



Leicestershire
Communities

Annual Report 2019/20



Foreword



Mrs Louise Richardson CC
Cabinet Lead Member Equalities,
Community Engagement and Rural Partnerships

It is a pleasure to introduce this annual report, which celebrates some of the achievements in our communities over the last year. I am particularly proud that the county council has once again played an active part in supporting and strengthening the communities of Leicestershire. Together we have achieved a lot.

The county council is focused on creating thriving communities where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities participate and help each other; feel included; enjoy high levels of social and economic wellbeing and are resilient and safe. This vision provides a foundation for how we want to work with communities now and in the future. We therefore remain committed to working in partnership in order to develop solutions based on the assets, priorities and aspirations of our different communities.

We have a lot to be proud of in Leicestershire and this report highlights how the council and community groups are working hard to utilise the commitment, talent and skills of people in our communities to achieve change for the better.

At the very end of the period covered by this report, we were faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. This has inevitably presented us with numerous challenges, but I can safely say that the response in Leicestershire has been incredible and has demonstrated the resilience of our communities, in tackling one of the most difficult periods in our history.

The pandemic has offered us many examples of positive community spirit which again shows the vital role played by our communities. Whilst Covid-19 has been a real challenge for our society, there are many successes which we can celebrate, to keep us motivated for the future. I am truly heartened by the willingness of people to volunteer to help others and provide support to their neighbours, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

I hope that the work outlined in this report provides the inspiration for us all to do more and to go further in achieving our aim of building and sustaining strong, resilient, happy and healthy communities in Leicestershire.



Introduction

This Annual Report highlights achievements within the Communities portfolio for the Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities Community Engagement and Rural Partnerships. The work has been coordinated by the Chief Executive's Department and delivered through complementary service areas comprising:

- **Grants and Funding**
- **Policy and Equalities**
- **Resilience and Emergency Planning**
- **Economic Development**
- **Communities and Wellbeing (within the Adults & Communities Department)**

The Communities Team forms part of the Communities, Policy and Resilience Service, located within the Strategy and Business Intelligence Branch of the Chief Executive's Department. The Team works to provide high quality leadership and strategic support to the delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan 2018-22 and the Leicestershire Communities Strategy ('Working Together to Build Great Communities') which sets out the Council's continuing commitment to work in partnership to support, strengthen and empower communities. The Team's mission is;

“Together we will empower Leicestershire Communities to become Strong, Resilient, Happier and Healthier”

The work of the Communities Team is focussed on supporting communities to be active, resilient and inclusive; helping to manage demand for services through prevention and early intervention activities and projects; and supporting communities to design and deliver services locally, sometimes with the support of grants and funding. Progress and proposals are overseen and driven forward by the Communities Board which includes senior representatives from across the Authority.



Project Initiatives

The **SHIRE Community Grants** programme continues to be a successful initiative which provides much needed grant funding to voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations, for projects that improve the health and wellbeing of people experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

In 2019-20, 90 community-based projects were awarded a total of £386,715.

This included:

- **£112,401 for 24 projects supporting disadvantaged young people**
- **£190,816 for 47 projects supporting older people, adults and people with mental health issues**
- **£83,498 for 19 projects to address wider community vulnerability**

SHIRE Community Grants are an important mechanism for helping us to achieve the objectives in the Communities Strategy, particularly around empowering communities to take responsibility for local issues and developing and strengthening the local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. The grants are also a key component of our work to reduce the demand on council and other public services.

The outcomes achieved for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and communities by SHIRE Community Grant funded projects include:

- improving health, wellbeing and quality of life
- enabling positive lifestyle choices
- improving confidence and independence
- enabling vulnerable groups to participate more fully in society

Two examples of projects which received funding in 2019-20 are outlined below:

RCC Rural Coffee Connect

RCC were awarded £10,000 towards a pop-up mobile coffee van that will travel to 20 rural locations around the County, to engage with rurally isolated people, breaking down any social barriers they may have, connecting them to other members of their community and any other appropriate local activities or services to reduce their loneliness and improve their health and wellbeing.





New Life Community Church

New Life Community Church is located in the Gorse Covert area of Loughborough. The church established a food bank in December 2019, providing emergency food for over 130 people. As the need for the foodbank increased over time, it became clear that additional capacity was required to oversee the running of the foodbank. A grant was awarded to the Church to enable them to recruit a part-time, paid Food Bank Manager to co-ordinate activities, train and supervise volunteers and ensure all aspects of the service are delivered to a high standard.

Additional case studies of projects which have been awarded SHIRE Community Grant funding can be seen at www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/grants/case-studies

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The **Leicestershire County Council Communities Fund** was launched on Monday 30th March 2020, following a decision made by Cabinet to establish a £1m fund to help VCSE sector organisations to continue delivering services for vulnerable people during the Covid-19 pandemic. The grant fund was subsequently increased to £1.5m in response to the high level of demand and in less than four weeks, over 250 applications had been processed. In total, 160 organisations were awarded £1.5m of funding to help manage the impacts of the pandemic on their ability to deliver services and to provide support to people during the crisis.

In recognition of the efficient and responsive way the Communities Fund was administered, the council received an award from the charity Leicestershire Cares, which highlighted the difference the funding had made to community organisations in such a short timescale, during a time of significant challenges.

Click here for more details about the types of projects which have benefitted from the Communities Fund, along with the geographical areas covered. Further case studies of projects which were awarded funding can be seen on the Leicestershire Communities website.



Parish and Town Councils - The council, in partnership with Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC), has continued to support Parish and Town Councils in their role as community leaders and as providers of community managed services and activities.

Our annual joint Conference with the LRALC held in July 2019 was well attended, with a good number of county council and partner agencies providing information and advice at the Market Place. The focus of the conference was to consider the council's proposed priorities, to consider the Passenger Transport Policy and to hear an update on Environment & Transport, including exploring opportunities for joint working.

The quarterly operational meetings with Parish Clerks continue and have been strengthened with input and attendance from senior colleagues in the Environment and Transport department: 'Highways Surgeries' were introduced as a 'bolt on' to meetings in February 2019 and continue to be an important part of partnership working with Parish & Town Councils. The surgeries give clerks an opportunity to chat with Highways colleagues about specific issues in their parishes and work together to find solutions. A dedicated Customer Service e-mail address has also been introduced.

Ongoing communication is supported by departmental input to the LRALC Town & Parish Council's bi-monthly newsletter and contributions to a weekly email messages service.

Volunteering is key component of the Communities Strategy that continues to be promoted and supported by the Communities Team. Internally our Volunteer Managers Network has helped to co-ordinate and promote new practices and policies by giving guidance to new managers who are working with volunteers for the first time or developing new volunteering programmes, offering a peer support platform to experienced managers and providing the opportunity to share their best practice and guidance. The Network supports volunteer managers from across the council to confidently support hundreds of volunteers in various roles, celebrate their many and varied successes and explore ways to get more people involved in supporting delivery of council services. With its strategic overview, the Communities Team seeks to signpost, co-ordinate and champion the valuable role of our volunteer managers and highlight the infrastructure needed to properly support them and their work.

In the community we are supporting all aspects of volunteering from encouraging social action and good neighbourliness through to providing training as a formal volunteer. The Team also promotes the work of volunteers and supports colleagues to demonstrate and understand the benefits of volunteering such as reducing isolation and loneliness, learning new skills and gaining experience to return to or change employment.

In addition, as part of the local Covid-19 response, officers from the Communities, Policy & Resilience Service have taken a lead role in working with partners (from across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) to ensure there has been a co-ordinated and structured approach to supporting volunteers during the pandemic, across the LLR sub-region.



The Leicestershire Communities website

provides a range of useful information to help support, promote and facilitate social action in communities. The website is focussed on helping people – individuals and groups - to actively participate in their communities, through the sharing of relevant information, tools and resources to support and enable community action.

The website includes resources around setting up a community group and accessing grants and funding, along with case studies of successful community projects. The website also provides details about the SHIRE Grants programme, Neighbourhood Planning and Community Managed Libraries, as well as additional information relating to 'Asset Based Thinking and Doing' and a Community Engagement Toolkit for Parish and Town Councils. The site further provides the opportunity for individuals to join the Communities Network, along with up to date news and information on upcoming events. Many areas of the website are managed and maintained by community members who have been trained by the Communities Team in the skills required.

Use of the website has grown steadily since it was launched and for the year April 2019 to March 2020 the site has attracted over 76,500 page-views and just over 17,000 users.

At the end of 2019, a Young People's section was added to the website, which now provides an online presence for the county council supported Youth Council for Leicestershire (CYCLE) and in February this year the website was used to host details about the Youth Parliament Elections.

At the end of March 2020, the Leicestershire Communities website played a key role in the rapid delivery of the Communities Fund. It enabled the Communities Team to give the public access to information about the Fund and provided the facility to submit an online application within a matter of days of finalising details of the grant scheme. It also enabled officers working remotely to have access to grant applications quickly and effectively in order to undertake their assessments.

Community Roadshows - This is a new approach to engaging with communities that utilises the expertise within the Team around Asset Based Development within communities. The aim of the events is to enable groups to get to know each other, understand what service/support they each offer and think about how they can work together. It is also an opportunity to showcase community groups/activities to the local community.

Following the success of the first event in Coalville in June 2018, a second event was held in Ashby de-la-Zouch in June 2019. Jointly organised with North West Leicestershire District Council, Ashby's Local Area Co-ordinator, VAL and a group of local volunteers, the event attracted 26 local community groups to the asset-based development session. Once again, the doors were opened to the public to showcase local groups and activities which attracted around 100 people from the local area.

Further information about the events can be found by visiting www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk.





In Leicestershire there are now 123 active Neighbourhood Planning Groups which have produced 38 Adopted Plans and 64 Designated Areas.

The Communities Team continues to provide support and advice for plan development as well as providing timely and co-ordinated consultation responses from the county council. Well-designed plans can help to reduce demand on public services and align with strategic needs as well as the priorities of the local area. The Team also supported 3 Districts (Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth & North West Leicestershire) with Neighbourhood Information Events, which were held for Neighbourhood Planning Groups or those interested in starting a Neighbourhood Plan.

There are 250 members signed up to the Neighbourhood Planning Network and the neighbourhood planning pages of the Leicestershire Communities website are a popular source of information.

Central Government continues to promote neighbourhood plans to communities as a way of taking local control and responsibility to develop a shared vision for local neighbourhoods and to shape the development and growth of local areas. This is backed up by funding provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government through the national voluntary sector support charity Locality.



Friendly Communities of Leicestershire is an open and innovative approach, designed and developed by the Communities Team in conjunction with colleagues that aims to:

- Support social action
- Scale up existing initiatives that are organised and developed in communities (Friendly Bench, Autism Friendly Environments, Dementia Friendly Communities, etc.).
- Recognise the role these initiatives play in supporting local communities to lessen isolation and loneliness and reduce the need for more expensive services.
- Spread good practice by making connections with other projects, interest groups and colleagues and by supporting local initiatives to establish and potentially share knowledge and expand.

During the year the Communities Team has continued to work across departments and with communities to support collaboration and inclusive community initiatives and to develop guidance to promote the approach.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Resilience Partnership - The officers in the Resilience Partnership Team undertake a wide range of projects – for individual authorities, for authorities collectively and by representing local authorities across the multi-agency LLR Prepared Forum. Highlights of key areas of engagement with communities during 2019/20 include:

Duty Officer Support - in addition to providing a 24/7 365 days per year emergency response first point of contact for local authorities the Duty Officer also receives, coordinates and assesses community emergency information such as flood alerts, flood warnings and severe weather warnings both in and out of hours, alerting and working alongside relevant services.

In addition to the Duty Officer support, the Partnership also supports authorities and communities in responding to, and recovering from, incidents. This year the Partnership has had key roles to play in the response to a number of severe flood events, planning for the potential implications of a No-Deal EU Exit and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Resilience Planning work has included delivery of:

- A first aid themed LLR Prepared Week in October training members of the public in emergency first aid skills such as CPR and stopping catastrophic bleeds.
- The continuing roll-out of the Community Emergency Stores scheme designed to encourage communities to produce community response plans focused on developing their resilience. The scheme provides community store funding for equipment to help deliver plans.
- Working with groups of young people on the National Citizens Service in the promotion of flood risk to local communities.



The **Green Plaque Awards** have demonstrated an enduring ability to foster community interest, with people of all ages and backgrounds nominating and voting for the well-known and the not-so-well-known in the county.

So far, 27 Green Plaques have been unveiled across Leicestershire. Individuals, societies, organisations and schools have all taken part in nominating people and places they feel deserve recognition. They've then rallied behind their favourites during the public vote, ultimately joining together with other members of the community to celebrate their success at one of our unveiling events.

Among the people honoured in 2019 and 2020 are members of the Suffragette movement, an astronomer and a WWI poet. Each represents a forceful demonstration of how an individual or group can realise their dreams or ambitions, which can prove inspirational, especially to young people. Other recent community heroes commemorated include Thomas the Tank Engine illustrator John Kenney and Victoria Cross recipient Col. John Barrett.

There appears to be no shortage of worthy candidates for a Green Plaque; the latest round of nominations resulted in 32 submissions, the shortlist of which will be put to the public vote later this year.

The Awards provide a sense of recognition and inclusion, add value to education and raise awareness and interest in heritage across the county and beyond.



The **Leicestershire Rural Partnership** (LRP) is an established and successful partnership which brings together public, private and voluntary stakeholders to improve services and support rural communities and businesses. During 2019/20 the Partnership has continued to champion issues relevant to rural communities including:

1. Rural inclusion and skills; focused on supporting those furthest from the labour market to move closer to work. Leicestershire has the only specific project for rural areas funded through the European Social Fund - the Work.Live.Leicestershire (WiLL) project is led by Vista in partnership with the county council (providing Work Clubs) and the Rural Community Council and has enabled access to employment in rural areas of Leicestershire.
2. Shaping communities and places; through support for Neighbourhood Plans and the Rural Housing Enabler project which is increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural areas.
3. Superfast Leicestershire; which has continued to deliver into rural areas. Phase 2 has now been completed which means that 85,000 premises across Leicester and Leicestershire can access superfast broadband and over 300 villages and towns are connected. The Phase 3 contract has now been signed and will deliver to additional premises in Hinckley and Bosworth, North West Leicestershire, Charnwood and Blaby. The Economic Growth Team is in the process of procuring a supplier to deliver to additional premises in Harborough and Melton districts.

The LRP has prioritised working in partnership with the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership during 2019/20 to ensure the needs and priorities of rural Leicestershire are included in the Local Industrial Strategy, including the Rural Evidence Base. The LRP has also led on work regarding Natural Capital for inclusion in the Strategy.

East Leicestershire LEADER - LEADER is a European funding programme designed to support rural development by providing grants to small rural businesses and communities. The East Leicestershire LEADER area incorporates a large rural area to the east of Leicester. The whole of Melton and Harborough districts are within the eligible area as well as parts of Charnwood and Blaby districts. Since its launch in October 2015 until the closure of the grant programme in October 2019, there have been 45 contracted projects with a total grant value of £1,147,128. 18 of these projects have supported farm diversification and small and medium sized enterprises, 18 have increased farm productivity, 6 have developed rural tourism, 2 have provided rural services and 1 has supported culture and heritage. Of the 45 contracted projects, 7 remain live this year and are due to be completed by December 2020 when all the grant funding will have been allocated. Despite the Covid-19 crisis causing delays to the completion of these remaining projects, all remain on track to be completed by the end of the year and will receive their grant payments.

Community Managed Libraries are now an established and successful part of the Leicestershire Library Service. There are 35 community managed libraries embedded in local areas and offering a wide range of hub services including adult learning, work clubs, keep safe places, café facilities, meeting areas for community groups and bases for Local Area Coordination, in addition to traditional library services. The Communities Team has continued to work with colleagues in the Communities and Wellbeing Service and with Voluntary Action Leicestershire to support service delivery, collaboration between libraries, sustainability and financial management. Information on individual community managed libraries is available at www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/cml.



Commissioned Services and Projects

Countywide Infrastructure Services - Support for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) in Leicestershire is provided by an infrastructure services contract that is delivered by Voluntary Action Leicestershire. The service is jointly commissioned with West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and East Leicestershire and Rutland Clinical Commissioning Group. It is aligned to the shared objectives of the county council and CCGs, specifically those around managing demand through early/community level intervention and prevention, increasing community resilience and more effective delivery of services by community groups. The examples below provide a flavour of the support provided to VCSE groups in 2019/20.

- Advice and training sessions; The 'Introduction to Funding Applications' training enabled participants to understand the basics of completing a funding application, the importance of project planning and how to use the funding toolkit in order to identify sources of funding available to their organisations. Feedback included 'I learnt an enormous amount and we both had many of our questions answered. The way the course was run and executed was brilliant. Thank you'
- Volunteering; Opportunities are advertised on the VAL volunteering website - <http://www.volunteerleicestershire.org.uk>. VAL has continued to work with The Well in Kibworth in developing their volunteering roles and promoting their opportunities to potential volunteers. The Well has a focus on supporting health and wellbeing, which has benefitted both the volunteers and people accessing the services in the café space. With VAL's assistance, The Well has recruited 4 new volunteers, including a social media volunteer to promote their work through online channels.
- Governance; VAL supported Melton Space – an unincorporated association – with the process of converting to an incorporated body. Details of structures were provided, in order that the committee could make an informed choice. This change in structure has enabled Melton Space to be successful with a tender for mobilising the community asset of Melton Country Park's visitor centre. The organisation will continue to help the local community make and fix items, sharing ideas and skills whilst bringing in income through trading as a café and hiring out rooms.

Community Buildings are the essential physical fabric from where community activities take place, where people meet and from where services are delivered. The Communities Team has worked with the Rural Community Council, Leicestershire and Rutland (RCC) to provide an ongoing programme of support for groups that run village halls and community centres and to support the development of new facilities and service delivery arrangements. The RCC has also provided Leicestershire based input into national legislative consultations including those on rural connectivity, rural health and social care and nett zero carbon and rural communities and is part of the National Village Hall Investment Grant Panel. Support to community buildings is very wide ranging and has included governance issues, health and safety, business planning, charity law, insurance and financial support.



Citizen's Advice Bureau services are supported by the County Council jointly with all district councils. Citizens Advice Leicestershire and Charnwood Citizens Advice Bureau provide community advice and support with a focus on issues relating to benefits, debt, homelessness and employment. Between them the Citizens Advice Bureaux provide advice services across the County to help people to manage debt and money, remain in employment, improve their health and well-being and stay in their homes. Casework has included supporting people to claim eligible benefits, recover costs charged by landlords, access disability equipment, leave abusive relationships, forecast and manage finances and access charitable support for essential household goods.

Social Enterprises - CASE (Cooperative and Social Enterprise Development Agency) provide a social enterprise support service across Leicestershire. In 2019-20 CASE provided support to over 40 existing and emerging social enterprises to develop their businesses through help with: strategic planning; partnership links; developing robust income streams and accessing other sources of funding. As a result of CASE's input, over 100 jobs were created or saved in the social enterprise sector. CASE have also contributed to the Council's corporate approach to the Social Value Act. In addition, CASE has contributed to wider Council agendas, by sitting on the Business Board of the LLEP; providing expert advice around mutualism and alternative service delivery options; offering support to projects supporting business growth and offering guidance on alternative finance, such as social investm

The Signposting and Community Support Service (SCSS) provides predominantly re-used/graded furniture and electrical goods (to enable people to move out of temporary accommodation, access tenancies etc.) together with emergency short-term food and fuel support to people in hardship and crisis. The Service also delivers preventative

support focused on debt and money management and is provided by a partnership involving all District Councils, Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureaux, The Bridge Housing Services, Leicestershire and Rutland Reuse Network and Women's Aid.

Furniture or electrical items can be donated by contacting; Hinckley Worklink (www.worklinkproject.co.uk/donate-items.html)

SOFA (Loughborough - <http://sofareuse.org/donate/>)

Open Hands (Leicester City - www.openhandsleicester.org.uk/donate/)

Healthwatch exists to give local people an effective voice about their health and social care services. The service for Leicester and Leicestershire has been jointly commissioned with Leicester City Council and is delivered in an integrated way across the city and county. The Leicester and Leicestershire Healthwatch service has established positive relationships with health and social care provers to highlight patient and carer's concerns and secure improvements. Achievements from 2019/20 have included:

- Wider public involvement in the planning and delivery of hospital services and highlighting patient priorities and experiences for incorporation in the development of services such as patient non-emergency transport and hospital discharge.
- A Medicines Management report which led to a review of prescribing practice to improve consistency during patient discharge from hospital.
- Improvements prompted by Enter and View visits to health and care settings such as GP surgeries and care homes including improved access to GP appointments, enhanced confidentiality, a wider range of activity for care home residents and improved health and safety.
- Enabling patient concerns and experiences to be incorporated into an audit of Dental Practice Accreditation.



Strategy & Policy Development

The Communities Team, working with the Commissioning Support Unit, has been involved in the design, development and implementation of a **Social Value Policy** for the County Council. Two important consequences of this work have been the introduction of a requirement to consider social value on contracts above £50,000 (a significantly lower threshold than the legal minimum) and a focus on market development to support smaller organisations to access council service provision opportunities.

Following on from the above, work is in progress to develop tailor-made tools to measure the impact of the social value that the council achieves from providers. The aims of this work are to:

- Ensure the communities of Leicestershire are supported by the social value secured through procurement exercises.
- Capture how that support impacts on communities and whether it helps to mitigate future, more expensive council interventions
- Inform future policy decisions and procurement needs.

Policy and Equalities - The council consulted from November 2019 to February 2020 on the refresh of its Equalities Strategy to cover the period 2020-24. The Strategy meets the council's obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to set itself specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years. 213 responses were received to the online and easy read consultation questionnaire from Council staff, members of the public, and voluntary sector, charity and community groups. The Strategy was also informed by face-to-face engagement with the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group and a range of organisations representing protected characteristic groups.

As a result, the draft aims, and objectives of the Equality Strategy 2020-24 were amended to better emphasise the council's commitment to improving its performance in its equality work including through evidence-based decisions, increasing participation of under-represented groups, providing inclusive services, working with others and celebrating success. By doing this, Leicestershire can be a place where there are good relations, equality of opportunity and outcomes for everyone. The final Equality Strategy 2020-24 (www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/equality-and-diversity/equality-act-2010) was approved by the county council on 8th July 2020 and will be supported by more detailed annual action plans.

Progress over the final year of the preceding Equality Strategy 2016-20 included maintaining a Top 100 rating in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index as one of the top 5 local authorities represented in the Index in 2020. The council also gained Gold level in the new Stonewall Children and Young People Champion Awards in 2020 to build on its work in tackling anti-LGBT+ bullying in schools under the previous Education Equality Index. A further area of work was with partners to develop the first LGBT+ Inclusion Award scheme to recognise the commitment of local business and other organisations to LGBT+ equality. These and ongoing activities like participation in Leicester Pride support LGBT+ staff and residents.



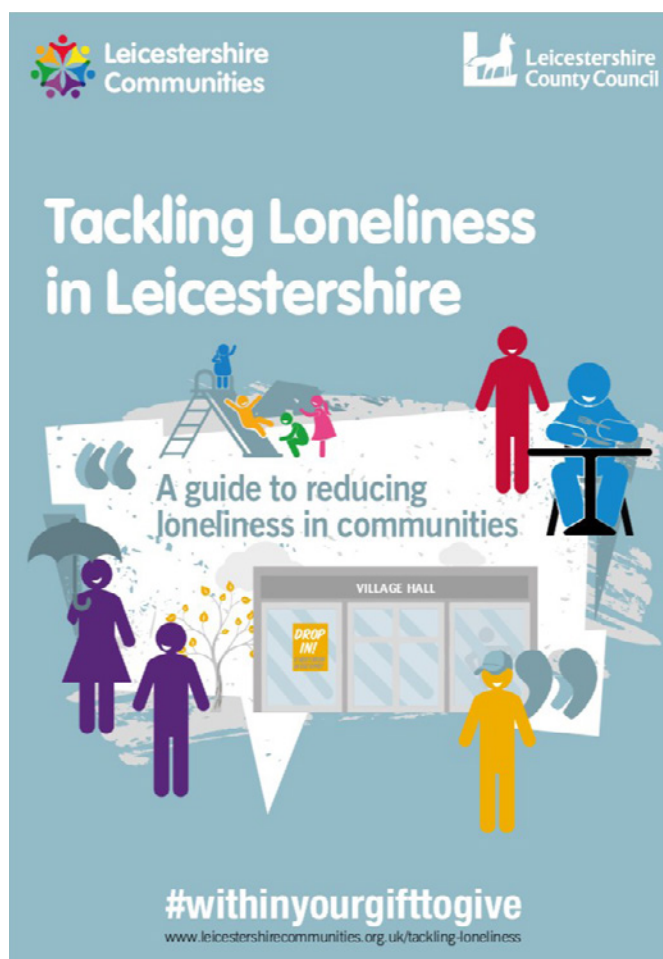
The Leicestershire Inter Faith Forum jointly organised a public event with the unit for Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement (DICE) at the University of Leicester in October 2019 with the suffragan Bishop of Loughborough, the Rt Rev Guli Francis-Dehqani, as keynote speaker on the subject of 'Justice, faith and belonging in a changing world'. The Forum supports a range of umbrella and local faith and belief communities through sharing news about their activities and services that promote good relations and shared values across a range of cultural backgrounds, activities and commemorations.

Tackling Loneliness - In November 2018, Government responded to the growing importance of the loneliness agenda by launching a Loneliness Strategy ('A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness'). As a response to national work around the issue of loneliness and social isolation, the County Council has led and implemented a range of successful projects and initiatives related to this agenda.

In November 2018, a successful Loneliness Summit took place at College Court in Leicester. This event was co-ordinated by the council, in partnership with Leicester University, and was attended by a wide range of stakeholders, from the public sector, academic institutions and voluntary and community sector organisations. The event was successful in establishing local commitment to addressing the challenges associated with loneliness and social isolation, across a number of different cohorts, including young people, older people, people with disabilities and people with mental health issues, amongst many other groups.

In 2019-20, the council has made further progress in its work to raise awareness of the problem of loneliness and;

- A social media communications campaign was undertaken during the winter months, to promote the principle of looking out for others, using the strapline 'within your gift to give'
- A Leicestershire County Council Loneliness Project Team was established with associated programmes of work
- A dedicated chapter focussed specifically on loneliness was developed for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- A VCSE Stakeholder Group was established (facilitated by council officers), to help take forward some of the recommendations which arose at the Loneliness Summit in 2018.



In July 2019, the VCSE Stakeholders Group came up with the idea of developing a Loneliness Toolkit for Leicestershire, based on a similar resource developed in Reading. The Council's Communities Board approved the development of the Loneliness Toolkit in September 2019, and the document and associated resources were ready by December 2019.

The Tackling Loneliness in Leicestershire 'toolkit' comprises an 8-page booklet, which provides useful information to help people reduce feelings of loneliness, along with information about local sources of support, as well as how to get involved in community groups, projects and activities. A shorter, 2-sided summary version of the document (containing key information) was also produced.

In addition to the booklet, the Leicestershire Communities website (www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/tackling-loneliness) was updated, with a section dedicated to tackling loneliness, including details about how to get help, information and support regarding loneliness.

The Loneliness Toolkit resources were officially launched at the 'Celebrating Great Communities' event in December 2020, following which, over 1000 copies of the A4 2-sided summary have been distributed and around 500 copies of the 8-page toolkit document have been distributed.

The Toolkit documents have been requested by residents, carers, professionals, GP surgeries, and Parish Councils, which demonstrates the wide-ranging commitment to tackling the loneliness problem across the County.

Asset Based Approaches - The Team has continued to develop and deliver a range of asset-based approaches and bespoke 'training' sessions which enable colleagues, stakeholders and partners to understand and adopt this way of working. By reframing conversations away from the traditional deficit-based model the Communities Team is able to focus and build on the strengths of a community, policy or delivery model and use this to build a more co-produced and sustainable model for the future.

We continue to work across the council and County and increasingly across the Region in promoting and advocating this way of working, and with partners in the VCSE we have, among other things:

- Delivered bespoke support training sessions within the Authority to support teams and departments to work differently.
- In conjunction with the Learning and Development Service, designed and delivered a series of Communities of Practice sessions to over 50 managers outlining the basic principles and theory of practice in this model of working.
- Designed and delivered a bespoke workshop for regional Heritage Volunteer Managers looking to work across the sector in new ways and supported them to work better together.
- Held session at Ashby Community Roadshow with grass-roots organisations helping them to make local connections and explore new ideas around working together successfully for the benefit of their local community.
- Delivered a workshop at the Enabling Social Action East Regional Event supporting national speakers and local case studies.
- Produced action plans and supporting materials around embedding the asset-based approach across the Authority including advising on how to incorporate the approach in strategy and delivery.



Armed Forces Covenant - The Communities Team and the county council continue to support the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces Family (those who have served in the armed forces, reservists, adult cadet volunteers and carers for a former member of the armed forces) in Leicestershire and beyond. Work is focused on actively promoting and supporting the four themes of:

- encouraging local communities to support their local armed forces community and vice versa
- promoting public understanding and awareness of issues that affect the armed forces community
- recognising the sacrifices made by the armed forces community
- encouraging activities which help integrate the armed forces community into local life.

The council has a strong track record of supporting the armed forces and in the past year the council has:

- Supported a regional Civil and Military Partnership Board covering Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to develop and deliver a regional action plan co-ordinating the work of local authorities, universities, military charities and our armed forces.

- Hosted a council armed forces employee network which supports forces family employees and explores ideas about how we can better improve service delivery to this cohort. The group has hosted guest speakers from Adult Cadet Forces and the Employee Engagement Team from The Ministry of Defence.
- Maintained ties with the Ministry of Defence Employment Engagement Team including attending Partnering with Defence training and events.
- Commemorated several important remembrance events relating to previous conflicts including WW1 and WW2 events.
- Partnered with Local business and VCS organisations to see how to better support the Forces Family in Leicestershire
- Worked with the National Defence Rehabilitation Centre to design a programme of work experience placements for service personnel to help them gain experience of working in a civilian environment and to support their transition out of the military.

Consultation and Engagement - The County Council undertook 10 major consultations during 2019/20:

1. Homelessness prevention support – reconfiguration of services
2. Substance Misuse Strategy and service recommissioning
3. Medium Term Financial Strategy
4. Equalities Strategy 2020-2024
5. Recycling and Household Waste Sites - reduction in opening hours
6. Strategic Transport Priorities 2020-2050 (joint consultation with Leicester City Council)
7. The Adult and Communities Departmental Strategy 2020-2024
8. A511 Road Junction Improvements
9. Hinckley Zone 4 – road and traffic calming improvements
10. School Admissions Policy – changes to criteria and catchment areas



A variety of methods were used to consult with the general public, service users and specific stakeholders. There was strong use of the council's website, and on-line questionnaires along with meetings with service users and stakeholders, and preparation of consultation materials in alternative formats such as British Sign Language and display models. The most effective consultations were those where there were specific proposals, and respondents could comment on the direct potential impact for them and where consultation materials used clear and concise language, the topic was of immediate interest, and there were easy and accessible ways of responding.

The Engagement and Consultation Manager worked closely with colleagues in Business Intelligence and Communications to advise Departments on their consultation approach and then develop consultation materials and publicity. The three teams worked well together to provide consistent advice and support and through early involvement strengthened the consultation process and its influence on eventual decisions.

During the year the council commissioned external training on the legal basis for consultation which was delivered by The Consultation Institute. 29 managers representing all Departments attended. The training was highly rated by participants and informed practice including through increased clarity about if and how a formal public consultation should take place, improved consultation planning and enhanced stakeholder identification and analysis. An Officers Guide to Consultation has also been developed to support consultations.

There was strong interest to spread the skills and experience of effective consultation to other officers and managers across the Council. The Service therefore worked in partnership with Learning and Development to design and deliver a "Communities of Practice" workshop on the issues. Six sessions were held, and 39 managers participated in the workshops. During the workshops the use of an interactive presentation tool called "Mentimeter" was trialled and it is intended to use this technology for future public and stakeholder engagement.

From 23rd March the County entered legal "lockdown" to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 Virus. Many council services were suspended or operated on a reduced basis. It was decided to extend the consultation period for two projects which were due to close during lockdown. As services resume, the council will need to find ways of operating them whilst maintaining social distancing, good hygiene and other precautions. Whilst some changes will be urgent or enforced, it will remain important to ensure that the public are engaged and informed about how the council will operate in the new environment.



A ***'Celebrating Great Communities'*** event was held at County Hall on 5th December 2019.

The event gave opportunities for delegates to:

- Hear about different projects, activities and initiatives which are making a positive difference in Leicestershire
- Hear from inspiring community champions, about how they have made an impact in local communities
- Attend workshops around developing community buildings; social prescribing; being a resilient community; and how to apply for Lottery funding
- Network and interact with other like-minded people who share common interests related to social action

The event also included the launch of the Loneliness Toolkit for Leicestershire, as well as presentations and workshops from the following:

- Ann Irving, a local volunteer and community activist from Woodhouse
- Sue Steer from Churches Together
- Rohini Corfield from VASL
- Paul Gadd from The Arc Community Hub
- Oliver Savage from the National Lottery Community Fund
- Andrew Murr, Helen Hardy & Heleena Chauhan from the LLR Resilience Partnership
- Debbie Preston & Emma Chouhan from Leicestershire County Council's Public Health Department talking about Social Prescribing in Leicestershire

This was a successful event, which was attended by over 60 delegates and another example of demonstrating the Council's commitment to sharing and celebrating the positive examples of social action in our communities.

