



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**



Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1 February 2024

Report of Councillor Rhea Rayside,
Cabinet Member for People and
Communities

Council in the Community – Outreach update

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on two outreach initiatives that were instigated in 2023, namely Council in the Community and SK Funding Workshops. This report provides an overview of both initiatives, their impact and outlines future plans for such community engagement.

Recommendation

In considering the report, it is recommended Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Notes the content of this report and that further updates on six monthly basis will be provided as part of reporting against the Community Engagement and Development Strategy Action Plan.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication? No

What are the relevant corporate priorities? • Healthy and strong communities

Which wards are impacted? All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 The financial implications arising from these initiatives are contained within existing budgetary levels. The report confirms that the most cost efficient and effective methods of customer access should be explored in order to ensure value for money to the taxpayer.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Completed by: Mandy Braithwaite, Legal Executive

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 South Kesteven District Council's Corporate Plan (2020-2023) had creating healthy and strong communities as a priority. The aim being to enable residents, working with partners, to develop strong networks of support and maintain strong communities.
- 2.2 During 2023 the Community Engagement Team developed two outreach projects: one at the request of a newly elected Member and one at the request of the voluntary and community sector.
- 2.3 This report provides background to both initiatives, an overview of what has been achieved and proposed future plans.

Community Outreach - Council in the Community

- 2.4 Following feedback from representatives from the community it was proposed that the Council pilot an initiative that focused on establishing a mobile team of officers to facilitate drop-in sessions for residents. The request was made as it was considered that some sections of the community had difficulty accessing face to face services in order to make enquiries and carry out business with the Authority.
- 2.5 Although there was no evidence to support this concern, it was proposed to trial a community outreach programme that would be held in a rural and urban setting to test the need and to explore the effectiveness of 'taking the Council to the people' for every-day interactions.
- 2.6 It was further determined that, based on high demand areas of customer contact, the first session should focus on topics such as Council Tax, Benefits, Housing (social and private sector), Antisocial Behaviour and Cost of Living support. Subsequent events would require input from the Ward member(s) on the provision of information specific to their local area where issues had been raised to them by residents.
- 2.7 To date, two events have taken place. The first, in Bourne, had eight officers in attendance from community engagement, housing, cost of living and revenues and benefits. The event attracted twenty-one visitors including eight elected Members. The event was advertised through SKDC's social media channels and with posters and flyers. Support was sought from housing colleagues and from community engagement. No queries were presented relating to cost of living or benefits.
- 2.8 The second event took place in December and was held, at the request of the elected Member in Belvoir Ward.
- 2.9 The elected Member shared with officers a Dashboard outlining interactions between the residents of the Ward with Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire (CASL). Dashboard information from CASL is also supplied to officers on a quarterly basis as part of the monitoring of actions against the core funding grant agreement between the Council and CASL.
- 2.10 The dashboard shared by the Member outlined the top 5 debt issues identified by CASL in their dashboard report for Belvoir Ward related to:
- Debt relief orders
 - Fuel debts
 - Breathing Space Moratorium
 - Council Tax Arrears
 - Unpaid parking penalties and congestion charges
- 2.12 One of the clients listed in the dashboard was identified as at threat of homelessness. The document however provides no detail of the tenure of the

household. Therefore, the need for officers to be in attendance to cover issues of both social housing and private sector housing was deemed necessary. The number of clients advised by CASL, based on this information, was 51 which represents 1% of the Ward's population.

- 2.13 A team of nine officers attended this event representing: Community Engagement, Neighbourhoods (ASB), Homelessness, Tenancy Support and Engagement, Cost of Living, Private Sector Housing, and Revenues and Benefits. Both elected Members from this Ward attended the event. It is disappointing to note that no members of the public attended this event.
- 2.14 Again, this event was promoted via SKDC's social media channels and with posters/flyers. Publicity for this event also went out to all residents of the Ward in the parish newsletter.
- 2.15 These events are resource-heavy in terms of officer time. If such events had been better attended it would have supported the concern that access to the Council is problematic for some residents. However, having piloted events in both a rural and an urban setting with little evidence of need identified, it is considered that an alternative method of engaging with residents should be explored.
- 2.16 In order to do this, it is suggested that officers develop a series of informal, open, community engagement opportunities that take advantage of pre-existing events across the district. The Community Engagement Team, with support from colleagues in Communications, would lead on this initiative with officers from other service areas attending such events as appropriate. This type of engagement would still provide opportunities for the general public to directly engage with officers from the Council but in a less formal way. These events would also support the delivery of our customer experience strategy and to promote the launch of systems like the Revenues and Benefits customer portal; housing portal and the Council's new website. Officers would be on hand to help educate and support customers in contacting the Council digitally. The attendance at these events could also be used to promote Go Digital and Hello SK and to broadly explore the demand for Council in the Community.

Council in the Community - Funding Workshops

- 2.17 Another initiative launched during 2023/24 came in the shape of a series of funding workshops.
- 2.18 These workshops, provided in support of the charity, voluntary and community sector across the District have, to date, taken place in the evening.
- 2.19 Attendees to these workshops are asked to book a place through Eventbrite. Although free to attend, the workshops are held in community venues so places are limited. We also ask that attendees book because it is useful for officers to have pre-event information on the groups being represented so that eligible funding sources can be investigated prior to the workshop taking place. Groups also attended that didn't book a space. Where necessary, follow-up contact was made

to provide information not available on the evening of the workshop.

- 2.20 Three workshops and one funding fair have been scheduled for 2023/2024. These workshops are promoted via SKDC's social media channels and through community partners.
- 2.21 The workshops include presentations relating to the SK Community Fund, LotterySK and UKSPF. These presentations are delivered by officers from the Community Engagement Team and Economic Development's SPF Team. There is also a presentation by the National Lottery. All cover the various funding support available and eligibility criteria. Community Engagement Officers also provide an overview of national and local funding sources (focused on the pre-booked participants to ensure relevance to attendees), tips for successful bid writing and links to infrastructure agencies such as Lincolnshire Voluntary and Community Service and other support agencies e.g. Charity Excellence, Lincolnshire Community Foundation, Amateur FA Funders, Sport England etc.
- 2.22 The first workshop took place in July 2023 and was held at Deepings Community Centre. This workshop attracted twenty-eight individuals representing eighteen voluntary and community groups.
- 2.23 The second workshop was held in Stamford at the Corn Exchange theatre. This workshop attracted thirty-two individuals representing twenty-four voluntary and community groups.
- 2.24 These workshops have received excellent feedback from groups stating that they are informative, an excellent way of networking with other groups from the local area and officers were knowledgeable and helpful. Since these workshops ten groups have reached out to the Council's Community Engagement Team for further support with funding searches and in the preparation of funding bids. Outcomes relating to funding levered into the district from such funding bids will be reported to this committee as part of the quarterly-reported suite of key performance indicators.
- 2.25 The third workshop scheduled took place in Grantham on 18 January at the Jubilee Church Life Centre. This event attracted forty-seven attendees representing forty-one voluntary and community groups. Requests for support with project development and funding bids have been received since the workshop and are being acted upon.
- 2.26 The final event for this financial year in this suite of awareness raising sessions will be a funding fair. This event will be held in partnership with Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service and will take place at Bourne Corn Exchange on 21 March 2024. Invitations have been sent to local, regional and national funders. To date the invitation has been accepted by the National Lottery, Children in Need, Lincolnshire Community Foundation, Sport England and Shine (Lincs). This event will take the shape of a market where interested parties can peruse information and have informal chats with funders. This will be a day-long event with sessions morning and afternoon. Workshops will also be held throughout the day for participants to have one-to-one sessions with Community Engagement staff.

- 2.27 These events provide an important source of information for the voluntary and community sector of South Kesteven and have been very well received by attendees therefore, a further suite of funding workshops will be developed and delivered for 2024/2025.
- 2.28 Going forward, the outcomes of Council in the Community outreach projects will be reported to this Committee as part of the monitoring report relating to the Council's Community Engagement and Development Strategy's Action Plan.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The Council places importance on supporting communities with the things that are important to them. To assist communities, the Council has provided a series of outreach opportunities for residents and the voluntary and community sector. This report outlines the effectiveness of events to date.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could stop such events however this would be in opposition to its new corporate objective of connecting communities as set out in the Corporate Plan.

5. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 5.1 The recommendation which includes the assurance of future updates to provide information to Members of this Committee on a six-monthly basis, will assist in their representational role as they work with communities to make a difference.