

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

6 March 2023

Stronger Communities Programme & Corporate Volunteering Update

Report of Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships and Communities

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the work of Stronger Communities and the Corporate Volunteering Programme.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Despite the ever-changing landscape of the pandemic over the past 12 months, the community support infrastructure through the Community Support Organisation (CSO) network has remained largely in place since March 2020. As we moved into recovery, a minority of CSOs wound down or scaled back their pandemic response activities. A significant number have however continued to work with the programme on supporting communities with the challenges they face in relation to cost of living and winter pressures. This has been alongside exploring how the successful CSO model could be built upon and developed further to support the health, wellbeing and prevention agenda, and wider community resilience in localities, through the Community Anchor Organisation (CAO) model concept.
- 2.2 In addition to this work, the programme has also been able to resume pre-pandemic projects and has taken the lead role on a number of new countywide programmes.
- 2.3 A number of new national initiatives have been launched over the past 12 months particularly around alleviating the cost of living pressures being felt by families and residents on low incomes. Stronger Communities are leading on a number of these programmes and work in partnership with others within the Council and externally.

3.0 Covid-19 Pandemic related activities

3.1 Community Support Organisations (CSOs)

As previously reported to the Committee, the work of the CSOs has shifted focus in 2022/23, moving from pandemic response to recovery. Instead of supporting people who were self-isolating or shielding, their efforts have been on building confidence and independence and helping to remove some of the dependencies that emerged during the pandemic. This has included activities such as supported shopping trips, accompanied walks, social events and support groups and activities.

- 3.2 In acknowledgement of broader community resilience challenges including cost of living and winter pressures, the CSOs have been retained until the end of March 2023; continuing to work in partnership with NYCC to act as a place based single point of contact for locally based support, in collaboration with their volunteers, partners and networks.
- 3.3 A total of £924,700 has been invested in the CSO infrastructure in 2022/23; this includes a £22,000 contribution from the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) to

support the development and rollout of the Rockwood Frailty Toolkit. A breakdown of CSO investment by geography is outlined below.

District	No. of CSOs	Total Value
Craven	3	£92,000
Hambleton	4	£138,000
Harrogate	6	£203,500
Richmondshire	5	£126,000
Ryedale	2	£68,000
Scarborough	3	£173,200
Selby	3	£124,000
Total	26	£924,700

3.4 Future Opportunities for CSOs

Stronger Communities has also been working alongside the CSOs to identify elements of the model that could be retained and developed further to support the wider health, well-being and prevention, and community resilience agenda. Following a well-attended 'Response to Recovery' event that took place in May 2022 for those organisations that had undertaken the CSO role, followed by the 'Learning Together and Co-Creation' day in early November, the development of a Community Anchor Organisation network across North Yorkshire has been progressed. This is building on the successful CSO model, and further exploring the role that locally rooted, place based organisations can play in building resilience in communities.

3.5 In February 2023, as part of its established 'Achieve Together' Investment Programme, Stronger Communities opened a new opportunity to establish a Community Anchor model for North Yorkshire. Grants of £15,000 a year (for up to 3 years) will be made available from April 2023 for place rooted organisations, based in principal service towns or centres, who are able to serve a wider hinterland. This investment supports the core aims of the wider Stronger Communities Programme which include:

- Prevention and reducing health inequalities
- Community resilience
- Social regeneration

3.6 After gathering insight from other local authorities and community development programmes and gaining insight from voluntary and community sector organisations (including CSOs), a number of characteristics and activities which we would hope to see in a Community Anchor Organisation have been developed. This encompasses:

Characteristics

- Crucial to the place and the community in which it is based.
- A voice for local people.
- Collaborative, open and encouraging of other contributions.
- Proactive with a can-do mindset.
- Already delivering services.
- Independent and community led.
- Financially resilient.

Activities

- Building local partnerships and alliances to deliver services.
- Improving physical and mental wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.
- Regeneration of their communities.

- Building community resilience.
- Improving people's financial resilience.

3.7 The funding currently being used to support this work is non-recurring and as such, the challenge will be to develop financially sustainable options for CAOs in order for them to become less dependent on public sector grants and establish diverse income streams – which could include earned income through contracts and charging.

3.8 Community Grants

In addition to the work with CSOs, Stronger Communities has awarded £114,696 in Community Grants supporting 109 groups and / or projects to date in 2022/23. This investment has allowed communities and small grass roots groups and organisations to recover from the pandemic and to re-establish local events and activities in their communities. A geographical breakdown of the grants awarded is outlined below.

District	No. of Grants	Total Value	% of total number	% of total spend
Craven	8	£10,000	7	9
Hambleton	8	£7,300	7	6
Harrogate	14	£13,990	13	12
Richmondshire	10	£10,000	9	9
Ryedale	15	£14,500	14	13
Scarborough	37	£35,214	34	31
Selby	16	£15,692	15	14
Countywide	1	£8,000	1	7
Total	109	£114,696	100	100

4.0 **Wider Stronger Communities Programme Work**

4.1 The Stronger Communities programme has been able to resume some of its pre-pandemic work over the past twelve months; it is also leading on a number of large new national programmes.

4.2 The range of activities the team are leading on, or are contributing to, is broad and varied:

- Holiday Activities and Food Programme for free school meal eligible children (Department of Education funded)
- Household Support Fund - awards to low-income households (Department of Work and Pensions funded)
- Homes for Ukraine Programme (Home Office)
- Wellbeing and Prevention investment – Stay Healthy, Independent and Connected
- Digital Inclusion
- Cost of living
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)
- Mental health programmes (NHS)
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

4.3 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.

- 4.4 The new Holiday Activities and Food Coordinator is now in post and is working with North Yorkshire Together partners, as well as colleagues in CYPS, Stronger Communities and Public Health to develop the programme further with a particular emphasis on providing a wraparound service for families, its nutrition and healthy food offer, building stronger relationships with schools, and increasing the number of teenagers engaging with the programme.
- 4.5 Household Support Fund
In the last 6 months, Stronger Communities have continued to administer the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded Household Support Fund.
- 4.6 The third phase of the scheme aimed to support those most in need with significantly rising living costs between October 2022 and March 2023, particularly focussing on those who missed out on national government cost of living support. In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework developed in partnership with the seven District and Borough Councils, 23,395 eligible households across North Yorkshire have received a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher in January 2023. This encompassed eligible families, pensioners and working age adult households, as well as those who missed out on other forms of national Cost of Living support. In addition to this, supplementary funding was awarded to North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF), Warm and Well, and 16 food providers across the County.
- 4.7 Household Support Fund will continue from 1 April 2023 for a further 12 months; guidance for the scheme has been received and work will commence on how this will be deployed shortly.
- 4.8 Homes for Ukraine Programme
Following the launch of the national Homes for Ukraine programme, officers from the Stronger Communities team have continued to lead on North Yorkshire's multi-agency approach to ensuring arrangements are in place for host families (sponsors) are approved (home and welfare checks) and procedures are in place to distribute the government funding for sponsors and guests. The approach also supports the many local groups who have set up across the county to help welcome and support the Ukrainian refugees with things such as language lessons, social events and peer support.
- 4.9 The current number of Ukrainian guests residing in North Yorkshire, through the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship programme is approximately 838. In addition, 346 guests, who initially arrived in North Yorkshire, have either moved into private rental accommodation, to another Local Authority area, or returned to Ukraine, making a total of 1184 arrivals since March 2022. Of the guests who have moved on from their sponsor, 78 groups, or 191 individuals are now living in rental properties within North Yorkshire.
- 4.10 The government has recently announced a number of updates to the scheme; this includes an extension to the maximum sponsorship term from 12 to 24 months, an increase to the thank you payment once guests have been in the UK for 12 months, and additional funding to acquire housing and support for guests to move into their own homes and reduce the risk of homelessness.
- 4.11 Wellbeing and Prevention – Stay Healthy, Independent & Connected
The Stronger Communities team have continued to support colleagues in Targeted Prevention (Health and Adult Services) to develop options for future investment in well-being and prevention, learning from the place-based pilots operating in Craven and Selby.

The Stay Healthy, Independent and Connected Grants scheme was launched in late 2022, with new providers starting work in their localities on 1 April 2023.

4.12 Digital Inclusion

The digital buddies and champions programme delivered in partnership with Citizens Online, libraries, Living Well and community volunteers has proved a vital resource during the pandemic helping people to access online services and stay connected to friends and families. This has been delivered in tandem with the recycling of ICT equipment and devices project Reboot North Yorkshire. Awareness of Reboot North Yorkshire continues to grow, with an increased number of organisations and services referring their beneficiaries into the scheme, particularly those who are socially isolated, or those in need of a device to access training or education.

4.13 Cost of living - Food Insecurity

Following the Council's investment of a Defra grant in 2020/21 for a range of community projects that help combat food and fuel insecurity arising out of the pandemic; additional funding was made available to deliver the Food for the Future programme, aiming to embed local sustainable food support options, which also support beneficiaries to build their levels of confidence and independence. An additional 44 have also been made available to food banks and / or providers of free or low-cost food through the three rounds of HSF.

4.14 The food insecurity research and insight work continues to progress well in conjunction with City of York Council (CYC), with the report expected in Spring 2023. This broadly encompasses the following areas:

- Developing and utilising an evidence base of interventions including associated outcomes.
- Building our understanding of the realities faced by food providers, the unmet needs, the real-life outcomes, and thoughts about sustainability /viability.
- Developing a clearer map of provision across York & North Yorkshire and gaining a feel for possible gaps in areas / or models.
- Innovating / experimenting with an approach that involved people with lived experience.

4.15 The team continues to work closely with the Public Health Healthier Lives, Community and Economy team who are looking to bring together a range of organisations in the food sector to establish a food system framework and ultimately a food partnership to address the immediate to long term challenges presented. Joint work on exploring the impact of Cost of Living on Health Outcomes will also commence in Spring 2023.

4.16 Broader Cost of Living work

In conjunction with internal and external partners and coordinated by Stronger Communities, the cost-of-living support page on the NYCC website has been updated and reconfigured to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible. This encompasses links to more local level sources of information, including the District and Borough Councils and Community Support Organisations (CSOs), as well as detailing information on Warm Spaces, and support available for community and voluntary groups wishing to tackle cost of living challenges in their communities.

4.17 The programme has also supported the development of the NYCC Cost of Living Communications Campaign utilising a variety of tools. This includes the development of a range of social media assets and an A5 leaflet that has been made available in hard copy and digitally, which will drive people to the updated cost of living page on the website, their local CSO, and potentially to NYCC's Customer Service Centre by telephone as an alternative.

4.18 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

As part of the government's Levelling Up agenda the Council submitted its proposals for its allocated UKSPF funding, which have now been approved. There is a strong emphasis within the criteria for UKSPF on place shaping, community empowerment, engagement and strengthening the voluntary and community sector, and Stronger Communities are taking the lead role in the delivery of the Communities and Place strand. An advisory group is in place made up of public and voluntary sector partners and the year one allocations have been signed off with contracts being prepared.

4.19 Mental health programmes (NHS)

The Stronger Communities Programme has worked in partnership with colleagues in Public Health and the NHS to deliver a range of community led mental health projects since 2019. These include grass roots suicide prevention programmes and other specialist mental health services. As part of the national Community Mental Health Transformation programme, Stronger Communities continue to work in partnership with the NHS to transform mental health services for people with a serious mental illness through building capacity within communities and the voluntary sector. The approach includes NHS financial investment, managed by Stronger Communities, working with four place based multi-agency partnerships to develop and/or pilot new community -based services and projects through grant funding to voluntary organisations and community groups with the overarching aim of enabling people with a serious mental illness to live well in their communities.

4.20 Children and Young People

In conjunction with Children and Young People Service (CYPS), the Stronger team continues to work with the Early Help team from CYPS to deliver their Get Going grants scheme 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.

4.21 Capacity Building

Stronger Communities Programme has continued to strengthen local community assets and infrastructure; this has included encouraging relationships and collaborations between voluntary and community sector organisations as well as stabilising, and / or building capacity within them if required. The impact of the pandemic on income and capacity within the sector, together with concerns in relation to rising fuel costs is resulting in concerns about their long-term viability and sustainability. Stronger Communities continues to work with colleagues such as Community First Yorkshire, The Two Ridings Foundation, the Lottery and other partners to identify issues and concerns and develop joint responses.

4.22 Local Government Reorganisation

The Stronger Communities team is involved in a number of work-streams to support the formation of the new unitary council. Stronger Communities also delivered elements of the Let's Talk campaign in partnership with District Councils between September and December 2022.

5.0 Corporate Volunteering Programme Update

5.1 The Corporate Volunteer Project relates to all volunteering activity that takes place by members of the community to support County Council services. This includes volunteers who help across many different services from the Youth Justice Service, Libraries, Major Incident Response, Countryside Service and Waste reduction education.

5.2 Sponsored by Stronger Communities, the corporate Volunteer Project is being delivered by the Resourcing Solutions Team – HR, recognising the synergies between the volunteer journey and employee journey, whilst acknowledging that there are key differences

between the two. The focus for this project is to maximise and optimise the use of volunteers across all council services, creating consistencies in marketing, recruitment, induction, expenses, training, ongoing support and efficient volunteer processes.

5.3 A Volunteer Sub-Group meets regularly to provide a steer for the project, discussing challenges and priorities and inputting into areas of work as they progress. This group comprises of representatives from Stronger Communities and the Resourcing Solutions Team and lead officers from the services that manage volunteers.

5.4 Volunteer Numbers

The number of registered volunteers in September 2022 stood at approximately 4000. This includes people who volunteer their time to support wider council services such as community Libraries and as School Governors. At the previous O&S committee a request was made for detail of all the services volunteers support, this is provided at **Appendix 1**.

5.5 Current Focus

The key focus for the Corporate Volunteering Project at the present time is Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and ensuring that volunteer services currently engaged by one of the District, Borough or the County Councils are identified and brought into a consistent Volunteer approach in the new North Yorkshire Council.

5.6 To date services that utilise volunteers have been identified in Craven District Council and the project is currently working with them to transition the approach for recruiting, training, coordinating and supporting volunteers

5.7 All policies and procedures relating to volunteers have been reviewed and it will be proposed that all volunteers in the new Council are brought in line with the same Volunteer Policy to ensure the same consistent approach.

6.0 **Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is recommended that Members note the updates on:
- i. The work of the Stronger Communities programme.
 - ii. The Corporate Volunteering Programme.

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23 February 2023

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Update on Volunteer Numbers

Number of NYCC Volunteers

Directorate	Service	Approx. number of registered volunteers	Role(s)
BES	Countryside Volunteers	126	Checking paths, low-level maintenance and conservation tasks
BES	Rotters	44	Events/shows, schools workshops and talks to groups all promoting reduction of food waste, home composting, recycling and reuse.
CSD	Libraries	1433	Help customers in library, help with shelving and stock, deliver books for home library service, help with children's activities & IT.
CSD	Records and archives	25	Digitising records, cataloguing, organising materials.
CSD	Democratic Services	50	Volunteers serve as appeals panel members for exclusion or admissions appeals.
CSD	MIRT	16	Supporting people affected by an incident.
CSD	Ready for Anything	325	Database of community volunteers to be called on in an emergency.
CYPS	Adult learning	32	Volunteer teaching assistants (Syrian Refugee project and English classes).
CYPS	Youth Justice Service	37	Panel members, appropriate adult, mentor, reparation supervisor.
CYPS	Young People's Council	5	A youth voice project for young people who have experienced Care Services.
CYPS	Youth Voice Executive	12	A youth voice committee representing young people's view across North Yorkshire.
CYPS	SENDIASS	5	Independent support for parents of children or young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), or for young people (16 -25 years) with SEND to ensure their education, learning or training needs are supported.
CYPS	School governors	1775	Serve as governors and trustees on school boards.
CYPS	Peer Mentors	2	Peer mentors- current or former care leavers who have volunteered to mentor other care leavers.
CYPS	Chaperones	10	Chaperones who accompany children who have a licence to act or perform, to auditions/performances.
HAS	Gardeners	1	Supporting service users with gardening and conservation activities.
CS	Team North Yorkshire (Covid Vols)	111	Responding to COVID support requests (weekends) e.g. collecting prescriptions, shopping etc.
Total		4009	

New Volunteers will join North Yorkshire Council from Craven District Council, where they volunteer in Museum Services and the Tourist Information Centre. No other current volunteers have been identified in District/Borough Councils.