

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 18 June 2024

Developing a Communities Strategy for Staffordshire

Recommendation(s)

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. **Note the engagement to date**
- b. **Review and comment** on the draft vision statement for the Communities Strategy.
- c. **Review and comment** on the draft pillars and objectives for the Communities Strategy.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Cabinet Member for Communities & Culture

Summary

What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

1. This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the following information regarding the ongoing development of the Communities Strategy for Staffordshire.
 - a. The **context** to this work and engagement summary.
 - b. The **current draft structure** of the strategy for review and comments including:
 - i. The draft vision statement.
 - ii. Draft pillars and objectives under each heading.
 - c. A summary of the **next phase of the engagement** activities to test the vision statement and pillars.
2. This report recommends that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a. Note the engagement to date.
 - b. Review and comment on the draft vision statement for the Communities strategy.
 - c. Review and comment on the draft pillars and objectives for the Communities strategy.
3. The comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Cabinet at their meeting on 18 September for them to take into account in their consideration of this matter.

Report

Background

4. In February 2023 Cabinet agreed to develop a long-term, innovative, and ambitious Communities Strategy for empowering communities.
5. The engagement approach was agreed in September and between November 2023 and the end of February 2024 a comprehensive engagement exercise took place with residents and partners to shape the future strategy.
6. The engagement exercise included a multi-method approach utilising online and paper surveys for residents and partners as well as targeted conversations with seldom heard groups.
7. A total of 2,106 residents took part in the survey and we received 96 responses to the partner survey.
8. The responses received from the survey with the 842 free text comments have helped us to shape the initial structure of the strategy, including the draft vision statement and strategic priorities for communities.
9. An engagement summary was shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments at a workshop held on 8 March 2024 and their comments have helped to shape the draft vision, pillars and objectives.

Summary Findings:

10. Key themes from the resident survey were also reflected through the face to face and commissioned work and a number of these are partner related, therefore engaging with partners as this work progresses will be essential.

11. **Staffordshire's residents see their community as where they live:** Identity is based in local place. Fewer residents identify with other communities, such as groups or clubs they are members of, workplaces, or places of education, however younger people placed a greater emphasis on online communities.
12. **Staffordshire's residents have pride in their communities:** The sense that people look out for each other, neighbourliness, friendliness, and community spirit being the most frequently cited sources of pride.
13. **Safety and neighbourliness:** Feelings of safety associated with low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, along with neighbourliness, or community spirit, are the things that matter most to people in their communities, followed by a clean and well-maintained, green environment, and the availability of community groups, activities, and events.
14. **Infrastructure and transport:** Residents identify infrastructure and maintenance (roads and pavements), along with the need for better public transport, as the things that could most improve their communities. Transport was the most important priority amongst the responses to the face-to-face work with seldom-heard groups, particularly regarding accessing local amenities, and seeing this as necessary for a thriving local area.
15. **Residents support one another through mostly informal neighbourliness:** Residents tell us that broadly, people in their community do help them out from time-to-time, mainly via neighbours helping them with small tasks. This has clear links to Doing Our Bit and the idea of small actions making a bigger difference.
16. **Residents would like to help-out further:** They tell us that they are already engaged where they are able, but that they would also like to help-out further given the right opportunities, or additional support. Better information, advice, or communication about opportunities that are available are identified as something that would encourage people more. Residents would also like to see the council setting an example, getting more involved, and listening to communities.

Draft Vision Statement, Pillars and Objectives

17. Having analysed the results of the engagement we have drafted the following for consideration:

18. **Draft Vision Statement:** The (draft) vision statement to guide the strategy, is:

“Communities are at the heart of everything we do. We will work better with residents and partners to help people get involved and make a local difference.”

19. **Draft Strategic Pillars and Objectives** focus on Places, People and how the Council will talk, act and listen:

a. Pillar – Great places where we live:

- i. **Objective 1:** Strengthen our work with partners and residents to help people feel safer and more included within their communities.
- ii. **Objective 2:** Help residents to get more involved in tackling climate change, take care of our environment and make Staffordshire more sustainable.
- iii. **Objective 3:** Help people to have better access to thriving local areas, by improving our roads and developing a Local Transport Plan.
- iv. **Objective 4:** Work with our Borough, District, Town, Parish, community groups and other external partners to understand our communities better.

b. Pillar – Connected Communities:

- i. **Objective 1:** Continue to work with and support our thriving Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.
- ii. **Objective 2:** Make it easier for residents to find information, opportunities and connections that help them do their bit and be independent.
- iii. **Objective 3:** Connect people of all ages to the right help, at the right time, in the right place.
- iv. **Objective 4:** Support people to become digitally included, informed, and connected across the county.

c. Pillar – The way the council listens, talks, and acts:

- i. **Objective 1:** Try our best to engage with residents earlier, more accessibly, more creatively, more consistently and more locally.
- ii. **Objective 2:** Change our approach to help residents get more involved, and support officers to understand how they can help.
- iii. **Objective 3:** Support all our councillors to access the local information they need.

Next steps:

20. Our initial engagement produced data which is statistically robust at a county level, and which gave us consistent messages throughout the engagement period. However, we know that we can bolster it further and are conducting limited further face to face engagement with partners and residents, to test our thinking and add to our insight.
21. We are working closely with internal delivery leads for the Digital, Customer, Environment and Cultural strategies to ensure that the Communities Strategy is part of a bigger jigsaw.
22. We are also engaging widely with partners about our findings and draft thinking, using their intelligence and reports to triangulate with our own learning.
23. Views on these draft pillars and objectives will be reflected in a new version that will be shared with Cabinet when they consider the draft strategy on **18 September**.
24. If the strategy is agreed, we will refresh the Communities Delivery Plan with the Communities Leadership Group to confirm the governance and metrics required to monitor progress before implementing the Strategy.

Link to Strategic Plan

25. How we work: Encourage our communities to help themselves and each other.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

26. Workshop held on 8 March 2024 allowed members of the Committee to review early data findings and offer thoughts.
27. After this meeting, ongoing scrutiny of the delivery of the strategy going forwards will sit with the Economy, Infrastructure and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Community Impact

28. The final Communities Strategy will mark a major milestone in the county council's work with communities, and shape how we engage, communicate and empower residents in the future.
29. The Committee is being presented with this draft thinking of key elements for the Communities Strategy, but not with the Strategy itself so the Community Impact Assessment has not been finalised at this stage.
30. An earlier CIA for the Communities Strategy is being reviewed and explored over the coming weeks, ideally with input from community groups. A full updated CIA will be attached to the final Cabinet report.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

31. None

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