

# Communities Strategy





Welcome to Stone

Farmer's Market | Stone Town Centre

# Foreword

## County Councillor Victoria Wilson

Working with communities is about finding ways to give residents power over their own lives and the places where they live. That has been at the heart of how we work in Staffordshire County Council, and now it is central to this strategy.



There are huge amounts of community activity across our county. The way our local people responded in the Covid-19 pandemic was astonishing, and I remain so grateful for the energy and commitment of our residents, our partners and our voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

In 2023 we developed our Communities Position Statement, to set the direction of how our work supports that energy, and to reaffirm how important this is to the county council. Within that, we committed to taking the next step forward and developing an ambitious Communities Strategy for the places where we live. I am delighted to now implement this strategy, taking us forward further and faster than ever.

Hearing from our residents, partners, businesses and others across Staffordshire has been crucial

to this. They have told us their stories and what happens in their local communities. This strategy reflects those stories and means that the county council will focus on the right things for the future.

We received a huge amount of feedback during our engagement, which helped us shape our vision for this great work:

***Communities are at the heart of everything we do. We will work better with residents and partners to help people get more involved and make a local difference.***

We have a lot of work to do now, working with our staff and partners about the things people

raised in their feedback. We have listened to what residents told us, but we want to respond to this properly and over time. This strategy sets out the areas we will focus on as we make progress, and all the while we will continue to listen to communities. Our priority areas focus on the Great Places Where We Live, our Connected Communities, and The Way the Council Listens, Talks, and Acts.

We will keep listening and talking with Staffordshire people, in an ongoing way. We will use what we hear to continue to build on this in the future. This strategy is step one and is only the start of the journey. I am hugely proud of Staffordshire's communities, and of being able to now take forward our next phase of supporting residents to achieve the lifestyles and local areas that they want to see.

Thank you for being involved, and for being at the heart of everything we do.



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# Introduction

**In every part of the county council, our councillors, staff, volunteers, and services interact with residents and partner organisations every day.**

It's important to do this in the right way. We know that when councils work together with residents and communities, the outcomes for everyone are improved. This is why working with communities is central to our Strategic Plan 2022-2026, and why we developed our [Communities Position Statement](#) in 2023 to show how we do this in Staffordshire. This strategy is the next step forward for this work.

The strategy is not something that could have been developed without engaging with our communities and hearing from people living in, working in, and enjoying Staffordshire's communities.

We asked about what people do to help themselves and each other in their local area, and what the council could do differently. This feedback has fed into the Communities Strategy for 2024-2029.

A massive amount of work takes place across the county council to develop how we work with communities, from finding ways to get better information to residents, to developing new forms of engagement that put residents at the centre. This is the first time we have developed a Communities Strategy to bring all of this together, to make sure that all that work helps us make progress against our vision for the next five years.

Behind this strategy, a detailed delivery plan will set out the practical actions we will take. This is important for turning our high-level pillars and objectives into the real actions our residents expect, so that we can show what is different in the future. We will review our progress against this every year, and at the mid-point we will stop and reflect properly, listening to our residents to make sure we are still going in the right direction.

# Who is this strategy for?

This strategy has been designed to guide how Staffordshire County Council works with its communities, and to support our workforce and partners. It is to provide clarity and guidance for:

**Residents**

**Our staff and volunteers**

**Town, Parish, District and Borough Councils**

**Organised voluntary, community and social enterprise groups**

**Health and care sector**

**Children and young people**

**Students**

**Businesses**



# Our Vision

**Communities are at the heart of everything we do. We will work better with residents and partners to help people get more involved and make a local difference.**

## Great Places Where We Live

1. Strengthen our work with partners and residents to help people feel safer and more included within their communities.
2. Help residents to get more involved in tackling climate change, take care of our environment and make Staffordshire more sustainable.
3. Help people to have better access to thriving local areas, by improving our roads and developing a Local Transport Plan.
4. Engage with our Borough, District, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and other external partners to understand and work with our communities better.

## Connected Communities

1. Continue to work with and support our thriving Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.
2. Make it easier for residents to find information, opportunities and connections that help them do their bit and be independent.
3. Connect people of all ages to the right help, at the right time, in the right place.
4. Support people to become digitally included, informed, and connected across the county.

## The Way the Council Listens, Talks and Acts

1. Try our best to engage with residents earlier, more accessibly, more creatively, more consistently and more locally.
2. Change our approach to help residents get more involved, and support officers to understand how they can help.
3. Support all our councillors to access the local information they need.

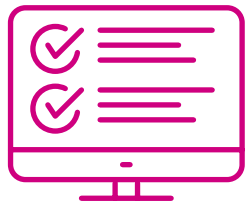


Lichfield Cathedral



# Engagement Process

From 1 November 2023 to 29 February 2024, we engaged with Staffordshire communities and partners, using a multi-method approach which involved:



## An online residents survey

that used the Let's Talk Staffordshire engagement platform to collect responses and encouraged people to share their stories about their community with us.



## We included a paper residents survey

so that people who couldn't take a digital survey were able to take part.

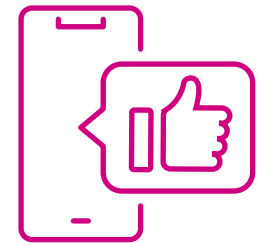


## Engaging people who work with us by sharing a dedicated partner survey



## Face to face conversations with targeted groups of people

to make sure that our engagement was inclusive, and we heard from as many different voices as possible.



## A Social Media campaign

that ran alongside the surveys to help raise awareness and encourage more people to take part.



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**5,755**  
clicks to  
engagement  
site



**166,867**  
times  
social media  
posts viewed



**2,106**  
resident  
responses



**236**  
detailed  
conversations



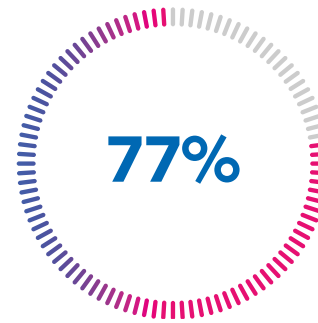
**96**  
partner  
responses

# Feedback Themes

The engagement we carried out was crucial. It helped us start to understand what matters to our residents and partners, what they already do within the local area, and what we can do differently to help them do more.

We learned:

## Community

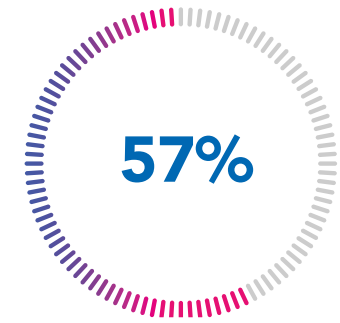


**People considered their town or village as their community.**

**Staffordshire's residents see their community as where they live:**

Identity is based in local place. Fewer residents identify with other communities, such as groups or clubs they are members of, workplaces, or places of education, however younger people placed a greater emphasis on online communities.

## Most Proud



**People are most proud of the friendliness / neighbourliness.**

**Staffordshire's residents have pride in their communities:**

The sense that people look out for each other, neighbourliness, friendliness, and community spirit being the most frequently cited sources of pride.

## Matters Most

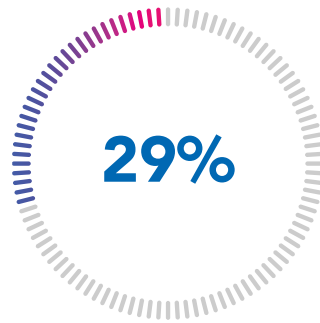


**Felt that safety / low crime matters the most.**

### Safety and neighbourliness:

Feelings of safety associated with low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, along with neighbourliness, or community spirit, are the things that matter most to people in their communities, followed by a clean and well-maintained, green environment, and the availability of community groups, activities, and events.

## Improve

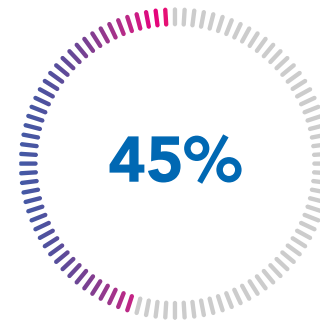


**Think that better infrastructure would improve their community.**

### Infrastructure and transport:

Residents identify infrastructure and maintenance (roads and pavements), along with the need for better public transport, as the things that could most improve their communities. Transport was the most important priority amongst the responses to the face-to-face work with seldom-heard groups, particularly regarding accessing local amenities, and seeing this as necessary for a thriving local area.

## Involvement

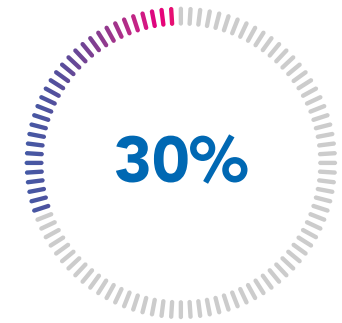


**Want to be more involved in local decision making.**

### Residents support each other through mostly informal neighbourliness:

Residents tell us that broadly, people in their community do help them out from time-to-time, mainly via neighbours helping them with small tasks. This has clear links to Staffordshire County Council's Doing Our Bit and the idea of small actions making a bigger difference.

## Done Differently



**Wanted the county council to communicate more.**

### Residents would like to help-out further:

They tell us that they are already engaged where they are able, but that they would also like to help-out further given the right opportunities, or additional support. Better information, advice, or communication about opportunities that are available are identified as something that would encourage people more. Residents would also like to see the council setting an example, getting more involved, and listening to communities.

# Communities Strategy for Staffordshire

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We have analysed the feedback and learning from the engagement and considered this alongside our experiences from other community work across the council.

We have also shared learning with partners and learned from what they could tell us, which has helped to test our thinking.

This has helped us to develop and agree three overarching ambitious aims for our work with communities. These will help us achieve our vision and set our focus for the next five years of the journey.



# Great Places Where We Live



Pride Parade | Stafford Town Centre  
Photo | David Wakefield, Peter Rogers Photographic Ltd

## 1

Strengthen our work with partners and residents to help people feel safer and more included within their communities.

People told us that feeling safe within their community and connections to other people were the things that mattered to them the most.

We have recognised this within our strategy and will continue to work with partners such as the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, and the District and Borough councils across the county to support these aims.



## 2

**Help residents to get more involved in tackling climate change, take care of our environment and make Staffordshire more sustainable.**

People told us that they would like to take a more active role in maintaining their local environment.

Our Climate Action Fund already supports community activity in this area and gives us a great starting point.

Our teams will work with partners and community groups to identify and provide more opportunities for people to get involved.

## 3

**Help people to have better access to thriving local areas, by improving our roads and developing a Local Transport Plan.**

People told us how important it was to access their local area through well maintained roads and pavements, using a range of inclusive, sustainable and safe transport modes.

We are working hard to maintain and improve our highways, spending an extra £50m between 2023/24 and 2025/26. We are also writing our fourth Local Transport Plan, which will support the Government's target to decarbonise the transport network by 2050.

The Local Transport Plan will play a key role in helping our communities to thrive.

## 4

**Engage with our Borough, District, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and other external partners to understand and work with our communities better.**

We also know that lots of other organisations understand our communities. It is important that we continue to work together, sharing whatever knowledge we can, to help us work even better.

# Connected Communities

## 1

Continue to work with and support our thriving Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.

A vital part of our work with communities is with organisations in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.

It remains important that we help the sector to thrive and be sustainable, so this is a key priority within the Communities Strategy.



Marquis Drive litter picking | Cannock Chase

## 2

**Make it easier for residents to find information, opportunities and connections that help them do their bit and be independent.**

People told us that they can find it hard to get information about activities in their community, or about how they could get more involved.

We know there is a lot of information available, but it can be hard to know which information is correct, and up to date.

We can build further on great work we have already done, such as our Supportive Communities programme which focuses on Communities within our Public Health and adult social care teams.

If we can make the system simpler, we think this could help residents to be and stay more independent.

## 3

**Connect people of all ages to the right help, at the right time, in the right place.**

A lot of work already takes place across Staffordshire County Council and with our partners. Whenever people need help, we try to link them to support which is nearer to home, and which helps them get on with their lives.

This is why encouraging our communities to help themselves and each other is already an important part of our Strategic Plan.

## 4

**Support people to become digitally included, informed, and connected across the county.**

We already support people to stay involved with the council through digital channels, from social media and emails, all the way through to digital ways of getting resident views on things.

Digital can help us to do more of this, but we know that not everybody wants to engage with us in this way and we don't want to leave anyone behind.

However, if we can support more people who would like to, then we can have better conversations together, and they can stay better informed.



Staffordshire  
County Council

Staffordshire Place | Stafford

# The Way the Council Listens, Talks and Acts

## 1

**Try our best to engage with residents earlier, more accessibly, more creatively, more consistently and more locally.**

People told us clearly that what they want from the council is better communication and information.

They also told us how important their very local area is to them.

Across the council, we are already engaging with residents in new creative ways, including “co-production” which shares the power with residents when we make decisions. However, we want to make our engagement better every time.

## 2

**Change our approach to help residents get more involved, and support officers to understand how they can help.**

Working with communities is already a key part of our Strategic Plan and we have a long history of fantastic work with residents and partners. However, there is more work to do.

This strategy will focus on making sure everyone in Staffordshire County Council understands how their role, and every decision we make, impacts on Staffordshire’s communities - and how we might be able to link up work and make things simpler and better.

## 3

**Support all our councillors to access the local information they need.**

Councillors across Staffordshire are vital to the success of this strategy.

Not just county councillors, but district and borough, and town and parish councillors.

As local champions who understand the patch, but who also understand the strategic work going on, they are the people who can join it all up.

We need to ensure they have everything they need, to do their essential job.

Jubilee celebrations | Tamworth Castle



# Other Key Work and How This Strategy Relates

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The Communities Strategy is closely related to other major pieces of work across the county council.

Many other organisations and agencies are also working with communities differently too, and we will develop our next steps in partnership with them.

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### • **People Strategy**

We will help our workforce to understand their role in this work, by supporting all of our staff to be Ambitious, Courageous and Empowered every day.

### • **Customer Experience Strategy**

This work is focused on how our residents and partners contact with the council when they need to, what they want from us and how we respond.

### • **Highways Transformation and Transport Plan**

Work which is already underway to fix more roads and footpaths, focus on customers, and explore how we can further develop inclusive, sustainable and safe transport modes across Staffordshire.

### • **Staffordshire's Cultural Strategy**

'Our Collective Culture' is an aspirational approach to align and unite the cultural activities, services, individuals, and organisations across Staffordshire's diverse communities.

### • **Strengths-Based Approach, Early Help and Supportive Communities**

These are the names of existing, crucial pieces of work across the council, crucial work across the council to help people find support from within their networks and places where they live, to keep them independent for longer.

# Communities Strategy

### • **Digital Innovation Strategy**

Understanding how our communities engage with us digitally, but not leaving residents behind. Creating improved digital tools and platforms to support community objectives.

### • **Working with the VCSE Sector**

Keeping Staffordshire's thriving Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector at the heart of what we do, and continuing to listen to their expertise about how we can support.

### • **Working with District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils**

Working ever closely with our partners across Staffordshire, to work together and jointly shape our approach with communities.

### • **Working with Statutory Partners and Health**

Partners such as the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, and health partners such as the Integrated Care Board, have a huge role working on the same issues across Staffordshire.

### • **Natural Environment Strategy**

We will help our communities to better enjoy Staffordshire's natural environment and use our assets to contribute towards tackling climate change, which is linked to our leadership of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.



Homecoming Festival | Newcastle-under-Lyme



# Measuring Our Impact / What Will Be Different

## This is the first strategy of its kind for Staffordshire County Council.

We have been working differently with communities for a number of years, but this strategy now gives us our long-term vision for where we want to get to and marks the start of the next phase.

To support this strategy there is a detailed delivery plan which sets out what we will do, to deliver each of the objectives and pillars and has detailed measures of performance for each one.

We will review this regularly, but most importantly we will not stop listening and talking to residents and partners about this work.

The strategy will guide, coordinate, and set the terms for everything we do with our residents and partners. It is essential that we continue to review this, to make sure residents still feel we are going in the right direction.

Long term	Mid-point review	Annually	All the time
This is a five-year plan, so that we have an agreed vision for the long-term.	After 2½ years or sooner, we will review progress and go back to communities for another engagement exercise.	We will review our progress every year to make sure we are delivering what we want to.	We will try to maintain a more consistent dialogue with residents about our work with communities in the future.

We will develop detailed performance measures and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) under each of the objectives of this strategy.

These will form part of the annual reviews but will be especially important at the mid-point review when we engage with residents in a full engagement exercise again.

For example:

### At the mid-point review

- › Residents feel safer in their communities, and feel the highways and transport in their area are improving

- › Residents feel better informed about where to find opportunities to get involved, and more of them do
- › Residents and partners tell us they feel more engaged and that the county council is more visible to them
- › VCSE partners tell us that our systems are evolving and becoming easier for communities to get involved
- › Our information, advice and guidance is being used regularly and increasing over time

If you would like to find out more, visit

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/communities](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/communities)

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[www.doingourbit.uk](http://www.doingourbit.uk)

Or email

[contactus@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:contactus@staffordshire.gov.uk)