

**COUNTY COUNCIL – SEPTEMBER 2020****POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEAD MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES,  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RURAL PARTNERSHIPS**

I am delighted to take this opportunity to provide an overview of the work the Council carried out to support Leicestershire Communities over the past financial year. The county council has once again played an active part in supporting and strengthening the communities of Leicestershire. Together we have achieved a lot.

The prime focus of my portfolio is to create thriving Leicestershire Communities where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities participate and help each other. This vision provides a foundation for how we want to work with communities now and in the future.

We have a lot to be proud of in Leicestershire and the [Annual Report](#) highlights how the council and community groups are working hard to utilise the commitment, talent and skills of people in our communities to achieve change for the better.

At the very end of the period covered by the Annual Report, we were faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst this has presented us with numerous challenges, I can proudly say that the response in Leicestershire has been incredible and has demonstrated the resilience of our communities, in tackling one of the most difficult periods in our history. I am truly heartened by the willingness of people to volunteer to help others and provide support to their neighbours, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

I would urge all Members, in your capacity as Community Leaders and Champions, to look at the initiatives and projects highlighted in the Annual Report. I am sure they will provide inspiration for our continuing efforts to build and sustain communities in Leicestershire that are strong, resilient, happy and healthy.

Brief highlights of some of the schemes and activities carried out are summarised below.

**Mrs Louise Richardson CC**

### The Leicestershire County Council Communities Fund

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic Leicestershire County Council recognised the need to provide urgent financial support to small voluntary and community groups. The Council set up a £1million Community Fund which was then increased by a further £0.5m to due unprecedented demand. 160 groups were awarded grants to maintain services to vulnerable residents and to respond to the pandemic. More recently an additional £100,000 was made available to support community organisations in the areas of the County affected by the extended lockdown and a further 62 applications were awarded funding.

### Leicestershire Communities website

The Leicestershire Communities [website](#) provides a range of useful information to help support, promote and facilitate social action in communities. It provides details about grants and funding, Neighbourhood Planning and Community Managed Libraries, the county Youth Council and many other initiatives. Use of the site continues to grow and it has been particularly useful for enabling the provision of information and the submission of applications and monitoring returns for both SHIRE Grants and the Communities Fund.

### The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Resilience Partnership

The Resilience Partnership Team carries out a wide range of projects – for individual authorities, for authorities collectively and by representing local authorities across the multi-agency LLR Prepared Forum. During 2019/20 the Partnership has had key roles to play in the response to several severe flood events, planning for the potential implications of a No-Deal EU Exit and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff from the Communities, Policy and Resilience service have been central to supporting delivery of the Resilience Forum response.

### Volunteering

Volunteering is an underpinning theme of the Communities Strategy that continues to be promoted and supported by the Communities Team. Internally the Volunteer Managers Network has helped to co-ordinate and promote new practices and policies to managers, offer a peer support platform and provide the opportunity to share best practice and guidance. In the community all aspects of volunteering are supported, from encouraging social action and good neighbourliness through to providing training as a formal volunteer. During Covid 19 volunteering has been critical to supporting vulnerable people, and staff have worked closely with Voluntary Action Leicestershire and other Resilience Forum partners to mobilise and co-ordinate the voluntary response.

### The Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP)

The LRP is an established and successful partnership which brings together public, private and voluntary stakeholders to improve services and support rural communities and businesses. During 2019/20 the Partnership continued to champion issues relevant to rural communities including through support for Neighbourhood Plans and the Rural Housing Enabler project which is increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural areas, supporting access to rural employment through the Work.Live.Leicestershire (WiLL) project and enabling access to superfast broadband in rural Leicestershire.

### Green Plaques

So far, 27 Green Plaques have been unveiled across Leicestershire. Individuals, societies, organisations and schools have all taken part in nominating people and places they feel deserve recognition. Among the people honoured in 2019 and 2020 are members of the Suffragette movement, an astronomer and a WWI poet. Each represents a forceful demonstration of how an individual or group can realise their dreams or ambitions, which can prove inspirational, especially to young people.

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