

North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee

13 September 2021

Stronger Communities Programme Update:

Report of Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships and Communities

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the work of Stronger Communities. The report will focus on the work the team has undertaken to support people and communities during the pandemic and outline the on-going work of the Community Support Organisations (CSOs) and volunteers. It will also highlight future opportunities for the CSOs and other emerging Stronger Communities projects and priorities.

2. Background

- 2.1 The network of CSOs was established at the start of the pandemic outbreak supporting residents to self-isolate. Volunteers have also supported the NHS with both testing and vaccination programmes.
- 2.2 As part of both the Council's – and the Local Resilience Forum's - pandemic recovery planning a number of priorities have been agreed for further investigation of which the retention and longer term sustainability of CSOs is one.

3. Community Support Organisations

- 3.1 Since April 2020 NYCC has been working alongside 31 VCS organisations who working together formed 23 Community Support Organisations (CSOs) across the county to support people during the pandemic.
- 3.2 The CSOs have provided a range of practical help to people to enable them to self-isolate. This support has been both long term for clinically vulnerable or older people and short term for those who have had contact with someone who has tested positive and were required to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.
- 3.3 As the pandemic evolved over the past 15 months the support offered was able to flex and evolve alongside the changing needs and support requirements. CSOs offered additional services including transport to medical appointments – including vaccinations - and supporting the NHS with stewarding volunteers for both testing and vaccination centres. Harrogate CSOs in particular, with support from Stronger Communities, secured funding from the Harrogate Primary Care Network to provide volunteer coordination at the Harrogate Showground vaccination site.
- 3.4 CSOs are also supporting a range of recovery activities as part of both the NYCC internal recovery planning activities and are also highlighted as being a priority in the NYLRF Humanitarian work-stream recovery plans, in helping to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on people's physical, financial and mental well-being by supporting people to regain their independence and confidence as restrictions are lifted.

3.5 CSO Operating Model

The model established is very flexible: the 'ask' of the VCS organisations at the start of the outbreak was simple and clear 'to provide a single point of contact for people in their locality to access a range of practical support to self-isolate'. The organisations were encouraged to use their local assets and networks to determine how the support would be delivered on the ground.

3.6 Some CSOs provided the majority of the support themselves; some formed a consortia across a number of charities in their area with one being the single point of contact; others co-ordinated and supported a network of local providers and smaller grass root charities across their localities. The depth and integration of CSOs in their local networks is impressive, most work with at least 3, typically 10 and in one case up to 37 different individual or types of organisation (over 150 in total) across health, care, mutual aid, food poverty, faith, education, community transport, employment services, hardship, parish councils, housing association and business sectors. In total, 31 VCS organisations have been supported by core funding to provide the 23 CSOs as in some areas 2 or more organisations have formed a single point of contact consortia.

3.7 This flexibility has been cited in the evaluation of CSOs that is being undertaken as extremely important, enabling and empowering CSOs to optimise the use of their local resources and community assets.

"We have felt supported and trusted to get on and do what our community needs to get through the initial response and since then to enable us to be able to continue to offer additional support as we identified areas that were lacking."

4. **CSO Evaluation and Evolution to Community Anchors**

4.1 The CSO model is being evaluated by SkyBlue, the Stronger Communities learning partner. The success of the CSO model as an effective, agile, community based response during the pandemic has been recognised across the authority and by partners. Their level of performance represents good value for money – see Annex A. Using proxy national volunteering values (the UK Median Hourly Rate) the financial value of the volunteer hours alone is over £2m for a total annual investment in 2020/21 of just under £940k. Innovative evaluation of just one of the CSO's performance (Boroughbridge Community Care) estimates that in fulfilling its role in 2020-21 alone, it has generated £2 million of social value (£13.59 per £1 invested) and has significantly mitigated the negative wellbeing effects of the pandemic on its community population.

4.2 The evaluation headlines identified during the evaluation include:

- CSOs are locally rooted, motivated organisations with a passion for supporting their communities.
- Support from Stronger Communities Delivery Managers acting as relationship managers was critical to their success and scored 96% for being very appropriate.
- Over 9 in 10 said the experience of being a CSO had strengthened their relationship with, and trust in or by NYCC.
- The level of financial grant from NYCC to fulfil their CSO role scored 87% very appropriate / appropriate with 9% rating it as adequate.
- CSOs report many benefits including being able to reach, understand and support new (vulnerable) members of their community, learning more about local needs, raising their local profile and collaborating more with others.

- Most but not all have an appetite to sustain most of the CSO functions amongst beyond the grant period and over 80% have a strong appetite to develop into Community Anchor Organisations.
- Across 22 adult social care, wellbeing and prevention services canvassed, there is strong interest from CSOs to build their capacity and track record providing support is in place from Stronger Communities in terms of both helping them strengthen their infrastructure and range of services and 19 wish to develop their credentials further in order to be in a position to deliver local authority contracted prevention services.
- Almost all CSOs wish to continue working with others to share expertise, strengths and experience; and wish to shape future services by actively engaging with their community giving voice to what matters to them locally.

4.3 As part of the evaluation, which has been undertaken with the participation of the HAS Service Development Team as part of their wider transforming commissioning work, we tested the level of interest, ambition and capability for CSOs to evolve into place based Community Anchors Organisations. The Anchors would have a broader role, being both a community hub - providing a range of place based services and activities (similar to those of the CSO) and also a more strategic role providing strong local community leadership, building local capacity and where appropriate working alongside public services.

4.4 An update on the Corporate Volunteering Project is attached at Annex B.

5. Strategic Alignment

5.1 To date the CSOs have been funded as pandemic response organisations using the national funding made available for this purpose. However, there are a number of short and long term benefits of both retaining and building further on this model.

5.2 Short Term

As the county moves between response and recovery it is essential that the Council's Outbreak Management arrangements retain an effective and comprehensive support service for people who are self-isolating and for those who have lost confidence and experienced a deterioration in physical, financial and mental well-being as a result of the lockdown restrictions and need support to reclaim their independence.

5.3 This ambition has been highlighted in a range of internal and external recovery plans including: NYLRF, NYCC Corporate, HAS, CYPS, NYCCG, VoYCCG, Districts.

5.4 Long Term

In addition to the pandemic related role, the evolution of CSOs who are interested in to Community Anchors also aligns to a range of existing or emerging strategies:

- UK Shared Prosperity agenda
- Levelling Up our Communities: Danny Kruger MP report
- Health Equity in England - Marmot Review 10 years on
- NHS Long Term Plan – focus on prevention
- West Yorkshire Care Partnership & Humber Coast & Vale ICS focus on Prevention and working alongside communities
- Devolution and unitary government proposals around community networks
- Stronger Communities strategy – People, Places & Power

- HAS Transformation Programme
- CYPS review of Early Help services
- Public Health – review of Healthy Child Programme (Growing Community Capacity is a key strategic outcome)

6. Financial

6.1 The 23 CSOs (made up of 31 VCS organisations) have received core grant funding since 1 April 2020. These arrangements will continue until the end of March 2022.

6.2 The average investment per CSO has been £3400 per month. This has been financed through both the national Shielding Grant from MHCLG and the Covid Practical Support ring-fenced grant from DHSC. There is some variation across districts. This largely reflects the differing levels of need and the number of VCS organisations that make up the CSOs. In some localities the CSO is a single charity serving a market town and its hinterland whereas in others, notably in Ryedale and Scarborough, the CSO has been formed by a number of charities working collaboratively as a CSO.

6.3 Funding split by districts

2020/21

District	Number of CSOs (individual VCS orgs)	Total Cost	Average per CSO
Craven	3 (5)	126,500	42,167
Hambleton	4 (5)	132,500	33,125
Harrogate	6 (7)	184,800	30,800
Richmondshire	4 (5)	129,000	32,250
Ryedale	1 (2)	72,325	72,325
Scarborough	2 (5)	177,000	88,500
Selby	3 (3)	114,000	38,000
	23 (32)	936,125	

2021/22 – 6 months April – September

District	Number of CSO (VCS)	Total Cost (6 months)	Annual cost	Average per CSO
Craven	3 (3)	36,000	72,000	24,000
Hambleton	4 (4)	66,000	132,000	33,000
Harrogate	6 (7)	93,000	186,000	31,000
Richmondshire	4 (4)	60,000	120,000	30,000
Ryedale	1 (2)	38,250	76,500	76,500
Scarborough	2 (5)	87,000	174,000	87,000
Selby	3 (3)	60,000	120,000	40,000
	23 (28)	440,250	880,500	

6.4 This regular income has ensured that VCS organisations could continue to operate particularly when they were struggling or unable to generate any earned income themselves. For some CSOs this financial investment has been a lifeline and has prevented them from closing completely during the pandemic.

6.5 The funding has enabled them to stay open throughout the pandemic, retain/take on staff to coordinate, train and deploy volunteers, ensure there is a single point of contact for

referrals, process North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund applications and develop covid safe practices and procedures on behalf of smaller local community groups and charities in their localities.

- 6.6 As restrictions eased the focus from Stronger Communities has been to work alongside both the CSOs and health and social care services to support people to re-gain their independence. However, it is worth noting that there is still anxiety and a loss of confidence from some of the county's more vulnerable residents and support is still being provided to them (circa 5000 in June 2021).

7. Other Stronger Communities activities

- 7.1 In addition to the work of the CSOs, the Stronger Communities has also delivered a range of other pandemic and non-pandemic related programmes over the last 12 months.
- 7.2 Pandemic Related
Managed the DEFRA investment for food support and financial advice through 3 rounds of community grants supporting food banks and other food and meal delivery services.
- 7.3 Supported over 200 small community groups to run services and activities for local people in their community in Covid safe and compliant ways.
- 7.4 Delivered 12,000 activity packs to children eligible for free school meals as part of the Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food Programme. Stronger Communities are leading a partnership of voluntary sector partners (North Yorkshire Sport, North Yorkshire Youth and Rural Arts) and a range of local delivery partners to deliver 46 summer holiday clubs under the branding FEAST.
- 7.5 Non-pandemic related
Managing over £200k investment from NHS to support suicide prevention and mental well-being projects.
- 7.6 Developing opportunities for community involvement in services for children and young people as part of a review of early help services and also the re-commissioning of the Healthy Child Programme.
- 7.7 Community engagement activities relating to the pilot of 5G capacity in Richmondshire.
- 7.8 Launch of Reboot North Yorkshire – a recycling and digital support programme to increase digital inclusion. This programme offers re-cycled equipment to both children and families and also older people to help them get on-line. As well as equipment we are also recruiting a network of Digital Buddy volunteers.

8. Future Opportunities

- 8.1 In addition to supporting the recovery activities, discussions are also underway regarding options for the long term sustainable retention of CSOs.
- 8.2 As detailed in 5.4 above, there are significant benefits in retaining investment in CSOs beyond the end of this financial year in order to enable the development of those willing CSOs into Anchors – or to identify possible new potential Anchors if appropriate - and to identify and secure long term sustainable financial models.

- 8.3 There are a number of emerging options to transition Anchors away from a reliance on grants to one of a mixed funding economy that includes social care and prevention contracts, NHS contracts and earned income.
- 8.4 A number of HAS contracts are scheduled to be re-commissioned in 2022, discussions are taking place to better understand the role of Anchors (the CSOs) in responding to these opportunities. This will potentially reduce the grant burden for those who are in a place to successfully secure contracts.
- 8.5 Selby Well-being and Prevention Pilot
Due to a provider withdrawing from a contract in Selby recently, the Well-being and Prevention budget allocation for Selby district has been re-purposed for the remaining 12 months of the contract. The budget is being used instead to run a 12 month pilot using a competitive grants process with 3 localities identified that mirror the CSO footprints. Encouragingly all three CSOs submitted applications and have been successful. There is the potential to extend this pilot to the whole budget next year.
- 8.6 Discussions are also underway with both CYPS (Early Help) and the Healthy Child Programme to understand what the potential role of Anchors may be to help grow community grass roots provision to support both programmes. This will build on the Grow and Learn school readiness pilot operating in Scarborough and Ryedale.
- 8.7 It is likely that some core investment through grants will continue to be needed over the medium to long term in order to develop the capabilities and capacity of CSOs/Anchors. This is highlighted as a priority in the Stronger Communities developing strategy – People, Places and Power.
- 8.8 Withdrawal of or a significant reduction in investment over the next two years could result in missing the opportunities that have been created through the pandemic response to further strengthen community resilience and add value to health and social care systems and delivery of services.

9. Risks

9.1 Return to pandemic response

- With the ongoing uncertainty in relation to the trajectory of the pandemic there is a risk that there is a need to return to *response* mode during the winter. Retention of CSOs through the winter will ensure a resilience community support offer is in place if needed.
- However, a return to *response* will slow down the ambition to evolve CSOs in to Anchors.

9.2 Legal and procurement processes

- In order to open up more opportunities to the VCS to benefit from public sector investment through devolved services, there will be a need to review procurement and legal processes and risk tolerances.
- As part of the Recovery working group this has been identified as a priority action.

9.3 Capability and Capacity of VCS

- The evaluation of the CSO response revealed varying levels of ambition, confidence and capacity across the CSOs. In order to ensure that the ambitions around an

evolution to Anchors aligns to strategic and investment opportunities support will need to be in place to facilitate the development.

- This is highlighted in the Stronger Communities People, Places and Power strategy and a support platform is being proposed.

9.4 Impact measurement

- Discussions with HAS commissioners and CSOs reveal a desire to make a difference, but there is more work to do in order to develop an outcomes framework that is proportionate, flexible and yet rigorous enough to enable the investment to be measured in agreed ways.
- There is a risk that too rigid a framework will alienate the VCS sector participants whilst a loose framework will induce a nervousness amongst commissioning and procurement teams. Co-produced learning will mitigate this risk.

10. Next Steps

10.1 In order to consolidate the work that has taken place during the pandemic by communities and voluntary organisations and to further develop the opportunities for greater involvement of communities and volunteers in the delivery of services, the Stronger Communities programme is shaping its future strategy (People, Places and Power) upon three core building blocks: Growing Community Capacity, Narrowing the Gap (in particular those around health inequalities) and Place Based Social Action.

10.2 It is suggested that a report is brought to a future meeting of this committee to outline the draft strategy, inviting Members consideration of the short and long term priorities.

11. Recommendations

11.1 It is recommended that:

- a) Members note the work of the Stronger Communities programme during the pandemic and the future priorities and ambitions outlined in the report.
- b) A further report is brought to a future meeting of the Committee to consider the priorities for the Stronger Communities People, Places & Power Strategy.

Report Author

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24 August 2020

Appendices:

Annex A – CSO Model Evaluation

Annex B – Corporate Volunteering Project Update