

Chief Executives' Group – North Yorkshire and York

16 March 2012

Capacity building - Active Communities project

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update the Group on the Active Communities project and invite suggestions of possible areas where a community development approach may provide a solution to public sector service reduction.

2 Background

- 2.1 £215,500 of North Yorkshire Performance Reward Grant was allocated to the Active Communities project for 2011 – 13, to develop community-run alternatives to reduced public sector services.
- 2.2 The project, led by North Yorkshire and York Forum in collaboration with local voluntary sector support and development organisations (CVSs, Voluntary Actions and Volunteer Centres), was developed in recognition that public sector funding cuts will have a substantial impact on services over the next few years. The Government's intention is that many services previously provided by the public sector will in future be provided by communities taking action for themselves. If this aspiration is to be met, within the time frame of likely withdrawal of services, there is a need for a substantial and rapid growth in community activity to meet the gap.
- 2.3 Some communities will be well placed to respond to this expectation; however it is frequently the case that people's enthusiasm for developing new community provision is not matched by the knowledge to successfully develop the idea into a functioning reality and in some areas there may be no clearly identifiable community provider for services.
- 2.4 The Active Communities project aims to provide support to communities, through a mix of community and organisational development, to help them overcome the issues they face.

3 Progress – community provision of library services

- 3.1 Public sector partners were initially asked to identify possible projects, early in 2011, however no firm suggestions were forthcoming at that time. It was therefore agreed to focus initially on the one known and high profile area of public sector service withdrawal – library closures.
- 3.2 From September 11, Active Communities has worked with the 8 'category 3' libraries scheduled for closure in April 2012, and a further 15 'category 2' libraries where opening hours were to be reduced. Community development workers have supported community groups and other stakeholders to develop alternative plans for provision of library services in the target communities.

- 3.3 This has included support with governance arrangements, business planning, volunteer recruitment and management, financial and operational issues, as well as a range of issues around buildings and the technicalities of the library computer system. As a result, NYCC has been able to approve transfer of library provision to community providers in all but one of the 'category 3' areas, and plans for alternative volunteer provision where opening hours are to be reduced at 'category 2' libraries are well developed. The attached news item from NYCC summarises the outcome of this work, and the considerable achievements of the community groups. NYCC has acknowledged the key role of Active Communities in enabling the community groups to develop to a point where services can be transferred to them with confidence.
- 3.4 We believe the Active Communities approach has been successful because it provides:
- A structured assessment of the development needs of the community group in order to achieve their aspirations
 - Relevant expertise – able to guide the community groups through the complexities of governance, financial and operational issues to achieve a workable organisational model and business plan
 - Staff time – able to provide practical help to supplement the time of volunteers during what will usually be a fairly intense period of development
 - An independent approach – committed to working from the perspective of the community group, and recognised by the community group as having no vested interest in the outcome.

4 Future projects

- 4.1 Whilst some work is continuing in supporting the library community groups, Active Communities is now in a position to consider new projects for 2012/13. We are again inviting public sector partners to identify possible initiatives where a community development approach may provide a solution to public sector funding cuts or service withdrawal. Suitable projects are likely to be ones where:
- A defined service is to be withdrawn or significantly reduced
 - There is a defined community affected, probably in a relatively limited geographical area
 - The public sector organisation has some capacity to support the transfer process, e.g. through staff time, technical advice
- 4.2 However we are able to consider a broad range of projects and may also be able to assist where a community development approach may help with other needs, for example a target community where a need for specific services has been identified but cannot currently be met; or where support is needed for development of a community-based social enterprise.
- 4.3 Active Communities is able to support both the setting up of new community projects, and the development of existing groups where this is a viable option. We have capacity to work with up to 10 additional community projects during 2012/13, depending on the scale and complexity of the projects and the ongoing support needs of the library groups.

- 4.3 Suggestions for possible areas where a community development approach may provide a solution to public sector service reduction are invited. In the first instance, an indication of the nature of the service reduction and geographical area affected will be sufficient. Further discussion and some initial exploratory work will then be needed to establish the potential viability of a community solution and extent of support needed to achieve this.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Group note the progress of the Active Communities project
- 5.2 That the Group identify possible further areas where a community development approach may provide a solution to public sector service reduction

6 Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Press release from NYCC website – Securing a vibrant and successful future for North Yorkshire libraries

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Further information:

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Appendix 1 - Press release from NYCC website – Securing a vibrant and successful future for North Yorkshire libraries

<http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=19579>

Securing a vibrant and successful future for North Yorkshire libraries

The final element of a comprehensive plan designed to ensure a vibrant and successful future for North Yorkshire's library service has been approved.

It means communities across the county will continue to have access to a first-class library service, despite cuts of millions of pounds in North Yorkshire County Council's funding from central Government.

Last year, the council approved arrangements for the operation of main libraries in key centres of population and in smaller towns. The final element of the plan has now been approved, with the go-ahead being given for six community-run libraries in Ayton, Barlby, Bilton, Embsay, Gargrave and Great Ayton. The libraries will be staffed by volunteers, with the support of the county council's professional library service, and with county council supplied book stock.

Community libraries are already up and running in Hawes, Grassington and Masham. The six additional centres will be handed over to their communities on May 1. Only one community library, at Hunmanby, failed to produce a business plan which was deemed sufficiently robust to allow it to proceed. Instead, Hunmanby will be served by the county council's "supermobile" from April, although discussions will be held to explore further permanent options.

"This is a tremendous achievement by people across the county who rightly said that their libraries are a hugely valuable and much-loved resource," said County Councillor Chris Metcalfe, executive member for library and community services.

"The way in which they responded to the challenge of producing robust business plans, of mobilising support and organising volunteers, is a remarkable feat. Although they received support at every step of the way from the professionals in the council's library service - and from other community groups - ultimately it was their hard work and determination which brought about this result. They deserve the heartfelt thanks of everyone."

The business plans submitted by the community groups were assessed on the basis of financial viability, sustainability, and the capacity of volunteers to provide the services on a day-to-day basis. All the voluntary groups have demonstrated a wide range of skills and experience, including education, business and the management of voluntary organisations and projects.

Ayton

To be run by the Ayton Library Steering Group, and renamed Derwent Valley BRIDGE, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of the services to be provided ... Books, Resources, Information, Diversity, Groups, Education.

Barlby

To be run by Barlby Parish Council and renamed Barlby Library and Community Hub. It will include a meeting place, information and exhibition space and a parish office.

Bilton

To be run by Bilton and Woodfield Community Library Group, which intends to become an incorporated charitable organisation. Bilton library is currently on the ground floor of premises owned by the county council, but it is intended that after the first 12 to 18 months it will be relocated to the new children's centre at the Woodfield School site.

Embsay

To be run by Embsay with Eastby Community Library Group, a registered charity. The library is based in the Embsay with Eastby village hall. The group's aims are to maintain a viable library and information service and to increase usage of the library by extending opening hours and developing a programme of further activities and initiatives.

Gargrave

To be run by Gargrave and Malhamdale Community Library Management Committee, and based in the village hall in Gargrave. The parish council is covering all the accommodation costs for at least the first three years.

Great Ayton

To be renamed Great Ayton Discovery Centre. The management team has secured funding from the parish council. The group's aim is to develop the library building as a centre for village activity, and in the longer term to extend the library building to enable financially attractive co-location with other village businesses.

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