

Test Valley Partnership

Report of the Head of Strategy and Innovation

Recommended:

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and endorses the work of the Test Valley Partnership.

SUMMARY:

- To report on the background and purpose of the Test Valley Partnership.
- Provide a summary of key areas of work for the Partnership as well as their progress and continued focus.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the work of the Test Valley Partnership and the benefit it brings to communities within the borough.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Test Valley Partnership brings together decision makers across the borough to work together for the benefit of our communities. The Partnership strives to have a good understanding of the place and its communities, being able to respond to needs in a co-ordinated and organised way by sharing skills, resources and information. Specifically focussing on addressing areas affecting the quality of life for residents in Test Valley
- 2.2 The Partnership was first established in 2002. This was in line with government guidance following the Local Government Act 2000, which placed a duty on local authorities to prepare a community strategy with a strategic partnership being a recommended vehicle in which to do this. This duty was later repealed in 2015 as part of the Deregulation Act.
- 2.3 In anticipation of this change in requirements, a review was undertaken with partners, and they were unanimous in their support for the role and value of the Partnership and agreed to continue its work. The removal of the requirement to prepare a community strategy has enabled the Partnership to become more community focused with greater alignment to the work of community-based partnerships such as Romsey Future and Andover Vision.
- 2.4 The Partnership also fulfils the function of the Community Safety Partnership which meets the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 2008 for statutory partners to work together in tackling instances of local crime and disorder. Previously, the Community Safety Partnership sat as a separate

board but as part of the review, partners agreed to the merger of the Community Safety Partnership Board and the Test Valley Partnership to ensure efficiency and avoid duplication of effort. Today, the Partnership is supported by a Community Safety Management Group which provides the tactical and operational focus whilst the Test Valley Partnership considers the annual strategic assessment and community safety priorities which guide the delivery of the work.

- 2.5 The Test Valley Partnership creates a space for local partners to develop effective relationships and organise cross working within communities in Test Valley. Meetings are held twice yearly and are chaired by the Leader of the Council. The meetings present an opportunity for partners to discuss complex issues impacting our communities and develop actions to tackle them. A number of sub groups meet throughout the year and report into the Test Valley Partnership, looking at more targeted or ongoing issues such as mental health, military support and cost of living.

3 Summary of key areas of work of the Partnership

- 3.1 The following are a few examples of how partners of the Test Valley Partnership are working together practically to take forward key strategic issues.
- 3.2 **Better Mental Health:** The Partnership are signatories of The Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health; an OHID (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) scheme outlining a commitment to working together to prevent mental health problems and promote good mental health through local and national action.
- 3.3 Identified by the Partnership as an area that required a collective focus, a sub group came together to build a case to become signatories of the Prevention Concordat. A detailed and considered piece of work which was approved by OHID in spring 2022. As part of this, the group developed a local action plan which identified areas of work such as: understanding local needs and assets, identifying opportunities for shared resource and the lasting impact of Covid on mental health. Partners have already been able to deliver outcomes by mapping local need and sharing access to data. This continues to be an important area of work for our communities and the Partnership will continue to progress and deliver against the action plan.
- 3.4 **Community Resilience:** Test Valley is recognised, at national level and regional level, as being an example of good practice in respect of community resilience. Reports of the National Preparedness Commission and the Local Government Association (links below) highlight this. The Borough Council co-ordinates the work of the Test Valley Resilience Forum which has been established for a decade and forms part of the wider Test Valley Partnership. The forum is led by Cllr Phil Lashbrook, the Council's member champion for Community Resilience, and provides a peer learning network. It has provided the conditions for many communities in Test Valley to have actively undertaken some form of community resilience. This was particularly apparent during the response to Covid. The Government recently published a new

national resilience framework (link below) which makes the promotion of community resilience the responsibility of public bodies such as the Council. Test Valley is in a strong position to build on its current strong foundations.

[Showcasing the value of democratic engagement in civil resilience: A collection of case studies | Local Government Association](#)

[NPC-CCA-Report-FINAL-FOR-PUBLICATION-ON-24-MARCH-2022.pdf \(nationalpreparednesscommission.uk\)](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-government-resilience-framework/the-uk-government-resilience-framework-html>

- 3.5 **Cost of Living:** A sub group was established in August 2022 to explore how partners could come together to plan for and mitigate against the impact of the rising cost of living on people living in Test Valley. The group was established following discussion of the issue at the Test Valley Partnership and as well as inviting the standing members of that group, also opened the invitation to a wider group of organisations concerned with supporting households.
- 3.6 From the work of this group, a Cost-of-Living Information hub was set up on the Council website, with contributions from a range of partners. This information is now well established, and organisations tell us they still refer people there as a good source of initial information. The group also helped establish the Council's Cost of Living grant programme, which has awarded more than £60,000 in grant funding to organisations supporting households in Test Valley. It also established a regular 'touch base' meeting between Citizen's Advice Test Valley, Romsey and Andover Foodbanks and the Council to specifically check on service demand and how families are being impacted locally. Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a more detailed update at its meeting in June.
- 3.7 **Civilian Military Forum (CMF):** The Test Valley CMF brings together partners with a military role, focus or responsibility to work together for the benefit of the Armed Forces community. Providing a space for relevant partners to network and support change. It is intended to compliment commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant, which outlines a moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at a local level.
- 3.8 The CMF was first formed in spring 2021 following an overview and scrutiny endorsed review of local military support. The findings outlined five key areas of work: Housing, community engagement, health, education and business & transition. It was agreed as part of overview and scrutiny's recommendations to Cabinet that a CMF be established under the umbrella of the Test Valley Partnership. The group meet on a quarterly basis to discuss current challenges and priorities for the military community in these areas and report into the main partnership.

- 3.9 A number of outcomes have been achieved such as creating a single point of contact webpage and forming a mental health support hub. The CMF has also begun working with health professionals to drive forward work encouraging our local GPs to become registered Veteran Friendly Practices. More recently, the CMF have signed up to the Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance South Hub and will be attending meetings to ensure they are up to date and informed on progress surrounding Armed Forces children.
- 3.10 The CMF was instrumental in supporting the council to achieve an Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award, indicating that Test Valley Borough Council is an employer that actively supports and values the Armed Forces community.
- 3.11 **Community Safety:** The Community Safety Partnership is a statutory partnership which brings together the council, police and probation, health and fire services to work collectively to reduce crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour and other behaviour adversely affecting communities in Test Valley); combat negative behaviours associated with the use of drugs and alcohol; and reduce the fear of crime.
- 3.12 As set out in 2.4, in Test Valley, the Test Valley Partnership acts as the Community Safety Partnership and the Community Safety Management Group is responsible for monitoring and driving progress against the priorities identified each year in the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment. They are currently working with partners, including the Police to explore opportunities to increase the participation of the Test Valley Partnership in both the review of data which informs the Strategic Assessment and to make the CSMG model more place-based and proactive to emerging issues.
- 3.13 Each year the partnership undertakes a strategic assessment of community safety matters taking into account local issues and the priorities of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This then results in a set of proposed priorities for Test Valley which the Test Valley Partnership approves. The current community safety priorities are as follows:
- (i) Community Crime Prevention
 - (ii) Tackling Anti-Social behaviour, through positive engagement and early intervention
 - (iii) Supporting Vulnerable people in need, including issues of domestic abuse, scams and Hate Crime
 - (iv) Drug related harm
 - (v) Fire Safety; including the promotion of the safe and well visits.
 - (vi) Maintain rural community confidence, through encouraging co-operative partnerships amongst landowners and partners.
 - (vii) Encourage co-operative partnership amongst agencies.
- 3.14 The Community Safety Management Group is then responsible for delivery against these priorities. The next meeting of the Test Valley Partnership in October will monitor the progress of the priorities and consider the updated strategic assessment.

- 3.15 The examples above demonstrate how the Test Valley Partnership has provided a vehicle in which to enable partners to collaborate on addressing key issues in a way that is based on evidence of need, is practical in its focus and seeks to remove unnecessary duplication of effort and deliver tangible benefits to local communities.
- 3.16 The conditions that enable this to happen are based on the development of a long-standing network of organisations where relationships and trust have been able to grow. It should not be underestimated the value the Partnership brings in enabling this to happen as was demonstrated both in the pandemic and the recent refugee crises when resources were able to be aligned at speed, focused on getting support to where it was needed most quickly. Without this trust and confidence amongst partners it is likely that the response to these issues would not have been as quick or effective in their deployment.

4 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 4.1 The Council's new Corporate Plan: A place for everyone – supporting our communities to thrive, recognises the need for the council to work collaboratively through partnership. Working in this way enables the council to have greater insight into the varying needs of communities across the borough and to be able to adapt and bring resources together with partners where they are needed most.
- 4.2 The Council will continue to work with partners through the Test Valley Partnership to champion the issues that are most important to our communities which are reflected within the strategic priorities of the new corporate plan.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 This report summarises the work of the Test Valley Partnership and the associated workstreams and sub groups that fall within it. The Partnership continues to be an important mechanism in which to bring organisations together to focus on what is most important to communities across the Borough.
- 5.2 Whilst there is no requirement for partners to engage (apart from those who are required to do so regarding specific community safety matters), the real value is on how the strength of the network builds trust which then enables a collective focus and use of resources to follow. Over recent years, as set out in the report, the Partnership has been able to focus on some of the most challenging issues faced by communities and as a result has been able to make a positive impact and deliver tangible benefits.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	None		
Author:	James Moody	Ext:	8130
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