



Organisation Name	Voices and Choices CIO
Project Name	Community Companionship
Funding Stream	Community Area Priorities / Health & Wellbeing
Total Cost of project	£5,000
Amount of Match Funding	N/A
Amount being applied for	£5,000
Amount suggested	£5,000

Project Summary

Voices and Choices currently offer two services in the Chiltern area of Buckinghamshire. They support older people to find practical services which help them stay safe in their homes. They also provide a community advocacy service which supports older people when speaking up about decisions being made which impact on their lives, or where they might have a complaint about a service they are currently receiving.

To support older people further in the Amersham area, Voices and Choices would like to offer a Community Companionship service whereby trained volunteers will be matched with users and work closely with them to understand their interests and needs, and provide information and referrals to local support networks or activities. The aim of the project is to reduce loneliness in older people, and has come at a particular time where more people are socially isolated and may be in need of support and companionship. Voices and Choices have a very extensive knowledge of groups and networks across the Amersham Community Board area and are very well respected by the community.

As part of the project, Voices and Choices will run local information sessions for residents to learn more about the services that can help. They already work closely with Trading Standards, local police and bank personnel and will initially focus on avoiding all forms of financial abuse. They have close relationships with many local organisations including Citizens Advice, AgeUK Bucks, Carers Bucks, the Alzheimer's Society, and local disability groups. They will also offer a quarterly meeting for group facilitators to share experiences and strategies for supporting lonely people who attend their groups and to help identify them in the future.

Voices and Choices work collaboratively with other services and providers and will continue to work with Social Prescribers to identify those who need support.

How does the project address local priorities?

Coronavirus Recovery and Ongoing Support:

With the continuing impacts of Coronavirus, the lockdown, and restrictions in place, more elderly people are becoming, or continue to be, socially isolated and need support to be linked with organisations,

groups and services which could help them to regain confidence and independence.

Evidence from the Public Health profile of the Community Board shows that Amersham has a slightly older age profile compared with the County overall and that loneliness for people aged 65 and older is a key area for the board to explore and should encourage community cohesion and befriending. Age UK loneliness maps have also identified the local Amersham wards which are at medium or high risk of loneliness. Working closely with local organisations will enable Voices and Choices to identify more local people in the community who require access these services.

How does the project align with the values, objectives and corporate priorities of Buckinghamshire Council?

Strengthening Communities: Providing support to the older population to help reduce social isolation has been identified as a key issue for the Amersham Board as well as Bucks as a whole. Enabling older people to access groups of interest to them will strengthen local resilience and support people to create and maintain their own networks. This will help people to remain independent for as long as possible.

Protecting the Vulnerable: Supporting residents by accompanying them to groups and activities will increase their confidence and reduce levels of loneliness by helping them to develop new connections/friendships and access local support networks. In addition, all volunteers receive the relevant Adult Safeguarding training.

How does the project achieve value for money?

Voices and Choices have applied to other sources in order to continue their existing services and organisational running costs. They are looking to provide this service specifically to the Amersham Board area – social isolation is an issue which has already been highlighted to the board as an area of focus within the Public Health Profile.

Voices and Choices have applied to other Community Boards (Chesham & Villages and Denham, Gerrards Cross & Chalfonts) however have confirmed that any funds paid by the Amersham Community Board will only be used for services within the board area.

Community Board Coordinator comments

Connection Support offer a countywide service on a similar basis which provides support to residents who are socially isolated, links them up with local groups and services and helps to build confidence for individuals to develop relationships and support networks and regain their independence. This service is time limited to up to 6 visits within an 8 week period in order to reduce any potential dependence that could come from offering ongoing support, which could consequently impact on the number of residents that could be supported each year.

Voices and Choices wish to offer a similar service but on a flexible basis (i.e. for as long as the person needs). With an increase in the number of socially isolated and vulnerable residents due to Covid, additional support in the Amersham area could help to fill a gap where increased demand could put more pressure on the existing services.

Following conversations with the prevention team it is advised that there needs to be consideration around the level of support available and the potential to create dependency on a service. Voices and Choices should continue to work closely with Connection Support, Social Prescribers and other voluntary groups and organisations to avoid duplication and ensure that these services complement each other and work towards the same end goal (i.e. for services users to regain independence).

Voices and Choices volunteers are already very well known within the community and have built up relationships with more local residents during the coronavirus crisis. They also have excellent connections with local partners who can help to identify those in need to ensure that the service offered can reach the right end users.

Voices and Choices should be aware that funding granted through Community Boards will prevent them being able to apply for the annual Buckinghamshire Council Prevention Grants.

The applicant will be required to agree to terms and conditions, which include a monitoring agreement, as discussed with the Community Board Coordinator before the fund will be formally awarded.