

REPORT TITLE: COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING STRATEGY UPDATE

6 JULY 2021

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Clear, Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

In March 2020 the Housing and Environment Policy Committee received a presentation on the proposed work to develop a Community and Wellbeing Strategy for the district. Just as work was about to commence the national and local response to COVID-19 diverted all our attention and resources to supporting our residents, businesses and communities. Work on the development of a strategy paused, however community engagement, consultation, collaboration and empowerment was at the heart of our response over the past 14 months. Much has been learned from being active on the ground, working with our partners and understanding our communities' needs.

Therefore the time is right to commence work on the development of a Community and Wellbeing Strategy. The purpose of this report is to review the initial assumptions and reset the parameters of this work by utilising consultation and research that has been recently completed and was not available to us in March 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Policy Committee is asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the approach set out in the report. The committee is requested to respond in particular to:
 - a. The importance of consistent and equitable principles that form the basis of all support to our communities;
 - b. The focus on ensuring that all communities display the characteristics of a 'flourishing' community;
 - c. Prioritising grant support on activity that supports those people most affected by inequality and disadvantage; and
 - d. What learning points from the local community response to the COVID-19 pandemic might inform a new strategy.

2. Note the following:
 - a. The evidence base summarised in section 2.19; and
 - b. The timescale detailed in section 2.24.

IMPLICATIONS:1 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report, though future budget allocation via grants and other community work will be influenced by the approaches detailed below.
- 1.2 Should a more detailed strategy and engagement process be required than that proposed in this report, then it would be necessary to engage consultants and there is no budget approved for this. If required, these would be procured in accordance with the Council's procurement rules and contract management policy.

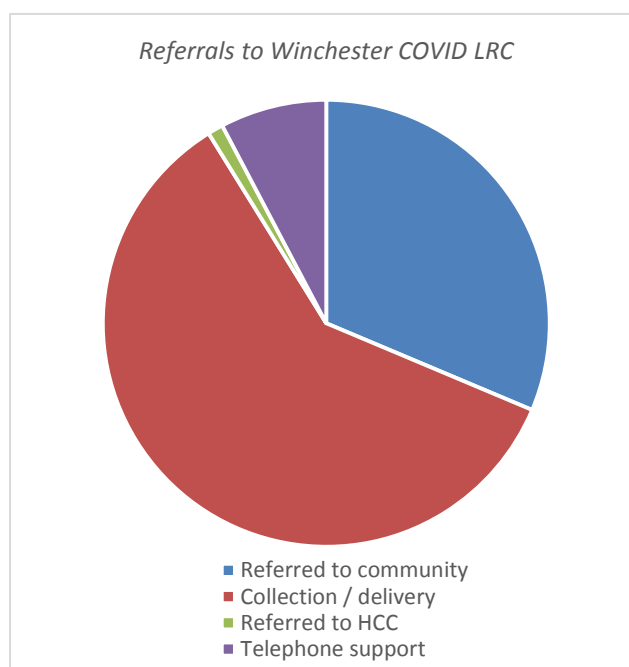
2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 2.1 The value and importance of communities has never been more evident than over last twelve months. In Winchester the community has played a pivotal role in supporting each other and ensuring vulnerable people have been looked after.

Of 805 cases supported by the council's COVID Local Response Centre since the pandemic began in March 2020, 252 (31%) were passed to a voluntary / community organisation to resolve. This is in addition to the many thousands of tasks that were undertaken by community groups and volunteers without ever reaching the council or other statutory agencies.

This is reflected across the country through national data and research. In April 2020, ONS research into social impacts of COVID-19 showed a steady increase in community spirit over preceding weeks;

- Nearly two thirds of adults (64.1%) said other local community members would support them if they needed help during the pandemic
- Three in four adults (77.9%) saying they thought people are doing more to help others since the pandemic
- Nearly two in three adults (62.6%) had checked in at least once in the last seven days on neighbours who might need help



- Over one in three adults (37.5%) had gone shopping or done other tasks for neighbours

It is important to capture these positive feelings and outcomes that resulted from the pandemic and that they are not lost as communities return to a more normal existence.

- 2.2 The council has a role in unlocking the potential of communities. Some are capable of great things and require little help, but others need more support to function effectively. However, all can support and learn from each other and our role should also be to create an environment in which this can happen.

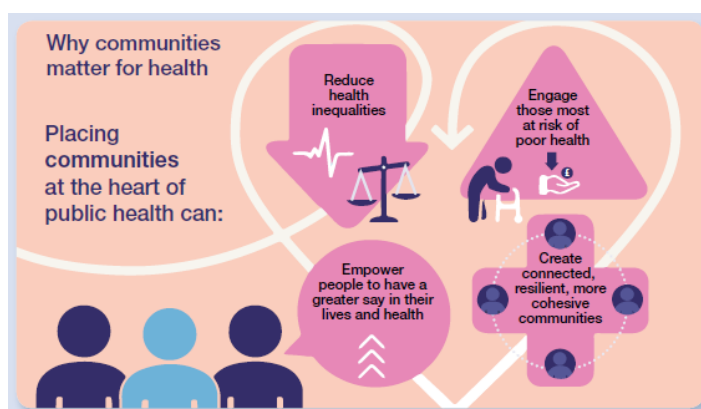
The national picture

- 2.3 In July 2019, MHCLG published its communities framework - *'By deeds and their results: how we will strengthen our communities and nation'* – which set out four pillars that will shape future work across government to strengthen communities:

- trust, connectedness and local pride – where people feel a sense of pride and connectedness with their local area
- active citizenship and local control – where people are active in their communities and have more control over decisions about their local areas
- shared community spaces - where sustainably-run and inclusive spaces are available for people to come together, including parks, community centres, libraries, pubs, and high streets
- shared prosperity, with no community left behind - where strong communities help create a thriving and inclusive economy

- 2.4 The events of the past year further strengthen the importance of these community pillars. COVID highlighted the value of volunteer activity, which increased dramatically and saw communities looking after their own. However, COVID also caused community spaces to close or fall silent and it has caused hardship that is likely to increase the gap between those that have and those that do not.

- 2.5 The Public Health England Strategy 2020-25 sets out priorities to protect people and help people to live longer in good health. While this has a large focus on the NHS and primary care, the importance of creating



Extract from Public Health England Strategy 2020-25

'healthy communities' is made clear.

- 2.6 The NHS has published its '5 steps to mental wellbeing', which have many similarities and areas of overlap with the MHCLG pillars of strong community:
- (i) Connect with other people
 - (ii) Be physically active
 - (iii) Learn new skills
 - (iv) Give to others
 - (v) Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)

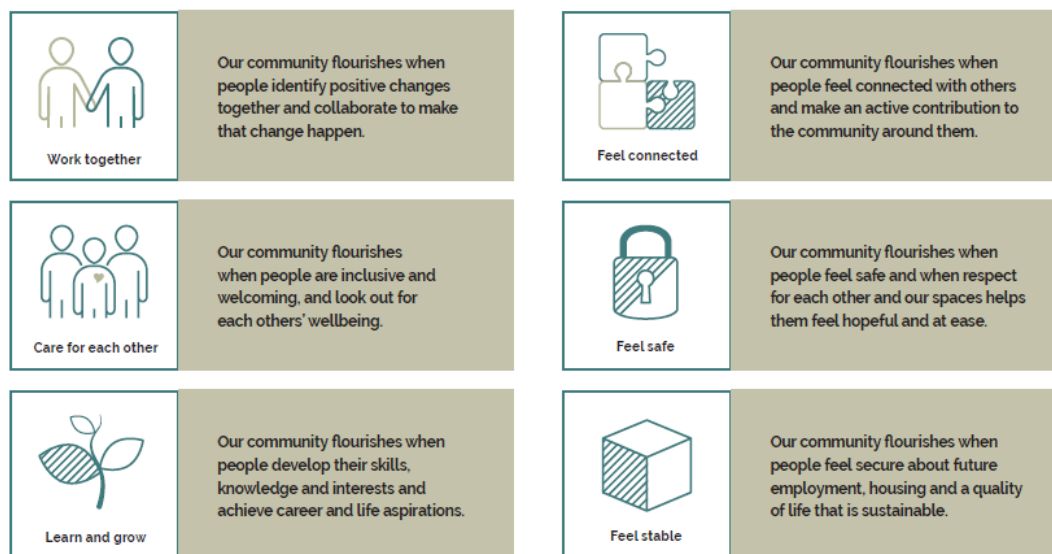
It is clear that strong, connected communities have a positive effect on mental wellbeing, and vice versa.

The local picture

- 2.7 The Council Plan clearly identifies a number of challenges we face and ambitions for the future that provide the basis for this strategy:
- Recovery and restoration response to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Inequality and its effects on mental health and physical wellbeing
 - Focus our activities on the most disadvantaged areas, communities and groups, supporting a greater diversity of residents
 - Diverse, healthy and cohesive communities - not just homes
- 2.8 The University of Winchester completed its two-year research project on *Flourishing Communities* in March 2020. They asked local residents, businesses, charities, voluntary organisations, and public services what makes our community flourish and there was strong agreement about seven features important to community flourishing.

WHAT MAKES A FLOURISHING COMMUNITY?

Our independent researchers asked local residents, businesses, charities, voluntary organisations, and public services (like a school, hospital or council) what makes our community flourish. Across this broad spectrum of people who live and work in our community there was strong agreement about seven features important to community flourishing.



This work was based on research into communities in and around the city area of Winchester, but the seven identified features should be present in any flourishing community so the findings are equally applicable in all parts of the district. This provides a good basis for understanding how the council might focus its efforts.

- 2.9 Winchester is a large and varied district with many communities, amongst which there are a number of commonalities but also many differences. We need to work with them all in ways that suit them, their own (sometimes unique) circumstances and which reflect what stage each is at in respect of the features detailed above.
- 2.10 This forms part of the core work of the Community & Wellbeing team but, with a large district containing many communities and a team comprising 3.1FTE for supporting them, this is achieved by acting as enablers rather than by the direct delivery of community work. Key to this is collaboration with partner agencies in the public and voluntary sectors with similar objectives around working with local communities. Amongst others this includes health agencies such as Primary Care Networks and Clinical Commissioning Group; educational establishments such as universities and colleges; and voluntary/community sector organisations such as Community First and Winchester Diocese.
- 2.11 One key group of stakeholders is our parish and town councils. They provide leadership at the most local level and have a detailed understanding of local issues and priorities, which is vital in a district as large as Winchester. Close working and good lines of communication are important, especially with communities in the more distant southern parishes of the district. The Cabinet

hosts parish briefings once or twice each year and regular meetings are organised by the council in our larger settlements. These meetings bring together parish / town councillors with ward members and other key stakeholders to share information and discuss topical issues. During the COVID recovery phase these have been an important forum for understanding the extent of the community response and for overseeing the recovery of the high streets and local economies in our market towns.

- 2.12 A more intensive community support is required in new, emerging communities on strategic development areas such as West of Waterlooville, Kings Barton and North Whiteley. To enable this more intensive work, funding is sought through the S106 planning agreements for those sites that allows for the employment on a fixed-term basis of a community worker to help establish the social networks and organisations that underpin all communities.
- 2.13 Grant support is another way in which the council builds the capacity of communities. Not only is this a cost-effective way to provide services thanks to the huge contribution of time on a voluntary basis, but those organisations are often best placed to engage effectively with the people that need them the most. This strategy will build on the direction provided by the Council Plan and reinforce the way in which grant funding is focussed towards activity that supports those people most affected by inequality and disadvantage
- 2.14 All of this work to increase the capacity of our communities creates opportunities for teams across the council to work with and take a lead from the wider community.

The Strategy

- 2.15 A presentation was made to the Health and Environment Policy (HEP) Committee in March 2020, setting out a framework for a Community and Wellbeing Strategy. The approach was accepted by members of the committee, with comments made about issues such as:
- a) The significant differences between our communities and how they function – for example Winchester’s neighbourhoods and our smaller, rural villages.
 - b) Caution to not ‘label’ communities or group them in ways that generalise the issues affecting them.
 - c) The importance of testing our approaches with the different communities we are aiming to support and viewing things from their perspective.
- 2.16 Other work pressures, including those caused by COVID, have taken priority in the period since but there are some benefits from the unintended delay. Our communities are only just emerging from the unprecedented events of the last twelve months and, even now, some of the impacts are still to be felt.

Volunteer numbers rose, but are now falling again; community buildings closed for long periods and (in some cases) are just reopening; some support groups halted activity and some may never return.

- 2.17 There are also other pieces of emerging work that this strategy needs to reflect and align with. Not least of these is the *Winchester Vision 2020-2030: "One Great Win"*, which was published in December 2020 and includes a wide range of ideas about how to change the way we do things in the city, focusing on the "how" rather than the "what". The recommendations in the Winchester Vision report are informed by three approaches, one of which is "people power" and it is important that the Community and Wellbeing Strategy is consistent with the approach that emerges over the coming months for the Winchester city area.
- 2.18 Winchester district's communities take many forms. Each settlement is a community in its own right and some (especially in Winchester and our market towns) include smaller, distinct communities based around neighbourhoods. There are also communities based on certain demographics or characteristics – for example based around some of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. All will need to feel that it 'speaks' to them if it is to be a success.
- 2.19 Involving our communities in the formulation of this strategy will be important, but we don't need to undertake large amounts of additional research as much has already been done.
- University of Winchester's *Flourishing Communities*
 - Winchester Vision 2020-2030
 - Local Plan engagement on the *Living Well* priority
 - Hampshire 2050 Commission
 - The council's residents' survey (2019)
 - Health and wellbeing deprivation data for Winchester district

Consultation fatigue is a risk, so by utilising existing work such as that listed above, we can identify the core principles that will form the basis of all support to our communities. This will allow us to balance the work on development of the strategy with the equally important continuation of recovery and restoration work with our communities.

- 2.20 The scope of this strategy will not be to identify and provide the solutions to issues faced by our communities – the Local Plan, Winchester Movement Strategy and many other plans and strategies do that. The aim of the strategy is to enable our communities to work with the council and play a greater part in identifying and developing those solutions. If successful, this would give them a feeling of greater control over their lives and of the decisions that

affect them – one of the factors acknowledged to contribute to personal well-being.

- 2.21 This strategy will give clear direction to the work of the Community & Wellbeing team, but will also set out an approach that can inform the way in which other teams interact and work with communities and enable those communities to better engage with the council and other agencies. The strategy will also recognise the varied aspects of council work that contribute positively to the wellbeing of our residents.

Next steps

- 2.22 Work on the development of a strategy paused as the national and local response to COVID-19 diverted all our attention and resources to supporting our residents, businesses and communities. Much has been learned from activity 'on the ground', working with our partners and understanding our communities' needs and it feels that the time is right to recommence work on the strategy.
- 2.23 It is intended to engage our communities in a self-assessment exercise by which they would consider to what extent they currently demonstrate the seven features of a flourishing community and where they might need support. This would help us to identify how to tailor our approach to be most effective, with the learning from the Winchester Vision and Local Plan work adding further context.
- 2.24 The timescale set out below is one that can be achieved by basing the strategy on the sound research that already exists, complemented by a baseline assessment of the current 'functioning of our communities to identify what support might be needed, and where. This work could be undertaken in-house but, should more in-depth engagement be required, the services of external consultants would be required and there is no budget provision for this.



3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 3.1 It is not intended to engage consultants to undertake an extensive and far-reaching engagement exercise to inform the draft strategy. By way of comparison, consultants have been engaged to develop a new Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS) and this work is currently in progress at a cost in excess of £40,000. This is not deemed a necessary expense, as there is much existing data and evidence to draw upon.
- 3.2 The council does not currently have a strategy that sets out the approach to supporting and working with its communities and which provides more detail about the approaches by which it will achieve its stated ambitions of tackling disadvantage and inequality. It is important to have an agreed set of consistent and equitable principles that form the basis of all support to our communities.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

Framework for Community and Wellbeing Strategy (Presentation) – Health and Environment Policy Committee, 4 March 2020 (item 10)

Other Background Documents:-

“By deeds and their results: strengthening our communities and nation” – MHCLG, July 2019

“Winchester Vision 2020-2030: One Great Win” – December 2020

Public Health England Strategy 2020-25

“Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain” – Office for National Statistics, 23 April 2020

APPENDICES:

None.