

# Cabinet

14 July 2022

## A Countywide Approach to Levelling Up in Warwickshire

### Recommendation

That Cabinet:

Approves and adopts the Levelling Up approach as attached in Appendix 1

### 1. Background and context

- 1.1 On 2 February 2022 the Government published the Levelling Up White Paper, followed by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in May 2022.
- 1.2 Together with related national policy change for Education, Integrated Health and Social Care, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Sustainability, as well as anticipated changes in rural policy, this constitutes a significant shift in national policy direction.
- 1.3 The White Paper outlines the Government's strategy to "spread opportunity and prosperity to all parts of the country" by 2030, through twelve national missions. This will also include stronger oversight of local government on performance against these missions.
- 1.4 Anticipating the publication of the White Paper, the Council Plan approved by full Council in February 2022 committed to develop a countywide approach to Levelling Up with the aim of publishing this by July 2022, recognising the urgency of this work to achieve progress against the Government's missions by 2030.
- 1.5 In March and May 2022 Cabinet considered reports outlining the Council's proposed approach to responding to the Levelling Up and associated devolution framework.
- 1.6 Subsequently work has been underway to develop a countywide Levelling Up approach for Warwickshire with significant engagement with, and input from, our key partners and stakeholders, most notably the District and Borough Councils. This will provide an overarching framework for Warwickshire to deliver against the twelve national missions, as well as informing and framing ongoing work to develop proposals for a devolution deal for Warwickshire to enable delivery against countywide and national levelling up priorities.

1.7 This report presents the final approach and seeks Cabinet approval to it.

## 2. Our Approach

2.1 Our countywide approach to Levelling Up in Warwickshire marks the recognition of all that has come before and signals the start of a new journey and approach to tackling longstanding, intractable inequalities.

2.2 Compared to previous initiatives such as Total Place and Big Society, Levelling Up takes a new approach by being evidence-led and targeted in its aims and creative and innovative in its methods. The approach has been developed in partnership across local government and with wider partners to support its delivery. Our Levelling Up approach will operate as a golden thread through all our strategies instead of an addition and complements our own Council Plan Integrated Delivery Plan, which includes a number of deliverables directly relevant to Levelling Up, as well as the Council's new Performance Management Framework.

2.3 Our countywide approach to Levelling Up in Warwickshire sets out:

- **Definition** - defines the key challenges relating to Levelling Up and what this means for Warwickshire;
- **Principles** - states the principles for how we will approach Levelling Up;
- **Communities of place** - identifies a series of priority places and communities which would most benefit from Levelling Up;
- **Communities of interest** - identifies a series of priority themes for Levelling Up across the county and in specific places, e.g. educational attainment, health inequalities and standards of living, among others; and
- **Objectives and priority actions** - sets the countywide objectives for Levelling Up and the priority actions.

2.4 Working closely with our partners, the approach has been designed to draw together and prioritise collective effort and activity across the county and in specific places and communities

2.5 By definition, this will mean prioritising effort in these areas, whilst recognising and protecting the unique strengths and assets that make us the county we are.

2.6 Levelling Up in Warwickshire will require focus and effort at different geographical levels. The countywide priorities represent the places where, if Levelling Up challenges are tackled successfully, the whole county will benefit. They are not exclusive, and we will review and refresh the list over time.

2.7 Our approach also anticipates working with the District and Borough Councils, and Integrated Care System 'places' (Warwickshire North, South

Warwickshire and Rugby) to develop local Levelling Up plans and priorities. Our intention is that these should follow a consistent format and align with the countywide approach, but critically will enable other local priority places and cohorts to be identified and supported across all five districts and boroughs areas. The approach also anticipates a hyper-local focus on community-driven Levelling Up. In this way, the countywide approach is as inclusive as possible while also recognising the need, at a county level, to set some clear priorities.

- 2.8 Levelling Up also has a significant impact on our current and future strategies, in particular work to develop a long-term Infrastructure Strategy, Warwickshire Economic Strategy and our Sustainable Futures 2050 Strategy. It will also inform plans to deliver against existing strategies on the economy, education, health inequalities and social inequalities which, among others, will need a strong emphasis on Levelling Up delivery.
- 2.9 Our new performance management framework, agreed by Cabinet in March 2022 will enable us to track delivery of the Levelling Up priorities, particularly through the Warwickshire Outcome Measures. As Government finalises its national measurement framework, we will review our outcome measures and recommend any changes if required.
- 2.10 Our work on Levelling Up has emphasised the importance of and connection to Community Powered Warwickshire. Our strongest communities have capacity in abundance, recognise this, and use it effectively. Communities experiencing inequality often lack the same level of capacity, or do not recognise this. Working with partners, a key strand to any Levelling Up approach must therefore be to raise community capacity, which is fully reflected in our local definition of Levelling Up.
- 2.11 The countywide approach sets out a number of immediate actions to deliver early progress, which are further set out in the Next Steps section below.

### **3. Evidence base and engagement**

- 3.1 To be credible Levelling Up relies on robust analysis of accurate data and evidence. The approach sets out the key challenges and the supporting evidence base for Levelling Up in Warwickshire.
- 3.2 Warwickshire is taking an evidence-led approach to identifying our priority places and communities. We are using robust, trusted data at a variety of geographical levels to determine where our interventions can have the biggest impact. Specifically, we will use the following frameworks:
- The Indices of Deprivation – this is the recognised, nationally-published dataset that enables us to analyse inequalities and need at a local level across a range of domains.
  - The 12 Levelling Up Missions – these are the themes set out in the Government’s [Levelling Up paper](#).

In delivering our Levelling Up activities, we will supplement these two frameworks with the use of additional nationally and locally produced intelligence.

3.3 We have also engaged extensively with partners and stakeholders:

**District & Boroughs** – There have been two dedicated sessions involving the Leaders and Chief Executives of the six Councils to inform the content of the countywide approach to Levelling Up and ongoing work on devolution. Senior officers have also engaged regularly with District and Borough Council Chief Executives on Levelling Up throughout the development of the approach.

**Voice of Warwickshire** - we engaged our Voice of Warwickshire residents' panel and analysed a representative sample of close to 500 responses, which have informed the approach and content. Headline messages included:

- there was overall agreement on all four elements of our working definition;
- 67% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed principles to guide work on Levelling Up (a joint mission; a long-term approach; addressing root causes; strengths-based; and data- driven);
- when asked 'thinking about the place where you live what actions would you like us to take to achieve the Levelling Up objectives' the most common themes suggested were community events, improved public transport and improved education;
- when asked how they thought about the place they live, rural residents are more likely to consider their local village/town as the 'place' they associate with; more urban areas such as Nuneaton, think in terms of their local neighbourhood (e.g., street, estate);
- when asked to select the top three priorities to improve the place where you live, the most common options chosen were: 'access to health provision (e.g., GPs, hospitals, dentists)' (49.6%), 'how safe it is to live here' (43.5%) and 'high street or town centre' (39.9%); and
- the top three priorities differed by area with 'transport links' being chosen more frequently by respondents in North Warwickshire Borough; and 'how safe it is to live here' being the top priority for residents in Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough and Warwick District.

**Warwickshire Youth council** - The Leader of the Council and senior officers have engaged directly with the chairs of the Youth Council, seeking views on both content and approach. Headline messages included:

- a positive response to our definition and principles of Levelling Up;
- the prioritisation of skill provision for young adults and improving transport connections were welcomed;
- town centre regeneration was a key priority;
- young people in Warwickshire should be engaged with and have opportunities to input into the Levelling Up journey; and

- an emphasis on engagement with businesses on how social value and corporate social responsibility can support Levelling Up and young people.

**‘Team Warwickshire’** – We have worked closely with key stakeholders both through bilateral meetings and a ‘Team Warwickshire’ workshop involving key partners to understand the challenges and opportunities in the county related to Levelling Up as well as informing priority communities of place and of interest. There is a strong appetite among partners to work collaboratively on this inherently cross-cutting agenda.

**Overview & Scrutiny Committees** – All four committees have considered papers on Levelling Up, looking at key elements of the approach and considering the specific connections relevant to the remit of their committee. Headline feedback included:

- recognition that this is the start of a long-term journey;
- the importance of robust data and being evidence-led;
- the need to recognise and build on existing community strengths and share learning between communities;
- emphasis on early action and the need for high-impact projects;
- recognition of the sub-groups within our identified communities of interests; awareness of needs; and clarity of actions;
- the need to ensure we have clear milestones and measures of impact;
- the importance of the unique role, and value, Elected Members can add to Levelling Up at both County and local levels;
- the need to reflect on past activity and what has worked well to ensure the new approach is innovative;
- the importance of avoiding a one size fits all approach; and
- the importance of attracting external funding and resources to support our Levelling Up priorities.
- the need to take a holistic and joined up approach to Levelling Up with our partners

**Cross-party member group** – a cross-party member group has been set up to advise Cabinet on the development of a devolution deal for Warwickshire, and held its first meeting on 13 June 2022. It will meet regularly to support the development and negotiation of a devolution deal for Warwickshire.

**Best practice** – We have considered approaches to Levelling Up being taken by other areas and local authorities to inform the Warwickshire approach, including Essex County Council, West Midlands Combined Authority, Birmingham City Council and Coventry City Council. We are similarly examining existing devolution deals to inform and shape our proposals for a county deal for Warwickshire.

## 4. Next steps

- 4.1 Levelling Up is a long-term commitment. However, there are things we can do immediately to mobilise our approach as both a County Council and with partners. Features of this will include:

### **Our Team Warwickshire partnership approach will**

- develop, with partners, targeted approaches to delivering impact for identified priority communities of place and communities of interest;
- create District, Borough and Integrated Care System (ICS) place-level Levelling Up delivery plans, using a common format to ensure alignment with the countywide approach, appropriate local nuance and priorities, and to present a coherent and co-ordinated approach in discussions with key stakeholders, in particular Government, external investors and the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- develop the Community Powered Warwickshire ‘offer’, supporting the specific projects in priority places/for community groups where community powered approaches can help; and emphasising Community Powered Warwickshire as the foundation for Levelling Up work in all places across the county;
- develop a clear countywide pipeline of Levelling Up projects for funding bids and external investment;
- support coordination of Levelling Up funding bids within the County; and
- continue to build on the ‘Team Warwickshire’ approach with partners to inform the emerging work and content of a devolution deal for Warwickshire.

### **Warwickshire County Council will:**

- embed Levelling Up in future county-wide strategies notably economic growth, sustainable futures, health inequalities and social inequalities;
- build Levelling Up into the 2023/24 business cycle as part of the integrated planning approach;
- refresh the performance management framework, if necessary, as further detail of the national measurement framework emerges;
- develop the Elected Member role in Levelling Up;
- link Levelling Up and Community Power Warwickshire and its various workstreams, including the development of an “Offer” between the Council, its partners, and communities; and
- create a countywide pipeline of potential Levelling Up projects and talk to external/institutional investors about the potential to invest in Levelling Up in Warwickshire.

- 4.2 A dedicated communication plan will be developed to raise internal and external awareness and understanding of the Levelling Up approach.

## 5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, but significant indirect ones that have long-term implications for the county.

- 5.2 The Levelling Up approach will help with prioritising resource allocations (revenue, revenue investment funds and capital) and in particular regeneration. There is also significant funding available from Government via the Levelling Up Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund, Towns Fund and Community Renewal Fund, among others. Securing external investment will also be a key feature of our approach, and is an area where we will look to enhance our approach, capability and alignment with the District and Borough Councils and West Midlands Combined Authority.
- 5.3 Levelling Up will therefore be a key consideration in developing and prioritising any future pipeline of projects.
- 5.4 Any future devolution deal for Warwickshire would seek to achieve the devolution of greater powers, functions, and/or funding from Government. Consideration of the financial implications, alongside developing a deeper understanding of the implications for both access to funding and our tax base will be a critical part of this work.

## **6. Environmental Implications**

- 6.1 Sustainable Futures is one of the four agreed elements of our definition and both a cornerstone of what Levelling Up means in Warwickshire and a key part of any future devolution deal for the county.
- 6.2 The emerging Sustainable Futures Strategy and plan will further help embed work on climate and Levelling Up will be a key element of this.
- 6.3 Climate Change and Sustainability are also key themes in the West Midlands Combined Authority Trailblazer Devolution Deal, which is anticipated to be submitted to Government in Autumn 2022.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – A countywide approach to Levelling Up in Warwickshire

## **Background Papers**

[Voice of Warwickshire – Levelling Up Survey](#)  
[Levelling Up in Warwickshire Evidence Base](#)

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): n/a - countywide

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