

North Yorkshire Council

Harrogate & Knaresborough Area Constituency Committee

30 May 2024

Stronger Communities Update 2023/24

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive - Local Engagement

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the Stronger Communities Programme and an overview of progress made in the Harrogate & Knaresborough Constituency area in 2023/24.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Over the last year, the Stronger Communities Team have continued to build on the successful Covid-19 Community Support Organisation (CSO) infrastructure through the development of the Community Anchor model, in order to further support the health, wellbeing and prevention agenda, and wider community resilience in localities.
- 2.2 The programme has also increasingly resumed pre-pandemic projects and activities in 2023/24 and has continued to take a lead on a number of countywide programmes; this has included developing pilot Community Partnerships as one of the four Council building blocks for locality working, as well as a number of national initiatives working in partnership with others within the Council and externally.

3.0 CORE STRONGER COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME UPDATE

3.1 Community Anchor Organisations (CAOs)

Twenty-four place-based organisations from across the county have continued to work with Stronger Communities to progress a Community Anchor model for North Yorkshire: supporting the core aims of the Public Health funded Stronger Communities Programme which include:

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

Activity has largely focussed on the development and progression of organisational development action plans in 2023/24. A UK Shared Prosperity funded collaborative support programme for CAOs, delivered by Community First Yorkshire (CFY) and Better Connect has also been commissioned; this will be tailored to meet the needs of each organisation and will broadly include the development and delivery of resources and training, one to one support meetings, partnership events and networking opportunities.

For the nine localities where a suitable CAO has yet to be identified, development work continues to explore the potential for a locally rooted voluntary sector organisation to become a CAO, or to look at alternative models. Collaborative work with our key voluntary sector partners in our larger settlements of Harrogate and Scarborough to explore options for CAOs in an urban context also continues.

3.2 Inspire Grants

The Stronger Communities Programme has awarded £130,074 in Inspire grants supporting 137 groups and / or projects in 2023/24. This investment has allowed communities and small grass roots groups and organisations to develop locally based projects and activities, promoting social action, volunteering, and supporting health and wellbeing. A geographical breakdown of the grants awarded is outlined below.

District	No. of Grants	Total Value
Craven	3	£2,119
Hambleton	12	£11,550
Harrogate	21	£20,091
Richmondshire	16	£14,515
Ryedale	20	£19,502
Scarborough	48	£47,064
Selby	17	£15,233
Countywide	0	£0
Total	137	£130,074

3.3 Community Partnerships

In 2023/24, the team started to develop the ambition of supporting local partnership and multi-agency working through the establishment of local Community Partnerships, focussing on principal towns and surrounding areas, and reflecting natural communities. This is taking a phased approach, with the team working in five pilot areas: Easingwold, Leyburn and Middleham, Ripon, Sherburn in Elmet and Thornton-le-Dale and rural hinterland.

3.4 Capacity Building

The Stronger Communities Programme continues 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 residual impact of the pandemic on income and capacity within the sector, together with concerns in relation to rising essential costs is resulting in concerns about their long-term viability and sustainability. Stronger Communities has continued to work with colleagues such as Community First Yorkshire, Two Ridings Community Foundation, The National Lottery and other partners to identify issues and concerns and develop joint responses.

4.0 BROADER STRONGER COMMUNITIES WORK

4.1 The Stronger Communities programme has been able to increasingly resume pre-pandemic work over the past twelve months, and also continues to lead on a number of large national programmes.

4.2 The range of activities the team have been leading on, or have contributed 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)

4.3 Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)

Stronger Communities has continued 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 is undertaken by North Yorkshire Together who in conjunction with the Holiday Activities and Food Coordinator, colleagues in Stronger Communities, CYPS and Public Health, and a network of locally placed clubs and community organisations, deliver a range of enriching activities over holiday periods.

Focus in 2023/24 has been on developing and improving the reach in all areas of the county, building stronger relationships with schools, and encouraging additional providers to come on board in-order to support programme delivery. There has been a particular emphasis on understanding 'non-attendances' as well as looking at Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) provision uptake, and young people's engagement with the activities available. In line with the HAF food framework, NYC's Healthy Schools Programme Manager has collaborated with environmental health to develop guidelines for FEAST providers to follow, whilst ensuring that appropriate support is in place for providers to be able to implement them where needed. The HAF partnership team are also hoping to launch a Flying High SEND Kitemark in collaboration with the NYC Youth Voice and Creative Engagement Team in 2024/25.

4.4 Household Support Fund

A fourth phase of Household Support Fund was delivered in 2023/24. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programme aimed to support those most in need with significantly rising living costs between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, with an allocation of £7,075,100.

In line with the expenditure guidelines and the agreed eligibility framework, c24,600 households across North Yorkshire received a direct award in the form of a shopping voucher

across two live windows (September 2023 and January 2024); with an average 95% redemption rate. 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), the HSF Energy Support Scheme, Money and Benefits Advice Service, Care Leavers, and 18 free or low-cost food providers across the County. An HSF Exceptional Circumstances Fund was also delivered, to support those who may have missed out on support due to circumstances beyond their control. In total, 62,817 households in North Yorkshire received support through the fourth phase of HSF.

HSF will continue for a fifth phase between 1 April and 30 September 2024; work is now underway to develop the scheme, building on the learning from previous phases.

4.5 North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF)

Stronger Communities continued to lead on the delivery of NYLAF in 2023/24, which provides practical support to those in need who are moving into or seeking to remain within the community. 13,302 applications were received by the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund last year. 89% of these applications were approved. 41% of the 1,363 rejected applications in the year, were rejected due to maximum award entitlement being met by the applicant, a further 24% of rejections were due to items expiring and or vouchers not being redeemed by the applicant.

A total of £1,519,761.21 was spent in 2023/24, 42% of which was spent on emergency food and / or energy vouchers, and 58% on standard awards¹. In keeping with previous years, the highest levels of demand are seen in Scarborough (40%), followed by Harrogate (22%), with lowest levels of demand in Richmondshire (5%).

4.6 Food Insecurity

Following the 'Food Summit' in September 2023, a partnership and engagement event to launch the findings of the collaborative food insecurity insight work undertaken in conjunction with City of York Council, three online Community of Practice sessions have taken place, focussing on place based collaborative food access models, cash/income first approaches and more than food (wrap around support available for those accessing food provision). A number of dedicated key stakeholder conversations continue to take place in relation to this work, including with regional funders, and colleagues in Public Health's 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 as they continue to develop the North Yorkshire Food Strategy.

4.7 Broader Cost of Living Activity

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

¹ Standard awards include; clothing, whitegoods, furniture, and other household items which cost more to the Scheme overall compared to food / energy vouchers despite the emergency applications making up 80% of all applications received in 23/24. 2,137 standard awards received were for beds and bedding.

The programme has also supported the development of the NYC Cost of Living Communications Campaign for a second year 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, or to NYC's Customer Service Centre by telephone as an alternative.

4.8 Homes for Ukraine Programme

The Stronger Communities team have continued to lead on Homes for Ukraine, and 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 language lessons, social events, and peer support.

In total, since the start of the scheme, 1501 Ukrainian guests have moved to North Yorkshire and of those, 463 remain in sponsored accommodation at the end of 2023/34. In addition, 372 guests, who initially arrived in North Yorkshire, have either been rematched to another Local Authority area, are renting outside of the county, or have returned to Ukraine. Of the guests who have moved on from their sponsor, 604 individuals are now living in rental properties within North Yorkshire.

In 2023/24, many families moved into, or were offered social housing through Broadacres, funded by the Local Authority Housing Fund. The houses, of which there are 25 in total, are mainly new builds located in Scarborough, Boroughbridge, Ripon, Knaresborough and Harrogate. In addition to this, families are also able to apply for social housing through the standard process.

4.9 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

Stronger Communities has continued to take the lead role in the delivery of the Communities strand of the Council's UKSPF programme. An advisory group is in place made up of public and voluntary sector partners, who are overseeing the work being progressed on the year one and two allocations, as well as planning and development work taking place on year three allocations. In 2023/24, notable progress was made in the following areas:

- The Community Grants and Village Halls and Community Buildings Grants schemes were launched and continue to be delivered.
- The Physical Activity, Sport and Active Travel Fund delivered by North Yorkshire Sport on behalf of NYC was launched in autumn 2023.
- Development of the Digital Inclusion funding offer which became available in May 2024. This will be for organisations to access capital funding, development funding and training to build their capacity.

4.10 Digital Inclusion

There is continued momentum on the strategic development of digital inclusion across North Yorkshire encompassing the three key strands of access, skills, and equipment.

In preparation for the Year 3 UKSPF funding, the stakeholder co-design phase which the team accessed funding for from the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care System

(ICS) was completed in 2023/24. This research and development will inform the coordination of the UKSPF Digital Inclusion investment programme in 2024/25 encompassing £200,000 capital infrastructure and £336,000 revenue for digital learning and skills. The ambition for the investment is to stimulate digital inclusion activity through learning, skills, resources, and volunteering, in a range of existing and new settings targeting digital and health inequalities.

Reboot North Yorkshire has continued to support digital inclusion with regular referrals into the scheme from a broad range of organisations, including from health partners, and NYC services. There has also been interest from several larger organisations who wish to donate their corporate devices to Reboot.

4.11 Health & Wellbeing

Stronger Communities has continued to work in partnership with the NHS for a third year to transform mental health services for people with a serious mental illness through building capacity within communities and the voluntary sector. The approach includes 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 over-arching aim of enabling people with a serious mental illness to live well in their communities.

The Stronger Communities team has continued to work with colleagues in Targeted Prevention (Health and Adult Services) to evolve the Stay Healthy, Independent and Connected Grants scheme which commenced on 1 April 2023.

5.0 KEY PROGRESS IN HARROGATE & KNARESBOROUGH CONSTITUENCY AREA

5.1 Community Anchor Organisations (CAOs)

Two place based organisations have been identified in the constituency area to progress the Community Anchor organisation model, these are;

- Chain Lane Community Hub in Knaresborough
- Boroughbridge Community Charity in Boroughbridge

These organisations have actively focused on developing a range of characteristics and services that enable them to work with the council as system partners.

The CAO model is about supporting very local places and there was a recognition that the larger urban centres of both Harrogate and Scarborough - which both incorporate a number of distinct neighbourhoods - would require additional research to ensure that any chosen solution can deliver maximum impact over the long term.

In Harrogate, funding was awarded to Harrogate and District Community Action (HADCA) to carry out a piece of work to identify the range of community organisations that currently operate in the town and its neighbourhoods and to assess the strength of the connections and relationships between them and their local communities. The new Localities Communities Team will continue progressing this work.

5.2 Partnership working with health partners.

Mental Health Support - The NHS programme Transforming Community Mental Health Services is directly supported by Stronger Communities Programme in the Harrogate and Rural District (HaRD). The Orb along with Community based organisations continue to in supporting partners within statutory and voluntary sector organisations to work better together, the ambition is this will lead to the creation of Wellbeing hubs across the area.

Macmillian Community Personalised Cancer Support – The development of Community Beacon information points that will be able to support the needs of those living with and beyond a cancer diagnosis. Seven organisations are participating in phase one of this project, they are attending a series of training sessions to develop their understanding of cancer, share information whilst also building relationships between community-based organisations and health teams.

5.3 Community Transport

The Stronger Communities Delivery Manager worked alongside colleagues from Integrated Passenger Transport and local partners to maintain a community transport offer across Harrogate & Knaresborough. Two solutions were sourced.

- A new Harrogate Community Transport Scheme provided by Tadcaster Volunteer Community Support Association (TVCSA) working in partnership with Harrogate Neighbours
- A new Knaresborough Community Transport Scheme provided by Chain Lane Community Hub

6.0 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS - LOCALITIES RESTRUCTURE

6.1 As part of the Council wider service restructures, the work to establish the new Localities Service structure has now completed. The new Localities Service went live on 1 May 2024 and is made up of three service teams:

- Communities (incorporating the work of the Stronger Communities Programme, voluntary and community sector funding, local partnerships, prevention, social regeneration and community resilience);
- Parish Liaison and Local Devolution (incorporating projects such as parish charter, parish liaison and engagement, service devolution pilots, community right to challenge and assets of community value); and
- Migrant Programmes (bringing together a number of existing refugee and asylum seeker programmes, Homes for Ukraine programme and other community-based support initiatives into a single team).

6.2 In addition, the programmes outlined in 4.2 above have been picked up by the new Localities Service teams and will continue to be delivered by the new service.

7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 As this is an update report, no alternative options were considered.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 No financial implications to note.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 No legal implications to note.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No equalities implications to note.

11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 No climate change implications to note.

12.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 As part of annual reporting arrangements to Area Constituency Committees, Members are asked to review and note progress made by the Stronger Communities Programme in 2023/24. In light of structural changes outlined in Section 6.1, it is recommended that in future, an update on this programme of work is encompassed within a broader annual update on Localities service activity.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) It is recommended that Members note the content of this report, outlining progress of the Stronger Communities Programme in 2023/24.
- ii) That Members agree to an annual update on the activity of the Localities service.

Rachel Joyce
Assistant Chief Executive – Local Engagement
County Hall
Northallerton
17 May 2024

Marie-Ann Jackson – Head of Localities
Liz Meade – Communities Area Manager (Central Area)

Presenter of Report – *Liz Meade* – Communities Area Manager (Central Area)