

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET: 21ST JULY 2009

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

REPORT OF HEAD OF POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to implement a time limited programme of support for a small number of voluntary / community groups or organisations during the credit crunch. This is meant to enable these groups to continue to inform and support vulnerable community members affected by the economic downturn.

2. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is requested to agree to the outline proposal set out in Section 5.2 below

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At Connecting Communities Group on 25th March 2009 issues were raised by Group members about how community based BME organisations are witnessing the effects of the credit crunch on local communities, in particular, job losses in the lower paid manufacturing sector and reduced small business revenue.
- 3.2 It was acknowledged that the Telford Town Centre based resource is useful, but that it was less likely to be accessed by some communities, because of the location, transport issues and residents with language difficulty.
- 3.3. It was stated that BME led community based organisations are struggling to survive themselves, and that the vital link with communities that they have established could be lost if they are allowed to "go under".
- 3.4 Examination of the "Economic Inclusion Baseline Report for the West Midlands March 2009" reinforces that some social groups within communities are more likely to be affected by unemployment and other effects of the downturn than other groups, as quoted below below.

"Worklessness is higher among residents of some localities in the region, and among some social groups, and the scale of the challenge to get these areas and groups up to the national rate of employment presents an even greater challenge.

While the worklessness rate for the general population of working age is 28%:

Among those with a limiting illness or disability it is 52%

For people from the Black / Black British ethnic group it is 44%

For those with no qualifications it is 53% and

For those from the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group it is 57%

There are some key factors which contribute to the region's workless total: Living in an urban area; holding no qualifications; being from a minority ethnic group; having a long-term health problem or disability; and being young all increase an individual's chances of being workless.

One third of the region's workless population live in urban areas;

30% have no qualifications;
More than one third have a limiting illness or disability;
and 24% are from a minority ethnic group"

Source: Economic Inclusion Baseline Report for the West Midlands March 2009

3.5 This indicates that some groups are more likely to suffer detrimental effects during an economic downturn, namely people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, people with disabilities and people from all backgrounds who have low levels of qualifications.

4. PREVIOUS MINUTES

4.1 Connecting Communities Group minutes 25th March 2009

5.1 PROPOSAL

5.1.1 The proposal is to provide some limited financial support for a number of community groups/organisations, in return for improving access to information and / or services for vulnerable groups via outreach activity. This will assist some of our most vulnerable community members during the economic downturn

5.1.2 Any proposal for assistance in the short term should be:

- In line with the Council's priorities in terms of safer and stronger communities
- Seen to be fair and equitable for all organisations and communities
- Cost effective and value for money
- Able to be implemented quickly
- Able to be easily managed
- If short term, should contribute to longer term goals

5.1.3 A number of small community organisations are likely to be in a position to facilitate some level of community support activity, even if this is just displaying or distributing information. It is proposed that different levels of financial support be offered to groups, in varying amounts, in return for the delivery of information or services to their target communities. The amount of financial support offered would depend on what each group or organisation feel able to deliver.

5.1.4 It is possible that this could be delivered as a form of "outreach activity" which mirrors the range of information /provision at First Point. Information available from the contributors to First Point, could be packaged for each organisation, along with guidance on how to contact service providers and signpost services.

5.1.5 It is proposed that a range community led organisations could be invited to sign up to provide some or all Level 1 actions / or some or all Level 2 actions, depending on their capacity and access to premises, meeting rooms, display areas etc. A draft menu of options has been devised to enable different organisations to sign up for what they can deliver, see Appendix A "menu".

5.1.6. The proposal would be for this to be "contract managed" via a simple Service Level Agreement between the Council and Telford Race Equality and Diversity Partnership who have contact with a range of groups and organisations within the Borough that support vulnerable groups such as bme led groups and disability organisations.

5.2 Equality & Diversity

5.2.1 An equality impact assessment of this proposal has been undertaken. The main issue arising is how do we identify which voluntary sector groups should be offered

this opportunity when there are other groups or communities who may feel equally disadvantaged by the credit crunch.

5.2.2 It is proposed that this is addressed by taking into account the following:

- It is recognised that unemployment and low paid employment within some BME communities within the Borough are already areas for concern. It is also recognised that people with disabilities and / or low skills levels are also more likely to be affected by the credit crunch.
- It is a reasonable to assume that people suffering greater levels deprivation at the start of the economic downturn are likely to be amongst those worst affected over time.
- Telford Race Equality and Diversity Partnership would be asked to target a range of groups, from bme and white communities, where deprivation is already an issue, and where some of the more vulnerable members of our communities are being supported. Within this principle each application to take part in the scheme would be assessed on its own merit.
- In community settings information can be provided in a way that is more accessible for some groups who have specific communication needs.

5.3 Environmental Impact

5.3.1 The provision of information within community settings may reduce the need for people travel to the town centre. Printed information can be directed to where it is needed to avoid waste. Web based information can be used within those organisations that have access to the Internet / IT.

5.4 Legal Comment

5.4.1 The provision of a grant in these circumstances would be within the Council's powers under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 (well-being powers).

5.4.2 However, whenever a Council benefit is to be conferred upon particular sections of the community, care has to be taken to avoid unlawful discrimination against other sections of the community.

5.4.3. It is important that the policy about these grants is reasonable and rational (general public law duty to act rationally and fairly) and the application procedure for the grants is developed in partnership with Legal Services.

5.5 Links with Corporate Priorities

5.5.1 This proposal supports:

- Priority 4. Creating a Safe, Strong and Cohesive Community,
- Priority 6. Strengthening the Local Economy and the Skills of Local People.
- Priority 7. An Efficient, Effective and Customer-Focused Council that delivers value for money for the community.

5.6 Opportunities and Risks

5.6.1 The opportunities are:

- The Council can help sustain a number of small community groups that play a valuable role in community life and community cohesion
- The Council can take practical steps towards helping to build greater capacity within local small voluntary sector organisations as a possible stepping stone towards greater involvement in service delivery.

- The Council and partners can get their messages about support that is available to a wider audience who may not access services by the mainstream provision.
- There is also an opportunity to link with the work of the recently formed inter-agency Financial Inclusion Group and work planned by Revenues and Benefits for targeted take up.
- The Council can demonstrate how it is meeting its public duties under various equality legislation.

5.6.2 The risks are:

- That the assumption about the need for this support is incorrect (see 5.2.2)
- That the initiative may have limited success in terms of the capacity of some organisations to deliver
- That whilst this is stated to be a "one-off" it may be seen as setting a precedent for providing financial support to the sector in the future

5.7 Financial Implications

5.7.1 It is understood that money originally allocated for additional funding for Fairshare Credit Union in our 'Credit Crunch package' has not been required/utilised due to the location of First Point in the Town Centre Library. It is proposed that this funding be switched for use on this community outreach initiative, as outlined in this report. This funding, like other 'credit crunch' initiatives, is a 'one off' and amounts to a maximum of £25,000.

5.7.2 If 10 organisations signed up to all level 1 actions this would cost £600 per organisation (£6000)

5.7.3 If 5 organisations signed up to all level 2 actions this would cost £2,000 per organisation (£10,000). Only a few of the organisations that operate within the Borough are likely to have the capacity to sign up to all or some level 2 activity

5.7.4 It is likely that for £16,000 (plus printing costs) we would have helped to maintain 15 community organisations over the coming year and would have reached numerous community members that would otherwise have not accessed information or services. This would be a "stop gap" measure, with a view to engaging in the wider debate on capacity building within voluntary sector.

5.7.5. TREDP have agreed to assist with the implementation and monitoring of this short programme. An administrative charge will be incurred but this will be no greater than 20% of the overall budget.

5.7.6. There may be secondary financial implications, for example, if better sign-posting of some communities to the First Point leads to an increase in visits from people with language needs or sign language needs, there will be an increase in costs for interpretation or translation. This will be managed within the one off funding of £25k that is available.

6. WARD IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This applies to all Wards

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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Appendix A

Menu of support that can be offered / supported

This menu is based on the range of activities supported at the Town Centre First Point and could form the basis of Vulnerable Groups Outreach activity.
The proposed payments are based on a one year SLA agreement

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Monitoring Data
Display of and distribution of information from First Point Credit Crunch	<u>1A</u> Putting up posters and displaying leaflets £50	<u>2A</u> Putting up posters displaying leaflets and distributing information to members and local homes £150	1. Posters on display 2. No. of leaflets distributed
Interpretation and assistance with understanding First Point related information	<u>1B</u> Assist people with understanding information in English only £100	<u>2B</u> Capacity to assist people with understanding information in English and community languages / or sign language / easy read £500	1. Approx number of people assisted in English 2. Approx number of people assisted in community languages
Directing or facilitating access to advice and guidance services	<u>1C</u> Holding and sharing information on CAB services and helping arrange appointments £100	<u>2C</u> As level 1 plus facilitating access to CAB services via local on-site surgeries £200	1. Information available 2. Any surgeries held
Facilitating access to Nextstep / Community Learning	<u>1D</u> Providing information on learning opportunities £50	<u>2D</u> As level 1 plus providing on site access to learning opportunities £200	1. Information available 2. Any learning sessions held
Facilitating access to Family Information Services	<u>1E</u> Providing information on Family information Service	<u>2E</u> As level 1 plus providing on site access to one or more of a range of services for children, young people and families	1. Information available 2. Any activities for children and young people held

	£50	£200	
Facilitaing access to Housing Advice	<u>1F</u> Providing information on Housing Services and assisting with appointments £100	<u>2F</u> Facilitating access to housing services via on site surgeries or on-site appointments £250	1. Information available / appointments arranged 2. Any surgeries held or on site appointments held
Facilitating access to revenues and benefits advice	<u>1G</u> Providing information on benefits and revenues services and assisting with appointments / arranging home visits £100	<u>2G</u> As level 1 plus facilitating access to revenues and benefits services via on site surgeries or on-site appointments £250	1. Information available / appointments made 2. On site surgeries or appointments held
Facilitating access to training and re-training	<u>1H</u> Providing information about training opportunities £50	<u>2H</u> As level 1 plus facilitating on site access to training organisations via on-site surgeries or training sessions £250	1. Information available 2. On site training surgeries or training sessions held
Total costs	£600 if all menu items selected	£2000 if all menu items selected	