



Act Local

in Worcestershire

“Act Local in Worcestershire” was renamed from “Think Local in Worcestershire” following stakeholder and consultation feedback, as it better reflects Worcestershire County Council’s pro-active vision of localism.

All references to Act Local or “Act Local in Worcestershire” in this document, and any previous Worcestershire County Council publications and references, are a direct rebrand of “Think Local in Worcestershire”.

What does "Act Local in Worcestershire" mean?

Wherever you live, Act Local really means people coming together to do things for themselves. To work it needs people to use their time, ideas and skills to make things better for themselves and their local community.

Act Local (or localism as it is sometimes referred to) is not new. There are fantastic examples all over Worcestershire of people in communities doing things that matter to them and that benefit themselves, their local area and others with the same interests. That might be providing opportunities and activities for children, young people and families; volunteers and groups looking after our countryside and parks and open spaces; organising and participating in sport and leisure activities; looking after people in our communities who may be vulnerable through age or ill health or organising services that people need such as community transport or community shops. Act Local is already happening in the area where you live.

Sometimes this happens "formally", through Voluntary and Community groups and organisations who are paid to do it, but often it is done voluntarily, by people who are willing to contribute and make things happen in their local community.

By getting involved, democracy is strengthened as more people are involved in their local area and actively able to influence and shape decisions. As people take more responsibility and control over the things that affect their quality of life, communities become stronger, and local life is improved.

For example

Libraries and Learning – a local service - We are committed to working closely with our communities and supporting individuals to provide truly local services for local people, including those in rural areas. We have two 'library links' in Kempsey and Martley run by volunteers who are supported by their local branch libraries and the wider Libraries & Learning team.

They have selections of popular novels and non-fiction, large print and children's books to choose from. In addition, books can be ordered in from other Worcestershire libraries.

Communities Lead Drive for Faster Broadband - Worcestershire County Council is working with local communities to make faster broadband locally a reality, ahead of the County-wide roll-out of enhanced broadband infrastructure that will start next year. In addition to the indicative local authority allocation of £8.5m for Worcestershire's Local Broadband Plan, and the £3.35m from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), extra funding of £700,000 has been made available to areas which may not otherwise get Superfast Broadband. These funds were for community-led innovative solutions which are now coming to fruition.

Three areas were successful in accessing funding. Two areas accessed a share of £400k available through the 'Green Infrastructure Fund' to improve facilities for rural areas; the Parish of Little Witley, to the north-west of Worcester, and the North-West Malvern Consortium which sees a number of rural parishes joining forces for a local broadband solution. Five parishes are also working together in Redditch, in what is known locally as the 'Redditch Arc', to bring faster broadband to the area. This group successfully bid for a slice of £300k from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund to increase opportunities for working at home, supporting rural areas and reducing congestion.

For many of us Act Local is something that we are already doing – even if we didn't know it!

Why are we talking about Act Local now?

Worcestershire County Council has a long track record in promoting and supporting local activity. We have done this through our community grants programme which funds local activities, by placing contracts to provide services with the Voluntary and Community Sectors, by working closely with Town and Parish Councils, and by offering support to people, groups and organisations who want to do more to improve life in their local area. We recognise and appreciate the wide range of activity that is already happening in local communities.

We are all aware however that the need to reduce the national deficit is having a knock-on effect on the amount local councils can spend on delivering services. Increasingly **our role as a Council is to focus on delivering services to people and communities who cannot provide for themselves, whilst helping others to help themselves by removing the barriers which get in their way.**

We are committed to providing the services which residents tell us are most important to them, such as caring for vulnerable people and helping them live independently as long as they can, and of course we will continue to comply with our legal obligations. We are also clear however that there will be some things the Council will no longer be able to do on its own. **This will mean that some services could stop unless local people choose to use their time, creativity and skills to continue to deliver those themselves.**

We believe that **local communities taking more responsibility for the areas where they live** will re-invigorate local democracy, as **more people will be actively involved in their local area.** It will also help local people and communities access any funding opportunities which may become available in the future.

Localism cannot succeed without the active engagement of individuals, communities and partners.

The **Council's vision** is that we will have:

- A strong society, with communities able to support themselves
- Strong relationships, and a culture that encourages communities and our partners to devise different and new ways of meeting need
- Local Councillors, as effective leaders in their local area, supporting and encouraging active citizenship and speaking up for the communities they have been elected to represent
- A County Council that is flexible in responding to the differing needs of local communities, and faster in terms of decision-making

What did you tell us about "Act Local in Worcestershire"?

Worcestershire County Council undertook an extensive consultation exercise on "Act Local in Worcestershire" from March to June 2012. The "Act Local in Worcestershire" consultation spanned approximately 1,200 organisations including Parish and Town Councils, Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and local community groups. Accessible versions were also made available for protected groups (eg. people with disabilities and faith groups). There were opportunities to participate through a range of media (on paper, phone, email, Twitter and Facebook). A website was established, www.worcestershire.gov.uk/actlocal, to provide further information about the framework and gave stakeholders the opportunity to leave comments or complete bespoke on-line surveys.

- A total of 71 people attended the 6 Viewpoint public meetings, with one held in each District
- 46 Parish and Town Councils were engaged (35 through the Parish Conference, to which all Parish and Town Councils were invited, and 11 responded in writing or through the on-line survey)
- There were 484 unique visitors to the website, 41 individuals responded to the survey and 15 comments were received through the website/email box
- 4 community organisations responded to the on-line survey (and a number of VCS organisations attended the Viewpoint public meetings)
- 3 businesses responded to the on-line survey. In addition, the County Council had a stand at the 'Find It In Worcestershire Business Breakfast' to promote the initiative to local businesses
- All 6 District Councils were engaged, and a presentation was made at each of the District Local Strategic Partnerships and at the County Local Strategic Partnership.

The County Council have published on the website a [summary of the feedback](#) received, together with our response to the comments made. We have also identified some "key messages" which summarise a number of the points raised, or which pick up comments that were made consistently through the consultation responses. We have carefully considered the comments received and have made a number of changes to this document based on your feedback. The key messages can be found at the end of this document.

What does Act Local mean for me?

Act Local means that there will be new opportunities for people, groups and organisations who want to do more. There are a whole range of ways to get involved which are set out in the table below. You may see other opportunities for getting involved – please let us know.

WHO	HOW
INDIVIDUALS	<p>Volunteer for an existing organisation</p> <p>Help others to get involved by being active in the community</p> <p>Realise a community project or idea</p> <p>Fulfil a civic governance role (e.g. school governor or parish councillor)</p> <p>Influence decision making</p> <p>Participate in community activities</p>
COMMUNITY GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST	<p>Provide services under contract on behalf of the council (VCS, social enterprises, mutuals, trusts, co-ops)</p> <p>Provide activities / services that meet community needs (not contracted)</p> <p>Take on and run a building or asset</p> <p>Raise funds to realise a specific community project or idea</p> <p>Carry out a scrutiny or advocacy role (monitoring what others are doing or speaking up for people to decision makers)</p> <p>Contribute to community resilience e.g. local emergencies such as bad weather or flooding</p> <p>Influence decision making</p>
PLACE - PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS AND NEIGHBOURHOOD ORGANISATIONS	<p>All the roles of community groups above</p> <p>Raise funds for specific initiatives (precepting)</p> <p>Exercise of powers available to Parish and Town Councils to get things done</p> <p>Neighbourhood Planning (as set out in the Localism Act)</p> <p>Community planning – a wider focus on their area (e.g. parish or neighbourhood plans)</p>

WHO

HOW

BUSINESS AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Getting involved with, funding or supporting local groups, organisations or projects (corporate social responsibility)

Exchange or transfer skills from your business (e.g. to Voluntary and Community Sector)

Philanthropy and charitable giving

Encouraging staff volunteering

Involvement in relevant local partnerships and forums

PLACE - LOCAL COUNCILLORS

“Go to” person in locality

Improve satisfaction / quality of life

Assist and lead communities to realise solutions

Support alternative ways of providing services that would otherwise stop

Advocating for the Council, and for the community they represent

What's the County Council going to do to support 'Act Local'?

We know that where communities want to do more they may require some help or support to get them started. Listed below are some of the things that the County Council will do to help.

Your Local Councillor

Your local Councillor is a key person who can help you to contribute to Act Local in your area. Councillors speak up for the Council and the community. They champion local causes by **representing the views of the local community** on a range of issues. They work with others to **improve quality of life** in their area. They will have a lot of information about what is happening on their patch and can “**signpost**” you to others who can help.

Each County Councillor is currently given £10,000 per year to spend supporting projects or initiatives in their area. This is called the **Worcestershire County Councillors Divisional Fund Scheme (WCDF)**. There are lots of examples of how Councillors have used this money to support good ideas locally.

For example

- A Youth Club and Norton Community Games have both benefited from support of local Cllr Rob Adams, who has donated £2,500 from his Councillors' Divisional Fund. £1,000 of this has been given to set up a new youth club for young people aged 11 years upwards. A further £1,500 has been given to Norton Community Games to purchase commemorative and winner's medals.
- Cllr Marcus Hart has also contributed some of his Divisional Fund towards the Emily Jordan Foundation, which is a charity set up to help individuals with moderate learning or physical disabilities lead fulfilled lives. The charity was set up as a lasting legacy to Emily, after she drowned whilst river boarding in New Zealand.
- In Alvechurch, Cllr June Griffiths has donated £1,000 towards the village's Inter-generational Project, which seeks to bring young and older people together to take part in events designed to bridge the generation gap. It is a not-for-profit organisation run by a group of dedicated volunteers.

Worcestershire's Community Offer

The Council is offering communities **an opportunity to take on and run local services**. This is known as the Community Offer. There are already lots of examples across Worcestershire of services being provided by local groups and organisations. The County Council will build on our strong track record in this area.

We want people to get involved in their communities and tell us how our vision for localism can be implemented in their local area. **We are open to suggestions** from you about Community Offers you would like to develop, and are happy to discuss your ideas. As part of our approach to commissioning services (this means getting the right service, from the right provider, at the right price) we will look with you at where communities or local people and organisations are right to deliver the service. We will also consider this when reviewing our services. In this way we will identify those services that will become part of the Community Offer.

This approach **offers communities the choice to do things themselves in a different way** (e.g. by volunteers providing services at times when they would not otherwise be available). **We have been clear that in some cases we will be looking to communities to take over the running of some services that may otherwise be withdrawn.**

We recognise that some may be uncomfortable about services being run by communities or local people instead of professional, experienced staff and there may be concerns that this will lead to a reduction in the quality of the service provided. We don't think this need be the case. **Before encouraging others to take on the running of services we would need to be satisfied those delivering the service had the capabilities and skills to maintain standards.** The Council must of course **continue to comply with its legal obligations** and so it is worth noting that all those services which the Council has a statutory duty to provide e.g. social care services for vulnerable people, will continue to be delivered by appropriately trained or qualified staff, either directly by the Council, or by its approved private/voluntary sector partners, or via direct payments arrangements.

What Act Local looks like will be **different in different places** depending on what it is that communities need, and what they want to do. There are already good examples of this happening in Worcestershire.

For example

- Welland Library is open in the village hall five days a week and is run by local volunteers with the support from the Libraries and Learning Team in County Hall. It is well stocked with a selection of fiction, non-fiction and children's books.



- A new community bus service in Redditch has been set up thanks to a partnership between the Council and Redditch Dial-a-Ride. It will be the first community bus service in the County to run a registered local route available to all residents.



Making it easier for you to get things done

We are making a commitment to **cut unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy** often associated with local government. It can get in the way of getting things done and we have to allow our local communities, organisations and people get on with the job without unnecessary obstacles blocking their progress. This includes recognising the different needs of all our communities and building on the strengths of local people of all ages and backgrounds.

We will **point you in the right direction** to get help with your ideas. For example the County Council has set up the **Changing Futures Fund**. We have set aside £750,000 over the next three years (2012-2015) to fund a range of targeted support packages for community groups and organisations. Eligible groups, who are contributing to delivering the Council's priorities, will be able to apply for expert advice about things like how to start up a community organisation, how to apply for funding or how to organise themselves so they are in a position to bid to provide services or do things in new and innovative ways.

The Worcestershire Partnership provides the **Worcestershire Grant Finder** service. The free online funding search facility details information on thousands of funding sources available to organisations in Worcestershire (e.g. National Lottery, Government and trusts and grant-giving organisations).

We will also give further consideration to support for volunteering; however this will build on the completed work of the Voluntary and Community Sector who have been awarded "Big Lottery" funding to transform the infrastructure provision for volunteering in Worcestershire until the end of 2013.

There is a lot of learning in Worcestershire that can be shared, and there are already a number of membership organisations whose role is to offer their members advice and support. This support will help to deliver Act Local in Worcestershire.

We will work closely with you to **achieve the best possible solution** to a problem or issue.

We will be **prepared to do things differently** where this will produce the best results. "Act Local in Worcestershire" will need new ways of working and thinking from the Council and also from local people and organisations.

For example

Greenspace Advice and Support to Local Communities

Historically, where a local community identified the need for local greenspace, a site would often be acquired, developed and managed by the Countryside Service. Today, the Countryside Service acts as a facilitator to identify grants, galvanize community action and offer expertise and training. This empowers local communities to manage their own greenspaces.

This has led to the development of over 30 community-run sites in the last 5 years, including:

- Primsland Way, Droitwich
- Bredon Playing Fields, Wychavon
- Chaddesley Community Orchard

The benefits include enhancing the local patch, getting the job done economically, empowering local people, building community cohesion and learning new skills.

100% of community groups assisted by the Countryside Service describe the support they get as good or very good. The Team is nearly 70% self-funded through the income that it generates.

Listening and acting

As part of the council's drive to save money, a proposal was put forward to relocate Pershore Library from its base in the Town Centre to the nearby Civic Centre. The library's building was in need of costly repair and on-going maintenance, so relocation was put forward as a more viable option. However it became clear that local people wanted their library to stay where it was, so the Council set about working with the Town Council in Pershore to explore alternative options. An option was put forward for the Town Council to purchase and then fund the refurbishment of the building, with the Council paying for staff and stock. The County Council would then rent the building from the Town Council, enabling it to stay in its current location. Local people praised the work of both the Town and County Council for listening to their views, going back to the drawing board and working together to develop an alternative solution.

The Council is itself bound by a number of national rules and regulations, and must be able to show that it is acting reasonably and in the best interests of Worcestershire. This may mean that in some instances we can't be as flexible as we might like. This is by no means always the case and we know that we can make things quicker and easier for you.

Localism Act 2011

Our Community Offer can be combined with new legal rights available to communities under the Localism Act 2011. Local people can get more involved in delivering and running local services, bid to own or run community assets such as buildings, parks and green spaces, and they can play a greater role in shaping the areas where they live. These new rights will be introduced throughout 2012.

Is this just the County Council's idea - what about other public services?

Act Local is the County Council's offer on localism. However we want to work even more closely with District, Town and Parish Councils, as well as police, health services and other public sector partners, the Voluntary and Community Sector and local businesses to make localism work. We know that you will expect us all to work together on the challenges that face us, rather than doing things separately, and possibly duplicating effort, which costs us all more.

A key partner will be **Parish and Town Councils** – who can work with us in delivering local services. Some Parish and Town Councils suggested that there may be potential for them to form a “cluster” with their geographical neighbours in order to share resources and skills, and achieve the appropriate scale to deliver some services locally.

The Parish Lengthsman Scheme

The County Council co-ordinates the Parish Lengthsman scheme throughout Worcestershire. It enables Parish Councils to take more ownership of their area and carry out low level highways maintenance works, such as clearing gully gates, unblocking drains and cutting back overhanging trees and branches. It means local people can have concerns dealt with quickly and effectively and allows the Council's Highways Team to focus their resources on more strategic maintenance issues. It also cultivates better relationships between local communities, landowners and local councils.

Listening to you

We know that Act Local is going to require us all to do things differently, think in a different way, and take more responsibility for the areas in which we live.

Act Local is all about people, communities and partners getting involved and the Council removing any barriers which currently prevent services being delivered on a truly local level and by local people. As a Council we are committed to engaging, listening and then feeding back to local communities to make sure what is being delivered is right and appropriate for that area and community. We engage with Worcestershire residents regularly through our Have Your Say roadshows, where we get out into local towns and ask people for their views. So far over 30,000 Worcestershire residents have been 'reached' with their opinions influencing decisions. In addition we also run the Worcestershire Viewpoint, which is the Citizen's Panel Partnership between the County Council, District Councils, NHS Worcestershire and the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. Panel members receive two main surveys each year, asking for their thoughts on services and the Council's approach to key issues.

We are genuinely open to new and innovative ideas. We want to hear your views about how localism could work in your local area. We are committed to listening and responding to your views. This is just the start of a continuing conversation about Act Local in Worcestershire.

Keep in touch by **visiting www.worcestershire.gov.uk/actlocal**

Or email **actlocal@worcestershire.gov.uk**

Appendix One

"Act Local in Worcestershire" Consultation – Key Messages

March - June 2012

Explanation

In general, respondents understood what the County Council meant by “Act Local in Worcestershire”.

Realism

In general, respondents felt that Act Local is realistic, but to be successful it will require volunteers with the willingness, time and capacity to get involved, funding and support and culture change. Respondents felt localism would work better in more affluent communities, and were concerned about potential variability of services across the County, particularly in vulnerable or deprived communities.

Act Local requires a culture change. The County Council (officers at all levels and Councillors) and other public service partners need to respond to contact made by groups and individuals, demonstrate and evidence a positive “can do” attitude, demonstrate willingness to consider alternatives to current practice, remove barriers to change and be prepared to allow communities to take responsibility and accept that this may involve risk.

Act Local also requires a culture change within the community, to promote a culture of responsibility and respect towards each other, active citizenship and volunteering.

Willingness to get involved

Most respondents would be willing to get involved with Act Local. A consistent message was that respondents wanted to see the County Council putting Act Local into practice, and more examples of what the opportunities, particularly in respect of the Community Offer, might be.

Local activity may require co-ordination, guidance and support. The sustainability and quality of locally provided services was a concern for some respondents.

A range of services were identified through the consultation that respondents felt there may be potential for them to become involved with.

Issues such as red tape and bureaucracy, health and safety, insurances, liabilities, legal and governance structures, vulnerability to litigation, Data Protection Act requirements were all perceived as potential obstacles to involvement.

Support

Respondents identified a range of support needs. These include funding, information, capacity building, access to resources and expertise, training and guidance and opportunities to share information and experience.

People are unclear about “who does what” across Parish, District and County Council tiers, and would like more combined information to be provided, and better co-ordination across the tiers.

Some respondents wondered whether all local Councillors and officers were sufficiently equipped to carry out the role described in the Act Local framework.

You can contact us in the following ways:

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Online:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/actlocal

This document can be made available in other formats (large print, audio tape, computer disk and Braille) on request from Marketing and Communications Team on telephone number 01905 766573 or by emailing marketingandcommunications@worcestershire.gov.uk

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To the best of our knowledge all information was correct at the time of printing: March 2012