

## Case study

September 2016

# Chorley District Council

## Using volunteering and incentivising greater community engagement to improve neighbourhoods

Chorley Council has invested in a number of community action activities, as the council's view is that these form part of its community leader/shaper role and as part of the consideration of new service models, moving away from a traditional service delivery approach to an integrated public services model, including wider partners.

The council has a community action plan, which is focused upon three geographic areas (wards) and also a general 'rural' theme. The types of activities that have been undertaken include: management of community assets; move to a commissioning-based approach to funding voluntary organisations; and commissioning the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide a coordinator to facilitate networking events, provide a voluntary organisation database and share assets and skills amongst the voluntary, community and faith sector. In addition, in terms of wider neighbourhood devolution, the borough has been divided into eight areas, with a total of £100,000 of funding (from New Homes Bonus) being available to support three key local priorities agreed within the area.

The main example of community action explored in detail relates to the use of Spice Time Credits. This was seen as a way of engaging the community and supporting organisations that had insufficient resources to operate to their full potential, by recognising volunteers' contributions through the use of Time Credits, which can be 'spent' on a wide variety of activities, eg shows and performances, classes, museum/art gallery entry, sporting activities, and parking eTime Credits.

Examples of areas where the Time Credits volunteering approach has been used include: co-production – seeking views from residents on what services could look like; meals to wheels – establishing lunch clubs and coffee clubs; clean up days, eg woodland; health walks and running programmes; encouraging young people 16-25 to volunteer, with a specific focus on sports activities; and using volunteering as a step to getting people back into work.

The council has invested £210,000 in total (split equally over three years) in Time Credits – this investment is to engage Spice, who employ a Time Credits facilitator and provide additional support. The council also invests staff time resources into Time Credits through officer work with community groups, both promoting Time Credits and working with groups who use Time Credits.

The council was clear from the outset that the use of Time Credits was not about achieving financial savings, but rather, wider benefits, such as improving health and wellbeing; reducing social isolation; increasing confidence; and getting people back into work. The council intuitively felt that individuals that engaged in their community were less likely to rely upon the state and council for help and saw the activity as being about very early intervention. Time Credits can also identify where there is need and potential gaps in provision.

In terms of engagement, the council's general approach has been to 'work with the willing – but this can be in deprived areas, not just in more affluent areas, and so does not mean that hard to reach groups are ignored.

Between 2012 and 2015, the use of Time Credits has involved 62 organisations being established, 1,189 volunteers (50 per cent of which had never volunteered before) and 26,232 hours of volunteering. Initially, a larger proportion of those volunteering was older people, but this is now diversifying. Being flexible about the activities that Time Credits can be used for, and empowering frontline staff on how they respond to community need, was identified as being key. Looking forward, potential developments in relation to Time Credits include: widening out Time Credits so they can be used with other businesses; greater automation of the Time Credits process; and creating a 'Chorley brand' for Time Credits, so that people identify more locally.



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