

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES POLICY**  
Policy, Inclusion and Intelligence  
March 2016

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## Key Information

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## **1. Introduction**

Local government has a long history of seeking to develop and maintain civic communities, promoting the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and encouraging both civic and political participation. Working closely alongside people in their everyday lives, it is well placed to work with communities and its multi-functional nature makes it uniquely positioned to work in partnership to tackle the more complex, social issues effectively.

Basildon Council is clear that improving the lives of residents and creating opportunity and prosperity for local people and businesses sits at the heart of all that we do. This commitment has been embedded within this policy, which sets out more explicitly Basildon Council's policy approach to supporting residents to develop stronger communities. Due to the cross cutting nature of this policy, it will be supported by a range of other policies and strategies that influence the work of different service areas across the Council and those of our Partners. It will also be instrumental in refining the Council's role as a Community Leader and developing the behaviour required within the organisation to translate the spirit of this policy into everything we do as an organisation.

Basildon Council recognises the challenges residents may experience do not neatly fit service boundaries. For this reason, we are committed to pushing beyond the traditional service provider role, utilising our role as a place shaper and community leader and working in partnership with whomever we need to find solutions to the wider social issues evident in the borough. Crucially we recognise that some of the solutions are best delivered by the community and Voluntary / Charity sector (VCS) and for this reason it is essential that as an organisation we look at how we can support our communities and the VCS to become stronger and empowered to meet their own needs. Having enabled communities will allow greater opportunities for residents to exercise more control over their own lives and futures, whilst also growing community based approaches to some of the more challenging issues facing communities today such as health inequality, poor educational attainment, crime, social exclusion and long term unemployment.

Strong social capital within a community benefits the individual, the community and the Borough as a whole. It creates a more stable and supportive society where people of all ages and walks of life can feel a sense of belonging.

This overarching policy identifies the contribution that Basildon Council can make at an individual, community and Borough level to support and build strong communities across the Borough.

## **2. Executive Summary**

The role of local authorities is changing. This is in part driven by financial necessity - councils can no longer do all the things they have, over time, come to do - whilst increasingly recognising that stronger, more sustainable social capital is best achieved by individuals and the VCS. If councils are to continue to provide good quality public services they need to do so in a way that improves outcomes for individuals, communities and place, recognising the unique social responsibility retained by local authorities. A measure of the success of a local authority will not

simply be how efficient and effective its services are, but how effectively it can strengthen its communities.

This trajectory of change makes the future uncertain, however what is clear is that local authorities will need to re-define their relationship with communities to determine how to do things differently and to understand what communities and individuals are able and willing to do for themselves<sup>1</sup>. In turn this will allow a greater understanding of which activities are best delivered and sustained by individuals, voluntary organisations, business and communities.

Tackling some of the more complex social problems that prevent individuals from realising their full potential will continue to be one of the public sector's biggest challenges, particularly during a time of dwindling resources. However, the Council cannot afford not to take up this challenge, in order to enable people to make a meaningful contribution to the borough and reduce demand on our services. The Council will work with whomever is most appropriate to deliver better outcomes for all, including the private, public and voluntary sectors.

Basildon Borough has many strengths, including a thriving economy, close proximity to major roads and rail links and a number of key regeneration projects underway. To deliver maximum benefit from these opportunities for our residents, due consideration must be given to the social benefits that can be extracted as part of local regeneration. The Council considers such schemes should deliver improvements to the lives of existing residents and provide a platform to give back to the community for future generations.

In developing this policy, an extensive literature review was undertaken and used to inform the focus of this policy. In addition, a number of local research studies were carried out during 2014, including:

- Strengthening Communities Survey;
- The 2014 Borough Business Survey; and
- Voluntary Sector Review

This policy recognises that focusing resources to meet needs at a community level alone will not fundamentally change or strengthen communities. For this reason, the Council's focus has been directed to 3 realms and what can be achieved within each:

- Individual Realm
- Community Realm
- Borough Realm

It takes account of the important role that social capital has in strengthening and sustaining local communities and considers the role of Basildon Council in this context.

In developing this policy, a more holistic approach has been adopted that considers the role of the individual and their capacity to actively participate in society. This has allowed reflection on what the authority does to support

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<sup>1</sup> Unlocking Local Capacity, POM, 2012

individuals in meeting their basic needs and the impact this needs deficit may have on an individual's capacity to do more for themselves and others. By focusing on delivering services that provide security and stability to those that may lack this in other areas of their lives, the Council will use these services as the platform for achieving positive outcomes to improve the lives of our communities.

### **3. Policy Statement**

Basildon Council will seek to enable citizens at an individual, community and Borough level to realise strengthened, more cohesive and resilient communities that work together to better identify and meet the needs of their area, putting strong, connected communities at the heart of everything we do as an organisation.

### **4. Strengthening Communities – Basildon Council's Approach**

#### **Corporate Promise**

Building and unlocking capacity within communities is essential. Without this, there is the risk that individuals and the community become and remain dependent on agencies, such as the local authority, to provide support and resources without themselves taking greater control of their own lives and responsibility for action.

The population of Basildon is expected to increase by approximately 16% over the next 20 years and with this the pressure placed on local services will increase. Those within the care and health sectors will be impacted the most, particularly as the population is ageing and the implications of future care and health demand is projected to place significant strain on the system. This scenario makes it paramount that effort and resource, both of the Council and our Partners, is targeted in a united manner that seeks to empower individuals and the community to be able to do more for themselves and others and thereby have greater control of their own lives and future.

The Council adopted a new Corporate Plan at Full Council in October 2015 which takes effect from 1 April 2016. The vision of the Council is:

*“Basildon Borough Council is committed to improving the lives of our residents and creating opportunity and prosperity for local people and businesses”*

The plan also includes the promise:

*“We will support residents to develop stronger communities”*

The Strengthening Communities Policy provides the focus for achieving this promise. As an organisation we will be consistently challenging ourselves to use our services as the platform for achieving enhanced community outcomes. This policy isn't about spending more money; it is about spending the same or less, but achieving better outcomes by having due regard to how we can strengthen communities to be more resilient and independent of public services and finding solutions where perhaps they have never existed. This approach will be echoed in the policies that sit alongside this document, the supporting strategies that will be

prepared to realise delivery, the design of Council services and the behaviour of officers in their approach to day-to-day council business.

### **Understanding the dynamics of a 'Community'**

Community is a term that is often used, but seldom defined well. Today, the notion of 'Communities' is far more complex than the traditional view of a community as a place where people simply live, with individuals having connections based on interest, values, place and/or identity. Individuals may also identify themselves as belonging to more than one community. Communities are not static entities; people now require different things from their community at different times in their life, and communities themselves can also change, particularly in areas with transient populations. Whichever guise a community takes, the overriding distinguishing factor is the presence of people coming together with a shared commonality.

It has been suggested that the meaning of community may be plotted along a spectrum. At one end, a community is intentional, with participants freely joining and agreeing common aims and values. At the other end of the spectrum, there are communities of limited liability, in which levels of participation are low and notions of community less influential<sup>2</sup>.

This policy focuses on the most commonly recognised type of community, that of the residential neighbourhood. It is into such local communities that end-user services are delivered and in which social relationships are formed and maintained.<sup>3</sup> This policy endeavours to better understand the inequalities that exist amongst communities in the Borough in order to nurture and support those attributes that instil capacity within community, unlocking and empowering them to use existing resident skills and knowledge to address the needs of those living and working in the locality.

The connections that individuals and families forge with extended family, friends, neighbours and local professionals support their ability to cope when problems arise, providing opportunities to seek advice and assistance. However, cultural, economic and social changes have seen more people living without support and feeling socially isolated and disconnected from the community. This is often exacerbated when the nature of individuals' lives is more transient, meaning it is more difficult to establish such local connections. When the fabric of a community is weakened, its ability to respond to the needs of those living within its locality is reduced and this in turn increases dependency on public service providers. What is evident is that some areas are less able to support the differing needs of those individuals and families living within their communities. The absence of formal and informal networks of support provided by the family, neighbours, the workplace, local institutions and organisations appears to be a key factor in understanding why some communities flourish whilst others struggle.

This policy establishes a focus on working with communities to unlock their hidden capacity.

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<sup>2</sup> The Community Press in an Urban Setting, Janowitz M, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1967

<sup>3</sup> Public Value and Local Communities – A Literature Review, The Work Foundation

## **The importance of Strengthening Social Capital**

Social capital describes the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks<sup>4</sup>. It is these shared norms, connections and co-operative relationships that allow us to get along in life and provide the social fabric within a community. Social capital can also be understood and evidenced in terms of citizenship, 'neighbourliness', social networks and civic participation. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests that individuals and families living in communities with such networks are more likely to be 'housed, healthy, hired and happy'. Research has also shown that higher levels of social capital are associated with better health, high educational achievement, better employment outcomes and lower crime rates.

With such emphasis on the role social capital can play in developing and sustaining local communities, seeking to support the conditions that strengthen social capital and allow greater access to such resource within the community is a key component in tapping into the potential that exists across the Borough and delivering against many of the Council's promises set out in its Corporate Plan 2016-2020. This in turn will serve to deliver a range of positive social outcomes, improving the quality of life of Borough residents.

## **People and Participation**

Participation is understood in a very broad sense as the act of taking part in a wide range of social and civic activities, such as volunteering to run a self-help phone line, being a member of a community group or responding to a local authority consultation.<sup>5</sup>

Participation does not happen in a vacuum. It is influenced and shaped by a range of societal and contextual factors and is best understood when considered in the context of individuals' lives. Taking this approach helps to understand why some individuals chose to participate, whilst others chose not to or are prevented from doing so.

The role of individuals is a crucial component in Basildon Council's approach to strengthening communities. Having a greater understanding of what motivates individuals to participate in their local community or engage in civic activities such as voting or attending a council meeting is as important as understanding why some chose not to or are prevented from participating. The Council's thinking has been shaped, in part, by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory<sup>6</sup>; if an individual is worried about where their next meal is coming from, whether they are going to lose their home, or they have no one to turn to, they are less likely to feel enabled to participate in and develop other aspects of their life. It suggests that in order for an individual to develop and take control of their own life (and contribute to wider society) they must first have their basics needs met before being motivated to

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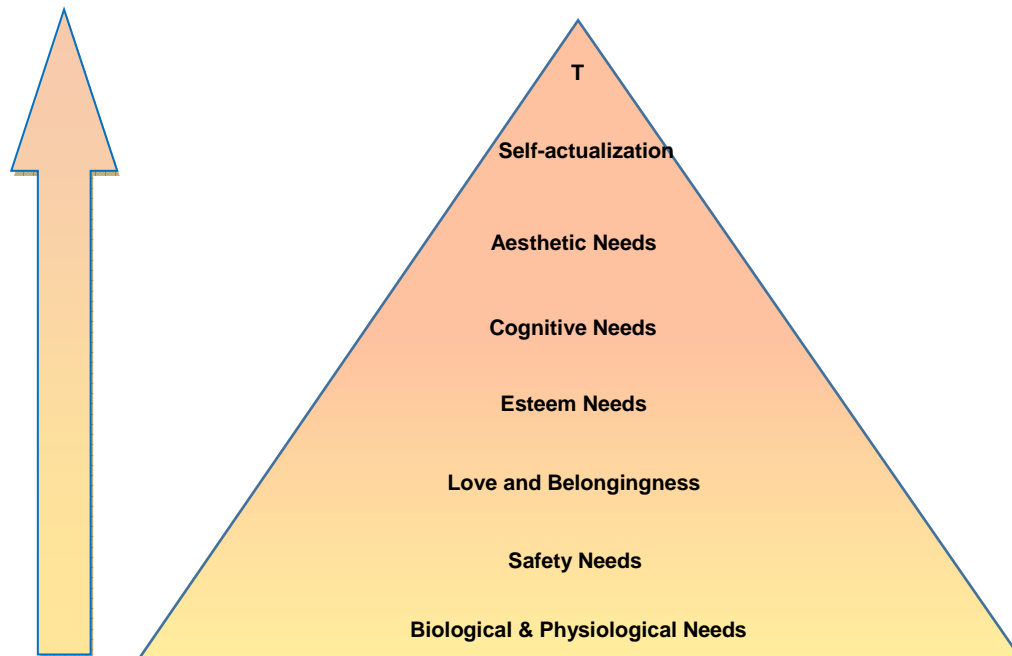
<sup>4</sup> Guide to Social Capital, Office for National Statistics, [www.ONS.gov.uk](http://www.ONS.gov.uk)

<sup>5</sup> 'Pathways through participation – Understanding participation: A literature review', Institute for Volunteering Research, December 2009

<sup>6</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper 'A Theory of Human Motivation'. His theory describes the hierarchy of human motivations and deals with the subject of nature of human fulfillment and the significance of personal relationships.



reach more aspirational life goals. Having basic needs met provides the foundation for further personal growth. This is demonstrated well in the diagram below:



**T = Transcendence**

## **5. Unlocking capacity and creating Opportunity in 3 Realms**

Gaining an insight into human motivations and needs has assisted in understanding the continued dependence of some on public services and the persistence of complex social issues apparent in the Borough. If individual's basic needs are not fulfilled this may reduce their capacity to focus on other aspects of their life and influence their ability to take advantage of opportunities to develop and grow.

Similarly, strong communities require enabled individuals who have the capacity and stability in their lives to participate in a wide range of social and/or civic activities. Coupled with this, both fledgling and established communities require the conditions and environment which encourage their long term sustainability. This sustainability and independence occurs when:

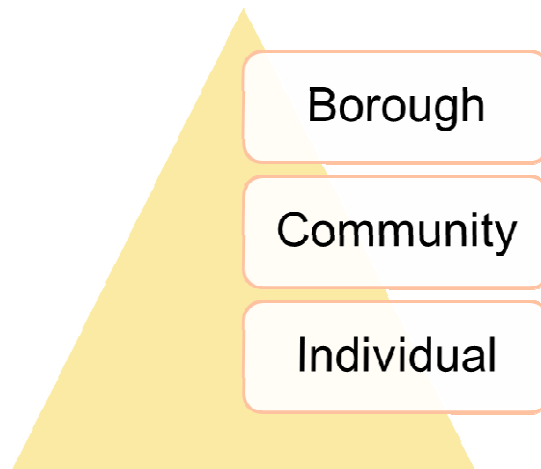
‘the formal and informal processes; systems; structures and relationships actively support the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and liveable communities’<sup>7</sup>

For this reason, focusing resources solely at a community level will not achieve Basildon Council's aspiration in respect of strengthening communities. A multi-

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<sup>7</sup> Western Australia Council of Social Services (WACOSS)

dimensional approach is required that recognises the differing component factors that build and support strong communities. In light of this, Basildon Council's approach will be deployed within 3 realms:



### **Individual Realm**

Individuals are the starting point to strong, sustainable communities. The Council will seek to create the environment for individuals and families to be empowered and independent from public services. The Council will use its services and those of Partners as platforms to help individuals and families to transition to independence. Developing a better understanding at the individual level will promote insight into the experiences of services users, the opportunities within our communities to address issues of need and to form the social connections needed to get on in life. This will assist the Council and Partner organisations to realign resources to alleviate demand, reduce dependency and deliver services that better meet the needs of service users.

### **Community Realm**

*“Certainly there will be examples in many local areas where local people are ready and willing to act ... but for the most part it isn't that simple. The capacity is there in many guises and many types of community, but there is often a process of finding it, mining it, nurturing it and support it – not simply lifting the lid and expecting it to burst out”<sup>8</sup>*

The Department for Social Development<sup>9</sup> describes community capacity building as:

‘The process of supporting individuals and community organisations to help them better identify and meet the needs of their area. It involves building on existing skills, providing opportunities for people to learn through experience and increasing people's awareness and confidence to enable them to participate more fully in society’

By better understanding the needs of our communities, Basildon Council will be best placed to fulfill its role as a Community Leader, working with communities to

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<sup>8</sup> Unlocking Local Capacity, OPM, 2012

<sup>9</sup> Established in 1999 as part of Northern Ireland Executive

influence, respond and address social deficit in an area, whilst building on existing community strengths. Greater emphasis on strengthening social capital and community capacity is the focus of this realm and stimulating the voluntary and community sector organisations to support this.

Councils play an important role in 'joining the dots' in a place, bringing individuals and organisations together to forge new connections, which can generate community-led activity independent of the council.<sup>10</sup> The specific needs of communities will dictate the level of capacity building required - organised communities would not benefit nor require intervention. These communities already have the capacity to plan and respond to change and meet the identified needs of their community. Their needs will be different to those communities where such cohesion and confidence has yet to be harnessed.

### The role of volunteering

Local authorities operate at a level that is particularly close to the everyday lives of residents and it is this strength that makes it uniquely placed to work alongside communities, but other sectors share this opportunity too. Working more closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is one way in which we can tap into and sustain the strengths of a community.

The increasing use of volunteers in the provision of services, which in the past have traditionally been provided by public sector organisations, marks a radical shift in the role local people can have in their community.

In summer 2014, Basildon Council conducted a survey with 309 voluntary and charity organisations registered with the Charities Commission and operating in the Borough. The purpose of this research was to establish a coherent understanding of the VCS in Basildon Borough. One third of VCS organisations responded providing a good insight into the views of the sector.

Findings from this research indicate that:

- Voluntary and community sector organisations in the area tend to have a low capacity, with limited ability to compete for funding.
- There are gaps in provision in the areas of healthcare, education and skills.
- Mechanisms to support and strengthen the sector are weak. There is minimal advice, guidance, market development, promotion of VCS organisations and provision of dedicated grant schemes to help achieve Borough outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

It is without question that having active voluntary and community sector organisations stimulates and bolsters capacity within communities. The findings of the Basildon Voluntary Sector Review do not appear unique to Basildon. In developing its approach to strengthening communities, Essex County Council also identified that the activity and funding to stimulate community-based and community-led activity within Essex was often patchy and short term, sometimes duplicative, with limited evidence of a joined-up approach to planning or

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<sup>10</sup> Unlocking Local Capacity, OPM, 2012

<sup>11</sup> Basildon Borough Council Voluntary Sector Review, 2014/15

commissioning.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, it was also identified that VSC initiatives were often hampered by short term funding arrangements, or by a lack of capacity to create sustainable models.<sup>13</sup>

This picture indicates a strong need at a strategic level to further develop the relationship between Basildon Council and the VCS and to find ways to strengthen the VCS offer in line with this policy. Facilitating this in Basildon will increase the opportunities for greater collaboration and co-operation between the sectors, whilst aligning priorities will further strengthen capacity within those communities with the most need.

Addressing the strategic challenges evident in the relationship between the two sectors will lead to greater co-ordination and collaboration in respect of service delivery, however the VCS also requires willing and enabled individuals who wish to take up volunteering opportunities.

The UK does not have one common national definition of volunteering. This partially reflects the dynamic nature of the sector. Volunteering England suggests that volunteering is:

“An expression of citizenship and fundamental to democracy. It is a commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, and can take many forms. It can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation”<sup>14</sup>

The United Nations definition, outlined in the International Year of Volunteers (2008), refines this further with the identification of at least four different types of volunteer activity: mutual aid or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation or civic engagement; and advocacy or campaigning.

Whilst all forms of volunteering are commendable, the focus of this policy is on encouraging volunteering that encourages and supports participation / civic engagement and mutual aid / self-help. Volunteering is not only instrumental in building capacity within communities, it also builds capacity within an individual. It can provide a positive route to gaining access to education and skills, developing self-esteem and confidence and gaining employment.

A survey of 1600 residents in the Borough invited responses to a number of questions in relation to volunteering in the Borough. The findings suggest that 69% of respondents viewed volunteering as a good way to develop skills and obtain qualifications, with 41% of respondents indicating they would be interested in volunteering in their community.

### **Borough Realm**

Basildon Council recognises the importance of physical regeneration as a catalyst for change in an area and in providing the physical conditions for communities to flourish. It also recognises the importance of working in partnership on agendas outside the traditional remit of district and borough authorities, in order to achieve

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<sup>12</sup> ECC Strengthening Communities – Business Case Proposal

<sup>13</sup> ECC Strengthening Communities – Business Case Proposal

<sup>14</sup> Volunteer England, Action Sheet, 2008

positive outcomes for the area. For this reason, the Council will work to influence and support the conditions required to put communities in the driving seat. This means working with whomever we need, to enable high quality education and skills development and to nurture (and sustain) a robust local economy. The Council is also committed to inclusive growth<sup>15</sup>, utilising all parts of the labour market to increase the pace of growth and ensure that the benefits of a strong economy are realised by all who live in the Borough.

### Council Promises

Corporate Promises	Levels of Impact			
	High	Medium	Low	None
We will support residents to develop stronger communities	•			
We will enhance and build pride in the local environment		•		
We will secure homes and enable regeneration with supporting infrastructure			•	
We will grow the local economy		•		
We will strive to keep communities safe and healthy		•		

## 7. Outcomes and Priorities

### Outcome

**Individuals supported within their community to fulfil their potential and have ownership of their future**

Priorities: Evidenced in the following ways:

- Residents are active participants in their communities
- Reduced health inequalities
- Communities help themselves and others and have low dependency on public services
- People achieve their potential through education, training and employment
- People live independently and exercise control over their lives
- Children get the best start in life

### Outcome

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<sup>15</sup> The Council is committed to inclusive growth, a concept that suggests the benefits of economic growth in an area should be incurred by every sector of society. Inclusive growth can be seen in a reduction in the levels of poverty and inequality in an area and benefits the most marginalised who may be trapped in low paid jobs or excluded from the labour market entirely. By utilising more fully all parts of the labour market there is an opportunity to not only raise the pace of growth, but to also ensure that the benefits are felt by all who live in the Borough.

**Collaborative and co-designed approach to services led by the community who take ownership and understand their individual and collective contribution to service delivery**

Priorities: Evidenced in the following ways:

- Engaged communities who are proactive in identifying and being part of the solution to identified need.
- Behavioral change in Basildon Council's approach to consultation and engagement of the community reflected in service management and delivery.
- A redefined relationship between the Council and community.

Outcome

**Reduction in the demand placed upon Public Sector institutions and associated services**

Priorities: Evidence in the following ways:

- Greater diversification of service delivery
- Financial reduction for the Council as a consequence of the change in relationship with the community.
- Increase in community based solutions evident in the Borough.

**8. Links to other Corporate Policies or Partner documents**

Specific strategies will be developed to implement this policy.

This policy also has direct links to the following key corporate documents:

- The Community Strategy
- Corporate Plan
- Consultation and Engagement Policy
- Economic Development Policy

And will link to the following emerging policies and strategies:

- Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Leisure Policy
- Housing and Regeneration Strategy
- Consultation and Engagement Strategy

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