



SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 17TH NOVEMBER 2021

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

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny Commission with an opportunity to comment on the draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities - Our Communities Approach 2022-26 before consideration of the final draft by the Cabinet.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Cabinet approved the current Communities Strategy 2017- 21 on 12th December 2017. The draft refreshed Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council collaborating with our Communities - Our Communities Approach 2022-26, was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on the 26th October 2021 for engagement with stakeholders.
3. The draft Communities 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 and by building community capacity and assets. It will continue to enable delivery of all outcomes of the Councils’ Strategic Plan and will set out how (through the Approach) the Council will seek to achieve its priority outcomes. The revised draft Strategic Plan is also on the agenda for this Scrutiny Commission meeting.

Background

4. 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.
5. 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.

6. 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.
7. 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 Covid-19 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.
8. 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

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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

13. The Cabinet, at its meeting on 26th October 2021 approved engagement with stakeholders on the draft Communities Approach between 1st November 2021 and 21st January 2022. Engagement will be used to gather insight and understanding about Leicestershire Communities and the approach that the Council proposes.
14. The engagement process is now underway and will invite contributions from 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 a basis for the 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 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.
15. A questionnaire survey is open for community feedback on the Leicestershire Communities website at <https://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/getinvolved/communitiesapproach.html> The survey invites community views on the principles of the Communities Approach, the priority of supporting communities to design and deliver local solutions and how the Authority might do more to support this, the strength of local community assets (the skills, social relationships, community organisations and meeting places in a local area) and suggestions for local community involvement.

16. The Scrutiny Commission is invited to consider the Communities Approach in the context of:
- the above questions,
 - how the Approach can support the delivery of the Strategic Plan,
 - examples of good practice that showcase the Communities Approach,
 - any other stakeholders that could be targeted for engagement feedback, and,
 - any additional areas of focus that could be reflected in the draft Approach.
17. The draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities - Our Communities Approach 2022-26 is attached as an Appendix to this report.

Resource Implications

18. 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.
19. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on this report.

Conclusion

20. This report has been presented to the Commission to provide an opportunity for comment on the draft Strategy before consideration of the final draft by the Cabinet.

Timetable for Decisions

21. 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.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

22. 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>

Report to the Cabinet – Draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities- Our Communities Approach 2022-26 – 26th October 2021

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/g6447/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%206-Oct-2021%2014.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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Appendices

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

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