

**NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
HARROGATE & KNARESBOROUGH AREA CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE –
17th March 2022
Stronger Communities and Community Response to COVID19 Update**

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on the Stronger Communities Programme and the support provided to and by local communities in response to the COVID19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, and an overview of progress made in the Harrogate & Knaresborough Constituency area.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In March 2020, the Stronger Communities Team were tasked with developing and mobilising community support infrastructure in response to the COVID19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. With a national lockdown imminent and those classified as clinically extremely vulnerable being advised to shield, it was imperative that a 'safety net' of community based support and assistance was in place for people who did not have friends, family or neighbours to call upon.
- 2.2 Working with 23 key trusted voluntary sector partners across the County and drawing upon the existing, sound working relationships in place, the community support infrastructure was mobilised in four days. The 23 Community Support Organisations (CSOs) were requested to act as the single point of contact within a locality, and in conjunction with local networks, commenced coordination of a variety of volunteer led support services. This included the collection and delivery of shopping and prescriptions, caring for pets, offering regular social contact by telephone, and acting as a local agent for the COVID-19 Self-Isolation Grant. The CSO also provided support to local networks and action groups (for example Mutual Aid Groups) that had come together to assist in their communities, providing information, advice and guidance to ensure that all activity was delivered as safely as possible for both the volunteer and the beneficiary.
- 2.3 In addition to this, North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) extended opening hours to include weekends and public holidays to ensure that support was in place 7 days per week between 8.00am and 5.30pm. This has been primarily delivered by the Customer Service Centre and Stronger Communities, in conjunction with Team North Yorkshire Volunteers and NHS Responder Volunteers where appropriate.
- 2.4 Alongside intensive support from their local Delivery Manager, funding has also been provided to all CSOs, using national Covid outbreak management grants, which has enabled them to continue to operate and has ensured that support has been available to residents throughout the pandemic. Although the generic support offer is universally available across the County, the model of delivery varies dependent on local need and community assets available. A number of CSOs have evolved their delivery model;

either reconfiguring their services, or developing new ways of working in order to continue to provide support within the varying levels of restrictions we have seen over the last two years.

- 2.5 Despite the ever-changing landscape, community support infrastructure through the CSO network has remained in place since March 2020. Following the national lifting of restrictions on 24 February regarding self-isolation requirements discussions are in place with the CSOs regarding either winding down or scaling back their pandemic response activities. This may see some CSOs winding down their pandemic services in a managed way however a majority are interested in building on the successful model and developing it further as an effective place based 'hub' that contributes to health and well-being services and pressures. Provision is in place to continue to work with the network of CSOs over this coming months to support them through this transition.

3.0 Community Support Organisation Performance (2021/22)

- 3.1 Since the mobilisation of the community support model in March 2020, the following activity has been recorded via the 23 CSOs across North Yorkshire to date, primarily facilitated by approximately 203,272 volunteer hours:

- 23,301 prescriptions delivered;
- 36,288 shopping deliveries made;
- 61,319 befriending calls and 33,990 phone check ins made;
- 17,311 transport requests fulfilled; and
- 48,923 meals delivered and 11,281 food parcels distributed.

- 3.2 As part of the community support offer, CSOs administer the Covid19 North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) grant; this was set up as a way of addressing emergency food and utility support needs for individuals and households isolating or shielding across North Yorkshire during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This financial year, the scheme has received 391 applications, and has approved 375 of these (96%), totalling £42,615 of expenditure.

- 3.3 In addition to this, Stronger Communities have distributed £119,599 in Covid19 Community Grants (to date in 2021/22). This investment has allowed communities and charities to respond to the needs of their communities during periods of heightened restrictions; examples of which have included support services to help people to self-isolate, have access to food and supplies, and stay connected to people through technology. Grants have also been used to support groups to re-open some services and activities where they were able to confidently operate in a Covid-safe and compliant way, helping people to regain confidence and independence, and to re-engage in their communities.

4.0 Covid19 Related Work

4.1 Sustainable Food Support

In 2020/21, the County Council was awarded £532,000 via the Defra Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential supplies to support those facing financial hardship because of the pandemic. 48 grants (investment of £277,000) were made available over two funding rounds, to further support and expand the direct provision of food for people experiencing financial hardship. Additional capacity was also put in to Citizens Advice Mid North Yorkshire's Money and Benefits Advice Service and North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF).

In summer 2021, additional funding was secured to deliver the Food for the Future programme, which aims to embed local sustainable food support options, which also support beneficiaries to build their levels of confidence and independence. An additional 19 awards were made to voluntary and community sector partners across the County through this programme.

In order to better understand the food insecurity landscape in the region, Stronger Communities are currently scoping a joint piece of insight work with City of York Council. Initial discussions on this with Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and Hartlepower (a Hartlepool based organisation currently developing and delivering a similar piece of research) have taken place and further work will commence shortly.

4.2 Holiday Activities and Food Programme

Stronger Communities continue to lead on the delivery of this programme, which was launched with the branding of FEAST (Food, Entertainment, Arts & Sport Together) in partnership with Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) and the voluntary and community sector. Coordination of the programme has been undertaken by North Yorkshire Together who in conjunction with a network of locally placed clubs and community organisations, deliver a range of enriching activities over holiday periods. This is alongside a host of online resources being made available for families to enjoy. Over the festive break, 2221 children benefitted from activities delivered through the Programme.

In December, the Department of Education confirmed funding for the continuation of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (FEAST) until March 2025 and plans are underway with Children and Young People's Early Help team to deliver the programme over the next three years.

4.3 Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund administered by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) aims to assist households who may need support with food, energy and essential living costs whilst the economy recovers from the pandemic. NYCC was allocated £3.54 million to provide support over the winter period (from October 2021 to March 2022), which is structured in to four main areas of provision in North Yorkshire:

- E-Voucher Direct Award – a total investment of £2.68million to make a £275 shopping voucher available to all households in receipt of means tested Council Tax Relief (CTR) with a child under 19.
- Food Bank Winter Support Fund – an investment of £145,000 to 14 organisations across the County to increase the capacity of food supply to those in need.
- Warm and Well – an additional £220,000 for Warm and Well to provide energy top up vouchers / direct supplier payments to those in need.
- North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) – increasing the NYLAF budget by £250,000 in order to uplift the number of applications to a maximum of four until the end of March 2022.

Interim monitoring undertaken in January 2022 showed that 12,083 households have benefitted from the various support strands of the Household Support Fund so far.

4.4 Digital Inclusion

Work on Reboot North Yorkshire continues to progress with a particular focus on enlisting the support of our local communities and voluntary sector groups as Community Partners to allow a network of community Reboot projects to grow and develop across the county. Working with internal colleagues and external partners, 415 devices have been gifted to socially isolated individuals to date, with an additional 200 devices distributed to school children.

Reboot North Yorkshire continues to work closely with Citizens Online (CO) and their Digital Champion Coordinator for North Yorkshire. The partnership with CO continues to grow and has been extended for another 12 months until Feb 2023.

5.0 **Wider Stronger Communities Programme Work**

5.1 Children and Young People

The Stronger Communities programme, in conjunction with Children and Young People Service (CYPS), continue to lead and coordinate the school readiness pilot 'Grow and Learn' in Ryedale and Scarborough, with 50 small scale grants awarded to date this year.

The team also continues to work with the Early Help team from CYPS to develop and deliver a project that seeks to grow community capacity by working alongside and with our communities to stimulate, support and develop activities that enable children, young people and their families to be happy, healthy and achieving. In autumn 2021, Stronger Communities supported the launch of CYPS' Get Going Grant, seeking expressions of interest from community-based groups to deliver activities for young people, or families with young children.

5.2 Health and Wellbeing

Stronger Communities continues to strengthen its relationships with NHS partners and has administered a range of NHS mental health grants for the last two years, including grass roots suicide prevention, a self-harm co-design project and postvention support. The Suicide Prevention Grants Programmes for the Humber, Coast and Vale Integrated Health Care System, and Harrogate and Craven were launched by the team last year; 43 grants were awarded in early 2022, 32 of which are in North Yorkshire. The programme is also supporting the transformation of Community Mental Health programme in partnership with North Yorkshire and Vale of York CCGs.

Stronger Communities also continues to develop strong working relationships with social care colleagues, with sustained involvement in the Health and Adult Services (HAS) Transformation Programme.

5.3 Capacity Building

In parallel to COVID-19 community response work, the Stronger Communities Programme has continued to strengthen local community assets and infrastructure; this has included continuing to encourage relationships and collaborations between voluntary and community sector organisations as well as stabilising, and / or building capacity within them if required. Since March 2020, the Programme has provided specialist support to assist 14 VCSEs with work areas such as restructuring their organisations, re-modelling their services and providing additional capacity for fundraising; all of which have been crucial in trying to ensure their future sustainability, in one of the most challenging times for the sector in recent years.

6.0 **Planning for 2022/23**

6.1 Independent Evaluation

The Stronger Communities Programme is subject to a 5-year independent evaluation, conducted by Skyblue Research. Evaluation of the CSOs has now been encompassed within this, alongside continuing to develop our ten-year strategy, People, Place and Power. Discussions on a strand of this Strategy, building on existing infrastructure and the creation of 'Community Anchor Organisations' in localities has been accelerated by the needs presented by Covid19 and the mobilisation of the CSOs; the fourth phase of evaluation with CSO volunteers commenced in late 2021, with some dedicated volunteer focus groups anticipated to take place in summer 2022.

7.0 **Local Area Information**

7.1 Harrogate, Knaresborough & Boroughbridge CSO areas

The CSO's are:

- Harrogate and District Community Action
- Knaresborough Connectors
- Boroughbridge Community Care

These organisations have worked collaboratively across their local areas other voluntary organisations and community groups sharing information and utilising local assets to meet local need.

The data below captures the work of the Community Support Organisations;

In 21/22

- 664 people were provided with advice and guidance
- 838 individuals were provided with practical and emotional support
- 2,859 befriending calls were made
- 1,456 food shops
- 304 prescriptions were delivered
- 2,972 people had help with transport
- 104 people had help with pet care / dog walking
- 460 food parcels were delivered and 788 meals delivered
- 1,182 volunteers provided 8,862 volunteer hours including volunteer support to vaccination clinics across the Harrogate District.

More recently, the CSO's have been supporting people to regain their confidence and independence.

Numbers of volunteers have remained consistent, some have returned to work whilst new volunteers have subsequently volunteered to support the vaccination clinics.

- Key areas of note; achievements, challenges, areas of focus.

Since January 2022 the CSO's have collaborated to work in partnership with the Yorkshire Health Network to supply volunteers to all the vaccination clinics across the district. This has involved a considerable commitment from the organisations and their volunteers who have covered vaccination in Harrogate and Knaresborough. The organisations are proud to have supported the national vaccination programme.

Demand for Community Transport has increased throughout the last year, enabling access to vaccination clinics and health appointments. There was a significant increase in requests for this service between; Dec 21 – Feb 22 because of reduced capacity in the Passenger Transport services provided by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service coupled with high levels of self-isolation, there was at this time a significant strain put on providers. These capacity issues eased when army resources were deployed within the Yorkshire Ambulance service. Demand for community transport services remains high.

The Stronger Communities programme has awarded £6,794 in Small Grants to support recovery activities as lockdown measures have eased, the national shielding programme came to an end and voluntary sector organisations and community groups restarted their services in a safe way. These have enabled people to feel confident, to re-connect with their communities, and to start to regain their independence.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the content of this report.

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