

Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board

26 June 2024

Thriving Communities

For Decision

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

TBC

Local Councillor(s):

All

Executive Director:

S Crowe, Director of Public Health

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The paper provides a summarised progress report on and proposal from a project, which was initiated by the Health and Wellbeing Board in June 2023, supporting place-based working in the Dorset Council area.

The Thriving Communities project had a specific aim to develop a plan which would result in growth of community support and capacity through the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), to support older people to remain living well and independently. To deliver the project through investment in the VCS infrastructure, the board approved the use of £309k from the shared service underspend in 2021/22.

It was noted that, in delivering this programme of work, Thriving Communities would positively contribute to delivery of both the Integrated Care Partnership and Dorset Council's strategic aims as well as enhancing closer working with the VCS. Through the creation and collation of a strong evidence base the project has naturally developed a close focus on providing care for our communities.

This paper seeks to provide the Board with an update on the research work carried out and the findings and insights gathered from the VCS, communities and older people across Dorset. The paper also sets out the key themes of issues identified and presents some options for the next phase of this work. The Thriving Communities Reference Group have considered a range of options and have provided their recommendation for the Health and Wellbeing Board's consideration on the next steps.

Recommendations:

1. The Dorset Health & Wellbeing board review the research findings and local insights contained within this Thriving Communities report.
2. The Board considers the options presented for the potential next phase of the Thriving Communities project.
3. If in agreement, the board to recommend the development of a project delivery and transition plan for Option 3: developing a VCS led Thriving Community Network model as supported by the Thriving Communities Reference Group.
4. The Board to agree a suitable Dorset Health & Wellbeing Board member sponsor to oversee the next phase of the project.

Reason for Recommendations:

The Thriving Communities project was provided support, direction, and guidance through a multi-agency Reference Group. That group, which included representatives from Dorset Council; NHS Dorset; Public Health Dorset; the VCS and Dorset Fire and Rescue Service, supported option 3 as the preferred route. The evidence base and community views signal that this option would generate greater commitment and momentum and as a result provide a much stronger and more resilient VCS model.

It was recognised by the Thriving Communities Reference Group that option 3 would require longer term commitment and resources from Dorset Council and ICS partner organisations. A project delivery and transition plan could be brought back to the next Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board in September for approval.

1. Background

1.1 Dorset's Council's population is growing older; in fact, we have the fastest ageing population in the UK supported by better than average life expectancy across most of our residents. Our older residents are a hugely valuable resource and play a vital role within our communities although there is recognition that there

may be increasing requirements for support for some through ageing, illness, grieving and dying.

1.2 Across Dorset the VCS already provides a huge variety of services and support that help older people live healthily, and independently for longer. However, there are significant and repetitive challenges that the sector faces which prevent increased capacity and capability, whilst leading to fragility, isolation, and exhaustion.

1.3 Through detailed research and a comprehensive, cross-sector collaboration on engagement which captured detailed views of over 250 participants, Thriving Communities has gathered evidence of effective practice both nationally and locally and identified opportunities which would reduce pressure on health and social care services and increase healthy life expectancy. The project report identifies 12 key issues which lead to evidenced based options:

1.4 Key issue 1: The need for local 'trusted people' in delivering support for older people to attract higher levels of participation.

Key issue 2: The use of known local, readily accessible, and sustainable 'trusted places' helps older people keep connected and healthy whilst reducing transport difficulties.

Key issue 3: The benefit of a clear communication mechanism to allow swift dissemination of risk issues, opportunities, learning and best practice.

Key issue 4: The momentum developed through 'connectivity and partnership working' at a local level.

Key issue 5: A fundamental gap in the coordination of VCS activity and networking

Key issue 6: The need to value and support volunteers to ensure retention and involvement of the next generation.

Key issue 7: Bureaucracy in funding, evaluating, and reporting requirements hinders VCS delivery of activities and support.

Key issue 8: The need to share best practice across groups supporting older people.

Key issue 9: Well-known, led, connected and 'trusted groups' can amplify their local messaging.

Key issue 10: The infrastructure foundations for local groups supporting older people need to be solid.

Key issue 11: The full impact of Thriving Communities will unfold as momentum grows over the course of several years, with its benefits being evident across multiple sectors and communities.

Key issue 12: Currently funding for Thriving Communities is concentrated on a 12-month delivery, yet maximising long-term impact will necessitate continued investment.

1.5 In all engagement Thriving Communities teams asked how the future should be viewed for older people in the area. The answers provided, in general, evidenced a broad understanding of the challenges facing health and social care services with an ageing community. There was a strong message that local groups and charities were needed, and if maintained the outlook could be bright for our older population. However, without investment and support the future would worsen and the health and social care challenges would be greater.

1.6 It was identified that understanding the strengths, depth and reach of the VCS in Dorset is the first step to a new and sustainable way of working in partnership. Whilst the development of trust through the creation of a network of local groups and organisations willing to work and engage in a new way will provide a framework for collaborative, place-based activity.

1.7 The Thriving Communities Reference Group met to review and consider all the research, data and insights gathered and identified and considered the following options for the next phase of this work.

1.8 Options for consideration for next steps:

(a) Develop a resource library for future projects and programmes:

Complete the research and engagement phases, develop a library of resources, documents and reports from which future programmes and projects can draw. Thriving Communities project to be closed or integrated into other work programmes.

(b) Develop a Public Service led Thriving Community Network model.

The Thriving Communities project is retained within Dorset Council and/or Public Health Dorset with a lead delivery resource identified and funded. Working with NHS Dorset and other partners, engagement with and coordination of a range of groups and organisations would be conducted to develop a Thriving Community Network of hubs designed to deliver on many of the health and care system's key priorities.

(c) Develop a VCS led Thriving Community Network model.

The Thriving Communities Network model led by the VCS, supported by a partnership of Dorset Council, NHS Dorset, Public Health Dorset, and other partners. Engagement with and coordination of a range of groups and organisations would be conducted to develop a Thriving Community Network of hubs designed to deliver on many of the health and care system's key priorities.

1.9 Through the growth of a Dorset Thriving Communities Network led by the VCS and supported by a partnership of Dorset Council, NHS Dorset, Public Health Dorset, the VCS and other partners, the VCS infrastructure would be strengthened and the local groups who support older people could become more resilient, effective, and voluminous. The Dorset Thriving Communities Network would also create opportunity to support the VCS in some of its challenges around leadership, development, governance, and administration, whilst also establishing opportunities to develop and grow cross sector working and understanding.

1.10 It is believed that the full impact of Thriving Communities Network would unfold as momentum grows over the course of several years, with its benefits becoming evident across multiple sectors and communities. Amongst other benefits the proposal would see:

- Support for all VCS infrastructure layers.
- Strengthened and more resilient local groups.
- Easier partnership working on strategic and operational priorities.
- Swifter and more effective partnership communication about, and work on, challenging or urgent issues.
- Simplification of bureaucracy.
- Swifter and easier funding.
- Direct and clear communication channels across sectors.
- Development of trust creating opportunity to empower the VCS to lead on complicated social issues.
- Provide simple methods to report, measure and evidence effectiveness.
- Provide resilient support at a local level.

1.11 In providing simple, clear processes and strong effective support, our community groups would be able to continue to work with confidence and would be equipped to grow and deliver even more to support older people to remain living well, healthily, and independently.

1.12 To deliver the proposed project delivery and transition plan will require several distinct stages, including:

- (a) development of commitment and investment for the proposals for a 3-to-5-year programme to increase the capacity of the VCS sector infrastructure, in line with identified needs as set out in option 3.
- (b) Report and evaluation back to the Health and Wellbeing Board

2. **Financial Implications**

2.1 The Joint Public Health Board agreed to invest part of the shared service underspend from 2021/22 into place-based working. The shared service is

funded by contributions from both BCP and Dorset councils' public health ring-fenced grant. The same conditions apply to any underspend held in reserves as apply to the original grant.

2.2. For the Dorset place-based partnership the share of these funds was £309k. The aim was to support a focused programme of work in line with health and wellbeing priorities.

2.3 For option 3 to deliver effective long-term; place-based support, there would need to be a more sustainable longer-term model of funding. Some detailed work looking at the potential costs to implement will form part of the project delivery and transition plan, but initial calculations based on evidence from elsewhere give an indication of very approximately £500,000 per year for an initial 3 year period.

3. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

3.1. Supporting people to stay well and live independently by building strong community networks of support close to their homes should reduce travel and healthcare utilisation - both of which also have the benefits of reducing travel time and costs and in turn have a positive impact on the environment and reducing emissions.

4. Well-being and Health Implications

4.1. Working with people to understand what keeps them well and healthy, and building capacity in the voluntary and community sector to offer support around these needs, should improve healthy life expectancy – keeping people living for longer in good health. Working in this way to develop person centred approaches should also have benefits for people's personal sense of wellbeing.

5. Other Implications

5.1. Capacity needs to be identified to support this programme and will be addressed as part of the first phase.

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

7.1 Any plan that is developed as a result of this programme of work will be subject to equalities impact assessment to ensure that people with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged from the proposal. In addition, information on reasonable adjustments that might need to be made for particular groups will be considered.

8. Appendices

Appendix A:

A selection of comments captured during the Thriving Communities engagement.

Collaborative Engagement – A few comments

"It seems much is available where we are: but, if figures for, say, dementia, are correct we are only reaching a tiny fraction of people who may benefit."

Volunteer

"Think about the loneliness and it's not just in rural communities, where is the care for people who are alone? People I see could sit in their homes for weeks on end and no-one would care"

Volunteer

"It would be good if doctors' surgeries and social services providers would help people to contact groups that they would perhaps find helpful, especially to their mental health."

Volunteer

"Who is going to take over when we're too old to do it? All our volunteers are in their 70's....People will be very lonely".

Volunteer

"..always remember that the person you are helping has a younger person at their heart.."

Volunteer

"By working together, we are able to develop our services and deliver so much more, making a positive difference to our environment and people's lives."

VCS CEO



"Working in partnership with other local support and care organisations appears to have been pivotal in successfully delivering support to the local community. This collaboration has resulted in multiple benefits."

Cornwall Community Hubs Evaluation Report



9. Background Papers

[Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board – Thriving Communities Report – June 2023](#)

[Thriving Communities Project Report – May 2024](#)