

Talk Community Strategy 2024 - 2027

Building strong connected communities

Introduction

Herefordshire has a vibrant and active voluntary and community sector, consisting of c3,000 organisations who deliver activities to benefit their communities. Since 2019, the council, partners and our communities have come together in response to floods, the pandemic, the impact of Brexit and the cost of living crisis demonstrating the power and benefit of communities being involved in designing and delivering solutions for themselves. During this time, the council strengthened its efforts to support Herefordshire's communities through Talk Community.

For more than a decade, Herefordshire, in common with other local authorities, has been grappling with the triple challenge of ever-increasing complexity of needs, growing demand for services, and continuing reduction in resources. Many councils are trying new approaches to manage demand, increase their focus on prevention and early intervention, by working more closely with communities. A number of studies and think pieces by national think tanks such as Nesta, New Local and Demos amongst others make a compelling argument for 'shifting the power'. There is now a body of evidence that given the tools and the opportunity, local people can change the things they believe need changing in their community better than anyone else.

If we are to maximise community assets the council needs to move from "providing to" communities to empowering communities to be part of the solution, encouraging the development of community networks, listening and working together. Talk Community's approach is one of empowering communities.

Talk Community is valued by our communities and partners but no service can stand still and, as social trends change, technology develops, demand continues to increase and communities grow, so must our service.

The county council undertook a review of Talk Community with the aim of developing a strategic framework for our work with communities going forward to ensure that the contribution to prevention and early help and building stronger communities would be maximised. This strategy is the outcome of the review.

We undertook a wide range of research and engagement, including:

- an analysis of the legislative framework and the strategy and policy landscape within which Talk Community operates;
- an analysis and review of quantitative and qualitative data held by Talk Community to understand reach and impact;
- gathering views from stakeholders, internal and external to the council



- engaging with Talk Community hubs; and
- assessing the use and value of the Talk Community website and directory.

Herefordshire

Herefordshire is a great place to live, work and thrive. The county is safe and welcoming, with residents reporting a strong sense of belonging where communities support each other. Herefordshire’s natural environment is rich and varied, providing opportunities for, and supporting a wealth of, outdoor activities and interests. We have a rich and vibrant heritage, and being located on the Welsh and English border, deep connections to both cultures and histories. All these characteristics together are essential ingredients to good health and wellbeing for all residents.

Key population statistics



**188,700
residents
(mid-year 2022)**



**58% of
residents are
aged 18-64**



**26% of
residents are
aged 65 and
over**



**Rural county,
with the fourth
lowest
population
density in
England**



**11
neighbourhoods
are in the 25%
most deprived
nationally**

95% of Herefordshire is classified as ‘rural’ which is home to over 50% of its population. Transport links are an issue in the county, with more than half of it being classified as amongst the worst in England in terms of geographical access to services.



Vision, aims and objectives for Talk Community

Talk Community delivers the council's asset based community development function, working with communities and statutory partners to identify ways to support individuals and communities to thrive, be more resilient and improve their health and well-being. An asset based approach means helping people to identify what matters to them and build upon their own strengths and resources to achieve that, so that they can be independent. It is the catalyst for bringing organisations together to work in a different way and creating places to better connect with the community.

In developing our vision, aims and objectives and the actions in this strategy we have taken account of the local and national legislative and policy context to ensure the strategy explicitly takes into account the extent to which Talk Community underpins other strategies. This is set out in Appendix 1. The drivers for change for the Talk Community review and a summary of feedback from our stakeholders is set out in Appendix 2.

Our **vision** for Talk Community is:

Working together to build strong and connected communities where people can thrive

With the **aim** of enabling stronger communities across Herefordshire, that are resilient and are empowered to input into decisions that affect their community. The **outcomes** that the council will achieve through Talk Community are to:

1. Individuals and communities across all ages are supported to access early help through pro-active promotion and delivery of activities and programmes to prevent and reduce demand for health and social care.
2. Communities are stronger with increased partnership working within communities and with statutory agencies.
3. Communities are able to influence decision making and empowered co-design solutions and services that meet identified needs.

Talk Community in action



Talk Community Development

The role and approach of the Talk Community Development Officers is seen as a considerable strength by stakeholders. They have contributed to strengthening networks at local level, connecting voluntary and community organisations and statutory services as well as supporting co-design of solutions in response to expressed community need. Stakeholders stated that Talk Community was the 'glue' in strengthening community resilience and capacity.

Talk Community Development Officers facilitate Community Action Networks (CAN) meetings every six weeks in each Primary Care Network (PCN) footprint. The primary purpose of the CAN is to bring together community, third sector and statutory services to connect with peers and share ideas and experiences within the local PCN area, meeting regularly to share knowledge, collectively identify and prioritise local challenges and formulate collective ways forward.

A referral came from the local authority for a man who had been ill and had to take time off work. He was suicidal, threatening to jump on the railway track. We were able to give him immediate food and working alongside other agencies we ensured he was able to claim the benefits he had not claimed and sort the debt he had amassed. As his health improved he was able to go back to work and his financial situation was resolved.

Amanda*, who had been homeless for two months, visited a TC hub seeking a place to charge her phone and find warmth. She shared her circumstances with a volunteer and received immediate support. The hub connected her with the food bank for a food parcel and helped her find temporary accommodation. Amanda also received warm clothes and expert assistance in claiming Universal Credit, which she didn't know she was entitled to. Furthermore, she was helped to apply for financial assistance through the Household Support Fund to cover her fuel costs.

Talk Community Hubs



The Talk Community hub network now numbers 77 hubs across the county, run by volunteers.

The original vision of the hubs was that the local community would develop and run their hub to meet their local needs and outcomes with facilitation and support from the Talk Community team. The audit of hubs recently undertaken has evidenced the value of places and spaces available locally for the community to connect and deliver activities of benefit to their residents. They clearly meet one of the factors identified as being important in strong communities – providing community spaces which allow opportunities for connection.



Volunteers in the hubs have received training in mental health awareness, first aid, provision of financial advice and how to signpost people to information and advice on the Talk Community website. Each hub acts as a digital access point for people where they may not have a computer. Drop in sessions take place in some hubs in direct response to community need with statutory agencies and VCSE partners offering services, increasing access especially given the challenges of Herefordshire's rurality.

However, the hubs range widely in terms of the spaces from which they operate and their volunteer capacity. This directly influences the opening hours and programme of activity each hub can offer – the majority of the hubs are part-time. Over 50% of the hubs only offer information, advice and signposting, under 30% also have space to support events and activities and less than 20 hubs have space to support services to be delivered at local level. Appendix 3 shows the distribution of hubs against these three levels.



The best thing about being involved [with The Hub] is the sense of purpose it gives me as someone suffering with isolation and depression, and the feeling of returning something to the place that helped me so much while I was shielding in lockdowns!' Café volunteer 2022.

The Talk Community Directory

The Talk Community website is the council's strategic response to the duty under the Care Act 2014 to 'provide information and advice'. The website serves as a one-stop-shop for information and advice, listing over 700 services and organisations.

The website also offers digital toolkits on topics such as falls and financial hardship with hard copy information available on these and a range of other useful information. Through the website and the Talk Community weekly newsletter, residents are connected to statutory and community organisations, services and events.

Developing our strategy to meet future needs

Delivery in 2024-2025:

- implement a Talk Community communications strategy by November 2024 to ensure stakeholders receive the information they need in a timely way and in a format that meets their needs
- Invest £2m capital funding to strategically improve community infrastructure inviting bids from July 2024 from community organisations, including but not limited to existing Talk Community hubs to
 - transform and better utilise existing/unused buildings for community benefit
 - improve spaces for communities to connect and for events and activities to be delivered at local level
 - increase opportunity for people to access integrated services in their community
 - targeting areas of health inequalities and deprivation
- develop an outcomes and evaluation framework for Talk Community to enable the council to measure impact
- strengthen our early help and prevention offer for all, through co-production but particularly for children, young people and families and seek funding to support community based activities designed through co-production
- improve our information and advice service to ensure residents can access the support they need and self-help and that it is compliant with the Care Act 2014
- establish an evidence base for each locality combining top-down analysis of vital statistics with systematic ‘bottom-up’ intelligence from residents and Talk Community staff embedded in our communities
- design a mechanism for ‘community intelligence’ gathered at hyper-local level to be fed up the system to influence strategy, service design and commissioning

Delivery in 2025-2026

- build on the existing capacity in Talk Community to provide advice to VCSE partners to maximising income and fund-raising
- review Talk Community performance and impact in 2024/25
- agree priorities and an annual planning and delivery (organising) framework for each locality which will be sufficiently flexible to enable inclusion of projects and activities in response to new community needs and external events that may occur within the year

Appendix 1: The national and local context for Talk Community

Local and national legislative and policy context

Local

Our new Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-28 sets out how the council will contribute to achieving a better and more successful Herefordshire; with the vision of “delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do.”

The council’s new plan has been developed with residents, partners and stakeholders across the county. We consulted widely to gather feedback on our priorities for the next four years. Nearly 1,000 people took part in the consultation via a range of mechanisms. Our vision is

Delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do.

Our priorities are

PEOPLE



We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.

PLACE



We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place and do everything we can to improve the health of our rivers.

GROWTH



We will create the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county; attracting inward investment, building business confidence, creating jobs, enabling housing development and provide the right infrastructure.

TRANSFORMATION



We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for money.

UNDERPINNING THEME - PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working is central to Herefordshire Council's success and to delivering the best results for our residents. We are stronger together and the council will always work to build strong, effective partnerships to ensure our county is much more than the sum of its parts.

Under the People priority, the council's objectives are to:

- Support all children to have the best start in life.
- Support all residents to live healthy lives within their communities.
- Tackle inequality and improve social mobility through timely intervention and prevention activities which allow residents to live independent and fulfilling lives.
- Enable people to support themselves and each other by providing the right help at the right time.
- Work with residents and partners to build connected and resilient communities.
- Support people to feel safe and respected in their communities

Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2033

The strategy recognises that statutory agencies need to work with their communities to deliver the ambition and has agreed eight priorities, with two identified as core. The core priorities are

1. 'Best start in life for children'
2. 'Good mental wellbeing throughout life'

Early Help and Prevention Strategy, Herefordshire Council, 2023

Vision - working together to ensure Herefordshire is a great place for families to thrive and that our children and young people get the best start in life

Physical Activity Strategy 2021 to 2026, Herefordshire Council, Public Health

The Herefordshire physical activity strategy sets out the priorities for physical activity in Herefordshire over the next five years, underpinned by the vision:

In Herefordshire every person has the opportunity to: get moving, be active, feel better, keep well and enjoy healthier lives as part of everyday life in their local community.

Herefordshire, Health and Well-being Board, Inequalities Strategy, 2023-2026

The vision is that Herefordshire residents are resilient; lead fulfilling lives; are emotionally and physically healthy and feel safe and secure. To achieve this it requires health outcomes between different groups of people to be reduced, particularly within rurally dispersed, travelling population and unregistered individuals.

NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Part of the [Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System](#) (ICS) with responsibility for improving health outcomes for our local population, reducing health inequalities, and supporting broader social and economic development. Working with people and communities that experience health inequalities is a key part of addressing unequal and unfair access to services, and health outcomes across Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

National

Care Act 2014

The council has key responsibilities around prevention, wellbeing and partnerships as detailed in the Care Act 2014.

These general duties are:

- promoting individual wellbeing
- preventing needs for care and support
- promoting integration of care and support with health services
- providing information and advice
- promoting diversity and quality in provision of services
- co-operating
- safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect

Next Steps for integrating primary care: Fuller Stocktake report, NHS May 2022

Sets out a framework for shared action. “At place level, bring together teams on admissions, avoidance, discharge and flow – including urgent community response, virtual wards and community mental health crisis teams. Focus on community engagement and outreach, across the life course.”

Tackling Neighbourhood Health Inequalities Supplementary Guidance, NHS, April 2023

“Supporting at place level the work to achieved integration of primary care with secondary and community services. By working in collaboration with peer organisational HI leads. They will support driving change which will help mitigate issues of inequality and unmet need. Also actively engaging with other place based partnerships, including Health and Wellbeing Boards.”

Health and Care Act, 2014

The legislation has two key objectives: To improve the quality of care and outcomes for patients and to reposition the mode of provision so that health service provision becomes more patient-centred and facilitates choice.

Health Improvement and Disparities Guidance: Community Centred Practice: applying All Our Health, 2022

Reducing health disparities requires a complex system approach that puts communities at the heart through

- greater involvement of communities in decision making, delivery and evaluation
- scaling integrated community-centred provision at neighbourhood levels
- developing community roles and staff skills in community-ways of working
- investing in and valuing the voluntary and community sector
- developing long term relationships with communities to build trust shifting mindsets and organisational cultures towards community-centred practice



What makes strong communities?

The term 'strong communities' has been used in policy and practice for many years. However the key characteristics of a 'strong' community have not been well defined. The importance of communities in responding to the pandemic has prompted many local authorities to focus on the factors that contribute to strong communities. Recent work undertaken by the Mayor of London as part of their 'Building Strong Communities' programme has identified the factors below:

- there are accessible community events and activities
- there are active voluntary groups and charities
- strong relationships exist between people in the community
- people come together to work toward shared causes
- people trust one another
- people trust in and feel represented by institutions
- there are opportunities for communities to be included in decision making
- people feel a sense of responsibility towards improving their community
- public services respond to local needs
- funding from private and charitable sources is available and there is a sustainable local economy
- community spaces allow opportunities for connection
- people feel secure and happy where they live

There is no single definition of community. Community means different things to different people. Communities are dynamic entities that extend beyond geographical boundaries, encompassing various groups and interests that contribute to the fabric of local life. Broadly speaking, ways to define a community include:

Communities of Place

Are characterised by a defined geographical area with tangible boundaries, such as a village, parish, or primary care network within Herefordshire. These communities may share common concerns and interests regarding issues that affect their local area.

Communities of Interest

Are defined by shared interests, experiences, or circumstances. Examples include groups such as young people, disabled individuals, council tenants and those concerned with specific issues like climate change who unite around common themes or activities.

Communities of Identity

Are defined by how individuals identify themselves or are recognised by society, often based on demographic characteristics such as age, faith, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Given that individuals often associate with multiple communities simultaneously based on their living arrangements, employment, and personal interests, it's crucial to empower them to define the communities they wish to be part of.

Herefordshire Council understands that each community possesses unique needs and perspectives that must be considered when designing and delivering services and initiatives. Talk Community serves as a vital conduit for facilitating engagement with communities, providing mechanisms for people to actively participate in shaping the services that meet their needs.



Appendix 2: Drivers for change for Talk Community review and summary of stakeholder feedback

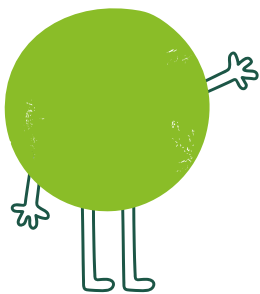
The challenge, drivers for change and stakeholder feedback

The Challenge

In defining the challenge we have considered the Herefordshire context, strategic drivers for our work with communities, the performance of Talk Communities and consider research and feedback from a number of key sources.

Drivers

In 2019 the council identified a number of drivers for establishing Talk Community. These are still relevant today.



- rural dispersed nature of Herefordshire's population, limited infrastructure present challenges to local people in accessing the support they need close to where they live or work
- new facilities and models of delivery are needed to bring services and support closer and increase participation and engagement in community life
- Herefordshire has a substantially low wage economy and associated challenges to social mobility
- the need to address health inequalities
- Herefordshire has an ageing population with numbers in older age groups growing at a disproportionately high rate.
- to reduce the number of families in crisis and young people becoming looked after, greater preventative work, early help and participation within communities are all required
- increasing demand for health and social care and reducing finances
- increase in complexity of need

Since 2022 cost of living pressure has also been a significant driver impacting the quality of life for Herefordshire's residents.

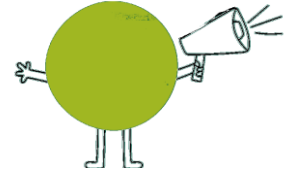
Stakeholder feedback

Between December 2023 and April 2024 we hosted a programme of stakeholder engagement to help develop this strategy. This included

- stakeholder workshops were held virtually and face to face with attendance, ranging from individuals, representatives of statutory partners, councillors, Town and Parish council's, Talk Community hub volunteers and Talk Community staff



- presentations were given to One Herefordshire Partnership, Herefordshire council officers from all departments, Children's and Young People Partnership Board and the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
- Talk Community hubs were invited to complete a questionnaire
- visits were made to Talk Community hubs across the county
- guided interviews were conducted with statutory and VCSE partners



We are grateful for the constructive engagement of stakeholders and partners, and for the feedback, issues and ideas raised. The headlines from stakeholder engagement and the review of Talk Community performance are set out below:

- CAN meetings have performed well against the stated purpose of providing an opportunity for networking and listening to the voice of local communities
- a survey of CAN attendees in 2023 rated CAN meetings 4.3 out of 5
- at local level, Talk Community is a trusted and valued partner and there is much good practice on which to build

The need for Talk Community support in Ledbury is as acute as it has always been. Arguably, there is a need for closer coordination of TCH efforts across the Town and County.

The ability to help individuals by signposting them to relevant support organisations does not exist elsewhere, so the importance of an effective Hub network cannot be overstated.

Ledbury Town Council

- the role and purpose of Talk Community was not clear and understood by stakeholders, internal to the council, statutory partners and VCSE organisations
- the Talk Community brand has sometimes confused stakeholders about the relationship with the council
- there is a lack of a shared and understood strategic framework for Talk Community
- stakeholders have not been clear about the role, purpose and impact of Talk Community
- understanding of the impact of Talk Community has been hampered by the lack of an outcomes measurement framework
- there has been a lack of clarity about expectations and the role of hubs
- however, the hubs are seen to offer an important network of community spaces
- the volunteer run hub model means that many of the hubs are only open part time
- all hubs offer access to information and advice and volunteers are trained in signposting

- the spaces and volunteer capacity of the hub network currently has resulted in an inconsistent offer and limited ability of statutory agencies and partners ability to offer services at local level to improve access
- evidence of effective partnership working is mixed, partnership working at local level is stronger than at strategic level
- the focus of Talk Community was perceived to be more on adults but there has been considerable delivery of programmes to support children, young people and families
- a survey of users of the Talk Community website found
 - achieved average ratings against meeting user needs, ease of finding what users are looking for, visual appeal and trust in the information
 - the site is clean and uncluttered and holds a wide range of content
 - it is hard to find information and the search facility is not good