

12. Community Development Officer Annual Report

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide members with an annual update on the range of Community Development activities undertaken in Area South during 2009 and to present priority areas of work for 2010.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members note the report.

Background

The post of Community Development Officer (CDO) is part of the Area Development Team.

The overall job purpose of the CDO is;

"To support the development of strong, self-sustaining communities by working directly with and linking: local individuals and groups, town and parish councils, voluntary and statutory agencies. To help local people articulate the needs of their own communities in order firstly to encourage them to work together to meet those needs and secondly to gain improvements to both Council and other public/local services".

The CDO works alongside the Regeneration Officer, Town Centre Manager, other council services and other local agencies to deliver a true community based approach in Yeovil, consistent with the government's ambitions for a 'place shaping' role for councils.

Main Areas of Work in 2009

Community Planning and Neighbourhood Renewal

Westfield and Milford Community Associations

This has continued to be a priority area of work and the CDO has supported and advised both Community Associations. The Associations have held a number of successful and well publicised events, part funded by the CDO delegated budget, including a Christmas Fair, Clean-up Weeks and Family Football Events. Both committees are building relationships with local businesses, agencies and the local schools.

Birchfield Area Residents Association

Members highlighted the need for a Residents Association as a priority for the year. Birchfield Area Residents Association adopted their constitution and Terms Of Reference at their successful launch on 19th September 2009. The launch took the form of an open day at Birchfield Community Centre, with various activities for children and adults and displays from different agencies on the work they undertake in the Birchfield area. The

open day was paid for from the CDO delegated budget. New members have since joined and the group have started to consider community activities for the next year.

Capital Projects

Milford Hall

This has been the main project for the CDO this year. The CDO is the Project Manager for the project and has successfully secured £720,000 of funding. The CDO and the Design Officer have worked closely with the Community Association and current and potential hall users to design the new facility and these designs have been approved by the Development Control Service. Work on the hall is due to commence in February 2010 and should be completed by the end of the summer/beginning of autumn 2010.

Birchfield

In 2009, as well as setting up the Residents Association, projects began with the aim of increasing the usage of Birchfield Park. The CDO is a member of the steering group for the redevelopment of the play area. Residents were consulted on the design of the new play area and the chair of the Residents Association is also part of the steering group. The project is due to commence in March 2010.

One of the main concerns for residents in this area is the lack of lighting in the park. The community, members and other agencies have raised these concerns. In response to this, the CDO has been tasked with identifying the necessary funding and is awaiting the decisions on four funding applications. If all applications are successful it is planned to not only improve the lighting but also improve the pathways and install a cycle path. The park links many important community facilities such as the school, doctors surgery and community hall so it is hoped that the improved pathways would encourage residents to walk and cycle to these rather than drive.

Community Engagement

The CDO has continued to arrange the Community Forum events that allocate the £40,000 service enhancement budget. General feedback from the Forum members was that they found the events very useful and really felt that they were having an opportunity to make decisions on the council's budget. Some work is needed to refine the initial meetings where residents give feedback on the council's performance. It is possible that this information could be obtained from the Forum Members before the meeting via the post or electronically to save time at the meetings. However, the second meeting, which gives Service Managers the opportunity to present information on their service and suggest possible projects or improvements, is very popular. This work is important in implementing the Government's involvement and empowerment agenda.

Addressing Health and Social Inequalities in Yeovil Pilot

The CDO has been part of the steering group leading on the study on Health Inequalities in Yeovil. The study, by consultants Roger Tym and Partners, has looked at the Health and Social Inequalities in Yeovil and how South Somerset District Council and partners can best begin to tackle them. It concluded that the best way to tackle these issues would be to use 'community hubs' and ensure services and activities were accessible to these residents from within their own communities.

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has supported the project and approximately £80,000 has been raised for the project. Somerset Primary Care Trust has importantly confirmed their commitment to the project for the next 5 years.

It was envisaged that the project would be commissioned to an external not for profit organisation. However, when partners were consulted on this approach it became apparent that they would prefer the project to be managed by the CDO due to the success of the community work already being undertaken in these areas of Yeovil.

The project requires a full time post so there was not sufficient capacity for the CDO to take on this work in addition to the other community development work. Therefore the LSP agreed to fund a project worker from the budget. James Divali has been appointed as the Project Manager and is based in the Area South Development Team. The CDO is managing this post and has overall responsibility for the project.

This work is key to achieving LAA targets and Strategic Priority 8 in the South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy: Improve delivery of services through joined up locality approaches. It is also a Key Target Area in the SSDC Corporate Plan.

Grants and Funding

The CDO has continued to promote the South Somerset District Council grant scheme and to assess the applications.

The CDO has also provided funding advice to local projects and charities and continues to research new opportunities and new grants for local groups. A funding file has been created that is available to local groups to view in Petters House. The file has details of the available local and national grants and is updated monthly. It is also now available for the other area offices to use to help their local groups.

Community Safety

The CDO is a member of Area South Community Safety Action Panel that supports stronger communities and is making a major contribution towards making Yeovil a safer place to live.

Youth Opportunities Group

The CDO has continued to chair and organise the group. The group has representatives from statutory agencies, local charities and local churches who meet to tackle issues relating to young people and identify opportunities for youth activities and joint working. This year more young people have been involved in the group and their valuable contributions have improved the way agencies communicate information with young people in schools.

Priority Areas For 2010

These are the proposed priority areas for the next year. The CDO will continue to offer advice and guidance to other groups and areas within Area South but the workload will need to be carefully monitored to ensure priority is given to those projects identified below:

Community Planning and Neighbourhood Renewal

Westfield and Milford Community Associations

These associations need less support now but the CDO will still need to support them to increase their membership and offer advice such as signposting and identifying funding opportunities for projects and improvements.

Birchfield Residents Association

The association is new and will need detailed advice and guidance in its first year to ensure the committee feel confident and able to take on projects. The CDO will also need to help the group raise funds to be able achieve the improvements they want in their community.

Addressing Health and Social Inequalities Project

This is both a strategically important project and one that could make a real difference to residents in some of the most deprived wards in Yeovil. The CDO will need to work with the Project Manager to ensure that the Community Development work is successful and help to build the necessary relationships with community groups, agency workers, local organisations etc. The CDO is also responsible for budget monitoring and general management of the project.

Capital Projects

New capital projects are likely to arise during the year. However, these will remain a priority until their completion:

Milford Hall

This project is likely to require much of the CDO's time in 2010. As the Project Manager, the CDO will be responsible for ensuring the successful delivery of the project and be required to produce various reports and projections for the range of funders and steering group members.

Once the build project is completed, the CDO will need to ensure that the facility is properly utilised and encourage a sense of ownership from within the community to ensure the facility will remain sustainable.

Birchfield Park

The lighting in Birchfield Park is a main concern for residents in this area of Yeovil and the CDO will ensure that this project is moved forward in 2010. The funding has not yet been secured so this will be a priority for the CDO.

Residents have also expressed a desire for something for the older young people in the area, once the play area has been completed. The CDO will work with the Resident Association to explore the possibilities for this.

Community Forum

If service enhancement funding is granted for the year 2010/2011 the CDO will continue to develop the Area South Community Forum. This is an interesting way of encouraging involvement and participation in council service planning.

Corporate Priority Implications

The work of the CDO contributes directly to the following Corporate Themes:

Theme 3: Improve the housing, health and well-being of our citizens

Theme 4: Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities

Theme 5: Deliver well managed, cost effective services valued by our customers

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

None

Background Papers: None
