

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Council	REPORT NUMBER: MC/18/51
FROM: Councillor Julie Flatman, Cabinet Member for Communities	DATE OF MEETING: 18 March 2019
OFFICER: Tom Barker - Assistant Director Planning and Communities	KEY DECISION REF NO. CNL41

JOINT COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report informs Councillors about the processes involved in developing the Councils' Joint Communities Strategy, the benefits of this approach and the work which will follow its adoption.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 To create a Joint Communities Strategy following the recent public consultation.
- 2.2 Not to create a Joint Communities Strategy despite the recent public consultation.
- 2.3 The Council has prioritised the creation of its Joint Communities Strategy.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 That the Joint Communities Strategy, attached as Appendix A, be approved.

3.2 That the Assistant Director for Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, be delegated the authority to make future minor amendments and updates to the Strategy, where required and appropriate.

3.3 That once the Strategy is approved, the Assistant Director for Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, be delegated the authority to take steps to make the vision and the direction of the Strategy more accessible to local communities, partner organisations and our staff, by:

- producing a summary version with more visuals and infographics,
- producing a delivery plan,
- producing a series of short films to explain the vision and the ways we want to work to achieve it.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council have an up to date Communities Strategy which provides:

- Strategic leadership on the big issues facing the districts
- Coherent and joined up approaches to the way we work with our communities and with partners
- More local accountability of decision making.
- A more focused approach to community development which has the greatest impact.

4. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The creation of a Joint Communities Strategy has been articulated as one of the Councils Organisational Priorities for 2018/19.
- 4.2 The Strategy is the Councils' collective response to some of the big community-related changes we have experienced in the districts and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.
- 4.3 This Strategy has been developed in collaboration with our statutory and voluntary sector partners. It recognises and takes into account existing commitments, for example, our role in supporting strategic objectives agreed within the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.
- 4.4 It aligns to other plans - our Homes, Open for Business, Customer Access and Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategies - as well as informing the development of our Joint Local Plan. These strategies also have a direct impact on communities, their health, prosperity and opportunity. It is incumbent upon us to seek to harmonise our approaches, sharing information and joining up services so that resources can be more effectively targeted to better people's lives.
- 4.5 The Council's ambition is for communities that thrive; stronger and healthier places, built on a balanced and targeted range of services and support, equally accessible to all our residents and to future generations. We need to see new development delivered in an inclusive way, so that more local people feel the benefits. We need to be responsive to changes in the population and make-up of the districts, particularly looking at how we give young people the best start in life and how we support older residents to stay active, healthy and connected to community life. We know there is already a strong sense of community and of collaboration, with residents and businesses keen to share their time, knowledge and skills. It is important that we build upon these strengths so there is greater willingness to take part in more open community dialogue about the issues we face as well as more inclusive decision making.
- 4.6 Delivering effective services which our communities expect or require is important but there are times we have not always questioned how we can step aside and let others do what they think is best. There are many examples of communities who have taken on responsibilities from other public bodies. These range from parks and play areas, to the development of new affordable housing, community library services and recycling centres. These services are well run, they work because they are valued, and they are proof that service delivery does not always have to follow traditional lines. The Council does not always know best and we need to be more willing to explore different ways of working with our communities.

- 4.7 The Strategy seeks to find the right balance between creating a sense of expectation that the Councils can live up to and empowering those who want to do more and can make a real difference. We need to be much more mindful of how we behave and communicate with our communities and we need to ensure the whole organisation understands and applies the values that have recently been articulated.
- 4.8 The Consultative version of the Communities Strategy which was approved by Cabinets in January 2019 described nine ambitions, high level commitments which were developed through our focused discussions with a cross-party group of Councillors, external partners, statutory agencies and staff and which would make a real difference in the priority areas agreed. The consultation period which started on 21st January and ended on 1st March 2019 was the opportunity both to seek further clarification and set out more detail as to how these priorities will be achieved.
- 4.9 The Strategy has developed nine approaches, cross cutting priorities which will help us to achieve our vision as follows:

- **A place-based approach**

We will work with people and communities based on where they live or work, not on our internal organisational structures or administrative boundaries.

- **A collaborative approach**

We will work more effectively across teams, with our partners and communities, so we are more integrated in our approach to local issues.

- **A devolved approach**

We will actively promote the transfer, management and protection of assets and services to communities.

- **A needs-based approach**

We will utilise locally expressed needs as well as other data and evidence to prioritise our resources on places and people experiencing hardship or disadvantage where our support is needed most.

- **A preventative approach**

We will build on early interventions that have the greatest long-term impact and we will encourage and enable communities to deliver and sustain preventative work themselves.

- **An enabling approach**

We will provide resources and toolkits, as well as personalised advice, to help empower and enable communities to deliver the things they really want.

- **A partnership approach**

We will identify and work with partners who are best placed and suitably skilled to support shared outcomes.

- **An intelligence-led approach**

We will develop and maintain data and local intelligence, so we understand more about our localities, their current and future challenges and opportunities, and how to target our interventions to best effect.

- **An inclusive approach**

We will reach out to under-represented groups, supporting them to be active in their communities and to play a part in the decisions that affect them.

- **A values-based approach**

We will ensure that our organisational values of positivity, honesty and personal responsibility underpin the new relationship with our communities.

4.10 We have also made the Strategy document more accessible by:

- Summarising our commitments and the actions which are necessary to help achieve them.
- Making clear which commitments are new and which ones are a continuation of work which has been agreed as part of complementary strategies.
- Using plainer language and avoiding policy jargon
- Being clearer about the things the councils will do, what we will do with others and what we will ask others to do themselves

5. LINKS TO JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN

5.1 The Community Strategy is closely linked to the main priority area of Strong and Healthy Communities and in particular the key strategic outcome of Community capacity building and engagement to enable all communities to be thriving, growing, healthy, active and self-sufficient.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 A small budget may be required to produce the Strategy in other formats, such as large font size although this cost will be met within existing resources. There may be broader financial implications to specific actions that achieve the objectives of the Strategy but these will be considered on their own merits as they emerge.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications to this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Corporate / Significant Business Risk No. 3a – a lack of effective engagement with communities to understand their future needs would mean that we may not be able to help communities become more sustainable. Key risks associated with this report are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Moving at pace could mean that staff, external stakeholders and community representatives do not feel 'engaged' in the development of the Strategy	2	2	The use of focused discussions has allowed for in-depth conversations with key individuals and formal consultation lasting almost six weeks has provided further opportunity for comment.
The vision we have developed is not accessible or is perceived to be not authentic enough by communities, and as a result people do not fully engage with what we want to do next to deliver it	2	2	We have worked with Community leaders to find practical ways of delivering the Strategy.
Without a commitment from partners to collaborate, it is unlikely that we will be able to achieve our aims	2	2	Our relationships with the voluntary sector and statutory partners are developed and effective.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The process used to develop the Communities Strategy started in November 2018 and has included the following stages:

- Research on key trends affecting the districts and the potential impacts of demographic and population change over the next 20 years.
- Examination and review of existing partnership arrangements as well as our existing commitments to support Suffolk wide programmes, particularly the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Suffolk Framework for Inclusive Growth and the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership to understand the synergies, connections and opportunities to better align our resources and future direction.

- Review of the evidence and outcomes on some of our strategic community engagement and consultation activities, most notably our Growth Engagement campaign in the summer of 2016, our Regulation 18 consultation on the Local Plan in 2017 and in developing our Housing, Economic and Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategies.
- Soft engagement on the principles that would inform the emerging Strategy through the Town and Parish Liaison Meetings in October 2018.
- Scrutiny Committee helped shape the way in which the process of further engagement should take place.
- Two workshops, the first with external partners and members of our Community and Voluntary sector and the second with a cross party group of Councillors.
- Qualitative focused discussions with our Extended Leadership Team and internal staff through the Employee Forum.
- Senior Leadership Team and our Cabinet members have been briefed and involved at every stage of this process.
- Reports to Cabinet for approval to the formal consultation [[Mid Suffolk \(MCa/18/55\)](#)].
- A formal consultation with partners and stakeholders on a consultative version of the Communities Strategy, took place 21st January until 1st March 2019.
- A further workshop with the cross-party group of Councillors was held towards the end of the consultation period.

9.2 The consultation document was a deliberately high level and discursive document. The feedback that we have received, from both the formal consultation and our broader engagement work has enabled us to refine the initial thinking and develop more focused approaches within the emerging Strategy.

9.3 Twenty responses were received to the formal consultation. Responses came from a range of parties, including some the Councils regularly funded bodies, like the CAB, some from Parish Councils and some from what look like interested individuals. The key areas that we have drawn out as a result of feedback received are set out in Appendix B.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

10.1 See the screening Equality Impact Assessment for the Communities Strategy (Appendix C). No further action required at this time. The Communities Strategy will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics and will draw in underrepresented voices. The EQIA will be revisited to inform delivery planning.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no environmental implications as a result of this Strategy.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Communities Strategy	Attached
(b) Key issues raised during consultation	Attached
(c) Equality Impact Assessment	Attached

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 13.1 The Government's Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone>
- 13.2 A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>
- 13.3 New Local Government Network (NLGN) insight report: Transforming the relationship between Councils and Communities - http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/Transforming-the-Relationship-Between-Councils-and-Communities_Insights-Report_-OCT-2018.pdf
- 13.4 Hidden Needs in Suffolk (Suffolk Community Foundation): <https://www.suffolkcf.org.uk/suffolks-hidden-needs/>
- 13.5 The district council contribution to public health: a time of challenge and opportunity (The Kings Fund): https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/district-council-contribution-to-public-health-nov15.pdf
- 13.6 Stronger Charities for a Stronger Society Report (Authority of the House of Lords): <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldchar/133/133.pdf>