

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020-25 Progress Report

14 July 2021

Recommendation(s)

1. The Committee notes and comments on the progress made against the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020-25

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020-25 was approved by Cabinet on 12 September 2019. It aims to create a thriving, sustainable and dynamic voluntary and community sector that improves the lives of individuals and communities in Warwickshire.
- 1.2 The Strategy recognises that within Warwickshire's many and diverse communities there is a wealth of skills, resources, relationships, and networks that we can build on. By working together, we can capitalise on the strengths of our collective assets to make Warwickshire the best it can be, now and for future generations.
- 1.3 The pandemic has further highlighted the wealth of skills and resources within communities, in their response to local priorities and identification of strong, robust, and sustainable solutions.
- 1.3 Although the voluntary and community sector has responded positively to the pandemic, it has faced many challenges and has changed significantly and fundamentally since March 2020. The sector:
 - Has needed to employ new models of delivery where face-to-face contact was often the default model.
 - Has seen large numbers of existing volunteers needing to shield, isolate or otherwise pause or stop their volunteering.
 - Has experienced large numbers and different types of new volunteer coming forward, although in many cases this is best described as social action rather than volunteering, for example in respect of the local COVID support and mutual aid groups.
 - Has seen a significant drop in income from grant streams and traded income.
 - Has needed to use financial reserves to continue operating in many cases.
 - Has seen increases in demand for services, especially around mental wellbeing, loneliness and isolation, and financial exclusion.

- 1.4 The vision and purpose of the Strategy have not altered because of the pandemic. The key objectives remain to support the Council Plan 2020-25 outcomes:
- Warwickshire's communities and individuals are supported to be safe, healthy, and independent.
 - Warwickshire's economy is vibrant and supported by the right jobs, training, and skills and infrastructure.
- 1.5 There is a crucial link between the Strategy and the COVID Recovery Plan, whose fourth priority is 'to harness the power of our communities to tackle inequality and social exclusion'. An extensive programme of work to deliver this priority forms part of the Council's Change Portfolio, flowing from, and reflecting, much learning from the Pandemic where the role of Warwickshire's voluntary and community groups has been instrumental. There will also be a crucial link between the Strategy and the new Council Plan.
- 1.6 Appendix 1 features the six priorities from the Strategy and activities completed against these priorities.
- 1.7 In addition to the Strategy's golden threads of social value and digital inclusion, additional threads around climate change, mental wellbeing, loneliness and isolation, and financial exclusion, must all now be considered.
- 1.8 2021/22 looks set to bring further uncertainty to the voluntary and community sector and the Council will need to continue its approach of the previous 12 months: acting on lessons learnt and evidence, investing intelligently, applying flexibility where necessary, and recognising the strengths of the sector.

2 Financial Implications

- 2.1 None

3 Environmental Implications

- 3.1 None

4 Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Strategy includes six interdependent and connected priorities:
- Strengths-based working.
 - Promoting social action and volunteering.
 - Community engagement.
 - Effective partnerships.
 - Self-help, early intervention and prevention.

- Investment in local communities.

4.2 To deliver the Strategy a delivery plan was being developed in the early months of 2020. However, at the time of commencing engagement on the draft delivery plan the pandemic took hold, resources were diverted, and engagement was paused. Subsequently many of the actions in the draft delivery plan were incorporated into the COVID Community Recovery Plan, including key workstreams around:

- The recommissioning of the Voluntary Sector Support, Equalities, and Residents' Advice services.
- The development of a set of proposals around the Council's approach to social value.
- Agreeing and implementing a common strengths-based approach across Council services.
- Increasing social action through the scoping and development of place-based institutions and assets.
- Developing digital platforms and technologies to support communities.
- Reviewing existing strategic partnerships including the Third, Private and Public Sector Partnership Group (now known as the Thriving Communities Partnership) and Financial Inclusion Partnership.
- Addressing poverty through the promotion of key support schemes and financial inclusion work.
- The introduction of a new Community Engagement and Participation Framework.
- Scoping opportunities / approaches to increase capacity building in communities for prevention, self-help, early intervention and improve community wellbeing.
- Ensuring access to IT and training for the most vulnerable.
- Supporting voluntary and community sector activities around employment and work-readiness, for example job clubs.

4.3 During the pandemic many new service offers were launched to support communities and residents as part of the Council's response, including:

- A directory of COVID support groups and mutual aid groups, which at its peak contained details of 280 groups across the county.
- A programme to train Community Champions across the county, which so far has recruited and trained 90 individuals from a wide range of communities and backgrounds.
- A simplified County Councillors' Grant Fund stripped back to expedite funding getting to grass-roots voluntary and community groups. The Fund supported 300 groups in 2020/21
- Targeted community engagement work to support test and trace activity in every part of the county.
- Volunteer involvement in the Shielding Hub which provided over 10,500 food parcels to residents.
- Enhanced support through our commissioned voluntary sector providers Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action, Citizens Advice, the

Equality and Inclusion Partnership, and Warwickshire Association of Local Councils. Examples include a comprehensive programme of support to organisations that have been negatively impacted through COVID, increased community engagement around Equality Act protected characteristic groups, translation/interpretation support, and weekly newsletters to town and parish councils to support those shielding and/or isolating.

- Extension of the existing contracts with our voluntary sector providers and service priorities reviewed and changed to reflect COVID pressures. Feedback on the existing services from communities, residents, and partners as part of continuous improvement.
- Continuation of work to have in place new voluntary sector support services/contracts from 1 April 2022, which has involved further stakeholder engagement to ensure both current and future service requirements are embedded into specifications.
- Online briefing sessions with Councillors.
- Increased work across Council Directorates and service areas, specifically around shielding, test and trace and the community testing programme.
- Increased partnership working with the Borough and District Councils, Health, and the Police, again around shielding, test and trace and community testing, but also supporting the vaccination programme and community safety initiatives.

4.4 Through a combination of funding to support clinically extremely vulnerable individuals, and Contain Outbreak Management Funding, additional investment has been made into the voluntary and community sector to help address specific pressures. Examples include:

- £46,000 COMF funding to support the volunteering elements of the community testing programme, resulting in 300 volunteers being recruited and managed.
- £120,000 COMF funding to provide additional debt worker and housing specialist advisors, providing intensive support to 400 vulnerable individuals.
- £9,000 of CEV funding to local art projects aimed at sustaining good mental health, engaging with 500 individuals.
- £20,000 of CEV funding for a befriending project, supporting 100 vulnerable individuals each week.

5 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

5.1 There are no associated timescales or next steps.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Activities completed against the six priorities of the Strategy.

Background Papers

1. Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020-25

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): None

Other members: Councillors Warwick, Singh Birdi, Phillips, Boad, W. Roberts

Appendix 1

Priority	Actions against this priority
<p>Priority 1: Strengths-based working To embed a new way of working within the Council which harnesses the skills, connections, and potential of our communities, thereby enabling a culture of innovation in service delivery.</p>	<p>The Council is developing an organisation-wide approach to strengths-based working.</p> <p>The Council continues to invest in an asset-based community development programme in priority neighbourhoods.</p> <p>The Council has developed a new Community Development apprenticeship programme.</p> <p>The Council has recruited a BAME Community Development Worker.</p> <p>The Council is supporting the network of COVID support and mutual aid groups.</p>
<p>Priority 2: Promoting social action and volunteering To create an environment that enables the mobilisation of individuals and communities to respond to locally agreed priorities and strengthen connectivity.</p>	<p>The Council has extended its current Voluntary and Community Sector Support service until 31 March 2022.</p> <p>The Council is commissioning a new Voluntary and Community Sector Support service from 1 April 2022. The commissioning is involving input from all Directorates.</p> <p>The Council has invested additional monies into the current Support service via the Contain Outbreak Management Fund and in response to service pressures.</p> <p>The Council, through its Voluntary and Community Sector Support provider is creating a network for newly formed community groups, including COVID support and mutual aid groups.</p> <p>The Council is undertaking research to understand the motivation behind social action.</p> <p>The Council is mapping social action.</p> <p>The Council is developing a community toolkit to create the conditions for and support flexible and dynamic social action.</p> <p>The Council is participating in a programme of Compassionate Communities as a model for Social Action.</p>

	<p>The Council has developed a Good Neighbour Scheme pilot in Rugby Borough.</p> <p>The Council is revamping its Volunteer Managers' Network.</p> <p>The Council is working with employers to encourage employer-support-volunteering schemes and micro-volunteering opportunities.</p> <p>The Council has created a programme of volunteering around mass testing sites, with over 250 regular volunteers.</p>
<p>Priority 3: Community engagement To facilitate effective and meaningful dialogue between the Council, residents and the voluntary and community sector to ensure appropriate involvement in the design, delivery, ongoing transformation and continuous improvement of public services.</p>	<p>The Council is creating a Community Engagement and Participation Framework.</p> <p>The Council is investigating new accessible and inclusive digital technology to assist with Community Engagement.</p> <p>The Council will launch the new Information and Advice Portal (Searchlight) in June.</p> <p>The Council is investigating alternative engagement methods for those who are digitally excluded, including older people.</p> <p>A new Digital Inclusion Task and Finish Group is planned.</p> <p>The Council has put in place a new service level agreement with Warwickshire Association of Local Councils, to engage with town and parish councils and to develop the capacity and resilience of these.</p>
<p>Priority 4: Effective partnerships To facilitate collaboration and coordination to maximise the use of resources across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.</p>	<p>The Council has reviewed its Third, Private and Public Sector Partnership Group (now known as the Thriving Communities Partnership).</p> <p>The Council is reviewing its Financial Inclusion Partnership.</p> <p>The Council remains committed to the Armed Forces Strategic Partnership</p> <p>The Council has had a key contribution to the establishment and running of new partnerships during the pandemic, including the Incident Management Teams</p> <p>The Council has created a Food Forum and</p>

	<p>associated sub-groups. The Forum is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate and Culture.</p> <p>The Council is involved with dementia partnerships and support groups across the county.</p> <p>The Council is involved in the creation of a COVID survivors' partnership.</p>
<p>Priority 5: Self-help, early intervention, and prevention To promote and support community-based models of self-help and early intervention activities that help to build resilience and reduce the demand on public services.</p>	<p>The Council has continued its Time Banking proof of concept, with time banks established in each of the 5 Boroughs and Districts.</p> <p>The Council has established a network of 90 Community Champions across the county.</p> <p>The Council is developing digital platforms and technology to support community recovery, in turn enabling self-help and prevention.</p> <p>The Council has undertaken a project around the NHS Volunteer Responder tool, to evaluate its effectiveness across the county and to help embed a refreshed tool, to be launched in summer 2021, with a specific focus on Nuneaton and Bedworth where usage rates have been lower.</p> <p>The Council is developing an early intervention and prevention strategy / framework, led by Strategic Commissioning.</p> <p>The Council is looking at ways of working with the voluntary and community sector to recycle IT equipment and to provide ICT skills and training.</p> <p>The Council continues to provide holistic support to job clubs across the county.</p> <p>The Council is creating a Loneliness and Social Isolation Action Plan.</p> <p>The Council is creating a Family Hardship Strategy.</p>
<p>Priority 6: Investment in local communities To help secure a strong and sustainable voluntary and community sector in Warwickshire, including the development of</p>	<p>The Council has created a Social Value Task Group.</p> <p>The Council has continued its Councillors' Grant Fund, running 2 rounds of this in 2020/21</p>

digital skills and capabilities within our communities.

and investing £342,000 into grass roots' voluntary and community sector groups.

The Council, through DEFRA Emergency Assistance Funding, has funded 29 projects a total of £520,000. The funding was allocated through proactive working with Borough and District Council partners.

The Council, through MHCLG funding to support Clinically Extremely Vulnerable individuals, has provided voluntary and community groups with around £300,000 of additional investment.

Vulnerable communities have been supported using Local Welfare Scheme funding and COVID Local Support Grant.

COVID funding has topped-up contracts supporting the mental health and loneliness and isolation agendas.

Following a Budget resolution in February 2021, proposals for a Social Endowment/Investment Fund are being developed, to go to Cabinet in September 2021.