




Compassion
 Welcome
 Collaboration
 Ambition
 Social Justice

Supporting and Sustaining Community Life

THE COLAB EXETER STRATEGY

2022 - 2025

"Health inequalities are not inevitable and can be significantly reduced... avoidable health inequalities are unfair and putting them right is a matter of social justice."

Health Equity in England : The Marmot Review 10 years On, 2020.

Introduction

Despite the challenges brought about by the global pandemic, Exeter has been able to celebrate its status as a prosperous and vibrant city. The aspiration from city leaders is that this trajectory continues, but that more people benefit, and none are left behind. The long term vision is of an inclusive, healthy and sustainable city, where prosperity is shared and all citizens are able to participate fully in civic life. (Exeter City Council 2030 Vision).

The majority of people who come to CoLab for help. They may be experiencing difficulties with maintaining health, wellbeing and personal safety for a range of reasons. They also have fewer connections and experience difficulties accessing support, or participating in local activities, because of personal life situations and social or system challenges.

The CoLab Exeter 2022-2025 strategy has been developed to rise to the challenges of local and national strategies; and to respond particularly to the call to action from leading lights like Professor Michael Marmot, who have proven that inequalities people face can and do harm to them, and there needs to be a concerted effort to level the playing field, improve outcomes and to create conditions for people to lead lives they have reason to value.

CoLab Exeter

CoLab Exeter was launched in June 2016 as a multi-agency wellbeing hub, designed to help people with complex life situations and health challenges. Over the last five years its structure and function has evolved to meet local needs and aspirations. CoLab Exeter currently describes two central functions:

- CoLab Exeter is a multi-agency hub hosting 26 statutory and community sector organisations specialising in supporting people with complex life situations.
- CoLab Exeter is the lead agency holding responsibility for the building, and providing "backbone" infrastructure support to stakeholders.

Our overarching aim is to provide a single point of contact for people needing help or access to expertise and opportunity. It is to build the capability and capacity of people to maintain health and wellbeing, and participate in community life. It is also to make the best use of available resources, and maintain optimum conditions for the work to influence positive change.

“There is a role for CoLab in challenging the system and organisational culture – they are more creative; talking to the VCSE sector is vital. CoLab can be an independent provider of checks and balances, acting as a critical friend. CoLab are different because they deliver and are not just strategic.”

Devon CCG Senior Manager

Our Visitors

In 2019 The Welcome Team recorded 13,000 visits to CoLab. Of that group, the top five reasons for attending were a housing need or support (2,687), Probation support (2,424), CoLab Core team (1,895), Drug and Alcohol support (1,114) and Support for women (680).

Of all the people who came 54% identified as male and 37% female. 39% of the cohort had a wellbeing related need, 25% housing, 25% criminal justice, and 11% recovery.

In 2020 as the country weathered the fall out of the pandemic; the community hub model was tested. Stakeholders from multi-agency team were able to organise, maintain a service, and participate in and/or organise community response activity.

The CoLab core team saw 4389 people. The main areas of support were CoLab Core Team (1457) Housing (755) probation (715) social care (290) and drug and alcohol support (225)

Similar to the previous year 62% male 38% female, but this time 39% had a housing related need, 28% criminal justice, 25% wellbeing and 8% recovery.

In 2021, after completing a stakeholder review we began development of the current strategy

What we have heard

In the CoLab Stakeholder Review, staff told us that they wanted to continue to work in a way that is inclusive, welcoming, accessible and fair. Visitors told us they want to continue to access the range of support they need in one place, but have more options to participate in activities that help them recover, progress, remain well and deal with crisis.

“Coming to CoLab I felt instantly welcome, their support and approach accelerated my recovery, the unique part of CoLab was that all the services that I needed at that point were all working side by side, within my first appointment I saw three services and joined the Resilient Women group, this was more progress in one hour than I had made in months.”

Resilient Women Group Member

Our hub partners value the work already done but would like the joint offer to be clearer, and for greater evidence of shared impact. They want to see more emphasis on core values like compassion, equality and social justice in the work, and have more opportunities to collaborate and influence social and system change. Ultimately they want to see better outcomes and life chances for visitors, and more opportunities for them to help themselves and progress.

One of the central messages was that we look for better ways of responding not just to problems, but to the reality of people's life situations, which come through their stories. There is a belief that the greatest indicator of success is those stories changing and improving.

Sara's Story – Point of Crisis

Sara was moved to temporary accommodation in Exeter to safeguard her from criminal activity and her experiences of domestic violence and abuse. Sara told us she was struggling most with isolation, but the trauma of all she had experienced, including having to flee with only her clothes, was also affecting her. Further chats with Sara revealed that she was under pressure; she had significant rent arrears, and was struggling with substance misuse. She was concerned about her health and desperate to connect to people and make some friends. Our support began with some practical suggestions; a referral to counselling, and links to a specialist substance misuse service, alongside an offer of financial help to settle the arrears. As those things were resolved, Sara joined group activities with other women and began to feel more confident and connected. She now support women going through similar experiences.

Pete's Story – Receiving Support

Pete began coming to CoLab daily. He was sleeping rough and not coping well with temporary accommodation because he feared contracting Covid. Over time, though lots of help was offered, he became increasingly anxious, distressed and chaotic.

The Welcome Team began advocating for him. They listened to his concerns, and tried to help him talk with service professionals who could help him. Over the next nine months a range of temporary solutions were provided, only to fail, until Pete became so unwell that he was sectioned under the Mental Health Act, and so began more intensive therapeutic support in a safe environment.

Pete stayed in touch with the Welcome Team during his stay, and contacted them again when he was discharged to let them know he was now living in supported accommodation; he has signed up to social activities at CoLab and is now able to participate in regular life again.

Steven's Story – Progression Pathway

Steven was introduced to the Exeter Homeless Partnership whilst rough sleeping in Exeter. He joined the Lived Experience Reference Group after expressing an interest in wanting to improve things for others.

Since being involved he has made a hugely valuable contribution to a number of local strategies and initiatives. The Lived Experience Reference Group was set up to make sure that people with experience of homelessness are able to be a part of conversations and co-design processes to improve support and services.

Steven has contributed as a volunteer to Groundswell meetings throughout Covid. Here his current experiences of rough sleeping provided a compelling, real life account of how strategic decisions impact directly on vulnerable people particularly in relation to access to public toilets and wash facilities. In addition he has contributed helpful questions, suggestions and knowledge to partners around how to effectively roll out testing kits and vaccines.

Steven, who is now living in temporary accommodation, also leads on providing a lived experience perspective to the design and provision of meaningful activities groups through the project.

Goal and Culture

The core goal is that we respond sensitively and proactively to people with complex lives as a multi-agency partnership, in alignment with shared values, with common understanding of the problems and a shared vision for change.

From the work we have done to develop the culture, or context for all our offer, we have learned that our stakeholders value a compassionate approach, investment in community spirit, and capacity for people to listen, respond proactively and lead change in their own lives and work.

Vision

Our shared vision is of a compassionate and inclusive city and hub where people actively participate and communities thrive.

Mission

Our shared mission is to create the conditions for people to lead their best lives, and do their best work; and for organisations to achieve their greatest impact and value.

Values

Our shared values are:

Compassion - Welcome - Collaboration - Ambition - Social Justice

Working to co-produced core commitments, in one location, within a common approach creates the optimum culture and conditions for our work to thrive, and underpins success of our key activities:

Core Commitments

- We will welcome you
- We will listen to you
- We will include you
- We will be ambitious for you
- We will work alongside you
- We will co-create the conditions for safety, sustainability and success
- We will champion fairness and equity for the benefit of all

Infrastructure Activity

- Progressive "backbone" Infrastructure support and critical friendship
- Relationship and collaboration brokerage
- Social innovation and tests of change
- Leadership and hosting
- Influencing system change
- Collective Impact support
- Hub and community development

Delivery Activity

- Community response to complex needs
- Single Point of Access (Social A & E)
- Team around person
- Expertise in recovery, housing, health, wellbeing and crisis support
- Learning and participation activity
- Experiments in practice
- Social innovation

To build on good practice and learning about what works and what else needs to happen to improve impact and outcomes, we have identified three strategic aims and six strategic objectives.

Our 3 Strategic Aims

1. Focus on the person not the problem and help them unravel challenging situations, solve problems, and move in a more positive direction with ongoing support – until they are able to self-sustain and participate in civic life.
2. Create the conditions for staff to do their best work and organisations to achieve optimum individual and shared outcome goals.
3. Generate evidence of shared impact and value, and utilise that learning to develop the initiative and influence civic and system change.

““The difference in my life has been massive I wouldn’t have been here now, I needed full support and that’s what I received, I didn’t feel like a victim at CoLab and that approach has helped me to become independent and healthier sooner”

Colab Service User

Our goal in the next phase is to strengthen the hub estate, the collaborative community team, and the shared offer. We anticipate this will have a positive impact on community life in the CoLab hub, system and wider community.

We will work towards ensuring that:

- People live lives they have reason to value and sustain
- The CoLab model is making a difference
- People are empowered and enabled to do their best work
- The CoLab Community Response maximises expertise, resources and relationships
- CoLab is safe, financially secure and influencing system change
- CoLab contributes to a fairer, more equal and inclusive city

Six Strategic Objectives of The CoLab Community Life Strategy

People

1. Sustainable Life

The fragmented system and increase in poverty and inequalities has resulted in the most vulnerable people being further marginalised.

Aim: People live lives they have reason to value and sustain.

2. Sustainable Team

People working in the complex needs system often struggle because of low pay and short contracts. Individual workers experience bureaucracy, confusion, a lack of agency, contributing to burnout and attrition.

Aim: Staff are empowered and enabled to do their best work.

Practice

3. Sustainable Model

The CoLab Model assumes that colocation, collaboration and joint working improves collective impact and outcome goals. We don't have consistent evidence to understand how the arrangements make a difference

Aim: CoLab is able to understand and evidence the difference the CoLab model is making

4. Sustainable Hub

Long term financial security and sustainably remains a challenge because of current funding and commissioning arrangements alongside a lack of clarity about the CoLab community offer. The lack of system wide response to complex needs results in people feeling unsafe.

Aim: CoLab is a safe, financially secure and sustainable.

Place

5. Sustainable System

It's long been recognised that the complex needs system is broken and at the same time the city, while prospering, is leaving some people behind.

Aim: CoLab contributes to a fairer, more equal and inclusive system and city.

6. Sustainable Community

Whilst the CoLab Community has a wealth of expertise, well developed relationships and some resource, there is a lack consistency of investment, evidence and system recognition.

Aim: The multi-agency community response maximises expertise, resources and relationships, to strengthen and develop the Community.

1. Sustainable Life

The fragmented system and increase in poverty and inequalities has resulted in the most vulnerable people being further marginalised.

People are living lives they have reason to value and sustain:

- People with complex lives benefit from the CoLab offer in crisis and beyond
- People benefit from options to recover and progress
- People feel welcome, heard, included and respected
- People say they are more confident, informed, aware, able
- People feel less isolated, confused and fearful
- People are able to sort out social issues and avoid unnecessary service use
- People feel more motivated and capable of making lifestyle changes
- People experience greater overall satisfaction with support
- People are able to influence services and contribute to system change.

2. Sustainable Team

People working in the complex needs system often struggle because of low pay and short contracts. Individual workers experience bureaucracy, confusion, a lack of agency, contributing to burnout and attrition.

Staff are empowered and enabled to do their best work:

- CoLab Core Team is fit for purpose and sustainable
- The CoLab Community stakeholders sign up to and embody joint working principles
- The CoLab Community communicates regularly around progress, issues, developments and opportunities
- Collaboration, learning training or other development opportunities are shared across the hub.

3. Sustainable Model

Currently we are unable to determine our full impact and value to demonstrate how the CoLab model is making a difference.

CoLab is able to understand and evidence the difference the CoLab model is making

We will work with our partners and funders to develop a set of performance and impact information that meets their needs as well as our own. A strong qualitative element from service users' perspective will be a part of this.

1. Impact on visitors of model and site
2. Impact on stakeholders of working collaboratively
3. Impact on system and civic goals of having the CoLab hub

Evidence of impact and value informs service improvement and encourages investment.

4. Sustainable Hub

Long term financial security and sustainably remains a challenge because of current funding and commissioning arrangements alongside a lack of clarity about the CoLab community offer. The lack of system wide response to complex needs results in people feeling unsafe.

CoLab is safe, financially secure and sustainable:

- CoLab provides a safe, accessible, inclusive Single Point of Contact for people with complex lives to experience compassionate, professional support information and guidance
- CoLab Senior Leadership Team sets annual investment and sustainability targets and funding priorities
- CoLab secures long-term funding relationships with key funders and commissioners
- Funding obtained is clearly aligned to mission and priorities
- CoLab is able to demonstrate the return on investment for each contract or grant
- CoLab demonstrates impact and value on service development and system change.

5. Sustainable System

It's long been recognised that the complex needs system is broken and at the same time the city, while prospering, is leaving some people behind.

CoLab contributes to a fairer, more equal and inclusive system and city:

- CoLab identifies priorities for focused joint work around key thematic areas
- CoLab works with community, business and system leaders to respond more efficiently and effectively to local challenges
- CoLab advocates for people who find it difficult to influence or participate
- CoLab hosts, supports and facilitates cross sector and area working
- CoLab representatives contribute to system and civic initiatives.

6. Sustainable Community

Whilst the CoLab Community has a wealth of expertise, well developed relationships and some resource, there is a lack consistency of investment, evidence and system recognition.

The Community Response maximises expertise, resources and relationships:

- The structure, function and purpose of the Community Response is clear, and joint working arrangements agreed and implemented.
- The impact and value of the community response is clear and communicated across stakeholders.
- There are lead agencies and professionals for individuals strands of work
- Core roles and activity are resourced
- There is ongoing investment in relationships and collaborative working
- Visitors shape and participate in the delivery and development of the offer.

And finally – from our Joint CEO's Fiona Carden and Amanda Kilroy

In September 2021 CoLab Exeter received awards for Best Civic Contribution and the overall Platinum Award from The Exeter Living Magazine. The judging panel of business leaders described CoLab as,

"A Caring organisation, very much for the people. Essential in promoting large scale campaigns against homelessness and domestic abuse. They brought dozens of charities together to change lives."

Though we were delighted to receive the awards, it was recognition of the person-centred model and the emphasis on collective, not just individual impact that was most encouraging. The hope is that the new 2022-25 CoLab Exeter Community Life Strategy will build on this strong platform, as well as stakeholder feedback. We have an opportunity now to not only develop CoLab as a central point of contact for people in crisis and beyond, but to empower and enable local people and organisations to become part of a movement towards improving community life, health and wellbeing for everyone.

What we have learned first and foremost over that last two years in particular, is that communities are about people, relationships, common aspirations and a shared sense of identity and culture. This is where we need to focus to be inclusive, to ensure no one is left behind, prosperity is shared, and all are able to participate as far as they are willing and able.

2020/21 were incredibly challenging years which revealed the worst, and brought out the best in people, places and systems. All our lives were touched by the pandemic, and every person has thought long and hard about what the experience means for them, their lives, and the life of the whole community. Though the future looks uncertain, this is fertile ground for individual and community action.

As people step forward to make changes, participate or give back, we want to be there to support and empower them to act. As organisations aspire to come together, share resources, collaborate and make a difference, we want to be there to host and enable their actions. As this city, and all the systems that make it work, talk about fundamental transformation rooted in community to improve lives, we want to be a catalyst and container for action. Despite everything, these are exciting times.

***"CoLab demonstrated phenomenal invention to bring together charities, businesses health organisations, educators, hospitality and retail; to collaborate with all sectors of Exeter to fight and survive the pandemic - together.
A civic inspiration in a time of great need..."***

Judging Panel, Exeter Living Awards 2021

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