



Cultural & Economic Committee

Date: 13 June 2022

Title: Community Agent proposal

Purpose of the Report:

To consider a recommendation from the Older Persons Sub-Committee regarding funding a Community Agent through Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity.

Contact Officer:

Sarah Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk

Corporate Objective/s	LLTC Five Year Plan – Objective 15 (To antidote isolation and loneliness)	
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	Initial costs could be met within allocated reserves. Funding for subsequent years would need to be identified.
Human Resources	No	
Operational/Service delivery	No	
Procedural/Legal	Yes	Localism Act 2011 (General Power of Competence)
Risk/Health and Safety	No	
Environmental Aims	No	

1 RECOMMENDATION/S

Should the Committee be minded, the proposals are:

- 1.1 To consider whether to support the recommendation from the Older Persons Sub-Committee to fund a part time Community Agent from September 2022 and
- 1.2 If supportive of the proposal and in agreement that a minimum of two full years (after 2022-23) will be needed to ascertain impact of the scheme, to recommend to Policy and Finance Committee that commitment be made to funding of the scheme into 2023-24 and 2024-25.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting held 17 February 2022, the Older Persons Sub-Committee received a presentation from Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) on Community Wellbeing Champions. The relevant extract of minutes is below:

Kate Ellis and Karen Hall from Bedfordshire Rural Community Charities (BRCC) were welcomed to the meeting and gave a presentation on the work their charity undertakes (please see Glossary table at end of this section) which included having staff who undertake social prescribing and others acting as community agents. BRCC currently have two Community Wellbeing Champions (who carry out social prescribing) working in Leighton-Linslade with one in post and one post currently vacant.

BRCC's social prescribing involves offering person centred advice and agreeing achievable goals for their clients in response to the reason for a social prescribing referral. They provide non-medical referrals to organisations and groups after identifying what type of service would be needed. These services could include coffee mornings, knitting groups, digital support, active lifestyles, food banks, MIND, debt services or over 50's clubs.

Face to face, on-line or telephone appointments could be offered to provide advice, increase independence and help with mental and physical wellbeing.

Concerns were raised that some older people would not have access to on-line devices and how would BRCC identify them and help them to access services. It was confirmed BRCC advertise in magazines and newsletters and could provide a device for an older person if they required one and wanted to learn how to use them. It was suggested that leaflets could be held at the Town Council or any other public building which would give a telephone number for older people to be able to make the initial contact.

A question was raised asking whether this Committee would be able to sponsor a Community Agent in some capacity for the Leighton-Linslade area. BRCC would recruit and carry out the appropriate checks and training. Members agreed to explore the idea and hoped more discussions would take place on this matter.

Kate Ellis and Karen Hall were thanked for attending the meeting and providing an informative presentation on the work carried out by BRCC. It was hoped they would return to a future meeting with a further update on their work.

- 2.2 At its next meeting on 23 May 2022, the Older Persons Sub-Committee received more detailed information including examples of schemes funded elsewhere in the county.
- 2.3 The relevant extract of draft minutes is below:

Further to previous discussion, officers had undertaken further research into the potential for funding or part funding a “Community Agent” through the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. An example was given of Biggleswade where the scheme had operated since 2016 and was now an ongoing contract. Biggleswade town council funded one person for two days per week with regular reports to committee demonstrating that the impact could be meaningful.

A cost for the period September 2022-March 2023 had been obtained at £8,476 to include £750 start up costs. The cost for the following full financial year would be £13,212.

The sub committee noted that costs for the current year could be covered by the £10,780.40 underspend from monies previously allocated to projects that came in under the estimated spend. However, future funding would need careful consideration and council support. It was felt that such a scheme would need to run for at least two full years to see any demonstrable impact.

It was proposed and seconded that a recommendation be put forward to the parent committee for consideration.

RECOMMENDED to the Cultural and Economic Services Committee to support the funding of a Community Agent through BRCC for an initial period of 2 years and 7 months from September 2022, with costs for 2022-23 to be met from existing Older Persons budget allocation but noting that commitment to funding for the next two financial years would be required by Council to demonstrate any meaningful impact.

It was noted that should the project proceed, the role of the sub committee might change to primarily monitoring of the service contracts with BRCC and Citizens Online and this would need further discussion.

3 BIGGLESWADE EXAMPLE

3.1 In their presentation of February 2022, BRCC described the Community Agent role as below:

- Help isolated and vulnerable people access information and support.
- Give 1-1 support and/or link to other services.
- Catch people before they need social care.
- Enable people to use their own natural supports (income, family & friends, local community)
- Increase independence, mental and physical wellbeing and help improve quality of life
- Boost community support – good neighbour groups and local volunteers

- 3.2 The Older Persons Sub-Committee heard of the sponsorship by Biggleswade Town Council of a part-time Community Agent (2 days per week). BTC have supported this project since 2016.
- 3.3 In the period 2016 – 2020, it was reported that 1,473 residents in Biggleswade had been supported, with 3011 issues resolved.
- 3.4 From a request for feedback via a survey, a sample of 123 residents returned the evaluation form. Of these, 91% reported feeling more supported and/or connected to the community and 78% reported a greater sense of independence.
- 3.5 A case study example is given below:

A resident made contact from a community group the Agent visited. She had recently fallen and wanted to get a pendant alarm for peace of mind. The Agent gave her the information to do so, and suggested she also apply for Attendance Allowance as she had a long-term disability. This has been awarded. She has no relatives living nearby so the Agent gave her the Good Neighbour Scheme contact details. The Agent also helped her reapply for Blue Badge Status as her old one had expired.

4 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Costs for a similar scheme (i.e. funding one agent for 2 days per week) are as follows:

Year 1 2022-23 (partial year, Sept '22 – March '23)	£8,176 (incl. £750 start up costs)
Year 2 2023-23	£13,212
Year 3 2023-24	TBC (likely RPI increase)

- 4.2 Costs for year 1 could be met within the existing funds allocated for the 55UP project due to underspend on other elements of the programme.
- 4.3 Experience in other locations demonstrates that it will take some time to build up awareness in the community and for the impact of a Community Agent to be evidenced. The recommendation from sub committee is to consider funding for the second half of this year and a further two full years.
- 4.4 Agreement to take this forward would require commitment from the Council to find the necessary funding for years 2023-24 and 2024-25 either through the revenue budget, earmarked reserves or Future Projects reserves (i.e. to factor in inclusion in the five year financial plan).
- 4.5 The projects currently included in the Council's five year financial plan are set out below.

Future Projects	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026	Totals
	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget	
Democratic and Central Services						
IT Provision	2,916		7,500	25,000		38,332
Grounds and Environmental Services						
Playground Refurbishments	53,422	37,000	37,000	37,000	37,000	278,747
Open Spaces Improvements	79,496					
New Play Equipment	45,000	45,000	45,000	45,000	45,000	
Parsons Close Adventure Playground						0
CCTV	40,000					40,000
Cemetery Chapel & Lych Gate				125,000		0
Drinking Water Fountains	25,000					25,000
Potential Youth Capital Project *			250,000			250,000
Cultural and Economic Services						
Living History Trail	11,608					11,608
Pigeon Project	40,000					40,000
Older Persons Project	50,000	30,000				80,000
Younger Persons Project	25,000	25,000				50,000
Expenditure	372,442	137,000	339,500	232,000	82,000	813,687
External Funding (PWLB)						0
Budget Requirement	372,442	137,000	339,500	232,000	82,000	813,687

* In accordance with Objective 45 of the 5 Year Plan which will be subject to future parish engagement

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Community Agent proposal provides a tried and tested mechanism by which the Council can actively support its most vulnerable residents but without impact on its own staffing resources. In working in partnership with BRCC, the council would benefit from their knowledge, experience and best practice in this field and therefore improve the likely benefit to be derived from the investment being recommended.
- 5.2 Much like the Teenage Advice and Information Centre, numbers alone may not clearly evidence the impact on individual people. However, case study examples from Biggleswade clearly demonstrate the difference a Community Agent service could make to vulnerable local residents.
- 5.3 The Committee is asked to consider progressing the scheme, subject to endorsement by Policy and Finance Committee/Council of the long term financial commitment.
- 5.4 Should the scheme proceed, regular reports would be provided and the scheme assessed for impact during financial year 2024-25.

End.