

Committee(s): Education Board	Dated: 17 th October 2023
Subject: Connecting Communities Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3,5, 7, 8, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£0
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Gwen Rhys, Business Manager, Connecting Communities, Department for Community & Children's Services	

Summary

The report attached in Appendix One, "Connecting Communities Report of outcomes and impacts of the City of London" provides Members with a detailed overview of the outcomes and impacts of the City of London's Connecting Communities programme, which occurred between 1 January 2022 and 30 September 2023.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report and the recommendations it contains.

Main Report

Background

1. The Report to the Education Board dated 3 December 2021 gave a detailed overview of Connecting Communities, an £18 million programme funded by the Greater London Council (GLA) and the European Social Fund (ESF) of which the Education Strategic Unit (ESU) was to receive £669,000 to deliver the programme's outcomes and impacts over the subsequent 18 months.
2. The City of London's Connecting Communities was extended by three months to be 21 months in duration and finished on September 30, 2023.

Current Position

3. During the main delivery period, the Connecting Communities Team consisted of 1 x Business Manager, 1 x Employment Engagement Officer, and 3 x Caseworkers. This team was reduced to 1 x Business Manager and 1 Caseworker during the extension period.
4. Emphasising intensive, personalised, and context-specific support, Connecting Communities sought to:
 - Build personal resilience and social networks to foster positive behavioural and attitudinal changes towards work.
 - Increase employment and skills training.
 - Work with local businesses to boost the recruitment and progression of disadvantaged individuals.

Unemployment and the current Economic Climate in the UK

5. Connecting Communities was bid for during the time of the Covid 19 pandemic. There was an assumption that the economic impact of Covid 19 would be significant and that particular groups of people might be negatively impacted as the economy recovered from the impact of Covid 19. The economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic hit the capital hard, triggering a large increase in unemployment in central London. The claimant count across the 12 inner London boroughs rose by 162% from March 2020.
6. During the 21 months of the Connecting Communities programme there was a changeable and largely unpredictable pattern of employment recovery. This meant that targets and aims kept shifting to try to keep pace with the dynamic nature of the situation. There were a number of employment and skills trends that occurred during the period of the programme. At times there were even contradictory trends, such as increased employment but also increases in people 'opting out' of education and employment.

Outcomes and impacts

7. Connecting Communities made a significant contribution to a flourishing society by giving people an equal opportunity to enrich their lives and reach their full potential. Moreover, people being in good work supports a thriving economy by enabling industries to access to the skills and talent they need and ensuring that more individuals can reach their potential and secure decent work.
8. Connecting Communities demonstrated that collaborative working makes the core City institutions better connected and responsive to changed needs.
9. Connecting Communities has contributed to individual and systemic resilience by providing support and enabling structures which can be mobilised in the shorter-term to boost individual's confidence, skills, readiness for work and employment.

10. The City of London's Connecting Communities programme outcomes continue to impact the lives of those it supports into training, education, and work.
11. Over the past 21 months Connecting Communities has supported unemployed jobseekers into training, education, and work. This has had considerable positive impact on the lives of those participants as well as their families.

Accountability

12. To ensure provision of a consistently high-quality service, there was a structured way by which participants progressed towards education, training, and/or employment. All support, including in-work support was entered onto the data management system called APTM. Caseworkers liaised with participants whilst they were in education or work for up to six months after which time they exit the programme. An End Form was completed electronically within 15 working days of participants completing or leaving the programme. The End Form was also recorded on APTM. Progress was monitored at weekly team meetings and at monthly meetings with the contract holders.
13. Central London Forward (CLF), the main contract holders, review each borough's progress against targets on a monthly basis. Connecting Communities, like all ESF-funded contracts, required accurate data entry supported by the provision of specific evidence as proof of participants reaching certain targets. In final compliance audits the City of London's programme has been 100% compliant.

Options

14. See the recommendations in the attached full evaluation report.

Proposals

15. See the recommendations in the attached full evaluation report.

Key Data

16. The City of London's Connecting Communities programme:
 - Engaged with a total of 321 unemployed or economically inactive participants
 - Supported 64 participants into employment (20% of participants)
 - Supported 21 participants into sustaining employment at 6 months (32% of those who got employed were still in employment at least six months later)
 - Supported 217 participants into education and/or training (68% of participants)
 - Supported 23 participants who undertook a basic skills programme with 69% of these people achieving a qualification
 - Supported 321 participants with job search activities
17. In the City of London's Connecting Communities programme:

- 8% of participants were closest to the labour market
- 60% of participants were male, and 40% of participants were female
- 43% of participants were 18- to 24-year-olds including those not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETS)
- 66% of participants were classified as unemployed
- 34% of participants were classified as economically inactive
- 74% of participants were from the 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic' BAME¹ community
- 9.5% of participants were aged 50 or more
- 5% of participants declared health or disability needs
- 3% of participants declared as lone parents
- 10% of participants needed basic/functional skills needs (can include any or all of English, Maths, and ICT).
- 64% of participants had entry level English
- 0.3% of participants reported being an ex-offender
- 0.3% of participants reported being care leavers

Corporate & Strategic Implications

19. Connecting Communities was an externally funded, time-limited project. The attached evaluation report makes some recommendations that could be considered to inform future skills strategy, including:

- a) Creating a permanent skills and employability hub that is physically visible in the community
- b) Further embedding of inclusive recruitment practices and support existing staff with training, development, and career support to ensure opportunities within the City of London are available to people who may currently be further from employment.
- c) Providing more support for work experience to people of all ages as a lack of current work experience is a major inhibitor to gaining employment.
- d) Reviewing local governance structures and funding allocations around skills and employability to promote knowledge-sharing between departments (especially between DCCS and IG) and between internal stakeholders including through regular meetings where experiences and practice can be shared both formally and informally, and be delivered consistently over time, including through staff changes.
- e) Emphasising the need for English language lessons to be made available to people for a much longer time after they have arrived in the UK. Particularly, people should be supported who have been in the UK more than 10 years and do not have entry level English.

¹ Note BAME is used here as it is a required reporting category by the funders, not how participants described themselves. The term was not used in the implementation of the programme.

Financial and resource implications

20. A total budget of £18 million was secured for Connecting Communities of which the ESU received £669,000 to deliver the programmes outcomes and impacts over a 21 month period. The delivery of the project was achieved within budget. Connecting Communities also aimed to support the Livery Companies to make better, more joined-up use of the existing £7.9 million currently dedicated on an annual basis to skills development work. There is the potential to continue to work more closely with business partners and the Liveries to gain access to wider skills funding opportunities. There is an increasing need for income to be generated from a range of sources. A skills and employability service could offer a paid-for/subsidised service to those in work. There is a need to upskill those in low-pay, and insecure jobs.

Legal implications

21. Connecting Communities is being managed through Central London Forward. Central London Forward (CLF) is a partnership of the 12 central London local authorities. They collaborate with their member authorities and with other stakeholders to support inclusive and sustainable growth in central London; so that our economy thrives, and our residents benefit from the opportunities this creates. CLF deliver large scale employment and skills programmes across central London.

Risk implications

22. The City of London's Connecting Communities project is now finished. An end process was undertaken to ensure that all data and compliance procedures were correctly completed and documented. Any remaining active participants were ended on APTEM and signposted to further support.

Equalities implications

23. Not every young person has access to a breadth of developmental relationships and life experiences, which facilitate and broker routes into employment. The least advantaged tend to not have access to networks, mentors, advocates, work experience opportunities, careers advice, and family support in the same way as their more advantaged peers. For example, only 46 per cent of young people from low-income families take part in extracurricular activities, compared with 66 per cent from higher income families.

24. A more equitable society is based on realising the potential of all people. This requires strong networks of support and trust. The Liveries could leverage that trusted network. They could use their connections to boost opportunities for structured work experience, internships, and employment. Young adults who have 'four or more employer contacts' are five times more likely to be in employment or training than those who have little or no contact with employers.

Climate implications

25. There are no immediate Climate implications.

Security implications

26. There are no immediate Security implications.

Conclusion

27. The City of London's Connecting Communities team has concluded its work and invites members to consider the findings and outcomes in Appendix 1.

Appendices

- (1) Connecting Communities: Report of outcomes and impacts of the City of London

Background Papers

None.

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