

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 7th JULY 2021**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEAD MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES,
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RURAL PARTNERSHIPS**

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to introduce the Annual Report of work that has been carried out within my portfolio to support Leicestershire Communities over the past financial year.

It has been a year dominated by the Covid 19 pandemic which has presented huge challenges both globally and locally. The pandemic has however also provided very many examples of positive community spirit, the willingness of people to volunteer to help others, particularly those who are most vulnerable, and the value of what can be achieved from within our communities.

The County Council has worked to support and complement community action, and this has been the prime focus of work within my portfolio. This work seeks to help enable the further development of thriving communities where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities participate and help each other. It also provides inspiration for us all to continue with, and build on, the enhanced community networks and initiatives that have been established over the past year.

The Annual Report is available on the Leicestershire Communities website and on the Members Hub and brief highlights of some of the schemes and activities included within it are summarised below.

Mrs Pam Posnett CC

The Leicestershire County Council Communities Fund

The Communities Fund was launched on Monday 30th March 2020, following a decision made by Cabinet to establish a £1m fund to help VCSE sector organisations to continue providing services for vulnerable people during the Covid-19 pandemic. The grant fund was subsequently increased in value and extended through further rounds of funding to help voluntary groups to manage the impacts of the pandemic and to continue to deliver services for vulnerable and disadvantaged people and communities.

In total, over 3 rounds of funding, 379 grants were awarded, totalling nearly £2.6m of funding from the County Council.

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 2020/21 the Partnership has been primarily focused on coordinating and supporting the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has involved working within individual councils, collectively with LLR local authorities and across the wider Local Resilience Forum partners on a wide range of work including support for shielded residents, provision of PPE and arrangements for increased mortuary capacity. Later in the year support was also provided for planning for the recovery phase of the pandemic. The Team has also responded to several flood events and an avian flu outbreak as well as planning for/responding to the implications of the EU Exit Transition.

Volunteering

Volunteering has been a key theme throughout the last year and one which the Communities Team has continued to co-ordinate, promote and support. A strategic volunteer advisory group was formed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and this has ensured that Volunteer Managers and their volunteers have been able to access consistent messaging and support for volunteering to safely continue and adapt to ever changing circumstances.

During Covid 19 volunteering has been critical to supporting vulnerable people and the vaccination programme and Voluntary Action LeicesterShire has worked closely with the County Council and other Resilience Forum partners to mobilise and co-ordinate the voluntary response.

Armed Forces

The Communities Team and the Council were incredibly proud to be awarded the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) gold award in 2020, one of only 17 employers in the East Midlands to achieve this. The Ministry of Defence award encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same.

Through the last year the focus of work has been on:

- Supporting the regional Civil and Military Partnership Board covering Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to develop and deliver a regional action plan co-ordinating the work of local authorities, universities, military charities and our armed forces.

- Hosting a council armed forces employee network which supports forces family employees and explores ideas about how we can better improve service delivery to this cohort.
- Maintaining ties with the Ministry of Defence Employment Engagement Team including attending Partnering with Defence training and events.
- Commemorating several important remembrance events relating to previous conflicts including WW1 and WW2 events.

Equalities

The Council adopted a new Equalities Strategy to cover the period from 2020-2024. The Strategy meets the Council's obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to set itself specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years. It was informed by engagement with the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group and a range of organisations representing protected characteristic groups.

The Strategy addresses workforce issues, service delivery issues and community engagement. Key achievements during the year include holding staff discussion forums on issues such as Black Lives Matter, access for deaf and hard of hearing service users, and support for transgender colleagues and service users. The Council commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day and celebrated diverse religious festivals. A new induction workbook for all staff on "Promoting Fairness and Respect" has been produced and is available on-line.

Engagement

Following discussions with Members, officers and local communities, the Council's approach to engagement has been reviewed and refreshed and a County Council Engagement Strategy has been developed that will be progressed through corporate governance over the coming summer, accompanied by an Annual Report on engagement over the 2020/21 financial year.

The Council recognises that the pandemic has considerably changed how officers talk with local communities, and how they expect to talk to us. The last year has enabled the organisation to test new approaches, but also to develop a better understanding of how digital poverty, literacy levels and other barriers continue to prevent many people from getting involved.

In addition, the Council undertook a project specifically aimed at understanding the impact of the pandemic on communities that may not have had their voice heard. ['Conversations about Covid'](#) showed the value of informal interactions on broad issues and enabled key messages to be fed back into departments to improve how we communicate and deliver services.

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