Berwick and Newbiggin Portas Pilots Update

Report of Executive Director of Local Services – Barry Rowland

Policy Board Member: Councillor A Hepple, Planning, Housing and Regeneration

Purpose of report

To respond to a request from Committee at the meeting on the 25 February 2014 for an update on the Berwick Portas Pilot and to provide additional information on the Newbiggin Portas Pilot for comparison purposes.

Recommendations

That the Committee receives this update on the Berwick and Newbiggin Portas Pilots.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the economic growth and places and environment priorities included in the Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2013-2017.

Key issues

1. The new arrangements for delivery of the Berwick Portas Pilot to address under performance were reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2014.

2. The implemented changes have had a positive impact on the Berwick scheme and the momentum of delivery has improved over the last year. Using the Council's financial monitoring systems Berwick’s uncommitted budget now stands at £39,339, slightly less than the figure for the Newbiggin Portas Pilot which is £48,196. However, it should be noted that using this system, budget only becomes financially committed when there are firm orders or invoices presented to NCC. In the case of Newbiggin the financially uncommitted budget is all fully allocated to projects and on target to be spent. This is not the case for Berwick.

3. Both pilots need to meet the deadline of the 30 June 2015 identified for conclusion of their respective schemes and defrayal of remaining funding. Identifying and working up deliverable projects is critical to this process. Newbiggin already had an action plan with agreed projects and has been proactive in preparing a defrayal plan to commit and monitor spend of their
remaining budget. Projects are well advanced to use the remaining budget to complete within
the required deadlines.

4. Whilst Berwick has put in place actions to generate new ideas and spend their funds on time
identifying projects to use the remaining uncommitted budget continues to be a challenge.
They still have a significant budget uncommitted. A focused approach to identify and approve
projects that can be delivered quickly will be needed if they are to defray their remaining funds
on time.

Background

Berwick Portas Pilot

1. Committee received an update on the development of the Berwick Portas Pilot in February
2014. This reported that the Berwick Town Council had agreed to take responsibility for the
management of the Pilot to strengthen governance arrangements and accelerate delivery
progress and that new arrangements were expected to be in place by the end of February 2014.

2. Steady progress has been made since then. In March 2014 the Berwick Portas Management
Group (BPMG) was established and constituted with nine members drawn from local
businesses, local community groups and the Town Council. This brings a wider range of skills
and experience to the project to improve effectiveness.

3. New governance arrangements have been put in place putting the group in a much stronger
position to allocate resources effectively. An application process now exists for anyone
interested in bidding for Portas monies. Meetings are convened to consider submitted
applications and decisions are taken if the Group is quorate.

4. In July 2014 the accountable body role was transferred from Arch back to the Council. The
County Council’s Corporate Programmes and External Funding Team now holds the balance of
the Portas funding previously held by Arch (£143,980) and will release funds to the group when
the money is approved for projects. The team also provides financial assistance and budget
monitoring support. Marketing and branding support and advice is also available from the
Culture and Communications Team on a project by project basis.

5. The original vision has been retained and focuses on rebranding the town, revitalising the
market and improving the physical environment.

6. Encouraging groups/individuals to come forward with ideas for projects to spend the budget on
has been a challenge. BPMG has proactively worked to stimulate interest including inviting the
Association of Town Centre Management to facilitate a community event in October 2014 to
generate potential project ideas for the Marygate (highstreet) area. This has resulted in some
further project ideas.

7. By the end of January 2015, of the £200k budget (NCC/Portas) available, £56,020 had been
advanced to the Berwick Portas Pilot for the following approved projects; a pop up shop, new
‘gateway’ signs at the station, improvements to the town’s market, the refurbishment of a former
toilet to provide a new catering outlet, the reintroduction of boat trips on the River Tweed, a
marketing campaign for the Lowry exhibition held in 2014 and the restoration of the Lowry Trail.

8. Developing projects takes time, but it is evident BPMG has been making a concerted effort to
bring forward ideas over the last year and a pipeline of projects is developing well with £104,641
of the remaining budget currently committed (Refer to Appendix 1). Commitments include the
purchase of 10 new Market Stalls and marketing materials with funding for an additional 10
market stalls if there is demand, support to exhibit art works in empty shop fronts, installation of
digital notice boards around the town, Berwick in Bloom (planters) and the purchase of up to 70
decorative shields to be installed on buildings around the town at a high level along with flags to support the Berwick 900 live re-enactment programme.

9. The remaining uncommitted budget is £39,339 but a number of other small projects are currently under consideration. These include supporting Berwick in Bloom with a further contribution and investigations are being made into the re-use of the aforementioned decorative shields through the purchase and installation of replacement logos.

10. With five months left to the defrayal deadline, it is clear that any new projects need to be capable of quick delivery without the need for any approvals that will slow the process down such as planning. Additionally if there is a lack of demand for the market stalls and it is decided not to purchase the additional stalls, a further £20,500 will need to be added to the uncommitted budget. Contingency plans need to be in place to cater for this event. Whilst projects are being committed with Berwick Town Council cash-flowing expenditure, a signed Grant Offer Letter must be returned to NCC before any payments of grant can be made.

Newbiggin Portas Pilot

11. The Newbiggin Portas Pilot received funding of £94,300 in the first round of allocations. As with Berwick, NCC matched the funds and awarded £100,000. Newbiggin also secured additional matched funding from Newbiggin Town Council and grant awards from Rio Tinto – Alcan and the Arts Council increasing their available budget to £248,300. The Portas and NCC monies have been held by NCC since December 2012 and are released to the Town Team on approval of projects.

12. Delivery has progressed well and DCLG has indicated their performance is good when compared nationally with other pilots to the extent they are seeking to use Newbiggin in best practice case studies. To date they have spent £149,480 and financially committed a further £50,625 leaving a balance of £48,196 to commit (£18,432 of which relates to the Property Improvement Project). (Refer to Appendix 2). Critically all of the uncommitted budget is fully allocated to projects which are well developed and defrayal of all these remaining funds is on track to meet the required deadlines. All the Portas, Rio Tinto (Alcan) and Arts Council monies have been expended, match funding from Newbiggin Town Council has been committed.

13. Newbiggin prepared an action plan at the start of the process and this has provided a focus for delivery with all projects clearly linking back to this. It is updated on a regular basis to ensure projects remain deliverable and relevant to their objectives.

14. They have delivered a range of projects including a Newbiggin marketing campaign, creating a strong brand for the town, improving tourist and cycling signage, supporting and setting up new tourist events such as the summer music festival, improving access and safety from the Sandy Bay Caravan Park into the town and enhancing the high street through a property improvement scheme.

15. Newbiggin set up a Town Team with two distinct but interlinked Tiers from the start. Tier 1 (The Town Team) is responsible for delivering the project and providing strategic direction, accountability and sustainability. Tier 2 is open to anyone with an interest in Newbiggin. Meeting on a less frequent basis this provides a forum for Tier 1 to directly respond to the needs of the community and to develop shared ownership for the success of the town.

16. Governance arrangements have not been without issue. Newbiggin Maritime Centre with support from Newbiggin Traders Association originally took on responsibility for managing the pilot; but after personnel changes, Newbiggin Town Team was formed in early 2013 as a Company Limited by Guarantee.
17. Membership of the Town Team has changed and expanded as the project has evolved and the need to share the workload has become more apparent. A number of sub groups and workstreams have been established to help push forward delivery and help with this.

18. The Town Team has also proactively taken steps to evolve and develop as a group. A strategy day supported by NCC’s Social Enterprise Team was held in October 2013 to refine their mission statement and objectives and identify gaps in skills. They have used this to actively recruit and strengthen the Board. An Annual Plan was produced in March 2014 outlining their achievements and future plans and the Town Team has developed an action plan with key projects to defray the remaining NCC and Newbiggin Town Council funding.

19. The Town Team’s AGM was held on the 4th November 2014 when they approved their annual accounts and the defrayal plan for the remaining Portas Pilot funding.

20. Along with the continued delivery of the high street property improvement project, committed or developing projects in the defrayal plan include the installation of interpretation boards to promote the attractions of the town, a new easter weekend event ‘Vintage Newbiggin - Easter by the Sea’ to attract visitors, purchase of additional christmas lights, a contribution towards the improvement of a play area on the promenade and further publicity and marketing. Monthly monitoring of the defrayal plan is being undertaken to keep delivery on track and a number of small reserve projects have been identified that can be brought forward quickly if there is any underspend.

**Implications**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>This report is relevant to the economic growth and places and environment priorities included in the Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2013-2017.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance and value for money</td>
<td>Delivery arrangements are in place to ensure that value for money is achieved on both pilots.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>NCC is the accountable body for the funding awards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Property</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Equalities (Impact Assessment attached)</td>
<td>Yes ☑ No ☐ N/A ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Assessment</td>
<td>An assessment of risk resulted in the decision to undertake a review and put in place alternative delivery arrangements in Berwick.</td>
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</table>
Supporting regeneration is a key way of reducing crime and disorder.

Businesses and local stakeholders are involved in the delivery of the Pilots.

Walking trails and cycling projects promote carbon reduction objectives and sustainable tourism objectives.

Berwick and Newbiggin by the Sea Wards.

Consultation
The report has been drafted using feedback from members of Portas Pilot Town Teams in both towns.

In developing and delivering projects, the Town Teams hold consultation events to encourage new project ideas to come forward.

Background papers:
Newbiggin Annual Report

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that relevant officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Initials</th>
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<td>Finance Officer</td>
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<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>BR</td>
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<td>Portfolio Holder(s)</td>
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