

Policy Report

# Levelling Up: Opportunities for Southampton City Council

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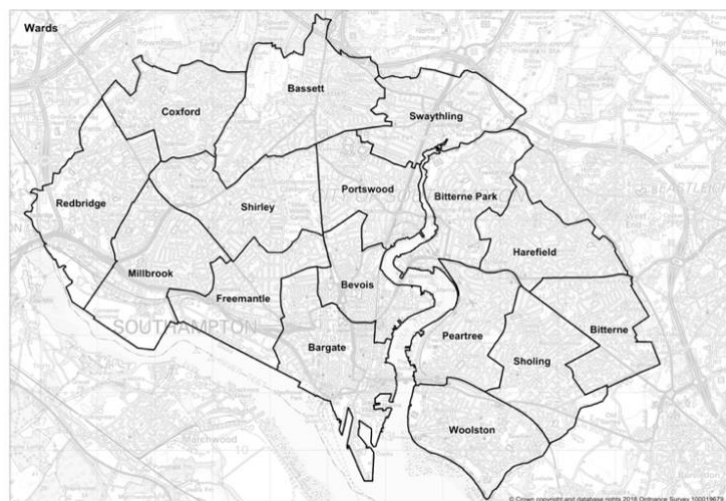
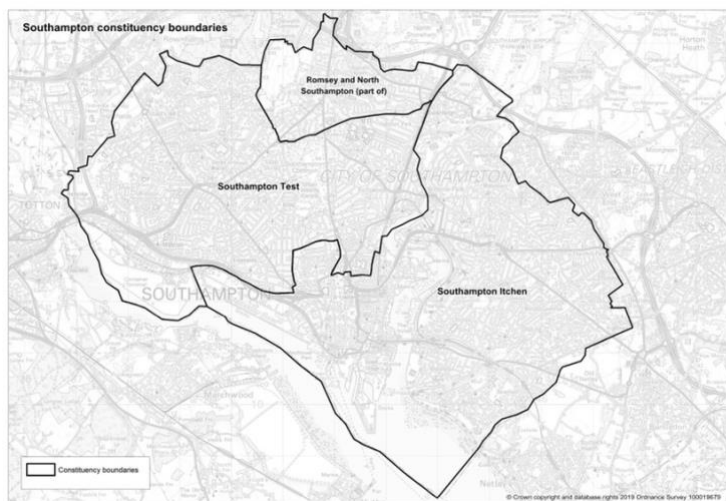
UNIVERSITY OF  
**Southampton**



# Levelling Up: Opportunities for Southampton City Council

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Source: Southampton Data Observatory

# Executive Summary

'Levelling up' is a key — if not the key — political agenda of the current UK government and Boris Johnson's premiership. As a domestic policy programme, levelling up aims to spread opportunity and prosperity to all regions of the UK, addressing regional imbalances in social mobility and people's life chances. This ambition seeks to move the focus of public and private investment away from London and the South East, areas historically identified as being more productive and affluent than the rest of the country. While its city boundaries fall within this demarcated Greater South East geography, Southampton has significant areas of need and deprivation that still require — in the language of the political moment — levelling up. So, in the context of the national levelling up agenda and its corresponding policy programme, this report seeks to negotiate difficult, sometimes competing, questions about Southampton's identity, topography, economy, health outcomes, and social disparities. Indeed, levelling up within the city may prove more crucial than emphasising its relative status within the country.

This report explores current relevant work within the Council and its comparator authorities. To provide a levelling up narrative for the city, the report will examine four overlapping agendas: the 2025 City of Culture bid, the Greener City Plan, the area-based regeneration projects, and Coastal Communities recovery. These agendas, which sit at various stages of development within the Council, can be deployed to support bids for forthcoming funding opportunities. The four agendas can also form part of a long-term approach to narrowing inequalities, developing skills and regenerating urban areas. These priorities thus extend beyond the temporary expediencies of current levelling up discussions.

This report uses mixed methodologies to conduct its analysis. A literature review of scholarly, media, and government sources establishes the national context of levelling up. Stakeholder discussions with local authority officers and academics locate the work within the Council and wider policy priorities for Southampton (see Appendix 1 for contributors). Data comparison between Southampton and its statistical neighbours gathers levelling up indicators, which are identified in the Levelling Up white paper and across its twelve accompanying "national missions". The conclusions of this report have been drawn from critical evaluation of materials and collaborative discussion with the Council's Policy and Strategy team.

## **Further research areas could include:**

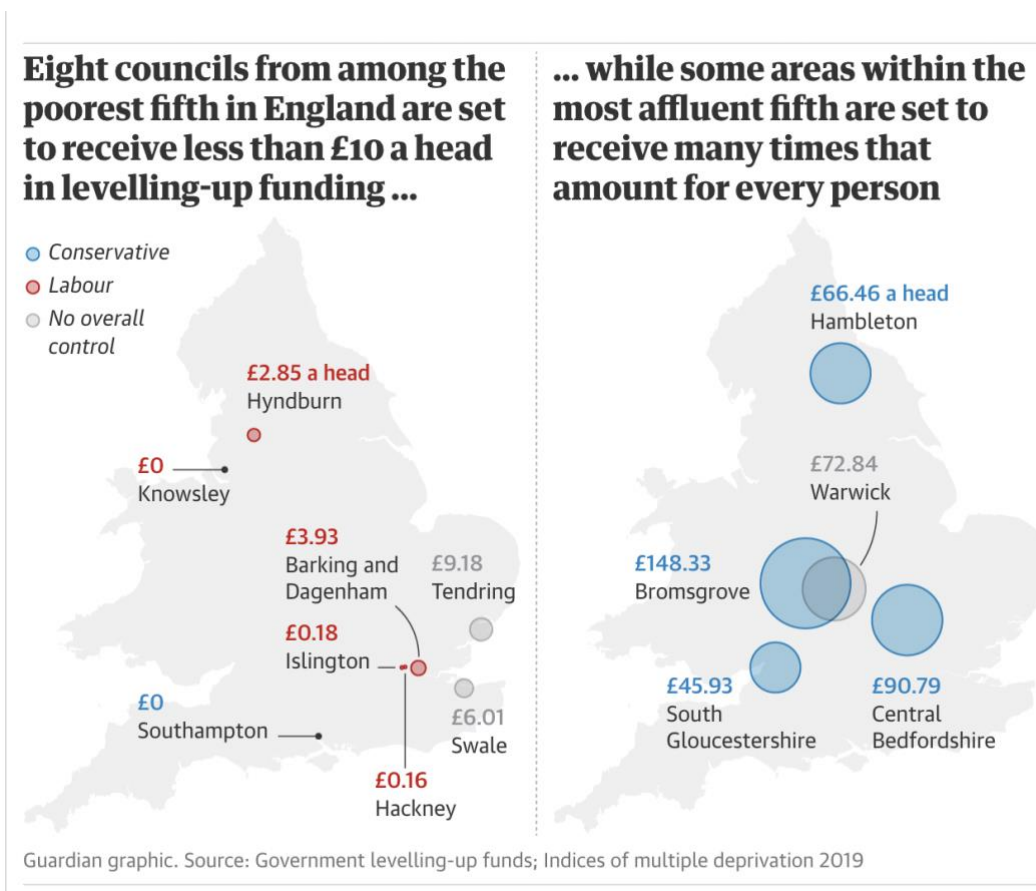
- University of Southampton have been awarded an AHRC grant to help local and national government create, embed and evaluate strategies for civic pride.
- The Council's Policy and Strategy team has suggested the Economic Prosperity Board model as a devolution option, with research proposed to the Southern Policy Centre.
- The Levelling Up white paper indicates the need for further collaboration with the SME decarbonisation cluster at University of Southampton on the Council's next 'Greener City Plan, 2023–50' and development of a Sustainability Strategy.

# Introduction

This report aims to provoke discussion on Southampton’s relationship to the levelling up agenda. This report argues that levelling up has a threefold relevance to the Council’s objectives, organisation and services:

- as a specific, technical set of criteria for funding opportunities
- as a much broader political agenda based on boosting productivity, improving public services, restoring local pride, and empowering leadership
- as twelve “national missions”, relating to policy areas such as education and health, outlined in the government white paper, and to be partly delivered through further devolved powers

Due to several factors, Southampton City Council (SCC) did not bid for the first round of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) in 2021. The Council is now well-positioned to take advantage of the forthcoming round of the LUF and other associated funds. It is crucial to obtain support and vocal advocacy from local MPs for these opportunities. Competitive funding between local authorities is integral to the allocation of levelling up money. [Sections of the media](#) have identified Southampton as a local authority area that has been underfunded in levelling up terms, despite being a recipient of the Transforming Cities Fund and a key location within the Solent Freeport (see below).



Source: The Guardian, ‘Levelling up funds distribution’

The national levelling up agenda has four broad objectives — on productivity, public services, pride, and leadership — that can be found threaded through several Council initiatives and strategies. Using the context of these four objectives, this report tries to articulate a levelling up narrative that integrates the Council’s work on culture, the environment, place, and health. Southampton has a distinctive marine, maritime, aviation and sporting history, a complex geography, and a diverse set of demographics. These factors pose as many opportunities as they do challenges. Southampton attracts investment and highly skilled labour; it also has high areas of need and deprivation. Balancing these narratives will form a key part of the report.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) published the white paper, [“Levelling Up the United Kingdom”](#). It outlines the government’s strategy for levelling up the UK and confirms the objectives for the levelling up agenda:

- i. boosting pay and productivity
- ii. improving public services
- iii. restoring local pride
- iv. empowering local leaders

These objectives are composed of 12 “national missions”, or targets, that cover 12 policy areas designed to ‘level up’ the UK by 2030. Despite its ambitions, the white paper contains no new spending pledges. Funds linked to levelling up had been announced in the 2021/22 Spending Review. While the white paper estimates a successful levelling up programme could see a permanent GDP rise of £50bn a year, Southampton does not appear too regularly in its diagnosis and analysis: in fact, the ancient metropolis of Jericho is mentioned more often than the city. In response, this report provides comparative data analysis on metrics for each of the 12 levelling up missions, revealing similarities and differences between Southampton and its recognised Office of National Statistics (ONS) neighbours (see Appendix 3 for dataset). This report is also keen to emphasise the health, economic and social inequalities within the city.

This report will first focus on levelling up as it has been characterised in academic literature. The concept is generally viewed with scepticism, read as a cynical political tool rather than as a means of making a difference to people’s life outcomes. However, scholarship recognises the need for a sustained diagnosis and policy approach to the geographical inequalities that levelling up seeks to address. Next, the national policy context is provided for levelling up, following its political inception, debate and development in public discussion. This work is subsequently matched up to Southampton’s social, economic, environmental and health priorities, as outlined by the Council. The report focuses on several key Council agendas that could supply a substantial basis for expressing the city’s levelling up narrative. It seeks to encourage effective and aligned work across Council directorates and departments to address complex issues. To support this research, the report offers a series of case studies on levelling up from other local authorities, before providing a more detailed, comparative statistical analysis of selected metrics that underpin each of the 12 levelling up missions, outlined in the government white paper. The report ends by offering several conclusions on the role of levelling up in the context of local authorities and their partner organisations.

# Levelling Up in Academic Literature

Levelling up has been a contested political concept since its widespread adoption after the 2019 UK general election. Nevertheless, the social, economic and geographical disparities that underpin the term have existed in the UK for almost a century. The most recent “bifurcation of politics” in England has been traced back to the 2015 general election and the subsequent 2016 EU referendum. [Jennings and Stoker \(2016\)](#) argue that citizens in cosmopolitan areas are more likely to have wider access to — and hold positive opinions about — the benefits of global economic development than those who live in “provincial backwaters”. Broadly, socially liberal views are common in cosmopolitan areas, which contain a higher number of skilled jobs. In contrast, feelings of nostalgia and nationalism are more common to provincial areas, which contain fewer growth opportunities and have suffered from prolonged economic decline.

These provincial areas have been designated as ‘left-behind’ places, whose longstanding local and regional inequalities could be addressed by the government’s levelling up strategy. Responding to early announcements on levelling up, [Tomaney and Pike \(2020\)](#) argue that the government’s agenda appears to be more “driven by electoral calculation than a real engagement with tackling deep inequalities”. This view is partly supported by the subsequent award of the LUF to “priority areas” with varying indicators of need and deprivation. In fact, 9% of LUF money — a total value of £151m — was distributed to 11 projects in the South East.

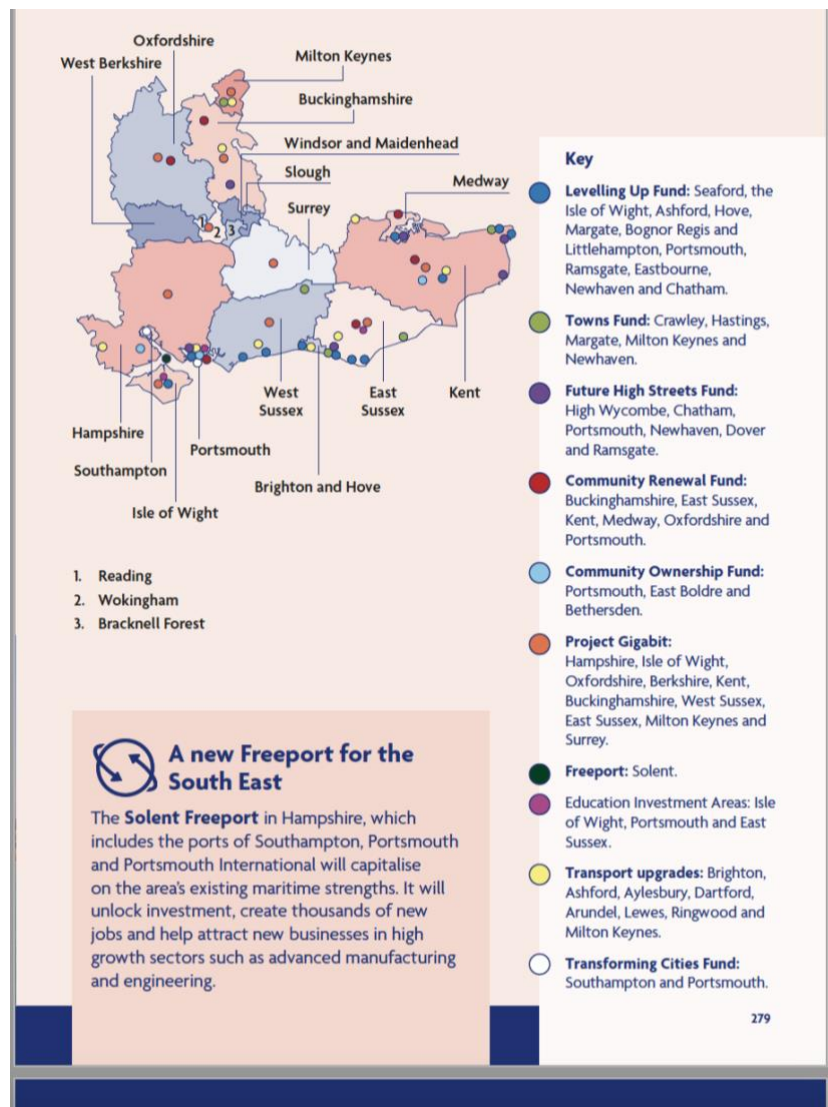
These instances suggest an apparent tension at the heart of the levelling up political project, which seeks to appeal to voters in areas where opportunities to prosper are few and far between. Rather than focus on sustainable, long-term social and economic development, however, the politics of levelling up appears more concerned with targeting citizens’ feelings of loss, neglect and abandonment. According to [Jennings, McKay and Stoker \(2021\)](#), the levelling up agenda contains significant policy and ideological contradictions, which it seeks to resolve through a form of “governing as political spectacle”. This perspective has come to bear in the LUF criteria for funding. Many of the successful LUF bids were based on town centre regeneration and capital infrastructure projects with high public visibility. The suggested logic is as follows: if voters can see the results of levelling up, which can be measured using metrics on civic pride, they will more likely vote for the incumbent government at the next election.

This has led scholars to diminish claims that levelling up is a sustained, coherent political project. [Newman \(2021\)](#) states that the government has rather deployed the agenda “as a tool for public communication and as a broad motif” that is unlikely to overcome the intractable complexities of its “ambiguous ideology”. The appeals of levelling up to tackling deprivation, equality of opportunity, economic liberalism, and national unity requires a broad, possibly unmanageable political coalition. On the other hand, the variety of ideological dimensions indicates the value of a flexible approach to levelling up, which may allow local authorities to take ownership of the agenda in a such a way that addresses local priorities. For more recent work and further diagnoses of local and regional inequalities in the UK during the pandemic, this report recommends the book, [“Levelling Up Left Behind Places: The Scale and Nature of the Economic and Policy Challenge” \(2021\)](#), published by Routledge.

# The National Policy Context

The 2019 UK general election precipitated the rise of levelling up as both a political slogan and policy agenda. On the morning following the Conservatives' win, Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that the defining mission of his government was to [“unite and level up the country”](#). Subsequent announcements laid further foundations for levelling up and in September 2021, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was retitled Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), with Michael Gove appointed as the Secretary of State. This coincided with the formation of the Levelling Up Taskforce, led by former Bank of England Chief Economist, Andy Haldane, who made significant contributions to the Levelling Up white paper, published in February 2022.

Several national funding pots have been designed to meet the objectives of levelling up. The first round of the LUF took place in 2021. Because Southampton City Council is a transport authority and contains two whole constituencies, it is entitled to three LUF bids. It would need a joint approach with Hampshire County Council (HCC) if it were to bid for Romsey and Southampton North. Discussions have yet to take place with HCC. Finalised criteria for the second round of the LUF is due in March and these may differ from the first round, taking into account the Levelling Up white paper. The Solent Freeport, which connects Southampton to the white paper more than any other project, is currently developing its business case.



Source: UK Government, 'Levelling Up the South East'

For the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the government will bypass local enterprise partnerships in England and allocate funding directly to local authorities. The themes of the fund — communities and place, local businesses, employment and skills, with a focus on pride — align the government's levelling up objectives with the Council's existing targets, plans and

approaches. Following publication of the framework in Spring, the government will ask local authorities to draft a local Investment Plan for approval. The second LUF round, the freeports, and the UKSPF are the essential live funding components of the levelling up agenda.

Correspondence with delivery advisors in DLUHC has identified further strands of thinking as the government attempts to establish levelling up as a fully-fledged policy programme. [Centre for Cities \(CfC\)](#) have provided extensive research on the relative complexities of long-term economic development in urban areas. According to [CfC](#), Southampton is classified as “complex” because it has a diverse, specialised economy. [Martin Sandbu](#) of the Financial Times has offered wider, influential insights on addressing inequalities of productivity and income across the UK. The [LSE](#), meanwhile, has given useful critical reaction to the white paper, noting that there is a lack of investment to match the government’s ambitions. The Bennett Institute for Public Policy at University of Cambridge has developed a highly regarded [“Levelling Up Anthology”](#) to be used as a point of reference for policymakers and advisors. University of Southampton has designed [a “place-based” approach to policymaking](#) that draws comparisons between cosmopolitan, post-industrial and provincial-coastal areas in the UK. This latter work highlights a key role for local authorities, advocated for by the white paper, in deciding, coordinating and promoting actions for the benefit of local communities. In theory, this type of policy response can be matched to the specific, diverse needs of Southampton.

Council data has highlighted key needs and challenges across the city, including:

- Southampton ranks in the worst 20% of England in the IMD index for income deprivation affecting children – worse than Sheffield, Preston, and Leeds
- Attainment 8 scores are around the lowest 10% in England – lower than Manchester
- Pupil absence is in worst 12% in England – lower than Manchester, Sheffield, Blackpool
- In the top 10% in England of children (10–17yrs) in the youth justice system – worse than Liverpool, Manchester, Bolton, and Newcastle
- In the worse 6% nationally for 16 and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training – worse than Liverpool, Bolton, Sunderland, and Manchester
- In the worse 20% nationally for obesity levels in children in Year 6 – worse than Sunderland, Sheffield, Bolton and Leeds
- Under 75s’ mortality rate from preventable causes is in the worst top 10% in England
- The 11<sup>th</sup> highest violent crime rate in England – worse than all its ONS neighbours
- Residents feel 15% less safe after dark, compared with the national average
- Domestic violence accounts for 14.5% of recorded crime in Southampton. 52% of high-risk domestic abuse referrals have children in the household. 9.7% increase in last year
- Disproportionately higher rate of domestic violence compared to population size. Domestic crime in Southampton accounts for 19.2% of all domestic crime in the UK
- Job postings were significantly lower than national average from May 2020 to July 2021



# Southampton's Levelling Up Narrative

Southampton has a distinctive marine, maritime, aviation and sporting history, a complex geography, and a diverse set of demographics. It has been variously understood as a Northern city in the South, a city of two halves, a gateway to the UK, a great place for investment with world-leading research institutions, and an area with pockets of serious need and deprivation. Bitterne is identified as a 'left-behind' ward in the [Local Trust's 2019 report](#). Southampton has often faced challenges when trying to reconcile these sometimes-competing narrative strands.

It is useful, then, to note the current work within the Council that can establish a productive levelling up narrative. Levelling up is a cross-cutting agenda that requires internal coordination between officers, teams, and departments. The Council also needs a strong strategic partnership to deliver on Levelling Up opportunities. A partnership approach to growth has been established in the "Southampton Economic & Green Growth Strategy". From this basis the Council can engage with businesses, FE/HE institutions, and health partners to demonstrate collective buy-in for its levelling up objectives.

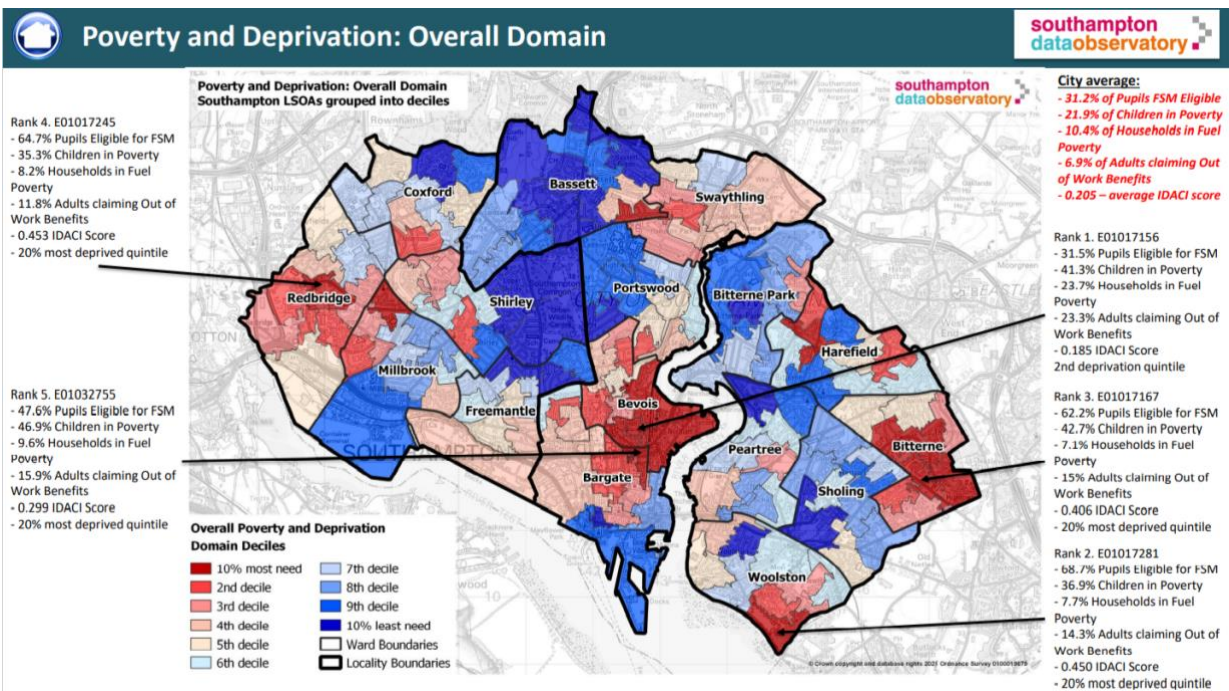
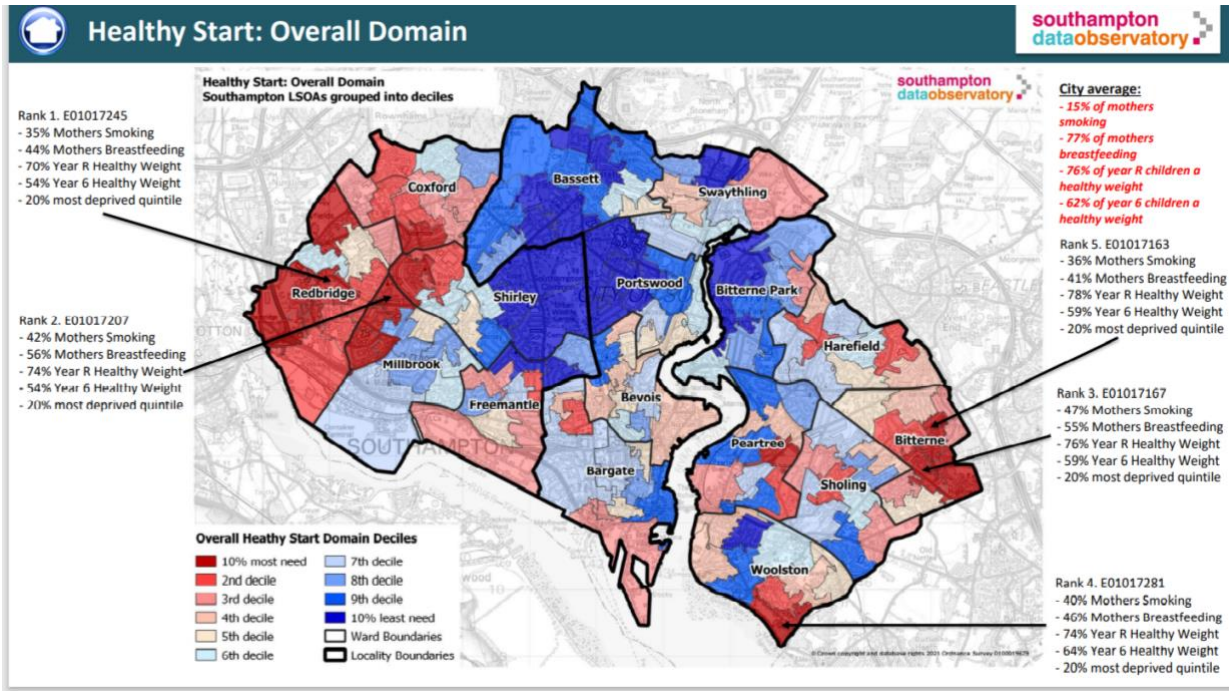
The work in Communities, Culture, & Homes forms an essential component of the Council's levelling up response. The Stronger Communities Team has organised a Prosperity/Levelling Up (formerly Anti-Poverty) group to set out an action plan for coordinating government objectives on Levelling Up with current Council activities, including work on:

- High rates of child, food, and fuel poverty
- Increased incidents domestic violence, cruelty and abuse
- Pressures on household incomes due to debt and price increases
- A digital divide, gaps in attainment and access to education, training and employment
- Engagement with communities and Child Friendly City ambitions

Clarification is needed on the Southampton Connect work with the consultancy firm, This Is Purpose, who identified levelling up priorities from a series of goals developed in partnership. Cohesive partnerships provide a foundation for delivering objectives and meeting funding opportunities. It is important to reconcile local priorities with the government vision. This collaboration agreed three priorities (from the wider This Is Purpose goals below), which address challenges in Southampton that align with the government's levelling up agenda: i. Strong foundation in early years; ii. Extending enterprise; and iii. Infrastructure for opportunity.



The practical and intelligent use of data supports the Council's agenda for levelling up. The accessible, succinctly articulated metrics on the Southampton Data Observatory provide an excellent resource for approaching levelling up objectives, particularly when comparing areas and wards within Southampton. The Council should identify the priority neighbourhoods where crime, deprivation and health data show the most marginalised areas that would benefit from levelling up relative to one another. This may prove difficult given that inequalities are spread across different wards in the city. See the LSOA work within the Council, focusing on healthy starts in early years and overall poverty in Southampton, which frames the narrative of need.



Source: Southampton Data Observatory

# Key Council Agendas

Which are the key council agendas to include in the landscape of levelling up? The City of Culture bid can be a key component of the Council's approach, and the Cultural Strategy, "Southampton Together", can further coordinate the Council's ambitions. Restoring local pride is a key objective of the government's levelling up agenda and crucial to forthcoming bids. Southampton City Vision consultations can provide indicators for heritage and the public realm; measures related to pride have been emphasised in funding feedback to councils.

Environmental sustainability can also be central to a levelling up approach. The Council's dedicated Greener City team is integral to decarbonising services and reaching net zero targets. As indicated in the "Greener City Plan", green recovery is a key enabler for many of the Council's other targets and strategies. Ongoing work on a "Green Spatial Strategy" can join up Council objectives on healthy life expectancy, obesity, air quality, the environment, place, and culture, areas of policy which have been highlighted in the Levelling Up white paper.

The Council's regeneration projects can meet levelling up targets, too. Four areas have been identified as key development zones. Deciding which of these plans is to move forward will be crucial to the Council's LUF planning and bidding strategy. Economic recovery and growth, improved transport connectivity, and regeneration were the designated place characteristics of the [government's first LUF prospectus](#). Investment in underserved urban areas can meet a significant number of the Council's economic, social and health priorities. Having a healthy working-age population is a golden thread that runs through skills, employment and growth.

These themes could form part of a wider, health-driven Coastal Communities' narrative to be integrated into the Council's approach. Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty's influential [annual report in 2021](#) focused on health disparities in these communities, drawing on narratives of deindustrialisation, poor housing, and the limitations imposed on services and transport by coastal geographies. This aligns with the challenges outlined in the Council's "Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017–2025" and in its ICS coordination. The forthcoming white paper on health disparities will be crucial to consider. Working towards a 'health in all policies' approach has agreed at the Council since the Director of Public Health presented her annual report.

The Levelling Up white paper sets out 12 "national missions" on **Productivity, R&D, Transport, Digital Connectivity, Education, Skills, Health, Wellbeing, Pride, Housing, Crime and Devolution**, all of which the government aims to deliver by 2030. To meet them, the "system change" section of the white paper contains five pillars: i. the 12 "missions"; ii. embedding levelling up into central government decision making; iii. further devolution; iv. a new national independent data body; and v. a new levelling up advisory council and statutory annual updates on progress. These pillars seek to establish accountability for metrics of success. 23 of the 49 proposed measures are at local authority level, including indicators of pride. The government has provided local authorities with a bid toolkit tailored for levelling up funds. In lieu of an imminent devolution deal, the Council could consider adapting its priorities to meet central government criteria.

# Lessons from Local Authorities

Discussions with other councils and academics have established useful levelling up comparator authorities for Southampton. Portsmouth City Council developed a ‘Solent Narrative’ document as a resource in its successful LUF bid. Metrics on Southampton are included in the prospectus and help to contextualise Southampton as part of the Solent geography, rather than as a part of the Greater South East. This supports the conclusions of Sitaram (2021), who notes that “the aggregation of all parts of the [central South] region as lying within the ‘affluent South East’ mask significant differences *within* that region, masking localities whose performance is more akin to other less affluent regions”. It is worth looking at a variety of areas with deprivation who have had success with levelling up, including Wigan, Derby, and Stoke-on-Trent.

## ‘The Wigan Deal’: Innovations to Improve Community Engagement

‘The deal’ is an informal agreement to create a more active relationship between the council and the communities of Wigan, aiming to incorporate all local services in a period when council funding has faced consistent financial cuts.

‘The deal’ is a successful example of how listening to communities, embedding integrated public services, placed-based neighbourhood teams and institutional culture-change can lead to positive results. Since the beginning of ‘the deal’, healthy life expectancy has increased by seven years within Wigan’s most deprived communities, whilst numbers of looked-after-children fell by 10%. Additionally, ‘the deal’ has benefited other areas such as increasing institutional trust across the town, with public approval of the council rising during a time of heavily constrained finances.

## Derby Levels Up: Local Development

As part of the government’s Levelling Up white paper, Derby City Council secured a county deal after collaboration between Derbyshire County Council and eight other district and borough councils in the area. The deal has allocated £49.6 million to the ‘Infinity Garden Village’ in the South Derby Growth Zone to support a residential development that aims to deliver 4,750 homes.

Derby City Council has also taken up development projects in the aim of ‘giving the city a culture heart’, ‘improving arts and tourism’ and having ‘better looking streets’. This has seen the approval of the Market Hall repair and regeneration for £25 million and the expansion of the Derbion Shopping Centre, an £11 million project.

The Southern Policy Centre report, [“Levelling up: making the case for investment in the central South”](#), draws comparisons between Southampton and Derby on metrics of employment, productivity and deprivation. It argues that “the constituencies which include Southampton are very much comparable [to Derby] when educational attainment and average earnings are compared, showing the striking similarities between the experiences of disadvantaged people in both cities”. The report also notes that in Southampton, “while business start-up rate is high, it is accompanied by a very high business churn rate, highlighting the need to provide more support to new businesses so that they can grow and flourish”. Southampton is also below average rank on educational attainment measures for children and young people eligible for Free School Meals. Across the city, there are “poor outcomes on a number of health and life expectancy indicators” (see Appendix 2 for detail).

The [Camden Renewal Commission](#) has been identified by central government as an exemplar of levelling up work. The “mission-orientated” approach to public policy and community engagement, led by Mariana Mazzucato, has clearly influenced government thinking in the Levelling Up white paper. The joint initiative between Camden Council and UCL’s Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose emphasises co-production and co-design rather than consultation with residents. Many indicators of local pride derive from citizens’ views on green spaces, the public realm and heritage zones. [The Greater Manchester Combined Mayoral Authority](#) is also viewed as a trailblazer for local levelling up approaches, although it has had several years of further devolved powers to capitalise on these types of opportunities. Neither Camden nor Greater Manchester tend to use the explicit language of levelling up for a variety of practical and political reasons. Yet these councils still find that they are badged as levelling up successes by central government. This suggests opportunities for Southampton to ‘level up itself’ by focusing on community engagement and local environmental, health, cultural and regeneration priorities. Embracing these priorities is crucial for strategy and communications.

#### **Stoke-on-Trent City Council: Potters Win Three Levelling Up Pots**

In October 2021, the government awarded Stoke three levelling up fund bids worth £56m. It is the largest single government investment in the city since the opening of the A50 in the 1990s. The investment will be split into three regeneration projects across the city.

Collaboration with key stakeholders was found to be vital to the success of the bids. Stoke-on-Trent City Council liaised with the three local MPs for the city, along with Staffordshire University and JCB who are big employers in the area. This created a “civic mission” that worked to drive forward the levelling up bids.

The bids were designed to tap into the some of the bespoke cultural aspects of the city that could be improved upon by cash injections. Acknowledging the city’s ceramic heritage allowed Stoke to stand out and present a coherent case for levelling up.

#### **Wakefield Council: The Highs and Lows of Levelling Up**

As a result of the competitive allocation system of funding, local authorities have been unable to attain a long-term trajectory of improvement.

Wakefield Council has had to shelve plans to regenerate brownfield sites across the area because these ambitions need 15 to 20 years to be fulfilled. Instead of pursuing these plans, Wakefield has tried to align itself with national political interests and been forced to re-shape its strategies to pursue various short-term funding opportunities.

Wakefield is set to benefit from a £44.9 million investment from successful bids for the Towns Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. Regardless of the benefits these pots of money may bring, councillors in Wakefield have been critical of the process, labelling it a “beauty contest” that undermines long-term strategic aims and local priorities.

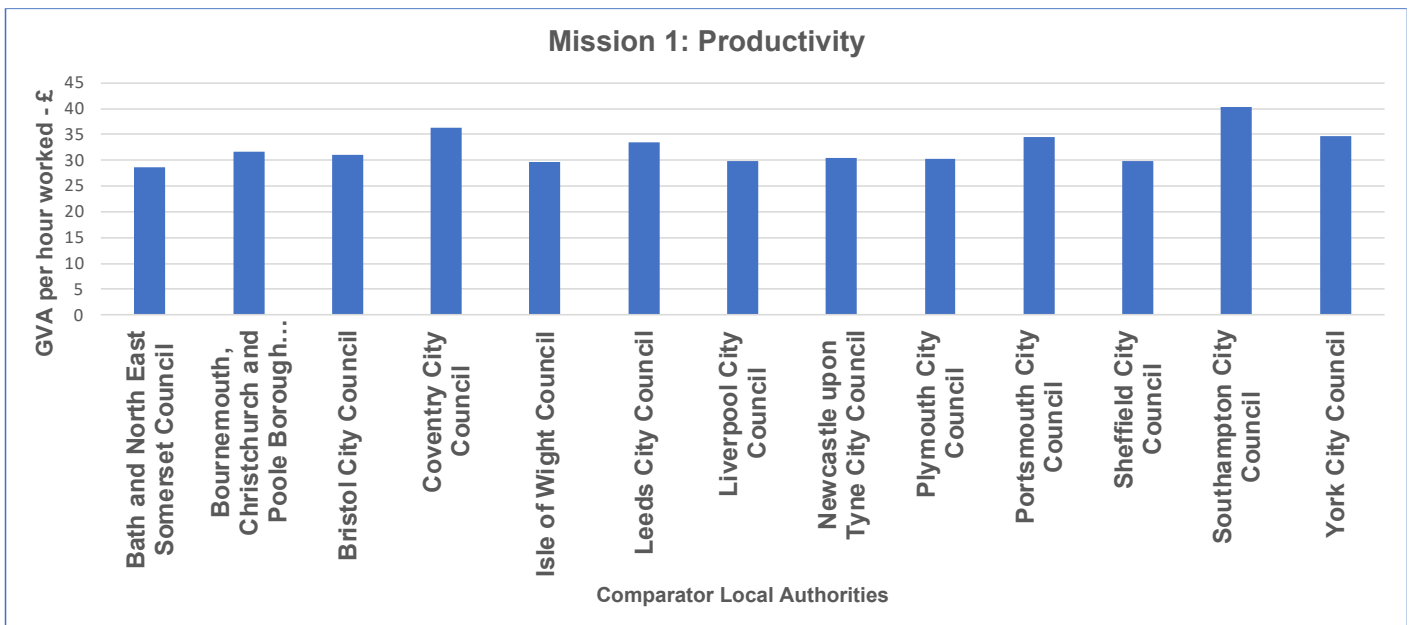
# Comparing Southampton to its ONS Neighbours

This section provides a range of comparative data on key local authorities, including SCC’s statistical neighbours and bid competitors. It supplies metrics for each of the 12 levelling up missions, based on the government’s accompanying [technical annex to the white paper](#). This work is provisional by its nature: the government is still investigating and developing relevant metrics for its missions. Nonetheless, by starting to reveal similarities and differences between Southampton and its Office of National Statistics (ONS) comparators, the Council can begin to understand its role within the levelling up agenda. All data has been sourced from the [ONS](#).

**Mission 1: Productivity — By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.**

Southampton performs better than all its statistical neighbours on Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked against other local authorities. The ONS “Subnational indicators explorer” identifies the GVA metric as one of Southampton’s positive indicators for levelling up objectives. The Council should thus emphasise that the city’s existing productivity suggests untapped potential for finding extra value in its industries, goods and services.

Local Authority	M1 – GVA per hour worked - £ (2019)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	28.73
Isle of Wight Council	29.6
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	31.67
York City Council	34.64
Bristol City Council	31.01
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	30.43
Leeds City Council	33.39
Plymouth City Council	30.2
Coventry City Council	36.21
Sheffield City Council	29.85
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>40.27</b>
Liverpool City Council	29.89
Portsmouth City Council	34.41



**Mission 2: R&D — By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40% and at least a third over the Spending Review period, with that additional government funding seeking to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.**

Public investment in R&D is measured via region. As a previous beneficiary of steadily increasing funding, Southampton’s universities should plan future bids strategically in line with these new priorities. Grant applications could focus on areas in the UK outside of the South East.

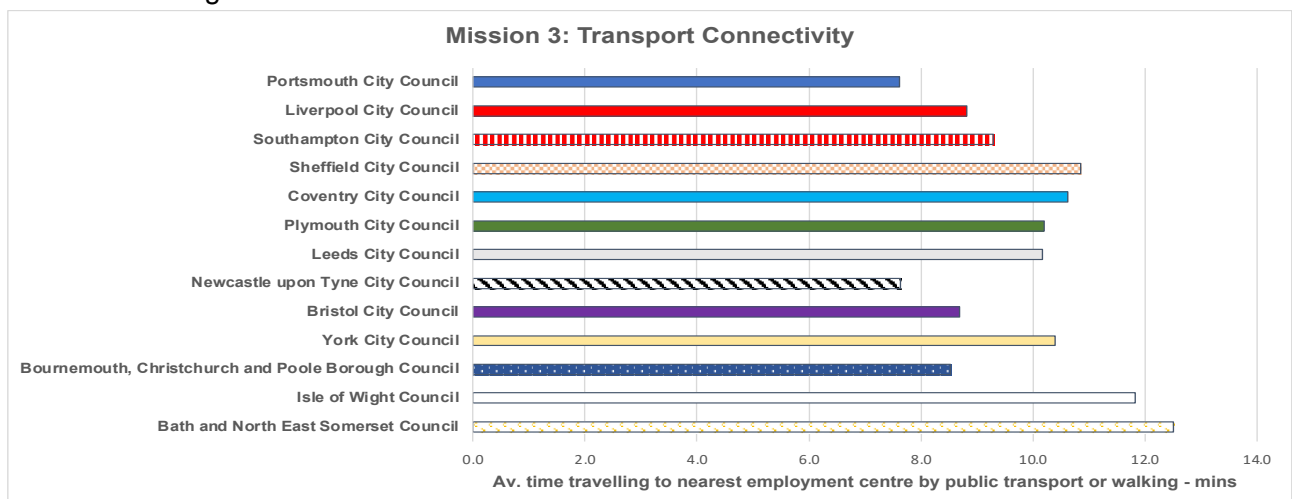
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	M2 – Total R&D spending - £ Million		
Region	2017	2018	2019
North East	711	777	742
North West	3,049	2,961	2,977
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,640	1,653	1,757
East Midlands	1,937	2,206	2,368
West Midlands	2,967	3,285	2,917
East of England	5,922	6,608	6,895
London	5,555	5,970	6,351
<b>South East</b>	<b>6,736</b>	<b>7,089</b>	<b>7,529</b>
South West	2,343	2,491	2,596
Wales	680	798	794
Scotland	2,543	2,712	2,789
Northern Ireland	691	715	805

**Mission 3: Transport — By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.**

Southampton can improve the connectivity of its transport network. Joined up walkways, decarbonised bus and rail services, and increased active travel routes can contribute to several of the Council’s objectives on health, the environment and employment. Jobs and work opportunities in the city centre must be attractive, accessible and affordable for residents to travel from surrounding areas.

Local Authority	M3 – Average time taken to travel to nearest employment centre by public transport or walking - mins (2019)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	12.5
Isle of Wight Council	11.8
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	8.5
York City Council	10.4
Bristol City Council	8.7
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	7.6
Leeds City Council	10.2
Plymouth City Council	10.2
Coventry City Council	10.6
Sheffield City Council	10.9
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>9.3</b>
Liverpool City Council	8.8
Portsmouth City Council	7.6



**Mission 4: Broadband — By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for most of the population.**

Along with GVA per hour worked, gigabit-capable broadband is the other positive indicator for Southampton on the ONS “Subnational indicators explorer”. This shows another instance where the city has existing strength on levelling up objectives. Southampton also has a complete spread of 4G coverage, the other metric used by government to measure broadband capacity.

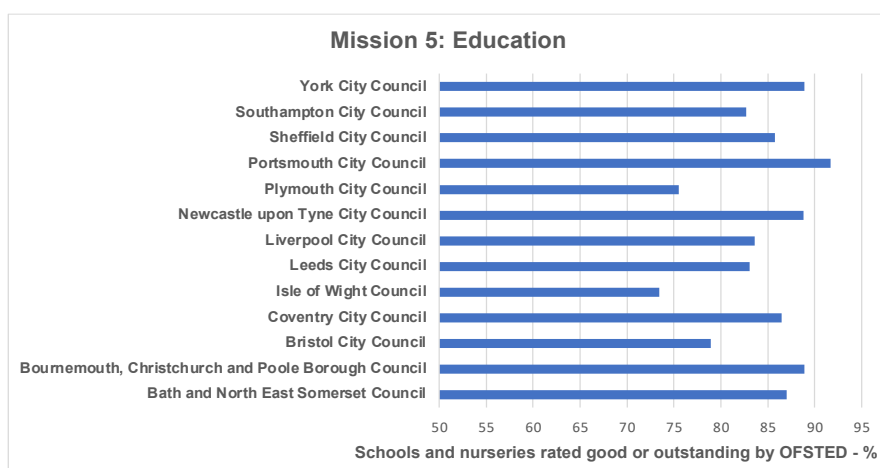
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**Mission 5: Education — By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.**

Southampton Connect chose “Strong Foundation in Early Years, ages 0–4” as a key priority for the city. While this period is crucial to children’s development, it is also important to focus on primary and secondary school standards, where Southampton performs moderately on OFSTED inspection ratings compared to other local authorities. Central government has not selected the city to be an ‘Education Investment Area’ as part of the levelling up agenda.

Local Authority	M4 – Premises with gigabit capable broadband - % (May 2021)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	30.6
Isle of Wight Council	34.1
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	28.6
York City Council	58.3
Bristol City Council	49.5
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	28.6
Leeds City Council	82.6
Plymouth City Council	2.8
Coventry City Council	92.8
Sheffield City Council	13.9
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>85.4</b>
Liverpool City Council	77.3
Portsmouth City Council	17.7

Local Authority	M5 – Schools and nurseries rated good or outstanding by OFSTED - % (2020–21)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	87.0
Isle of Wight Council	73.5
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	88.9
York City Council	88.9
Bristol City Council	78.9
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	88.8
Leeds City Council	83.1
Plymouth City Council	75.5
Coventry City Council	86.4
Sheffield City Council	85.7
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>82.7</b>
Liverpool City Council	83.6
Portsmouth City Council	91.7





**Mission 6: Skills — By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.**

Southampton performs relatively poorly on apprenticeships achieved. Ongoing work on ‘Intelligent City’ in the Council provides a framework for joining together technology, place-shaping and local pride in economic development. Broader objectives on industry, skills and investment can be driven by Solent Freeport and innovations clusters identified in the white paper.

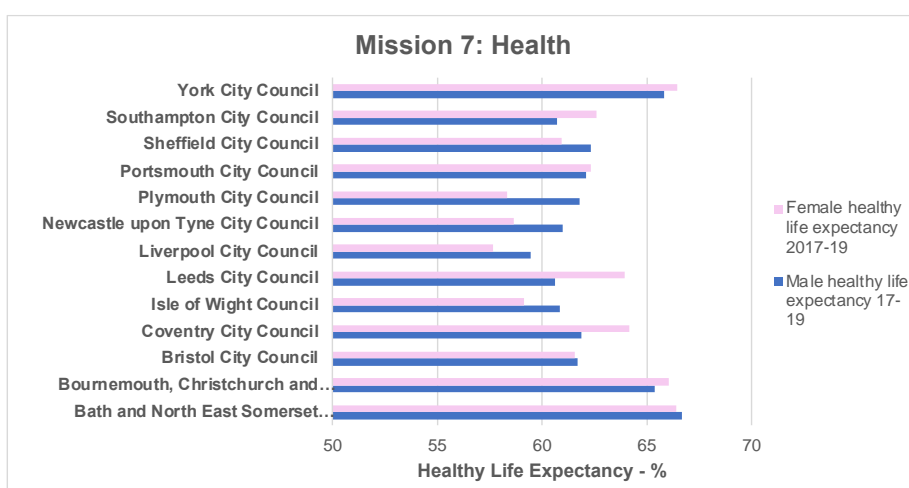
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**Mission 7: Health — By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by 5 years.**

Southampton features in the white paper for its relatively low health outcomes, borne out against its statistical neighbours: “Females born in Wokingham can expect to live 12 years longer in good health than those born in Southampton.” COVID has exacerbated unequal physical health, mental health and education outcomes in Southampton. A COVID impact assessment has been agreed for the city.

Local Authority	M6 – Number of completed apprenticeships (2020-21)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	450
Isle of Wight Council	440
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	1150
York City Council	520
Bristol City Council	1200
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	680
Leeds City Council	2500
Plymouth City Council	1200
Coventry City Council	1080
Sheffield City Council	1470
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>660</b>
Liverpool City Council	1280
Portsmouth City Council	600

Local Authority	M7 – Male healthy life expectancy 2017-19	M7 – Female healthy life expectancy 2017-19
Bath and North East Somerset Council	66.65	66.41
Isle of Wight Council	60.84	59.12
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	65.37	66.03
York City Council	65.82	66.44
Bristol City Council	61.69	61.56
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	60.98	58.65
Leeds City Council	60.61	63.94
Plymouth City Council	61.8	58.33
Coventry City Council	61.86	64.16
Sheffield City Council	62.33	60.91
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>60.7</b>	<b>62.61</b>
Liverpool City Council	59.46	57.66
Portsmouth City Council	62.09	62.33



**Mission 8: Wellbeing — By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.**

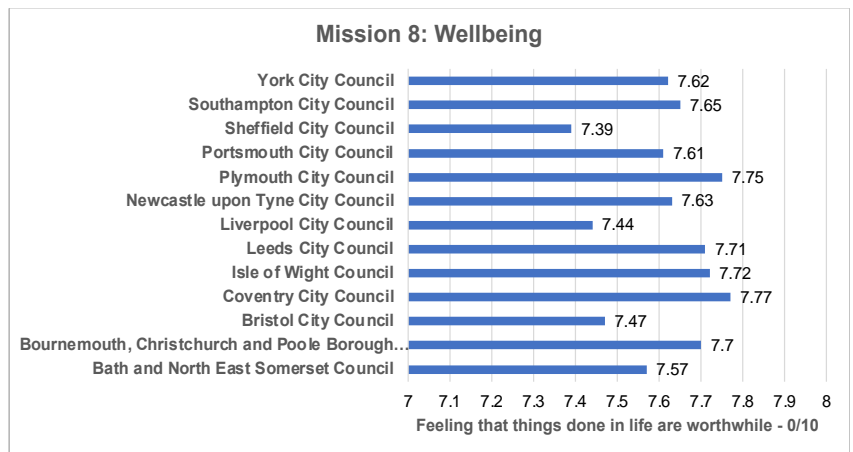
Southampton performs moderately relative to its statistical neighbours on indices of wellbeing, which have been generally measured by residents’ ratings out of ten. These average ratings are the result of subjective prompts, including questions about people’s life satisfaction and anxiety. These types of metrics suggest the need to ‘level up’ in more productive and affluent areas, which have older populations and rural geographies that contribute to a poorer sense of wellbeing. The greater coverage provided by these metrics may prove an indicator for the yet-to-be developed “pride in place” measures (see below).

\*

**Mission 9: Pride of Place — By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.**

This data shows Southampton’s moderate performance on happiness. This is technically a “wellbeing” metric, in lieu of the proposed metrics on adults who are satisfied with their local area and engage in civic participation. This gap in data indicates a role for Council consultation, co-design and co-production with residents on initiatives, schemes and developments. Pride is a key theme for the government, informing its communications, strategies and funding criteria for levelling up.

Local Authority	M8 – Average feeling that things done in life are worthwhile - (0/10)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	7.57
Isle of Wight Council	7.72
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	7.7
York City Council	7.62
Bristol City Council	7.47
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	7.63
Leeds City Council	7.71
Plymouth City Council	7.75
Coventry City Council	7.77
Sheffield City Council	7.39
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>7.65</b>
Liverpool City Council	7.44
Portsmouth City Council	7.61



Local Authority	M9 – Average happiness rating - 0/10 (2020–21)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	7.28
Isle of Wight Council	7.5
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	7.33
York City Council	7.39
Bristol City Council	6.99
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	7.29
Leeds City Council	7.19
Plymouth City Council	7.44
Coventry City Council	7.38
Sheffield City Council	6.9
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>7.15</b>
Liverpool City Council	7.13
Portsmouth City Council	7.51

**Mission 10: Housing — By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government’s ambition is for the number of “non-decent” rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.**

For the government, quality housing is seen as a key driver of life chances and outcomes. The Council has statutory house building targets that could put pressure on plans and services. It appears unlikely that levelling up will lead to a softening of targets as the programme seeks to build on brownfield sites. The government is also seeking to bring tighter regulation to the private rental sector by introducing a landlords’ register.

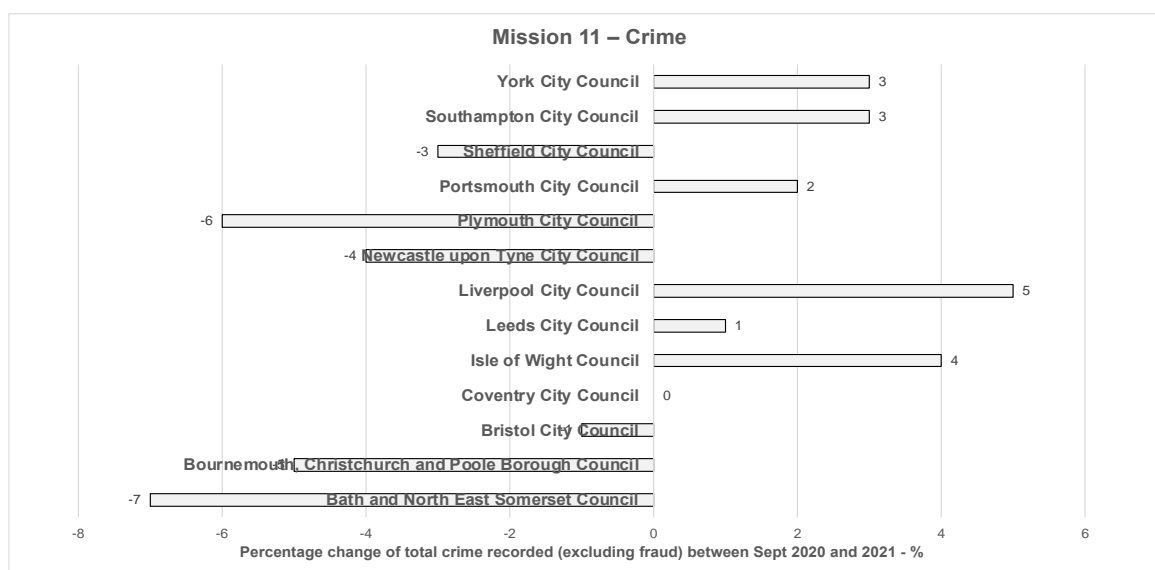
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**Mission 11: Crime — By 2030, homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on worst-affected areas.**

Southampton has seen a 3 percent increase in total crime recorded from recent statistics.

Local Authority	M10 – Net additions to the housing stock 2019–20.
Bath and North East Somerset Council	764
Isle of Wight Council	445
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	790
York City Council	622
Bristol City Council	1621
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	1268
Leeds City Council	2950
Plymouth City Council	537
Coventry City Council	589
Sheffield City Council	1850
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>645</b>
Liverpool City Council	2363
Portsmouth City Council	285

Local Authority	M11- Change of total crime recorded (excluding fraud) - % (Sept 2020–21)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	-7
Isle of Wight Council	4
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	-5
York City Council	3
Bristol City Council	-1
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	-4
Leeds City Council	1
Plymouth City Council	-6
Coventry City Council	N/A
Sheffield City Council	-3
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>3</b>
Liverpool City Council	5
Portsmouth City Council	2

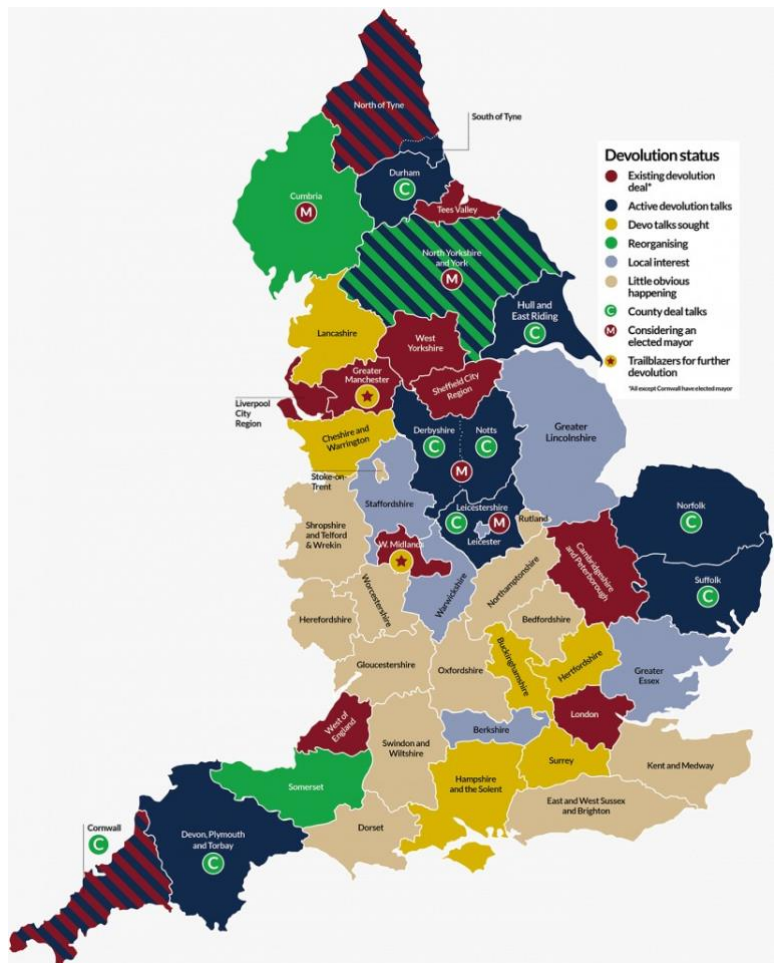


**Mission 12: Devolution — By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.**

More devolution is likely to align Southampton further with the government’s levelling up objectives. The white paper contains a devolution framework, which sets out the expected powers and funding areas for councils under different levels of devolution. As noted in the LGC, “areas that opt for a directly elected mayor under tier three of the framework will stand to gain the most.” A keen interest in devolution exists in most places, but there remains a strong resistance to metropolitan mayoral systems and county governors, which may limit access to levelling up programmes.

Local Authority	M12 - Devolution status.
Bath and North East Somerset Council	Existing devolution deal
Isle of Wight Council	Devo talks sought
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	Devo talks sought
York City Council	Active Devolution talks, Considering an elected Mayor & reorganising.
Bristol City Council	Existing devolution deal
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	Existing devo deal and considering an elected mayor
Leeds City Council	Existing devo deal
Plymouth City Council	Little obvious happening
Coventry City Council	Existing devo deal
Sheffield City Council	Existing devo deal
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	Devo talks sought
Liverpool City Council	Devo talks sought
Portsmouth City Council	Devo talks sought

[A county deal bid covering Hampshire County Council, the unitaries, and BCP Council](#) was submitted to the government last year. As reported by LGC in March 2022, although “leaders are understood to be keen to pursue devolution, [...] there is little appetite for a mayor at this stage”. Whatever the outcome of these discussions, Southampton needs to improve its soft power in the country by advocating for its needs as well as promoting its qualities. Applying pressure on central government will improve its chances of levelling up. It may also address the embedded health, social and economic challenges that need a long-term solution, one that even extends past the ambitious levelling up national targets set for 2030.



Source: Local Government Chronicle

# Conclusions

- This policy report aims to provide a levelling up narrative for the Council to adopt and embed into its communications, practices, plans and strategies. The findings are drawn from independent secondary research and 25 discussions with researchers and officers.
- Internal coordination must be strengthened between departments and teams within the Council to meet the challenges of levelling up. Synergies are needed, not silos. The second LUF round, the freeport, and the UKSPF are the essential live funding components of the levelling up agenda.
- Councillors, Cabinet Members and MPs must be encouraged to support — formally and informally — levelling up bids and strategies. There is scope to use regional partnerships to meet levelling up ambitions. The Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) is the main strategic and economic driver for local authorities in the central South region.
- Many of the key levelling up themes can benefit from cross-authority collaboration. For instance, the Greenprint project, endorsed by PfSH and its member authorities, seeks to join up green recovery strategies and climate plans across the region.
- One issue facing UK cities is the role of culture and how cultural strategies are expected to contribute to myriad, complicated policy agendas and multiple areas of need. The broad objective to improve culture in cities addresses wider challenges, but the cultural sector must be sufficiently resourced and supported. This is a longstanding concern.
- The call for evidence in the DCMS Select Committee Inquiry — ‘Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda’ — fails to distinguish between “culture” and “the arts”, nor reckon with heritage, nor define the terms of “creativity”. This illustrates the gaps in policymakers’ understanding about the creative sector.
- Conditions within various economic sectors pertaining to mental health, skills, resources, and capacities have not been sufficiently interrogated. Attaching concepts of culture and pride to the levelling up agenda invites a more sustained engagement and discussion.
- Civic pride must be understood as more than a set of nebulous metrics if the policy aim is to offer interventions in cities classified as relatively deprived, unhealthy and unproductive.
- The Levelling Up white paper acknowledges disparities in health and social capital. More understanding is needed of Healthy Life Exp. drivers, time trends and priorities for action.
- Community organisations sometimes do not have the knowledge, skills and confidence to make effective bids, strengthen relationships with local authorities, and develop project pipelines to respond to time-sensitive levelling up deadlines.
- A “Levelling Up roadmap” has been produced for the Council. This document seeks to prepare the Council and organisations for upcoming funding pots tethered to levelling up by providing timelines and allocating internal teams to each bid.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Southampton City Council for its assistance in writing this policy report. I would like to thank all the contributors from across the Council but particularly those within the Policy and Strategy team. Romilly Beard and Joshua Huckins have provided vital contributions while Mike Harris, Lisa Erlandsen, Sian McIlwaine, Stephen Barratt and Harriet Riches have offered excellent help and guidance during the secondment. I would also like to thank Public Policy Southampton for funding and supporting this work.

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# Appendix 1: List of Contributors

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## Appendix 2: Extract from Southern Policy Centre Report

Southampton as a Primary Urban Area (PUA) compares well against Derby on economic performance (business start-ups, GDP per worker, employment rate) and the IFS assessment is that the city will be less affected by the impact of COVID-19 in the short term. However, there are significant issues to address:

Despite its apparent economic success, median earnings in Southampton Itchen and Southampton Test are lower than the England average.

- The difference between weekly earning of place of residence and place of work is 71.50 per week, which means that commuters into the city enjoy an income almost 13% higher than residents
- While business start-up rate is high, it is accompanied by a very high business churn rate (7.35%), highlighting the need to provide support to new businesses so that they can grow and flourish
- Nearly half of the residents (45.2%) live in a neighbourhood in the top three deprivation deciles
- One in two pupils (55%) did not achieve the GCSE average attainment 8 score for England
- Only 3% (Southampton Itchen) to 7% (Southampton Test) of pupils achieved AAB in their A Levels in 2019; this was 14% for pupils in Southampton North and Romsey
- One in five children in Southampton Itchen and Southampton Test constituencies are growing up in poverty
- Southampton Test has a high ranking for social mobility (373)
- All three constituencies are in the below average rank for educational attainment measures for children and young people eligible for Free School Meals (secondary school attainment, positive destination after KS4, A Levels or equivalent). It is not a surprise therefore that they also experience below average earnings and in the case of Southampton Itchen and Southampton Test constituencies, home ownership
- Health: Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 years is below the England average and nearly exactly the same as that for Derby

# Appendix 3: Full Comparative Dataset on Mission Metrics

**Table of Comparison between Southampton City Council and its ONS Neighbours:  
The 12 Levelling Up Missions**

## i. Mission 1 – Mission 6 (Key: red = weakest | green = strongest)

Local Authority	M1 – Increase in pay, employment and productivity. Measured by GVA per hour worked - £ (2019)	M2 – Public investment in Research & Development. Measured by region.	M3 – Transport connectivity. Measured by average time to travel to nearest employment centre by public transport or walking - mins (2019)	M4 – Broadband. Measured by premises with gigabit capable broadband - % (May 2021)	M5 – Increase in primary school children reaching expected standards. Measured by schools and nurseries rated good or outstanding by OFSTED - % (09/20-08/21)	M6 – Rise in numbers completing high-quality skills training. Measured by number of completed apprenticeships. (2020–21)
Bath and North East Somerset Council	28.7	M2 is measured using regional statistics so cross-authority comparison is not possible.	12.5	30.6	87.0	450.0
Isle of Wight Council	29.6	N/A	11.8	34.1	73.5	440.0
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	31.7	N/A	8.5	28.6	88.9	1150.0
York City Council	34.6	N/A	10.4	58.3	88.9	520.0
Bristol City Council	31.0	N/A	8.7	49.5	78.9	1200.0
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council	30.4	N/A	7.6	28.6	88.8	680.0
Leeds City Council	33.4	N/A	10.2	82.6	83.1	2500.0
Plymouth City Council	30.2	N/A	10.2	2.8	75.5	1200.0
Coventry City Council	36.2	N/A	10.6	92.8	86.4	1080.0
Sheffield City Council	29.9	N/A	10.9	13.9	85.7	1470.0
<b>Southampton City Council</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>85.4</b>	<b>82.7</b>	<b>660.0</b>
Liverpool City Council	29.9	N/A	8.8	77.3	83.6	1280.0
Portsmouth City Council	34.4	N/A	7.6	17.7	91.7	600.0

## ii. Mission 7 – Mission 12 (Key: red = weakest | green = strongest)

M7 – A narrowing in male healthy life expectancy. Measured by age. (2017–19)	M7 – A narrowing in female healthy life expectancy. Measured by age. (2017–19)	M8 – Wellbeing to improve in every area. Measured by average feeling that things done in life are worthwhile - 0/10 (2020–21)	M9 – Increase in "pride of place", such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community. Measured by average happiness rating - 0/10 (2020–21)	M10 – Create more first-time homebuyers in all areas, and reduce the number of "non-decent" rented homes by 50%. Measured by net additions to the housing stock. (2019–20)	M11 – Reduce murder, manslaughter, serious violence and neighbourhood crime. Measured by Percentage change of total crime recorded (excluding fraud) for year ending Sept 2020 and year ending 2021 - %	M12 – Give every part of England that wants one a devolution deal and a long-term funding settlement. Measured by Devolution status.
66.7	66.4	7.6	7.3	764.0	-7.0	Existing devolution deal
60.8	59.1	7.7	7.5	445.0	4.0	Devo talks sought
65.4	66.0	7.7	7.3	790.0	-5.0	Devo talks sought
65.8	66.4	7.6	7.4	622.0	3.0	Active Devolution talks, Considering an elected Mayor & reorganising.
61.7	61.6	7.5	7.0	1621.0	-1.0	Existing devolution deal
61.0	58.7	7.6	7.3	1268.0	-4.0	Existing devo deal and considering an elected mayor
60.6	63.9	7.7	7.2	2950.0	1.0	Existing devo deal
61.8	58.3	7.8	7.4	537.0	-6.0	Little obvious happening
61.9	64.2	7.8	7.4	589.0	N/A	Existing devo deal
62.3	60.9	7.4	8.9	1850.0	-3.0	Existing devo deal
60.7	62.6	7.7	7.2	645.0	3.0	Devo talks sought
59.5	57.7	7.4	7.1	2363.0	5.0	Devo talks sought
62.1	62.3	7.6	7.5	285.0	2.0	Devo talks sought