

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
SELBY AND AINSTY AREA CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE – 9th APRIL 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 Selby and Ainsty 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 Local Community Support Organisations

Five Community Support Organisations are active across the constituency. Boroughbridge Community Care and Harrogate and District Community Action support residents in the Ainsty area. Sherburn in Elmet Community Trust support residents of Sherburn and surrounding villages in the west of Selby district, Tadcaster Volunteer Cars and Services Association support those in Tadcaster and surrounds, whilst Selby District Association for Voluntary Services covers Selby town, Barlby, Brayton, Thorpe Willoughby and the rural areas in the east and south of the district.

6.2 Spontaneous Local Activity Underpinning the Response

Whilst the Community Support Organisations have all provided much direct support to residents and continue to do so they also link to pre-existing or new local structures which manage additional local volunteers. Examples of these organisations include Parish Councils; Churches and emergency responders such as Tadcaster Community Action Group, which developed out of the Tadcaster Flood Action Group.

6.3 Additional VCSE Resources

Inevitably, some residents have experienced financial impacts from covid-19 and, as already referenced, Community Support Organisations have been able to access

covid related North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund support in such cases. However, we have been keen to ensure that residents do not become dependent on covid support but receive assistance to address any underlying financial or other welfare issues surfacing through the pandemic so Community Support Organisations refer residents into the original NYLAF scheme and / or support from Citizens Advice where this is deemed appropriate. Residents are also directed towards long standing VCSE support such as that provided by Selby District Foodbank and Harrogate and Knaresborough Foodbank. A range of new food related offers have been established. Resurrected Bites in Ainsty have changed their café offer to home deliveries; BRIGHT, Barby Region Independent Group Helpers Trust, a new charity, is working with a local pub to provide hot meals to people and Community House in Selby is hosting a new community fridge. Food providers In Ainsty (Harrogate and Knaresborough Foodbank, Boroughbridge Community Care and Resurrected Bites) are producing joint communications setting out their respective offers and 'donation needs' and circulating this information locally and to partner agencies so that residents can get help from or donate to the most appropriate group.

It is encouraging to witness new initiatives but the pandemic does provide some unique challenges to giving new or developing organisations the best guidance and assistance around governance and other issues to enable them to secure a long term future if that is what they want. Stronger Communities Delivery Managers try to contact new groups directly and encourage groups to access free support from Community First Yorkshire to support their development. However, it can be difficult for groups with a strong focus on delivery during these difficult times to prioritise this engagement, particularly when funding for covid-related activity has been relatively easy to access. Obviously, the Stronger Communities programme is a resource for the VCSE across North Yorkshire but our role is not to seek to control or impede the independent flourishing of the sector merely to support as best we can when invited. That said, the programme does have a role in helping the VCSE to maximise benefit to local communities, particularly in the spaces where funding has become more challenging for us eg in adult social care so we are keen to encourage new groups which could play a long term role in the count.

6.4 The current situation

Covid infections and rates are generally falling across the constituency although Selby district persists at the top end of the County statistics. That said, the calls upon the Community Support Organisations to access food and prescriptions have fallen to very low levels. We know that local volunteers are continuing to provide longer-term assistance for some individuals which tends to reflect a need for befriending. Interestingly, Age UK Selby District Selby District have indicated that part of their reason for closing (from September 2021) is due to a reduced demand for their services which they see in part as relating to the local support being accessed because of covid-19.

Selby District AVS, in particular, is providing a lot of phone contact for individuals requiring low-level mental health support and guidance for other local groups about re-opening etc. This reflects their pre-covid work and in a similar way both they and

Tadcaster Volunteer Cars and Services Association are increasing their community transport activity getting people to hospital, GP, vaccination appointments etc. Sherburn in Elmet Community Trust have developed a very strong relationship with the Sherburn Visiting Scheme who have expanded their Meals on Wheels Service and are also community transport providers.

Some local groups, such as the Tadcaster Community Action Group, are gradually standing down as volunteers return to work and demand reduces. The Community Support Organisations have retained links with local groups and are encouraging them to identify any individuals in need of longer term support who may require referral into the County Council via the Customer Service Centre or who require the Community Support Organisation to pick up support for a short period whilst society, we hope, opens up again.

6.5 Moving forward

Stronger Communities Delivery Managers have been in conversation with their Community Support Organisations and new agreements to take us to the end of September are being signed. The Phase 4 agreements have an added emphasis on supporting residents, particularly those who have been shielding, to re-engage in their communities as this becomes possible as well as identifying local need to help plan recovery support.

The impending closure of Age UK Selby District is clearly part of the conversation in the Selby part of the constituency. Both Sherburn Visiting Scheme and Tadcaster Volunteer Cars and Services Association are well placed to meet any additional local need whilst Selby District AVS also has the experience and skills to provide support directly within Selby town and by stimulating and supporting the revival of local groups in the rural east and south of the district. Community First Yorkshire's network for those running community buildings will also provide a platform for responding to this opportunity to respond to local need.

The needs of young people will also be significant. The Barn in Tadcaster, working with the Bridge Youth Project and others, has been very active in meeting those needs through covid and will continue to do so. A number of initiatives are underway to support young people's mental health with Brighter Futures and the Big Community-tea looking at this area. Young people are also set to benefit from the Kickstart programme with opportunities to gain work experience being made available by Selby District AVS, Selby Big Local and Tadcaster Community Library.

The Selby Health Matters Programme has benefitted from much stronger links to the Vale of York CCG and mental health is likely to be a particular focus for this group.

Right across the constituency the general desire for people to help their local communities during Covid 19 has led to a substantial increase in volunteers coming forward. A significant focus for 21/22 is to build on this opportunity and to encourage new volunteers in particular to move to into long-term, sustained volunteer activity in their community where possible. Alongside this it would be good to see the local

VCSE providing short-term or one-off volunteering options for those people who cannot commit long-term but are still keen to be involved where they can.

Recommendations

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

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30th March 2021