Leicestershire Communities

Leicestershire County Council
Collaborating with our Communities

Our Communities Approach
2022 - 26 Draft

Leicestershire
County Council

Contents

Foreword

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It is heartening to see that collaborating with, and working alongside, Leicestershire Communities is at the forefront of the way in which the county council makes it plans and delivers its services. This approach has guided our work for many years, and there are many inspiring examples of what has been jointly achieved, but there are also opportunities to go further and I am delighted that this draft strategy makes a strong commitment to fully embed a way of working centred on an asset-based approach and the value of social action.

Every community has a tremendous supply of assets including people, skills, land and buildings and networks that can be used to build the community and solve the challenges that require a shared commitment and a willingness to come together. The approach of communities and the council to the Covid 19 pandemic is testament to this and has also informed our Communities Approach.

This is a draft document, it sets out a proposed way of working for the council over the coming years and we would be very pleased to hear your views.

> "*I am delighted that this draft strategy makes a strong commitment to fully embed a way of working centred on an asset-based approach and the value of social action.*"

Introduction

This Communities Approach sets out our aspirations to strengthen and further embed Leicestershire County Council's approach to decision making and to designing and delivering public services in Leicestershire. Formerly known as the Leicestershire Communities Strategy, this refreshed and updated Communities Approach has been informed by:

Recognising and learning from the difference made by approaches to working with communities that have become embedded within the county council and growing these,

The role and significance of civil society (communities and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector [VCSE]) prior to and during covid-19 (including social action and community responses)

A focus on recovery from the pandemic and the plans to 'build back better'.

Our first Communities Strategy 2014-17 was delivered against the backdrop of austerity measures and at a time when making efficiencies, within a market-led, transaction-based public service framework was required. The impact of these measures meant that adopting new models of delivery and relationships with citizens was needed to mitigate the impacts of reduced resources on Leicestershire communities.

New models were beginning to be adopted and during this period we saw the establishment of Community Managed Libraries, the creation of Local Area Coordinators within Leicestershire and, with more savings needed, a continued commitment to support our communities and voluntary sector through grants and commissioned activities, albeit within a reduced resource envelope.

The aim of the Communities Strategy 2017-21 'Working Together to Build Great Communities' was to move away from the dire warnings of the previous few years and to look at 'what can be done.' This aim was underpinned by 4 Key Priorities:

1. Communities support themselves, individuals and families

2. Communities in collaboration with public services, are supported to design and deliver better outcomes for the people of Leicestershire

3. Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, Social Enterprises and Parish & Town Councils are supported and empowered to provide a range of effective services and activities for individuals and communities

4. The Council continues to be outward focussed, and open to new ways of working

The Strategy introduced asset-based approaches to support and enable 'how' we do things. It has helped change our thinking and provided the impetus to collaborative solutions that have developed new relationships, values and culture within the county council and with our communities.

Key Achievements 2017-21

Supporting Voluntary, Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) infrastructure and community organisations

*Leicestershire has a dynamic and diverse VCSE, with **over 3,000** different organisations operating across the county, ranging from **small grassroots groups**, to **social enterprise**s and **national charities**.*

These organisations have a strong track record of innovation and responsiveness to communities and are an essential part of improving the lives of people across the county.

Support for the VCSE in Leicestershire is provided by an infrastructure services contract that is delivered by Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL). The service is jointly commissioned with West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and East Leicestershire and Rutland Clinical Commissioning Group. It is aligned to the shared objectives of the county council and CCGs around managing demand through early/community level intervention and prevention, increasing community resilience and more effective delivery of services by community groups. The Service brings together commissioners and sector groups in information, advice and learning events, provides advice and support around topics such as governance, group development and funding and promotes, develops and supports volunteering.

In addition to the infrastructure contract, support for the VCSE in Leicestershire is also enabled by a contract with CASE (Cooperative and Social Enterprise Development Agency) to provide support for social enterprise development and a grant to the RCC to provide assistance for Community Buildings; an invaluable resource where community activities take place, where people meet and from where services are delivered.

Supporting Town & Parish Councils

Leicestershire has a total of 191 Town and Parish Councils and a further 89 Parish Meetings. The council works closely with the Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC) to support Parish & Town Councils and has a Grant Agreement with the Association to help enable this support.

They key elements of the agreement are around engagement with the Sector and enhancing the role of Parish & Town Councils. We meet regularly with Parish Clerks to discuss operational matters. We have developed a dedicated contact point for all Parish & Town Councils within our Customer Service Centre alongside a dedicated resource within our Communities Team. A new website – A-Roads to Zebras' – has also been launched to support Parish & Town Councils with Highways related queries and applications. We have held several meetings, briefings and training sessions around the 'Climate Emergency' which will help shape the support we can offer to Parish & Town Councils in responding to our Net Zero goal.

A recent focus has been identifying and securing additional support, through the LRALC, around the financial impact of the pandemic on our Parish & Town Councils. Tailor-made training sessions and 1-1 support are included in the package of support offered to all Parish & Town Councils for 2021-22.

Embedding Asset Based Approaches

An asset-based approach is one that harnesses the skills, knowledge, connections and potential which already exist within communities. Through a combination of influencing and direct delivery a range of asset-based projects and programmes have been supported and delivered working with peers and colleagues, local, regional and national partners and Leicestershire communities and citizens.

Within the Council the Communities Team has developed a number of long and short facilitated asset-based sessions; tailored to different teams and departments to meet the needs of groups ranging from small new teams to entire services and inter-departmental groups.

With partners from health and the VCSE we have designed and delivered a long-term asset-based development programme running over 6 months that has resulted in a number of collaborative, practical new initiatives. We have also facilitated sessions with partners such as Town and Parish Councils and, by invitation, delivered workshops to partner conferences.

Within communities themselves we have hosted events such as Community Roadshows to put asset-based approaches into practice and enable whole geographical communities to come together. We have also worked with communities of interest such as Community Manged Libraries, collecting and developing tools and resources to be made available to all.

Website

The Leicestershire Communities website is a resource which provides a range of useful information to help local people to actively participate in their communities. It continues to be a place where our communities can find information and support. The website has dedicated pages for the Neighbourhood Planning Network and Community Managed Libraries where volunteers can manage and update their own pages.

www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/
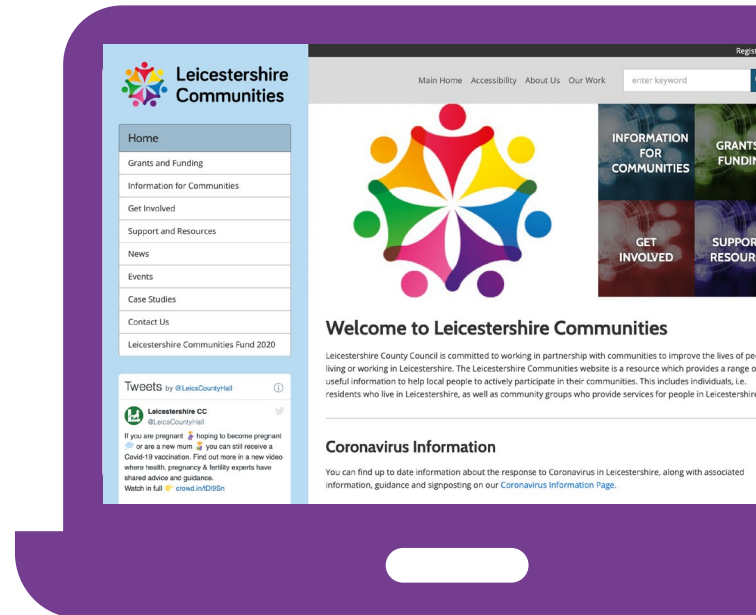
SHIRE Community Grants Fund

Leicestershire County Council's SHIRE Community Grants programme provides grant funding to charities and other voluntary/community organisations and social enterprises, to support the delivery of services, projects and activities which improve the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged people and groups.

www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/grants/

The Communities Board

The Communities Board was established in August 2016 to co-ordinate delivery of the Communities Strategy across the Council by developing active, resilient and inclusive communities. Progress and proposals are overseen and driven forward by the Board which meets bi-monthly and includes senior representatives from across the Council.

The Communities Strategy acts as a key enabler across the work of all Council departments and all five Outcomes of the **Strategic Plan**, although it is acknowledged that it has a strongest connection to the Great Communities Outcome. The Communities Strategy aims to facilitate and drive culture change within the Council and identifies opportunities to do things differently by:

Encouraging, enabling and supporting volunteers and volunteering	Creating the conditions and commissioning for social action and asset-based thinking and doing	Working with communities, town & parish councils, the VCSE and businesses.

Covid-19 – Since March 2020

March-June

Leicestershire County Council had a leading role in the response for our communities to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the host for the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) there was a clear line of responsibility within the Authority for the initial set-up and support for the crisis response. Structures were quickly established across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR) to identify issues and co-ordinate support. This included the establishment and leadership of partnership response 'cells' that were tasked with dealing with all aspects of the response.

Whilst specialists for health, care and blue light services were drawn into the planning for their responsibilities, LCC established and led the

Voluntary, Faith and Community Engagement Cell and the sub-cells that were tasked with supporting our communities.

*At this time, our ongoing work, informed by the **Communities Strategy 2017-21**, and our role in supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector, Town and Parish Councils, communities and working with partners, was invaluable.*
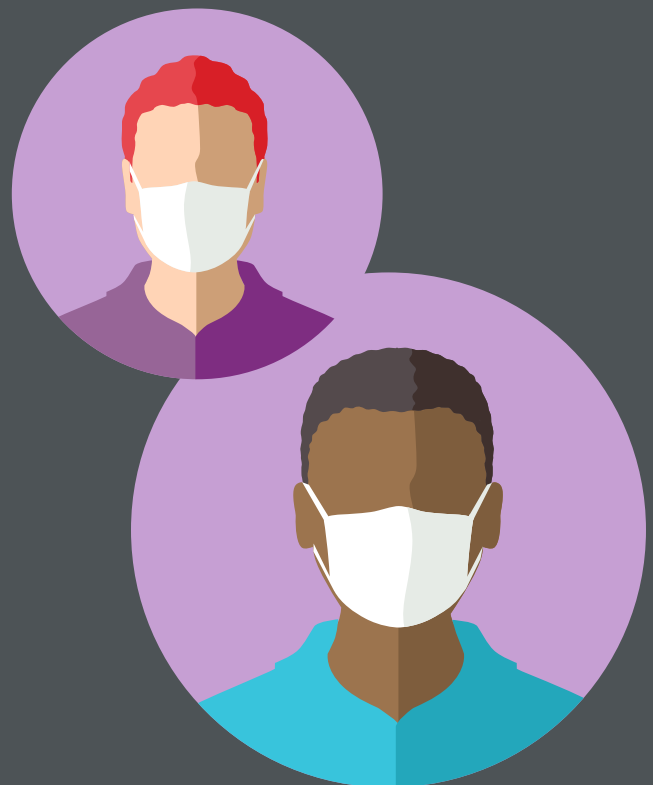
Within the LRF a Community and Volunteering group was established and has been responsible for supporting and driving forward work linked to:

The multiple community responses that were happening across LLR in support of neighbours and communities within local areas.

The role and impact on voluntary and community sector organisations in supporting communities and those that were shielding, how these organisations were operating and could continue.

The establishment and co-ordination of volunteering and volunteers in support of delivering the response to requests for help from both individuals and public services as consequence of the pandemic.

LEICESTERSHIRE

£2.6m
COMMUNITIES FUND

3 ROUNDS
OF FUNDING

GRANTS
AWARDED **379**

Communities Fund

In March 2020 the Council announced a £1 million fund to support voluntary and community sector organizations in the county to manage the financial impacts of the pandemic. This hardship fund was established to enable local groups, impacted by reduced income from sales/ trading, room rental or donations, to keep on providing essential support to vulnerable people, including those isolating and with reduced social contact.

The grant fund was subsequently increased in value and extended through further rounds of funding to help 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 3 rounds of funding, 379 grants were awarded, totalling nearly £2.6m of funding from the county council.

June 20 and ongoing

Optimistically, the LRF and county council took its first steps towards thinking about recovery in the early summer period of 2020. Whilst there has needed to be a continuing focus on responding to the impacts of the Covid-19 this has been accompanied by looking at what could be learnt from the pandemic to help us shape how we recover.

This learning concentrated on the vital role that civil society (communities, voluntary sector, local groups) had, and continues to have, in providing services and support to individuals and communities and how this can be built upon.

An ongoing focus over many years, and in the lead up to and learning from the pandemic, was not to focus solely on what communities have done or can do. Rather, it is to look at the role the county council

has and how it operates in supporting and enabling individuals and communities to help themselves.

Our refreshed and updated Communities Approach 2022-26 reflects this not only in its title but in its ethos, principles, and model of delivery.

Policy Developments

Financial pressures and the implications of ongoing reductions in funding for the public sector accompanied by rising demand for public services has meant that there has been, and continues to be, a need to focus on how the county council can best achieve its outcomes.

Locally the Council's Strategic Plan and Outcomes have been reviewed and updated.

Our Communities Approach is reflected in the Great Communities Outcome through the enabling commitments that;

- People participate in service design and delivery, and

- People support each other through volunteering.

....

The Communities Approach does however support all aspects of every Outcome and all elements of the Strategic Plan and should be viewed as 'how' the county council can deliver 'what' (all the Outcomes) we want to achieve.

....

Since the adoption of the 2017-21 Communities Strategy there has been a notable shift amongst commentators, think-tanks, policy developers and politicians that has promoted a change in how the public sector operates; with a greater emphasis on how it collaborates with communities and where and how decisions are made.

The greater emphasis on collaboration and involvement for our citizens and communities, supporting and empowering them to have autonomy and agency over their lives and in their interactions with public services, is not without its challenges.

However, this shift towards greater community involvement and collaboration should be viewed as model of 'how' we can achieve solutions.

New Local* advocate that the public sector needs to recognise and acknowledge 'that the solutions to an area's biggest challenges are to be found outside in the community not inside the institution…' and that this can be achieved though:

Community decision-making:

Using deliberative and participatory tools to involve citizens more meaningfully in local decision-making.

Collaboration with communities:

Public services shifting from hierarchical and siloed ways of working, to more collaborative approaches which deeply involve communities as equal partners with essential insights.

Building community capacity and assets:

Equipping communities with the resources and skills they need.

This way of working is related to, and can be viewed alongside, associated calls and lobbying for regional and local devolution and changes to local governance and our aspiration to learn from the pandemic and 'Build Back Better' by 'Levelling Up our Communities.'

Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant - A report for government by Danny Kruger MP, September 2020 www.dannykruger.org.uk/sites/www.dannykruger. org.uk/files/2020-09/Kruger%202.0%20 Levelling%20Up%20Our%20Communities.pdf, set out a series of recommendations 'to give civil society a greater role in levelling up the country.' He advocated that 'What is missing in our current model [of public service] is community power: the role of local people, acting together spontaneously or through enduring institutions, to design and deliver the kind of neighbourhood they want to be part of.'

..

Kruger recommends that 'The economic and social model we need for the future has community power, and the civil society that enables it, at its heart. This is the way to level up the country - to make great places from within' rather than by outside interventions to give civil society a greater role in levelling up the country.'

....

As New Local note, 'This principle [Community Power] is not just a theory. It already exists in neighbourhoods, in local networks, and in voluntary and community organisations where people come together to overcome challenges and support each other. This comes to the fore in times of crisis, such as with the sudden flourishing of mutual aid during the Covid-19 pandemic but has endured for decades in many forms. It is also rapidly influencing practice in the public sector and local government. Public services are seeing the benefits of moving towards practices which involve actively collaborating with communities. New methods of enabling community insights to shape action are increasingly being developed: from councils trialling participatory and deliberative democracy; to frontline professionals using asset-based practice and co-production.' www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/the-community-paradigm/

This refreshed Communities Approach aims to act as a catalyst to further develop and strengthen the achievements of collaboration and community involvement and move this approach 'From the Margins to the Mainstream". This will be achieved by enhancing and embedding the mindset, values, behaviours, relationships and infrastructure creating '…the conditions for new operating models to thrive. ' From the Margins to the Mainstream-Nesta -Collaborate Published September 2020. https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Margins_ to_Mainstream.pdf
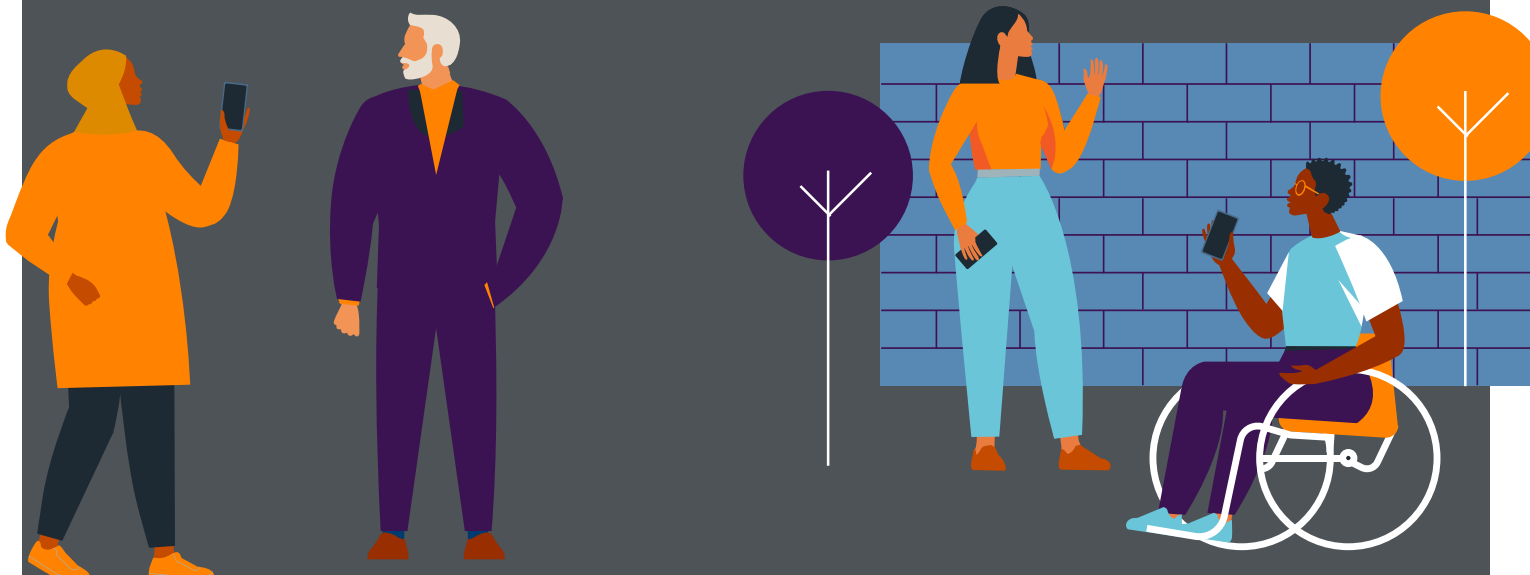
Our Communities Approach 2022-26

Principles of the Strategy

The principals outlined in this refreshed Strategy build on and incorporate the Priorities of the Communities Strategy 2017-21.

Prevention - (Priority 1 Helping people to help themselves and others)

Supporting and enabling citizens to help themselves and others. This is about how the whole council works towards providing preventative and self-help support and how we communicate this with our communities. We must focus on how the information and advice we produce underpins prevention and reduces demand, ensuring that it is accessible, relevant, and timely.

Engagement - (Priority 2 Work in collaboration & Priority 4 Be outward focused)

The Council will work across services, departments and with partners and will be led by our work with our citizens and communities. Through listening and conversations and by building trusting relationships we will collaboratively define and design our solutions locally.

Catalysts - (Priority 3 - Supporting VCSE & Town & Parish Council service provision)

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, Social Enterprises and Parish & Town Councils are supported and empowered to collaborate and provide a range of effective services and activities for individuals and communities.

The Principles of the Strategy will be supported by the Strategic Plan and associated plans-Engagement Strategy; VCSE Partnership Statement; Strategic Volunteering Vision; Social Value Policy and others.

Model

The Principles of our Communities Approach are underpinned by asset-based thinking and doing and social action. These concepts were introduced in our Strategy 2017-21 and we want to reiterate and emphasise them as the model for delivery for the county council over the next 4 years.

Asset Based Approach – working with the skills, knowledge, connections and potential that exists within a community.

The asset-based approach starts by making visible and explicitly valuing the strengths that exist in people and places rather than starting from the perspective of the problems in a community, or what a community needs (a 'deficit-based' model).

These strengths include:

> **Personal assets** – the knowledge, skills, talents and aspirations of individuals
>
> **Social assets** – the relationships people have with family, friends and the wider community
>
> **Community assets** – voluntary and community sector organisations; faith groups; public sector services that operate in the area
>
> **Neighbourhood assets** – the physical assets that contribute to health and wellbeing where people can meet and take part in activities, for example community centres and parks.

An asset-based approach develops connections, builds relationships, and mobilises social action at the local level, helping to prevent the need for more formal services and helping communities to develop and flourish. This approach also highlights that the design, development and delivery of solutions is not only the responsibility of public services, but is much more effective when accompanied by local community involvement which helps people to take ownership of, and responsibility for, local solutions. As evidenced clearly through the responses from local communities within the pandemic.

Investment in identifying, understanding and developing community assets can help to prevent and address problems early on, rather than when they have had a greater impact on people and have become more difficult and costly to tackle.

We want to continue to focus on this approach by:

- Embedding the 'asset-based' approach amongst our staff, service departments and partners, understanding that is 'how' we think and do things such commissioning and service planning that will help achieve change.

- Supporting communities to recognise their own and local assets, ensuring that all can take full advantage of what is available.

Social Action

A focus on social action acknowledges that when people come together and act, they can improve their lives and solve the problems their communities face. Social Action can be best understood as:

People coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can broadly be defined as practical action in the service of others, which is (i) carried out by individuals or groups of people working together, (ii) not mandated and not for profit, (iii) done for the good of others – individuals, communities and/or society, and (iv) bringing about social change and or value.'

(adapted and updated from Leicestershire Communities Strategy 2017-21)

Implementation

The aim of this Communities Approach is not to present a complete 'plan', mapping out the specifics of what can be achieved; rather it is intended as guide to shape 'how' we should work to fulfil the ambitions of the council and of communities. It should be understood as a live document wherein we further develop and enhance the approach over the next 4 years as we implement and learn.

Through the principles and model, we believe that we are creating the conditions to enable and support community involvement and collaboration that will benefit all of Leicestershire.

Over the coming months (November 2021-January 2022 as we undertake our engagement plans for this draft 'Our Communities Approach 2022-26,' we will be undertaking several activities and holding a range of conversations with our colleagues, partners and communities to help us refine, develop and grow this approach.

If you would like us to have a conversation with your community or would like to find out how else you can get involved please see: www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/getinvolved/communitiesapproach.html

or email us at leicestershirecommunities@leics.gov.uk