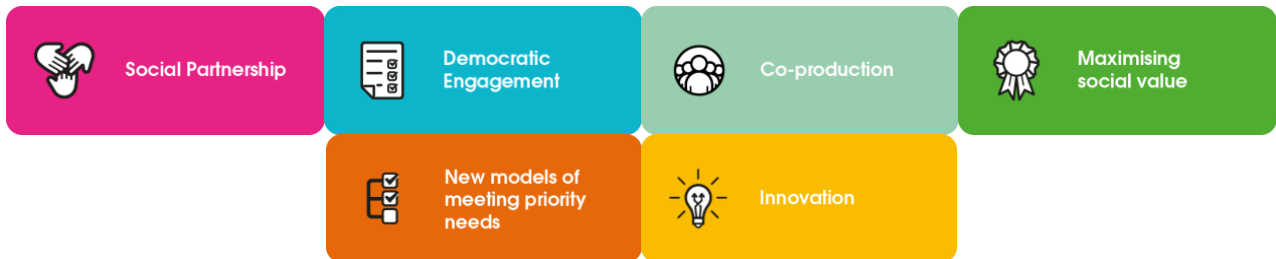




COMMUNITY



PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Making the invisible visible

Mobilising community assets to address the social determinants of health and shape the city we want together, through Plymouth's Community Builder Programme

Plymouth's Community Builder Programme (CBP) is a partnership between the Local Authority, NHS and the VCSE. Set up in 2022, as part of the City Council's Community Empowerment Programme (CEP), which aims to '*work collectively with communities to deliver the city we want*', the CBP is part of Plymouth City's innovative approach to improving wellbeing and tackling health inequalities through addressing the wider social determinants of health and improving our relationships with communities in the city. It is funded by the NHS, through Devon's Integrated Care Board, a body that aims to join up health and care services and make sure that everyone has the same access to services and gets the same outcomes from treatment.

The CBP Theory of Change was designed with the support of University of Plymouth through stakeholder workshops and a UK wide review of community building models. Targeting historically under-invested populations (defined by demographic or geographic characteristics), CBs are based across 8 neighbourhoods and - unique to Plymouth - 7 communities of interest/identity. Identified through analysis of citywide surveys, these 15 communities were chosen due to their higher levels of social disadvantage, lower levels of belonging and cohesion and fewer people participating in community life. Taking an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which recognises the value of assets within communities and that everyone has gifts to share, the CBP aims to build resilient, thriving and connected communities to achieve the best health and wellbeing outcomes.

Community Spirit: Each CB embeds themselves within communities and city-wide networks and are consistently present in community spaces, e.g. cafes, social clubs, GP surgeries, to build good quality relationships and help to create an environment of trust. They build community spirit by discovering individuals and/or groups with common purpose, provide a listening space and use passions as a starting point to identify, map and mobilise community assets (these include people, places, networks, associations and institutions).

To date, over 3,700 listening conversations have taken place, activating 1,800 residents to set up over 500 new community-based activities which improve individual and community resilience, support friendships and networks of support. Activities range from photography, to planting, drama, cooking and 'getting ready for winter' campaigns.

"Now I get involved; it's impacted on my mental health fantastically... it's the first time in 2 years I have felt valued as a human being" Community member

Asset Mapping: Based on feedback from partners and communities about the lack of awareness of community resources, this year the CBs created online asset maps with simple, accessible information about hyperlocal initiatives. These maps have been viewed almost 22,000 times over a 4-month period indicating that they are a popular and useful tool for partners and communities to share information about the rich and vibrant network of community assets available to support individual and community wellbeing.

CBs also serve as a bridge between the community, statutory and VCSE sectors, improving relationships with institutions and enabling residents to connect with and support the development of services:

Community Research: Through forming strong relationships on the ground, CBs gather community stories through appreciative inquiry, working with partners to share and reflect on the themes that emerge and use these insights to help shape policy, plans and programmes of work. To date, this type of community research has informed citywide plans such as Safer Communities and Welcoming City, Thrive (Health Inequalities), Anti-Poverty, Cost of Living and HROD as well as other commissioned services including One Plymouth (health improvement) and Advice Plymouth (income maximisation). More recently they are helping to inform local development of Integrated Neighbourhood Health teams and a prevention-focused City Help and Support strategy.

"I want to acknowledge the CBs for their incredible support to Plymouth's Safer Communities Partnership across several key projects. Their contribution has been invaluable—whether through community engagement in response to ASB concerns, appreciative enquiry and listening campaigns to understand how safe people feel in their communities, or their forthcoming role in insight gathering for the Knife Angel project. Their efforts have strengthened our ability to respond effectively, build trust, and ensure that community voices shape the solutions we deliver. Working with CBs exemplifies what collaborative working should look like". Plymouth Safer Communities Technical Lead

"The CB has added so much value to our work... connected us with 23 service providers to reach people to offer support with housing, benefits, energy, work etc. and leading to our best event this year reaching 750 in one day. Weekly, he helps reach us 50 people." Citizens Advice

CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL'S WIDER OBJECTIVES:

LISTENING, INFLUENCING AND SHAPING

Thriving Communities Framework 2026-2030 – informing the values and approach to community engagement

Equalities framework – listening campaigns focusing on hate and community cohesion

Armed Forces Covenant – support for veteran communities and female veterans

Safer Plymouth Safer Communities – listening campaigns focused on community safety and knife crime

Adult Safeguarding Partnership – support for engagement to reach out, understand barriers and promote awareness

Ageing Well Plan – listening campaign focusing on what ageing well means

Inclusive Growth – providing insight into the barriers faced by women furthest from the labour market

Plymouth Pride in Place – listening week and 'Love your Community' film production

Net Zero plan – listening to and mobilising communities to focus on climate initiatives incl. new food waste programme.

Collective Action: With support from the Council Community Empowerment team, the CBs convene 'collectives' of organisations/groups to build relationships, share community resources and address common challenges. Local Councillors and statutory agencies sit alongside members of local associations to asset map, to listen and learn from communities and to codesign collective action around issues affecting communities. CBs are currently supporting this in work with a local secondary school and their young people to affect community safety issues through a '*fearless.org*' TikTok campaign as a response to insight gathered from within the local community. The CBs facilitate other Collectives in the city including an Ageing Well Collective that takes this approach to collaboration with institutions and associations who work with older people across the city.

"I really appreciated the networking and the strength-based approach to sharing existing resources and assets - as there are many and lots of opportunities to collaborate and share experiences/practices in the city" – Ageing Well Collective member.

The CBP uses the RSPH's Community Spirit level framework to evaluate impact using 4 characteristics representing the wider determinants of health: Relationships, Collective Action, Sense of Belonging and Cohesion - measured using quantitative and qualitative data. Using a 'realist' methodology an independent evaluation in 2024 showed that the programme is achieving reduced isolation, increased friendships, improved sense of belonging and sense of control. It showed that CBs are empowering communities through building trust, creating connections with individuals and organisations, partnership working and bringing about sustainable change.

IN 2025 WE:

Supported 833 volunteers (connectors) to develop NEW community led activity

Connected 498 people into existing services

Helped create 252 new community led activities

Held 1,394 listening conversations

Had over 27,000 views on our community asset maps

Lead and participated in over 20 citywide networks, collectives and partnerships



For further information contact:

Zoe Sydenham

Plymouth City Council

zoe.sydenham@plymouth.gov.uk | Plymouth.gov.uk



People-centred councils
driving social innovation
putting people first

E: comms@councils.coop | X: [@CoopInnovation](https://twitter.com/CoopInnovation) | W: councils.coop