

## Cultural & Economic Services Committee

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Title:** 55UP Project Overview

### Purpose of the Report:

To provide background information on the 55UP project and to inform consideration of recommendations arising from the Older Persons Sub-Committee of 17 November 2022.

### Contact Officer:

Nina Bailey, Cultural and Economic Support Officer  
Sarah Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk

<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>	55UP Project- seeking to tackle loneliness and isolation with older people in the community	
<b>Implications:</b>	Yes	To show statement of intent to join Age Friendly Communities Network
<b>Financial</b>	Yes	To establish new line in 2023/34 Revenue Budget of £9,000 to continue digital exclusion programme
<b>Human Resources</b>	No	
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	Yes	For Older Persons Subcommittee to continue it's role into the next municipal year
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>	No	
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>	No	
<b>Environmental Aims</b>	No	

## 1 RECOMMENDATION/S

Should the Committee be minded, the proposals as made by the Older Persons Sub-Committee of 17 November 2022 are:

- 1.1 To endorse and recommend to Council that a Town Council resolution be made of commitment to becoming an Age-Friendly Community and joining the UK Network of Age Friendly Communities/World Health Organisation Global Network.
- 1.2 That the remaining £18,604.40 of the £80,000 allocated to the 55UP project continues to be ringfenced in an earmarked reserve for additional projects to support older residents.

- 1.3 That a new revenue budget line be established for Older People from 1 April 2023, with an initial budget allocation of £9,000 to fund possible continuation of the digital support project from October 2023 – March 2024 (noting that this reflected half yearly costs and that consideration might need to be given to increasing this from 2024-25).
- 1.4 That the Older Persons Sub-Committee continue through municipal year 2023-2024.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Older Persons Sub-Committee was established in early 2021, following on from the previous Older Persons Task and Finish Group. As a new initiative, it was agreed that the group would operate until March 2022, later extended to May 2023.
- 2.2 The main focus of the Sub-Committee was seeking to tackle loneliness and isolation within the older community and following research undertaken with local groups and residents, a programme of projects had been identified.
- 2.3 A budget of £80,000 was ringfenced from the five year financial plan for 2021-2026 (Future Projects Fund) for the 55UP programme.
- 2.4 Within the first 18 months, the 55UP project offered two rounds of grant schemes of up to £2,000 per grant, for local community groups to enhance wellbeing and leisure opportunities for older people. Seven community organisations benefitted from this grant funding.
- 2.5 Another element of the project programme was to support local volunteers in publishing an updated Information Booklet for Older People (known as the “yellow booklet”). Following work by a number of volunteers, the first update was published in 2022, with further funding ringfenced for a next update in 2024.
- 2.6 Recognising the importance of the local Helping Hands group (operated under the Good Neighbours scheme supported by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity), the Council funded creation of a new website.  
<https://leightonlinladehelpinghands.org.uk/>
- 2.7 A key aspect for the 55UP project was seeking to tackle digital exclusion in older people. In October 2021, Leighton Linslade Town Council (LLTC) entered into a two year contract with established charity Citizens Online to create a digital support programme. The scheme seeks to recruit and train volunteer “digital champions” who can then offer support to residents by phone or face to face.

- 2.8 In its first year of operation, the scheme has recruited and trained 8 digital champions and these volunteers have supported 38 learners in our community. Support can be as simple as how to switch a device on and off, to registering for online shopping or prescriptions, or learning how to video call family members not living close by. is now offers free over the phone and face to face digital support, including weekly drop- in sessions at the Chatty Café.
- 2.9 The technical support project offers both telephone and in person support, with a regular presence at the weekly Chatty Café as well as meetings in places such as the Leighton Buzzard Library. The scheme has also engaged with the Helping Hands volunteers, enabling them to offer digital support in people's homes. Anecdotal feedback and case studies demonstrate the impact of this support on older members of the community.
- 2.10 The Leighton-Linslade Community Agent project was established in September 2022, run through Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) and following successful examples elsewhere in the county. The Agent is currently funded by LLTC for 14 hours per week and is able to help vulnerable and isolated residents access services and support that they need, either in person or by signposting them to appropriate services.
- 2.11 In its first two months, the Community Agent scheme got off to a flying start by supporting 13 residents with a range of queries relating to health, money or carer support. The Agent will work closely with other local sources of support such as charities and social prescribers. Funding is ringfenced for delivery of this project until March 2025.
- 2.12 In November 2022, the project delivered its aspiration to offer loan tablet devices to those at risk of digital exclusion, as a means to "try before they buy". Thanks to partnership working with Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and Citizens Online, it has been possible to implement this project at no cost, thereby providing funds which can be used for additional future projects.

### **3 FUTURE PROJECTS**

- 3.1 At its meeting held 17 November 2022, the Older Persons Sub-Committee was advised about the UK Network of Age Friendly Communities and the World Health Organisation Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.  
<https://ageing-better.org.uk/uk-network-age-friendly-communities>  
<https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/>
- 3.2 This provides an international platform to share good practice and support communities in adapting their structures and services to meet residents' needs as they age. In order to join the network, the Town Council is required to make a resolution and written commitment to actively work towards becoming a more 'age-friendly' community. The four step programme essentially reflects the work the Town Council has already undertaken and is

delivering and therefore incurs no additional work or cost. The Sub-Committee recommends signing up to this national and international initiative to demonstrate commitment to older residents.

- 3.3 The Digital Inclusion Project is envisioned to continue its work supporting older people with digital skills alongside providing tablet and router loans for those who require this. With the current Citizens Online contract set to expire October 2023, it is suggested that financial provision is made in the 2023-24 revenue budget in the amount of £9,000 to ensure that the digital support offering can be maintained for residents until the end of that financial year. Consideration can then be given to budget for future years.
- 3.4 Additional workstreams are being actively explored to see how the 55UP project can further support older people. These include:
- Collaboration with Central Bedfordshire Council to support/complement the planned changes to adult day care support with the closure of Duncombe Drive Day Centre and the opening of Marigold House
  - Support further programmes to help tackle loneliness and isolation in older men e.g. A 'Men in Sheds' project
- 3.5 In light of the need to continue monitoring existing projects and to develop future projects, it is suggested that the Older Persons Sub-Committee continues to form part of the committee structure for at least the first year of the next Council administration, i.e. until May 2024.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 Since its inception the 55UP project has delivered a range of tangible initiatives benefitting older residents in Leighton-Linslade. These are evidenced in the grant reports received from recipients, the project updates received in respect of the Digital Support helpline and the Community Agent scheme, as well as anecdotal feedback.
- 4.2 The 55UP scheme also demonstrates a multi-agency partnership focussed approach with the involvement of a wide network of volunteers, thereby ensuring maximum benefit and impact whilst ensuring Town Council resources are managed as effectively as possible.
- 4.3 With 17.4% of the 42,392 population\* of the parish of Leighton-Linslade aged 65+ , the need to support our older residents is clear and it is recommended that this work continues.

**End.**

\*source: [www.centralbedfordshire.communityinsight.org](http://www.centralbedfordshire.communityinsight.org) (Census data 2021)