

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
RICHMONDSHIRE AREA CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE – 24 March 2021
Stronger Communities: COVID19 Social Isolation and Approach to Community Efforts

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on the Stronger Communities Programme contribution to the COVID19 Social Isolation and Approach to Community Efforts workstream, including an overview of progress made in the Richmondshire 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 support was also made available for the CSOs; this will total approximately £950K over a 12-month period. 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.

2.5 Despite the ever-changing landscape, community support infrastructure through the CSO network has remained in place throughout the last 12-month period, and will continue to be in place until at least September 2021.

3.0 Community Support Organisation Performance (2020/21)

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, primarily facilitated by approximately 95,000 volunteer hours:

- Approximately 82,000 contacts;
- 17,214 prescriptions delivered;
- 24,724 shopping deliveries made;
- 32,559 befriending calls and 22,083 phone check ins made;
- Administered and allocated 1,132 Covid19 Self Isolation Grants totalling £108,775;
- 4,402 transport requests fulfilled; and
- 31,876 meals delivered.

3.2 There have been complementary services developed to support the CSOs and community support infrastructure; this was demonstrated when CSOs started to receive an increasing number of requests for transport to hospital and medical appointments in summer 2020; particularly for those who did not have support within their own household and who were not eligible for patient transport services. A solution was developed in conjunction with Integrated Passenger Transport (IPT), utilising NYCC Fleet capacity should no other local option be viable. This referral pathway remains in place, and has recently been broadened to support vaccination appointments (as outlined in Section 4.2).

3.3 In addition to this, Stronger Communities have distributed £55,982 in Community Response Grants (March – September 2020), and £99,242 in Covid19 Community Grants (September 2020 onwards). This investment has allowed communities and charities to respond to the needs of their communities during lockdowns and 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. Over the summer period, grants were also 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. As Stronger Communities tentatively look towards recovery, the Programme will continue to offer small grants to help groups adapt existing and / or start new activities that help people regain confidence and independence in a safe and covid compliant way.

4.0 Covid19 Related Work

4.1 Defra's Local Authority Emergency Assistance Fund for Food and Essential Supplies

The Government made provision for an emergency fund of £63 million to be distributed to local authorities in England to help those who were facing financial hardship and as a result were struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. The funding was a one-off contribution for the 2020-21 financial year, and was intended to help local authorities to continue to support those people and families facing hardship over the coming months due to COVID-19.

The County Council was awarded £532,000 via the fund. In September 2020, NYCC, in consultation with the seven district councils, allocated £177,000 via 24 grant awards to further support and expand the direct provision of food for those people and families experiencing financial hardship. A second round of funding was made available in December 2020 for food banks and other food supply schemes (for example community kitchens and fridges, or meals on wheels) to support voluntary and community sector efforts over the winter months; a further 24 grants totalling £100,000 were awarded and distributed before Christmas.

In addition, £105,000 has been awarded to Citizens Advice North Yorkshire (comprising Citizens Advice Mid North Yorkshire, Citizens Advice Craven & Harrogate Districts and Citizens Advice Scarborough & District) to expand their Money and Benefits Advice Service across the County. This was in direct response to evidenced increased demand between April and July 2020, particularly from a new cohort of individuals who are presenting to services for the first time. The remaining funding has been used to extend the reach of the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF).

This investment was to complement the £1.4million that was also awarded to NYCC via the Covid19 Winter Grant, to support families and children who have been affected by the pandemic, as well as existing resources in place through the NYLAF General Financial Hardship and the aforementioned Covid19 Self-Isolation grants.

4.2 Support for the NHS Covid19 Vaccination Programme

CSOs in Ryedale, Harrogate, Hambleton and Richmondshire were approached to support the NHS Covid19 Vaccination Programme. Volunteers have been offered in the short term while longer-term arrangements are discussed; in collaboration with Community First Yorkshire, information, advice and guidance has been offered to the voluntary and community sector to ensure that key areas of consideration such as insurance were explored. Strategic conversations continue to take place at North Yorkshire and York Local Resilience Forum (NYLRF) level to establish the support requirements, and the LRF continue to review options to ensure that this can be maintained in the longer term.

Since the inception of the NHS Covid19 Vaccination Programme, there has been an increased level of requests for transport to vaccination appointments. In order to support this logistical work area, NYCC has broadened the access/transport to medical appointments referral pathway to include vaccination appointments, with the key triaging point being in locally based CSOs. Should there be no locally based solution available; CSOs can request support from NYCC Integrated Passenger Transport (IPT) should capacity permit. Details of the CSOs have been circulated via

the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) so GPs are aware of the support that is available in relation to vaccination transport.

4.3 North Yorkshire Together Activity Packs

Approximately 3,500 North Yorkshire Together Activity Packs have been distributed through Stronger Communities, CSOs, and partners to families and adults across the County over the three phases of the project in 2020/21. The packs contained a range of equipment to encourage people to remain active and increase mobility, alongside a range of resources aimed at increasing wellbeing.

4.4 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 10 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.

5.0 Planning for 2021/22

5.1 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 have been accelerated by the needs presented by Covid19 and the mobilisation of the CSOs; the third phase of evaluation with CSOs is taking place in March 2021, in conjunction with colleagues in NYCC Health & Adult Services Service Development team.

5.2 Holiday Activities and Food Programme

Stronger Communities are working with colleagues in Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) and voluntary sector partners to support the delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (funded from Department for Education grant). Acknowledging that holidays can be a pressure point for families due to increased cost, and that some children will experience 'unhealthy holidays' both nutritionally and physically, a programme to deliver nourishing food, nutritional advice and a range of enriching activities is being developed for Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays. The programme – FEAST (Food, Entertainment, Arts & Sports Together) - is being delivered in partnership with a communities and voluntary sector groups and is be coordinated by a consortia of North Yorkshire Youth, North Yorkshire Sport and Rural Arts working as North Yorkshire Together. This not only ensures that a breadth of provision can be made across the county, but it also enables the funding to be

invested directly into communities and local assets. Due to restrictions the Easter programme will be delivered remotely providing vouchers, a range of digital resources, and distribution of age appropriate holiday activity packs. Summer provision will - it is hoped – be delivered face to face across the county and North Yorkshire Together partners will work with local groups and clubs to build their capacity, and develop new groups, if required, to meet gaps in activity provision.

5.3 Reboot North Yorkshire

Working with colleagues in Technology and Change, Stronger Communities have been supporting the development of Reboot North Yorkshire. The movement is bringing together a wide range of partners and community organisations across the County, including businesses, libraries, schools, local charities and volunteers – to help provide people across North Yorkshire with IT equipment and access to the internet so they can stay connected.

Initially prioritising children and young people who need access to digital resources to support remote learning, it is anticipated that Reboot North Yorkshire will also seek to support older and vulnerable people to get online to tackle social isolation and improve their mental health and wellbeing in further phases.

6.0 **Local Area Information**

6.1 Richmondshire

Richmondshire is covered by four CSOs: The Bridge (covering Colburn, Catterick, Richmond and North Richmondshire), Leyburn Arts and Community Centre, The Upper Dales Community Partnership and Reeth and District Community Transport.

All four CSOs have successfully harnessed significant levels of volunteer support from the community by working with a combination of mutual aid and parish support groups. It is clear to see that this, in turn, has created a cultural shift, where neighbourliness and individuals' ability to ask for support, is becoming ever more commonplace.

Effective partnership working and signposting to both the wider voluntary and community sector, as well as into Local Authority services, has ensured that local volunteer capacity has been available for the most urgent food and prescription requests. In addition to this, the CSOs have expanded their telephone befriending offers to support those who are experiencing loneliness and isolation resulting from a lack of social interaction.

All CSOs have designed and adapted services in line with the needs of the local community. For example, in Swaledale it became apparent in the sub-zero weather conditions that some elderly members of the community were struggling to safely fill and carry coal buckets inside; volunteers have therefore started to offer this service, along with a range of other household chores which might otherwise be difficult or unsafe for the resident to carry out.

Due to the rural nature of the district, requests for transport to hospital and vaccination appointments have been constant. Suitable and affordable solutions have been found in all cases.

Transitional activities are now being planned, ensuring that confidence is built as we move towards recovery.

6.2 Hambleton

A proportion of Hambleton is encompassed with the Richmondshire Constituency boundary, and is covered by two CSOs: Hambleton Community Action (covering Northallerton and Bedale) and Stokesley & District Community Care Association (SDCCA). Both CSOs are established direct delivery organisations in their area, providing a range of primarily volunteer led services in order to support the needs of their local communities.

Working with local networks, partners and emerging community response groups, both CSOs have provided a core offer of community support, including shopping and prescription delivery and befriending. A number of their existing services have been expanded, or new services have been developed, in order to respond to the needs that have emerged within their localities. Examples include:

- Re-designing of support services at both CSOs (for example, respite, support and learning groups and community transport) to allow them to continue throughout the varying levels of restrictions in place;
- Partnership with local business LabMan in Stokesley to ensure that transport for those attending Covid vaccinations is fully subsidised.

As we tentatively move towards recovery, the CSOs are working with Stronger Communities to consider how they deliver transition activity in order to help build people's confidence to re-engage in their communities, particularly if they have been self-isolating and / or shielding.

Recommendations

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

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(15 March 2021)