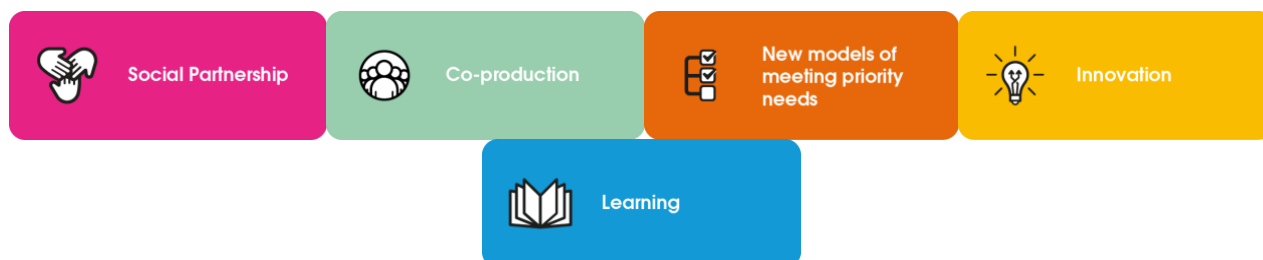




## COMMUNITY



## Stevenage Borough Council

### The St Nicholas Little Bank of Kindness

#### Background and Foundation

In Winter 2023, **Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)** in partnership with community technology provider **Made Open**, undertook a 12-week pilot exploring the viability of **time banking** in the St Nicholas ward. Time banking is a community-based model where members exchange time and skills rather than money — each hour given earns one “time credit” that can be spent on receiving services from others.

This initiative was championed by **Councillor Sandra Barr**, inspired by a successful time banking scheme she encountered in Ireland. Recognising the potential for local replication, the Council applied for **Policy Prototype funding through the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN)** to test a small-scale implementation.

Although initially considered as a council-led programme, capacity constraints led SBC to commission **Made Open**, specialists in time banking software and community platforms. St Nicholas was selected due to its active community network and existing partnerships under the **Stevenage Together** and **Social Inclusion Partnership** banners.

#### Aims of the Pilot

The project had three core objectives:

1. To test the feasibility of a **strengths-based time banking model** in Stevenage.

2. To develop an **accessible and secure platform** for residents to exchange time.
3. To gather **evidence and community feedback** for a potential town-wide expansion.

Dubbed the “**Little Bank of Kindness**”, the pilot ran from **December 2023 to March 2024** and targeted St Nicholas ward residents. The programme also aimed to reinforce community cohesion and inclusive participation in local civic life.

## Set-Up and Platform Development

Working closely with Made Open, the council co-designed a bespoke digital platform allowing users to:

- Offer and request services.
- Earn, spend, or donate time credits.
- Engage in one-to-one and group exchanges.
- Access onboarding support remotely.

**Safeguards and moderation features** were included to ensure member safety, and efforts were made to support residents with low digital literacy via **face-to-face training at the community centre**.

## Delivery Strategy

The pilot was officially launched during the annual **St Nicholas Day event** on December 2, 2023. Key promotional methods included:

- **Business cards, postcards, and posters**
- Social media outreach (including Cllr Barr’s Facebook)
- **Community Info Weekly email** sent to 145 local partners
- Workshops and drop-ins at St Nicholas Community Centre

Made Open also delivered online events and supported onboarding remotely, while SBC officers facilitated local engagement through partner networks.

## Key Outputs and Outcomes

Goal	Planned Output	Achieved	Notes
Establish time bank platform	Bespoke localised software	✅ Delivered	Fully functional pilot site
Member engagement	Onboard 20+ residents	✅ 21 members joined	5 hours exchanged, 7 offers posted
Community awareness	Promotional materials + events	✅ Delivered	Wider school/business involvement recommended
Digital support	Onboarding toolkit	✅ Toolkit created	Appendix 1
Stakeholder involvement	Discovery and community events	✅ Above expectations	2 community, 2 online events

## Challenges and Learning

- While **initial interest was high**, conversion to active participation was limited.
- **Lack of a dedicated local coordinator** hindered momentum and member recruitment.
- Digital barriers affected uptake, particularly among older residents.
- More **local “champions”** and embedded community partners could have amplified impact.

Significant learning included the need for **preliminary engagement with voluntary groups** to build early buy-in and trust. Additionally, post-pandemic social fragmentation remains a barrier that time banking could help address if supported properly.

## Next Steps and Recommendations

To scale and sustain time banking in Stevenage, the following actions are proposed:

1. **Recruit a Volunteer Time Bank Coordinator** (see Appendix 2) to oversee onboarding, promotion, and engagement.
2. **Expand outreach** through town-wide events, newsletters, and direct partnerships with local groups like **Irish Network Stevenage**, **Green Space Volunteers**, and **St Nicholas Wombles**.
3. **Host regular in-person workshops** to bridge digital divides and promote platform functionality.
4. **Embed time banking into broader community engagement strategies**, integrating into the Council’s corporate and social value framework.

## Conclusion

The **St Nicholas Little Bank of Kindness** pilot demonstrated promising potential for building social capital and enabling resourceful community support through a non-monetary, skills-based exchange system. Though challenges around uptake and resourcing were present, the foundations are strong for a more expansive and impactful future programme.

With refined outreach, strategic stakeholder alignment, and the recruitment of a dedicated coordinator, **time banking could become a vital tool for community connection and resilience in Stevenage.**

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