

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	14 March 2012	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2338
TITLE:	Community Organisers in Bath and North East Somerset	
WARD:	Southdown, Combe Down, Odd Down, Radstock, Farmborough, Timsbury, Bathavon West, Keynsham North, Keynsham South	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report		
Appendix: Co-operation Agreement with RE:generate		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The national Community Organiser programme aims to train 5000 community organisers across England. They will work to enable people to take action on their own behalf to tackle the issues that are important to them. The programme is led by Locality (programme managers) and RE:generate (lead training partners) with the Cabinet Office acting as the client. The report provides an update on this national programme as it is being introduced in Bath and North East Somerset

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet agrees that:

- 2.1 The introduction of five community organisers into Bath and North East Somerset as part of the national scheme be welcomed
- 2.2 Action to Regenerate Community Trust (RE:generate) as the local host for the scheme be encouraged to work closely with local elected members, community groups, parish councils and other local forums and public service bodies to maximise the effectiveness of the initiative
- 2.3 The Council enter into a Co-operation Agreement with RE:generate as set out in the Appendix
- 2.4 Officers be requested to work with the scheme to identify service improvements and potential cost savings from improved working with the local community
- 2.5 Feedback and learning from the Community Organisers Programme and its impact locally be used to identify opportunities for linking to existing or emerging forms of community engagement.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The cost of the 12-month training and placements for community organisers nationally as well as other costs of the scheme are being met through funding allocated to the national scheme providers by the Cabinet Office. This is a national scheme that has been procured by the Cabinet Office with Locality and RE:generate as the delivery partners, and without the involvement of local authorities. As such, there is no Council budget to support ongoing costs following the end of the initial 12-month period. The community organisers in Bath and North East Somerset operate within this national framework with RE:generate as the local “hosts”. Consequently, all risks relating to future and ongoing funding for the scheme are borne by these funders and providers and not by the Council.
- 3.2 Any additional resources - for example to develop business cases for cost savings from better community engagement or to respond to specific projects arising from the scheme- would be required to be allocated from budgets such as the Community Enablement Fund.

4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 Community organisers aim to work directly with communities to strengthen their capacity to address local issues and priorities. They therefore contribute potentially to the full range of corporate objectives in the following ways:
- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone-* through helping and encouraging people to take part in their local communities
 - *Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live-* by supporting social action that delivers community improvements
 - *Building a stronger economy-* through developing skills and providing the basis for entry into employment and the development of businesses and social enterprise

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The national Community Organisers Programme is a key part of the Government's Big Society initiative. However, the community organisers themselves are recruited locally. During their 12-month training they work within their community to listen to residents, and to build trust, respect and networks to help people develop their collective power to act together for the common good. Their support aims to help people take action on their own behalf to tackle the issues which are important to them.
- 5.2 Each community organiser is recruited and supported by a “host” organisation while they undergo their training. The first 47 community organisers have now been recruited by “host” organisations from 11 communities. These 11 hosts were selected by Locality (a national organisation with links to many local development trusts and other organisations) to be part of the pilot stage of the programme.
- 5.3 As part of the extension of the scheme to a further 11 areas across the country, funding for the training of five community organisers has been announced for Bath and North East Somerset. The “host” organisation for these community organisers will be Re:generate, who will build on the “Listening Matters” work already progressed in Bath and North East Somerset, particularly in Whiteway, the Queens Road area of Keynsham and London Road and Snowhill.

5.4 This announcement provides a significant investment into the area in recognition of the forward-thinking approach taken by the Council, other public services, partners and local people to new ways of working. Building on learning from the three areas highlighted above, the Cabinet Office investment provides a number of opportunities for the Council to work with the community organisers scheme to develop further a shared approach and to maximise opportunities for improving services, for example:

- Ensuring community ideas for changing the way services are delivered “on the ground” are identified and acted upon
- Supporting and championing the role of local elected members as community leaders
- Making sure projects arising from the work of the Community Organisers make a real difference, leave an effective legacy and are sustainable

5.5 In addition, there will be a need to address any impacts arising from the introduction of community organisers, including:

- Ensuring effective communication and engagement with partners and community groups
- Responding to the changing landscape for community engagement including working with local forums and parish councils
- Working with communities on expectations to balance realism and ambition, particularly given the short-term nature of the community organiser roles
- Managing the impact on the capacity of public services and other agencies to respond to new initiatives and demands

5.6 Recruitment by RE:generate for the 5 Community Organisers in Bath and North East Somerset has now taken place and they are beginning their work in five neighbourhoods, as set out in the Appendix. These communities reflect a mix of building on opportunities arising from existing “Listening Matters” work, and engagement with new communities and areas. Bath and North East Somerset ward councillors representing these areas have been invited to an event to introduce Community Organising. This will set out the process of how community networks are developed and action in local communities supported.

5.7 Funding for Community Organisers is for the one-year training stage only. Hosts around the country are therefore considering the sustainability of their schemes. Community Organisers are being encouraged to identify business cases for cost reduction and service improvement from the Council and other agencies by finding new ways of working. There is an opportunity for the Council to provide analytical and other support for this process where appropriate as well as “pump-priming” Business Cases where this improves services and/or reduces costs. However, as stated in 3, all risks relating to future and ongoing funding for the scheme are borne by the national funders and providers

5.8 In order to manage and progress the issues set out above, it is proposed that a co-operation agreement be entered into with RE:generate as the local hosts for the community organiser programme, as set out in the Appendix.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.
- 6.2 There is a risk that without the development of a Co-operation agreement and engagement with the community organisers programme that there will be a disjointedness with other forms of community engagement, for example those available through the Localism Act such as neighbourhood planning. To help avoid this the Co-operation agreement will be used to identify potential links to existing or new community partnership meetings and other forms of engagement. The important role that parishes play in local governance will also be recognised.
- 6.3 There may be opportunities to link the work of Community Organisers with other forms of local community engagement, including through other initiatives arising from the Localism Act. These opportunities are currently being explored as there is at present a relatively complex pattern of community engagement potentially made more complex by the Localism Act.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 The Co-operation Agreement commits the parties to work together to promote equalities and to use the agreement to contribute to the delivery of the Council's public sector equality duty.
- 7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found. Whilst it is not foreseen that the Co-operation Agreement in itself will raise equalities issues, specific projects arising from it might, and these will be considered in the initial phases of each project by the Partnership Group. The Community Organisers project is part of a national scheme. Cabinet Office have confirmed that the Public Sector Equality Duty under the 2010 Act has been incorporated into the contract with Locality and all relevant suppliers including at local delivery level.

8 RATIONALE

- 8.1 Given that the Community Organisers scheme is to be introduced in Bath and North East Somerset, it is considered appropriate to ensure that the advantages of the scheme can be maximised through effective joint working with public services.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 An alternative option would be for the Council not to engage at any level with the Community Organisers scheme. It is considered appropriate however for the Council to have an overall approach to such a key initiative and that this would not maximise the potential benefit to our area. It could also lead to a disjointed approach which could bring additional risk and possible cost, particularly in officer time.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 *Ward Councillor; Cabinet members; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer*

10.2 Drafts of the report have been circulated to officers and Cabinet members. A briefing session on community organising for relevant ward members has been arranged.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Young People; Human Rights;*

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

12.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	