

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25 September 2024

Community Powered Warwickshire update

Recommendation

That the Committee recognises the progress made in relation to the Council's Community Powered Warwickshire approach and supports the areas for continued development as set out in this report.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has worked to embed a community-powered approach across its services since April 2021, supported by the organisation New Local (formerly the New Local Government Network). 'Harnessing community power' is a key part of the 5-year Council Plan, as set out below. This is a long-term process of change, involving the Council, partners, communities, business, and residents. Key actions to progress this agenda are captured in the Council Delivery Plan, with quarterly reporting of delivery and performance to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

1. Harnessing Community Power

The Council will harness the power of communities to tackle inequality and social inclusion through a community-powered approach. This requires us to work differently with residents, communities, and partners. We will build on their strengths and assets and keep alive the community spirit, so powerful before and during COVID-19.

This will change our relationships and requires new ways of communicating and engaging with citizens and communities. We will change from 'what will the Council do' to 'what do we want to do together, and how could the Council support the community to deliver it?'

We will achieve this by

- Working with our partners and communities to develop a simple Community Powered Warwickshire offer to embed our community-powered approach.
 - Running innovative projects to test, and embed, our community power model.
 - Developing an evaluation framework to track progress against the Community Powered Warwickshire offer, and we will convene an annual conference with communities and partners.
 - Refreshing our approach to communications and engagement to support community powered approaches, including our new 'Voice of Warwickshire' residents' panel.
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1.2 The Council commissioned New Local in two phases:

- April 2021 to March 2022, developing a vision and overarching narrative for a community-powered Warwickshire; and
- April 2022 to March 2024, embedding the vision and taking practical action to support the implementation of a community-powered Warwickshire across the Council and its partners.

1.3 At the heart of a community-powered approach is a belief that communities are well-placed to identify their own priorities and to be involved with the delivery of solutions to address these priorities. This is often articulated in terms of Local Authorities and other public sector organisations as “working with” communities rather than “doing for” or “doing to” communities. Our definition of community power in Warwickshire is captured in the three components set out in the diagram below.



**Involve communities
in decision making**



**Work alongside communities
to take practical action**



**Enable communities
to lead**

1.4 The move towards a community-powered approach is integral to progress around the Creating Opportunities programme, the former often described as the “how” to the latter’s “what” in tackling deprivation and inequality and increasing social mobility.

1.5 As we move to the conclusion of the commission with New Local, they have produced a report providing an overview of activity since April 2021 and outcomes from the work to embed community power.

1.6 The report recognises that, notwithstanding the considerable progress made over the last 3 years, there is more to do to transition to a fully community-powered approach. This is to be expected considering the challenges around wholesale culture and practice change across a large organisation with a wide range of responsibilities and functions. Consequently, the report includes five focus areas for future development for the Council to consider.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any work undertaken to further embed Community Powered Warwickshire will be done within existing budgets

3. Environmental Implications

- 3.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report. Any work undertaken to further embed Community Powered Warwickshire will accord with the Sustainable Futures Strategy and the Council's commitments to Net Zero 30 and Net Zero 50.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Council commissioned New Local in April 2021 to develop a vision and overarching narrative to help the whole Council move towards a community-powered ethos: a Council that works with communities, rather than does to or does for communities. Some parts of the Council were already working towards, or had already embedded a community-powered approach, but many parts of the Council were still operating a service-led model of operation.
- 4.2 To an extent, New Local was also commissioned to develop a vision and narrative for the embedding of community power across the Council's partners, recognising that many of the Council's activities rely on partnership working and the importance of early buy-in from partners.
- 4.3 The timing of New Local's involvement reflected a renewed interest in community-powered approaches because of the Pandemic, including a large uplift in volunteerism and social action, and a belief that with the correct environment, encouragement, and support, communities could and would take a leading role, as had been demonstrated across Warwickshire throughout the Pandemic.
- 4.4 Moving towards a community-powered approach was and still is a key building block and enabler to delivering the Council's vision to make Warwickshire the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations, and supporting wider developments such as the Integrated Care System, climate change, and the Creating Opportunities visions around reducing deprivation and inequality, place shaping, and increasing social mobility.
- 4.5 New Local's first commission revolved around the following objectives:
- developing a place and interest-based programme of change designed to position community power at the heart of the Council's work and connected to the major priorities for Warwickshire and the Council;
 - fostering and building community capacity and capability in support of upstream intervention and prevention, delivering better outcomes for residents, and ensuring our approach is flexible to meet the needs of different places and avoiding a "one size fits all" approach;
 - developing a clear and simple narrative about community power that can motivate and guide Councillors, employees, partners, and community catalysts;

- providing Councillors, the Council workforce, partners, and community catalysts with a sense of ownership of Community Powered Warwickshire;
 - capturing best practice from the Pandemic response and enabling new and innovative approaches to flourish as part of COVID recovery, encouraging pilots and practical steps to develop and embed a refreshed approach and way of working for the Council post-COVID; and
 - creating the enabling elements to support communities including a social investment fund(s) to support the overall objectives.
- 4.6 New Local's first commission resulted in four staged reports around analysis, partner mobilisation, ground breaker projects, and mainstreaming. The mainstreaming report identified practical steps to make community power the default approach to the Council's work, placing a strong emphasis on culture and behaviour change. The mainstreaming report also included an evaluation framework.
- 4.7 As a result of the mainstreaming report and the success and buy-in of the first commission, New Local was commissioned for a second time in April 2022, to support the practical steps needed to (further) embed a community-powered approach and to bring to life the vision, narrative, and supporting infrastructure which was put in place as a result of the first commission, in particular support around a comprehensive delivery plan with tangible outcomes over two years up to March 2024.
- 4.8 Appendix 1 comprises a report produced by New Local describing the progress made over the two years up to March 2024. The delivery plan was divided into 5 themes:
- organisational development;
 - services and assets;
 - decision making;
 - relationships; and
 - empowerment and capacity building.

Key tangible outputs from the delivery plan, which have resulted in real differences on the ground, include:

A series of "ground breakers" to test and learn about the impact of community-powered ways of working.

- Highways, creating a unified and co-produced way of working across the transport, highways, and road safety policy area, resulting in initiatives including community information packs, safe and active travel champions, low traffic schemes, lengthsman schemes, community adoption of verges, community orchards, and community speed watch schemes.
- Establishing community supermarkets in three high priority areas, Lillington, Camp Hill, and New Arley, and acting as a catalyst for several smaller, independent community supermarkets across the

County. A report setting out options for the sustainability of the pantries went to Cabinet on 14 December 2023, recommending a time-limited Medium Term Financial Strategy allocation from April 2024 based on transition to a sustainable model of operation by March 2026. This was agreed by Cabinet and subsequently considered and agreed by Council on 8 February 2024 as part of budget setting.

- Organisational Development, unlocking the time and skills of Council staff through a network of Anchors/Ambassadors, a community of practice, and inclusion of community-powered topics on team meeting and workshop agendas across Council services so as to embed the community-powered approach and give confidence to staff to try new approaches aligned to a community-powered way of thinking.
- Place shaping, feeding into the work around Transforming Nuneaton and other town centre initiatives.

Multi-agency, community-powered pilots in three priority lower super output areas, all with a focus on communities being at the heart of identifying priorities and developing future delivery plans.

- Mancetter South and Ridge Lane, including a delivery plan focusing on activities for younger people, transport, policing, cost-of-living, and education.
- Lillington East, including a delivery plan focusing on developing community groups, mental health, public spaces, and housing.
- Bar Pool North and Crescents, focusing on creating a community hub on Vernons Lane to act as a catalyst for further community development.

Each of the three pilots above are still at the developmental stage and it is too early to assess the impact that a community-powered approach has had. However, early signs are positive with community engagement helping to influence and shape future plans, and connections being made across local community groups and gaps identified in the priority areas which we are seeking to address through the Creating Opportunities programme.

Community investment - a series of funds established to allocate funding (capital and revenue) to local community-led projects, with a focus on a community-powered approach and community sustainability.

- The £1m Social Impact Fund, with funding originating from the (COVID) Control Outbreak Management Fund. 21 projects awarded a total of £600,000 revenue funding and £400,000 capital funding. Projects delivered between 2022 and 2024, focusing on areas and communities most affected by COVID and embedding community-powered principles. The outcomes, including case studies, generated from the Social Impact Fund and demonstrating the impact of this approach are set out in more detail in a separate agenda item at today's Committee meeting.
- The £2.5m Social Fabric Fund, using £1m Revenue Investment Fund monies, and £1.5m Capital Investment Fund monies. Fund running

until March 2025 and focusing primarily on lower super output areas in the top 20% of the Indices of Deprivation. Community engagement, identification of local priorities, and sustainability are all embedded within the Fund criteria. As this Fund remains open, with all applications not yet having been assessed, there is little quantitative evidence around the impact of the projects. However, this information will be collated and assessed through the Fund's tracking and monitoring arrangements in the same way as has been undertaken for the Social Impact Fund.

- The £1m Green Shoots Fund focused on community-powered projects related to climate change. 69 projects were funded in the first phase in 2021, and a further 38 projects received funding in the second phase in 2022. More information on the Fund, and the projects funded through this can be seen on the County Council website warwickshire.gov.uk/greenshootsfund.
- The Councillors' Grant Fund, each of the Council's 57 elected members receiving £8,000 each year to award to local projects, with community power embedded in the Fund criteria.

Supporting outputs – to embed the culture and infrastructure required to deliver in a community-powered way.

- A series of multi-agency "Big Conversation" events, involving up to 70 delegates and drawing high profile speakers from the national and international stage.
- Councillor peer learning sessions.
- A programme to establish community-powered libraries.
- Development of the Council's relationships with local (town and parish) councils, including the Town and Parish Councils' Reference Group and refresh of the Local Councils' Charter, which was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 5 September 2024.
- The re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant in November 2024 (subject to Cabinet approval in October 2024), now fully aligned to community power principles.
- Links to the Council's strengths'- and asset- based approaches, restorative practice application, and co-production work.

4.9 The report shows substantial progress towards embedding a community-powered approach across all its services. It also demonstrates that by taking a community-powered approach, community supported solutions can be achieved which help secure their sustainability. Although it is early days with some of the projects that have been initiated, the real impact on the ground of taking a community-powered approach can be seen through the progress made on the ground breakers and the three community powered pilots, together with the impact that has been delivered through the Social Impact Fund. However, we cannot be complacent and there is more to do in making the transition. As the report states "a wholesale shift in culture and practice requires commitment and consistency over the long-term."

4.10 With this in mind, and building on the strong foundations that are in place because of our initial work, the report includes five focus areas for future development that the Council may wish to consider:

- extend and deepen a community culture;
- maintain the strategic focus and visibility of community power;
- tackle organisational barriers to community-powered ways of working;
- continue to equip and support staff to work in community-powered ways; and
- further mobilise partners and leverage resources around a shared agenda

4.11 The Council, primarily through the work of the Community Partnerships Service but also recognising other services working in this space, is committed to these five focus areas and to continuing to monitor and track the impact of our community-powered approaches. Whilst this is not an exact science and performance metrics are not always easy to articulate in this area, the level of community engagement and the sustainability of the projects, coupled with a focus on specific issues relevant to place through the community-powered pilots will further help to demonstrate the impact that a community-powered approach can have. The areas of further development are and will continue to be incorporated into the Council Plan and its Delivery Plan and are reflected in key business and performance measures.

4.12 The commissioning of New Local since 2021 has been essential to the Council's move towards a community-powered way of working. Refining a concept, or theory of change, firstly into a narrative and set of principles that can be understood by all stakeholders, and latterly into a series of practical, tangible actions to demonstrate and embed community power, has all been possible because of New Local's expertise and practical support. This support also sets the Council up for the next stages of implementation towards a Council that:

- involves communities in decision making;
- works alongside communities to take practical action; and
- enables communities to lead.

4.13 This report and the appended New Local report are presented to Committee for information and comment.

5. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

5.1 The development areas included in the report will progress over the next 24 months.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1, New Local Community Powered Warwickshire Final Report

Background Papers

None

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

Local Member(s): None (N/a)

Other members: None (N/a)