



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COMMUNITY

Kirklees Council

Empowering partners to develop dialogue on difficult topics

In Kirklees we are developing an approach to empower local community groups to discuss difficult topics with residents that they oftentimes are not comfortable discussing with the Council. This has been very successful with the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and COVID Community Champions scheme.

The **EU Settlement Scheme** offers indefinite leave to remain for EU citizens who had come to live and work in the UK. A number of issues made this a significant challenge:

- The online application process, simple for those with biometric ID and comfortable with a computer or smartphone but difficult for those lacking the necessary ID, digitally excluded, or who lack the capacity.
- The uncertain number of individuals to be reached – estimated by the Home Office at 13,000 in Kirklees – exceeded as in many other places.
- The COVID pandemic making face-to-face awareness raising impossible.

Missing the deadline carried the risk that some of the most vulnerable people could be deemed to have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) with clear dangers to individuals, landlords, employers and the Council itself.

To address this, the Council began work with Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre (KCALC) to run training and engagement sessions for a range of organisations, including small businesses, educational institutions, and community and faith organisations. It resulted in one of our biggest partnership-wide communication campaigns, engaging over 10,000 people and 900 local businesses.

This initial partnership work attracted 6 months' Home Office funding allowing the ramping up of print and online communications including in several European languages. Information on EUSS was made 'core business' for all client facing council services.

Leaflets were distributed to community groups and local shops. Council officers and partners, including faith groups and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) engaged with Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian congregations, as well as other faith and social groups, 135 schools, two FE and sixth form colleges, over a dozen GP surgeries and adult social care providers. The Council's business support service contacted over 900 local businesses, resulting in 56 enquiries for further information and advice.

KCALC and Council officers provided 18 training sessions to over 470 attendees from a diverse range of organisations empowering staff from settings like homelessness support but also nurseries and schools to start conversations about EUSS and signpost those needing further information.

Online initiatives such as the European Christmas Story were adopted to counter the lack of direct contact due to lockdown. This consisted of stories and recipes contributed by individuals from 26 EU countries with the blog, featuring EUSS advice, receiving over 1,000 hits in a fortnight.

We estimate the council and partners engaged with over 10,000 people and encouraged them to apply for EUSS. For those who missed the deadline, the support will continue as long as necessary.

The **COVID Community Champions** project worked with community organisations to engage residents on a similarly difficult topic aiming to increase engagement of residents and building confidence in the vaccination programme.

Funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government the bid was co-designed with the VCS and the funding has been distributed through a transparent grant process to the local VCS.

As a grant programme for our local third sector it has provided them with funds they desperately needed following the impact of the pandemic, while being deeply embedded in communities they know our residents better than anyone. This means that the person encouraging someone to get vaccinated or giving information was someone they knew, trusted or respected.

Community Champions help build confidence in the vaccination programme and encourage safe behaviour, delivering accurate public health information and building confidence in community testing. They also offer practical help booking transport for vaccine appointments and have played a key role in promoting pop-up vaccination clinics. In total 49 organisations have been funded through the programme: 12 with 'larger grants' (from £7.5k to £25k) to recruit, and coordinate the activities of 80 individual Champions; 37 with smaller 'community grants' (averaging £1k) building vaccine confidence through their usual activities and managed through Third Sector Leaders, Kirklees' local VCS infrastructure organisation.

Additionally two South Asian community radio stations have been funded to run 10-12 week series of programmes. As well as lots of people getting vaccinated who were hesitant before speaking to our Champions, the Council has strengthened relationships with community organisations. The programme has supported people to be part of the solution, not just passive recipient

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