



**FOR PUBLICATION**

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES**

**7 August 2025**

**Report of the Director - Public Health**

**Derbyshire rural communities resilience and social connection project**  
(Cabinet Member for Health and Communities)

**1. Divisions Affected**

1.1 County-wide

**2. Key Decision**

2.1 This is not a Key Decision

**3. Purpose**

This report seeks approval from the Cabinet Member for Health and Communities for:

- a) the continuation of the Derbyshire community resilience and social connectedness work across the County for a further 18 months from 01 October 2025 to 31 March 2027.
- b) the allocation of £0.250m from Public Health grant reserves to strengthen communities work in Derbyshire Localities from 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2027 in accordance with the breakdown of allocations in appendix 1.2.
- c) Note that strategic development work is underway to facilitate a longer term sustainable approach to social connectedness, as detailed in section 4.23.

## 4. Information and Analysis

- 4.1 During the Covid 19 pandemic, the Cabinet Member for Health and Communities approved the launch of the Covid-19 Community Partners Scheme, (subsequently known as the Community Champion Scheme), and Social Connectedness projects utilising funding from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund. The schemes were subsequently extended for a further period during the Covid recovery phase. The latest funding was distributed via grants to local Health and Wellbeing Partnerships and is due to end 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025.
- 4.2 A range of community based social connection initiatives are currently being funded through locality Health and Wellbeing Partnerships utilising this funding. Initiatives contribute to broad aims to develop and connect people to opportunities for social connection in local neighbourhoods; and to build resilient communities resulting in better preparedness for, ability to respond to and recover from emergencies like the pandemic and flooding. Specific initiatives have focused on developing opportunities for social connection; developing infrastructure that supports communication with and gathering insights from seldom-heard communities; supporting individuals to feel safe and connected to community members and community organisations.
- 4.3 The importance of resilience and social connection for Derbyshire communities
- 4.4 Loneliness and social connectedness are fundamental social determinants of health. Having good quality social connection helps improve resilience both for individuals and for wider communities. Addressing loneliness is vital for population health due to direct links between loneliness and health and wellbeing but also due to the impact loneliness can have on people's ability to engage in positive health behaviours or reach out for support. Studies show that loneliness can increase the risk of early mortality by 26%.
- 4.5 These outcomes not only impact on individual health and wellbeing, they also bring systemic pressures to the health and social care system in terms of increased demand and/or increased complexity as people's ability to reach out for early, preventative support reduces.
- 4.6 Derbyshire has many rural communities. These communities, while often known for their strong sense of community spirit, can face challenges in fostering social connections due to factors like limited access to community spaces, transportation, and health and social services. Despite this, opportunities for building meaningful connections

and building community cohesion exist, often relying on the dedication of volunteers and individuals, and community assets and activities.

4.7 Younger people are also increasingly affected by loneliness, with young carers and care leavers being particularly affected. Whilst the increase in online communicating can have benefits, particularly in rural Derbyshire, it can lead to loneliness if someone is being bullied online or struggling with self image. Local services for young people such as youth and sports clubs, provide social connection, safe spaces, opportunities for development, and positive role models, which are crucial for young people's well-being. Such services can support good school performance, reduced crime rates, and reduced risk of mental health issues. However, public sector funding challenges in recent years have reduced the availability of such services.

4.8 Other groups at increased risk of loneliness include:

- Those living in lower income households.
- Working age adults, in particular single parents on low incomes.
- Young and adult men, due to a combination of societal expectations, and reliance only on partners for emotional support.
- Those in rented property, due to risk of unstable tenancies and frequent moving
- Those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Digitally excluded adults living in rural areas.

4.9 Local community and voluntary organisations in Derbyshire play a vital role in these and other communities. Organisations work on the ground to identify and support vulnerable residents and help them access support and opportunities to reduce loneliness, via safe spaces and organised activities, clubs and events, and signposting to both NHS and non-clinical support services.

4.10 Key outputs of the community resilience and social connectedness grants to date include:

4.11 Over 250 specific local interventions and community activities have been funded across Derbyshire to address and support rural communities and improve resilience, wellbeing and social connection of local people. These interventions have collectively supported thousands of people and include: dementia memory cafes, Senior's chat group, community board games, arts and craft groups, digital support groups, social circles, Thr1ve young people's mental health support, community gardens, faith support groups, and a Socialympics event to promote a range of hyper local sports activities alongside connecting people.

- 4.12 Many localities have used the funding to employ Connect workers in the voluntary sector, alongside funded activities and micro grants. These individuals drive forward work, oversee the local small community grant schemes that enable new groups and activities to be established and provide support to local people and initiatives with an excess of 3000+ local beneficiaries recorded since the work began.
- 4.13 Wider impact of the community resilience and social connectedness grants include:
- 4.14 Improved relationships within communities, and increased community cohesion and safety. The number of individual residents who have benefited from the initiative, and the ripple effect to increase social activity with friends and family members is immeasurable.
- 4.15 Development of an agile community engagement approach. Learning from the pandemic, we have over time further developed our connections between professionals and communities through this project, recognising there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model and different approaches have been used in different contexts and settings. This approach and our community connections are invaluable in the event of another pandemic or emergency – like flooding.
- 4.16 The ability to mobilise large numbers of volunteers increases local organisational and community capacity, building a lasting sustainable legacy of community support and resilience.
- 4.17 The rurality of some parts of Derbyshire means some communities and individuals do not have access to up-to-date information regarding their health and wellbeing. The project is an enabler, and has opened up discussions about common issues like rural travel, financial inclusion, warm spaces, flood response, and health issues around vaccinations and screening, mental health support, and sexual health services, with varied audiences that have been traditionally hard to engage.
- 4.18 There has been an opportunity to connect with Active Derbyshire, to include movement/physical activity in the support offered to community groups. The sports team have provided some taster activities and as a result groups have purchased a variety of sporting equipment for their local community group activities.
- 4.19 Working with the local VCSE and voluntary sector has been hugely beneficial and has allowed us to tap into their existing high levels of community engagement and insights, and utilise their connections to

many different strategic boards, and can help to assign priorities across other partner projects.

- 4.20 Increased volunteering and community activity, is also increasing community cohesion and resilience, and has left a legacy of connected community members with a renewed interest in working together at a local level to improve their communities and support to people.
- 4.21 Developing the socially connected neighbourhood model has allowed us to establish strong links between the community and NHS health professions and there have been a number of health events run by the GP practices that we have been able to collaborate on and input/connect people to.
- 4.22 Public Health is committed to support the ongoing work of the eight Locality Health and Wellbeing Partnerships to strengthen rural communities resilience and social connections, increase community engagement and co-production and to support public health messaging to seldom-heard communities. The local initiatives it supports in each community, are also important enablers of the Derbyshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Public Health departmental strategy.
- 4.23 Future development and sustainability
- 4.24 Public Health are in the process of developing a longer term, sustainable strategic approach to social connection and loneliness, and this work will be an important component of that. Therefore it is proposed this project and funding is extended for a further 18 months, whilst this work is undertaken.
- 4.25 The proposed project funding distribution is outlined in Appendix 1.2.
- 4.26 The additional funding during this time, will enable partners to continue to develop and implement action plans to improve social connection and reduce loneliness; to contribute to reducing health inequalities by identifying local issues and barriers to support and services from the local community voice; and to ensure mechanisms are in place to cascade relevant public health messaging to communities and that can also be stood up to support crisis response if required.
- 4.27 There will also be a specific focus on reviewing and identifying learning from work to date, and strengthening links to primary care.
- 4.28 Oversight of this work will be provided by the eight Health and Wellbeing Partnerships across Derbyshire, and the Public Health

Performance and Governance Board. The grant agreements will be refreshed to outline the specific requirements for the additional year of funding. The reporting and monitoring requirements will also be strengthened.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 Not applicable

## **6 Alternative Options Considered**

6.1 Do nothing, funding will cease from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025: This is not recommended as community resilience and social connectedness remains a priority across all localities, and particularly in rural areas in Derbyshire. This is also not recommended as the networks and infrastructure that have developed as a result of the project development to date could form part of a future public health approach to pandemic response, community engagement, and are vital for the implementation of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Public Health departmental strategy. Maintaining the social connectedness funding through the next 18 month review period will allow the benefits to continue whilst a longer-term sustainable approach to social connection is being developed and implemented.

## **7 Implications**

7.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

## **8 Background Papers**

- 2 December 2021 - Cabinet Member for Health and Communities Report: Extension to Covid Community Champions scheme utilising the Contain Outbreak Management Fund
- 4 September 2023 - Derbyshire rural communities resilience and social connection

## **9 Appendices**

9.1 Appendix 1 – Implications

## **10 Recommendation(s)**

- a) the continuation of the Derbyshire communities resilience and social connectedness work across the County for a further 18 months from 01 October 2025 to 31 March 2027.
- b) the allocation of £0.250m from Public Health grant reserves to strengthen communities work in Derbyshire Localities from 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2027 in accordance with the breakdown of allocations in appendix 1.2.
- c) Note that strategic development work is underway to facilitate a longer term sustainable approach to social connectedness, as detailed in section 4.23.

## **11 Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

- 11.1 The project outlined in this report will contribute towards building community resilience, improving community cohesion and social connectedness, and provide community engagement continuity as a longer term sustainable public health approach to social connection is developed.

## **12 Is it necessary to waive the call in period?**

- 12.1 No

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## Appendix 1

### Implications

#### Financial

- 1.1 £0.250m will be allocated from Public Health grant reserves to fund social connectedness work.
- 1.2 The Social Connection funding will be allocated as follows for the period 1 October 2025 until 31 March 2027:

<b>District/Borough:</b>	<b>Funding recipient</b>	<b>Funding proposed</b>
Amber Valley	Amber Valley CVS	£31,250
Bolsover	Bolsover District Council	£31,250
Chesterfield	Derbyshire Voluntary Action	£31,250
Erewash	Erewash Voluntary Action	£31,250
Dales	Derbyshire Dales CVS	£31,250
High Peak	High Peak Borough Council	£31,250
North East Derbyshire	North East Derbyshire District Council	£31,250
South Derbyshire	South Derbyshire CVS	£31,250
<b>Total:</b>		<b>£0.250m</b>

- 1.3 The funding recipients are working on behalf of the eight Health and Wellbeing Partnerships, to distribute funding through hyper local projects and community partners.

#### Legal

- 2.1 The Council has power to provide grants under the general power of competence set out in section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 2.2 The Council's Financial Regulations state that grants to external organisations up to £0.100m each require approval by the relevant Cabinet Member.
- 2.3 The Council's standard grant agreement shall be used to set out the terms and conditions for which the grant is made. This includes conditions for clawback of funding in certain circumstances and states that the Council is not liable for any employment liabilities.

## **Human Resources**

- 3.1 The funding will enable local providers to deliver projects and services. Derbyshire County Council accepts no employment or future redundancy liability, with all employment and related matters to be managed by the providers.

## **Information Technology**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

## **Equalities Impact**

- 5.1 The Localities Approach is focused on reducing inequality and therefore is considering equality impact as an ongoing function.

## **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 6.1 The recommendations in this paper support delivery of the following priorities for the next year in the Council Plan:
- Delivers against the Derbyshire County Council Plan outcome of resilient, healthy and safe communities.
  - Delivers against the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Derbyshire.