



Committee and Date

**Council**

**22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018**

## **PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT FOR COMMUNITIES**

**Portfolio Holder: Cllr Joyce Barrow**

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### **Summary overview**

The Communities Portfolio Holder Annual Report includes an overview of the activity of –

- **Community Enablement Team**  
The Community Enablement Team (CET) continues to provide a strong bridge between communities, the council and our partners. Working alongside elected members, the team is focussing on ensuring that high quality, accessible and relevant intelligence, information and knowledge is created and shared to inform decision making, investment, planning and signposting. The key purposes of this intelligence is to support economic activity, i.e. increase investment into Shropshire, and to allow people to be supported to find solutions from within communities that will help them live the life they want to lead, i.e. reduce the demand on services.
- **Voluntary and Community Sector**  
Partnership working between the council and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector continues to be essential in understanding changing community needs and how to collaboratively address them.
- **Equalities and Ruralities**  
The three key strategic strands of our work are to –
  - ✓ publish our intentions more visibly
  - ✓ collect and analyse evidence more proactively
  - ✓ work more in partnership
- **Armed Forces Community Covenant**  
A highlight for Shropshire Council in 2017 was being presented with the Gold Employer Recognition Award. This was presented to Shropshire Council by His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales and the former Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Fallon.

### **Community Enablement Team**

The CET continues to focus its work on the corporate priorities of the council – Healthy People, Resilient Communities, and Economic Prosperity. The following themes fall under these priorities -

- Shropshire Council core work
- Economic Growth and Planning Policy
- Resilient Communities, Healthy Lives and Social Prescribing
- Community Safety
- Market Towns
- Rural Communities

Key activity for the CET in the last 12 months includes –

- a significant piece of development work to review the design, and update the content of the Place Plans – working in partnership with Planning Policy and town and parish councils
- the development of our community capacity programme Resilient Communities to support Shropshire’s emerging social prescribing model and our Healthy Lives programme
- our continued support for town and parish councils through a number of activity streams
- high levels of support for groups involved in the delivery of community assets and services, e.g. SpArC leisure centre, Severn Centre, Gobowen and Pontesbury libraries
- leading the county’s community safety and reassurance partnerships – Bronze Level Tasking

2017/18 will be the second year that the CET has achieved its annual savings target through income generation and the management of temporarily vacant posts within the team.

## **Summary of the CET’s activity over the last 12 months**

### **Shropshire Council core work**

- Working with and supporting Shropshire Council members – addressing local issues, implementing council strategies, project work, regular briefings
- Community development work – supporting interventions in areas of multiple deprivation, working with communities to develop and create new groups and projects, co-ordinating multi-agency activity to achieve shared outcomes
- Community asset transfers – support for groups interested in taking on council assets, linking these to our CAT processes and colleagues in Estates
- Locality youth commissioning – working with elected members and Local Joint Committees to commission youth activities within towns and villages, run small grant schemes within rural communities
- Local Joint Committees – organising and facilitating planning and public meetings
- Designing and delivering local consultations – on behalf of services and partners design and deliver consultations within communities of geography and interest
- Supporting council colleagues with the networks, contacts and relationships they need to deliver their work in communities
- Delivering training – the team is delivering training on PREVENT and community led planning

### **Economic Growth and Planning Policy**

- Place Plan reviews – working with local councils and Planning Policy colleagues to lead the redesign and updating of the Place Plan – focussing on identifying priority needs and aspirations and supporting councils to consider appropriate funding sources to meet these
- Local Plan Review – working with local councils and Planning Policy colleagues to ensure a level of understanding about the LPR process by councils that will enable effective responses to the proposals being made
- Community Infrastructure Levy – advice and guidance to local councils, support for the development of appropriate community projects that can be funded by CIL
- Community Led Planning – support across the county for community groups and local councils that wish to undertake community led planning of any kind, including Neighbourhood Planning.
- Economic Growth Strategies for the larger market towns – working with colleagues in Economic Growth to run workshops with the larger town councils, surrounding parishes and other stakeholders to start the creation of local Economic Growth Strategies

### **Resilient Communities, Healthy Lives and Social Prescribing**

- Resilient Communities – designing and delivering the programme to build and share local intelligence, knowledge and networks – creating hyper-local directories, creating local networks of Community Connectors – bringing people interested in health and well-being

- together within communities, creating and facilitating local governance structures, identifying gaps in provision and working with communities to fill those gaps with activity
- Social Prescribing – delivering Resilient Communities activity to support Shropshire’s social prescribing activity in the communities where it is being rolled out, being an active and impactful member of local social prescribing teams
  - Healthy Lives programme – supporting the wider programme of preventative health activity as needed using the knowledge and skills of the team
  - Care navigation within communities – playing a key role in local approaches to referring, signposting or connecting people to activity, groups and services that will help them to have good outcomes in their health and independence

### **Community Safety**

- Bronze Level Tasking meetings – co-ordinating and facilitating, alongside local police inspectors, area based multi-agency meetings
- Bronze Level Tasking projects – advise on the design of projects, design and deliver projects directly, source funding, manage project budgets
- Integrated Community Management – e.g. Team Shifnal/Albrighton

### **Market Towns**

- Delivering the activity described above in our market towns, plus -
- Liaising with town council clerks and councillors – providing information, advice and guidance, acting as a conduit to colleagues, teams, public sector partners, translating Shropshire Council policy into clear language and actions
- Providing advice and guidance on the implementation of Shropshire Council strategies – support councils and communities with the ‘what does that mean for us?’ questions on developments and changes that impact on local people’s lives
- Supporting local partnerships, boards and forums – often working alongside elected members to provide advice, guidance, encouragement and sharing good practice from elsewhere

### **Rural Communities**

- Delivering the activity described above in our rural communities, plus -
- Liaising with parish council clerks and councillors – providing information and guidance, encouraging actions to tackle specific local issues, acting as a conduit into other Shropshire Council teams and services
- Providing advice and guidance with community led planning – identification of which route will be most appropriate, supporting and facilitating the process, ensuring effective community engagement
- Community Infrastructure Levy – passing on the latest information and processes to local councils, encouraging local councils to use their Neighbourhood Fund and potentially CIL Local
- LEADER programme – responsibility for the delivery of LEADER is now shared with the CET, providing a means of supporting SME business development, and supporting economic sustainability in our rural communities

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

Partnership working with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector continues to be essential in understanding changing community needs and how to collaboratively address them. Recognising that many services now aim to signpost people with lower level needs to community support, in the first instance, Shropshire Council officers are monitoring changes within the voluntary sector. Those changes include:

- Increases in demand for services and changes in the needs of people using VCS services (for example increased risks as a result of welfare reform changes, debt, financial abuse, social isolation etc.).

- Losses of voluntary and community sector groups and organisations (the current rate of loss within the sector in Shropshire is estimated at 3% a year).
- Changes in the profile of Shropshire's volunteer workforce.

These changes are monitored through the support Shropshire Council provides to deliver the VCS Assembly's Value and Future Needs of the VCSE Sector Survey. The results of the 2017 survey will be considered at the VCS Assembly Board meeting in April 2018 and sector changes will be reported following the analysis. It is recognised that an effective system wide approach can only be achieved through a thorough understanding across sectors and organisations.

The last 6 months has been a busy time for Shropshire's VCS Assembly. Support from Shropshire Council officers means that work has taken place to share information and address common challenges across sectors. A number of information sharing events have been held including:

- A Big Debate on Welfare Reform designed to highlight some of the challenges individuals and organisations are facing as they implement welfare changes and work to support people in increasing need. This was well attended by members of staff at Shropshire Council, DWP and voluntary organisations. (4<sup>th</sup> October 2017)
- A VCS networking event for social prescribing designed to share learning from the current social prescribing pilot in North West Shropshire and gather information to apply for the Department of Health's Health and Wellbeing Fund for Social Prescribing. The outcome of the bid will be known shortly. (12<sup>th</sup> October 2017)
- A briefing for Elected Members on the voluntary and community sector, the Assembly and current social and community issues. (6<sup>th</sup> November 2017)
- A joint session on the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) with SALC to ensure voluntary and community sector groups and organisations are prepared for the changes expected to be in place from May. (8<sup>th</sup> November 2017)
- A World Café event designed as an informal evening to allow for VCS networking and mutual support. (22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017).
- Universal Credit Training designed for members of the VCS Assembly and delivered by leads from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). (7<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

The events have been of benefit to a wide audience and the sharing of information has proved effective at better understanding current community needs and concerns. There are many specialists within the VCS Assembly who have built up knowledge of their sub sector and services over many years. That sharing of information and experience is very valuable and of great benefit to the public sector.

An example of the VCS Assembly Board's work includes its prevention research completed in June to September 2017. This was delivered with the help of Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team. The project had three main elements:

- 1) A Prevention Report bringing together a wide range of information about Shropshire and the needs of the population, the VCSE sector and volunteering, the impact of recent policy and operational changes, issues organisations are currently facing and a look ahead to the future.
- 2) A Prevention Prospectus featuring examples of preventative services through inclusion of case studies covering partnerships, service/organisations and beneficiaries.
- 3) A Prevention Impact Assessment based on a more detailed assessment of 15 organisations. It considers the current provision and investment of staff and volunteer time in preventative services, and the risk of services being lost or reduced.

The three documents combine to highlight the importance of a system approach covering employment, housing, benefits, advice, health, social isolation etc. as the best and most effective way of ensuring that people receive support with complex problems and concerns.

The Prevention Impact Assessment's findings were of particular interest and covered the work of 15 organisations. The assessment highlighted that:

- 79 different services and activities are provided by the 15 organisations studied.
- In total, the 15 organisations provide 29,990 hours of staff time per month (498 members of staff: many part time) and the remainder of service provision is carried out by volunteers.
- The volunteer time contributed by the 15 organisations is worth £165,262 every month and approximately £1.98 million a year based on the national minimum wage.
- The 15 organisations support 41,339 beneficiaries and 26,588 of those are considered frail, vulnerable and at high risk.
- The ratio of paid staff to beneficiaries is 1:83, highlighting the demand for services.
- 57% of all the preventative activities and services currently delivered (approximately 45 activities) are considered to be at risk or reduction or closure within the next 12 months.
- If investment into the VCSE reduces, the 15 organisations believe 58 activities/services could see reduced opening times, 20 a reduction in range/scope and 15 a change in eligibility criteria.
- The 15 VCSE organisations believe that the loss of social activities will have the most widespread impact in particular leading to social isolation, an impact on carers, an impact on the wider community and generating increased demand for public sector services.

The results of this work have been reported at a variety of partnership groups including the Health & Wellbeing Board and are being used to inform work taking place to plan for commissioning of prevention in the future.

## Equalities and Ruralities

### Local policy context on equality and rurality

Shropshire Council seeks to ensure that it is compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This PSED, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, may be described as the duty on a public authority, when carrying out its functions, to have what is called *due regard* to three equality aims.

These equality aims are:

- eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advancing equality of opportunity; and
- fostering good relations.

The legislation states that a listed authority must comply with both a general equality duty and with specific duties, as set out in the Act. To demonstrate compliance with the specific duties, the Council publishes annual information about workforce diversity and service user diversity, as tandem reports. These set out to share information and statistics about the diversity of Shropshire Council's service users and communities, and to complement each other. This is not least as the workforce is largely drawn from local communities who therefore experience the services of the Council in their day to day lives. Information in this portfolio holder report is extracted from the latest annual Service User Diversity Report.

The Council is also required to show that it is working towards corporate equality objectives that will help to achieve any of the things mentioned in the general equality duty. These are set out in the Shropshire Council Equality Objectives Action Plan 2016/2020, which is published on the Council website.

The Equality Objectives Action Plan 2016/2020 enables up to date positioning of the Council to assist in efforts to meet our general duty; to seek to demonstrate good practice in so doing; and to facilitate timely links with other corporate policy and strategy development, utilising the core value of Equality and Inclusion as set out in the Shropshire Council Corporate Plan 2016/2017. This

value is defined as: *“Treating everyone as equal regardless of their circumstances and backgrounds, and identifying and helping people who may need support”*.

### **Shaping corporate policy**

As with all of our communities of place and interest, we aim to involve people in ways in which they may want to be involved, can be encouraged to do so, and are able to do so, in order to support and sustain them as resilient communities. Our focus on locality working that recognizes our rurality and sparsity and the diversity of our communities relates directly to this aim.

The Council collects and uses equality and diversity data as part of a range of partnership and corporate approaches towards meeting the needs of service users. These approaches involve consultation and engagement with:

- current and potential service users;
- communities and neighbourhoods;
- those who represent communities, such as from the voluntary and community sector, and town and parish councils, alongside Shropshire Council councilors and MPs;
- those who work across regional boundaries to provide services, such as utilities companies, infrastructure providers, and health care providers;
- those who work within sectors to provide more local services and facilities including sport and leisure and outdoor and environmental activities
- those who work within education and further and higher education and workforce skills sector, to improve access to learning and skills
- local and regional businesses and stakeholders such as housing developers, social care providers, and strategic partnerships including the Marches LEP and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

### **Input to national and regional policy**

We endeavour to make appropriate and timely links into national and regional policy and practice. This includes responses to calls for evidence from Government Departments; submissions to parliamentary select committee inquiries, to seek to shape Government and local policy; and participation in calls for evidence from bodies such as the Local Government Association (LGA), the County Councils Network (CCN), and the Rural Services Network (RSN). In working with other local authorities, through the Marches LEP and through the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), and directly with Government Departments such as DEFRA and DCMS, it is also timely and appropriate to seek to ensure that the equality and social inclusion dimension has been factored in to decision-making processes.

This is particularly so in the case of pieces of work and calls for evidence where we may usefully highlight rural realities, for example around higher costs of service delivery, physical practical challenges around digital and transport infrastructure, demographical issues including an ageing county profile, and the case for fairer funding for rural counties.

A specific action area linked to Religion and Belief, and Race, focusses upon partnership work to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day, which is held every year on the 27<sup>th</sup> January, with a national theme identified each year.

The 2018 theme is “The power of words”. This lends itself particularly appropriately to what Shropshire Council is doing, as the focus is upon work with local primary schools and with inter faith forums to plant a cherry tree each year, in different parts of this very large county, so that over time there will be a cherry tree orchard of remembrance across Shropshire.

## **Armed Forces Community Covenant**

### **What is the Armed Forces Covenant?**

To those who proudly protect our nation, who do so with honour, courage, and commitment, the Armed Forces Covenant is the nation's commitment to you.

It is a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives.

### **The Covenant in Shropshire**

The overall remit of the Covenant is potentially very large and it is important to focus on the issues and themes that matter most to people, and reflect most closely the unique circumstances of life in, around, and after serving with the Armed Forces. Shropshire Council's officer lead for the delivery of its AFCC is Sean McCarthy.

The Covenant is focused on supporting all serving forces personnel, reservists, veterans and the families of each of these, as well as cadets based in the county.

### **Approach**

1. To understand... the contemporary experience of life in Shropshire for serving and ex-forces personnel and their families in accessing all public services like housing, health, employment, education, leisure and culture when integrating with the local community, including getting the support they need.
2. To eliminate... unfair disadvantage faced by serving and ex-forces personnel and their families.
3. To encourage... understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the armed forces community.

### **Employer Recognition Award**

On the 9th October 2017, Shropshire Council was presented with the Gold Employer Recognition Award. This was presented to Shropshire Council by His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales and the former Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Fallon. This award was given in recognition for the work that Shropshire Council has done in support of the military community in Shropshire. The award highlights the many changes that the Council has made to internal policies to better support military personnel and their families.

### **Covenant Operations Group**

The Covenant Operations Group meets every month to discuss specific individuals who are in need of support. The meeting is attended by RBL, SSAFA, Help for Heroes, Enable, Shropshire Council Housing, Strengthening Families, Blind Veterans UK, Army and RAF welfare representatives and Combat Stress. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss issues that current serving personnel and veterans may be experiencing. These issues may be homelessness, ill health, family separation, those at risk of offending, financial issues, legal etc. Each individual is signposted to a particular service charity or organisation that can support them with their problem.

### **Covenant Strategic Group**

This group meets once a quarter. Its purpose is to receive updates from the organisations and service charities that attend and report on the work in which they are involved. This is also a forum for sharing good practice. During these meetings, there is discussion on some of the wider issues and challenges facing the Armed Forces that the Covenant can help with, for example the redevelopment of Cophthorne Barracks, the relocation of 1 Royal Irish and future use of their base, support for Armed Forces Day, RAF 100 celebrations etc.

**Housing Benefit / Council Tax support**

When making a housing benefit/council tax claim, veterans of HM Armed Forces may receive extra support, potentially 100% relief from certain military pensions will be discounted and won't count against them during their financial assessment.

**Social Housing allocation**

Any veteran or transitioning service person will receive 'gold banding' which is an additional preference for military personnel. This is no guarantee of housing provision, but puts them on a higher band than might otherwise have been possible given their military service. Shropshire Council also has a supportive HR Policy for reservists.

**Employment**

The 'Home Straight' - supporting veterans into employment project, provided by Shropshire Council's Enable service and charity 'Walking with the Wounded', offers individualised support in finding the right job for each person, as well as time-unlimited assistance in the job, to both the veteran and the employer. 25 people placed into employment from 47 referrals. All referral were employed veterans.

**Veterans' mental health support**

Covenant partners Combat Stress have a treatment centre located in Shropshire to support vulnerable veterans with mental health support. Additionally, the charity complete many hours of support in the community throughout Shropshire supporting veterans living and working in Shropshire, and also the wider area (Wales and the West Midlands). 44 veterans from Shropshire are currently 'under care' with Combat Stress for Mental Health issues.

**Planned developments for 2018**

Joint funding applications with the Covenant areas of Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire & Worcester have been submitted to the national Covenant to support the development and reach of the Covenant through a shared co-ordinator, and the creation of 'veterans' service hubs'. The outcome of these funding bids will be known soon.

Armed Forces Day will take place on 30<sup>th</sup> June and planning for this within the Shropshire partnership is well under way.

The focus will remain on widening the Covenant partnership, strengthening these relationships and looking for the opportunities to work together to create great outcomes for our armed forces personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families.

<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b>
<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b> Cllr Joyce Barrow
<b>Local Member</b>
<b>Appendices</b>