

**Open Report on behalf of Debbie Barnes OBE, Chief Executive**

Report to:	<b>Councillor M J Hill, OBE, Leader of the Council (Executive Councillor Resources, Communications and Commissioning)</b>
Date:	<b>9 - 14 September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Community Strategy</b>
Decision Reference:	<b>I022132</b>
Key Decision?	<b>Yes</b>

**Summary:**

The corporate plan sees the council working for a better future for the residents, businesses and visitors of Lincolnshire. It seeks to further develop relationships with communities to ensure the successful delivery of the plan. There is a need to focus on increased community participation and engagement to ensure that citizens are well informed about council services and are able to interact with us in an efficient manner. The community strategy will support the delivery of these ambitions. This report provides an overview of the community strategy, along with findings of a consultation and engagement exercise that has supported the development of the strategy and work plans.

**Recommendation(s):**

That the Leader of the Council (Executive Councillor: Resources and Communications) approves and adopts the Community Strategy 2021-2024 in the form set out in Appendix A.

**Alternatives Considered:**

The report sets out the value of the community strategy and the outcomes that it seeks to achieve for communities. Operating without the community strategy would limit the council's impact and fail to realise the benefits contained within the action plan.

**Reasons for Recommendation:**

The adoption of the community strategy enables the council to build on the work that

has taken place over recent years and enhance the level of independence and cross-organisation working within the county.

## **1. Background**

1.1 The community strategy (Appendix A) recognises that there is already a lot of good work taking place within communities across Lincolnshire. This has been bolstered throughout the pandemic, and has seen a valuable contribution to those with the greatest level of need. There is an opportunity to continue to build on longstanding relationships, grow new networks and ensure that there is strong legacy for Lincolnshire that will help to support recovery ambitions and enable communities to thrive.

1.2 The strategy is split into five different themes as detailed below:

- Consultation, engagement and collaboration
- Community networks
- Volunteering
- Funding for our communities
- Tools and data

1.3 The strategy recognises that sometimes there is a need to engage in a formal manner. The council will continue to do this in line with best practice, but it should also seek more innovative ways of engaging others. To support effective service design, transformation and policy development, there is a requirement to have more open dialogue with residents on a range of topics. As an example, high levels of engagement are already taking place in public health with partner organisations, representative groups and residents, to better understand needs and develop cost-effective solutions. The strategy recognises that this sort of collaborative exercise can deliver improved outcomes for communities, as those living in or representing communities often have greater insight into local needs, and are well placed to help to solve the challenges that they face.

1.4 Within the community network theme, it is recognised that the role of the council is not to become the sole service provider and that it does not have all of the skills, resources and expertise required to meet every community need. The strategy seeks to support increased levels of independence. It places a focus on the development of even stronger community networks to help residents to effectively navigate complex systems. It seeks to enable citizens to retain a sense of choice and ownership of decision making, and only need to draw on council services where suitable alternatives do not exist elsewhere.

1.5 As set out in the corporate plan, our communities need to be able to gain the skills required to be successful, both now and in the future. One way of doing this is through volunteering. The strategy seeks to build on the existing grant funded volunteering coordination and support arrangements that are in place with Voluntary Centre Services (VCS) and Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service (LCVS). It will

review existing provision and identify opportunities to improve the offer. Focus will be given to supporting those who need additional help to access volunteering opportunities along with enabling those who have the skills and confidence to self-serve. The strategy also considers how those who already have well developed skills can access opportunities to give back to communities, as well as how commissioned services or contracts can be leveraged to improve community based opportunities.

1.6 The council also provides grant funding to Citizen's Advice Lincolnshire to deliver accredited advice and support across Lincolnshire. The strategy recognises the value and importance of the work that is delivered by both Citizen's Advice Lincolnshire and the VCS/LCVS and seeks to work more closely with them to better understand the needs that they are addressing and the future trends that they expect to see. This work will take place throughout 2021 to inform the grant agreements from 2022 onwards, and will help to ensure that the efforts of these organisations are appropriately aligned to council priorities and have the maximum impact for Lincolnshire.

1.7 As detailed in the digital strategy and the customer strategy, the way services are delivered is changing and citizens expect an increased level of digital presence and interaction. The community strategy therefore looks at how consultation and engagement exercises can be delivered to better meet current and future needs. This sees an investment in new technologies to enhance our provision as well as seeking improvements in the way that data is used to inform thinking and future policy decisions.

1.8 Each of the themes within the strategy is supported by a work plan that draws resources from across the council together to share expertise and effectively coordinate activities. The oversight of the strategy will be held centrally by the Engagement Team, with regular updates being provided to the Executive Councillor.

### ***Consultation and engagement***

1.9 It is important that communities and their representatives are able to influence the content of the strategy and its work plan. In support of this, engagement has taken place with a number of organisations to test key concepts and better understand the community offer. Officers have met with members of Involving Lincs who provide a representative view of voluntary organisations across the county, as well as representatives from the Voluntary Engagement Team (VET), Citizen's Advice Lincolnshire and Voluntary Centre Services. This was the first stage of our engagement process.

1.10 This pre-engagement activity was designed to:

- Introduce and present the draft proposals and aspirations to key stakeholders
- Test key concepts and better understand the community offer

- Gather local intelligence regarding needs and priorities from across Lincolnshire
- Enable key stakeholders to discuss and influence the strategy content and work plan
- Incorporate findings into the draft strategy

Officers worked with the Executive Member, officers and services areas across the council that will be involved in delivering the strategy, as well as a number of partner organisations. This saw a number of meetings, group presentations and one-to-one sessions be held to talk through the suggested content of the strategy and ensure it was informed and met a broad range of needs and expectations. This activity was completed between January and May 2021.

1.11 A wider engagement exercise has also been completed through an online survey to obtain feedback on the content of the strategy. The engagement exercise also raised awareness of the strategy and identified a number of individuals and groups that wanted to continue to work with us on the delivery of the strategy. The engagement exercise was targeted and promoted to a range of stakeholders including:

- Over 200 members of the LCC engagement database
- 366 Town and Parish Council database members
- The VCS and LCVS who we asked to promote the engagement exercise through their networks of c.1,000 newsletter subscribers
- Citizens Advice Lincolnshire
- Voluntary Engagement Team (VET) with 600 members on their facebook page
- A range of organisations that represent those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
- Other groups identified within the equality analysis, such as Every-one, Community Lincs/YMCA and Healthwatch
- The general public through social media and web-based promotion

1.12 The targeted survey ran from 18 June to 9 July 2021 and received 39 responses. It was promoted through a range of mechanisms, including direct mail, face to face presentations, and the use of council engagement databases, social media and an article in the town and parish newsletter. The survey responses came from residents, those representing community groups and a number of voluntary sector organisations. A small number of responses were also received from Lincolnshire business owners. The number of responses received was in line with what was expected for a targeted strategy engagement exercise. As already referred to in 1.9, significant pre-engagement had already taken place with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that proposals, concepts and discussion had already taken place prior to the survey going out.

1.13 The survey showed overwhelming support for the action plan themes and needs that it seeks to address. This is detailed further in appendix C. The free-text comment sections within the survey also provided some useful highlights. Notably, respondents felt that there was a need to ensure inclusivity in approach with a particular focus on those with protected characteristics. There was also recognition of the positive work that has been completed to date to help communities thrive as well as efforts to promote access to funding for the sector. However, there was acknowledgment that there needs to be greater coordination in the future.

1.14 The feedback questioned the creation of a shared vision in terms of whether this could be achieved and whether it should be seen as a priority area to focus on. It is suggested that rather than creating a single vision, a series of areas of focus should be developed with the voluntary and community sector to help to focus resources and deliver improved outcomes. Work has already started on this through the Community and Voluntary Sector Engagement Cell as part of Covid recovery planning. This engagement identified suggestions under the following areas:

- networks: a need to sustain robust community networks to support the most vulnerable within our communities
- volunteering: to sustain the volunteering legacy and respond to changes in availability of volunteers across Lincolnshire
- engagement: a need to enable greater levels of consultation, engagement and collaboration between those operating in the sector
- funding: to work collectively to identify, secure and maximise funding opportunities within Lincolnshire
- data: to be able to collectively show the value that the sector brings to Lincolnshire and to be able to shout loud and proud about achievements

These areas will be further developed as part of the action plan that supports the strategy and will see extensive partnership working to deliver improved outcomes for our communities. The action plan, shown in appendix B is provided to give members assurance around the activities that will be completed. The content of the plan will vary as our engagement work develops over the course of the strategy.

1.15 As part of the survey, respondents were asked whether they wished to be involved in the development and delivery of the strategy. 19 respondents expressed a desire to remain involved and welcomed Lincolnshire County Council having an open-door to working on the strategy. This is mapped across the needs identified within the strategy and provides a useful basis for on-going engagement activities.

## **2. Legal Issues:**

### Equality Act 2010

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.

Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

The duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the decision-maker. To discharge the statutory duty the decision-maker must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision making process.

The Community Strategy will not result in adverse impacts on people with protected characteristics. It is been developed to better engage with and support our communities including specifically people with protected characteristics. This will better enable the Council to understand and to direct efforts and resources to areas of need.

#### Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council must have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health & Well Being Strategy (JHWS) in coming to a decision.

The content of the Community Strategy will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals. It draws together resources from across a range of sectors to better align activities and develop solutions that will support both the current and future needs of Lincolnshire.

#### Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

The strategy will have due regard to the requirements of section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as appropriate.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 The report sets out the positive response to the draft Community Strategy. It highlights areas where changes should be considered to align the strategy to the expectations of our residents, the voluntary sector and community groups.

#### **4. Legal Comments:**

The Council has the power to adopt the Strategy in the form attached at Appendix A.

The decision is consistent with the Policy Framework and within the remit of the Executive Councillor

## **5. Resource Comments:**

Adoption of the Community Strategy does not have any direct financial implications and it is expected that delivery of the Action Plan will be achieved utilising existing resources.

## **6. Consultation**

### **a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?**

The strategy covers all areas of Lincolnshire.

### **b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?**

Yes

### **c) Scrutiny Comments**

On 27 July 2021, the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report on the Community Strategy, and supported the Recommendations to the Executive Councillor.

The following points were highlighted:

- Concerns were raised in relation to lack of responses (39 in total) and that it appeared that the community had not been fully engaged in the development of the Community Strategy. It was acknowledged that there had been a lack of response, but there had been on going additional engagement activity with voluntary groups, representative bodies, and organisations as part of the strategy development prior to the formal engagement commencing. The need for obtaining more representative views in future activity was acknowledged and is part of the strategy. Limitations and constrains included: that the activity took place over a three-week period and whilst restrictions were in place due to the Covid pandemic; and the pandemic-imposed restrictions forced all engagement activity to take place online, which had an impact on demand and response levels. Despite alternative means for completing the survey being offered, the responses received were only submitted electronically. The Strategy aimed at building a greater level of awareness of networks in communities, promoting more activity and participation and identifying ways of being more proactive including collaboration with other organisations and groups to achieve wider participation and access to resources.
- The use of case studies as examples would be more appropriate to showcase to participants how topics related to their communities. Assurance was provided that the Strategy would look at a wide range of engagement methods to allow for more interactive surveys and consultations to be carried out in the future including different models of scenarios to be provided to participants.

- Concerns were raised about particularly challenging areas in the County that had few voluntary community groups and received very limited support. In relation to how Lincolnshire County Council engaged with these areas and whether these challenges would be reflected in the strategy, it was confirmed that the Strategy aimed to identify needs that were not being met across the County and needed addressing. Work would then be done within these areas highlighted to ensure that any gaps in provision were bridged and that community needs were met, especially in areas where communities were without any provision. Existing data on gaps in provision were used as part of this engagement activity. An example was given on how the Council was currently working with some organisations exploring ways of growing community provision within challenging areas from a Public Health and a Community Strategy point of view through a set of standard terms and conditions and a standard governance model. Furthermore, good practice would be communicated through particular case studies that would showcase benefits and how expertise could be transferred across the County. Throughout the consultation, eighteen plus groups had been identified as wanting to work with the Council on developing and shaping the Community Strategy. Reassurance was provided that the Strategy was a live document aimed at being developed with the support of communities and that work would continue through the work plan. We would work with communities to understand the challenges they faced, the provisions in place, the actions to be considered and that any gaps in provision identified would continue to be reported back to the Committee going forward in addition to updates on the Community Strategy.
- Concerns were raised about the consultation being a targeted engagement, where the targeted audience had not responded. It was confirmed that some of the questions were answered by as little as four (4) individuals which was a considerably low figure to base any decisions upon, for a population of over 751,000. This was in comparison to a previous consultation in 2016 for which there were thousands of responses collated.
- The consultation exercise had been promoted through publicising on social media, through targeting of organisations which aimed to provide representative views, and through the Town and Parish Council Newsletters. It was highlighted that the subject matter was not one that necessarily appealed to the community which may have also hindered engagement. It was also clarified that the four responses quoted was the number of businesses that had participated in the survey. Better tailored engagement would need to be carried out with the public in the future.
- In relation to the low response rates, it was suggested that the methods of engagement employed for different nationalities were looked at as other organisations which ran surveys during the pandemic had received a greater volume of responses due to being more target specific, intensive local work and research to understand better the communities as well as improved publicising of the facilitations provided for participation (i.e., survey being available in different languages).
- There was a need to tailor engagement activities to integrate and accommodate

diverse communities. It was highlighted that in Boston more than 30% of the population has migrated from Europe and that more than 32 nationalities were residing in this area. Reassurance was provided that the Council worked in partnership with other organisations and an example of a project led by YMCA had seen the introduction of the Good Neighbour Schemes which recognised the need for greater integration of cosmopolitan communities and increased cohesion through identifying shared purpose and ambitions. The Council had sought to access additional funding and would continue to look at system wide changes to test and improve better outcomes for Lincolnshire residents. This aligned with work of the Integrated Care System which was working on how to integrate the needs for health services within communities.

- The role of Parish Councils and the role of Elected Members in understanding the needs within their communities, developing these and providing key messages to communicate solutions was also considered as part of this Strategy. It was acknowledged that the role of Parish Councils was important as they could pass on information and engage with their local groups and communities directly and assurance was sought that consultation would continue in light of the abolishment of Covid restrictions as would the development of the Community Strategy living document. Assurance was provided that these comments would be taken on board as part of this ongoing journey towards the development of the Strategy.
- The Equality Impact Assessment carried out as part of this consultation was an exceptional, detailed and excellent document that was informative in its own right.
- In relation to Citizens Advice Hubs operating across Lincolnshire, the funding from LCC is provided to Citizens Advice Lincolnshire (umbrella body); with four Citizens Advice Bureaus operating as independent bodies covering different geographical areas. The service has operated predominantly through a telephony-based service; and the Hubs were located in Lincoln and in market towns. Further information would be provided to the Committee on locations and opening times of different venues as these operated in varying patterns and not always on a full-time basis. The free telephony system acted as the initial entry point that triaged and managed demand and operated Monday to Friday. Performance information in relation to calls answered was fed back and would continue being brought back to this Committee for Scrutiny in the future.

#### **d) Risks and Impact Analysis**

The content of the Community Strategy was consulted on with communities and their representative groups. This helped to inform and address any risks associated with the proposals. In support of the development of the strategy, an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

## **7. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Draft Community Strategy
Appendix B	Draft Community Strategy Action Plan
Appendix C	Engagement Report
Appendix D	Equality Impact Assessment

## **8. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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