

EAST SUFFOLK ENABLING COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

Introduction

The Councils' Strategic Plan (2020-2024) identifies five areas which we believe will be important for East Suffolk over the next four years – economic growth, value for money, digital transformation, our environment and **enabling communities**.

This Enabling Communities Strategy explains what we mean by 'enabling communities' and how East Suffolk Council will work with communities and our partners to **enable** local people and groups to do more. This means that we will help communities to do what they want to do, rather than doing things 'to' or 'for' them. In other words, we will help communities to help themselves.

We also want communities to take advantage of the positive things (the assets) that already exist within their local area, and not just focus on problems and needs. This is called an **'asset-based' approach**.

Communities approach us for support with lots of different projects – such as buying and running a community building as a hub for young people, securing a site for affordable homes for local people or setting up a project to support those with dementia and their carers. This Strategy shows how the Council will work, with its partners, to help our communities to make projects like these a reality. We already work closely with East Suffolk communities to improve the environment, the economy and the social life of the area – all things that make services, and life, better for everyone.

What is our vision for East Suffolk communities?

We want East Suffolk communities to thrive – to be vibrant, resilient and able to help themselves. National research has identified some things that make communities resilient including healthy, engaged people who feel included and are proud of where they live, good access to green spaces, food, water, energy, services, jobs and housing, and strong links to other places and communities. A **resilient** community is one that is strong and quick to recover when things go wrong.

Covid-19 is a prime example of a test to community resilience. The response from East Suffolk communities to the pandemic was amazing, groups quickly formed to provide food, help with accessing prescriptions and mental wellbeing support to the most vulnerable members of their community. Our role as a Council was to enable that response – with advice, information and funding – and to fill in the gaps where communities were less resilient.

We will work with all of our partners – including Town and Parish Councils and the County Council, health (our Clinical Commissioning Groups and Public Health), schools, Suffolk Police, businesses and the voluntary sector, including Community Action Suffolk, to help East Suffolk communities to be resilient. We work with other organisations because we

want our combined resources (money and people) to have the biggest possible impact.

We want to build the skills and knowledge of East Suffolk communities so that they can do more for themselves, rather having things done 'for' or 'to' them. This ensures that skills stay in the community and can be used for future community projects. Our role includes helping people to identify what matters most to them – what they most want to do or change. Sometimes views about what is most important will differ and so we need to talk about these differences and agree together what should happen first.

Some communities will need more help and support than others and some communities do not need or want our help at all. There are lots of examples of communities doing things for themselves, spending less money and giving better end results for local people and places.

We will work with communities to explore new ways of interacting and engaging with us and each other through digital platforms and similar, as well as utilising more traditional engagement approaches (surveys, meetings and events) to ensure as many people can engage on local issues and tell us what is important to them as possible.

What do we mean by 'communities'?

Each of us belongs to lots of different 'communities' at the same time. Within each **geographical community** (where people live), there are lots of **communities of 'interest'**. Communities of interest are groups of people who care about similar things - for example farming, a church or an on-line forum - or have things in common, for example being lesbian/gay, a young mum, of a similar age or having impaired hearing.

What does an 'asset based' approach mean?

Often communities and the organisations that work with them focus on 'fixing' things that are wrong, rather than looking at what is already in the community that could help.

Working in this way is called an 'asset based' approach because it starts with assets – what's strong – and not with what's wrong. Assets are people, groups and things in the community. The most important asset is the people in the community who have the knowledge, energy and enthusiasm to make things happen.

If communities understand what they have that's strong that they can build on, they can think about the gap between what they want / need and what they already have. They can also agree what is most important to tackle first. This works better than trying to do everything at once.

How can communities support individuals and families?

Lots of support is needed by some individuals and families in our communities. Some people struggle to cope, particularly when lots of things happen to them at the same time. For example a frail older person might be more in need of support than usual if they have a fall, have no local family and live in a rural area without any transport, or an unemployed young person might drink too much or take drugs and stop going to school when a close family member dies.

Communities can help find the individuals and families who might need more support and think about whether the community itself can give that support, as they did during the Covid-19 pandemic. This often means that people can get the help they need sooner. We want communities to work with communities to protect and support people; keeping them safe in their own homes and in the community.

People often do not ask for help until a problem is too much for them to handle on their own. We want people to get help earlier - before their problems get serious. We will also help individuals to 'help themselves' so that things don't become more serious.

It is important that people look after their own mental and physical health and wellbeing. This includes managing what are known as 'long term conditions' such as diabetes, dementia, depression, heart disease and arthritis. We want to help people to make good choices, ensure that they do not put themselves or others at risk and encourage them to look out for and after each other.

The East Suffolk Enabling Communities model

We think that there are twelve steps for communities to follow. We have called this our Enabling Communities model. For each of the steps, there are organisations, people or things that can help.

We want to help communities to access the right support (if and when they need it) from the right organisation at the right time.

STEP 1: What's Strong?	Map existing community assets (people, groups, buildings, money and things)
STEP 2: What's Wrong?	Understand current (now) and future (later) needs
STEP 3: What's the gap?	Identify the gap between your assets (what's strong), needs (what's wrong) and aspirations (hopes for the future)
STEP 4: What's most important?	Agree what you want to achieve (outcomes) and in what order (priorities)
STEP 5: What's the best solution?	Agree how to tackle your priorities (and achieve your outcomes)

STEP 6: What help do we need?	Identify sources of advice, information and support
STEP 7: What's getting in our way?	Identify and remove (or manage) any barriers or blockers
STEP 8: Who can lead?	Identify community champions to lead your project. Give them the tools that they need
STEP 9: Who can give time?	Find (formal or informal) volunteers and ensure you understand their skills and interests
STEP 10: What resources do we need	Secure new resources or use existing resources differently
STEP 11: Do IT!	Work together to make your project happen
STEP 12: What difference have we made?	Measure and understand your impact. Celebrate your success!

Enabling Communities Toolkit

The Council has produced a 'toolkit' which has 19 different 'tools' that you could use to engage local people in your project or activity and get their views about what is most important. The toolkit includes Asset Mapping, Community Visioning and Ideas Walls and can be found at [Enabling Communities Toolkit » East Suffolk Council](#).

What help and support is available to 'enable' communities?

We want to make sure that we do not just work with those who shout the loudest but find those individuals, families and communities who need our help the most. One way of doing this is using data and intelligence to help us to target our work to those areas that most need our support.

We produced a data pack for each of our eight Community Partnerships which includes lots of useful statistics about the local area. The Community Partnerships used these data packs to identify a set of priorities – the most important things for them to tackle. You can find your Data Pack [here](#). Another great source of information about your community/area is the Suffolk Observatory – [follow the link below](#).

Councillors (District, County and Town/Parish) are community leaders and engage, inspire and represent their communities. Councillors can make sure that all the different voices within a community are heard and support local community champions - people who put time and energy into making things better in their community. You can find your East Suffolk Councillor [here](#).

Communities can get help from ‘enablers’ – usually paid staff who have ‘community development’ or ‘capacity building’ as part of their role, for example in the District Council, County Council, Community Action Suffolk, voluntary sector organisations, and some Parish Councils. Each of the eight East Suffolk Community Partnerships has a support officer – a Communities Officer – you can find your Communities Officer [here](#). The ‘enablers’ can help to identify appropriate support for you/your project, for example training for committee member or help to develop a project plan.

Community Action Suffolk provide advice and support on a wide range of subjects from setting up a Good Neighbour Scheme (GNS) to Volunteering and managing Community Buildings. Become a Member of CAS (FREE) now! [Link to website](#)

Suffolk Community Foundation is an invaluable source of information and advice about funding from local organisations and donors. Their website includes all the giving programmes that are currently live. [Link to website](#)

Information about East Suffolk Council funding programmes, including Councillor Enabling Communities Budgets, can be found at [Community grants and funding » East Suffolk Council](#)

Different departments within the District and County Councils, and a range of other organisations, can provide specialist advice and guidance, for example about economic development, regeneration, planning, highways, housing, coast and flood management, tourism, public health, resort and countryside management, charitable structures, education, social business models and many more.

East Suffolk Council Enabling Communities Priorities

Our Enabling Communities priorities, set out in the new East Suffolk Strategic Plan are:

Community Partnerships

We will facilitate community partnerships to connect people and places at a local level, encourage collective problem solving and ensure a needs-based approach to delivering local solutions to local issues, building upon local assets. We will enable all East Suffolk voices to be heard.

Enabling Actions:

- We have set up eight Community Partnerships. Each Community Partnership has a total of £85,000 of funding to March 2023 for community projects to tackle their top priorities
- There is an overarching Community Partnership Board which has just over £1 million to spend by March 2023 – initial priorities for East Suffolk are Social Isolation / Loneliness, Transport and Mental Wellbeing
- Suffolk Association of Local Councils and Community Action Suffolk are working with us to support Town and Parish Councils and voluntary and community sector organisations to get involved in the eight Community Partnerships
- Community Action Suffolk is leading a piece of work around ‘rural proofing’ to ensure that the needs of rural communities are not overlooked
- Each of our fifty-five Councillors has an Enabling Communities Budget of £7,500 per year to support projects in the ward that they represent

Taking positive action on what matters most

We will use data and community intelligence as the basis for working with communities and partners to do the right things in the right places. This will mean less duplication, shared resources and a better experience for individuals, families and communities. We will take a targeted, place-based approach to tackling, deprivation, hidden needs and the challenges of rural areas – helping communities to access the tools to identify and tackle their own needs.

Enabling Actions:

- We lead and fund three partnerships – Lowestoft Rising, Felixstowe Forward and Leiston Together - which bring partners together to co-ordinate work in these three towns
- We set up East Suffolk Youth Voice to enable the views and needs of young people to feed into our work, including the Community Partnerships
- We support the Waveney Youth Council and organise an annual Youth Take Over Day

- We support the Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Disability Forums and events to highlight the needs of those with a range of disabilities in our communities
- We fund Disability Advice North East Suffolk to advocate for and support disabled people
- Our Hidden Needs Grant Programme supports community-led projects that tackle Social Isolation and Loneliness (grants of up to £10,000)
- We fund the Suffolk Funding Portal to enable local groups to quickly identify potential sources of funding for projects
- We set up a Period Poverty project which provides access to free sanitary products in different public locations in our communities
- We fund the three Citizens Advice that cover East Suffolk to enable them to provide a range of support, including financial advice, to vulnerable individuals and families
- Citizens Advice also deliver the Suffolk Advice and Support Service set up to support people in financial need during Covid-19
- We provide practical support and funding for community hubs through our grant schemes (including Bounce Back grants to help community buildings to open back up following Covid-19). Community Action Suffolk provide a whole range of information and practical support to community buildings in Suffolk
- Various teams in the Council provide support and advice to Neighbourhood Plan groups, we also support town and parish plans and village reviews
- We have transferred Council assets (including play parks, allotments, buildings, countryside sites and common land) into community ownership
- We support communities to list assets of community value under the 'Right to Bid' legislation. More than 40 assets have been listed in East Suffolk including pubs, allotments, village greens, community buildings and shops.
- We advise on Housing Needs Surveys to identify housing needs in individual East Suffolk communities and work with Community Land Trusts to meet housing needs that are identified

Maximising health, wellbeing and safety in our District

We will provide the environment and opportunities for everyone to lead healthy, active, fulfilling and safe lives. We will connect communities together and help individuals and families to be more resilient, achieve their full potential and age well. We will ensure our communities are safe, helping communities to address issues as early as possible.

Enabling Actions:

- We work with our health colleagues (in the Clinical Commissioning Groups) to support Social Prescribing across the District which is delivered through five local VCSE organisations who use a 'person-centred' approach to connect people to sources of support in their community

- We work with partners to support community safety initiatives including Prevent (Preventing Violent Extremism) awareness raising, Domestic Abuse Forums, Town Pastors, Speedwatch, Pubwatch and Nightsafe
- We support area-based Anti-Social Behaviour meetings to enable joint problem solving and encourage shared ownership of solutions
- Through Suffolk Family Focus we employ staff who provide in-depth support for families with chaotic lifestyles
- We work in partnership to deliver Crucial Crew Plus in schools for 13-15-year-olds focussing on different dimensions of personal safety including online safety, consent, drugs and alcohol and grooming
- We enable a range of community-led interventions to reduce social isolation including Men's Sheds, Meet Up Mondays, Good Neighbour Schemes, Dementia projects, Talking Benches (in conjunction with CAS and Rural Coffee Caravan)
- We facilitate intergenerational projects and activities which bring together older and younger people in communities, working with schools and care homes
- We have funded more than 100 Grandpads – simplified tablets that are loaned to older people without IT kit or Wifi to enable them to stay connected to friends and family
- We want to enable more 'Compassionate Communities' to help and support people at the end of life and their friends and families (led by St Elizabeth's Hospice)
- We help to deliver the Fit and Fed summer activities programmes during the school holidays
- We support a range of health-focussed events and activities including Women's and Men's Cycle Tours and associated community activity, Operation Camouflage at Rock Barracks, Park Runs and Fit Villages

Community Pride

We want everyone to be proud of where they live, and we will support this by helping people to come together around a shared sense of purpose, responsibility, place, care and respect for each other. We will support places to be culturally rich.

Enabling Actions:

- We fund Community Action Suffolk to provide Business and Project Planning support to community groups and voluntary sector organisations
- CAS also have a voluntary and community sector 'Health Check'
- We help communities to put on community events e.g. Street Parties
- We are involved in developing the Suffolk Volunteering Strategy which focusses on raising the profile of volunteering, supporting people to volunteer and engaging employers in providing volunteering opportunities
- We encourage staff volunteering through our new Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) scheme

- Community Action Suffolk host the Volunteer Suffolk Website which includes a wealth of information about volunteer opportunities across the county
- Our Funding Team can help community groups to identify funding, including through sources such as the Suffolk Community Foundation
- Infolink is a countywide online database that includes information about local groups and activities