



CABINET – 26 OCTOBER 2021

DRAFT COMMUNITIES STRATEGY: LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL COLLABORATING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES – OUR COMMUNITIES APPROACH 2022-26

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet's approval to engage on the draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities- Our Communities Approach 2022-26, a copy of which is appended to this report.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that:
 - a. The draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council collaborating with our Communities- Our Communities Approach 2022-26 (appended to the report) be approved for engagement;
 - b. It be noted that a further report will be presented to the Cabinet in March 2022 regarding the outcome of the engagement and seeking approval for the revised Communities Strategy 2022-26 to be submitted to the County Council for approval.

Reason for Recommendation

3. The current Communities Strategy is due to expire in 2021 and therefore a revised Communities Strategy covering 2022-26 (the draft Our Communities Approach), has been developed.
4. It is intended that a 12-week engagement exercise will be undertaken between 1 November 2021 – 21 January 2022. This will include consideration by the Council's Scrutiny Commission, in addition to stakeholders and communities including council departments and staff groups, voluntary sector groups, faith groups, parish and town councils and the general public, to enable them to contribute to the further development of the draft Approach. Following on from the engagement exercise it is the intention that a final version will be presented to the Cabinet in March 2022 followed by the County Council in May.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The engagement exercise will run for 12 weeks from 1 November 2021 to 21 January 2022 and will involve stakeholders and communities as set out at paragraph 22 below. This timescale links with that for consultation on and approval of the proposed revised Strategic Plan.
6. The Scrutiny Commission will consider the draft Our Communities Approach 22-26 as part of the engagement process at its meeting on 17 November 2021 and will consider the outcome of the engagement on the Strategy in March 2022.
7. In March 2022, a report will be presented to the Cabinet regarding the outcome of the engagement and seeking approval for the revised draft Our Communities Approach 22-26 to be submitted to the County Council for approval in May 2022.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

8. The Cabinet approved the current Communities Strategy 2017-21 on 12 December 2017. The Strategy will continue to enable delivery of all outcomes of the Councils' Strategic Plan – it will set out how (through the Approach) the Council will seek to achieve its priority outcomes. The revised Strategic Plan is also on the agenda for this Cabinet meeting.
9. The draft Approach will complement and support government objectives to “build back better” after the pandemic and to “level-up” prosperity and opportunity by enabling and supporting communities to achieve their goals through co-production and collaboration with communities and building community capacity and assets.

Resource Implications

10. There are no direct financial implications in relation to the draft Our Communities Approach 22-26. Delivery of the Approach will be supported from within existing staffing resources and through the commissioning of community capacity building contracts and grants.
11. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

Officers to contact

Tom Purnell, Assistant Chief Executive, Strategy and Business Intelligence, Chief Executive's Department
 Tel: 0116 305 7019
 Email: tom.purnell@leics.gov.uk

Zafar Saleem, Head of Communities, Policy and Resilience,
Chief Executive's Department

Tel: 0116 305 4952

Email: zafar.saleem@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

Communities Strategy 2017-21

12. The existing Communities Strategy 2017-21 sets out the Council's continuing commitment to work in partnership to support, strengthen and empower communities. It adopted 'a glass-half full' approach to build on and develop new relationships, values and culture within the County Council and with communities that could support and enable 'how' the Council does things.
13. Several significant achievements have resulted from delivery of the existing Communities Strategy including continuing high quality support for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector delivered through contracts with Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL), the Rural Community Council, Leicestershire and Rutland (RCC) and the Cooperative and Social Development Agency (CASE), building strong and supportive relationships with town and parish councils through working with the Leicestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils, embedding asset-based approaches to service development and delivery across the County Council, supporting the growing number of neighbourhood plan groups across the County and development and implementation of an approach to tackling loneliness.
14. During the Covid-19 pandemic the County Council has had a leading role in the response for communities including hosting the coordinating multi-agency Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The County Council established and led the Voluntary, Faith and Community Engagement Cell, the response for which was informed by the Communities Strategy 2017-21, and the Council's role in supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector, Town and Parish Councils, communities and working with partners was invaluable.
15. A critical supporting intervention was the Communities Fund which was established to support voluntary and community sector organisations in the County to manage the financial impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. The grant fund has helped 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 three rounds of funding, 379 grants were awarded, totalling nearly £2.6m of funding from the County Council.
16. The Council's Communities Board, comprising officers from each Council department, has been established to provide a focus for implementing and refreshing the Strategy.

Development of the draft refreshed Strategy; The Leicestershire Communities Approach 2022-26

17. Since the adoption of the Communities Strategy 2017-21, there has been a notable shift amongst commentators, think-tanks, policy

developers and politicians to change how the public sector operates; with a greater emphasis on how it collaborates with communities and where and how decisions are made. The shift towards greater community involvement and collaboration is reflected in the draft refreshed Strategy - Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities, our Communities Approach 2022-26 - which should be viewed as the model for 'how' solutions can be achieved.

18. The work to develop the draft Communities Approach has been guided by the following key influences:

- Recognising and learning from the difference made from the approaches embedded within the County Council and growing these.
- The role and significance of civil society (communities and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector) prior to and during Covid-19 (including social action and community responses).
- A focus on recovery and how the County Council can support and enable the Government's levelling up/build back better agenda with communities.

19. The principles of the draft Communities Approach build on the priorities of the existing Strategy and cut across all Outcomes of the Strategic Plan. The principles are;

- **Prevention:** Supporting and enabling citizens to help themselves and others. This is about how the Council works towards this and how the Authority communicates this with communities. Focus must be on how the information and advice produced underpins prevention and reduces demand, ensuring that it is accessible, relevant, and timely.
- **Engagement:** The Council will work across services, departments and with partners and will be led by its work with citizens and communities. Through listening and conversations and by building trusting relationships solutions will be collaboratively defined and designed locally.
- **Catalysts:** Voluntary and community sector organisations, social enterprises and parish and town councils are supported and empowered to collaborate and provide a range of effective services and activities for individuals and communities.

20. The principles of the refreshed Communities Approach will be supported by the Strategic Plan and associated Council plans and the delivery model will be underpinned by the themes of an asset-based approach centred on the strengths of local communities, and social action. These themes were introduced in the Communities Strategy 2017-21 and will be reiterated and emphasised as the basis for delivery for the work of the County Council over the next four years.

Engagement, conversations and further development

21. Engagement will be used to gather insight and understanding about Leicestershire Communities and the approach that the Council proposes.
22. It is proposed to engage on the draft Our Communities Approach with the Communities Board/Departmental Management Teams, workers groups, the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, parish and town councils, other public sector partners and the voluntary and community sector including VAL and the RCC. An asset-based approach will form the basis for this engagement and colleagues, partners and communities will be asked to discuss examples and experience of communities helping themselves, collaboration and partnership working. The methods of engagement will include a survey and dissemination of information through newsletters and briefings, with opportunities to feedback via group discussions, email responses and an on-line questionnaire. The engagement process will be promoted via an article in Leicestershire Matters, web articles and newsfeeds, social media and briefing meetings with stakeholder groups and organisations.
23. The proposed timescale for engagement, development and approval of the refreshed Our Communities Approach is:
 - November 2021 – January 2022 - engagement with communities and stakeholders
 - February 2022 - Final draft of the Approach produced
 - March 2022 - Report to the Cabinet on final draft of the Communities Approach
 - May 2022 - Report to the County Council seeking approval of the refreshed Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council collaborating with our Communities, Our Communities Approach 2022-26.

Equalities and Human Rights implications

24. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment screening document will be completed as the draft Approach is developed and will be used to inform the final draft of the Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council collaborating with our Communities, our Communities Approach 2022-26.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet – Working Together to Build Great Communities in Leicestershire: The Leicestershire Communities Strategy 2017-21 - 12 December 2017

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s134009/FINAL%20Communities%20Strategy%20report.pdf>

Appendix

Draft Refreshed Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council
collaborating with our Communities, our Communities Approach 2022-26

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