

## REPORT OF THE CABINET

### B. LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMUNITIES STRATEGY - OUR COMMUNITIES APPROACH 2022-26

#### **Introduction**

1. This report concerns the outcome of engagement on the draft Leicestershire County Council Communities Strategy - Our Communities Approach 2022-26. A copy of the Approach is appended to this report.

#### **Background**

##### **Development of the revised Communities Approach 2022-26**

3. 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 operates.
4. Since the adoption of the existing Strategy there has been a notable shift amongst commentators, think-tanks, policy developers and the Government 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 revised Communities Approach which should be viewed as the model for 'how' solutions can be achieved.
5. 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 various approaches embedded within the County Council.
  - 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.

#### **Engagement feedback**

6. The Cabinet, at its meeting on 26 October 2021, approved engagement with stakeholders on the draft Communities Approach between 1 November 2021 and 21 January 2022. This engagement period was subsequently extended to 18 February 2022 to coordinate with the extended timescale for consultation on the draft revised Strategic Plan

and to allow time for additional input to development of the revised Approach. Engagement was used to gather insight and understanding about Leicestershire Communities and the approach that the Council proposes.

7. The engagement process invited contributions the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, parish and town councils, other public sector partners and the voluntary and community sector including Voluntary Action Leicestershire and the RCC (previously known as the Rural Community Council) and colleagues. The methods of engagement included 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 was promoted via web articles and newsfeeds, social media and briefing meetings with stakeholder groups and organisations.
8. The questionnaire survey on the Leicestershire Communities website was the focus for community feedback and 97 responses were received. In addition to the survey, feedback was also received through meetings, letters, and stakeholder briefings.
9. Feedback from the engagement process showed support for the principles identified in the Communities Approach (73% agreeing, 24 % undecided and 3% disagreeing) including community empowerment, the role and potential of communities and the individuals, groups, and buildings within them. Other feedback received included calls for prioritisation of principles and actions, more clarification and information on how principles translate to action, recognition of the continuing value of the public as well as voluntary service delivery and broad and early co-production engagement starting with issues definition.
10. The engagement identified support for the objective to help communities to design and deliver solutions (60% agreeing, 19% undecided and 21% disagreeing) with suggestions for increased support in areas such as community buildings and mental health and wellbeing. A number of comments also promoted enhanced engagement with communities, including the most disadvantaged, and openness to community ideas and initiatives. Others called for the principles to be embedded across the Authority and highlighted the value of providing advice and support for communities and community groups.
11. There was a broad spread of opinion on the strength of local assets with 40% rating local resources as strong, 36% rating them as neither weak or strong and 24% rating them as weak. Views on how the Council could collaborate with communities to further strengthen community assets centred on support for enhancement of physical assets such as community centres and village halls and an identified need for improved and sustained communication and deepening trusting relationships with stakeholders. There were also suggestions

for increased recognition/funding of, and collaboration with, communities and increased devolution of power to communities and parish councils. Feedback highlighted the value of joint working with parish and town councils, district councils and communities in non-parished areas. Many positive examples of community collaboration were put forward as part of the engagement, with many people highlighting valuable community services delivered by/from community venues including community managed libraries, church halls, community cafes, community centres/village halls and heritage centres.

### **Comments of the Scrutiny Commission**

12. The engagement draft of the Communities Approach was considered by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 17 November 2021 and points made by Members at that meeting have been taken into account in the revised Communities Approach as follows:
- The Council should continue to support communities to come together and address local issues – the revised Approach has an increased focus on supporting empowerment, participation and enabling social action.
  - Prevention will continue to be of critical importance – there is a continuing focus on prevention in the revised Approach.
  - Unparished areas and the issues affecting them are not adequately represented in the draft Approach – the revised Approach highlights that the Council will continue to work with a wide range of voluntary and other groups that operate in non-parished areas.
  - There should be increased clarity around infrastructure support available via the RCC and the Leicestershire and Rutland County Association for Town and Parish Councils – delivery of the revised Approach will include a focus on enhanced communication including on how support services complement each other.
  - The vital role of volunteers should be further supported – support for volunteering is a focus of the revised Approach.
13. The outcome of engagement and the revised Communities Approach were considered by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022 and arising from discussion, the following points were made:
- Members welcomed the broad level of engagement undertaken and the conversations held with communities to seek their views on the Council's proposed Approach. It was acknowledged that the process had focused on ensuring good quality feedback and that this had provided some useful insights and helped to shape and inform the planned way forward.
  - The Commission was pleased that there was overall support for the Approach but acknowledged requests for further embedding existing practices and building on partnership working and what people were already doing within their communities.
  - The Members were satisfied that its comments and concerns previously made had been addressed and complimented the

revised Strategy, which was clear and focused, easy to follow and engaging. Members also welcomed the inclusion of hyperlinks which easily signposted communities to useful information and support available.

- A Member commented that the Strategy would be a valued document and support elected members in their role as community leaders.

14. The Scrutiny Commission resolved:

- (a) That the revised draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council– Our Communities Approach 2022-26 be welcomed and supported;
- (b) That the comments now made by the Commission be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

### **The revised Communities Approach**

15. The engagement draft of the Communities Approach was designed specifically to promote co-production of the Council's approach to working with communities and to encourage consideration, debate and feedback on the background, context and emerging direction of a future Approach. The revised Communities Approach retains the format of the engagement draft but has been restructured. The narrative and emphasis on previous work, policy development and context has been revised while the principles, themes and implementation objectives have been enhanced.
16. Engagement feedback has been taken into account and the revised draft includes increased explanation of the meaning of key concepts, and the mechanisms for embedding the principles within the Authority and for promoting them to partners.
17. The principles of the revised Communities Approach build on the priorities of the existing Strategy and cut across all Outcomes of the revised Strategic Plan. The principles, revised in light of engagement feedback, are outlined below;
  - **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.
  - **Participation:** 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.

18. The principles of the 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.
19. This change has also led to the replacement of the Principle of Engagement with one centred on Participation that better reflects the ambition to work with and alongside partners and communities in collaboration and reflects the partnership sub-objective of the Strategic Plan.
20. To augment the Communities Approach whilst retaining a shorter document, a dedicated resource has been developed on the Leicestershire Communities Website ([www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk](http://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk)). This focuses on asset-based thinking and doing and features local and national examples, academic research and case studies that identify and demonstrate how activities can support the principles of the Communities Approach and the Outcomes of the revised Strategic plan.

#### **Consideration by the Cabinet**

21. The Cabinet at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March noted the outcome of the consultation and approved the revised Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council – Our Communities Approach 2022-26.

**(Motion to be moved: -**

**That the Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council - Our Communities Approach 2022-26, appended to the report, be approved.)**

**Mr N. J. Rushton  
Leader of the Council**

#### **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 – 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/g6447/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2026-Oct-2021%2014.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Report to Scrutiny Commission - Draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities- Our Communities Approach 2022-26 – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=6747&Ver=4>

Report to the Scrutiny Commission – 9 March 2022 – Draft Communities Strategy – Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities, our Communities Approach 2022-26

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=6868&Ver=4>

### **Appendix**

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