Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	Evaluation of the Families and Communities Approach	
Report No:	**OAS/FH/18/020**	
Report to and date:	**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**	12 July 2018
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Purpose of report:	This report follows on from the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities' presentation to the Committee on 20 April 2017, at which the Committee asked for further information on evaluation of the Families and Communities approach, to better understand whether it was making a difference to communities and residents.	
Recommendation:	**Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** **Members of the Committee are invited to consider progress so far in the development of an evaluation model for the Families and Communities approach.**	

Key Decision: *(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that __do not__ apply.)*	*Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?* Yes, it is a Key Decision - ☐ No, it is not a Key Decision - ☒	
Consultation:	• n/a	
Alternative option(s):	• Not developing an evaluation tool for measuring progress would not allow the councils to assess the impact of its approach and would miss opportunities to continuously improve ways of working.	
Implications:		
*Are there any **financial** implications? If yes, please give details*	Yes ☐ No ☒ •	
*Are there any **staffing** implications? If yes, please give details*	Yes ☐ No ☒ •	
*Are there any **ICT** implications? If yes, please give details*	Yes ☐ No ☒ •	
*Are there any **legal and/or policy** implications? If yes, please give details*	Yes ☐ No ☒ •	
*Are there any **equality** implications? If yes, please give details*	Yes ☐ No ☒ •	
Risk/opportunity assessment:	*(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*	

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
	Low/Medium/ High*		Low/Medium/ High*
There is a risk that using qualitative techniques provides only a partial picture of how communities are making progress in becoming more resilient.	Medium	The qualitative approach described in the report is supplemented with a range of contextual quantitative measures	Low

Ward(s) affected:	All
Background papers:	None
Documents attached:	**EXEMPT Appendix A** – Evidencing and Evaluating the Families and Communities approach **EXEMPT Appendix B** – FirstCare report summary **EXEMPT Appendix C** – Officer toolkit and guidance **Appendix D** – Evidence from evaluation exercise **Appendix E** – Case study examples

1.   Key issues and reason for recommendation

1.1.   **Development of evaluation approach for Families and Communities**

1.1.1.   The report updates Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work being
        undertaken to evidence and evaluate the Families and Communities
        approach, as requested by the Committee. The report provides examples
        of how the evaluation model has been used and tested and seeks the
        Committee's input into the further development of the model to evidence
        and evaluate the Families and Communities approach.

2   Families and Communities evaluation approach – progress so far

2.1.   Since the development of the first West Suffolk Families and Communities
        Strategy in 2013, Councillors and staff alike have been mindful of the
        need to measure and monitor the outcomes of the work. This is inherently
        challenging as measuring change in communities cannot be done in the
        same way as output measures, such as the number of new affordable
        homes built or the number of jobs created.

2.2.   The problems faced by local government include not only increasing
        funding restrictions but growing demand for services and assistance from
        communities which cannot be met by current methods and approaches.
        Issues including social isolation, loneliness and disconnection from
        traditional community-based support mechanisms can be positively
        influenced by the Families and Communities approach through working
        with communities to strengthen them.

2.3.   Although it is widely accepted both nationally and internationally that
        working with communities to improve resilience is an effective and
        sustainable approach to addressing individual and social issues, the
        challenge as to how to evidence and evaluate this work has yet to be
        successfully addressed.

2.4.   As well as providing accountability in terms of the councils' deployment of
        resource, evaluating the Families and Communities approach also helps to
        build up an evidence base of what is and is not successful when working in
        particular types of communities. It also helps to inform both the
        communities and the council about future action.

2.5.   Work was therefore begun by the Portfolio Holders from Families and
        Communities in late 2016 on the development of a bespoke evaluation
        approach. Key stages included:

1. Forming a cross-departmental working group with representatives from the Families and Communities and Policy teams

2. Undertaking a desktop review of literature and best practice

3. Meeting with academics from University Campus Suffolk to gain insight into possible methodology

2.6. Our research showed that evidencing and evaluating approaches to increase community resilience is a challenge which has not been successfully addressed to date by any organisation working in this field. There are few, if any, examples of work to measure community outcomes being done successfully elsewhere. The approaches used tended to focus either on *activities* without reference to whether they were successful; or to focus on *individuals* (for example, in social care contexts).

2.7. Building on our research findings, work was then carried out to:

- Articulate the core elements of the Families and Communities approach which inform our work – known as the West Suffolk Way (see paragraph 2.8 below)

- Draft an evaluation approach (**EXEMPT Appendix A**) setting out the rationale and proposed methodology for evidencing and evaluating the Families and Communities approach. The evaluation approach is based on working with communities to undertake self-assessments of how things were before and after a project or initiative was carried out. The results from using the tool then help the community and the councils understand the nature and size of the impact that the project/initiative had

- Engage an independent consultant to test the evaluation approach (see paragraph 2.9 below)

2.8. The evaluation approach was developed to measure contributions against the five elements of the Families and Communities approach, referred to as 'the West Suffolk Way'. In simple terms, this aims to measure what has the Families and Communities team contributed towards making communities stronger in each of these elements;

Element 1: **A safe place** – is about working in a way which increases the safety of a place and people's sense of the place in which they live, work or visit. It can apply to emotional safety as well as physical.

Element 2: **Recognising individuals** – is about working in a way which recognises people's individuality, that differences matter and that each

person has different needs and strengths. It applies to the development of, and respect for, important concepts such as self-identity, self-esteem and self-worth. It embraces culture and values.

Element 3: **Understanding relationships** – is about working in a way which recognises the context of relationships and the connections that exist between people, in spite of difference, be they transactional, nurturing, emotional, practical etc.

Element 4: **Encouraging agency** – is about working in a way which encourages people to help themselves, validating their own ability, recognising that taking action is an important step to change, development and improvement. At a personal level, this increases people's ability and capacity to demonstrate power, influence and control over their lives.

Element 5: **Developing vision** - is about working in a way which builds positive goals and an understanding of what is being worked towards

2.9.   FirstCare consultancy was engaged in 2017 to test the evaluation approach (see summary at **EXEMPT Appendix B**). The key conclusions of this exercise were that the West Suffolk Way was based on an extensive body of evidence; that it was essentially a 'theory of motivation', describing what brings about change in communities; that it had great potential; and that it was at the forefront of the development of thinking about families and communities.

2.10.   An exercise was undertaken by the Families and Communities team in 2017, using the model to measure the initial position of communities against the five elements of the West Suffolk Way and to then re-evaluate those positions following a period of support and assistance from the team through officers' locality or specialism roles. Examples of the model being used in practice are attached at **Appendix D**, along with case studies to illustrate the type of work being evaluated (**Appendix E**).

2.11.   The outcomes of the FirstCare evaluation and the learning from the team exercise were taken on board and the model refined. An officer toolkit and guidance was produced (**EXEMPT Appendix C**) with a further exercise being carried out in 2018 (**Appendix D**). Staff also considered the indicator set produced by the Government's What Works for Wellbeing network, which draws on a range of published data sources (for example, the Office for National Statistics and Public Health England), to ensure West Suffolk's approach was in line with best practice around measuring change in communities. http://www.happycity.org.uk/measurement-policy/happy-city-index/ .

3.   <u>**Key points to note**</u>

3.1.   *This is an innovative piece of work*

3.1.1.   The aim of the evaluation approach is to evidence the contribution the Families and Communities approach, and in particular the team of officers, is making towards the delivery of the councils' Strategic Priority of *Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active*.

3.1.2.   This evaluation approach has not been undertaken elsewhere and there are no successful examples of similar models which look at whole communities rather than individuals. The model is therefore very much a work in progress. The model is, however, part of a suite of studies into approaches with whole population/community outcomes such as loneliness https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/06/08/prescribe-line-dancing-save-nhs-officials-say/

3.2.   *The model enables a comprehensive assessment of each community's position*

3.2.1.   During the assessments a conversation is carried out between a Families and Communities Officer and the community. This conversation starts with the community setting their own vision for what they want to achieve and covers important aspects of a community's capacity to become resilient and thrive, set against their own definition of what success looks like.

3.2.2.   From these conversations, an action plan is co-produced, setting out what they and the community will do to progress towards their goals. This action plan is then reviewed at regular intervals. Completed actions provide evidence of the Families and Communities team's contribution to the community's success, which can be captured in a case study to accompany the qualitative assessment. (see **EXEMPT Appendix C** for methodology)

3.3.   *The Families and Communities team's contribution is only part of the picture*

3.3.1.   There are very few circumstances where the growing resilience and self-defined success of a community can be exclusively attributed to the Families and Communities team's work with that community, where the role is often that of enabler and instigator. There are many other factors involved including the often very hard work put in by community members themselves, or other voluntary groups or public sector-led initiatives such as social prescribing or the Buurtzorg model of care, both being piloted in West Suffolk. Rather, the model looks to capture the contribution the

team has made to a community's success – how the support, advice and assistance provided by officers and ward councillors has helped move a community towards where they want to be.

3.4.   ***Establishing evidence requires a mix of methodologies***

3.4.1.   <u>Measurement data normally fall into one of two types:</u>

1. Quantitative data is any kind of data that can be measured numerically. For example, the number of houses built or the number of jobs created.

2. Qualitative data is non-numerical in nature and gathers information such as narrative stories, feelings and attitudes.

   Quantitative data defines, where qualitative data describes. Each approach has its strengths, weaknesses and applications.

3.4.2.   The Families and Communities approach works almost exclusively with qualitative data, although some quantitative measurements such as reductions in GP attendances or increased voter turnout can contribute to the overall picture of the impact of the work.

3.4.3.   One of the key challenges is to capture the value of the work in a way that can produce useful evidence and comparisons in a consistent way. This requires quantifying qualitative work whilst recognising that not everything that is important can be measured and not everything that can be measured is important.

3.4.4.   Quantifying qualitative work is never an easy process and incorporates a high level of subjectivity. This model seeks to place that subjectivity with the communities themselves – where they feel they are on a scale of 1-10 against each element at each assessment point. This qualitative measure is backed up with notes and case studies to capture the all-important story behind the figures (see **Appendix E** for case study examples).

3.5.   *Success depends on many factors*

3.5.1.   As there are many contributing factors to a community's success there are also many factors which can influence a community not reaching its goals. For example, loss of key community connectors, availability of third party input and support and engagement of the wider community in initiatives cannot be guaranteed. This model provides a framework under which such risks can be mitigated and contingency plans discussed, but

matters outside officers', individuals' and communities' control can and do emerge to affect outcomes.

4. <u>**Next steps**</u>

4.1.   This is an ongoing piece of work. Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments on the development of the evaluation approach is welcomed.

4.2.   The model will be embedded in the work of the Families and Communities Team and reviewed regularly, with lessons learnt noted.

4.3.   The evaluation approach will support the revision of the Families and Communities Strategy which will be considered by Councillors later this year. This revised strategy will include a detailed delivery plan which will include the incorporation of the approach into the new single council for West Suffolk.

4.3.1.   Work will also continue on developing our approaches to understanding our communities through data, intelligence and insight. A new set of statistical summaries will be produced for the new wards of the new West Suffolk Council, which form the basis for monitoring wider progress in a community alongside the evaluation approach. Over time, through the linking of data and the introduction of new sources, this analysis, which will be carried out by the West Suffolk Corporate policy Team, and the Suffolk Office of Data and Analytics, will become more sophisticated, and will help complement the qualitative observations made through the evaluation approach.