

# Community Engagement Update 2024-2025

A review of activity carried out in the delivery of the Community Engagement and Development Action Plan.

## Introduction

This review provides an overview of work undertaken by the Community Engagement Team in support of the Council's priority of Connecting Communities.

The Council's Community Engagement and Development Strategy 2024-2027 – Our People, Our Place, outlines its commitment to supporting communities within South Kesteven. The accompanying Action Plan provides information on how we deliver against the aims and objectives of the strategy.

The primary focus for the Team is working with the civil society groups and organisations that operate within South Kesteven. The Council's role in community engagement and community development is not to tell communities what they must do, rather to support and advise in the delivery of what *they* want and where *they* want it. It was vital therefore, while we were in the process of developing the strategy, that the communities of South Kesteven were given the opportunity to input via public and direct consultation.

The Community Engagement and Development Strategy outlines that two of the main challenges faced by voluntary and community groups centre around the need for appropriate governance and access to funding. Engaging with groups to determine where they are in their journey and what their support needs are is key to beginning a dialogue. This ultimately leads to a passage of development that not only delivers a local project but sustains the group to continue its work within its community.

The Council's Community Engagement Team supports civil society groups and organisations to ensure effective governance is put in place. Officers also work with groups to source and attract funding to meet the needs of their projects. Support includes:

- advice on the relevance of status (constituted group, charity, social enterprise etc.)
- undertaking funding searches to identify the most appropriate funder for their project -including with the bid writing process and ultimate submission.
- funding and project surgeries to explore the ideas of voluntary and community groups, share knowledge and advocate partnership or collaborative working where appropriate
- acting as a sounding board for new projects and challenges to help find the solution that brings the project to fruition.

## **What is Community Engagement?**

Community engagement is like building a bridge that links organisations to communities through open and honest dialogue and based on mutual respect. Community engagement is active participation with local residents and community groups in the decisions that affect their lives. By getting to know our communities we build trust. Community engagement is not about questionnaires and surveys, it's about talking, listening and learning from one another. What do we want for the local area and how can we work collaboratively to achieve our goals? Successful engagement at community level helps to make development opportunities possible.

## **What is Community Development?**

Community development is the process that builds on Community Engagement. Some communities are self-mobilising and will seek out the support available from third-sector, public sector and business to achieve their goals. Some communities are self-sufficient and do not require support from these agencies and some don't yet know or appreciate that they can evoke change. Community development is about enabling individuals and groups to bring about change within their neighbourhood.

Community Development is not an activity: it is a process or set of principles used to enable communities to grow and change according to their own needs and priorities.

The objectives of the Community Engagement and Development Strategy are therefore based on four key focus areas:

- building capacity
- addressing needs
- mutual support
- strengthening cohesion

Alongside, and complementing the delivery of these themes, the Team also looks after the SK Community Fund; the Coronation Community Orchards Fund; the Food Support Agency Fund and LotterySK. During 2025, the Team also collaborated on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund supporting applications relating to Parish and Community Assets and Decarbonisation.

The remit of the Team is, however, broader than its key function of working in support of civil society. Other areas of responsibility and collaboration include:

- Armed Forces
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Prevent and Protect
- Safeguarding

An annual update on the Council's compliance with the Armed Forces Covenant and its work in support of its Gold Award status under the Employer Recognition Scheme is provided as a separate document and will, therefore, not be included within this report. The latest update relating to Armed Forces was presented to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2025.

The Community Engagement Team holds and maintains a database of in excess of 500 civil society groups and organisations located within South Kesteven. Data held often includes personal contact details as many groups do not hold generic, organisation-named email addresses. Given the sensitivity of the information held, these details are never shared. The Team will, however, pass information to its contacts on behalf of partners and other service areas within the Authority for purposes of consultation, funding alerts etc. It is always made clear that information is being shared on behalf of someone else and details are provided for groups to get in direct contact with the originator should they wish to participate.

The effectiveness of Community Engagement and Development relies on building relationships and trust. This takes time, often years, in the making. Interventions, support and projects are ongoing. The value of taking the time to get to know a group or individual should never be underestimated. Some groups, particularly those at the start of their existence, require a lot of support and can result in multiple visits. These groups seek guidance on what type of governance structure they should have; how to set up a community bank account; what policies they may need and how to get volunteers DBS checked etc. Other, more established groups, may need less help but may ask for extended support in developing a funding bid for example. Our role is to work with them at whatever stage they are at, until they no longer need our support. The Team does, however, remain in contact and is always ready to step in again should further help or advice be needed.

The key focus areas of the Community Engagement and Development Strategy are provided in this document.

Objectives were set in each of these focus areas. These are not intended to be viewed in isolation of each other, particularly as in some instances, the objectives overlap or fit within more than one area. These objectives provide high-level activities and the framework for a more detailed action plan, which was developed utilising the outcomes of community consultation. Below is information on the objectives and over-arching actions of each of the key focus areas and a summary of outputs against identified activity outlined in the Strategy's Action Plan during 2024/2025. For the purpose of this report 2024/2025 refers to calendar years.

# BUILDING CAPACITY

**Objective:** To work with the voluntary and community groups within the District to enable them to participate in and deliver community-based projects and activities.

**Action:** Provide support for groups to develop governance structures, create project plans, identify and source funding and build in resilience and sustainability.

The role of the Community Engagement Team is to work with groups and organisations within civil society, supporting them to achieve their goals within the communities they serve.

Building the capacity of such groups starts from their set-up and throughout their journey. This includes helping to ensure they have the most appropriate governance structure and policy in place through to setting up dedicated bank accounts and enabling them to become 'fit for funding'. The Team also works with established groups when their ambition is to deliver larger scale projects or expand their offer and provide funding searches and direct support during the process.

We work collaboratively with other agencies such as CVS Lincolnshire who provide health checks for groups, training and 'funding ready' workshops.

The Community Engagement Team delivers funding workshops which provide information on available funding and advice on writing a successful funding bid. Whilst the Team does not write funding bids for other groups, agencies or organisations, it does offer a service whereby the funding bids of others will be reviewed prior to an application being made.

2025 marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SK Community Fund. Across those ten years the Fund has awarded £875,682 to groups in the voluntary, community, faith and sports sectors and to charities.

Significantly, the funding provided by the SK Community Fund has supported projects with a value of £7,680,416.

This means, the funding provided to the voluntary and community sector across our District has helped to lever in almost **£7million** of additional funding to the District in support of civil society groups and organisations. Larger grants offered by external (often national) funders would not have been released without groups getting the required match funding. This is when our support is invaluable to the groups we support and provides significant contribution to the capacity building of local groups and also has an impact on the local economy.

It should also be recognised that some of the grants awarded during the 10 years of SK Community Fund have not required match funding, particularly for grants given to smaller and new groups and for celebratory events such as the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, the Coronation of King Charles III and 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of VE and VJ Day.

### **Outputs for 2024-2025:**

- **8 Funding Workshops** held in Bourne, Deepings, Grantham and Stamford which attracted **219** participants representing **189** voluntary and community groups.
- **1 Funding Fair** held in Bourne which hosted funders representing the National Lottery, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Lincolnshire Community Foundation, BBC Children in Need, Lincolnshire Co-op, The Key Fund, Sport England, SK Community Fund and UKSPF. This event attracted **115** participants representing **70** different voluntary and community groups
- **funding searches** and **direct support** for group set-up and funding bids provided to **85** voluntary and community groups across South Kesteven as a direct output from holding funding workshops and the funding fair
- the **value** of funding bids successfully supported to external funders on behalf of the voluntary and community sector: **£173,000**.

### **Actions going forward include:**

- introduction of funding surgeries to enable the Team to work with groups on writing successful funding bids
- continued delivery of funding workshops
- exploring the potential for joint working with CVS Lincolnshire to deliver a funding fair
- continued 1:1 support for groups across South Kesteven.

# ADDRESSING THE NEEDS

**Objective:** To work with communities within locations challenged by health, economic and social mobility to enable people within those communities to feel enabled to improve place and personal outcomes.

**Action:** Signposting communities to seek the support of relevant agencies to address issues faced within disadvantaged areas.

Disadvantage comes in many forms and its impact is felt across communities. Key ways in which we can help communities include our commitment to providing funding to support those in need through our Food Support Agency funding stream and through both the SK Community Fund and the Coronation Community Orchards Fund which offer opportunities for people to come together to tackle isolation, loneliness and mental health.

The Team is an active participant in networks which support people in food poverty and those who support people living with mental health issues. Through these networks we are able to work collaboratively with others in support of our own communities. Networks also provide us with key contacts through which to signpost people in need to the right agency for the support they need.

Funding through the Food Support Agency scheme is offered to all Foodbanks operating in South Kesteven and to a wide variety of community pantries and larders which offer food either free or for a small donation. Larders and pantries typically source close to shelf-life foods which are donated rather than having to go to landfill.

The SK Community Fund has provided funding for community benches and picnic tables in rural settings which the applicants intend to help bring people out of isolation and join together. Some of these projects have also been at locations of funded Coronation Community Orchards.

The Community Engagement Team also takes opportunities to support communities through its presence at events. These activities are known as Council in the Community. The Team attends public events and activities which are organised by other agencies to engage with members of the public. Depending on the event, interactions are rarely specific to the remit of the Community Engagement but the team is always happy to signpost to the appropriate service or work with colleagues to provide answers for our customers.

Responsibility for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion also sits within the remit of the Team which produces the Annual Position Statement for EDI and agrees the Council's Equality Objectives in consultation with other service areas to ensure the Council meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Annual position statement is published to the Council's website. Training is provided through the Community Engagement Team to Equality Allies who support the development of Equality Impact Assessments to ensure the Council provides services that are equitable and inclusive.

### **Outputs for 2024-2025:**

- funding support for the development of **16 community orchards** across South Kesteven
- **£32,000** support provided to Foodbanks in Bourne, Deepings and Grantham, Second Helpings (Stamford), The Butterfield Centre (Bourne), Georges Food Hub (Stamford); St John's Larder (Grantham)
- projects alleviating **poverty, loneliness, social isolation and mental illness** made possible through the provision of **£42,833** grant funding which have included:
  - a Good Neighbours scheme
  - the implementation of sports activities for older people
  - the provision of winter coats for children living in poverty
  - equipment to assist with the delivery of counselling for children living with grief (project based in Grantham but delivering service across the District)
  - community arts projects and events to alleviate social isolation, provide support to people living with autism and to raise awareness of the impact of suicide
  - building renovations for a new mental health hub operated by Mindspace, Stamford
  - equipment for a centre supporting Mental Health through woodworking
- attendance at **6 events** under the umbrella of Council in the Community
- preparation and publication of the Annual Position Statement for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

### **Actions going forward include:**

- collaborations with other agencies to provide support for those with health needs
- increasing the reach of available assistance through Food Support Agency funding
- increasing the opportunities for support through the SK Community Fund for those working to alleviate loneliness, social isolation and poverty
- development of an EDI Strategy and action plan which will encompass the actions of all service areas to show the Council's commitment to the delivery of equitable services
- updates to training provided relating to Equality Impact Assessments.

# MUTUAL SUPPORT

**Objective:** To assist communities to develop, support and communicate with groups and agencies delivering projects and services in their local area

**Action:** Develop and facilitate network opportunities for people to come together to discuss local needs with an aim of creating collaborative projects

Mutual support, across the voluntary and community sector and across services within the Council works to ensure the best of opportunities and a minimisation of duplication of effort. Many groups want to work alone. They have their own purpose, drive and identity and they don't want to dilute or lose that. Providing opportunities to network however builds stronger communities. It provides the opportunity to share experience, learn from mistakes and identify gaps in provision. This learning helps groups to grow and develop.

The Community Engagement Team holds a database of groups, organisations and agencies that operate across South Kesteven. This eco-system (it is ever growing and changing) is made up of over 700 groups representing communities, sport, faith, places of interest, charities, support groups, infrastructure organisations and schools.

Funding workshops and participation in training and development opportunities made available to civil society provide a platform for networking. Add to this the work the Team does on a 1:1 basis with groups to support them in their development and linking them with other groups to promote collaboration engenders peer learning.

The Team also collaborates with other service areas offering mutual support to deliver such programmes as Coronation Community Orchards with the Climate Change Team and UKSPF alongside colleagues from Finance and Economic Development.

The Community Engagement Manager is the Deputy Safeguarding Lead, working alongside the Safeguarding Lead to ensure the Council's policy on Safeguarding remains fit for purpose and developing a training programme for staff and Elected Members which meets national competency requirements. The Team also supports in the preparation for requirements under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 and in emergency planning situations with the Community Engagement Manager being one of three people trained within the Authority to open and operate an emergency rest centre should one be required.

Further support for groups comes via LotterySK. Constituted community groups and charities operating within the District can become a 'good cause' supported by the Council's community lottery. Each good cause earning 50p of every £1 ticket bought in support of the group. Established in 2018 there are now **131** groups signed up to LotterySK. It has raised **£448,354** during this time and has paid **£178,450** in prizes.

The Team also works in mutual support for groups through CVS Lincolnshire signposting for issues such as volunteering, group health checks and community forums.

The Team also supports on elections, member training and collaborates with colleagues to deliver against the Council's commitment to being an age friendly District.

**Outputs for 2024-2025:**

- interaction with **481** voluntary and community groups across 24/25
- **21** groups supported to apply for UKSPF funding for parish and community assets and decarbonisation resulting in grants totalling **£302,038**
- **£102,000** of funding to good causes across the District through LotterySK
- development and delivery of **10** in person Safeguarding Training sessions to Elected Members
- in person Safeguarding Training delivered to Repairs Operatives
- completion by staff (across the Council) of **835** modules of Safeguarding Training

**Actions going forward include:**

- introduction of community network 'join the dots' workshops for peer learning relating to project development and delivery to help groups to become sustainable
- introduction of a community newsletter to provide information on volunteering opportunities, funding flashes and community events
- safeguarding policy update to account for legislative changes to Council's responsibilities
- review of safeguarding training programme to ensure it remains within the requirements of the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board
- continued development and delivery of in person safeguarding training

# STRENGTHENING COHESION

**Objective:** To foster good relations between communities to improve understanding and cooperation among people from diverse backgrounds

**Action:** Collaborate with existing providers of support and celebratory events to enhance opportunities to bring people together to explore their differences and similarities.

There are many ways to promote and strengthen community cohesion but it would be short-sighted to think that this issue can be tackled without working collaboratively with others. Active promotion and participatory programmes which are long lasting and consistent are key to supporting cohesion and this is where the Council's long and established relationship with the voluntary and community sector really comes into play.

As a Council we have legal duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Team also works in support of voluntary, faith and community groups who deliver participatory activity, support and signposting to ethnically diverse communities across the district, helping them to source and secure funding to continue their work.

The Community Engagement Manager is the lead officer for Prevent which places a duty on the council to help prevent the risk of people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Prevent sits alongside the Council's safeguarding duties to protect people from a range of other harms, such as substance abuse, involvement in gangs, and physical and sexual exploitation. The duty helps to ensure that people who are susceptible to radicalisation are supported as they would be under safeguarding processes.

The Council is represented on the County Prevent Steering Group which carries out a range of actions including the development of the Counter Terrorism Local Profile

Key to the success of initiatives like Prevent is the awareness and involvement of communities. To this end the Community Engagement Team has worked with professionals in the field to deliver training to volunteers.

The Team also collaborates with Neighbourhoods colleagues on issues such as exploitation, Hate Crime and trafficking under its safeguarding responsibilities.

**Outputs for 2024-2025:**

- provided financial support for **28** projects which bring people together to celebrate the differences and similarities
- provided training to **24** community volunteers on identifying and reporting concerns related to Prevent

**Actions going forward include:**

- continue to explore opportunities to deliver Prevent training to the voluntary and community sector
- continue to work with groups and agencies that support projects that bring people together from diverse backgrounds

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