

# Empowering Our Communities

Communities Position Statement 2023



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# Foreword



**Cllr Victoria Wilson,**  
Cabinet Member for  
Communities and Culture

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

We have seen what Staffordshire's communities can achieve when they come together. The power of our community was critical to Staffordshire's response to Covid-19, with people all over the county doing their bit and going above and beyond to support each other and their local neighbourhoods. Over recent years we have had a proven track-record of working with our residents and community groups to find new ways of addressing local issues. With people struggling with the rising cost of living and challenging times for public finances, there continues to be a real need for creativity and collaboration.

We know that together we can do even more, and in 2023 we aim to do just that by continuing to empower the wonderful communities of Staffordshire.

Helping our residents to live in thriving and sustainable communities is a key priority in our Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026. We have created this Communities Position Statement to clearly set out for our Councillors, our staff, and our partners how our work with communities will help to achieve this priority, including what we have achieved so far and the actions we are taking moving forward.

This includes our Communities Delivery Plan 2023, which details the range of activities taking place across the Council over the next 12 months with our partners to help empower our communities. This plan is actively supported by our Cabinet and focuses on:

- **Embedding community-led prevention and early help to make sure our residents can access the support they need to be healthy, independent, and live in sustainable communities.**
- **Promoting community action and building community capacity, working with Staffordshire's vibrant voluntary and community groups and helping our residents to get involved in what matters to them.**
- **Supporting our organisation and others to have a communities mindset by challenging our approach to commissioning, exploring opportunities for partnership working, and reviewing our internal policies.**

We will put in place strong oversight of this plan to ensure that we are delivering and we understand the difference we are making.

Finally, 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 voluntary, community, and social enterprise (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 Review<sup>1</sup> through to research from Government<sup>2</sup> and think-tanks such as Onward<sup>3</sup>, Centre for Social Justice<sup>4</sup> and New Local<sup>5</sup>.**

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 and innovative 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' report<sup>6</sup> 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 2021/22<sup>7</sup>.

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 and being innovative where possible. 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.

[1. The Marmot Review. \(2010\). Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010.](#)

[2. HM Government \(2022\). Rapid evidence review of community initiatives.](#)

[3. Onward \(2020\). The Policies of Belonging.](#)

[4. Centre for Social Justice \(2021\). Pillars of Community: Why Communities matter and what matters to them.](#)

[5. New Local \(2021\). Community Power: The Evidence.](#)

[6. Support Staffordshire \(2021\). The State of the VCSE sector 2021.](#)

[7. SCVYS \(2022\). Children and Young People Voluntary Sector Census Report 2022.](#)

# 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 facing multiple challenges were supported to improve their lives between April 2021 and March 2022 through our Supporting Families Programme, working alongside community groups across the County



Working 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

Saving families in need

**£46,000**

with established Library Uniform Hubs, working with partners and local community groups to gift free school uniforms in 2021/22



**1,400** 

families in Newcastle-under-Lyme offered slow cookers, in a cost of living pilot scheme

*This will be rolled out across the county in Spring 2023*



## Encourage good health and wellbeing:

Engaged with partners and communities into causes of obesity as part of the Better Health Staffordshire programme



**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

Had conversations 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

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

As of January 2023,

**870**  
Ukrainians



have been accommodated in Staffordshire since March 2022, with **630** still being hosted by local sponsors

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

Worked with Support Staffordshire to deliver Supportive Communities training sessions to just under

**1,000**  
participants

## Tackle climate change, enhance our environment:

**£76,000**



secured by Schools, community groups, and parish councils from the Climate Change Action Fund 2021/22 for local initiatives to help reduce Staffordshire's contribution to climate change

reductions in air pollution outside schools up to

**17%**



as part of Air Aware Staffordshire, whilst 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



VCSE groups supported to secure **£6.3million** of additional funding

The final year of our VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership saw community groups supported with access to 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 a **£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

**3**

successful #DoingOurBit local communications campaigns

focussing on loneliness, mental health, and climate change, reaching thousands of Staffordshire residents

over

**250** digital devices



received and recycled through the The Donate-It ICT scheme, to share with 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 community 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 help to 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, bringing together all the support families may need from pregnancy through to young people turning 18 (25 if they have a disability).
- Deliver the Supportive Communities programme and embedding the approach to ensure adult social care works with the strengths of our communities. This includes further developing our Community Help Points, building on our recent 'citizen enquiry' conversations with communities and growing our networks of local Community Champions.
- Deliver round 3 of the Climate Change Action Fund to help local communities to reduce their contribution to climate change 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 community action and build community capacity

We have an important place leadership role, working with VCSE partners, residents, and communities to promote empower people to get involved and 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 this work 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, and the place they live.
- 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 continue to be creative and innovative, challenging how we do things and reviewing 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, innovative, and 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 community 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 of 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. The estimated total cost of the Communities Delivery Plan is circa £4m.

## Empowering Our Communities

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