

3 June 2015

Report of	Assistant Chief Executive	Author	Matt Sterling
Title	Community Enabling Strategy		 282577
Wards affected	All		

This report concerns the adoption of a new Community Enabling Strategy to promote self-help in the borough's communities.

1. Decision Required

- 1.1 To approve and adopt the Community Enabling Strategy (see Appendix A)
- 1.2 To re-introduce a Locality Budget of £120,000 shared evenly between all Councillors to use for local initiatives.

2. Reasons for Decision

- 2.1 A Community Enabling approach provides a way in which the Council can re-focus its work to promote self-help where appropriate.
- 2.2 In particular, a Community Enabling approach encourages self-help where three outcomes can be achieved:
 - 1. Services or outcomes are protected or enhanced
 - 2. Communities are strengthened or neighbourliness is increased
 - 3. CBC is able to better manage demand and make savings
- 2.3 A Community Enabling approach has the potential to deliver wider social benefit. It will promote social cohesion by bringing together and empowering communities. Also, by encouraging volunteering and community activity, the borough gains more 'social capital'. This is defined as greater citizenship, neighbourliness, social networks and civic participation. The Office for National Statistics says that greater social capital is "associated with better health, higher educational achievement, better employment outcomes, and lower crime rates".
- 2.4 £125,000 of funding from New Homes Bonus has been allocated to support community initiatives as part of the delivery of the strategy.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The main alternative to this decision would be not to adopt this strategy and to continue with the current model for delivering services and engaging with communities. However, this will leave several discretionary services vulnerable to reduced funding.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 Colchester's communities are complex and overlapping. They may include small neighbourhoods, allegiances based on shared characteristics, or associations based on common interests. Some are long-term, while others may rise up in response to a

particular issue. Residents are likely to be members of many different communities with varying degrees of commitment.

- 4.2 Colchester has a diverse voluntary and community sector. This is characterised by a high number of organisations covering a wide range of issues. These include small informal community groupings through to large, staffed service providers, but many have limited resources.
- 4.3 Colchester Borough Council has a long track record of working with and supporting community and voluntary organisations to help achieve our common goals. Currently this includes:
- Investing £305,000 annually in voluntary organisations through grant programmes.
 - Involving and supporting community groups in the Council's community initiatives work (such as the SOS Bus).
 - Galvanising the efforts of partners such as with Community Days of Action.
 - Zone teams working with communities to support local initiatives, activities and clubs.
 - Providing financial support to local charities through discretionary business rates relief.
 - Supporting Parish and Town Councils to write Neighbourhood Plans to gain more influence.
 - Putting CBC tenants and leaseholders at the heart of Colchester Borough Homes service delivery through membership of the CBH Board, opportunities to scrutinise services, and involvement in community improvements through 'make a difference days'.
 - Building digital skills in communities by developing Online Champions, digital 'surgeries' and Go Online events.
- 4.4 The Council has also transferred several assets to community management, such as community centres.

5. Proposals

- 5.1 To adopt the new Community Enabling Strategy (see Appendix A).
- 5.2 To re-introduce a Locality Budget of £120,000 shared evenly between all Councillors to use for local initiatives.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 This decision contributes to achieving the new Strategic Plan for 2015-18. In particular, it relates to the objectives to
- "develop a strong sense of community across the borough by enabling people and groups to take more ownership and responsibility for their quality of life" and
 - "be clear about the major opportunities to work in partnership with public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve more for Colchester than we could on our own".

7. Consultation

- 7.1 During its preparation, consultation about the Community Enabling Strategy took place with Colchester Community Voluntary Services, representatives of the voluntary sector, Colchester Borough Homes and Council officers.

8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 This decision will affect various communities and community groups across the borough. The strategy will be published on the Council's website, and its adoption will be

communicated to the community sector via their umbrella bodies. As opportunities for change arise through the pursuit of the strategy, these will be communicated to interested parties.

- 8.2 The proposal to adopt a Community Enabling Strategy has been publicised in the Council's Forward Plan as an item which is likely to have a significant impact on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards within the borough.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The current budget has an allocation of £125,000 funding from New Homes Bonus to pump-priming new initiatives. This allocation is intended to support the development of individual opportunities that arise in the delivery plan for this strategy.
- 9.2. The closure of the 2014/15 accounts is nearing completion. Due to an improved overall position it has been possible to identify funding to re-introduce the locality budget scheme. The overall outturn will be reported to Cabinet on 8 July 2015 and this will reflect the proposal to allocate £120k for this purpose.

10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 10.1 An equality impact assessment for this decision has been completed and no negative impacts on equality have been identified. This can be viewed on the Council's website www.colchester.gov.uk via the following pathway Your Council/How the Council Works/Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessments/Corporate and Financial Management.
- 10.2 No likely negative impact on human rights has been identified for this decision.

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 This decision has no particular community safety implications. However, some specific opportunities that may arise through the pursuit of the strategy may improve community safety in affected communities.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 This decision has no particular health and safety implications.

Appendix A: The Community Enabling Strategy.