

## Community Investment Strategy 2021-25

### Introduction

West Kent has a long and proud history of investing in communities as a core part of its vision to provide great places to live and space for people to grow. We aim to ‘create in Kent a prosperous, strong and sustainable society; a place of opportunity for all; where people can plan for their futures’.<sup>1</sup>

The National Housing Federation defines community investment as ‘community programmes which respond to local needs and help build resilient communities’<sup>2</sup> – and this is what we deliver, alongside and supporting the successful development and management of our homes and tenancy sustainment. As a founder member of Placeshapers, we work with local partners and focus on the long term and the needs of future as well as current residents; our tenants don’t exist in isolation and we provide more than just landlord services because we care about the people and places where we work.

This is West Kent’s second strategy looking at the range of Community Investment work we deliver. Its purpose is to focus community investment work delivered through both West Kent and its charitable arm West Kent Extra, and strengthen how teams across the business work together in pursuit of their shared mission. All our staff, volunteers, residents and partner organisations have a part to play in achieving our vision.

### Vision

The vision for our community investment is to improve the lives of individuals and strengthen communities across Kent by working alongside residents and partners to tackle inequalities, increase opportunities and promote wellbeing.

We are ambitious for the growth and development of our community services and aspire to be the best (in terms of the quality and impact of what we provide) rather than the biggest (in terms of numbers or size of projects and contracts). This will mean:

- We can clearly demonstrate and are recognised for the impact of our work on the individuals or groups we work with, the business, and the community as a whole.
- We are a partner of choice for local authorities and other organisations working to achieve similar outcomes.
- We play a prominent role in the sector’s ongoing work to define, improve and champion community investment, learning from other organisations and sharing what we learn from our communities as well as what has and hasn’t worked for us.

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<sup>1</sup> West Kent Strategic Plan: Beyond 2020

<sup>2</sup> Definition taken from the National Housing Federation (no date):

<https://www.housing.org.uk/topics/investing-in-communities/community-investment-hub/what-is-community-investment/>

## Operating Environment

West Kent's strategic plan sets out some of the key challenges and opportunities facing the housing and community sectors and our diverse residents, from housing supply and increasing regulation to health and economic inequalities and an aging population, and how we see and respond to the impact of these in Kent.

Our community projects and services can help address some of these challenges directly, for example, by increasing the support available to individuals in crisis, creating training and employment opportunities or delivering activities that encourage healthy lifestyles. We can also make sure we understand what the challenges and opportunities look like on a local basis, and how we and our partners can best respond to these, by working with groups of people connected by their background, interests or where they live to understand their circumstances, strengths and aspirations. Recognising, celebrating and building on the strengths in our housing communities is also one useful way we can help challenge and tackle stigma.

The need to tackle inequalities, increase opportunities and promote wellbeing has never been greater. The Covid19 global pandemic has had a significant impact on our economy and society, affecting both individuals and organisations and exacerbating existing inequalities. We have not yet seen the full impact on government policy, public services and the communities we serve, but it is more important than ever to make best use of our resources. This strategy sets out the basis for this.

## Achieving our vision: Strategic Priorities

We have an existing established service and project portfolio to build on, shown in Diagram 1 below. In the first year of this strategy we will review and consolidate our existing work to ensure our projects, services and contracts are delivering the right level of financial and social impact. We want to make informed, conscious decisions as to whether there remains a need and a role for us to invest in or deliver that particular work, balanced against deploying our resources elsewhere, or whether we can encourage greater ownership in the community or support others to deliver.

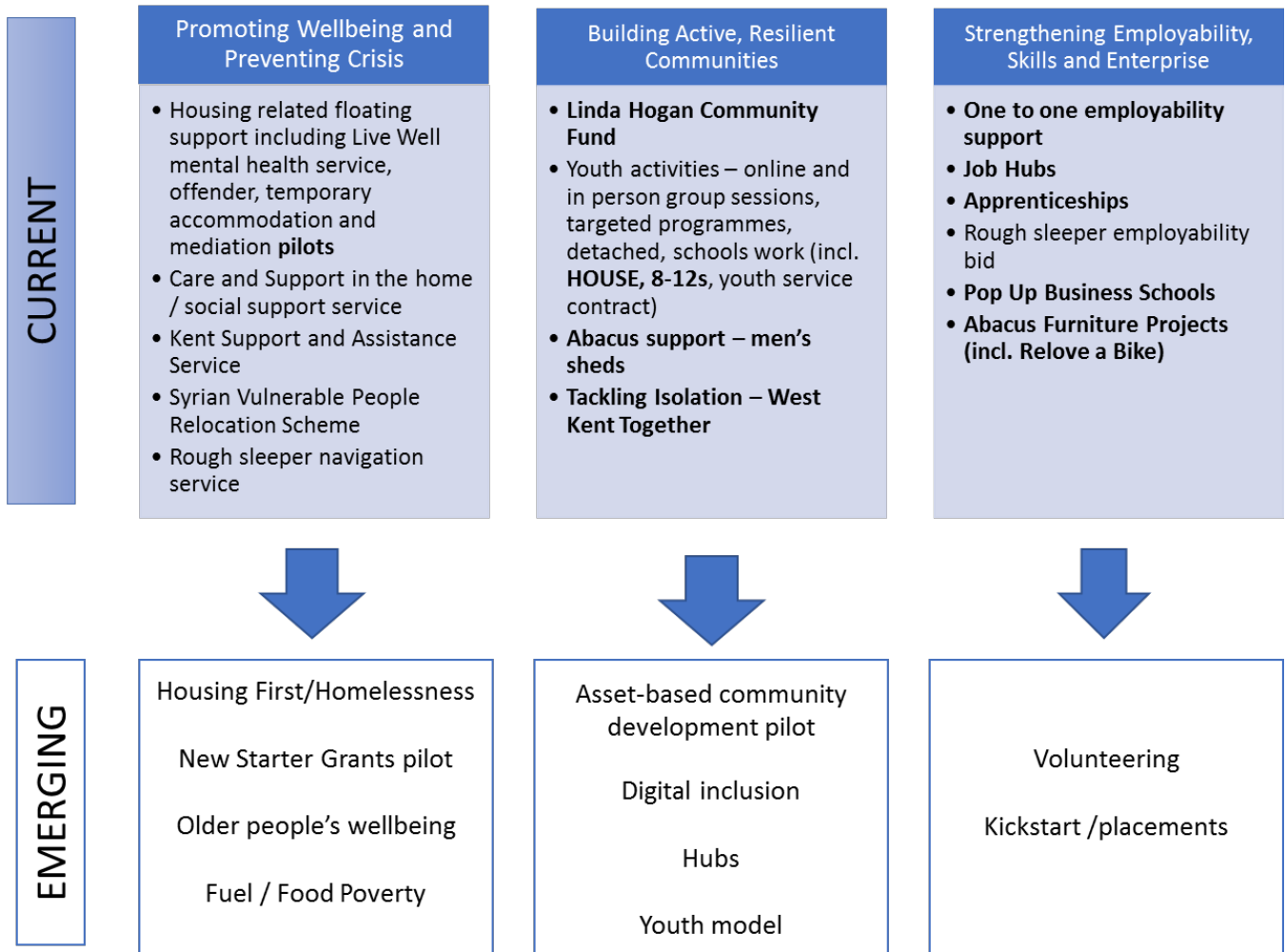
Over the lifetime of the strategy we will reshape and increase our internal investment to give greater benefit to our tenants and surrounding neighbourhoods. To do this, we must first improve our internal insight and profiling data so we have a better understanding of our tenants and what they want and need.

We will put this together with local open source data to help us understand areas of need or inequalities within our communities, and be better able to target our resources within the top level priority themes we have established for our community investment. These themes are **promoting wellbeing and preventing crisis; building active, resilient communities; and strengthening employability, skills and enterprise**. These are all areas in which:

- We have expertise in delivering related projects and services to build on, and see a logical role for us in working with residents and partners to shape local services.
- We consider a broad, ongoing need that is relevant to our residents and the business, addressing hardship and helping create successful communities.

Our themes and outcomes link to those of our key local authorities and to Kent County Council’s strategic vision of ‘improving lives by ensuring every pound spent in Kent is delivering better outcomes for Kent’s residents, communities and businesses’, making sure children and young people get the best start in life, older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently, and communities have people in work, healthy and enjoy a good quality of life<sup>3</sup>.

**Diagram 1**



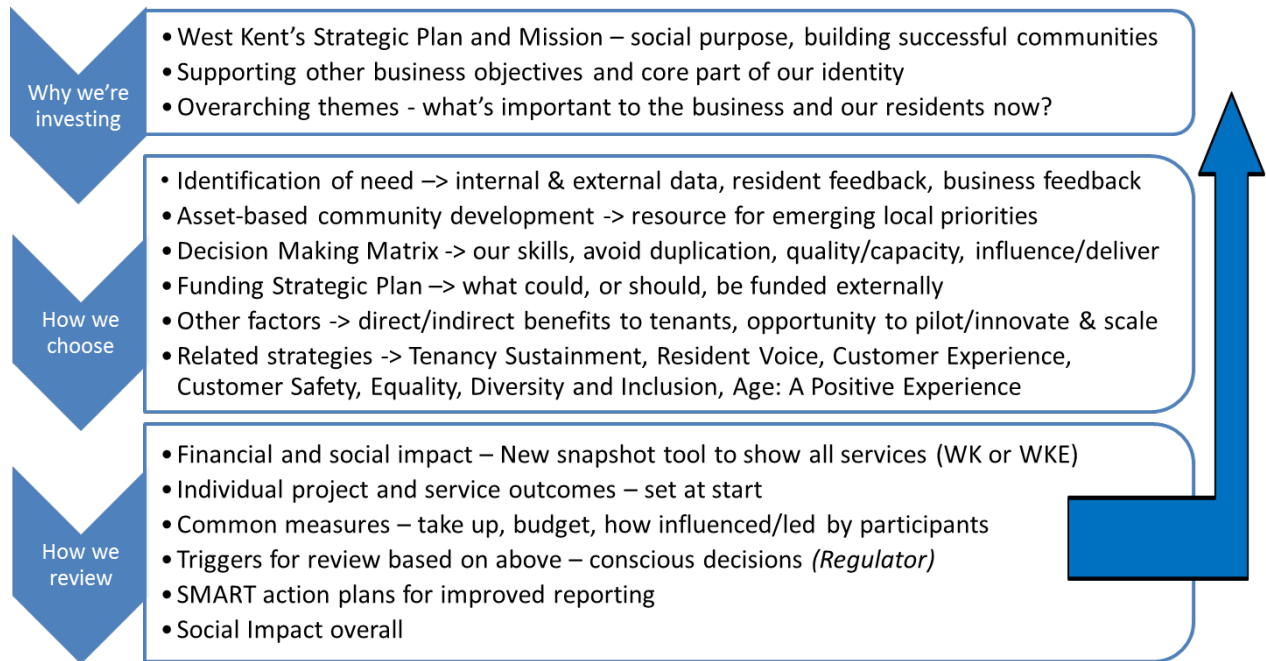
**Directing our investment**

Our remit covers the whole of Kent (including Medway) but we recognise we have limited resources. The scale of our delivery will match our housing and development footprint and we need to be dynamic and responsive in evolving our approach over time, as shown in Diagram 2.

<sup>3</sup> Kent County Council Increasing Opportunities, Improving Lives 2015-20 <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/increasing-opportunities-improving-outcomes>  
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Diagram 2

# Directing community investment



We will continue to assess external funding opportunities which align with our thematic priorities, and consider contracts which may cover the whole of Kent and/or Medway where expertise and capacity allows. We will proactively seek to position ourselves to secure new contracts in areas where we have the greatest level of stock, and for our established and emerging service priorities.

We will be more proactive about getting to know our communities, and we will target our internal investment to offer a higher level of intensive and ongoing service development and delivery in those district or boroughs where we can be considered an 'anchor organisation' – where we provide benefits to the local economy as an employer and spender, as well as holding significant long-term assets and providing key services there – predominantly Sevenoaks, and also Ashford, Medway and Maidstone. We will develop a standard offer for other areas where we are developing new homes and improve our communication to new residents about how we are more than just a landlord and can work with and support them, if needed, through their tenancy term.

To prioritise service development we will use feedback, data and requests from:

- Teams across West Kent – helping align our services with other business priorities and address trends
- Residents and local people – through our wider resident involvement activity, community development activity and customer feedback
- From our partners across all sectors - including local authorities and voluntary and community organisations

To ensure that all our projects and services align with our strategic priorities we will update the community investment decision matrix, which also prompts us to consider whether we are

responding to a genuine need; whether we are best placed to deliver; and whether we can properly resource the work, whether that is through internal or external investment. Where that is not the case, we will work with residents, partner organisations and/or funders as appropriate to help facilitate another solution. This matrix reflects the principles of the ‘Lead, Influence, Follow, Exit (LIFE) model’<sup>4</sup>, which helps organisations work together to identify what kind of role they should play in a particular area depending on their expertise and resources.

## Delivering on our Priority Outcomes

Diagram 3



### Theme 1: Promoting Wellbeing and Preventing Crisis

We want to help people secure and sustain a tenancy, access any services and support they need, and equip them to respond to life events which could impact on their home or their wellbeing.

<sup>4</sup> National Housing Federation Great Places Commission Final Report page 38  
<https://greatplaces.housing.org.uk/about-great-places/great-places-final-report>  
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We have an established track record in delivering excellent commissioned support services to those who have faced challenges including domestic abuse, substance misuse, homelessness or managing mental health conditions or learning disabilities, to help them find and keep a home and stability. We also provide practical support to address temporary hardship, such as providing essential household items to help those starting out or starting over make their house a home.

We have delivered a range of activities that promote physical and mental health and active lifestyles to different groups within our community, in particular our older residents and young people. As the NHS moves towards more integrated forms of health and social care, with a greater emphasis on population health, there is an opportunity for us as a community organisation to work with partners to help develop and deliver broader community services that promote wellbeing. This includes working alongside Kent Housing Group partners who have identified Health and Wellbeing as a theme in the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy 2019-23<sup>5</sup>.

Intended outcomes:

- Individuals are less likely to get to or return to crisis point, at which their health or home is compromised
- Our customers have greater physical and mental wellbeing, supporting personal resilience

We will do this in 2021-5 by:

- Working with tenants and partners to understand issues around financial hardship, food and fuel poverty, and how we can best respond – continuing to provide essential household items and developing other practical interventions for those most in need.
- Supporting the development of West Kent's tenancy sustainment approach, identifying ongoing and emerging needs to make sure our cross-departmental services are joined up and working together addressing areas of crossover such as financial wellbeing.
- Continuing to deliver commissioned housing related and social independence support services to those with specialist needs across our communities, and reviewing where we can apply the skills and learning from this to build an internal support offer and/or support tenants to navigate the landscape of external specialist services as their needs change.
- Increasing our support and accommodation services to support people out of homelessness, including developing a Housing First model.
- Delivering community activities that support good physical and mental health, in particular increasing our support for older residents to remain active and independent and expanding our support to residents of all ages around mental health and isolation.
- Developing a digital inclusion plan to ensure our tenants have the right kit, connectivity and skills.

## **Theme 2: Building active, resilient communities**

As we manage our housing stock and build new homes, helping to regenerate existing or create new communities, we also think about the evolving lives of the people living in those communities and the services and infrastructure we and our partners provide to help them thrive. Ensuring these

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<sup>5</sup> DRAFT Kent and Medway Housing Strategy 2019-2023 'A Place People want to call Home' August 2019  
<https://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/assets/uploads/2019/08/DRAFT-Consultation-Kent-Medway-Housing-Strategy-August-2019.pdf>

sides of our business are linked is increasingly important as we continue with our ambitious growth programme, and as we think about challenges like sustainable growth and the green agenda and the long term impact of Covid19, which require joined up thinking and action.

We can do more to recognise and understand the different experiences of diverse groups within our communities, and our role in actively tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion. We recognise the skills, knowledge and experience within those communities that mean they are best placed to understand what it's like to live there, and can help West Kent and other organisations understand the most suitable role they can play to build on existing assets and connections. This will help ensure we use our resources to best effect as we expand across Kent.

We have a long track record of supporting different resident and community groups to develop and shape their own activities, from in-depth long-term work helping young people come together and design their own award-winning local youth services, to more short-term practical support to resident groups through funding and/or training. We want to do more of this, and more strategic partnership work with other organisations, as well as well as delivering our own projects.

Intended outcomes:

- Residents are better equipped to identify and act on their own aspirations for their community
- We have more connected communities and reduced social isolation
- We do more to celebrate and share the strengths and positive aspects of our communities

We will do this in 2021-5 by:

- Building our asset-based community development<sup>6</sup> framework and developing local community investment plans which set out our community offer across Kent and Medway.
- Working with the housing, support and communication teams to make sure these are clear and communicated to our tenants so they know how they can get involved and benefit from local services if they need them.
- Doing more to actively engage tenants in our priority anchor areas, including increasing the opportunities for our older tenants to connect to the wider community in line with our Age: a Positive Experience strategy.
- Increasing our capacity to deliver timebound, outreach youth and community development work on new estates, working with the development and tenancy services teams to identify priority areas and shared outcomes.
- Developing community hubs and delivering more intensive, ongoing youth and community projects in Sevenoaks, and Ashford, Maidstone and Medway.
- Supporting local community organisations, small groups and associations working across our communities by sharing our assets (buildings, staff, expertise) and offering funding via the Linda Hogan Community Fund.

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<sup>6</sup> An Asset Based Community Development approach builds on the assets that are found in the community and mobilizes individuals, groups and organisations to come together to realise and develop their strengths. See Appendix 1 for illustration.

### **Theme 3: Strengthening Employability, Skills and Enterprise**

As a landlord and service provider we know that our tenants face challenges around financial and digital inclusion, navigating the impact of welfare reform, and finding sustainable employment. We also hear from the young people we work with and our support clients about the barriers they face, and where they feel they are in terms of their journey to employment.

We have a track record of working with partners to deliver projects and services that help people build their skills and access employment or self-employment, from training courses, volunteering opportunities and work placements to one-to-one employability support and apprenticeship schemes. We will develop this area alongside the development of our tenancy sustainment work, connecting with partner organisations including the Department for Work and Pensions, housing providers, local authority partners and education and employment organisations to understand any gaps in provision and where we might link in with existing initiatives. We will do more to understand which groups within our tenant base and our communities face greater challenges or local barriers to employment that aren't met by specialist organisations and target our resources accordingly.

As an employer and a business with a local supply chain we also look to maximise the positive impact we can have on the Kent economy.

Intended outcomes:

- More opportunities for residents to recognise their skills and capabilities, increase and use them to benefit themselves and the community
- Residents are moving into or closer to sustainable and worthwhile employment or self-employment, avoiding the in-work poverty trap

We will do this in 2021-5 by:

- Delivering one to one employability support to tenants in person and online, ensuring closer links with West Kent's income and financial wellbeing teams to identify and support priority customers – continuing to support not only those who are unemployed but those facing in-work poverty.
- Work in partnership to break down barriers to employment including issues faced around affordable childcare and travel, low skills or the need to transfer skills/retrain in the post-Covid job market.
- Delivering group employability and skills activities to tenants and our wider communities, including business start-up support, job hubs in our anchor areas and facilitating access to training courses that match local market/employer need.
- Exploring a range of potential delivery models with residents, including community led enterprises, skill share schemes, apprenticeship and work placement schemes.
- Develop a full volunteer programme that adds value to our services and enables customers to gain work experience, skills and references.
- Continuing to develop our Abacus Furniture projects to maximise their financial and social impact; and developing at least one new social enterprise model with a different focus.



## **Cross-cutting theme: Quality - Working the right way**

As in all our services, we are guided by West Kent's values and desire to do the right things in the right way. As well as meeting the requirements placed on us by bodies such as the Regulator of Social Housing and the Charity Commission, we want to work in partnership with residents and other stakeholders to develop and deliver excellent services. This means we will continue to work with a wide range of partner organisations, and increase the involvement of local people in shaping, delivering and reviewing services.

We are making a long term commitment to community investment and recognise that we are working to tackle complex issues in our society that need joined up thinking and research to understand and address. We need to learn from and work with others across the sector to help inform what we do and help us advocate on behalf of the communities we serve.

Intended outcomes:

- More residents are involved in the development, delivery and review of our community investment
- We are better able to demonstrate the financial and social impact of our community activities – to an individual/group; to the business and to the wider community (including funders/partners)

We will do this in 2021-5 by:

- Developing a plan to improve our customer insight and build our research to better understand areas of need or inequalities for our tenants and across our communities.
- Working with teams across the business to identify and improve outcomes for our tenants and neighbourhoods.
- Delivering on our Funding Strategic Plan to lever in external funding and maximise the ongoing investment made by West Kent, ensuring that internal investment is directed to those projects and services that have the greatest impact on our tenants.
- Actively contributing to, learning from and benchmarking with local, regional and national partnerships and networks, such as the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment, Placeshapers, Communities that Work, Kent Housing Group, Local Strategic Partnerships and other district or borough forums.
- Increasing the number of people involved in the development and delivery of our services, as well as facilitating community groups to develop and deliver their own initiatives. This will include inviting tenant scrutiny, developing community champions, making sure project steering groups include local people, increasing the volunteering opportunities across our projects and services and increasing service user engagement.
- Carrying out action research into the need for and the impact of one area of our work each year, to help us challenge and evolve what we deliver.
- Reviewing and refreshing our approach to social impact reporting, improving our ability to demonstrate the impact of our community investment activities (as well as that of the business as a whole).
- Working with teams across West Kent and our contractors and suppliers to ensure we maximise community investment opportunities in the development and delivery of our functions and services, in our procurement, and in staff initiatives such as volunteering days.

## **Measures, monitoring and reporting**

This strategy will be supported by a delivery plan for each theme which will be refreshed annually, with a progress report to Communities and Housing Committee.

Through the period of this strategy we will continue to develop the ways in which we monitor the impact of our work, which is relatively straight forward to do at project level but gets more complex to collate, analyse and present meaningfully as a whole. This continues to be a key topic for the voluntary and housing sectors and there is no one simple answer; we continue to work with partners to build best practice. We will carry out a data mine to understand where we hold internal data that can inform our business impact, and review external data sets and social value measures that can inform our community impact, and assess which of these feel most meaningful.

We will monitor individual projects and services to ensure they are delivering the identified outputs and outcomes for the individuals or groups who benefit from them, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative information. This may include longer term follow up to see whether outcomes are sustained over time. These outputs and outcomes will be identified and agreed through a theory of change planning process – a way of mapping how they will be achieved. Depending on the piece of work, this will be influenced by residents, West Kent colleagues and funders or commissioners.

We will meet the broader quality assurance and compliance measures set by commissioners and regulatory bodies as relevant, for example, passing commissioning 'deep dives' and Quality Assessment Framework audits.

In addition, we will develop a dashboard of common indicators that will allow service managers, the Executive Team and West Kent Board to manage any performance issues and make informed choices to evolve our services. These will include:

- Number of Kent residents reached – differentiating between light touch contact and the more specialist and in-depth engagement
- Number of West Kent tenants reached – as above
- Volunteer / service user / community input – number/hours
- Service operating within agreed budgets/funding plan
- External funding secured
- Ratio of internal and external investment across thematic priorities

## **Risk Statement**

The high level risks relating to the delivery of this strategy are outlined within West Kent's overarching Strategic Plan, with quarterly commentary provided as necessary.

The operational risks presented in the delivery of our community investment activities are identified in and managed through West Kent's risk management policy and framework.

## **Funding, Financial implications and Value for Money**

The Funding Strategic Plan sets out the funding routes available to our community investment work, which include self-generating investment; donations and sales/trading income; grant and contract income to deliver specific outcomes and the investment from West Kent.

We are working to diversify our external income sources including focussing more on trusts and foundations, which is a relatively untapped source of income for some elements of our work and which we can access through West Kent Extra. For other funding sources, for example, local government and health who will be our partners and funders in the housing related support and health services market, we are likely to bid as West Kent Housing Association. We will also increase our impact by maximising social value commitments through West Kent's supply chain.

We note however that we cannot rely on external funding for all our activities, especially as we do more to respond to the specific needs of our tenants, and to support our other business objectives. We are moving our funding and operating model to a more flexible and outcomes driven approach to invest in services that help us achieve our aims. We will agree annually a financial commitment from West Kent to achieve these outcomes, levered against external funding.

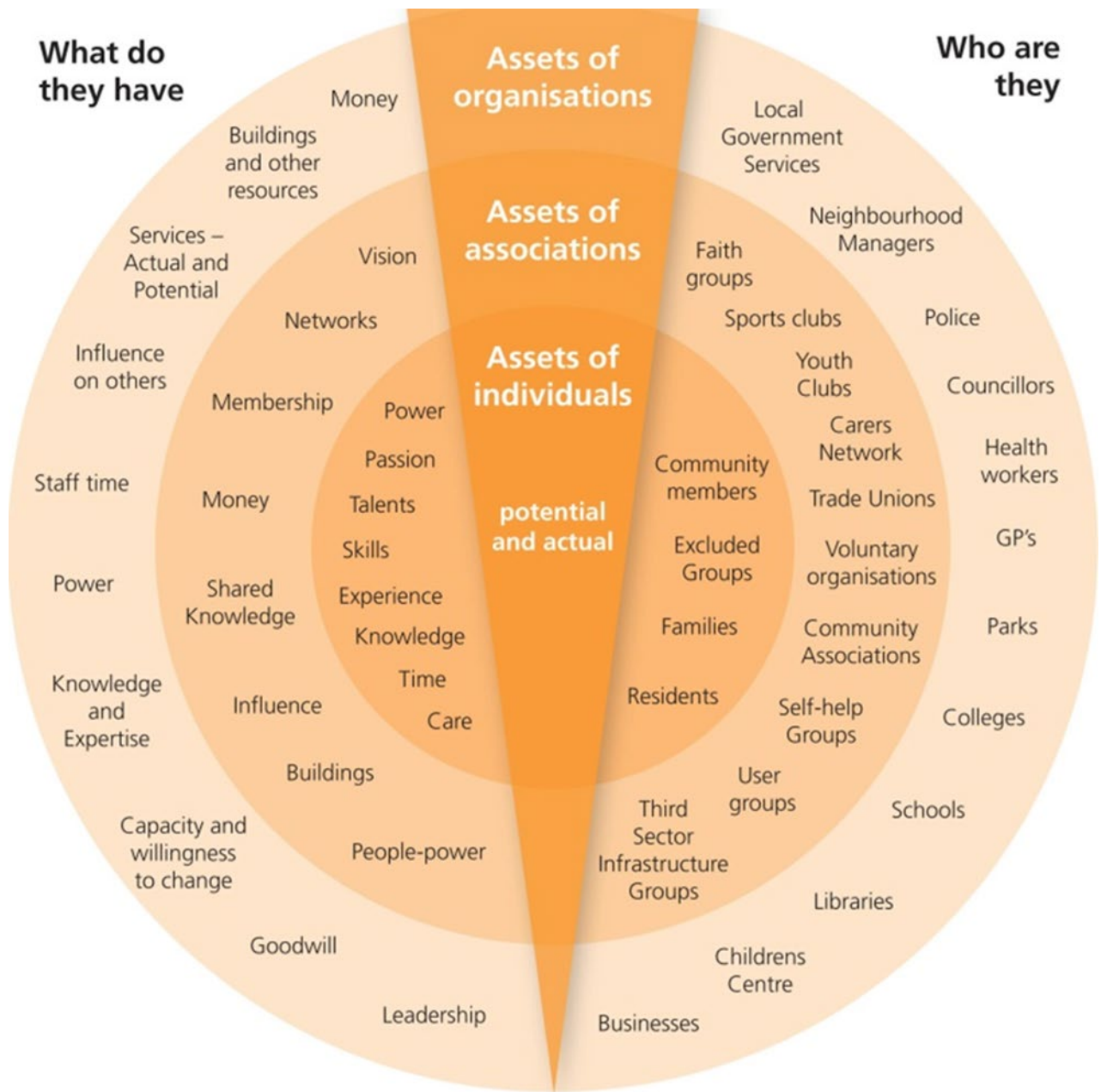
This strategy explains the objectives for our community investment, how it links to our overall organisational purpose and how we will prioritise and measure the impact of our investment. This helps us demonstrate to key stakeholders, including the Regulator for Social Housing, our funders/commissioners and residents that we are making optimal use of our resources. In addition:

- We will monitor our community / neighbourhood services and other support services cost per unit compared to our peers and ourselves:

Value for Money metric 5 social housing cost per unit detail – community / neighbourhood services and charges for support services

- We will work with the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment and other organisations that focus on the impact of community investment and facilitate learning and peer comparators
- We will deliver on our Funding Strategic Plan to lever in external funding to maximise the ongoing investment made by West Kent, and ensure the ongoing viability and best use of our charitable subsidiary
- We will bring together the financial and social impact of our work in an annual social impact report

**Appendix 1: Taking an asset based approach**



## Appendix 2: Measuring our impact – options map

	Promoting Wellbeing and Preventing Crisis	Building active, resilient communities	Strengthening Employability, Skills and Enterprise
Individual	<p>Reported positive change to health and wellbeing</p> <p>Proportion of income spent on fuel costs</p> <p>Access to appropriate financial services and support</p> <p>Tenancy sustainment</p>	<p>Reported positive change to isolation</p> <p>Reported positive change to soft skills: resilience, confidence, motivation</p> <p>Engagement in meaningful activities</p>	<p>Reported change in vocational skills / confidence</p> <p>Increase in household income</p> <p>Employment outcome</p> <p>Job-relevant qualification/experience achieved</p>
Community	<p>NHS and local authority costs/social spend</p> <p>Crisis Support service demand</p> <p>Social Value bank: health / financial inclusion / homelessness outcome</p>	<p>Change to asset map – groups, building use</p> <p>Community Champions supported/trained</p> <p>Groups supported – advice, funding</p> <p>Activities/events</p> <p>Social Value bank: local environment / youth outcome</p>	<p>LA Benefit claimants/costs</p> <p>Job creation</p> <p>Work placements created</p> <p>Training opportunities created</p> <p>Social Value bank: employment outcome</p>
Business	<p>Levels of tenancy failure</p> <p>Cost of tenancy failure</p> <p>Reduced staff time relating to set issues</p>	<p>Tenant satisfaction</p> <p>Volunteer hours</p> <p>External investment levered into neighbourhoods</p> <p>Neighbourhood satisfaction</p>	<p>Levels of arrears</p> <p>Volunteer hours</p> <p>Levels of tenancy failure</p> <p>Cost of tenancy failure</p>

### Appendix 3: Five Year Milestone Visual

