affect change.

This could include specific reference to the improvement of community infrastructure, including through support for community organisations.

Achieving this could be facilitated through greater good practice sharing among Parish and Town Councils within, and beyond, South Gloucestershire.

However, there has been experience of previous local plans not being implemented due to a lack of engagement or funding from South Gloucestershire Council. This re-emphasises the need for agreement on investment in the approach.

● Stronger, more meaningful relationships with the VCSE sector

Local VCSE representatives saw the potential for an ABCD approach to improve collaboration and co-production for joint decision-making with statutory partners.

Indeed, they felt that partnership and investment between each sector at every level was crucial for the approach to work effectively. This includes support for grassroots groups by community “anchor” organisations, themselves supported by statutory bodies.

Achieving this was seen to require the council in particular to show a greater willingness to drive change and a commitment to co-production even if it takes time. The sector felt this would be facilitated by better communication and information sharing with the council – something that could be supported from both sides, including through clearer points of contact.

This was all seen as necessary by the sector to bring together the existing good practice across the district, stop action happening in isolation, and truly understand the value of the VCSE sector. It was also hoped that such understanding would facilitate greater, more effective funding of the sector.

- **Connecting residents and unlocking assets**

There was also enthusiasm for the role that ABCD could play in bringing residents together to understand and appreciate their respective skills, experience and ambitions.

Where adequately resourced, this could be facilitated by local VCSE organisations to create repositories for skill-sharing and social action at the neighbourhood level.

There were examples given of places in South Gloucestershire, like Stoke Gifford, where this is well placed to happen. There, several community organisations are already operating, and many residents are active on social media, providing fertile ground for connection.

Kingswood was also suggested as a focus area for the approach, with an existing council focus to try and increase social action but with little transformation achieved so far. Establishing the new Kingswood Town Council provides an opportunity here.

- **Aligning with fresh starts for the council and health system**

The change in administration at South Gloucestershire Council since 2023 is seen as an opportunity to inject political energy behind a new and improved form of community engagement and development.

Similarly, the formal introduction of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) in recent years, including Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire ICS, can support a more consistent, asset-based approach to prevention locally.

Under the ICS, the South Gloucestershire Locality Partnership brings together local authority, NHS and VCSE representatives. Here, initiatives like the Village Agents highlighted above can be jointly understood, supported and resourced to achieve common purpose through shared approaches.

There is also opportunity for the South Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board to grow an ABCD approach to its [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA). It could work with communities to recognise both the health needs and assets across the district, using the JSNA as a formal mechanism for reporting these to decision-makers.



- **Supporting people falling through the gaps**

Turning the inequalities challenge into an opportunity, some of the greatest potential impact of the ABCD approach was identified among residents currently “falling through the gaps” of, for example, primary and mental health services.

Where partners focus on the people and populations most at risk of this, they can invest in activities that directly address both the specific needs and strengths of those populations.

The example of Sirona’s work with the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community on breast cancer screening, also mentioned above, demonstrates well the current and potential impact of this approach.



5.

A Framework for ABCD in South Gloucestershire



Through the co-production group engaged in the “Develop” phase of the project, we drew together a set of underlying principles and actions to underpin a shared ABCD approach among partners in South Gloucestershire.

These are designed to collectively achieve a set of agreed outcomes for local partners, communities, and services, to be measured against a number of distinct indicators.

Each principle starts with “We will...”, to demonstrate that this is not just one organisation making a commitment on behalf of South Gloucestershire, but a commitment from equal partners to take ABCD forward.

“We” includes South Gloucestershire Council, the South Gloucestershire Locality Partnership under the ICS, the wider VCSE sector, and Town and Parish Councils.

This should not be seen as an exhaustive list, though. There is clear and valuable scope for other partners, such as the district’s Primary Care Networks, Avon and Somerset Police, and others to join this effort.

In embedding these principles and carrying out the associated actions, each partner in South Gloucestershire will need to think about the role they and others play.

All partners will need to consider the following, internally and externally:

What among the actions needs to start happening that currently isn’t, to fully realise the principles?

What among the actions is currently happening in part but requires more of to better realise the principles?

What needs to stop happening in the way we currently work together that does not align with the actions and therefore stifles the principles?

The collective answering of, and agreement around, these questions is what will drive forward the application of the framework and embed it into the everyday working of partners.

Principles	Actions
<p>1 We will work together</p> <p>Making collaboration the starting point: sharing power, listening to each other, building trust and making connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get key people from all sectors together in community spaces • Understand everyone's roles and what they bring to the table • Consider power – who has it, who doesn't, and how it can be shared so the already powerful don't dominate • Pool collective knowledge
<p>2 We will start small</p> <p>Working in communities at a hyper local level and piloting approaches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define our neighbourhood - where will we be working together? • Don't overreach - start with small pilots to test what works and build confidence in the approach
<p>3 We will unlock community strengths</p> <p>Understanding what assets already exist and how they can be developed further</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an initial asset map to understand our neighbourhood's strengths and where there are gaps • Consider what resources are necessary to harness these strengths and fill those gaps
<p>4 We will tackle inequalities</p> <p>Looking at everything through the lens of how it addresses – or risks furthering – disadvantage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about who isn't in the room but should be • Build new partnerships with grassroots organisations to expand our reach into the community • Assess our communications to ensure inclusion
<p>5 We will learn from what works</p> <p>Developing a learning culture, testing ideas and embracing failure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what's already working to avoid duplication • Share data as much as possible • Look outside our area to draw lessons from elsewhere • Analyse and evaluate, openly and honestly, whether or not we've been successful
<p>6 We will take our time</p> <p>Recognising that big changes don't happen quickly, having patience and long-term commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure we've listened before taking action • Set realistic outcomes • Be comfortable with slow progress
<p>7 We will invest</p> <p>Making a clear and realistic assessment of what resources exist across the partnership and how they might be most effectively deployed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand resources might be a range of different things, like finance, staff capacity, buildings, volunteering • Assess the different contributions everyone could make • Focus in on how existing resources can be best coordinated to support action • Consider how new resources might be brought in over the short, medium and longer term

Outcomes	Indicators
Buy-in to asset-based thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner organisations adopt ABCD principles in strategic plans • Partner organisations include measures to track implementation and success of this commitment
Identification and recognition of the strengths and assets within South Gloucestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared toolkit with methods to highlight strengths and assets in places and an 'ABCD insights hub' to share data amongst partner organisations and communities • Tracked information on additions to and use of hub
Residents provided with resources and support to be better connected and more active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and resources provided to active residents and community groups • Connected and active residents and their networks better connected to, listened to, and supported by strategic partners
Residents more motivated to bring positive change to their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number participating as volunteers in VSCE sector • Number participating in co-production activities • Number setting up new social action projects / groups
Improved public service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number reporting higher satisfaction with services where ABCD has played a role in its design • Services designed through ABCD delivering improved outcomes for the community
A more robust and sustainable local VCSE sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in the size of the VCSE sector • Number of new "community anchor organisations"
ABCD-influenced services leading to reduced health and social inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABCD-influenced services reaching the people who need services most • ABCD-influenced services reaching the people at the point of prevention rather than acute need • ABCD-influenced services reducing specific health inequalities
Increased morale in communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number reporting that they feel they can influence decisions affecting their community

6.

Next steps – options to take ABCD forward in South Gloucestershire



Based on the assessment of our work so far across sectors in South Gloucestershire, there is a strong appetite for this kind of working.

While there are clear challenges to overcome and some scepticism about its ultimate impact, there is a willingness to work together that provides a crucial foundation for ABCD locally.

The principles, outcomes and indicators we have developed have been accepted as a good overall framework to guide the approach.

As we have discussed them across our engagement and co-production workshops, there has been a growing sense of wanting to know what happens next. What is the process or mechanism through which the principles might be put into practice?

This falls outside the remit of Locality's specific commission. But it is clear that promotion of the framework in isolation of how it will be implemented will be of limited value.

In particular, training key stakeholders in the framework will be much more effective if we are able to provide a sense of what will happen next and through what means the training will be put into practice.

We have therefore suggested some broad approaches to taking this forward for partners in South Gloucestershire to consider. We don't think a definitive decision needs to be taken before publication of the Framework.

However, in order to deliver the training, it would be helpful to outline the potential next steps which might be in scope. This will help people locate in what it might mean for them and make it a practical rather than theoretical exercise.

One consideration is whether South Gloucestershire wishes to explicitly badge or brand this as a new ABCD approach. We have heard opposing views on this question. For example, ABCD is seen as a key component of the council's new Community Conversations approach.

For some, a big bang moment which launches the approach through a new programme would be a way of creating momentum and excitement, signal the council's commitment to doing things differently, and enable fresh communication with both the community sector and local residents.

For others, as mentioned in the "challenges" section on [page 29](#), there is a sense of "new initiative fatigue". Particularly for those in the council and the VCSE sector who are involved in community development work, there is a feeling of "we do this already".

So, here the task is less about kickstarting something new, and more about deciding how to build out from and spread more widely the good work that is happening already.

There are then three broad mechanisms for taking ABCD forward that partners might wish to consider.

- **The community builder approach**

There has been particular interest in the community builders model ([see page 20](#)), which has been successfully developed in places like Leeds over many years. Rolling something like this out would involve:

Identifying a small number of ABCD pilot areas.

Working with a local community organisation to be a host in each pilot area. In Leeds, each host organisation has been able to access a small amount of seed funding to resource a community organiser to lead the early phases of the work. Building out from our principles, this might include: bringing together the key people locally, defining the neighbourhood, developing an asset map, and identifying collective outcomes.

From this, following the Leeds model, pilot projects could be resourced through small pots of funding.

Building on the learning from these pilot areas, the programme could be expanded to further areas in future.

- **Weaving into current place-based practice**

We have heard of numerous examples where ABCD approaches are already taking root in South Gloucestershire, which provide a clear platform to build on.

As mentioned in section 5, for example, there is positive, ABCD-led public service delivery in the form of the Village Agents programme and Sirona's culturally competent wellbeing support.

Elsewhere, the Community Conversations initiative has been well established and understood as a change in approach to consulting residents and taking a partnership approach to council decision making.

The council is signed up to the Keep it Local principles and has an established VCSE Compact. We have also heard about other initiatives like "Bridging the Gap" - a VCSE-hosted and run event series inviting partners from other sectors to attend, supporting better understanding of each other's work and priorities and providing opportunities for collaboration.

So it is clear there are a range of initiatives to build out from. For example, could ABCD provide the next phase of the Community Conversations approach, a practical outcome of the consultation?

This would require careful thought, given the cost-cutting context for the Community Conversations, and that creating a potentially negative frame for ABCD going forward.

But there is clear sense to building on established brands and programmes and infusing them with ABCD principles. Bridging the Gap may provide another opportunity to do this.

- **Piloting through specific service areas or themes**

A third approach might be to apply the Framework in the first instance to discrete areas of work by statutory bodies. For example, there was some interest in one of our workshops about thinking of ABCD through a service commissioning lens.

In York, the Adult Social Care team has taken the lead in driving through a strengths-based approach, introducing a new “community operating model” which focuses on prevention and early intervention.

They have also used a “Local Area Coordination” as tool to support ABCD, with a particular focus on loneliness and isolation. Birmingham have also focused on ageing and isolation, supporting local networks to develop with the aim of reducing and preventing social isolation.

So this suggests that the idea of piloting ABCD could be looked at in a thematic or services-based way, instead of / as well as a place-based approach.

This could be particularly useful for focussing on the power of the approach to tackle inequalities – understanding in what services and themes it would be most valuable to take an ABCD approach for the benefit of marginalised communities of interest or identity in South Gloucestershire.

This would also enable the council to follow the energy internally, working in greater depth perhaps with a team or department who are already on board with trialling the approach to really demonstrate it in action.

This in turn could then help the process of getting buy-in from other departments, who might not currently have the benefits of ABCD on their radars.



There is a tension in all of these options that should be addressed head on. One of the key insights that has shaped our work is to make clear that ABCD isn't a council-led process. It is about a range of different partners working together and sharing power in a place. We have sought to highlight this by making "We will work together" the first principle of the framework.

However, it is also likely that the next step on the journey does need to be, if not a council-led process, at least a council-enabled one.

There is therefore a careful balance that needs to be struck.

Without some kind of council-driven mechanism as the next step, it is unlikely that ABCD will have much further purchase from here. However, it is crucial that this doesn't become council control over what happens next.

In the spirit of ABCD, the council can bring to bear its own strengths – its ability to organise, convene, make policy decisions and create processes – but must be mindful of doing so in a way that doesn't crowd out the strengths of others, and indeed provides partners with leadership roles.

Evaluation

Whichever route is chosen, the outcomes included in the Framework can form the primary goals of the collective action. Some may come sooner than others, but the achievement of each in turn will show that an ABCD approach is happening and working.

The indicators under each outcome – particularly the quantitative metrics – are likely to be of more use and interest to public sector bodies which traditionally measure development in such ways. However, it is important that residents understand and recognise the development of their communities in their own terms.

This may be facilitated through more qualitative, longitudinal, narrative based reflections by communities. Members may engage in the telling and sharing of stories about how skills have been developed and shared locally, how this has strengthened community relationships and resilience, and how they now feel more able to act for their own benefit.

**"You measure best
when you treasure first."**

Cormac Russell, Nurture Development.

7.

Process evaluation – lessons learnt from the creation of the Framework



In the delivery of this project, Locality conducted a process evaluation to reflect on the work done, the approach taken, and outcomes achieved.

This aims to extract key learning that will inform the implementation of the Framework, further cross-sector initiatives in South Gloucestershire, and Locality's own future delivery of work of this kind.

Ultimately the process evaluation seeks to understand the extent to which South Gloucestershire has a satisfactory ABCD approach which can be taken forward by partners.

Methods

This process evaluation has drawn insights from the following sources:

Data on participants and their representation of different stakeholders in South Gloucestershire

Locality's chronicling of its own experience / internal reflections in delivering the different of stages of the work

A survey of participants in the process, feeding back on experience and impact

Reflections and views from members of the South Gloucestershire Keep it Local Steering Group who commissioned Locality's work and provided oversight for it.

Internal review

The following are reflections by the Locality delivery and Keep it Local Steering Group members on the experiences and outcomes of the different stages of the development of the ABCD Framework. These stages align with those described in the "Methodology" section on [page 12](#).

1. Literature review – building ABCD evidence and strategic context for work in South Gloucestershire ("Discover" phase)

This stage helped to create a good understanding of workstreams / strategies in South Gloucestershire informing what the new ABCD framework should align to. It also allowed Locality to bring together a good oversight of ABCD work carried out elsewhere and develop a strong combined resource of ABCD theory to allow for in-depth explanation of the approach.

In terms of challenges, though, it was difficult to provide more advanced or deeper experience of ABCD being implemented elsewhere – many had little impact data to date – so Locality could only report on the methods rather than results. It may have been useful to draw on international (particularly US) examples where the implementation of ABCD methods is potentially more advanced.

Though constrained by time, it was also mentioned that this stage would have benefited with some detailed quantitative information on South Gloucestershire's VCSE infrastructure landscape rather than just qualitative information.

2. Engagement phase – connecting with sectors, building awareness and gathering insights on starting point (“Discover” and “Define” phases)

It was useful that the format for this approach was tailored to the differing sectors – using interviews, joining team meetings and setting up bespoke workshops (both online and in-person) to suit the logistics for each.

Most of the key areas for discussion were covered and it allowed Locality to build a good understanding of South Gloucestershire context from different perspectives and test the levels of awareness and appetite for an ABCD approach.

Those who were engaged were at different starting points on ABCD, so it was sometimes difficult to work at a suitable pace. Some feedback during and after events suggested that the slides and reading materials were a little ‘too wordy’ and ‘repetitive’ – possible use of illustrative explainers might have helped (and these were incorporated during the latter stages).

Most sessions generated good feedback and highlighted positivity towards adopting an ABCD Framework. It was also an opportunity to delve into the existing context of ABCD in the district as well as opportunities and challenges with those more versed in the approach.

While the engagement sessions aimed to reach a broad section of people, there was the possibility that those most sceptical (e.g. at the council) were not sufficiently represented.

Town and Parish Councils were possibly the least receptive of the sectors engaged, and the workshop format might have worked better following some one-to-one engagement with these representatives in order to orientate them more to the purpose and nature of the assignment.

Where the Locality team sought to “piggy-back” the subject onto the agenda of regular and pre-existing meetings, it was sometimes difficult to cover the engagement questions properly – more bespoke / standalone / pop-up sessions dedicated to the topic may have helped.

Sometimes there was a presumption (amongst the Locality team and Keep it Local Steering Group) that some VCSE organisations were already delivering ABCD just by virtue of being part of that sector.

3. Co-production – collaboratively designing the framework (“Define” and “Develop” phases)

The co-production phase included some strong sessions, with good feedback – particularly the in-person event in Kingswood – which generated some additional benefits for participants (e.g. many cited that they were meeting some key potential partners for the first time).

Locality’s approach to focus on the main perceived challenges to establishing a functional ABCD framework as a way of generating principles was a fruitful step in the design process.

However, there was some difficulty with participants joining at different stages of the process – e.g. online sessions towards the end of the process that included some who had been involved at each step alongside some who were new and did not know anything about ABCD. An improved approach to this co-production process would be to create a willing cohort of framework “designers” identified after the engagement stage to help continuously to build the framework.



It was also difficult during this stage of the process to move the perception of the work as something solely focused on council action.

4. Drafting and finalising the framework – putting the agreed approach in place (“Deliver” phase)

The co-produced ABCD framework is comprehensive in its ambition and relevant to a range of different sectors and stakeholders. It has a logical sequencing of principles, actions, outcomes and indicators and has received plenty of support from the different stakeholders.

However, this stage flagged the need for a shorter, more accessible takeaway document for wider consumption alongside the longer report document (for key stakeholders) providing the context and learnings behind its development. This has been addressed in the finalisation work.

The framework finalisation process also highlighted some structural issues affecting the scope of Locality’s work – for example the need for a resourcing element for the Framework and, connected to this, an on-going requirement to measure progress and impact. There was also the practical question of where to start with the implementation of the Framework and how the training element should be packaged.

There was also a dilemma about the ordering of signing-off the Framework and maintaining the principle of collaboration across the sectors in finalising the work.

Participant feedback

Across the course of the process, we engaged a total of 100 people from 45 organisations across the public, private, and VCSE sectors. This included 15 people from Town and Parish Councils, 21 from the NHS and its providers, and 26 from local VCSE organisations. It also included 28 council officers from six different departments and three Councillors.

We sought the views of South Gloucestershire stakeholders who had participated in the process of developing an ABCD framework. This included those interviewed (one-to-one), those involved in group sessions during the engagement phase, and those taking part in the co-production workshops.

Sixteen people responded to our questions, some anonymously (a choice that was offered) but of those who stated their name and role - representation came from the council, VCSE sector and Town and Parish Councils.

Which of these statements most closely reflects your position prior to your participation with Locality's ABCD work?

- I was interested and curious about ABCD and how it might work in South Gloucestershire
- I was unaware of what ABCD was so I came to learn
- I knew about ABCD but was sceptical about how it might work in South Gloucestershire
- I was excited about the possibility of ABCD approach being used in South Gloucestershire
- I had low expectations about this whole process
- None apply

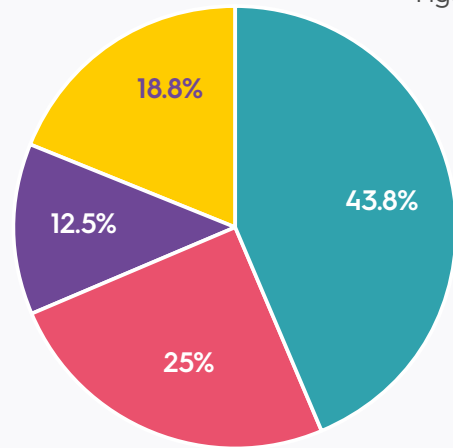


Figure 3

In terms of their starting position before working with Locality on developing the ABCD framework, the majority said they were “interested and curious” about how ABCD might work in the district (see **Figure 3**). Other respondents were equally positive in their expectation whether “excited at the possibility” (25 per cent) or “coming to learn” (18.2 per cent). This illustrates overwhelming positivity from participants on engaging with Locality on the framework.

Which of these statements best reflects your view on the quality of informations provided before your participation in Locality's ABCD event(s)

- I was given good prior information which ensured I was clear about the purpose and format of the event(s)
- Adequate information was provided informing of the purpose and format of the event
- Information was provided prior to the event(s) but it did not adequately cover the details I needed
- There was no prior information given on the purpose and format of the event(s)
- None apply

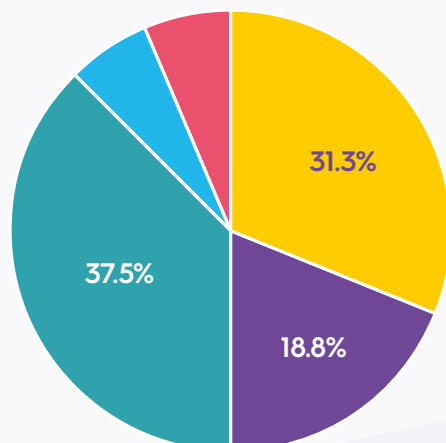
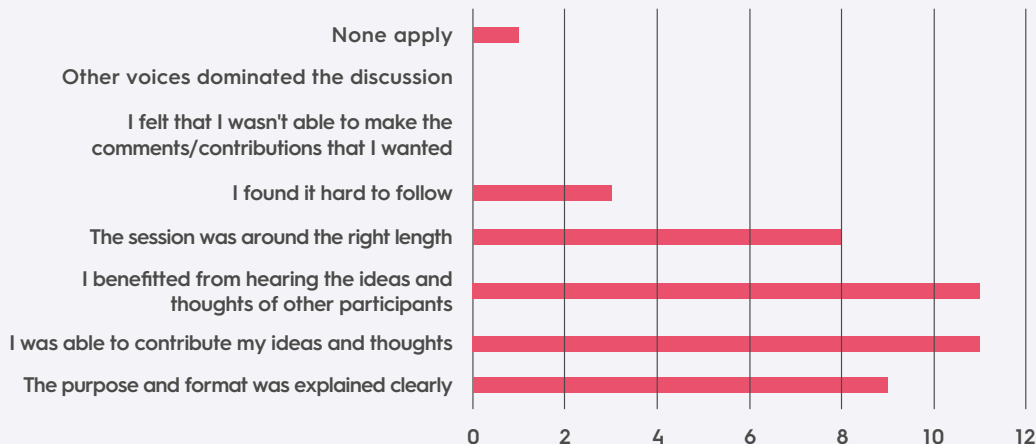


Figure 4

In terms of being provided with the right information before attending a Locality session, most (68.8 per cent) thought it good or adequate, with the remainder (31 per cent) feeling that better prior information was needed (see **Figure 4**). As cited by a sizeable minority, this highlights that improvements could have been made on the provision of preparatory information for participants.

Select all the statements that best describe your experience in participating at the Locality ABCD event(s)?

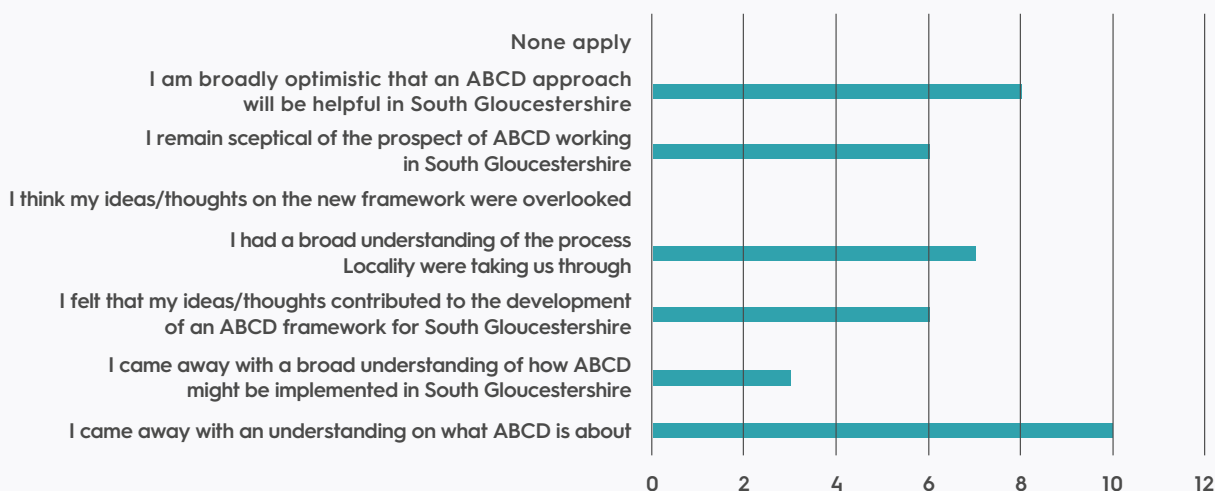
Figure 5



In terms of their experience of participating in Locality-led ABCD framework sessions, those who responded to our survey were, on the whole, positive about their experience (see **Figure 5**) - with eight or more agreeing with the statements **“I benefitted from hearing the ideas and thoughts of other participants”**; **“I was able to contribute my ideas and thoughts”**; **“The purpose and format were explained clearly”**; and **“The session was around the right length”**. However, a couple of respondents agreed with the statement: **“I found it hard to follow”**.

Select all the statements that best describe your overall take-away from participating at the Locality ABCD event(s)?

Figure 6



In terms of the impact of the experience and their outlook on the implementation of an ABCD framework in South Gloucestershire, again the survey respondents were positive – as **Figure 6** shows. Popular agreed statements included: **“I came away with an understanding on what ABCD is about”** and **“I am broadly optimistic that an ABCD approach will be helpful in South Gloucestershire”**. However, six respondents said they **“remain sceptical of the prospect of ABCD working in South Gloucestershire”**.

Many people in their comments highlighted that, while the sessions helped get across the ideas and principles of ABCD, there was an appetite to hear more about how it works in practice and what a successful approach looks like.

“I attended all workshops. I understood the concept from the first explanation. It would have been useful to have more examples of implementation in other areas.”

“I would have liked the discussion to move on to how it was to be implemented and what it would look like more than the concept.”

“My main interest is in learning how the ABCD approach can work in practice and what it will take to achieve whatever goals/targets that may be set, and how these might be measured. In other words, what will success look like for the ABCD approach?”

“I am not clear on how the outcomes will be achieved and by whom.”

“More time could have been spent on how best to implement the approach in more practical terms.”

“There were not many (other) councils in attendance that use the principles and framework in their area, it would have been good to have heard their challenges and how they overcome them.”

“How it will be taken forward at a practical level remains unclear.”



Others commented on specifics related to the logistics and facilitation approach and ways in which these could have been better:

"I want the creation of the ABCD framework to be exciting and inspirational."

"I found [the Google Jamboard] useful to contribute my ideas when others may be dominating the discussion verbally."

"It was a little repetitive as it felt like we were starting again at each workshop as new stakeholders joined."

"A lot of people found the post it notes on screen hard to understand."

"The venue was not the best - a cold church hall and the acoustics weren't great to hear what people were saying."

However, many were, on the whole, positive about the experience and supportive of the process:

"I think the creation of the ABCD Framework will be exciting and inspirational."

"It was useful to hear the thoughts of others to get a better idea of how the concept is being perceived more broadly."

"[It] managed to explain the process to my councillors in a way that they understand."

"[It's] a really exciting opportunity to make some meaningful impact with partners and hear what communities want/ need and work in collaboration."

"The concept and approach was very clear and I think the overall feeling was enthusiastic and positive to value all partners working together."

Further suggestions included:

"The use of tech e.g., Jamboard - many people were unfamiliar with it, was sometimes a distraction and stifled dialogue."

"I imagine the best delivery vehicle for this concept might be a parish or town council as they are more local organisations."

"I would be interested in learning how this work will be taken forward, from an overarching concept, to delivery in communities."

Summary findings

Having reviewed the internal, participant, and wider stakeholder feedback above, Locality has concluded the following summary findings:

- Following a patient and methodical approach to engagement, co-production and design was helpful in bringing together voices and interests from different sectors in South Gloucestershire.
- Extrapolating from the survey, the vast majority of participants came with a positive mindset about the potential for ABCD in the district.
- Participants were, on the whole, positive about their experience of being in sessions and their role in building up awareness and understanding of ABCD and supporting its deployment in South Gloucestershire.
- Events – like the in-person event in Kingswood, had the added benefit of bringing people together for the first time which had additional benefits for participants.
- More dissemination of evidence in the practical implementation and the impact of ABCD in other areas would have been helpful – this would have helped move the discourse (particularly in earlier sessions) from being too wordy / academic.
- The method would have benefited from retaining the same cohort group of people at the latter co-production / design phase to put the Framework in place – this would have addressed issues of people being at different stages of the (Framework-building) process and having to cater for this.
- While tailoring sessions to different sectors / audiences during the engagement phase was helpful, the Town and Parish Council group may have benefited from a different approach (for example more one-to-one meetings leading to a group session). Also “piggy-backing” the topic onto existing meeting agendas did not allow for enough time to cover the engagement questions properly.
- Locality’s approach to focus on the main perceived challenges to establishing a functional ABCD framework to generate principles was a fruitful step in the design process.
- The co-produced ABCD framework is comprehensive in its ambition and relevant to a range of different sectors and stakeholders.
- A shorter, more accessible, takeaway document is required to support awareness / understanding from a broader audience.
- Throughout the whole process, it was challenging to move the perception of the ABCD Framework as solely focused on council action. However, it has a logical sequencing of principles, actions, outcomes and indicators and has received plenty of support from the different stakeholders.
- There are some practical lessons for Locality on the provision of good prior information, making concepts accessible and the use of technology (e.g. Google Jamboard) in making sessions work for all.

8.

Resources and reading



ABCD theory and application:

- [The Four Essential Elements of an ABCD Process, ABCD Institute](#)
- [ABCD - 5 Core Principles, Nurture Development](#)
- [What is ABCD?, Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation \(US\)](#)
- [ABCD, TransForm Integrated Community Care](#)
- [Strengths-based approach: Practice Framework and Practice Handbook, Department of Health and Social Care](#)
- [Evidence for strengths and asset-based outcomes, SCIE & NICE](#)
- [ABCD for Local Authorities: How to rebuild relationships with communities through asset-based approaches, Nesta](#)
- [A glass half-full: 10 years on review, LGA](#)
- [Asset-based approaches in local authorities: achieving a better balance between service delivery and community building, LGA](#)
- [Creating health and wealth by stealth: Community anchor organisations, prevention services, and the wider determinants of health, Locality](#)
- [The state of strategic relationships between councils and their local VCS, LGA & Locality](#)

Examples of ABCD in places:

- [ABCD in Essex](#)
- [ABCD in Northumberland](#)
- [ABCD in Croydon](#)
- [ABCD in Monmouthshire](#)
- [ABCD in Birmingham](#)
- [ABCD in Windsor & Maidenhead](#)
- [ABCD in Leeds](#)
- [Principles in practice: lessons and examples from the Keep it Local Network, Locality](#)

Endnotes:

1. Nurture Development, 2018, "The four essential elements of an Asset-Based Community Development Process". Available at: https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/4_Essential_Elements_of_ABCD_Process.pdf
2. TransForm Integrated Community Care, 2021, "Asset Based Community Development". Available at: https://transform-integratedcommunitycare.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ABCD-paper_v03C.pdf
3. See: <https://www.abcdinleeds.com/>
4. South, J and Woodward, J and Coan, S and Bagnall, A-M and Rippon, S, 2021, "Asset Based Community Development: Evaluation of Leeds ABCD". Available at: <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/7640/1/AssetBasedCommunityDevelopmentEvaluationOfLeedsABCDPV-SOUTH.pdf>
5. Micheli, J, 2020, "York's ABCD Journey - People helping people". Available at: <https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/yorks-abcd-journey-people-helping-people/>
6. See: <https://www.activeessex.org/local-delivery-pilot/>
7. See: <https://www.activeessex.org/asset-based-community-development-abcd/>

Locality

Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our national network of over 1,800 members helps hundreds of thousands of people every week. We offer specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society. Together we unlock the power of community.

South Gloucestershire Council

South Gloucestershire Council is a unitary authority that provides a wide range of services for around 290,000 residents. Our values are working together, equality focused, committed to our communities, ambitious and adaptable, resourceful and encouraging responsible growth.

If you would like to get in touch about ABCD or connect on any of the issues in this report, email us to start the conversation: communityconversations@southglos.gov.uk



 @localitynews

 /localityUK

locality.org.uk

Locality | 33 Corsham Street, London
N1 6DR | 0345 458 8336

Locality is the trading name of Locality (UK) a company limited by guarantee, registered in England no. 2787912 and a registered charity no. 1036460.