

Stronger Communities

Strong communities are those where people have pride in where they live, where people are confident, welcoming, 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 address inequalities. North Somerset has one of the widest ranges of inequality in terms material deprivation and health inequalities in England.

There is limited data specifically relating to stronger communities. At a North Somerset level, 59% of adults feel they belong (very or fairly strongly) to their immediate neighborhood similar to the national average. The percentage of adults doing voluntary work in a typical week is 13% and in a typical month is 27%. This is higher than the national average (monthly) figure of 23%. North Somerset scores above average on the four measure levels of respect and social cohesion in the area contained in the Place Survey.

The current focus for developing stronger communities across North Somerset involves the following priorities which are overseen by the Stronger Working Group: developing social enterprises; delivering a programme of service and asset transfer in partnership with local people and; increasing levels of volunteering and developing more volunteering placements.

Current initiatives to tackle the pockets of entrenched deprivation primarily within Weston-super-Mare include the adoption of the neighbourhood management approach in South and Central wards; supporting the growth of locally based social enterprise (such as Somerset Wood Recycling project) and the Healthy Living Company which delivers a range of community based health and well being interventions in South ward.

Priorities for developing stronger communities are to tackle inequalities and promote social justice, focusing resources and effort on the hardest to reach families and communities. There is also a need to build capacity, involving communities in developing and monitoring services provided at neighbourhood level and ensuring local services are determined by and responsive to local needs. Action is also required around employment opportunities; reducing financial exclusion; and increasing volunteering and the capacity of voluntary and community organisations.

Challenges for consideration

Recognise the inter-connectedness of the causes of ill health, and develop responses with partners to tackle ingrained deprivation; a clear strategy to target resources to communities experiencing greatest need e.g. South and Central wards of Weston-super-Mare; create employment opportunities for individuals in South and Central wards; partner agencies to develop a consistent approach to volunteering; service providers to engage with and develop an ongoing dialogue with local people; strengthen the role of the community and voluntary sector in commissioning and delivery of services.

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Why is this important?

Strong communities are those where people have pride in where they live, where people are confident, welcoming, resilient and able to respond positively to the challenges that they face. Specifically, individuals who reside in a strong community are

- Able to work with and understand the services and decisions that affect them;
- Able to understand and respect each others differences;
- Empowered to make the most of opportunities;
- Involved and participating;
- Resilient, able to cope and respond to difficult situations and issues;
- Confident that change is possible and that the community can make a difference.

What are the needs of the population?

People who are socially excluded or disadvantaged as a result of their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, gender, religious belief or social background, often experience the worst health and well being. In North Somerset the life expectancy is 10.1 years lower for men and 7.5 years lower for women in the most deprived areas than in the least deprived. (Based on Slope Index of Inequalities published on 5th January 2011). There are clear links between the health and well being of communities and a range of other factors including employment, poverty, housing and education, some of which are used to establish the index of multiple deprivation.

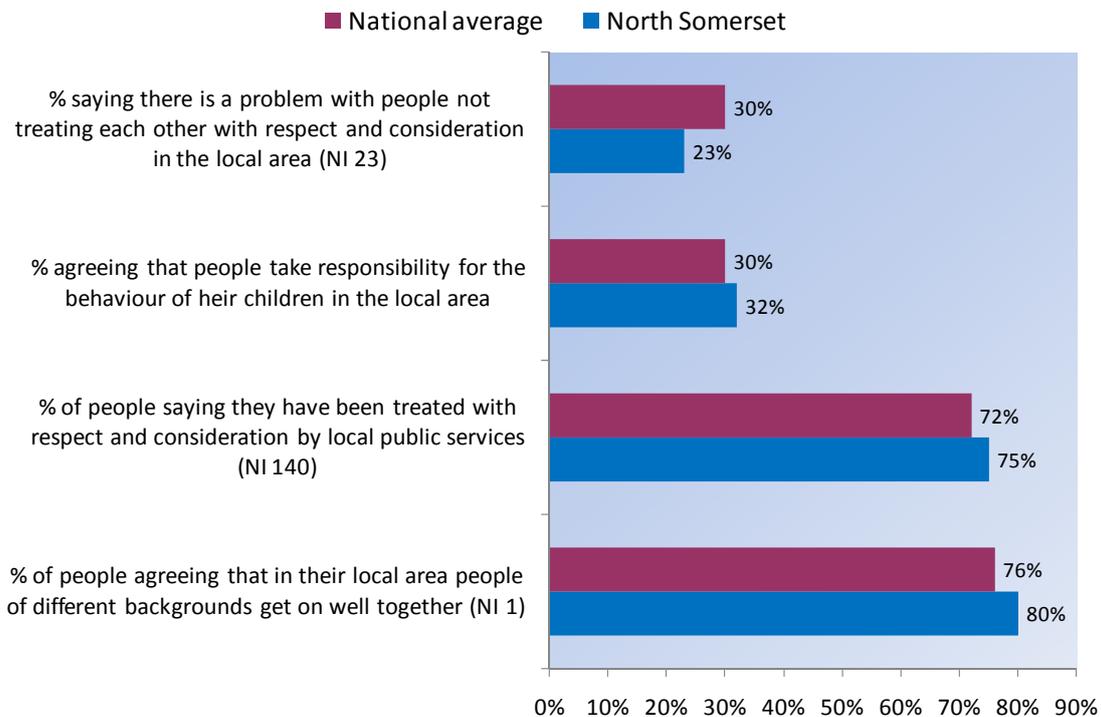
North Somerset is an area that overall performs much better than the national average in terms of the indices of multiple deprivation. However North Somerset for the first time has lower super output areas in the top 1% and the most disadvantaged 1% nationally. North Somerset therefore has one of the widest ranges of inequality in England, with pockets of spatially concentrated deprivation which are showing relative decline compared to other areas in the country. North Somerset has 22 lower super output areas in the 20% most disadvantaged in England, representing 21.8% of the population of North Somerset or 19,941 people.

There is limited data relating to stronger neighborhoods. In 2008, 59% of adults felt they belong (very or fairly strongly) to their immediate neighborhood. This is national indicator 2. North Somerset is on the national average. However certain groups within the population were less likely to feel they belonged, most notably those aged 18-29 (29%).

In North Somerset, the percentage of adults doing voluntary work in a typical week is 13% and in a typical month was 27% in 2008. This is higher than the national average (monthly) figure of 23%.

Four questions on the Place Survey are designed to measure levels of respect and social cohesion in the area. The North Somerset figures are better than the national average for all of these four measures (lower score on NI 23 is better). The only one of these four measures which can be compared over time is NI 18. This figure was 82% in 2006 versus 80% in 2008.

Chart 1: North Somerset versus national average indicators of respect.



Source: North Somerset Council monitoring data.

Current services provision

Neighborhood management has been operating in Weston-super-Mare's South Ward for the past four years and has recently expanded in to W-s-M's Central and West wards. The aim of the approach is to influence the way public services are designed, developed and implemented, so that they will be most effective in meeting residents' needs. This is achieved by engaging with and involving residents in decisions that affect them and utilizing their local knowledge and expertise, and matching this with the specialist knowledge and expertise of service providers. The result is that services become more locally responsive and accountable.

Somerset Wood Recycling project, a social enterprise based in South Ward has developed a partnership with statutory agencies to deliver mainstream services. The project has won Council contracts to refurbish street furniture and deliver responsive environmental projects. Somerset Wood is able to provide supported volunteer and work placements for local people who are distant from employment opportunities, helping to improve their life and vocational skills

What works?

Developing stronger communities can deliver specific outcomes to tackling health and well being. These include:

- People who lack social networks are more likely to die from all causes than people with close family, friendship, and community ties. (Putnam R. Bowling Alone The Collapse and Revival of American Community 2000)
- Social connections inhibit depression, low self esteem, problems with eating and sleeping (Neighbouring in Contemporary Britain JRT 2006)
- Strong communities can relieve carers from some of the burden of caring for elderly / sick people.
- Volunteering can reduce depression (Rushey Green Timebank Evaluation Report April 1999 – 2001)
- The sense of empowerment that comes from managing your own long term health condition can result in less demand on NHS service, reduced symptom severity, significant pain decrease, improved life satisfaction

Challenges for consideration

Priorities for developing stronger communities are

- to tackle inequalities and promote social justice, focusing resources and effort on the hardest to reach families and communities
- to build capacity, involving communities in developing and monitoring services provided at neighbourhood level and ensuring local services are determined by and responsive to local needs.
- to provide more employment opportunities
- to improve the capacity of voluntary and community organisations to deliver services
- to encourage people to be active in their communities by increasing levels of, and opportunities for volunteering
- to reduce financial exclusion by increasing access to debt services and advice about in-work benefits

Action is required to:

- Commissioners need to recognise the inter connectedness of the causes of ill health and develop responses with partners to tackle ingrained deprivation
- A clear strategy is needed to target resources for those communities that are experiencing greatest need, e.g. South and Central Wards of Weston-super-Mare

- Create more employment opportunities for out of work individuals in South and Central Wards of Weston-super-Mare
- Partner agencies should develop a consistent approach to the recruitment, development and support of volunteers
- Service providers should engage with and develop an ongoing dialogue with local people to inform the design and delivery of local services
- Opportunities should be sought to strengthen the role of the community and voluntary sector in the commissioning and delivery of services

References

Neighbouring in Contemporary Britain JRT 2006

Putnam R. Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community 2000

Rushey Green. Timebank Evaluation Report April 1999 – 2001