



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	
Human Resources		
Operational/Service delivery	Yes	Guide the work towards objective No.27
Procedural/Legal	Yes	
Risk/Health and Safety		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Should members be minded, the recommendations are:

1.1 Budget allocation:

a) To recommend to Policy and Finance Committee that £30,000 of the current £37,000 in Earmarked Reserve (Community Projects for older persons and younger persons activities – 925/9507) be committed to fund the delivery of the following project themes for the current financial year in support of the older persons agenda:

- Digital Inclusion,
- Directory/ Information hub of activities & services,

b) To recommend to Policy and Finance Committee that the anticipated project costs (up to a maximum of £50,000) for the financial period 2021/22 be met from the 5 Year Financial Plan – “Future Projects” for the purposes of:

- Digital inclusion,
- Directory/ information hub,
- Older Persons Visual identity - branding of work,
- Direct support of local community activity groups.

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) To create an Older Persons Sub Committee to assist with the progression of work and to bring forward detailed recommendations for Committee’s consideration. That the Sub Committee consist of 6 member Councillors, include non-councillors, meet bimonthly and concluding its business on 31 March 2021 when its need and purpose can be reviewed. In keeping with Standing Orders 2019 Ref. 4. a), b) and c).
- b) To directly oversee work progress receiving regular update reports and future recommendations from officers.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 09/12/2019, Committee resolved to convene an Older Persons Task and Finish group to look into schemes for older people with a view to a recommendation for the 2021/22 budget, Ref. 36/CE.
- 2.2 In the Council’s current year budget, £37k (925/9507) has been allocated for supporting Young People and Older Persons projects. Given the level of progress in formulating projects for older people, the Task and Finish (T&F) now present the above recommendations at 1.1, a), and propose to commit £30k of this budget to older persons projects.
- 2.3 In considering the future development of projects, T&F also propose additional funding of £50,000 for 2021/2022, as per recommendation 1.1, b).

3 INFORMATION

3.1 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 the Head of Strategic Commissioning, Adult Social Care and the 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'.

3.2 Identified needs gaps

3.2.1 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.

3.2.2 **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.

3.2.3 **Other areas of consideration:**

- a) **Befriending services support** – there is current capacity available, should demand increase. 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 an activity-based reason to meet.
- c) **Activities in general for older people** – most organisations (e.g. Alzheimer 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.

3.3 **Covid-19**

It is important to recognise 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.

3.4 **Project proposals**

3.4.1 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	Create ' <i>key information for older people</i> ' to be placed in About Town and Bee Local	Support a new updated 'Yellow Booklet' for older people (Bassett Rd Surgery led directory)	
	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.	

3.4.2 A fuller explanation of the proposed Technology helpline can be seen at **Appendix A, attached**. It is proposed that a 2-year pilot scheme is set up. Committee would seek to out-source the delivery and enter into a service level agreement.

3.4.3 Upon assessing the scheme, and if successful, Committee would likely need to consider any future funding commitment, e.g. an annual commitment, possibly in perpetuity, lump sum to assist the delivery organisation's taking on of the service, or otherwise. Should the scheme prove effective, effort would be made to secure external and partnership funding towards its running costs and further development.

3.5 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.

3.6 Project costs

Estimated project costs are identified in the table below with some predicted costs split over two years. Further exploration of costs will be required.

Areas of focus			Cost breakdown (from quotes)	
	Project	Specific activity	2020/21	2021/22
Digital inclusion	Leighton Linlade Helping Hands Website	Design of website	£250	£0
		Domain name and website hosting costs	£150	£150
	Technology helpline	Running helpline including staff, IT etc. Introduce face to face/ workshops in phase 2	£14,500	£24,500
	Tablet loan scheme	Set up including purchase of x10 tablets, annual SIM/data, security, training and scheme promotion.	£1,000	£14,000
Directory/ information hub	Town Council webpage	Design of webpage on LLTC website	£500	£0
	Interactive online directory	Compile all information to go on directory	Staff time	Staff time
		External organisation to design directory	£10,000	£0
		Web hosting (including security etc.)	£350	£350
	Yellow Booklet & short version 'key information' insert.	Creation and printing of temporary 'key info.' for local publications	£1000	£0
		Yellow booklet - printing and distribution of updated version	£2000	£1000
Older Persons Visual identity - branding of work	Create an identity for this 'Older Peoples Project'	Design of visual identity (similar to Youth Promise Grant identity)	£250	£0
Direct support of local activity groups	Grant funding scheme	Grants available to support set up, or 'on going' costs of activity groups targeting older people	£0	£10,000
		TOTAL	£30,000	£50,000

4 PROGRESSING WORK

- 4.1 Committee is asked to consider how best to continue directing the work of officers. Given that developmental work is ongoing and that the impact of

Covid-19 has been both a significant influence on identifying need as well as limiting officer ability to gain traction with community based organisations, T&F members consider there is still much work to do in formulating the identified projects on behalf of Committee.

4.2 With the above in mind, two approaches have been presented above in recommendation 1.2. for consideration:

a) As per 1.2, a) – Standing Orders 2019, (No.4, a), permit Committee to appoint a Sub Committee, “whose terms of reference and members shall be determined by the committee. (No.4, b), The members of a committee may include non-councillors unless it is a committee which regulates and controls the finances of the Council. (No.4, c) Unless the Council determines otherwise, all the members of an advisory committee and a sub-committee of the advisory committee may be non-councillors.

b) As per 1.2, b) – Alternatively, Committee may wish to oversee and direct the work officers directly in progressing the Council’s development of strategic aim No. 27.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 Research also identified other themes as listed under section 2.2 above, which could be further developed over the medium to longer-term.

5.5 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 in overseeing the furtherance of activities presented above.

End