

**Agenda item: SC 07/21**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Services & Communities Committee**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To update the committee on Services activity and plans for the new council year.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That committee notes this report.**
- 2. That committee considers any further priority areas for the coming year or for consideration for the council year 2022/2023.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

Following the recent byelections, the annual meeting and the new committee make up, this paper aims to update the committee on activities currently being delivered and those that have been agreed via the Service Plan or otherwise for the coming year.

The Services remit is considerable, covering as it does, the Advice, Wellbeing, Youth, Community Development, Events, Landscape and Environment teams, alongside elements of community centres and 'ad hoc' elements that often find their way to this committee. Over recent months, the 'public realm' has come to the fore, with grit / dog / waste bins and a focus on fly tipping and litter very much part of the local election strategy. This has led to considerable discussion and re-opened considerations relating to CCTV provision, which may be something that this committee wishes to revisit now the budgeting season is over and there is greater clarity regarding the finances for the coming year.

The Service Plan has considerable focus on things that fall within the remit of this committee, including the majority of the 'Covid Recovery' elements noted. In total, 10 of the 19 specific targets are Services Committee, including:

- Food poverty
- Advice and representation
- Community Building and engagement
- Training, education and employment  
(these are the four 'Covid Recovery' areas)
- Fly-tipping and waste management
- Landscaping
- Community Growing Space
- Geeks in Sheds
- Winter Grit Bins
- Rats and vermin (although this could sit within PLaD instead, given the Terms of Reference).

The Service Plan offers an overview of the NEW elements of delivery but doesn't include that which is already being offered. In brief, this includes;

### ***Landscaping***

10+ cuts of ALL grass each year, plus maintenance of shrubbery, hedging, trees (at lower level), weed management and hardstanding. This is provided under contract to MK Council until 2023 (current contract) and also includes the management of the 'depot' (the landscape base on Fishermead) and considerable partnership working with other areas of the council, mainly the Environment Team, where there is significant crossover. The landscape team are also used widely by the council for both muscle and transport (e.g. the moving of 9 grit bins from CHMP to NFMP, transport of staging for the festival, etc.).

### ***Environment***

Responsible for a wide variety of reporting, creating, developing and educating. Management of notice boards, 'public realm' (reporting of issues, monitoring of problems, educating of residents), creating specific projects that enhance the parish (e.g. Ashby, Community Gardens, etc.), dog bins / bags, grit bins, litter, fly tipping, etc. etc. The Environment Team is also often the 'face' of WCC, as the role is predominantly based outside, in the community.

### ***Advice***

The advice service offers first tier support for a wide range of needs – basically, if you have an issue and you live in Woughton, the advice service is a good place to start. If the issue is one that the service can't manage, they will support you in finding an alternative. The service also supports in more practical ways, such as helping to complete forms, support with accessing service providers, access to IT and the internet, etc.

### ***Wellbeing***

The wellbeing service sits alongside the advice service and offers support to people who may benefit from additional help, especially those experiencing mental health issues. Delivered online over the past year, the service also provides a range of groups and mentoring that help support people in need, alongside having the Wellbeing Room, which will, it is hoped, host a range of groups, activities and organisations once things are back to some normality.

### ***Youth***

The youth team provide open access and specialist youth clubs, the Play Rangers service using the parks, specialist services around sexual health, the arts, LGBTQ+, young parents, young carers, etc. They also provide more formal approaches, such as Escape the Trap (a defined course, focusing on abusive relationships). Working from No95, a well-equipped youth building that includes a studio, gym and café space, the team also work closely with other officers to provide collaborative approaches.

### ***Community Development***

The Community Development worker (also covers events) has a remit that focuses on supporting people within the parish to take on actions and activities that help. WCC is excellent at offering services but supporting others to take these issues on

builds strength and sustainability within the parish. Working with Residents Associations (including the quarterly forum and regular training) and other community members and groups, the focus is on supporting and developing community members. The past year has made this difficult.

### **Events**

The events remit is one that has been a bit 'on hold', but with restrictions starting to ease, will restart over the coming months. There has been some excellent work where possible (e.g. the Santa Sleigh), but it has been patchy at best. Moving forward begins with the 'pop up' café that is linked to the Community Fridge (expected in May 2021), but will also include working on estates to develop activities and events that start to bring people back together, safely and in a responsible way. The regular calendar would include everything from Chairs Awards to Festival to Apple Day and Christmas.

### **Other**

- The community fridge has been running for a couple of years now and, whilst it took a break during the early part of the pandemic, has been back up and running since July last year, saving around 850kg of food per week from going to waste.
- This links to the proposed Community Café, which will start when safe to do so. The pop up cafes that ran last summer were an excellent way of trying out the model and appeared successful.
- The Grants programme is also managed by the Services committee and the Community Services Manager, supported with admin by the CMSO. Last year was very poorly used, with only two grants awarded (although some others were 'rolled over').

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The Services committee oversees delivery of the majority of things provided by WCC, with an overall budget for this of well over £500,000. With further consideration needed for the Service Plan items and impact of the past year, committee oversight and clarity around finances, the impact and ongoing needs will be crucial, especially with the usual confusion around what may happen in the coming years.

### **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

As with the finances, most officers of WCC deliver services that sit under this committee remit. Knowledge and relationships are crucial, and it would be welcomed for officers and committee members to have time to discuss the services provided and answer any queries. Committee may wish to consider this as an option for forthcoming meetings.

### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

None perceived.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Service Plan 2021-22 RATIFIED.

**AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager

**Agenda item: SC 08/21**

**WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**Services & Communities Committee**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021.**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To request a recommendation for training to enable councillors to support the advice / wellbeing services.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That committee notes this report.**
- 2. That the committee considers the suggestion made to offer training to councillors in the following areas:**
  - a. Mediation**
  - b. Basic benefits advice / form filling.**
- 3. That committee considers any further training that may be beneficial for councillors to add to the submission.**
- 4. That the council manager provides a paper with any recommendations to the next meeting of the Operations Committee.**

**MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

Following several recent interactions where councillors have offered support to residents, a request was made for some formal training in key areas to help support councillors in getting things right. Whilst we have an advice service which provides some of this, councillors are at the heart of communities and their input can be invaluable. Given this, offering training to those that want it and for whom it would bring benefit would also help ensure that additional capacity is offered by WCC in the event that this is necessary.

The past months have shown the challenges that can occur – people needed advice and support and yet many of the funded services were not able to provide this. Even WCC was ‘online only’ at times (although this has changed over recent months, to also offer Covid safe, face to face options).

The request made included two specific elements; mediation training and benefits advice / form filling, specifically relating to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) forms, which are long and complex.

Mediation training is usually linked to becoming a professional mediator and the cost can be considerable. However, there is an MK based mediation service that may be able to tailor something to the needs of councillors. Alternatively, knowledge of the services that Mediation MK (<https://mediationmk.org.uk/>) offer may be an alternative to WCC offering this.

Training around how to complete benefits forms is also quite niche, as often tied up with a wider range of benefits knowledge support. There are some specific courses that look at this – an Introduction to Welfare Benefits is £120, a specific one relating to PIP is about the same cost (<https://bookwhen.com/the-benefits-training-co#focus=ev-s3f7-20210511094500>)

These training courses, or something similar, are offered to people within the WCC advice service team, to enable them to both understand and then stay up to date with the changes that take place within the benefits system. If councillors are also undertaking this work to a significant extent, ensuring that they are suitably equipped with the knowledge to offer advice with confidence would be sensible. However, the alternative is that councillors refer into the Advice Service instead and / or work alongside one of the officers (once social distancing allows).

There may be other bits of training that this committee feels would be helpful for councillors to undertake to ensure that Services committee oversight areas are covered. There is some Safeguarding training that will be coming up shortly, but if anything else is felt to be valuable, it can also go on the submission to Operations, if there is one.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The costs of courses vary widely but start at around £120 (basic benefits or more specific session(s) relating to individual benefits).

Training in mediation is more expensive, but there may be alternatives in terms of some basic skills around communications, independence and neutrality that could be offered – the Council Manager can continue to investigate this if wanted.

#### **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:**

None noted.

#### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

It is also apparent that not all councillors are aware of all the services that WCC offer. There is a paper for this committee that gives an overview, but this does suggest that there may need to be more information available to councillors and / or that councillors can spend some time finding out about the different services (or a combination of the two).

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

#### **AUTHOR**

Steve McNay – Council Manager