

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting: 16th June 2015

Report of: Cllr Bull, Champion for Community Engagement and
Chair of the Council's Role in the Community and Tackling
Isolation Task and Finish Group

Title: Council's Role in the Community and Tackling Isolation Task and
Finish Group Report.

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

To report the findings and recommendations of this Task and Finish Group to the Scrutiny Community Committee.

2. Recommendations:

- (a) The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer will provide an update to the Scrutiny Community Committee twice a year detailing work in progress, results and any areas of concern.
- (b) The Group will hear from the two new Community Organisers in 6 months' time to find out what progress they are making and what issues they may identify as needing attention. The Group will then report back to the Scrutiny Community Committee.
- (c) The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer, at any point in time, can ask for this Task and Finish Group to reconvene and consider any areas which she would suggest merit further investigation, with a direct reporting line between the Group and the Scrutiny Community Committee.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- To recognise the work of this Task and Finish Group and to provide the Scrutiny Community Committee Members with an opportunity to comment.
- To ensure that the Scrutiny Community Committee are kept fully informed and up to date on a regular basis with Community Engagement work.
- To have the opportunity to investigate any areas of concern which may be highlighted at some point in the future.
- To continue to support Exeter communities in so far as the Council is able with consideration to available resources and capacity.
- To encourage stronger communities in line with the Exeter Vision.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources:

None.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

This report raises no issues for the Section 151 officer to consider.

6. What are the legal aspects?

None.

7. Monitoring officer Comments

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring officer to consider.

8. Report Details:

The "Council's Role in the Community and Tackling Isolation" was identified as a high priority topic for Task and Finish Group investigation at the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme Meeting which took place in July 2014.

Membership of the Group consisted of:-

Cllr Bull (Champion for Community Engagement)
Cllr Shiel
Cllr Newby
Cllr Holland
Cllr Morris
Cllr Clark
Cllr Hannaford
Cllr Owen
Cllr Foggin

Council Officers:-

Bindu Arjoon, Assistant Director, Customer Access
Dawn Rivers, Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer
Anne-Marie Hawley, Scrutiny Programme Officer

A presentation was provided by the Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer to give an overview of the current position and work in progress. It was recognised at an early stage that there was a significant risk of duplicating work given the wide ranging area of the topic. Some areas would already be dealt with through existing Council work streams together with the work of outside community organisations and the Health and Well Being Board. It was readily established that a clear focus for the Group would be paramount if realistic and useful recommendations were to be put forward for approval.

It is evident that there is a lot of good community engagement work already taking place although the Group recognised that social isolation is an ongoing concern in particular. The work of Community Organisers was held in high regard by the Group given their commitment and the fact that they work in direct contact with individuals and communities. They are best placed to find out first hand:-

- How people feel about living in their area.
- What challenges they face.

- If they feel that they have a voice in the community and feel part of a community group.
- What changes they would like to see within their community.

The Group recognised that Councillors can pick up on community and individual issues whilst out canvassing for instance and that this was also of great value. It was decided that it would be of great benefit to hear from Community Organisers in relation to the work that they do, the communities they work with and any particular difficulties that are faced.

During the second meeting the Assistant Director, Customer Access explained that there was already work in progress on some of the initiatives mentioned in the first meeting. For example, re-design for elderly people is integrated with the Care Exeter work involving primary healthcare and community health services to stop the elderly going into the acute sector. This provides at an earlier level of intervention. Talks are also ongoing with regards to the warden service which supports Exeter residents and there is ongoing work targeting families and mobilising care around families rather than lots of individual organisations becoming involved at different times.

The Customer Service Centre will have a “One View of Debt” team/facility and the drive is very much towards mobilising services and organisations around individuals.

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer and the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Well Being also updated the Group as to the current position of the Neighbourhood Health Watch project. This is an initiative that encourages people to look out for their neighbours and is currently being trialled in the St Thomas area. The Health and Well Being Board will receive the feedback from that trial and it was felt that this particular initiative would be very good at identifying need but that if the Group were to look at this aspect in more detail they would simply be duplicating work.

Mapping of organisations, services and facilities was discussed as a way of finding out what is available in the City. However, this was recognised as a real challenge in so far as collating and producing an accurate list to form one central record. Reference was made to the Community Directory but it was established that this directory is incomplete and that at least some of the information contained would already be out of date. This further illustrated the particular difficulty in producing a list with reliable data relevant only to the City– constant updating would not only be required but still wouldn’t account for community groups which were not known about.

Guest Speakers

The Group heard from Emily McCarthy of Exeter CVS (who runs a volunteer centre working with community organisations across the City), Stuart Crewes of Exeter CVS (who works with volunteers around individuals with learning disabilities), Sue Bulled, Community Organiser (Wonford) and Laura Robinson, Community Organiser (Cowick and St Thomas).

The important role of Community Organisers was further emphasised through Group discussions with the guest speakers. It was apparent that isolated individuals need to be approached rather than relying on them to approach organisations and services for help. Word of mouth and connecting with people on a face to face basis was thought of as imperative in tackling isolation.

Isolated individuals who may have been overlooked can be discovered and helped by someone simply knocking on their door.

At the conclusion of the second meeting, the Group felt that they were not yet in a position to narrow down a focus and finalise the scope and so it was agreed that the Assistant Director, Customer Access, the Community Involvement Officer and the Scrutiny Programme Officer would meet separately to pull together the information and form a structure to assist the Group whilst also taking into account the discussions so far.

Following this the Group reached a point where they could identify and settle upon the recommendations contained within this report, without the need for further investigation.

The Scrutiny Community Committee is now invited to agree the proposed recommendations which are, it is felt, realistic, focussed and capable of delivering effective results in promoting stronger communities within the City and further enhancing community engagement whilst complimenting existing work streams.

9 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, Economy safety and the environment?

Not applicable.

**Cllr Bull, Champion for Community Engagement
Chair of Council's Role in the Community and Tackling Isolation Task and Finish Group**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:**

None

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