

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

North Area Council Meeting:

13th November 2023

Agenda Item: 7

Report of North Area Council
Manager

North Area Council Connecting Communities Grant Extension

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To update members on the contract extension arrangements for the Stronger Communities Grant funded programme.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

2.1 Members confirm their decision to continue the funding for two providers of the Connecting Communities Grant programme at a total combined value of £75,000 for a period of 12 months. (Age UK - £40,875.00, DIAL Barnsley - £34,125.00)

3. Background

Having noted the success of the Stronger Communities Grant funded projects which have been delivered throughout 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21; but reviewing the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic it was agreed at the Area Council Meeting on the 19th July 2021 that the North Area would run a new grant opportunity Connecting Communities Grant from December 2021 to March 2024.

The NAC Connecting Communities Grant was established as a grants programme totalling £100,000 per annum, initially for a two-year period to address loneliness and isolation in the North Area. Applicants could bid for up to £40,000 per annum. The grant is aimed at developing the capacity of community groups and organisations, social enterprises and not for profit organisations, with a strong emphasis on legacy. This build on the Stronger Communities Grant 2021/22, where the Panel particularly welcomed bids that supported communities with recovery from Covid-19.

Aims and Objectives of the Connecting Communities Grant Fund:

- Reduce loneliness and isolation
- Increase the confidence of individuals
- Improve the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals
- Re-connect communities

Following a market engagement event that helped to shape the final grant criteria, the grant opportunity was advertised at the end of September 2021 and the final date for submission was the 22nd October 2021. A total of 9 applications were received before the deadline totalling £615,710.39.

Stage one moderation took place on the 1st November and 4 organisations were invited back to present their projects on the 8th November.

The Wards were represented by the following Councillors.

Darton East Cllr Steve Hunt

Darton West Cllr Trevor Cave

Old Town Cllr Clive Pickering (no evaluation scores received)

St Helen's Cllr Jenny Platts

4. Projects running during the initial 2 years of the programme

4.1. The scoring evaluation matrix provided a robust qualitative and quantitative basis upon which to identify suitable projects. The inclusion of the Five Ways to Wellbeing in the scoring criteria helped the Grant Panel understand how the North Area Funding contributes to the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. Three projects were successful.

The total allocated amount for these 3 projects was £186,766.44.

- Age UK Barnsley – North Area Social Inclusion Service - £79,600.20
- DIAL Barnsley – Connection Hubs - £66,450.00
- Reds in the Community – Reds Connect - £40,716.24

5. Grant Review Process

5.1. At the Grant Review Workshop on the 31st August 2023 the grant panel reviewed the providers delivery; their performance and considered if the North Area was receiving good value for money. The Area Manager highlighted that it would not be possible to continue commissioning the whole programme that is currently funded by the North Area Council during 2024/25 because this would exceed the budget available. Therefore decisions are needed to reduce expenditure.

5.2. Due to a change in elected member representation the composition of the panel now includes the following members:

Darton East	Cllr Steve Hunt
Darton West	Cllr Trevor Cave
Old Town	Cllr Clive Pickering
St Helen's	Cllr Neil Wright

In addition, the following Councillors attended:
Cllr Leech (Area Chair), Cllr Newing, Cllr Lofts, Cllr Tattersall

5.3. In summary the Grant Panel expressed that they:

- Would like to see more numerical data from the monitoring reports.
- Wished to see more demographic information provided for each project.
- Requested the KPI information for the three projects
- Liked the weekly timetable which provides an overview of engagement opportunity and would like to use it to help promote the provision (the Area Manager intends to double check the information with the providers prior to wider distribution)
- Requested that a Steering Group is introduced, similar to the Anti-Poverty Steering Group.

5.4. The Grant Panel concluded that they are receiving good value for money from two providers. For one of the providers, they requested that the provider adapt their offer for the remainder of the grant period to attract additional participants.

5.5. A discussion took place regarding the continuation of the grant opportunity. Options discussed:

- 5.5.1. Discontinue the grant funding opportunity.
- 5.5.2. Extend the existing grant agreements
- 5.5.3. Extend the grant agreements of the providers who have delivered best value for money
- 5.5.4. Re-advertise the grant opportunity with existing aims and objectives.
- 5.5.5. Re-advertise the grant opportunity with revised aims and objectives.

5.6. The preferred option was option 5.5.3. The grant envelope cannot be increased at this time. Providers will need to be requested to adapt provision accordingly.

5.7. On the 11th September the Area Council agreed a further 12 months of intervention by two providers.

This will enable:

- **Age UK to continue to deliver their project from December 2023 – November 2024 at a value of £40,875.00**
 - Overall aim is to reduce the current level of social isolation and loneliness in people aged over 50 in the North Area. We will do this by:
 - Developing and supporting personalised plans and support to enable individuals to tackle their social isolation.
 - Developing community responses to provide innovative solutions to barriers to inclusion and involving local volunteers.
 - Working with a wide range of partner agencies to increase the number of sustainable community activity opportunities available within the North Area
 - Apply Age Friendly principles to increase involvement of older people in community development and ensuring their full social value is appreciated.

- **DIAL Barnsley to continue to deliver their ‘Connect Together’ project from March 2024 – February 2025, at a value of £34,125.00**
 - Support individuals, especially those with long term health conditions or disabilities, to recover from the longer-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic by re connecting them with their community through the creation of a weekly hub providing opportunities for people to meet, share and learn.

 - Building on the proven successful Happy Café model (both national and in the north area) the hub will deliver a varied programme of activities and events and provide opportunities for increasing social capital through volunteering and establishing a concept of membership amongst participants.

5.8. Due to the delayed start at the beginning of the programme the Reds in the Community will continue to deliver until the end of June 2024.

5.9. The Panel advised that they re-evaluate early in 2024/25 when the financial position was updated and decide if option 5.5.5 was viable dependant on the needs of the community.

6. Budget Constraints & Community Capacity Building

6.1. This programme was advertised with legacy as a key priority. The Area Manager has met with the providers for the quarterly monitoring meetings and emphasised to the providers that it is unlikely that the funding opportunity will be advertised again. Therefore it is vital that all three organisations dedicate resources to build capacity with the groups they are working with, aiming to recruit and empower volunteers. It is hoped that at least one group will be capable of self-sustaining when the social isolation workers withdraw.

7. Risks

7.1. This is a particularly challenging at a time when social isolation worker are reporting that many people have not bounced back from psycho-social impact of Covid-19 and people are struggling with the Cost of Living Crisis.

8. Next steps

8.1. At the time of writing the grant extension agreements have been prepared with the support of BMBC Legal Services, have been signed off by the Assistant Director of Communities and are due to be signed by all remaining parties.

8.2. The Area Manager recommends that the Area Council re-evaluate any of the commissioning budget in early 2024/25 when the full costings for 2023/24 have been reconciled and consider if there is the opportunity for any further social isolation work to be undertaken, balancing budget and need.

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Date:

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