

North East Derbyshire District Council

Cabinet

24 November 2022

Development of a Community Outreach Service

Report of Councillor Cupit, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

Classification: This report is public.

Report By: Samantha Bentley, Environmental Health Service Manager

Contact Officer: As above.

PURPOSE / SUMMARY

As part of the Council's response to the cost of living crisis, the proposal is to develop a Community Outreach Service, which will deliver individual support to residents on maximising income, making referrals for debt management, advising and assisting with fuel debt, general budgeting and assistance with form filling and accessing services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To develop a Community Outreach Service for residents of North East Derbyshire District Council.
2. To create two Community Outreach Worker posts, as 2 year fixed term contracts at Grade 7. Should recruitment be unsuccessful, then one or both posts may be delivered by an external provider via contract. Posts to be fully funded by the Better Care Fund (BCF) allocation.

Approved by the Portfolio Holder – Cllr Cupit, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services

IMPLICATIONS

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details:

On Behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection):

Yes

No

Details:

On Behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Staffing: Yes

No

Details:

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

Decision Information	
Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: NEDDC: Revenue - £100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £250,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i>	No
Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	No
District Wards Significantly Affected	None
Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cabinet <input type="checkbox"/> SMT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes Details: The Deputy Leader has been consulted on the proposals in this report.

Links to Council Plan priorities, including Climate Change, Equalities, and Economics and Health implications.

The key Council Plan priorities delivered through Community Outreach would be: Protecting the most vulnerable in our community and helping communities address local issues and concerns.

REPORT DETAILS

1 Background

- 1.1 As the well-publicised cost of living crisis takes hold, this proposal aims to equip the Local Authority to respond in the most effective way possible, by providing direct support and advice to residents in need of help.
- 1.2 Organisations are reporting that the demand for advice and support is growing. Citizens Advice Bureau at a recent energy conference reported that the current demand for energy advice is beyond anything they have ever experienced. The debt charity 'Step Change' have said that during August this year, they experienced their highest ever levels of debt advice requests. 22% of these clients cited cost of living as a cause of their debt, yet previously this cause was cited by only 4% to 5%. In addition, at the same conference, the organisation Christians Against Poverty, reported that the demand for fuel vouchers was at their usual winter levels during July this year.
- 1.3 An existing Community Outreach Service is delivered in the Bolsover District Council area and is a well-established function, managed by the Joint Environmental Health Service. There are two Community Outreach Workers covering the whole of Bolsover District. The posts are on the establishment as revenue funded posts. The delivery focusses on the following themes: -
- Support to ensure residents are receiving the financial help available
 - Help with budgeting to reflect residents' individual circumstances
 - Referral to debt advice agencies
 - Support in tackling food and fuel poverty
 - Help to deal with letters and forms
 - Referral to specialist agencies to meet the resident's needs
 - Help with improving physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
 - Close working with partner agencies to support families in need of additional support and interventions

Whilst the service is flexible to the needs of residents in need of help and support, the demand for the service has predominantly been around advice and support for financial assistance.

- 1.4 The Bolsover Community Outreach Service has experienced an increase in requests for service. In the year 2019/20 (pre-covid lockdowns) the service handled 450 cases (with multiple interventions per case). In the year 2021/22 there were 599 cases (a 33% increase on 2019/20) and by quarter 2 this year, they have already handled 371 cases, indicating a further increase in this year. It should be noted that no additional marketing or advertising has been done, due to the finite existing capacity and ability to meet demand. Each case can be very detailed and therefore involve many hours' worth of assistance, with multiple visits and interventions.
- 1.5 The links between housing and health are widely understood. A Community Outreach Service is ultimately aiming to assist our residents to live or remain in

a safe and healthy home, and to assist their overall health and wellbeing. It is of course anticipated that with the increasing crisis, the impact on our resident's mental health will increase also. It is therefore important that outreach support is provided and that appropriate referrals are made.

- 1.6 The existing Community Outreach Service delivered in Bolsover is very well integrated with the range of other council services, as well as external organisations. The strong links mean that cases are easily cross referred, ensuring the customer receives a wide suite of interventions and support, as opposed to a narrow, focussed intervention which deals with only finite matters. The attached case studies demonstrate the depth and breadth of interventions and support.
- 1.7 The close integration is also demonstrated by the fact that many cases are shared with other teams in Environmental Health across the wider housing and public health functions. In particular, the Housing Assistance Coordinator role, which delivers specialist support around energy efficiency and fuel poverty.
- 1.8 As a shared service, Environmental Health has valuable experience in this approach to service delivery, hence it being appropriate to expand on an already successful and established delivery arrangement.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

- 2.1 To develop a Community Outreach Service in the NEDDC area as an extension to the service already delivered by Environmental Health.
- 2.2 To fund the workers using the Better Care Fund (BCF) allocation, for which permission has been sought. Due to the funding source, it is not possible to obtain permanent funding and so the proposal is to create two posts funded by the BCF, initially for 2 years. The posts will be Grade 7 at £33,461.84 including salary on costs. The total cost for two years will therefore be in the region of £134,000 plus mileage costs and subject to pay awards.
- 2.3 The service will focus on the needs of residents and any advice or assistance we can provide around financial hardship and the impact of the cost of living crisis. Although the demand will inevitably be around the cost of living and financial difficulties, the services will include: -
 - Support to ensure residents are receiving the financial help available
 - Help with budgeting to reflect the residents individual circumstances
 - Referral to debt advice agencies
 - Support in tackling food and fuel poverty
 - Help to deal with letter and forms
 - Referral to specialist agencies to meet the resident's needs
 - Help with improving physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
 - Close working with partner agencies to support families in need of additional support and interventions

2.4 Community Outreach will not only act as a sign-posting service, but will also provide direct assistance and support to residents, helping with form filling and helping to maximise income.

3 Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 To provide a response to the national cost of living crisis which is within the remit of Local Authority functions.

3.2 To make use of available funding to deliver positive outcomes against shared housing and public health priorities.

3.3 To complement existing Local Authority services and provide a wider range of interventions, additional to signposting alone.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 Whilst to do nothing is clearly an option, the reason for rejection is that there is an existing service to build upon, with available funding to support a temporary service provision.

4.2 The establishment of a service with permanent funding has been rejected due to the growth in establishment costs and the revenue implications.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Appendix No	Title
1	Bolsover BDC Community Outreach Case Studies.
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet you must provide copies of the background papers)	

Appendix 1: Bolsover BDC Community Outreach Case Studies

Case One.

'Sarah' was referred to the Community Outreach Service from social care when she was three months pregnant: at the time she was homeless, unemployed and sofa surfing with a friend with two small children who was also receiving support from social care.

This was an entirely inappropriate situation for both women and meant that social care were very concerned for the wellbeing of all the children involved, Sarah had previously had a child removed from her care and was a known substance misuser.

Sarah was not receiving any DWP benefits and had no income at all, meaning that she was unable to buy food for herself or her dog or to make any contribution to the house where she was staying. The first action that Community Outreach addressed was helping Sarah to apply for ESA (Employment support allowance) which would give her an amount of money to live on, Community Outreach also helped her to complete a Bolsover District council Housing application as well as offering her support and guidance in looking for privately rented accommodation.

Unfortunately, Sarah was unable to find suitable accommodation before her baby was born, and due to this her baby was removed by social care shortly after his birth. At this point, Sarah's social worker referred Sarah back to the Community Outreach Service with the hope that given support to improve her financial and housing situation, Sarah could help to improve her situation to the extent of gaining back custody of her son. At this point, Community Outreach worked alongside BDC housing department to ensure that Sarah was offered a suitable flat that was appropriate for her needs. Community Outreach ensured that Sarah had applied for housing benefit. Assistance was given to Sarah to help her manage her finances before her son could be considered for return to her care.

Sarah rang the Community Outreach a month after this to say that she was not coping financially, this was due to the flat being a two bedroom property. Sarah was under occupying and was not receiving all of the rent. She now had rent arrears, and other debts.

Payment plans were arranged for her to pay her council tax, rent arrears, TV licence and her water rates. Sarah had made good progress with these, making payments to address them, however she needed guidance on suitable amounts to pay to make all the household payments manageable.

A Discretionary Housing Payment was applied for to help meet Sarah's under occupancy fee which she had to pay until her son returned to her care. This would stop her rent arrears increasing and she could concentrate on reducing these.

Sarah's son was returned to her when he was 6 months old and Community Outreach helped her to ensure that all child related benefits were put in place. The

Service also applied for a Derbyshire discretionary fund for carpets and other essential items, and this was successful. To ensure that Sarah stayed on top of her finances, she worked with Community Outreach to do a personal budget plan which would allow her to stay on top of all her bills. Sarah had surplus income at the end of every week which she expressed would be spent on any extra essential items for herself or Nathan and she would look to saving for the future. We also discussed Sarah's desire to further her education, prepare her CV and look for a career. Since this intervention Sarah has kept to payment plans set up for her and fully cooperated at every meeting, asking for help if she needs it. She continues to keep custody of her son.

Case Two.

'Carol' was referred to the Community Outreach Service from the DCC multi agency team as her teenage grandson had recently moved in with her due to a breakdown in family relationships and was NEET (Not in education, employment or training). Community Outreach went to see Carol originally to do a benefit check and ensure that child benefit and child tax were being claimed, they weren't so Community Outreach ensured that these were applied for at the first engagement with the client, but it also became apparent that Carol was struggling due to severe arthritis and COPD and was unaware that she was able to claim PIP (personal independence payment) due to these disabilities.

Community Outreach helped Carol to apply for PIP and at this point Carol disclosed that she was not coping financially and had had her housing and council tax benefit suspended due to not reporting a change in circumstance. As a result she was now in arrears with both her rent and council tax. Community Outreach rang BDC benefits to find out what documents needed to be produced and told Carol exactly what steps she needed to follow in order to have her benefits reinstated. Even though, her benefits were put back in place, this lady now had rent arrears so Community Outreach mediated with the landlord to help to facilitate a payment plan which would be manageable. This was done with Carol's input into a personal budget plan which clearly showed her how she could manage her finances.

The PIP application was successful which allowed Carol to help manage her household finances more effectively. Carol's grandson is now in an educational package and so is no longer NEET.