

Report to: **Housing Review Board**

Date of Meeting: 19 September 2019

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: **Community Development Update**

Purpose of report: To receive an update on the activities of the Community Development Workers, and to consider their work within the wider context of the Housing Service Plan 2019/20

Recommendation: **For Members to note the work that is underway that focuses on building our communities to be more resilient.**

Reason for recommendation: To ensure the Housing Review Board are fully apprised of why we employ Community Development Workers and how their work can be central to achieving the wider objectives of the authority.

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Financial implications: The financial implications are contained within the budget section of the body of the report.

Legal implications: There are no legal implications identified.

Equalities impact: Low Impact

If choosing High or Medium level outline the equality considerations here, which should include any particular adverse impact on people with protected characteristics and actions to mitigate these. Link to an equalities impact assessment form using the [equalities form template](#).

Climate change: Choose an impact level

Risk: Comments
Low Risk

[Click here to enter text on risk considerations relating to your report.](#)

Links to background information:) [Housing Service Plan](#)

Link to Council Plan: Encouraging communities to be outstanding

Report in full

1. Background

1.1 In 2008 we recognised as a Housing Service that it would be beneficial to invest in our communities in order to help them to be resilient, vibrant places where people support each other and where people want to live. By putting our efforts into making communities more

sustainable, we would be able to provide the environment for people living in them to become more confident, social individuals, with the added benefit that they are more likely and able to sustain their tenancies as a result.

1.2 With this in mind we recruited one Community Development Worker (CDW) initially to set up mechanisms by which we could effectively work with young people who were some of our harder to reach residents at that time.

Gradually over time we have expanded the team to five and the function to cover many more activities to support wider groups of the community.

Some examples are given below.

- **Asset Based Community Development** – we are increasingly implementing this approach to community development which involves getting to know local residents in whichever area we are focussing on, and supporting them and the wider community around them to address anything they feel strongly about. It's also about making sure we are listening to tenants and that they are aware of any local services or opportunities that they might find helpful. Through the project in Littleham, Exmouth, we have supported the development of a peer-led mental health group and a partnership to improve green spaces. A second project is now commencing in St Pauls, Honiton; one of our Community Development Workers will be at the Board meeting to tell you first hand of progress so far.
- **SWITCH clubs** – Switch clubs are designed to provide children with positive free time activities, particularly focussed where we have our largest estates. Over the years we have found that linking in with the children helps us to build enduring relationships with local families. This helps us support them to engage positively with other teams within Housing such as Repairs, Estate Management and Rental, and we have also been able to connect families in need with other local activities and initiatives. We run three SWITCH clubs during term times in Littleham in Exmouth, Millwey in Axminster and St Pauls in Honiton, which continue to be well attended. We have expanded our activities so we offer trips and activities in holiday times, specifically activities that will challenge and take young people out of their comfort zones.
- **Right Track Programme** – a development programme for tenants and young people to improve key life skills, employability success, confidence building and mental health mentoring. Each programme is designed around the individual's needs and preferred outcomes. After an initial consultation a visit is carried out where plans are put in place to ensure that the programme is suited to their desired outcomes and style of working. A range of topics are covered and then further plans put in place to make next steps and progress. One of our Community Development Workers will be at the meeting to give more detail of one tenant's experience of the programme, illustrating one of the aims contained within the current Service Plan.
- **Youth tenant conference** – initially CDWs were brought into the annual Tenant Conference so they could look after the children of tenants who were attending, but they aspired for more! Over the last couple of years they had their own conference so that the voices of the children themselves can be heard and their opinions expressed, which helps us to shape the service for the future. Bringing communities together to solve problems can, in turn, help us to improve as a council.
- **Fun Days** – are activities we have run with from our early days and are very popular with local communities. This year we have had events in Broadclyst, Woodbury, Farway, Payhembury, Exmouth and an event in Seaton for National PlayDay. All continue to grow in popularity and give us the opportunity to run a series of events that is mostly in our more

rural areas, and to engage with families and younger people who we otherwise find it more difficult to consult with.

- **Dragons' Den** – 6 years ago we won funding from central government to build a place-based network in Honiton that supported local groups. The Dragons' Den came out of that project, and since then we have run it every year in partnership with Devon County Council and Honiton Town Council. It is an opportunity for small local groups to pitch for funding in front of an audience of their peers. The event itself is also an enjoyable, vibrant networking opportunity.
- **Countryside events** - as reported to the Board's June meeting we run a series of events with the Education Ranger and the Thelma Hulbert Gallery to ensure our tenants (many of whom are less likely to engage with these services than residents in the private sector) are able to access these activities either for free or at half price. This also heavily supports our Public Health agenda in relation to the benefits of using outdoor green spaces to improve physical and mental wellbeing.

2. Housing Service Plan 2019

2.1 For anyone wanting to see the thinking behind all the varied activities we undertake within our communities, the annual service plan is a good place to start, as it highlights particular pieces of work we need to carry out in order to support the work of the wider Housing Service for the coming year. Our Community Development workers are here to give you first hand their experience of how this is progressing using examples that are in this year's service plan.

2.2 **Mental Health Project** – responding to an increased demand to focus upon the mental health issues within our Landlord Services team, we have spent the last 9 months, since January 2019, assessing, reviewing and researching the Council's plans, processes and systems that relate to mental health support and understanding. As there is currently no existing mental health strategy, we are working to create a draft strategy for December 2019, to accommodate the visions, needs and requirements of the Housing Service. As an essential element of our front line work and customer service, we must improve the understanding and education within our staff and provide the training that is required to be better prepared and equipped to deal with mental health cases and individuals. The alarming number of cases that we have with underlying mental ill-health means we must have staff who feel confident and can respond accordingly, especially as it is within their remit to accommodate and refer individuals for the correct support. In addition, the consistency across Housing teams has to be stronger and more cohesive, whereby all parts of the service are working to the same guidelines and strategy to support our tenants with their mental health needs. Meeting the needs of our tenants with their mental health, looking after the wellbeing of our own staff and ensuring we put mental health at the forefront of our approach and service is paramount to meeting our aim of being an 'outstanding place' which encompasses physical, mental and emotional welfare.

2.3 **The St Pauls Project** – Our housing in 'The Square' at St Pauls Road in Honiton was, for some years historically, used as temporary accommodation for the authority, resulting in residents from across the district being housed in an emergency situation away from their jobs, schools and support. Many of these had required housing due to family breakdown, which meant St Pauls had a higher than usual proportion of children to adults on the estate. While this undoubtedly helped by giving a home to families in crisis, there was a high level of nuisance in and around 'The Square' and support required for the residents. We responded by taking a flat out of the housing stock to use as a community facility where we could meet with the Police, County Council and Health Services to co-ordinate our work on the estate and offer residents extra services as a landlord such as rubbish removal, Police and Estate Management surgeries, play facilities and events, and support them also through a residents association to

ensure full engagement and understanding of their needs. This policy of how we used our housing at St Pauls changed in around 2005 when we made the move to reduce the number of temporary households by offering tenants the chance to make their tenancies permanent. Many took up the offer, and although this successfully reduced the amount of temporary accommodation we were left with the legacy of an unusually high proportion of children on the estate and have continued to work with residents to some degree, responding to the level of need, using the links we set up in those early days. Since August 2019 we have been spending much more time in St Pauls in Honiton. This is the beginning of a project that we expect to last at least 3 years. The ultimate aim is to make the neighbourhood and community a safer, happier place to be. During this first phase we are running events and activities that will help us build trusting relationships with local people, starting to find out what people love about the area and what their biggest concerns are. Alongside our activities we have started a partnership with Sovereign and LiveWest (who also have housing on the estate) and with the police and local councillors so that we can work together, sharing resources, ideas and experiences.

2.4 Case Studies – We have personal stories from three tenants who've been part of the peer-led mental health group, and another who's been fundamental to the partnership for improving the green areas of Littleham for Wildlife and for People. We also have one from someone who's benefited from Right Track, a programme where tenants can sign up to receive mentoring to build confidence, improve employment opportunities and increase their life skills development.

2.5 Budgets – while the budget for us to spend on community development work over the past five years has remained relatively stable at around £20,000, our staffing costs over the period have risen from £74,719 to £147,154, as we have grown the team from two to five Community Development Workers at the recommendation of the Housing Review Board.

2.6 Other work in our communities - We have many more activities and opportunities available to residents in and around our areas of housing across the district, that are run by other Landlord Services teams, so when you see we have put on an event it may be our Mobile Support Officers or Estate Managers or Rental Officers who have organised it. You can keep an eye out for what is coming up on the Housing Events calendar on Outlook.

2.7 For more information follow or like us on

<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/housing-and-homelessness/community-development/>



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