

Newby & Scalby Town Council Woodsmith Foundation Grant Review

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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BACKGROUND

In September 2022 Newby & Scalby Town Council (N&STC) submitted a grant application to the Woodsmith Foundation (Sirius Minerals plc) for a 'Wellbeing Without Fuss at 65+' older people's support programme. The grant application was accepted and a formal grant offer was made to the Town Council in December 2022, with the offer being accepted by two Council Officers in January 2023. The grant was awarded for a 2-year project commencing January 2023, with a grant sum of £37,314 towards an overall projected budget of £65,214.

The project application form was signed electronically by Head of Hub and Community Support Service ('Head of Hub') for N&STC, and was dated 09.09.2022. By signing and submitting the application form certified that she was authorised to make the application on behalf of N&STC; that the information provided was accurate and true; that the application had been authorised by the Council; and that the grant terms and conditions would be complied with, including a requirement to report back to the Woodsmith Foundation on how the funds were used¹.

In January 2024 Maoni Consulting were commissioned by N&STC to support to an internal review the grant application, governance, project delivery and other elements associated with the 'Wellbeing Without Fuss at 65+' project. In compiling this report we have reviewed a set of documents that were provided to us under a non-disclosure agreement (see [the list of documents here](#)), publicly available records on the [N&STC website](#), and carried out a small number of interviews (see [the list of interviews here](#)).

Our [findings](#) and [recommendations](#) are intended to help the Council to resolve the current uncertainty regarding the grant, to act, to draw a line under what has been a difficult time, and to learn lessons for future governance and administration by the Council.

¹ See p14 of the application form dated 09.09.2022

Purpose of the project

It is not immediately clear from the application form what the proposed 'Wellbeing Without Fuss at 65+' project actually entailed in tangible output terms. The original application form indicated that the funding bid was intended to cover the Hub's older people's support project costs including room hire for a 2-year period, as well as providing a wider range of services and longer opening hours. The form references loneliness and bereavement as key issues being addressed by the Wellbeing Hub and by this project²:

We want to create services and activities that are not already available in our area in order to provide extra services rather than duplicate! Reminiscing and life story making, film afternoons, quizzes, painting to music, bereavement support, hobbies at the hub, flower arranging, guest speakers, dementia cafes, and the list goes on. Wherever possible donations towards provision of services will be encouraged as in refreshments but not compulsory therefore making the services available to all 65+³

The application form originally proposed three outcomes that would be measured to evidence the success of the project:

Outcome 1: Availability of Services - longer opening hours.

Outcome 2: Wider range of services available - outside agencies providing services for 65+

Outcome 3: Number of Service Users accessing our services.⁴

The Woodsmith Foundation grant administrators were not satisfied with these project outcomes, stating in the grant offer later of 01.12.2022 that the grant offer was subject to a number of conditions including that:

² See p5 of the application form 09.9.2022

³ See p14 of the application form 09.09.2022

⁴ See page 10 of the application form 09.09.2022

You review and improve your three project outcomes. These need to be agreed and approved by the Woodsmith Foundation before the project commences.⁵

The N&STC Head of Hub submitted a revised set out of outcomes for the project to the Woodsmith Foundation in February 2023:

Outcome 1 – An additional 100 older people (65+) will express feeling less isolated within their community.

Outcome 2 – An additional 3 new activities will be established providing older people with increased control and choice in their lives.

Outcome 3 - Better social networks will lead to improved wellbeing for over 500 older people (65+).

Arrangements for the project

The initial proposed start date for the project was 01.11.2022⁶ although this was later moved to January 2023 by the Woodsmith Foundation due to their concerns about the initial project outcomes and monitoring arrangements⁷.

The application form stated that the majority of referrals would be either self-referral or via the NHS Social Prescriber, and also via Carers Resource, local housing developments and a new Dementia Forward Café due to commence in October 2022⁸.

....., Head of Hub, was the named lead for the project, and the application form proposed that five volunteers would support the project by serving refreshments and organising/presenting activities such as quizzes, bingo and a reminiscing group⁹. Although the Head of Hub was initially employed in the role on 01.10.21 on a 12 month contract, the role was made permanent from 01.10.2022¹⁰.

⁵ See p1 of the grant offer letter 01.12.2022

⁶ p4 application form 09.09.2022

⁷ p1 grant offer letter 01.12.2022

⁸ pp7-8 application form 09.09.22

⁹ P6 application form 09.09.2022

¹⁰ p1 Council report: 'Review of post of Head of Hub and Community Services' 28.09.2022

The job description for the Head of Hub role includes a responsibility for establishing links with funding providers and identifying development and funding opportunities for the hub. It does not include any specific delegated authority to make funding bids on behalf of the Council, nor to commit the Council to any contractual obligations for the provision of goods and services. There is also no separate scheme of delegation for the council in which such delegations have been prior approved¹¹.

The N&STC Standing Orders delegates full executive powers to the Council’s Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and/or Vice Chairman, ‘...*in the interests of the effective and efficient discharge of any of the Council’s functions*’¹². This delegation is not extended to any other officers of the Council and so do not apply to the Head of Hub.

The N&STC Financial Regulations delegate procurement decisions to the Clerk or RFO within certain prescribed limits. There is no prescribed delegation to any other Officers other than the Clerk.

..... The Chief Executive of the Woodsmith Foundation has stated that she spoke to the Head of Hub and Cllr on 29.11.23 and that they explained that there had been some staffing issues that had escalated in August 2023 and the Hub had come to a standstill. They indicated the issues were being resolved and staff would be in place in the New Year (2024)^{13 14}

¹¹ This was confirmed by the N&STC and a Councillor during a Zoom interview 29.01.24
¹² Standing order 16a. N&STC Standing Orders
¹³ p1 Email: ‘Documents requested yesterday and Support for People Over 65 grant status’ 11.01.2024
¹⁴ Confirmed during interview with the CE of Woodsmith Foundation 30.01.24



Project Budget

The following project budget was set out in the application form submitted by the Head of Hub on behalf of N&STC:

Cost items	How costs calculated e.g. 30 sessions@ £150/session	Cost £ Year 1	Cost £ Year 2 (if applicable)	Total funding request for Woodsmith Foundation
Salaries including on-costs such as NI and pensions	20 hours @ £21	18900	18900	18900
Overheads / Organisational costs				
Activity Costs	20 hrs room hire pw x 45 wks @ £10	9000	9000	9000
	Refresments	1384	1384	2768
	Activity	1564	1564	3128
	Goods/Speakers	1659	159	1818
	Television & Licence			
Annual events & Marketing	Notice Board	1700		1700
Staff Training				
Transport				
Monitoring & Evaluation				
TOTAL	-	34207	31007	37314
Income source (If any)	Confirmed/ applied for if grant, or how calculated if other			Income £
Newby and Scalby Town Council	Confirmed 50% of Salary and Room Hire provided.			£27,900

The application form also included the following statement:

Newby and Scalby Town Council have confirmed if successful with this bid, the funding availability of 50% towards the salary and room hire costs over 2 years.¹⁵

¹⁵ pp12-13 application form 09.09.2022

A first grant payment of £22,000 was made to N&STC on 08.02.2023. A second and final grant payment of £15,314 was scheduled for Feb 24 subject to satisfactory performance¹⁶.

Monitoring arrangements

The grant offer was conditional on the Town Council establishing a detailed monitoring and evaluation framework for the project, and submitting 6 monthly monitoring return forms to the Woodsmith Foundation, with the first monitoring return due in July 2023. The application form proposed three outcomes that would be measured to evidence the success of the project:

Outcome 1: Availability of Services - longer opening hours.

Outcome 2: Wider range of services available - outside agencies providing services for 65+

Outcome 3: Number of Service Users accessing our services.¹⁷

The application form stated that the Council would monitor outcomes and impact:

By monitoring daily numbers of service users, and by keeping detailed information of conversations held regarding day-to-day mental health and wellbeing. To work closely with clients, families, other care agencies and service providers to ensure that an holistic service is available for our 65+ clients therefore, ensuring a quality of life that is acceptable to all.

Monitoring of our clients wellbeing, will be monitored both one to one and in group settings -any concerns will be addressed as soon as possible.¹⁸

The Woodsmith Foundation grant award letter of 01.12.2022 stated that the grant offer was subject to a number of conditions including that:

You take advice to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for your service. This should include an initial assessment for all clients and a method of tracking distance travelled for each client over time. A good starting place

¹⁶ p1 Email: 'Documents requested yesterday and Support for People Over 65 grant status'
11.01.2024

¹⁷ p10 application form 09.09.2022

¹⁸ p10 application form 09.09.2022

would be Community First Yorkshire's website resources or support from one of their Development Officers.¹⁹

The Head of Hub and Support Services submitted a revised set of qualitative and quantitative outcomes for the project in February 2023:

Outcome 1 (An additional 100 older people (65+) will express feeling less isolated within their community.)

We will draw together anonymous case studies of people that have expressed a significant change in their lives since attending the hub

We will maintain records of all new clients and their attendance at our activities.

We will use the De Jong Gierveld Scale to establish how clients feel when they first register with our organisation and then again when they have attended the project for 6 months.

Outcome 2 (An additional 3 new activities will be established providing older people with increased control and choice in their lives.)

We will continue to consult with our clients regarding their interests to ensure our activities are developed in line with our client's needs and aspirations

We will maintain attendance registers for all activities

Evidence of the impact of our services will be gathered via an annual survey to all our clients.

We will maintain records of all new activities, detailing what is working well and what is not.

Outcome 3 (Better social networks will lead to improved wellbeing for over 500 older people (65+))

We will gather evidence via our annual survey to all our clients.

We will maintain records of conversations with our clients which demonstrate improved wellbeing, these will be documented as case studies

We will monitor the increase in participation in our activities via attendance registers

We will use the De Jong Gierveld Scale to establish how clients feel when they first register with our organisation and then again when they have attended the project for 6 months.

¹⁹ p1 grant award letter 01.12.2022

The Chief Executive of the Woodsmith Foundation has confirmed that they did not receive the 6 month monitoring form in July 2023, nor have they received any other outcome, output, or financial information relating to the delivery of the project from N&STC²⁰.

Project delivery

The initial project start date of November 2022 was revised to January 2023 to enable N&STC to review and revise its project outcomes and monitoring arrangements.

According to information provided to us by the N&STC Clerk, the Council purchased a TV licence in April 2023 and TV/stand in June 2023. There has been no monitoring data collected or provided as per the approved outcomes and measures agreed with the grant funders, and so there is no evidence that the promised activities were delivered between January 2023 and December 2023 when The Chief Executive of the Woodsmith Foundation has confirmed that in the meeting of 29.11.23 the Head of Hub and former Council Chairman confirmed that the project had not got off the ground, and that they had offered to return the grant funding at that stage.

It would appear that although there was an ongoing regular pattern of use of the Hub by local people during this period, this was largely confined to 'business as usual' events such as biweekly social coffee mornings and a weekly menopause support group, and not the ambitious range of potential activities that had been proposed in the original funding application and its subsequent revisions. While these social activities clearly have value to the participants, they are not representative of the extended hours and services that the grant funding was intended for and the N&STC Clerk has confirmed that separate external grant funding was received for some of the activities that did occur during this period.

²⁰ p1 Email: 'Documents requested yesterday and Support for People Over 65 grant status'
11.01.2024

FINDINGS

RECONCILIATION OF WOODSMITH FOUNDATION GRANT ALLOCATION

Total allocation agreed: £37,314

Total grant received by N&STC to date:	£22,000.00
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Less: Confirmed expenditure

Purchase of TV/stand (net of VAT)	£1,033.72
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Purchase of TV license	£159
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Total expenditure	£1,192.72
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<u>Balance</u>	<u>£20,807.28</u>
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It is clear that the activities delivered by N&STC from the Hub during the project period January 2023 – December 2023 did not meet the project application's stated ambitions. There is no monitoring information available and the mandatory monitoring returns were not submitted by the Head of Hub despite several reminders from the Woodsmith Foundation.

However, the Hub was operational during this period and the Woodsmith Foundation have confirmed that they recognise that some level of community/social value was being delivered from the venue at this time, in line with the broader intentions of the project application²¹.

²¹ Interview with Chief Executive of Woodsmith Foundation 30.01.24

Although the Council does have the option to return the full outstanding balance of £20,807.28 to the Woodsmith Foundation, there is also an option to propose a reasonable contribution from the balance towards the Council's legitimate staffing and venue expenditure during that period. It is our understanding that such an proposal may be accepted by the Foundation as a final settlement of the grant allocation, and would enable N&STC to reallocate the funding freed-up by that contribution to other community activity for the benefit of local residents.

WIDER GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROJECT

Line management arrangements

The N&STC Standing Orders do not make any provision for the Chairman of the Council to have delegated staffing responsibilities. Although N&STC did approve a Job Description for the Head of Hub with the provision '*Reports to: Chairman of Newby and Scalby Parish Council*' this arrangement is not enabled by the Council's own standing orders and other policies. The Chairman has no delegated authority to manage staff, other than to receive notification of absence from the council's most senior member of staff and to report such absence to the Council at its next meeting²². N&STC Standing Orders forbid councillors from issuing orders, instructions or directions unless duly authorised to do so by the Council as a whole²³. This treatment in N&STC's core governance documents is reiterated in the NALC publication 'The Good Councillors Guide to Employment' which states: '*Decisions about employment matters cannot be delegated to individual councillors, including the chair.*²⁴'

We have seen no evidence that the Chairman was authorised by the Council to act as a line manager for the Head of Hub. Council minute 65/21.4 of October 2021 confirms the variation of '*...the terms and conditions of the Community Support Co-Ordinator post with*

²² Standing Order 20b, N&STC Standing Orders

²³ Standing order 26, N&STC Standing Orders

²⁴ p52, The Good Councillors Guide to Employment, NALC (2023)

effect from 1st September 2021 such that the post is forthwith known as Head of Hub and Community Support Services (20 hours/week on SCP24, 1 year contract to be reviewed after 6 months).' however the minutes are silent as to any delegation of powers to the Chairman to line manage that post. Without a minuted Council resolution or prescribed approved policy, it would appear that the Chair had no such authority.

As NALC advise: *'The clerk/chief officer is the most senior employee of a council and is generally best placed to manage other employees²⁵'*. While it is usual for the Clerk as the most senior officer of the Council to report to the Chairman as a day-to-day pragmatic way of staying in touch with the Council, the Clerk would usually be expected to report to a Staffing Committee in formal terms, and not to the Chairman. It is highly unusual for other employees junior to the Clerk report to the Chairman. Such an arrangement has clear potential to cause confusion in officer reporting lines and may undermine the role of the Clerk as the most senior member of staff and Proper Officer of the Council, as well as being against sector recommended practice.

Sign-off of grant application

There is no evidence of a minuted resolution approving the grant application made by the Head of Hub in the name of N&STC, despite the Head of Hub certifying in the application form that the Council had approved it. The application form was signed on 09.09.22 but there is no resolution approving the application in any preceding Council minutes. The Town Clerk and a member of the Staffing Committee have confirmed that the Council was made aware that the grant application had been submitted, and this is confirmed by the September Council minutes, but there is no evidence that the Council had been party to nor had approved the grant application prior to submission.

²⁵ p53, The Good Councillors Guide to Employment, NALC (2023)

Agenda, minutes and reports

During the research for this report it was noted that reports supporting Council agenda items are not always routinely published by N&STC. For example, for the Council meeting of 9th February 2022 the agenda includes the following item:

7.2 To receive report from re. Community Hub.

And the minute records:

*123/21.2 A written report by (emailed to all councillors 9/2/22) and tabled at the meeting was **received & noted**. Councillors were impressed with the amount of work being carried out.*

The agenda includes a link to supporting papers, however the supporting papers do not include the report from the Head of Hub. This appears to be a common issue for N&STC agendas and minutes, and the same phenomenon was observed many times over the period covered in this research with either broken hyperlinks (for example 11th May 2022; 13th July 2022; 28th September 2022; 12th October 2022) or missing papers (9th March 2022; 13th April 2022) .

It is recommended good practice for local authorities to openly publish reports and other relevant information relating to agenda items. Publishing reports and other documents relating to council business is consistent with the principles of openness and transparency, and enables greater trust and understanding by the local community.

Without a copy of the actual report being discussed by the Council the public are denied any wider understanding or context as to the nature of the business being transacted. This is true both immediately before meetings and also for potentially years after meetings, where understanding the context of previous council decisions can be critically important.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) state: *'Councils must also publish meeting agendas, which are as full and informative as possible, **and associated papers** not later than three clear days before the meeting is taking place.'*²⁶ [accent added for emphasis]

The Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC) guidance for clerks states: *'Reports should be circulated at the same time as the agenda and made available to the public, unless they include exempt/confidential matters that would justify the exclusion of the press and public at the meeting. This improves the ability of councillors to make good decisions, enhances the transparency of the council's decision making and improves local knowledge of its activities.'*²⁷

Council and committee reports are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and would almost certainly have to be disclosed to a member of the public if requested, unless one or more statutory exemptions applied. It is therefore common and good practice to openly publish all reports to Councillors unless they contain sensitive/confidential information that would exempt them from publication under the FOIA.

General governance issues & member training

Encapsulating many of the findings raised above is a broader issue of a potential lack of familiarity with governance issues amongst members of N&STC. There were opportunities for the Council to intervene in the process. For instance, the Head of Hub reported that a substantial grant application had been submitted despite the Council not having seen or approved that application prior to submission and there is no evidence that this was queried in the meeting. And the Council approved a job description that directed that the Head of Hub should report directly to the Chairman rather than to the Clerk, despite the fact that the Council's own Standing Orders and general sector guidance preclude that arrangement. In

²⁶ p55 The Good Councillor's guide to finance and transparency, NALC (2018)

²⁷ Local Council Governance Toolkit - Part 3: Ensuring Effective Governance, SLCC (2024)

our opinion these missed opportunities are contributory factors in the unfortunate situation that the Council is currently faced with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 : repayment of grant

1.1 It is recommended that the purchase of the TV/stand and TV license were in line with the project application and as such the funding for this expenditure of £1,192.72 should be retained by N&STC.

1.2 Of the remaining balance of £20,807.28 from the grant payment, it is recommended that N&STC consider negotiating a reasonable sum to include an element of staffing and venue costs for the Hub for the period January – December 2023 when some level of social activity for over-65s was being delivered, albeit not within the requirements of the grant award.

1.3 Should the recommendation in 1.2 not be accepted by N&STC, the balance of £20,807.28 should be returned to Woodsmith Foundation.

1.4 It is recommended N&STC should officially notify Woodsmith Foundation that the second tranche of funding for year 2 of the project is not required and should be returned to their unallocated fund reserve.

Recommendation 2: Line management arrangements

N&STC are recommended to review the line management arrangements for the Head of Hub and any other relevant roles. It is highly unusual for members of staff other than the Clerk to report to the Chairman (or any other Member) of the Council from a line management perspective and the Clerk/Proper Officer should represent the top of the staffing structure with line management responsibilities cascading down below that role.

Recommendation 3 : publication of reports

3.1 It is recommended that reports and other documents supporting meeting agenda items should be circulated to Members and also published on the Council website alongside the meeting agenda.

3.2 Where reports or documents are received late, they should be added to the original supporting documents and uploaded to ensure that the lasting public record is as complete and accurate as possible.

3.3 It is also recommended that all legacy agenda records are checked and broken links to supporting document packs are fixed. This will make the public record of Council meetings more accurate, increase transparency, and also reduce the risk of significant unplanned workload if a FOIA request for the missing information was to be received in the future.

Recommendation 4 : approval of funding bids

It is recommended that when the sector's revised model Financial Regulations are published later this calendar year, N&STC should review their processes and practices to adopt the new regulations and also pay particular attention to the matter of authority to submit and approve funding bids.

Recommendation 5 : general governance issues & member training

It is recommended that N&STC consider commissioning a suitably qualified and experienced training provider to deliver a Members' training course specifically tailored around awareness raising of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, delegated powers and authority.

DOCUMENT LIST

Document title	Document date
Community Support Coordinator Statement of Particulars	22/02/21
Head of Hub and Community Support Service Statement of Particulars	25/10/21
Woodsmith Foundation Supporting People 65+ application form	09/09/22
Council report: 'Review of post of Head of Hub and Community Services'	28/09/22
Grant Offer Letter and Agreement for Support for People Over 65 Programme	01/12/22
Woodsmith Foundation grant acceptance form	03/01/23
Email: Updated Outcomes for Newby and Scalby Town Council Wellbeing Hub "Wellbeing Without Fuss at 65+	08/02/23
Woodsmith grant expenditure breakdown	21/12/23
Email: 'Documents requested yesterday and Support for People Over 65 grant status'	11/01/24
Town Clerk's analysis of expenditure against grant	17/01/24
Head of Hub and Community Support Service Job Description	undated
Sirius Minerals Foundation Small Capital and Training Grants Monitoring Form V1	undated
Support for People Over 65 Programme Monitoring Form - 'Wellbing without fuss 65+'	undated

INTERVIEWS

Event	Date
Telephone conversation with Town Clerk re. initial brief and proposal	16/1/24
Zoom video call with Town Clerk and N&STC Councillor re. outstanding issues from first draft report	29/01/24
MS Teams video call with Chief Executive of Woodsmith Foundation	30/01/24