



# Supportive Communities in Staffordshire

A Progress Report | 2018 to 2024

supportive  
**Communities**

Help and support is closer than you think

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# Foreword

**Claire McIver, Assistant Director, Public Health and Prevention,  
Staffordshire County Council (Supportive Communities Board Chair)**

Welcome to the first Supportive Communities Progress Report.

As we look back on the many achievements made over the last 4 years, this report tells the story of how the Supportive Communities programme has responded to the challenge of growing pressure on health and social care services, in a way that recognises the strengths and abilities of the communities across Staffordshire. A lot has happened since the programme launched back in early 2020, with events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis highlighting the stark health inequalities that exist across Staffordshire. However, whilst these events have been challenging, they have also provided significant opportunities to be creative and innovative, whilst working with partners to improve outcomes for people.

As the programme has grown and evolved over the years, a variety of projects and initiatives have been created, all with the aim of empowering people and communities to live well, including:

- Over £500k of funding via new grants programmes for local communities

- Continued awareness raising of the benefits of assistive technology
- Introduction of the Community Champions Initiative
- Implementation of new training courses for the wider care and community workforce; and
- The introduction of networking sessions that bring together the Adult Social Workforce with the Voluntary Sector

Whilst the design and delivery of the programme started as an internal transformation project led by the Staffordshire County Council public health team, it has grown to become a true partnership. With a co-designed and shared action plan for 2024/25, and a Supportive Communities Board overseeing the delivery of the programme with our partners, including Support Staffordshire, the SCC Libraries management team, Midlands Partnership University Foundation Trust (MPFT) and many others.

With so many lessons learned, the focus of the programme for the future will be to build upon its strong foundations, but also accelerate its delivery at a much more local level which

# Foreword

**Councillor Paul Northcott, Cabinet Support Member,  
Public Health and Prevention**

recognises the diversity that exists across the county. Our hope is that this report not only helps to explain what the Supportive Communities programme is all about and what it has been achieved so far, but also inspires others to get involved and help us to realise its vision and priorities. Plans for the future are ambitious and there is so much more to do, but we are excited to embark on the next phase of the journey.



*Emmaver*

A key corporate priority is to promote good health, wellbeing, and independence, and continue our approach of empowering communities to provide more support to the people within them. Getting this right will mean more people living in good health and independently for longer, whilst easing the burden of rising care costs on Staffordshire taxpayers.

Research tells us that when people need help, it is often most effective when it comes from their family and friends. We want more people to draw on their personal strengths and to find support in their communities when they need it.

Getting this right will see a healthier population, increased use of community support and timely social care assessments that are based on people's strengths.

We are just at the beginning of our journey, having put the basic infrastructure in place with our partners. Now we must ramp up our combined efforts to co-design with communities what they need.



*Paul Northcott*

# Why a supportive communities programme in Staffordshire?

**Our health and wellbeing are influenced by many things; the homes we live in, the jobs we do, the food we eat, and how physically active we are.**

Staffordshire County Council's Strategic Plan (2022-2026) prioritises good health, wellbeing and independence which means we want more people to draw on their personal strengths and to find support in their communities when they need it.

Our health and wellbeing are influenced by many things; the homes we live in, the jobs we do, the food we eat, and how physically active we are. Staffordshire County Council's Strategic Plan (2022-2026) prioritises good health, wellbeing and independence which means we want more people to draw on their personal strengths and to find support in their communities when they need it.

Covid-19 increased already existing pressure on health and care services, which are not evenly distributed, and widened health inequalities across the county. It is more important than ever that people take more control over their health and wellbeing and use their communities' assets well, helping us

to live longer in good health and reduce the reliance on health and care services.

In 2018 Staffordshire County Council ('the council') identified that around three quarters of adult social care requests were for support that can be found in local communities, such as help with shopping or ways to combat loneliness. Figure 1 shows the main reasons for calls to the council for social care support.

## Our response

In April 2020 the council launched the Supportive Communities Programme to deliver its ambitions for healthy and independent communities.

Now, over 70% of calls made to the council from either residents or relatives, results in information, advice and guidance being provided .

**“When people get in touch with us at the county council, we use Supportive Communities resources to help connect more individuals with their local communities”.**

Caroline Fullwood,  
Contact Centre Manager





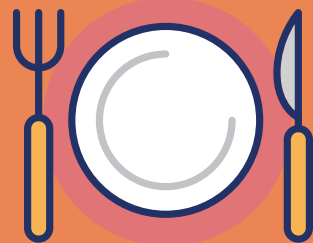
## Volunteers

**1,300**  
icount and icare

**2,000**  
VCSE

**7,000**  
NHS Responders

**5,034**  
weekly  
food  
deliveries



**6,001**  
Prepared  
meals  
delivered

**2,864**  
prescription  
collections



**1,594**  
befriending  
calls



Set up and distributed  
food packages to circa

**2,500**  
vulnerable people



# The early days of Supportive Communities

**Proving pivotal to Staffordshire’s effective response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the launch of the Supportive Communities programme built on the availability of the right information, advice and guidance, use of data and collaboration by partners across the voluntary, health and social care communities.**

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Working together with anchor organisations, Support Staffordshire (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise partner), we were able to respond quickly to the needs of the community in the first pandemic lockdown. The impact that community-based support achieved for the most vulnerable and self-isolating residents across the county and can be seen in figure 2.

## Adapting to change

From these early days, the Supportive Communities programme has adapted and flexed, responding to emerging issues, and developing new approaches to engage with communities. We have seen a significant increase in social action and volunteering amongst communities, which helps people feel more connected. The next stage for the programme is to overcome challenges to ensure a resilient and sustainable community and voluntary sector and preventing digital exclusion.

# A partnership vision for the Supportive Communities programme

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**Vision: People can live independently with support from families and communities.**

## Priority 1

**Develop tools for promoting independent living (digital and non-digital means)**

## Priority 2

**Grow and enhance community capacity for residents to help themselves and others**

## Priority 3

**Help to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of the wider care and community workforce**

## Priority 4

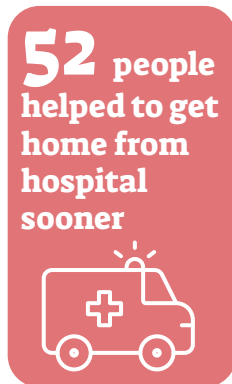
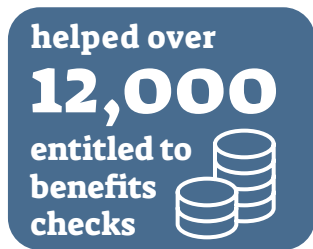
**Effective communication and engagement with both communities and the workforce**

While the delivery continues to be our core purpose, the programme has grown to become so much more, acting as a valuable source of insight into the needs of communities. As well as forging new relationships and partnerships across the statutory and community sectors. We thank all our stakeholders for being a critical part of this journey to date and being part of an ongoing partnership that will continue to be vital to achieving this programme's potential.



## What has been achieved so far?

Measuring the impact of this kind of multifaceted, long-term programme is both challenging and complex. That said, since Supportive Communities launched in April 2020, we estimate to have reached over 270,000 people which is over 30% of the Staffordshire population (excluding Stoke on Trent).



**“The Supportive Communities programme has worked in partnership with adult social care to shift the focus from formal care services to preventative, holistic and collaborative ways of working.”**

Jo Cowcher, Assistant Director for Adult Social Work and Safeguarding

**“The Supportive communities’ tools and resources have enabled us to signpost on average 60-70% of people to their local communities, during social care assessments”.**

Tammy Drinkwater, First Contact Manager

## Progress against Priority | 1

# Tools for promoting independent living

Communities, workforce, and stakeholders all need to know what resources, community groups and organisations are available right now to help people to live well and independent in their homes and communities. Developing tools and resources for individuals and communities underpins the whole programme.

### Tool #1 Staffordshire Connects

Staffordshire Connects, the council's online directory of community activities and services

Almost 5,000 community organisations and services listed

An average over 1,000 visits per month



**“I completed a Needs Assessment for a lady who had a visual impairment... the lady was physically able and managing well independently, but she struggled to participate in the groups that she had once enjoyed.**

**With her consent I had a look on Staffordshire Connects and found a social group specifically for people with visual impairments at Cannock library. The lady was keen to find out more, so I sent her the details in a format that was readable for her. She contacted me a week later to say she had been in touch, and she was going to attend.”**

Social Care Assessor, First Contact Team

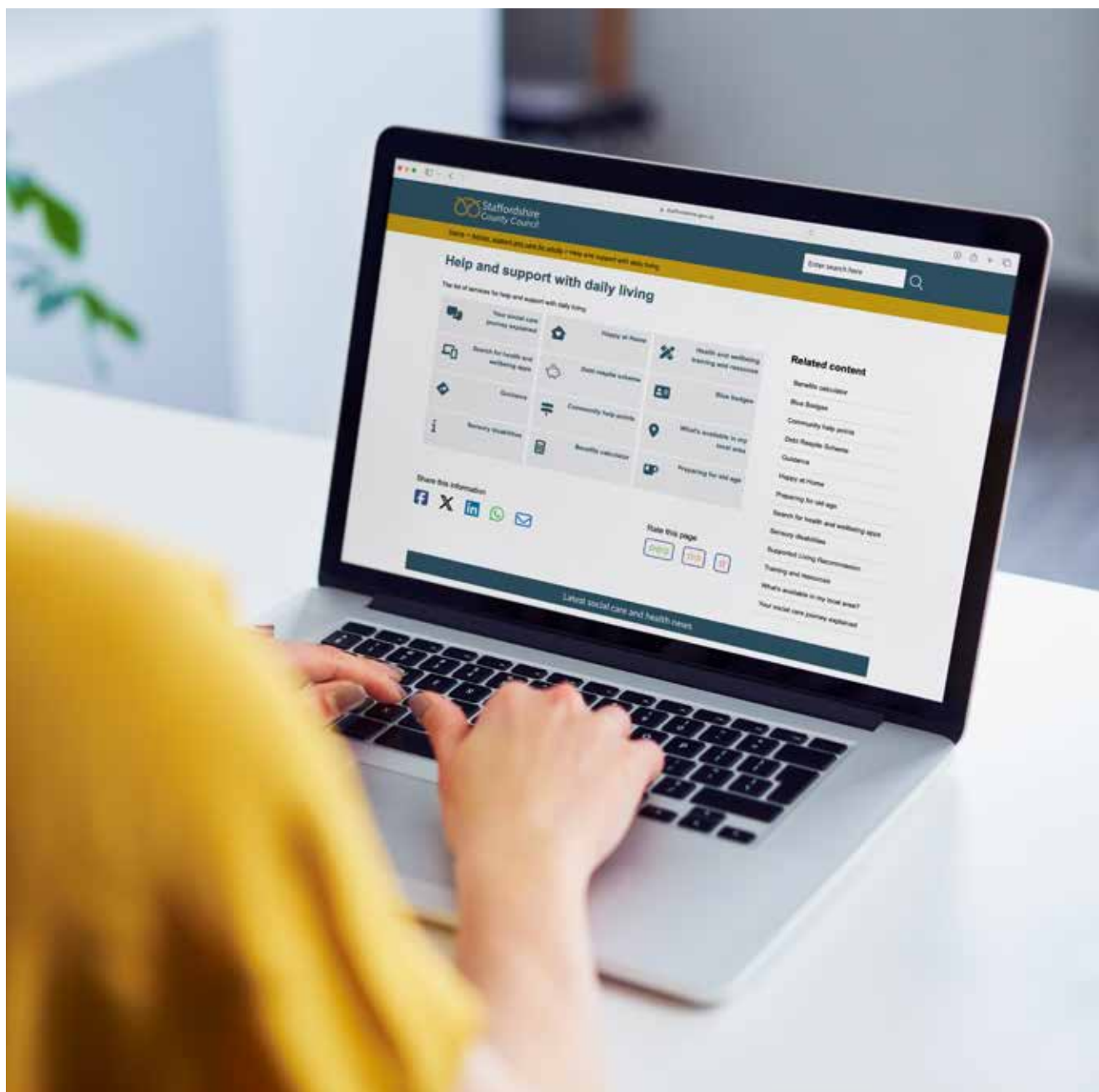
The First Contact team helps people explore and regularly use Staffordshire Connects to meet their needs and stay connected to their communities.

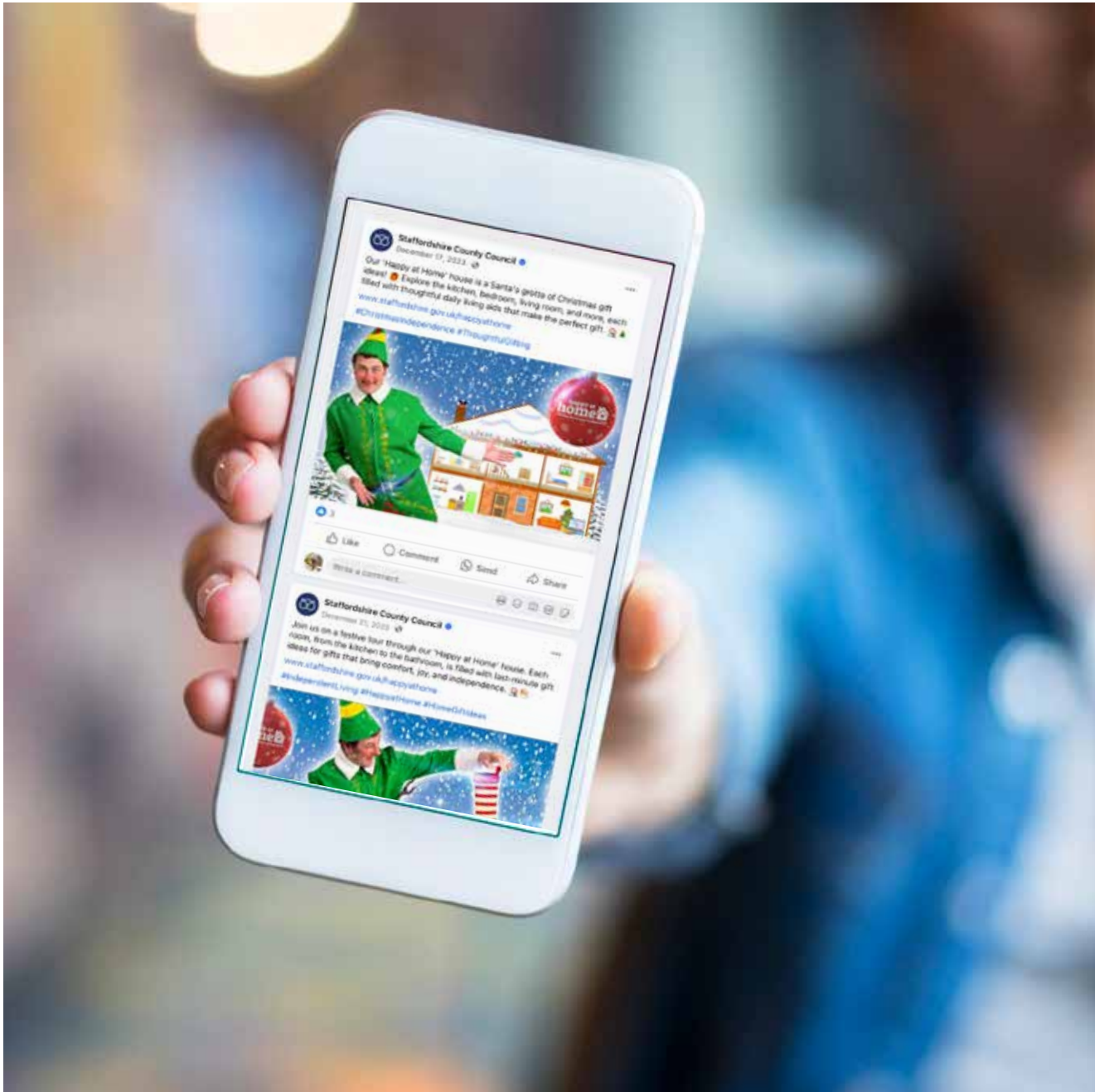
## Tool #2 Staffordshire Web

The county council continually updates the information available on the Advice, support and care for adults pages of its public facing website ([www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk)). Topics range from safeguarding and support for carers, to help accessing benefits and preparing for older age.

Following a refresh of the webpages in April 2020, a Health and Care information, advice and guidance governance group was established to ensure a co-ordinated and standardised approach, with various stakeholders providing feedback which has led to several improvements concerning the layout and use of language, making the information as easy to access as possible.

The popularity of both websites continues to increase consistently throughout our redesign programmes.





## Tool #3 Happy at Home webpages

To help people visualise the everyday use of assistive technology to help them to live more independently at home, an interactive house where people can browse helpful gadgets and uses was developed.

It was described in a survey with adult social care staff (carried out in early 2023) as 'Very helpful and informative'.

Proactive communications campaigns are delivered throughout the year to raise awareness and encourage the purchase of daily living equipment as alternative gifts for Mother's Day, Father's Day and Christmas.

The success of the campaigns continue to grow, with the 2023 Christmas 'Elf and Wellbeing' campaign running for 2 months and attracting over 9,000 unique visitors to Happy at Home webpages.

## Tool #4 Benefit Checker

The online Benefit Checker helps people to find out what benefits they could be entitled to.

It takes on average about 10 minutes for each person to complete and so far has helped over 12,000 people access additional benefits.



## Progress against Priority | 2

# Grow Community Capacity for communities to help themselves and others.

**The Council has had a long-standing relationship with the local voluntary sector and interacts regularly with community-led organisations.**

We have built strong and effective relationships with the local voluntary sector, forged through our eight-year VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership with Support Staffordshire. Support Staffordshire is made up of 1,228 members who have strong connections in local communities.

Last year alone they:

- enabled over 500 charities and community groups to thrive through one-to-one support and training
- successfully brokered 120 new volunteers into roles with 39 different groups
- reached over 1,400 participants through local networking forums
- upskilled over 1,500 participants through Supportive Communities Training.
- supported 683 local charities and community

groups to get onto Staffordshire Connects

- secured £1.3 million of investment for local communities

### Real life impact

In October 2022, a new Bereavement Friendship Group was established in Biddulph, thanks to the collaborative efforts of staff from Support Staffordshire.

The Community Officer and Social Prescribing Link Worker spotted a gap for community-based support for those experiencing bereavement. After consulting with others in the community voluntary sector, as well as the local Town Council, the group was established and attracted people immediately.



## Approach #1 Grant funding

The community and voluntary sector was key during pandemic. To build on these strengths, continue momentum and provide stability to the sector, the Supportive Community grants continue to make an impact.

£510,000 awarded to 353 community groups

“Thank you for the grant for the Community Centre. With this money we were able to make space available to support groups...the benefits of providing community space are not only good for mental and physical wellbeing but can reduce loneliness and isolation too.”  
Uttoxeter Heath Community Centre.

### Focus on - Community Church Burton and District

£1,990 from the Covid VCSE Recovery Grant scheme

Delivery of the “Warmth and a bite” project, providing a safe, warm space over the winter months for isolated and lonely people

**“One gentleman has started to come along. He was very nervous, didn’t want to talk to anyone or even for anyone to sit near him. Now, having been gradually encouraged, he comes along regularly, integrates in group conversations and happily sits with others.”**

Community Church Burton and District volunteer



## Approach #2

# Community Help Points making a difference to the digitally excluded

A county council survey (2022) reported that 46% of respondents having no access to the internet or email. This poses a challenge to get valuable information, advice, and guidance information to everyone in Staffordshire. Working with the council county managed libraries, and community and voluntary sector organisations, Community Help Points are tackling that by:

- providing help and information in person or via the phone
- create connections in communities to reduce loneliness and social isolation
- supporting adult social care professionals to work in a 'strengths-based' way
- help people to access daily living equipment
- receiving referrals from adult social care colleagues
- responding to demand from young people leaving care or disabilities for support
- support towards financial advice and form-filling

(CHP locations map [here](#) - see addresses provided separately)

### Real life impact

26 Community Help Points = Over 1,000 people with support to community resources, so far.

To tackle digital exclusion, there are 26 Community Help Points across the county in places people trust.



Sarah Sproston, Stone Library

**“There are so many vulnerable people out there. To be able to help just one person who is struggling gives you such a feeling of joy.”**

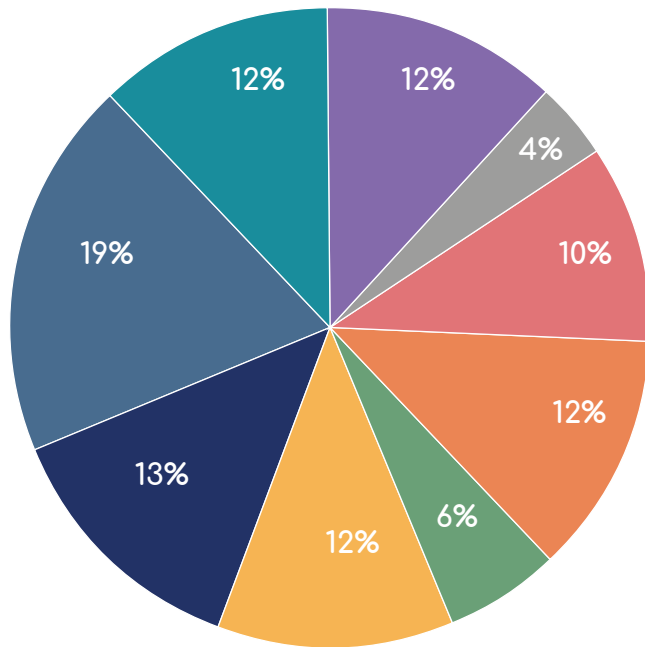
Keely Spilsbury,  
Stafford and Stone Library

**“It has been an honour to be a Community Help Point on behalf of Staffordshire County Council. It makes good use of the community resources, mapping and signposting work we have undertaken in the last few years. We look forward to continuing in this role where we can meet, help and empower local people.”**

Chris Fielding,  
Rugeley Community Centre



### Approach #3 Getting people home from hospital as quickly as possible



- Help with shopping
- Accessing online services
- Handyman services
- Befriending services
- Meals on wheels
- Key safe fitting
- Decluttering/domestic cleaning services
- Signposting to other agencies
- Other

During the winter of 2022/23 the Supportive Communities programme partnered with Methodist Homes Association and Community Together CIC (Community Interest Company) to deliver a short-term project to return people home after a stay in hospital as quickly and safely as possible.

Both organisations were able to mobilise a quick response, helping 52 people over 11 weeks.

The project was considered an exemplar and learning has supported the development of a new hospital discharge project called the 'Transfer of Care Hub - VCSE Link Worker', funded by Staffordshire and Stoke Integrated Care Board.

**“I just wanted to say thank you to Methodist Homes for all their help and support with a patient by moving their furniture to support a hospital discharge- this was extremely efficient.”**

Patient Flow Assistant from  
Royal Wolverhampton (NHS) Trust

## Progress against Priority | 3

# Developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of the wider care and community workforce

**From the outset we have worked with adult social care teams to understand the challenges they face in accessing community capacity and promoting independent living resources.**

Over the life of the programme, we have co-designed tools and resources alongside the workforce, to provide them with the support and tools they need.

However, that's only the beginning. The Supportive Communities programme is a critical part of the new 'strengths-based working' programme, led by Staffordshire County Council in partnership with Midlands Partnership University Foundation Trust (MPUFT) that will see a cultural change in how everyone in the sector empowers individuals and communities.

### Approach #1 Supportive Communities Training

August 2020, we have seen over 2,000 attendances of the training programme with over 97% reporting more awareness and confidence to use tools and approaches to support health, wellbeing and independence.

Support Staffordshire is the main training provider delivering a range of face to face and digital sessions to aid frontline staff with signposting to community resources, explore assistive technology options and support clients with their digital skills and mental health. The sessions are all based on the principle of building on an individual's strengths, rather than focusing on what they cannot do.

**"I had no idea how much information there is on your website!"**

**"I wasn't aware there was so much equipment that could assist with daily living."**

**"I now know where to access lots of relevant information quickly and easily."**

Quotes from participants about the training:

## Approach #2 Independent Living Project

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During the winter of 2022/23 the Supportive CAssistive technology is a term used to describe products or systems that support and assist individuals with disabilities, restricted mobility or other impairments to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible .

In early 2023, a survey was carried out with adult social care staff which demonstrated low levels of knowledge and confidence concerning the use of assistive technology.

As a result, a network of Assistive Technology Champions has been created, with the aim of promoting the benefits of daily living equipment, and how they can be used to enhance people's lives and promote independence.

## Approach #3 Localising Supportive Communities in Staffordshire Moorlands

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### What did we do?

During 2022/23, a local approach to community independence and empowerment was trialled in Staffordshire Moorlands. A project team was established, and a series of networking events took place with local stakeholders, providing people with the opportunity to learn, network and build closer working relationships.

### What did we learn?

Examining data and learning from local staff, voluntary sector, and other partners, and found that:

- Adult social care caseloads are growing, and the cases are becoming more complex.
- Issues facing clients include finance, transport, support for carers, isolation and help with basic home tasks.
- Opportunities to benefit from community support were not always utilised as staff were not consistently aware of what was available in their local communities.

- Local solutions are important - both to meet the needs of residents, but also to reflect the specific capabilities within their local community.
- It is essential to maintain good communication across staff, voluntary sector and communities, and to develop strong networks and partnerships to share knowledge, learning and solve problems.
- We need to deliver a much more localised Supportive Communities offer.

### What next?

As a result of this pilot, we aim to localise the supportive communities programme in each of the 8 districts across Staffordshire, in a way which reflects the unique needs, challenges, assets and opportunities across the county.

## Progress against Priority | 2

# Effective communication and engagement

**Ensuring effective, two-way communication and engagement with key stakeholders has led the Supportive Communities programme to reflect the needs and priorities of our communities.**

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### **Approach #1 Community Champions**

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The Community Champions programme evolved as a response to low vaccine uptake during the Covid-19 pandemic. Founded with trusted local voices in small communities, the Community Champions defined challenges and shaped local solutions, using their own networks to distribute important information. The Burton Community Champions approach was so successful in improving vaccine uptake to almost 70% as well as gaining valuable insight from local communities, it has since been expanded into two other areas, namely Newcastle-under-Lyme and Tamworth. Champions have a digital space to connect on Let's Talk Staffordshire where they can access trusted health and wellbeing information and resources to share with their networks as well as providing a space for Champions to collaborate and connect with each other: <https://letstalk.staffordshire.gov.uk/hub-page/community-champions>

### **Approach #2 Citizen's Inquiries in Newcastle under Lyme and Tamworth**

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In 2022, the council partnered with the Staffordshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and was successful in drawing down funding from NHS England to reduce health inequalities. This supported local citizens to actively engage and identify how their local communities could be empowered to sustain positive health and wellbeing.

The most significant highlight from this work was that people in communities did not always feel connected or know what opportunities or activities were happening on their doorstep.

This resonates with the results of other initiatives and has influenced our thinking for the future development of the Supportive Communities programme.

Following on from the Citizen's Inquiries, several steps have been taken to address the priorities identified, with grant funding allocated to support the development of existing and new groups or activities. The insight collected has also been shared with partners, influencing approaches towards service delivery and funding opportunities such as the UK Shared Prosperity fund.

# What next?

**What started as an internal Staffordshire County Council programme is now more inclusive with shared commitment from a variety of partners, with engagement at every level.**

The review undertaken in summer of 2023 acknowledged the good progress made to build community capacity, develop, and share tools and resources and support the workforce to take on the 'strengths-based' mindset and approach to their work. There is strong agreement to take the programme to the next level and partner organisations will work closer together to develop a new Action Plan to localise the Supportive Communities Programme by:

- delivering responsive and flexible information, advice and guidance resources, and tools.
- achieving sustainable investment for building community capacity.
- helping the Adult Social Care workforce to strengthen its relationships with the Community and Voluntary sector.
- creating networks of Community Helps Points, Community Champions, and volunteers.

We need to work differently to do this.

We need to:

- engage and collaborate with communities, partners, and the workforce.
- embed a strengths-based culture.
- evaluate at every stage to focus on the right outcomes to pinpoint the difference we are making.

# Governance

**The delivery of the Plan will be led by the Supportive Communities Partnership Board, consisting of representatives from: Staffordshire County Council, Integrated Care Board, Midlands Partnership University Foundation Trust, Support Staffordshire and Combined Healthcare Trust.**

**They will bring the plan to life and make it the centre of what they do. They are currently held accountable by the council's Health and Care Senior Leadership Team and governance arrangements will be reviewed annually.**

