

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report

Report of Director of Service Delivery

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Date: 10 November 2020

**Aspire – the Council’s commitment to Improving the quality of life of people who need our help**

**Officer recommendation:**

The Committee is asked to

- Comment on the evaluation of Aspire (formally Project Aspire) as set out in this report.
- Comment on the suitability of actions set out in the work plan to deliver the strategic priorities of Aspire.

Reason(s) for Recommendation:

To ensure Councillors are aware of this Council’s focus and commitment to the importance of the health and wellbeing of all Guildford residents.

**1. Executive Summary**

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 March 2019 supported embedding health and wellbeing in Council decision making following the motion carried by full Council on 9 October 2018 that,

*‘this Council will ensure that due consideration is given in all decision making as to how any decision will promote and support the improved health and wellbeing of Guildford residents.’*

1.2 Due to the central role Aspire (formally project Aspire) has in embedding health and wellbeing, the committee also asked for a subsequent report to evaluate the work of Aspire.

1.3 This report sets out progress against the strategic priorities of Aspire by demonstrating the benefits, impacts, successes, and challenges under the following headings:

- Background of Aspire
- Lessons learned and development of Aspire
- The people helped by Aspire
- The Impact of Covid 19 on Aspire
- Work plan overseen by the Aspire Health and Wellbeing Governance Board

## **2. Strategic priorities**

2.1 The Housing and Community draft strategic priorities adopted by the Executive for public consultation (following a councillor workshop and joint EAB consideration) include

- Caring for people who need our help.
- Keeping the community active and well.

2.2 Aspire is the delivery workstream for our communities regarding these two strategic priorities and demonstrates our commitment that Every Person Matters – particularly those who are vulnerable and socially isolated.

## **3 Background of Aspire**

3.1 Aspire began as 'Project Aspire' with funding approved by the Executive on 24 November 2015 and was viewed as an isolated project to help less advantaged people in north Guildford. Early in the project the scope was expanded into Ash.

3.2 £250,000 Project Aspire grant money was made available by the Council with the intention of helping build community resilience and encouraging people to look after themselves and each other in a world of decreasing public funds and increasing public health demands due to the impact of low self-esteem, social isolation, and mental health challenges.

3.3 The Council supported this intention through the Community Wellbeing team, engaging with local communities and individuals to help address issues of importance related to their overall wellbeing and support them to find solutions through activities and community projects.

## **4 Lessons Learned and Development of Aspire**

4.1 As the project progressed the team embraced opportunities for learning, and the workstream evolved to increase the effectiveness in terms of supporting those in need to achieve change.

4.2 Initially the grant money we were offering organisations was the only driver for their engagement with Aspire. We realised that grant applications were coming from voluntary agencies to fund staffing posts. Although understandable, this was not how we wanted to progress. We wanted to directly help individuals and

communities achieve change and live well so our approach changed and we engaged with grassroots community groups to develop projects that, with the support of Aspire funding, would have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of local communities.

- 4.3 It became clear that narrowing the focus of project Aspire to just Park Barn, Westborough, Stoke and Ash was not helpful, as it appeared to perpetuate perceived stereotypes of certain communities. People who may be of less advantage and in need of care and support with their health and wellbeing are not defined by geography or an income stream.
- 4.4 To address these issues the project evolved as follows:
- the voluntary sector were directed to other funding opportunities
  - the project Aspire funding process was made more community friendly and less bureaucratic
  - the scope of work was widened to all communities within the borough
  - the initiative was renamed Aspire to remove the sense of this being a timed 'project' the Council is 'doing to' labelled communities. Aspire became more about working alongside and in partnership with all communities in the borough
- 4.5 To support these actions stronger governance was developed through the Aspire Health and Wellbeing Governance Board, which is chaired by the lead member for Aspire and attended by the Managing Director, with councillor representation from all parties.

## **5 The People helped by Aspire**

- 5.1 Aspire has developed a dual approach to helping and supporting people.

Firstly, through the Aspire funding stream available. This helps encourage community groups to help themselves by providing activities that develop community interaction, improved health and wellbeing, and the skills, mentoring, and training needed to be stronger, happier, and healthier individuals.

The funding provided to date can be seen in Appendix 1 to this report.

- 5.2 The second approach has been via the support of the Council's Community Wellbeing team who through grassroot projects and individual support, monitored and evaluated by the Aspire Health and Wellbeing Governance Board, support the community in addressing the issues that affect them most. The aim being to overcome the boundaries that community groups and individuals face when wanting to improve their health and wellbeing and support them to start community projects that can then be owned and run by the community.

Appendix 2 of this report shares some feedback and case studies regarding the impact of Aspire on people in the borough.

5.3 The Aspire Health and Wellbeing Governance Board has identified the following key work streams to improve the quality of life of those in need.

- Community Strengthening
- Behavioural Change
- Food Poverty and financial security support
- Supporting mental health
- Increasing physical activity

5.4 The expectation of the board is that delivery will be unified across the Council under the strategic priorities of Housing and Community. Officers will work together to ensure Aspire is delivered – as set out in the diagram below:



## 6. The Impact of Covid 19 on Aspire

6.1 Under the governance of the Aspire Health and Wellbeing Governance Board, a work plan was created and expected to start in April 2020. However, Covid 19 meant many of these initiatives were not commenced due to the curb on social interaction.

6.2 Nevertheless, the impact of Aspire during Covid 19 has very much continued. The Community Services team has led on the Council's welfare response to the pandemic and in doing so has reiterated to our communities that the Council cares for our most vulnerable.

6.3 At this time work focus has been redirected to the following areas:

- Delivering food parcels to people across the borough who are in need
- Supporting the North Guildford Food Bank with referrals and deliveries
- Providing meals on wheels to the most vulnerable – including supported housing tenants and homeless individuals
- Collecting and delivering prescriptions to those in need
- Weekly phone calls to people who are experiencing isolation
- Social media supportive messaging as well as informing residents as to what support is available throughout the borough
- Socially distanced elderly supportive day care at the Park Barn Centre
- Home visits to the elderly who are unable to attend centres
- Community transport journeys for medical appointments and shopping
- Thrive at the Hive donation project

6.4 We have seen during Covid 19 tremendous community spirit across the borough and the formation of community groups to support people where they live. The team are working closely with these community groups and helping them to sustain the support they are providing to people, and harness ways in which this community spirit can continue beyond the pandemic.

## **7 Future Work Plan for Aspire**

7.1 Prior to Covid 19, the Aspire agenda was delivered by the Community Services Team with support from the Leisure Development Team regarding improved mental health and physical wellbeing through arts, play, and sport.

7.2 As we recover from Covid 19 the impact of Future Guildford gives us an opportunity to embed Aspire across all service delivery functions of the Council within the new structure. It is anticipated the Community Service team will drive the Aspire agenda working across all the service delivery teams with the support of Strategy and Communication.

7.3 A community strategy will be developed that will set the framework for delivering Aspire, taking into consideration current and future resources available to meet

the Council's priority outcomes. The scope of the strategy may include community assets, grant schemes, community engagement, support and development.

- 7.4 Developing a safe and intergenerational community space for all communities has been essential in breaking down barriers between the Council and community groups who are less likely to engage. A priority in the Covid 19 recovery Aspire plan is to resume (within Government guidelines) the intergenerational activities at the Park Barn Centre.
- 7.5 It is intended to rename the Park Barn Centre to The Hive in 2021. We had hoped to achieve this earlier in 2020 but Covid 19 happened and we did not want to launch The Hive without giving the community the opportunity to celebrate with us.

However, the centre is a flagship space which has now been redecorated, with the help of the Community Payback scheme, to make the space a hub for intergenerational activity. There is currently a play zone for children up to 7 years old, a youth reading corner, a weekly youth café, older people's lounge, community kitchen and coffee shop with a community fridge. The 'Thrive at the Hive' pay as you feel donation project is also based at the centre.

- 7.6 The Hive is an excellent space where community groups and partnership agencies from across the borough come to engage and work together for the benefit of the whole community. Many community groups and partners are very keen for the space to re-open, but older people care has been the priority use during Covid 19. This is so we can support the elderly to stay well and support the NHS. It is hoped that in 2021 the centre will reopen to full capacity once more.
- 7.7 The team are always looking for opportunities to share this community space model with community groups and partner agencies to help replicate the achievements in other community assets across the borough.
- 7.8 The future work plan places significant importance on reaching rural areas of the borough and achieving youth engagement to discuss issues such as climate change and youth identity in 2021.

The Aspire work plan can be seen in Appendix 3 of this report.

## **8 Future Funding**

- 8.1 As part of the review of grants and the introduction of funding agreements with key organisations delivering our priority outcomes, we have created two smaller grants schemes under Aspire.
- 8.2 The first is an Aspire voluntary grants scheme that has an annual budget of £50,000. This £50,000 will focus on supporting voluntary organisations that provide services and support for those most in need.

The main features of the new proposed voluntary grant scheme include:

- maximum grant of £5,000 per annum
- criteria to support older, more vulnerable, and less advantaged residents
- organisations with separate funding agreements will be ineligible
- simplified application process
- grant decisions delegated to the Director Service Delivery in consultation with the relevant Lead Councillor

8.3 The second is a lighter touch Aspire Community grants scheme that has an annual budget of £30,000. This £30,000 will focus on supporting community led projects. The main features include:

- maximum grant of £1,000
- simplified grant application process
- regular (monthly) grant award decisions
- decisions delegated to the Director of Service Delivery
- scheme overseen by the Aspire Health and Wellbeing Governance Board

## **9. Challenges**

9.1 There are challenges with Aspire and the wider aims of this type of work within the Council. It is very difficult to demonstrate hard facts regarding impact on individuals. However, when viewing the current work plan and the funding community groups have received, the feedback and case studies Aspire supports as well as the efforts made by the team during Covid 19, there is significant help being given to those in need in the community.

Details of the work undertaken during Covid 19 from the Community Service team are detailed in Appendix 4

9.2 The aim of the Community Strategy will be to identify and develop measurable indicators against the Council's priority outcomes drawing on best practice from social outcomes frameworks.

9.3 The current social and financial climate is very hard for many people in Guildford and the Council cannot fix everything. Nevertheless, Aspire reinforces the Council's commitment that Every Person Matters and because of this, is the flagship amongst our partners and communities that demonstrates the Council cares about people and their health and wellbeing, particularly those who are vulnerable and socially isolated.

## **10. Financial implications**

10.1 There are no additional financial implications from this report.

## **11. Legal implications**

11.1 There are no legal implications from this report

## **12. Human resource implications**

12.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

## **13. Conclusion**

13.1 The Council, through the strategic priorities of Housing and Community and the delivery of Aspire, are committed to caring for those in need and improving the community health and wellbeing of all our residents.

13.2 The motion carried by full Council on 9 October 2018 has provided an opportunity for us to strengthen our approach to community health and wellbeing and Aspire work streams ensuring that there is stronger governance for the benefit of all our residents.

## **14. Suggested issues for Councillors to consider**

- Are there any comments on the evaluation of Aspire?
- Are there any comments on the suitability of actions set out in the work plan to deliver the strategic priorities of Aspire?

## **15. Background papers**

- <http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=1622>

## **16. Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Aspire Funding Awarded to date (September 2020]
- Appendix 2: Aspire Feedback/Case studies
- Appendix 3: Aspire work plan
- Appendix 4: Covid 19 Community Services Support figures