

Meeting	Community Development Committee
Date	7 th April 2026
Report Title	Continuation of Craft & Connect Evenings
Agenda Reference	11C
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Officer's Recommendation

1. To note the report and consider continuing the Craft & Connect Evenings.

Background

The Craft & Connect Group is a well-established, high-impact community initiative supporting adults within the Parish through accessible, creative, social engagement.

Running since May 2025, on a fortnightly basis with closure during school holidays, the group provides a safe, friendly and mentally stimulating environment for adults aged 30–75+ to meet, socialise and learn new skills. The group addresses several key parish objectives, including:

- Reducing loneliness and social isolation
- Increasing adult learning and skills development
- Supporting mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Strengthening community cohesion
- Engaging 'inbetweeners' — working adults who are otherwise unable to attend daytime activities

Given its consistent attendance, positive outcomes, and growing demand, this business case recommends the continuation of the Craft & Connect Group for a further 12 months.

2. Background and Context

The Craft & Connect Group began in May 2025 to provide an inclusive, free community space for adults to participate in craft activities, exchange skills, and form supportive social connections. Sessions run fortnightly for two hours, with capacity for 16–20 participants. The group is marketed in 6-week activity blocks, leading to a natural flow of new joiners. Approximately 50% of the original group have continued throughout the year, demonstrating strong retention and a sense of belonging. There are no equivalent evening craft groups within the parish. The only comparable offer is the Big Knit, which is Swindon-wide and not parish-specific.

3. Strategic Alignment

The group directly supports parish and community objectives including:

- **Reducing loneliness:** Many attendees report this is their *only* opportunity to socialise.
- **Improving mental health:** Participants state the group improves their wellbeing, provides purpose, and helps them build confidence.
- **Increasing adult learning:** Members regularly learn and teach new craft skills.
- **Strengthening community cohesion:** Cross-generational, culturally diverse participation enhances local unity.
- **Inclusivity for working adults:** The evening schedule uniquely supports residents aged 30–60 who cannot attend daytime groups.



4. Attendance and Demographics

- Average attendance: 16 participants per session
- Age range: Mid-30s to mid-70s
- Gender: Currently all female
- Demand: Growing — several residents waiting to join the next 6-week block
- Volunteers: Participants regularly step into leadership roles to teach their own crafts

This demonstrates:

- High and consistent engagement
- Strong community ownership
- Clear and growing demand

5. Activities and Skills Development

Participants have shared and learned a broad range of craft skills, including:

- Paper crafts (folded books, flowers, paper beads)
- Sewing and embroidery
- Mosaic
- Wet felting
- Decorative finishing techniques
- Fabric beads and creative upcycling

The group also produced:

- 120 embroidered hearts for Christmas Parcels for residents aged 70+ living alone
- China cup pincushions for raffle prizes supporting Kell's Kitchen, a local mental health charity

This demonstrates not only learning and creativity, but meaningful contribution back into the community.

6. Outcomes & Impact

Emotional and Social Benefits

- Participants report improved mental health.
- Increased confidence — some residents who once only spoke to staff now comfortably engage with the group.
- Safe, welcoming environment for people experiencing isolation.

Community Value

- Increased volunteering at parish events including:
 - Summer Extravaganza Craft Zone
 - Macmillan Coffee Morning
- Development of new friendships and informal support networks.
- Participants feel pride and ownership over community projects.

Inclusivity & Accessibility

- Reaches working adults who cannot access daytime services ("inbetweeners").
- Free attendance removes financial barriers.
- Craft materials are partly donated or recycled, supporting sustainability.

7. Costs

Although the costs below have been itemised in this report, it is important to note that room hire and staff time are already absorbed within the Council's normal operating budget. While it is true that the venue could technically generate hire income during the two hours used each fortnight, we do not cross-charge venue hire for comparable activities—such as the Easter children's events—which also sit within the Community Development programme.

Therefore, in line with our usual approach, the only additional cost associated with running the sessions for the year would be the materials required, estimated at approximately **£125.00**.



Room Hire

- 18 sessions per year
- £35.20 per session
- **Annual cost: £633.60**

Staff Time

- 1 staff member per session
- 4 hours per session
- £18 per hour
- Annual staffing cost:
18 sessions × 4 hrs × c£18 = c£1,296

To reduce workload, the sessions are split between the Marketing & Events Coordinator and Community Administrator.

Materials & Resources

- Combination of donations, leftover youth/workshop materials, and essential purchased supplies
- **Annual estimated cost: £125**

Total Annual Cost

£633.60 (room)

- £1,296 (staffing)
- £125 (materials)
- = **£2,054.60**

Cost per participant (approx.)

With approx. 288 total annual attendances (16 people × 18 sessions):

£2,054.60 / 288 ≈ £7.13 per participant per session.

Or 0.43p per session based on the £125 material costs – an expenditure which could be offset by asking attendees to 'give what you can afford' donation towards the running of the sessions.

8. Risks & Mitigation

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Staff capacity for fortnightly delivery	Low	Medium	Staff alternate delivery; volunteers increasingly support sessions
Rising costs of materials	Low	Low	Continue sourcing donations; participants willing to pay small contributions for specialist crafts
Room availability	Low	Low	Book sessions annually in advance
Demand exceeding capacity	Medium	Medium	Use 6-week blocks to manage waiting lists and rotation

9. Alternative Options

1. Do nothing / discontinue group

- Loss of a vital social lifeline
- Negative impact on mental health of regular attendees
- Reduced community volunteer engagement
- Loss of a unique evening offer for working adults
- Damages the parish's reputation for inclusive community support
- **Not recommended**

2. Reduce frequency

- Would reduce engagement, momentum, and community benefit
- Savings would be minimal
- **Not recommended**

3. Continue and explore light development

- Introduce optional themed workshops



- Explore partnerships with local craft practitioners
- Consider minimal voluntary contributions for special materials
- **Recommended**

10. Recommendation

Based on strong participant outcomes, high engagement, demonstrable community value, alignment with parish objectives, and excellent cost efficiency, it is recommended that:

The Craft & Connect Group continues for a further 12 months in its current format.

Further exploration of volunteer integration and optional participant contributions may enhance sustainability without reducing accessibility.