

Plymouth Community Champions: Initial evaluation report

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Introduction

Introduction

1. Introduction

This report provides an initial evaluation of the Plymouth Community Champions pilot project. The Champions project was commissioned by Devon and Cornwall Police, and has been supported through the Home Office Police Transformation Fund as one of a number of Citizens in Policing national pilots. The project has been managed and delivered through Improving Lives Plymouth, a voluntary sector organisation delivering community-focused support across Plymouth. Governance of the project has been through a Board bringing together the force, Improving Lives Plymouth, IPSCJ as the evaluator, and other key stakeholders as required.

The rationale for the project

The Plymouth Community Champions project was an innovative model, aiming to engage as volunteer Community Champions existing key individuals across communities, who were already well connected, respected, and knowledgeable in their areas.

The concept of a Community Champion was of an individual in a community (living, working or volunteering in a particular community) who would have some additional knowledge and the confidence to provide brief advice or to help out in a situation in order for other people in a community to access the right service for their problems or needs. Each Community Champion is unique to their community as they know about local services and information so they can point people in the right direction. The Community Champions are provided with initial training and then supported through a network

to meet with other Champions to share their experiences and develop best practice and to receive training updates. An employed Champions Co-ordinator role provides support and telephone advice when required for the Champions, as well as leading on the recruitment, training and support of the Champions.

The Community Champions project had initial aims to impact upon demand for policing services, to better support and signpost individuals in the community to the services or advice they needed, and in doing so to enhance community involvement in policing and to contribute to building trust and confidence.

Aims of the Community Champions project included:

- Looking to educate the public utilising trained volunteers who will disseminate information across local communities to improve general understanding on where to go to access support services for a variety of issues thus reducing demand on police services and contact centres;
- Working in partnership with other organisations (third sector, public sector) to improve connection and access with local Advice Centres;
- Understanding and exploring how workers/volunteers who are already active and operating in localities can be identified and provided with the right training to enable them to deliver signposting, messages, basic support and information on our behalf.

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The geographical areas of focus

The Community Champions model adopted a strong geographical focus on specific neighbourhoods, reflecting the rationale that it was building on the community involvement and connections of individual Champions. The community activism and roots of many of the Champions was very much focused on specific neighbourhoods, and thus logically the project followed this pattern. This geography also reflected data on police demand, which pointed to key neighbourhoods of Stonehouse, Stoke and Devonport in Plymouth which were particularly significant in the volume of demand. The fourth area, encompassing Plympton and Plymstock, was in broad terms more affluent and less high-demand for policing and other services, and was added into the project to provide a contrasting community in which to test the Champions model.

A brief pen picture of the three higher-demand areas focused upon in the pilot project is provided below:

Stonehouse was one of the original three towns which came together to make up the city of Plymouth (the others being Devonport and Sutton). It encompasses one of the most deprived areas of the UK. There has been regeneration activity in the site of the former naval hospital which has been taken over by the Millfields Trust. The buildings are a mix of private housing and incubator office space. And also in the Royal William Yard, the former navy victualing yard, which has been converted into high-end apartments, restaurants, artists' studios and shops and is a popular tourist destination. Union Street was an area populated by pubs and clubs frequented particularly by the

services when ships were in port. With the decline in the navy presence, many of the buildings are empty and derelict. Community organisations are starting to bring these back to life and finding new uses for them.

Devonport was another of the original three towns of Plymouth and the area containing the naval dockyard which dominated the area in the past and is still a major feature of the area. This again has been an area of deprivation with one of the lowest life expectancy rates in the city. It has been a focus for considerable regeneration funding in the past. Whole areas of former council flats have been demolished and a mixed range of modern social and private housing, flats and houses have been built in their place. The regenerated Devonport Guildhall is also a focus for local social enterprise and voluntary sector activity and there are a number of community groups and trusts who have grown up in the area.

Stoke is a more mixed area of the city. There are areas of considerable deprivation, particularly where it borders on Devonport and the dockyard, but there are areas containing some of the largest Victorian and Edwardian villas in the city. There are areas with a great sense of community, for example, Morice Town which borders Stoke and Devonport and a lively village high street.

The delivery of the project

The project was commissioned by Devon and Cornwall Police, with Improving Lives Plymouth as the delivery partner, with responsibility for financial, employment and volunteer support elements. Improving Lives Plymouth were selected due to their strong links into local

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communities and their experience and expertise in supporting volunteers. This volunteer support expertise was aimed to ensure appropriate training opportunities were available, and assurance and quality processes for the management and support of Champions were in place.

Improving Lives Plymouth appointed and managed the Volunteer Coordinator role for the project. As discussed later in this evaluation, this role was viewed as pivotal to the development and delivery of the Champions model.

Key deliverables across the Community Champions project have been:

- September 2018 – Coordinator appointed by Improving Lives Plymouth;
- September-November 2018 – Recruitment of the first volunteer Community Champions;
- October – December 2018 – First training sessions for the Community Champions;
- January 2019 and ongoing - Ongoing training of new Champions, and network events and CPD for existing Champions;
- January 2019 and ongoing – Champions commence delivery in their communities
- June – Focus groups and interviews undertaken for evaluation
- August – initial pilot phase due to end. Publication of this Initial Evaluation Report.

The Community Champions are trained in small groups, with training led by the Coordinator. The training runs over one day. It is very participatory in nature, with an emphasis on individuals sharing knowledge about their work and experience in the areas concerned. The

training covers aspects of ‘people skills’, discussion about the role, and importantly boundaries to the role. There is a focus within the training upon the geographical areas, and a sharing of insight about what matters in and to those communities. The training considers services available in the areas and access to those services and support. The training looks at solutions for particular scenarios that Champions could assist in, and the ‘tipping points’ for formal involvement of the police. Each Community Champion receives a toolkit summarising the training and role, and containing information about a wide range of organisations and services available in the area.

As of the 1st August 2019, the project has recruited 49 Community Champions, 36 of whom have completed their training. There have been five initial training events (two in November 2018, and one in each December 2018, February 2019 and March 2019), with two further focused training inputs (on ‘making every contact count’ and on ‘mental health first aid’), and four Network Events bringing Champions and others in the community together (in January, March, May and July).

The Champions recruitment has produced a very diverse cohort of Community Champions. The volunteers ranged from 20 to 78 years old, 66% were female, 16% identified as disabled, 31% identified as other than White British with 16% being BAME, including volunteers from the refugee and asylum seeker population.

Between December and June, the Community Champions have recorded 335 interactions with the public in their communities through their volunteering role. This is likely a substantial undercount, as there have been some

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significant challenges in achieving comprehensive feedback from some of the volunteer Champions, and it may be that the actual number of interactions is much higher, estimated potentially at over 1,100.

The model for evaluation

This initial evaluation report draws upon three key elements:

- Interviews and focus groups conducted in June 2019, engaging over half of the Community Champions. These sessions focused on the motivations to become a Champion, the experience of being a Champion, activity and impact delivered through being a Champion, perceptions of the project, and perspectives about the future for the Community Champions model;
- Interviews with strategic stakeholders, including key leads in Improving Lives Plymouth and in Devon and Cornwall Police who have been involved in its development and delivery. The particular focus of these interviews was to understand perspectives on objectives and rationale for the project, the experience strategically and operationally of designing, setting up and developing the project, and strategic views about outcomes and future direction;
- Learning derived from IPSCJ involvement throughout the duration of the project from the initiation stage of the project through design, build and delivery phases, which has provided opportunity to directly

observe the experience of shaping and developing the new Champions model;

- Review of documentation relating to the project, including strategic paperwork relating to the governance and strategy of the project, materials relating to the recruitment and training model, and logs from Community Champions summarising their engagement and perceived outputs and outcomes.

The evaluation is primarily qualitative in nature. Given the relatively small scale of the project, the large volume of police incident data, and the many other factors impacting upon that data, it was recognised that a project of this nature would not be able to point to a quantitative identifiable shift in demand data for the force. The evaluation primarily focused upon:

- Undertaking a 'process evaluation' of the experience of designing, building and implementing the project;
- Developing insight into the experience of being a Community Champion;
- Understanding the value, and the potential future value, of the model, albeit primarily in narrative terms.

The next chapter of this report provides findings in respect of the perspectives and experiences of those involved in delivering and volunteering within the project.

The final chapter then provides some brief conclusions and some key recommendations based upon the initial evaluation findings.

Perspectives and Experiences

Perspectives & Experiences

2. Perspectives & Experiences

The Community Champions project is still very new. This section of the report discusses findings relating to the experience of the project to date over its first few months of being fully operational; reporting on both the experiences of volunteers and also the experiences of those key professionals and stakeholders managing and leading the project. The findings derive from:

- Interviews and focus groups conducted in June 2019 by the IPSCJ with volunteer Community Champions;
- Interviews conducted by the IPSCJ with professionals involved in the commissioning, management and delivery of the project (where quoted in the analysis below, referred to as 'project lead/stakeholder', as being identified more specifically would compromise anonymity of participants in the research);
- An ongoing engagement by IPSCJ throughout the initiation and commencement of the project, including attending project boards, ongoing liaison with key leads, and analysis of project documentation.

The experience of designing and establishing the project

Most project leads and stakeholders acknowledge that the project began with some degree of uncertainty about how it was going to operate and what it was going to be focused upon achieving. There is also a recognition (discussed in more detail later in this report)

that thinking about the focus and purpose of the project has shifted over time. With reflection, it was felt that more time should have been taken to engage more broadly and clarify the definition of the project from the beginning.

“To be honest we should have taken a whole lot longer right at the beginning to be clear how we saw it all working.” Project lead/stakeholder

Project leads and stakeholders reflect that the project had a relatively slow start. This was in part associated with the initial project focus to reduce police demand, which in turn pointed to the need to establish analytical data about demand patterns in Plymouth. Sourcing this data and undertaking a usable analysis of it took some time, and acted as a delay in progressing the shape of training and recruitment. Allied to this, there were also delays associated with appointment, and then subsequent resignation, of the first Community Champions Coordinator. The general sentiment is one that the project “got there in the end” but that its developmental journey, particularly at the early stages, was not particularly straightforward.

“We lost a lot of time trying to get the analysis done.” Project lead/stakeholder

“We got there in the end! It started off slowly, the worker recruitment took a long time, then they left.” Project lead/stakeholder

A critical success factor for the project has been the second Community Champions Coordinator who was subsequently appointed into leading on the project. Many participants across the focus groups and interviews, both with Champions and with strategic stakeholders, reflected that the project “swam rather than

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sank”, as one Community Champion put it, on the basis of having the right individual in that Coordination role.

“A round peg in a round hole. She’s brilliant, a perfect fit.” Project lead/stakeholder

“I’m not sure if the project, if the recruitment of Champions, would ever have got off the ground without her. She has been the energy behind it all happening and brings her background and skill set in policing and community development and her huge personal network to draw upon into the project. I do think she has been so important to the success of it all.” Project lead/stakeholder

The project coordinator is seen as having brought a mix of a strong pre-existing network and communication across the communities, a well-matched skill set in terms of engaging and training the Champions, and also a background and understanding of the police, which together has proven important in the project “getting off the ground and taking flight”.

“At the end of the day it’s about building relationships and about people and the coordinator role is the heart of making that all work for us.” Community Champion

The project design of involving a voluntary sector partner (Improving Lives Plymouth) was seen as a strength. There was some shift in the focus of Improving Lives Plymouth during the duration of the project, including the closure of their volunteer bureau, which perhaps led to the project being less clearly aligned with their areas of focus and activity, and therefore less actively led and engaged at corporate level.

Engaging volunteers – reasons for joining the project

After a slow start, the recruitment of Community Champions is viewed to have gone well, at least across Devonport, Stoke and Stonehouse. There are two particular positives across the attraction of Champions into the project which have been drawn out from the interviews and focus groups:

- The project has attracted a very strong diversity of individuals, which has produced a profile of Community Champions which is very much more diverse than would typically be the case for Police Support Volunteer cohorts;
- The individuals attracted to be Champions bring a lot in terms of their network and connections into their communities, their ‘reach’ into and across those communities, the knowledge, skills and experience they bring, and the interconnections with other services and community initiatives.

“People in communities who feel it and see it.” Project lead/stakeholder

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“The reach and diversity, that’s the strength. Drawn people to be involved who in the past might not have been.” Project lead/stakeholder

Compared to many other ‘Citizens in Policing’ initiatives, the Plymouth Community Champions has drawn in a greater diversity of individuals, which has been a particular strength of the project.

“The obvious strength of the project is the diversity of the Champions and that they are all people who know people who know people in their communities.” Project lead/stakeholder

This diversity, alongside the level of connectivity that the Champions have into and across their communities has resulted in a very strong base of volunteers for the project, and provides a strong foundation for future development and growth.

In terms of what has attracted Champions to get involved, for many of them they are already engaged within their communities and they were attracted to the project as a means of giving more back, and having a greater impact for local people.

“I saw the advert and I wanted to do my bit.” Community Champion

“It sounds cheesy but an opportunity to give something back.” Community Champion

“To me, this was a way to be genuinely engaged. To give something back to this community I am now living in. To do something for Plymouth, positively, beneficial for others.” Community Champion

Given the nature of those who have volunteered as Community Champions, and that many of them were already active in their communities and engaged in other ways, it is not surprising that networks, “word of mouth” and “personal relationships” seem to have contributed significantly to how many of them had become aware of the project and to their decisions to volunteer for it.

“A lot of us have come to it from knowing other people and knowing the project lead [Coordinator].” Community Champion

For some, this is framed in terms of feelings of frustration with existing agencies, initiatives and partnerships and a desire to work differently and to have a greater and a more direct impact at the local level.

“To be honest, I was disenchanted by neighbourhood watch and by the lack of police support.” Community Champion

There was a sense for some Community Champions that they recognised that the police, and other agencies, were not able and would never be able to “do everything”, and that communities needed active citizens to “fill gaps” and “do things for ourselves”. There were sentiments that communities and local people can become “over-reliant” on state agencies and public services, and that those services were never going to be able to provide everything the community needs, and that local activism by local citizens is important. This thinking seems to have been an important driver for many of those volunteering to become Community Champions.

“For me it’s getting beyond entitlement, not relying just on public services to do stuff, do

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everything, because they can't. Community Champion

"It's not someone else's problem, it's down to us. We all can play our part. I hate it when I hear people talking about what they haven't done, there is no them, only us, we are in it all together. That's how I've always seen it anyway, and I try to play my little part in that, to do my little bit." Community Champion

Such thinking reflects beliefs about the value and importance of community. Several Champions talked about the "power" of communities to make a difference, if local people came together and worked together, and many saw their communities as already being active and strong in terms of local people being engaged and wanting to come together and make a difference.

"Violence and drugs. This doesn't feel as safe a place to be anymore but there is an amazing community here, community spirit, which stands against all that." Community Champion

"Yes this is a community that has its problems... I think we're stronger than letting those problems be what defines us." Community Champion

As reflected above, for many of those volunteering for the Champion role, they were already individuals who were active within their local communities. The Champions role was attractive to them in the sense that they felt it would add value in helping to coordinate and support and enable them to do more, including through providing training and information, and through the support of the project structure.

"An opportunity to be better informed and do more." Community Champion

"The training and toolkit. Learning new things." Community Champion

Alongside this sense of learning new things and gaining new support, for many of the Champions there was an appreciation that they themselves brought useful skills and experience, and that the Community Champions project presented a good context in which to put those skills to use in their local communities.

"I have a lot of skills. I have high-level qualification. I want to put all that to use in helping people." Community Champion

"I have skills and qualifications and this is one way to use them." Community Champion

For some Champions, their volunteering was framed in part by their perspectives that the police were not as visible, engaged and present in their communities as they had been in the past; a context which they attributed to national budget cuts and public sector austerity.

"The public sector has been fried by austerity. We never see the police except as Robocop, they don't really talk to us as a community anymore and we don't talk to them." Community Champion

For some volunteers, they see a role in helping to support what they saw as "over-stretched" police officers, and as a means of changing what was seen as limited or problematic relationships and creating fresh opportunities for communication and engagement between the community and the police.

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“Taking some of the weight off the police.”

Community Champion

“I see it as a better way to communicate with the police. Let them know what’s really going on.” Community Champion

Alongside these views towards the police, there is some ambivalence and ambiguities for Community Champions in respect of their perspectives of how the project relates to policing. For some, there was not a sense that the project particularly related to policing at all.

“No, I don’t see this as working for the police.” Community Champion

“It’s all the services not just the police.” Community Champion

Quite often across the interviews and focus groups, the narratives were much more general than ‘policing’, in essence broadly encapsulating a language of community development and community activism, and talking in broad terms about the value of community, empathy, compassion, counselling, and the kind of open, welcoming and supportive communities that Champions wished to live in.

“Collective empathy. Empathy and compassion. Help, counsel, sort things out, make the links for people. Community, that’s what I believe in.” Community Champion

“People need help and I can help them.” Community Champion

Community Champions tended to have many other priorities, causes and concerns that they saw as potentially being addressed through the project. Whilst many of these have a direct relationship or linkage to policing, there is also a

strong sense of Champions constructing the project and its aspirations in very much broader terms than policing alone.

“I think minorities often don’t know how the British system works. I have experience of that asylum process and I’m here to help through this project.” Community Champion

Whilst recruitment of Champions is perceived to have been a success in Stonehouse, Devonport and Stoke, this has not as yet been the case in Plympton and Plymstock. This is felt to reflect that there was less of an existing or organic sense of engaged and active community in those communities.

“The model is dependent on community resources in an area.” Project lead/stakeholder

The volunteer experience

Overall, the feedback from Community Champions during the interviews and focus groups has been that they are positive about their role as Champions and also about the project more broadly. Typically, Champions saw a resonance with other work and roles that they were undertaking in the communities concerned, and felt that the Community Champions project fitted well with that and brought a potential to add value and have an increased impact for their communities. As such, the ‘fit’ of the role with the individuals concerned, and the positioning of the project in terms of growing from existing networks, resources and individuals, both seem to have been achieved successfully.

In terms of the ‘journey’ and experience of becoming a volunteer with the project, the

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consensus was that the early stages of recruiting and being engaged as a Community Champion were managed well, and progressed quite quickly in most cases.

The initial training was received well, with views that both content and delivery were good. The emphasis on practical elements of what might be involved as a Champion were welcomed. Feedback also reflected that training as a group was positive, and that this gave opportunity both to learn from others, but also to make new connections and develop networks. The toolkit was also seen as helpful by most Champions, albeit there were some concerns regarding it, more in relation to challenges of keeping it up to date, and having opportunities to add to it and to develop it.

“The training was excellent and taught me lots of things I didn’t know.” Community Champion

“The training was well delivered and the toolkit is very helpful.” Community Champion

“Very helpful [toolkit] but there is that challenge of how we keep it up to date. Developing something online or as an app would be amazing.” Community Champion

Talking to the Champions, their sense that the project was flexible and fluid about the role of Community Champion rather than it being rigidly defined was welcomed. They on the whole liked the sense of self-tasking and self-determination, and how they saw the role could naturally evolve around and from other activities and networks they were already engaged with in the community. There was also appreciation that there was not a pre-determined minimum expectation from

Community Champions, so that they could be flexible and remain engaged even if they did not have much time and space to undertake the role.

“Not a big ask, and information and support were both available.” Community Champion

“Flexibility of how much time we have to give and how much we do.” Community Champion

“I was attracted by the flexibility.” Community Champion

For some Community Champions, there was concern that perhaps the project is too flexible, and that it would benefit from a greater clarity of role, and of expectation.

“Need a shape and a purpose. That can lie in [the] disconnect between communities, professional and police.” Community Champion

The networking events were also experienced as being helpful, both in terms of providing useful information and learning, but also once again as opportunities to meet up with others in the community. Some Community Champions felt that there should be more opportunities for Champions themselves to meet up with one another, share their practice and experience, and learn from one another, with some feeling that at present their execution of the role could feel a bit “isolated” from what others were doing on the project, and that this could lead to a very varied and inconsistent model of delivery.

“I’ve found the networking events immensely helpful.” Community Champion

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“I think more opportunities to meet up, beyond the training. To hear what other people are doing, how they’re approaching being a Community Champion and the sorts of things they’ve been getting up to.”

Community Champion

“I think the Community Champions network is a great thing, it is real grass root-activists coming together to make a difference and share ideas and knowledge and gain extra knowledge. The recent meeting was great on cyber-crime and the last one on Mental Health was so informative. You can see people making connections and getting support during the meetings.”

Community Champion

“Meet up more and learn from each other.”

Community Champion

“Am I getting it right? I think so, but I’m aware that... [X and Y, other focus group participants] might be doing it differently to what I am.”

Community Champion

What has been delivered

The project has been experienced by Community Champions as having a broad and indistinct mission. Typically, for many Champions, this level of flexibility and ambiguity has been welcomed rather than seen as a problem.

In essence, the project ‘on the ground’ has worked through volunteer Champions engaging people in their local areas largely on an ad hoc basis, as they encounter people and situations when they are about their other activities, including other community work and projects.

The focus of Champions’ encounters has been on giving an opportunity to people to talk through their issues and problems, helping to “signpost” and “to open doors for people”, often with an emphasis on resolutions which are simpler, quicker and more informal than might be the case were there to be formal police or other public sector engagement. Talking to some Champions, they bring a distinct emphasis on the importance of helping people to help themselves, rather than doing everything for them and creating dependencies. The bulk of Champions work has been seen as brief engagement, short-term and if longer involvement is required signposting to who can provide that; the volunteer Champions do not see their role as being one where they have an ongoing “caseload” of people and issues they are working with over more enduring episodes of engagement.

In very broad (and probably over-simplifying) terms, the engagement of volunteer Community Champions is ‘low dosage’ and ‘short-term’ intervention, focused on problem-solving, signposting and advice giving, and characterised by easy access and strong reach in terms of their positioning in communities. Primarily the interventions of the Community Champions are drawing on community knowledge and network as the primary asset Champions bring to their encounters.

“Opening doors and helping people”

Community Champion

“Talking something over always helps, doesn’t it?”

Community Champion

“A little bit of advice or knowledge, it’s amazing how helpful it can sometimes be for

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someone when they have a problem.”

Community Champion

“Sometimes all people want is someone to listen and someone to care. Or to discuss what the possible courses of action that they might have might be. Not everyone needs you to do something for them.” Community Champion

“I find if you talk it through often they see themselves what they can do.” Community Champion

“Our chat gave her the confidence to talk to them. To confront them, but not in a negative way.” Community Champion

The positioning in the community, with recognition and network, is highly valued by Champions. Reflecting very active involvement of many of the volunteers in community work and community activism, and a place-based philosophy and focus that many of the volunteer Champions bring.

“I think I am somebody who is one of them.”

Community Champion

“I’m someone I think who is well known around here and trusted I hope, and that gives me the opportunity as a Champion to build on that and to be helpful and make a difference where I can. I’ve always believed it’s important everybody makes a difference, having the community we want is not everyone else’s job or problem and it’s definitely not the job of the police and it’s not their fault when it goes wrong.”

Community Champion

For some Community Champions, they have framed their impact as being about building linkages between police and community, and

about being able to constructively divert from calls for police assistance.

“Bridges, that’s what a project like this does. The police have vanished off the streets because of austerity. The community has taken a hard knock with unemployment and especially the drugs on the streets. Building bridges, trust, between society and police.”

Community Champion

“Signposting, really. That’s what I can provide. Residents don’t know which services there are or how to get help, and if they ring the police it’s because sometimes they don’t know who else could be there for them.” Community Champion

“Sometimes doing something less formal that helps sort out their problem rather than reporting it to the police.” Community Champion

Often, Community Champion encounters occur spontaneously, and in street/public space contexts, and involve only relatively brief advice-giving and practical support.

CASE STUDY:

I witnessed two homeless men in a shop asking for the shop to heat up some food for them. The shop wasn’t able to do this but I was able to signpost them to somewhere that would be able to. Once they had their food, I sat with them and asked if they were aware of the places available to them where they could get support and hot food and offered to write them a list of places and when they were available. The two men were aware of most of the services. They said they did use the Salvation Army Sleep Safe service but when the evenings were fine they preferred to be outdoors. Both men seemed

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happy with the services on offer and were confident to use them if and when they needed them.

In other cases, there has been a more ongoing linkage, but still a focus on facilitating access to services and signposting support

CASE STUDY:

I have been working with a family who need support and mentoring. The mother is a single parent with five school age children. She works really hard and the children are well cared for. One of the children, the only boy, hit a troubled patch and was threatened exclusion from school. We were able to signpost the mother to an agency who has been able to provide a mentor for the mother, providing weekly support over the next six months. This has enabled her to feel more positive that she has support to deal with the issues.

The project has demonstrated how it can build links between police and community, in particular where there are issues at a very local level and challenges of police being aware and engaged, with related issues of trust and communication between police and community.

CASE STUDY:

Three Community Champions, separately, brought an issue to the Coordinator about a flare up of incidents in one of the areas of the city. There was a lack of trust in the police and, as a result, incidents weren't being reported. As a result, the situation in the area was

deteriorating and residents and business owners were feeling unsafe.

One of the Community Champions had built trust with one of the business owners and was able to introduce the Coordinator, who again built a trusted relationship and was able to broker a meeting with a police inspector. This enabled the business owner to express her frustrations and feel more confident about contacting the police. In return the police were able to gather valuable intelligence about the situation.

A meeting was then organised through one of the local community organisations who have Community Champions in their organisation. Local business owners, residents and other people with concerns about the situation came together with the police to discuss what action everyone could take. A week of action has been planned with follow up meetings with the police. The police have also been invited to neighbouring residents' groups as a result.

In some cases, the interventions of Community Champions are swift and informal basic problem solving, diverting what might otherwise have been a more involved formal process with agencies such as the police.

CASE STUDY:

A boy of about twelve knocked on my door with a wallet he had found in the road, knowing my role in the community (also involved in Neighbourhood Watch). There was enough information inside to identify the owner and we were able to return it to him.

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In many cases of Community Champion involvement, the engagement simply provides an opportunity to talk over a problem or issues, and to weigh up the options available. This has been demonstrated in some cases to help in de-escalation, sometimes of what could otherwise have developed into more confrontational disputes in neighbourhoods. Such conversation can lead to people in the community opting for more effective approaches to tackling their problems and to them better accessing other advice and support that is available.

CASE STUDY:

I talked to someone who had been having problems with a neighbour parking inconsiderately outside their house. They had planned to confront the neighbour about it, but after having someone to listen to their concerns and suggest alternative ways of approaching the issue, they decided on a less confrontational course of action.

CASE STUDY:

One of the people I spoke to was having problems with a neighbour and was feeling very fearful as a result. After we spoke, they contacted Citizen's Advice Bureau about how best to address the situation and spoke to their landlord. They started gathering specific evidence about the problem. I also invited her to come to a support group in the area.

Community Champions pointed to specific ways in which their involvement has impacted for people in their local communities.

CASE STUDY:

Four homeless men have been taken into a new hostel run by Plymouth Churches and they are now being integrated back into the local community.

CASE STUDY:

I have had two conversations with people about their mental health. Both have gone on to access services, one spoke to a support worker from the Red Cross and we filled in a volunteering application for them to make contact with organisations who run horse-riding related activities.

Alongside the numerous examples of activity and impact by the Community Champions, there is also a recognition that more could be done to share knowledge within the project about activities, approaches and outcomes between the Champions.

"We need better feedback. Not just individuals going off doing what they're doing." Community Champion

"It feels that we are doing a lot of good things but we haven't been as good as we need to be at sharing that amongst ourselves." Community Champion

Looking across the Community Champions, there has been a quite wide variability of how active Champions have been. Whilst some have undertaken quite a lot of activity in their communities through the project, others have largely been inactive. Some of that variability is to be expected in a project of this nature; and indeed, part of the ability to attract so diversely and successfully has been through framing the expectations of the project quite flexibly.

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Relationships

The project does seem to have struggled to achieve a profile, awareness or understanding across the police locally in Plymouth. This represents a major challenge given that the initial project rationale and design and the funding all link to policing.

There has only been a quite limited relationship directly with the local police in Plymouth, either operationally or at leadership level. Invitations to engage have only been patchily taken up. This no doubt is reflecting many other demands on those concerned within a busy policing environment and probably also limited understandings about what the project is and how it is intended to 'fit' with policing, with related challenges in terms of 'buy in' and engagement.

Many strategic stakeholders and leads across the project acknowledge that there has been a lack of a sufficiently clear model of linking what Community Champions focus upon, or engage about, with local policing demands and concerns, and a resultant disjoint with local policing activity. Future development of the project would helpfully look to see how these working relationships and the local police engagement could be developed to a much greater extent, including models for how potentially local policing can help shape and task the activity of the Community Champions.

This viewpoint that the project has been somewhat separate to local policing is reflected in many of the interviews and focus groups undertaken in this initial evaluation. For some Champions, this challenge is linked with a wider perspective they hold that local policing is less

visible and actively engaged on the ground in their communities, something which they tend to connect to cuts in police funding.

"It's been great, but it hasn't connected with the local police, the neighbourhood teams."

Project lead/stakeholder

"To be honest what's missing is the police. Used to be neighbourhood policing, now there isn't that friendly police presence, coming to events, time to chat to people in the street. That friendly police presence in community centres, in schools, time to chat. Because we've lost that we don't know them and they don't know us, they don't get the intelligence, they don't see what we see or know what we know. When the police stop being in the community and stop being part of the community when we have these problems with drugs on the streets, these zombie addicts and all that, they're not there any longer to do anything about it."

Community Champion

"A couple of PCSOs came along once but they haven't been back."

Project lead/stakeholder

"Sector inspectors haven't really been engaged. It's not for the want of trying."

Project lead/stakeholder

These issues with limited involvement from local policing are perceived by some project leads and stakeholders as linked to an insufficient strategy and plan, from the start of the project, to educate and explain about the project and to embed it into the local strategy and practice of neighbourhood policing.

"I don't think neighbourhood policing gets it, didn't understand it from the start."

Project lead/stakeholder

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“Right from the beginning we have lacked a structure for the local policing working with the project.” Project lead/stakeholder

The need to better link the project with the police was seen as a key element of strategic developing, looking forward in terms of the future of the project.

“How Champions might get activated by the police? How we might change that relationship?” Community Champion

“We need that endorsement. To be part of it [policing]. For it to feel like partnering. It is a good thing but it will not be a perfect thing until the police work with us.” Community Champion

“More practical ways for police to actually get involved, because they haven’t been. I haven’t really seen it as a police project. I don’t think I’ve seen the police once during my time as a Champion.” Community Champion

Beyond the local policing relationship with the project, more broadly it is recognised that the relationships developed through the project and by the volunteer Champions, both with other agencies beyond the police and across local community networks are a critical factor for success. Some would like to see this develop ever further. The local nature of the project, focused in specific and quite well defined community areas, is seen as important to success in developing the links and relationships through the project.

“Develop more links.” Project lead/stakeholder

“Our strength is who is involved and the networks we all have.” Community Champion

“The local nature, that’s what works on this. It works because we haven’t tried to do it across Plymouth, it has been about our community here. The success is because we’re already here, there is already a lot of community here, activists, artists, people who just care, just want to help.” Community Champion

“Linking people together. Bringing together local agencies, community workers and local people.” Project lead/stakeholder

“Making connections, it’s been as much about that as anything for me. We are community organisers, the project helps us be better equipped, to do that, gets us coming together more. Self-organising, self-generating, organic, community. Setting a spark, hopefully a beacon for others to get involved.” Community Champion

Plans for the future

Across the research interviews and focus groups there is considerable anxiety expressed about the sustainability and longevity of the project. It appears that many of those involved in the project have seen similar initiatives “come and go” in the past, and worry that the same fate may await the Community Champions.

“Don’t let community champions down.” Community Champion

“I very much want this to continue.” Community Champion

“We do this all the time. Projects like this start up, local communities sign up, then the

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funding goes and the project ends. I think that is a damaging cycle.” Community Champion

“I remember the last project we had like this, and the one before. I was involved in them both.” Community Champion

For some, and in particular several of the strategic stakeholders and project leads, there is a recognition that a clearer sense of outcomes may be required to help attract future continuity to funding and a stabilised and supported future for the initiative. There is a sense of lack of clarity about whether how the project works is understood, and what it is intending to achieve.

“Unless it can be clearer what it’s for, it is going to struggle to attract funding. It’s lovely we have all these Champions but I’m not sure I know what we are aiming to deliver.” Project lead/stakeholder

“Clarity of role and recruitment.” Project lead/stakeholder

“Rich data about our community. Intelligence the police don’t have. That is one role we have that we really need to shout out and clarify.” Community Champion

“Sustaining the project is important but it needs to begin with more clarity of why we need it.” Project lead/stakeholder

“How it works. How much it works.” Project lead/stakeholder

“Getting feedback about what people have been doing has been difficult.” Project lead/stakeholder

It is also recognised that the future of the project relates in part to how it connects to (reflecting the discussion above) local policing, and how it maps into and is integral to and supported by local volunteer infrastructure. The future working relationship with local policing was felt to bring some challenges, not least that local policing was perceived as being very stretched and therefore potentially challenged in respect of the time they have for general local engagement and connectivity.

“It’s been great, but it hasn’t connected with the local police, the neighbourhood teams.” Project lead/stakeholder

“Need to map into local volunteer infrastructure but that has itself seen a lot of change and uncertainty.” Project lead/stakeholder

“The strength and the weakness is that it’s been grassroots led. That has led to it being less owned by the police than it might have been” Project lead/stakeholder

“This is what policing should be doing but the police are very busy. Needs to be less arms-length.” Project lead/stakeholder

“We can produce the intelligence, bring the community to them but do they have the time?” Project lead/stakeholder

“How does this fit with the everything else police are focusing on? All the other initiatives and priorities?” Project lead/stakeholder

It has been widely recognised amongst the strategic stakeholders and project leads that the Community Champion project requires a greater clarity and re-shifting of objectives. Looking

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forward, those would seem to sensible shift from a framing of the project in terms of 'demand reduction' to a framing of the project as enhancing community engagement, including connectivity across local communities and the police.

“Not replacing the police, but helping to solve problems.” Community Champion

“The value to policing of community mapping and appreciating community leaders and community resources.” Project lead/stakeholder

As the project has evolved the challenges of linking it so directly to a principal aim of 'reducing demand' on policing were brought into quite sharp focus. Policing 'demand' is large and complex and a very small project of this nature, sitting in the context of many other changes in practice and other variables, is not going to produce a tangible shift in the 'hard data' of demand reduction.

The potential for the growth of the current Community Champion model to help deliver a much more connected, co-productive and whole community-engaging model of neighbourhood policing is substantial. Such objectives may also in turn reduce patterns of demand, but that is probably not sensibly seen as the top-line strategic objective going forward.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section of the report provides some brief conclusions from the initial evaluation and provides recommendations for the future.

Successful recruitment of Community Champions

The recruitment of Community Champions has gone well, at least across Devonport, Stoke and Stonehouse. There are two key positives across the attraction of Champions into the project which are worthy of particular note:

- The project has attracted a very strong diversity of individuals, which has produced a profile of Community Champions which is very much more diverse than would typically be the case for Police Support Volunteer cohorts;
- The individuals attracted to be Champions bring a substantial strength in terms of their network and connections into their communities, their 'reach' into and across those communities, the knowledge, skills and experience they bring, and the interconnections with other services and community initiatives.

The exception to this pattern has been in Plympton and Plymstock, where recruitment has proved considerably more challenging, in large part reflecting a less evolved pattern of individuals already involved in community initiatives in those areas. There seems to be a key learning point here, in that a model of recruiting individuals into this kind of role presents a different set of challenges in

communities where there is a less developed existing network of community associations and initiatives. Various church and religious institutions are seen as one potential route into better accessing community networked individuals in this kind of environment.

The volunteers engaged as Community Champions represent one of the major achievements of the project. It is recommended that whatever future course is taken with the project, that the significant asset and potential which those individuals collectively represent be recognised and built upon.

Positive feedback from those who have volunteered as Community Champions

Overall, Community Champions were positive about their role and about the project more broadly, and typically saw a resonance with other work and roles they were undertaking in the communities concerned.

The positive morale and generally good levels of engagement of the volunteer Community Champions with the project reflect several positive aspects of the experience for them:

- The training sessions at the beginning of the project have been experienced well;
- The Network Events are seen as useful, both in terms of their content and as opportunities for Champions to further build their networks in their communities;
- Champions generally felt valued, and had positive experiences with each other and particularly with the project coordinator;
- Champions felt that the project added a further value for them to their involvement and roles in the community;

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- For many Community Champions, the nature of their activities to date (as reflected in some of the brief case studies shared earlier in this report) have given them opportunities to ‘make a difference’, and for many of them the fact they have been able to do so locally in the context of their wider commitment and interest to their local communities is particularly important to them.

The importance of effective project co-ordination

A critical success factor for the project has been the Coordinator for the project. Many participants across the focus groups and interviews, both with Champions and with strategic stakeholders, reflected that the project “swam rather than sank”, as one Community Champion put it, based on having the right individual in that coordination role. A mix of bringing a very strong pre-existing network and communication across the communities, a well-matched skill set in terms of engaging and training the Champions, and also a background and understanding of the police, together has proven important in the project “getting off the ground and taking flight”.

The activity and engagement of Community Champions

The project is still relatively new. Therefore, activity to date is indicative of future potential, rather than reflecting a longer period to capture impact more comprehensively. There have also been some key challenges, probably reflective of many volunteer-based projects, of achieving more than a partial feedback from the volunteers about their activity. This has led both

to gaps in having a full picture of the delivery of the Champions, and to gaps in communication from the Community Champions around their experiences and any issues and barriers.

Six key dimensions can be drawn from the Community Champion delivery:

- Most interactions by the volunteer Community Champions have arisen in an ad hoc, pro-active and unplanned fashion, arising organically and spontaneously from opportunities to help that have occurred in the context of their presence and engagement in their communities;
- The engagement of volunteer Community Champions is primarily ‘low dosage’ and ‘short-term’ intervention, focused on problem-solving, signposting and advice giving, and characterised by easy access and strong reach in terms of their positioning in communities;
- The issues engaged with by Community Champions are broader than ‘policing’, and certainly very much broader than just demand reduction for the police, but nevertheless do by-and-large reflect a broader ‘problem-solving’ policing agenda;
- Primarily the interventions of the Community Champions are drawing on community knowledge and network as the primary asset that Champions bring to their encounters;
- The activity and achievements of the volunteer Community Champions to date reflect their strong connectivity within their communities, but also reflect only a limited connectivity with local policing;
- Talking to some Champions, they bring a distinct emphasis on the importance of

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helping people to help themselves, rather than doing everything for them and creating dependencies.

Overall, collectively the Community Champions have engaged in quite a lot of activity given the short period of time the project has been operational.

Looking across the Community Champions, there has however also been a quite wide variability of how active Champions have been. Some of that variability is to be expected in a project of this nature; and indeed, part of the ability to attract so diversely and successfully has been through framing the expectations of the project quite flexibly.

Defining and delivering the working relationships between Community Champions and the police

The project does seem to have struggled to achieve a profile, awareness or understanding across the police locally in Plymouth. Invitations to engage have only been patchily taken up; no doubt reflecting many other demands on those concerned within a busy policing environment. Reflecting this, there has been a lack of a model of linking what Community Champions focus upon or engage about with local policing demands and concerns, and a degree of disjoint with local policing activity. Future development of the project would helpfully look to see how this could be developed, including policing helping in identifying issues and in tasking of Community Champions. Having said that, much of the Community Champions problem-solving activity does align with policing issues and priorities, and through that problem-solving they are contributing to demand reduction and

to enhanced engagement and connectivity in their communities.

Recognition that the concept of Community Champions has potential

On the whole, whilst it is early days for the project, the concept definitely points to having potential, primarily in relation to:

- Building community capacity and connectivity;
- Engagement with other agencies and organisations.
- Two-way engagement between communities and the police;

Reflecting the points made above in respect of attraction of Champions, the model has shown that it can recruit and engage a body of volunteers who have a considerable potential to impact, through their diversity, networks, local knowledge and credibility.

The need for a greater clarity of objectives

Alongside the achievements of the project, the evaluation also points to some key challenges. First and foremost is in relation to a clarity of objectives, stability of objectives, and measurability of objectives.

Engagement in the project was strong from the Community Champions and views were consistently very positive about wanting to see it continue. However, the reality was also that there was only a limited consistency in the views of Community Champions as to 'why?' the project existed, what success would look like, and what Champions should prioritise.

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There was only a limited sense amongst Champions of the linkage to policing either organisationally, or in terms of policing objectives. Whilst the formal initiating paperwork for the project foregrounded the reduction in demand on policing, that didn't seem to be explicitly in the minds of many of the Community Champions themselves in terms of their purpose. For them, they saw a much more crosscutting and community-centred (and arguably, also quite vague) agenda of problem-solving and supporting individuals.

Discussions with stakeholders recognised there has been some shifting of objectives as the project had evolved, and that clarifying objectives and achieving better 'buy in' from neighbourhood policing for those objectives, was a point of learning for similar future projects.

A shift in objectives from demand reduction to connectivity

As the project has evolved the challenges of linking it so directly to a principal aim of 'reducing demand' on policing were brought into quite sharp focus. Policing 'demand' is large and complex and a very small project of this nature, sitting in the context of many other changes in practice and other variables, is not going to produce a tangible shift in the 'hard data' of demand reduction.

It has been widely recognised amongst the strategic stakeholders and project leads that the Community Champion project requires a greater clarity and re-shifting of objectives. Looking forward, those would seem to sensible shift from a framing of the project in terms of 'demand reduction' to a framing of the project

as delivering problem-solving in communities and of enhancing community engagement, including connectivity across local communities and the police. The potential for the growth of the current Community Champion model to help deliver a much more connected, co-productive and whole community-engaging model of neighbourhood policing is substantial. Such problem-solving and connectivity objectives should also in turn reduce patterns of demand, but that is probably not sensibly seen as the top-line strategic objective going forward.

Defining future processes and priorities for Community Champions

The paradox of the current project model is that whilst there are significant advantages to how the volunteer Champions currently are deployed – which is largely a self-deployment approach, intuitively arising from their contacts and activity in their communities – the absence of a more structured and prioritised model of activity and deployment is also one of the potential barriers for future project development.

With improved engagement and communication with local policing, there should in theory be the grounds for a solution to this dilemma. Working side by side the local policing teams could help in tasking and deploying the activity of Champions, and Champions could help shape the knowledge and priorities of the local policing teams, in a working model which brings them together much more closely than has been the case in the opening period of the project.

Potentially, at times, such activity could take the form of a more specific and directive tasking, in the sense that the local policing team highlights

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individuals, and specific issues, arising from their working knowledge in the area. The local policing team, through a greater engagement with the project, would become better attuned to identifying those individuals or contexts which could benefit from the informal, problem-solving input of the volunteer Champions. And then it would seek to task the project to help contribute to finding solutions for those individuals and issues.

Measuring future success – a performance framework for the Community Champions

The development of a clearer performance framework for capturing the success of the project in part reflects the discussion above, in that the measurement of direct impact of the activity of the volunteer Community Champions needs to be set against desired objectives and identified priorities.

A future performance framework should aim to capture:

- The collective impact the Community Champions have had, through their interactions, for local people and communities (and as discussed, set against some clearer sense of priority areas). This might, ideally, involve some specific feedback from those assisted by the Champions in terms of their experience and any impact it has had for them;
- The activity of volunteer Champions (e.g. numbers and nature of interactions);
- The numbers, demography, diversity and engagement of the volunteers;
- The morale and experience of the Champions;

- The experience of communities from the project (perhaps framed through the perspectives of key community stakeholders?);
- The experience of local policing from the project.

Sustainability and future ambitions for the Community Champions

Finally, in terms of challenges, a key element of challenge relates to the future sustaining of the project. Many Community Champions expressed a frustration that similar projects in the past “have come and gone”, and that such projects tend to be at risk from short-term funding models, and a lack of centrality of prioritisation in budgets.

In truth, the future sustaining of the project probably links in large part to the points raised above about clarity of objectives and outcomes; as any funder, the force or another agency or commissioning source, is going to wish to frame its investment against outcomes which are more clearly articulated and focused upon.

There have been many voices during the evaluation calling for a further growth in the project. Whilst that clearly reflects the considerable success in drawing together a strong and diverse cohort of Champions, once again future funded growth to other areas of Plymouth will require a clearer setting and capturing of priorities and outcomes.

Key learning from the project more broadly for Citizens in Policing

Excellent attraction of a diverse and capable group of volunteers - The project has

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demonstrated how, with the right coordination skills in place, and with a project designed in the way this one has been to allow flexibility of role and expectation, it is possible to attract a diversity and community-reach of volunteers which is a step change from many PSV cohorts.

Purpose – The intended outcomes to be delivered through the project have shifted (from a focus on demand reduction to a broader construct of problem-solving and connectivity) and have remained somewhat under-specified. The project reflects the need for volunteer initiatives supported by and working with policing to start with a clear sense of ‘why?’ they are being developed, and for this rationale to be understood and supported by police, community, project leads, and volunteers consistently.

Relationship – There is rightly, across ‘Citizens in Policing’, a broad and healthy diversity in volunteering models and projects. As part of this diversity, volunteering models will exhibit a range of working relationships with the police, from direct hosting, ‘command and control’ and regulation (e.g. Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers) to models where the relationship is less direct, and less directive. This project is very much at the less directed, and looser, end of this working relationship continuum. What this project demonstrates is that in such looser, more distant and less prescribing or controlling models of relationship between police and volunteers, there is a need to understand and define the relationship, and to work actively on all sides to achieve a good working relationship. The danger, exhibited to a degree in this project, is that such looser arrangements for volunteer involvement achieve only limited understanding, ‘buy in’ and

engagement on the police side of the relationship, especially for the local and front-line operational elements of the police organisation.

Sustainability and short-term funding – As with many such projects, there is a clear message from participants in this evaluation (and in particular from the Community Champions themselves), at the sense of loss and disruption that projects like this coming and then going over short-term funding cycles can cause. A key element of consideration is how models of working such as this can attract and sustain longer-term models of funding and support, and alongside that be seen to be more ‘mainstream’ in the planning and delivery of agency objectives, including those of the police.



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