

URN: 22-246
Subject: Volunteering Cities – Cultural Connections Project

Report to: ELT – 15 December 2022
Economic Development Committee – 9 January 2023

Report by: Dean Wilson, Community Capacity Manager

SUBJECT MATTER

This report sets out a new volunteering project, known as Cultural Connections, working with Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk's cultural sectors to create new volunteering opportunities for residents leading to access to accredited skills and training pathways.

The purpose of this report is to ensure the committee is fully briefed on the nature of the project, its projected positive outcomes for the wellbeing and engagement of our residents and to enable members are able to act as ambassadors for the project within their wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Economic Development Committee:

- a. Notes the successful grant award from Spirit 2012 from its 'Volunteering Cities' fund shared between Great Yarmouth Borough Council and East Suffolk Council.
- b. Agrees that Great Yarmouth Borough Council will act as Accountable Body for the award which follows on from the joint bid between to become the UK City of Culture.
- c. Supports the key aims and deliverables of the Spirit 2012 'GY&ES Cultural Connections' project as set out in this report.
- d. Requests that an annual update report be provided on deliverables and outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In June 2021 Great Yarmouth Borough Council (GYBC) and East Suffolk Council (ESC) submitted an expression of interest to Department of Digital Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to become the next UK City of Culture 2025. A range of partners from the arts, culture and heritage sectors came together to support this bid. Whilst the UK City of Culture bid was not successful, as a direct result of that national competition, Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk were invited by DCMS to apply to their partner, Spirit of 2012, for a further grant funding opportunity aimed at increasing volunteering opportunities working with local health and cultural sector partners across Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk. The area covers from Winterton-on-Sea to Felixstowe, home to 359,728 people.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that the UK City of Culture status has since been awarded to Bradford for 2025. Nevertheless the efforts of GYBC and ESC resulted in the two councils being invited jointly to

apply to the national organisation Spirit 2012 under its Volunteering Cities programme (Connected theme): <https://spiritof2012.org.uk/project-types/connected/>

- 1.3 Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk together with Bradford, Medway, and Conwy (all areas that applied for UK City of Culture 2025), are now part of the Spirit 2012's Volunteering Cities programme until 31 March 2025. These four geographic areas will work with each other, a central learning partner (Neighbourlylab) and the Spirit 2012 team in London to build sustainable volunteering capacity to support cultural programming and events by encouraging local people to take-up volunteering roles.
- 1.4 The overall aim of 'Cultural Connections' is to build on the work and opportunities that already exist across GYBC and ESC areas, adding value to create a volunteering offer for those furthest away from volunteering. Working with key VCSE organisations and both councils' cultural partners the project will increase access to volunteering roles for residents, in particular those residents that face the largest barriers getting involved in cultural activities and volunteering including; age, health and disabilities, social isolation, geographies they reside and language.

2. CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

- 2.1 The Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk project is called 'Cultural Connections'. To deliver the project, GYBC and ESC developed a collegiate partnership application. The Tier 1 delivery partners involved are:
 - Great Yarmouth Borough Council (Accountable Body)
 - East Suffolk District Council
 - Community Action Suffolk
 - Voluntary Norfolk
 - Norfolk County Council, Adult Education Service
 - Institute for Volunteering Research, UEA
- 2.2 Additional Tier 2 delivery partners have also agreed to be involved and will act as a steering group for the project. Those partners include: East Norfolk Sixth Form College, East Coast College, the Primary Care Networks, NHS Norfolk & Waveney Integrated Care Place Board, Lowestoft Rising and the key cultural sector organisations: Out There Arts, Freshly Greated, DWP, First Light Lowestoft, High Tide, St. George's Theatre, Marina Theatre, Seagull Theatre, Britten Pears, Norfolk and Suffolk Museum Services.
- 2.3 The aims of the Cultural Connections project and the purpose of the grant funding is set out below:
 - **Improve the life chances for our young people** - by providing them with significant skills through volunteering, alongside a broader cultural educational path, that roots them in our communities, helping to address our demographic challenges.
 - **Remove the barriers to volunteering** – focussing in on inter-generational volunteering, younger people and families, older isolated people, and those with physical and learning disabilities by providing support through 'Event Buddies'.
 - **Shine a light on local heritage, arts and culture** - and our diverse communities, an engine room of local opportunities that offer authentic, relevant and meaningful experiences to volunteers through cultural events that improve the lives of our volunteers, encourage integration, and kickstart a diversity of thought and experience that enriches our communities immeasurably.

3. BENEFICIARIES AND DELIVERABLES

3.1 The project will target the following beneficiaries:

- **New Entrants** – those who have not volunteered before, including seldom heard / marginalised residents (1,000 people including 16-25 year old cohort, those with a registered disability or barriers to access)
- **Young People (16-25 years)** – from LSOAs with higher deprivation (within the top 10% nationally), families wanting to volunteer together (200 people).
- **People with physical / learning difficulties / mental ill health / neuro diversity** (100 disabled plus likely to be another estimated 100 people with other issues which act as barriers to volunteering)
- **People who feel isolated / lonely** – and disconnected from neighbours, friends, and their communities (will be included in the 1,000 people).

3.2 Additionally, Members will be aware that the Borough Council already co-ordinates a successful Community Champions' Programme with over 160 active health volunteers since it started in April 2021. These residents will help promote this new Cultural Connections project linking to the wider health and well-being benefits this project offers.

3.3 The overall ambition of the project is to recruit 1,000 more volunteers from our target beneficiary audiences detailed above, with focus on the quality of the volunteering experience, the propensity of new volunteering capacity to be sustained and opportunities to increase life skills. Therefore, rather than purely focussing on the qualitative side of this project, the steering group plans to provide quality experiences for everyone that takes-up a volunteering opportunity regardless of background. The aim is to be fully inclusive.

3.4 In terms of its legacy, the project aims to create positive long term social impacts on community wellbeing; increasing civic pride, feelings of community ownership, social connectedness, employability, skills and confidence. Whilst there will be sustained positive impact to individuals who take part in this programme, the aim is to ensure the programme continues to make a difference to people and our place long after the programme has finished in a full and inclusive way and during the programme, we will explore other resources to support this ambition.

3.5 Over the 2 ½ year period of the project, starting in 2023 to 31 March 2025, Cultural Connections will:

- **Build volunteer confidence through community events** - hyperlocal neighbourhood events, where friendships can be made, with people becoming an integral part of how communities are shaped and led. A network of skilled volunteers – young and old - who are champions for, and shapers of, local cultures and communities, who have the skills to benefit the region and the reasons to stay.
- **Inspire families to volunteer** - a 'menu' of different types of volunteering opportunities (digital, social action, marketing, learning activities, events, outdoor, catering) with a range of duration (one-off, short term to regular and consistent), combined with a comprehensive mentoring system, that helps first-time volunteers take that first step into volunteering along with networking opportunities to build and maintain connections.
- **Create a detailed package of skills development opportunities** - with clear progression from preparing for volunteering (pre-entry) right through to 'community producers' who lead diverse arts and culture events that spring from their individual communities, and who are provided with a broad range of skills from project management to budgeting and marketing,

with further clear progression pathways into additional training and employment in the local cultural sector.

- **Offer a joined-up reward system** - that links specifically to culture, with free entry into cultural events and access to an inspiring programme of cultural education and onwads skills & training opportunities.

3.6 In order to deliver these outcomes, the project will put in place:

1. **‘Cultural Connections’ volunteering land page** - volunteering platform, Volunteer Portals, bite-sized skills modules building towards an accredited ‘Volunteer Passport’ including a Cultural Events module, free access to a Skills Builder for volunteers.
2. **Promotion and active engagement** - with cultural and community-based organisations offering volunteering roles.
3. **Volunteer Co-ordinators** - to build trust and confidence with would-be volunteers e.g., undertaking home/community visits working with Social Prescribers, Care Co-ordinators, Community Champions and Community Marshals.
4. **Accessibility Fund** – to overcome financial and other barriers to participation such as co-designed support packages for volunteers needing additional support, buddying, adaptations and/or help with transport.
5. **A Cultural Connections ‘Activation Grant’ fund** for volunteer event organisers to access to run hyperlocal events and support new volunteers at those events.
6. **Dedicated project staff** - 3 new part time roles (Project Officer and Volunteer Co-ordinators) to deliver the programme working with VSCE partners across Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk.

3.7 The opportunity to work with Spirit 2012 and its national partners, means the funding can be used to create an inclusive ‘movement’ rather than a time-limited programme by embedding the robust volunteering and partnership infrastructures developed, along with our learning, in our way of working across our place.

3.8 In terms of outputs, Cultural Connections will:

- Establish an accessible web-based landing page for residents to sign-up to volunteering using existing Volunteer Portals operated by Voluntary Norfolk and Community Action Suffolk.
- Recruit a total of 1,000 new volunteers across Great Yarmouth and East Suffolk.
- Create Volunteer Co-ordinators to facilitate and support people digitally excluded.
- Provide local Activation Grants across three financial years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 to support hyper-local neighbourhood level pop-up events supporting volunteering roles.
- Support residents new to volunteering from across the age spectrum to take part in existing cultural programming and local events.
- Provide a pathway to accredited training sessions (for those who choose to do so) to build their skill levels and acquire a NVQ level volunteer passport supported by Norfolk Adult Education Services.
- Signpost those wishing to utilise their new-found volunteering skills for paid work or further education and training, to FE/HE partners such as UEA, UoS, East Coast College and East Norfolk Sixth Form College.

- 3.9 The funder, Spirit 2012, is really keen to understand the impact of volunteering. The Cultural Connections project will therefore be monitored against the following agreed outcome targets:
- **Wellbeing:** People's subjective assessment of their personal wellbeing increases through volunteering.
 - **Engaging volunteers:** Increase in the number of people volunteering across our target audiences, including creating more meaningful and accessible volunteering opportunities
 - **Engaging volunteers:** Increase in volunteers' confidence levels to progress into skills development.
 - **Perceptions of disability:** Positive change in the perception of disabled people in communities (by both disabled and non-disabled people)
 - **Social connectedness and Empowering young people:** Increase the number of young people who report increased social connectedness and who are engaged with and positive about their local community.
 - **Inspiring events:** Generate actionable insight into the type of events that recruit and engage new volunteers in our target audiences.
- 3.10 The Institute of Volunteering Research based at the UEA will be providing support around the monitoring and evaluation of Cultural Connections to ensure the project is providing the information required by the funder.
- 3.11 In terms of a timeline, Cultural Connections will be launched in February 2023 following the recruitment of staff and sign-off of the delivery plan with commissioned Tier 1 partners. The project will be co-ordinated by the Borough Council's Communities team working closely with Inward Investment and the Great Yarmouth Skills Taskforce.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Spirit 2012 grant totals £250,000 to be spent over 2 ½ years to deliver their 'Cultural Connections' volunteering project across the two borough and district council geographies. The project runs until 31 March 2025 with a total committed spend of £340,000.
- 4.2 The grant budget includes for the creation of three part time officer roles, payment of Tier 1 supporting partners when additional services are required not already publicly funded elsewhere, and an accessibility fund of £50,000 to help overcome barriers residents new to volunteering may face.
- 4.3 Norfolk County Council Adult Education service has committed tutor time for the volunteer skills pathway to the value of £30,000.
- 4.4 It is proposed that Great Yarmouth Borough Council and East Suffolk Council each provide funding of £30,000 to create a small local Activation Grant fund of £60,000 in total for grass roots community groups to apply to during the life of the project specifically to support delivery of local/community events which will enable recruited of volunteers at a grass roots level across both council areas. GYBC's match of £15,000 per full project year can be funded from an existing carry forward budget.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Localism Act 2011 allows for a general power of competence for local authorities to act in innovative ways, that is, in doing things that are unlike anything that a local authority – or any other public body – has done before or may currently do.
- 5.2 The project will work to the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK's implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) with regards to GYBC staff recording, storing and sharing of any personal information.
- 5.3 As the lead organisation, robust partnership and commissioning agreements are being put in place with Tier 1 delivery partners to ensure that all legal, financial and project deliverables are met as per the project plan agreed with Spirit 2012.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The risk and mitigation table below was prepared to support the application to Spirit 2012 and forms part of the project management governance.

Risk	Mitigation
1. Project Delivery - lack of leadership, ownership & momentum to carry the project forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Project Steering Group to drive the project to include reps from Tier 1 and Tier 2 partner organisations. Agree detailed PID, Project Plan and incl. roles and responsibilities. Report to committee/cabinet to provide political support & visibility for councillors. Work with Tier 1 partners to integrate backend volunteering portals. Set-up M&E data feeds. Embed resources and project in both councils' community plans and cultural strategy delivery plans. Establish regular project management meetings to review milestones, KPIs and operational impact. Allocate and manage staff and VCSE resources.
2. Lack of awareness - of 'Cultural Connections' project & new Volunteering Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a community & sectoral-owned communication, marketing and stakeholder engagement Plan. Link arts, cultural & VCSE/community groups into access pathways via word of word, social media and networks of contacts. Promote via Community Hubs, Community Partnerships, Councils' engagement channels, planned events and activities and partner organisations' networks. Offer demo sessions for wider community agencies/stakeholders. Promote at the monthly Great Yarmouth Multi-Cultural & Faith Network & East Suffolk Disability Forum meetings. Ensure Community Champions & outreach community staff in NHS and other IAG sector are aware.
3. Unable to recruit volunteers – lack of attractiveness of offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-design the volunteer programme with our volunteering partners and existing and prospective volunteers, to ensure it meets our target audiences' needs Ensure Tier 2 community organisations and Tier 2 cultural partners understand the project and secure their support. Ensure as wide a reach as possible in terms of the project. Co-produce marketing materials with target populations Provide marketing materials to explain the project in plain English and available in other formats.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivise hyperlocal events for volunteering via Community Grant fund. • Use accessibility funding to remove financial barriers. • Involve NHS/PCN/GP and Acute hospital trusts to engage via Making Every Contact County (MECC).
4. Unable to offer sufficient volunteer roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Tier 2 community organisations and Tier 2 cultural partners understand the project and its benefits and secure their support. • Ensure as wide a reach as possible in terms of the project. • Co-design roles and opportunities with cultural and community organisations. • Listen and respond to need locally. • Produce generic roles/responsibilities template that can be tailored r used as-is for specific volunteer roles. • Support with access to Volunteer Passport skills modules. • Incentivise hyperlocal events for volunteering via Community Grant fund. • Use accessibility funding to remove financial barriers. • Use case studies to share real experiences
5. COVID Restrictions - unavailability of staff or inability to undertake events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience is built into costings using Volunteer Co-ordinator roles. • Ensure code of conduct followed by beneficiaries & volunteers re: sanitisation measures, social distancing and temperate checks at check-in. • Follow Event Safety Advisory Group (E-SAG) guidance in terms of limiting numbers and social distancing.

Area for consideration	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	Yes as part of ELT
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	Yes as part of ELT
Existing Council Policies:	Corporate Plan Annual Action Plan Great Yarmouth Locality Strategy
Financial Implications:	Yes – as set out in section 4
Legal Implications (including human rights):	Yes – as set out in section 5
Risk Implications:	Yes – as set out in section 6
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	Yes – on file
Crime & Disorder:	No
Every Child Matters:	Yes