



CABINET – 13th OCTOBER 2014

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

PART A

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to detail the responses to the consultation on the draft Communities Strategy and to seek the Cabinet's approval of the revised final Strategy for the County Council and for the development of a detailed Delivery Plan incorporating the views of local partners.
2. This report and the proposed final Communities Strategy should be considered in the context of the reports approved by the Cabinet in May 2014 regarding the County Council's Strategic Plan and its Transformation Programme.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The outcome of the consultation on the draft Communities Strategy as summarised in paragraphs 20 to 34 and detailed in Appendix C to this report be noted;
 - (b) The Communities Strategy attached to this report as Appendix B be approved;
 - (c) A detailed Communities Strategy Delivery Plan be developed and that partners, communities and their representatives be engaged in the development of this Plan;
 - (d) The final Communities Strategy Delivery Plan be presented for consideration to the Cabinet at its meeting in January 2015.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The draft Strategy represents a move away from generic support for all communities in Leicestershire and towards a more nuanced approach which focuses on new ways of working with communities to utilise the Council's reduced resources to best effect.

5. The consultation exercise has informed the content of the final Strategy and helped to refine the outline Delivery Plan. However, a strong recommendation, arising from both the on-line consultation and the eight workshops held during the consultation period, was that additional work should be undertaken with partners and communities to develop a more detailed Delivery Plan.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. As part of the consultation, the draft Strategy was considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 11th July 2014. The comments of the Scrutiny Commission are attached as Appendix A.
7. This Cabinet report will be presented to the Scrutiny Commission on 10th October to enable it to consider the final Strategy. Comments of the Scrutiny Commission will be reported to the Cabinet.
8. A further report, summarising the outcomes of the further engagement undertaken in relation to the Delivery Plan, and a final Delivery Plan will be presented to an appropriate meeting of the Scrutiny Commission and then to the Cabinet at its meeting on 14th January 2015.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. The 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 19th February 2014. The MTFS sets out a new vision for the County Council and a new Target Operating Model (TOM) which reflects the need to adopt a much more integrated approach to prevention and early intervention so that fewer people are reliant on costly public services.
10. The Cabinet agreed on 5th March 2014 to consult on the allocation of savings of £590,000 against the Chief Executive's Department's 'Funding and Support to Agencies' budget (S72) and approved the proposed approach for delivering savings of £430,000 against the 'Provision and refocusing of grants to individuals and community groups' budget (S71) as set out in in the MTFS. Both of these budget lines contribute to the delivery of the Communities Strategy.
11. Along with the Council's new Strategic Plan and the Transformation Programme agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 6th May, the draft Communities Strategy provides an overview of the Council's ambitions and intentions regarding how it will work with communities over the coming months and years.

Resource Implications

12. There are no direct financial implications in relation to the Communities Strategy. However, it is proposed that various funding streams be tailored to support the Council's new approach to working with communities. The Strategy will guide the extent to which communities play a role in all relevant future transformation and service change proposals.

13. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

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

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PART B

Background

15. 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 the following four Leicestershire aspirations:
 - i. Everyone can be involved in their community;
 - ii. Everyone has opportunities to influence decisions that affect them;
 - iii. Local people are able to shape and deliver public services;
 - iv. Local people and organisations grow the Big Society together.

16. However, there is now less money, increasing demand for services and major changes being made to both public services and the welfare system. The combined effect of these changes on communities is that fewer services will be available for fewer people and there are therefore likely to be more vulnerable people at risk.

17. The final proposed Communities Strategy attached at Appendix B sets out the County Council's thinking about the role of Leicestershire communities (both communities of place and of interest) in this new context. It is essential that the Council works with partners in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to reduce demand for services and empower communities to work alongside it to deliver key services to Leicestershire citizens.

18. The Communities Strategy moves away from the generic aspirations set out in paragraph 15 above, to instead focus on working with communities to reduce demand for services (a longer term demand management role), 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.

The draft Communities Strategy

19. The draft and final Strategy sets out how the Council will address three specific priorities:
 - Priority 1: Unlock the capacity of communities to support themselves and vulnerable individuals and families - thus reducing demand for public services

 - Priority 2: Support communities to work in partnership with us to design and deliver services, including those currently delivered by the council

 - Priority 3: Develop voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in Leicestershire as effective providers in a diverse market which supports

delivery of Council priorities to devolved services and support vulnerable people.

The Consultation Process

20. The draft Strategy was subject to a 10 week consultation process between 23rd June and 1st September 2014. All members of the County Council were consulted, along with County Council staff, Town and Parish Councils, community groups, equalities groups, voluntary sector organisations and public sector partners and stakeholders.
21. The consultation took the form of an on-line consultation survey and eight workshops with different groups of stakeholders (Councillors, Senior Managers, Staff (two), wider Stakeholders, Voluntary and Community Sector, Town and Parish Councils and the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group).
22. The draft Strategy was also considered at a number of partnership meetings, including the Health and Well Being Board.

The Consultation Findings

23. 90 individuals/representatives of groups completed the on-line consultation survey and more than 200 people participated across the eight workshops. The findings are set out in detail in Appendix C, which is a full report on the responses to all elements of the consultation process. A summary is given below.

General Comments

24. The majority of respondents supported the Communities Strategy. For example, almost 4 in 5 of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with focussing County Council resources on delivery of the Strategy's three priorities around supporting vulnerability, devolving services and developing the voluntary and community sector. In addition, there was 75% net support for all but one of the Building Blocks the strategy proposes and only 1 in 10 of respondents did not feel that the right actions had been identified.
25. Within the minority, there were some respondents who were opposed to the Strategy in principle, linking it with a reduction in services and a failure to identify savings or income elsewhere - for example, reducing the Members budget, using the Council's reserves or increasing Council Tax.
26. More generic comments suggested that the Strategy was too long and complex and lacked detail, and needed to be clearer as to what the Council can and will do and what it meant by 'community'. Other less critical responses highlighted the need to work with and involve other local authorities, local businesses and local groups. The County Council needed to foster a culture that recognised the capacity, diversity, responsibility of these components.

Vulnerability (Priority 1)

27. Respondents stressed the need to empower vulnerable people and felt the need to reduce demand was required across the whole system, not just the County Council. Respondents felt that communities required a better understanding of vulnerability, but there was a recognition that existing networks and groups could support vulnerable people. Responses stressed the need to distinguish between short-term and long-term vulnerability as well as being in a position to understand the type of specialist support it would be appropriate for communities to provide.

Service Devolution (Priority 2)

28. Respondent's concerns focussed on the sustainability of devolved services based on volunteers. For example, will there be enough volunteers? What value could volunteers add by replacing or working alongside paid, specialist staff?
29. A list of service devolution opportunities was identified – Highways (reporting of minor defects and minor works), Libraries, Recycling and Reuse, Youth services/work, Grass Cutting, Public and Community Transport, Home Care, Befriending, Meals services, Public Health Services, Mental Health support and Country parks/open spaces were all mentioned multiple times. Communities, the voluntary and community services (VCS) and local councils also want to be able to see the complete picture in terms of service changes/reductions/ cuts and have this information clearly communicated.

VCS (Priority 3)

30. Respondents recognised the need for VCS contracts to support the delivery of the Communities Strategy. This VCS requires infrastructure support in order to diversify and secure different resources. It was felt that VCS support was most needed to 'support older people to live independently', 'support people with mental health problems' and 'support vulnerable families'.

Building Blocks

31. 'Funding', 'training' and 'support/advice' were the top three areas of support identified, with the need for the County Council and district councils to join up their respective offers also being referenced. In addition, respondents felt communities needed access to good quality evidence and information to help achieve the Strategies aims around supporting vulnerable people. More specific responses highlighted were as follows:
- the need to combine Building Blocks 2 and 3 (communicate effectively and engage actively);
 - that Local Councils and residents groups should not be included in the same Building Block; and
 - that the Helpline at the County Council should direct people to appropriate support.

Engagement and Communication

32. The three preferred methods for receiving information from the County Council were 'by e-mail', 'on the website' or 'in my community newsletter or magazine'. The three least preferred methods were 'by post', 'through social media' and 'by attending meetings and events'. The preferred methods of engaging with decision makers were also 'by e-mail', but also 'by attending specific public meetings/events/forums based on local priorities/issues and 'through representative or infrastructure groups'.

Community Champions

33. Respondents recognised 'people who lead on community projects', 'people who support local groups/charities' and 'Town/Parish councillors' as community champions. Many felt that Community Champions should represent their whole community and not operate as 'gatekeepers' and the County Council needed to empower people to become these role models.

Volunteering

34. The top three barriers to volunteering were 'lack of time', 'fear of liability' and 'family/caring responsibilities'. Suggestions to address these included, a volunteering hub (the County Council does operate a hub through its contract with Voluntary Action Leicestershire), local events and taster sessions to promote volunteering and free training for volunteers. Respondents asked that the County Council also consider providing:
- a paid resource to support volunteer recruitment and matching, training, retention and on-going support;
 - a County Council employee volunteering scheme/volunteering challenge;
 - incentives and rewards for volunteering, e.g. community volunteer credit scheme, certificates, access to small grants.

Changes made to the draft Strategy

35. The main changes that have been made to the Strategy in response to the feedback received during the consultation process are summarised below. The final proposed version of the Strategy is attached as Appendix B.
36. In general, the language used in the Strategy has been simplified and where more complex key words are included, explanations/definitions have been provided (e.g. for words such as commissioning, public sector, capacity). The length of the strategy has also been reduced.
37. The Strategy is more explicit about the need to work in partnership with other local authorities and public sector partners, local businesses and local community groups in order to deliver it effectively and many of the key points from the consultation have been incorporated into the Strategy, including those outlined above.

38. In addition, some specific alterations have been made including the following:
- The name of Building Block 1 ‘Understand community needs and priorities’ has been changed to ‘Communities understand their needs and priorities’;
 - Building Blocks 2 and 3 (‘Active engagement with decision makers’ and ‘Effective, clear and regular communication’) have been combined into a new Building Block 3 ‘Communities communicate their needs and engage effectively with decision makers’;
 - A new Building Block 2 has been added: ‘Communities take responsibility for meeting their own needs’;
 - Each Priority and Building Block now includes a section about what the heading means. This often includes key findings from/points made through the consultation process;
 - A new section has been added under each priority and headed ‘We already support this Priority/Building Block by...’ which includes an overview of existing and planned County Council support;
 - New indicative actions have been included throughout the revised Strategy (Appendix B) under the Priorities and Building Blocks based on the consultation results which will be further developed during the proposed engagement on the Delivery Plan.

Further Consultation

39. A further engagement process is proposed in order to develop the detail in the Delivery Plan which sits alongside the Communities Strategy. Whilst the actions included in the delivery section of the Strategy have been updated and expanded, it was felt that a more detailed Delivery Plan should be produced. This engagement will be focussed around a series of themed workshops to be held between October and December 2014.

Background Papers

Report to the 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)

Report to the 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)

Report to the Cabinet 5th 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)

Appendices

Appendix A – Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 10th October 2014

Appendix B – Draft Communities Strategy

Appendix C – Consultation Results – Full Report

Relevant Impact Assessments

40. Equality and Human Rights Implications

An Initial Equalities and Human Rights Assessment (EHRIA) has been carried out on the Strategy. It is proposed that a full EHRIA be conducted on the Delivery Plan and this will be included in the report to the Cabinet in January 2015.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

41. It is anticipated that the County Council will work with a wide range of partners to deliver specific aspects of the Communities Strategy, specifically District Councils, businesses, faith organisations and health organisations.

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