NEIGHBOURHOOD
Area Committee

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees

Evaluation report – condensed version

May 2026



1. Purpose of report

This document provides a **condensed summary of learning** from the Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC) pilot programme (July–December 2025). It is intended for **NAC members and partners** – including councillors, VCSE, business, health and public sector colleagues – who contributed time, insight and leadership to the pilots.

The purpose is to:

- share what the evaluation found, in an accessible way
- reflect back what participants told us
- highlight what worked well, what was challenging, and what made the biggest difference
- summarise learning from each NAC area
- support shared understanding as NACs develop further in 2026

This summary sits alongside the full evaluation report. It does not repeat all detail, but it does draw directly from the same evidence base.

2. Evaluation approach

The evaluation was designed using a **"test, learn and grow"** approach and ran alongside delivery of the pilot programme, allowing learning to inform changes as the pilots progressed.

Evidence sources
The evaluation drew on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods:

- **80 survey responses** from NAC members
- **29 semi structured interviews** with NAC members and staff
- **10 focus groups / workshops** with officers, partners and NAC members (180+ participants, non-unique)
- **842 residents engaged** through in person outreach (high streets, libraries, markets, local events)
- **Digital engagement** across pilots:
    - 1,963 site visitors
    - 167 respondents
    - 203 contributions
    - 313 subscribers

Evidence was gathered:

- after initial workshops

- after first and second NAC meetings
- after third NAC meetings
- through follow-up interviews and workshops

What the evaluation focused on
Six evaluation themes were agreed at the outset:

1. Process
2. Communication
3. Model efficacy
4. Participation and representation
5. Influence
6. Partnership working

The evaluation focused on **how the NAC model functioned**, participant experience, and early indicators of impact – not long-term community outcomes, which will develop as action plans are implemented.

3. Achievements

Across four very different areas, the NAC pilots **created new cross-sector spaces for collaborative working at neighbourhood scale**.

Headline findings

- NACs brought together **elected members, public sector partners, VCSE organisations, business and residents** in ways that had not previously existed at neighbourhood level.
- **Confidence in the NAC model increased** over the course of the pilot.
- Understanding of **purpose and process improved**, and optimism grew as the pilots progressed.
- Participants consistently valued:
    - partnership working
    - networking and relationship building
    - shared understanding of local issues

By the end of the pilot:

- **100% of surveyed members supported continuing NACs in 2026**
- **88% were optimistic** about NACs' potential to make a difference
- **83% said participation had made a positive difference** to them or their work

As one participant put it:

"Meeting new people and understanding where our objectives overlap has been one of the biggest benefits."

4. What worked well

4.1 Bringing the right people together
Across all areas, participants highlighted the value of:

- cross sector membership
- access to people who could "get things moving"
- hearing perspectives not normally in the same room

"The NAC brought together people who wouldn't usually sit round the same table."

4.2 Partnership working and connectivity
Partnership working was consistently identified as **one of the strongest features** of the pilots.
Survey results showed:

- baseline connectedness with partners at **6.9/10**
- rising to **7.3/10** by the third meetings

Participants frequently described:

- new connections
- easier follow-up conversations outside meetings
- better understanding of who is doing what locally

4.3 Facilitation, venues and meeting design
Where facilitation was strong and venues felt neutral and community based:

- participation felt more equal
- discussions were more constructive
- political dynamics were easier to manage

"Well structured and kept on track."

5. What was challenging

The pilots were deliberately fast paced. This enabled learning but also created challenges.

5.1 Clarity early on

After the first workshops:

- understanding of purpose averaged **6.0/10**
- understanding of process and timeline averaged **6.5/10**
- optimism averaged **5.7/10**

Participants frequently asked:

- What can the NAC decide or influence?
- How does it connect to wider decision-making?
- What will success look like?

"Clarify what success looks like. Still not sure of objectives."

5.2 Representation and diversity

While participation was strong, perceived gaps remained:

- young people
- lived experience
- some ethnic minority communities
- business representation in some areas

This was a consistent theme across surveys, interviews and workshops.

5.3 Pace and sustainability

The intensity of the pilot was energising, but difficult to sustain alongside existing roles.

"I'm not sure what can realistically be achieved in three meetings."

6. What made the biggest difference

One message was repeated across **all evidence sources**:
NACs succeed when meetings enable action – but delivery happens between meetings.

Key enablers of impact

- clear ownership of actions
- working groups or follow-up activity
- named leads and partner responsibility
- continued communication between meetings

As one participant noted:

“Knowing who to connect with to influence decisions has made a real difference.”

Where discussion moved towards concrete actions, timelines and shared ownership, confidence and perceived value increased noticeably.

7. Learning by NAC area

East Elmbridge

Strengths

- Strong focus on children and young people
- Effective use of mixed breakout groups
- Good alignment with health and prevention agendas

What would help next

- Clearer governance and chairing arrangements
- Stronger communication between meetings
- Consideration of operating scale over time

North Tandridge

Strengths

- Broad cross-sector representation
- Strong use of lived experience and local insight
- Clear shift towards action by later meetings

What would help next

- Greater clarity and support for chairs
- Continued balancing of councillor and community voices
- More structured follow-up between meetings

Dorking and the Villages

Strengths

- Good engagement across town and village perspectives
- Effective use of data to ground discussion
- Strong optimism by the end of the pilot

What would help next

- Clearer routes from recommendations to influence
- Greater reassurance about the NAC’s role and purpose
- Broader representation in some sectors

Farnham

Strengths

- Very strong partnership foundation
- High levels of engagement and ownership
- Clear examples of early impact (e.g. children and young people's mental health)

What would help next

- Planning for long-term sustainability
- Clear governance of sub-groups
- Continued focus on representation and diversity

8. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation, the following factors will be critical going forward:

Protect what worked

- cross-sector membership
- strong facilitation and chairing
- use of data and lived experience
- partnership-led approaches

Strengthen what matters

- clarity of purpose and influence
- communication ahead of meetings
- follow-up and delivery between meetings
- inclusive participation

Be realistic about capacity

- pace needs to match available resource
- delivery requires staff and partner support
- momentum depends on shared ownership

9. Conclusion

The NAC pilots demonstrated that this model of **neighbourhood-level community governance can work** in Surrey.

The NACs:

- created new relationships
- strengthened partnership working
- improved shared understanding of local priorities
- built confidence over time in the potential for practical, local delivery

While meetings were important, the evaluation clearly shows that **the credibility and impact of NACs depend not only on the meetings themselves but also on what happens between them.**

With continued clarity, realistic pacing, inclusive participation and sufficient support, NACs have the potential to play a **significant and lasting role** in shaping place-based working and local prevention efforts as Surrey moves into its next phase of local government reorganisation.