

Priority 1

Active, inclusive and empowered parish councils and meetings

Leicestershire has 187 rural parishes. Parish and Town Councils play a crucial role in rural communities and there is a growing emphasis on Local Councils shaping local communities and directly providing local services. The importance of Local Councils within the localism agenda has been recognised through not only the Localism Act but also the Open Public Services White Paper and Sustainable Communities Act; this role is re-enforced locally through the Leicestershire Communities Strategy where Local Councils have been identified as key local enablers.

Local Councils are in an excellent position to have a close understanding of the needs of all those that live in their parish and the types of local interventions that can help improve the well being and independence of all residents. They also have statutory powers to provide a wide range of local facilities and services and remain free to increase precepts to meet the demands of parishioners, as well as implement opportunities for local service devolution.

National support for the key role Local Councils play and recognition of their importance in helping the Government deliver its localism agenda is reflected in the “New Councils Programme”. This DCLG led initiative provides over £1 million to support the creation of new Local (i.e. parish, town, and neighbourhood) Councils. The current economic and political environment has pushed Local Councils to the forefront of public service provision unlike anything experienced in recent history.

In a recent survey undertaken by the LRP, 92.4% of Parish Councils indicated that ‘rural issues’ were a priority for their council. Common themes identified by the Councils as a priority included: rural broadband, local facilities, the rural economy, protecting the rural characteristics of an area, providing and enabling community activities, and housing and planning matters.

Delivery

The LRP will work with the Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils to increase the understanding, expertise and capacity of Parish Councils to fulfil their roles in supporting rural communities.

Outcomes:

- Local Councils are more representative of their communities through activity in the lead up to elections
- Local Councils support vulnerable members of their community
- Local Councils lead innovative service delivery, including the provision of new and/or devolved services
- The successful establishment of new Local Councils where there is an aspiration from rural communities

Case Study



Supporting Rural Parish Councils

In March 2014 funding through the Leicestershire Rural Partnership enabled the Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils to host a highly successful training and networking event for its members. Sessions at the event included community engagement, strategic planning, the new community rights, and working with volunteers.

Feedback from those who attended was overwhelmingly positive with many commenting that the event was the best they had attended in their role as councillors and clerks.

As part of the LRP’s ongoing training programme for local councillors, a further 221 delegates from Leicestershire Parish Councils benefitted from a variety of courses aimed to help them better serve their communities throughout 2013/14.