



# Stronger Communities: Lincolnshire's Community Strategy

2021 – 2024

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# Community Strategy - Foreword

The communities of Lincolnshire, like those across the rest of the world continue to go through a period of unprecedented change. The value, role and impact of strong communities has been seen like never before as we've faced the impact of a global pandemic and worked across sectors and boundaries to ensure those in the greatest need receive the help and support that they require.

This strategy seeks to build on the work that has taken place over the last few years and places a renewed focus on our communities and how we as a local authority can best work with them. We've set out a number of themes and objectives, each designed to pull together and enhance the amazing work that is already going on in our communities and explore opportunities to achieve even more. Only by working with our communities and their representative groups will we be able to achieve the mission set out in our Corporate Plan to enable everyone to enjoy life to the full.

This strategy sees us establishing improved ways of being able to engage with and listen to our communities. We want to find out more about their needs and how we can work together to make Lincolnshire a place where everyone can prosper. Lincolnshire is the fourth largest county in the UK. Its communities are increasingly diverse and we know that one size will not fit all. Understanding community needs better will help us all to shape our service provision and target our joint efforts.

Lincolnshire has got a lot to be proud of, whether it's the high quality educational offer, our outstanding natural environment or the innovation and strong partnership working that sees the delivery of high quality services. It's right that we celebrate these things, but we must also spend time working together to do even better in the future. That doesn't just mean that we will consult about our services. It means we'll actively engage with our communities through two-way meaningful dialogue. That's why this strategy also sees us investing in our staff and the tools that they will use to inform the decisions that we make and how we go about delivering our services.

I look forward to working with our communities to deliver the aspirations of this strategy and to help Lincolnshire to thrive.

**Cllr Sue Woolley**

**Executive Councillor – NHS Liaison and Community Engagement**

# About Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire is full of opportunities. It offers a safe environment, great educational opportunities and a world-class heritage and tourism offer. Lincolnshire covers 5,921 square miles and is a patchwork quilt of quaint market-towns and idyllic villages. But Lincolnshire is not without its challenges. Our population is growing older, with 30% expected to be aged 65 and over by 2043. A lack of infrastructure and the rural nature of our region can see residents face challenges when seeking to access our services and those provided by others.

Tackling these challenges and enabling our communities to flourish cannot be done by one organisation on its own. For local government, the level of resources available continues to reduce and community support networks therefore play a vital role in ensuring that our residents are able to enjoy the benefits that Lincolnshire offers. By working together, strengthening relationships and improving the awareness of what is on offer, we can better understand the gaps that we need to fill in the future and build an even stronger offer for Lincolnshire.

Communities are usually best placed to solve the challenges that they face. We can help to ensure that the right support and facilitation is in place. We want to see our communities being better able to bring about the changes that they want to see. That means that we need to be clear on the way we will work with communities to remove unnecessary obstacles and bureaucracy and to direct our limited resources to where we can have the biggest impact.

This Community Strategy explains the things that we are going to do to improve our understanding of our communities and the way that we plan to engage and work with them. The Strategy is split into five key sections, each one complimenting the other. It is only by moving all of these items forward that we will really be able to make a positive impact for Lincolnshire. The themes of the strategy are:

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

This strategy also links closely with the aspirations of our digital strategy, customer strategy and transformation plans that see us improving our citizen experience, removing duplication of effort and improving outcomes for all.

# Our Themes and Objectives

## Consultation, engagement and collaboration

Much of this strategy is about the way that we work with others. Whilst sometimes there is a requirement for this to be completed through a formal consultation, we want to develop new ways of engaging and collaborating with our residents, communities and their representative groups. We want to make sure that they have a strong voice at the table, have the independence to act and solve problems and ultimately to have the ability to thrive.

We will enhance our approach to formal consultations to make it even easier for people to share their views. We want to make sure that we capture opinions from a broad range of people and organisations that represent our diverse communities. But we also want to get people involved much earlier on in the decision making process so that we can be even more confident that the proposals we are putting forward have the backing of our communities and have taken into account a broad range of needs.

To achieve this, we want to have more community-based conversations so that people become more empowered and closer to the decisions that have the biggest impact on how and where they live. We will also be clear about where we do not need to play an active role in decision making. We appreciate that some decisions sit better with our communities and representative groups, but we will be able to provide expertise where necessary.

We will develop our relationships with community groups to influence our policy decisions and enhance the community voice in all that we do. We will ensure that our decision makers have access to more current and meaningful data about our communities and their wishes and aspirations.

## Community networks

Enabling everyone to enjoy life to the full requires strong community networks. We know that there are examples of where the local community and the local authority work really well together. This is already being used to shape the way that we deliver our services and improve the offer to communities. We want to do even more to connect with, learn from and understand communities. We want our policies to be informed by the views of citizens and will be working to develop clear engagement plans so that people know what we are working on and how they can get involved.

We will also work with communities to understand where our help and support can be best directed and what we jointly want to achieve. We will regularly test our approach across communities to develop a shared set of goals. This will see the council working with its partners and community groups to develop solutions in relation to public health and social care, as well as developing strong relationships with our customers to modernise the way that our services are delivered.

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen amazing examples of communities working together to support each other, both in person and through innovative digital solutions. We want to build on these successes to help communities to become even stronger and more self-sufficient. We will develop a better understanding of where communities are well

placed to meet needs and where gaps in provision exist. We want residents to know what is available to them and for them to be able to access it when they need it, irrespective of who the provider is. By working with communities we will be better able to develop solutions together that will improve the quality of life for our citizens.

## **Volunteering**

Volunteering has never been more valuable to Lincolnshire and our way of life. Nationally, in 2019, 19.4 million people were engaged in volunteering activities through groups, clubs or other organisations. More locally, in 2019/20, the volunteer centres in Lincolnshire were able to attract over £1.5m of funding with 2,787 people being supported to access volunteering.

Through increasing the level of community participation we can help communities to become more self-sufficient and sustainable. We want to work with others to promote opportunities to volunteer and the benefits that volunteering brings.

We recognise that people will volunteer for lots of different reasons, whether it's to gain new skills or simply to give something back. We want to work with those closest to communities to improve opportunities for skills development through volunteering. This is often a really effective way of helping somebody to take the first steps into employment and for them to gain the confidence and experience that they need to thrive.

We want to see better ways of matching skills and volunteering opportunities with a much greater focus on the ability to self-serve. We want those who want to give something back to be able to find easy ways of connecting with voluntary organisations that need support. We also want those organisations to be well placed to take up the offer and to get the most from the diverse range of skills that are available. We will develop new ways of ensuring training and development is in place to support community participation initiatives and to enable our community networks to grow and prosper.

We also know that those working within Lincolnshire County Council often volunteer within their local communities and utilise their time, skills and expertise to help others. We want to celebrate and support this amazing contribution and encourage more to come forward. As part of this, we will use our networks to encourage our partners and key employers to get involved and support community initiatives.

## **Funding for our communities**

One of the ways that we invest in communities is through grants to groups and organisations. These often provide valuable support to our residents at a time of need or crisis. Most recently, we've seen an increased need for services such as Citizen's Advice Lincolnshire due to the impact that the pandemic has had on our economy and individuals' abilities to either sustain existing employment or secure new opportunities.

Through this community strategy we will review the effectiveness of our current approach. We want to look at how funding to voluntary sector infrastructure bodies is used across the UK to identify opportunities to learn from best practice and deliver better outcomes for our

communities. We will engage nationally and aim to attract more money into Lincolnshire. We will look for opportunities to target funds to those most in need and achieve the maximum impact.

We will work with groups to ensure that they are aware of the funding that is available to them from others and help that is available on how to secure additional financial support to further their ambitions. We will continue to provide advice and guidance to community groups.

## **Tools and data**

To achieve the ambitions set out within this strategy we need to invest in our teams. They must have the right tools to support high quality engagement. They need to be able to capture data and analyse it to share meaningful insight with decision makers and communities. This work happens right across our organisation, so the tools must be easy to use from both a customer and practitioner point of view and keep pace with the changing expectations of those who want to engage with us.

The world has moved on from engagement being simply about filling in a survey. We know communities increasingly want more open dialogue with us through a range of mechanisms, including polling, ideas walls, moderated forums as well as more formal mechanisms. The strategy sees us developing a clear set of requirements to enable us to effectively find solutions to support the delivery of the strategy ambitions.

We will continue to train and develop our teams so that they are better placed to apply best practice techniques and advise others on how to gain the maximum benefit from engagement activities. This, together with the new technologies, will enable us to embed new approaches to engagement across the organisation and increase the number of people who participate in dialogue with us. It will also support us to develop policies and practices that have the voice of our communities at the heart of them.