

The Balsam Centre – Allocation of Healthy Living Centre Funding (Executive Decision)

Assistant Director: Helen Rutter/ Kim Close, Communities
Service Manager: Helen Rutter, Area Development Manager East
Lead Officer: James Divall, Community Development Officer
Sue Place, The Balsam Centre Project Manager
Contact Details: James.divall@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01963) 435023

Purpose of the Report

To update members on the position at the Balsam Centre and to consider the allocation of funding ring-fenced for Healthy Living Centres.

Public Interest

Supporting and helping the Balsam Centre to improve the work of voluntary community organisations in the towns and villages across Area East

Recommendations

It is recommended that members

- 1) Note the report
- 2) Award the £10,000 ring fenced for Healthy Living Centres to the Balsam Centre for the delivery of the work programme.

Background

The Balsam Centre was established in 1998, with the purchase of the former memorial hospital in the centre of Wincanton. Extensive refurbishment of the building and the setting up of services was enabled through a Lottery grant and support from a range of funders, including SSDC. The project was established to specifically meet the needs of Wincanton and the surrounding area (this includes some 40 settlements with a population of 30,000) due to an identified gap in services in the area, particularly in mental health services.

The Balsam Centre delivers a range of integrated health and wellbeing projects and initiatives, most of which directly link with physical activity, healthy eating and mental health support alongside participation in community based activities, supported social engagement and learning.

The Centre is a Children's Centre and until recently the Balsam Centre was contracted by Somerset County Council to deliver child and family health and social services, linked to skills and achievement. This service delivery is still operating within the Balsam Centre building but through the new County Council delivery arm of the 'Get Set' programme. This still enables the Centre to deliver targeted and universal services to a wide range of families, with a clear focus on prevention. Many users of the 'Get Set' service now link in to other services offered at the Balsam Centre.

Current tenants are also considered to be on site partners and include The Balsam Nursery, Midwives, CAT Bus, Transition Vision Media Company, the Growing Space and Health Visitors. The presence of other key services helps to provide integrated, seamless services

that make people using the Centre feel safe, welcome and supported. The C.A.B runs a twice weekly outreach session on a drop in basis to offer help with a range of issues including welfare benefits and debt management advice. The Centre has exceptionally strong links with the local health visitors' team and works closely with Children's Social Care, local schools, pre-schools, and other partners supporting families. The Balsam Centre has now extended this strand of service by running its own nursery at Churchfields, South Somerset District Council offices.

SSDC has supported the Balsam Centre through both core funding and project grants, since it began. In the past, core funding has been allocated through the Healthy Living Pooled Fund; a budget set up jointly by SSDC, NHS Somerset and SCC, and reported annually to the South Somerset Health and Wellbeing Partnership (SSH&WP).

Members will recall that this budget was originally established to support Healthy Living Centres across the whole of the District but as the only eligible organisation is based in Area East, the budget was transferred and subject to local monitoring by AEC.

Current programme & future work

Most of the work of the Balsam Centre focuses on reducing health and social inequalities, in particular working with individuals and families who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and have little other support. The project is particularly successful at working closely with people to improve their own, and their families' life chances. There is still a strong focus on mental health and this has been reinforced through securing the 'Like Minds' project, a successful Big Lottery application (Reaching Communities).

The 'Like Minds' programme will make a reduction in high numbers of people experiencing poor mental health or distress in the Balsam Centre's area of benefit. The Balsam Centre will work with people of all ages and all backgrounds with low or moderate mental health support needs, whether medically diagnosed or not. Identified beneficiary groups will include families on low income, lonely and isolated people and those with long term and limiting conditions. In particular it will work with young people who have emerged as a very vulnerable and high priority group with serious high levels of self-harm and associated concerns.

The 'Like Minds' programme will work at different levels; from preventative activities and early intervention to preventing deterioration when a condition has become entrenched. In all cases help with addressing the immediate problem (which may be a crisis) will be the first step, followed by the appropriate support to enable each person to make improvements that lead to recovery and lasting changes. The project's philosophy is to provide a social (as opposed to a medical) model of health and to address the inequalities that are at the root of these problems.

The Balsam Centre's strong partnership approach has been built up over many years with Health & Social Care, Schools, Children Centre's and local charities, local authorities, housing associations as well as their own projects such as the Growing Space (on site social and therapeutic horticulture) and the 'Men's Shed' initiative. The partners have a vital role in making referrals to the 'Like Minds' programme, underpinning and endorsing its role.

People referred or self-referring to the project will have access to one-to-one counselling, social and therapeutic groups, cooking and sharing food, walking and talking and other activities appropriate to their needs. New groups will be encouraged and develop as people using the projects pursue common interests.

Additionally the Balsam Centre has continued to increase and develop its programme and have included new projects such as Forest School for children and families as well as the expansion of the 'Men's Shed' project which is increasing in numbers and helping combat isolation and poor mental health.

The Centre continues to generate income from use of the building and marketing the building is an ongoing priority. The weekly 'Loose Ends' café has made a big difference and has increased footfall and increases local understanding of the centre and the services available. Total weekly 'uses' of the centre exceed 1000 with a range of community groups meeting and running classes/activities which include Painting and Drawing, Health Walks, Pilates, Textiles, Job Club, Beginners' IT and Patchwork and Quilting. There is a strong Volunteering project with around 60 active volunteers.

The Balsam Centre's 'Like Minds' project will be carefully monitored, using a range of performance monitoring indicators and measures against their identified project outcomes.

Outcome 1	People of all ages will have improved access to mental health support and recover or manage their conditions better
Outcome 2	People who are lonely or isolated will have increased opportunities to socialise in their own communities.
Outcome 3	Young people will have greater confidence and self-worth and improved school, family and work relationships.
Outcome 4	People of all ages will be able to enter or return to employment, training or learning.

Its management will include quarterly reports to the Big Lottery to ensure high quality delivery. This will also be replicated to the South Somerset District Council Neighbourhood Development Officer. The Balsam Centre through its current work with the University of the West of England will enable future (in house) analysis of Social Return on Investment.

Financial Implications

There is £10,000 transferred to Area East from the Healthy Living Pooled fund for allocation in 15/16. If members agree the above recommendation, this will all be allocated for this year.

Council Plan Implications

Focus Four: Health & Communities: encouraging communities to be healthy, self-reliant and with individuals who are willing to help each other.

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

None as a direct result of the report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The loss of services designed to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged in target communities is likely to have a significant effect over time.

Background Papers

N/a