



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 11TH July 2014

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Commission's comments on the Council's draft Communities Strategy, which is attached as Appendix A to this report. The draft Strategy sets out how the Council will address three specific priorities:
 - Priority 1: Building the resilience and capacity of communities to support themselves and vulnerable individuals and families - thus reducing demand on public services
 - Priority 2: Supporting community groups to take over relevant services, including those currently delivered by the County Council, and to work more closely alongside us to design and deliver services
 - Priority 3: Developing voluntary and community sector organisations in Leicestershire as effective providers in a mixed, diverse market which supports delivery of our service devolution and support for vulnerable people priorities, and effective commissioning of the sector
2. The Commission is also asked to note that it was agreed at Cabinet on June 17 that the resources currently deployed to support the network of 25 Community Forums should be diverted to support both corporate and service-specific engagement relating to the Council's service transformation agenda.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

3. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2014/15 – 2017/18, including the 2014/15 revenue budget and capital programme, was approved by the County Council on 19 February 2014. The MTFS sets out a new vision for the County Council and a new Target Operating Model (TOM) which reflects the imperative to adopt a much more integrated approach to prevention and early intervention so that fewer people are reliant on costly public services.

4. The Cabinet agreed in March to consult on the allocation of savings of £590,000 against the Chief Executive's Department's budget line 'Funding and Support to Agencies' (S72) and to approve the proposed approach to delivering savings of £430,000 against the budget line 'Provision and refocusing of grants to individuals and community groups' (S71) in the MTFs. Both of these budget lines contribute to delivery of the Communities Strategy. The consultation on the former ended on June 2nd 2014.
5. The County Council's Strategic Plan was approved by the Council on 21 May 2014. It sets out high priorities and supporting actions and targets for the Authority over the next four years.
6. The Transformation Programme, approved by the Cabinet on 6 May, sets out how the Council will transform both services and the ways it operates to deliver its priorities and meeting financial challenges.
7. As a detailed plan for supporting Leicestershire communities, the Communities Strategy aligns closely to the Transformation Programme and Strategic Plan.
8. Cabinet approved the draft Communities Strategy for a 10 week consultation period, from 23 June to 1 September, at its meeting on June 17.

Background

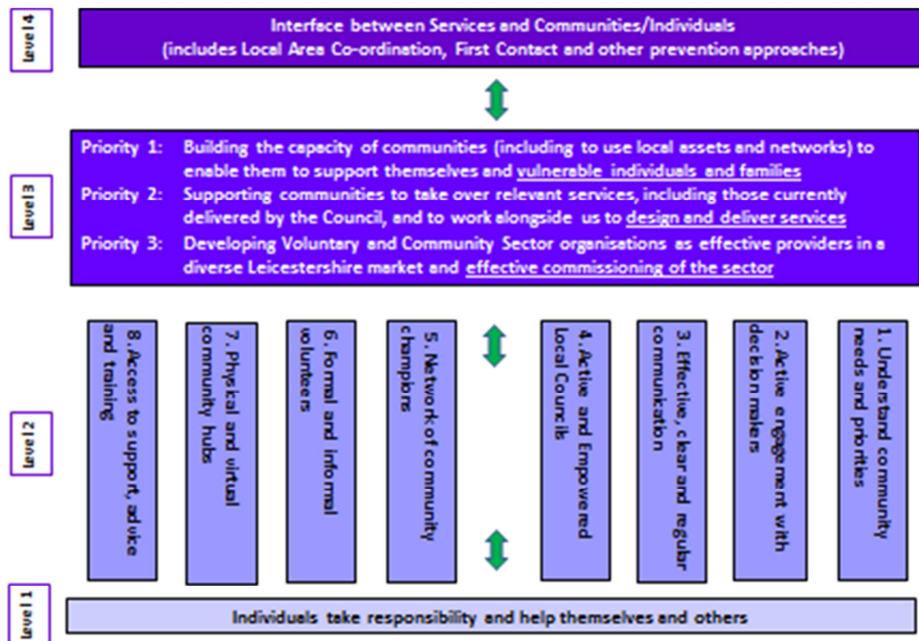
9. The Council has a longstanding track record of working in partnership with its communities and 'helping them to help themselves', including through its previous Big Society and Communities in Charge initiatives. In 2010, the Council worked with partners, local community groups and voluntary sector organisations to develop and agree four Leicestershire aspirations:
 - Everyone can be involved in their community
 - Everyone has opportunities to influence decisions that affect them
 - Local people are able to shape and deliver public services
 - Local people and organisations grow the Big Society together
10. In 2007 25 Community Forums (also known as Area and Resident Forums) were established by the County Council under the auspices of Leicestershire Together. All forums except those in Oadby and Wigston are organised by the County Council and 19 are serviced by the Council. All areas have at least two public meetings a year (some meet more often) which bring together Councillors, residents and service providers. In addition to the meetings themselves, there is also the leicestershireforums.org website, which is well-used and received more than 70,000 unique visits in 2013, an e-mail alert service (with a circulation of more than 4,000 people) which promotes opportunities for people to 'have their say' and funding opportunities, and the Community Forum participatory budget process.

11. However, there is now less money, increasing demand for services and major changes to both public services and the welfare system are in train. The combined effect of these changes on communities is that fewer services will be available to fewer people and there are likely to be more vulnerable people at risk.
12. In response to the more challenging financial climate, the Council has developed a new Communities Strategy. This moves away from the generic aspirations set out in paragraph 16, to instead focus on working with communities to reduce demand for services, supporting communities to work alongside the Council to deliver services/take on devolved service delivery and repositioning the voluntary sector as part of a vibrant and effective market that supports the Council in delivering its ambitions. This Strategy builds on the Council's previous approaches (and learning), but is closely aligned to the Council's new transformation programme and priorities.
13. The Communities Strategy sets out the Council's proposals for the role of Leicestershire communities (both communities of place and of interest) in a new public service environment. Significant change is required in order to achieve the required savings whilst protecting the most vulnerable individuals and communities. It is therefore essential that the Council works with partners in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to reduce demand for services and empowers communities to work alongside it to deliver key services to Leicestershire citizens.

Proposal

14. The draft Strategy represents a move away from generic support for all communities in Leicestershire and towards a more nuanced approach. A good example of this is the cessation of support for the 25 Community Forums, instead focusing the County Council's on different forms of community engagement, ensuring that these are timely, reach the right audiences and uses the most suitable channel for both the service change and the audience in question. This reflects the necessity for robust engagement to underpin our service transformation ambitions and will enable us to utilise our remaining resource to best effect.
15. The Strategy articulates the Council's ambition to build community capacity in order to help it to achieve three key outcomes:
 - 1) a longer term 'demand management' role, which involves building capacity and resilience of local communities to support themselves and vulnerable individuals and families;
 - 2) supporting community groups to take over relevant services, including those currently delivered by the County Council, and to work more closely alongside us to design and deliver services
 - 3) an intention to developing voluntary and community sector organisations in Leicestershire as effective providers in a mixed, diverse market which supports delivery of our service devolution and support for vulnerable people priorities, and effective commissioning of the sector

Leicestershire Communities Model



16. The diagram above sets out the four distinct, but closely connected, dimensions to our approach to working with communities. These are described below, working from the top of the diagram:

Interface between services and communities/individuals

17. The interface between services and communities/individuals, level one on the diagram, will become increasingly important over the coming months and years. There are a number of different 'enablers', one of which is Local Area Co-ordination (LAC). LAC is a key dimension of the unified prevention approach at the heart of the Better Care Plan and will be tested in eight learning sites from autumn 2014. Local Area Coordinators (LACs) will be based within the community, have close links to the local GP practice(s), work with between 50-65 individuals and their families at any time and provide a vital interface between vulnerable individuals/families, services and communities. They are a single, accessible point of contact, identifying and supporting vulnerable people, particularly those with disabilities, the frail elderly and those with mental health issues, before they hit crisis.

Priorities

18. The second level in the diagram reflects our main priorities – enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to support themselves and vulnerable individuals and families, increasing the ambition, appetite and ability of community groups, social enterprises and the voluntary sector to take over, or work alongside the Council to deliver, public services and a repositioning of the voluntary sector as part of a diverse market. More detail about each of these priorities is set out in the Strategy document.

'Building blocks'

19. The third level shows the 'building blocks' of the Communities Strategy. These are the things that local voluntary organisations, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and partner organisations have told us need to be in place in order for communities and the voluntary sector to be able to work with us to deliver our priorities:

Strong and Resilient Communities...

- understand community needs and priorities
- engage actively with public services
- communicate effectively with service providers
- have active local councils and residents groups
- nurture a network of champions
- support formal and informal volunteering
- operate a wide range of activities from one or more community 'hub'
- have access to the right funding, support and training

Role of individuals

20. The final level is about how we encourage individuals to make better choices, including how to live healthier lives and how and where to live. We also want to encourage people to take greater responsibility for themselves and others, including by improving their physical and emotional wellbeing, to reduce the risk that they will need to rely on services in the future.

Community Forums

21. The volume and complexity of the service changes and reductions that the Council is required to make over the coming years is unprecedented. Its engagement and consultation activity will therefore need to focus on implementing the necessary savings. In this context, it was considered that continued support for the network of 25 Community Forums across the County in their current form is not sustainable and that the Council can no longer commit to supporting a generic service i.e. holding at least 2 Community Forum meetings a year per Forum area, regardless of whether there are locally relevant issues and/or service changes to discuss at that particular point in time.
22. It was therefore agreed by Cabinet that the Council should redirect the resources until recently used for Community Forums to instead support

corporate and service-specific engagement around its transformation proposals, for example the current engagement around proposed changes to libraries and museums. The consultation on the Communities Strategy therefore includes specific questions and conversations about how communities and their representatives (including Town and Parish Councils) can best engage with the Council about key issues, including service changes/devolution and funding reductions, in the future.

23. It is proposed to continue the participatory budgeting process in a different form, alongside the launch of the new Shire Community Solutions Grants, and options relating to a new form of participatory budgeting will be presented to the Cabinet on July 20th.
24. It is important to note that the valuable contribution of the Community Forum Chairs (both past and present), and their time and commitment in supporting Community Forums over the last 6 years, was acknowledged by Cabinet and through individual correspondence following the Cabinet meeting.

Consultations

25. The consultation on the draft Communities Strategy will run for a ten week period between 23 June and 1 September 2014. This will enable a final version to be considered by the Cabinet on 14 October 2014. All members of the County Council will be consulted, along with LCC staff, Town and Parish Councils, community groups, voluntary sector organisations and public sector partners and stakeholders.
26. The consultation will seek views on the draft Strategy document as a whole, the three identified priorities and eight 'building blocks', and on specific aspects of the outline delivery plan. As outlined above, this will include questions about the best way for the Council to engage with communities and their representatives in the future given the proposed move away from supporting a network of 25 Community Forums across the County.
27. The consultation period includes a Member Workshop on Thursday 7 August, staff workshops and specific stakeholder and voluntary sector briefing events.

Resource Implications

28. Detailed funding proposals around 'Funding and Support to Agencies' and 'Grants to Individuals and Community Groups' were considered by the Cabinet on March 5th. The Communities Strategy has a role to play in terms of influencing the role of communities in all relevant future transformation and service change proposals.
29. The repositioning of the funding and staffing resource currently used to support Community Forums will ensure robust engagement with communities, residents, stakeholders and partners around the Council's transformation agenda.
30. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Timetable for Decisions (Including Scrutiny)

31. The 10-week consultation period on the draft Strategy runs from 23 June and 1 September 2014.
32. A further report, summarising the consultation findings including the Scrutiny Commission comments and proposed changes to the draft Strategy, will be presented to the Cabinet on 14th October 2014.

Conclusions

33. The draft Strategy represents a move away from generic support for all communities in Leicestershire towards a more nuanced approach, focusing on new ways of working with communities to utilise the Council's reduced resources to best effect. The consultation exercise will help the Council to develop the final Strategy and refine the outline delivery plan.
34. Comments are sought from the Scrutiny Commission on the draft Communities Strategy. A further report on the outcome of the consultation exercise, including any comments from the Commission, will be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 14 October.

Background Papers

Cabinet 12th June 2012 Final Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on the Big Society

[http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003392/AI00031496/\\$BBigSocietyPanelReport.doc.pdf](http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003392/AI00031496/$BBigSocietyPanelReport.doc.pdf)

Cabinet 16th January 2013 Communities in Charge Programme

[http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003628/AI00033436/\\$Hcommunitiesinchargeprogramme.doc.pdf](http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003628/AI00033436/$Hcommunitiesinchargeprogramme.doc.pdf)

Cabinet 5 March 2014 Reduction in Funding and Support to Agencies

[http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003988/AI00037205/\\$9reductioninfundingandsupporttoagencies.docxA.ps.pdf](http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/C00000135/M00003988/AI00037205/$9reductioninfundingandsupporttoagencies.docxA.ps.pdf)

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

35. A copy of this report has been sent to all Members of the Council under the Members News in Brief service.

Appendix

Appendix A – Draft Communities Strategy

Appendix B – Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment

Relevant Impact Assessments

Equal Opportunities Implications

An Initial Equalities and Human Rights Assessment has been carried out on the Strategy. This is attached as Appendix B.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

It is anticipated that the County Council will work with partners to deliver specific aspects of the Communities Strategy, including through the Stronger Communities Board.

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