

# Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

## Report of the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities

**CABINET**

**7 JANUARY 2014**

**CAB14/128**

**DRAFT WEST SUFFOLK FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY** (Decision Plan Reference: Nov 13/02)

### **1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 This Strategy, which has been developed in conjunction with St Edmundsbury Borough Council, provides the framework for reshaping the relationship between the Council, its communities and their families. It aims to foster resilience in local communities and seeks to address the dependency culture which can build up when the Council is seen as the first port of call for any issue. It also deliberately focuses on supporting families. Providing support early, rather than when a family is in crises, is a preventative approach which is both better for the families and reduces the demand placed on public services by those in crisis.
- 1.2 The approach outlined is founded on an asset-based approach to working with communities which focuses on the strengths a community already has and can build on, rather than a focus on deficits or problems (see page 2 of the Strategy for further detail). It is based in the knowledge that sustainable local solutions can only come from the communities themselves, not from Council generated projects.
- 1.3 At a time of scarce resources it seeks to focus resources within communities where they can provide the greatest impact. The thinking behind this strategy has been reflected in the creation of a Families and Communities Team as part of the Leisure, Culture and Communities restructuring. This team will provide locality officer support to councillors across both Councils as you engage with your local communities. They will be working with you to support local communities in delivering the projects that they are motivated to take forward.

### **2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 **Subject to the outcome of debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 December 2013, to be reported to Cabinet by the Executive Member for Families and Communities, to recommend to Council that the West Suffolk Families and Communities Strategy be adopted.**

<b>Contact details</b>	<b>Portfolio holder</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>
Name	Councillor Robin Millar	Neil Anthony
Title	Cabinet Member for Families and Communities	Head of Leisure, Culture and Communities
Telephone	07939 100937	01284 757064
E-mail	<a href="mailto:robin.millar@forest-heath.gov.uk">robin.millar@forest-heath.gov.uk</a>	<a href="mailto:neil.anthony@westsuffolk.gov.uk">neil.anthony@westsuffolk.gov.uk</a>

### **3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?**

3.1 This strategy provides the framework within which the Council can deliver its current priority of creating “Stronger, More Active Communities” and through which it can redefine the relationship of the district council with its communities.

### **4. Key issues**

4.1 These are outlined in the Strategy which describes the changes in society and the need to revisit the relationship which all levels of government have with local communities.

4.2 It also outlines the importance of the early years of the development of children and the case for supporting families to give both the children and parents the best life chances. The benefits of this approach feed out into wider agendas such as improvements in health and wellbeing, greater contributions to the local economy and less crime and anti-social behaviour.

### **5. Other options considered**

5.1 The Council could continue without a formal policy on how it relates to communities.

### **6. Community impact**

#### **6.1 Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 The asset based approach to community development advocated should support the production of lasting local solutions within communities where these issues can be resolved at a community level. Both Councils will continue to engage with the Police and other statutory partners through the Community Safety Partnership and in other arenas where strategic issues, or those involving a multi-agency response, can be progressed.

#### **6.2 Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 The asset-based approach established in the strategy provides opportunities for all communities to engage with the Council.

#### **6.3 Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 No adverse impact anticipated. A Sustainability Impact assessment has been completed for this strategy.

## 7. **Consultation** *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

- 7.1 There has been extensive discussion of the overall approach between Portfolio Holders, Cabinet colleagues and officers in the Families and Communities Team. This report provides the opportunity for wider debate. There will be individual opportunities for Councillors to discuss the application of the strategy when they meet with their locality officer
- 7.2 The message about the new approach to working with communities has already begun to be communicated at a corporate level.
- Cabinet and Joint Leadership Team have been thinking through the new approach and principles for some months. They recognise the need for change beyond shared services, see the relevance and potential of the new approach and believe it to be deliverable and effective
  - As part of their review, all staff within the Policy Team and the new Families and Communities Team attended a workshop over the summer, to consider the potential impact and challenge of the new ways of working.
  - Further workshops for staff are being scheduled as part of the roll out across the council. The Housing team have spotted the potential for their work with parishes and have registered their interest in learning more.
  - The specifics of our Families approach have also been developed over the summer with Suffolk County Council. The Directors of Children's and Adults' Social Services in the County Council are keen to support this way of working and explore its impact on delivery of traditional care. Details of delivery are now being worked out with the new Families and Communities Manager and officer team.
- 7.3 The Policy Team are capturing these principles and carrying the implications through into revision of the Strategic Plan. These documents will provide further opportunities to publicise the changed approach.
- 7.4 Councillors have also been introduced to the principles behind the new ways of working:
- **Member development sessions** introducing the principles of asset-based community development and a simple action plan all councillors can follow within their own wards have started (two to date). These are being repeated bi-monthly with the next taking place this month. These will be boosted by the involvement of the new Localities staff to work on the plans alongside the Ward Councillors.
  - **Locality Budgets** were the first step to implementing a local commissioning approach and changing the conversation between Councillors and communities. This is being continuously developed to help Councillors and staff and with the assistance of this committee via its review of the scheme. Within the community the approach has been trailed as part of messages to various groups, including those attending the Parish Forum, about the refocusing around the three strategic priorities.
  - **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** will have debated the Families and Communities Strategy at the meeting on 19 December 2013.

7.5 Within the community the approach has also been introduced:

- **Parish Councils** Over the last 15 months the Council has held a series of bi monthly Parish Forums under the headline "Ten Tonne Truths", to draw attention to the need for a strong relationship with the District Council in order to have difficult conversations about the growing demands from residents and the role that Parishes can play in building "fences" within their own communities. Parishes have responded enthusiastically to the new approach and responsibility they are being given in their relationship with the District Council.

7.6 The Council have begun to review development grants for the market towns (Community Partnership Budgets) and individual grants (e.g. CAB, SOS Bus) have been reviewed as they have come up. The new approach has been communicated and accepted in principle. Important messages about the time to transition and the phasing of the transition have been taken on board.

7.7 Formal strands of communication will now be needed to launch the strategy:

- The first is an overarching communication of this shift in thinking and approach. It will comprise a variety of events, messages and channels and is essentially a strategic communications matter.
- The second is with bodies currently receiving grant funding to inform them about the review taking place. This is an extension of the work already done with CAB and Newmarket Open Door (SOS Bus) funding.
- The third will be communication with external bodies/partners if the Councils are withdrawing from some areas of work or annual events. This is an extension of the conversations with the ACS at County.
- A fourth is specific to Parishes, through the Parish Forum.
- A fifth is with/through Councillors into communities. This is arguably the most important and will be the starting point for local discussion.

## **8. Financial and resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 Implicit in adopting the strategy is the creation of the councils' new Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The interaction between the Strategic Plan and MTFS will be particularly important in the setting of budgets for 2015-16, as the councils' priorities will be used to inform real choices about the allocation of resources. The MTFS will also set out some of the new ways of working for West Suffolk, which will allow the Strategic Plan to be delivered within a more financially constrained environment.

8.2 A review of the current approach to the council's community budgets, both those managed internally and external grants provided, is also implicit in adopting the strategy. The result will be a transition to more commissioning funding pots. Advanced notice of this change in the model of funding and a managed transition will give organisations currently receiving grants the opportunity to reshape their provision and adapt to meet this new market.

8.3 There will also be a shift to draw down a larger proportion of the existing community budgets at ward/locality level via the locality staff in response to community led activity. This should be seen essentially as an enhancement to Member locality budgets, albeit with a different process of approval, as it is in

effect a response to community priorities developed through the ward councillors.

- 8.4 This is an important emphasis of the current member training in community development that has started to develop the role of the councillor as a leader of their community.

## 9. Risk/opportunity assessment

<b>Risk area</b>	<b>Inherent level of risk (before controls)</b>	<b>Controls</b>	<b>Residual risk (after controls)</b>
New ways of working for Councillors and staff	High	Councillors being introduced to the approach through Member Development (more so at FHDC to date, SEBC just starting) and through O&S discussion of the draft strategy.  Robust selection process for staff. Strong programme of team development. Regular monitoring of performance.	Medium
Communities do not engage with the new way of working	Medium	New staff structure provides for dedicated locality officers who work closely with ward Councillors to engage. Sharing and celebrating the success of communities which have engaged to demonstrates the benefits of doing so.	Low
Changes in funding structures	Medium	Engagement with Parish Forums, community groups, voluntary sector groups for their input in shaping the new approach. Communications plan to accompany the roll-out of the strategy and new ways of working. Open discussion with councillors on the implications of the new ways of working on their role	Low
Managing the transition	Medium	Communications plan, to be led by councillors, to accompany the roll-out of the strategy and new ways of working. Open discussion with councillors and partners	Low

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
		around the implications of the new ways of working, including funding and locality working	

## 10. Legal and policy implications

- 10.1 The shift to a more preventive model where communities are supported to first look to their own ability to address issues of local concern is applicable to many services. It sits within the national dialogue about reducing the size of government, reducing the demand on services through prevention, involving the family and empowering people and communities to get more involved in and take more control over their own destinies.
- 10.2 Although the strategy is now being progressed by the Families and Communities Team it is important that Councillors and staff recognise that its adoption is a core initiative of the council to position itself for further funding cuts in the future, beyond the savings achievable through shared services. It will mark a change in the core business of the council because it changes the assumptions underpinning the relationship between the Councils and communities.
- 10.3 This naturally has implications for the way that the council does its business: local government can no longer afford to be a first resort for help, advice and support, except in emergencies. Rather we will become an enabler of residents, families, neighbourhoods and communities, seeking to support them in what they have already started to do.
- 10.4 Adoption of the strategy commits the Councils to apply the prevention/families and communities model to all future policies. This will be worked through the council on a rolling basis over the coming months and will affect all services. It might be compared to the way in which all services were required to carry out Equalities Impact Assessments on their work, but without the bureaucratic burden.

## 11. Ward(s) affected

- 11.1 All

## 12. Background papers

- 12.1 None

## 13. Documents attached

- 13.1 Appendix - Draft West Suffolk Families and Communities Strategy