

# Stronger Communities Shaping the Future



# Foreword

This Report – *Shaping the Future* – is the first in a series of reports to be produced annually over the next five years by the Stronger Communities Programme.

We are producing these reports to assist in the process of assessing the effectiveness of the Programme and the associated investment and activity, in achieving its intended goal – for all communities to have greater collective control of their own well-being. Each report will build on the last to create a continuous and comprehensive narrative of change over time. We invite your feedback and comments to support this assessment process.

At the beginning of this journey, this first report, *Shaping the Future*, explores how the Programme challenged the way it had been operating and transformed its delivery model in order to enable a more effective, replicable, and long term approach, supporting and investing in strategic partnerships and social action.

It has been a pleasure to see how communities and voluntary organisations have embraced this change and early outcomes are promising with the majority of Inspire grants going to support new grass roots social action.

The next five years promise to be an exciting time for communities in North Yorkshire and we hope that you will work with us, sharing a journey that we believe can make real, sustainable changes for the people and communities of North Yorkshire.



**Councillor David Chance**  
Executive Member for  
Stronger Communities



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If you are unfamiliar with, or are unsure of the meaning of some of the key terms and concepts highlighted in this report, you can find a glossary of terms at the end of this document.



# Introduction

Initiated in 2015, Stronger Communities is an ambitious programme to support communities to play a greater role in the delivery of services in North Yorkshire. Many communities within North Yorkshire have vibrant groups and active volunteers who work innovatively and collectively to add to the richness of local life and to help people who are in need of some additional help and support. Indeed, it is estimated that 42% of residents are likely to have volunteered in the past 12 months<sup>1</sup>.

However, this pattern is rarely consistent; and latest results from the North Yorkshire Citizen's Panel which surveyed 640 residents in April 2018 indicated that there are still many people who are not involved in local activities. In addition a similar number of respondents indicated that they did not believe that they could influence decisions about their local area.

- 57% of respondents said they had had no involvement with community activities, groups or local issues in the last 12 months
- 56% of respondents disagreed that they could personally influence decisions affecting their local area

The Stronger Communities Programme is particularly keen to address this issue by ensuring that residents feel empowered to get involved in addressing local issues and concerns and are able to see that their contribution can make a positive difference.

Faced with significant issues such as the size and rurality of North Yorkshire, an ageing population and reducing budgets, there are a range of services that the County Council has traditionally provided that will no longer be available or will need to be delivered in a different way. This may affect how people feel about their local area. Whilst we can celebrate that 71% of residents are satisfied with local services and amenities, this also means that nearly three in ten may not be satisfied or are ambivalent about them. Moreover, 29% of residents felt that their local area has got worse as a place to live<sup>2</sup>. One in four<sup>3</sup> people report not having as much social contact as they would like. This would suggest that there is great opportunity to identify ways to prevent loneliness and social isolation escalating in North Yorkshire. We are encouraging and supporting people to take action in their community that will make a significant difference to the quality and quantity of local social connections.

The Stronger Communities Programme is one of the main ways that the County Council is supporting communities to continue to provide the range of services that are important to them and upon which many people rely. The Programme will also support the ambitions of communities to do even more, wherever possible.

In March 2016, a Local Government Association Peer Challenge encouraged the Council to “achieve even more” after identifying the potential of the Stronger Communities Programme. This initiated an internal review of how the Programme was performing and whether any changes were required for it to extend its reach.

The review found that:

- The local VCSE sector was tending to see the Programme only as a grant giving programme rather than as a development and change programme. This was reflected in the size and type of organisation approaching the team for support, and the frequency in which they were doing so.
- Partly as a result of this, investment was driven by too many unique, standalone, time limited projects, achieving short term outcomes at the expense of a longer term aim for coherent and collaborative needs led plans for communities throughout North Yorkshire.
- While the range of amounts awarded (up to a maximum of £15,000) varied there were two noticeable trends; one for amounts of approximately £1,000 for groups seeking seed funding to start a new project or activity, and another for projects with the potential to achieve more but who were artificially constrained by the funding cap.

It was concluded that to maximise the effectiveness of available resources, develop long term strategic partnerships and deliver needs led investment, the model needed to change.

In late 2016 the Programme set about implementing this by developing a Theory of Change. A Theory of Change helps to articulate the change (or changes) that you would like to make over a period of time, and what is required to achieve this change. Focussing on a five year period, by 2022 our goal is;

## for all communities to have greater collective control of their own well-being compared to their situation in 2017.

It is this goal that we will be reporting on throughout this series over the next five years, and we are inviting you to reach your own conclusion of how effective the Programme has been towards achieving this. We also want this series of reports to generate feedback, conversation and new partnerships, so throughout this document you will find questions that we would like you to consider. You can find details of how to contact us on the back cover of this document.

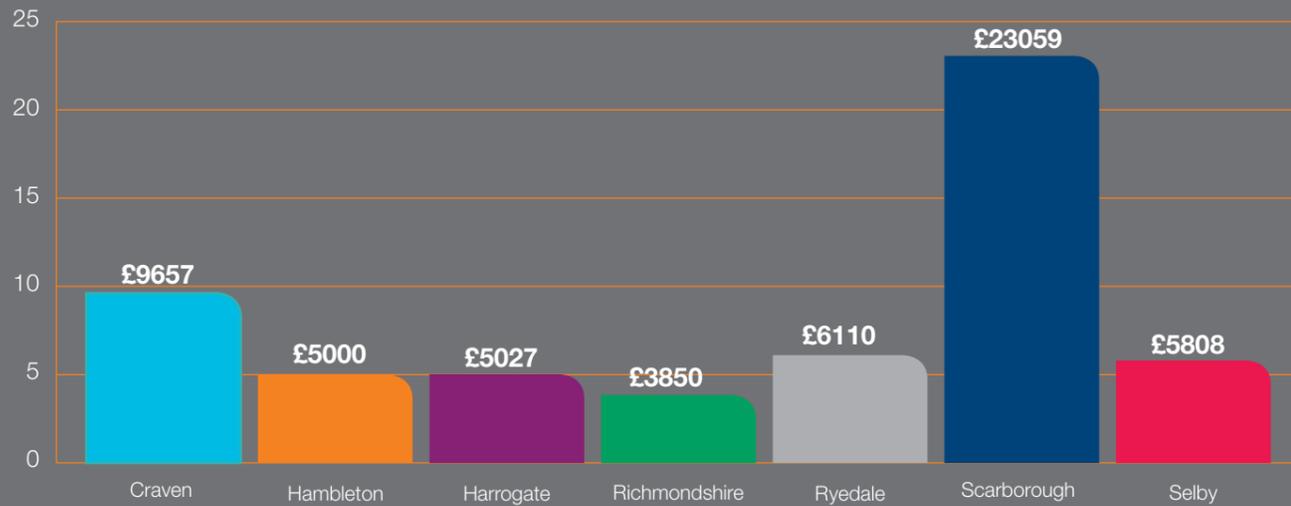
**Question: What do you believe will be the biggest challenges to achieving our goal?**

The last 12 months have been a period of transition and learning for the Programme as it made the changes necessary to align with its new goal. Much has been accomplished but we know there is always scope for further improvement. We never cease to be amazed by the capacity and resilience of communities to adapt to change, as well as their commitment and drive to identify and respond to local need and take a greater role in managing and delivering a range of services. This is one of the great strengths of North Yorkshire and we will continue to do what we can to encourage and support it in the months and years ahead.



**Approved Inspire Applications by District (and the value of awards)**

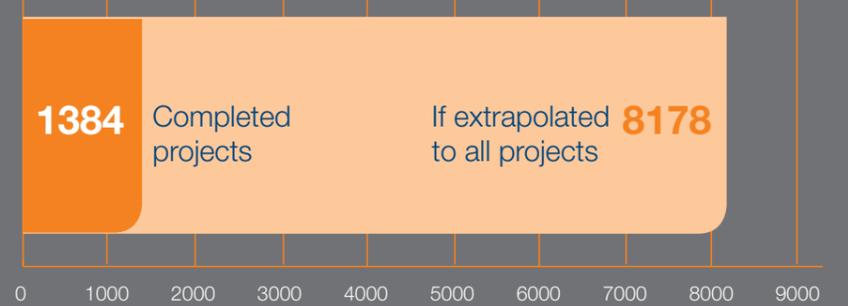
1 Aug 2017 - 31 Mar 2018



**Question:**  
What is your reaction to these numbers?

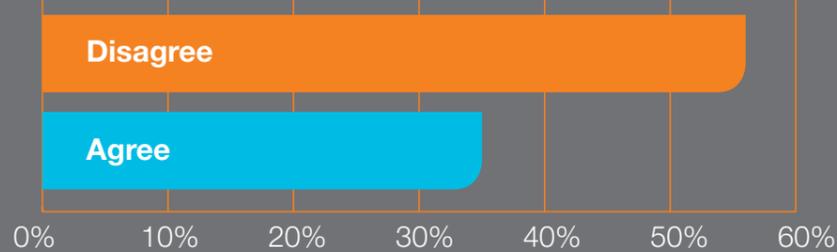
**Beneficiaries from Inspire Projects**

1 Aug 2017 - 31 Mar 2018



**Do you agree or disagree that you personally can influence decisions affecting your local area?**

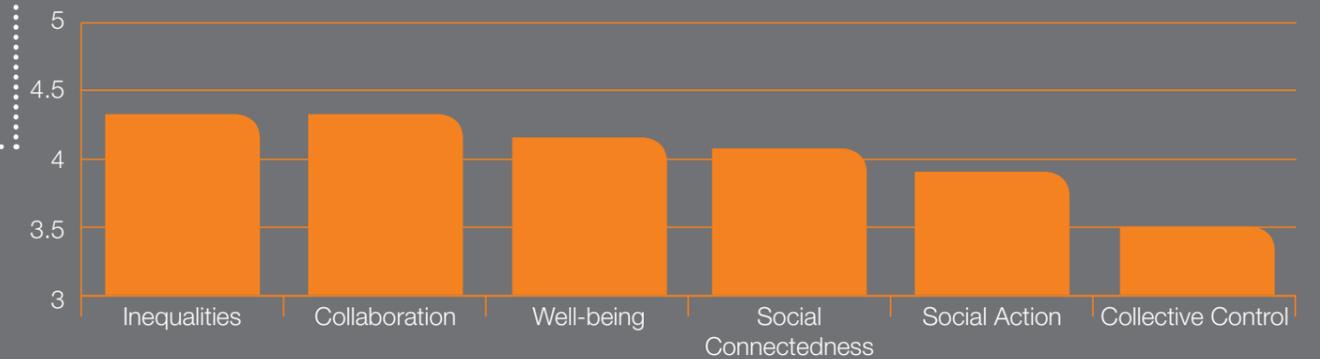
Citizens Panel, April 2018



**In Numbers**

**How strong would you say your understanding is currently about the following key Stronger Communities investment ideals (out of 5)?**

12 NYCC officers from the Commissioner Survey, February 2018



**Applications to the Inspire Fund**

1 Aug 2017 - 31 Mar 2018



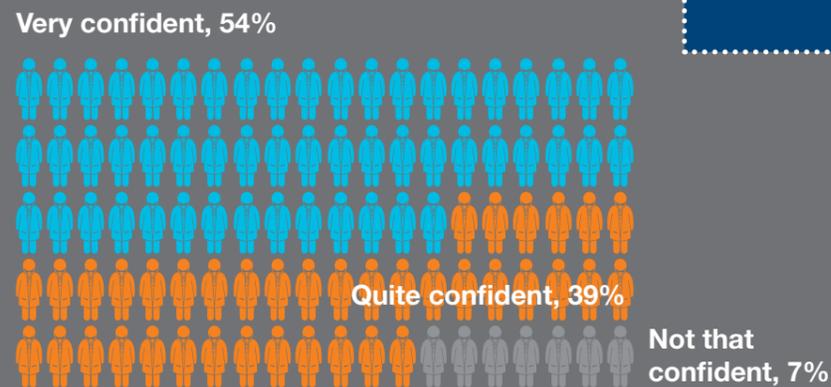
**Is this the first time applying to the Stronger Communities Programme?**

1 Aug 2017 - 31 Mar 2018



**How confident are you that your organisation will be able to access at least some relevant support for your organisation in the coming years?**

Roadshow Evaluation Report, November 2017



**The value of volunteering hours in completed projects<sup>4</sup>**

**£101,319.40**

**Question:** Are there other numbers you would appreciate us reporting on to inform your own work?

# Laying the Foundations



While this report considers the changes that have been implemented to maximise progress towards the Programme's goal for 2022, it is worth noting that in many respects the foundations were laid with the Programme's inception. Investment in communities and the creation of a dedicated team ran contrary to a national trend of de-investment and rolling back support. It demonstrated a Council committed to its relationship with its communities and acknowledging that traditional top down ways of working would no longer be feasible.

To achieve our goal, the Programme needed to build on its experience of its first two full years and develop a model more ambitious in scale in addressing local need. The success of any model, however, is predicated on having the right support, infrastructure and investment in place to help voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations survive and thrive and be reliable delivery partners. While this is beyond the scope of the Stronger Communities Programme alone, it became clear as the Programme matured that there was an underlying need for capacity building and organisational development, which outstripped the support available. The flow of funding into the sector was disproportionately targeted at the delivery of projects and activities to the detriment of building the skills, capabilities and structure necessary for groups and organisations to continue to grow sustainably and support frontline delivery.

## Creating an Approved Provider List

The Programme established an Approved Provider List (APL) of expert external consultancies able to assist VCSE organisations across 12 specialist and technical areas<sup>5</sup>. The list is accessible throughout the Council, by partners, and VCSE organisations. With more than 80 providers now on the list and just over £140,000 spent to date to support VCSE organisations, the APL is now a valuable asset in enabling VCSE groups to feel supported in accessing high quality assistance to support their organisational development into the future with an emphasis on embedding skills within each organisation. The APL was shortlisted in the Best Contribution to Corporate Social Responsibility category at the CIPS Supply Management Awards 2017.

## Case Study – Parents4Parents - North Yorks

Parents4Parents is a community organisation run by and for parents. They provide peer support for parents from military and civilian communities who are facing difficult circumstances when expecting or looking after their children.

Stronger Communities was invited to run a “visioning” session which was an opportunity for trustees and users to take stock and reflect on future plans. It quickly became apparent that the group were doing great work – exceeding targets and changing lives, clearly grounded in the community and providing wraparound support that went way beyond what any statutory service could provide.

However, they were also in a precarious position, surviving on one small grant after another, never sure if they would be in existence in six months’ time. This made planning impossible and their one member of staff, who worked a few part-time hours a week and often gifted time, spent a lot of time fund-raising.

Parents4Parents were at a crossroads and knew that if they wanted to continue to deliver services then they needed to move from a business model dependent on short term funding by carrying out an important piece of work to strengthen business structures and lay the foundations for a stronger more sustainable organisation.

Stronger Communities agreed to help by providing consultant support from their Approved Provider List to develop a business plan and carry out governance and financial systems reviews. They also received help to put together an ambitious Big Lottery Reaching Communities application – based on a plan to change their business model and move from 100% reliance on grant funding to 40% by developing new earned income streams. The approach was collaborative with the consultant working closely with staff, trustees and volunteers.

At a time when competition was growing for Big Lottery funding, Parents4Parents secured £136,000 in early 2018 allowing them to start work on setting up their own peer support training company; extend programmes and geographical reach; enter into contracting partnerships with other local organisations and investigate the feasibility of opening a charity shop and very visible new base in order to reach even more parents. Of course all of this was down to the hard work and passion of staff, trustees and parent-volunteers with Stronger Communities acting as a catalyst for growth.



**“The support Parents4Parents received from the Stronger Communities Programme has been instrumental in helping our charity to grow as an organisation. The support secured through the Approved Providers List and the Achieve Together programme, has included introductions to significant partners, and work with dedicated consultants, where we have benefitted from expert advice which has guided our organisational journey. It has afforded our charity opportunities which we may not have otherwise had access to or known about. This support has undoubtedly helped to secure larger scale funding which will allow the charity to develop services, strengthen infrastructure, and develop new income-generating resources and activities.”**  
Rebecca Briggs (Parents4Parents)

## Partnering with Community First Yorkshire

The awarding of a countywide contract to provide infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector to Community First Yorkshire; a new organisation which formed from the merger of two long standing VCSE sector support organisations; provided an excellent opportunity for Stronger Communities and Community First Yorkshire to shape a collaborative relationship to ensure a more integrated offer for the voluntary and community sector. Working towards the same outcomes, the relationship will be key in coming years to ensure a coordination of support between Community First Yorkshire, Stronger Communities and the APL, and to ensure that this menu of support is clear and distinct for the VCSE sector.

The fledgling relationship has shown much promise with Community First Yorkshire joining Stronger Communities at its Roadshow events (when launching its new investment model), holding joint meetings, referring and sharing information and collaborating on certain areas of work. A significant step was the creation of a shared diagnostic tool that could be completed with voluntary organisations to help them critically analyse their organisational strengths, and areas for development, along with an action plan. The purpose is to encourage groups and organisations to undertake an honest self-appraisal in a supportive environment in order to celebrate areas of strength and identify and act to improve any areas which may be holding the organisation back in applying for funds, attracting volunteers and ultimately delivering services with and for local people.

25 diagnostics were completed within the first six months of its introduction. While each organisation, its people and circumstances are unique, it quickly became clear that certain challenges were not. Support with funding, marketing, control systems and understanding impact have been common in early action plans; and close working and appropriate information sharing with Community First Yorkshire has ensured that adequate support is in place for the organisation to lead on its development. Despite no advertisement, organisations now actively request diagnostic assessment. While the concept of diagnostic assessment is not new, for some groups the coherent offer and structured process which may have been lacking previously has been quite revelatory; made possible only by the developing relationship between Stronger Communities and Community First Yorkshire.

This support is now a central element of the new model, with mandatory diagnostic assessment and potential APL investment a requirement for the Programme’s main investment fund – *Achieve Together*. Recognising the need in the sector, the Programme will also work in a more structured way than in the past with those organisations supporting the Programme’s key outcomes but only seeking support around organisational development.

**Question: How clear are you about the way in which the Stronger Communities Programme and Community First Yorkshire’s roles work to complement one another in North Yorkshire?**





### Launching Inspire, Achieve, Innovate

In July 2017 the Programme launched its new investment strategy: *Inspire, Achieve, Innovate*, at a series of ten roadshow events held throughout the county. For the first time the Programme published its offer as a prospectus, outlining a future relationship between the Programme and the voluntary and community sector centred on investing in social action. This new investment approach recognised that in order to extend the reach of the Programme, meet the needs of the model, and realise its goal to 2022, it was essential that investment is used to help create the conditions for social action. Thus enabling people to come together to help improve their lives and solve problems that are important in their communities.

Inspire, Achieve, Innovate have varying processes, ambitions and investment levels; but all will deliver desired outcomes around reducing inequalities, improving wellbeing, and social connectedness:

- **Inspire (Fund)** – designed to encourage people to get involved in their local community by offering small grants (up to £1000) which help establish new services, events or activities that help to increase social interaction, encourage neighbourliness and improve the well-being of individuals and communities.
- **Achieve (Together)** – the main investment programme; designed to build longer term strategic partnerships with communities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises who share the Authority's priorities. Achieve will design with partners a range of social action projects and services that meet clearly evidenced need, are sustainable and where required, are capable of being delivered at scale.
- **(Time to) Innovate** – aimed at encouraging creative ideas to solve thorny service delivery issues and is particularly targeted at social enterprises.

**Question:**  
Are there any ways in which we could help you collaborate with others to develop Achieve projects in your community?

Approximately 450 individuals from an estimated 315 separate (and predominantly VCSE) organisations attended the Roadshows<sup>6</sup>. The Roadshows were also used to launch Community First Yorkshire and the shared platform helped to demonstrate the value of that joint relationship and the commitment to cooperation between the services. It also offered the opportunity for attendees to clarify what support was available and from where.

Feedback from attendees provided reassurance that the format of the Roadshows and the communication of key messages was both well placed and well framed<sup>7</sup>.

It was really encouraging to see that over nine in ten delegates felt they had increased their knowledge of funding opportunities, had sufficient information to decide to apply for funding or not, and appreciated how

the new investment approach would seek to fund projects/activities aimed at improving well-being, reducing inequalities and increasing social connectedness (93%). Delegates also felt the Roadshows had enabled them to learn how other organisations had benefited from the Programme in the past. 83% of attendees<sup>8</sup> found the prospectus helpful with many praising the example projects and activities provided as inspirational and informative. Within three months of the event four in five had shared the prospectus with others in their organisation and one in two had been in contact with one of the Programme's Delivery Managers. One in five had started to develop project ideas with other organisations they might partner with to develop a funding application in future, which suggests the Programme's aim to encourage more collaboration within the VCSE sector is starting to take root.

65% of attendees were likely or highly likely to apply for the Inspire Fund, and some (but not all) of this interest has subsequently converted to applications, with 69 applications received in the first nine months. 71% of these applications were from groups who had never previously applied to the Stronger Communities Programme suggesting that both the reach of the Programme is expanding, and that the key message of the Inspire Fund – the generation of new grass roots social action projects – is resonating with some communities.

Due to the level of collaboration, planning and development time involved with Achieve Together projects, there is a lengthy lead in time between initial proposal, organisational/partnership readiness, and funding award.

As a result it was January<sup>9</sup> when the first Achieve project was approved with a further two being approved by the end of March 2018. Five further projects will be ready for sign off within the first three months of 2018/19. There has been significant interest in becoming an Achieve partner since launch and while many valid ideas have been proposed, Achieve Together is not an open fund like Inspire. Partnerships have instead been formed where it has been identified that there is significant scope to meet priority needs and deliver at scale.

The most important outcome from the Roadshows, however, was that attendees left either quite confident or very confident (93%) that their organisation would be able to access some relevant support for their organisation in the coming years – a good foundation on which to build.

# Building Momentum



There are always risks when making a significant change to something that has become established. The new model uses some new terminology and introduces new concepts and ideas such as social action, collective control and community capital, based on leading research and best practice. While these new concepts and vocabulary may challenge people initially we hope that by reframing the conversation more innovative and empowering activity will follow. It is easier to change actions if you can first change the ideas and language.

The Roadshows were the first opportunity for many partners and colleagues to hear about the new investment approach. It was also the first opportunity the Programme had to deliver key messages and new concepts to audiences at scale. Attendees were invited to complete a survey 2-3 months after attendance at a Roadshow, in which they were asked if their understanding of key investment principles and terms raised at the Roadshows had changed. Average understanding of concepts rose from 3.27 to 4.08 (out of 5).

Another audience that has been asked to rate their understanding of the same principles are those VCSE organisations and groups that were successfully awarded an Inspire Fund for their project between August 2017 and March 2018. Sampled analysis found that average understanding of concepts rose from 3.75 (out of 5) before their Project to 4.6 at the end of their project. This demonstrates a growing understanding of concepts among the Programme's target audience.

## Inspire Projects: emerging outputs and outcomes

Of 65 Inspire Fund projects funded in the 2017-18 period, eleven<sup>10</sup> had been fully completed at the time of writing this report. Each one submitted an end of project report that reflected on the achievements and learning from their experience. Analysis of these reports found some very encouraging outputs and outcomes summarised in the next section. Most importantly though the Inspire projects have enabled a diverse set of individuals, particularly those in a situation of disadvantage, vulnerability or unequal opportunity to engage with a locally delivered experience, event, service or activity.



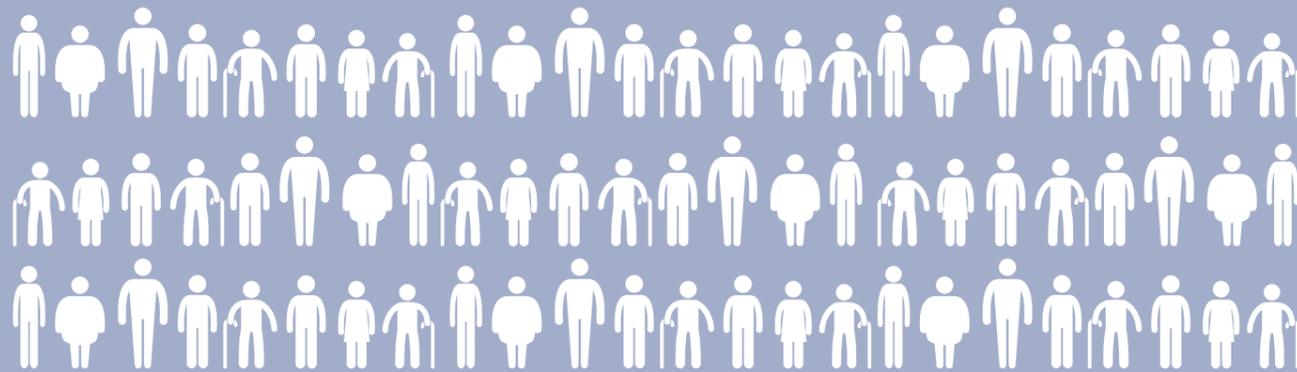
**Outputs: Beneficiaries**

**1,384** individuals directly benefited from these 11 projects, an average of 126 per project. If this proxy was found to be representative of all 65 Inspire projects supported by the Inspire Fund in 2017/18, potentially 8,178 people may have directly benefited across the County<sup>11</sup>.

Approximately **55%** of these beneficiaries have been female<sup>12</sup> and approximately two thirds of the beneficiaries have been adults over the age of 16.



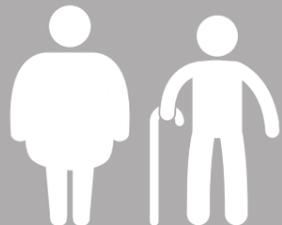
Target groups that have benefited include **individuals on low incomes, those with a disability, learning difficulty, complex mental health situation, those limited by fear or anxiety and young carers.** Families, parents, children and siblings have also benefited.



**Outputs: Social action**

**Six out of seven**

types of social action<sup>13</sup> that the SCP is aiming to encourage have been used by these projects, particularly volunteering (8 projects) and peer support (8 projects).



**204 volunteers**

have supported the delivery of these 11 projects with a total of 1,468 hours, almost double the amount of time estimated before they commenced<sup>14</sup>. Using a proxy of £11.72 per volunteer hour<sup>15</sup> this equates to a prudent estimate of

**£17,000** of value compared to a total of £10,199 grant awarded<sup>16</sup>.



**Outcomes: new activities and more community choice**

**Ten out of eleven**

Inspire projects reported that their grant had enabled them to deliver new activities, services or events that their organisation or charity had not been providing twelve months ago<sup>17</sup>. Three of the projects also reported that the grant had enabled them to deliver in areas and communities that their organisation / group was not reaching twelve months ago.

**Outcomes: Stronger Community Programme priorities**

There has been an encouraging spread of well-being, reduced inequalities and improved social connectedness outcomes across even this small sample of Inspire supported Projects. Seventy one examples of inter-related outcomes were described as follows:



### Reduced Inequalities

The type of inequalities addressed by Inspire projects has included **social/emotional-, financial-, physical- and health-related**.

*"This project has removed barriers for young people (disabled and non-disabled) from an area of deprivation and has improved access to cultural activity."*

*"Many of our (art) workshop participants expressed that this was their first experience of engaging with such work."*

*"Living on a limited and fixed income often means that health suffers due to the cost of accessing activities. All participants have recently suffered from poor mental health and have used these funded (swimming) sessions to aid their recovery."*

Some projects reported beneficiaries having **greater voice** and having been enabled to raise the profile of their mission in local communities.

*"This project was proposed by a group of guerrilla gardeners in the village and their presentation to the Parish Council resulted in community support for the idea."*

*"Their work (the Young Carers Youth Council) is capacity building within the community – there is a buzz/discussion happening within the community."*

### Improved social connectedness

Some projects have described **multi-generational experiences**<sup>18</sup> of mutual benefit:

*"We had multiple elderly people involved with the decorating and getting ready for the event, working side by side with teenagers to make the area beautiful. Many of these people suffer social isolation so they enjoyed being involved. One gentleman even gave a slideshow using old pictures of Ingleton which had the room filled with young people totally transfixed."*

*"People feel that they are not alone. They are finding companionship amongst others in the village."*

*"It was encouraging to hear from a number of participants and audience members at both events, that they were surprised to see so many people from the local community out to support one another, and also by the scale of the event, showing community groups, schools, families and individuals just what they can achieve when working together towards a common goal."*

*"One carer said: 'I find association with others relieves my sense of isolation.'"*

*"Friends have been made and all associations came together to create the event."*

### Improved well-being

The consistent theme of all the projects is how they have created **safe, supportive and inclusive environments** where people have been able to improve their well-being with others.

*"Peer relationships have been extended and strengthened through the filming of #wecare and the putting together of the red carpet event. But we have also developed stronger youth clubs, lunch clubs and initiated a buddying system."*

*"Although the project was not intended to work towards the physical well-being of individuals, the numbers of people encouraged to participate and follow along with the lantern events showed an interest locally in getting involved with community events that promote physical engagement in public spaces."*

*"The children look forward to the group and show pleasure at seeing each other. The children are made welcome and valued as individuals."*

*"One carer said 'I feel supported and empowered'. Another fed back that they felt more 'optimistic about the future.'"*

*"Participants are reporting that the sessions have improved their mood, and helped reduce stress and anxiety. This has resulted in feeling more positive and improved general well-being."*

*"Many of our workshop participants expressed that this was their first experience of engaging with such work."*



### Case Study – Animated Objects. Community Lantern Celebrations

Animated Objects Community Arts applied to the Inspire fund to support their idea to run drop-in multi-generational lantern making workshops at both Scarborough and Whitby libraries in November 2017. The lanterns would then be part of community lantern parades taking place in each of these towns later that month.

Animated Objects already had some funding but needed match funding to ensure that they could reach the widest group of people possible. The intention was to offer free sessions, removing the barrier of finance that so many families and individuals face when looking to participate in cultural activity. These creative sessions were designed to allow people the space not only to create, but also to socialise, and provide them with a tangible result that they could take home, and use to connect with others as part of community celebrations.

The workshops, held in Scarborough and Whitby Library were a huge success and both were extremely well attended, with 137 adults and 79 children taking part. Many families were not library customers and were unaware of the space and opportunities the library had to offer. Attendance data revealed that the majority of participants at the workshops were from deprived areas that fall within the highest 10% nationally on the Index for Multiple Deprivation. This attendance highlighted that by removing the financial barrier to entry, the arts and cultural participation can be enjoyed universally regardless of circumstance.

The lantern parades that followed brought large numbers of people from disparate communities together to share a magical experience that demonstrates what incredible achievements can be made when community groups, schools, families and individuals work together towards a common goal.

The sessions held at Whitby and Scarborough made a positive difference in making people aware of their community as a whole and celebrating diversity. The sessions and parade also encouraged community volunteers with the project involving 50 volunteers, 20 of which had not volunteered before.

*“It was an amazing experience. Thank you for giving me the opportunity, and I would love to be involved in any future projects.”*

Chris

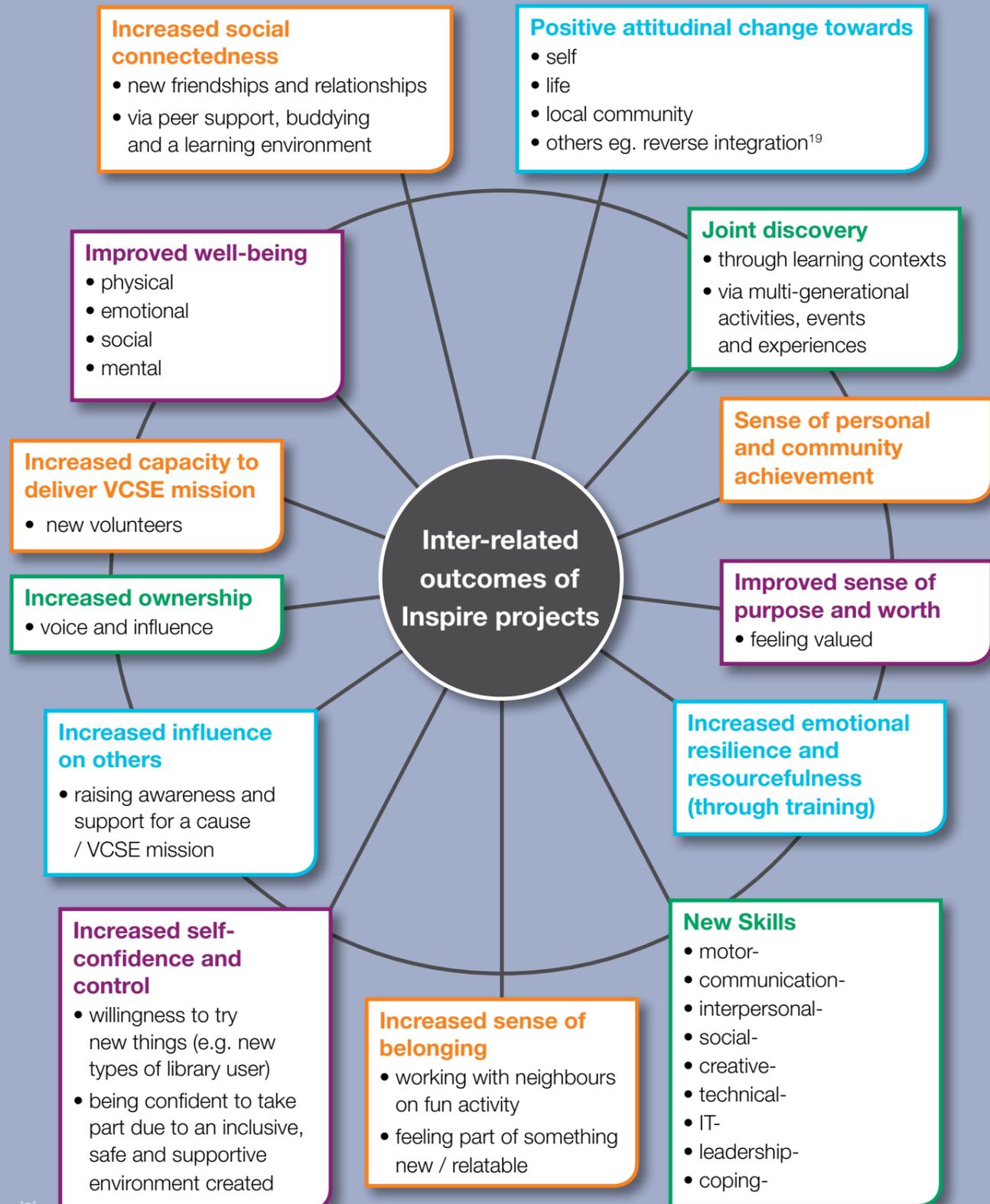


### Outcomes: the Five Ways to Well-being

There have been outcomes across all of the ‘five ways to well-being’ with the most prevalent being the one which encourages people to ‘connect.’ Interestingly, some projects used their end of project report to reflect more deeply on the extent to which outcomes they had and had not expected were realised. Specifically, more projects enabled participants to ‘keep learning’ than anticipated.



In summary, there has been an encouraging spread of well-being, reduced inequalities and improved social connectedness outcomes across even this small sample of Inspire Projects. These outcomes can often be inter-related.



**Outcomes: by Council Service Areas**

End of project reports suggested that for this sample of eleven projects, most benefit has likely been delivered to older people and adults (9 projects), followed by children, young people and families (7 projects), whilst three projects specifically sought to use libraries to good effect (encouraging new types of user and participant) and one project had focused on the promotion of community transport.

*“This grant supported a ground-breaking project entitled Scamps. This is a new fully accessible and inclusive music group that brings disabled and non-disabled children and young people together as equals to make music, socialise and have fun. The project has provided a safe, supportive environment where young people can express themselves and start to learn about who they are.”*

**Outcomes: Collaboration**

Seven of the eleven projects reported that they collaborated with others more than they would have done before the Inspire Fund.



**Future outcomes: Sustainability beyond the Inspire grant**

Ten out of eleven organisations/groups reported a desire to sustain their activity/intervention beyond the Inspire grant period. Seven of these projects would also like support to develop a case study about their experience in order that they can celebrate its achievements, and further promote their capability to appeal to other investors in future.

# New Opportunities

One of the most important ways to create lasting change and achieve our goal for all communities in North Yorkshire to have greater collective control of their own well-being, is to increasingly transfer spending power for commissioning away from the County Council, to a community level and community-sector delivered services, where those best placed can respond to local need.

This will be a gradual process. Since 2010 the County Council has been undergoing its own transformation agenda, adapting to an environment of challenging financial circumstances. This has fostered a climate of partnership working, innovation, and doing things differently. The Stronger Communities Programme itself was a product of this change, and there has never been a better time to influence internal culture.

The challenge is two-fold, to change any perceptions of the VCSE sector held by commissioners in the County Council which may be preventing the award of contracts and grants; and to change the perceptions of the County Council among the sector which may discourage them from bidding for contracts, or developing a closer relationship with the Council. The creation of the Stronger Communities Programme itself goes some way towards the Council's move to relinquish some control and accept more risk, and we believe that close working, relationship building and support for the VCSE sector will be required to achieve this aim over the next five years. The successful transformation of the Library Service to a joint County Council and community run service shows that, not only this approach can work, and at scale, but that the ambitions of community groups when supported, can surpass those of traditional local authority service models.

## Case Study - Boroughbridge Area Community Library Association (BACLA)

Charitable trust BACLA was formed in 2011 by a group of interested residents who wanted to ensure their local library continued to serve the local community. BACLA took on the running of Boroughbridge Community Library in December 2016. They received support from the Stronger Communities Programme during this transition, and have been awarded grant funding to develop some of their new initiatives.

The library has gone from strength to strength since transferring to community ownership and is now a thriving community hub delivering a range of services that had not been provided before, including: digital support, scrabble, code, and jigsaw clubs as well as activities for children and the local schools. In addition the core library offer has grown with more visits, book issues and active borrowers than ever before.

The reaction of the community has been positive with a surge in the number of people volunteering. The Library has won a number of awards, including the North Yorkshire Library of the Year Award 2018. With so much going on, BACLA still has plans to grow in the future and are looking to further develop the educational offer to schools, and at ways to support disadvantaged members of the community.

"I think we've also grown in confidence as an organisation and developed a certain maturity... we're much more outward looking and involved with the community than the library was in the past".

John Helliwell, Boroughbridge Community Library



### Surveying Commissioners

In early 2018, the Programme identified that one of the ways in which it could achieve its ambition more confidently is to understand the attitudes and behaviours of County Council procurement officers, commissioners and individuals who strategically influence these functions. The aim is to work with these individuals moving forward, to develop a way to enable conditions for social action through commissioning. This should, ultimately, result in more local services being designed and delivered by the communities they would serve. Led by an independent evaluator, to encourage open and honest responses, a combination of in-depth interviews and a survey of 12 commissioners and procurement specialists provided a baseline from which future direction of travel can be assessed.

All respondents were either very aware or aware of the Programme and there was a good appreciation of the Programme's outcomes and its key investment principles. However, understanding of the term 'collective control', a key element of the Programme's new goal, was weaker, with respondents scoring their understanding as 3.5 out of 5. Understanding and experience of the Government's three ways to commission social action showed that understanding was greater than experience in this area, 3.16 compared to 2.91; with both presenting a good opportunity for development through collaboration with the Programme, to 2022.

Half of the respondents said their attitude had not changed towards commissioning social action since 2015, but of the four who said that their attitude had changed, three said this change was a result of their dealing with Stronger Communities. Respondents highlighted perceived risks that discourage or prevent commissioning community sector delivered services, including concerns about the quality, governance and affordability of the service, as well as worries about the pace of and resistance to change within the Council.

*"We need to move the conversation within the Council from cost to value."*  
(Commissioner Survey respondent, 2018)

While there is clearly much work to do to change attitudes within the Council and to ensure those changes result in tangible action, all respondents were receptive to the idea of change, facilitated by a good understanding of the Stronger Communities Programme: a necessary requirement for trust about motives and relationship building. Respondents were keen to discuss potential opportunities for joint working with the Programme and this has been a significant step change since the Programme's creation, as awareness of the Programme has improved and other service areas increasingly recognise the added value that closer community relationships can bring.

**Question: What suggestions do you have for changing the culture of commissioning towards more community-sector delivered services in North Yorkshire?**

### Raising Profile

Areas of work that Stronger Communities were invited to collaborate on in 2017/18 were:

**The Essential Life Skills Fund**, an £825,000 grant fund to support extra-curricular activity and life skills in the Department for Education: Scarborough Opportunity Area

**Commissioning for Well-being and Prevention Contracts**, a £435,000 budget to commission community based services to help people to stay well and independent in their local communities and reduce the demand for long-term statutory services care and support

**Strong and Steady**, a £300,000 grant with Public Health to deliver community and targeted physical activity sessions to increase physical activity levels and reduce falls for older people in North Yorkshire

All three highlight how far the Programme has travelled since inception, with collaboration with Stronger Communities independently recommended to each service area. This also evidences the extent to which the Programme is beginning to influence spend outside of its own direct investment budget and make a contribution to important outcomes pursued by different NYCC Directorates.

One of the most important roles in any Council is that of its elected Members (Councillors). Champions of their communities, Members are key partners for the Programme and will be vital in the coming years, helping to ignite appetite in communities to take on greater control of their own well-being. There is an opportunity for Members to effectively support the Programme's new investment approach by identifying community need and encouraging social action. Stronger Communities was pleased to be asked by the Chairman and Executive Member to organise a 'Community Showcase' event, a series of visits for Members to community projects and view social action across the county. There was good engagement with the Showcase and Members have requested that it continues in future years.

*"These visits to community groups have been a great example of communities working together to deliver projects and activities that benefit residents and the local area. It is important, through programmes such as Stronger Communities, that as a Council we continue to support this sort of grass roots social action and I look forward to working closely with the Programme around this in the future."*

County Councillor Helen Swiers



# Looking Forward



In order to know if our goal has been achieved, and to what extent, what works well and what needs to be changed, the Programme will work with an independent evaluation partner to consider five key questions that underpin the Theory of Change:

## By 2022, to what extent has the Stronger Communities Programme...

- 1 ...contributed to a more sustainable VCSE sector that is working...
  - 2 ...enabled the conditions for more effective social action...
  - 3 ...contributed to a change in the commissioning culture at North Yorkshire County Council towards more community-sector delivered services...
  - 4 ...used evidence and learning about what works best to inform future decisions about the most impactful deployment of the available resources...
  - 5 ...been an effective and efficient model to achieve its intended and expected ambitions...
- ...to reduce inequalities, increase social connectedness and improve well-being?



The evaluation will encourage a culture of continuous learning to ensure that the model is responsive and flexible, and able to meet need or make necessary changes as they arise. We hope that those VCSE organisations we have invested in will also benefit from support available to help articulate their own outcomes and achievements, as this is not just an evaluation of the model, but of the investment also.

We did not expect, when undertaking such a significant change in approach that it would be implemented flawlessly from the outset. These first 12 months have highlighted many valuable lessons that will help shape activity and inform our approach to 2022. There have been many successes as well, such as the relationship with Community First Yorkshire, the voluntary and community sector's response to the new approach, and the first tangible outcomes being achieved, which provide reassurance that our improved approach is breaking through and starting to work.

### Looking forward, the following will be areas of development:

- It is clear that the term 'collective control' is less well understood among all target audiences. The term is complex but the meaning, when explained, resonates with the desires of communities. Put simply, it is the idea that communities, and individuals in those communities, feel they have the power, together, to make decisions about matters which affect them and people in their locality now and in the future. We must work proactively to ensure that communities understand the intention behind the term.
- The Programme has a clear role to play, as the lead advocate within the Council for social action and the devolution of commissioning spend to communities; to move the conversation away from cost, and the savings which can be made, and instead talk about value, and specifically the added value generated by co-production and communities taking responsibility for themselves. The organisational culture change has already been highlighted earlier in the document, but the transformation of the Library Service from direct delivery to a mixed community-Council model is the very real example. All the libraries remain open and many are flourishing as community hubs, delivering a range of additional activities which the Council simply could not deliver previously.
- As the culture of the organisation changes the Programme will increasingly be seen as the natural vehicle for achieving those collaborative community outcomes. New opportunities emerged this year and the Programme must be ready to meet future demand. Achieving its goal to 2022 while also flexing to meet increased demand may put strain on resources and this will need to be carefully considered moving forward.
- While the response to the new investment approach has been positive, this has varied across the geographies in North Yorkshire due to a range of historic and contextual factors such as prior investment in communities and the nature of organised community involvement. Proactive engagement in communities, through further roadshow or pop-up style events and close working with local elected Members will help to generate interest and redress geographical imbalances. We still have a job to convert the very high interest and latent demand for projects expressed at the launch Roadshows into Inspire and Achieve project applications.
- We wish to better understand and document coherently and quantifiably the difference that the diagnostic process and provision of organisational development support through the APL is making to VCSE organisations. Ultimately, we need to know if the VCSE sector is becoming stronger and more sustainable as a result of the expert interventions they receive.
- There has been significant progress in addressing some of the need in the VCSE sector for capacity building and organisational development support. However, at its current rate demand is at risk of quickly outstripping our ability to provide support, and the Programme will need to consider further with key partners how best to prioritise and deploy resources to most effectively achieve outcomes.
- The existing team set up, of one Delivery Manager per district as the primary link between Council services and the VCSE sector invests heavily in that one individual to build and develop relationships and maintain knowledge. The coming year will see the first major change for the team since inception as two of the initial Delivery Managers move on. New appointments are being made and the Programme will need to work extensively to ensure those transitions are as seamless as possible.
- The Programme's profile is high amongst all NYCC Directorates, although there is a clearer focus for joint work with some compared to others. Sometimes, consultations or decisions outside the Council's control can hinder intended progress such as has been the case with community transport in 2018<sup>20</sup>, so we need to continuously reposition our effort to achieve our outcomes, without duplicating effort or wasting limited resources.
- The Programme has not yet instituted a formal mechanism for gathering satisfaction ratings from all its stakeholders, but initial results from Roadshow attendees, NYCC commissioners and Inspire project recipients appear encouraging. Feedback has been given that the Programme could do even more to celebrate its achievements and the positive progress being made in the VCSE sector and communities.
- Ongoing evaluation will help us over time understand how and where we can create greatest impact with the tools and levers we have at our disposal. Creating the conditions for effective social action will likely take time and we can also be proactive in the way we look at approaches others are taking around the country to inform our own practice.

**Question:** If there was one thing you would recommend to improve the effectiveness of the Stronger Communities Programme in the next 12 months what would it be?

# Location of Inspire Projects



# Glossary of Key Terms

This short glossary is intended to provide a useful and accessible set of definitions for some of the terms found in this document.

## Collective Control

This is the idea that communities, and individuals in those communities, feel they have the power, together, to make decisions about matters which affect them and people in their locality now and in the future. Closely connected to the idea of social action, when communities feel sufficiently resourced, supported and skilled to solve problems that are important to them then they begin to have collective control.

## Commissioning

Commissioning is the local authority's cyclical activity to assess the needs of its local population for (care and support) services that will be arranged by the authority, then designing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating those services to ensure appropriate outcomes. The focus of high quality commissioning is on local people, health and wellbeing: achieving good outcomes with people using evidence, local knowledge, skills and resources to best effect. Individuals and organisations who commission these services are called commissioners.

## Community

A community is a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Where a group of people share a particular characteristic, such as a religious belief this is often called a community of interest.

## Community Asset

A community asset is a strength or a potential in a community that can be used as a basis for development or empowerment of that community. Examples of community assets might be key buildings, an active voluntary organisation or volunteers.

## Community Capital

Although people typically think of money when the term 'capital' is used, community capital is wider than simply money and comprises the resources available to the community to solve problems and sustain collective control. Community capital particularly places an emphasis on community assets and the connections and relationships between people in the community to benefit the community as a whole.

## Co-production

Co-production is a relationship where professionals and citizens share power to design, plan, and deliver support or services together, recognising that both partners have vital contributions to make to improve quality of life for people and communities.

## Grant

A grant is quite simply money transferred from a funder (typically a public sector body, corporation, foundation or trust) to a recipient for work or an activity the funder wishes to support but for which it doesn't directly benefit from in return. A grant will typically benefit the community or a particular group. This is unlike a contract which is a payment for services benefitting the funder that the recipient is obliged by law to deliver.

## Locality

A locality is a defined geographical area.

## Loneliness and (Social) Isolation

Loneliness and isolation, (or social isolation), are often discussed together and even used interchangeably. While they are related, they are distinct concepts. **Loneliness** can be understood as an individual's personal sense of lacking desired affection, closeness, and social interaction with others. Although loneliness has a social aspect, it is also defined by an individual's emotional state. Loneliness is more dependent on the quality than

the number of relationships. **Social isolation** refers to a lack of contact with family or friends, community involvement, or access to services.

## Reducing Inequalities

Inequality generally is the difference in social status, wealth, opportunities and/or outcomes between people or groups. Inequality is deemed to be unfair or an inhibiting factor for one person or group and not another. While we should always seek to reduce inequality where possible, we recognise that it would be impractical and unrealistic for this investment approach to reduce all inequality in North Yorkshire. Instead we are focussing on:

- **Health inequalities**, by increasing support and opportunities for the very young, the elderly and those with additional needs.
- **Improving access to services or the removal of barriers.** In a large rural county such as North Yorkshire this could be helping people travel to services which are often in the larger market towns, or it might be encouraging digital learning as more services move online.
- **Influence and control – increasing civic participation.** This is about giving individuals and communities the resources, skills and confidence to make decisions about matters which affect them and people in their locality now and in the future.

## Social Action

Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can broadly be defined as practical action in the service of others, which is:

- carried out by individuals or groups of people working together,
- not mandated and not for profit,
- done for the good of others – individuals, communities and/or society,
- bringing about social change and or value.

## Social Connectedness

One of the key outcomes for the Stronger Communities Programme; creating and building social connectedness is about developing the links and relationships within and between communities. More connected communities are those where individuals have a greater investment in their community, seek shared outcomes for the benefit of all, and care for those who are more vulnerable or isolated.

## Social Enterprise

A social enterprise is a business created to further a social or environmental purpose in a financially sustainable way. Social enterprises can be both non-profit and for-profit in form. Some social enterprises are created, operated and/or owned by non-profit, charitable organisations as a means of generating income to further their social mission. Other social enterprises are incorporated as a for-profit entity but the business strategy is designed to achieve a social objective. The profits then are reinvested to achieve that objective.

## Volunteering

Volunteering is any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

## Well-being

Wellbeing is about how people experience their own life. It is most usefully thought of as the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and state of mind.

# End Notes

1. North Yorkshire Citizen's Panel North Yorkshire County Council Citizens' Panel 34 – Spring 2018.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. Three-quarters of all respondents (75%) stated that 'I have as much social contact I want with people I like', whilst 20% stated that 'I have some social contact but not enough', and 4% that 'I have little social contact and feel socially isolated'.
4. If all volunteer estimates expressed in the application forms of the 65 Inspire projects materialise, this would see 23,348 hours contributed by 1,119 volunteers suggesting a value of £273,638.56 (23,348 hours at £11.72 per hour. See also end note 15. The average number of hours per project would be 359. A more prudent calculation would be to use the average volunteer hours observed in the 11 completed projects – 133 hours per project – and extrapolating that to the 65 projects. This is the figure presented in the report. In either scenario, the volunteer value delivers significant return compared to the total grant awarded (£58,511 to 65 Inspire projects in the 2017-18 period) and the value methodology applied is also purposely conservative.
5. Governance, finance, ICT, training and development, recruitment and retention, marketing, start-up support for new charities and voluntary groups, crisis resolution, risk management and business continuity, organisational development, service delivery and measuring performance, contracting.
6. Organisations offering emotional and psychological support, (30) community empowerment, (30) information advice and guidance (28) and those that facilitate networks and support groups (16) made up the 4 key categories of organisations attending the Roadshow events.
7. 213 Roadshow attendees completed an event feedback form on the day, and 44 of these completed a post-event online survey within three months of that experience.
8. This was from a total of 42 delegates who completed the post-event online survey.
9. Four months after Achieve Together launched.
10. Scamps (Scarborough Accessible Music Project); #wecare hits the red carpet; Caring with Confidence; Internet Hub; Grassington Hub Open Day; Cherry Tree Activities; Community Lantern Celebrations; Ingleton Autumn Light Festival; Swimming For Wellbeing; Community Orchard; and Gristhorpe & Lebberton Village Hall refurbishment. Four of these eleven projects were first time applicants to the SCP.
11. The actual volume of beneficiaries will be possible to estimate with more accuracy when all projects submit their end of project reports wherein beneficiary numbers and characteristics are described.
12. 750 females and 596 males were estimated in the end of project reports.
13. Volunteering (8 projects), peer support (8 projects), co-production (6 projects), community organising (4 projects), co-operative or community ownership (2 projects), befriending and helping (1 project) and reciprocity (0 projects amongst this sample).
14. The original estimates were 209 volunteers giving 794 hours.
15. Derived from the 2016 Household Satellite Account. Please note this is measured by labour input only and this proxy is for frequent formal volunteering. Alternative proxies that value private benefits and wider societal impacts of informal volunteering would likely increase the true social value of volunteering. A similar but differently sourced proxy is found in the social value engine which uses the value placed by a local authority on volunteering at £11.00 per hour. Source: ERVAS VCS Support Contract 2012 – 2016 SROI p8 outcome 1.d <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/articles/changesinthevalueanddivisionofunpaidcareworkintheuk/2015>
16. Projects were awarded between £475 and £1,000 each and in total these 11 projects received £10,199 in grant.
17. Examples of these include: delivering workshops for free enabling opportunities for families and individuals with limited finances; providing a meeting place for the community; expanding offer available – e.g. putting on swimming sessions for the first time; delivering a course of 5 separate sessions that support carers to access a range of information and advice; increasing the opportunity to talk to community groups and potential partners; offering free wifi to those that hire a local hall; hosting an open day to promote a hub and becoming a hub volunteer; hosting an event to promote and celebrate the village; expanding the offer available in a village hall.
18. Projects have encouraged inclusive, multi-generational community experiences successfully using media such as IT, art, craft, culture, planting, sport and learning.
19. The Scamps project promotes an excellent model of 'reverse integration' where young people with disabilities can help their non-disabled peers with signing and a positive message about disability and inclusion, helping to change preconceptions about what young people with disabilities are capable of achieving.
20. The Government announced a consultation on the use and issue of Section 19 and 22 permits the outcome of which could have potentially significant ramifications for a number of operators in North Yorkshire. More information on the consultation can be found here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/680319/section-19-section-22-permits-consultation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/680319/section-19-section-22-permits-consultation.pdf)

Notes

Notes

We would like to thank  
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