

Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Warm spaces success and future operation

Date: 4 September 2023

Author: Democratic Services Manager

Purpose

To advise members of the success of the warm spaces programme that was put into place for winter 2022 and to give information about its future operation.

Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny committee:

- Notes the report and makes comments as appropriate.

1 Background

- 1.1 Following the national cost of living crisis, Gedling Borough Council connected many services to create a local directory which highlighted and signposted residents to agencies, groups and charities offering support across the borough. This directory included links to financial support, foodbanks and community hubs.
- 1.2 One of the support options included in that directory was the warm spaces programme, which was an initiative set up to create places within the local community where people could come together, socialise, stay warm and in some cases have hot refreshments during the winter months. The idea of warm hubs were a national initiative, initially known as warm banks. From this, District and Borough's across Nottinghamshire started to explore local options to support this concept. Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) choose to not support the "warm spaces" name and instead choose to name their venues "places of welcome". NCC named some of their libraries to be places of welcome but didn't feel it necessary to open additional venues.

As a borough, the council are more connected with the community so we knew residents would benefit from additional spaces where they could go and be warm and have some company. As such, we organised and

connected the services that the voluntary sector were already providing to help everyone come together and provide the best support available to our residents.

To start the programme, the communities' team wrote to known voluntary groups to see if they currently offered a warm space that the public could go to. Groups were not asked to provide anything above their current offering. Many confirmed they already provided a warm space and offered food and drinks to those utilising them. Some groups made the decision to offer additional facilities, which were not funded by Gedling Borough Council. Some venues provided food and drink for free and others provided refreshments and food at a small cost.

1.3 Which partners joined?

32 venues/partners signed up to offer services across various settings across the Borough, including some of the council's venues such as the Richard Herrod Centre and the Bonington Theatre. Several other community groups also offered out their spaces such as Men in Sheds in Carlton, Netherfield Forum and the Salvation Army.

The full list of venues is attached at appendix 1.

1.4 Success and feedback on warm spaces programme

The initiative was deemed to be a success, with many residents benefiting from it at various hubs across the whole borough. The communities' team recently wrote to venues to ask for their feedback and experiences of hosting a warm space and some of the feedback received so far is below:

“We had a gentleman coming to one of the community groups we put on in the initiative. We could see his health deteriorating and so as we spoke to him over a couple of weeks it became apparent his house was very poorly heated, and was suffering with mould, which was likely making his health worse. We were able to encourage him to see his GP about his health and gave some advice regarding heating and ventilation at home etc., as well as checking his benefit entitlement and support with potential employment. He did get a temporary employed position but it didn't last long term. His health has improved over the last few months, and he's very happy continuing to come to our group which gets him out the house, saves him money, and gives him a sense of community and confidence.”

“I have seen several people who are struggling with energy bills, as has my colleague, and in part due to us advertising as a warm space people have come to us for support. We have been able to do referrals to the HHSF and make applications to the big difference scheme for people and this has been very beneficial for people in difficult financial positions.”

“We've seen an increase in attendance to our centre for community groups, and for people just sitting and chatting to volunteers or completing jigsaws on their own. As in the first example, sometimes this has led to us working on other kinds of issues with them, but in some cases it's simply been a good source of relaxation, community and a way of reducing bills.”

“We found that we had greater number of guests coming in and commenting that it did help them not putting on the heating at home and that the opportunity to have hot drinks and something to eat also was a help with bills. Also out of this, the friendship group grew - not only for getting together but place to come for warmth and refreshments.”

Groups were only recently asked for their feedback so it is likely that additional feedback will be provided in due course - this can be circulated to members if they wish.

1.5 Future of the warm spaces programme

Another reason the communities' team contacted venues, was to ask if they would be willing to continue to work under the Gedling Borough Council umbrella and if they did, whether they had any changes to be made to their contacts details or information provided about the venue.

Following on from last year, the council are moving towards promoting “welcome and warm spaces” for all year round use; a slightly different name and offering than the year before. It is important that people know they can go to these places all year round and as such the names and details of these places will go into Gedling support booklet again this year.

The booklet was really well received by residents which was proven by the fact that all of the hard copies went really quickly, even in times of digitalisation. The next issue of this booklet is due to be distributed around November/December time.

The welcome and warm spaces are consistently promoted in the council's monthly health and wellbeing newsletter which is sent to roughly 7000 residents and partners. The wide spread of information helps the council in meeting priorities surrounding reducing loneliness and isolation and allows us to continue to support and promote the groups we have locally.

2 Proposal

That the committee note the report and makes comments as appropriate.

3 Alternative options

The committee could choose not to note the report and give any

comments but this would go against their wish to review the programme.

4 Financial implications

No additional council resources were utilised specifically for the programme – the communities' team have been and will continue to utilise resources we already have. To confirm, there was there was no funding from central government or the county council for this project.

5 Legal implications

None.

6 Equalities implications

The programme supports people in need of a warm space and helps to combat isolation and loneliness. The programme is available for all residents of the borough and is not means tested or dedicated to one group of people. Participation in the programme does require people to be able to leave their property so it is not suitable for everyone.

7 Carbon reduction/environmental sustainability implications

There are no carbon implications as a direct result of this report.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Welcome and warm spaces

9 Background papers

None.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer