



SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 9TH MARCH 2022

DRAFT COMMUNITIES STRATEGY: LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL COLLABORATING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES – OUR COMMUNITIES APPROACH 2022-26 **FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Scrutiny Commission on the preparation the draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities - Our Communities Approach 2022-26 before consideration of the final draft by the Cabinet at its meeting on 29th March 2022.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Cabinet approved the current Communities Strategy 2017- 21 on 12th December 2017. The draft refreshed Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities - Our Communities Approach 2022-26, was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 26th October 2021 for engagement with stakeholders.
3. The draft Communities Approach will complement and support government objectives to “build back better” after the pandemic and to “level-up” prosperity and opportunity by enabling and supporting communities to achieve their goals through co-production and collaboration and by building community capacity and assets. It will continue to enable delivery of all outcomes of the Councils’ Strategic Plan and will set out how (through the Approach) the Council will seek to achieve its priority outcomes. A report on the outcome of the consultation on the draft Strategic Plan is also on the agenda for this Scrutiny Commission meeting.

Background

4. The engagement draft of the Communities Approach was considered by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 17th November 2021. The report to that meeting set out progress resulting from delivery of the existing Communities Strategy, the context for, and influences on, the development of the draft Communities Approach and the key cross-cutting principles that underpin the Approach. The report also highlighted that the principles of the Approach will be supported by the Strategic Plan and associated Council plans, and that the delivery model will be underpinned by the themes of an asset-based approach centred on the strengths of local communities, and social action.

Engagement feedback

5. The Cabinet, at its meeting on 26th October 2021, approved engagement with stakeholders on the draft Communities Approach between 1st November 2021 and 21st January 2022. This engagement period was subsequently extended to 18th 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 draft Approach. Engagement was used to gather insight and understanding about Leicestershire Communities and the approach that the Council proposes.
6. The engagement process invited contributions from the Communities Board/Departmental Management Teams, workers groups, the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, parish and town councils, other public sector partners and the voluntary and community sector including VAL (Voluntary Action Leicestershire) and the RCC (Rural Community Council). 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.
7. 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.
8. Feedback from the engagement process showed support for the principles identified in the Communities Approach (73% agreeing, 24 % undecided and 3% disagreeing), including support for 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 public as well as voluntary service delivery and broad and early co-production engagement starting with issues definition.
9. 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 communities, 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.
10. 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.

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11. Points raised by Members at the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 17th November 2021 have been taken into account in the revised draft 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 Rural Community Council (RCC) and the LRALC (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.

The revised draft Approach

12. 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 draft 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.
13. 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. 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.
14. To augment the Approach whilst retaining a shorter document, a dedicated resource has been developed on the Leicestershire Communities Website. This resource 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 this Approach and the Outcomes of the Strategic plan.

15. The Scrutiny Commission is invited to consider the outcome of the engagement on the Communities Approach and the changes to the document that have been made as a result.
16. The revised draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Our Communities Approach 2022-26 is attached as an Appendix to this report.

Resource Implications

17. There are no direct financial implications in relation to the draft Our Communities Approach 22-26. Delivery of the Approach will be supported from within existing staffing resources and through the commissioning of community capacity building contracts and grants.
18. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on this report.

Conclusion

19. This report has been presented to the Commission to provide an opportunity for consideration of the outcome of engagement and the consequent changes to the draft Communities Approach before consideration of the final draft by the Cabinet.

Timetable for Decisions

20. On 29th March 2022, a report will be presented to the Cabinet regarding the outcome of engagement on the draft Our Communities Approach 22-26 and seeking approval for the revised Communities Approach to be submitted to the County Council for approval in May 2022.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

21. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment Screening has been carried out on the draft Communities Approach. The screening assessment concluded that the implementation of the Communities Approach is likely to have a positive equalities and human rights impact. Through a focus on early intervention and prevention, developing inclusive and supportive community connections and community solutions it will promote community cohesion and have a positive impact on individuals or groups that identify with protected characteristics.

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 – 26th October 2021

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/g6447/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%206-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 – 17th November 2021

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

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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Appendices

Appendix – Draft Refreshed Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council collaborating with our Communities, our Communities Approach 2022-26

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