



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: Health and Community Activities

Date of Meeting: 24th April 2006

Public

Key Decision: No

Recorded in Forward Plan:

No

Inside Policy Framework

Title: COMMUNITIES RE-UNITED

Report of: Community Services Directorate

Report reference: CS 15/06

Summary:

To consider the Council's continuing commitment to support the Communities Re-united Project for a further limited period.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to approve the suggestion in Section 3 of this report, together with the budgetary implications outlined in Section 4, regarding the continuation, for a limited period, of the Communities Re-united Project.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1 The Communities Re-united Project was set up in response to the floods of January 2005.
- 1.2 It emanated from the Carlisle Churches Flood Response Group which had operated a number of respite centres from various temporary locations in the affected areas. It was originally established to trace and find many of the 3,500 people who moved out of their homes having been flooded and whose whereabouts were uncertain. This resulted in a 95% success rate.
- 1.3 The ongoing emotional and practical support which Communities Re - United continues to provide, developed from the overwhelming demand from flood victims which resulted initially in a series of Advice and Help days (18 to date). Additionally a regular monthly Newsletter has also provided an essential link and support for those who were flooded.
- 1.4 The Project, which has operated from the Assembly Rooms in the Old Town Hall since March 2005, is run by Carlisle Churches Flood Response Group, but has been funded from a variety of sources, including Cumbria Community Foundation, Cumbria County Council and the City Council.
- 1.5 It was originally intended that the Project should finish after Christmas 2005, but such was the demand still being made on it's services, it was agreed, in consultation with the Housing and Community Recovery Group, (a multi-agency group set up to co-ordinate social, welfare and housing recovery issues in flood affected areas), to continue until Easter 2006. (a spreadsheet illustrating the breadth of issues being covered by the current 'live' caseload of 27 enquiries, is attached)
- 1.6 The funding to enable this has come from a grant of £17,950 from the City Council and a further grant of £5,000 from the Cumbria Community Foundation.
- 1.7 Since it's inception, over 2,800 people have sought advice and support from the Project on a variety of issues, predominately complex building and insurance matters. Other matters include late payments for utility bills, insurance content lists and complaints re poor workmanship.
- 1.8 Also, a number of specific information and advice days run every three weeks have been organised around issues such as insurance, flood defences, health, etc. The

Project acts as a 'one-stop shop', as many people expressed frustration at having to go from one agency to another to resolve different issues and the service includes giving assistance to write letters, make phone calls and visit homes for inspections.

- 1.9 In addition, off-shoot projects have also emerged, such as the Flood Therapy Centre, stress busting sessions etc etc.

2.0 CONTINUING SUPPORT

- 2.1 As at the end of March, there are still over 300 households who have not returned to their homes post flood and the Project continues to be a source of support, both to people who have returned but who have on- going social or housing issues and to people who still seek help to return. Since Christmas, on average, 42 people have visited the office each week with existing problems, and an additional 18 new people have made contact with problems that have arisen since they have moved back home. A further 55 people on average, contact the Project by telephone for advice.
- 2.2 Some of the outstanding issues that continue to be a problem include, unsatisfactory building work, insurance settlements, emotional / welfare support etc
- 2.3 It is true that the staff running the Project have developed a rapport with many hundreds of individuals who have sought their advice and support and who continue to do so and it is true also that that support has undoubtedly been more effective because it has come from a single source.
- 2.4 However, as the numbers reduce and the need diminishes, further reflection needs to take place with regard to how the service should continue.
- 2.5 An 'exit strategy' is being prepared by various partner agencies, which will clearly outline the support network which will be available to residents who still require it, on the cessation of the Communities Re-united Project at the end of June.
- 2.6 It is anticipated that by Easter, perhaps around 200 homes will remain unoccupied, although it is difficult to estimate the exact number, particularly as builders keep putting completion dates off and people continue to remain uncertain how long its going to be. Also, some builders as they reach the end of their contracts, find it is uneconomical to travel distances to complete outstanding properties, so they pull out and work remains incomplete.

- 2.7 For those who remain in temporary accommodation and indeed for some of those who have recently returned home, many of the social, welfare, health and practical issues will continue to affect them and so, the need for a service to be available which can continue to offer advice and support will also remain.
- 2.8 It is possible that the majority of these issues could now be picked up by relevant statutory and voluntary agencies who would have had the expertise and skill but perhaps not the capacity to do so when numbers were high, e.g. Trading Standards, Building Control, CAB, the Churches themselves, but it is felt, that for a limited period and perhaps on a reduced basis, Communities Re-united are in fact best placed to continue to provide these services, using the specific experience and contacts they have built up over the past 15 months.

3.0 THE WAY FORWARD

- 3.1 Following discussion with the Carlisle Churches Group, it is suggested that, in order to continue to support those families and individuals who remain unable to return to their homes, the following action be taken;

The Communities Re-united Project should remain open, but on a diminishing scale, up until the end of June. This would mean retaining the service at it's current level of 3 staff, five days a week until the end of April, reducing it to two staff, 5 days a week, until the end of May and further reducing it to one day a week with one person until the end of June.

During this period, an 'exit strategy' will be developed which will ensure that a system of referrals to other agencies will be introduced, to ensure that those people who continue to require advice and information after the Project has ended, will still be supported.

4.0 COSTS

- 4.1 Carlisle Churches have estimated that the cost to continue the Project as outlined would in the region of £12,000.
- 4.2 In addition to these costs, some minor subsidiary costs may also be required, not more than £500, to ensure that adequate training and supporting information is available to staff and volunteers from those agencies who will continue to offer the range of support which some residents may still require after the Project has closed.

- 4.3 The funding for this could come from the following sources;
- a) The Cumbria Community Foundation will agree a further grant of £2,500;
 - b) Carlisle Churches will contribute £1,000;
 - c) The remaining £9,000 will be contributed from within existing Carlisle City Council budgets.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members are recommended to approve the suggestion in Section 3 of this report, together with the budgetary implications outlined in Section 4, regarding the continuation, for a limited period, of the Communities Re-united Project.

6.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 To enable Carlisle Churches Flood Response Group and other agencies, to make appropriate arrangements for a continuation of the support services available to residents of flood affected properties after the currently proposed closure of the Communities Re-united Project at Easter.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – Possible implications for Customer Contact staff in increased no of enquiries if CU Project finishes at Easter
- Financial – If Council agrees to continue to financially support the Project, there could be a maximum expenditure of £9,000, which would have to be found from within existing budgets.
- Legal – n/a
- Corporate – There may be a temporary increase in the numbers of people requiring assistance from a variety of Council services e.g. Customer Contact, Building Control, Community Support etc
- Risk Management – There may be a risk to the Council's reputation if we do not support the continuation of the project whilst an identified need remains.

- Equality Issues – n/a
- Environmental – n/a
- Crime and Disorder – n/a
- Impact on Customers – continuation of Project would enhance the Council's reputation as a caring Council

RB/VH

12th April 2006

Director of Community Services

Current Active Inquiry Issues as of 31 March 2006

[illegible]

