

MORE FENCES. FEWER AMBULANCES

DRAFT FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils understand that the role of local government is changing in response to reduced funding and new models of how to maximise councils' effectiveness. A key part of this change is the role of government within the community. For this reason, the councils are committed to supporting families and strengthening communities to enable them to become more resilient and more able to help themselves in the knowledge that the wider benefits in terms of better health outcomes, less crime and disorder and improved life chances will help manage future demand for services.

Some of the difficulties experienced by people could be prevented or tackled early if support and potential solutions were available close to home, for example, from within family, neighbourhood or community networks. This would then result in a different role for public services, namely being an option of last resort, rather than the first port of call.

In future, the councils' role will be to support families and communities in building "fences" at the tops of cliffs, rather than directly to provide "ambulances" at the bottom. In practice, this will mean changes to the way the councils work, namely:

- a different kind of work; prevention is different to crisis response
- different ways of working across organisations: conventional silo working approaches are unsuited to preventative approaches
- different skill sets for the workers and councillors
- a different workplace – broadly speaking, in the places where people are, not in public sector offices.

When successful, there are many benefits to this preventative approach, including more empowered individuals and strengthened communities, a reduced dependency culture and a better skilled society, leading to a stronger economy and fewer health inequalities. Reducing demand for services through preventative approaches is also the only sustainable way to reduce costs in the public sector.

But in order to achieve these goals, all levels of government need to both change their criteria for being involved in a given situation, as well as their models of delivery, and also create the conditions in which families and communities can, and are willing, to help themselves and others.

There are many well-publicised examples of prevention and empowerment models being taken forward in other sectors and at other levels of government. For example, central government has advocated a small government, big society approach, and has championed early intervention approaches. Similarly, the National Health Service in recent years has sought to divert patients away from acute medical care, by promoting prevention, self-help and community-based solutions. But there are only a

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few publicised examples of district councils embracing the concept, including Thurrock, Gloucester and Sheffield. Meanwhile, the scale and functions of district and borough councils make them uniquely placed, even amongst their county and Metropolitan cousins, to support people in making a real difference in their communities, being organised as they are around localities and wards, not large-scale geographical areas. Examples from West Suffolk, such as good neighbour schemes and community events, have already proven the benefits of this type of approach.

Crucial to our approach of centring our support on families and communities will be encouraging them to explore their strengths and assets, and tailoring our support and responses accordingly. Traditionally we think of assets as being buildings or places but in this approach references to assets **also** means local people who care enough about an issue in their community that they are prepared to do something about it. Each locality's social, economic and demographic make-up will be different, as well as the challenges it faces, and understanding these will be fundamental to the success of the Councils' work.

In practical terms, prioritising the role of families and communities in society will mean that the Councils will take a range of actions to empower and enable people to spot, prevent and address emerging problems, rather than waiting until they become serious and manifest in as worklessness, anti-social behaviour or poor health.

Principles

The core principles underpinning the new Families & Communities approach can be expressed as a series of tests:

1. **Prevention Test:** building "fences" starts in the home and the community long before acute public services ("ambulances") are called on.
2. **Asset Test:** any action on "deficits" (gaps, problems, weaknesses) is developed from a conversation about the assets of people (values, priorities, relationships, commitments etc.) and place (buildings, meeting spaces etc.).
3. **Family & Community Test:** the priority people place on a service or project is demonstrated by their involvement in producing that service or project.
4. **Personal Agency Test:** we will not do what people can do for themselves.
5. **Legacy Test:** the contribution of the activity to increasing assets within families and communities. This is a true return on investment.

Towards a families and communities strategy

This document sets out how Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils, working together as West Suffolk, will put work to strengthen families and communities at the centre of its approach. The document is structured as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Why do we need a change in approach?
 - i. Current social issues
 - ii. Past role of the public sector
3. The Families and Communities model
4. Examples of successful initiatives with families and communities
5. The strategy for West Suffolk
6. Indicative work programme

2. WHY DO WE NEED A CHANGE IN EMPHASIS?

i) Current social issues

When measured at the local authority level, the populations of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils appear to be relatively affluent, and experiencing lower levels of deprivation and social upheaval than is the case in many other parts of the country.

However, this overall picture masks pockets of real deprivation and a lack of social mobility, in some cases, just a few households, but in others, whole neighbourhoods where individuals and families are experiencing real difficulties on a day to day basis. Difficulties which are likely to be compounded by changes to welfare and benefits.

There is a further concern that current metrics and indices of deprivation do not adequately capture all the causes and consequences of poverty and a lack of health and wellbeing. Many of the issues facing our residents today are not picked up in statistical analyses, such as loneliness and isolation, a lack of practical support or mental health problems. Primarily there is a focus on financial related measures (income, benefits etc.) while there is relatively little that captures the importance of relationships and connections throughout life.

Example: The Children's Society "Good Childhood Report" (2012)

This report based on interviews with more than 30,000 children aged eight to 16 and identified six key priorities needed for a happy childhood, including choice, quality of family relationships and stability. It illustrated that while children as young as eight are aware of financial pressures at home, at any moment half a million children across the UK are unhappy with their lives for a much wider variety of reasons. Children who have low levels of happiness are much less likely to enjoy being at home with their family, feel safe when with their friends, like the way they look and feel positive about their future. Children unhappy in this way are also more likely to be victimised, have eating disorders or be depressed, ie have a wider range of confidence and health issues.

Finally, there is a growing awareness of the importance of acting early – both in preventing problems, but also in determining life outcomes. It is often issues such as loneliness, work related mental health that can spiral out of control, causing crises at a later stage. Likewise investing in good relationships between parents and children and effective parenting techniques play a role in determining social skills, educational and health outcomes and more that have a lifelong benefit. This understanding is growing and is starting to work its way into policy.

Example: Early Intervention Foundation

In 2011 an independent report "Early Intervention: The Next Steps" was presented to government by Graham Allen MP. This was based on a 2005 report on "The Early Years" by the Centre for Social Justice and Young Foundation which produced a cross party agreement on the importance of early intervention by all the main political party leaders at the time. The

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recommendation for an Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) was later adopted into the DWP's Social Justice Strategy (March 2012).

This work is developing in the UK, now under the aegis of the EIF. It is further developed and well established in the USA where clear links have been drawn between specific interventions and support a child receives in the first 5 years of life, the physiological impact it has on the child and the economic benefit to society in later years.

Case study 1 – Hidden rural deprivation and education

A recent Ofsted report found that the areas where the most disadvantaged children are being let down by the education system are no longer deprived inner city areas. Instead the focus has shifted to deprived coastal towns and rural, less populous regions of the country, particularly down the East and South-East of England.

The author of the report, Sir Michael Wilshaw said "Often [poor children] are spread thinly, as an 'invisible minority' across areas that are relatively affluent. We need new policies and approaches to deal with underachievement in these areas."

Case study 2 – Knitting Families Together (Young Foundation study, 2009)

A study into parenting support in 2009 found that a sustained relationship between parent or carer and child ought to improve the health and wellbeing of both individuals. The authors also expected that the better parents felt about themselves and their role in the family and society, the better equipped they will be to engage with their children in an encouraging and supportive manner. The report cited studies have shown that this kind of positive parental investment has the potential to influence a child's conduct, educational achievement and health and reduces the likelihood of police contact and can also yield a long-term gain for children in terms of employment, housing, income, relationship stability and a child's own parenting skills in the

As West Suffolk, we therefore need to make sure that the way in which we use our resources to support our residents takes account of this mixed and changing social picture. Each locality will require a different approach, depending on the presenting social issues, poor health, increased crime and disorder or poor educational attainment for example, and the different capacities of the residents to make changes in their lives and neighbourhoods. We also need to absorb the emerging understanding of what really makes a difference – and relationships within the family and community are at the heart of this. This is not rejecting current approaches, merely recognising that by themselves they are not enough.

Therefore, our approach will also need to be sensitive to the changes in society, in family make-up and in community structures that have taken place over recent years and which will continue to evolve.

ii) The past role of the public sector

Too often in the past, public services have responded to social problems by providing a safety net when situations reach crisis point. Whilst this is both necessary and appropriate for genuine crises, in many cases, the crisis response has become the norm, with investment focused on critical services, at the expense of preventative ones. However, continuing to operate in this way is no longer affordable.

The spotlight on the pressure being placed on the NHS's accident and emergency services demonstrated how this had become the case. Rather than accessing primary care services, some patients were going straight to their local accident and emergency department. Many said that they had done so because of the difficulty of being seen in a primary care setting.

- ➔ Because of West Suffolk's very local focus, and its existing resources, the councils have a unique opportunity to target these resources on supporting families and communities early on in order to prevent them needing to access expensive, acute services later.

A preventative approach – an example

Sheffield has a network of health champions who are knowledgeable about their neighbourhood and motivated to improve the health and wellbeing of their community. Each champion is hosted by a local organisation and receives training and support.

Because they are local people they can tune in to localised needs. For example through talking to other mums on their estate two of the champions identified that there was interest in parent and toddler swimming sessions. They set up a programme and now have two full groups meeting and a waiting list. Other schemes include encouraging disabled people to take part in local cycling groups, five-a-side football for marginalised groups and local stop smoking campaigns within individual communities.

As well as the community benefits many of the champions report that their lives have been transformed by the experience which has improved their skills and confidence and, for some, has helped their progression into paid work.

iii) Transformation vs. maintenance

Where intervention by the public sector is required, we need a change of emphasis from "maintenance" of an individual or family's situation, to an

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expectation that their situation can be transformed. In effect this is recalibrating standards and expectations to something that is appropriate for approaches designed to reduce future service demands. In order for this to be the case, we need to build on the resilience of the individuals and families concerned with appropriate and high quality support, with the aim of making it a significant process that results in lasting change, rather than something that will need to be repeated throughout their lives.

3. THE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES APPROACH

The majority of people in West Suffolk are well supported by family, social and community networks. For example, Lakenheath Good Neighbour Scheme, Mildenhall Road Estate residents association and church communities. Much of the support they may need is available socially within these family, community and other networks. Importantly, this comes at a time when it may not even be perceived as support, but is preventative – eg a shoulder to cry on, advice on a problem, wisdom on financial management, relationships or parenting. Support from external agencies is available at crucial moments when it is needed such as accidents, crises or around the time of particular life events (e.g. pregnancy, birth, schooling, couple and family formation), or because of particular specialist needs (such as ill-health, or a physical or learning disability).

However, a well intentioned desire from public services to help more has seen the scope and scale of services increase. An unintended consequence has been to reshape expectations of what public services are there for, with the result that a small percentage of people have become dependent on external agencies on a daily basis to support them in dealing with issues such as anti-social behaviour, children in school, health inequalities and worklessness. In some cases, this can lead to families neglecting to take responsibility for themselves. Many such families in West Suffolk are being supported by Suffolk Family Focus, whose aim is to “turn them around”.

This strategy will:

- Change the expectations of people about the role they and the council play in prevention and support.
- Improve prevention (fences) so that there is less demand for services (ambulances) so preventing people from reaching the point of being dependent on external agencies.
- Reverse the dependence on public services that can occur. By empowering families and communities to support one another individual crises should in future not automatically lead to an intervention public agencies.

Instead, building on resources put in place by West Suffolk, communities will be able to prevent the need for services from arising and where they do arise, provide community-led solutions that prevent the difficulties experienced from becoming serious. This complements conventional public services for critical and acute matters.

The approach

At the centre are our residents, our families and our communities. They are surrounded by other neighbours and volunteers in their locality who, with the right enabling, can provide support and solutions to those they live alongside. This enabling comes both from the district or borough council, but also from other voluntary bodies or commissioned specialist

organisations who provide the frameworks within which communities can support themselves. And linking the two are community **connectors**, who are able both to identify what communities need, but also to articulate this to the network of agencies who can provide resources and other forms of enabling. The Councils, through their Councillors and staff, need to make the links with these community connectors to support the enablement of that community.

We think enablement is achieved through an asset based approach to personal, family and community development. This is supported by many years of experience and delivery across different cultures, demographics and income brackets. It means rather than approaching communities in order to “fix” their problems, our engagement with them will be shaped around the following cycle:

1. Identify connected people

These community connectors may not hold positions of leadership or formal office within organisations, but they will have excellent networks within communities.

2. Map assets

By bringing the connectors together, networks are connected. These connectors and networks are key assets within communities. By definition these are not going to be formal connections – many of those who are well connected shun formal arrangements. Further assets – skills, passions, physical places/spaces etc. - within the community can also be identified

3. Ask what people are willing to do

Where ideas to tackle problems and improve people’s lives/places are identified, the key question is “what do you care enough about to do something?” This identifies what is really a priority for people and communities. It reframes the conversation between government and residents.

4. Commission support

Assets can then be mobilised to address needs. Important to differentiate between three different types of tasks: those people can do without help, those for which they need some help/resource and those which they cannot do at all.

5. Recognise and promote these initiatives

This is key to setting new expectations. Celebrating projects stimulates new ideas, promotes the approach.

6. Repeat the process

This embeds it and establishes it as a new way or working, rather than a stand alone, or here-today-gone-tomorrow way of working

4. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Examples:

The Newmarket Festival Community Interest Company

Set up by residents with no state assistance. Has raised over £60,000 for the Town since it started in 2007. This was in response to the problems of perception in the town of Newmarket, a need to encourage more overnight stays from visitors to racing and to help put a bump in retailer take in the summer months.

The Hub, Great Yarmouth - asset based community development

Great Yarmouth Borough Council shifted the focus of their work with communities from investment into supporting community development and empowering communities. A youth club was developed with local support from residents and church groups, including donations of equipment, resources and time.

Once the youth club was established deeper issues came to light including neglect, bad health, domestic abuse, truancy and low levels of life skills. The neighbourhood came together to discuss the issues and the strengths they already had in the community. They realized that in the youth club they had an asset which was not being used during the day so opened it up to be used for a range of community-led services.

Newmarket "Let's Read!" campaign

Initiated by the Newmarket Festival through the Newmarket News but which is entirely voluntary. This has attracted 75 volunteers to read for 2 hours a week in Newmarket schools (5 primaries and the College). A direct response to the problems of literacy identified in the 2012 Ofsted report into Newmarket College and the growing number of first languages spoken within Newmarket Primary schools (one school has 22 different first languages, up from 15 in the previous year).

Good neighbours scheme

Lakenheath introduced a Good Neighbour Scheme in 2006 after the need for one was identified through a village Health Check. The scheme is managed by 14 volunteers and aims to help individuals with health and mobility problems and their carers. This can be through help with shopping, jobs in the house and garden, or lifts to and from appointments. The group also hold three or four coffee mornings a year to give users of the scheme the opportunity to meet in an informal setting.

Bury St Edmunds Skatepark Experience

This group was formed by a group formed of young people who use the park and some of their parents. The group oversees the development of the skatepark. Having previously secured £50k of lottery funding to develop a BMX track around the outside of the park they have now secured over £150k of external funding to replace the dilapidated wooden skatepark with a new concrete skatepark. The group consulted over 330 users of the park on the design to make sure it met their needs.

As well as adding to and renewing a valuable local facility, the members of the group have developed their own skills, such as writing funding bids, carrying out consultations and analysing the results.

Southgate Community Centre

In 2012 Southgate Community Centre was transferred into the ownership of Southgate Community Partnership (SCP). The transfer has been instrumental in building a stronger community in the area. With a clearly defined business plan and a sub-committee focused on commercial opportunities and development of the centre, hirings and income for the centre have risen.

The trustees have worked hard to ensure that the centre offers events and opportunities to all sections of the community, and this has resulted in a true sense of both pride and ownership. As well as offering fundraising, social and family activities, the community centre also offers several support and activity groups for the most vulnerable, and the trustees are keen to build on

5. HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE THIS APPROACH?

Using our financial and staff resources, our access to information, our physical assets and our relationships with other public sector partners, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils can significantly influence the situation of families and communities in West Suffolk and the outcomes, in terms of the assets and places where people live.

This is likely to be in three main ways:

- changing the way our services are delivered (for example, housing, health, environmental services)
- specific projects and activities within localities
- influencing our partners

i) Changing the way we work

In changing our approach to a greater emphasis on support and empowerment, we will take a broad view of what poverty and deprivation look like. In practice, this will mean listening to communities better to understand what are the issues affecting their lives, rather than focusing purely on statistics.

We will test the current delivery models in all of our services to see whether they meet the new model of local government being the option of last resort, as set out above. This will mean asking tough questions about whether we have created a dependency culture by our previous policy decisions and whether we have stifled entrepreneurialism within communities where they could have stepped up and taken responsibility for a local issue.

We will also embed the principles of prevention into all our services. Some services already have this focus, for example, housing and community development, but there is more work to be done to test where our services could be more focused on prevention and early intervention, rather than more costly approaches such as enforcement and prosecution. These considerations will feed into all our decision making. This is a gradual approach but one that is deliberate and intentional none the less. It is also owned by everyone involved.

Case study - Disabled Facilities Grant

As many residents in West Suffolk are now living longer and experiencing higher levels of illness, often with multiple conditions, a new approach to supporting adaptations to housing will be needed. As part of the prevention of harm agenda, we will need to enable disabled and older people to remain well and live independently at home by investing in an integrated approach to home adaptations, including the provision of assistive technology and excellent advice/ information.

Under current arrangements, people who require adaptations to their homes will commonly apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant from the council. However, in some cases, the need for adaptations may have been prevented if different choices had been made about the type of housing needed or if community-based solutions had been in place. Taking such an approach would help to free up resources that could then be targeted at those in most need.

The councils will therefore embed the principle of prevention in our soon to be revised 'Adaptations Strategy'.

ii) Locality based approach to community development

At the heart of this is a locality based approach. The Councils will adopt a locality-based model of working, led by Members and supported by staff.

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This approach has been reflected in the recent staff restructure which has created a Families and Communities team to be the first, but not the only, source of officer support to Members working in their communities.

Much of this work will involve the commissioning of projects and initiatives that are community-led. Resources are allocated to develop, promote, or support such initiatives within a locality. What the specific project is will depend entirely on the resources, assets and people within a particular locality, but projects could range from transferring assets to communities using Localism Act powers to providing family support services.

A selection of the specific projects and activities is shown in the action plan in the next section.

iii) Working with others

We will take and seek opportunities to work with other public sector, voluntary and private sector organisations where they support the enabling, asset-based approach to working with communities which is at the heart of this strategy. For example we are currently having discussions about the role the Councils can play in supporting community-based recommendations within the Raising the Bar report provided to Suffolk County Council.

The Western Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, the NHS body which now commissions the bulk of health services for local people, is another body which the Councils will seek to work with to help drive support for very local solutions to health issues.

Other potential partners include the Police and Crime Commissioner, who holds the funding for police and community safety, West Suffolk College and other local training providers who could play a part in increasing local access to literacy, numeracy and skills training, and local businesses. There are strong links between this strategy and West Suffolk Six Point Plan for Growth and Jobs, and the Suffolk Growth Strategy as the correlation between employment opportunities, deprivation and poor health is well recognised.

All these institutions have a role to play, both in the services they deliver and in their anchoring role for people and groups in the community.

The **Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk** has as its first priority that “every child in Suffolk has the best start in life”. This will entail early intervention and prevention, as well as promoting a family focus across the work of all agencies including support to “Troubled Families”, and supporting parents to improve their own circumstances. The second priority is that “residents have access to a healthy environment and take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing” which complements the enabling approach outlined in this strategy.

6. INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME ARISING FROM ADOPTION OF THE STRATEGY

This Strategy provides a framework to reshape the relationship between the councils and local communities. The work programme will evolve as the strategy is implemented. This programme is not intended to be an exhaustive list, rather an indication of some of the ways in which engagement with communities will be different in future.

Embedding the Families and Communities approach in all our decision making		Timescale	Resources
The Families and Communities "test"	All new policies and policy reviews considered by Cabinet should be checked against the prevention / Families and Communities model, to work out their contribution to enhancing the safety, values, or connections of individuals or communities.	From adoption of this Strategy	Officer time to complete the test.
Measuring the impact	To develop light-touch but robust indicators to capture the impact of supporting Families and Communities through an asset based approach to community development, including linking with other similar projects, for example The Den in Great Yarmouth, to learn from them.	Initial development to March 2014 Evaluate to March 2015 Refine and then evaluate and refine annually	Officer time to develop initial indicators
Locality-based approach to community development			
Development of West Suffolk-wide community infrastructure			
- community development through locality working	Conversations between West Suffolk locality staff and neighbourhood representatives, centring around an Asset Based Community Development approach	Start November 2013	Reworking of current Communities budgets + potential refocus of resources around the three strategic priorities of the two councils
- community app	Creating a platform for West Suffolk residents. Residents put it on their smart	Pilot by end of	Circa £15k previously quoted

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	phone and choose which channels (businesses, retailers, friends, groups etc.) they add to their own profile. It could be people's social media pages or Neighbourhood Watch, or Red Lodge Community Network, for example, or offers from businesses etc. The aim is to build community and connections within West Suffolk.	June 2014 Evaluation by Dec 2014 Full launch by March 2015	
Capacity building that can be applied in specific localities where requested			
- neighbourhood hubs	Consideration should be given to whether any council or community assets could be used as a physical base for activities to support local families and communities.	From adoption of the plan	Through internal asset management, locality and community budgets
- family support around specific life events	For example, community money advice services	Seek to shape the market over the next two years	Initially through a managed refocusing of existing resources
- embedding restorative approaches	Providing training and the support to carry out restorative approaches to the resolution of local issues by local people	Locality officer training by end of March 2014. Pilot with communities through to March 2015	Initially from Locality budgets/a refocusing of existing Community budgets
1. Neighbourhood projects	These resident-led initiatives would flow out from an asset based community development approach to working in localities	From November 2013	Locality and other community focussed budgets
Working with others			
West Suffolk Families and Communities Board	Establish a West Suffolk board including all the partners involved in working with families and communities, and supported by an	Discussing with SCC	

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	operational board. This board should be the umbrella for other subject-specific arrangements such as community safety, anti-social behaviour etc, and should lead the follow up to initiatives such as Raising the Bar (Suffolk County Council’s project on improving educational attainment) in West Suffolk.		
Work with young people at risk of becoming NEETs	Contribute to the work of the West Suffolk Partnership to prevent young people becoming NEETs through resident-led initiatives	Timescale to be established by the WSP	From within existing Locality/Community budgets
Troubled Families	Work with Suffolk Family Focus to support the work in turning around troubled families in Suffolk	Timescale to be discussed with SFF	Within existing resources, or through attracting additional external resources