



**Co-operative Councils**  
Innovation Network



**ST NICHOLAS**

**LITTLE BANK OF**



**KINDNESS**

# Cooperative Community Bank of Kindness

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## Background and Foundation

Over a 12-week period, Stevenage Borough Council, and community technology partner Made Open conducted a small pilot to gather feedback and evidence for a future community programme focussing on time banking in Stevenage.

The idea was introduced to Community Development by St Nicholas Ward Member Councillor Sandra Barr. During a visit to Ireland, Sandra had seen how a small community gave their time and skills to help each other in times of need without money being exchanged and was keen to know if it was possible to replicate this in Stevenage.

As a member of the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN), Stevenage Borough Council Officers were able to apply for Policy Prototype funding to use as a base from which to conduct a pilot and feasibility study and look at the options for a time banking provision in Stevenage. as a community driven project involving partnership work across the town, the pilot aligned perfectly with the principles and values of the CCIN.

We originally thought that this may be a project that we would be able to facilitate directly through Stevenage Borough Council Community Development Officers however after some desktop research into other time banking provisions, it was clear that we would not have the capacity to be able to do this.

Other time banking provisions across the country use an online model for residents and community members to register and engage. We consulted with colleagues in CCIN who recommended a community software company called Made Open, they have delivered time banking online facilities previously and were keen to work with us to see what could be delivered in Stevenage.

Following an initial consultation with Made Open, we agreed to provide a Pilot of the time banking model in the St Nicholas Community, this was mainly due to established community groups already in place that we could use as a stepping stone.

It was also felt that trying to roll the programme out across the whole of the town over such a short period would be counter intuitive to seeing if the programme could be successful. We therefore led intending to use Made Open to provide a platform focussed on the residents and communities of St Nicholas.

## Aims of the pilot

Stevenage Borough Council aimed to implement a strengths-based community development model, which included time banking. Time banking is a community-based system where people exchange services using time as currency. Members earn "time credits" by providing services, like tutoring or gardening, and spend those credits on services they need from others. Every hour of service is equal, promoting equality and reciprocity within the community.

The 'Little Bank of Kindness' aimed to test the concept of time banking in a small area and assess its feasibility for rolling out to other areas of Stevenage.

This pilot ran from December 2023 until March 2024 and focused on the St Nicholas ward of Stevenage where:

- a) Councillor Sandra Barr, Cabinet Member for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhoods is the elected member,
- b) The community is seen as 'active',
- c) The community centre already has links with partner agencies through the council's 'Stevenage Together' strategic partnership and the 'Social Inclusion Partnership' sub-group.

To address the practical challenge of Stevenage Borough Council resourcing the pilot project, Made Open (a leading time banking software provider) were commissioned to deliver a three-month pilot with remote member onboarding support. This was with the understanding that the Community Development team at Stevenage Borough Council would support Made Open with recruitment via local networks and connections.

## CCIN Values and Principles



### Social Partnership

It isn't possible to deliver a project like this without a mutual sense of shared responsibility between all key stakeholders in a local community. The partnership aspects built on the work we have been undertaking with our Social Inclusion Partnership, which was a collective of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations that have been moving towards a model of greater co-operation and were in the process of forming a multi-stakeholder co-operative.

We engaged with residents by using promotional business cards, postcards, and posters to raise awareness of the pilot. This was posted on Councillor Barr Facebook page, SBC internal intranet, poster distribution throughout the Town and sent to other partners such as the Irish Network – a well-established community group, the Elim Church in St Nicholas, Stevenage Football Foundation, Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's branch of St Nicholas and St Nicholas Wombles litter picking group.

The poster was also included in the Community Info Weekly e-mail which is sent to all 145 of our Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise partners (VCFSE) to try to drum up some interest in the pilot.



### New models of meeting priority needs

We have already been exploring new models for the delivery of services such as co-operatives.

Similarly, there is an opportunity to look to formalise the project using a similar model. This approach would make sense as it would allow for increased ownership and agency of all stakeholders.

This approach would make sense as it would allow for increased ownership by the community and an independent agency for all stakeholders.

Through the project's links with the Social Inclusion Partnership, there is opportunity for support and guidance with this and the possibility of a one-off grant to support the formalisation process.



## Co-production

Genuine production is a central pillar of this approach. Without the opportunity for residents to be involved in the design of the project from the start, there was no guarantee that this would be a good fit solution to meet social needs. As such, early and consistent engagement with key local stakeholders was a core building block of the project.

Working with Councillor Sandra Barr and local residents helped us mould the concept to develop the process for member onboarding. Community members who joined the online meetings or received a demo of the platform have provided very positive feedback to the overall concept. The pilot identified the need to bring in timebank members at a local level, possibly incentivising initial participation through rewards or incentives from local partners in exchange for credits.

Local individuals, organisations and groups were contacted and were invited to meetings, workshops, and demos of the Little Bank of Kindness to gather input and address any concerns. Identifying local stakeholders to work together on the implementation before the pilot was launched may have made the project more successful. For example, a local charity Waste Not Want Not – Nurturing Plants and People (Community Interest Company) as a local stakeholder. This organisation's ethos statement is being inclusive through the delivery of their projects and initiatives they reach out and touch those with a real need.

This organisation works with multiple teams within Stevenage Borough Council providing community gardens, allotments as well as giving those who volunteer with them the opportunity to gain skills and experience working in a community setting. Waste Not Want Not work with the probation service and special need schools providing a safe place to volunteer and gain the skills needed to gain employment.



## Innovation

Whilst time banking is an established concept used in a variety of ways across the country. It is significant innovative step for Stevenage.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to both tailor delivery to the needs of local people and the current challenges they face. This means that our Little Bank of Kindness is a bespoke offer, specifically designed for the people of Stevenage.

When we made the decision to pilot this concept in one ward, it was to truly recognise that this would be a new and innovative development for Stevenage.

In order to obtain the most success, a small pilot gradually being built upon to deliver across the town would be the most effective way in which the project would succeed.

This innovation differs to that of other time banking platforms set up in the UK as they tend to be town wide.



## Learning

A core aspect of delivery was the creation of a guide and toolkit and the production of a feasibility study around the scalability of the project. Both presented ample opportunities for learning and will be made available to the CCIN.

## Set Up

**ST NICHOLAS'S  
LITTLE BANK OF  
KINDNESS**

**WELCOME  
EVENT**

What is the little bank of kindness?  
From helping a neighbour to swapping skills, timebanking is a great way to exchange kindness in your community.

Please come along to our welcome event to find out more.

**Date: Wednesday 6th December**  
**Time: 12.30pm**  
**Location: St Nicholas Community Centre and online via Zoom**

Scan the QR code to sign up or visit [www.stnicholas.madeopen.co.uk](http://www.stnicholas.madeopen.co.uk) for details of how to join.

supported by:  
**Stevenage** BOROUGH COUNCIL  
**Made Open** Building better communities.

Stevenage Borough Council worked closely with Made Open to design and set up the time banking software, providing remote member onboarding support that lets people exchange skills and support using time credits, ensuring everyone's time is valued equally. Time banking is the process of giving and receiving time with other people in a community. It facilitates members' exchange acts of kindness using time credits. For every hour a member gives to their community they earn 1 time credit in return. Time credits can be earned, spent or donated to others.

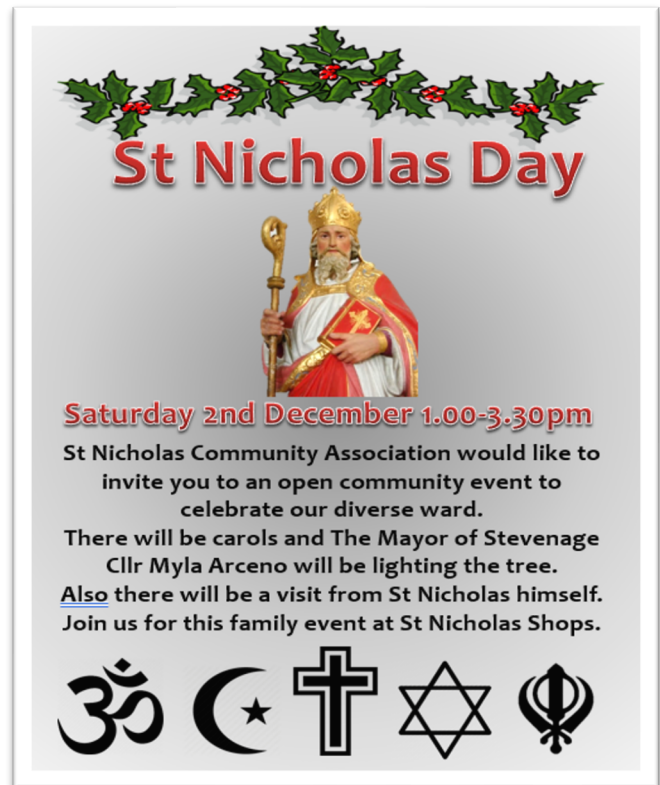
Time banking created new and positive ways for people to connect and make friends. Members offered help doing things they enjoy at a time that suits them. No money changed hands, and everyone's time was valued equally. Members didn't need any qualifications or special skills to join the Timebank, just a willingness to offer help to others or ask for help when they need it.

Members shared their offers and requests across all devices, and recorded exchanges on a 1-2-1, 1-2-many or many-to-many basis.

Members spent their time credits freely, donated credits to others and recorded their impact. Built-in safeguards enhanced member safety.

Integrated features worked smoothly with each other. Potentially, multiple timebanks across Stevenage could join in a shared pool.

## Delivery



Firstly, a startup guide/toolkit designed to specifically highlight how the solution has been tailored at a local level to respond to the needs of local people. Toolkit Appendix 1.

Secondly, a feasibility study to both increase scope and scale in Stevenage, but also to feed into a potential future policy lab, focused on innovative local responses to deprivation and inequality.

These elements will be shared through the CCIN and will serve as a learning piece that could also be utilised as a case study.

Made Open created promotional materials such as business cards, postcards and posters which were distributed in many ways to try to reach out to as many residents as possible to get on board with this pilot.

The launch of the Little Bank of Kindness coincided with the St Nicholas Day event held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023. This event is celebrated every year on the first Saturday of December. This is a community event to celebrate Saint Nicholas. The event takes place in the St Nicholas shopping precinct next to the Community Centre. The day is well attended by the local community, and community groups performing with songs from a local school, St Nicholas church choir, St Nicholas Invis-Ability signing choir and blessings given by a variety of religious groups.

Postcards were given out to all residents that attended the event to promote the pilot. One-to-one sessions at St Nicholas Community Centre were also advertised on posters for those who do not have technical access. The poster was distributed to our partners and was also posted on our internal intranet. Cllr Sandra Barr posted the details of the time banking on her Facebook page. We also facilitated workshops at the local Community Centre to promote the pilot within the St Nicholas ward.

The poster was also included in the Community Info Weekly e-mail which is sent to all 145 of our Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise partners (VCFSE) to try to drum up some interest in the pilot.

## Key Outputs & Outcomes

Required Outcomes	Required Outputs	Achieved Outputs	Comments
A functioning online platform for time banking called the St Nicholas Little Bank of Kindness	Create a specially designed software platform catering to the needs of the St Nicholas Community	Made Open and SBC officers and Members worked together to produce a bespoke programme	Delivered within expectations
Development of an easy-to-use, accessible process for member onboarding	Direct messaging and reference checking. Moderator support.	Made Open and SBC officers and Members worked together to produce a system that was secure and accessible for residents and community members.	Delivered within expectations
Creation of promotional materials and marketing that encourages community involvement and feedback.	Produce physical promotional materials alongside online advertising to promote the project and encourage involvement	business cards postcards posters Social Media Posts E-newsletters SBC intranet and website	Delivered. Additional marketing and promotion opportunities could have been sought through better engagement with community groups, businesses, and schools.
Develop stakeholder engagement	2 x discovery meetings	Delivered at St Nicholas Community Centre	Delivered within expectations.
	1 x community event	2 x community events attended	Delivered above expectations
	2 x online events	Delivered by Made Open and SBC officers and elected members	Delivered within expectations
Community members sign up to and use the platform	Community members sign up to Little Bank of Kindness and use the model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 members joined the timebank</li> <li>• 7 offers were added</li> <li>• 1 request added</li> <li>• 5 hours exchanged</li> <li>• 7 pending members</li> </ul>	Delivered. Further interest could have been built through additional work on encouraging community involvement as detailed above. Provision needs to be made for community members who are unable to use an online service to be catered for.



## Learning

- Lots of interest at events, however this didn't result in lots of people joining.
- Recruitment was difficult without a local co-ordinator.
- We needed more local 'champions' promoting the little bank of kindness in the area.
- We could have considered engaging more active community groups in Stevenage.
- Lack of digital skills is a barrier for some people in the community, overcome by one-to-one training and support.

The biggest learning curve that the Council had would be to identify established community/ voluntary groups within Stevenage to establish the appetite for such a scheme before putting together a strong business plan.

By establishing an interest at an early stage with stakeholders would establish trust through transparent communication and regular interaction to help sustain the relationships beyond the pilot for lasting impact and continued collaboration.

Also, we need to take into consideration the impact to communities throughout the UK when lockdown took place and the repercussions thereafter. The pandemic strained social ties, created divisions and in many cases weakened the community spirit that typically helps communities thrive.

Engage with smaller community groups within Stevenage to promote the idea of time banking. Contact groups such as the Green Space Volunteers and the St Nicholas Wombles litter picking group that are already volunteering their time to community acts of kindness and encourage them to set up their own time banking with the use of the tool kit.

Because interest didn't lead to action Made Open suggested to Stevenage Borough Council that we consider incorporating the little bank of kindness into a broader community engagement approach.

## Next steps

The St Nicholas Little Bank of Kindness showed promise, but it may not be the ideal model for expansion without more involvement from the council and a local co-ordinator responsible for recruitment and onboarding of new members. Advertise the volunteer co-ordinator job to recruit a dedicated person to organise and maintain the day-to-day running of the time bank.

### Enhanced Communication and Outreach:

We will look to implement awareness to better inform the entire town about the time bank, including workshops and regular updates to keep the initiative top of mind. Promote the concept at all corporate events with tablets to sign members up and to gather e-mails that are interested in time banking.

Contact established groups and organisations within Stevenage to promote the time banking concept and encourage these groups to set up a similar process within their groups with the use of the tool kit.

Set up weekly / biweekly sessions to recruit new members, support existing members to help facilitate connections within the network, also to promote the website's functionality and help community members to understand how the website can help meet their needs.

Approach established active Community groups in Stevenage (Irish Network Stevenage INS) which have over 800 followers on Facebook and have been established since 2007.

Engage with smaller community groups within Stevenage to promote the idea of time banking. Contact groups such as the green space volunteers and the St Nicholas Wombles that are already volunteering their time to community acts of kindness and encourage them to set up their own time banking with the use of the tool kit.

### Ongoing Support and Training:

Recruiting a Timebank Co-ordinator will provide continuous support and training sessions will be essential to ensure all members feel confident in participating and maximising the benefits of the time bank.

### Regular Monitoring and Adjustment:

The Timebank Co-ordinator will continue to monitor participation levels and gather feedback to make iterative improvements. A follow-up review will be conducted in six months to assess progress and determine the best path forward.

## Conclusion

The time bank pilot was a valuable learning experience, demonstrating the potential for fostering collaboration and community within our town. While the pilot was partly successful, with several participants actively engaging in skill exchanges, we also encountered some challenges that need to be addressed to realise the full potential of this initiative.

Key successes included:

- **Active Participation:** A core group of members regularly engaged in exchanges, highlighting the value of the time bank for connecting colleagues with complementary skills.
- **Positive Feedback:** Participants expressed satisfaction with the concept, appreciating the opportunity to contribute and receive services in a non-monetary way.

Challenges identified:

- **Limited Awareness:** Participation levels were lower than anticipated, suggesting that more comprehensive communication and promotion strategies are needed. By limiting the pilot to St Nicholas ward only, the narrow geographical focus was a constraint. By opening the concept to a townwide approach may provide more positive results.

By addressing these challenges and building on the successes of the pilot, we are confident that the time bank can become a more integral part of our town's culture, fostering deeper connections and mutual support among communities throughout Stevenage.

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# Appendix 1

This toolkit provides a comprehensive roadmap for launching and sustaining a time bank.

## 1. Understand the Concept of a Time Bank

- **Definition:** A time bank is a system, where members exchange services and skills, with the currency being time instead of money. For every hour you spend helping someone, you earn a time credit, which you can then spend to receive services from others.
- Principles:
  - **Equality:** Everyone's time is valued equally.
  - **Reciprocity:** Mutual exchange of services.
  - **Community:** Building stronger connections among members.
  - **Inclusivity:** Everyone has something valuable to offer.

## 2. Initial Planning

- **Objective Setting:** Define the purpose of the time bank (e.g., skill-sharing, community building).
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Identify key stakeholders and engage them in the planning process.
- **Resource Allocation:** Determine what resources (time, technology, space) will be needed to start and maintain the time bank.

## 3. Choose a Time Bank Platform

- **Custom Solutions:** Develop or customise an in-house platform to manage time credits, services, member profiles and safeguarding policies.
- **Existing Platforms:** Utilise existing time banking software such as Made Open
- Features to Consider:
  - User-friendly interface.
  - Time tracking and management.
  - Member profiles and service listings.
  - Communication tools for members.
  - Safeguarding procedures implemented.

## 4. Develop Policies and Guidelines

- **Membership:** Define who can join the time bank.
- **Earning and Spending Time Credits:** Outline how time credits are earned and spent.
- **Code of Conduct:** Establish rules for respectful and ethical interactions.
- **Dispute Resolution:** Create a process for resolving conflicts or misunderstandings.

## 5. Launch and Promotion

- **Awareness Campaign:** Use external communications (emails, intranet, posters) to educate employees about the time bank and its benefits.
- **Workshops and Training:** Offer sessions to help understand how to use the platform and encourage participation.
- **Incentives:** Offer initial time credits as a bonus for signing up or for referring others.

## 6. Managing the Time Bank

- **Coordinator Role:** Designate a time bank coordinator to oversee the operations, monitor usage, and resolve issues.
- **Regular Updates:** Provide regular updates and success stories through newsletters or meetings.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Create channels for members to provide feedback and suggest improvements.

## 7. Measuring Success

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):
  - Participation rates (number of active members).
  - Volume of exchanges (total hours exchanged).
  - Satisfaction surveys (member satisfaction with the system).
- **Regular Review:** Periodically assess the time bank's performance against its objectives and adjust as necessary.

#### 8. Sustainability and Growth

- **Continuous Engagement:** Keep members engaged with new initiatives, challenges, or events.
- **Expansion:** Consider expanding the time bank to include external partners or communities if successful.
- **Long-term Vision:** Integrate the time bank into the broader community and social responsibility strategies.

#### 9. Legal and Ethical Considerations

- **Data Privacy:** Ensure member data is protected according to relevant laws.

#### 10. Case Studies and Best Practices

- **Learn from Others:** Research case studies from other organisations that have successfully implemented time banks.
- **Adapt and Innovate:** Customise the time bank to fit the unique culture and needs of your organization.

#### 11. Documentation and Resources

- **Guides and FAQs:** Create clear documentation to help members navigate the time bank.
- **Templates:** Provide templates for service offers, time credit tracking, and feedback forms.

**Support:** Offer ongoing support through a dedicated help desk or online resources.

## Appendix 2

Advertise for a Time Bank Co-ordinator position:

### Volunteer Opportunity: Timebank Co-ordinator

#### Can you help us run a community timebank in Stevenage?

Are you passionate about supporting your local community? Are you someone who can help organise? Can you add a bit of sparkle to someone's day? If the answer is yes, then we would love to hear from you. We are looking for a volunteer to be responsible for the day-to-day management and smooth running of the Stevenage 'Little Bank of Kindness'.

#### What is the Little Bank of Kindness?

Timebanking is the process of giving and receiving time with other people in a community. Our website [<insert link>](#) helps members in [<insert location>](#) exchange acts of kindness using 'time credits'. For every hour a member gives to their community, they earn 1 time credit in return. Time credits can be earned, spent or donated to others.

Timebanking creates new and positive ways for people to connect and make new friends. Members offer help doing things they enjoy, at a time that suits them. No money changes hands and everyone's time is valued equally. Members don't need any qualifications or special skills to join the timebank, just a willingness to offer help to others or ask for help when they need it.

#### About the role:

We are looking for someone to be responsible for growing and supporting the timebank in [<insert location>](#). As a volunteer, you will be happy to help individuals, community groups and businesses to connect and exchange acts of kindness.

#### Key tasks:

- Promote the timebank via local community networks / social media channels
- Approve, manage and message timebank members
- Undertake reference checks before member approval
- Recruit new members to the timebank
- Support members and help to facilitate connections within the network
- Pro-actively promote the website functionality (helping members create their profile, add their offers, requests, events etc)
- Check and approve content added by members (Events).
- Work with community members to understand how the website can help to meet their needs

#### Skills / Characteristics required:

To be successful in this role you need you to have a caring nature, good organisational skills, be a good listener, relish being part of a team and be reliable. Ideally, you'll have experience using a range of digital tools/software and be proficient with social media.

#### Time commitment:

To begin with, we estimate that this role is approx. **4 hrs per week** which could be spread over several days. As the timebank grows this commitment may increase.

What will you get out of it?

- You will make a positive difference to your community

- You will develop and learn new skills
- You will make new friendships
- You will get specific volunteer role training
- You can claim any travelling expenses incurred in this role
- You will receive a volunteer reference from [Stevenage Borough Council](#)

### Additional information:

When completing the application form please provide information about any skills, experience, hobbies, and training that you have. We will provide full training which includes safeguarding and digital platform training. Please note that a DBS Certificate and suitable references are a requirement of this role, but we will guide you through these processes.

### When and where?

Flexible. Work from home.