

# Supporting Communities – A strategy to tackle deprivation and inequalities across Rushmoor

## Executive Summary

Rushmoor is a generally affluent area and for most people it is a happy, healthy and safe place to live. However, despite its overall affluence, there are pockets of deprivation and some residents who do not have the same opportunities, hope or aspirations that others may have.

The unprecedented socio-economic crisis created by Covid-19, together with the more recent cost of living challenges and energy bills rising to unprecedented levels, have been extremely difficult for households, communities, and businesses across the borough. While the cost of living has impacted most households, the impact is greatest on those already living below the poverty line, and those on low incomes.

The Council recognises that there are factors that affect deprivation and poverty that we cannot directly control but we know that strong, resilient communities can help to reduce inequalities, increase social connections and improve the well-being of our communities. At a borough level we continue to respond and support people, working collectively to build longer-term resilience.

Supporting stronger communities is about collaborating with partners to tackle the inequalities and focus our collective efforts on the most deprived families and communities in the borough.

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the approach to Rushmoor’s ongoing commitment to tackle inequality and deprivation. It provides an overview of the priorities and proposed action seeking to address local challenges in order to build stronger, resilient communities.
- 1.2 Strong communities are those where people have pride in where they live, where they are confident, resilient and able to respond positively to the challenges that they face. There is a need to strengthen communities in order to improve health and wellbeing and address the disadvantage that impacts on the long- term life chances for residents in our deprived communities.
- 1.3 Whilst no single action or even a series of actions will eradicate deprivation and poverty, the Council recognises it’s role, to work with others, towards tackling the issues and addressing peoples’ needs where we can.
- 1.4 The Strategy focuses on the improvements the Council and our Partners are prioritising in the next three years. It supports the Council Plan and the longer-term delivery of ‘Your Future, Your Place’ – a Vision for Aldershot and Farnborough 2030 which puts strong communities at its core with a strong emphasis on people and place.

1.5 Overall Objective:

***To work with partners, to tackle the effects of poverty and deprivation, and to have a positive impact on people’s daily lives.***

1.6 Priority Themes

The priority themes have been informed by partner organisations, data sources, and the aspirations and ambitions of our communities:

## **Economic Hardship**

- To support people back into employment, raising skills and confidence

## **Young People**

- To raise aspirations - increase access to businesses and role models
- To improve the participation of young people in education and employment through training

## **Physical and Mental Health**

- To support physical and mental health and wellbeing provision

To support the objective of Public Health England to increase life expectancy at birth by two years and reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy between the least and most deprived communities by three years

## **Connecting Communities**

- To increase levels of community engagement and specifically engage Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities
- To reduce social isolation and loneliness
- To support digital enablement

## **Cost Of Living**

- To support local residents with the cost-of-living challenges

## **2. Background**

2.1 The Council has worked with partners, over many years, to address the issue of deprivation in the Borough. The focus of the work has included:

- Neighbourhood Renewal Plans
- Rushmoor Strategic Partnership – priority to tackle deprivation in Mayfield, North Town and Heron Wood wards
- My North Town – to assist North Town regeneration
- Prospect Estate Big Local (PEBL) – targeted to Cherrywood ward
- Skills and Employment programme, Skilled up, Rushmoor Employment & Skills Zone (RESZ)
- Mental health support in schools
- Physical activity in schools to tackle obesity
- Cohesion strategy and action plan
- Local coordination of national Troubled Families programme

2.2 Historically, the Council has delivered some successful initiatives to tackle the pockets of entrenched deprivation and this has primarily focused on Cherrywood. Despite this good work, it is acknowledged that it has not significantly altered deprivation levels in terms of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data and we must recognise that, due to how the IMD is measured, it is unlikely to do so in the near future.

2.3 Addressing significant deprivation is difficult and long term. For many communities that have experienced deprivation for some time, the causes are complex and multi- faceted and making real progress remains extremely difficult.

## 2.4 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Data

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation identifies that Rushmoor has three small areas of deprivation, in the 20% most deprived wards in England for multiple deprivation. They are:

Part of Cherrywood ward

Part of Aldershot Park ward

Part of Wellington ward

2.5 In addition to these locations, the data highlights key 'functional areas' where relatively speaking, Rushmoor does not generally perform well. This is also supported by other data from sources including Frimley ICS Shared Care Records, Public Health England, Acorn – Well-being Segmentation, Hampshire County Council's Rushmoor Covid-19 District Report and Active Lives Survey May 2018/19.

## 2.6 Functional areas

There are significant deprivation levels across the Borough for: Income, Health inequalities - especially mental health, self-harm, obesity and for Education, skills and training.

- **Income:** In Rushmoor, 11.2% of children live in low-income families. Wellington & Aldershot Park have high rates of income deprivation affecting older people.
- **Health** - Poor health in general compared to many other boroughs in Hampshire, with particular high levels of mental health issues and depression, falls in older people and injuries resulting from self-harm.

Rushmoor has one of the highest levels of adult inactivity in Hampshire across its population (Active Lives Survey May 2018/19) and this is worsening. 71% of adults are categorised as overweight and we have above average levels of obesity in young people in Years R and 6.

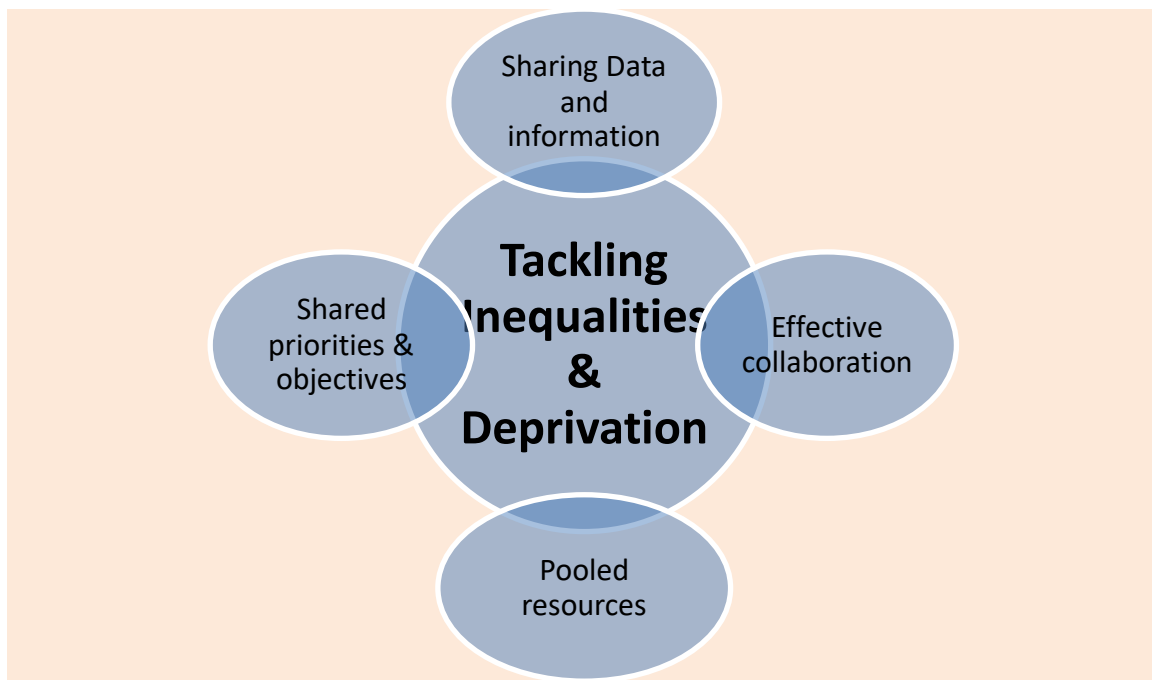
- **Education, Unemployment & Skills** – Rushmoor has high levels of unemployment – particularly for those between 18-24 years of age. These levels have been further damaged by Covid-19. Compared to Hampshire and the South East, Rushmoor has a higher percentage of residents with no qualifications.

Many of Rushmoor's primary schools are well below average for reading and writing levels and from our secondary schools three out of the four are below the Hampshire average.

### 3. Context

- 3.1 Partnership, collaboration and co-operation are the essential building blocks for tackling the inequalities and deprivation we know exist in the Borough. The commitment to tackling inequalities and deprivation and supporting stronger communities, is shared by partners and reflected in some of our mutual priorities and objectives.
- 3.2 We recognise that by having more honest conversations, understanding one another's priorities better and sharing data and resources, where possible, we can achieve more (Fig. 1).
- 3.3 The approach taken in preparing the strategy and action plan has taken account of:
- Indices of Multiple Deprivation - the official measure of relative deprivation in local communities across England
  - Data, evidence and local insight and intelligence from partner organisations
  - Partner workshops to identify joint priorities and future joint working
  - The priorities in the Council Business Plan and specifically Strong communities – proud of our area
  - The views of Members, local organisations and some community leaders, who have suggested a range of possible initiatives and opportunities.
  - The views of RBC Service Managers
  - Impacts of Covid-19 and the results from the Council's Covid-19 Survey of residents
  - Healthier Communities Partnership Committee
  - The uncertainty regarding re-opening of Council-funded leisure centres
- 3.4 The document reflects the strong view of partners that local targeted action is the best approach to making a difference to people. It is supported by an action plan which details where effort will be focussed in the next two/three years ahead.

Fig. 1:



## 4. Covid-19 Impact

- 4.1 Covid-19 has highlighted, and in many cases exacerbated, existing inequalities across the Borough. Whilst much of the early commentary gave the impression that Covid-19 had no boundaries and was indiscriminate in who it affected, it has become increasingly clear that the impacts of the disease fall disproportionately on our most deprived communities and put a spotlight on the long-standing, entrenched health inequalities in the Borough.
- 4.2 Throughout the coronavirus pandemic the Council, alongside many partners, has worked hard to ensure that those most impacted by the crisis are able to access the support that they need, whether that be emergency food or medicine supplies, accommodation for rough sleepers, or digital support to enable people to stay connected.
- 4.3 A Community and Recovery Plan has addressed the immediate and urgent welfare response to supporting communities in the short term. This includes a particular focus on food and emergency provisions, but also engaging and understanding the impact on local communities better.
- 4.4 The plan includes an objective to facilitate the physical, mental and financial recovery of communities via the provision of appropriate, sustainable and community-based food initiatives. This includes developing longer term community led food provision such as community larders.

- 4.5 Some of the projects identified in this plan will complement the Community and Recovery Plan or, in some cases, continue the work that has been developed in response to Covid-19 to support stronger communities.

## 5. The Action Plan

- 5.1 The Action Plan has been developed with partners over the last nine months. It is a “live” document to acknowledge the rapidly changing situation and to ensure it is adaptable to changing needs.
- 5.2 It is based on the following:
- Place based – developing projects for specific locations based on need
  - Function based – for example mental health or aspiration projects developed across the borough
  - Empowering communities and enabling community led initiatives
  - Working together to achieve more with our available resources
- 5.3 The plan will be updated annually in the same way that the Council Business Plan is refreshed so that priorities are reflective of local issues and partner priorities.
- 5.4 The partner working group will monitor and evaluate the delivery of the action plan.

## 6. Targeted approach

- 6.1 It is crucial that we target our approach to the areas of greatest need, where we can engage the local community and make the biggest difference to residents with our limited resources.
- 6.2 Based on data, existing partnerships and priorities the action plan will initially focus on the following areas:
- Cherrywood ward – via PEBL-related projects expanding into other areas of the ward
  - Aldershot Park ward – focus on health projects
  - Wellington ward/Aldershot Town Centre – focus on income and debt, recognising the importance of supporting communities in the wider regeneration context
  - Tower Hill – focus on health and disability related projects
  - Borough wide – Income, employment, education and skills projects

- 6.3 Whilst there will be a particular emphasis on targeted projects in these areas it is not at the exclusion of others. There remains a significant amount of work being delivered through Borough wide programmes and as part of the annual refresh the needs and issues within other wards will be considered for future initiatives.

## 7. The Role of the Council

- 7.1 Deprived communities experience poorer mental health, higher rates of smoking and greater levels of obesity than the more affluent. They spend more years in ill health and have lower life expectancy. Reducing health inequalities is an economic and social challenge as well as a moral one.
- 7.2 The Council recognises it has a moral and legal duty to challenge barriers and promote equality of opportunity for all our residents and that is why it has developed a renewed approach to supporting stronger communities in conjunction with our partners.
- 7.3 In recognition of the intrinsic link between health and deprivation the Council is in the process of developing a joint post with the CCG to oversee the delivery of the physical and health priorities and reduce health inequalities.
- 7.4 The Council recognises that it needs to remove barriers to opportunity and close existing equality gaps. To support this, the Council will commit to review its existing Equality Plan by focusing on the following proposals:

**As one of the borough's major employers:** The Council should lead by example and is committed to cultivating a workplace where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are valued. The Council's People's Strategy will promote engagement in order to encourage a wider diversity in its employment profile.

**As a Community Leader:** The Council will challenge inequalities in every community. Council Ward Members actively lead the work in their wards, engaging with local communities and groups to identify opportunities.

**Increased community engagement:** Rushmoor is a diverse borough; a home to many different communities, interests and perspectives. An equal Borough must ensure that all voices are heard and represented, by taking active steps to engage, listen and learn, especially from those who have traditionally struggled to be heard.

- 7.5 The Council will explore different models for engaging with communities and learn from the success the Council had when engaging on the response to Covid-19 and issues around tackling climate change.