

REPORT TITLE: THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

12 MARCH 2026

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Kathleen Becker, Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities

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WARD(S): ALL WARDS

PURPOSE

This strategy sets out the council's approach to building strong and resilient communities. This will be achieved through our own place-shaping and capacity building activity, and through the fostering of an environment where communities can grow, evolve and solve their own challenges.

To help focus efforts of both the council and the wider Winchester district community, five pathways are proposed in the strategy:

1. Social connection, inclusion and belonging
2. Community capacity and local leadership
3. Access to community assets, services and opportunities
4. Supporting people facing the toughest circumstances
5. Strong community networks and partnerships

The impact of this Plan will be seen and felt in daily life: more people taking part, more places open and welcoming, stronger neighbourhood identity, and a voluntary sector that is confident, collaborative and equipped for the future.

As we move towards local government reorganisation, this strategy sets out our ambition for Winchester's communities. It establishes a foundation from which we can move forward jointly with our new partner districts – increasing opportunities for

communities to shape decisions, express local priorities, have influence close to where they live, and potentially take responsibility for local services and assets.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Adopt the Winchester District Winchester District Thriving and Resilient Communities Strategy (2026-2030) as shown in appendix 1.

IMPLICATIONS:1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

1.1 Greener Faster

1.2 The provision of services and activities within local communities, often by local voluntary or community groups, will increase their accessibility by public transport, foot or bike.

1.3 Environmental or climate action is often led by local activists, and this strategy creates an environment in which community-led activity can thrive.

1.4 Thriving Places

1.5 The strategy recognises the importance of community facilities and the important role they play in activating smaller settlements. Parish councils and volunteers play a key role in maintaining attractive, clean public spaces and facilities across the district.

1.6 Healthy Communities

1.7 This strategy is pivotal to the achievement of the Council Plan's 'healthy communities' ambitions.

1.8 A thriving local voluntary, and community sector underpins our efforts to tackle isolation, build community cohesion and support those in need. We have neither the capacity, the expertise nor the connections to provide the level of support that is required to support those people across the district who need the most help. Our supportive and enabling relationship with the voluntary, and community sector allow them to do what they are best placed to do and generates the best possible outcomes for residents.

1.9 Our planning role helps to ensure strong health and community infrastructure across the district. This network of facilities provides a physical base from which residents are engaged, supported and form connections and relationships - social interaction that is key to their personal wellbeing.

1.10 Good Homes for All

1.11 N/A

1.12 Efficient and Effective

1.13 Working in partnership with parish councils and other community organisations can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what we do, by utilising their local knowledge and by unlocking their capacity to do things for themselves.

1.14 Listening and Learning

- 1.15 The strategy aims to strengthen the voice of local communities, allowing them to better express their views and to increase their influence over local decisions and service design. This includes those sectors of the community who are seldom heard.
- 1.16 The strategy is also closely aligned with the Council Plan aim to see a strong network of parish and town councils across the entire district – capable of operating in any new local government structures.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The evidence base that supports the strategy was developed by consultants Temple Group, thanks to funding secured from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 2.2 There are no other direct financial implications. Delivery of this strategy involves primarily enabling and supporting communities and organisations across the district, so it is expected that the council's actions to deliver the strategy will come from existing resources.
- 2.3 Any additional projects or actions that might emerge, and require further resources, would be subject to future decisions. Working with partners, stakeholder and communities may lead to opportunities to apply for external funding to support specific projects or groups and these will be explored where possible.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 This strategy operates in the context of a framework of statutory duties and national and regional policies relating to resilience and wellbeing, as set out in section 2.8 of the strategy. Particularly relevant is the Localism Act (2011), which was designed to devolve power away from central government, giving local councils, communities, and individuals greater control over local decisions.
- 3.2 A formal grant agreement is produced for any organisation receiving council grant funding to support its work. This is reviewed regularly to ensure the funding is delivering the expected outcomes.
- 3.3 Any procurement of works or services will be compliant with the council's Contract Procedure Rules and applicable external legislation.
- 3.4 The principles set out in this strategy will be incorporated in the council's Sustainable Procurement Guide which is published to assist council officers to effectively procure contractors and suppliers to deliver work for the council.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None. The ambitions set out in this strategy can be delivered through the work of existing teams and require no additional staff resources.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None. The majority of community buildings referenced in the strategy are owned and operated by external community organisations.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 The initial work of consultants Temple Group in 2025 provided an evidence base to inform the strategy. This work included several elements:
- a) An insight questionnaire was available online for five weeks and promoted via social media channels, website and newsletters, to obtain qualitative insights of subjective experiences of community wellbeing and resilience.
 - b) A community panel of representatives from local organisations and charities, as well as residents with professional experience relating to resilience and wellbeing, discussed statistical findings and preliminary insights.
 - c) Targeted community engagement was undertaken through organised events at specific locations including Wickham's Men's Shed, Unit 12 Community Pantry, and the Wellbeing Renew Café. Additional unstructured interviews were conducted at public spaces including Whiteley Shopping Centre, The Arc Library, the University of Winchester Students Union, and Winchester City's high street.
 - d) Online engagement with councillors was undertaken to understand constituency-specific challenges and identify systemic gaps in community resilience and wellbeing support.
- 6.2 The Health and Environment Policy Committee considered a first draft of the strategy at its meeting on 2 December 2025.
- 6.3 Stakeholder engagement sessions were held in Wickham, Alresford and Winchester during December 2025 to test the draft pathways and principles, and to receive general feedback on the emerging ideas. A similar session was also held online with representatives of parish and town councils.
- 6.4 If approved, we will publish a public-facing summary document (see appendix 2) including key content from the full strategy and clearly communicating the pathways and principles that will resonate with residents and community stakeholders. Its accessible and engaging style will ensure that residents are clear what we are seeking to achieve and how we all have a part to play in creating places where people feel connected, confident with thriving and resilient communities.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 None.

7.2 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

7.3 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken see appendix 3 for details.

8 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 None required.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<u>Financial Exposure</u> None		
<u>Exposure to challenge</u> Challenge to our prioritisation of target communities based on need.	Data-led approach underpinned by statistical evidence of need.	Demonstrate the positive impact of our work.
<u>Innovation</u> None		
<u>Reputation</u> None		
<u>Achievement of outcome</u> Grants awarded do not bring about the expected results. Community initiatives fail.	Application process seeks evidence of deliverability. Grants above a certain size threshold are paid in instalment and capital funding paid on production of invoices. Involvement of stakeholders on project design.	Learning opportunities from unsuccessful initiatives often lead to subsequent successes.
<u>Property</u> None		
<u>Community Support</u>		

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Lack of understanding or awareness of the strategy.	A public-facing summary document (see appendix 2) and associated communications plan to raise awareness.	Utilise stakeholder networks to cascade information and help raise awareness.
<u>Timescales</u> None		
<u>Project capacity</u> Small team leading this work is impacted by vacancies or other loss of staff.	Proactive recruitment. Embedding principles within the work of other teams helps sustain progress.	
<u>Local Government Reorganisation</u> Approach varies from other LGR partners.	Discussion and collaboration with some potential LGR partners have identified a good degree of alignment. LGR workstreams will explore the challenges around neighbourhood working and governance.	The community 'culture' of Winchester is documented and known.

10 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Background

- 10.1 The UK and its communities have faced unprecedented challenges in recent years; these include the COVID-19 pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis and an accelerating climate crisis. These challenges have impacted communities and individuals in a variety of ways, felt most keenly by those least able to manage.
- 10.2 The draft Winchester District Thriving and Resilient Communities Strategy (see appendix 1) sets out our approach for creating stronger, more resilient communities across the district through to 2030 working alongside our diverse communities. By delivering this strategy, we aim to create the conditions in

which communities across the district can thrive — socially, economically, culturally and environmentally. Our goal is to strengthen the social fabric of Winchester by building local capacity, enhancing belonging, and enabling residents and community groups to lead the activity that matters most to them.

- 10.3 The council recognises the vital role that is played by ‘community’ in all its senses, so the strategy sets a framework for how the council will both deliver services and work collaboratively with others to create communities that can thrive in both good and bad times.

The Strategy

- 10.4 We have defined community as:

“A group of people connected by shared place, identity, or interest, who experience a sense of belonging and engage in mutual support or collective action.”

Communities are able to thrive when they are inclusive, connected, resilient, and full of opportunities, where people feel they belong, can influence decisions, support one another, enjoy good quality of life and are able to fulfil their potential.

- 10.5 We have defined resilience, in the context of our communities, as:

“The capacity for individuals and communities to respond to and overcome shocks or challenges. It is underpinned by personal and community wellbeing, which creates the capacity to transcend challenges”.

- 10.6 The remaining factors that directly influence levels of personal resilience and wellbeing are classified as ‘social capital and support networks’. It is important that we remain sighted on the community-level need that sits below these strategic documents. Work with partners such as the police, health agencies and county council help us to achieve this but, most importantly, we must have a basis for constructive engagement with our communities.
- 10.7 The clear correlation between social connections and life satisfaction suggests investing in community networks could significantly enhance community resilience and help them thrive. This requires supporting social network formation in new developments and maintaining existing community facilities, particularly in areas with economic challenges where such spaces serve as hubs for social connection.
- 10.8 The data tells us where inequality is the greatest and health outcomes for people are worse. The same areas often show weaker social networks, less volunteering and fewer community groups and activities. This gives us a clear steer as to the areas where we should focus and prioritise our support and will

help inform the sort of programmes and activities we enable, commission or deliver.

10.9 Despite many years of work supporting communities across the district, the council has never had a strategy to provide clear direction to its work with communities. This new strategy fills that gap and has been informed by various other council documents and by local, regional and national policy and legislation. Engagement with local people, elected representatives and organisations has helped ensure a local context.

10.10 The strategy sets out five pathways and a series of associated principles, by which to build social capital and create stronger, more resilient communities.

a) **Social connection, inclusion and belonging**

We want residents to experience stronger social ties, reduced isolation, and a greater sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods.

We will help them to...

- Promote and celebrate local identity and pride in place
- Celebrate diversity and promote inclusion
- Secure, protect, support and promote the use of key community assets

b) **Community capacity and local leadership**

We want communities to feel confident, skilled and supported to lead local activity, shape decisions, and mobilise resources.

For example, through...

- An effective network of parish and town councils
- Voluntary sector representation as a strategic partner
- Local involvement in emergency response
- Working with communities to build skills and participation in local projects

c) **Access to community assets, services and opportunities**

We want people to easily engage in activities that support their wellbeing, culture, skills and social participation.

To achieve this, we recognise the importance of...

- Grant funding and other support
- Promotion and encouragement for volunteering
- Collaboration with other stakeholders

- Activating and utilising under-used public spaces, such as schools or churches, for wider community activity

d) **Supporting people facing the toughest circumstances**

We want individuals and families with long-term vulnerabilities to feel supported, connected and able to participate in community life.

To make this possible, we will...

- React and respond to changing circumstances
- Target effort to maximise impact
- Show compassion

e) **Strong community networks and partnerships**

We want to see a well-connected voluntary, community and social enterprise ecosystem that collaborates effectively and shares resources.

To bring this about, we will encourage...

- Networking and collaboration
- Sharing of information, data and intelligence
- Measuring and demonstrating the impact of community initiatives

Next steps

10.11 The principles detailed in the strategy are supported by the ongoing work of a number of council teams. Working with communities in an enabling role to increase their capacity will help advance our ambitions in all these areas, but there are some where there appears to be greater opportunity to build and strengthen.

- a) The impending reorganisation of local government in Hampshire makes the role of parish and town councils ever more important as the most local level of democracy. Work is already underway to address the democratic deficit caused by the lack of a parish or town council for the town wards of Winchester, but there is also potential to work with existing parish and town councils to ensure they are fully prepared for the change and to embrace their role in a unitary world and the opportunities it presents them.
- b) The council's Emergency Response Plan recognises the important role of communities to prepare, respond and recover to emergencies or other unexpected events. Several communities within the district have developed community resilience plans, which formalise the ways in which they work alongside statutory public bodies in responding to emergencies or other unexpected events, as part of a wider multi-agency response. Working alongside colleagues in the Local

Resilience Forum, a suite of community resilience related plans has been recently developed, including a handbook for residents which could be used to engage with parishes and residents to further strengthen community preparedness.

- c) Targeted support for key community assets such as community centres and village halls to help them thrive and succeed as a focal point for community life.
- d) Grant funding and other support to our voluntary and community sector allows them to build on existing assets and strengths to meet the needs of people in the district. At a time of increasing pressure on public sector resources, we can focus even harder to ensure that our grant funding is used as effectively as possible and brings maximum benefit.
- e) Recent work with Hampshire County Council's Public Health team has seen us identify a series of health priorities to address health inequalities in the district. Led by those findings and the associated data, we can look to target efforts more systematically at the areas where they are needed the most to ensure that we are helping the people who face the toughest circumstances. We have recently established a community network of agencies operating in Stanmore and intend to work with partners to strengthen the impact of our collective efforts.

10.12 The impact of this strategy will be seen and felt in daily life: more people taking part, more places open and welcoming, stronger neighbourhood identity, and a voluntary sector that is confident, collaborative and equipped for the future.

10.13 Local government reorganisation will see a change in the way that services are delivered. This creates opportunities for the new unitary authority to do things differently and for communities to shape decisions, express local priorities, have influence close to where they live, and potentially take responsibility for local services and assets. This strategy sets out our ambition for Winchester district's communities to be at the forefront and establishes a foundation that will inform neighbourhood governance arrangements in the new unitary authority and from which we can move forward jointly with our new partner districts.

11 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

11.1 The council could opt to continue without adopting the Winchester District Thriving and Resilient Communities Strategy. However, this would mean moving towards LGR without any formally approved approach to working with communities or published aspiration for our

communities to thrive and succeed. This would risk a new unitary authority taking a different direction, so this option is discounted.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

2 December 2025 – HEP044: Community Resilience Strategy

Other Background Documents:-

Community Wellbeing and Resilience Strategy – Report to Winchester City Council by Temple Consultants (March 2025)

APPENDICES:

1. Winchester District Winchester District Thriving and Resilient Communities Strategy (2026-2030)
2. Draft Public-facing summary document
3. Equality impact assessment