

**North Yorkshire County Council  
Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
11 December 2017**

**Stronger Communities Programme – Progress Report**

**1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 To provide an update on the work of the Stronger Communities Programme.

**2.0 Background**

2.1 Established in late 2014 and becoming fully operational in 2015/16, Stronger Communities is an ambitious programme to support communities to play a greater role in the delivery of services in North Yorkshire and achieve some key community objectives.

2.2 Faced with significant issues such as the size and rurality of North Yorkshire, an ageing population and reducing budgets, there are a range of services that the County Council has traditionally provided that are no longer available or need to be delivered in a different way.

2.3 North Yorkshire has a strong tradition of volunteering and communities supporting one another to add to the richness of local life and helping those in need. The Programme builds on this foundation by working in partnership with communities to help them continue to provide the range of services and activities that are important to them and upon which many people rely. In many places the ambitions of communities have surpassed those of traditional local authority service models, with communities better able to respond to local need.

2.4 With a dedicated Delivery Manager for each district the Programme provides a package of support and expert advice appropriate to need of the community and the project proposed. In order to manage change, and to allow concepts to be proven, the focus in the first three years has been on four priority service areas:

- Community libraries.
- Community provision for children, young people and families.
- Increased and more sustainable community transport.
- Services for older people and adults with additional support needs.

2.5 In the first two years of operation the Programme has invested £1.9m on more than 250 community projects across 80 communities in North Yorkshire benefitting an estimated 20,000 individuals.

2.6 The latest summary report for 2016/17 can be found on the Council's website - [Annual Report Summary 2016/17](#).

### **3.0 Inspire, Achieve, Innovate**

- 3.1 The LGA Peer Review in 2016 set the council a challenge by identifying the potential of the Council's Stronger Communities approach to "achieve even more". This initiated an internal review of how the programme was performing and whether any changes were required for it to extend its reach. On-going monitoring of projects demonstrated the types of projects that worked well and in particular those which could be replicated or up-scaled in a way that would be financially sustainable in the future. It was also evident that the programme was increasingly being perceived narrowly as a 'grants programme' rather than a development and change programme and this was being reflected in the size and types of organisations approaching the team. It was recognised that in order to deliver an effective, replicable and long term approach to the establishment and delivery of community led services that reflected the Council's ambitions and priorities (as detailed in 2.4) a new operating model was needed.
- 3.2 In late 2016 the Programme partnered with Sky Blue Research, an organisation which specialises in measuring impact and creating long term strategies and ambitions, to work on a Theory of Change project.
- 3.3 Theory of Change maps a path from an identification of need, to activities, outcomes and impact. The process starts by describing the change that you want to make before working back through the steps involved in making that change happen. The Theory of Change feeds into an Impact Measurement Framework which enables the programme to focus in on what works, target investment to areas of greatest impact and improve the way that any investment is evaluated.
- 3.4 Complementary to this work was a fundamental review of the investment strategy and internal processes to better align it to the new ambition and model. This project concluded in May 2017 and was signed off by the Programme Board on 27 June 2017. The new investment strategy includes three unique investment propositions that support and encourage local action, partnership working and innovation.
- 3.5 In July 2017 the Stronger Communities Programme launched its new investment plan "Inspire, Achieve, Innovate" to more than 500 people at a series of ten roadshows held throughout the county. A range of Voluntary & Community sector and other partner organisations were represented, and feedback about the new approach has been overwhelmingly positive (independent evaluation of the events returned 98% satisfied or highly satisfied), with attendees praising the emphasis placed on collaboration, greater choice for the sector, and the accessible and user friendly processes and information.
- 3.6 Published as a prospectus, 'Inspire, Achieve, Innovate' sets out the new offer available to communities from the Stronger Communities Programme, examples of best practice projects, and details the overall approach i.e. how

the programme works collaboratively with communities using principles of *co-design* and *co-production* to develop services and activities that help deliver both the communities' and the Council's priorities. The approach recognises that in order to extend the reach of the programme, and to enable as many communities as possible to benefit, it is essential that the investment is used to help create the conditions for 'social action' and enables people to come together to help improve their lives and solve problems that are important in their communities.

3.7 Members will be kept up to date with progress on Inspire and Achieve in their areas through regular reporting to Area Committees and details of any awards will be published on the Council's website and the 360 giving open data site. It is also envisaged that there will be on-going discussions with local Members about Achieve projects in their areas as happened with the library projects.

3.8 The [prospectus](#) provides detail on the three strands summarised as:

- **Inspire Fund** - designed to encourage people to get involved in their local community by offering small grants (up to £1000) which help establish new services, events or activities that help to increase social interaction, encourage neighbourliness and improve the well-being of individuals and communities.
- **Achieve Together** – our main investment programme; designed to build longer term strategic partnerships with communities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises who share the Council's priorities. Achieve will design with partners a range of social action projects and services that meet clearly evidenced need, are sustainable and where required, are capable of being delivered at scale.
- **Time to Innovate** – aimed at encouraging creative ideas to solve thorny service delivery issues and is particularly targeted at social enterprises.

3.9 The Inspire programme in particular is seen as being very much complementary to the Council's Locality budgets. Delivery Managers, who are involved in the evaluation of both, are well placed to ensure projects are receiving the most effective support for them and ensure that projects are not double funded.

3.10 Since the new programmes went live, 32 Inspire projects have been approved with a further 23 in the pipeline. Projects are from groups from across the county and it is particularly pleasing to see that the majority are from small or new groups who haven't previously received support from Stronger Communities. In addition, Delivery Managers are engaging with partners to work up proposals and detailed plans for the first Achieve projects. We expect the first Achieve projects to commence early in the New Year.

#### 4.0 Strategic Projects in 2017

- 4.1 **North Yorkshire Connect** - this is the new community directory for North Yorkshire which officially launched at the Wider Partnerships Conference on 3rd November. It's a resource for people of all ages and the professionals working with them, helping to build self-reliance in communities and supporting customers to access services and information for community and voluntary organisations online. It has been developed in a partnership between the 2020 Customer Programme and Stronger Communities, and built in house by the development team within Technology and Change. It will contribute to key priorities of the County Council by helping to reduce social isolation, using technology to enhance the way we work, and encouraging more people to go online for help and support. The site can be found using this link: [North Yorkshire Connect](#).
- 4.2 **Physical Activity Services for Older People** - Stronger Communities was asked by Public Health to lead on the commissioning of a contract for a new community based physical activity service which provides age and physical ability appropriate activities across North Yorkshire for adults who are at risk of falls, increasing frailty, or loneliness and social isolation. The principle of the service is that people will be able to 'step-up' or 'step-down' dependent on their need between a universal session (such as a bowls group or walking club) and a targeted session (more intensive support appropriate to need).
- 4.3 The opportunity closed in early August 2017. North Yorkshire Sport (lead) and REACT were the successful bidders. Over quarter three (17/18) NYS and REACT have been engaging with health and care sector colleagues, mapping existing universal provision in the county, establishing the referral pathway and beginning to advertise and market the service (including naming and branding).
- 4.4 The intention is to launch at least two targeted sessions in the Harrogate District, one in Richmondshire and one in Hambleton during January 2018, with a further 11 being rolled out across the county in the first 12 months. The locations of these targeted sessions will not be fixed, there is an emphasis on flexibility to move sessions based on need and demand.
- 4.5 **Go Local** - Stronger Communities has led on a marketing and branding exercise aimed at increasing awareness of community transport. Colleagues in Integrated Passenger Transport, a specialist marketing agency and with community transport providers have worked together to create an overarching community transport brand and associated marketing materials aimed at increasing the public's awareness, perceptions and usage of community transport.
- 4.6 The Go Local brand and [video](#) were launched at the Stronger Communities summer roadshows where it received positive feedback. Since the launch, a formal community transport provider network group has been formed which is Chaired by a Community Transport Operator. The group has decided to further develop the website, run a volunteer recruitment campaign, establish social media presence, produce a joint promotional leaflet and develop a Go Local 'Quality Mark 'that all providers using the brand will sign up to. This will ensure

that all CT providers will work to a set of service standards thus improving the overall quality of their services.

4.7 **Approved Provider List** - identified as an area of need in the sector, the demand for which was not anticipated at Programme inception; the Programme has procured and updates a framework of expert external specialist consultancy organisations able to assist voluntary and community sector organisations across 12 specialist and technical areas from finance and training to marketing and risk management. Since its creation 24 call-off contracts have been awarded, are currently out for bids, or are in development with £75k of direct investment from the Programme to support the sector.

## 5.0 Future Activities

5.1 **Prevention Contracts** – recognising the need to align all the Council’s current prevention programmes, the Head of Stronger Communities has been asked by Health and Adult Services (HAS) to work alongside their commissioning team to provide the strategic lead for the re-commissioning of Well-being and Prevention contracts. HAS currently provides funding towards a small number of community-based wellbeing and prevention services throughout North Yorkshire which help people stay well and independent. These contracts are due to expire in September 2018. Engagement and consultation on the future shape of these contracts is currently underway.

5.2 **Volunteering** – volunteers are fundamental to the delivery of community led social action. The programme is currently working with partners on projects that will develop opportunities for young people to volunteer and for adults with additional support needs. Activity is also planned to further develop internal resources which support volunteers such as recruitment, retention and training. This will build on the work that has been delivered over the past two years as part of the library reconfiguration programme.

5.3 **Innovation** – with the new investment approach for Achieve and Inspire live, focus over the next quarter will be on the implementation of the final investment stream **Time to Innovate**. The final format for this investment is still under discussion. Options are being drawn up which include Member and Area Committee involvement in the award decision making process.

5.4 **Showcase events** –a programme is currently being prepared which will offer all Members the opportunity to see first-hand the range of projects supported. The schedule will include the opportunity to visit projects that have received funding and/or information, advice and guidance from the programme. Each visit will provide Members with the opportunity to meet with groups and volunteers and will allow them to showcase their work. The visits will take place between January and March 2018 and invitations will be sent out to all Members shortly.

5.5 **Programme Evaluation** – in early 2018 the Programme will commence a procurement exercise for a five year independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the Stronger Communities Programme and its new investment

approach. The emphasis will be on collaborative learning to help the Programme understand what is working, where to target resources and how it can enhance its offer. The evaluation will also help our voluntary and community sector partners to reflect on areas of learning, share their experiences widely and in new ways, and evidence their impact.

## **6.0 Challenges for the Future**

- 6.1 Although initial take up for Inspire is encouraging, it is still very new and represents a significant shift from the Programme's previous investment approach. In order to build and keep momentum for this very local community action, it is recognised that further efforts will be needed to really target those smaller groups with whom there has been little or no contact.
- 6.2 Members have an important role as champions in their community, and we would encourage all Members to let local groups and voluntary organisations they are involved with know about the Inspire Fund. Further information is available on the Council's website: <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/stronger-communities>
- 6.3 Stronger Communities has been in operation for nearly three years. During this time we have witnessed first-hand the ambition and capacity of communities to take a greater role in managing and delivering a range of services, most noticeably the role communities and volunteers now play in the delivery of the Library Service. However, it is important not to be complacent and to continue to support new and existing community groups in the months and years ahead.
- 6.4 One of the potential challenges for greater collaboration with communities is the recruitment and retention of volunteers, and the increasing demand that is placed on volunteers. This is an issue that cannot be considered in isolation and officers are currently looking at how volunteers – including the Council's own c5000 volunteers - are best supported.
- 6.5 In July the Department for Transport announced that they would be changing the issue and use of Section 19 and 22 permits for passenger transport in Great Britain. Consultation commenced in the autumn and any statutory changes are awaited. This may have significant implications for a number of community transport operators in North Yorkshire whose main activity is operating passenger transport services and does not fall into the exemptions<sup>1</sup>.
- 6.6 The County Council has been in direct contact with those operators for whom it issues Section 19 and 22 permits and has contacted all providers to offer one consolidated legal position rather than each provider seeking their own legal advice. We will continue to monitor the situation and support the community transport sector wherever possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Exclusively for non-commercial purposes or which have a main occupation other than that of a road passenger transport operator.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 Members are asked to note the report.

Report Author

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