

Delegated Decision Report



Subject:	Northern Roots – Nature for Health
Decision maker: Senior Officer	Rebecca Fletcher, Director of Public Health
Decision maker: Cabinet Member	Cllr Barbara Brownridge, Cabinet Member for Adults, Health & Wellbeing
Decision date:	7th May 2025
Report author:	Rachel Dyson, Community-led Prevention Lead (Public Health)
Ward (s):	All

Reason for decision

To allocate grant funding of £95,000 from the Health and Social Care Integration Pooled Fund (Reserve) to Northern Roots (Oldham) Limited to support the Nature Health project for one year (1st April 2025 – 31st March 2025) and to enter into a fit for purpose Grant Agreement for the funding.

Recommendation(s)

- To allocate grant funding for one year (25/26) to Northern Roots (Oldham) Limited as a contribution to the running costs of the Nature Health project and to enter into a fit for purpose Grant Agreement for the grant funding.

Background

Northern Roots (Oldham) Limited launched the Nature Health project in Autumn 2023 supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and in partnership with Hilltop GP Surgery. Over the past 14 months it has grown and to date has supported 162 participants.

The project supports participants through a targeted, person-centred approach designed to understand their needs, interests, abilities and objectives. The project offers a menu of nature activities designed to support participants’ wellbeing within a supportive community. Activities might include sensory nature walks, breathwork, nature crafts and creativity, outdoor games, nature play, insect hunts, bushcraft, green woodworking, conservation activities, therapeutic gardening, edible food growing, mixed ability rambles, pond dipping, foraging, kite flying, wild sound recording, photography, nature natter picnics and outdoor cooking.

The project is supporting Oldham residents experiencing a range of mental health challenges including;

- Anxiety and depression
- Social isolation and low self-esteem

- Mild Learning Difficulties; neuro-diversity
- Substance abuse
- PTSD; childhood trauma

Participants often also have physical health conditions such as obesity and diabetes, which the project can support with by promoting increased physical activity as well as improved knowledge about healthy food and diet.

To date referrals from Hilltop Surgery reported a collective **54.83% improvement** in wellbeing for the whole group, and **66.48%** average increase in overall wellbeing per person using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).

Proposal

The project is seeking funding to continue to test the Nature Health model with a larger number of people in 25/26. The aims and outcomes of the project are aligned with the priorities of Oldham’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy in particular to improve mental wellbeing and mental health. It is proposed to award a grant to Northern Roots to support the delivery of the Nature Health project for one year (25/26) and to enter into a Grant Agreement to formalise the funding.

Alternative option(s) to be considered *(please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s))*

Option 1 - To allocate grant funding of £95,000 for one year (25/26) to Northern Roots (Oldham) Limited as a contribution to the running costs of the Nature Health project and to enter into a fit for purpose grant funding agreement for the project. This will enable the project to work with more participants and as a result to support Oldham’s Health & Wellbeing Strategy priority of improving mental wellbeing and mental health.

Option 2 – Do not allocate grant funding to Northern Roots Nature Health project. As a result the project will need to seek funds elsewhere, work with fewer participants or potentially cease operating completely. This will reduce the positive impact the project can have on mental wellbeing and mental health.

Consultation

This proposal has been developed in consultation with the Director of Public Health and Deputy Chief Executive of Oldham Council and the Director of Northern Roots.

Risks

There is a small risk that the organisation is not able to continue to deliver. The Council will carry out quarterly meetings with the recipient who will provide written updates with regards the progress of their work and key outcomes delivered in line with the Council’s corporate plan.

Implications

Financial	The proposal is to allocate funding of £95k from the Health and Social Care Integration Pooled Fund (Reserve) to Northern Roots to support the Nature Health project for one year; 1 st April
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	<p>2025 – 31st March 2026.</p> <p>The commitment forms part of the agreed programme of work to be funded from the Reserve which is hosted by the Council and jointly managed by the Council and Oldham Integrated Care Board. The cost has been included in the schedule of planned expenditure of the fund which is incorporated within the pooled fund in the Section 75 Agreement and also in the Councils financial monitoring. The balance in the reserve at the start of the current financial year is £4.630m.</p> <p>(Andy Cooper – Senior Finance Manager)</p>
<p>Legal</p>	<p>The award of grant funding is not governed by the Contract Procedure Rules, so there are no commissioning procedures to consider. Nonetheless, the report author should consider the reasons for not opening up the grant scheme to other organisations.</p> <p>Whilst the CPRs will not apply, the Council must consider the subsidy control regime when making grant awards. The client team will need to liaise with Legal Services to determine if the grant will amount to a subsidy and, if it will, what formalities need to be undertaken to ensure that the subsidy award is permissible under the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Any approval of the recommendations should be subject to compliance with the subsidy control regime.</p> <p>If the grant is not determined to be a subsidy, the actions which must be taken under the subsidy control regime come to a natural end.</p> <p>A grant funding agreement will need to be entered into with the recipient of the grant to formalise the purpose for which the grant is being given, the authorised expenditure using the grant, any outcomes which must be achieved and another fit for purpose provisions, including the ability to clawback the grant funding in the event of a breach of the grant agreement.</p> <p>The risk of challenge when making a grant award sits alongside the judicial review regime; however, there are limited grounds for bringing a JR claim and the claimant must have sufficient interest, or “standing” in the matter to which the judicial review relates.</p> <p>Sarah Orrell – Commercial & Procurement Solicitor</p>
<p>Equality impact including implications for Children and Young People</p>	<p>No vulnerable group will be disproportionality affected from the proposals contained within this report. The project actively seeks to target population groups experiencing health inequalities.</p>
<p>Other</p>	<p>None.</p>

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?	Yes
Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?	Yes
Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?	No

Report author sign-off	R. Dyson
Role	Community-led Prevention Lead (Public Health)
Date of sign-off	2 nd May 2025

Approval	
Officer approval sign-off	
Role	Director of Public Health
Date of sign-off	07.05.2025