

Chard Community Plan

Summary Report for Progress, March 2026

Presented to Chard Town Council and Community Partners



Introduction

The Chard Community Plan continues to be a collaborative, community-led initiative bringing together local organisations, volunteers, statutory partners, and residents to improve the wellbeing, opportunities, and quality of life for people in Chard.

Over the past year, the steering group has focused on strengthening local information sharing, supporting young people, reducing isolation, improving access to services, and building stronger partnerships across the town.

This report summarises progress since the last update and highlights key achievements, developments, and priorities for the year ahead.

Key Highlights Since the Last Report

Community Information & Signposting (KIND Directory)

Significant progress has been made in improving access to clear, reliable local information.

Working in partnership with Chard Town Council, Chard Community Hub and The Watch Project, funding has now been secured to implement the **KIND** (Key Information Network Directory) an online directory of services, groups and support available locally.

The directory will:

- act as a single, trusted source of information for residents and professionals
- reduce duplication
- make it easier for people to find help early

The platform is fully funded and is due to launch in **Spring 2026**.

This represents a major step forward from the earlier KIND database proposal and provides a sustainable, long-term solution for improving access to local information.

Youth Voice & Engagement

Supporting young people has been a significant priority this year. Chard Community Plan was integral in bringing all youth providers together to review existing youth provision in

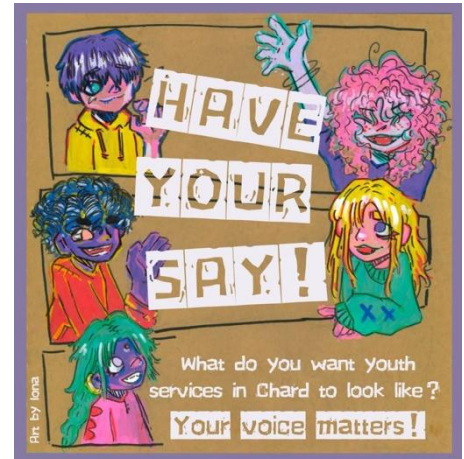
Chard and identifying current gaps and challenges. This was on the back of Chard Young Person's Centre closing and Chard Town Council was voting on whether to take on the building and support another Youth Club.

When a new youth provision for Chard was being developed, there was a short window to gather meaningful youth voice and evidence of need to inform decision-making. Members of the Community Plan steering group responded quickly to coordinate a youth survey.

This included:

- an online survey
- in-person engagement in parks and town spaces
- direct conversations with young people
- encouraging participation through the local secondary school community
- gathering views from parents and carers

This proactive, grassroots approach ensured that young people who might not usually engage were heard.



Key findings included:

- Concerns around safety, drugs and anti-social behaviour, particularly in parks and at night
- Many young people feel safest at home or with friends, with few dedicated youth spaces
- Strong demand for a safe, supervised youth club or centre
- Requests for more affordable activities, sports facilities, creative opportunities and places simply to "hang out"
- Parents consistently prioritised safe, staffed spaces and continuation of existing youth provision

The survey has:

- directly informed local youth service planning
- provided evidence for funding discussions
- strengthened partnership working between schools, youth providers and community groups
- ensured decisions are grounded in lived experience

This work has helped place youth voice at the centre of local planning, which remains a core principle of the Community Plan.

The Hive Young People's Centre has now been established in the former youth club building and is becoming well embedded within the community as a key element of local youth provision. Through the work undertaken by partners and the wider community during this process, there is now a stronger shared understanding between organisations of the range of youth provision currently available in Chard.

Continued Priority Areas

Alongside new developments, the following strands of work continue to progress:

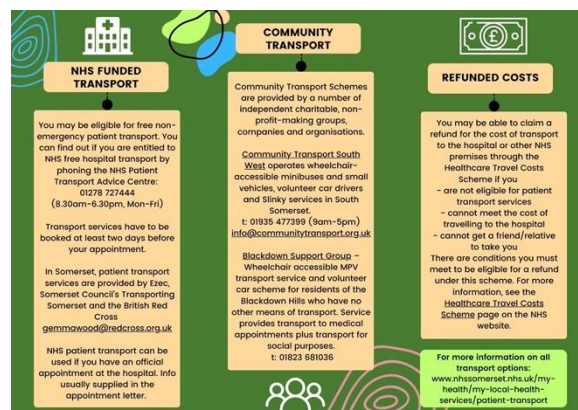
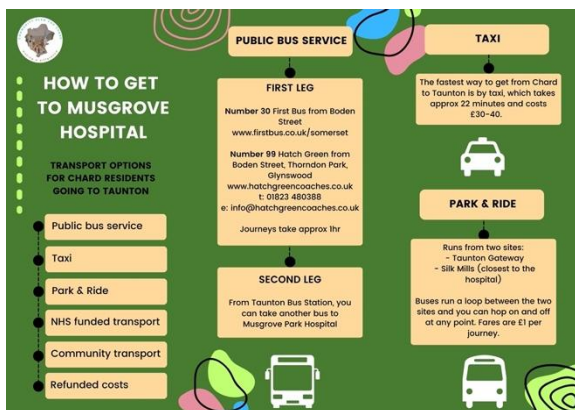
Culture & Community Activity – Culturally Chard

The group has continued as an active networking forum supporting collaboration between local event organisers and cultural groups. Meetings are held quarterly to share plans, avoid clashes and encourage joint working. The KIND calendar is expected to further support coordination between organisers and reduce event clashes.

Transport

Improving public transport and connectivity remains a long-term priority for the Community Plan, particularly access to essential services and Sunday provision. A significant proportion of households in Chard do not have access to a car, so social mobility is a key element to their wellbeing and access to employment.

Over the past year, the group has worked with Somerset Bus Partnership and Chard Town Council to address a specific gap in access to healthcare, as there is currently no direct bus route from Chard to Musgrove Park Hospital. In response, a clear, practical transport information leaflet was developed outlining the available travel options, connections, and guidance for residents.



Printed copies have been distributed locally, including at The Guildhall, to ensure the information is easily accessible, particularly for those who may not use digital services.

Alongside this, continued engagement and data collection with bus users is planned to support evidence-based discussions and lobbying with Somerset Council and regional partners, with the aim of improving routes, reliability, and accessibility for the community.

Reducing Loneliness & Social Isolation

Several initiatives remain active and well used:

- Warm Spaces across multiple venues (supported by a locally distributed leaflet)
- Increased focus on accessible public seating, led by Chard Town Council



- Installation of chat benches (including near Tesco and on the High Street – timelines to be confirmed)
- Tea dances

These initiatives provide welcoming, low-cost opportunities for connection, particularly for older residents.

Additional support is available through organisations such as The Watch Project, CommuniTEA Waffle, Forefront Centre, and Chard Community Hub. The KIND network is expected to further improve visibility and access to these services.

The Watch Project (CIO), based at The Hive Youth Centre in Essex Close, specialises in peer support and connection. It supports adults aged 18+ (with no upper age limit), linking individuals with others and with services such as the Open Mental Health Network. It also provides free wellbeing and support courses in a safe, supportive environment.

Volunteering & Community Participation

Volunteer recruitment and training opportunities continue through local projects, with growing collaboration between organisations to share volunteers and skills, a strong example of this collaboration is the new, 'Bridges to Wellbeing' project. The Community Plan steering group often share training opportunities between the different community groups that are represented, such as, first aid or safeguarding training.

Early Years & Families

Work continues with Holyrood School and partners to strengthen early years support, addressing support gaps from antenatal stages through early childhood.

The Cradle to Career programme (Holyrood School and Chard Community Hub), facilitated by Megan Parfoot, is supporting a coordinated approach across Chard and surrounding areas.

This work focuses on:

- supporting families from before birth through early development
- improving access to learning opportunities
- strengthening parental confidence
- reducing early disadvantage

Locally rooted, relationship-based support helps build resilience in communities such as Chard, where higher levels of educational deprivation highlight the importance of targeted early intervention.

Community Safety

The Community Safety Task Force was developed through this group, creating a partnership approach to issues such as anti-social behaviour, exploitation, and drug use.

This work involves close collaboration with police, schools, and parents and has been shared through Community Leaders Breakfasts and Council meetings.

Plans are in place to host a range of police and crime-related events in 2026, focusing on improving community safety awareness and engagement.

Sustainability & Food Security

Local partners continue to:

- promote energy efficiency, through community groups and Council
- coordinate food support provision – Chard Food Team through Chard Community Leaders Breakfasts at Holyrood School.
- explore community growing initiatives – Supporting data from the Community Plan helped inform successful fundraising for The Great Mead, which is planning to provide community growing opportunities. In addition, the Conversation group at Chard Community Hub now have an allotment plot with the plan to grow food, as well as a wellbeing retreat.

This collaborative approach has improved coordination and reduced duplication of effort.

Looking Ahead

Priorities for the coming year include:

- launch of the **KIND** Directory
- supporting sustainable youth provision informed by the Youth Survey, including a broader mix of youth opportunities across the town.
- Supporting the Youth Park Run based on Holyrood School grounds.
- Continued partnership working across safety, health, and wellbeing, including the launch of *Bridges to Wellbeing* (a collaboration between four local charitable organisations)
- Strengthening communication between organisations
- Increasing community engagement and volunteering
- Exploring the development of a localised safeguarding collaboration group

The Community Plan remains a living document, shaped by local need and delivered through partnership.

Progress to date reflects the commitment of volunteers, local groups, and statutory partners working together for the benefit of Chard.

Closing Note

The success of the Chard Community Plan relies on collaboration. We welcome continued involvement from residents, organisations and partners who wish to contribute ideas, time or expertise.

Together, we can continue to build a safer, healthier, and more connected community for everyone in Chard.