

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

Communities Strategy



2019 - 2036



Communities Strategy

Our goal is to create the right conditions for communities to thrive; to bring volunteers, community leaders and publicly funded services together to plan and provide the most sustainable support for each other so that our communities are resilient and connected places for people to live and work.

Our Strategy sets out both the opportunities and challenges this presents as well as our tactics for delivering the change and improvements that you want to see.



Foreword

We are proud of our districts, they provide an excellent quality of life and an outstanding natural and built environment. Our towns and villages each have their own unique identity, providing spaces and places where people come together, where ideas and ambitions are shared, and where people discuss the inevitable changes to community life.

We value our communities. The variety of achievements carried out by the people who live here is remarkable. Our Town and Parish Councils and local volunteers deliver a range of local services, including providing village halls, sports pitches and playing fields, managing good neighbour schemes, local charities and alms-houses, developing affordable housing, Community Land Trusts and running sports clubs and associations. It is perhaps even more heartening that they do much of this work as unpaid volunteers because they care about what happens in their towns and villages and they know if they didn't commit their time and energy then much less would get done.

Our strategy builds on this strength of local action through our understanding of why and how people choose to commit to worthwhile projects that make a real difference to local people. What we call community capacity building is key to getting things done, for people to feel energised and enthused that their time as volunteers really does make a difference.

This strategy will guide when we should intervene to help resolve local issues. We need to avoid thinking, even worse telling, our communities that we know best. The Strategy places much more emphasis on developing stronger relationships with communities so we can both agree on what will make a difference.

Building closer relationships across a wide range of communities, not only with our Town and Parish Councils, but also with other local groups and organisations, has helped us to understand our local landscape, but this is only the start. Our Voluntary and Community sector partners play an immensely important role, helping to identify, give voice to and respond to needs across our communities.

Ensuring these relationships are resilient, that we are both responsive but also approachable about the issues that really matter, should ensure relationships don't break down when a contentious local issue arises, as it inevitably will from time to time. We need to ensure that we are accessible and move our communication from what are often one-off consultations to a more meaningful real-time dialogue. This will take effort and commitment on all sides and it must be founded on a relationship developed through mutual trust and respect.

We recognise that it is much easier to write a strategy than to implement one, but we are committed to ensuring this strategy has impact by embedding it across all our services.

Our vision is simple, we want "all our communities to thrive". We invite you all to act with us to achieve this vision for the bright future of our Districts.



Councillor Julie Flatman,
Mid Suffolk Cabinet
Member for Communities



Councillor Margaret Maybury
Babergh Cabinet Member for
Communities

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Introduction

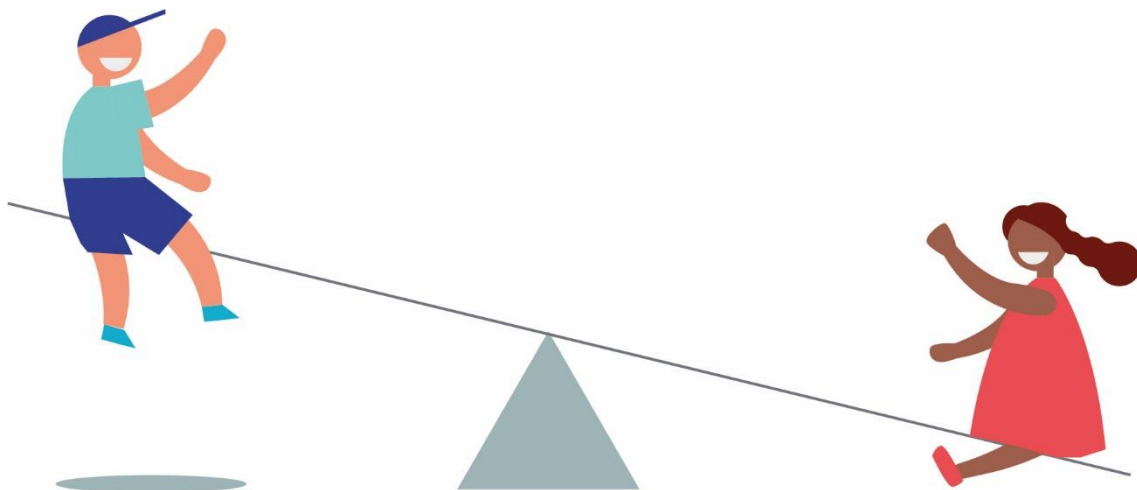
Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are proud to present our first Communities Strategy.

This Strategy has been developed in collaboration with our statutory and voluntary sector partners. It recognises and takes into account existing commitments, for example, our role in supporting strategic objectives agreed within the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.

It aligns to other plans - our Homes, Open for Business, Customer Access and Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategies - as well as informing the development of our Joint Local Plan. These strategies also have a direct impact on communities, their health, prosperity and opportunity. It is incumbent upon us to seek to harmonise our approaches, sharing information and joining up services so that resources can be more effectively targeted to improve people's lives.

The Strategy also reflects the views of the communities who have responded to the consultative draft of the Communities Strategy, and through our ongoing dialogue with communities as we undertake our everyday business. Some of the feedback we received has made for uncomfortable but necessary reading. We know there is much more to do to build more trusting relationships and this strategy will describe how we intend to achieve this. We also have heard the views of organisations who are involved in delivering vital services to people within our communities, who are wanting more certainty from us about how we commission and fund services and whether they are in a better position to provide such services themselves.

This Strategy identifies challenges as well as opportunities which we will develop into precise actions, to make our communities thrive, within an environment where the way we spend money becomes increasingly important and we need to be focused on achieving clear, identified outcomes.



Why do we need a strategy?

We have a pivotal leadership role across the districts. People expect their Councils to listen, to be accountable, make decisions they can understand and spend public money not only wisely but also in a way which has the biggest impact within the local area. When there are so many calls upon the public purse, our Strategy will enable our communities to recognise and anticipate the ways in which we will try to use our resources to best effect.

In order to achieve a deeper, more trusting relationship with our communities we do have to change the way we work. This means not only our systems, services and processes but also our organisational culture so that it embodies positivity, personal responsibility, openness and transparency. We expect our workforce to be passionate about the things they do, to innovate and be creative, always bringing new ideas to improve services and the relationships on which we depend.

It is important that we always seek to represent local views, encouraging local people to make their opinions known. It is vital therefore that we direct our effort, avoid duplication and that we target our resources to achieve the right outcomes.

We know that our communities have a wide-ranging set of views about the relationships they have with us. We know they have concerns about the impact of growth, young people being priced out of the housing market, the loss of local services and the implications of our move out of the districts. The consultation has helped us complete a picture of what our communities, voluntary sector and partners are telling us about the types of relationship and focus on activity that is required.

We are confident these ambitions are broadly right, however, some of the ambitions are perceived as being more important than others. Consultees told us there were some gaps in key data sources and topic areas and that existing commitments, particularly those contained within other strategic documents, should not be restated.

The role of this Strategy is to establish how we can deliver a coordinated and consistent approach, making full use of all the resources available, so that those who live and work within Babergh and Mid Suffolk feel valued, understood and connected within their community.

Horizon scanning - a look to the future of the districts

The key issues to be tackled

Our population is getting older, more people are experiencing frailty and loneliness, and this places greater pressure on social care and health interventions. By enabling and supporting individuals at greatest risk to take care of themselves and their health, this will take pressure off the system and assist in reducing social care and healthcare costs.

There are also needs within the districts which are often hidden. Issues such as low income can be compounded by the barriers to accessing key services and the higher additional costs associated with living in the countryside. These hidden needs often increase the real sense of isolation people experience when they find it more difficult to gain access to support and services. Social isolation, particularly where people have limited access to resources, threatens the overall resilience of our communities.

A growing population, increasing life expectancy, smaller households and a historic under-supply of new homes are all placing a huge strain on our existing housing supply, which has in turn affected housing affordability. Over the next 20 years the populations of Babergh and Mid Suffolk are expected to grow significantly, we are likely to require around 20,000 new homes by 2036. We will also need more jobs, schools, and health care services; as well as shops, leisure facilities and open spaces.

Some communities have not witnessed any increase in new homes for many years. Not only does this mean that not enough homes are available, it is also placing the future of local services in some of our villages at risk. We need to deliver more homes, and we want to ensure that developers build the right homes, in the right places, that people can afford. We also need to ensure that the right local and strategic infrastructure is delivered to help this development to be more inclusive and sustainable.

Looking ahead to the future the following key factors have been considered to support the development of the Strategy.




According to Age UK Suffolk there are over 15,000 older people in Suffolk who say that they are always or often lonely - that's 1 in 10 people aged 65 and over.

Population, health and social trends

We need to ensure that the Strategy is closely aligned to future population changes and growth in the Districts, as well as other changes that affect social mobility. For example, whilst our districts are comparatively affluent we also know that we have relatively low average wages.

Key considerations are as follows:

Population growth

	Population	2018	2036
	Babergh	91,000	98,300
	Mid Suffolk	101,900	111,200

Population over 65

		2018	2036
	Babergh	26.2%	34.6%
	Mid Suffolk	24.5%	32.9%
	England	18.2%	23.5%

Population over 90

		2018	2036
	Babergh	1.4%	3%
	Mid Suffolk	1.1%	2.3%
	England	0.9%	1.6%

Source: ONS 2016 based subnational population projections



Median gross weekly earnings for full time employees by place of work:

Babergh	£478.50
Mid Suffolk	£560.30
UK	£569.00

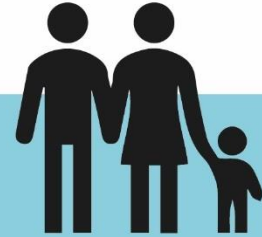


In 2007 and 2010 all of the areas in Suffolk within the most deprived 20% of areas in England were found in Ipswich and Lowestoft.

By 2015 these areas of higher deprivation had increased and spread to new parts of the county, including Great Cornard and Stowmarket.



Research suggests that people living in rural villages and hamlets need to be able to spend between 15-25% more than their counterparts in order to be able to afford the same, minimum socially acceptable, standard of living.



The Social Mobility Index measures the differences between different local areas in the chances that a child from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background has of doing well as an adult. Babergh ranks 270, Mid Suffolk ranks 80 on a national ranking of 1 to 324 where 1 is the most socially mobile area.

Sources

ONS Employee Earnings in the UK 2018

Suffolk Community Foundation, Hidden Needs Report

Social Mobility Index 2017

Vision, strategic aims and priorities

Our vision is for “communities that thrive” now and in the future - built on a balanced and targeted range of services and support, equally accessible to all our residents and their future generations.

Our strategic aim is to provide guidance, support and inspiration to our communities so we have a clear picture of what we can achieve together now and in the future.

Our objectives are for all our communities to be attractive, successful and connected places for people to live and work. Our Strategy sets out ten approaches to how we will work with our Communities to achieve this.



Making it happen

A place-based approach

The Strategy is a timely opportunity for us to develop a new approach to place within our towns, villages and communities, rather than relying on our traditional organisational structures and statutory responsibilities.

This Strategy is therefore built on getting to know all our communities through what we call the 'asset-based' approach. This will provide much better visibility and appreciation about what communities already do well and what they are capable of doing; a focus on what is strong rather than what is wrong. This approach will recognise the importance and value of the positive things that can be developed and the improvements which can be made.

Making more visible local demand for services will also highlight opportunities to reduce or redirect resources to areas of need. Where these arrangements work well it has enabled communities to take more control and initiative, developing different forms of service provision or activities to reduce demand on current services and understand the role they might play in strengthening local resilience and supporting change.

We will also ensure that we work much more closely with community leaders and those who influence and inspire change, including Councillors at all levels of local government, because they are often best placed to understand and respond to local issues.

Community inspired and community led outcomes require a change in our culture and behaviour and this new approach will be aligned to our corporate values.

A collaborative approach

Communities expect public services to be coherent and joined up. We have a good track record of collaboration in some areas, but we know we can do more. The Strategy will develop a new approach to the way we work internally so we can improve how we address planning, economic development, housing and other issues within communities in much more effective, cross-working ways.

We will also develop a much clearer focus on the way we work with our Voluntary and Community Sector, ensuring that their independence and specialist skills help to complement and not compete for business.

We will continue to work alongside strategic partners to address some of the very complex issues which matter to people. These include our role in promoting physical activity, addressing loneliness, improving levels of physical as well as mental health which form part of our Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, and the countywide Health and Wellbeing Strategy. We also have an important role in helping communities feel safe, responding with partners to address national issues of concerns such as County Lines within our Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.

Our commitments to ensure our communities are healthy and safe will be managed and monitored by existing programme groups and not within this Strategy.

A devolved approach

Delivering effective services which our communities expect or require is important to us but there are times when we haven't always questioned who knows best and who is best equipped to step in.

There are many examples of communities who have taken on responsibilities for local service delivery from other public bodies, ranging from parks and play areas, to the development of new affordable housing, community library services and recycling centres. These services work because they are seen as local priorities and because they are valued. Our consultation confirmed the view that communities want us to step back from intervening but to do more to help them deliver for themselves. They also expect this to be an instinctive step, a positive approach in the way we work with our communities.

All our communities have formal legal rights to take more local control over key decisions which affect them. For example, to develop Neighbourhood Plans, to preserve important community assets within their areas and even to bid to run Council services. We will be more pro-active to encourage and support communities to adopt these types of local solutions rather than waiting for a community to ask.

A needs-based approach

Our districts are undeniably successful. They are thriving economically, they experience low levels of crime, people generally experience good health and most people experience a high quality of life. However, we know that significant inequalities in health, income and access to services exist across our communities.

We will concentrate our work and our resources to help close the gap for those who are socially excluded, disadvantaged and marginalised. It is important to acknowledge that a significant amount of activity is already underway to tackle some of these issues, whilst there is undoubtedly more work to be done.

The Strategy will explore opportunities to build upon existing initiatives, for instance the Health and Wellbeing Strategy which focuses on ensuring everyone in the districts have improved health and wellbeing; and that inequalities in levels of health and wellbeing are reduced.

We will develop a new evidence-based approach to identify the specific needs of geographical communities as well as communities of interest and to evaluate potential interventions to address these needs. This will involve re-aligning the types of activity we

undertake, our spending decisions and staffing resources to more directly help address social, health and economic disadvantage.

Our strategy will develop how our needs-based approach can be delivered using the following key principles:

- An agreement of common interest: where there is a commitment within a community to explore greater opportunities for joint working and to engage the whole community in doing so.
- The Prevention Test: where there is evidence that activity will reduce the demand on services or be used to address an issue that creates demand, for instance poor health or isolation.
- The Asset Test: where the assessment of the community “deficits” is developed alongside the community assets.
- The Legacy Test: the lasting contribution of the activity or project and its positive impact within the community. This could be an increase in volunteering, better use of a community space, an increase in physical activity.

A preventative approach

Public services are effective at responding to problems by providing a safety net when situations reach a crisis point. Whilst this is both necessary and appropriate for genuine crises, it is far better for everyone concerned to prevent or avert such difficulties before they become far more complex, entrenched and ultimately costly problems to solve. Our strategy aims to rebalance this issue, with greater investment focused towards preventative approaches.

An enabling approach

An important aspect of localism is about how people work together and get involved with things that affect them locally and we are determined to see decision-making take place at the most local practical level.

Many communities are very capable of getting things done, some with our support and guidance and at other times through a network of other resources which are available. Others are less confident, they may not possess either the skills or the experience, which can mean local projects and activities may be less likely to be delivered.

We will ensure a range of toolkits and resources are available for communities covering issues from how to establish effective governance, how to fundraise and how to develop projects. We will also encourage learning networks of communities who are keen to share their successes and lessons learned with others.

We realise the inspiration of learning from other people, that showcasing innovative practice can help to crystallise new ideas and energy. We know we have exemplary

examples of activities and projects which have worked through community endeavour, so we will seek to ensure this experience can be shared.

We also possess a range of professional skills, both within our support services; finance and audit, governance, human resources, data analysis, and also within our front-line services. However, these skills are not always valued as commodities our communities can utilise, they are focused internally on how we do business. We will explore how communities can harness these resources, so they more actively contribute to local activity.

A partnership approach

We recognise and value the unique contribution our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) makes in supporting and delivering services that meet the needs of residents in the districts. We have a strong commitment to supporting our VCS because they are trusted and independent.

Our Strategy provides a timely and compelling reminder that a sustainable and diverse voluntary and community sector, as well as effective Town and Parish Councils, are essential for developing and maintaining strong community bonds.

It is important that both the VCS and councils work together to promote better understanding of the important role of the sector in helping to identify, give voice and respond to needs in local communities as an essential element of good planning and delivery. VCS organisations, as well as statutory bodies like Town and Parish Councils, Suffolk County Council and Clinical Commissioning Groups, also bring their own resources to local partnerships and are keen to share the work involved in supporting the creation of healthier, safer and stronger communities.

We will continue to provide support for community and voluntary groups because we truly value their contribution to our strategic priorities and promoting positive behaviour change.

An intelligence-led approach

We already have access to a wide range of data. Our approach to collecting and making best use of the information, however, is not as robust as we would like. Building a strong evidence base, and providing analysis and intelligence, is a vital part of how we make good decisions.

The Strategy will help us to develop a new approach in relation to how we utilise our data and local knowledge to generate effective intelligence on what really matters to our local communities.

To do this we need to develop a much better understanding through listening and engaging, so we get a 'real-time' window into what is going on in our communities. By bringing together information and intelligence gathered internally, by partner organisations and

elsewhere, we will aim to establish a more holistic and sophisticated picture of our communities. This will allow us to understand what is going on, the priority needs of communities and ultimately where our resources can be best deployed to optimise the impact this will have on the ground.

An inclusive approach

Whilst our communities may appreciate our willingness to enter into discussions on local issues, we know that some think we don't always get our engagement approach right. We know our consultees have told us we do not always appear to listen and act accordingly and for them it seems that we too often pay lip service to the views they provide.

We are also aware that some people have louder voices, representing their views and opinions with fluency and determination and in a way that we find easier to understand. These voices are not always fully representative of the whole community. We need to take the time to understand issues from within a community which may affect a particular group or a much smaller number of people, sometimes who have different views to the majority but are no less important.

We are aware that written objections about the scale and size of new development, for example, do not always represent the views of all people within a community. It is important that we account for those who would wish for a home in a community for their children and recognise that the finance from a development can help to protect the local school from closure. These voices are not always as clear, and we don't always find it as easy to create the conditions for them to be heard.

Our strategy will develop new ways to engage and to reach out so we can have more confidence and a much broader sense of need and we can promote cohesion and foster good relations.

A values-based approach

In order to achieve a deeper relationship with our communities we have to change the way we work. Making sure that our organisational values are an integral part of our policies and strategies will break down some of the relationship barriers which exist, building trust and making us much easier to work with as well as giving communities a good reason to want to work with us.

This means not only changing our systems, services and processes but also our workforce behaviours and values. This change in mindset and approach is needed both at leadership level and in the frontline workforce, to make real change happen in practice.

Our workforce is our most important asset - their talent, skills, knowledge and experience truly are at the heart of everything we do and all that we achieve.

We are fostering a culture that embodies positivity, personal responsibility, openness and transparency. We are empowering our workforce to be innovative and creative, bringing new ideas to improve services. For those delivering services for communities this means the freedom to focus on what is important, having a different conversation to identify assets and approaches unconstrained by tick box assessments. We believe in being ambitious, inspiring our communities, taking pride in our places and striving for excellence; we care about delivering high quality, customer focused outcomes with our communities and partners; and we will be open, transparent and truthful.

It's not just about what we achieve; it's also about demonstrating why Councils exist and the importance of getting things right. Our values will help to create a culture that is passionate and proud, that celebrates our successes and our achievements, and sets out how we expect our workforce to behave.

We are empowering staff to take responsibility for their own engagement and development and feel committed to the districts so that they embody our values and our new relationship with our communities.

At the heart of our strategic framework

The Communities Strategy forms part of an integrated framework of Council strategies as well as national, regional and countywide commitments to inclusive growth, health and wellbeing and community resilience.

This approach ensures that we are making the very best use of available resources and expertise to help our communities thrive now and in the future.

- Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Joint Strategic Plan
- The Economic Strategy for Norfolk and Suffolk (led by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership)
- Suffolk's Framework for Inclusive Growth
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk's emerging Joint Local Plan
- Parish and Neighbourhood Plans
- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk
- The Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership
- Suffolk Volunteering Strategy
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Homes Strategy
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Open for Business Strategy
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Customer Access Strategy



Practical actions

What we will continue to do - building on success of the past

- Provide community grants, administer developer contributions and offer funding support.
- Support communities to create and enhance community spaces, 'hubs', local places, village halls and community centres.
- Deliver, support and promote "Community Rights" to local communities - Assets of Community Value, Neighbourhood Plans, Community Land Trusts and local need housing schemes.
- Support volunteering, connecting people with a shared experience and providing mutual support.
- Enable and support community safety activities, to reduce the likelihood of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within our communities.
- Support local providers to recognise the important role leisure, sport and physical activity can play in reducing health inequalities and wellbeing.
- Enable communities to develop meaningful activity and improve quality of life for people with dementia.
- Facilitate partnership and collaborative working across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

What we will support and enable - enhanced ways of working

- Support local Councillors in developing their role as community leaders, so that communities can take a lead on, and resolve, issues that are important to them.
- Engender cross service working both internally, with external partners and with community leaders who are confident to work in the same way.
- Explore approaches to community budgeting, recognising that what might work well in one place may not be appropriate for all.
- Adopt place-based approaches with dedicated officer support where it is appropriate to do so.
- Explore the use of 'Locality' roles to act as enablers, facilitators, conduits and "navigators" to support local Councillors and work with local communities to understand our places holistically and establish agreed priorities.
- Use this knowledge to contribute to the effective delivery of social prescribing approaches.
- Ensure toolkits are available and accessible to help build community capacity and skills.
- Facilitate communities to share their experiences with others so people can gain more confidence to get things done.
- Ensure financial sustainability, "invest to save" and social return on investment are recognised as essential principle for any projects and not simply their costs.

- Explore opportunities to create a staff volunteering scheme.
- Develop a comprehensive and centralised information system, based on dialogue with communities, that is kept 'live' and is forward facing on community intelligence.
- Make targeted interventions based on evidence of strategic and local need, directing resources to those who will benefit from it the most in the long term.
- Identify overt and hidden needs and put them at the forefront of the rationale for developing projects and interventions.
- Proactively seek to encourage long term behaviour change across the community to enhance cohesion and wellbeing.
- Continually review and remodel our staffing structures, making better use of existing and future available resources.

What we will not do:

- Work in service "silos" and only be reactive to local issues when raised with us.
- Support projects that cannot demonstrate wide community buy-in; by Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, community groups, charities and local people.
- Support inconsistent or ineffective service arrangements, for instance differing management of play and open space within the same community.
- Think in the short term only, recognising that the preventative agenda requires longer term investment to achieve longer term outcomes.
- Support projects without sustainable business plans.
- Support those communities and groups who shy away from or actively resist a collaborative approach.
- Take things for granted or make assumptions without checking the facts. We have more than 200 individual communities, as well as communities of interest, all with their similarities but also their differences.
- Assume all volunteers and voluntary organisations are equipped and confident and able to understand increasingly complex agendas.
- Provide financial support to communities based on historical arrangements and out of date policy decisions.
- Provide capital funding to communities who cannot demonstrate evidence of their needs, for example through Parish Infrastructure Investment Plans (PIIPs).
- Take the lead on projects or activities which would be better led by others.

Making it all happen

We need to ensure that our strategy is resourced, embedded, communicated and delivered. In order to achieve this, it will need to be embraced by our Councillors, partners and communities and integrated as a common approach across Council departments.

We acknowledge that our community development focus has become less clear and our response to dealing with new service demands has sometimes been at the expense of some of the basics. Our new approaches will help us to focus, to prioritise and set out a common statement of purpose that people can understand and to establish the supporting roles that are vital for the strategy to be successful.

This will result in changes at many different levels; for people, local communities and our relationships with other public and voluntary organisations.

We know the districts are likely to look and feel different in 20 years time, so it is important that we adapt our approach now and plan for the future.

Measuring our success

We will use a range of methods to measure our success on the ground. To this end, we will be developing a list of key, but not exhaustive, measures against which we will track our progress. Some of our approaches will require a more creative process of monitoring and we will also need to develop measures where outcomes depend on the inputs of partners and communities to try and demonstrate the added value brought to the delivery of local services.

The Communities Strategy and its delivery plan will be reviewed every two years.

