



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

Date: 7 December 2020

Purpose of the Report: Proposal for investment in activities/services to support Older People

Contact Officer: Sarah Jewell, C&E Services Support Officer

Corporate Objective/s	No. 27 To consider ways to support the increase in leisure opportunities for older people.	
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	XXXX TBC
Human Resources		
Operational/Service delivery		
Procedural/Legal		
Risk/Health and Safety		

1. RECOMMENDATION/S

Should members be minded, the recommendations are:

- 1.1 To fund XXX using budget code XXX / XXX to XXXX activities/services
(needs to be more specific)
- 1.2 To confirm Committee's preferred option as set out below towards developing its programme of work for meeting objective No. 27, To consider ways to support the increase in leisure opportunities for older people:
 - a) The continuation of a dedicated working group made up of 5 members from Cultural and Economic Services Committee, and to bring further recommendations forward for Committee's consideration when developed.
 - b) To directly oversee work progress receiving regular update reports and future recommendations.

2 INFORMATION

2.1 Scoping exercise and its findings

The focus of this work is to explore what the Town Council can do to help increase leisure opportunities for older people (as per Council objective No.

27). It was agreed to focus on older people over 55 years, with an interest in those experiencing loneliness.

Online and hardcopy survey (appendix 1) was carried out with over 100 responses. The key findings were as follows:

- a) U3A were the most frequently mentioned group people were members of, followed by the Friday Club then the WI.
- b) *Company/Socialising* and *Interest/Theme/Hobby* were the main purposes stated for reasons people were members of a group.
- c) When asked the reason respondents need a 'new' group or service, both the reasons (in b) stayed high, but '*Physical Activity*' shot up in prominence. (NB, this could be due to shielding/people not able to get out during Covid-19)
- d) Majority of groups that respondents were members of, are currently suspended due to covid-19, those that were operating were doing so online or in touch via email or telephone.
- e) It was clear that respondents wanted groups during the week and weekend and at various times of the day. Most respondents were willing to pay a form of membership 'sub'.
- f) Gender split – on breaking down the responses by gender, it was apparent that less men are currently part of a group (65% stated they are not part of a group) and that men 'state' their reason for wanting to be part of a group as being linked to *interest/theme/hobbies* and *physical activities*.

Meetings with charities, organisations, group leaders

Conversations were carried out with numerous organisations about their beneficiaries/members including inviting some representatives to talk directly at the Task & Finish Group. A meeting was held with Jane Moakes, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Adult Social Care and Sarah Hughes, Community Engagement Manager, Central Bedfordshire Council. The officer attended the Healthwatch 'Older Peoples Festival' (online) and a Community Catalyst hosted conference about support schemes such as the Good Neighbours Scheme.

Overview of findings from this research:

- a) There are a diverse number of groups available for different needs (e.g. older people with different ailments, disabilities, support reasons), many are on hold due to Covid-19, some have been transferred successfully online.
- b) Knowing what is happening in our community is hard – information sources are very splintered – there is no one 'information hub'.
- c) Community members and organisations still think more activities/groups are needed in Leighton Buzzard, but organisations themselves do not have the human resource capacity to run them. Many say 'funding' is not the issue.
- d) Digital exclusion is a big issue. Covid-19 has shown that people being

digitally connected is increasingly the way of the world, and supporting older people in accessing this is important. Being intimidated/not knowing how to use the technology is a big barrier to its use.

- e) There are not as many opportunities for men – their needs/desires for a 'group' are specific.
- f) When looking at supporting older people who are housebound and lonely, one of the few avenues of practical support is 'befriending services'.

2.2 Identified needs gaps

2.2.1 Digital Inclusion

There is a clear need for 'digital inclusion' among this age group. This should not come at the expense of hard copy information/activities being available, but Covid-19 has shown us that supporting older people to use technology is fundamental to reducing their isolation and loneliness. The urgent need could be addressed through a telephone 'technology helpline', with face-to-face support and then group workshops being introduced.

2.2.2 Directory/information hub of activities and services for older people

Both individuals and organisations are struggling to find 'one clear place' to go to which lists what is available - activities and service wise for older people. The Older Peoples Directory, printed every 2 years, is good, but is not comprehensive when it comes to activities. Plus this information needs to be available online, so that older people, their friends, family and neighbours can search up-to-date activities for them online.

2.2.3 Other areas of consideration:

- a) **Befriending services support** – there is current capacity available, if demand increases, the Town Council may wish to consider supporting organisations/groups who offer this service. (see 'Befriending in Leighton Buzzard Table in appendix 2)
- b) **Activities specifically for older men** – there is a needs gap for groups/activities specifically catering for older men e.g. men in sheds 'type' offering – a preference being a activity based reason to meet.
- c) **Activities in general for older people** – most organisations (e.g. Alzheimers Society, Carers in Bedfordshire etc.) said they didn't have the capacity to create new groups/activities for older people (funding was not their issue, but human resources is). They said they desperately wanted to see more activities for older people in Leighton Buzzard that they could refer their beneficiaries to.

2.3 Covid-19

It is important to bear in mind that this project has been researched and driven forward during Covid-19 when the circumstances that older people find themselves in is very different to that which they would 'normally' face – in many cases making this part of the community 'more lonely' than ever. We

have therefore created a time frame that looks at both 'short term' activities during Covid-19 and longer-term heading into post-Covid-19 project activation.

2.4 Project proposals

2.4.1 The identified priorities are outlined in the below table:

Project Activation (time frame)			
Area of focus	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Digital Inclusion	Technology helpline	Technology workshops face to face – in community centres/libraries and via befriending services	
	Leighton Linlade Helping Hands website	Tablet loan scheme through the library	
Directory/ Information hub of activities & services	Town Council webpage listing known activities & services	An interactive 'searchable' online directory that organisations and individuals can have password access to for updating their activities/services directly.	

2.4.2 Estimated project costs are identified in the table below:

Area of focus			Annual cost (2 year period)	
	Project	Specific activity	2021	2022
Digital inclusion	Leighton Linlade Helping Hands Website	Design of website	£tbc	£0
		Domain name and website hosting costs	£tbc	£tbc
	Technology helpline	p/t coordinator of helpline (CAB hosting)	£tbc	£tbc
Directory/ information hub	Town Council webpage	Design of webpage on LLTC website	Staff time	£0
	Interactive online directory	Compile all information to go on directory	Staff time	Staff time
		External organisation to design directory	£tbc	£tbc
		Web hosting costs	£tbc	£tbc
		TOTAL	£	£

2.5 On-going support for older people

The initial scope of this project activity is looking at the short to medium term support of older people through an officially coordinated technical helpline and by creating a directory. In the medium to longer term, the Task & Finish Group propose the Committee look at opportunities for additional project support including:

- a) **Digital inclusion** – the scoping of a ‘**Tablet Loan Scheme**’ that could potentially be run from Leighton Buzzard Library.
- b) **A grant scheme to support** an increase in activity groups. This could include a specific focus on older men, an area identified as a gap in current provision, or a separate project activity stream could be set up looking at activities for men.
- c) **Befriending services** – an on-going activity stream to assess and thereby support organisations if and when, there is an increase in demand.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 Research was made harder due to the suspension of community activities as a result of Covid-19. This proved to be a key lesson in forming proposals for Committee’s consideration. Three timescales have been identified:
 - a) During Covid – short to medium term,
 - b) Coming out of Covid - medium to long term,
 - c) Post Covid – long-term.
- 3.2 A high importance is given to the theme of ‘connectivity’ and the issue of ‘digital exclusion’ when gaining feedback from community infrastructure and service organisations. Social interaction was a common thread for survey respondents for engaging with a local group/activity.
- 3.3 Committee is initially asked to consider recommendations for the short to medium term to keep older people connected with their families, communities, and service providers. As people and services rely more on technology platforms, the gap in technical skills and access to communications equipment has been highlighted.
- 3.4 Research also identified other themes as listed under section 2.2, above which could be further developed over the medium to longer-term.
- 3.5 The work of the Task & Finish Group in overseeing the exploration of issues and development of recommendations has concluded. As per para. 3.1 above, there is much potential for future development of work. Committee is asked how it wishes to proceed its focus on furthering its objective in supporting leisure opportunities for older people.

End