Main Findings

The purpose of this report is to produce recommendations that foster a new engagement in civic life and help strengthen communities, by allowing them to become more resilient.

Ensuring all individuals have the opportunity to benefit from a prosperous local market is a key ambition for Essex County Council. We hope to identify and find ways of removing potential barriers to economic growth within the region.

We have identified some possible approaches that can be applied in future years to build upon the recommendations of this project to aid the Council in achieving its outcomes.
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Economic growth increases the capacity of an economy to produce goods and services. It provides citizens with higher standards of living, increases job opportunities, average incomes and the range of goods and services available to consumers. Moreover, it allows government to deliver more effective public services by generating a larger base for tax revenues. For all these reasons, sustainable economic growth is the number one priority for both central and local government of the past six years.

Greater Essex makes a significant contribution to the national economy; generating over £30 billion per year (Gross Value Added, GVA). It supports over 60,000 businesses, providing more than 600,000 jobs. Essex has a reputation for its entrepreneurial spirit and business start-ups. It is also the home to multi-national and leading edge companies. The County is ideally located between the great city of London on the one side and the great ports of Harwich in Essex and Felixstowe in Suffolk that provide a gateway to world trade, particularly with Europe. The London Gateway, Stansted and Southend Airports also provide them with valuable international links.

Nevertheless, Essex faces certain economic challenges. Productivity within the region was 2% below the national average last year. The County’s close proximity to London results in a great deal of commuting to the capital, leaving a reduced pool of skilled labour for local businesses. Furthermore, Essex has above-average proportions of people in the over 65 age range; this is forecast to increase. The working-age population, moreover, is growing at a slower rate. As a result, a relatively small proportion is required to support a larger proportion of economically inactive residents. In addition, skills levels are below the national average. The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) was high in comparison to its neighbours in the East of England as of 2014. The transport infrastructure is under strain, access to broadband needs to be significantly improved and projected population growth means that there is a need for more housing and jobs to be created within the County.

The consequences of the 2007–8 financial crash is still being played out, with uncertainty continuing to grip the global economy. Whilst unemployment has steadily fallen, living standards have yet to return to pre-crash levels. It is more important than ever for local government to try and stimulate the local economy. However, their ability to affect outcomes has changed with fluctuations in the powers and budgets allocated to them by central government.

Historically, UK local government has enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. However from the 1960s onwards, successive governments have centralized power in Westminster. Local authorities became increasingly reliant on central government for finance and had their powers curtailed and regulated. Since 2010 there has been a shift towards devolution, with a formal recognition that local authorities should play a more active role. As the closest governmental body to ordinary people, they are often better suited to making the right decisions for their area and understanding both the barriers to, and drivers of local growth and prosperity. The ‘localism’ agenda has created an expectation that local government should support economic growth and resilience in their local communities, deciding how to deliver greater value for money and introduce innovative ways of working in their local areas.

These developments have occurred against the backdrop of austerity, which were introduced by central government after the 2008 financial crisis to reduce the budget deficit. This has had a particularly large impact on local authorities, with central government reducing their budget by 40 per cent in 2012–15.

Local government itself operates within the constraints imposed by national government and national policy. The policy proposals set out in this chapter are designed to incur minimal costs and target resources where they can have the most impact. We avoid proposals that involve interference with free markets; rather we view the local authority as an enabler of sustainable economic growth. We try to remove some of the most important barriers that prevent the economy from reaching its full potential.

Our recommendations are founded in behavioural economics theory. This recognises that people are not simply rational utility-maximisers but are influenced by a range of external factors.

Behaviour is often at the root of complex policy issues. Public policy will be more effective if it aims to understand, engage and change the behaviours of people to produce more desirable outcomes. These interventions can be significantly more cost effective and achieve more efficient outcomes by tackling problems at their roots.
Chapter 1 – Economic Growth

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Skill levels are cited as one of the main weaknesses within the County of Essex. According to a report from the Essex Employment and Skills Board (ESB), 64 per cent of businesses in Essex did not feel as if they could hire suitably qualified staff from within Essex. Investing in the skills base of the population as economically inactive. Although this figure was slightly lower than the national average, it was higher than the regional average. We have decided primarily to focus on ways to increase the skills level in Essex and thereby raise productivity, whilst developing countywide infrastructure and changing behaviour for the better.

In making our recommendations for Essex we have drawn on case studies from other counties. We have modified these proposals to ensure they are appropriate for Essex.

Our proposals adhere to the four core principals developed by the UK’s Behavioural Insights Team when attempting to influence people’s behaviours; make it Easy, Simple, Attractive and Timely (EAST).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Apprenticeships

Skills are the key to increased productivity. Someone with higher skills can produce higher quality goods or services more quickly than someone with lower skills. Apprenticeships are increasingly recognised as a valuable way of individuals increasing their skills and qualifications. They are also recognised as a way of increasing employment prospects and productivity. Central government has set targets to increase the number of apprenticeships by 2020; increasing the number of apprenticeship start-ups and ensuring apprenticeship schemes are responding to labour market needs should be a top priority for local skills providers as well as employers.

We recommend that Essex County Council hosts a series of Apprenticeship Seminars that aim to disseminate information on the changes to the apprenticeships system by central government. One of the problems with apprenticeships is the problem of free riding behaviour, where it is often cheaper to simply bid up wages for qualified apprentices rather than initially train them. In order to encourage attendance it could provide a selective incentive, such as providing information about how to win contracts from local authorities or advice on regulatory matters to help reduce red tape for businesses. In particular, it should support the Trailblazers Initiative that is currently underway. This should be predominantly aimed at SME’s and should aim to guarantee their interests are represented in developing new standards for apprenticeships within their respective industries.

The seminars can also be used to gather information about the skills needs of target sectors in Essex. This might also involve initiatives such as taster days at schools to encourage young people to consider careers in Essex’s core and opportunity growth sectors such as the life sciences and tourism.

Plugging the leaks

Essex County Council can also consider ways of keeping the income generated in the County within the local economy, rather than being spent elsewhere. The County’s close proximity to London means that income and spending is naturally pulled south to the capital. Plugging the Leaks is a concept designed by the New Economics Foundation and consists of workshops to map out the outflow of money from the local economy. It aims to induce a behavioural shift in local people to recognise and make use of their local resources. This could also be applied to the Council’s procurement and commissioning activity. This can revitalise the economy by addressing every outflow as a potential opportunity.

Greater recycling and reduced demand for landfill

The budget reductions imposed by central government mean local authorities need to find innovative ways of reducing financial costs. Colchester Borough Council (CBC) ran an experiment on the effect of behavioural incentives to encourage recycling and reduce landfill costs. The experiment involved three treatment groups; one of which simplified the message on household food caddies which reduced the amount of food going in to black bags by quarter of a kilo a week. CBC calculated that if this method were applied to all households in the borough it could save them nearly £67,000. Furthermore, Oldham council carried out an experiment in 2009 in which postcards were delivered to households in a treatment group, with data comparing recycling in their street with the neighbourhood average. This was associated with a 3% increase in recycling within the treatment group.

ECC could support the dissemination of information about these insights across Essex districts and boroughs to encourage recycling. This is environmentally desirable and the savings can help reduce the financial pressure on other frontline services.
Reducing congestion

Congestion is detrimental to economic growth; it increases fuel costs, wastes labour and harms the environment. It also imposes higher indirect costs as a result of higher freighting fees and missed deliveries. This provides a clear incentive to reduce traffic congestion within Essex.

The Area Licensing Scheme in Singapore is a congestion pricing scheme in which motorists are required to purchase a license if they want to enter a designated restricted zone during peak hours. The project resulted in a 76% cut in the number of cars entering the zone during those hours and the number of bus trips increased by 13%\(^\text{11}\), helping reduce congestion. Behavioural economics research has demonstrated that individuals are more influenced by the change of an item from being free to being priced at a low level than they are to a general increase in the price of a commodity\(^\text{12}\). The congestion charge introduced therefore only needs to be low to be effective. We propose the Council tests a similar initiative in part of the County, potentially in Chelmsford, Colchester or Harlow. The revenue generated could be invested in public transport, road infrastructure and walking and cycling routes.

Secondly, we suggest ECC uses a digital platform to highlight the savings citizens could make by using public transport. A ‘Personal Savings Calculator’ developed in Adelaide allowed car drivers to calculate their potential savings by switching to public transport for a given route. The calculator also provided the estimated reduction of greenhouse gases\(^\text{13}\) by using such a route. Providing such personalised information will provide a powerful nudge to encourage residents to choose public transport rather than use their car as individuals are loss-averse.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultivating civic engagement has been consistently attempted by politicians of all colours as a way to encourage better allocation of resources, as well as increasing the legitimacy of the provider of those services.

The most obvious forms of community and civic participation come in the shape of democratic elections at every level of the political system; with the turnout being the easiest way of measuring the extent to which communities are engaged with the political system itself. However in modern times, where electoral turnout – especially at lower tiers of government – is becoming frighteningly low we must look for ways to reverse this trend as well as look for new ways of measuring the extent of civic participation.

However, it is not just direct engagement with central or local government but participation and connectedness within a community that has fallen in recent years, as the traditional forms of community that have existed for years seem to be suffering from changes in society. A decline in trust, increasing diversity of age, culture and wealth, modern technology changing the nature of communication and a focus on career rather than community have all contributed to the breaking down of traditional communities.

Despite these factors we can still investigate methods to reinvigorate and rebuild these pre-existing, location based horizontal communities. These communities have been the strongest and longest lasting communities and by adapting them to the modern world we can ensure that they can survive into the future, with a certain level of support these communities will be able to sustain themselves. We must also look towards the new communities that are developing in the modern world; these ‘vertical communities’ are based around common interests or on digital platforms that are separate from the traditional location based (horizontal) communities.

Civic engagement has often been focused on encouraging greater levels of participation in the younger sections of the population; however with the issues of aging populations the focus has begun to switch to attempting to encourage participation throughout the entire population at all age ranges and socio-economic wealth.

BACKGROUND

Dimensions of community engagement

With the goal of providing effective and low-cost recommendations aiming at increasing community engagement, it appears essential to investigate the dimensions of community engagement itself.

Recent research produced by Eileen Coon investigates two organisational arrangements: vertical and horizontal. On one hand, vertical engagement relates to ‘an active citizenship in terms of engagement with the state’, directly linked with the institutional and organizational domain, it involves voting or being involved in policy making. On the other hand, horizontal engagement refers to ‘an active citizenship through being engaged with the local community’. Also referred to as a ‘horizontal peer community’, it relates to any activity out of civic duty such as volunteering, membership in a club or a common interest group. With the development of technology and globalization, we are increasingly ‘linked together’ through online networks rather than geographical factors.

Using this distinction allows us to develop new ways of strengthening community engagement as both types have different dynamics and different governance. Understanding the latter will considerably contribute to the creation of well-directed recommendations and actions aiming at increasing civic participation and community engagement.

Non-effective vertical hierarchical approach

There have been a growing number of experiments aiming to improve community engagement yet results have repeatedly exhibited important effects that counteract the ambitions of the experiments. This is because the vertical approach to community engagement is generally dominated by an agenda and a way of working that detracts from the real engagement of the horizontal system, undermining the key benefits of the engagement itself.

Action research in the Netherlands demonstrated that giving greater power and opportunities of participating in politics (through interactive governance and decision making) recurrently emphasized the lack of confidence of citizens and the lack of self-maintenance by those groups. Only several groups (experts, community elected representatives and so on) were increasingly participating directly to policy decisions. In that sense citizens were only contributing through participation in the experiments emphasized the lack of confidence of citizens and the lack of self-maintenance by those groups.

The lack of distinction and understanding of the two dimensions behind community engagement (the horizontal versus the vertical) has led to the experiments of giving greater power and opportunities of participating in politics (through interactive governance and decision making) recurrently emphasizing the lack of confidence of citizens and the lack of self-maintenance by those groups.

The lack of distinction and understanding of the two dimensions behind community engagement (the horizontal versus the vertical) has led to the delivery of public services that were not solving the real needs of communities but the perceived needs of the vertical hierarchy (experts, elected representatives etcetera).

Therefore, increasing community engagement by strengthening the relationship between local authorities and citizens through interactive governance appears to be as effective as once expected.
With the results presented in the previous parts, we understand the urgent need to change our approach to community engagement. As a vertical engagement approach has been revealed to have clear shortcomings and limitations, we will focus on horizontal approaches that we believe can contribute indirectly to an improved relationship between communities and local government. In that sense, our method concentrates on strengthening bonds and ties within horizontal peer communities. We hope to observe the latter to result into the amelioration of local authority and communities’ rapport.

Who is the subject of the present recommendations?

Essex County has a population of more than 1.4 million (2013) people and is England’s 11th largest county. Due to this large size, it seems unrealistic to use the entire population of Essex as a sample size. For the most efficient and pragmatic approach, the following recommendations will focus on considerably smaller projects that could eventually be scaled up to larger populations.

The University of Essex (UoE) brings together a global community of students from more than 130 countries. Students are often engaged and dedicated to their horizontal peer community. As such, there is a flourishing and vibrant cohesion within the clubs and societies. Nevertheless, the campus has a weaker vertical community, as most students do not feel like their opinion counts or do not feel part the Student Union, let alone the local authority. More than 6 out of 10 students do not believe they could have influence on the Student Union decisions. As such, the University suffers from a lack of wider community engagement. Therefore, most of the following recommendations use the University of Essex as a potential quasi-experiment laboratory to test approaches within a diverse and often apathetic community.

It is undeniable that there are considerable opportunities to test and to investigate experiments at the University. Moreover, the cost to experiment would be minimal as most of the participants would be volunteers. The proposals below will use the University of Essex as a potential location to test the recommendations before applying them elsewhere, as we believe the University represents a pragmatic and optimal way to test the following proposals as we hope to see this project develop further in the future.

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Catalyst Community Hubs

There have been many attempts in more deprived areas where public-oriented services have tried to concentrate local services into a single community hub. This effort can be in areas where services are not provided as a result of poverty but can also be useful in areas where services are being reduced due to the remoteness of given community. These are both situations that apply to areas of Essex: rural areas where services may be reluctant to expand or are actively pulling out of; and deprived areas where the spending power of the population is insufficient to support the desired services for the population. This applies to commercial services (businesses) and local public services.

The public services provided can and should be tailored to fit the demands of the community, by being responsive and reflective of the wants and needs of the community. Not only will this see local services become more effective, but may become self-sustaining as the hub will react to what people want and need, will encouraging them to become more involved in the services the hub provides as it better reflects their interests.

This hub must be allowed to develop naturally, starting small projects, partly to allow it to feel as if the hub is growing as a result of the community and helping to tie it in into the wider sense of community and belonging, as well as to prevent the hub from overstepping and making the community feel that the hub is being forced upon it. This distance between local government and the hub helps to create the feeling within the community that they are talking up to the local government and not being talked down too, and by allowing this feeling to grow a stronger basis for the relationship between citizens and local authorities can be formed.

Communities that either feel or are separated from the rest of civil society can be helped greatly by ‘hub’ projects as they provide a platform with which to interact with local government outside the traditional vertical engagement methods. This allows the people of these isolated communities to participate with the hub in a way that they feel they can control, removing those influences that they feel are acting against their interests. The hope would then be to widen the successes of a targeted hub in an isolated community and encourage the people of a wider geographic area to become more engaged in other aspects of civic life. This also means reducing the perceived presence of the local authority as a negative influence. After all, people will not feel removed from the negative influence of local government if they see its branding and staff around, as this will only serve to drive away the people who are the ones who most need to be targeted. Removing mistrust and disillusionment are vital aspects needed for the hub project to be successful and in turn offer some of the greatest future benefits as a result of it.

While depth of participation is obviously a more desirable and perhaps more attractive goal for this project, the breadth of participation is more important for increasing civic engagement. Ensuring a breadth of participation means removing all possible barriers, as even small barriers can be fatal to a project like this. Trying to engage people who have little or no interest requires our efforts to respond to the barriers that are preventing people from participating.

Many of these areas, while lacking some services needed by the community, will still have some active community groups in the area and communication and co-operation with these groups is of great benefit to the hub project. Not only does it increase local loyalty, but if you utilise the human resources of social groups already found in the community it reduces the cost and workload for local government, whilst removing feelings of disillusionment and mistrust. The use of volunteers is also recommended; by taking people from within the community you help build a sense of trust and safety within the community and reduce the feeling of external, negative interference in the community. Working with existing groups also helps when attempting to expand the programmes offered by the hub – providing advertisement, resources and volunteers for local services and eventually helping to spread the reach of the hub further than the pilot area itself by developing the channels necessary to interact both horizontally, and vertically.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Even in areas which are not resistant to the idea of external governmental involvement it is still advisable to minimise the extent that the influence of the local authority can be felt and to maximise the feeling of local empowerment and engagement. In areas where the main challenge is not the engagement of people in the hub directly, but in the process of making the community feel they have control over local services, it is important to change citizenry attitudes towards local government to encourage positive and constructive engagement more broadly.

Time Bank

Time Bank is a relatively simple concept that can prove effective at engaging people who would normally not volunteer by providing them a way to contribute towards their community in a time-efficient manner. A member of a Time Bank will volunteer their time to one of the various opportunities provided and in exchange they are given a form of currency in return. Volunteers can use their banked time in exchange for goods or services from either other volunteers directly or from participating businesses. By incentivising the programme in this way Time Banks appeal to people who would not normally participate in a volunteer scheme due to lack of time, effort or for financial reasons. In a single process it takes those who are excluded or isolated from civil society and helps them become providers of charitable services and provides them in turn with services from their community, fostering a link between the individual and the community that did not previously exist.

The incentives act not only as a way for people to earn goods and services but provides a way for people who would not normally be able to afford those services to feel that they have earned them rather than having been given them as an act of charity. This provides them with the feeling of improved personal standing and connectedness to their community. The focus of a Time Bank scheme also enables local charities to access the services provided by volunteers, helping local charities and community groups to deliver support within the community in the immediacy and in a way which local residents can directly see.

However, Time Banks often suffer from having only short term and insufficient funding to expand beyond their existing locality, yet with the support and promotion of Essex County Council a well-supported Time Bank system can be of great help to creating social capital and civic engagement from people who would otherwise be difficult to reach and engage in volunteering. This leaves the possibility for expansion both in depth and breadth in the future for the affiliate services a Time Bank can provide.

Smartphone application

As previously explained, the horizontal community has an undeniable social media and technology network. This then adds a dimension to the horizontal community engagement as we can now reach an increased number of citizens through social media platforms and other digital tools. Communities are constantly connected: especially students. Using this virtual proximity could not only bring consequent feedback from communities but also considerably help local authorities identify issues as known by local communities.

Even though the university is already largely reliant on social media and other digital tools to reach the student population, this could still be improved. The creation of a smartphone application dedicated to the student population – as a test group – to articulate and vote on issues could actually significantly change the perception of the Student Union, and of local services. As such, the perception of Essex County Council could gain legitimacy but also trust, as students grow to see interaction with vertical institutions as the norm. Utilising the social media phenomenon in modern technocratic societies could largely influence the two engagement systems’ relational experience and impact.

Policy Labs

Policy Labs are a scheme that Essex can put to great effect given the number of high quality research universities in the East of England. It is the one of the best ways of creating the most effective and co-produced policy proposals. These schemes take advantage of the research capabilities of local universities by approaching universities with research areas that are of interest to both researchers and local authorities, and then utilising the expertise of academics to co-create policies that will benefit the local area. Where a Policy Lab differs from the government consulting academics on certain issues is that the lab is opened up beyond the small group of academics that would usually be consulted on policy research. There are various groups that can be brought in for the purpose of producing more effective policies – business leaders, consultants and so on – yet academics from different disciplines and the general public have valuable insight to donate. The advantage for local government when working within a Policy Lab context is that the entire system is setup to create effective policy, the academics are producing research not aimed at the academic community as they may normally do, but instead conducting research for the operational environment.

This means that the research is focused on recommendations that are able to be enacted by the local authorities involved in the Policy Lab process. The nature of these labs is that they are part of a wider university environment, meaning that they are perfect laboratories for researching issues regarding young people, not only are they easily accessible but the student body of most universities are more diverse than the broader population.

There are also many forms of these Policy Labs, such as the Mindlab in Denmark, where the research is carried out by the local authorities directly, with an emphasis on attempting to gain perspective of projects from ‘the outside-in’. Businesses and citizens are contacted by the programme team to investigate the way that they perceive various aspects of government and how they interact with them. This information is then used to help to make specific research topics that are directly affecting the end users of government services.

No matter the exact form that a Policy Lab takes they always have the same basic aims of attempting to create specific and detailed recommendations for policy and look to create these recommendations from the experiences and expertise not normally consulted in policy making, and in ways that are not normally examined when creating policies. Innovative policy making is also an aim of many Policy Labs, if the traditional forms of policy making are not providing an effective response to the issues facing local authorities then Policy Labs can provide an effective alternative for co-creating more responsive and evidence-based policies.

Policy Labs are becoming an increasingly prominent factor in policy design in many countries, and in the UK it can be used as a way of expanding existing projects using external expertise and focusing on the delivery of public services into the area of policy design that have not previously been prominent in the UK.
INTRODUCTION

Community resilience, stemming from social capital, is extremely important and is salient to issues all across the world. Social capital in particular can contribute to economic prosperity and civic participation; alternatively a lack of community resilience or social capital can hinder socio-economic gains within a local area. In spite of the limited amount of research that has been done on these topics, all of the conducted experiments and academic literature explain the viability of improving a community’s social capital as a way to improve its resilience. Particularly in Essex, given the extensive size of the County and the variety of backgrounds, there is an even greater emphasis placed upon these concepts.

The measurements of social capital and community resilience are extremely complicated, with some arguing that it is impossible. Social capital as such is represented by relationships amongst people, and the social networks that they have created. Another measure is considered to be trust among members of the community and the feeling of involvement and importance to an individual’s surroundings.

In this chapter, we examine the existing efforts which are being made towards building social capital across Essex, as well as consider examples from other parts of the world which provide us with insight to improve our existing schemes. Essex County Council has already shown great initiative in this area, and these efforts have been successful to a greater extent. Therefore, this chapter looks at the possible improvements that can be done in specific localities, where social capital is significantly lower, and what conditions need to be met for the projects to be successful, without the necessity for further resources.
BACKGROUND

There are three types of social capital, bridging, bonding and linking (OECD, 2016): bridging capital links people and creates a shared sense of identity; bonding capital is a stretch beyond a shared sense of identity in a community, for distant friends and/or colleagues; and linking capital is influential in linking people to other social groups, lower or above on the social ladder.

Ultimately, social capital is referred to as a function of contributions of more people, as well as the variety of different characteristics of people in a community (National Statistics, 2001). It is essential in order for the economy to prosper and for development to be sustainable. Furthermore, social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation amongst different people, in order to tackle any negativity within a community (World Bank, 2015). Adversely, lack of social capital can lead to a number of negative outcomes, such as the growth of drug cartels, which hinder any possible economic or social development (World Bank, 2015) within that community.

All of these factors contribute to higher community resilience within a community, which is beneficial for the residents, since higher social capital can help with finding jobs more quickly, receive higher performance evaluations, and feel safer in the community. Social bonds can help people socially and economically, as well as emotionally. It is proved that in the United Kingdom overall, people secure more jobs via personal networks, rather than job advertisements. A lack of these social bonds can potentially lead to a lack of interest in taking care of the elderly, a hindering of economic prosperity of certain social groups and even stop the evolution and integration of diverse communities. However, by increasing the level of social capital, and thus increasing the level of trust amongst different people, the adverse becomes true with improved perceptions of safety and greater involvement in the community. Community resilience also increases overall health in a population, and it also works as a predictive method of future health needs of a population.

Among other influences, community resilience improves the ability of communities to ‘bounce back’ in case of a displacement from their equilibrium (their preferred position). This can be understood as, in case of damage to their street, people are able to cooperate more effectively towards fixation of the problem at hand. The County Council has a lot of responsibilities in this matter, which is why its support is demanded so highly in these areas. However, if the Council can provide people with higher community resilience, people might not be as dependent on it, as they can depend on each other to help improve the quality of their local environment.

In order to be able to increase community resilience, we have to have a look at the main drivers of social capital. These seem to be mainly: participation in volunteering and creating opportunities for people to form closer bonds. Unfortunately there are often unfavourable conditions which need addressing before the local population can utilise these drivers. By increasing the numbers of volunteers in the wider community, and creating opportunities for people to network, we can help develop linking, bonding and bridging social capital.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In order to be able to establish what needs to be done at Essex, we firstly need to look at which areas have more social capital and why that is the case. However, in order to do this with greater clarity, we propose a number of surveys that could carried out in Essex, which should provide local agencies with the necessary knowledge of where and what to concentrate on.

Social capital itself is a multi-dimensional concept and therefore there is not a single measurement for obtaining a reliable result. The main ways of measurement can include the levels of participation in local clubs/organizations. This then leads onto designing questionnaires to send out to local institutions such as schools, libraries and other organizations; however it should also be carried out randomly, so that we do not encounter selection bias of people participating in the surveys, being the ones who also take part in activities that contribute to social capital. Ideally, the same surveys would be distributed within council divisions, which would allow for the collection of data for specific areas, so that we could find the main drivers of social capital in Essex.

Despite that, social capital is not directly replicable, thus just because it works in certain conditions, does not mean it will work for a different area, which is why we mainly concentrated on those localities with similar conditions to Essex (our statistical neighbours). These conditions are, for example, the geographic size of a place, inequality, and poverty rates.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey
Based on the ‘Civic Engagement in America Project’. The structure of the survey could be highly useful for Essex with a few alterations. It would allow for the Council to measure the levels of social capital at a reduced cost and it is estimated that the survey took 25 minutes to complete. Each community sponsored at least one of the surveys in local educational institutions. By applying specific questions asking about the type of the organizations people tend to be involved in, we can obtain a clearer view of which groups should receive higher levels of support. It would also provide the necessary knowledge about which social groups should be targeted, in what manner, and how they can contribute to building social capital.

Neighbourhood Watch Essex
A project launched in Essex with particular emphasis on the issue of safety was the Essex Neighbourhood Watch Association, which has several hundred different branches across Essex, with over 5,000 active volunteers. The main aim of the project is to increase people’s safety in their neighbourhoods as well as create a ‘neighbourly spirit’ within the community. This is done by people’s mutual cooperation working to inform police of suspicious activities in the area as well as encouraging neighbourliness.

This project has been adopted by many countries with high community resilience levels such as Canada or Australia, and has proved to be extremely beneficial in Essex itself. This initiative, however, is simply to be the ‘eyes and ears’ of the community and participation is passive, people do not have to sacrifice additional time in order to be involved, which makes it an easy initial step to participating in volunteering more broadly. Neighbourhood Watch has been active in UK for the last 33 years and it is considered one of UK’s largest voluntary movements.

Introducing more hierarchy into it could improve this particular scheme. By assigning specific officers with quotas of neighbourhood watch volunteers, it could improve the overall quality of the programme. This would allow for older people to take part in the initiative as well, and reducing social isolation in older communities. Furthermore, by creating this as more of a ‘virtual’ or internet based programme, the participation opportunities would be wider and more people would be likely to get involved – particularly from younger age groups. By having this as an initial step, it could lead to more involvement in volunteering later in life.

Local Libraries
Local libraries can play more of a part in increasing community resilience in Essex. A report by the Arts Council found that library users are more likely to be willing to pay an average of £19.51 more in council tax a year to maintain library services, and non-library users were willing to pay an average of £10.31. Library users are also more likely to be of good health with a 1.4% improvement over non-users. Expanding the reach and participation rates in local libraries could expand these benefits.

What If
Essex County Council has previously launched a project called “What if?” and pilot examples were launched in 10 primary schools across Essex in 2011. This project was launched in a small number of schools, and was unfortunately not rolled out to more, despite its satisfactory results. It provided people with more incentives to bridge the age gap, as everyone could be involved. The idea of applying this project in educational institutions increases the likelihood of young people volunteering. By putting emphasis on introducing this type of project into schools and colleges in those communities with a social capital deficit would help increase volunteering numbers, whilst providing a platform to encourage integration amongst Essex’s more diverse communities (i.e.: Harlow and Basildon).
Throughout this report, we have incorporated economic and political theory into our research that has helped us shape and develop what we believe are innovative and cost-effective recommendations to solving the challenges of ‘reinvigorating Essex’. All of us have acknowledged the importance of social attitudes at the grassroots level as being key in bringing about meaningful changes for sustainable development across all three strands. Furthermore, we recognized the inter-connectedness of our strands, as social capital plays a crucial role in each socio-economic challenge uncovered in this report.

**Conclusion**

Improved Civic Engagement and Community Resilience play a part in fostering a healthy and vibrant society, helping to reduce the strain on public services and allowing them to become more effective and targeted. Civic Engagement and Community Resilience are obviously linked but are also both integral in promoting Economic Growth by improving social capital. Similarly, economic growth can broaden the revenue base for the local authority and the public services it delivers.

We hope that this report has provided you with insight on the current socio-economic challenges that the County of Essex faces. Although our recommendations are specifically targeted to certain groups and localities, we have put emphasis on a ‘bottom-up’ approach. This approach has the potential to significantly improve the quality of engagement between the local authority and the communities that it serves.

We hope that these recommendations will be taken into consideration and provide a foundation on which to conduct further research and testing.

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**LINKING THE PUZZLE**

| Improving the skills base within Essex through an improved apprenticeship system that ensures the markets needs are matched is vital in ensuring a prosperous and vibrant economy. |
| Community hubs are means to provide services to the population in a way that not only makes them feel empowered but also changes their perception of local government. |
| Applying thorough surveys on involvement in local volunteering projects and groups. Introducing these specific surveys enables us to address the issues more effectively. |
| Creating projects and activities in educational institutions, which can bridge variety of social groups, from different backgrounds. |
| Policy labs use outside expertise and experiences; be it businesses academic or the general public, to help to create specific and innovative policy suggestions. |
| Due to the county’s close proximity to London, efforts to understand and ‘plug the leaks’ through which money generated is unnecessarily leaving the local area could be a step towards enabling a thriving local economy. |
| Implementation of community projects, with passive volunteering focused on security. These projects then address people’s basic needs in their homes, which gives them a greater incentive to participate. |
| Making greater use of local libraries to turn them into connectivity hubs in each community. This can integrate the community further at a reduced cost to the County Council. |
| Using the social phenomenon in modern technocratic societies could largely influence communities and local authority’s relational experience and impact. |
| Using the theory of behavioural economics, a simple and cost-effective way of inducing people to recycle more has been found, easing the strain on public services by the county. This can be applied to the Greater Essex Areas. |
| Experiment with the implementation of a congestion zone in Colchester as well as methods of increasing the salience of alternative ways of transport. This could reduce the economic waste and environmental damage incurred by bottleneched traffic. |
| Exchanging services is an effective way to involve people unaccustomed with community engagement. |
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If you would like to find out more about the challenge project, or the work found within this report, you may contact the University of Essex by writing to us:

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