

HEALTH AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY REPORT

DATE: 1 DECEMBER 2020

Northumberland Communities Together: Service Update

Report of: Maureen Taylor, Director Business Development & Communities
Cabinet Member: Cllr Veronica Jones

Purpose of report

This paper follows on from the report to Cabinet on 13th October 2020 (COVID-19: Response & Recovery Update) and provides members with the latest update on the establishment of the Northumberland Communities Together service and its response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. It provides an overview of the services ongoing response and delivery initiatives since March 2020 and its strategic aims and priorities going forward:

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus emergency on the residents of Northumberland and the need for a collaborative partnership response;
- Acknowledge the continued work undertaken to date by the service to build community capability and capacity to respond;
- Seek further clarity and assurance through scrutiny and challenge, helping to set future strategy and prioritised action;
- Agree to receive further reports on the work being undertaken by the Northumberland Communities Together Service, aligned to corporate response and recovery plans.

Link to Corporate Plan

- We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for; 'living'.
- We want you to love where you live; 'enjoying'.
- We want you to have access to the things you need; 'connecting'
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential; 'learning'
- We want to attract more and better jobs; 'thriving'.

Key issues

Background

1. **COVID-19 Community Response Hub (Northumberland Communities Together)**
 - 1.1. Northumberland Communities Together went live on 18th March operating a seven day a week service from 9.00am - 6.00pm. The initial aim was to ensure that Northumberland County Council was able to satisfy its statutory function of ensuring all Clinically Extremely Vulnerable resident 'Shielding patients (circa 20 thousand) were appropriately and adequately supported during those early days of the Coronavirus pandemic.
 - 1.2. Contact to the Community Response Hub was by phone via the Council Contact Centre Mon-Fri and via OneCall at weekends. Enquiries were also received through the website or by email: NCT@northumberland.gov.uk. Information was regularly shared across our social media platforms @NlandTogether
 - 1.3. During those initial months the service was structured on a temporary basis and was incredibly indebted and humbled by the wonderful staff that came together from across numerous directorates and services to help stand up and expediently mobilise a response that included;
 - 1.3.1. establishment of a contact centre to deal with call and enquiries, online support for residents to register for access and support, signposting and connection to emergency food and assistance, voluntary community assistance and support
 - 1.3.2. the development of a food delivery and distribution hub, for the emergency preparation, packaging and distribution of emergency bridging parcels, hygiene and sanitary products, personal protective equipment, digital devices and office equipment for those working from home.
 - 1.3.3. the development of capability and capacity within local communities through more systematic and coordinated approach to community engagement and empowerment. Working with VCS leads to establish

the necessary pathways and solutions required to respond to the emerging needs of residents at a local level.

- 1.3.4. supporting sustainability through the recruitment and mobilisation of an army of volunteers and mutual aid organisations.

2. Northumberland Communities Together Service

- 2.1. From the 1st August 2020 the Northumberland Communities Together operating model moved from a temporary COVID-19 Community Response service to a more formal and sustainable service. An Enhanced Service Plan was developed aligning the service priorities and actions to the wider corporate plan and strategic priorities for NCC.
- 2.2. Northumberland Communities Together exists to support, engage and enrich our communities through the development and delivery of sustainable and collaborative relationships with all our residents and across private, public and voluntary sectors. Our multi sectorial, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team approach involves working in partnership with Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB), NHS Partners, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Public Health, Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) Voluntary & Community Sector partners and organisations and others to ensure an appropriate triage and support pathways are in place.
- 2.3. The Northumberland Communities Together Service now directly operates as a multidisciplinary and multi-agency team involving 26.24 Whole Time

Equivalents (WTE) The team is a blend of existing positions from across the council and NHS and no external appointments have been made.

2.3.1. NCC - NCT Permanent Posts (Total: 2.8 WTE)

Operational Lead 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) NCT Permanent
Project Manager 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) NCT Permanent
Volunteer Coordinator 0.8 WTE (1 x Post) NCT Permanent

2.3.2. NCC - NCT Temporary Posts (Total: 3.6 WTE)

Strategic Lead 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) Temp Secondment
Service Lead 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) Temp Secondment
Project Coordinator 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) Temp Secondment
NETS Officer 0.6 WTE (1 x Post) Temp Secondment

2.3.3. NCT - NHS Shared Management Posts (Total: 18.84 WTE)

Carer & Prevention Manager 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) NHS Staff
Locality Coordinators 5.00 WTE (5 x Posts) NHS Staff
Support Planners 11.84 WTE (13 x Posts) NHS Staff
Welfare Rights 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) NHS Staff

2.3.4. Police & Crime Commissioner Hosted Posts (Total: 1.00 WTE)

Violence Reduction Officer 1.00 WTE (1 x Post) PCC Hosted Staff

2.4. Northumberland Communities Together also works in direct partnership with numerous NCC services and departments who significantly contribute directly to operational delivery including; customer service staff, revenue and benefits staff, children and early years professionals, libraries and cultural services staff, fire and rescue staff, education and adult learning staff, regeneration and economy staff along with colleagues from property and housing services. This list is an example and not exhaustive of our truly collaborative and whole systems approach across NCC.

3. NCT Pathways for Support & Assistance

- 3.1. Northumberland Communities Together responds to the specific and emerging needs of our residents and communities by making the most of knowledge, capability and capacity that exists within our communities. This is achieved through capture of information and triaging resident's needs to determine the most appropriate support and assistance.
- 3.2. To promote co-production and ensure we take an authentic collaborative approach to developing local solutions, Northumberland Communities Together has continued to take an asset based approach which further builds upon and strengthens the work of our empowering communities project. NCT is doing this by linking voluntary and community sector

organisations together to establish both local placed based partnerships and thematic partnerships response to emerging needs such as:

3.2.1. NCT Local Food Partnership

3.2.1.1. The Council has been allocated over £367k in Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. Building on the locality-based working, five leads across the county have been identified from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and are being supported to work with one another to provide food at 'points of crisis' and to explore more sustainable and innovative community food solutions across the county.

3.2.2. NCT Financial Hardship Partnership

3.2.2.1. In April this year, at an early stage of our response to Covid, Bernicia Homes fast-tracked an allocation of £200,000 to eight local authorities across the region. The aim of this funding was to help charities and organisations tackle hardship caused by the Coronavirus crisis. Bernicia asked councils to use their local knowledge to ensure the money swiftly got to those able to deliver real help to people in need. Northumberland County Council received an allocation of £120,000 from the fund.

3.2.2.2. As part of our Northumberland Communities Together approach, the Council identified local Voluntary and Community Sector leads who were well-placed to allocate this funding in five areas across the County. Allocations of £20,000 were made to each of the 5 locality leads, with the remainder held for contingency support.

3.2.3. NCT Fuel Partnership

3.2.3.1. During the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic it became apparent that fuel poverty and hardship was an emerging theme in regards to requests for support and assistance. Working in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau a fuel pathway was developed and £25,000 secured to support Northumberland residents.

3.2.4. NCT Community Enrichment & Engagement Partnership

3.2.4.1. Community enrichment events have been co-delivered county-wide with support from partners. The 'pop-up' event provided the opportunity to target and engage with some of our most

vulnerable communities addressing issues of social isolation, psychological wellbeing whilst also providing fun and engaging multi-generational activities. Northumberland Communities Together is currently conducting an evaluation project to examine the learning from those events. It is hoped the findings will help to shape the future model and approach towards future community outreach and enrichment programmes.

- 3.3. NCT provides a real-time online database, accessible to all partners, which enable residents in need of support to input their postcode and requirements and be 'served up' with a list of local groups and organisations able to meet those needs. The aim is that those with less complex needs can 'self-serve', and find their own support, without the need for further help.

4. Performance and progress

- 4.1. Since launching the service over 17,000 calls have been dealt with by Northumberland Communities Together, connecting people to support with access to food, medicines and other essential services along with wellbeing support. Where matches for help cannot be made, the request is passed onto community and voluntary group partners who use their knowledge to find support. Where a solution does not exist regionally, Communities Together engages with regional and national partners on local solutions. An example is the development of a pathway to provide access to emergency fuel and energy provision in partnership with the Citizen Advice Bureau.
- 4.2. Data over the past 8 months shows a consistent trend in referral activity across the week. Monday is the busiest day receiving 23% of referrals, Tuesday 19%, Wednesday 19%, Thursday 19% and Friday 18% and 2% weekend. Data is skewed from an increased level of calls at weekends

during the initial phase of the pandemic. Weekend averages are now less than <0.5%.

4.3. Current activity is as follows:

- 20,604 shielded residents supported with 9,323 accessing Government support; 3,751 bridging food provisions delivered by our team and volunteers;
- 2,196 home visits to carry out wellbeing checks on shielded residents who had not accessed Government support or who the National Shielding Hub had been unable to contact;
- 4,688 people supported through NCT referrals;
- 2,218 unique households have contacted NCT for assistance;
- 797 referrals for emergency food assistance;
- 508 residents connected to financial support and advice;
- 2,812 people connected to GoodSam- the NHS volunteer network to help with things like shopping assistance, prescriptions;
- £14K+ in small grants distributed to 31 community organisations;
- £5K+ in individual hardship grants given to residents;
- 1.93 million face masks have been distributed;
- 119,344 disposal aprons distributed;
- 16,029 litres of Hand Sanitizer provided;
- 2,092 boxes of gloves provided; and,
- Over 100 community enrichment 'pop up' events delivered to over 3,000 residents.

The national shielding team have assessed the council in relation to its readiness to respond to the demands of the current situation and the potential for future and ongoing restrictions; NCT has received a strong assessment and is described as an exemplary model which we are incredible to hear.

5. Financial Assistance

- 5.1. The Council has been allocated over £367k in Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. Building on the locality-based working, five leads across the county have been identified from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and are being supported to work with one another to provide food at 'points of crisis' and to explore more sustainable and

innovative community food solutions across the county. The financial allocation has been broken down as follows:

- 5.1.1. The £367,814 .51 awarded to Northumberland County Council to 'help support people struggling to afford food and other essentials' has been allocated and distributed as follows:
- 5.1.2. COVID-19 Northumberland Food Partnership £115,000 allocated (Funding being managed through Community Food Partnership of local VCS organisations representing local communities and food partners. A signed Memorandum of Understanding exists between all parties which details roles and responsibilities and the distribution and allocation of funds to local groups and individuals. The local VCS infrastructure organisation is playing a role in ensuring good governance and reporting)
- 5.1.3. COVID-19 Northumberland Food Sustainability £100,000 allocated (Funding opportunities being managed by Northumberland County Council in partnership with Community Food Partnership to ensure that available funding exists to further enhance, compliment and innovate food solutions in order to ensure a robust and sustainable provision that can deal with and respond to future demand and shocks. Latest partnership reporting indicates £44,472.98 distributed to date)
- 5.1.4. COVID-19 Fuel Essentials £10,000 allocated (Funding being managed through Partnership with Citizen Advice Bureau and Local VCS organisations, helping to provide fuel and utilities assistance to individuals struggling with fuel and energy costs due to the pandemic or where they are unable to sustain regular healthy hot food/hot meal provision. Latest partnership reporting indicates only £3,000 remaining and a proposal for further financial support being submitted to cover the winter period)
- 5.1.5. COVID-19 Financial Hardship Support £25,000 allocated (Funding being managed through Community Partnership of local VCS organisations and Bernicia Homes Partnership, latest partnership update indicates £16,139.79 distributed to date)
- 5.1.6. COVID-19 Prescriptions Support £5,000 allocated (Funding being managed through Community Partnership of local VCS organisations and Local Pharmacists to help with costs for delivery of prescriptions where local delivery option not available.

Support has covered financial cost of postage, local delivery including taxi, etc)

- 5.1.7. COVID-19 Holiday Hunger & Enrichment Provision £15,000 allocated (Funding managed through Community Partnership with VCS organisations. Support to complement and enhance food and social enrichment activities for targeted young people and families impacted by COVID19 throughout Summer Aug-Sep, Autumn Oct/Nov, Christmas Dec/Jan school holiday period.)
 - 5.1.8. COVID-19 Christmas Hampers £2,500 allocated (In partnership with Northumberland Schools and Rotary Club of Blyth targeting our most vulnerable families impacted by COVID. £2,500 allocation spent)
 - 5.1.9. COVID-19 Essential Support for family and young people £15,000 (In partnership with Northumberland Schools, alternative education providers, Early Years Services and VCS organisations all who support our most vulnerable families. Support for the purchase of essentials, where ineligible for alternative schemes, school uniform items, warm clothes, toiletries, hygiene and sanitary products, medical related transport, and other unexpected costs arising as a result of the current pandemic that impact children and young people's outcomes)
 - 5.1.10. Digital Connectivity and Social Isolation £5,000 (In partnership with Northumberland Schools, Adult Care providers and VCS organisations to provide digital assistance to those struggling to access online services through lack of digital skills, connectivity, or device. Support to extremely vulnerable individuals to help them maintain connection and inclusion addressing isolation and loneliness)
- 5.2. In total £287,500 has been allocated with £75,314.51 remaining unallocated.
- 5.3. The remaining funds will be allocated to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and essentials due to COVID-19. The

fund will continue to meet needs in the most cost effective and efficient way demonstrating best value.

6. Winter Support Grant

- 6.1. The Government has allocated Northumberland County Council £992,515.33 in regards to the proposed winter support grant. The grant has two criteria that we need to prepare for and deliver against:
 - 6.1.1. i) Household - In regards to household elements 80% of the funding is targeted at Children and Young People and their families, 20% to other i.e individuals.
 - 6.1.2. ii) Provision. - Of the provision criteria 80% is targeted for Food, Fuel, Water and Utilities, the remaining up to 20% for Other emergency assistance.
- 6.2. The winter support grant needs to be able to satisfy the government commitment to FSM entitlement over the Christmas and February (spring half term) and March/April (Easter) school holidays.
- 6.3. If numbers were projected to rise at the same rate as they did between June and October (4.1%) that would involve projected numbers of 9,147 pupils by Easter and a cost of £686,025 for the 5 weeks holiday (9,147 x 25 days x £3)
- 6.4. However looking at the number as at 16 Nov - in the month since the last request numbers have increased by 119 ; If numbers continue to increase at 119 per month that would involve projected numbers of 9,527 pupils by Easter and a cost of £714,525 for the 5 weeks holiday (9,527 x 25 days x £3). This amount would be 76% of the grant funding available.
- 6.5. The Government has also pledged additional funding of £16m for food distribution charities, with conversations with FareShare and others ongoing as to how this is allocated.
- 6.6. We still await details around the payments of the grant and what additional funding may be going to others such as food banks so that we can ensure there is no duplication in funding. However, we have already started to plan for the need to scale up and ensure we have an appropriate response that meets the needs of our residents in Northumberland.
- 6.7. Our intended approach will involve collaboration and cooperation with the local organisations, Local Town & Parish Councils, schools and other public sector partners and professionals to ensure that children, young people and

families have choice with the funding available whether vouchers, food delivery, hamper, or some local meal vouchers (eg local hot food etc).

- 6.7.1. Where a school has an appropriate response in place, this means hot meals, voucher, or food delivery, NCT would complete the simple transfer of funds to these schools to cover this and include our contact details for access to the wider supports (eg utility pathway). Existing relationships between the school and the family would provide assurance against fraud.
 - 6.7.2. Where a school is without appropriate provision in place, then NCT would be the route to access support and assistance. NCT would need a comprehensive data set so that eligibility could be assured and the appropriate contact made with families. Schools and others would be actively encouraged to signpost/ support families to engage with NCT.
 - 6.7.3. We would add discretionary funding for families claiming Universal Credit who might not satisfy free school entitlement. This would also include outreach work to identify and reach those most at need.
 - 6.7.4. Support from colleagues such as those from finance/revenues and benefits may be used to develop an appropriate system which offer the appropriate assurance and financial safeguards.
 - 6.7.5. Offers would be a mix of cash transfers, hot meals, and food delivery, we would also include vouchers which could be picked up at local community hubs (eg libraries) if families have this preference.
 - 6.7.6. Using NCT ensures we are able to offer the wider support required by the grant which is focused on household poverty "those who need" rather than FSM.
- 6.8. We recognise that Poverty is not simply around addressing the need for food, but a holistic view of the family circumstances and social-situation, taking into account the whole person and their situation. That is why we will be putting further funding and support into existing local pathways for Food, Fuel, Hardship and Digital Connectivity and isolation. These pathways have already helped thousands of families throughout the pandemic and have helped reduce stress and uncertainty during an already difficult time.

7. NCT Future Priorities

- 7.1. Develop a plan for allocation and distribution of the Winter Support Grant to ensure that those children/households requiring additional support and

assistance over the school holiday period are well prepared for and appropriate local solutions are in place.

- 7.2. Monitor allocation and detail of future government funding to maximise opportunity and negate duplication.
- 7.3. To ensure the most efficient and joined-up approach possible, Northumberland Communities Together continues to review its core processes ensuring accessible referral pathways are in place, along with safe and secure information sharing protocols and procedures. Through greater collaboration and shared working with strategic partners, Northumberland Communities Together have started to reduce the level of duplication in referrals, assessment and provision of services to meet the needs of residents.
- 7.4. The Community and Voluntary Sector are a crucial partner in responding to the Covid crisis and will continue to play a vital role in the recovery phase. Many community organisations will have been adversely affected by the crisis and we are assessing the financial resilience of the Community and Voluntary Sector moving forward.
- 7.5. As part of the longer-term plans, Northumberland Communities Together are starting to identify and consider a number of Community Hubs that could further strengthen and develop our 'empowering communities' agenda. These hubs will be shared spaces for public, private and VCS sectors to come together to support co-production and delivery of services that will improve the health, educational and life chances of residents within those communities. The empowering communities work and Community Hubs will help to build new relationships between the Council, communities, volunteers and the voluntary/community sector.
- 7.6. We will continue to explore funding and delivery opportunities through North of Tyne Combined Authority, maximising opportunity to strategically and operationally align our inclusive economy activities with the development of community hubs. We envisage a greater opportunity for the delivery of employability and skills training, educational and learning along with health and wellbeing programmes within the heart of our communities.

Implications

Policy	Northumberland Communities Together may have an impact on a wide range of Council's policies as we look to review and co-produce new ways of working with our Voluntary & Community Sector partners. Where specific changes to policy are required these will be subject to separate report(s) and decision(s).
Finance and value for money	The S151 Officer is closely monitoring the financial impact of Covid response and recovery, including additional income and emergency grant assistance funding. Financial monitoring and reporting to the Government will be carried out where appropriate in line with requirements placed on all councils and in accordance with terms of grant funding. The financial implications of NCT's operational plans will be set out in separate reports as projects and programmes of recovery are taken forward.
Legal	In line with other local authorities, NCC has numerous and wide-ranging legal duties and powers to respond to and recover from the Covid crisis. These include, but are not limited to the provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and extant Civil Contingencies legislation. Moving forward, the Monitoring Officer will continue to be consulted on the detailed legal implications of our response and recovery plans and our co-production of community engagement and empowerment activities.
Procurement	Our response to the Covid crisis and our Communities Together programme delivery has required our approach to procurement to be agile to respond to rapidly, changing circumstances. We will continue to evaluate lessons learned from the crisis and how these might inform future approaches to procurement. We will also take account of any ongoing national changes to procurement frameworks
Human Resources	The response to the Covid crisis has resulted in significant changes to the way staff work and deliver services, Northumberland Communities Together is evidence of that step change. It is possible that some of these changes will remain long-term and may well become permanent. As part of the work outlined in this report we will consider what has changed due to Covid and the establishment of the Northumberland Communities Together Service and how our services will need to adapt to reflect those changes and meet the needs of our residents and businesses. Any specific changes to services or

	HR policies to facilitate this, will be the subject of separate report(s) and decision(s).
Property	As we move further into this new phase, we will consider the best use of the property portfolio to support ongoing response and recovery and deliver services in a changing context such as Community Hubs and Community Learning Hubs aligned to the aspirations and opportunities afforded under the North of Tyne Combined Authority. Any future changes to the use of the property portfolio will be the subject of separate report(s) and decision(s)
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	This report sets out a wide range of policies, services, projects and initiatives to ensure Northumberland Council responds to and recovers from the Covid crisis. These will, of course, have implications for all our residents and communities and therefore are likely to have implications across the nine 'protected characteristics' under equalities legislation. Where there are specific changes to services or policies as part of our response and recovery planning, these will be assessed separately in Impact Assessments relevant to the specific change proposed.
Risk Assessment	In line with Council's overall policies and procedures, individual risk assessments are in place for the services, projects and other activities set out in this report
Crime & Disorder	We will continue to monitor and respond to ongoing changes in relation to community safety. We have established partnerships with the Police and Crime Commissioner Office and the Violence Reduction Unit to codesign and develop local plan
Customer Consideration	Our strategy and delivery plans will take a 'residents first' approach, taking account of the changing needs and requirements of our residents and communities as a result of Covid and the future demands and shocks that might be faced by communities across Northumberland.
Health & wellbeing	COVID-19, the measures to control the virus and the long term economic impacts has highlighted existing health inequalities. Many of the population groups affected are not covered by the 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act. This report emphasises the key role that many Council departments play in reducing inequalities by targeting those disproportionately affected such as younger people and those from lower socioeconomic groups. This support includes access to education, employability and skills programmes, employment, digital and financial support. Ongoing efforts to prevent and

	quickly respond to outbreaks will minimise the transmission of the virus. A key consideration will be our role with partners in supporting people whose mental health has been negatively impacted as a result of the crisis.
Wards	Covid crisis response and recovery planning impacts on all Wards.

Background papers

Report sign off

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	initials
Finance Officer	Chris Hand
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Human Resources	Kelly Angus
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