

Winchester District
Thriving and Resilient Communities
Strategy
2026-2030

Winchester City Council
January 2026

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Abbreviation	Definition
ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Indices of Multiple Deprivation
JSNA	Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
LGA	Local Government Association
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
WARM	Wellbeing and Resilience Measure
WELLBY	Wellbeing-Adjusted Life Year

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the Winchester District Thriving and Resilient Communities Strategy 2026–2030. This strategy marks an important step in our commitment to supporting the wellbeing of all who live, work and volunteer across our district. It sets out how we will work alongside communities—large and small, urban and rural—to build places where people feel connected, confident and able to thrive.

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, ongoing cost-of-living pressures, growing inequalities, and the effects of a changing climate, the people of Winchester district have continually demonstrated compassion, creativity and resilience. From neighbourhood support groups and volunteer-led services to faith organisations, charities, community centres, and informal networks — our communities are rich with strength and determination. This strategy builds on those foundations.

We recognise the diverse nature of our district — its market towns, rural villages, new developments, and the historic city — and the different pressures each face. By listening to local voices and focusing on areas where inequalities are greatest, this strategy provides a shared framework for action that responds to these challenge and real need.

We have sets out five pathways that will guide our work. These pathways reflect what residents, community organisations and partners told us they value most, and where the council can play a meaningful role. Our ambition is to support communities, so they feel empowered to lead local solutions, build strong networks and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

By 2030, we want to see communities that are more connected, more confident and more resilient — places where people feel a sense of belonging, where local assets flourish, and where residents can live healthier, happier and more fulfilling lives.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed their experiences, insights and expertise to help shape this strategy. Your voices have made it stronger.

Together, we can build a more vibrant, inclusive and resilient Winchester district for all.

Councillor Kathleen Becker

Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 This strategy 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.
- 1.1.2 This includes drawing on the strengths and assets that already exist in communities throughout the Winchester district, and new communities, for example through major housing developments or refugees displaced because of war or conflict.
- 1.1.3 We know our residents and communities have faced unprecedented challenges in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis and an accelerating climate crisis.
- 1.1.4 Greater resilience will be achieved through both place-shaping and capacity building activity, and through the fostering of an environment where communities can grow, evolve and solve their own challenges. In doing so, this will actively help to deliver the Council Plan priorities of Healthy Communities and Thriving Places.
- 1.1.5 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.”***
- 1.1.6 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.
- 1.1.7 We have defined resilience, in the context of our communities, as:
- “The capacity of individuals and communities to respond to and overcome shocks or challenges, underpinned by personal and community wellbeing”.***
- 1.1.8 We will seek to foster vibrant, inclusive, and connected communities that can thrive. Winchester district’s communities have consistently demonstrated their ability to come together, support their most vulnerable members and create positive change. The strategy builds on these foundations and explores how we can support the community structures and social relationships with friends, family or the wider community that can serve as support networks.

1.1.9 The strategy identifies the drivers that fall within two main domains of wellbeing and resilience:



1.1.10 We already have a broad and comprehensive set of strategies that direct our work on the key enabling infrastructure of wellbeing and resilience. As a result, we can take a high level view of the situation and the key challenges that exist.

Driver	Council strategy	
Housing	Housing Strategy (2023–2028)	Housing affordability ratio significantly higher than both Hampshire and England/Wales. Most obvious in areas with high levels of social housing and higher rates of poor self-reported health e.g. St Luke ward .
Income	Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS)	Median weekly resident pay exceeds both the Hampshire average and most neighbouring districts. IMD data shows St Luke and St Bartholomew wards as most challenged areas. The South Hampshire Urban Areas show moderate IDACI scores compared to other geographies.
Transport	The Winchester District Transport Statement Winchester Movement Strategy	Significant gaps exist in transport options across the district, particularly in the rural areas . Disabled residents particularly emphasised transport's role in accessing essential services.

Driver	Council strategy	
	Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plans	
Crime and Community Safety	Community Safety Partnership District Strategic Assessment	Total recorded offences (56.09 per 1,000) substantially below the Southeast average. Specific concerns about safety affecting service access, particularly for women and vulnerable groups . Young students express safety fears when walking between university to their accommodation after dark.
Employment	Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS)	Overall economic inactivity rates are lower than the national average. Economic activity rates are generally lower in the urban areas .
Education		Strong formal educational attainment, significantly exceeding the national average, with most schools achieving Good or Outstanding Ofsted ratings. The Market Towns and Rural Area face challenges in accessing further education and skill development opportunities.
Physical Health	Playing Pitch Strategy	Average life expectancy exceeds the national average. Pronounced inequalities within Winchester Town, with St Luke ward recording the lowest life expectancy.
Mental Health and Wellbeing	Health Priorities Statement Cultural Strategy	Mental health of young people emerged as a particular concern - evidence showing elevated self-harm rates in urban wards including St Michael, St Paul, and St Bartholomew .
Environmental quality and access to green space	Open Spaces Assessment Nature Improvement Plan	Winchester Town wards like St Luke and St Paul have smaller private outdoor spaces and Town wards show greater deficits in public open space. Denmead shows a notable public space deficit.

1.1.11 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.

- 1.1.12 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.
- 1.1.13 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.
- 1.1.14 By focusing on the social network drivers, we have identified a series of pathways and principles through which we will seek to make this possible.

We commit to supporting five pathways to build social capital and create stronger, more resilient communities across the district.



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

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

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

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

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

1.1.15 The council takes on a variety of different roles, depending on the context and the needs of our communities.

- As an **Enabler** we create the conditions for community organisations and the voluntary sector to succeed.
- As a **Facilitator** we bring people and organisations together to collaborate, share resources, and solve problems.
- As a **Provider** (or **Commissioner**) we directly deliver services to residents, or purchase services from external providers to meet community needs.
- As an **Advocate** we represent the interests of residents at regional or national levels.
- As a **Guardian** we look after public assets and community wellbeing.

1.1.16 Our success will be evidenced by measurable growth in community-led action, deeper participation, stronger local networks, increased access to local opportunities, and improved wellbeing — particularly for those facing the toughest circumstances. Over time, communities will become more confident, better connected and more self-sustaining, reducing dependency on reactive support and enabling a shared culture of collective responsibility, pride and everyday resilience.

1.1.17 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.

2 Introduction

2.1 Setting the scene

- 2.1.1 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.
- 2.1.2 These challenges have impacted communities and individuals in a variety of areas including economic wealth, housing, employment, health, and exacerbated inequalities. They have been felt most keenly by those least able to manage, whether that be due to their challenging circumstances, limited capacity or a lack of support. As a result, communities have been left destabilised, and individuals face an erosion of their socio-economic welfare.
- 2.1.3 The Local Government Act¹ places the ‘promotion of economic, social [and] environmental wellbeing’ as a central tenet of the duties and activities of local government bodies. Therefore, we have a key role to play in supporting our communities to develop resilience against various pressures and support residents and communities to safeguard their own wellbeing.
- 2.1.4 The **Winchester District Thriving and Resilient Communities Strategy** (‘the strategy’) sets out our approach for creating stronger, more resilient communities across the district through to 2030. The strategy establishes how we will work alongside our diverse communities across Winchester city, market towns and rural villages to enhance wellbeing and build resilience.
- 2.1.5 Drawing on the strengths and assets that already exist in communities throughout the Winchester district, we will focus our support where it is needed most. Tackling inequality is a key thread that runs throughout the strategy and highlights the importance of data and intelligence to inform our approaches. Through our Health Priorities work we know health inequalities lead to poor health outcomes for people in certain areas. We have an aging population and an increasing risk of loneliness and social isolation. We have welcomed many Ukrainian nationals who were displaced by war in their country and arrived in Winchester in need of much support with housing, language and employment. We have large new housing developments with fledgling or yet to be established facilities, social networks or sense of community. However, things change, and priorities alter over time. We will monitor and respond to evidence to ensure that we continue to focus our efforts where they are most needed and where they make the greatest difference.

¹ Local Government Act (2000). Available at: [Local Government Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

- 2.1.6 We will seek to foster vibrant, inclusive, and connected communities that can thrive through change and challenge. Winchester district's communities have consistently demonstrated their ability to come together, support their most vulnerable members and create positive change. The strategy builds on these foundations while acknowledging the evolving needs of the overall district.
- 2.1.7 The district of Winchester continues to grow and welcome new communities, for example through major housing developments in strategic development areas or refugees displaced as a result of war or conflict. The strategy provides a framework and principles for ensuring all residents can live healthy and fulfilled lives. In order to achieve this aim, we are committed to understanding and supporting the diverse needs of our communities, be they urban or rural.

2.2 Purpose of the strategy

- 2.2.1 The strategy sets out the council's strategic approach to building strong and resilient communities. This will be achieved through both 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. In doing so, this will actively help to deliver the Council Plan priorities of Healthy Communities and Thriving Places.
- 2.2.2 The strategy underpins the local and national drivers highlighted in Section 2.8, which rely on strong and vibrant communities to ensure outcomes are achieved. There will be a strong link with the emerging Local Plan (2020-2040) which sets out policies for the creation of new communities through strategic development sites at key sustainable locations across the district. While the Local Plan will ensure the necessary physical infrastructure is delivered, it is the principles of this strategy that will shape the success of the new community. Planning shapes **'the place we live in'**, but this work will define **'how we live in that place'**.
- 2.2.3 Quality of Life's Empowering Healthy Places² report highlights the importance of focusing on *"proactive, long-term measures while assessing and addressing immediate key challenges"*. It is important to note that whilst *"long term improvements are vital and may yield the greatest benefits over time, addressing immediate challenges through short-term interventions can also yield significant benefits"*.

² Quality of Life and Local Government Association (2024) Empowering Healthy Places – Unveiling the powers and practices of local councils in fostering healthy neighbourhoods. Available at: https://www.qolf.org/wp-content/uploads/LGA-Empowering-Healthy-Places-Final-compressed_1.pdf

2.3 Development of the Strategy

- 2.3.1 A comprehensive evidence base underpins the strategy which has adopted Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) principles, ensuring community assets and capabilities are central to its development. This includes:
- Literature and policy review
 - Statistical evidence gathering
 - Engagement with representatives from diverse community groups
- 2.3.2 A 'Community Panel' was established through active stakeholder and community engagement, to support and inform the work. This panel included representatives from diverse community groups, with particular emphasis on traditionally under-represented voices and geographies. Through facilitated workshops, the panel helped define local interpretations of wellbeing and resilience and identify community priorities and assets.
- 2.3.3 The evidence base combines quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative engagement and survey-based research. Statistical analysis examined indicators across multiple geographic levels, from wards and lower super output areas (LSOAs) to national spatial scales. The strategy uses the Local Plan groupings for geography of the district - Winchester Town; Market Towns and Rural Area; and South Hampshire Urban Areas.
- 2.3.4 The qualitative component involved twelve community engagement events using varied methodologies including discussive workshops with local charities and organisations, semi-structured interviews with community members and local councillors and digital surveys.
- 2.3.5 We aim to develop monitoring capabilities, through engaging stakeholders to create a dashboard of indicators, building shared ownership and insight, and enabling ongoing assessment of the strategy's effectiveness. This systematic approach will ensure that the final strategy is both evidence-based and community-owned, with clear mechanisms for implementation and evaluation over the period to 2030.
- 2.3.6 A key measure of success will be that the Strategy's impact 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.
- 2.3.7 At all stages, the work has ensured that the needs of vulnerable and under-represented groups are reflected, while building on existing community strengths and assets. This balanced approach ensures the strategy addresses immediate needs while building long-term community strength and resilience.

2.4 Defining community

- 2.4.1 At its core, a community is a group of people who are connected by something they share. That shared element can be a place; identity or characteristic; interest or purpose. All of these bring people together and it is important that we look beyond the traditional view of a community as people who live close together. All forms of community are within the scope of this strategy and what it seeks to achieve.
- 2.4.2 However, a community is more than just a group. Members of a community might share values, a mutual identity, relationships and social ties, or a common cause and collective action. Communities can provide a form of mutual support that is reflected in the words shown in figure 1 – expressed by a range of community stakeholders at events held as part of the development of this strategy.

Figure 1: Stakeholder feedback – “what ‘community’ means to me”



- 2.4.3 Community means different things to different people but, for the purposes of this strategy, we have defined it as follows:

“A community is 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.”

- 2.4.4 Communities are not fixed — they overlap, evolve, and vary in strength. They change over time, in response to external factors and challenges, but also to evolving relationships and internal dynamics. The purpose of this strategy is to create the conditions in which communities across the district can thrive — socially, economically, culturally and environmentally.
- 2.4.5 A thriving community is 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.

2.5 Defining resilience

- 2.5.1 Community resilience has become increasingly important in the wake of wider societal challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic; international economic shocks; and anxiety about the climate crisis.
- 2.5.2 The WARM² framework notes, importantly, that whilst these events may be broad in their scope, their impacts play out at a local or community level. As such, community and individual resilience should take into account Winchester's geographical contexts since enabling infrastructures and social capital are bound by place, context and geography.
- 2.5.3 The council's Emergency Response Plan recognises the important role of communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies or other unexpected events. A number of communities within the district have developed community resilience plans, which formalise the ways in which parish councils, voluntary organisations and other community-based resources work alongside statutory public bodies as part of a wider multi-agency response. Increased resilience of our communities helps the speed and effectiveness of the response to and recovery from emergencies such as floods, fires and gas leaks which may require residents to stay in their homes and be unable to get food, water or essential medication for an unknown period of time. Working alongside colleagues who are members of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum, a suite of community resilience plans has been created to support communities develop their own Community Emergency Plans and to prepare for resilience in households and communities.

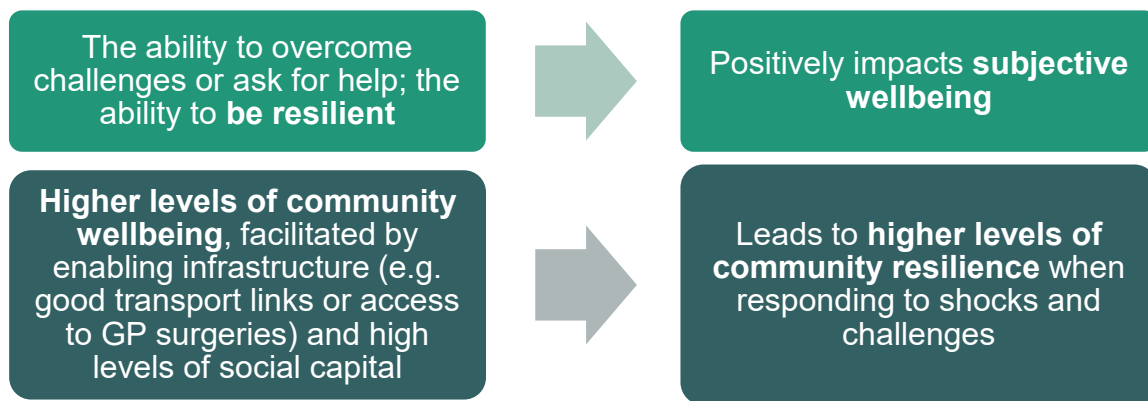
- 2.5.4 There is much literature on community resilience available in various fields such as international development, social psychology and human health. Broadly, resilience can be categorised as being either person focused or variable focused, as per the WARM² framework.
- 2.5.5 A person focused assessment of resilience considers the personality traits of individuals who meet set resilience criteria. Alternatively, variable focused approaches to resilience explore how people relate to and interact with family and wider social environments, alongside their individual characteristics.
- 2.5.6 This perspective requires a consideration of social capital – the extent to which social relationships with friends, family or the wider community can serve as support networks and enable individuals to bounce back from shocks or withstand adversity.
- 2.5.7 Critically, a variable focused approach is considered to be more appropriate, given that our role as a local government body includes a broad overall remit to repair and strengthen societal fabric.
- 2.5.8 Given all that has been mentioned above, a proposed definition of resilience in the context of our communities is:

“Resilience is 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”.

2.6 How resilience and wellbeing interact

- 2.6.1 Resilience and wellbeing are inextricably linked and have a somewhat symbiotic relationship. Drawing on the WARM² framework, **Figure 1** demonstrates this:

Figure 2: How wellbeing and resilience interact at the individual and community level



2.6.2 There is no universal definition of wellbeing. Several definitions and conceptual approaches exist; this makes arriving at an overview challenging. This is clearly stated in the exemplar Wellbeing and Resilience Measure (WARM)³ framework developed by the Young Foundation.

2.6.3 For this strategy, wellbeing has been considered in context of issues which are relevant to our council, such as sustainable housing development; reducing health inequalities; and improving access to the natural environment. The importance of our place-based, geographical context has also been considered.

2.6.4 A key distinction is the difference between **objective wellbeing** and **subjective wellbeing**. It is important that this strategy considers both objective and subjective approaches to wellbeing.

- Objective wellbeing is assessed using indicators which are *assumed* to contribute to a person’s experience of wellbeing, such as life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and gross national income per capital. The assumption is that these socio-economic indicators are reflective of a person’s experience of wellbeing⁴.
- Subjective drivers of wellbeing are those factors that are private to the individual through their personal lived experiences. This can be assessed through questions such as “is there anyone who you can totally be yourself with?” and “is there anyone you could rely on to help you from you outside your own household, if you were feeling depressed?”².

³ Taking the temperature of local communities – The Wellbeing and Resilience Measure (WARM) (2010) The Young Foundation. Available at: [Taking-the-Temperature-of-Local-Communities.pdf \(youngfoundation.org\)](https://www.youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Taking-the-Temperature-of-Local-Communities.pdf)

⁴ Breaking the gridlock – Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world (2024) United Nations Human Development Programme. Available at: [Human Development Report 2023-24 | Human Development Reports \(undp.org\)](https://www.humandevelopmentreport.org/)

2.6.5 The definition of wellbeing in the context of this strategy incorporates both objective and subjective dimensions:

“Wellbeing is a positive state of life satisfaction experienced subjectively by individuals and communities, which is supported by objective enabling infrastructures and support networks”.

2.7 Social value

2.7.1 As the definitions for wellbeing and resilience have shown, there are various objective drivers of personal and community wellbeing and resilience. These drivers run across economic, social and environmental plains, and will often overlap. For example, a given level of economic security and affluence might facilitate access to appropriate housing. Similarly, managing public open space to take account of the impact of climate change may improve access, unlocking associated health and wellbeing benefits.

2.7.2 **Social Value** is an approach to measuring the net social, economic and environmental value an organisation or activity brings to society⁵, which is rapidly gaining traction¹². It has been described as “the enduring systemic change created within communities that leads to improved quality of life for individuals and more just, inclusive and equitable societies”⁶. Health, wellbeing and quality of life at both the personal and community level, are key outcomes and drivers of social value, especially in the context of local communities and placemaking.

2.7.3 **Table 1** below lists the four wellbeing and social value frameworks that have been identified in this report, each with their associated drivers identified in the column beneath:

⁵ Social Value Portal (2022) Social Value 101: A guide to getting started. Available at: [Social Value 101: A getting started guide \(socialvalueportal.com\)](https://socialvalueportal.com)

⁶ ARUP (2023) Social Value: A UK White Paper. Available at: [social-value-a-uk-white-paper.pdf \(arup.com\)](https://arup.com)

Table 1: Drivers of wellbeing in wellbeing and social value* frameworks

OECD How's Life?	WARM Framework	WELLBY ^{7*}	TOM System ^{8*}
Income and Wealth	Buoyant local economy	Good mental and physical health	More local people in employment
Work and Job Quality	Low crime	Higher and further education	Improved skills for local people
Housing	Effective public services	Work	More opportunities for disadvantaged people
Health	Strong and stable families	Physical Exercise	Increased levels of volunteering
Knowledge and Skills	Networks of friends	Faith	Creating a healthier community
Environment Quality	One-to-one services	Relationships	Vulnerable people are helped to live independently
Subjective Wellbeing	Wealth	Fresh Air	
Safety	Health	Retirement	
Work-life balance	Education	Helping others	
Social Connections	Life satisfaction		
Civil Engagement			

2.7.4 Historically, the development of community resilience and wellbeing was centred upon needs-based approaches, through assessing the deficiencies in a community or local area and focus on ‘filling in the gaps’, often making communities disempowered and dependent.

2.7.5 An alternative approach emerged, known as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)⁹, which **focuses on assets in the community, rather than deficiencies**. These assets might include initiatives such as food banks or community pantries which are deeply embedded in the fabric of places at the community level or the relationships between community leaders and the wider community.

2.7.6 Good practice is acknowledged to show that a strengths-based approach can successfully challenge isolation and fragmentation in communities by strengthening what is already there.

⁷ State of Life (2024) WELLBY – Where’s WELLBY? – the big picture and WELLBY Guide. Available at: [WELLBY & TOOLS — State of life](#)

⁸ Social Value Portal (2024) Social Value Measurement – Social Value TOM System™. Available at: [Measurement | Social Value TOM System™ | Social Value Portal](#)

⁹ Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets. Pg. 1-11. Institute for Policy Research.

2.8 Policy, legislation and strategy

2.8.1 This work operates in the context of a framework of statutory duties and national and regional policies relating to resilience and wellbeing.

National Legislation

- The Equality Act (2010)
- The Localism Act (2011)
- The Health and Social Care Act (2022)

National Reports

- Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review (2010)
- Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On (2020)
- Building Health Equity: The Role of the Property Sector in Improving Health (2025)

National Policy and Strategy

- National Planning Policy Framework (revised December 2024)
- Public Health England Strategy (2020 – 2025)
- UK Government Resilience Framework (UKRF) December 2002
- Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy (2025–2035)
- Pride in Place Strategy 2025 ([Pride in Place Strategy - GOV.UK](#))

Regional Policy and Strategy

- Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan (2021 – 2025)
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board Integrated Care Strategy (2022)
- Hampshire Public Health Strategy 2023 – 2026 (2023)
- Community Resilience in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight – Verudatus report (February 2024)

2.9 Winchester City Council's policy and approaches

2.9.1 Many of our policy responsibilities overlap with one another and reinforce strategic policy objectives relating to community resilience. Those of material importance are outlined below:

- Winchester City Council Plan 2025 – 2030 (2025)
- Winchester Community Safety Partnership District Strategic Assessment (2024)
- Winchester District Cultural Strategy (2024)
- Winchester City Council Housing for Winchester - Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028 (2023)

2.9.2 Other policies and strategic documents play a key part in improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people which, in turn, reinforce the ability to respond to and overcome shocks or challenges.

- Winchester City Council Local Plan Joint Core Strategy (2013)
- Winchester City Council Proposed Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) 2020 – 2040 (2024)
- Winchester City Council Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2023 – 2030
- City of Winchester Movement Strategy (2019)
- Winchester Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS) 2021
- Winchester City Council Air Quality Strategy (2024)
- South Downs National Park Authority South Downs Local Plan (2019)

2.9.3 Themes such as health, wellbeing and community cohesion often appear as golden threads which run through different policy and strategy documents, at various spatial levels.

2.9.4 Much of our policy activity and priority aims overlap with one another, in terms of our capacity to drive community resilience and wellbeing. The intention is that this strategy will establish principles that can be applied across all aspects of our work, providing a consistent basis for the relationship between the council and the communities that it serves.

2.10 The council's role

2.10.1 The council takes on a variety of different roles, depending on the context, subject matter, and the needs of our communities. The most common roles are set out in table 2 below:

Table 2: The council's role

Role	What it means	Key actions	Example
Enabler	The council creates the conditions for community organisations and the voluntary sector to deliver their services or achieve outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing funding or grants • Setting strategic direction or policy frameworks • Removing barriers to community involvement 	Supporting a local charity to run a youth centre by offering a building and funding.
Facilitator	The council brings people and organisations together to collaborate, share resources, and solve problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting forums or partnerships • Mediating between stakeholders • Encouraging co-production of services 	Convening a multi-agency group to tackle social isolation in the area.
Provider (or Actor)	The council directly delivers services to residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running services and facilities • Employing staff and managing operations 	Operating a council-run activity programme.
Commissioner	The council plans and purchases services from external providers to meet community needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs assessment and market shaping • Contracting and performance monitoring 	Commissioning a private operator to run a council-owned leisure centre.
Advocate	The council represents and champions the interests of its residents at regional or national levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobbying government for funding or policy change • Promoting the area to attract investment 	Campaigning for better transport links or supporting bids for funding from regional or national bodies.
Regulator	The council enforces laws and regulations to protect public interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing (e.g. taxis, alcohol) • Environmental health inspections • Planning enforcement 	Inspecting food hygiene standards in community centres.
Steward / Guardian	The council acts as a custodian of public assets and community wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing public spaces and heritage • Ensuring long-term sustainability 	Maintaining our parks or public spaces.

3 Resilience and Wellbeing in Winchester district

3.1 Key drivers

3.1.1 While resilience and community wellbeing is difficult to define and relates somewhat to the lived experiences of individuals themselves, the same contributing factors often appear.

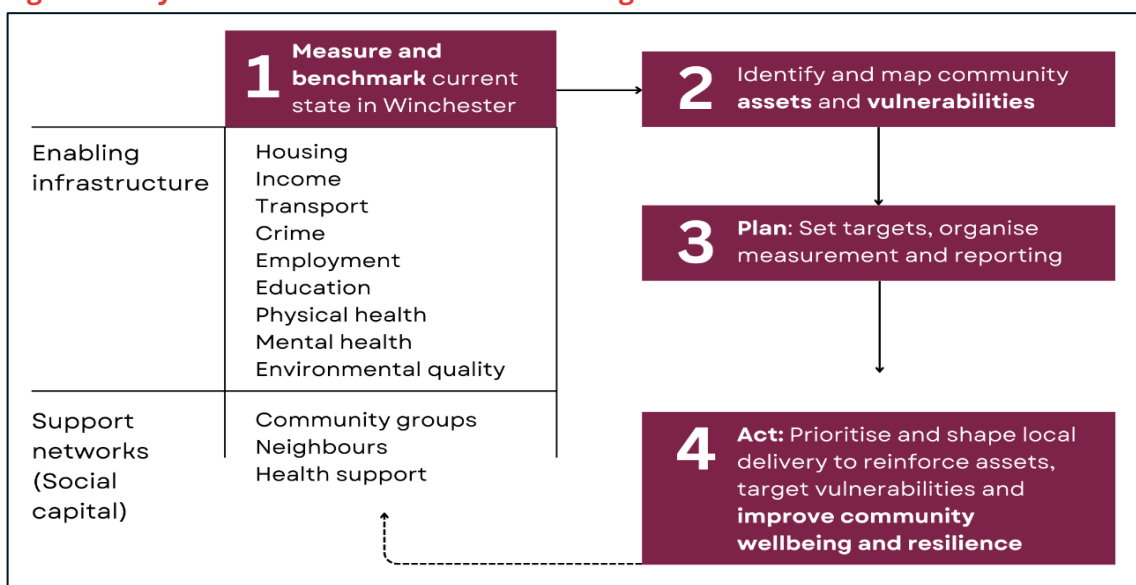
3.1.2 The work to identify the key drivers of resilience and wellbeing has been informed by academic research covering areas such health, wellbeing economics and psychology, social value measurement frameworks such as WELLBY⁷ and wellbeing frameworks such as the OECD's How's Life?⁷ survey and the Young Foundation's WARM² framework. It draws on thematic areas of importance, where consensus can be seen in terms of the relevance of these factors to resilience and wellbeing.

3.1.3 The drivers fall within two main domains of wellbeing and resilience:

- **Enabling infrastructure:** These are evidenced **objective drivers** which support an individual or community's wellbeing and resilience.
- **Support networks:** Where an individual is currently located across different support networks. This influences their stock of **social capital**, a pertinent driver of wellbeing. This is often **contextual** and **subjective** to the individual.

3.1.4 Within each of these two categories, there are a series of specific drivers. These drivers are outlined in **Figure 2:**

Figure 3: Key drivers of resilience and wellbeing in Winchester district



3.1.5 The specific objective drivers of resilience and wellbeing which relate to '**enabling infrastructure**' are:

- **Housing** (access to suitable housing, housing affordability and permanence);
- **Income** (income levels, deprivation levels);
- **Transport** (access to decent and reliable transport systems to 'plug in' to the community);
- **Crime** (feeling safe in your community);
- **Education** (the ability to upskill and gain qualifications to 'open doors');
- **Employment** (decent and meaningful employment);
- **Physical health** (good nutrition, means to exercise);
- **Mental health** (state of self-actualisation, stress management); and
- **Environmental quality** (access to green/blue spaces, quality of spaces)

3.1.6 The specific drivers of embeddedness within '**support networks**' and levels of social capital are:

- **Participation in community groups** (recreational, community, sport or other groups);
- **Access to support from outside your household** (networks of family, friends, colleagues and others); and
- **Neighbourly and community relations** (relationships with those in a geographical proximity).

3.2 Evidence gathering

3.2.1 These key drivers have been applied to the context of Winchester district to measure and benchmark the area in terms of its performance and community experiences. This measurement exercise was undertaken in two ways.

3.2.2 **Statistical evidence gathering** for the enabling infrastructure category, desk-based research which comprised of gathering and modelling socio-economic and environmental data, to measure the 'state of play' in Winchester district. This drew on the JSNA and was supplemented by data from a survey using a "community insight" questionnaire, to get a subjective perspective of access and priorities.

3.2.3 **Qualitative evidence gathering** in terms of the support network category, for which the consultants used the following to provide insights into levels of social capital and the existence of support networks for individuals in their communities. They engaged with community members, community leaders, Voluntary,

Charitable and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) and both elected and non-elected councillors from across the district of Winchester.

- A **community panel** was established of representatives from local organisations and charities, as well as residents with professional experience relating to resilience and wellbeing. Initial fact-finding calls with applicants gathered individual perspectives on wellbeing and resilience specific to Winchester. The subsequent panel sessions presented statistical findings and preliminary insights from the fact-finding calls, facilitating structured discussion among participants.
- Targeted **community engagement** was undertaken through organised events at specific locations including The Lifestyle Club, 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, ensuring broad community representation.
- **Engagement with councillors** was undertaken to understand constituency-specific challenges and identify systemic gaps in community resilience and wellbeing support. This approach enabled data collection across diverse community segments, providing place-specific qualitative insights to supplement the quantitative analysis.
- An **insight questionnaire** was available online for a period of 5 weeks. Details of how to access the survey were shared via our social media channels, website and newsletters. This enabled residents from a variety of geographical areas within the Winchester district to provide qualitative insights in terms of their subjective experiences of community wellbeing and resilience.

3.2.4 Community engagement has also revealed priority areas for community members in terms of wellbeing and resilience, alongside key assets and needs.

4 Enabling infrastructure

The first of the two main domains of wellbeing and resilience is enabling infrastructure and below is a summary of each of the nine drivers that contributes.

All of these drivers are supported and given strategic direction by existing key policy documents, which are referenced within the summary of each area.

4.1 Housing

- 4.1.1 Winchester district faces acute affordability pressures, with a housing affordability ratio significantly higher than both Hampshire and England/Wales. This challenge extends across both purchase and rental markets. Median house prices in Winchester substantially exceed regional averages and private rental costs are also higher than Hampshire's average. Winchester shows high exposure to housing cost increases associated with remortgaging, payment increases and rising rental costs.
- 4.1.2 Statistical evidence reveals distinct housing challenges across Winchester's Local Plan geographies. Winchester Town demonstrates pronounced internal contrasts, with central wards showing low home ownership and high social housing concentrations, while peripheral areas like Badger Farm have high ownership rates. In contrast, the Market Towns and Rural Area show high ownership rates but limited social housing provision.
- 4.1.3 The Insight Questionnaire found 73% of respondents ranking decent and affordable housing among their top three wellbeing drivers, with 62% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that such housing is widely available in the district. This quantitative evidence aligns with qualitative findings from community engagement, where housing emerged as a foundational concern affecting multiple aspects of wellbeing.
- 4.1.4 Housing also emerged as a foundational concern that intersected significantly with other wellbeing factors, with those strongly agreeing they have access to decent and affordable housing reporting an average life satisfaction score of 8.00, compared to 7.07 for those strongly disagreeing. Qualitative research revealed particular challenges in urban areas, where dramatically lower home ownership rates suggest concentrated housing challenges for certain community segments. Community perspectives provided context to these statistics, with residents expressing concerns about "astronomical" housing costs and limited affordable options.
- 4.1.5 The impact of housing on community cohesion and identity emerged strongly in discussions with council members, particularly regarding new developments, with

one councillor sharing a resident's experience: "We were told the promised park wouldn't be completed until our primary school child reached secondary school."

- 4.1.6 A representative from Winchester City of Sanctuary emphasised that "safe housing, feeling physically safe" forms the basic foundation of wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable populations. This connection between housing security and broader wellbeing outcomes was particularly evident in areas like St Luke ward, where 45% of housing is social housing and health outcomes show higher rates of poor self-reported health.
- 4.1.7 The council's Housing Strategy (2023–2028) addresses all these issues to ensure that negative impact on resilience and wellbeing is minimised.

4.2 Income

- 4.2.1 The district's median weekly resident pay exceeds both the Hampshire average and most neighbouring districts¹⁰, positioning it as one of the more affluent areas in the region. However, this prosperity is not universally experienced across the district, as evidenced by the dramatic rise in food bank usage at one site in Winnall, which increased by 142% between 2019 and 2023. This suggests significant income inequality within Winchester, where some residents benefit from the high median earnings while others struggle considerably with the district's high housing costs and cost of living, creating substantial pressure on certain household budgets despite the area's overall economic strength.
- 4.2.2 Income patterns vary across the Local Plan geographies. Winchester Town shows internal income disparities, with Indices of Multiple Deprivation Data (IMD) data placing St Luke and St Bartholomew in lower deciles (1-2), indicating relatively high deprivation. The South Hampshire Urban Areas show moderate Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) scores compared to other geographies. The Market Towns and Rural Area presents contrasts, with higher income areas alongside pockets of rural deprivation.
- 4.2.3 These income challenges have important implications for community wellbeing and resilience. The growing disparity between income and housing costs may force some residents to make difficult choices about basic needs, potentially affecting wellbeing dramatically. The concentrated nature of deprivation in specific areas such as Winchester city risks creating two-tier communities, where some areas face multiple challenges across education, health and living environment domains, while others remain relatively insulated from these pressures.

¹⁰ Where data is most recently available.

- 4.2.4 The council operates a suite of benefit payments, discounts and exemptions that help ensure that negative impacts on resilience and wellbeing resulting from income challenges are minimised.

4.3 Transport

- 4.3.1 The research revealed significant transportation challenges across Winchester district, with both quantitative and qualitative data highlighting access issues. The Insight Questionnaire found that 52% of respondents either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" with having access to reliable and accessible transport options, regardless of their location in the district. This statistical evidence aligns with community engagement findings that identified transport as a critical barrier to accessing services and opportunities.
- 4.3.2 Transport challenges manifested differently across Winchester's geography. While city centre residents reported good access with "buses every 10 minutes," rural communities faced limitations. As one resident noted, "public transport options are limited in rural areas. I often have to drive everywhere." Cost emerged as a significant barrier, with evening service limitations another barrier to access, particularly impacting working residents and young people accessing services.
- 4.3.3 The research also highlighted the importance of active travel infrastructure, with residents emphasising that "Safe cycling infrastructures to allow safe commuting and recreation are crucial for wellbeing." This connects to both environmental and health outcomes, though implementation varies across the district. Disabled residents particularly emphasised transport's role in accessing essential services, with one noting, "As a disabled person, being able to get out of the house easily is important, including healthcare access."
- 4.3.4 The research revealed that residents in parishes on the fringe of the district frequently access services in neighbouring towns like Basingstoke and Fareham rather than Winchester City Centre, suggesting that for them transport infrastructure out of the district is more important.
- 4.3.5 These findings suggest that while Winchester has some transport strengths, particularly in the city centre and rail connections to London, significant gaps exist in providing comprehensive, affordable, and reliable transport options across the district. The impact on service access, community participation, and wellbeing highlights transport as a crucial factor in community resilience.
- 4.3.6 The Winchester District Transport Statement, Winchester Movement Strategy and Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plans address these issues to ensure that negative impact on resilience and wellbeing is minimised.

4.4 Crime and Community Safety

- 4.4.1 Winchester's crime statistics present a positive picture for community safety and resilience, with total recorded offences (56.09 per 1,000) substantially below the South East average and showing stability between quarters, and sexual offences having notably decreased¹¹. These favourable crime indicators will aid community cohesion by fostering greater trust in public spaces, encouraging more active community participation, and enhancing residents' feelings of safety – all essential elements for building social capital and community resilience in a district that already benefits from relatively high economic prosperity.
- 4.4.2 While crime rates did not emerge as a primary concern in the Insight Questionnaire, we know that safety considerations significantly influence how residents' access and utilise community spaces. The research revealed that perceptions of safety particularly affect vulnerable groups and impact community participation. Survey respondents highlighted the importance of "crime-free neighbourhoods" and "safe streets" as contributors to wellbeing.
- 4.4.3 The qualitative research revealed specific concerns about safety affecting service access, particularly for women and vulnerable groups. As one participant noted, "Women may feel unsafe on their own," highlighting how perceived safety affects utilisation of community assets. University of Winchester representatives noted that young students often struggle with safety due to the lack of good quality lighting on their regular walked routes from university to their accommodation.
- 4.4.4 The research suggests that while Winchester may not face significant crime challenges, perceptions of safety significantly influence community participation and service access. This highlights the importance of considering safety in service design and delivery, particularly for vulnerable groups and in creating accessible community spaces.
- 4.4.5 The council's annual Community Safety Partnership District Strategic Assessment addresses these issues to ensure that negative impact on resilience and wellbeing is minimised.

4.5 Employment

- 4.5.1 Employment data reveals significant variations across the district's communities that have important implications for both wellbeing and resilience. The district shows notable urban-rural disparities, with rural areas generally demonstrating higher economic activity rates (>60%) compared to urban areas (<55%).

¹¹ [LGA's Inform benchmarking tool](#)

- 4.5.2 Employment patterns across Winchester Town areas vary significantly, with St Paul ward showing high professional occupation rates (34%) while St Luke demonstrates low economic activity (44.6%). The South Hampshire Urban Areas show diverse patterns, with Bishop's Waltham having economic activity rates of 56.9% and Market Towns and Rural Area wards like Central Meon Valley reaching 59.3%. Winchester overall has strong representation in professional and managerial roles, exceeding both regional and national averages, though these roles are not evenly distributed across all wards.
- 4.5.3 Winchester's overall economic inactivity rates are lower than the national average across most categories, including those looking after home/family and those with long-term sickness/disability. This suggests relatively high access to employment opportunities, though the variations between wards indicate that some communities may need targeted support to enhance their access to employment markets and therefore enhance community wellbeing and resilience.
- 4.5.4 The council's Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS) addresses these issues to ensure that negative impact on resilience and wellbeing is minimised.

4.6 Education

- 4.6.1 The district demonstrates strong formal educational attainment, significantly exceeding the national average, with most schools achieving Good or Outstanding Ofsted ratings.
- 4.6.2 Educational attainment and access show notable variations across Winchester emerging Local Plan geographies. Winchester Town demonstrates high educational attainment (particularly in peripheral wards) with good access to educational institutions, including higher education facilities. The South Hampshire Urban Areas show more moderate educational outcomes but maintain good access to schools. The Market Towns and Rural Area presents generally strong educational attainment but faces challenges in accessing further education and skill development opportunities, with the district's overall attainment rate masking significant geographic variations.
- 4.6.3 Geographic distribution analysis exposes notable urban-rural disparities. Central Winchester benefits from major institutions like Peter Symonds College and the University of Winchester, while rural areas face more limited institutional access with fewer but more evenly distributed schools. This institutional landscape directly impacts service accessibility, as highlighted by one youth worker: "Schools struggle to interact with third party organisations. Barriers seem to be up for children seeking support, schools can't provide everything their students require and in turn they struggle to access services out there."

- 4.6.4 While Winchester's educational infrastructure demonstrates strong formal metrics, the research revealed that educational infrastructure could serve a broader purpose beyond academic outcomes, functioning as vital hubs for their communities, connecting families with available support services.
- 4.6.5 The council has little role in formal education, as this is a statutory responsibility of Hampshire County Council.

4.7 Physical Health

- 4.7.1 Physical health emerges as a fundamental driver of community wellbeing in Winchester, with the Insight Questionnaire identifying it as residents' highest-ranked factor in personal wellbeing. The district demonstrates strong overall health outcomes, with average life expectancy exceeding the national average and 87% of respondents reporting good access to healthy lifestyle enablers, including nutritional diet opportunities.
- 4.7.2 However, there are stark variations when considering Winchester district emerging Local Plan geographies, with a difference in average life expectancy of more than 7 years. Within Winchester Town, there are pronounced inequalities, with St Luke recording the lowest life expectancy and relatively poor self-reported health, while peripheral areas such as St Paul and Badger Farm demonstrating better outcomes. In the South Hampshire Urban Areas, health outcomes are better, but the Market Towns and Rural Area consistently show the most positive health indicators.
- 4.7.3 Childhood obesity rates particularly highlight health inequalities across the district. While Winchester's overall rate compares favourably to the national average, significant ward-level variations exist. These health disparities often align with broader socioeconomic factors, particularly in urban areas, suggesting a complex and multi-layered set of factors that challenge community wellbeing.
- 4.7.4 The importance of preventative approaches and integrated support systems was strongly emphasised in the qualitative research findings. Participants shared positive experiences with social prescribing initiatives and community hubs, while identifying opportunities for expanding these approaches. One healthcare professional noted that "Social prescribing is an incredible source of improving wellbeing but need GPs to drive this more," highlighting both the potential of this approach and current implementation challenges. These preventative health strategies take on particular significance when considered alongside Winchester's documented geographic health disparities.
- 4.7.5 The research identified integrated community hubs as effective delivery mechanisms for preventative health services. These multifunctional spaces combine practical support with health promotion, creating environments where

preventative approaches become embedded in everyday community interactions. The success of prevention-focused initiatives demonstrates the efficacy of community-based health interventions, though financial barriers like participation fees may restrict access to beneficial preventative health services. These findings align with the Framework's focus on building resilient community support structures that can prevent and address wellbeing challenges.

- 4.7.6 While Winchester generally maintains strong health outcomes, significant inequalities could affect community resilience. Urban areas, particularly St Luke, consistently show poorer health outcomes across multiple indicators, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to build health-related resilience in these communities.
- 4.7.7 The council will shortly be developing an Active Wellbeing Strategy, which will address the relationship between physical health and broader socioeconomic factors with a comprehensive approach that considers multiple determinants of wellbeing.

4.8 Mental Health and Wellbeing

- 4.8.1 Mental health in Winchester presents a complex landscape of challenges, with significant variations across areas and demographics but a concerning rise in depression rates between 2016 and 2023. This statistical pattern is reflected in community experiences, with mental health emerging as a critical concern through both quantitative and qualitative research.
- 4.8.2 The Insight Questionnaire revealed clear correlations between mental health support and overall wellbeing, with respondents having access to mental health support outside their household reporting notably higher life satisfaction scores (7.8) compared to those without such support (6.2).
- 4.8.3 Geographic analysis reveals significant disparities, particularly in self-harm admission rates. While Winchester's overall self-harm admission ratio (107.36) sits slightly above the national baseline (100), urban areas show markedly higher rates. St Luke ward records the highest at 180.08 - almost 80% above the national average - while more affluent rural areas like Upper Meon Valley show much lower rates (41.94).
- 4.8.4 Youth mental health emerged as a particular concern, with one mental health youth worker observing that "People tend to be younger in Winchester suffering from Mental health problems, and more likely to present with suicide and self-harm, compared to Portsmouth and Southampton." This observation aligns with the statistical evidence showing elevated self-harm rates in urban wards including St Michael, St Paul, and St Bartholomew.

- 4.8.5 However, the importance of community connections in supporting mental health was consistently emphasised by residents, with one noting "Feeling part of a community, which I do. Volunteering has also improved my mental health."
- 4.8.6 It should be noted that COVID-19 in particular, had adverse impacts on mental health at both national¹² and global¹³ scales. These findings suggest that while Winchester district faces significant mental health challenges, particularly in urban areas and among younger populations, there are active community-led responses and preventative wellbeing services. However, access to these services varies across ward demographics, indicating a need for targeted support in areas showing higher vulnerability.
- 4.8.7 The council has a Cultural Strategy and will shortly be developing an Active Wellbeing Strategy, both of which will reflect their roles in supporting and promoting positive mental health.

4.9 Access to Green Space

- 4.9.1 Environmental quality and access demonstrate distinct patterns across Local Plan geographies. Winchester Town wards like St Luke and St Paul have smaller private outdoor spaces and Town wards show greater deficits in public open space. Peripheral areas to Winchester Town like Badger Farm and Oliver's Battery maintain larger private spaces and better access to public green space.
- 4.9.2 Within the South Hampshire Urban Areas, there's moderate provision but notable variations - Whiteley and Shedfield demonstrates suburban characteristics with moderate outdoor space sizes, while Denmead shows a notable public space deficit. The Market Towns and Rural Area consistently show the largest private outdoor spaces, though access to public green space varies significantly. What should be noted is that everywhere in the district, even the built-up areas of Winchester town, is within a short travelling distance of countryside.
- 4.9.3 The qualitative research revealed strong engagement with Winchester's green and open spaces, though access and quality vary across the district. The Insight Questionnaire showed that 67% of respondents either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" they have good access to high-quality green spaces, suggesting generally positive provision of environmental amenities across Winchester.

¹² Centre for Mental Health (2024) COVID-19 and the Nation's Mental Health. Available at: [Covid-19 and the nation's mental health - Centre for Mental Health](#)

¹³ World Health Organization (2022) Mental Health and COVID-19: Early evidence of the pandemic's impact. Available at: [Mental Health and COVID-19: Early evidence of the pandemic's impact: Scientific brief, 2 March 2022](#)

- 4.9.4 Qualitative engagement revealed how these spaces serve multiple functions for community wellbeing. Participants consistently emphasised the value of natural environments for both physical and mental health, with one forest therapy practitioner noting that "nature connectedness" helps people "feel part of something bigger than yourself" and reduces feelings of isolation. The research found that green spaces provide crucial opportunities for exercise, relaxation, and social interaction, contributing to multiple aspects of community wellbeing.
- 4.9.5 However, the research identified important barriers to environmental access. Financial constraints caused by parking charges and safety considerations for certain demographic groups were both highlighted as barriers to access. Comments from residents emphasised the importance of having "access to parks and green spaces" alongside concerns about pollution levels, suggesting environmental quality significantly influences community perceptions of wellbeing.
- 4.9.6 The research revealed geographic variations in access to publicly managed green space, but good access to ample open countryside means that Winchester district is well served.

4.10 Conclusions

- 4.10.1 The council already has a broad and comprehensive set of strategies that direct our work on a number of drivers and address gaps and identify opportunity to ensure that the key enabling infrastructure of wellbeing and resilience is in place.
- 4.10.2 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. This will ensure that issues are brought to our attention and that communities have the ability to proactively trigger a community response or action to address challenges and build local resilience from the ground up. Section 6 identifies a series of pathways and principles through which we will seek to make this possible.

5 Social capital and support networks

The second of the two main domains of wellbeing and resilience is social capital and support networks. Below is a summary of the three drivers that contribute to this domain.

However, unlike the enabling infrastructure detailed in section 4, there are no key policy documents to support and give strategic direction to these factors. The remainder of this strategy is therefore focussed on establishing a series of key principles that shape our efforts to protect and enhance social capital and support networks across the district.

5.1 Participation in community groups

- 5.1.1 Participation in social activities has multiple benefits for wellbeing. It reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation, improves self-esteem and confidence, encourages learning and growth, and encourages healthier behaviours. When people from diverse backgrounds come together in social settings, they share experiences, break down stereotypes, express their identity proudly and build trust.
- 5.1.2 Winchester district is blessed with a wealth of community groups, organisations and opportunities to participate. Groups range from large and formal with numerous paid employees, to small and informal based only on volunteer efforts. Some have existed for many years, whereas others have only emerged recently in response to current needs and challenges. In 2023, across the whole of Hampshire, there were more than 10,000 voluntary community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations¹⁴.
- 5.1.3 One of the great strengths of the VCSE sector in Winchester is its reach across the entire district. It takes different forms in different places, but VCSE organisations are present and active across all Local Plan geographies. They often emerge and develop organically, as a community-led response to a local problem rather than a top-down solution to an identified need.
- 5.1.4 Stakeholder engagement showed community participation with organisations and activities external to individual's households to be strong, with 73% of respondents engaging in community, recreational, or sport group activities at least monthly.
- 5.1.5 However, the research also identified significant challenges in coordinating and communicating about community resources. This suggests that while Winchester

¹⁴ Action Hampshire (2023) Hampshire's State of the VCSE Sector. Available at: [State-of-the-VCSE-Sector-2022-Final-Version.pdf](#)

possesses significant social capital, barriers to information flow may limit its full utilisation. Multiple stakeholders highlighted fragmented communication channels between service providers, with participants in both the Community Panel and engagement sessions describing instances where parallel initiatives operated without awareness of each other. The Insight Questionnaire further supported this finding, as respondents frequently mentioned discovering essential services through informal networks rather than official channels, indicating systematic gaps in information dissemination that could be addressed through coordinated communication strategies.

5.2 Access to support from outside your household

- 5.2.1 The COVID pandemic had a profound impact on communities. Lockdowns and social distancing disrupted daily life, leading to increased feelings of isolation, especially among the elderly and vulnerable. Many communities saw a rise in mutual aid groups, food banks, and volunteer efforts to support those in need, but access to these services became more challenging. This highlighted the crucial part that support from beyond the household plays in maintaining personal wellbeing for everyone but, in particular, those already experiencing some form of anxiety, depression or stress.
- 5.2.2 The qualitative research revealed strong correlations between social connections and community wellbeing in Winchester, supported by both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The Insight Questionnaire demonstrated that 69% of respondents feel part of supportive networks outside their household, with these individuals reporting notably higher life satisfaction scores compared to the national average.
- 5.2.3 The research with stakeholders revealed particularly strong neighbourhood connections, with 78% of respondents reporting good relationships with neighbours. Those strongly agreeing they had positive neighbourly relations demonstrated higher life satisfaction scores compared to those without such connections.
- 5.2.4 Mental health support through social networks emerged as particularly significant. The data showed that 56% of respondents had someone outside their household they could rely on for mental health support, with these individuals reporting markedly higher life satisfaction compared to those without such support. This quantitative evidence aligns with qualitative findings about the importance of community connections for wellbeing.
- 5.2.5 The research highlighted how informal support networks complement formal services. Participants emphasised the role of local groups, community events, and shared spaces in fostering vital social connections. This suggests the need for

approaches that strengthen both formal service provision and informal community networks simultaneously.

5.3 Neighbourly and community relations

- 5.3.1 A sense of identity and belonging are deeply connected to a person's overall wellbeing. Identity gives people a clear understanding of who they are — their values, beliefs, and purpose – while a sense of belonging helps people feel accepted and valued. These are often expressed as pride in place, a powerful expression which fosters trust, mutual respect, and social cohesion, and encourages active participation.
- 5.3.2 A key focal point for community identity across Winchester are the network of 44 parish and town councils that form the lowest tier of local government, and they play a vital role in representing and serving the interests of their local communities. Parish and town councils vary greatly in their size and activity but, in all cases, they help define the identity of the community they represent.
- 5.3.3 While the South Hampshire Urban Areas and Market Towns and Rural Area have complete coverage of parish and town councils, this tier of local government is missing in Winchester town. Work is currently underway to review this, via a Community Governance Review that will determine the shape of future governance in the town area. In the meantime, the City Council fulfils this role for the town area and several neighbourhood-based community associations and resident forums provide a platform for local people to have a voice and a focal point for community activity.
- 5.3.4 Another key focal point for community activity are the community buildings that exist in all but the smallest of settlements across the district. Community centres and village halls are supplemented by scout huts, sports clubs and church halls to provide a network of facilities that host a huge variety of activities and services that meet all needs. Most are run by volunteers, with local people best placed to understand and respond effectively to local needs and challenges.
- 5.3.5 Churches and other faith-based organisations also play a particularly important role. They provide not only a physical space to bring people together, but social and support networks that represent a community in their own right. The role of churches and other faith-based organisations can be particularly important in larger settlements, such as Winchester town, where sense of place can be weaker.
- 5.3.6 The qualitative research revealed innovative approaches to building social capital, exemplified by initiatives like The Carroll Centre's 'peg it forward' system. This program demonstrates how community spaces can strengthen social bonds while supporting wellbeing through practical support mechanisms. As one participant

noted, "Support systems are important to enable us to bounce back," highlighting the connection between social capital and community resilience.

- 5.3.7 The infrastructure supporting social connections emerged as a critical concern. The research identified two parallel challenges: delays in delivering community infrastructure in new developments, which inhibits social network formation, and deterioration of existing facilities, which threatens established community bonds. As one councillor illustrated: "We were told the promised park wouldn't be completed until our primary school child reached secondary school." This sequencing approach systematically undermines community cohesion in developing areas.
- 5.3.8 Geographic variations in social connection emerged as important, particularly in southern parishes where residents often access services in neighbouring districts. This pattern suggests social networks may develop along practical access routes rather than administrative boundaries, highlighting the need for flexible approaches to supporting community connections and for collaboration with neighbouring areas.
- 5.3.9 Social capital plays a crucial role in enhancing a community's ability to respond effectively to unexpected events—such as natural disasters, public health crises, or economic shocks. This local capacity reduces the reliance on formal services by enabling faster mobilisation of local volunteers and resources, providing local intelligence and supporting recovery through community solidarity. Community-led self-help, mutual aid and informal care networks are key components of a rapid and effective response to public emergencies.

5.4 Conclusions

- 5.4.1 These findings demonstrate that while Winchester has strong foundations of social capital, strategic support is needed to ensure these networks effectively serve evolving community needs and remain accessible to all residents.
- 5.4.2 The clear correlation between social connections and life satisfaction suggests investing in community networks could significantly enhance community wellbeing and resilience. 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.
- 5.4.3 We have data that 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.

6 Pathways and principles

6.1.1 The council has identified five pathways to build social capital and create stronger, more resilient communities across the district. These pathways have strong links to the Council Plan and each is supported by some guiding principles, which will always be at the heart of the council’s work and which will help our communities to thrive and succeed.

Figure 4: Pathways to create stronger, more resilient communities



Pathway 1: Social connection, inclusion and belonging

6.1.2 We want residents to experience stronger social ties, reduced isolation, and a greater sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods. This pathway strengthens the connections between people, and with the place in which they live. It reflects the important physical elements that contribute to resilient communities and all the things that make a place special. The council’s role as Local Planning Authority gives us a unique opportunity to seamlessly integrate the development of physical and social infrastructure.

6.1.3 The principles that support this are:

- **Promote and celebrate local identity and pride in place....** through the creation of new communities at our major development sites; empowering and working collaboratively with a network of effective parish and town councils; reviewing the effectiveness of local governance and making improvements through the Community Governance Review process; and by encouraging communities to take ownership of and resolves the issues of importance to them.
- **Celebrate diversity and promote inclusion....** by supporting the *City of Sanctuary* principles and making the district a welcoming place for everyone; informing and involving all sections of the community, but particularly disadvantaged and excluded groups; promoting the benefits of intergenerational activity; and through a wide range of events, festivals, celebrations, creative and cultural activities.
- **Secure, protect, support and promote the use of key community assets....** to ensure a thriving network of community centres and village halls in settlements across the district; by securing new, modern facilities on our major development sites; through the *Community Right to Bid* process that protects Assets of Community Value; using Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to invest in and improve infrastructure; and through the continued use of community buildings as polling stations to encourage greater participation in the democratic process.

Pathway 2: Community capacity and local leadership

6.1.4 We want communities to feel confident, skilled and supported to lead local activity, shape decisions, and mobilise resources. Public trust and social cohesion are built on the foundations of democracy, local leadership and representation. This was highly visible during recent events such as the COVID pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, when local communities were responsive and agile in finding solutions that best served the people that lived there.

6.1.5 The principles that support this are:

- **An effective network of parish and town councils....** with devolved responsibility for managing local assets; that takes ownership of local issues and finding solutions; shaped by public opinion through regular elections and the use of Community Governance Reviews; and with clear and effective lines of communication to the council and other statutory bodies.
- **Voluntary sector representation as a strategic partner....** through overarching community and voluntary sector (CVS) infrastructure

organisations to represent the wider sectoral voice; and opportunities for CVS organisations to influence strategic decisions or policy direction.

- **Local involvement in emergency response....** underpinned by community resilience plans; utilising local knowledge and experience to ensure the best outcomes for local people; and supporting the formal emergency planning responses of the local authorities when dealing with unplanned and unexpected events.

Pathway 3: Access to community assets, services and opportunities

6.1.6 We want people to easily engage in activities that support their wellbeing, culture, skills and social participation. This pathway recognises the value that the voluntary sector adds to society - moving at pace and adapting as circumstances change. It fills gaps in services where statutory services are limited or absent. It can drive innovation by testing new ideas and piloting innovative approaches to social issues, unconstrained by public sector bureaucracy. If sufficiently empowered, the sector can build capacity and unlock untapped resources.

6.1.7 The principles that support this are:

- **Grant funding and other support....** including annual core funding for strategic partner organisations that provide essential services; smaller one-off project and innovation funding to test new ideas, introduce new services and encourage seldom-heard groups; discretionary rate relief for organisations with their own premises; endorsement and encouragement for organisations seeking external funding to bring value into the district; and sharing of skills, expertise and knowledge.
- **Promotion and encouragement for volunteering....** through support for the organisations that recruit volunteers; recognising and celebrating volunteers and the value of their work; collaboration with public and private sector partners to create an environment where volunteering thrives; and promoting the principle of workplace volunteering.
- **Collaboration between agencies to simplify** reducing bureaucracy, aligning funding and priorities; bringing consistency to reporting mechanisms; avoiding conflicting policies; and removing barriers for people who access services in neighbouring districts.
- **Recognise the social contribution of all public spaces, such as schools, churches and cafés, for wider community interaction....** To make activity more inclusive, increase capacity and avoid duplication of effort; recognise their important roles as 'anchors' within their communities; and strengthen connections and joined-up thinking.

Pathway 4: Supporting people facing the toughest circumstances

6.1.8 We want individuals and families with long-term vulnerabilities to feel supported, connected and able to participate in community life. This pathway acknowledges that some parts of our community need more support than others. Many people have a strong support network of family, friends or neighbours - communities blessed with strong leadership, powerful voice, willing helpers and responsive support groups. But other people and communities are less able to make their voice heard, so tackling disadvantage, addressing isolation, building community cohesion where it is lacking and supporting those in need is essential to create a future where everyone has the same opportunity.

6.1.9 The principles that support this are:

- **React and respond to changing circumstances....** through swift introduction of intensive support such as the COVID or cost-of-living programmes; by long-term planning and focussed investment in new communities on major development sites; and by embracing new groups and involving them in shaping the support they receive, as we did with displaced Ukrainian nationals.
- **Target effort to maximise impact...** by acknowledging that some areas need more help than others; prioritising effort and funding where it can make the most difference; and building social capital to help people to help themselves.
- **Show compassion...** by working with people, not on them; offering options wherever possible; focussing on strengths, not deficiencies; and embracing lived experience.

Pathway 5: Strong community networks and partnerships

6.1.10 We want a well-connected voluntary, community and social enterprise ecosystem that collaborates effectively and shares resources. This pathway recognises the diverse and responsive nature of our communities and the vast wealth of skills, knowledge and experience they contain. It is important that good practice is shared, knowledge passed on and efforts joined up. The council and other public services also hold information that could be powerful in helping communities to identify and develop solutions, especially if made accessible in digital, interactive formats.

6.1.11 The principles that support this are:

- **Networking and collaboration....** via the Social Inclusion Partnership and other multi-agency partnerships and networks; collaborative working to

avoid duplication of effort; identification of mutual aims and objectives to align efforts and strengthen alliances; and by sharing and celebrating each other's successes.

- **Sharing of information, data and intelligence....** such as Census, surveys, research, open mapping (GIS); by listening to stakeholders; embracing local intelligence for emergency planning activity; and by using our leadership role to facilitate a culture of openness.
- **Measuring and demonstrating the impact of community initiatives....** by being data-led; and using social determinants of health and social value models to demonstrate progress; utilising case studies to celebrate success and show the qualitative impact of our work; and disaggregating evidence to smaller geographical areas to enable targeted intervention and strategic decision-making.

6.1.12 Success will be evidenced by measurable growth in community-led action, deeper participation, stronger local networks, increased access to local opportunities, and improved wellbeing — particularly for those facing the toughest circumstances. Over time, communities will become more confident, better connected and more self-sustaining, reducing dependency on reactive support and enabling a shared culture of collective responsibility, pride and everyday resilience.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1.1 The strategy identifies a series of pathways through which the council can cultivate more resilient and thriving communities through to 2030 and beyond. By embracing a collaborative, community-centric approach that builds on existing engagement structures and partnerships, we can make significant strides in strengthening communities and enhancing wellbeing across the district. Through continued engagement with diverse community voices, including traditionally underrepresented groups, we will ensure that local stakeholders play a full part in delivering the strategy's objectives.
- 7.1.2 Following recent national developments, the strategy will be deployed amidst local government reorganisation and the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Hampshire and the Solent. For Winchester district, whilst the structure of the public bodies who have the ability to deliver services in support of these drivers will shift and change over the coming years, the role of communities has never been more important.
- 7.1.3 The strategy is built on a foundation of evidence gathering, combining in-depth statistical analysis with qualitative insights from community engagement events, interviews, and surveys. This mixed-methods approach has enabled us to develop a nuanced understanding of community needs and aspirations, identifying existing strengths and opportunities for targeted interventions. It will be crucial that we continue to collect and use solid evidence to shape our work and ensure that it remains targeted and focused as time passes and things change around us.
- 7.1.4 The strategy's emphasis on Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles ensures that community capabilities are central to its development and implementation. This focus on leveraging existing assets empowers communities to take ownership of their resilience-building efforts.
- 7.1.5 The pathways set out in the strategy to build social capital and create stronger, more resilient communities require long-term commitment to yield the greatest benefits. However, we will continue to address immediate challenges through short-term interventions that will also yield significant benefits.
- 7.1.6 A key measure of success will be that the Strategy's impact 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.
- 7.1.7 Through the strategy, we have established a clear framework for co-producing improved community resilience across the district. By working together with our communities, we can build a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient Winchester district for all.