

Empowering Our Communities

DRAFT – Communities Position Statement 2023

Foreword

Our communities and residents are at the very heart of what makes Staffordshire a strong and thriving county.

We have seen what communities can achieve when they come together. The power of our community was critical to Staffordshire's response to Covid-19 – when people and VCSE groups across the county were doing their bit and doing extraordinary things to support each other and their local neighbourhoods. We have a proven track-record of working with our people and vibrant voluntary sector organisations to find innovative solutions to local issues. With people struggling with the rising cost of living and challenging times for public finances, there is a real need for creativity and collaboration.

Continuing to help our residents live in thriving and sustainable communities is a key priority in our Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026. This document reflects the importance of this work and the need to clearly articulate the actions we are taking to achieve this aim.

Supporting this document is a Communities Delivery Plan for 2023. This plan shows the range of activities taking place over the next 12 months with our partners to help empower our communities. This plan will make sure we have strong oversight of what we are delivering and the difference it is making.

It is important to recognise that everything we set out in this document will be delivered with, or by, our communities and partners, including the local VCSE sector. With this in mind, we are setting ourselves an ambitious target of co-designing an aspirational, long-term Communities Strategy for Staffordshire with our communities over the coming year.

Context

The national evidence base on the wide-reaching benefits of empowering communities is well established and growing. This evidence comes from a variety of sources, from the 2010 Marmot Review¹ through to research from Government² and think-tanks such as Onward³, Centre for Social Justice⁴ and New Local⁵.

Closer working with our communities can improve outcomes for residents in a range of ways, from helping individuals to improve their health and wellbeing, all the way through to enhancing participation in the democratic process. There is also evidence that empowering communities builds community and individual resilience and improves community cohesion.

In order to continue helping our residents and communities thrive and support each other, the public sector has to find a way to balance our challenging financial outlook with early help to prevent needs from escalating. We must work alongside residents, communities, and our vibrant VCSE sector to draw on all the existing strengths and assets in a community and embed new approaches to prevention and early help in public services.

A strong and sustainable VCSE sector is critical to achieving this. Local infrastructure organisation Support Staffordshire estimated in their 'State of the VCSE Sector 2021' report⁶ that the local VCSE sector has a turnover of more than £112m, employs almost 8,000 people, and engages over 50,000 volunteers worth another £90m. This includes a strong youth sector, with the Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) reporting that 35,641 young people accessed VCSE provided positive activities in 2021/22⁷.

¹ The Marmot Review. (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report.pdf>

² HM Government (2022). *Rapid evidence review of community initiatives*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rapid-evidence-review-of-community-initiatives/rapid-evidence-review-of-community-initiatives>

³ Onward (2020). *The Policies of Belonging*. <https://www.ukonward.com/reports/policies-of-belonging/>

⁴ Centre for Social Justice (2021). *Pillars of Community: Why Communities matter and what matters to them*. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/pillars-of-community-why-communities-matter-and-what-matters-to-them>

⁵ New Local (2021). *Community Power: The Evidence*. <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/publications/community-power-the-evidence/>

⁶ Support Staffordshire (2021). *The State of the VCSE sector 2021*. https://www.supportstaffordshire.org.uk/sites/default/files/State%20of%20the%20Sector%20Report%202021_2.pdf

⁷ SCVYS (2022). *Children and Young People Voluntary Sector Census Report 2022*. <https://staffscvys.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/SCVYS-Census-2022-Report-Final.pdf>

This shows the strength of the VCSE sector in Staffordshire and the fundamental part it has to play in supporting our communities to be healthy, resilient, and proud of the place they live.

Empowering communities has been a key priority for Staffordshire County Council for a number of years. What makes Staffordshire great, is its people and communities. We want to create the conditions for all of our communities to thrive and be places where people can contribute, help themselves and each other. Since 2015 we have achieved a huge amount by working in partnership. We continue to be ambitious, and we know we can do much more.

Working with our communities is central to our Strategic Plan 2022-26, and as such it is a "How we Work" statement. This reflects the importance of our communities and partners in delivering against all our priorities. For example, tackling climate change is a priority within our Strategic Plan, and we can only achieve this by working with our communities to tackle carbon emissions across the county.

2021/22 Review

This section summarises the key highlights and achievements of the work we have done with our communities, the local VCSE sector, and public sector partners in 2021/22.

Offer every Staffordshire child and young people the best start in life:

- 1,238 families were supported to improve their lives between April 2021 and March 2022 through the **Supporting Families Programme**, working alongside community groups across the County.
- Worked with partners and our VCSE sector to review and agree our new **Early Help Strategy 2022-27**, established eight **Virtual Family Hubs**, and agreed a **new Family Hub Model** with Cabinet to change the way we deliver services for families.
- Administered over £12 million in the last 12 months to assist people facing financial hardship through the **Household Support Fund** and other grants made available to the council.
- We **established Library Uniform Hubs**, working with partners and local community groups to gift free school uniforms, saving families in need £46,000 in 2021/22.
- A cost of living pilot scheme that has offered **slow cookers** to 1,400 families in Newcastle-under-Lyme. This scheme will be rolled out across the county in Spring 2023.

Encourage good health and wellbeing:

- Engaged with partners and conducted a citizen enquiry into causes of obesity as part of the **Better Health Staffordshire** programme.
- Supported just under 110,000 people to find help through **Supportive Communities**, our community-based public health programme that helps residents be healthier and more independent for longer. This has taken place through different routes, including our **Community Help Points** in libraries and community buildings across the county.
- 4,650 community groups have been registered on **Staffordshire Connects**, our online directory of community-based support. The Staffordshire Connects website averages approximately 27,000 unique hits per month.
- We have continued to deliver our **Community Managed Libraries** and our **Libraries Community Offer**
- Worked with a fantastic community response to support **Ukrainian Refugees**.
- We have worked with 193 **Community Champions** in Burton, Knutton, and Cross Heath to champion local health initiatives. As trusted community voices, the Champions also co-design and share information and guidance with specific groups.
- Undertaken **citizen inquiries** with 5 local communities, supporting the Community Champions to develop £50,000 worth of local projects addressing health inequalities.
- Distributed **£200,000 worth of grants to support VCSE groups** to recover post Covid-19 and address rising costs for the VCSE sector.
- Worked with Support Staffordshire to deliver **Supportive Communities training sessions** to just under 1,000 participants.

Tackle climate change, enhance our environment:

- Schools, community groups, and parish councils secured £76,000 from the **Climate Change Action Fund 2021/22** for local initiatives.
- Engaged with schools across the county as part of **Air Aware Staffordshire**, seeing reductions of up to 17% air quality pollution outside schools and delivering targeted campaigns on the benefits of walking and cycling.

Cross Cutting:

- 156 community groups were awarded £114,000 of small grants through our **Member-Led Community Fund** in 2021/22 to deliver a huge range of local activities.
- The final year of our **VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership** saw community groups supported to access £6.3m of additional funding. In addition, 206 individuals were supported to access local volunteering opportunities in their area, and 230 free training places were accessed by VCSE representatives.
- We have committed £1.5m investment over the next three years to continue supporting the voluntary sector by commissioning a new **VCSE Capacity Building Framework** contract.
- We have delivered three successful **#DoingOurBit** local communications campaigns focused on loneliness, mental health, and climate change, reaching thousands of Staffordshire residents.
- The **Donate-It ICT scheme** has received and recycled over 250 digital devices to share residents at risk of digital exclusion.

Empowering Staffordshire's Communities

The Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26 sets out our vision for Staffordshire to be an innovative, ambitious, and sustainable county where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy. An important part of this vision is that everyone in Staffordshire lives in thriving and sustainable communities.

Empowering our communities is a key part of our Strategic Plan 2022-26. It is one of our 'How We Work Statements' – "**encourage our communities to help themselves and each other**" because it is central to delivering against all our Strategic Plan priorities, and a cross-organisation way of working.

The county council has a key role to play in helping our communities achieve their aspirations. This includes:

- **Creating the right conditions** to allow communities to support themselves and flourish,
- **Championing and connecting our communities** so that we always think about the strengths of our communities, listen to what they say, and promote the good work that is happening
- **Trusting communities to get more involved** and take more control over what matters to them, and

- **Targeted community-led prevention and early help** so that people stay healthy, well, and independent for longer. Working to make sure it is the right help, at the right time, in the right place.

To do this, we have identified three strategic objectives to focus our work over the next 12 months:

- Embed community-led prevention and early help
- Promote social action and build community capacity
- Support our organisation and others to have a communities mindset

Embed community-led prevention and early help

As outlined earlier in this document community-led prevention and early help is key to improving outcomes for the people of Staffordshire. Research tells us that when people need help or support, it is often most effective when it comes from their family, friends or from within their communities. Working with our partners to ensure that local, community-led and strengths-based support is available and accessible is a key objective. Accessibility includes ensuring that people have the information, and right help to help navigate to the right support.

In 2023 we will:

- Improve access to **early help for our families and children** by developing the Family Hub model.
- Deliver the **Supportive Communities programme** and embedding the approach as part of strengths-based practice in adult social care. This includes further developing our Community Help Points and building on our citizen enquiries and Community Champions work.
- Deliver round 3 of the **Climate Change Action Fund** and working with Members and partners to establish a new **Communities Highways Offer**.
- Work with volunteers and community groups to continue delivering our **Community Managed Libraries & Libraries Community Offer**.

Promote social action and build community capacity

We have an important place leadership role, working with VCSE partners, residents, and communities to promote social action, and empower people to help themselves and each other. As such we will continue to promote opportunities for residents to get involved and connect with each other.

We understand that residents and businesses are busy, so alongside volunteering opportunities we will also encourage our residents to do “one small thing” that cumulatively could make a big difference in their communities.

A thriving VCSE sector is key to empowering our communities and achieving our ambitions for Staffordshire. Since 2016, the County Council has a Strategic Capacity Building Framework in place with local infrastructure organisations to help build capacity and sustainability. This relationship has been vital in not only supporting the sustainability of the VCSE sector but has also played a key role in helping us deliver priority programmes including Early Help for Children and Families, Supportive Communities, and Staffordshire’s Young People’s Offer. In 2022 we recommissioned the framework to continue to provide vital support to the sector.

In 2023 we will:

- Deliver our newly commissioned **VCSE Capacity Building Framework** contract. This includes helping the VCSE sector to be sustainable post Covid-19 and working with community groups on Supportive Communities, Early Help, and our statutory youth offer.
- Review and expand our **‘#DoingOurBit’** communication campaign to continue to inspire and empower people to help themselves and each other.
- Continue with our successful **Members Fund**, providing vital funding to community projects across Staffordshire.

Support our organisation and others to have a communities mindset

We recognise there is more to be done to embed an empowering communities culture across the county council. We must challenge how we do things and review our policies and procedures. We need to continue to support our workforce to understand the power of our communities, build on the strengths of our communities, and how we can help communities to help themselves. We also recognise that we must continue to challenge ourselves to engage and work in partnership with our residents, communities, and other public sector partners.

In 2023 we will:

- Deliver an **internal communications plan** to promote the importance and progress of our communities work across the organisation.

- Challenge the organisation's **approach to commissioning** to ensure that community engagement and a communities mindset are at the heart of our thinking.
- Review our internal **policies and procedures**, to ensure that where possible we have the right mechanisms in place to support a communities approach.
- Explore opportunities for greater **partnership working on all things communities so that** joint approaches on this agenda through the Staffordshire Leaders Board, Staffordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and the Integrated Care System can be maximised.

Developing a Long-Term Strategy

We have very purposely described this document as a Position Statement as it sets out the progress we've made to date and what we plan to do in the immediate future.

However, over the next 12 months we want to go even further and work with our residents, communities, businesses, and partners to develop **a long-term, aspirational Communities Strategy**.

Engaging with our communities on what they want, what is important to them, and how our work is having an impact locally will be essential. With this in mind, we will start an open and honest conversation with our communities and partners on what more we can do to help, where we should focus, and how we can work better together to support the people of Staffordshire to prosper, be healthy and happy.

We would welcome the opportunity to develop a Communities Strategy in partnership with other public sector organisations who are also committed to this agenda.

Delivery and Governance

Empowering our communities is everyone's responsibility. It involves all areas of the Council, from members to front-line workers, as well as working closely with our partners. As such, our approach to delivery will co-ordinate this activity in an effective and collaborative way.

The Communities Delivery Plan for 2023 is attached and contains further detail on how we will achieve the objectives set out in this document. The Communities Delivery Plan is overseen by the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture and the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills. The Communities Delivery Plan is a corporate plan, as such all portfolio holders and directorates contribute to its delivery.

A Communities Leadership Group brings together senior officers from across the county council with our VCSE infrastructure partners, to co-ordinate, collaborate and monitor progress against the Communities Delivery Plan.

Cabinet and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be provided with an annual report that summaries progress against the Delivery Plan for oversight and scrutiny.

Measuring Success

Performance data and information is vital in understanding the impact our work. At a strategic level, by delivering the objectives set out in this Position Statement we aim to:

- Increase feelings of pride in our communities
- Increase the number of people who feel they can access support and help from within their communities
- Increase the amount of community support available in Staffordshire

In the next 12 months we will be exploring how we can establish metrics, methodologies, and baselines for the above. This will allow us to monitor strategic progress, as well as progress against the Delivery Plan.

We will regularly monitor progress and impact against each of our three objectives. Key measures of success have been defined for each deliverable included in the Communities Delivery Plan. Reporting of progress, performance highlights, and improvement areas will be shared on a quarterly basis with the Communities Leadership Group and aligned with the Council's Integrated Performance Management process. High-level, key performance measures for each objective are summarised below:

Objective: Embed community-led prevention and early help

- Number of successful family outcomes delivered as part of our Supporting Families Programme
- Number of positive activities available for young people and levels of participation in our youth offer
- Number of people who have accessed resources, either through the Council's digital offer or at community help points, to promote independent living and community support
- Number of schemes and level of funding through the Climate Action Fund
- Number of people accessing Staffordshire's Libraries Community Offer, either digitally or in person

Objective: Promote social action and build community capacity

- Number of Community Champions
- Number of schemes and level of funding provided to support community initiatives through the Members Community Fund
- Amount of external funding secured by VCSE organisations following support from the VCSE Capacity Building Framework
- Number of VCSE organisations provided with one-to-one development support through the VCSE Capacity Building Framework
- Number of individuals supported to access local volunteering opportunities

Objective: Support our organisation and others to have a communities mindset

- Staff engaging with communities related content delivered through our internal communications activities
- Progress on policy review areas in relation to our volunteering, social value, and community engagement approaches.

Data and information on our performance will also be used to feed into the future development our longer-term Communities Strategy, helping us to understand what more we can do to empower our communities.

Resources

Empowering Communities is a cross-organisation way of working. Our vision is that every part of the county council, and Staffordshire's public sector challenges themselves to think differently about how we work and engage with communities. Included within the Communities Delivery Plan are details on the costs of delivery, where available and possible to quantify. The estimated total cost of the Communities Delivery Plan is circa £4m.