

**EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION MEETING
HELD ON 11 JULY 2014 RELATING TO THE DRAFT COMMUNITIES STRATEGY**

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive, the purpose of which was to seek the Commission's comments on the Council's draft Communities Strategy. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mrs. P. Posnett CC, Lead Member for Communities to the meeting.

Arising from discussion, the following principal points were noted:

- i) The draft Communities Strategy recognised that due to austerity, the County Council had to refocus its resources on delivering its statutory responsibilities, core functions, and protecting the most vulnerable people in Leicestershire. The Strategy also sought to make best use of the remaining resources still available to the Council to focus on helping communities to support individuals and families in most need, and enabling community groups to provide services for their communities, including services that the County Council could no longer afford to provide;
- ii) There was some concern expressed as to whether there was a sufficient number of volunteers available to support the Council's intentions to reduce the demand on public services and use community volunteers to help design and deliver some services that it currently provided;
- iii) As such, members considered that capacity building of volunteers could be helped through a re-focusing of the support contract the Authority held with the Rural Community Council to ensure a greater amount of support to urban and built up un-parished areas. It was considered the development of community champions would also help in this regard, as would the cascading of information through District Voluntary Sector forums and via other networks such as Residents' Associations;
- iv) In seeking to broaden the pool of volunteers in Leicestershire, the Strategy would also seek to link in to the work and skills agenda, i.e. helping unemployed volunteers develop particular skill sets that could help them back into work;
- v) With regard to supporting community groups in delivering relevant services that the County Council may no longer be able to support, for example rural libraries, such support could include providing assistance to community groups in the recruitment of volunteers and providing a level of tapered infrastructure support;
- vi) It was acknowledged that the level of support that the County Council needed to provide in support to community groups may differ between localities. In all cases where support was considered, an equality impact assessment would be undertaken;

- vii) A criticism of the Government's Big Society policy had been that it was very aspirational but difficult to measure in terms of performance outcomes. The intention of the draft Communities Strategy was to be more focussed and measurable, through the production of a delivery plan and targeted outcomes such as service devolution;
- viii) An all-member briefing would be held as part of the consultation on 7 August, prior to Cabinet considering the consultation outcome on 14 October 2014.

RESOLVED:

- a) That officers be requested to take into account the Scrutiny Commission's comments now made as part of the consultation process for the draft Communities Strategy;
- b) That a further report on the outcome of the consultation exercise be considered by the Scrutiny Commission prior to consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting on 14 October 2014.