



Basingstoke
and Deane

Strengthening Communities Strategy 2022 to 2027



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Portfolio holder foreword

Cabinet Member for Partnerships Cllr Jenny Vaux

Residents have told us that a sense of community is a vital factor in what makes Basingstoke and Deane a great place to live. I recognise the incredible value local communities bring to the life of the borough. I frequently see communities in action, pulling together to improve their local area, running local hubs for services and activities and providing places and ways for people to connect and support each other.

A community can be as small as a collection of immediate neighbours, or it can be about what connects people across a larger geographical area around a place, belief or interest. Basingstoke and Deane has a wide range of communities, each with their own unique strengths, characteristics and ambitions. Whatever it means to each of us, we know how important a sense of community is to people's feeling of belonging and wellbeing.

During the Covid-19 pandemic I was heartened to see the way people came together to rise to the challenge and help others who were isolated or needed support accessing food and medical supplies. It really highlighted the importance of social connections, the strength that exists within our communities identifying what is needed for their local community, and to make sure it is delivered.

We are fortunate in Basingstoke and Deane to have such active individuals and communities, and a strong, diverse community and voluntary sector, which delivers a wide range of valued services in response to local need. It is essential that the council, alongside partner organisations, continues to work with our communities and voluntary organisations with a focus on retaining this strong and vibrant community and voluntary sector.

By setting out our commitments and asks of others, this strategy highlights the importance of everyone playing their part in building stronger communities.



Vision

Enabled communities who are well connected, resilient, self-reliant, and able to influence.

Introduction and scope

Community means different things to different people, but it usually refers to people who are connected by place, background, belief or interest. Although public bodies have specified geographic boundaries, communities tend to organise themselves in whichever way best suits them, whether that be based around the place they live, a common background, shared interests, or a desire to address short-term challenges. A connection to place has been shown to be an important factor in feeling a sense of community and belonging. Communities can be organised formally or informally and can be anything from a small group of residents in a street to a borough-wide constituted organisation.

The council will always take a strengths-based (also known as assets based) approach to working alongside communities, seeking to continually build upon the inherent strengths which already exist, be that skills, knowledge, social connections, or physical assets, enabling them to take a lead on the focus and solution for their own area. Rather than assuming that there is something 'wrong' that needs fixing by an external body, this approach acknowledges that communities are made up of resourceful, resilient people who are capable and able to do things for themselves, usually without any external involvement. A great deal more can be achieved through this approach as starting with strengths helps build on what already exists to achieve greater community benefit.

Strengthening Communities is one of the council's four priority themes within the [Council Plan](#), which sets out the council's plans for supporting local communities to seek improvements to their local area. [Horizon 2050](#) sets out a clear aspiration for the role of community within the Borough: 'The borough will have a strong sense of community where existing and new residents of all ages and backgrounds can live well and happily together.' This strategy is also intended to complement other relevant strategies including the Cultural Framework, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Housing and Homelessness Strategy, all of which recognise the importance of working in partnership with others, including the community and voluntary sector, to engage and empower communities.

We are fortunate in Basingstoke and Deane to have so many individuals and communities who already strive to do more for themselves, supported by a thriving community and voluntary sector, which we recognise as being vital to the quality of life of residents. The council has long tradition of working with communities to deliver local services through a range of measures, such as providing community buildings, advice, guidance, practical support, and funding. To respond to societal and economic changes as well as increasing financial pressures, the council is refining and targeting its approach and seeking further opportunities to build upon the work already undertaken by communities and the voluntary sector, putting emphasis on developing their resilience and self-reliance.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the value of social connection and the inherent strengths within communities. At the beginning, the council, communities, and the community and voluntary sector quickly came together to form local community hubs

providing support to those who needed it most. The level of local volunteer support which came forward meant the response was able to be sustained by the community for far longer than if the council was directly delivering support and to scale up and down in response to need. Although it is recognised that emergencies often trigger a great deal of energy amongst the community, this response was made possible by the strength of existing connections and relationships. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that many people who volunteered throughout the pandemic may not wish or be able to continue to volunteer but there are many who have gone on to take up other voluntary roles with existing organisations, helping to fill skills gaps and provide vital resource. Many of the community organisations involved in the response learned more about their local communities, which has furthered their reach and strengthened their position and connections. There was a great deal of creativity shown by communities as they learned to adapt and respond to challenges, seizing opportunities to work differently and connect more.

In addition to the pandemic response, there have been numerous examples of communities repeatedly stepping forward to help those in need, both to assist people already within the borough and most recently in response to several humanitarian crises taking place in other countries, resulting in individuals and families seeking refuge.

We recognise that each community is unique and that there are significant differences between urban and rural areas, including levels of formal representation and challenges such as isolation and access to services. Equally strengths and skills within each community vary as well as the availability of volunteers, meaning some are in a stronger position than others to respond to their own needs.

We will endeavour to enable communities to build upon the energy, skills, and unique strengths that they bring and to ensure the quieter voices are heard and any barriers to participation are dismantled.

This strategy sets out the guiding principles for the council's future approach to working with communities, including community facilities and funding for the community and voluntary sector.

Our approach will always:

- be community focussed
- work from identified community strengths
- be evidence-led
- embrace equality, diversity, and inclusion
- develop networks and relationships
- promote community benefit

Our commitment to and ask of communities

Theme	Our Commitment:	Our Ask of Communities:
Priority one - proactive and engaged communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on enabling communities to be strong and self-reliant, recognising the need for a flexible approach and ongoing dialogue • Draw upon a range of information and knowledge to build an understanding of changing local strengths and needs to inform the targeting of support and resources • Enable under-represented and new communities to have a voice • Work with others to develop the understanding of what is important for local communities including the community groups themselves, as well as networks and representative organisations • Work with representative groups, including Basingstoke Voluntary Action (BVA) to build capacity, skills and knowledge, to ensure resources are targeted where they are needed most, and that community and voluntary sector organisations can access appropriate support and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to know your neighbours and offer help when needed • Be tolerant of others and embrace diversity within your community • Volunteer your time to help out in your local community • Take opportunities to have your say and help ensure local services respond to local demand • Representative forums and organisations ensure they do what they can to make sure they are truly representative of the communities they speak for
Priority two - maximising community facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance community benefit through a renewed lease structure and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for existing council owned buildings • Continue to seek financial contributions through the planning system for community facilities • Focus new developer contributions from small developments on extending or enhancing existing buildings to respond to the needs of the new development • Establish a consistent approach to community and voluntary organisations seeking to take on existing council owned facilities • Explore a range of options for the ownership and management of new facilities, while ensuring community benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer your time or expertise to help run your local centre or hall or get involved with running local groups and activities • Take part in activities and use services at your local community centre or village hall • Community groups who run community buildings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ understand their role and ensure they reach out to their communities to understand what's happening and match services and activities to local demand ○ work with the council and other organisations to care for and maintain the building to ensure it remains fit for purpose and responds to changing local need

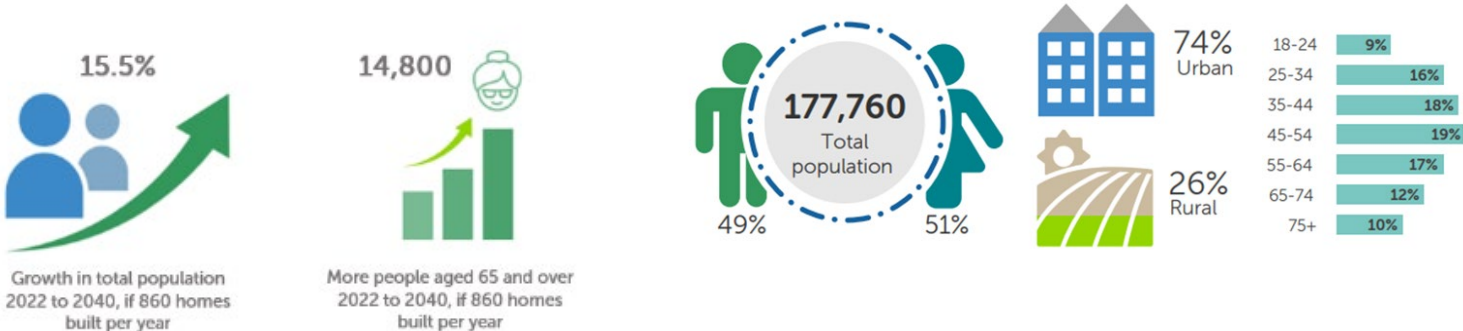
**Priority three
- enabling
through
funding**

- Focus funding on delivery against the council's core priorities and identified community need
 - Work with Basingstoke Voluntary Action to encourage a community and voluntary sector-led approach to external funding that:
 - Seeks greater collaboration across funders and from those seeking funding
 - Simplifies access for a wider range of organisations
 - Enables access to a wider range of funding sources
 - Encourage financial resilience and diversification of funding, such as requiring some match funding or that funds are focused on building sustainability
- Look out for and take opportunities to help fund services and activities in your area, such as the community lottery, local fundraising and crowd funding initiatives
 - Groups seeking funding should:
 - Have a clear funding strategy
 - Understand and respond to the needs of their community
 - Work together
 - Proactively seek funding opportunities from a range of sources



About Basingstoke and Deane communities

Most of the Basingstoke and Deane population is based in urban areas of the borough. Formal representation for local communities is not universal, with less than half of the population being represented by Town and Parish Councils.



Communities within Basingstoke and Deane are growing and changing, and this will continue with rapid growth expected over the coming years. Basingstoke and Deane communities are also increasingly diverse with increasing numbers of people expected to move into the borough from both within and outside the UK.



Basingstoke and Deane's community and voluntary sector¹

There are an estimated 675 Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations across the borough, 192 of which are registered charities.

VCSE organisations are served by a workforce consisting of over 1,398 employees and 4700+ volunteers (including 1,100+ Trustees)

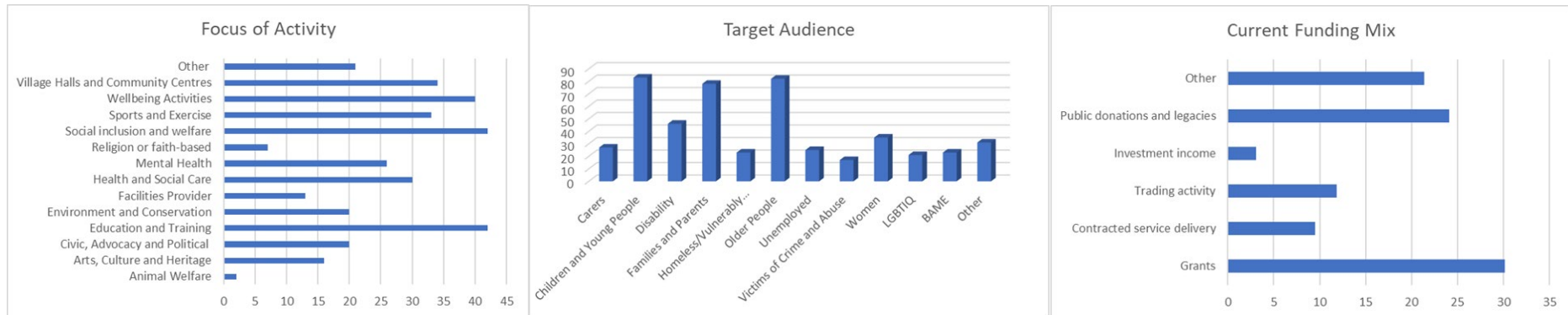


The majority are classed as micro (income of less than £10,000 per year) or small (income of £10,000 to £100,000)

Grant funding is the primary source of income, followed by public donations.

¹ Provided by Basingstoke Voluntary Action (BVA).

These findings are based primarily on a survey conducted by BVA in June-August 2021. Information has also been drawn from a range of secondary sources including the Charity Commission, Action Hampshire and Basingstoke Voluntary Action's own records, demographic information from Hampshire County Council and various others



The key identified needs of the VCSE sector were:²

Volunteering - Organisations reported a need to revisit their volunteer recruitment methods and receive assistance in building their volunteer workforce

Funding – support around bid writing, finding funding opportunities and assisting with diversification of income all feature strongly

Marketing and promotion – organisations increasingly report a need for assistance with building awareness of what their organisation delivers

² Provided by Basingstoke Voluntary Action (BVA).

These findings are based primarily on a survey conducted by BVA in June-August 2021. Information has also been drawn from a range of secondary sources including the Charity Commission, Action Hampshire and Basingstoke Voluntary Action’s own records, demographic information from Hampshire County Council and various others

Knowing and listening to our communities

Many things come together to make a great place to live and for communities to thrive. The latest [residents' survey](#) tells us our residents feel Basingstoke and Deane is a great place.



Residents also told us that the top five things that are most important in making a great place to live are:



The council has many roles in addressing these – as steward of the local area, as landowner, enabling and championing its communities and bringing people and organisations together to achieve better, as well as through the services it provides directly.

The council continually draws on information from a wide range of sources that tells us what communities say is both “strong and wrong” and what their aspirations are for the future. For example:

- In the consultation for Horizon 2050, “a sense of community” was the third most mentioned aspect in making somewhere a good place to live (25% of residents) and was a popular spontaneous mention in what residents would like the borough to be known for in 2050.
- Our Residents’ Survey (2019) tells us around a fifth (18%) of residents had provided unpaid help or support in the last 12 months, through religious activities, working with people with disabilities and the elderly. Barriers to providing unpaid help and support were identified as not having enough time, not knowing what opportunities are available and people being unwilling to help.
- Consultations help shape local areas on matters such as planning and environmental improvement schemes, and council services such as car parking and play facilities. Engagement for the emerging Local Recreation and Needs Assessment has focussed on how residents and management organisations view the local provision for sport and community facilities.
- Community-led engagement such as Neighbourhood/Community-led Plans have been instigated and led by geographical communities to understand the needs, identify local issues, and set out community ambitions on how their community could develop in the future. There are currently 11 [Neighbourhood Plans](#) and several more in development that focus on spatial planning, while [community-led plans](#) have identified a wide range of issues that are important to that local community, from activities for all ages, to developing communication channels. By their very nature they are all tailored to respond to the local circumstances and aspirations.
- Council service areas are attuned to local demand through their daily contact such as those running community organisations in council buildings, giving time as conservation volunteers on council land and the enquiries from voluntary and community organisations seeking accommodation, and through their connections with other organisations – such as for housing, health, and community safety. A recent survey of the voluntary sector by Basingstoke Voluntary Action has been shared giving insights to the state of the sector and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.

Priority one - proactive and engaged communities

Everyone has a role to play in making Basingstoke and Deane a great place. The council delivers a wide range of services to the community focussed on making the borough clean, safe, and prosperous, while supporting the most vulnerable. Some services must be provided but some are discretionary and are offered because residents have said they are important to them. Everyone who lives and works in the borough can also contribute. There are a wide range of things people can do to help, most of which everyone does at some point, sometimes without realising the difference they are making. Examples include anything from assisting neighbours, picking up litter, helping maintain open spaces, reporting broken streetlights and potholes to volunteering time or donating funds to organisations which deliver services or helping respond to local emergencies. Every contribution, no matter how big or small, helps develop a better borough, which we can all be proud of.

In addition to the council's range of legal responsibilities to directly provide services to residents, there are additional duties that require actions to be taken to ensure there is equitable access to services for specific members of the community, including:

- people who may experience inequality or discrimination ([Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#))
- young adults leaving care ([Care Leavers Local Offer](#))
- members of the armed forces ([Armed Forces Community Covenant](#))

The council takes these duties seriously and has taken actions to meet these duties and to progress further work to ensure people have equitable access and opportunity.

The community and voluntary sector has always played a vital role in delivering local services, which complement those of the council and partner organisations and very often fill unmet gaps. The sector has also demonstrated, through the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability to respond flexibly to provide longer term support to people in need. While the council had a significant role in co-ordinating the initial response, only by working closely with community and voluntary sector organisations was it possible to set up local community hubs, which took a community-led approach to ensuring people who needed food, medical supplies and practical and emotional support were able to access services locally. The response from the local community to the crisis was inspiring and this has been seen in the past in response to other emergencies, particularly flooding. In times of crisis the strengths and connections that exist within communities are vital. It should however be recognised that these strengths bring additional challenges. There is currently increasing demand to deliver additional or more specialist services as public authorities face greater pressures on budgets and recognise the benefits that can be achieved by working with the community and voluntary sector.

In Basingstoke and Deane, Basingstoke Voluntary Action (BVA) acts as the infrastructure organisation for the community and voluntary sector. BVA has an important role in supporting, advising and connecting community and voluntary sector organisations and acting as a voice for the sector, to ensure there is an understanding amongst the council and partner organisations of the

strengths of the community and voluntary sector and the scale and nature of the challenges faced. BVA played a significant role during the Covid-19 pandemic, helping to co-ordinate the community response to ensure people's basic needs for food and medicine were met and to limit social isolation. The council works closely with BVA to build understanding of what is going on for the sector, how well it is responding to community need and to ensure organisations can access the advice, guidance and support they require in order to collectively focus on enabling and strengthening communities and the community and voluntary sector.

The council works closely with a range of representative forums and umbrella organisations for the community and voluntary sector, who each have a role to play in striving for equitable community representation across the borough. We want to ensure we do what we can to help strengthen the sector and recognise that by working in partnership alongside these organisations and where appropriate enabling them to take a lead will help strengthen their position. Where support is provided to a community and voluntary sector organisation or group, be it through advice and guidance, practical support, funding, or a building, the expectation is that those forums and organisations will ensure they act as a representative voice for their communities and that any barriers to participation are identified and broken down. It is however recognised that not everyone is represented by a forum or organisation and therefore it is vital that there is a range of mechanisms to enable the council to engage with communities and ensure that quieter voices are heard.

By working alongside communities and partner organisations, the council will seek to continually develop an understanding of changing strengths and needs across Basingstoke and Deane. This is intended to enable communities, the council and other organisations to have an evidence base to help inform local activities, services, and investment decisions. Communities and organisations seeking funding, must be able to demonstrate a need and demand for their services.

The borough is made up of a collection of urban and rural areas, each of which face their own unique challenges and many of which are represented by town and parish councils. Engagement with them is critical to ensuring the council understands the challenges and opportunities faced in the areas of the borough they represent. However, there is a disparity across Basingstoke and Deane as many areas are not represented in this way. Therefore, it is essential that there are also a range of mechanisms to connect with local communities, not represented by Town and Parish councils, such as through place-based community groups and organisations. Councillors have a specific role in understanding and enabling their communities. They help balance competing needs and interests and raise the profile of what is impacting on local people.

Although communities already do a great deal for themselves, the landscape is varied, and resources, skills, representation and levels of volunteering are not equal. This means that there is a need to adapt the approach to respond to the circumstances of different communities. There are situations where some communities may need additional help, either with advice and guidance or accessing funding. When working with communities, there are a range of approaches, which can be used. In most cases, when communities need assistance, they can be signposted to or connected with the most appropriate organisation to provide information or advice. In some circumstances, other communities, who have faced similar situations, will be able to provide support and in others either a specialist representative organisation or the council will need to directly give advice and guidance, and practical support. These approaches are all focussed on ensuring communities can access the knowledge and tools they need to act themselves and remain self-sufficient.

Universal	Signposting and connecting to information and support	Signposting to information or connecting with organisations which are best suited to provide advice and guidance and can support with governance, business planning and accessing external funding, such as BVA and wider professional advice such as ACAS
	Peer support	Connecting with other communities who have faced similar situations and are able to share experience and provide relevant support
	Universal training	A training programme is made available to the Community and Voluntary sector through BVA, part funded by the council.
Specialist	Advice, guidance, and specialist support	Direct targeted support based on knowledge and experience of council staff, helping to develop an action plan where previous interventions have not achieved the desired outcome. This can involve drawing in expertise from a range of internal teams or external organisations as appropriate.
	Connecting	Linking communities to and brokering relationships with other groups that serve the same area, to promote understanding, develop collaboration and connect to neighbours to support developing community cohesion.

We will:

- Focus on enabling communities to be strong and self-reliant, recognising the need for a flexible approach and ongoing dialogue
- Draw upon a range of information and knowledge to build an understanding of changing local strengths and needs to inform the targeting of support and resources
- Enable under-represented and new communities to have a voice
- Work with others to develop the understanding of what is important for local communities including the community groups themselves, as well as networks and representative organisations
- Work with representative groups, including Basingstoke Voluntary Action (BVA) to build capacity, skills and knowledge, to ensure resources are targeted where they are needed most, and that community and voluntary sector organisations can access appropriate support and guidance



Priority two - maximising community facilities

Community facilities provide local place-based hubs for a wide range of activities delivered by and for communities. There are over 100 community buildings in the borough, managed and run by various community organisations, including town and parish councils and village hall committees. Of these, 23 are council owned community centres leased to independent community organisations, community associations and other charities, all required to operate within charity law. Six of these are within parish/town council areas while many of the other facilities are within urban areas.

These facilities are a crucial resource for local communities, providing essential services and developing community cohesion. The range of services and activities that run from community buildings support those attending sessions and events and provide a positive impact on the wider local community. Since 2016/17 there have been over a million visits to council-owned centres annually (apart from 20/21 when closures and social distancing were mandated in response to Covid-19). In 2018/19 footfall was up by 5% on the previous year, 12 youth groups were running for various ages, centres were delivering activities for older people, education and skills, recreation, health, and wellbeing, as well as community events. During 2021/22, there was a notable recovery, with footfall around three times the same period last year, signalling confidence and desire of communities to return to their local facilities, accessing services and taking part in activities.

Local community buildings provide essential resident support and safe havens during extreme events. Many community centres opened during the Covid-19 pandemic as Community Hubs, supporting their local communities with access to food and medication and looking after the welfare of their residents. They have continued to provide both access to permitted support groups during lockdowns, such as for addiction, and childcare supporting families of key workers. During the 2014 flooding event the community centre in Buckskin operated for 24 hours a day for six weeks.

Given the significant value of these facilities to local communities, the council will focus efforts on ensuring they can continue to act as local hubs, providing services which respond to local need. It is vital that the community can influence how these facilities are used and the services they provide to ensure they are being used to deliver maximum community benefit. By reviewing the current lease arrangements and developing a renewed lease structure, the council will seek to ensure that council owned buildings are always used to provide benefit to the local community and respond to identified need through the introduction of service level agreements (SLAs).

The council is committed to ensuring that where there is new development within the borough, contributions are sought from developers to contribute towards community infrastructure. Where the scale of the development does not justify a new community facility, the council will direct contributions towards enabling existing community facilities to, where possible, either be extended or enhanced to respond to the needs of the new development.

We will:

- Enhance community benefit through a renewed lease structure and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for existing council owned buildings
- Continue to seek financial contributions through the planning system for community facilities
- Focus new developer contributions from small developments on extending or enhancing existing buildings to respond to the needs of the new development
- Establish a consistent approach to community and voluntary organisations seeking to take on existing council owned facilities
- Explore a range of options for the ownership and management of new facilities, while ensuring community benefit



Priority three – enabling through funding

The council currently provides funding to the community and voluntary sector through competitive grant schemes to deliver services and programmes in the community. The criteria for these reflect changing needs and priorities. The funding provided by the council is split between core funding for organisations considered to be of strategic importance for the borough and funding for short term programmes.

Given the increasing pressures on finances and the learning from recent years, it is necessary to review and refine the focus of council funding for communities. The pressures are being felt both by funders and the community and voluntary sector and to ensure organisations can sustain the work they do, there needs to be a clear focus on using available funding to help develop greater financial resilience and enabling access to a greater range of funding sources. It is also essential that we encourage opportunities for greater collaboration between voluntary and community sector organisations as well as between potential funders.

We will:

- Focus funding on delivery against the council's core priorities and identified community need
- Work with BVA to encourage a community and voluntary sector-led approach to external funding that:
 - Seeks greater collaboration across funders and from those seeking funding
 - Simplifies access for a wider range of organisations
 - Enables access to a wider range of funding sources
- Encourage financial resilience and diversification of funding, such as requiring elements of match funding or that funds are focused on building sustainability

What success looks like over the next five years

- Services delivered by the community and voluntary sector are targeted towards meeting identified demand, building upon existing strengths and are accessible to the local community.
- Residents feel like they belong to their local community.
- Community facilities are vibrant places, used to bring benefit to their local community, ensuring the activities and support available is tailored to local need.
- Organisations benefiting from council funding can demonstrate a greater level of financial resilience and sustainability as a result

High level actions:

Theme	Action
Proactive and engaged communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed an enabling culture across council services, empowering residents to take actions for themselves • Work with partners to collectively understand what is happening in communities from a range of community insights • Seek to facilitate community-led solutions to local issues • Build upon existing relationships and networks that enable residents to take action • Support the volunteering drive within the community and voluntary sector • Connect the business community with local volunteering opportunities • Promote volunteering opportunities amongst council staff
Maximising community facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the approach to managing existing community facilities with a focus on enhancing community benefit • Revise the community building strategy to inform the local plan update • Explore different approaches to the management of new facilities in new communities • Develop a consistent approach to community organisations seeking to take on responsibility for a community building
Enabling through funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot a Strengthening Communities grant scheme to support the community and voluntary sector with building capacity and resilience to better meet community need • Conduct a review of community and voluntary sector funding in 2022/23

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