

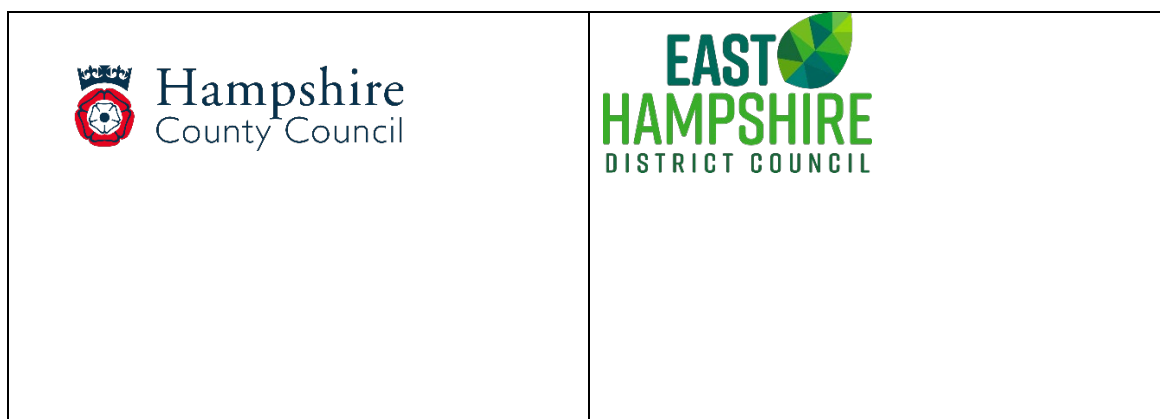
Appendix C

Neighbourhood Model: Local Voices, Lasting Change

Local Voices, Lasting Change

A report to the UK Government on Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's vision for local government reorganisation to reinvigorate localism and democratic participation across the region of Hampshire and the Solent.

Our vision is founded on evidence-based guiding principles and compelling opportunities for future unitary councils in our region to be responsive and inclusive of local voices and identities, enable stronger community engagement, and deliver genuine and lasting opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.



September 2025

List of Maps and Case Studies

Map

Map 1: The four future unitary councils proposed by Hampshire and East Hampshire, covering the region of Hampshire and the Solent

Map 2: Population Density by Lower Super Output Area in Hampshire and the Solent

Case Study

Case Study 1: An ABCD approach to addressing local issues in East Petersfield

Case Study 2: A partnership approach to tackling obesity in Hampshire

Case Study 3: Rowlands Castle Flood Action Group – Community Resilience in Action

Case Study 4: ABCD – Foodbanks in East Hampshire

Case Study 5: Co-production in Hampshire's adults' health and care services

Case Study 6: Community Asset Transfer – Woodlands Hall

Case study 7: Petersfield Neighbourhood Plan

Case Study 8: Romsey Citizens' Assemblies

Case Study 9: Councillors and Community Development teams: Buriton Pond

Case Study 10: Muslim women's Pilates classes in East Hampshire

Case Study 11: Libraries and Community Hubs

Case study 12: Gosport Heritage Generator – Hampshire Cultural Trust

Case Study 13: Staunton Country Park

Note: All webpages in the footnotes were accessed on 9 September 2025, unless otherwise stated.

Executive Summary

Local government reorganisation provides an opportunity for wholesale culture change in how local government works, by fully adopting a neighbourhood empowerment approach that reshapes how councils work with and for their communities.

Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's proposal for four new unitary councils covering the Hampshire and the Solent region offers a long-term financially viable model that would enable councils to meet their statutory responsibilities, while unlocking the capacity to invest in community-focused transformation of public services through neighbourhood empowerment.

The 'traditional model' of working has largely seen local authorities and public institutions setting policies and delivering services that affect localities. In effect, *doing to* communities. The neighbourhood empowerment approach in Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's proposal turns this on its head and would ensure local empowerment is central to both strategic and operational activity. It would require close partnership working between public institutions and communities, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and town and parish councils, so that the grassroots knowledge, skills and ambition of a community help to shape and direct local service delivery and decision-making. It would create a model that *delivers with* communities.

This report responds to the views of residents, town and parish councils, VCSE organisations, businesses and partners across the region of Hampshire and the Solent who took part in Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's engagement activities on local government reorganisation during summer 2025. The engagement showed there is strong appetite among residents and local partners to have greater say and influence over what happens in their area. It also highlighted community concerns that new unitary councils could be too large and remote to understand the distinctive identities, characteristics and priorities of all communities and places in their area, particularly in cases where small towns and rural villages are in the same council area as one of the region's major cities of Portsmouth and Southampton.

Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's proposal directly responds to these concerns by embedding neighbourhood empowerment at the heart of our vision for the new unitary councils. This approach would ensure that communities are not only heard but actively supported and enabled to shape, deliver, and sustain locally relevant services and solutions.

Councillors would play a vital role in this model as community convenors: trusted local leaders who bring people together, connect ideas, and help turn community ambition into action. Their deep understanding of place, combined with dedicated support and the right tools, would enable them to champion local priorities and foster collaboration between residents, voluntary groups, and public services. In doing so,

they would help communities build on what matters most to them, whether that is a local green space, a historic building, a community group, or a shared passion, and in turn, strengthen the unique identity of each place.

Local identity is not defined by administrative boundaries; it is a foundation of community resilience, pride, and participation. Across Hampshire and the Solent, identity is shaped by history, geography, culture, and the everyday experiences of people who live and work in our cities, towns, villages, and communities. By harnessing the passion, commitment, skills, and deep local knowledge that already exist in our communities, the new unitary councils would be well-placed to create the conditions for people and local partners to thrive. Empowered communities would be equipped to support their neighbours, respond to challenges such as flooding, manage and enhance local assets, and develop services that reflect local priorities. This is how we ensure that local government remains rooted in place, responsive to people, and reflective of the diverse identities that define our region.

Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's vision for future neighbourhood empowerment is centred on the following conditions for success:

- **Financially sustainable local government:** Initiatives that build the capacity and resilience of communities require sustained investment in community-led, person-centred and place-based approaches. Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's strategic business case presents rigorous financial modelling that demonstrates how four unitary councils in Hampshire and the Solent would offer strong potential for efficiencies and savings through reorganisation, which would lay the foundations for sustained investment in neighbourhood empowerment.
- **A strengths-based organisational culture:** Embedded at every level of the new unitary councils, where community voices help shape the decisions and services that impact them. This would represent a step change from the 'traditional model' of engagement with communities, where local authorities and other public sector organisations *do to* residents, to one that will *deliver with* them.
- **A 'no one-size-fits-all' approach to engagement with communities:** All future unitary councils, regardless of size, would need to adopt flexible and responsive approaches to community engagement and empowerment in order to speak to all voices in their area. Even relatively small administrative geographies, such as council wards, include a variety of communities and partnerships with different ideas, priorities and solutions for improving their local areas.

Six principles for effective future neighbourhood empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent

Informed by our summer engagement activities, desk-based research and lessons learned from East Hampshire's Transformation Programme, Hampshire County

Council and East Hampshire District Council have identified six principles to guide future decisions on effective neighbourhood empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent.

| Principle | Summary |
|--|--|
| Build on community strengths | Through an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, the skills, knowledge, ambition and resources within the community are unlocked and enabled so communities can deliver local solutions and influence asset and service delivery. |
| Build on existing good practice | A future model would build on the good practice that is already taking place to empower local communities throughout the Hampshire and Solent region. |
| Partnership approach | Delivering solutions with town and parish councils, the VCSE sector and the community, in partnership and with trust, encouraging co-design and co-evaluation of activity. |
| Inclusion | Officers could actively build links with all sectors of the community, to enable all voices to be heard, as opposed to just hearing the loudest voice. |
| Prevention and resilience | The future model would not just be responsive to the immediate concerns and priorities of local communities but also involve communities in programmes and initiatives that support local resilience and prevent reliance on acute health and care services for the long term. |
| Long-term outlook | A future model would be founded on financially sustainable public services, in order to facilitate long-term commitment and investment in the discretionary place-focused services that matter to communities. |

The three themes – How neighbourhood empowerment can be delivered

The six guiding principles have shaped three interconnected core themes on *how* neighbourhood empowerment could be delivered by the future unitary councils. There is considerable scope to build on existing best practice across Hampshire and the Solent, and existing community mobilisation supported by a strong VCSE sector and active town and parish councils. However, simply continuing with existing mechanisms risks retaining the *doing to* approach. This report suggests opportunities that could enable existing community mobilisation to reach its full potential. One such opportunity will see East Hampshire District Council evolve some of its existing place-shaping forums and pilot broader Neighbourhood Area Committee models for the next two years, providing the new unitary councils with evidence and options to inform their decisions on future governance and delivery.

| Theme | Opportunities for the future councils' neighbourhood empowerment model |
|---|--|
| Councils as enabling organisations | Empowerment culture through ABCD approach Coordination by Community Development teams Co-production and co-evaluation of key strategies Social value policy Framework for community asset transfers Neighbourhood covenants with the VCSE Neighbourhood Planning Enhancing digital and in-person engagement |
| Neighbourhood governance as a vehicle for empowering communities | Neighbourhood Area Committees Collaboration with town and parish councils Deliberative and participatory democracy |
| Councillors as community convenors | Dedicated support for councillors Ward profiles Representation and inclusion |

Next steps

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council will use this report as the basis for further and deeper conversations with communities and local partners on opportunities for future neighbourhood empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent following local government reorganisation. This will include exploring with health and policing partners how neighbourhood empowerment in local government would align and dovetail with future neighbourhood health services and neighbourhood policing.

Hampshire and East Hampshire will work collaboratively with partners and communities throughout the period before vesting day in order to co-develop an evidence base on effective community engagement and empowerment approaches to inform the decisions made by the future unitary councils and councillors on the design and delivery of their neighbourhood empowerment models. The evidence base will include the findings of East Hampshire District Council's pilots of Neighbourhood Area Committees, which will be co-designed with local communities. Hampshire and East Hampshire will also seek to embed a culture of empowerment into the design and implementation of the new unitary councils.

Done well, neighbourhood empowerment will enable communities to co-design services, influence strategy and take ownership of local solutions. Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's proposal for local government reorganisation, founded on a simpler, stronger and financially secure model of four unitary councils, would offer strong potential for lasting transformation of public services centred on local communities.

By placing local voices at the heart of decision-making, Hampshire's and East Hampshire's proposal would create lasting change that strengthens identity, builds community capacity, and transforms how councils and communities work together.

Introduction: The case for neighbourhood empowerment

Hampshire and the Solent is a region defined by the diversity of its people, geography, history and culture.² From the bustling port cities of Southampton and Portsmouth, the coastal and island settlements of Gosport, Hayling Island and Isle of Wight, and the tranquil landscapes and small rural villages in the New Forest, South Downs and North Wessex Downs; to the historic city of Winchester and the vibrant market towns like Basingstoke, Farnborough, Andover, Eastleigh and Fareham that knit the region together, Hampshire and the Solent is home to many different kinds of communities and identities, each deeply rooted in local pride and connection (explored further in Appendix 3).

The rich tapestry of places that form the Hampshire and Solent region shapes how people live, work, and relate to their local community. It is also the foundation for neighbourhood empowerment. When people feel connected to the place where they live, they are more likely to take action, support one another, and contribute to the wellbeing of their neighbourhood. This sense of belonging is not just emotional; it is practical. It strengthens the health, cohesion and resilience of communities and fosters local innovation.

That is why communities must have a leading role in shaping places, so that the local infrastructure and services meet the requirements of the people who live, work, study and visit there. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' method to achieving this. Every place has unique identity and characteristics, and communities have different needs. Inequitable access to services, infrastructure, skills and resources often present barriers for communities to shape the places where they spend much of their time.

Communities possess considerable skills, ambition and understanding of their local area, and are well positioned to drive local solutions for the benefit of all. This was seen on a great scale in terms of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and shows how communities can and will mobilise to support each other when given the opportunity and support. This is central to the UK Government's policy agenda on neighbourhood empowerment.

Neighbourhood empowerment is a step change from local government's traditional model of engagement with communities

The 'traditional model' of working has largely seen local authorities and public sector partners setting policies and delivering services that affect localities. This leads to an over-reliance on public services and hinders community resilience. It also fails to fully unlock the skills, ambition, knowledge and capacity that exists in the community. Additionally, it creates a lack of trust by the community in local democracy and a subsequent disengagement.

² The term 'Hampshire and the Solent' denotes the combined area of the upper tier local authorities of Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight.

Local government reorganisation provides an opportunity for a complete culture change in how local government works. The neighbourhood empowerment approach turns the traditional model on its head. It requires a culture change at all levels of a council, ensuring community empowerment is central to both strategic and operational activity. It requires close partnership working between public institutions and communities, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and town and parish councils, so that the grassroots knowledge, skills and ambition of a community help to shape, tailor and direct local service delivery and decision-making. It creates a model that *delivers with* communities.

Local government reorganisation is an opportunity to reset and rewire how councils work with communities

Local authorities are closely tied to the places they serve, making them well-positioned to support community-led initiatives and foster meaningful local engagement. In February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution sent a statutory invitation to the Leaders of the 15 county, district and unitary councils in Hampshire and the Solent to request the submission of a proposal for local government reorganisation covering the entire area.³ The statutory invitation sets out criteria against which the Government will assess reorganisation proposals, including:

- Criteria 4b): Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- Criteria 6): New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

In this report, Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council respond to the UK Government's statutory invitation to demonstrate that our proposal for four new unitary councils covering Hampshire and the Solent meets criteria 4b and 6.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council are required to respond directly to the statutory invitation and assessment criteria. However, we recognise that final decisions about how the new unitary councils will empower communities will be made by those future councils and their elected members. To avoid pre-empting their decisions, this report presents guiding principles, ideas and opportunities that the new unitary councils could explore in the development of a future 'neighbourhood empowerment model'.

During summer 2025, Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council undertook surveys and engagement activities to seek the views of councillors, cross-sector partners and residents throughout Hampshire and the Solent on local government reorganisation (Appendix 1). The opportunity for

³ MHCLG. 6 February 2025. [Letter: Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton.](#)

enhanced local influence over decision-making and neighbourhood services was one of the most consistently cited potential benefits of reorganisation, particularly among residents:

“[A potential benefit of reorganisation is] decisions can be made more locally to better address the needs of an individual community.”

Hampshire Perspectives

“[Reorganisation] could mean that local people will be listened to more about what they want changed about their local area and what they want done for it to become better and be fixed.”

Engagement with Young People

“[A potential benefit of reorganisation is] More localised services and staff with a more in-depth knowledge of those areas.”

Public Survey

Beyond responding to the Minister’s criteria, this report builds on the views of residents in Hampshire and the Solent by highlighting the timely opportunity that local government reorganisation represents to rewire and strengthen the relationship between councils and communities through neighbourhood empowerment approaches.

Neighbourhood empowerment can unlock significant benefits for communities and councils

In times of crisis, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic and incidents of severe flooding, the benefits of empowered neighbourhoods are at their most visible. It is always the local, community-led response to crisis that is the most rapid, compassionate and impactful, with individuals, community groups, councillors and businesses using their local knowledge and networks to provide food, medication and acts of kindness where they are most needed. These experiences demonstrate that – whether in emergencies or in general day-to-day life – communities are often best placed to know what they may require to become healthier, happier, more connected and more resilient, while reducing reliance on acute services for complex health, care and housing issues.

Evidence shows that initiatives which facilitate community-led action can help reduce demand and reliance on high-cost acute services by improving individual wellbeing and independence; strengthening community resilience; and embedding prevention and early intervention into public service policy and delivery.⁴ Through enabling such

⁴ New Local. 2021. [Community Power: The Evidence](#).

outcomes, neighbourhood empowerment approaches offer possibilities for financial savings for councils and other public services in the long term.

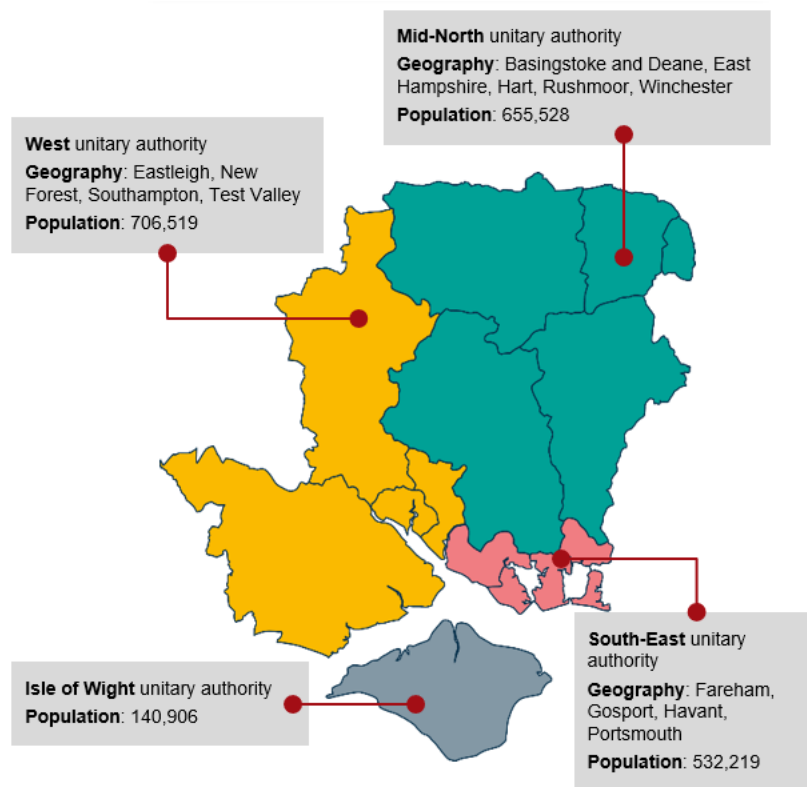
Neighbourhood empowerment is not a standalone solution to the financial pressures facing councils and the wider economic, health and social challenges communities experience. Nor is it about shifting responsibilities away from councils. Instead, it offers a way to unlock the strengths and assets within all kinds of communities and neighbourhoods – whether in urban, rural, coastal, affluent or deprived areas – and enable more proactive and preventative approaches to local issues. By supporting residents to take part in place-making, empowering councillors to convene and represent their communities, and fostering strong partnerships with other public bodies, town and parish councils, and VCSE organisations, councils can help enhance the wellbeing, capacity and resilience of neighbourhoods and thereby reduce the longer-term need for costly intervention-based services.

Neighbourhood empowerment is not only a mechanism for improving services and strengthening resilience; it is also the key to preserving and celebrating the distinctive identities, heritage and culture of communities. If empowerment approaches are delivered successfully, communities will help shape the council strategies and services that affect them and influence how these are applied locally in ways that reflect and respect their unique character. These opportunities should be central to the local government reorganisation process in order to stimulate re-engagement in participatory democracy.

Across Hampshire and the Solent, local people, groups and organisations are actively shaping their places, supported and enabled by the 15 counties, district and unitary councils. This report features a range of examples and case studies that highlight how councils are working with communities to unlock local strengths, mobilise assets and co-create solutions. These, and other examples of best practice, will continue to feed into the ideas, opportunities, data, innovation and research that Hampshire and East Hampshire co-develop with partners and residents to inform the new unitary councils' decision-making on their future neighbourhood empowerment models.

Four unitary councils would provide strong potential for genuine and sustained neighbourhood empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent

In July 2025, following consideration of an evidence-based options appraisal, the Cabinets of Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council concluded that four new unitary councils would be the most suitable outcome for effective future local government in Hampshire and the Solent that meets the terms and criteria for local government reorganisation defined in the Minister's statutory invitation.



Map 1: The four future unitary councils proposed by Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council, covering the region of Hampshire and the Solent

Reorganisation offers opportunities for strengthening and simplifying how residents and partners interact with councils about local services, but it could also pose challenges and risks for community engagement and protecting local identities. Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have actively listened to concerns raised by Hampshire and Solent residents and town and parish councils that the future unitary councils could be too large and too remote to understand the diverse identities and needs of all communities in their area, and that smaller rural and urban communities could struggle to make their voices heard by a new council that includes a major urban centre like Portsmouth or Southampton.

The ideas in this report signal Hampshire's and East Hampshire's commitment to identifying and co-producing solutions to the concerns raised in our engagement activities, thereby also bringing considerable added value to our proposal. In doing so, we are guided by the principle that ***it is how a council works effectively with communities within its boundary that is more critical to neighbourhood empowerment than the size of the council's geographic area.***

Even within smaller administrative geographies like council wards and divisions, different kinds of communities co-exist and have different priorities for their hyperlocal neighbourhood areas. Genuine neighbourhood empowerment in a unitary council area is made possible by a model that is founded on equal partnerships; is inclusive of all local voices, not just the loudest; uses Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and a variety of engagement methods to ensure decisions are

informed by a data-driven understanding of all local communities; and is sufficiently responsive, adaptable and flexible to enable communities to shape public services to the characteristics and requirements of their places.

Such a model can be scaled to any number of future unitary councils but will only lead to positive outcomes in local communities if a council can afford to implement it.

Financial sustainability is a prerequisite for future unitary councils to deliver genuine and inclusive neighbourhood empowerment.

For councils and other public organisations, local empowerment is an ‘invest to save’ initiative, requiring multi-year investment in place-making, partnerships and the employment of dedicated Community Development teams. By enabling communities to shape services and take greater ownership of local solutions, councils could reduce demand on high-cost statutory services. Hampshire’s and East Hampshire’s modelling indicates that four unitary councils in Hampshire and the Solent would have strong potential to achieve net financial savings from the reorganisation process, whereas five unitary councils would not deliver any financial savings in the first five years and would cost more than the current local government arrangements in the region.⁵

Even with the net financial benefits modelled from four unitary councils, there remains a significant risk that future unitary councils would face difficulties meeting rising demand for statutory services and therefore struggle to commit meaningful resource to their neighbourhood empowerment model. ***The UK Government has an essential role in facilitating neighbourhood empowerment by ensuring its governance, resourcing and regulations form an ‘enabling environment’***, in which councils and other public service bodies across all areas of England receive, and have the authority to raise, sufficient funding to meet their statutory duties and invest sustainably in place-based preventative and discretionary services.⁶

Local voices and lasting change are at the heart of Hampshire County Council’s and East Hampshire District Council’s proposal for local government reorganisation in Hampshire and the Solent. The next chapter of this report sets out six guiding principles to support the new unitary authorities in establishing organisations which are built on a culture of empowerment.

Six principles for effective neighbourhood empowerment

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have identified six principles that underpin effective models of neighbourhood empowerment. These principles have been shaped by desk-based research; engagement with residents,

⁵ See the Strategic Business Case, and Hampshire County Council. 18 July 2025. [Decision Report: English Devolution White Paper – Local Government Reorganisation](#). pp.34-36.

⁶ LGA et al. 3 July 2025. [Trusting place: Improving the lives of local people through place-based approaches](#).

councillors and partners; and lessons learned through East Hampshire's Transformation Programme

The six principles describe the conditions necessary for councils to successfully deliver stronger community engagement, support local identities and enable genuine opportunity for the empowerment of communities. They have shaped the content of this report and will continue to shape further activities to embed a culture of empowerment into the design of the new unitary councils.

The six guiding principles are:

1. Build on community strengths (asset-based community development)
2. Build on existing good practice
3. Partnership approach
4. Inclusion
5. Prevention and resilience
6. Long-term outlook

1) Build on community strengths (asset-based community development)

Community mobilisation already takes place on a wide scale across Hampshire and the Solent, with a significant number of community groups and volunteers coalescing around particular issues and driving local solutions themselves. Examples include setting up and running local foodbanks and community pantries, dementia support groups and community transport schemes, as well as a plentiful number of sports clubs and social clubs run by volunteers and supported by the VCSE sector.

This activity belies a greater community strength: there is significant pride, identity, ambition and skill in communities which the old, traditional local authority model of engagement did not fully unlock. Communities are passionate about their local area and will often be best placed to fully understand the issues that need addressing. When given the chance, they are also often best placed to shape and drive the solutions.

The new unitary model has an opportunity to build on these community strengths by adopting an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to deliver neighbourhood empowerment. This approach uses the assets that already exist in local communities as the foundation for driving positive changes and outcomes in neighbourhoods. There are three types of assets involved: Physical assets (e.g. buildings, benches, market squares and public toilets), Environmental assets (e.g. parks, open spaces and public rights of way), and social assets (e.g. the skills, ambitions, knowledge that exist in the community). The latter is central to a new unitary delivering neighbourhood empowerment.

ABCD is not about delegating tasks; it is about shifting power. It requires councils to create the conditions for communities to step into power, while offering support, resources and trust. With dedicated Community Development teams to build capacity and foster collaboration, councils can enable communities to become a key arm of

local delivery. This is not just a better way of working; it is a necessary one. When communities are empowered to shape services and strategy, they become more resilient, more connected, and less reliant on public services, helping councils to manage demand and resources more sustainably. Case Study 1 at the end of the chapter tells the story of how an ABCD approach helped address local issues in Petersfield, East Hampshire.

2) Build on existing good practice

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to genuine neighbourhood empowerment in a region as geographically and demographically diverse as Hampshire and the Solent. Over many years, good practice has developed naturally around the identities, preferences and priorities of local communities.

The new unitary councils' approach to neighbourhood empowerment could retain and build on good practice where possible and potentially involve the future Hampshire and Solent Mayor in supporting the creation of opportunities and networks for sharing good practice across the region. Appendix 4 shines a spotlight on a variety of examples of existing good practice on community engagement and empowerment, enabled and supported by councils throughout Hampshire and the Solent region.

3) Partnership approach

The UK Government's emerging policy agenda on neighbourhoods will require public sector bodies such as councils, the NHS and police forces to work together more effectively in local geographies, such as council wards and potentially Primary Care Network (PCN) areas if these are aligned with neighbourhood health areas.⁷ The current national policy context on neighbourhoods is reviewed in Appendix 2.

Strong multi-agency partnerships are already delivering positive outcomes in places across Hampshire and the Solent, as Case Study 2 at the end of this chapter illustrates. In Hampshire and the Solent, local government reorganisation could provide impetus and opportunity for large public bodies to develop a joined-up partnership approach to neighbourhood services and empowerment, underpinned by Joint Strategic Needs Assessment data and engagement that identify the needs and strengths of communities.

This partnership approach could include the establishment of Neighbourhood Area Committees by the future unitary councils. Neighbourhood Area Committees, led by ward councillors, could involve communities, VCSE organisations, and town and parish councils as equal partners, so that neighbourhood governance becomes a vehicle for local insights and experiences to shape the design and delivery of public services.

The partnership approach could also involve co-producing a shared culture of community engagement across public sector partners, aligning partners' strategies to embed a collective strategic commitment to neighbourhood empowerment, and

⁷ DHSC. July 2025. [Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England](#). p.32

ensuring partners are able to connect communities to wider systems of support – such as finance and employment – as part of a whole person approach to health and wellbeing.

4) Inclusion

A neighbourhood empowerment model can only be truly empowering if it hears and reaches *all* members of the community, not just those who speak the loudest or are already well-connected. For the new unitary councils, inclusion would be a core principle backed by dedicated resource. Without it, there would be a real risk that empowerment efforts will reinforce existing inequalities rather than address them.

Community Development teams will be essential to this. Part of their role is to actively seek out and engage those who are often excluded from traditional council processes. These include people who do not have time, feel able or want to attend formal consultations, who may feel intimidated by civic spaces, or who face barriers due to language, disability, culture, or circumstance. Officers working with the community must go where people naturally gather, build trust over time, and create safe, welcoming environments for co-design and participation.

Inclusive engagement means meeting people on their terms, listening deeply, and providing the support needed for them to feel confident and comfortable contributing. It also means using data and local intelligence to identify who is not being heard and taking proactive steps to change that. For the new unitary councils, investing in inclusion is the foundation for a neighbourhood empowerment model that is fair, representative, and capable of delivering better outcomes for all.

“I’m speaking for the learning disability community, I think if they want to be engaged then don’t just send out a survey. You know, have some focus groups, be present, let people meet you. Have all the information in easy read. Have the organisations there to support, so it’s a kind of partnership working.”

Commissioned research, delivered by Action Hampshire

5) Prevention and resilience

The new unitary councils’ model of neighbourhood empowerment could be responsive to the immediate concerns and priorities of local communities and also take a longer-term view to involve residents and the VCSE sector in programmes and initiatives that facilitate improvements to the health, wellbeing, independence and social connectedness of local populations. In doing so, neighbourhood empowerment approaches would enhance the resilience of communities to times of crisis and prevent more people from needing to access acute public services for as long in their lives as possible.

In an effective neighbourhood empowerment model, ‘primary prevention’ would be an important focus. Primary prevention includes actions that tackle the root causes of ill-health and stop people from developing health problems in the first place, such as

councils, local partners and communities creating and nurturing accessible, safe and attractive green spaces for people to take exercise or relax. These would be delivered alongside actions that promote early intervention or community support to prevent existing health concerns from becoming worse and requiring formal care. Joint Strategic Needs Assessments provide a lens for councils to monitor and review the health, wellbeing, needs and strengths of local communities.

The prevention and resilience principle would not only include neighbourhood health and wellbeing but also place-based concerns and emergencies in a broader sense. Case Study 3 at the end of this chapter highlights how a community-led initiative in the Rowlands Castle area of East Hampshire has helped reduce the local impacts of flooding and enhance community resilience with managing serious flood events.

6) Long-term outlook

Local government reorganisation in England generally involves establishing unitary councils that are larger than the district, borough and unitary councils they replace, which risks widening the gap between councils and communities. An effective neighbourhood empowerment model is vital for enabling unitary councils to build and maintain strong connections and relationships with communities, identities and localities within their boundaries. Connections and relationships are founded on trust, and it is therefore important that the future unitary councils in Hampshire and the Solent assure partners and communities of their long-term commitment to the staffing and financial resource needed to deliver genuine neighbourhood empowerment.

The full benefits of neighbourhood empowerment to communities and councils can only be realised through a long-term, dedicated approach to enabling communities and building their capacity, wellbeing and resilience. Neighbourhood empowerment initiatives tend to deliver medium- to long-term results, which can be put at risk by reductions in public sector budgets incentivising short-termism and one-off schemes. The extent to which the new unitary councils will be able to organise their future neighbourhood empowerment models around a long-term outlook will depend on their potential for financial sustainability and the enabling environment created by national government.

Case Study 1: An ABCD approach to addressing local issues in East Petersfield:

In East Petersfield, concerns about anti-social behaviour sparked a surge of local energy. Residents were passionate about creating something positive for young people: a safe and active space that could bring the community together.

Recognising this strength, East Hampshire District Council's Community Development team supported the formation of the East Petersfield Community Group, enabling residents to take the lead.

With council grant funding and guidance, the Group transformed an underused grass area into a community-run astro turf sports pitch. The council provided resources, but it was the community's appetite for change that drove the project forward. The Group took on a licence to manage the facility, which quickly became a well-used local asset.

When stray footballs began affecting nearby properties, the focus remained on solutions, not problems. A passionate resident stepped up and, with support from a Community Development Officer, the Group secured planning permission and funding for fencing and netting. The facility remains a well-used asset, for which local residents are proudly acting as stewards.

This case study is a testament to the power of strong and active communities and the important role of councils as partners, convenors and facilitators in enabling communities to tackle local issues.

Case study 2: A partnership approach to tackling obesity in Hampshire

The prevalence of residents living with obesity is not evenly distributed across Hampshire. Prevalence increases with deprivation, as does the number of illnesses related to or exacerbated by being overweight.

Hampshire County Council's Public Health team works with partners to apply a community-based partnership approach to tackling obesity in Gosport, Havant and Rushmoor. This involves working collaboratively with key stakeholders to develop and implement bespoke solutions to tackling obesity within local communities. Key stakeholders include Integrated Care Boards, district councils, the EnergiseMe charity, Housing Associations and Local Children's Partnerships.

Successes to date include:

- **Havant:** Adult outdoor gym equipment installed in an area of greater need (based on income and prevalence of obesity), which has become an accessible community asset used to deliver an ongoing programme of outdoor physical activity sessions.
- **Rushmoor:** Multiple pilots of programmes, from targeted support for individuals in the Nepalese community to a youth boxing club.
- **Gosport:** This newly established stakeholder group is working alongside local charitable and community groups to ensure local intelligence shapes the design of an engaging programme.

Case Study 3: Rowlands Castle Flood Action Group – Community Resilience in Action

In response to recurring groundwater flooding, particularly in Finchdean, Rowlands Castle Parish Council supported the formation of a Flood Action Group.

Evolving from local volunteer Flood Wardens, the Group now provides a single point of contact between the community and agencies such as the Environment Agency, Hampshire County Council, and Network Rail.

With the support of East Hampshire District Council, the Group monitors water levels, liaises with riparian landowners, and coordinates proactive flood responses. Volunteers inspect watercourses daily, clear debris, and manage road closures when necessary.

This collaborative model has enhanced local preparedness, reduced flood impacts, and fostered a strong sense of agency and community ownership. East Hampshire District Council's enabling and coordinating role, and access to wider networks, has been critical to the model's success. The result is a more resilient community, better equipped to respond to emergencies and shape local solutions.

Delivering a Future Model of Neighbourhood Empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have identified three themes where the new unitary councils could have the greatest opportunity to empower communities, in collaboration with residents and partners, and supported by an enabling environment from central government.

Each theme is accompanied by ideas and opportunities for an effective future model of neighbourhood empowerment. The themes, ideas and opportunities have been informed and shaped by the six guiding principles; desk-based research; engagement with residents, councillors and partners; and lessons learned through East Hampshire's Transformation Programme

The themes, ideas and opportunities are summarised in the table below and explored in greater depth throughout this chapter.

| Theme | Ideas and Opportunities for future councils' neighbourhood empowerment model |
|---|--|
| Councils as enabling organisations | Empowerment culture through ABCD approach Coordination by Community Development teams |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Co-production and co-evaluation of key strategies</p> <p>Social value policy</p> <p>Framework for community asset transfers</p> <p>Neighbourhood covenants with the VCSE</p> <p>Neighbourhood Planning</p> <p>Enhancing digital and in-person engagement</p> |
| Neighbourhood governance as a vehicle for empowering communities | <p>Neighbourhood Area Committees</p> <p>Collaboration with town and parish councils</p> <p>Deliberative and participatory democracy</p> |
| Councillors as community convenors⁸ | <p>Dedicated support for councillors</p> <p>Ward profiles</p> <p>Representation and inclusion</p> |

It should be recognised that the three themes are not mutually exclusive. There are significant overlaps and dependencies between them: for example, councillors as community convenors will have a crucial role in ensuring neighbourhood governance genuinely and meaningfully empowers communities and reflects local identities.

Councils as Enabling Organisations

Councils are major local employers and providers of a wide range of local public services that influence place-making. Staff and contractors work in neighbourhoods throughout council areas to deliver universal and targeted services. A small number of council offices and hubs host staff who provide administrative and corporate services, such as legal and finance, which are necessary for running a large organisation effectively. Many council employees are also resident in the council area and therefore part of a neighbourhood and local community.

⁸ The term ‘community convenor’ was used in the [English Devolution White Paper](#) (2024). Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council define a community convenor as an elected representative who brings together residents, local organisations and council services to identify community needs, build partnerships, and co-create solutions.

As anchor institutions, councils are deeply rooted in local communities and have a significant impact on the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of the area due to their size, spending, and employment. By strategically leveraging their resources, councils as enabling organisations can contribute to local economic development, improving health outcomes, breaking down social inequalities and empowering neighbourhoods. Appendix 4 features examples of how the 15 councils in Hampshire and the Solent engage with and empower communities and local partners like town and parish councils.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have identified the following ideas and opportunities for the new unitary councils to consider as means for enabling neighbourhood empowerment across their operations.

- *Organisational culture shaped by Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)*

ABCD is an approach that starts with what is strong in a community, not trying to right what is wrong.⁹ It encourages local authorities to work with communities, town and parish councils and local VCSE organisations as equal partners in identifying the assets, strengths and resources that already exist in neighbourhoods. Partners mobilise these assets to enhance the capacity, resilience and outcomes of all communities in the neighbourhood, not just those with the right skills and networks or the loudest voices.

Councils that are embedding ABCD principles into their organisational culture and approaches have identified benefits for councils and communities. For example, a pilot study on one of Leeds City Council's neighbourhood projects found that every £1 invested by the council in ABCD returned up to £14 in social value within the local community through outcomes such as increased life satisfaction and volunteering time.¹⁰ Case Study 4 illustrates how East Hampshire District Council's ABCD approach has enhanced the resilience of local food support groups and their connections with other voluntary and community organisations, which is helping them to provide joined-up services to residents in food poverty.

An organisation's decision-making is shaped and guided by its culture and values. There is an opportunity for the culture of the new unitary councils to champion strengths-based ABCD approaches in all operations and services as the foundation of their models of genuine neighbourhood empowerment, actively supported by strong and adaptive leadership, commitment at senior political and senior officer levels and empowered frontline staff. One of the key elements of the landmark 'Wigan Deal' approach was the Wigan Council leadership's empowerment of frontline staff to have more open-ended conversations with clients and take decisions for

⁹ TEDx Talks. 16 May 2016. [Sustainable community development: from what's wrong to what's strong | Cormac Russell | TEDxExeter](#). [video]

¹⁰ Leeds City Council. 16 June 2021. [Pioneering Leeds Asset Based Community Development programme a success, according to university study](#).

themselves if the potential benefits for clients were believed to outweigh the potential harms.¹¹ The ‘Liberated Method’ developed by the councils participating in Changing Futures Northumbria also grants greater autonomy to frontline caseworkers to provide responsive and person-centred support to their clients.¹²

The new unitary councils’ decisions on whether to adopt an organisational culture based on ABCD principles would need to be made at the earliest opportunity in order to guide further decisions that shape their neighbourhood empowerment models.

Case Study 4: ABCD – Foodbanks in East Hampshire

The increasing demand for, and provision of, foodbanks across the district was a good example of the community mobilising to support local issues. However, due to the nature of this work, the foodbanks and pantries were often working in isolation.

East Hampshire District Council’s Community Development officers established the East Hampshire Food Network, which unites foodbanks, community pantries, and community cupboards to share best practice, coordinate resources, and strengthen service delivery. The Community Development officers identified the need for other frontline community organisations, such as Citizens Advice, Social Prescribers and Home Start, to also participate in the network to provide a joined-up approach to supporting local residents.

This collaboration, facilitated by Community Development officers, has enhanced the resilience and effectiveness of local food support organisations. This partnership approach with other community support organisations also ensures their advice reaches those residents who need it most, addressing wider support needs beyond food provision.

- *Coordination by Community Development teams*

Each new unitary council could consider employing a dedicated Community Development team to coordinate and oversee its neighbourhood empowerment model.

Community Development officers are the subject matter experts in implementing ABCD approaches in neighbourhoods. They would build effective and trusted relationships with communities, town and parish councils and the VCSE sector, and use local intelligence and data to tailor a council’s empowerment model to suit any neighbourhood – whether urban, coastal or rural, or affluent or deprived. They would

¹¹ Naylor, C. and Wellings, D. 25 June 2019. [A citizen-led approach to health and care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal](#). The King’s Fund.

¹² Lowe, T. and Smith, M. 19 April 2024. [Relational public service can tackle hardship in neighbourhoods](#). Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

provide effective officer support to councillors in their role as community convenors and promote inclusion by working with and connecting communities, VCSE and other local partners across a council's area to build their capacity, skills and confidence to resolve local issues and shape community-led improvements in neighbourhoods.

This report refers to these officers as 'Community Development officers' but the new unitary councils might wish to use a different name for this team. Examples of alternative names used by councils include 'Community Engagement Officers' (Test Valley Borough Council), 'Community Builders' (Plymouth City Council) and 'Local Area Coordinators' (Surrey County Council). Some district and unitary councils in Hampshire and the Solent already employ officers in Community Development roles.

Community Development officers could be the lead function overseeing the design and delivery of the unitary councils' models of neighbourhood empowerment, but they cannot be the only officers responsible for working with and empowering local communities. The foundation of a model of genuine neighbourhood empowerment in each unitary council would be an organisational culture based on ABCD principles that is actively supported by the senior political and officer leaderships and reflected in many roles as being intrinsic to how the new council's work.

- *Co-production and co-evaluation of key council strategies*

Councils in Hampshire and the Solent already have a strong track record of co-production with local communities and people with lived experience. For example, Test Valley Borough Council undertook extensive community engagement on the development of its 2023-27 Corporate Plan, including through a series of deliberative workshops involving around 100 residents reflecting the demographic make-up of the borough.¹³

Hampshire County Council co-produces a range of adults' health and social care services with people with lived experience, as set out in Case Study 5. Co-production is fundamental to the success of the County Council's strengths-based practice model, delivered by frontline staff in neighbourhoods throughout Hampshire on a daily basis.

Case Study 5: Co-Production in Hampshire's adults' health and care services

Hampshire County Council's Adults' Health and Care Directorate defines co-production as "*professionals and citizens sharing power to plan, design and deliver support together.*" The County Council has a strong history of integrating co-production into a wide range of adults' health and care services,

¹³ Test Valley Borough Council. 2023. [Corporate Plan 2023-27: A Place for Everyone – Supporting our Communities to Thrive](#).

ensuring that ‘Experts by Experience’ – the people and carers who use a service – have a prominent role in shaping services and driving improvement.

Hampshire’s *Let’s Go with Co-Pro* website provides tools and templates, co-produced with Experts by Experience, to assist partners and communities with the co-production process. The County Council also supports ten co-production forums to enable communities with lived experience to shape adults’ health and care services. These include the Hampshire Autism Partnership Board, the Hampshire Carers’ Partnership, and the Hampshire Learning and Disability Partnership.

Successful recent examples of co-production include Self-Advocates from the Hampshire Learning Disability Partnership working alongside Hampshire County Council to co-deliver the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism; and the Hampshire Carers Partnership co-producing The Hampshire Carers Joint Strategy 2024-2029 and how the strategy is being implemented.

Co-production and co-evaluation would be important processes for setting and assessing measures of success in a future neighbourhood empowerment model, ensuring that key strategies are focused on enhancing the assets and strengths of communities and neighbourhoods. Each new unitary council could co-produce its Corporate Plan with communities as a starting point and actively seek further opportunities to co-produce, co-deliver and co-evaluate other key place-focused strategies with local communities.

In the long term, the future unitary councils could consider co-commissioning support services with communities with lived experience. For example, Essex County Council has established the Essex Recovery Foundation to involve residents with lived experience in the co-commissioning of drug and alcohol recovery services.¹⁴

- *Social value policy*

Social value is a framework for assessing the impact of projects based on the positive outcomes they could bring, or have brought, for people and places. The new unitary councils could support the community and VCSE sector with toolkits and guidance to help them record evidence of the social value of community activities. The future councils could also include considerations of social value in their own decision-making processes.

Social value is a more appropriate framework for organising and evaluating neighbourhood empowerment initiatives than conventional value for money assessments based on quantitative data and outputs. Social value is a broader understanding of value that allows for difficult-to-quantify aims and outcomes, such

¹⁴ Essex Recovery Foundation. [Our mission](#).

as tackling loneliness and improving community wellbeing, to be considered in decisions and resource allocations.

The Government's 2025 consultation on reforms to public procurement included proposals to require contracting public authorities to apply a weighting to social value criteria when awarding large contracts and use social value metrics from a streamlined list to be co-designed with the public sector and suppliers.¹⁵

There is an opportunity for new unitary councils to build on existing good practice by drafting their own social value policies to guide decisions on public procurement and assets. Through a partnership approach, the new councils could work with the future Hampshire and Solent Mayor and public sector partners to explore principles for alignment on social value policies across the region to provide transparency and consistency for Hampshire and Solent businesses and VCSE organisations bidding for public contracts.

- *Frameworks for community asset transfer*

Local assets are often central to community identity and activity, such as the local play area or village hall. Maintaining and retaining these valued community assets for community use is a cornerstone of neighbourhood empowerment.

There is an opportunity for each unitary council to explore developing a community asset transfer policy and support framework for any town and parish council and community group that might be interested in taking ownership of a council-run asset. Case Study 6 provides an example of East Hampshire District Council's ABCD approach to community asset transfer.

The new unitary councils could also develop toolkits for community groups and town and parish councils to take on the running of local assets. These would include asset-mapping, business planning, access to skills support, as well as guidance on the asset transfer process.

A community asset transfer policy would need to be underpinned by a social value policy so that community benefits are given an appropriate weighting in the councils' decision-making processes. The General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 states that local authorities can transfer assets to community level at below best value without the consent of the Secretary of State if it can be evidenced that there is strong social, economic or environmental value (and where the undervalue is below the threshold of £2 million).

Large unitary councils like Cornwall Council have placed community asset transfer at the heart of their programmes for double devolution.¹⁶ Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council would seek to learn from the policies and

¹⁵ Cabinet Office. 26 June 2025. [Public Procurement: Growing British industry, jobs and skills - consultation on further reforms to public procurement](#). Closed on 5 September 2025.

¹⁶ Cornwall Council. [Devolution Case Studies](#).

assistance provided by Cornwall and other large unitary councils to support town and parish councils and community groups interested in asset transfer, in order to inform further research for the new unitary councils. Town and parish councils that do not have the capacity or interest in assuming liability for a local asset would not be obliged to engage in an asset transfer process.

Case Study 6: Community Asset Transfer – Woodlands Hall

In June 2025, Woodlands Hall in Headley Down was transferred to Y Plus Youth Services Community Interest Company (CIC), marking a significant community asset transfer under East Hampshire District Council's new asset-based approach to community development.

Woodlands Hall was previously the only community building directly operated by the council and faced financial and operational challenges. The transfer enables Y Plus to lead a vibrant new era of community-led services.

Y Plus is expanding the Hall's offer with youth clubs, life skills training, and inclusive events, including a nursery reopening later in 2025. The council continues to play a vital role, with Community Development officers actively supporting Y Plus to build capacity, secure funding, and enhance the Hall's facilities and operations.

This case exemplifies how local government can use ABCD and sustained partnership to empower residents and reinforce neighbourhood identity, offering a model for future local government reorganisation in Hampshire.

- *Neighbourhood covenants*

In July 2025, the Government published the Civil Society Covenant as a set of principles to help build effective partnerships between civil society and government.¹⁷ Government and civil society commitments in the Covenant include: engaging citizens and communities in decision making and delivery; removing barriers to active participation to build a healthy democracy and community resilience; and creating the conditions for collaboration and innovation that prioritise preventative interventions and take a long-term view to tackle challenges and realise opportunities.

There is an opportunity for the new unitary councils to develop their own local Neighbourhood Covenants with civil society, setting out how councils and civil society will work together in partnership in a future neighbourhood empowerment model. Typically, such Covenants tend to coalesce around a local issue. For example, in Cornwall, there were previously Neighbourhood Covenants relating to litter and managing public realm in specific streets, with both the unitary council and the neighbourhood agreeing to commit time and resource to tackling litter and graffiti.

¹⁷ DCMS. July 2025. [Civil Society Covenant](#). The UK Government defines 'civil society' as including charities, social enterprises, co-operatives, trade unions, faith organisations, informal community groups, philanthropists and social investors.

The community group also delivered public realm enhancements through public realm artwork and became a consultee on street scene improvements.

There could also be potential for a regional Civil Society Covenant to be agreed between the future Hampshire and Solent Mayoral Combined County Authority, the future unitary councils and local health and VCSE partners. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority signed a VCSE Accord with the region's VCSE sector in 2017, which was refreshed in 2021 to include health and local government partners.¹⁸

- *Neighbourhood planning*

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework underlines the importance of neighbourhood planning for empowering local communities to shape development in their local area: *"Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan."*¹⁹

On the Hampshire and Solent mainland, there are currently more than 50 made neighbourhood plans and further neighbourhood plans in the process of being formulated. Neighbourhood plans, along with Local Development Orders, enable communities to have a direct say in the development that takes place in their area. Case Study 7 shows the positive impact of neighbourhood planning in Petersfield.

Town and parish councils can lead the neighbourhood planning process in parished areas, while a neighbourhood forum can be designated by the local planning authority in unparished areas. The neighbourhood plan area does not have to follow administrative boundaries so that it comprises an area with which communities identify, which can be smaller or greater than a town or parish council area.

Given the importance of neighbourhood planning in neighbourhood empowerment, there is an opportunity for new unitary councils to work with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC), Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils (IWALC), town and parish councils, National Parks and existing neighbourhood forums to identify what support would be helpful for areas with a made neighbourhood plan and areas considering embarking on the process. Unitary councils could then produce a guide on their role in neighbourhood planning and the support available, using existing guides as examples.²⁰

Case Study 7: Petersfield Neighbourhood Plan

¹⁸ Greater Manchester Combined Authority. 24 September 2021. [New Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector Accord signed with Greater Manchester Leaders](#).

¹⁹ MHCLG. December 2024. [National Planning Policy Framework](#). p.11.

²⁰ For example, guides produced by [Hampshire County Council](#) and [East Hampshire District Council](#).

Led by Petersfield Town Council and shaped by extensive community engagement, the Petersfield Neighbourhood Development Plan (PNP) enabled residents to take control of their town's future. It delivered 800 homes within the South Downs National Park while safeguarding heritage assets, green spaces, and vital infrastructure. But its greatest success lies in transforming local engagement. Volunteers who initially resisted new development became informed advocates for sustainable growth. Two became town councillors; one continues to serve with deep expertise in planning and landscape sensitivity.

The neighbourhood plan reflects what residents value most: the historic town square, narrow alleyways with independent shops, streams weaving through the town, and small green spaces. These features, central to Petersfield's identity, were identified and protected through the PNP.

This journey highlights the power of ABCD and the vital role community development will play in a unitary structure, supporting councillors, facilitating neighbourhood governance, helping residents shape their places, and protecting local identity.

- *Enhancing digital and in person engagement*

All ideas and opportunities for future unitary councils as enabling organisations must be underpinned by access to information, both digitally and in person. The websites of the new unitary councils should be fully accessible, potentially with opportunities in the long term to upload dashboards and reports covering key services, performance, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and plain English summaries on easy-to-find sections of each website.

There is an opportunity for the new unitary councils to set up a robust and accessible digital inclusion programme. Hampshire County Council's 'Digital Hampshire' strategy describes digital equity as a "critical issue for society" and identifies opportunities for a more joined up and strategic approach to the commissioning and signposting of digital skills programmes across local partners and businesses.²¹

Through a partnership approach to neighbourhood working, the new unitary councils and partners could explore the merits of creating 'one-stop-shop' integrated services hubs in some strategic neighbourhood areas, if these would be financially viable and substantially improve outcomes for local residents and businesses.

²¹ Hampshire County Council. 6 February 2024. [Decision Report: Digital Hampshire – Future Strategy](#).

Neighbourhood Governance as a vehicle for community empowerment

Neighbourhood governance is a critical enabler of genuine community empowerment. Without meaningful structures that bring decision-making closer to communities, there is a risk that the new unitary councils will feel too large or remote to reflect the diverse identities and priorities of the communities and places they serve. Effective neighbourhood governance provides the framework through which local voices can shape services, influence strategy, and hold institutions to account: ensuring that empowerment is not just a principle, but a reality.

The new unitary councils would need to design neighbourhood governance arrangements that are inclusive, flexible and rooted in places. This means recognising the value and contributions of town and parish councils, which have long been the bedrock of community governance in parished areas of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, by ensuring that neighbourhood governance becomes a mechanism that supports town and parish councillors to represent the voices and identities of local communities. It also means creating new routes for engagement that enable all communities, including those in unparished or under-represented areas, to participate meaningfully in local decision-making.

Area Committees or similar models could play a key role, but their success will depend on how they function as a vehicle for community empowerment. Area Committees must be porous in their boundaries, responsive to local context, and inclusive of a wide range of voices, including councillors, town and parish councils, VCSE organisations, and residents. They should be supported by dedicated officer capacity, have clear remits and action plans, and be empowered to make or influence decisions that matter locally.

Every local area already hosts a unique patchwork of organisations and governance, demonstrating that there can never be an effective one-size-fits-all method to establishing neighbourhood governance. Some of the key existing organisations and governance that are active in neighbourhoods across Hampshire and the Solent are listed below.

Not every organisation on the list is present in every neighbourhood: for example, some areas of Hampshire and the Solent do not have a town or parish council currently.

- Council-designated or -sponsored neighbourhood committees and partnerships, such as Local Area Committees in Eastleigh, Regeneration and Growth Partnerships in Hampshire, and Neighbourhood Forums in Portsmouth.
- Neighbourhood governance established by central government programmes, such as the Neighbourhood Board in Ryde formed because of Ryde's participation in the Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods.
- Town and parish councils.

- Health services, including Primary Care Networks and the future Neighbourhood Health Service.
- Blue light services, including neighbourhood policing.
- Registered Providers (Housing associations).
- Business Improvement Districts and other business forums.
- VCSE organisations.
- Residents' and Tenants' associations.

Ultimately, neighbourhood governance must be more than a tick-box exercise. It must provide a means for protecting local identity, enabling place-based decision-making, and building trust between councils and communities. If designed well, it can become the backbone of a council's neighbourhood empowerment model that is inclusive, resilient, and genuinely transformative.

- *Neighbourhood Area Committees*

Local government Area Committee systems generally cover groupings of council wards, or a collection of town and parish council boundaries. Area Committees can be formally constituted by councils through the Local Government Act 2000 and The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000. This means that delegated powers and devolved budgets can be conferred on them to make decisions on a range of local issues. Some councils have opted not to formally constitute their area boards. Appendix 2 includes a summary of Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's research on the Area Committee systems of unitary local authorities in England.

Area Committees in Hampshire and the Solent would need to be proactive and innovative to engage with communities, particularly those in sparsely populated rural areas. There are risks with any form of neighbourhood governance that the loudest voices could dominate, that attendance at meetings might not be representative of the whole community, and that residents and partners could become less engaged if decisions taken at meetings are not translated into meaningful action.

Some councils have taken proactive and innovative steps to mitigate the risk of low engagement with Area Committees: from Wiltshire Area Boards holding specific community engagement activities such as events and workshops to gauge local opinions;²² to Buckinghamshire Council assigning a Service Director to each Community Board to demonstrate the support of the council's senior leadership to facilitate actions and unblock issues where needed.²³

²² LGA. 23 July 2025. [Wiltshire Council: Local Area Boards](#).

²³ LGA. 31 July 2025. [Buckinghamshire Council – Community Boards](#).

As part of preparations for local government reorganisation, ***East Hampshire District Council will deliver a pilot of Area Committees ahead of vesting day.***

The pilots will be an evolution of East Hampshire's longstanding existing area-based place-making governance and experience of ABCD. The additional learning and experience from the pilots can help inform any discussions and decisions about Neighbourhood Area Committees at the future unitary councils covering Hampshire and the Solent.

The pilots could test ideas and opportunities in relation to geography, purpose, Area Action Plans, decision-making remit, costs and budgets, engagement with the whole community, facilitation of community-led action, and officer support requirements.

The pilots will be co-designed with local communities and partners, guided by the importance of testing the following core elements of Area Committee systems:

- Membership of the committees may include town and parish councils, where they exist, as well as unitary ward councillors.
- The VSCE sector could be included as a member, with individual community groups attending as members of project working groups.
- Attendance by representatives of other public agencies (NHS, Police, PCNs etc) as part of a partnership approach to neighbourhood empowerment.
- Each Area Committee could have an Area Action Plan, supported by numerous project groups working together to deliver solutions.
- Committee boundaries should be porous, allowing for broad-area issues to be addressed jointly between numerous committees.
- Area Committees could be a forum for targeted distribution of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other place-based funding sources.
- All meetings should be public and accessible, with published agendas and minutes.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council would be keen to work with the other 13 councils in Hampshire and the Solent to potentially launch additional pilots. We would be particularly interested in supporting test and learn pilots in neighbourhoods with characteristics different to those in East Hampshire, such as neighbourhoods without a town or parish council, and deprived urban neighbourhoods. We would also seek to learn from Eastleigh Borough Council's existing Local Area Committee system and from other forms of neighbourhood governance and partnerships in the region which receive strong local engagement, such as the Romsey Future community partnership.

- *Collaboration with town and parish councils*

There is an opportunity for each new unitary council to work with HALC, IWALC and town and parish councils in their area to establish a Charter, which would set out councils' respective responsibilities and how they will collaborate in neighbourhoods.

Following vesting day, the new unitary councils could work with HALC, IWALC and town and parish councils on a 'Double Devolution Menu' with new powers and responsibilities, including ownership of local assets, that unitary councils would be willing to devolve to town and parish councils that want them and meet specified financial and readiness conditions. Double devolution would not be mandatory for town and parish councils that do not want to take on new responsibilities and liabilities.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council recognise that unparished areas are at risk of a democratic deficit through opportunities specifically designed to empower town and parish councils. We would seek to work with existing councils and VCSE organisations in unparished areas to identify potential mitigations to the democratic deficit risk for the future unitary councils to consider.

- *Deliberative and participatory democracy*

There is an opportunity for the new unitary councils to explore deliberative and participatory approaches, such as citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting, as structures for empowering communities.

Participatory budgeting in Hampshire and the Solent could empower residents to allocate resource to projects in their own neighbourhoods, learning from previous experiences and good practice in Newcastle, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, and Scotland.²⁴ A long-term aspiration could be for a participatory budgeting scheme to be held within a council's area once a year, with Section 106 funds, CIL proceeds and any community benefits linked to the planning system potentially earmarked as consistent sources of funding for participatory budgeting.

Area Committees could potentially serve as a forum or host for participatory budgeting exercises. In Cornwall, Community Area Partnerships have an annual budget ranging between £22,932 - £144,660 for local transport improvements.²⁵ The Community Area Partnerships, led by parish councils and unitary ward members, work with communities to identify concerns and plans for highways improvements, which are then assessed by the council's Highways Team and delivered once approved by the Portfolio Holder.

Citizens' assemblies and panels could be considered among options for engagement with communities on strategies and projects that have significant implications for a neighbourhood or community with lived experience. Case Study 8 highlights the experiences and impact of the Romsey Citizens' Assemblies.

²⁴ Howe, V. April 2008. [Newcastle, UK: Participatory budgeting for a vibrant city](#). London Borough of Newham. [People Powered Places](#). Barking and Dagenham Giving. [Our Priorities](#). PB Scotland. [Home Page](#).

²⁵ Cornwall Council. [Local Transport Plan](#).

Case study 8: Romsey Citizens' Assemblies

The Romsey Citizens' Assemblies (2019 and 2024) were commissioned by Test Valley Borough Council in collaboration with the Romsey Future partnership and with the support of a range of organisations. The citizens' assemblies brought residents together to discuss proposals for the regeneration of the area south of Romsey town centre.²⁶

The 2019 Assembly was established as part of the UK Government's Innovation in Democracy programme, which aimed to facilitate greater use of deliberative democracy at the local level.²⁷ Forty-two randomly selected citizens from Romsey and the surrounding parishes heard evidence, took part in deliberative discussions and made recommendations to the council for achieving their vision for the south of the town centre.²⁸

The 2024 Assembly involved 36 people recruited as a representative sample of the population of Romsey. Through four workshops, the Assembly deliberated on options for community facilities in Romsey and developed a set of preferences to inform further work by Romsey Future and the council.²⁹

Councillors as Community Convenors

In the English Devolution White Paper, the Government describes local councillors as “frontline community convenors”.³⁰ It is a term that puts the spotlight on the important role of councillors in a council's model of neighbourhood empowerment. Councillors are grounded in the local communities and places they represent; have valuable insights on what matters to communities that stem from the strong personal relationships they build with residents and businesses; and work seven days a week to resolve local concerns, champion local causes, signpost to local services, bring residents and local partners together, and use their local knowledge, relationships and influence to drive positive change in, for and with their local communities. In the new unitary model, it is likely that there will be fewer councillors and that each will have larger wards. To aid them in their community convenor role, councillors could have the support of dedicated teams of Community Development officers.

²⁶ Romsey Future. [Citizens' Assembly 2019](#) and [Citizens' Assembly 2024](#).

²⁷ MHCLG et al. 30 May 2019. [The Innovation in Democracy Programme](#).

²⁸ The Democratic Society et al. December 2019. [Romsey Citizens' Assembly](#).

²⁹ Thinks Insight and Strategy. October 2024. [The future of community facilities in Romsey: Citizens' Assembly report](#).

³⁰ MHCLG. 2024. [English Devolution White Paper](#). p.17

Councillors as community convenors do not have all the answers to local issues but are able to bring organisations and people together to co-develop effective solutions. Community convening is a cornerstone of ABCD and community empowerment approaches.

The visibility and connections that councillors have cultivated in communities perhaps explains why LGA polling in Autumn 2024 found that 70% of respondents singled out 'local councillors', rather than 'members of parliament' (8%) or 'government ministers' (5%), as the individuals they most trust to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area.³¹ However, the same poll also found that only 50% of respondents trusted their local council either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount', which is the lowest result for this indicator in the LGA's records and reflective of a globally observed trend in declining public trust in democratic institutions.³²

The reasons behind the concerning trend in declining public trust in democratic institutions are complex and not in the remit of this report to review. However, it is clear that localism offers potential for rebuilding trust, led by local councillors who are visible in communities and regarded as trusted representatives to make decisions affecting local areas.

There are currently 650 seats in the 15 county, unitary and district councils in Hampshire and the Solent. Almost two-thirds of the 78 Hampshire County Councillors also serve as a councillor on one of Hampshire's 11 district and borough councils. Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's proposal for local government reorganisation would reduce the number of councillor seats in the region from 650 to 324.³³ Although moving from a two-tier to a unitary system of local government in Hampshire would bring opportunities for enhancing residents' awareness of who provides local services, concerns have been raised that the reduction in the number of principal councillors could have a negative impact on local democratic representation and on the capacity of new unitary councillors to manage a larger volume of casework and carry out their important community convening roles across potentially larger ward areas.

To mitigate the risks to local representation and unitary councillors' capacity, Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have identified opportunities for new unitary councils to enhance support for local councillors' role as community convenors. These opportunities, built on existing good practice and engagement with councillors, are complemented by those outlined in the 'councils as enabling organisations' and 'neighbourhood governance as vehicles for empowering

³¹ LGA. October 2024. [Polling on resident satisfaction with councils: Round 39](#).

³² University of Southampton. 19 February 2025. [Democracy in crisis: Trust in democratic institutions declining around the world](#).

³³ The full Strategic Business Case includes detail on Hampshire's and East Hampshire's proposal for the number of councillors in each new unitary council.

communities' themes. The ideas and opportunities will be developed further through research and conversations with councillors and local partners.

- *Council support for councillors as community convenors*

To support unitary councillors with their community convening roles, there is an opportunity for each unitary councillor to be assigned a named Community Development officer. The officer would assist councillors in their patch with gathering local intelligence, statistical data relating to the economic and social make-up of the community (sometimes referred to as ward profiles) and building personal and trusted relationships with communities, businesses and local partners like town and parish councils and community groups.

Case Study 9 showcases an example of how an East Hampshire district councillor, with the support of the council's Community Development team, convened and mobilised partners and communities in a way that has led to greater community use of an environmental asset.

Case Study 9: Councillors and Community Development teams: Buriton Pond

In Buriton, a local councillor, alerted by residents at a parish meeting, convened a partnership to address concerns about the condition of the district council owned pond. With support from East Hampshire District Council's Community Development Team, the councillor brought together Buriton Parish Council, landowners, residents, environmental activists, and the local angling club to co- design a plan for ecological restoration.

This initiative reflects ABCD principles: focusing on local strengths and passions. The angling club's deep knowledge and love of fishing became a key asset. Their voluntary removal of carp, whose presence contributed to silt build-up and poor water quality, was a turning point in restoring the pond's ecological balance and motivating others to get involved.

The council's and councillor's roles were not to lead, but to enable and support, facilitate connections, provide technical advice, and help unlock funding. Local residents have committed to ongoing maintenance of the pond, and the nearby school will use the pond as a learning resource, embedding environmental education into the community.

This model of councillor-enabled action is informing wider ABCD practice across East Hampshire.

There could be opportunities for new unitary councillors and town and parish councillors to receive training and guidance on ABCD principles to empower them to carry out their community convening role with confidence. The training would be provided by the Community Development team alongside all other services with examples of likely scenarios and how these principles could assist in delivering effective outcomes.

In a survey carried out in June 2025, Hampshire County councillors suggested further ideas that a future unitary council could consider supporting councillors as community leaders and convenors. These ideas include digital tools to support casework management, regular policy briefings, community engagement training, and accessible systems for residents to report issues. In the coming months, Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council will undertake further research and engagement with councillors on how the new councils could effectively empower councillors as community convenors.

- *Ward profiles*

The Government appears to be looking at council wards as units for the delivery of neighbourhood policing and council Area Committees (see Appendix 2 for an overview of the national policy context on neighbourhoods). Comprehensive ward profiles would therefore be a crucial early activity for the new unitary councils.

The new unitary councils' ward profiles could cover:

- **Population data** – such as health and disability, ethnicity and religion, deprivation, population change and age breakdown.
- **Education and employment data** – such as qualifications, economic activity, and employment by sector.
- **Properties and neighbourhood planning** – such as number of properties, type and household tenure and trends, and areas covered by made neighbourhood plans.
- **Map of community infrastructure and assets** – such as libraries, faith buildings, schools, sports grounds, parks and open spaces. Voluntary and community organisations
- **Community wellbeing** – explore the possibility of using a tool like The Place Standard in Scotland as a longitudinal qualitative survey of how communities perceive the place where they live.³⁴

The compilation of ward profiles would be led by councillors and Community Development teams, in collaboration with council officers, communities and local partners. Ward profiles would assist councillors and officers to decide, develop and scrutinise council policies based on an in-depth understanding of the skills, assets and infrastructure in ward geographies. Some of the proposed data and information forward profiles are already collected by councils, such as through Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

There would be an opportunity in the period before vesting day for existing councils to speak with local partners about data they hold that would be useful to include in

³⁴ Scottish Government. [Place Standard Tool](#). [Accessed 10 August 2025]

ward profiles, and how ward profile data could support wider partnership efforts to join up services and activities in strategic neighbourhoods.

There could be a long-term opportunity to explore digitising ward profiles, such as through a system of updated dashboards, so that councils, councillors, partners and communities have access to the latest figures to underpin evidence-based policy- and place-making.

- *Representation and Inclusion*

In a model that genuinely promotes neighbourhood empowerment, it is important that all communities can see themselves represented in their local council and that anyone feels able to put their name forward to stand in council elections.

There are currently two main barriers to attracting more candidates to consider standing in council elections: security and support.

On security, an LGA survey published in June 2025 found that seven in 10 councillors in England and Wales had experienced abuse and intimidation in the last 12 months and feel personally at risk when fulfilling their councillor role. This rises to more than eight in 10 councillors who are female, disabled or from an ethnic minority background.³⁵ The LGA is seeking further engagement with the Government on security concerns, and the new unitary councils would need to establish policies and relationships with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary to support councillors locally.

On support, the average basic annual allowance for councillors at upper tier authorities in England is £12,505,³⁶ which is topped up for councillors with special responsibilities, such as cabinet members and committee chairs, but is significantly lower than the average gross annual salary for full-time employees in the UK (£37,340 in April 2024).³⁷ Councillors without special responsibilities must rely on savings or combine their councillor role with other employment to build an income to live on. It is therefore particularly difficult for demographic groups with low savings or other important demands on their time, such as younger adults and people with caring responsibilities, to become a councillor.

To attract and retain councillors who are a cross-section of the local communities they serve, national government could work with local government to review the security and allowances provided to councillors to fulfil their important community convening and representation roles. In June 2025, the Local Government Chronicle launched the 'Councillors for the 21st Century' campaign, calling on the UK

³⁵ LGA. 27 June 2025. [More than half of councillors report being victims of misinformation, while rates of abuse and threats remain high across local government, LGA survey finds.](#)

³⁶ Local Government Chronicle. 24 July 2025. [Exclusive: Inconsistent approach to councillor allowances revealed.](#)

³⁷ ONS. 29 October 2024. [Employee earnings in the UK: 2024.](#)

Government to formally review the system of support and payment for councillors, restore councillor access to the Local Government Pension Scheme and introduce parental leave as a statutory right.³⁸

As some town and parish councils take on additional responsibilities for community assets and services as a result of local government reorganisation, there could be an opportunity for the UK Government to also review parish councillor basic allowances to boost the community convening capacity of town and parish councillors and attract more candidates to stand in town and parish council elections.

Conclusion: Next steps and success measures

This report underlines Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's ambition and commitment to supporting local identities and delivering stronger community engagement and genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment through local government reorganisation in Hampshire and the Solent.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council intend to use this report as a 'springboard' for further and deeper conversations, collaboration and research with councillors, partners and communities on ideas and opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment. Our goal is to co-produce a comprehensive evidence base to inform and guide our successor councils' models for delivering genuinely effective, inclusive, and impactful neighbourhood empowerment. The evidence base will include the findings of East Hampshire's neighbourhood governance pilots.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council will also use this valuable 'test and learn' period before vesting day to develop a toolkit for measuring and reporting on the performance and success of local empowerment initiatives. The toolkit will be added to the evidence gathered to inform the future unitary councils' neighbourhood empowerment models. Success measures to be tested include:

- Co-design and co-evaluation of success measures for specific projects with representatives of communities whom the projects are intended to benefit;
- Bespoke success measures based on the six guiding principles presented in this report;
- Existing good practice measures of community health and wellbeing, such as Hampshire County Council's Mental Health and Wellbeing Index³⁹, and monitoring Joint Strategic Needs Assessments over time;
- Social value measurements like those in the National TOMS Framework;⁴⁰

³⁸ Local Government Chronicle. 25 June 2025. [Why LGC has launched a campaign in support of councillors](#).

³⁹ Hampshire County Council. [Mental Health and Wellbeing Index 2024](#).

⁴⁰ Social Value Portal. [Social Value Measurement](#).

- Potentially utilising data collected as part of the national Local Government Outcomes Framework, if this is adopted by the UK Government.⁴¹

Ultimately, a successful neighbourhood empowerment model will be one that moves away from the traditional 'doing to' approach to local delivery and pivots future unitary councils in Hampshire and the Solent towards a strengths-based organisational culture and participatory approaches that 'do with' communities and partners. Such a model could take some years to co-produce and get right, but local government reorganisation presents a timely opportunity to fire the starting gun on a 'Hampshire and Solent' mission of empowerment that delivers lasting change for communities and is shaped by local voices and identities.

Four new unitary councils in the Hampshire and Solent region would provide the financially viable local government arrangements needed to deliver this mission, backed by an enabling environment in national government.

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire look forward to continuing to work with partners and communities on this once-in-a-generation opportunity for public service transformation with a renewed approach to localism and democratic engagement at its heart.

⁴¹ MHCLG. 3 July 2025. [Local Government Outcomes Framework: Call for Feedback](#). Closed on 12 September 2025.

Appendix 1: Methodology and Engagement

The three research questions guiding the desk-based research that contributed to this report are:

- How are councils in Hampshire and the Solent already enabling community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment?
- What is happening elsewhere in England?
- What could happen in future in Hampshire and the Solent?

The following engagement activities during summer 2025 also informed and shaped the contents of the report:

- **Public survey:** From 21 July until 17 August 2025, Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council launched a public survey on our proposal for local government reorganisation. A total of 3,492 responses were received, incorporating 3,398 from individuals, 36 from groups, organisations, and businesses and 58 from democratically elected representatives. Additionally, 26 unstructured written responses were received via letter or email.
- **Hampshire Perspectives:** In May 2025, members of Hampshire County Council's residents' forum 'Hampshire Perspectives' were asked how they feel about the changes that local government reorganisation might bring and what they might achieve. Acknowledging that the forum tends towards an older demographic, County Council staff aged under 40 were also invited to participate to share their perspective as younger residents. The survey ran for 2 weeks from 15-29 May 2025. It received a total of 1,150 responses, incorporating 767 from forum members and 383 from staff.
- **Engagement with Young People:** In June 2025, members of the Hampshire Youth Forum were invited to take part in an online focus group to discuss and give their views on Local Government Reorganisation. In July 2025, a survey was sent to Year 10 and Year 12 students from education settings in Hampshire to ask what they thought about the upcoming changes to local government. The survey received 406 responses.
- **Commissioned research, delivered by Action Hampshire:** Hampshire County Council commissioned Action Hampshire to hold two focus groups in August 2025 with representatives of voluntary and community organisations in Hampshire, to seek their views on local government reorganisation. One of the focus groups comprised organisations that work with people who use social care services. The second focus group included organisations active in urban and/or unparished neighbourhoods.
- **Councillors:** A Hampshire County Council Member survey on local identity and empowerment ran from 6 -15 June 2025, receiving a total of 33

responses. Members of Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have had opportunities to attend briefings and a dedicated event on 11 July 2025 on neighbourhood empowerment.

- **Town and parish councils:** As well as attending stakeholder briefings, town and parish councillors and clerks across Hampshire and the Solent were invited to workshops on 7 August 2025 to share their experiences and insights on neighbourhood empowerment.
- **Stakeholders:** Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council organised discussions, briefings and attended partnership meetings to discuss the potential impacts of local government reorganisation on key partners and stakeholders.

Appendix 2: Neighbourhoods: Definitions and National Policy Context

There is no agreed definition of what a 'neighbourhood' is as a unit of geography. 'Neighbourhood' is a term generally used to describe a boundary that is broadly recognisable to people as the 'natural geography' of their local community.

Many people, including the Hampshire Perspectives panel of residents who shared their views on local government reorganisation, identify their 'neighbourhood' as the immediate area surrounding where they live, comprising a collection of households, streets, and local amenities. In statistical measures, Lower Level Super Output Areas with an average population of 1,500 are the usual description of neighbourhoods.

Some neighbourhoods have a defined and fixed boundary. For example, Local Planning Authorities can formally designate an area as a Neighbourhood Area under neighbourhood planning legislation.

Since 2024, the UK Government has been developing a 'neighbourhoods' policy programme to require and encourage a range of public service organisations to shift decision-making, resource, and delivery from central institutions towards neighbourhoods. In this national policy-making context, a neighbourhood is a larger area than a collection of households and streets. At the time of writing, the Government has issued the following guidance on neighbourhood areas:

- **Health:** In the 10-Year Health Plan, which sets out proposals for a Neighbourhood Health Service, a single neighbourhood is estimated to cover approximately 50,000 people. PCN areas, which cover a patient population of 30,000 to 50,000, are described as a basis for this type of working.⁴² The Government selected Portsmouth as one of the first 43 'pioneer areas' to roll out neighbourhood health services in England.⁴³
- **Policing:** In a letter on the Government's Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, the then Home Secretary Yvette Cooper wrote that she expects neighbourhood-level policing to be linked to council wards, but will work with councils and police forces to define and implement neighbourhood areas that are recognisable to communities and workable for police forces.⁴⁴
- **Regeneration:** Guidance on the Plan for Neighbourhoods, which is targeted at 75 towns across the UK, notes that the default geographic boundary for Neighbourhood Boards in England and Wales is based on built-up areas as

⁴² DHSC. July 2025. [Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England](#). p.32.

⁴³ DHSC. 9 September 2025. [Millions of people to benefit from healthcare on their doorstep](#).

⁴⁴ Home Office. 10 April 2025. [Letter from the Home Secretary to police and crime commissioners and chief constables on the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee](#).

defined by the Office for National Statistics (2022 boundaries GB BGG).⁴⁵ Ryde is the only place in Hampshire and the Solent among the 75 towns. In the June 2025 Spending Review, the Government also announced that 25 trailblazer neighbourhoods across the UK, mostly inner-city districts, would receive up to £20m regeneration funding over the next decade.⁴⁶

- **Neighbourhood outcomes:** The Government’s consultation on its proposed Local Government Outcomes Framework closed on 12th September.⁴⁷ The proposed priority outcomes include a ‘Neighbourhoods’ category and draft outcomes metrics from the Community Life Survey, which publishes data at lower tier local authority level. Draft output metrics are sourced from Government fly-tipping statistics, which are also published at lower-tier local authority level, and access to green spaces statistics, which the Government plans to develop as a local authority level metric.
- **Area governance:** The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, as introduced in July 2025, proposes a new requirement for local authorities to make appropriate arrangements for effective governance in a ‘neighbourhood area’. Such arrangements would be specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State following the enactment of the Bill. In written statements, the former Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon, indicated that the Government’s preferred arrangements would likely involve ‘Neighbourhood Area Committees’ led by ward councillors.⁴⁸

Through desk-based research, Hampshire and East Hampshire have reviewed examples of Area Committee-style structures in single-tier council areas outside Hampshire and the Solent. The table below shows the council areas we have looked at so far and a summary of their membership.

| Council | Neighbourhood governance | Membership |
|----------|---|--|
| Barnsley | 6 Area Councils, linked to Ward Alliances ⁴⁹ | Ward councillors are members of Area Councils. Ward Alliances include councillors and community leaders. |

⁴⁵ MHCLG. 12 March 2025. [Plan for Neighbourhoods: governance and boundary guidance](#).

⁴⁶ MHCLG. 11 June 2025. [Government announces 25 "trailblazer neighbourhoods" to receive long-term investment – details](#).

⁴⁷ MHCLG. 3 July 2025. [Local Government Outcomes Framework: Call for Feedback](#). Closed on 12 September 2025.

⁴⁸ McMahon, J. 3 June 2025. [Local Government Reorganisation](#). Written Statement.

⁴⁹ Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council. [Your local area and ward](#).

| Council | Neighbourhood governance | Membership |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Bristol | 9 Area Committees ⁵⁰ | All councillors in the area covered by a committee. |
| Buckinghamshire | 8 Community Boards ⁵¹ | All unitary councillors and town and parish councils in the area are members. Voluntary and community groups and residents are encouraged to participate. |
| Cornwall | 12 Community Area Partnerships ⁵² | Councillors, town and parish councils, police, health services, and the voluntary and community sector. |
| Cumberland | 8 Community Panels, linked to Community Networks ⁵³ | Ward councillors are members of Community Panels. Community Networks include partners, third sector, businesses, and residents. |
| Durham | 12 Local Networks ⁵⁴ | All councillors in a network area, bringing together partners, businesses, and residents. |
| North Yorkshire | 6 Area Committees ⁵⁵ | All councillors in a committee area. |
| Oldham | 5 District Community Councils ⁵⁶ | All councillors in a community council area. |
| Sheffield | 7 Local Area Committees ⁵⁷ | All councillors in a committee area. |

⁵⁰ Bristol City Council. [Your Local Area Committees](#).

⁵¹ Buckinghamshire Council. [Community Boards](#).

⁵² Cornwall Council. [Community Area Partnerships](#).

⁵³ Cumberland Council. [Community Panels and how to apply for support](#).

⁵⁴ Durham County Council. [About Local Networks](#).

⁵⁵ North Yorkshire Council. [Committee structure](#).

⁵⁶ LGA. 15 August 2025. [Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council: District Community Councils](#).

⁵⁷ Sheffield City Council. [Local Area Committees](#).

| Council | Neighbourhood governance | Membership |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Somerset | 18 Local Community Networks ⁵⁸ | All councillors in a network area and representatives from partners, business groups and town and parish councils. |
| Westmorland and Furness | 3 Locality Boards ⁵⁹ | All councillors in a board area. |
| Wiltshire | 18 Area Boards, which develop networks ⁶⁰ | Ward councillors are members of Area Boards. Networks include town and parish councils, public and VCSE partners, schools, businesses, and residents. |

The UK Government's emerging policy on neighbourhoods is therefore generally targeted at the 'strategic neighbourhood' level of council wards and PCN areas. A partnership approach to empowering neighbourhoods in Hampshire and the Solent will likely be based on strategic neighbourhood geographies.

However, if neighbourhood empowerment is to be genuine and effective, partnerships and governance at strategic neighbourhood level must facilitate positive outcomes that are perceived in the 'real neighbourhood' areas of households and streets, with which residents identify most.

⁵⁸ Somerset Council. [Somerset Local Community Networks](#).

⁵⁹ Westmorland and Furness Council. [Area Locality Boards and Community Development Teams](#).

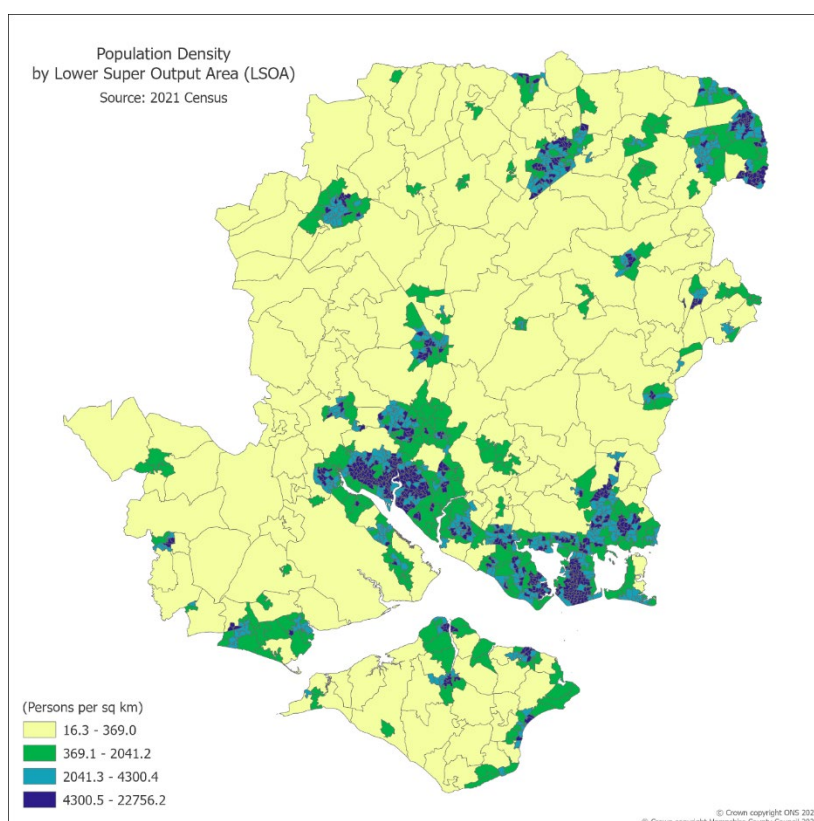
⁶⁰ Wiltshire Council. [Area Boards](#).

Appendix 3: Community and Identity in Hampshire and the Solent

An Overview of People and Places in Hampshire and the Solent

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Hampshire and the Solent region is the diversity of its places and geography – from the major port cities of Portsmouth and Southampton; the smaller historic city of Winchester; and large towns such as Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Fareham and Farnborough; to the coastal and island communities of Gosport, Hayling Island and Isle of Wight; small market towns and villages that are the hubs of activity in rural areas; rolling countryside and farmland; precious chalk streams like the River Itchen and River Test which are crucial for biodiversity; and protected natural landscapes located in the New Forest, and South Downs National Parks and the North Wessex Downs.

Hampshire and the Solent's geographic diversity and polycentricity have shaped a variety of different communities, identities, and lifestyles among the more than 2 million people who live in the region. Population density varies greatly due to the mix of urban and rural settlements. (Map 2). Portsmouth is the second most densely populated local authority outside London, with approximately 5,258 people per square kilometre.⁶¹ By contrast, there are an estimated 192.8 people per square kilometre in the Winchester district area.⁶² In the more isolated, rural areas, residents and businesses face significant challenges accessing key services and infrastructure.



Map 2: Population Density by Lower Super Output Area in Hampshire and the Solent

⁶¹ Portsmouth City Council. [Portsmouth demography – JSNA report](#).

⁶² Hampshire County Council. October 2024. [JSNA Demography](#).

There are also place-level variations in the age and ethnicity structure of the region's resident population. These variations shape different local requirements for age-appropriate and culturally appropriate infrastructure and services in different areas. The Equality Impact Assessment accompanying Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's local government reorganisation proposal identifies that:⁶³

- The Isle of Wight (29.8%), New Forest (30.3%), Fareham (25.6%), Havant (24.9%), and East Hampshire (24.1%) have the highest proportions of residents aged 65 and over, significantly above the England average of 18.7%.
- Southampton and Portsmouth have significantly lower proportions of older residents (13.7% and 15.0% respectively) and a higher proportion of working-age adults aged 16 to 64 (68.7% in Southampton and 67.0% in Portsmouth) than other parts of the area, reflecting a younger demographic profile.
- Some areas, such as Basingstoke and Deane (17.7%) and Test Valley (21.7%), are close to the England average of 18.7% of residents aged 65 and over. In Basingstoke and Deane, Rushmoor and Test Valley, the population aged 75 years and older is forecast to increase by over 20% between 2023 and 2030, which will shape a greater need for age-friendly places and demand for health and care services in those areas.⁶⁴
- The ethnic composition of Hampshire and the Solent is less diverse than the national average for England, with 90.6% of people identifying as White in the 2021 Census compared to 81.0% in England. In the region, 9.4% of people identify with other ethnic backgrounds, with the resident population of urban areas such as Rushmoor (22.6%), Southampton (19.3%) and Portsmouth (14.8%) reporting significantly higher levels of ethnic diversity than in more rural districts. Case Study 10 shows how East Hampshire District Council engaged collaboratively with the Muslim community in Whitehill and Bordon to organise a culturally appropriate service that responded to an identified local need.

Case Study 10: Muslim women's Pilates classes in East Hampshire

Physical activity surveys highlighted very low levels of exercise amongst Muslim women in Whitehill and Bordon. Further consultation, supported by a ward councillor, identified that this community faced significant barriers to

⁶³ Hampshire County Council. July 2025. [Appendix H: Equalities Impact Assessment](#).

⁶⁴ Hampshire County Council. October 2024. [JSNA Demography](#).

exercise, mainly due to their needs of exercising in a private environment, exclusively with other women.

After speaking further with the Muslim community and a local exercise instructor, East Hampshire District Council helped to fund and start a new Pilates class in a suitably private venue, at an appropriate timing to suit childcare responsibilities and avoid prayer times.

There have been more than 25 unique participants across the span of the project. East Hampshire is continuing to work with the instructor to help the class become self-sustaining so that it can be a long-lasting and accessible scheme for local Muslim women to be physically active.

Hampshire and the Solent is one of the strongest regional economies in the country, with a GDP of £81.05bn, but there are pockets of urban, rural, and coastal communities across the region who experience deprivation. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019, there are 44 local areas in Hampshire and the Solent which are ranked in the 10% most deprived areas in England: 7 in Hampshire (of which 6 are in Havant borough), 3 in the Isle of Wight, 15 in Portsmouth and 19 in Southampton.⁶⁵ On the Isle of Wight, just over half the population live in areas which are in the three deciles of highest deprivation.⁶⁶ In these and other areas of the region with higher levels of deprivation and poverty, local communities are more likely to face poorer health and educational outcomes and inequalities accessing public services.

Although the focus of this report is on communities of place, there can be important overlaps between communities of place and communities of interest. A community of interest includes people who share common experiences and interests that are not necessarily tied to living in the same area. An example of the overlap between communities of place and interest is the Armed Forces Community, which includes serving personnel, veterans, reservists, and immediate family members.

Hampshire and the Solent has a historic and special relationship with the Armed Forces and is home to one of the largest Armed Forces communities of serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and military families in the UK. In Portsmouth, an estimated 18% of the population is a member of this community,⁶⁷ and Hampshire is unique in being the only local authority that has military bases for all three of the Armed Forces Services (Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force), located in areas such as Havant, Gosport, Aldershot, Hook and Andover.⁶⁸ Hampshire's Armed Forces community includes a large number of Gurkha veterans and their families,

⁶⁵ Hampshire County Council. [Hampshire and Isle of Wight JSNA – Demography Report](#).

⁶⁶ Isle of Wight Council. May 2024. [JSNA Healthy Places](#).

⁶⁷ Portsmouth City Council. [Portsmouth's Armed Forces Community](#).

⁶⁸ Hampshire County Council. [Background to our support for the Armed Forces Community in Hampshire](#).

with the 2021 census indicating that 10.6% of people in Rushmoor borough identify as Nepali.⁶⁹

As part of local government reorganisation, councils in Hampshire and the Solent could work collaboratively with the Armed Forces Community so that the Armed Forces Covenant's duties and principles are embedded into the design and future operations of the new unitary councils. In doing so, the new unitary councils could be well positioned to sign an Armed Forces Covenant Pledge as soon as possible after becoming established.

Considerations on the shaping of local identities in Hampshire and the Solent

The local identities of any community of place are multi-layered. An individual might define themselves by their street; the local area immediately surrounding their home; a local landmark; the village, town, or city they live in or live closest to; historic county or region; or nation.

The 'Hampshire Perspectives' panel of residents chose 'the neighbourhood immediately surrounding your home' as the local area with which they most strongly identified (83%). There were lower scores for identifying with 'your local authority' (71%) and 'your closest town or city' (56%), demonstrating that the administrative boundaries set by local authorities are less important in shaping the identities of individuals and communities than their hyperlocal area.

"I think a lot of the time people don't actually base their identity or connection to the local area based on their authority. They base it on what there is around them, rather than the authority name written on their bills or street signs."

Engagement with Young People

As discussed previously, local identities can be shaped by the characteristics, advantages and challenges of living and working in urban, rural, and coastal geographies. Other features of places that can define and shape local identities include:

- **Anchor Institutions and Community Infrastructure** – Anchor institutions are major local employers whose presence and operations can have a significant impact on the economic and social wellbeing of local communities. These include public bodies like councils and the NHS; universities and large colleges; large businesses like BAE Systems in Alton and Portsmouth; and prominent sports clubs like Portsmouth F.C. and Southampton F.C. Community infrastructure describes smaller organisations and spaces that are essential to the economic and social wellbeing of neighbourhoods. These include VCSE organisations, as well as assets like local schools, community

⁶⁹ Rushmoor Borough Council. February 2025. [Ethnic diversity and migration data sheet](#).

centres, libraries, health centres, high streets, faith buildings, public transport, pubs, parks and grassroots sports, heritage, and cultural facilities. Local identities can be shaped by the presence and absence of community infrastructure.

- **History, Heritage and Culture** – These include the Hampshire and Solent region's historic close ties with the Armed Forces; historic buildings and landmarks like Winchester Cathedral; heritage and traditions such as the practice of commoning in the New Forest; popular festivals like the Isle of Wight Festival and community fetes; connections to prominent figures of British history like King Alfred of Wessex and Jane Austen; the region's international reputation as 'the gateway to the world' through its ports, airports and direct road and rail links to London; and local traditions such as the historic rights and privileges of certain cities and boroughs to appoint a civic mayor.⁷⁰
- **Personal affinities** – These include the places where one played as a child or got married. They hold a deep and special emotional significance to individuals.

Economic and socio-economic geographies can serve as a measure of local identities through the mapping of commuter patterns and daily routines, particularly in large cities and their immediate environs. Hampshire and the Solent contain many shared aspects of a Functional Economic Area (FEA), such as a high degree of labour market self-containment, an inter-linked housing market and Travel to Work Areas that are largely contained within the region. More than 85% of Hampshire residents live and work in the Hampshire and Solent FEA.

The impact of socio-economic factors on mobility and networks shapes local identities. Affluent, healthy people with access to transport and broad social networks tend to travel more often and at greater distances for employment and leisure. On the other hand, those who live in more deprived areas, who have health conditions affecting mobility, and who have less access to reliable transport, good jobs and broad social networks tend to base their life in a smaller geographic area and feel the loss of economic and community infrastructure within their area more keenly.

Local identity is closely linked to pride in place. The local identities of individuals and communities tend to be shaped by the positive associations of geography, culture, history, traditions, and presence of social infrastructure. Frustration, disillusionment and narratives of decline take root when the places in which communities have pride are perceived to change for the worse; when areas, services and buildings that

⁷⁰ The former Minister of State for English Devolution and Local Government, Jim McMahon MP, indicated that parish councils and unparished areas could make ceremonial appointments, such as civic mayors, after reorganisation to preserve cultural traditions that are an important part of the identity of some local communities. See: Question for MHCLG. Answered on 24 January 2025. [Civic Dignitaries](#). UIN 24613.

matter to communities are not looked after, are damaged or shut down; when areas feel less safe because of crime and anti-social behaviour; and when communities perceive that they have had no power to influence any change or improvement in the area and feel like their voices and wishes are ignored. Community empowerment approaches are essential for reinvigorating people's pride, connection, and sense of agency in the places where they live.

Isle of Wight

Hampshire County Council's and East Hampshire District Council's proposal for four unitary councils includes the retention of a standalone unitary authority for the Isle of Wight.

Island communities have a strong sense of shared local identity, as well as specific priorities and needs regarding transport and access to key public services such as education, care, and environmental resilience. Although police and health geographies cover the island along with parts of the mainland, a cross-Solent council would face significant difficulty overcoming market barriers that drive the high costs of providing council services on an island. The Leaders of Hampshire and the Solent's 15 councils proposed in their joint interim local government reorganisation submission that they support Isle of Wight remaining as a separate unitary authority.⁷¹

While the preference remains for the Isle of Wight to continue as a standalone authority, this does not preclude future collaboration with mainland unitary authorities. All partners recognise the Isle of Wight's unique challenges with the delivery of public services on an island, and are committed to exploring further opportunities for partnerships, collaboration, and joined-up services where appropriate.

⁷¹ Hampshire County Council. 21 March 2025. [Decision Report: English Devolution White Paper – Local Government Reorganisation](#).

Appendix 4: Community Engagement and Empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent

When considering the opportunities that local government reorganisation could offer for enabling stronger community engagement and empowerment in Hampshire and the Solent, the best starting point is to review and learn from existing approaches that are effective and responsive to local identities and priorities across the region.

This appendix highlights some examples of the good practice led and supported by the 15 existing principal councils – one county, three unitaries and 11 districts and boroughs – in Hampshire and the Solent. It is by no means a comprehensive list of the breadth and impact of the community engagement that takes place in the region but serves to illustrate that future unitary councils will have a wealth of existing good practice from which to learn and build their own empowerment models.

The appendix also highlights the vital contributions that town and parish councils make to community engagement and local democratic representation in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and looks ahead to the neighbourhood empowerment role that the future Hampshire and Solent Mayor and MCCA could adopt in the years following May 2026.

- **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD):** In November 2024, *East Hampshire District Council* led a conference launching its ABCD programme, which empowers and enables communities to take on a greater role in local decisions, mobilisation of local assets and delivery of local services. More than 60 representatives from community groups and parish councils attended the conference. Examples of how ABCD has influenced East Hampshire's work with local communities are shown in Case Studies 1, 4 and 6. ABCD will be at the core of East Hampshire's forthcoming Community Development Strategy.
- **Asset Strategy and Management:** *Hampshire County Council* acquired 15.78 acres of agricultural grazing land near Rockford Common in the New Forest in November 2012. This purchase was part of a collaborative initiative involving several organisations committed to preserving commoning, a traditional practice vital to the New Forest's ecology and economy. The land is leased by the County Council on a long-term agreement to the New Forest Trust, a local charity, to ensure it remains available for commoners' winter grazing.
- **Co-production:** *Portsmouth City Council's* Adult Social Care Strategy commits to using the principles of co-production as a fundamental approach in all adult social care work.⁷² In addition to the adults' health and care co-production featured in Case Study 5, *Hampshire County Council* supports the Hampshire SEND Youth Forum, a participation platform co-designed with

⁷² Portsmouth City Council. 2024. [Adult Social Care Strategy 2024-27](#).

young people aged 14 to 25 with special educational needs. The County Council also established the Voices group across the Public Health functions of the four upper tier local authorities in the region, which brings together voices of lived experience of suicidality and bereavement by suicide to shape suicide prevention planning and implementation of programmes.

- **Community Champions:** *Hampshire County Council* works with 34 Waste Prevention Community Champion Volunteers who promote waste prevention messages through attendance at local events and talks to community groups.
- **Community cohesion:** *Rushmoor Borough Council* has established the Rushmoor Voices community engagement group, which enables councillors to work with local community groups and leaders to better understand community concerns and work together to mitigate local tensions.⁷³ *Hampshire County Council* is working with Afghan refugees who are referred to the county by the Home Office to give them support to integrate into the community. An example of the integration is the County's commissioning of bespoke ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lessons responding to caseload data and ensuring, if required, female only lessons and also in individual homes. There has been a high attendance rate, new friendships forged, and growing confidence in speaking English, which can unlock greater employment options for the refugees.
- **Community events:** *Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council* produces Basingstoke Festival, an annual outdoor arts festival that takes place in summer bringing together local and national creative talent with local communities. *Southampton City Council*'s Love Where You Live campaign organises community events in neighbourhoods, with information stalls on council services. *Winchester City Council* supported Cycle Winchester to organise its eighth Mass Ride in April 2025 to encourage community connections and interest in cycling.⁷⁴
- **Community Hubs** are essential to *Hampshire County Council's* commitment to supporting children, adults, and families earlier and more effectively within their locality. Case Study 11 highlights how Hampshire is developing local libraries as impactful community hubs.

Case Study 11: Libraries and Community Hubs

In alignment with the principles of the 2022 MacAlister Review, Hampshire Children's Services are already in the process of implementing a strengths-based neighbourhood model that includes libraries and other community spaces such as Community Hubs. Council teams work with partners, community groups, and

⁷³ Rushmoor Borough Council. [Rushmoor Voices community engagement group - terms of reference](#).

⁷⁴ Cycle Winchester. [Mass Ride 8 on April 26th 2025](#).

organisations to deliver a range of campaigns, activities, and networking opportunities that empower communities. These include:

- **Early Years Impact:** In 2024-25, 165,000 family members participated in initiatives like Rhyme Time, Storytime, and New Parent Meet & Connect, providing support to improve speech and language, literacy, and home learning; aiding school readiness. Staff and partners report that over 90% of families attending New Parent Meet & Connect felt more supported in understanding child development and about local services.
- **Warm Hubs and Community Connection** opportunities provide free, safe spaces for all, including vulnerable and underrepresented groups. Community-led activities, including coffee mornings and wellbeing drop-ins, reduce isolation and build resilience. Signposting and support sessions provide practical help like energy-saving or benefit guidance. Since 2022, over 70,000 residents have accessed these activities in libraries, with many reporting improved wellbeing and awareness of available support.
- **Community networks:** *Hampshire County Council's* 'Hampshire Hives' approach builds a network of fostering families who support one another in their local area, with one foster carer known as the Hive Carer Support Worker acting as the heart of the hive. Hives have become a support bubble for the foster families and the children they care for and enabled families to identify and receive assistance with potential challenges at an earlier stage to help ensure the child or children they care for remain in a stable home.⁷⁵
- **Community participation:** *Winchester City Council* supported a Winchester District Climate Assembly, which was organised by local climate groups in 2022.⁷⁶ *Havant Borough Council* manages a dedicated 'participation platform' for communities to share views and feedback on the council's projects.⁷⁷
- **Community researchers:** *Hampshire County Council's* Public Health team funds a network of trained community researchers (members of the public equipped with research skills) who conduct studies within ethnic minority communities and specific local areas. Their work helps capture insights and perspectives from groups who are often under-represented in traditional research, offering valuable understanding of local views on key public health

⁷⁵ Hampshire County Council. [The Hampshire Hive](#).

⁷⁶ Winchester City Council. 12 June 2023. [Winchester City Council supports first Winchester District Climate Assembly event](#).

⁷⁷ Havant Borough Council. [Participation Platform](#).

topics. A recent example of this was recruiting community researchers from the Afghan population to understand the barriers to women's access to health services.

- **Connecting communities through culture and heritage: *Isle of Wight Council*** adopted the Cultural Strategy 2023-33 developed by local cultural development agency Creative Island, which includes commitments to support grassroots creativity and expand the programme of cultural participation to marginalised communities.⁷⁸ ***Gosport Borough Council*** and The National Lottery Heritage Fund provided funding for Hampshire Cultural Trust to increase community engagement and involvement in Gosport's heritage and enhance the skills and capacity of local heritage organisations, as described in Case Study 12.

Case Study 12: Gosport Heritage Generator – Hampshire Cultural Trust

Gosport Heritage Generator is a three-year project led by Hampshire Cultural Trust that celebrates Gosport's heritage and invests in its future, supported by funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Gosport Borough Council.

Running until 2026, there are several strands to the project:

- A training programme is enhancing the skills and capacity of local heritage organisations. So far, 85 participants have attended training ranging from governance to event planning, marketing to community engagement.
- A small grants programme is available to support attendees to put their ideas and learning into practice. So far, Hampshire Cultural Trust has received 24 applications and awarded £46,000 in grant funding, leading to heritage trails, exhibitions, green sketching, and blackout poetry all engaging communities in Gosport's heritage.
- Alongside the skills and grants programme, community co-creation projects have resulted in a new board game exploring Gosport's pub history, an exhibition delving into Gosport's vibrant entertainment scene, and a collection redisplay at Gosport Museum and Art Gallery launching in 2026.

The programme is shining a spotlight on the town's rich heritage, unearthing untold stories, developing hands-on heritage experiences, and investing in both individuals and groups to increase local community involvement in heritage and ensure the sustainability of the local heritage offer.

⁷⁸ Creative Island. 2023. [All the Wonder: The Isle of Wight Cultural Strategy 2023-33](#).

- **Digital Inclusion:** In 2024-25, **Gosport Borough Council's** award-winning 'Digital Peninsula' digital inclusion initiative saw the development of four Community Digital Hubs in communities most affected by social deprivation and support for several community groups to build new websites to enhance their digital presence.⁷⁹
- **Empowering town and parish councils:** **Hampshire County Council's** Parish Lengthsman Service empowers some town and parish councils to manage lower priority highway issues. Hampshire's Community Engagement Rangers work with town and parish councils and communities to support them with practical tasks to improve the rights of way and rural paths in their areas and signpost to funding opportunities to assist with meeting community priorities for improvements.
- **Local governance:** **Eastleigh Borough Council** supports five Local Area Committees made up of ward councillors. These Committees enable local communities to have a voice in council business affecting their area and ensure that decisions are taken at the lowest possible level on matters such as determining planning applications and managing local budgets and capital projects.⁸⁰ **Isle of Wight Council** is supporting the Ryde Neighbourhood Board to oversee the management of a £20m endowment-style grant awarded to Ryde by the UK Government.⁸¹
- **Social value:** **Portsmouth City Council's** Social Value Policy aims to create opportunities for lasting, positive impact in local communities, businesses and the environment through all aspects of the council's operations, including services and procurement.⁸² Portsmouth also developed a Social Value Roadmap setting out pathways for making social value 'business as usual' and supporting alignment with the 2040 City Vision.⁸³
- **Supporting community groups and activities:** **Southampton City Council's** Stronger Communities programme offers practical information, tips and policies for communities to help start, fund, and run a local community group. **Hart District Council's** 'Here for Hart' is a directory of local help, information, connections, and community services in the district.⁸⁴ Staunton Country Park, managed by **Hampshire County Council**, empowers local communities by providing opportunities for engagement, wellbeing and skills development. (Case Study 13)

⁷⁹ Gosport Borough Council. [Gosport Wins Future Skills Category at Prestigious Visa 'Let's Celebrate Towns' Awards](#).

⁸⁰ Eastleigh Borough Council. [Your local area](#).

⁸¹ Ryde Town Council. 28 May 2025. [Ryde Neighbourhood Board are seeking new Members!](#).

⁸² Portsmouth City Council. 2021. [Social Value Policy](#).

⁸³ Portsmouth City Council. 2021. [Appendix 1 – Roadmap to Development and Implementation](#).

⁸⁴ Hart District Council. [Here for Hart Directory](#).

Case Study 13: Staunton Country Park

Residents and community groups in South East Hampshire were looking for accessible spaces to meet and organise activities to enhance social connections and community wellbeing.

To support the local community, Staunton Country Park committed to transform into a vibrant community hub, enhancing the availability of its buildings and green spaces to support community activities.

The Country Park now hosts park runs, park yoga, walking trails and volunteering. Local community groups based at the Country Park include The Right to Work CIC, providing real-work experiences for adults with learning disabilities; Tearooms run by Park Community School providing vocational training for secondary school pupils; Men's Shed; Friends of Staunton Country Park; Community Payback and educational visits, including vocational training and animal therapy for SEN pupils at Staunton Farm.

Thousands of residents now participate in voluntary and community activities at Staunton Country Park, including:

- Over **300,000** people visiting each year.
- **180** local volunteers provide over **30,000** hours supporting the park and community activities.
- The Right to Work supports **100** adults with learning disabilities to work at Staunton.
- The Men's Shed currently has **25** regular participants, reducing social isolation and improving mental health.

These outcomes demonstrate how councils' physical assets can help facilitate stronger social bonds, improved well-being, and a more resilient local community.

- **Town centre regeneration:** In May 2025, **New Forest District Council** sought to recruit up to 50 people from Totton to form part of a new community panel that would help shape and influence the future of Totton town centre.⁸⁵ As part of the Romsey Future community partnership, **Test Valley Borough Council** supported the organisation of citizens' assemblies in 2019 and 2024 to help shape future plans for Romsey town centre (featured in Case Study 8). As **Fareham Borough Council** begins to develop and deliver projects in the Town Centre, the council is creating an online panel of Borough visitors, representing the diversity of people that visit the Town Centre.⁸⁶
- **Youth democracy:** **Test Valley Borough Council** awarded £10,000 to a youth project designed to develop the skills, confidence, and capabilities of young people aged 15 to 18 in Andover, so that they can lead and influence

⁸⁵ New Forest District Council. 7 April 2025. [Totton Town centre framework masterplan](#).

⁸⁶ Fareham Borough Council. [Get involved and stay up to date](#).

change in their communities.⁸⁷ **Southampton City Council's** Junior Neighbourhood Wardens scheme aims to empower young people and provide them with the skills, knowledge and opportunities they need to make positive contributions to their communities.⁸⁸

Town and Parish Councils

The Government's programme of local government reorganisation does not directly affect town and parish councils, which form the most local tier of government in England. However, the inclusion of 'neighbourhood empowerment' in the Government's assessment criteria demonstrates that local government reorganisation will have implications, and could bring opportunities, for town and parish councils.

Town and parish councils, councillors, clerks and volunteers are the bedrock of community governance in most of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, playing a prominent and integral role in local democracy and place-making. Their activities can include delivering hyperlocal services and community events to meet local needs; managing and mobilising local assets for the benefit of communities; giving residents and local businesses a voice and representation in decisions on hyperlocal issues such as planning decisions; and improving the quality of life and community wellbeing through organising and funding community projects.

The scope and extent of a town or parish council's activity largely depend on its size and capacity. Some town and parish councils are small organisations run by a few dedicated volunteers; others are considerably larger and have greater capacity and resources to develop place strategies, take over the ownership of local assets, and deliver hyperlocal services. For example, three town and parish councils in partnership with Isle of Wight Council launched a Place Plan for their combined area.⁸⁹

In Hampshire and the Solent, there are currently no town or parish councils in the areas of Gosport, Havant, Portsmouth, Rushmoor and Southampton. In summer 2025, Rushmoor Borough Council launched a community governance review to seek residents' views on establishing town and parish councils in the borough.⁹⁰

Winchester City Council, which currently has 44 town and parish councils in its area, is considering a community governance review on the creation of a new town council covering the unparished area of Winchester Town.⁹¹

As the new unitary councils will be larger than the current district councils, the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC), the Isle of Wight Association of

⁸⁷ Test Valley Borough Council. 8 May 2025. [Test Valley Borough Council backs youth democracy project in Andover](#).

⁸⁸ Southampton City Council. [Junior Neighbourhood Wardens](#).

⁸⁹ Isle of Wight Council. 6 March 2024. [Bay Place Plan next steps call for community representatives](#).

⁹⁰ Rushmoor Borough Council. [Your community, your say](#).

⁹¹ Winchester City Council Licensing and Regulation Committee. 16 June 2025. [Community Governance Review: Winchester Town Area](#).

Local Councils (IWALC) and town and parish councils will be key partners on neighbourhood empowerment and a crucial link between larger unitary councils and community voices.

Hampshire and Solent Mayor and MCCA

The Hampshire and Solent MCCA is expected to be established in early 2026, with the first Mayoral election scheduled in May 2026.

The new Mayor and MCCA could have an important part to play in the engagement and empowerment of communities throughout Hampshire and the Solent. Although the responsibilities and priorities of the Mayor and MCCA would be focused on strategic place-making at the regional level, the decisions they make and their mandate to influence, convene and coordinate national and local partner organisations would lead to actions and outcomes that impact on communities and businesses at the local level.

The Mayor's visibility and leadership as one of the most prominent public figures in the region could create opportunities for the empowerment of local communities and voluntary and community groups – by encouraging and participating in a region-wide partnership approach to community empowerment, and by lending Mayoral backing and support to initiatives that fund, involve or enable communities to make change happen in their own neighbourhoods.

It will be for the future Mayor and MCCA to decide their priorities and preferred strategies for working with local partners and communities.

The following examples illustrate how the Hampshire and Solent Mayor and MCCA could take inspiration from existing Mayoral Strategic Authorities and Mayors in England by leading and supporting community engagement and empowerment initiatives:

- **A strategic approach to public service reform in neighbourhoods:** In 2018, Mayor Andy Burnham and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority launched a plan for a 'Greater Manchester Model' of public service reform based on integrated public services, neighbourhood delivery and asset-based approaches.⁹² A 'White Paper' with further detail on the proposed reforms was published in 2019.⁹³
- **Participatory democracy:** South Yorkshire Combined Authority established a working group with officers from across the authority who are embedding participatory democracy within policy development and other activities. This follows consultancy work carried out by TPXimpact to help South Yorkshire CA embed greater participatory democratic processes in its operations.⁹⁴

⁹² Greater Manchester Combined Authority. 2018. [The Greater Manchester Model: Further, Faster.](#)

⁹³ Greater Manchester Combined Authority. 2019. [The Greater Manchester Model.](#)

⁹⁴ TPXimpact. [Involving communities in the decisions that affect them in South Yorkshire.](#)

- **Youth democracy:** The Liverpool City Region supports a Youth Combined Authority to empower the voices of young people and create opportunities for them to influence decision-makers.⁹⁵ The East Midlands Combined County Authority held workshops for young people to co-design the functions of the East Midlands CCA Youth Committee before it is formally established.⁹⁶
- **Grant funding:** In York and North Yorkshire, Mayor David Skaith allocated £600,000 from his investment fund to the North Yorkshire Village Hall and Community Buildings Programme, which will help fund vital renovations to up to 21 community halls and hubs.⁹⁷ North East Mayor Kim McGuinness launched a £1m Opportunity Fund for small charities and community groups that bring together diverse communities to develop strong relationships and thriving neighbourhoods.⁹⁸
- **Community engagement:** The West Midlands Combined Authority hosted 'Ask the Mayor Anything' events. Up to May 2025, over 175 residents had taken part in the Q&A events held across local authority areas in the West Midlands. Mayor Richard Parker commented: "Over the past year, these conversations have helped shape how we deliver more social homes, improve the bus network, and tackle youth unemployment, while also helping to connect people to support and opportunity along the way."⁹⁹

In Hampshire and the Solent, future Neighbourhood Area Committees could assist the Mayor to hold Q&A events and strengthen connections with local communities in the region.

⁹⁵ Liverpool City Region. [Youth Combined Authority](#).

⁹⁶ East Midlands MCCA. 31 January 2025. [Young people come together to help shape the East Midlands region](#).

⁹⁷ York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. [Supporting communities at a local level](#).

⁹⁸ North East Combined Authority. 6 March 2025. [Mayor Kim McGuinness's pledge for grassroots community projects in the North East](#).

⁹⁹ West Midlands Combined Authority. 6 May 2025. [Opportunity for Birmingham residents to speak to Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands](#).