



Building Sustainable Communities: Learning from interviews with stake- holders

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LSE Housing and Communities

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Executive summary

Since 2022, LSE Housing and Communities, based at LSE's Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), has revisited ten low-income neighbourhoods across England to understand how they have changed since 2010 and what can be learned to help make disadvantaged areas more sustainable. This report shares the views of 75 local stakeholders working in key frontline services and voluntary organisations in each neighbourhood.

The ten neighbourhoods were originally chosen for research in 1998 because they were among the most deprived in England. They include a mix of inner-city, outer-city, and town areas with different housing types, levels of ethnic diversity, and industrial histories. Many have long-standing social and economic challenges that have been made worse by over a decade of public funding cuts and welfare reform, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

Stakeholders shared their experiences of trying to support local residents through these challenges. Across the ten areas, they described a mix of deep-rooted problems and community strengths. Poor-quality housing, problems with private landlords, overcrowding, and not enough suitable social housing were raised in nearly every area. While some places have seen new private house building, this has sometimes created tensions where local people feel that this new housing provision fails to meet their needs or leads to local families being pushed out due to affordability.

Cuts to local services were reported everywhere. Stakeholders highlighted the loss of children's centres, youth provision, libraries, and other community facilities which many local people rely on. Voluntary and community groups have had to step in to fill the gaps, often with limited resources and reliant on insecure and short-term funding. Many stakeholders felt this extra pressure was unsustainable and that there was a risk of burnout for dedicated staff and volunteers.

Despite these pressures, many stakeholders spoke about a strong sense of community and pride in the area. In many of the neighbourhoods, families have lived there for generations. In others, changing populations have brought new diversity but also new challenges for community cohesion. There are signs of gentrification in several inner city areas, and while this has brought some benefits, it also risks pricing out the more long standing residents, and the improvements are not always felt by everyone.

Stakeholders described both good and bad examples of how services work together. Where local councils, housing providers, schools, health services, and community groups build trust and share resources, support is better targeted and local people feel more involved. In places where this partnership working is weaker, groups can end up competing for limited funding or duplicating work.

All the stakeholders had clear ideas about what would improve the areas. They called for investment in decent, affordable housing, safe and welcoming public spaces, better youth and family services, and stable funding for voluntary and community organisations.

Introduction

Since 2022, LSE Housing and Communities, a research group based at LSE's Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) have been conducting research to understand how ten low-income neighbourhoods in England have changed since 2010, and to explore how disadvantaged neighbourhoods can become more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable. The research revisits the neighbourhoods included in CASE's Areas Study¹ carried out between 1998 and 2010.

The neighbourhoods were initially selected in 1998 based on wards ranking in the highest 5% of deprivation measures included in the 1991 Census and the Breadline Britain Index. The ten neighbourhoods were chosen to reflect a range of characteristics including urban, rural, coastal, as well as former industrial and manufacturing areas. The areas vary in terms of ethnic diversity, housing tenure, and region. We have classified the areas into inner-city: areas close to a city centre; outer-city: neighbourhoods on the outskirts of a city; and town areas with no clear connection to a city. Each neighbourhood has been given a pseudonym, taken from the original study.

Neighbourhood	City/Area	Category
The Valley	Sheffield	Inner-city
Middle Row	Birmingham	Inner-city
Riverlands	Nottingham	Inner-city
East Docks	Newham	Inner-city
Kirkside East	Leeds	Outer-city
Overtown	Knowsley	Outer-city
Shipview	Newcastle	Outer-city
Southside	Redcar	Town
High Moor	Blackburn	Town
Beachville	Margate	Town

LSE Housing researchers have revisited the ten areas since 2022 and have interviewed 180 residents and key stakeholders alongside analysis of Census and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. 'Stakeholders' in this context refers to individuals working in key support organisations, including frontline staff in statutory services, core agency staff, volunteers in charities and third sector, and members of community groups.

This research provides unique insight into the lived experiences of residents and changing conditions in ten low-income neighbourhoods since 2010, based on resident and stakeholder perspectives; alongside this we provide quantitative analysis of Census and IMD data. Spanning over 25 years, this longitudinal research offers critical insights into how deprived neighbourhoods have fared under New Labour, throughout the austerity measures since 2010, and more recently through COVID-19, and the cost-of-living crisis. The research aims to uncover:

¹ Lupton, R. (2003). *Poverty Street: The Dynamics of Neighbourhood Decline and Renewal* (CASE Studies on Poverty, Place & Policy). Policy Press

- What makes a low-income community viable socially, economically, and environmentally?
- What undermines its sustainability?
- What actions can be taken to improve conditions and make low-income areas more sustainable?

Background

This report presents the findings from interviews with 75 stakeholders working across a range of key frontline organisations in each neighbourhood. This includes

- housing officers;
- police officers;
- headteachers;
- GPs;
- ward councillors;
- local faith leaders;
- food bank coordinators;
- employment advice workers;
- managers of community centres, youth centres, and children's centres; and
- those working in core voluntary and community organisations.

Stakeholders provide unique insights into their neighbourhood's problems, the assets, and future potential, from a service delivery perspective.

Interviews focused on stakeholders' experiences in supporting local people; the area's strengths and weaknesses; changing neighbourhood conditions; perspectives on the area's future; and priorities for change as seen by stakeholders. The research team identified key stakeholders through desk-based research about organisations in each neighbourhood. Additional participants were gathered through visits to each area, as well as snowball sampling, which built-on connections with key stakeholders and community groups in each area.

We know from our extensive work in low-income communities that organisations such as community centres and libraries play a much more important function in low-income areas, compared with more affluent areas. This is because low-income groups generally rely more heavily on local services and on organisations offering free or low cost, locally based activities that people can easily access and afford. Since the cuts to public spending started by the coalition government in office from 2010, community organisations have increasingly played a central role in supporting communities. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis have added to this pressure.

This report is part of a series of publications relating to the Sustainable Communities project. A parallel [report](#) explores findings from interviews with residents across the ten areas, to understand their perceptions of the neighbourhoods.

Key themes from the research

This section examines the findings from stakeholder interviews in ten low-income neighbourhoods across England, focusing on the experience of supporting low-income communities, relating to the ten themes listed below. It also seeks to understand stakeholders' perceptions of how the issues have changed over time, and particularly for this report, how they have evolved since 2010. The following topics were identified through encountering repeated themes in our interviews with stakeholders:

- Housing and neighbourhood
- Community
- Crime and policing
- Public services
- Voluntary and community provision
- Private enterprise (and lack of)
- Employment and skills
- Inequality and need
- Public health and community wellbeing
- Environmental sustainability



Section One: Housing and neighbourhood conditions

Housing stock condition

Across the areas, stakeholders reported varying housing conditions. The only area where there was a consensus view of housing being in ‘good condition’ was Kirkside East (Leeds), an outer-city area with one of the highest proportion among our areas of social housing². In other areas, the housing conditions in the majority of social housing, such as tower blocks in Shipview (Newcastle), were reported as particularly bad.

“I’m going to fight for those people in those tower blocks that have to live like that, it is disgraceful. So on the stairwells, there’s needles, human faeces. People are frightened to leave, young people just ride the lifts causing problems, banging around. You have vulnerable people living in there, women who’ve experienced and fled domestic violence with men who’ve come out of prison for causing domestic violence” Shipview (Newcastle)

A special challenge, raised by stakeholders across the areas, was the issue of private landlords failing to maintain properties and carry out repairs. In Southside (Redcar), the council’s introduction of a selective licensing scheme³ gave the council greater power to enforce on landlords who were neglecting their repair responsibilities. However, community stakeholders felt there was little impact.

“They’re very good at taking their rent but not maintaining them. And there’s issues with mice and damp and all sorts of things” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“You could spend money on doing up the outside of the houses or doing things to make it look nicer but at the end of the day...it wouldn’t last long, it wouldn’t stay nice” High Moor (Blackburn)

“The selective licensing scheme gave RCBC greater powers in terms of prosecuting landlords that were being socially irresponsible, but I am not sure how big the impact has been” Southside (Redcar)

Middle Row (Birmingham) and Beachville (Margate) witnessed a trend in people buying and refurbishing old houses, thereby improving the quality of stock in the area. In Middle Row (Birmingham), this upgrading of property is predominantly led by established Pakistani and Bengali communities where families will buy houses close together, do them up, and establish local business. It was reported that this led to an increase in the number of working parents in the area.

“The established Pakistani community, Bengali and Pakistani communities, who have been here...they’ll buy houses next to each other so that their relatives and their extended family etcetera can move in...I’ve seen a lot of regeneration because of that, they’ve got businesses, and I can say as a childcare provider that there’s more working parents in this area” Middle Row (Birmingham)

2 <https://observatory.leeds.gov.uk/housing/profiles/#/view-report/151eb-b2e771e4a90a345bdde82317b50/E05011400/G7>

3 <https://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/Housing%20Strategy%202019-2024.pdf>

Alternatively, in Beachville (Margate), “middle class” families moving from London in search of cheaper housing renovated properties.

“In my perspective it has got better. Money has come into the area. There are houses that were awful being done up. When you go down into Beachville on the seafront in winter and summer there are loads of people, it’s just a nice feel” Beachville (Margate)

Other housing-related issues

Overcrowding presents a major issue, especially in inner-city areas with a shortage of three and four-bedroom family homes. Even High Moor (Blackburn), with large numbers of empty homes, has challenges with overcrowding. In The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham) with diverse and multicultural populations, stakeholders reported that people were resistant to moving out of the neighbourhood as they want to stay with their own communities.

The problem of high levels of damp and mould in overcrowded, poor-quality homes also came up. Even in areas where overcrowding is less of a challenge, a lack of social housing still raises concern.

“A lot of people don’t want to move out of the area because they’ve got access to their local shops, some don’t speak English very well so they want to stay in a community that’s predominantly Urdu speaking...that’s where they feel comfortable and safe” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“There’s a housing crisis...the local authority or your landlord can’t automatically move you, and the more children you have, the more bedrooms you’re going to need... they’re getting frustrated because they’re not moving... everything is a waiting list even if you are on priority moves” East Docks (Newham)

“They’re living in hugely overcrowded conditions because there is no social housing with 4 beds... they can’t afford to move into private rented, so you do get a lot of people stuck in 3 bed properties...then that has an impact on damp, mould [and] condensation” The Valley (Sheffield)

In areas with a large Victorian and Edwardian housing stock, like The Valley (Sheffield), Middle Row (Birmingham), and Beachville (Margate), poor-quality houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) were a significant concern. Stakeholders explained how private landlords often divide large houses into HMOs to maximise housing benefit income, placing tenants in sub-standard conditions. In Beachville (Margate), the council introduced a selective licensing scheme designed to stop the creation of more one-bedroom flats. They also introduced a policy to support people turning flats back into houses. While this policy improved the quality of homes, it reduced the number of affordable units, leading to increased homelessness.

“You drive up the main road, there’s some huge, beautiful houses...but they’ve gone into disrepair...there’s not that many single occupancy houses...There’s a lot of families living in a small space so it feels quite cramped” The Valley (Sheffield)

Homelessness, particularly hidden homelessness, was described as an issue in inner-city

areas like Middle Row (Birmingham) and East Docks (Newham). This was not generally highlighted as an issue in outer areas and towns, other than in Beachville (Margate). The family centre in Middle Row (Birmingham) deals with families facing eviction, who are likely to be placed in temporary accommodation, often outside of the area. These families struggle with meeting their basic needs, such as having “nowhere to wash their clothes, nowhere to prepare meals,” and finding it difficult to get their children to school. A family centre manager here explained:

“we collect children from local primary schools [...] [we] had sixteen children [...] who were all classified as homeless, and they were all living in either hostels or hostels with their families”. Middle Row (Birmingham)

In East Docks (Newham), a headteacher reported a falling number of children enrolled at schools due to families being moved out of the borough to accommodation outside of London.

In contrast, empty homes were raised as a significant issue in the town areas of High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar). A housing officer in High Moor (Blackburn) explained how vacant properties are vulnerable to break-ins and vandalism, requiring shutters and alarms, which can deter prospective tenants and increases letting difficulties, which is already a problem due to area stigma. In Southside (Redcar), there are areas where people will only accept a house if they are desperate. The Housing Association decided it is not fair to house people in these areas because they are at risk of targeting by the existing population, so it is better for these properties to remain empty:

“We have areas that people will only go for if they are homeless and that’s their only option.... Recently we have had to rehouse a gentleman cause he was a target and we’ve decided to leave that property empty for the moment because the last two tenants who have lived there, they’ve been targeted [by existing residents], so to put someone vulnerable in there again, it’s just not fair really” Southside (Redcar)

New house building

There has been significant housebuilding in all the “outer” neighbourhoods, Shipview (Newcastle), Overtown (Knowsley), Kirkside East (Leeds). East Docks (Newham) which is an inner-city area, and High Moor (Blackburn), a town area, also mirror this trend. There has been a significant shift towards private house building in the neighbourhoods that previously comprised council-owned estates. In the outer-city areas, new housing is predominantly family houses, as opposed to flats in East Docks (Newham) mainly built for city workers. There were also small new blocks of flats in Middle Row (Birmingham), on a much smaller scale than in East Docks (Newham).

Stakeholders had mixed views about whether private housing developments improved these areas. Some saw the new housing as a positive change, creating more mixed communities housing more diverse populations, improving the appearance of the area, and boosting demand for local shops. However, others were critical, particularly where there was high

demand for housing among existing local families, and a lack of necessary infrastructure planned or built to support the incoming population.

New housing developments need to be planned and managed carefully to support community cohesion and to alleviate any potential tensions. In several neighbourhoods, stakeholders noticed a divide between long-standing residents and more affluent newcomers, who were seen as being “given” vital new homes that were unaffordable for local people. It was also felt that the new residents received a better service from the council, particularly in Overtown (Knowsley) and High Moor (Blackburn).

“It’s improved a lot visually because there’s no broken down houses or anything now, you’ve got the new properties and things. But it’s like a distinction where the new properties are, you’ve had roads resurfaced... People are saying ‘how come we pay the same council tax etc. as that half of the estate, yet look at the state of our roads’”
Overtown (Knowsley)

In East Docks (Newham), the divide between the new and existing populations was particularly stark. It was reported by interviewees that the new shops that opened in the new development are not used by the existing population, and the only interaction the new population have with the local area is using the local tube station. Some of the new properties have been purchased by international buyers as an investment and remain empty. To add to this divide, the “old” population was often seen to have been pushed out through the demolition of social housing, only to be replaced with property unaffordable to local people. Riverlands (Nottingham) shared a similar experience with social housing demolished to be replaced by student halls. Overall, demolition exacerbated the general decline in social housing stock caused by the right-to-buy scheme and a lack of investment in new social rented homes.

“They call it regeneration where they have taken down properties and moved families, families that have lived in this area for generations...groups have just been destroyed. They knocked down certain areas and then rebuilt them but most of them are private or student accommodation” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“The tube opened then land value grew, and that’s what led to the demolition of 1000 social homes and their replacement by tower blocks. The new people in the tower blocks are not low wage. They exist on the western fringe and their only communication with [East Docks] is walking to the tube. They don’t integrate at all” East Docks (Newham)

The lack of essential new infrastructure, such as health services and schools, alongside the loss of valued community assets to make way for housing, also deepened frustrations in the areas. A common concern expressed by stakeholders was the sense that communities were being asked to give up spaces without receiving adequate new facilities to accommodate the growing population. This issue was particularly acute in High Moor (Blackburn) where stakeholders described residents feeling frustrated and unheard after a valued local park was demolished to make way for new private housing. Similarly, in East Docks, the demolition of the market area to build private high-rise blocks was a significant point of contention. The dramatic transformation of the local landscape was powerfully illustrated by one stakeholder, who reflected on returning to East Docks after time away:

“I just couldn’t recognise the place...everything is high rises. The communities that used to live and call those places home weren’t there” East Docks (Newham)

Residents’ resentment about new housebuilding in the area is particularly strong where older social housing is seen to be in disrepair. A housing officer in High Moor explained, “I’ve had a lot of complaints about ‘why are we not having anything done to our properties?’ and ‘our streets look scruffy now next to these new ones’”. This growing resentment contributed to discontent and in some cases anti-social behaviour:

“When they first started building the private ones, the windows kept getting broken in—youth in the area were throwing stones and smashing them. There are a couple of streets backing onto the new ones saying, ‘Are you gonna do something with ours now, because we’re gonna be right next to these new houses’” High Moor (Blackburn)

A lack of effective communication with long-standing residents led to further confusion and frustration. In High Moor (Blackburn), for instance, stakeholders noted false rumours spreading about a private park being built exclusively for residents of the new private housing.

“Someone said to me at the fun day, there’s a patch of grass on the ones that are completed, the private ones, and it’s been fenced off. Someone said, ‘I’ve been told that’s gonna be a park, but it’s only for the kids from the new builds’” High Moor (Blackburn)

Hostility toward residents of new housing was particularly strong when the newcomers were perceived as migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. This was highlighted in inner-city Middle Row (Birmingham) and Riverlands (Nottingham), but also High Moor (Blackburn).

“Some [new] houses [were] built and a lot of the local residents that are in the older Victorian terraces were waiting to get better housing. But all of these houses went to refugee asylum seeker type families who were on the waiting list, and that did cause conflicts and friction within the community” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“We have a couple of hotels for the Syrian refugees and there is some tension around that. People think ‘they have come over and they are living in a lovely hotel or have a two-bedroom flat, when I am sleeping on my sister’s floor, how is that fair?’. But that’s about communication because councils are paid by the Government to house refugees!” Riverlands (Nottingham)

In Southside (Redcar), a different approach to new housing is being taken. During the early 2000s, large areas of houses were demolished, but houses were never rebuilt due to the financial crisis, leaving large areas of empty space. However, one estate in the area is currently being regenerated via a more measured approach; existing properties are being renovated with new houses built in empty spaces. Additional community and green spaces are also being offered. It is hoped this work will help strengthen the existing community by providing more opportunities for them to come together. This project is still in progress but initial feedback from stakeholders is positive.

Social landlord management

Social housing is a significant tenure across the areas, excluding Beachville (Margate), making up over 30% of the stock, in comparison to the UK average of 17.1%⁴. There were mixed views about the standard of social housing management across the areas. Concerns were raised about the responsiveness of social landlords in High Moor (Blackburn), Middle Row (Birmingham) and Shipview (Newcastle), with housing officers in High Moor (Blackburn) describing the patches as “hard to manage”. In Shipview (Newcastle), housing management was centralised, and the local housing office was located outside the area, meaning residents have to get the bus to visit the office.

“I have told her she needs to complain, but she says they don’t do anything, so she just paints over it [the mould]. I have heard of peoples clothes going mouldy, not having their repairs done, having their windows smashed, just getting boards put up” High Moor (Blackburn)

“There are problems, there is damage, overcrowding, years of underfunding. People who are disabled with wet rooms that won’t drain so they can’t use them” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“If people are in adequate housing, it’s then often that the repairs aren’t getting done... You know that mould and damp we’re talking about, repairs to bathrooms” Shipview (Newcastle)

In contrast, stakeholders feel the social housing in East Docks (Newham) is of better quality than the private rented stock in the area.

“I would say the social housing is better than the rest of Newham because the council housing built in the 40s, 50s, and 60s was good, and it was built to Parker Morris standards. They are not in multiple occupation because they are not private rented. So I would say that’s better.” East Docks (Newham)

Across all the areas, there was little mention of tenants and residents’ groups or opportunities for tenants to have an influence over the management of their housing.

Gentrification

Definition of gentrification: “the process by which a place, especially part of a city, changes from being a poor area to a richer one, where people from a higher social class live”⁵

The strongest signs of gentrification are in the areas in and around London: East Docks (Newham) and Beachville (Margate), which has a high-speed rail link to London. However, the way this process is happening is unique in each area. In East Docks (Newham), as outlined above, old social housing has been demolished to make way for new private flats marketed towards working professionals.

⁴ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8963/CBP-8963.pdf>

⁵ “gentrification”, Cambridge Dictionary, Cambridge University Press, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gentrification>

In Beachville (Margate), Victorian properties have been bought up by families who have moved “down from London”, known as DFLs. In Beachville (Margate), it was felt the increase in rents due to the new population had pushed certain groups into homelessness. Despite the challenges in Beachville (Margate), stakeholders felt that DFLs have given the area a “boost” as they often take an active role in improving the local area, which did not appear to be the case with the new East Docks (Newham) population.

“They [DFLs] have been buying up houses and doing them up making it look much better. But the homeless problem is getting worse because all these people have been evicted, there is no cheap housing available. Lots of people can’t afford rent anymore” Beachville (Margate)

“There is always litter picking going on the beach. There are “community kicks” people buying local amenities like the bandstand and developing it as a community project. Then there are people planting up amazing thing in areas that were just plain grass.... A local soap company that moved from London bought an old Sauna and did it up for people to use” Beachville (Margate)

Stakeholders raised concerns about the potential risks of gentrification in other areas with a strong link to an urban centre, such as the outer city area of Shipview (Newcastle), and inner-city areas of The Valley (Sheffield) and Riverlands (Nottingham). Gentrification was not raised as a concern by stakeholders in Middle Row (Birmingham), Overtown (Knowsley), Kirkside East (Leeds), High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar).

“I do see gentrification being a problem, it might have slowed down now because of economic problems, but its already started. They are building houses for students and that’s not going to be very helpful for people because a lot of people can’t afford to move already” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“There’s parts of [The Valley] that have started to be on the cusp of gentrification, the parts closer to the town centre and in 10 years I think the council have a plan to build up that area more, so I think in 10 years, I mean its not gonna be on the levels of London but that part of town might be a bit different. But then we know that the most disadvantaged poorest people don’t benefit from gentrification do they so they’re just priced out” The Valley (Sheffield)

Local environment

When asking stakeholders to reflect on the local environment, we wanted them to think about the built environment itself but also the management and maintenance of the local physical infrastructure. In Kirkside East (Leeds), Overtown (Knowsley), and Riverlands (Nottingham) stakeholders generally felt the local environment was well kept where people looked after their homes and the local environment. In contrast, in High Moor (Blackburn), Southside (Redcar) and The Valley (Sheffield), there was the sense that people don’t look after their homes as well.

“I constantly get reports and complaints about rubbish...people don’t look after their gardens, they’ll just dump their rubbish in the gardens or on the streets...they’re not

interested in looking after the area” High Moor (Blackburn)

In The Valley (Sheffield), where many of the houses are older Victorian and Edwardian properties, one stakeholder suggested this was due to people not having the money to maintain and improve their properties. In Southside (Redcar), one stakeholder felt this was because the majority of the properties are rented so people don't take responsibility for the local area and put the responsibility on the housing association and council.

“Theres a lot of untidy garden areas caused probably by people who A) haven't got time [and] B) haven't got the money to sort it” The Valley (Sheffield)

“You know, it's almost like it's the Council's problem...There's never that kind of social responsibility that actually 'this is my property'. 'This is my street that I live in'. 'I should maybe just pick up the litter'” Southside (Redcar)

Stakeholders in Middle Row (Birmingham), Riverlands (Nottingham), Shipview (Newcastle) reflected that they thought their area looked run down.

“I was speaking to somebody who was saying, 'you know what, the area looks so much more run down than it did twenty, thirty years ago...' I see it everyday but they were coming back and saying it looks so run down” Middle Row (Birmingham)

In Beachville (Margate), the stakeholders felt the local environment had improved as more money had been brought into the area.

Stakeholders in The Valley (Sheffield) and Shipview (Newcastle) felt the council looked after other areas of the city better.

“It just tends to look quite like run down...if you walk down St George's terrace in Jesmond. You've got these huge 100-year-old trees in the street, beautiful. You go to [Shipview], you see blocks, you see railings, you see graffiti, you've got the barbed wire on top of the school gates. It's a bit like, okay, bit dystopian, not very nice, and that must rub off on people” Shipview (Newcastle)

In contrast, the council in Kirkside East (Leeds) was praised for looking after the local area very well.

“I think it's pretty decent. The roads get repaired, they have estate walkabouts in the council and they usually check things like roads and pathways and they also check people's gardens and if gardens are a mess, they'll go in and have a chat with tenants and say, 'look, you need to do something about this' ...they'll support them and help get it cleared” Kirkside East (Leeds)

Litter / fly-tipping

Litter was cited as a particular challenge in inner-city The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham); and outer-city Beachville (Margate) and Southside (Redcar). In The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham), issues around rubbish were linked to a proliferation of fast-food shops in the local area. In Kirkside East (Leeds), stakeholders felt the litter

picking group greatly improved the rubbish problem in the area.

“Some of the streets it’s just rubbish, people just eat their food and dump it on the floor. There are bins around, but people would rather use the floor” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“We struggle a huge amount with litter, and it is off putting... we litter pick at least once a week, sometimes more than that but even within a few hours of it being done there’s more. I guess litter breeds litter” The Valley (Sheffield)

Fly-tipping was a problem in Shipview (Newcastle), High Moor (Blackburn), Beachville (Margate) and Southside (Redcar). Stakeholders reflected that because of the stigma attached to the area, people from other areas would come and dump their rubbish there and it would be left for long periods of time.

“There is some woodland round the back of the area but it’s been so fly tipped...You couldn’t even plan a walk through it, it was that bad. There is a lovely little stream that runs through it, but people are pulling up on the bridge and throwing sofas in it, shopping trolleys, food bags” High Moor (Blackburn)

In contrast, in East Docks (Newham) fly-tipping is dealt with promptly by the council before it builds up. In High Moor (Blackburn) the council were also taking action on fly-tipping by arranging collection and skip days, but it was not yet clear if this would solve the problem.

Parks and open spaces

All stakeholders felt access to good quality green space was important, but quality and quantity varied across the areas. Stakeholders in The Valley (Sheffield), Riverlands (Nottingham) and Overtown (Knowsley) expressed positive views of local green spaces. In East Docks (Newham) the area was felt to have better green spaces than the rest of the borough, some of which were linked to the new housing developments. In Kirkside East (Leeds), a local community action project has improved both the appearance and the perceived safety of the local park. This involved campaigning and fundraising for the playground to be repaired and organizing litter picking days.

“Now the park is packed every night, you go in there, there’s always somebody in there, you’ve got more families using it, we see it on social media...there’s lots of comments on it, lots and lots of people posting lovely photos of daffodils, that’s what you want to see” Kirkside East (Leeds)

In Middle Row (Birmingham), Southside (Redcar) and Shipview (Newcastle), stakeholders expressed concerns over the quality of green spaces and shared that they are often used for illicit activity as opposed to being places people can enjoy. In both High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar), playgrounds had been knocked down to make way for new houses.

“There are some parks around. But that park over there it’s just bare, children don’t go there. They go there to walk through it, but its lifeless” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“I think some of them [parks] are not used in a way you would want them to be... they

can be risky areas for young people conducting anything from drugs to vapes” Middle Row (Birmingham)

In High Moor (Blackburn), although green spaces and playgrounds in the direct area are poorly maintained, access to the countryside was highlighted as a strength of the area.

“I would say it’s a good place to grow up, you have the community, you are in the middle of the countryside” Councillor, High Moor (Blackburn)



Section Two: Community

Sense of community

Across all the areas stakeholders highlighted the strong sense of community, with local people looking out for each other and offering support. Stakeholders felt this was different from other areas, and maybe a distinctive feature of typically “poorer” areas. In the neighbourhoods in Riverlands (Nottingham), High Moor (Blackburn), and Beachville (Margate), stakeholders highlighted that people were proud to come from the area and that it was integral to people’s identities.

“I always think we’re quite lucky within the locality of [Middle Row] in that, because of the demographic and the culture, it’s very supportive of community, so there’s lots of organisations out there who offer support, and I think we’re quite rich in that respect” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“I just think the biggest thing about the area is the community spirit. They face more deprivation than most areas and in terms of how many people are literally unemployed and not working, and in receipt of benefits... And I don’t think that will ever change and that’s what gets people through” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“There’s a [Shipview] community Facebook. People will say I’m struggling with food, and they’ll be so quick...They’ll give their last penny to someone else, so it still has that going on in the community” Shipview (Newcastle)

“There is definitely a sense of community that I don’t really see with lots of other places, it is a very strong community. There’s quite a sense of self sufficiency and ‘can do’ sort of attitude” Kirkside East (Leeds)

“They are very proud people here. They say they come from here. If you are born and bred here, you are proud to come from here. It’s like a tribal thing” High Moor (Blackburn)

One stakeholder in Southside (Redcar) highlighted that although people look out for each other, the local environment was neglected which they felt was paradoxical.

“Everybody’s willing to help and it does frustrate me within those communities that they’re so willing to help you. Yet they don’t just pick up the rubbish or they’ll fly tip... it’s almost like it’s a huge contradiction” Southside (Redcar)

However, in the East Docks (Newham), Middle Row (Birmingham), Riverlands (Nottingham) and Kirkside East (Leeds) neighbourhoods, it was felt the community was weakening. In East Docks (Newham) and Kirkside East (Leeds) this was linked to the demolition of local spaces where people would regularly get together.

“Before [name of estate] was known as a big family estate. There were issues, but when there was, people came together. Now its divide and conquer” Riverlands (Nottingham)

Population change

In Overtown (Knowsley), Shipview (Newcastle), Kirkside East (Leeds), High Moor (Blackburn), and Southside (Redcar), it was reported that people stay living in the areas for gen-

erations, and part of the “strong community” was attributed to these established residents living in the area. These are the areas with the largest white British populations.

“There’s a sense of community. They’ll have known people a long time, their family and friends live close by... And they’ll often say, ‘I wouldn’t move anywhere else’, which is really interesting, you know, given all the money in the world, they wouldn’t move” Shipview (Newcastle)

During interviews, stakeholders reflected that the neighbourhoods in East Docks (Newham), Riverlands (Nottingham), Shipview (Newcastle), High Moor (Blackburn), and Beachville (Margate) were all becoming more diverse. In East Docks (Newham), Middle Row (Birmingham) and Riverlands (Nottingham), this was coupled with a decline in the more traditional white “working class” populations. In Riverlands (Nottingham), a stakeholder reflected that this increase in diversity was helping to broaden people’s horizons.

“Going back many years, it would be a massive proportion of white British families and then you started to get an influx of Caribbean, especially Jamaican families into the area. And then obviously Pakistani and Indian families but now you’re seeing much more diverse cultures, Polish, Ukrainian all... different, you know. And lots of refugees, asylum seekers moving into the area as well” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“It’s a rich blend of different cultures...it gives children those options to think I can move to Australia or Croatia” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“There are 600 new houses being built at the moment. I think the first couple of hundred are done. We held a welcome party for them on Saturday, the families don’t seem to be from Blackburn, they seem to have come from different countries” High Moor (Blackburn)

In Beachville (Margate) it was felt a lot of diversity was linked to very transient communities

“I think the last count a policeman said to me about three years ago was there were 372 languages spoken. It’s a very, very diverse area...We do have a lot of unaccompanied minors. We do have refugees, Ukrainian, African, Afghan, Syrian, you name it, we have it. I think that’s the other thing, a lot of people feel it’s a dumping ground” Beachville (Margate)

“One of the biggest problems we are seeing is people coming from Eastern Europe for work and renting a space in a house and then not finding work. So they come to us for help” Beachville (Margate)

As reflected in the previous section the areas that have seen the biggest socio-economic change in population were East Docks (Newham) and Beachville (Margate). In East Docks (Newham), there had been an increase in young professionals, and in Beachville (Margate), middle class families from London had moved into the area looking for larger, more affordable housing within commuting distance of London. In these areas, it was felt that the newer and more established populations lived quite separate lives.

“The new folks are mainly residing in the area, they go out to work, they come home to rest and then leave the area again” East Docks (Newham)

“I would say it’s two halves, okay, the haves and the have nots. So you have a lot of new blood, which is a good thing, down from London, or where they’ve sold something in wherever for lots of money, and they’ve been able to buy something down here that’s much bigger, and they’ve been able to move their work down here, and they’ve been able to set up either a business or work from home or so. They’ve got money and they own a whole property, and then you’ve got the multiple occupancies, which are rented out at what 100 pounds a room per week. And they haven’t got a lot” Beachville (Margate)

Community cohesion

In The Valley (Sheffield) and Kirkside East (Leeds), it was felt people of different ethnicities and cultures generally get along well and this has improved over time.

“The area is strong by being diverse and by communities working together. Very little racial connotations and conflict in the area when you compare it with other areas and I think that’s because of its diversity” The Valley (Sheffield)

“People know each other and they bring in elements of their own culture into life here. So, the pavement cafes and the mosques are doing that, so when for example we just finished Eid and there was a lot of people out in the streets and greeting each other... Personally I love the fact that it is so multicultural and I enjoy working here” The Valley (Sheffield)

“Everybody’s really welcoming. There’s never been ‘oh you shouldn’t be here, it should be our families getting these properties’, none of that at all. People are welcoming and it’s a nice feeling, it’s nice to see that people get along” Kirkside East (Leeds)

Stakeholders in Southside (Redcar) and High Moor (Blackburn) also felt attitudes towards people from different ethnicities had improved, but there was still hostility from some people, and a general wariness of people perceived as “outsiders”.

“It’s definitely mainly white people. I heard that years ago if any other race moved in [to the estate] they would get their house burnt down. That stopped now. Recently there have been a lot of different races coming through” High Moor (Blackburn)

As mentioned above, there was reported hostility towards refugees/asylum seekers in Middle Row (Birmingham), Riverlands (Nottingham), Shipview (Newcastle) and Kirkside East (Leeds), mainly linked to housing access. Stakeholders in a few areas reported that some residents held “racist views” which was often linked with the scarcity of resources, and a lack of understanding of other cultures.

“There’s always been the far right in [Kirkside East] but there’s been a bigger rise, because people see things like the Britannia [hotel] housing some asylum seekers. So people are able to see on their doorstep, and lay blame on it for other things people feel is wrong. Because, again, that scarcity mindset, that lack of resources” Kirkside East (Leeds)

“Local people are accused of racism, and some of them are. But what I think people

miss in that is that it's not some of these people that are against a certain race or culture, it's that they are struggling with the influx of people into accommodation when it's short" Beachville (Margate)

Area stigma

All neighbourhoods in the study were perceived to be stigmatised – an issue which is often amplified by the local press. In Overtown (Knowsley), one stakeholder stated that this made it hard for young people wanting to access employment because people judge them based on where they live.

"You work so hard to get to a point and then just by the media... or there's somebody shot somewhere, or other areas come in and fly-tip in our area, then we just go 'Woah' and we start from square one and we have to start building again" The Valley (Sheffield)

"That all comes about because of negative press, or that come out because a police officer made a derogatory remark in a newspaper about the area and about the children...The Times newspaper ran an article, and it was disgusting. He basically referred to our children as characters from Lord of the Flies" Overtown (Knowsley)

A councillor in High Moor (Blackburn) felt this reputation was slowly changing with the addition of the new houses.

"It's getting better. There has been a change in the last couple of years. At one time it was a place where people didn't want to come but because of the new house building and the industrial units people want to come. Most of the new houses have been sold, there is a waiting list for some of the others. So that will help the area" High Moor (Blackburn)



Section Three: Public Services

Cuts in services / funding

All of the areas have experienced cuts to public services following the 2008 financial crash and the subsequent austerity politics from 2010 onwards, creating a greater reliance on the voluntary and third sector, often funded by short-term and precarious grants. Stakeholders told us that the funding provided by the council is often very ad-hoc, meaning services can't become properly established. This was a particular on-going concern in High Moor (Blackburn), as the funding for the organisation providing the bulk of community support in the neighbourhood was coming to an end a few months after we visited and it was not yet clear what was going to happen.

“Yes, as council funding has been cut, and cut and cut, all those services we have provided in the past just aren't there anymore because there just isn't the money. That's not the council's fault as much as everyone would like to blame the councils. There just isn't the money” Beachville (Margate)

“[Organisations] are going to be terribly missed. I am not sure about the future of the community library. They don't run it themselves, but that's where they are based so they get a lot of people in. When they are gone, the building is quite run down. I don't see the council in any rush to maintain it” High Moor (Blackburn)

“We get funding from the city council but it's very limited and it's very ad hoc... But we do so much work for the city council. Our contribution is huge. I said to the Chief Executive a few days ago, 'if you take us away from the area, you'll start realizing how much money you'll be spending just to keep that service going which will be probably fifty times more than we spend' and I think it knocked her” The Valley (Sheffield)

“I always say the prevention is better than the cure kind of scenario where I feel like a lot of the time in [neighbourhoods] what happens is, they have projects set up and then they disappear or dissolve, and then something serious happens and then it's like, we need to set something up to combat what's going on, respond to that, rather than having really good projects that are consistent and keep them going. I always feel like funders want to fund something new” The Valley (Sheffield)

While areas across the country had experienced funding cuts, in Shipview (Newcastle) one stakeholder felt that cuts were unevenly distributed across the city, with richer areas receiving more funding.

“The other side of [Shipview] seems to always get a lot of money, a lot of funding, whereas [the neighbourhood] seems to be forgotten about and written off” Shipview (Newcastle)

Across the areas, there were examples of the community trying to plug the gaps made by cuts to funding. The Community Centre in Riverlands (Nottingham) was set up in reaction to the closure of the Children's Centre. In High Moor (Blackburn) and The Valley (Sheffield), volunteers have opted to run the library after funding for staff was cut.

“I think over the 15 years [since 2010], there has been a drop with the Children Cen-

tre closing down, but where one service closes, another opens. So, if you take the Community Centre, the Children Centre closed down, and they thought ‘how we can support those people?’, so they apply for funding or open their space free of charge. This is why I say [The Valley] is resilient, because despite all the cuts and changes, the services that are here are working their very best. So [name of group] is delivering food to elderly, The [name of group] is doing an outdoor school for children” The Valley (Sheffield)

Loss of social infrastructure

Places for people to come together are crucially important. Often these buildings provide multiple functions, for example being a community café, food bank, and a place for children’s activities. A lack of these spaces was cited a particular problem in East Docks (Newham), with groups meeting in McDonalds as an affordable space to spend time.

“There was a group of older women, and they meet up in McDonald’s once a week for a coffee and a chat. And I was just thinking, this is not, this should not be happening in McDonald’s. You know, McDonald’s serves a purpose, but that’s a real shame, actually, that stuff’s happening in that big chain” East Docks (Newham)

High Moor (Blackburn) had seen the biggest reduction in social spaces. The local community centre had been sold by the council during the austerity period and was taken over by a social enterprise until it became unsustainable:

“They were very angry about the Community Centre closing down. That was closed down 11 years ago. They used to have a community café, different groups used to meet there, there would be a disco for children. As soon as the new company took it over, that was one of the first things they shut down. There was a community gym in there, but they put the rents up so much that the gym couldn’t afford to run, so the gym is now based in the library. There was a project called Bootstrap there where people could make stuff, and they also did the allotment space. But in the end they couldn’t afford the rents either. Rents were just put up and up” High Moor (Blackburn)

Youth provision

In all areas, excluding Kirkside East (Leeds), people cited a lack of youth services, and cuts to funding affecting provision for young people. Even in Middle Row (Birmingham), which has a well-funded youth centre - with a better offer than most areas of the city - it was felt that more was needed. The youth worker also reported that it had become harder to support young people as life has become challenging.

“The offer hasn’t changed in terms of there is still a youth facility and a chance for young people to connect with a trusted adult in a safe space. But it’s more challenging, mental health is more prominent since COVID, they are lacking confidence” Middle Row (Birmingham)

As well as a feeling that more needed to be done, there were also challenges about the ef-

fectiveness of the available youth services. In East Docks (Newham) there was a “state of the art youth centre” but stakeholders explained that it fails to address the real issues that need tackling; and in both Middle Row (Birmingham) and High Moor (Blackburn) young people struggled to engage with the services that were on offer.

“The youth people are often on the estate talking to people, inviting them to things but they just don’t engage. I remember them offering ‘if you can get me 10 of your friends, I will take you bowling and for fish and chips’, but they [the young people] never did”
High Moor (Blackburn)

In Middle Row (Birmingham), levels of engagement were linked to postcode rivalries.

“There is stuff [youth services] available but that causes problems. Some young people won’t travel or they won’t go to another area of the city because they have issues or fears with other young people” Middle Row (Birmingham)

The only area where people felt there was both an adequate level of youth provision, and that the provision met the needs of local young people, was Kirkside East (Leeds). Services were provided by a combination of groups that had come together to form a collective voice for charities and community organisations in the area and received funding via a local charitable trust. The budget allowed for paid staff to engage young people and ask them what services they would like to see in the local area. The council also provided a physical building to run the services from.

Children and families’ provision

In all the areas, it was felt that more support and provision for families and children was needed. As was the case across the country, funding for Sure Start/Children Centres, the main provider of family support, had been cut back. There were still Children Centres in Middle Row (Birmingham), High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar) but with a heavily reduced offer. In Southside (Redcar), engagement with the Centre was a challenge, with lower attendance levels than other centres in surrounding areas.

“[Southside] are still our lowest figures. So, we don’t see as many parents coming through those support drop-ins as we do in the other areas... I think it’s just cultural, probably generational” Southside (Redcar)

“We had a play centre which used to be the core that every young person went to, that closed down when my daughter was 12, she is 33 now and it has never re-opened”
Riverlands (Nottingham)

“So, the things that helped me to thrive, the children’s services, they are very small now or non-existent. The Children’s Centre, it’s not a Children’s Centre anymore. There’s not the opportunities that there was for someone like me, who was kind of a write-off” Shipview (Newcastle)

In High Moor (Blackburn), the transport required to reach services was also a challenge for many and in Riverlands (Nottingham) and Overtown (Knowsley), people have to travel long distances to reach services which are available, which isn’t an option for many families.

“There is an expectation that if someone wants a service they will go to a service, but actually if you have £3 for the week and the bus costs £4 to get there, you’re not going to go. They need to put services where people are, and understand some people are living with a huge amount of trauma. How can they be expected to travel halfway across the city?” Riverlands (Nottingham)

Transport

Stakeholders in all the inner-city areas felt there was generally good public transport. Inner-city areas all benefit from being able to walk or easily access the city centre, however even with the availability of regular public transport, cost was said to be a barrier to people using it.

“It’s a great place to live because Stratford is very close. You know, Parliament, not that they’d be going to Parliament, but it’s 20 minutes down the Jubilee line. So it’s really well connected” East Docks (Newham)

“The transport links are pretty good, to be fair. The issue that you’ve got is that people can’t afford to use it...so it’s all very well me saying here’s a voucher to go to a food bank. How are you gonna get there now?” Shipview (Newcastle)

In Beachville (Margate) and Overtown (Knowsley) and Shipview (Newcastle), there were challenges with connections to local hospitals or public transport wasn’t suitable for people working irregular hours, making transport a barrier to people gaining employment.

“I had somebody here today who could have had a job in Liverpool Airport, but they can’t get there. They can get there through the day, but the start time was 4am and it was shifts, so he can’t get there, but he can get home, but then the shift which is 2pm to 11pm, the bus stops at 10, so he can’t get home” Overtown (Knowsley)

In Middle Row (Birmingham), despite there being good transport, there is still heavy car reliance, and cars are seen as a “status symbol”, suggesting reliance on cars goes beyond just the quality of other transport available.

In contrast, the transport in Southside (Redcar) and High Moor (Blackburn) was not fit for purpose, with very limited and infrequent bus services, that don’t take people where they want to go.

“There is no proper bus service because that was withdrawn. There are two or three buses in the morning, then two or three in the early evening and that’s it. There are loads of people that use taxis because they don’t have cars” High Moor (Blackburn)

Schools and education

Across the areas, people were generally positive about the standard and quality of primary

schools. There was more variation in the views regarding quality and accessibility of secondary schools. Like most public-services, school funding had been cut, and schools were dealing with more challenging problems alongside reduced budgets. This was a particular challenge in East Docks (Newham) where schools are reported to struggling to fill their spaces as so many families have moved out the area due to the lack of affordable housing. A lack of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision was seen as a particular challenge in Middle Row (Birmingham).

“I’m having to lay people off...I’m not replacing my deputy head. I’m losing someone from the office, I’m losing the midday, I’m losing after-school club staff. I’m losing everything around the children” East Docks (Newham)

“The Primary School, we’ve got strong links with them and with referring families and communicating together and supporting where we can” Middle Row (Birmingham)

GPs and local health centres

Across all the areas people were struggling to get dentists and doctors’ appointments. Many services have been brought online, which is a particular challenge for elderly people.

“There are huge issues with the health services... lot of things have gone online. A lot of people in this area really struggle with that. They might not have a smartphone or a computer to even go online” Shipview (Newcastle)

Stakeholders told us that health services in Overtown (Knowsley) were greatly improved through New Deal for Communities (NDC) area investment which was used to set up a new Health Centre, in the mid to late 2000s.



Section Four: Voluntary and community provision

The role of voluntary and community provision

As set out in the introductory section, voluntary and community provision plays a crucial role in providing support to residents living in low-income communities. This support can take many forms, from food provision to advice and guidance, activity groups, and children's services. While all the areas had some form of voluntary and community provision, the amount and organisational capacity of this provision was varied. It is important to consider what has enabled or hindered the ability of these voluntary and community groups to thrive across the different neighbourhoods.

In areas where community-based services appeared to be strongest, organisations are backed by a larger, central pot of funding, enabling them to have paid staff and a permanent location. In addition, the views of the community are pivotal to how the organization runs, ensuring the service they are providing is meeting people's needs. There were examples of this happening most effectively in The Valley (Sheffield), Kirkside East (Leeds), Shipview (Newcastle) and Overtown (Knowsley).

In Kirkside East (Leeds), the local community and voluntary groups have formed a Trust, which receives funding from the council to cover staff salaries. The staff then engage the community about what services they would like to see and create programmes and services based on this feedback.

“So we basically sat and listened to our community for a year... through that we identified there was a lack of space for people to go and meet up. All the pubs had closed, there were only the social clubs where you have to pay membership... So we responded to that, and we opened up a pay-as-you-feel café” Kirkside East (Leeds)

“We're not some flash person rocking up in a flash car and a suit and dictating what they're gonna get and what they're not gonna get. We actually listen to the community and if we can do it, we do it for them... We live exactly the same as what they live” Kirkside East (Leeds)

A community group in Overtown (Knowsley) said they exist because they are provided with free space to use by a local regeneration charity.

“We're lucky, because [a larger charity] owns the building... the costs are met by them, which is wonderful, because that would be a nightmare if we had to find another 20k a year just for running costs, for the leccy and the gas and everything else... that would be totally unmanageable. There's no way we could cope with that” Overtown (Knowsley)

In Shipview (Newcastle), the local housing association provides and covers the cost of the community space. These more formal structures can then help support the creation of smaller voluntary-led groups. For example, in Shipview (Newcastle), a more established charity, led by paid staff, supports volunteers to set up their own groups; these groups ranged from a community pantry to a women's craft group.

In contrast, community groups in East Docks (Newham) reported that they were really struggling due to a lack of central funding and the unavailability of affordable space for their activities.

These findings echo our research into community group responses to the COVID-19 pandemic⁶ and the cost-of-living crisis⁷. We found groups struggling to fundraise enough to sustain their services. Larger pots of longer-term funding, and free or heavily reduced space to use, were hugely beneficial to the services the community groups could provide.

One of the problems often cited with community-led provision is the reliance on individuals, for example, a volunteer Community Centre Manager in Shipview (Newcastle) said she wanted to take a step back from the role but felt there was no one who would step up into the position. Having more formal structures in place and longer-term funding removes some of this risk

Many of the community and voluntary organisations providing services in the ten areas do so largely through the contributions of unpaid volunteers. Where staff are paid, it is important to highlight they are often on very low wages, and for far fewer hours than they actually work. They will also usually be backed up by a team of volunteers which make it possible to do all the work that needs doing.

In The Valley (Sheffield), the youth group previously employed paid staff, but with a lack of funding they then had to rely on volunteers. On the other hand, in Beachville (Margate) the homeless shelter went from being run by volunteers to paid staff. It was reported that the paid staff didn't seem to care as much as the volunteers and were not as good at managing it.

“What we get paid for is peanuts compared to what we do in terms of our time... we don't do it for the money, we do it because we believe in it, we passionately believe that we have to support our communities, we passionately believe that we have to deliver services, we passionately believe that no matter how long it takes, it's something that we need to do to make our community stronger” The Valley (Sheffield)

“The volunteers were more careful about who they let in, and they worked with other organisations like Rise to come and help out. So, I am not sure throwing money at things is always right if it's not managed properly” Beachville (Margate)

It is not enough for services to be offered; people need to want to engage with them to make a real difference. This was cited as a particular challenge in Middle Row (Birmingham). In Kirkside East (Leeds), this problem was overcome when services started to work more closely with the residents to ensure services are tailored to the needs of the local commu-

6 Benton E. and Power A (2021) Community responses to the coronavirus pandemic: how mutual aid can help. LSE Public Policy Review, 1 (3). http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108972/1/Community_Responses_to_the_Coronavirus_Pandemic.pdf

7 Benton, E. and Power A (2023) Cost of Living: Community responses to poverty. CASereport 145. London. LSE.
<https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/casereport145.pdf>

nity.

“We have a Welcome Space here opened to the community but hardly anyone came in, only 2 or 3 people...We have lots of things here: classes, well-being, language, stuff for the children, but some people are just not interested” Middle Row (Birmingham)

In Kirkside East (Leeds), supportive councillors were reported to have been very important in helping support the provision of services.

“We’ve had three new elected members and they’re absolutely fantastic, they’re really on board with everything we do” Kirkside East (Leeds)

Even in Kirkside East (Leeds) however, which has a much better-established network of organisations, people were still not aware of all of the services available:

“So, there’s a lot of people out there who don’t even know who we are and I’m still quite shocked by that” Kirkside East (Leeds)

Voluntary organisations taking on more functions

Across all the areas, communities are struggling with the rising cost of living, making it harder to afford basic essentials such as food and utilities, and public services have been cut back following years of austerity. Across the neighbourhoods, third sector organisations are working to plug these gaps. The provision of food was an area where voluntary organisations had clearly stepped in, running food banks, food pantries, community meals:

“There has been a lot of underfunding, but other services have tried to step up” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“I feel in some ways we are stepping into roles that previously the government would have provided for” The Valley (Sheffield)

In Kirkside East (Leeds), the voluntary sector was supporting people into work by helping people grow confidence and skills, but also in providing job opportunities. Many of the paid staff within local community and voluntary organisations were originally volunteers.

In High Moor (Blackburn), the council cut the funding for the local library meaning it would have to close; volunteers came together to ensure it could stay open. It is now entirely volunteer run.

“Obviously the local authority had to make some cutbacks...they’re gonna close the library down. So we sat down with our volunteers and they all decided that they wanted and they said this was an asset they didn’t want to see closed. So we formed a group who could sustain the opening hours” High Moor (Blackburn)

In Beachville (Margate) it was felt community groups provide most of the mental health support in the area and try and fill the gap of underfunded and overstretched NHS services.

Funding challenges

Funding for voluntary and community organisations was a challenge across all the areas. In some of the areas - Middle Row (Birmingham), Riverlands (Nottingham), The Valley (Sheffield) and Overtown (Knowsley) - there is a lack of long-term funding, meaning organisations are constantly having to apply for new funding, so projects are very short term. In The Valley (Sheffield), stakeholders reported having to constantly “re-invent the wheel” in order to access new funds.

“The funding is very short term, you build a project and the funding goes, and there’s no long-term regeneration programme” The Valley (Sheffield)

In Riverlands (Nottingham), it was felt the short-term nature of funding led to feelings of distrust; as soon as a service starts to build trust in the community, the funding comes to an end, the project stops, and the process has to start again, so people are hesitant to engage.

“One of the things people struggle with is the lack of continuity, as soon as they trust a service, a new one comes in and they have to start again” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“My personal opinion is that I see a lot of agencies or initiatives being set up and then obviously when the funding stops, it stops. I think one of the solutions to that could be sort of supporting local people to lead on things...If you have local people invested in something they’re gonna do it regardless of whether it’s [got] money or not” Riverlands (Nottingham)

In Overtown (Knowsley), stakeholders reported a lack of accountability over spending money in the right way, with individuals setting a project up and then leaving before it is used properly. In Kirkside East (Leeds), voluntary and community organisations had worked together to overcome the problem of short-term funding; the local voluntary and community organisation network receives central council funding which they can then allocate to local groups, ensuring they have stable funding. The stakeholders felt this helps people to engage with the offer. The network can also advocate for the community when other projects are being established and ensure funding is used effectively.

“When we’re in the room, we can see what’s going on, we can feed that back and say we’re doing this. These people are feeling neglected, why can’t we work together and just do it as a whole?” Kirkside East (Leeds)

In Shipview (Newcastle) and High Moor (Blackburn), the funding for key community engagement programmes was coming to an end while we were carrying out this research, and it was not clear if anything would replace these structures.

The decline in social infrastructure has significantly impacted the capacity of voluntary and community groups to operate effectively. In High Moor (Blackburn), for instance, a community centre was sold off and turned into a business centre. As a result, affordable spaces for group activities have become increasingly scarce. Both residents and stakeholders highlighted a marked decrease in voluntary and community provision within the area as a result.

Partnership working

In Kirkside East (Leeds), Overtown (Knowsley), The Valley (Sheffield), and Shipview (Newcastle), there were strong partnerships between the different services, including the voluntary and public sector. In Leeds this initiative brings together all the groups in one area under one central structure which helps ensure funds are well distributed and services are not replicated. It also means groups can come together and tackle issues collectively.

In High Moor (Blackburn), they had recently set up a partnership between local groups, but it was not yet clear what impact this would have.

On the other hand, there is a lot of rivalry between voluntary and community groups in other areas because of competition for limited resources, and so little partnership working takes place.

“I wish everybody stopped empire building their own little agendas and actually just worked collectively together as a whole, it would get so much more done and it would be so much more beneficial for the wider community” Southside (Redcar)

Stakeholders told us that statutory services work more effectively when they work closely with the community groups, who are often more trusted and have a better awareness of what the community needs.

“It’s really interesting because I work for a statutory service, but community services are the backbone, and we couldn’t do what we did [during COVID] without them. It’s the community services that are trusted, and by us working in partnership with them we become trusted” Riverlands (Nottingham)

In The Valley (Sheffield), it was reported that services became much more effective when the voices of the community were listened to via public services partnering with voluntary groups. It was reported that NHS staff were struggling to engage people in meetings about a new health centre until they worked alongside a local community group to run the meetings.

“When they asked I said, ‘listen no one’s gonna come, let’s go Friday on prayers, there’s three mosques, there’s so many people who hang out before Friday. I’ve got a table, I’ll get you guys a cup of tea and just ask the questions and I’ll give you the authority’... and we got 163 just walking past” The Valley (Sheffield)

In Kirkside East (Leeds), the local trust makes referrals to the council’s “Green Doctors” scheme for people struggling to pay their energy bills, and stakeholders felt that individuals were more likely to open up to the local trust as they are a known, trusted organisation.

“If people come in and say, ‘I’ve got no gas’, or ‘I’ve got no electric’, we can make a referral to Green Doctors... that’s funded through the council. So that’s them identifying that we’ve got that ‘in’ on the ground. People come in, they trust us, they can talk to us” Kirkside East (Leeds)

In some of the areas, the public and voluntary sector work together to tackle very specific local issues. In Kirkside East (Leeds), they have a specific group to tackle antisocial behaviour that is made up of the Council, Housing Managers, local schools and grassroots

youth groups. There is also a similar group in Shipview (Newcastle) that worked together to decide what should happen with the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) funding. One stakeholder reported that the fund was used more effectively in this area compared to others because it was led by local groups.

A stakeholder from The Valley (Sheffield) pointed out the community needs to be open and receptive to working with the council, if they come in “shouting” it will put the council off engaging.

“We don’t need you coming in and shouting and being very negative, we need you to come in and say how can we work together because the power comes from the authority, the money comes from the authority, so if you’re coming in and slagging them off, it’s not gonna get you anywhere” The Valley (Sheffield)

There were also examples of partnerships between statutory and voluntary services being less successful. For example, in East Docks (Newham), the Newham New Deal Partnership, which was set up by the council to bring services together, was criticised by staff in a local charity who said it is just attended by “the same old people” and fails to “penetrate the community”.

In Riverlands (Nottingham), it was reported that partnerships don’t work because everyone is fighting for the same money. In Beachville (Margate), the council tried to co-ordinate a network for all the food support in the area, but stakeholders reported its impact was limited by the smaller organisations not attending.

Impact of COVID-19

Our interviews with stakeholders took place towards the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the experience was fresh in the minds of many interviewees. In all ten areas, we asked stakeholders to reflect on the impact of the pandemic.

While COVID-19 presented a lot of challenges for the local areas, stakeholders also highlighted how it helped to bring services together, for example, the partnership group in Kirkside East (Leeds) was formed during this period. It was also reported that in this period, community and voluntary groups were made aware of people that needed support, and they were able to engage with these individuals and continue this provision long-term.

However, in Southside (Redcar) and High Moor (Blackburn) it was felt COVID-19 had been very damaging to local community infrastructure with lots of groups closing down and not coming back afterwards.

“I think the pandemic had a real knock-on effect with community groups...We used to have a coffee morning group that ran every Friday morning. Since the pandemic, that group have just disbanded” Southside (Redcar)

It is interesting to consider why groups in some areas were more resilient and there appears to be strong links with those that had better existing structures in place to support

them.

The role of faith and cultural groups in the community

Across all the ten areas, religious organisations provided support to the local communities. This was felt most strongly in Middle Row (Birmingham) and East Docks (Newham), which are multi-cultural inner-city areas. Mosques and churches are seen to be more trusted than public sector services. It was also reported that religion was a good way of encouraging people to engage with wider services. Council services often showed a lack of cultural understanding of the issues that communities were facing.

“What we find a lot is that the mosques tend to play a part in community-based support, and churches as well. That’s down to the locality that we’re in. A lot of the churches will run the food banks” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“There’s an organisation called Approachable Parenting which is based on the pillars of Islam, again they offer a range of courses, I find that sometimes an easier sell to parents who are a little bit reluctant because of the religious connotations attached to it. So for a lot of our parents, that’s more palatable” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“Mosques and schools, people feel trust there and they are strong stakeholders in the area.... Churches are probably trusted among a wider community, even though it’s a church it has less association with religion, it feels more inclusive and more generic” The Valley (Sheffield)

In The Valley (Sheffield), a large amount of community provision is provided by a group that had started as a Yemini Workers Union, that supported migrant workers from the steel works who were experiencing racism and exploitation. The organisation now provides a wide range of support services for the community including health support including GP drop-ins, English classes, IT support, English/maths/science support for kids, advice service, youth activities four nights a week, and a community café.



Section Five: Crime and policing

Crime and Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Crime was raised as a concern by stakeholders across all the areas. The main challenges raised were domestic violence, drug dealing, dangerous driving, and general antisocial behaviour. Gun and knife crime was raised as an issue in The Valley (Sheffield), Riverlands (Nottingham) and East Docks (Newham).

Stakeholders in Birmingham reported parents being afraid to let children out due to safety concerns.

“Some parents are really bubble wrapping their kids and not allowing them to come out. Many years ago, kids would be able to go out, do stuff in the park, but we are finding now parents are not allowing kids out” Middle Row (Birmingham)

Several stakeholders felt the increase in drug dealing was linked to poverty, with young people sometimes seeing it as an easier way to earn money.

“Looking at why so many young people feel disenfranchised and the best way to make money is through crime. If you are 15 and your family is struggling and you can make £100 by delivering something. People think it’s about greed but its necessity” Riverlands (Nottingham)

“You grow up with that scarcity mindset of like, we don’t have enough, we’re struggling. And so, then that’s fed into the decisions and the actions you make as you get older, ‘Oh someone’s offering me a new pair of trainers I could never afford, great, gonna get involved in that’” Kirkside East (Leeds)

“Times are hard round here, some of these children, it’s so easy for them to go down the wrong road, so places like this [community centre] are what help prevent that,” Overtown (Knowsley)

Stakeholders believed antisocial behaviour was made worse by a lack of funding, young people feeling disenfranchised, and a lack of things for them to do in their neighbourhoods.

“There’s more ASB now, just in 5 years, children have been throwing bricks at cars, mindless vandalism really” High Moor (Blackburn)

“It’s more in your face, its everywhere, on your doorstep. Before you could open your door but now you are scared, you are looking out your window to see who is knocking on the door” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“There is a lack of resources and there’s a higher level of antisocial behaviour as a consequence of that, I think even the morale, not even just young people, people within the community because there’s such little investment in the area” Riverlands (Nottingham)

Stakeholders in Kirkside East (Leeds) and Overtown (Knowsley) felt that youth services were going some way to reducing ASB by creating spaces for young people to be, although there are issues around how to get young people to engage in services, as outlined in the youth

section above.

Stakeholders in Riverlands (Nottingham) also reported a fall in crime. They explained this was due to the young people now no longer having any memory of historical gang rivalries that previously affected the city, so not feeling the need to continue past behaviours.

“The good thing is the majority of young people I see under 25 have no knowledge of the previous history of the gangs, they go everywhere” Riverlands (Nottingham)

Safety was raised as a particular concern in High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar), with staff from voluntary and community organisations avoiding visiting certain streets as they are deemed as dangerous.

“We obviously have difficulties sometimes in the community in terms of our staff safety when they’re home visiting, so you know, we have had significant difficulties fairly recently where we’ve had certain roads that have been out of bounds for our staff” Southside (Redcar)

In Beachville (Margate), one stakeholder felt people viewed the area as unsafe, but said neighbouring areas have higher levels of crime according to the statistics. This raises an interesting question about people’s perceptions, and the reality, of crime.

“This is interesting because [Beachville] has a reputation for being awful and people from outside of the area would say “I wouldn’t walk there at night” ... but they showed me the figures and there is more violent crime in Ramsgate. So it’s more of a perceived thing” Beachville (Margate)

Policing

Overall, people’s views about the police were fairly consistent across the areas. The majority of stakeholders felt the police were underfunded, and there was a lack of police presence within the neighbourhoods. People across all areas said there was a feeling that if you contacted the police, they often didn’t respond or do anything about the problem.

In East Docks (Newham), Overtown (Knowsley), High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar) it was reported that people were afraid of going to the police because they didn’t want to be accused of “snitching”, and individuals often took issues into their own hands. In these areas, systems were being put in place to help people report crime anonymously, for example, QR codes to scan and report issues.

In Riverlands (Nottingham) stakeholders reflected that, historically, the police have treated the black community badly, practising discriminatory stop and search practices, which led to a continuing lack of trust.

Across the areas, young people were reported as having a particularly bad relationship with the police. These findings are echoed in a recent report by the Children’s Commissioner which highlighted lack of opportunity and young people’s distrust of the police as the main

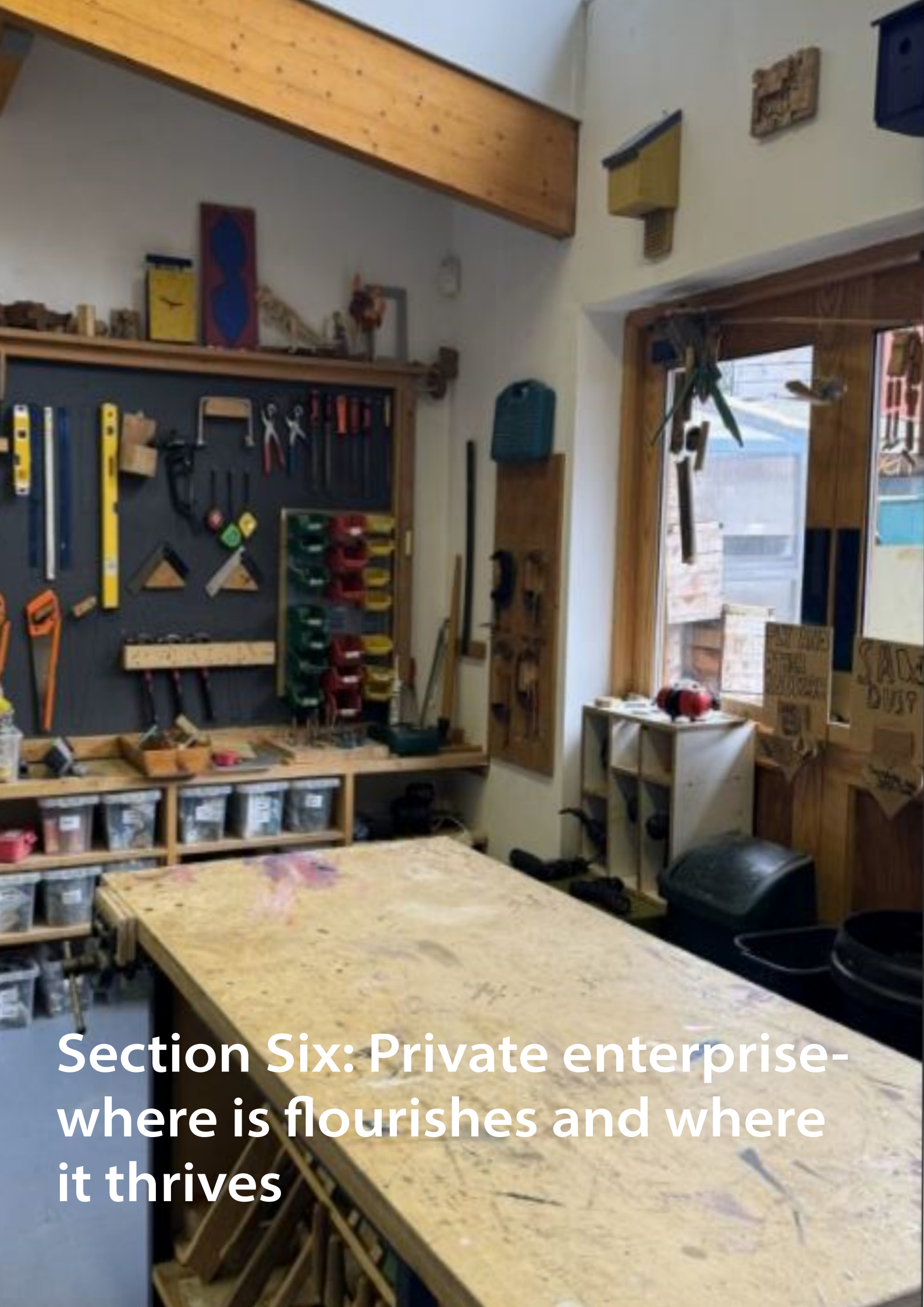
reasons young people got involved in the summer 2024 riots⁸

In Middle Row (Birmingham), Overtown (Knowsley), and Riverlands (Nottingham), stakeholders told us that, in the past, individual police officers had built up good relationships with the local community, but when they are moved on or promoted, that familiar presence disappears, and the process of building relationships has to start again.

“My biggest frustration is that if we get a good person they stay max two years and then they are off. They have worked in this high profile spot, they have done their bit...So there is no consistency and each time you have to start again” Middle Row (Birmingham)

Despite challenges, stakeholders in The Valley (Sheffield), East Docks (Newham), Riverlands (Nottingham), Overtown (Knowsley), High Moor (Blackburn), and Beachville (Margate) gave more recent examples of the police trying to work alongside the community and making efforts to improve relationships, for example attending the local community centre to talk to residents.

⁸ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/news/press-notice-deep-distrust-of-the-police-and-lack-of-opportunity-as-drivers-in-childrens-motivation-to-take-part-in-last-summers-riots>



Section Six: Private enterprise-
where it flourishes and where
it thrives

Shops and local businesses

One of the starkest differences between the areas was the quality and offer of the local high street with the inner-city areas of East Docks (Newham), The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham) all having access to a vast variety of shops.

The neighbourhoods in The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham) have a range of shops and restaurants representing the different cultures and ethnicities living in the areas. Despite good access to shops in East Docks (Newham), stakeholders spoke about the loss of the local weekly market and its impact on the community. The market space has been redeveloped into new built flats.

“We have got a lot of shops here. We’ve got local grocery shops, we’ve got a butcher, we’ve got you name it, clothes shops...we are blessed in that way that we’ve got local places that we could just walk in and get stuff we need” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“I love walking down during the summer’s day. It’s amazing because there’s a little café there. There are takeaways, there are stores there that sell slushies, and restaurants. There’s a Starbucks, there’s grocery shopping, they’ve got everything” East Docks (Newham)

By contrast, in Riverlands (Nottingham) and Kirkside East (Leeds), the central shopping areas now stood mainly empty.

“20 years ago it was really thriving in terms of shops and resources that were here, especially on the [high street]. It’s sort of known as the heart of [Riverlands]...It’s almost become a ghost town, and that’s generally happened over, I’d say, the last 20 years. You’ve seen it demise and demise” Riverlands (Nottingham)

In Beachville (Margate), the picture was slightly different again. Many of the big chains and businesses have moved to an out-of-town shopping centre, but have been replaced with independent shops and restaurants, many of which have been set up by the new “DFL” population. In Southside (Redcar) and High Moor (Blackburn), there was a reported serious lack of shops, which has been the case for a long time.

Access to an affordable supermarket selling healthy food was an issue in Riverlands (Nottingham), Overtown (Knowsley), High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar).

“We do not have any access to good food. It seems like a food desert. I don’t own a car, I have got a bike, I have to walk 20 minutes to get food. I don’t know how people who aren’t as fit and can’t carry a week’s worth of food on their back cope” Riverlands (Nottingham)

Interestingly, in Kirkside East (Leeds) the supermarket, although seen as a positive asset, was said to have led to the decline of small local businesses.

“It was a natural bumping space, there were places where you could sit down and have a chat. There were little cafes there, there were supermarkets, all kinds of differ-

ent shops...So, when that went, it kind of took a lot away from local residents. So that was I think one of the reasons that changed [Kirkside East], with its sense of community, because people just got disconnected” Kirkside East (Leeds)



Section Seven: Employment and skills

Employment and opportunities

Across all the areas, except for East Docks (Newham) and Kirkside East (Leeds), it was felt that much of the employment local to the neighbourhoods is low paid, zero-hour work, mainly in the retail and hospitality sector, offering little chance of progression. People who want more “aspirational” jobs tend to leave the areas.

“So, you know, yes, there are jobs in hospitality. There are jobs in the industrial areas, in warehouses and production. But is it worth it? By the time they take the travel cost out, by the time, they have the meals, they have to pay the rent, which has gone up. And if they’ve got a private landlord, can they afford that? And then there’s childcare” Overtown (Knowsley)

“People who want to achieve something...they leave the estate” High Moor (Blackburn)

One of the key themes in the ex-industrial areas, is the long-term impact of loss of local industry and employment, leading to long-term generational worklessness.

“I think it was 95 or 94 percent of working age people prior to that were working, and then it was mass unemployment in this area, between the dockers, we had Birdseye, we had Robinson Willey, English Electric, there was umpteen factories, whole communities were working and they all come out of work, so you had mass unemployment” Overtown (Knowsley)

A stakeholder in The Valley (Sheffield) reflected that this cycle would only be broken by long-term investment in the areas.

“I think the area needs to be restored to its former self, its former glory in a sense. That will only happen if the government is willing to invest in the area, and the local council but with government support. It used to be a quite well-off area; it needs to get back to that and become richer as an area” The Valley (Sheffield)

In Riverlands (Nottingham), the situation had been made worse by the closure of small factories and shops. In Southside (Redcar), the site of the steel works is in the process of being turned into Teesworks which will be Britain’s largest freeport, an initiative aimed at regenerating economically declining areas near to ports; they have relaxed economic regulations to boost investment and trade. It is hoped the site will become an important industrial base for green energy production. Stakeholders were hesitant about how much this project would help local people who may not have the skills required for the roles available at the site.

“I mean, obviously we had, you know a massive steel industry so... a lot of people lost their jobs and couldn’t access other employment which had a real knock on effect, and I think it’s been felt for generations” Southside (Redcar)

“My gut feeling is that it will bypass the immediate area and that it will be outside people commuting in. I’d love to be proven wrong” Southside (Redcar)

There were also challenges relating to employment in the non-industrial areas. In Beachville (Margate), although it was felt the new “middle class” population has created employment opportunities by setting up new businesses, many of these roles are seasonal. In High Moor

(Blackburn), long-term unemployment is linked to people's long-term health conditions and general poor physical and mental health. In Middle Row (Birmingham), there was a particular cultural challenge around women entering the workplace, and language barriers that limited access to jobs.

"We haven't got a lot of employment; we have a lot of seasonal employment. Even the all-year-round jobs are unskilled, zero-hour contracts, minimum wage" Beachville (Margate)

"We have a lot of wives and mothers who don't work, it's not a case of they can't work. It's a family thing; we're often told it's the cultural thing that the wife doesn't work" Middle Row (Birmingham)

In inner-city Middle Row (Birmingham) and Riverlands (Nottingham), stakeholders told us that many young people were hesitant to travel to different parts of the city due to gang rivalries, which limited the take up of opportunities across the wider city.

"There is stuff available but that causes problems. Some young people won't travel, or they won't go to another area of the city because they have issues or fears with other young people" Middle Row (Birmingham)

"It's [apprenticeships] more into the city and the surrounding areas for that. So, you have to travel out of the area, which could be a barrier for some of the children...Some of the young people in these areas have postcode wars so they're in conflict with other groups of young people in very close by areas" Riverlands (Nottingham)

Skills

All the areas had some form of skill-building and job application support available; this was normally provided in a local community centre, and often via the local housing association. In Kirkside East (Leeds), it was felt that the offer had improved a lot over the last few years however in Southside (Redcar) although support was available, engagement remained low. Furthermore, it was felt that the training on offer doesn't go far enough, dropping off when people reached minimum wage or entry level jobs, and there is little support for people who want to progress further in their careers. Access to apprenticeship opportunities was seen as a particular challenge in High Moor (Blackburn) due to poor public transport.

"We now know if people come in and are struggling for work, we can actually go speak to so and so over at Kentmere and we can help you get back into work. They did a big push, there were a lot of jobs going in the NHS, so we supported them and were sign-posting people" Kirkside East (Leeds)

"It's really hard to engage...The majority of people can literally just walk across the road or walk down the road and they're there. Still, there seems to be this barrier, and it's not a physical one" Southside (Redcar)

"Just because they're in that minimum wage job it shouldn't discount them from future training to access the high-quality jobs that will then obviously improve the economy" Southside (Redcar)

Aspirations and apathy

Across all the areas, except for East Docks (Newham) and Riverlands (Nottingham), stakeholders felt that people (especially young people) have low aspirations about what they can achieve, often being nervous about looking for opportunities outside the area or not having the confidence to apply for certain jobs. One stakeholder reflected that it was hard to break this cycle due to a lack of positive role models. There was concern that the apathy and lack of aspiration meant that young people are moving towards drug dealing as it is seen as an “easy” way to make money.

“Some of our kids are 3rd or 4th generation unemployed, I think their aspirations are just so low. Trying to turn that round is so difficult, it’s a massive oil tanker not a tiny boat” Overtown (Knowsley)

“It’s 13 years of austerity, it’s COVID, it’s Brexit. When your aspirations are already quite low, and your support network doesn’t encourage you, you don’t see any jobs coming. We have drugs, in some of our most deprived areas we have kids young as 10 smoking weed” Overtown (Knowsley)

“High levels of unemployment, there’s not really a desire, I feel at times, for people to get out there and really push it...I think it’s deeply ingrained within the area” Shipview (Newcastle)

“People do have aspirations, I’m not saying they don’t, but there’s a ceiling on those aspirations. People are told that they’re not going to amount to lawyers and doctors.... Of course, that’s not my opinion but that’s how young people feel. ‘We’re from [Kirkside East] we can’t do that’” Kirkside East (Leeds)

“I said to one little boy, not too long ago, he came in with his mum, I said, ‘What do you want to do when you grow up?’ And he said, ‘I want to be unemployed like my dad’. I think he was about eight years old. I just think, wow, that’s his goal, what he’s growing up with” High Moor (Blackburn)

In Beachville (Margate) there was a divide between the aspirations of the “old” Beachville (Margate) population and the “DFLs” whilst in East Docks (Newham) a stakeholder reflected on some of the cultural differences around aspiration.

“My parent body is largely immigrant, either first generation, or just second generation in this country. They are very aspirational to get out, to use education, to improve their lives” East Docks (Newham)



Section Eight: Inequality and need

Poverty

Across all the areas, stakeholders reported an increase in people struggling with meeting their basic needs due to the cost-of-living crisis, leading to increased pressure on food banks and warm spaces. Organisations felt they were having to take on extra responsibilities to help support people through this period. For example, the Adventure Playground in The Valley (Sheffield) was staying open longer hours to give people a warm space to spend time. A housing officer described how they felt they were currently acting more as a social worker, trying to support families with all the issues they are currently experiencing.

“I don’t think there’s been as much progression- obviously with the cost-of-living. I think the demographic has changed as well. In terms of deprivation, I feel there’s a lot more and there’s a lot more child poverty” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“With the cost-of-living, people are panicking now. It’s not a joke when we’re saying it’s eat or heat, that’s the reality for people” Riverlands (Nottingham)

Social isolation

Stakeholders from several of the areas reported that loneliness was a significant issue for residents, particularly in East Docks (Newham) and Middle Row (Birmingham). There was a sense that social isolation compounded other challenges, such as health and poverty, and led to some residents “falling through the cracks” due to a lack of personal support and networks. This exacerbates the impact on statutory and voluntary services, as people’s problems may be much worse by the time they have been picked up by services; or they are contacting services because they are lonely. Some stakeholders also discussed a loss of public spaces for people to meet others, make friends, and combat isolation, such as affordable cafes.

“Sometimes I find a lot of times they just need someone to talk to. So, it starts off on one thing, but it ends up on something else. And then you realise that there was not really an issue as such” East Docks (Newham)

“I think there’s interventions in place but it’s not really enough to alleviate some of the social conditions, it’s more on a superficial level to be honest. You get the support, you get the intervention, but the real problem around these experiences on a daily basis, I think, that’s a lot worse. It’s more difficult for families now. And also, people living in isolation, those that don’t have that support structure in place, I think they tend to fall through the cracks” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“Left Behind” communities

Across all the areas, excluding East Docks (Newham) in London, there was a feeling of the areas being “left behind”, receiving less funding than other areas of the country. Years of underinvestment have led to a distrust of both government and councils. In Beachville (Margate), one stakeholder felt that the need in the area was overshadowed by the rest of Kent, so it didn’t receive the funding it needed. As well as a lack of resources, a stakeholder in The

Valley (Sheffield) reflected that local people have little say over how local resources and services are used.

“The [local government] were feeling that they were getting quite a lot of flak and not getting the support we needed from central government because it was in the north of England. And I’m sure they weren’t on their own feeling that” The Valley (Sheffield)

“We can’t afford to lose any more jobs, we have cut, cut, cut, like most northern towns. Mainly Labour places have been cut to the bone, and they were already the most deprived places” Overtown (Knowsley)

“Because it’s an area that’s had years of hardship happen to it, it constantly gets hit the hardest when things are tougher in the whole country. You know, all this, ‘Oh, we’re in it together’, all of that rubbish” Kirkside East (Leeds)

“I think a lot of the communities have been let down before. You know, they’ve been promised like regeneration activities, well, not activities, but projects that just haven’t come through...and I think there’s a kind of a lack of mistrust for authoritative figures like the Council” Southside (Redcar)

Despite the stakeholders in East Docks (Newham) not feeling like the area was “left behind” in the same way, one stakeholder reflected that “poorer working class” communities were treated differently from more middle-class communities, with no one caring what happened to them.

“If you’re poorer working class, you can do whatever you like, and no one really cares. Although you’ve got people, populist politicians who pretend they do, but no one does” East Docks (Newham)

A photograph of a community garden with several raised garden beds. The beds are filled with various plants, including purple flowers in the foreground, orange and white flowers, and green foliage. In the background, there is a playground with a blue and purple structure. The sky is cloudy and blue. The text "Section Nine: Public health and community wellbeing" is overlaid on the image in white, bold, sans-serif font.

Section Nine: Public health and community wellbeing

Mental and physical wellbeing

Poor physical and mental health were cited as challenges by stakeholders across the areas, with many residents struggling with long-term health problems and obesity-related conditions. Doctors often struggle to keep up with demand for services, and there is a lack of mental health support within the communities. In High Moor (Blackburn), services are hard to reach due to the lack of adequate public transport. Long-term health conditions had led to long-term worklessness.

“Just an overwhelming number of people who are on long term sick, and probably the vast majority have mental health problems stopping them from working, anxiety, depression, but a good chunk of physical health ailments definitely as well” High Moor (Blackburn)

Stakeholders reflected it was often hard to get people to open up about mental health issues, as there is a stigma attached to admitting you are struggling. In East Docks (Newham), there is a particular challenge around men’s mental health among migrant families where men are seen as the breadwinner and are now struggling to fulfil this role due to challenges accessing employment.

In Southside (Redcar), it was reported there is a high suicide rate amongst younger girls and women, but there has been little research and understanding into why this is the case.

“I don’t know all the figures, but it seems in the last year we’ve had quite a lot of suicides, particularly with young girls. More so than the rest of the borough, particularly in [Southside], and it just kind of, it feels like there’s something underlying. There’s something there that’s not quite right” Southside (Redcar)

“One of the things is that these communities are very disempowered and disconnected and they’re big users of public services, but they don’t really have a say in what happens to them” The Valley (Sheffield)

In The Valley (Sheffield) and Middle Row (Birmingham), both inner-city multi-cultural areas, amongst many residents there was a distrust of health services, which created barriers to people engaging. They felt this problem had worsened since COVID-19.

“[Since COVID] I feel there’s definitely been more of a lack of trust, in terms of people trusting the healthcare services and healthcare system and getting the right intervention for them” Middle Row (Birmingham)

“If you’re not from those communities it’s really difficult to kind of engage with them and win over their trust in order to receive that support” The Valley (Sheffield)

In several of the areas, health services are trialling new ways of working. In High Moor (Blackburn) and Middle Row (Birmingham), there has been a move towards “social prescribing” a scheme that links people to groups, activities, and services in their area to support their physical and emotional well-being, for example, a gardening group or a gym.

“Another interesting thing is the move towards social prescribing, and I think that’s a

fantastic way of encouraging people not to be so reliant on health services because a lot of the health problems within those areas are lifestyle rather than hereditary” Middle Row (Birmingham)

In The Valley (Sheffield), the NHS trust is taking an entirely new approach, targeting funding in deprived areas and working with grassroots groups and residents to identify what the priorities should be, with a greater focus on holistic and preventative work.

Drug and alcohol misuse

Drug and alcohol dependence issues were seen as challenges across all the areas, with stakeholders reflecting that substance abuse is often inter-generational, with families stuck in a cycle of misuse.

“We have drugs, in some of our most deprived areas we have kids as young as 10 smoking weed and they don’t call it a spliff they call it a ciggie” Overtown (Knowsley)

“You have a lot of drug dealing there, a lot of drug taking, antisocial behaviour, violence” Community Health Worker, Shipview (Newcastle)

“All these post code wars are about drugs. Take the drugs out and it would be different. I don’t want to call it ASB I want to call it drug wars because that’s what it is” East Docks (Newham)

“There will be a massive impact due to lack of employment opportunities, substance misuse, drugs, alcohol and I think there’s a real culture issue. Not just one generation of adults dealing with issues. It’s kind of like three generations worth of family” Southside (Redcar)



Section Ten: Environmental sustainability

A key element of the Sustainable Communities research project is to uncover how low-income areas could become more environmentally sustainable.

Community perceptions of climate change

For lots of the population in the ten areas, climate change wasn't a big concern as they have more immediate pressures to deal with, reflecting the increased cost of living crisis. Some stakeholders felt there is more concern about the climate amongst the younger generation. The only area where stakeholders felt climate change was a major concern was Kirkside East (Leeds), the area with the most active climate group. Involvement in this group may sway stakeholders' perspectives.

"I think generally people want to do their best by it. But there's always a group that aren't in a place to care because of mental or financial reasons" Beachville (Margate)

"I think this environmental stuff is for young people, they are the ones that are getting upset about it. Then it's the kind of university-educated people that haven't penetrated here. I don't think it registers" East Docks (Newham)

Community climate action initiatives

Despite stakeholders reflecting a lack of concern about climate change, across all the areas there were examples of environmental or green initiatives, mainly litter-picking groups and community gardens. This perhaps shows a disconnect between climate change policy and action that makes people's immediate environment nicer places to be.

"We're also part of a composting community project, which is in partnership with the Active Well-being Society, Friends of the Earth...So the communities can come in and when we do an open day, we'll demonstrate how you can compost your waste and reduce your waste and that kind of thing" Middle Row (Birmingham)

Green transport schemes

As reflected in the transport section, there are different levels of service in terms of public transport in the ten areas, with the outer and town areas having worse public transport. Stakeholders did report some improvements in green or active transport schemes: in Shipview (Newcastle), electric buses have recently been introduced; while East Docks (Newham), Shipview (Newcastle), and Middle Row (Birmingham) were all reported to have good cycle lanes. However, there are safety concerns over the cycle lanes, which sometimes put people off using them, showing it is not simply enough to mark the roads. In Middle Row (Birmingham), they are trying to overcome this by organising cycling groups to help people to build up their confidence. In Overtown (Knowsley), a stakeholder reported a growing interest in electric cars amongst residents, but they weren't sure if this was prompted as a way to save money or out of concern for the environment. Air pollution was raised as a particular concern in The Valley (Sheffield).

“All the money in terms of developing green transport links, all that money seems to go into the south of [The Valley] where there is more money anyway. There’s no incentive at all here. In fact, there’s a disincentive because the roads are busy, traffics bad, people don’t have any patience” The Valley (Sheffield)

“It’s not too bad for cycle paths. We run cycling groups and in [Middle Row] its actually quite good and there’s cycle paths close to the city centre” Middle Row (Birmingham)

In Shipview (Newcastle), there had recently been a big push to install electric car charging points.

Wider net zero initiatives

As well as local grassroots initiatives, we asked stakeholders to reflect on larger net-zero initiatives in the areas.

Perhaps the largest scheme across the ten areas was the Teesworks site in Southside (Redcar), a freeport and green energy production site on the site of the old steel works. The site will also be home to “UK’s first zero-carbon industrial cluster, capturing the same amount of energy annually as more than three million homes”.

In Middle Row (Birmingham), all the homes in a set postcode were eligible to apply for a grant to pay for energy efficiency works on their home. There was no income cap on the grant, but it was targeted at older housing. The scheme was completely free for owner-occupiers, but landlords were required to pay a third of the costs.

“There was another scheme locally called Retrofit, where we had a big pot of money for houses in certain parts of [Middle Row]. They could get somebody would come in and do an energy efficiency check on the house and to see if there were eligible” Middle Row (Birmingham)



**Section Eleven: What
would stakeholders
change about the area**

Finally, we asked stakeholders to reflect on what they would change across the areas. This was split into local area-based initiatives and wider structural changes. Improvements to local housing and better provision for young people were key themes across most of the areas as local initiatives.

In The Valley (Sheffield), stakeholders wanted better quality housing, both through house building and improvements to existing homes. They also highlighted ways to improve the local environment through dealing with litter problems, implementing better traffic control measures and pedestrianising certain streets. Residents wanted to see more investment in the community through initiatives which celebrate the strengths of the people living in area and more long-term funding for projects. Finally, residents wanted more local job creation, especially jobs targeted at young people

In Middle Row (Birmingham), similar to The Valley (Sheffield), there was a big focus on improving local housing through more energy efficiency, and better enforcement against exploitative landlords. Residents also wanted more initiatives to encourage people to build stronger community ties, and to ensure people are making best use of local resources and initiatives. Finally, residents felt there was a need for better Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision.

In Riverlands (Nottingham), like other inner-city areas, improving the quality of housing was a top priority. Stakeholders also wanted more family-friendly facilities, such as a youth club and a leisure centre. The lack of a local supermarket and other local shops was highlighted as a key problem.

In East Docks (Newham), improving housing was a key priority for change, stakeholders felt there should be more affordable housing being built for local people. They also wanted better training and skills development for young people.

In Kirkside East (Leeds), some stakeholders gave more holistic responses, they wanted everyone to keep working to make the world a fairer place and create a more positive outlook for people so they believe things can change. Others suggested more specific changes, including a community mini-bus to take local people on trips, and more activities for children. One resident thought education should be reformed to set up smaller specialised schools to better cater to different students' interests, for example a specialist arts school. Finally, one resident felt that getting rid of the drug dealers would greatly improve the area as a lot of problems in the area linked back to drug taking and dealing.

In Overtown (Knowsley), the main focus was to increase initiatives that support and empower local children. They also wanted better access to services across a range of issues including mental health, domestic abuse and employment.

In Shipview (Newcastle), stakeholders wanted more social housing to be built in the area. They also felt there should be better funding to support local initiatives that are already working and have strong links with the community. Finally, one resident suggested that people should be taught life skills in school, such as paying bills to help set them up for life.

In Southside (Redcar), similar to Middle Row (Birmingham), stakeholders wanted stronger enforcement on private landlords. At a wider level, residents wanted better coordination between different local services, and for the community to have a greater say in what is delivered. Similarly, residents in The Valley (Sheffield) wanted the creation of local jobs and training targeted at young people. Finally, one resident felt the benefit system should be reformed to encourage more people into work.

In High Moor (Blackburn), stakeholders highlighted the need for infrastructure that can support population growth due to new housing, this included local schools and GPs. They also wanted more services provided locally, and for the community centre to be re-opened. They felt this would help strengthen community spirit. One resident wanted local people to start taking more pride in their community.

In Beachville (Margate), stakeholders wanted community spaces to re-open for public use. As was true in many areas, they also wanted increased youth provision. Finally, they called for greater transparency and accountability over how council funding is used.

Section Twelve: Conclusions



This report attempts to draw together the views and experiences of 75 stakeholders working across ten low-income neighbourhoods in England. Their insights reveal shared challenges across communities in difficult times, while also highlighting distinct differences between inner-city, outer-city, and town-based areas.

The inner-city areas, East Docks (Newham), Middle Row (Birmingham), Riverlands (Nottingham), and The Valley (Sheffield), have seen the most visible change, particularly through regeneration and demographic change. In East Docks (Newham), new high-rise developments and rising property values have transformed the local environment. While this has brought in jobs and investment, it has displaced long-standing communities. Stakeholders in these areas raised concerns about overcrowding, homelessness, and tensions between established residents and newcomers. These areas stand out for their good public transport systems, ensuring the areas are well connected.

Outer-city areas, Shipview (Newcastle), Kirkside East (Leeds), and Overtown (Knowsley), showed signs of more stable populations, often with deeper-rooted community ties. These areas have seen family-oriented new housing developments, which have helped to improve the neighbourhoods visually. However, the new housing has also brought new pressures where infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth. There is also resentment from long-standing populations, about homes being given to “outsiders” or being unaffordable to local people. In some outer-city areas, stakeholders described effective partnership working and strong collaboration between statutory services and the voluntary sector, particularly in Kirkside East (Leeds), where there were strong partnership models between local groups and the council. Nonetheless, issues around antisocial behaviour, youth disengagement, and perceptions of unequal funding remain a challenge.

Town-based areas, Southside (Redcar), High Moor (Blackburn), and Beachville (Margate), face a different set of challenges. In High Moor (Blackburn) and Southside (Redcar), the loss of social infrastructure and inadequate public transport were particularly challenging, with some stakeholders expressing concern about being “left behind”. The situation in Beachville (Margate) stands out from the other town areas, the area is experiencing rapid change due to the influx of more affluent residents from London. While some stakeholders viewed this as bringing new energy and investment, others raised concerns about rising rents, displacement of the existing population, and a growing gap between long-standing residents and newcomers.

Across all the areas, the withdrawal of statutory services since 2010 has increased reliance on the voluntary and community sectors. In neighbourhoods where community organisations are better resourced, and have better coordination in place, such as The Valley (Sheffield) and Kirkside East (Leeds), stronger services to support local needs were reported. In other areas, short-term funding and the lack of secure, affordable space available for local use were highlighted as key challenges.

Despite the differences evident across the neighbourhoods, all of the study areas demonstrated a strong sense of community and people’s willingness to help and support one another despite financial pressures. Stakeholders felt this was distinct from other wealthier

neighbourhoods in their area. However, it is clear from the challenges highlighted that this is not enough to allow the areas to thrive, and greater structural changes are needed at both a local and national level.

Across all stakeholders and roles, there was a clear dedication to their communities. All the stakeholders had a strong understanding of the challenges their areas face, and what could be done to improve them. Improvements to housing and better youth provision stood out as the key areas people wanted to see change.

This is the second in a series of reports summarising our research across the ten areas, where we will delve deeper into these issues.

