![Institute for Community Studies]

Safety in Numbers?

A research agenda with communities, for communities

Authors & Acknowledgements

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With thanks to the ICS Community Advisory Board, Aldas Gustas, Tigran Sogomonian and Zoe Dibb

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Foreword

The destination we are heading, both as a global community and as a country, is uncertain. This is a year that has been shaped by events - and reactions to those events. Where the mood, freedoms and experiences of a nation have been continually shaped and altered, in deeply personal and unequal ways.

Safety in Numbers? rests on that new reality, and challenges us on a number of levels. It challenges us that long before the pandemic hit, we were feeling unsafe and insecure as a population. The pandemic rests on feelings of insecurity which may unconsciously feed our actions and reactions in the months and years to come.

The pandemic and prior to it, the experience of political and social upheaval in the last four years, challenges us all to listen and understand differently. To look to other forms of evidence that are not readily condensed into a metric, or a number. Our experiences and lived realities *are* evidence of whether a policy or an initiative is working, they tell us how far, deep and diverse the roots of an issue or problem lie. As such, qualitative evidence can often take us to far richer places of understanding; and we will continue to fall short in our efforts if we continue to ignore them.

It challenges us to continue to value and recognise that community exists, and that we are undoubtedly safer together, than we are as individuals. Community during Covid was given a renewed substance and form across neighbourhoods across the whole country. It is easily mobilised to a cause and made stronger through crisis; and yet we are a long way from being a communitarian country, with many people contributing to *Safety in Numbers?* feeling uneasy about being left 'responsible' for others.

Public engagement, involvement, participation - the extent of interest and noise in this topic has been growing for a number of years now. But rarely is it more than a function or project within an institution or organisation. But if we want to work with the power that resides in communities, and believe that large scale challenges cannot be solved without sustained involvement of a far broader set of people and actors, we need new models of institutions and new forms of listening that have participation and community involvement at their core.

The Institute for Community Studies is one expression of this need. Supported through a Community Advisory Board, underpinned by a growing national community research network, wi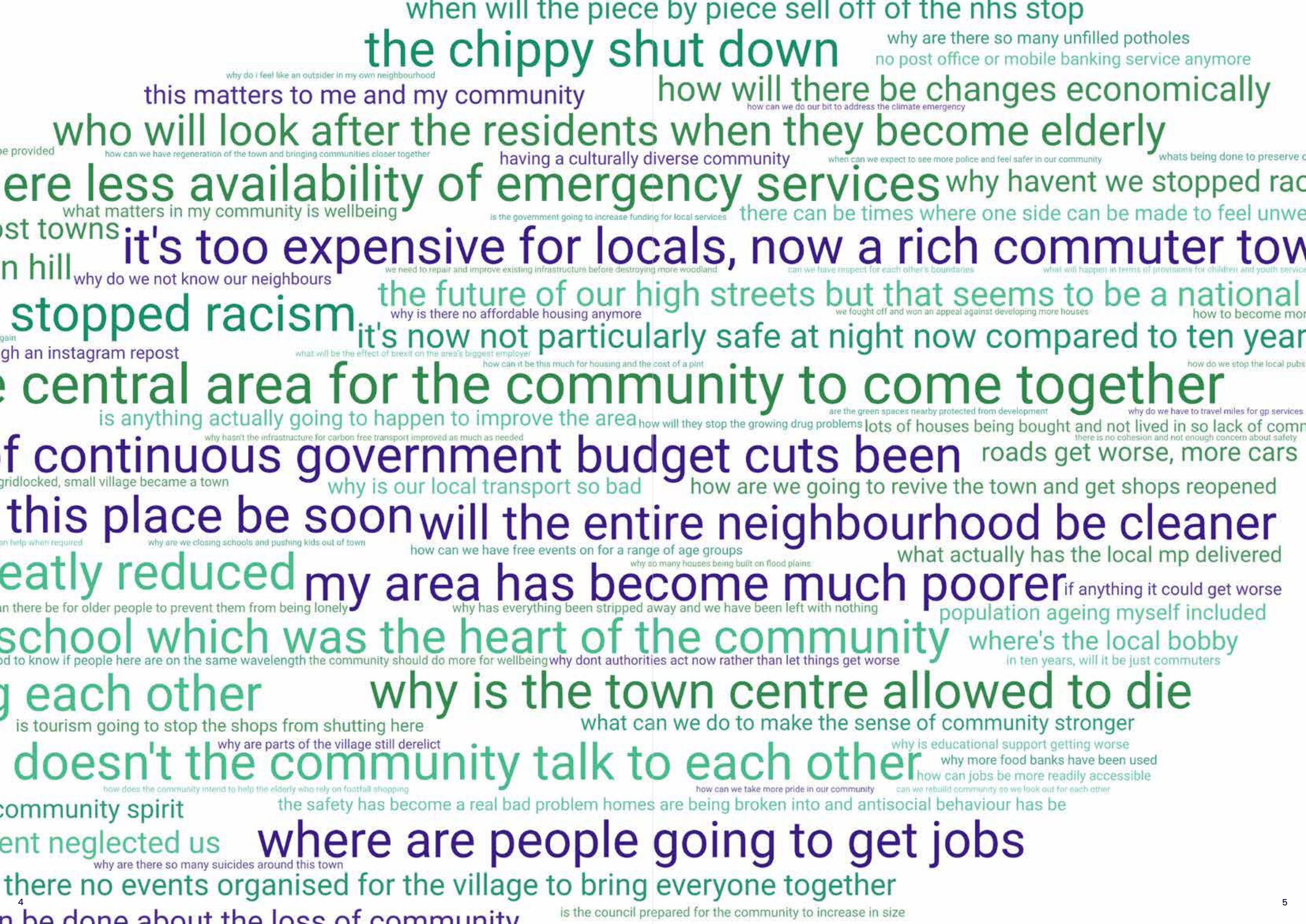th a commitment to researching what matters to people – the involvement of a broad base of people in the governance, design and delivery of the Institute is a fundamental principle and could not exist without it.

This publication presents a key milestone in our journey to test and evolve the Institute for Community Studies' model. *Safety in Numbers?* sets out questions that matter, as told to us and prioritised by over three thousand people. How can communities be supported to take a bigger part in building local economic resilience? What is the role of communities in creating shared strategies to keep people safe? These are our two starting questions, chosen based on community prioritisation of issues set out in this publication. And underpinning each of these - how can we capitalise on the growth informal community capital during Covid-19 to strengthen inclusive community involvement in how we unpick these challenges and find practical and policy based solutions. We will be digging deep on what's working, who's innovating and what's changing in response to those loud cries from communities in these two key areas.

None of this would be possible without significant seed funding from our three major funders - Stian Westlake, Friends Provident Foundation and Power to Change. To them we owe a debt of gratitude, which we hope over the coming years will be repaid many times over.

We invite all those who are interested in how we're working, and what we're exploring, to join us on the journey.

Helen Goulden
Chief Executive Officer, Young Foundation

when will the piece by piece sell off of the nhs stop

the chippy shut down

why are there so many unfilled potholes

no post office or mobile banking service anymore

why do i feel like an outsider in my own neighbourhood

this matters to me and my community

how will there be changes economically

how can we do our bit to address the climate emergency

who will look after the residents when they become elderly

how can we have regeneration of the town and bringing communities closer together

having a culturally diverse community

when can we expect to see more police and feel safer in our community

whats being done to preserve

e provided

ere less availability of emergency services

why havent we stopped rac

what matters in my community is wellbeing

is the government going to increase funding for local services

there can be times where one side can be made to feel unwe

ost towns

it's too expensive for locals, now a rich commuter tow

n hill

why do we not know our neighbours

we need to repair and improve existing infrastructure before destroying more woodland

can we have respect for each other's boundaries

what will happen in terms of provisions for children and youth service

the future of our high streets but that seems to be a national

how to become mor

stopped racism

why is there no affordable housing anymore

it's now not particularly safe at night now compared to ten year

gh an instagram repost

what will be the effect of brexit on the area's biggest employer

how can it be this much for housing and the cost of a pint

how do we stop the local pubs

e central area for the community to come together

is anything actually going to happen to improve the area

how will they stop the growing drug problems

lots of houses being bought and not lived in so lack of comm

why hasn't the infrastructure for carbon free transport improved as much as needed

are the green spaces nearby protected from development

why do we have to travel miles for gp services

there is no cohesion and not enough concern about safety

f continuous government budget cuts been

roads get worse, more cars

gridlocked, small village became a town

why is our local transport so bad

how are we going to revive the town and get shops reopened

this place be soon

will the entire neighbourhood be cleaner

an help when required

why are we closing schools and pushing kids out of town

how can we have free events on for a range of age groups

what actually has the local mp delivered

eatly reduced

why so many houses being built on flood plains

my area has become much poorer

if anything it could get worse

n there be for older people to prevent them from being lonely

why has everything been stripped away and we have been left with nothing

population ageing myself included

school which was the heart of the community

where's the local bobby

d to know if people here are on the same wavelength

the community should do more for wellbeing

why dont authorities act now rather than let things get worse

in ten years, will it be just commuters

each other

why is the town centre allowed to die

what can we do to make the sense of community stronger

is tourism going to stop the shops from shutting here

why are parts of the village still derelict

why is educational support getting worse

doesn't the community talk to each other

why more food banks have been used

how can jobs be more readily accessible

how does the community intend to help the elderly who rely on footfall shopping

how can we take more pride in our community

can we rebuild community so we look out for each other

ommunity spirit

the safety has become a real bad problem homes are being broken into and antisocial behaviour has be

ent neglected us

where are people going to get jobs

why are there so many suicides around this town

there no events organised for the village to bring everyone together

be done about the loss of community

is the council prepared for the community to increase in size

Introduction

This research agenda is a co-creation between communities and the new Institute for Community Studies. Re-launched in October 2019, the Institute is focused on four key things:

First, that our sense of community and connectedness to each other is perhaps the most under-rated yet profoundly important phenomenon that will guide us through the coming decades of change; and this importance is increased, not reduced as a result of Covid-19. The huge protests in the US over the tragic and unjust death of George Floyd show us too how community mobilises at a time of crisis.

Second, that the UK's considerable and collective research capacity should be dedicated to answering and prioritising questions that communities most care about.

Third, that research activity should involve 'everyday' people in the research process and give far greater legitimacy to their stories as evidence of what's working – and what's not.

And lastly, that research should have a clear and tangible purpose – supporting our primary goal of supporting a strong society; and that our outputs are uncomplicatedly useful - for policy makers, businesses and communities alike.

This report sets out 40 questions that need answers. And those answers are as likely to come from communities innovating right now, as they are from retrospective, academic analysis of existing activities and interventions. We recognise both these sources as equally valid, with the combination of the two being most likely to produce quality evidence, quickly

In the months preceding the global Covid-19 pandemic, the new Institute for Community Studies undertook a radical and extensive exercise to understand 'what matters?' to communities across the UK. We spoke to 3,000 people who raised 4,000 questions they wanted answers to, which they then prioritised; revealing a set of questions to direct our attention towards.

We engaged widely and deeply with communities, using methods which present the issues that communities told us mattered most; a sense of scale in how widely and how diversely these issues are affecting different regions, places and population demographics, and most critically - how the experience of these issues is affecting communities' ability to thrive. The findings are representative nationally but also speak to a deeper narrative through the voices of 150 people across eight qualitative case studies of different communities in the UK.

We have set out these questions in plain language; faithfully reproducing how those questions were spoken about by most people. It represents "Questions that Matter" to the UK community.

Questions raised by people very often started with "How can we…?" strongly hinting at a shift towards collective responsibility; of communities engaging with issues, looking for answers and questioning their responsibility and power over how to solve serious, seemingly intractable problems.

While the pandemic has catapulted us into a new decade, with dramatic and far-reaching consequences, what matters to communities has remained a constant; built as it is on the hopes, fears and aspirations of a small island nation, in a rapidly changing world.

This report sets out a research agenda - both for the Institute for Community Studies and for those who have an interest and mission to support a more equal society. We invite you to both explore the questions raised, listen to the voices contained in this report and to engage with us through the Institute for Community Studies to undertake high impact and transformative research activities.

The Backdrop

"Can I look to others?" (Male, 42, East Midlands, 2019)

This verbatim question, submitted as part of our research, captures the situation in which we now find ourselves, and sits at the heart of this report.

When we finished our work to gather questions about 'what matters' to people across the UK in late 2019, we had no clue that we were about to be entering one of the most unique periods of social upheaval since the second world war. The IMF has described the subsequent global decline as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930's. And at the time of writing, we are poised and somewhat unwillingly entering a new phase: the very long recovery from lockdown; with 'a return to normal life' an uncertain and un-promised concept.

But what was 'normal life' before Covid-19? How were people experiencing the UK at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century? Because it is on these experiences and feelings that the current unfolding crisis rests. This report does not dive into the geo-political and economic landscape; the rising inequality, the precarity of work, disruptive technologies, the end of the meritocracy, a climate changing world or the rise of populism, that all constitute some of the mega-trends that were (and are) shaping our shared future.

Rather, it sets out what people were experiencing and feeling as we entered the 2020's. What we found was a country concerned primarily with **safety**. And the personal and deep fear of Covid-19 that is experienced so keenly, now rests on this pre-existing feeling. These feelings of being unsafe reflected people's anxieties and insecurity as much as reflected personal lived experience or perceptions of crime. At the same time, we uncovered a deep questioning of responsibility. Who is responsible for caring for the people in our society who most need it? Alongside this, we saw a strong and significant theme of 'community' – of people reaching out for a lost sense of community and local economy, and wanting to feel a far keener sense of belonging, and a desire to make change at a local level.

Feeling safe, shifting responsibilities for care, and the purpose and prevalence of 'community' in the 2020's, these are issues which would have demanded attention in their own right, even if the pandemic had not hit. But issues of whether we feel personally safe, who we can rely on, and the role of community (which has played such a crucial role in supporting our passage through a pandemic), has now taken on an importance that none could have predicted.

Martin Lee
stock.adobe.com

Over the coming months, as we emerge from a period of 'lockdown' it will be understandable that policy will focus on economic recovery, on jobs, industry, getting people into work, navigating recession and possible depression. Some hope the economic recovery will be swift; but that is by no means assured, and the path will likely be chequered with unpredictable twists and turns, and recovery unequally felt across the country.

Given the well-evidenced impact of recession on mental health, social fabric, cohesion, education and housing, it would be a large mistake to ignore the tangible and emotional needs that continue to need to be met by increased community life and social action at this time, and the clear and obvious sources of grassroots innovation and local action which may support and aid recovery and inclusive growth.

Which future do we want?

Scholars and more recently, policymakers have proposed for twenty years that a 'turn' to community will occur in times of uncertainty and globalised crisis. And the dominant narrative about communities in the early decades of the 21st century has been that community is a weak and fragmented concept; born from the idea that the centre for many peoples' lives has shifted inwards towards individual livelihoods and values, insular behaviours and family structures; isolated further through the ubiquitous use of digital technologies to connect and communicate.

The permeation of digital into every aspect of our lives has raised complex questions about the substance and role of community today; with many proposing that our networks and how we form 'communities' in modern life are driven by interests, close kinship bonds and opportunity; not by place, diverse priorities or mutual aid. 'Me' has outpaced 'We' in contemporary UK society and that the ability to build 'bridging' capital between diverse and different groups has faltered whilst 'bonding' capital dominates; reinforcing ties between those of similar circumstances and status.

We also hear of communities being 'divided' across ideological, political and geographical frontlines. The EU referendum and its preceding campaigns were keenly felt and fought by politicians and political interest groups within local communities, exposing the extent to which people sharing a common place and in many cases, citizenship status, had become divided by socio-economic experience and inequalities in the UK. The referendum and its result laid bare the impacts of fast paced change in a globalised society, and the way in which national policies have or have not mitigated and shared out the impact of change across different people and places across the UK.

However, those working with and for communities across the country, largely outside of the academic arena, see growing evidence of the powerful, innovative role community can and has played in the face of hardship, social opportunity and financial crisis. How, in often highly significant ways, people have come together to be a force for powerful local change. There is a growing regional and national voice for advocating the importance and role of community life in Britain today;

and a groundswell of local action by informal, un-constituted community groups, with Covid-19 providing high-octane fuel for its growth.

There are both huge levels of civic muscle, apparent across the country; as evidenced in the Community Strength Index, and through the huge volume of stories of communities taking action on the things they care about. And there are high levels of vulnerability, loss of community, and a dismantling of the soft and hard infrastructure that supports strong civic life. Both of these narratives are true.

However, the questions developed with communities that sit at the heart of this research agenda, present a significant challenge to the narratives of individualism and division that were dominant pre-Covid, revealing a heartening indication of the state of community in 2020. The surge in community spirit that we have seen as a result of the pandemic, the rising tide of people willing to take to the streets to protest against injustice and inequality, is one that can only give us more cause to trust our enduring faith in the critical role of community as the bedrock of a safe and well society.

This research agenda set out with a clear purpose: to put the voice and experience of communities at the heart of our – and others -research efforts. To involve people from all walks of life in the creation, exploration and analysis of our most pressing questions, in ways that drive local and national change.

Reading this Agenda

The findings in this agenda are divided into a **national overview of what matters** and **five chapters** reflecting core cross-cutting themes:

- What is 'community' in the 2020s?
- Understanding what matters
- Whose role is it anyway?
- Lost in Place
- A bedrock of inequality
- Voice & Power
- Uncertain Horizons

Within each chapter is a **case study** highlighting the primary issues and sub-themes and how they were discussed in communities. These illustrate how the different issues, from public services to local economy to social cohesion, interact and shed light on these broader themes and resulting research questions.

Co-creating this agenda with communities, including through our Community Advisory Board, offered a unique opportunity to bridge the 'researcher-participant' divide and change the relationship between who asks the questions and who provides the answers. Communities questioned us and each other, raised and discarded problems and discovered well-trodden and surprising areas of contestation and consensus.

Talking about the 'community' was not always an easy entry point but became a useful lens that illuminated accounts of how people relate to complex systems of welfare, economy and technology. It catalysed discussions about social values; debated individual, collective and authorities' responsibility; revealed people and place-based vulnerabilities, and connected to larger questions of loss, opportunity, and what kind of society people in the UK want to live in. Their voices run through this research agenda in their own words, and we have sought through the analysis process to lose nothing of the perceptive, reflexive and openly expressed insights of individuals that we have been fortunate to listen to.

CoCreating

the ICS Research Agenda

To identify the most important issues and burning questions that people have about communities, we undertook a nationwide investigation and priority-setting process. We were guided and supported by our Citizen Advisory Board who live and work in and with communities to make sure our approach was as inclusive and expansive as possible.

Validating

The final priority issues were tested with stakeholders who work in communities across the UK .

They fed back on the local resonance of the analysis and contributed additional questions from their perspective of working on the ground.

Oral histories were used to explore the priority themes in depth with community members.

The interviews were carried out by members of our Community Advisory Board.

Gathering

UK-wide nationally representative surveys captured the questions people have about changes in their community over the last 10 years, communities today, and in the future. People told us in their own words what issues need attention and which matter most.

Group discussions allowed us to capture additional questions and explore the meaning behind them. People prioritised individually a set of key questions, and then worked together to agree a shared set of priorities.

8 ● **8 stakeholder group locations**

82 **82 people from civic society & public sector**

30 **30 oral histories across 12 locations**

2800 Over 2,800 people took part in the survey

4000 Over 4,000 questions were asked or issues raised

16 ● 16 focus groups in 8 locations

Analysing

52 52 issues and,

14 14 themes emerged.

All the data was sorted and similar questions grouped together. Each group was then turned into one key question which captured its meaning and essence. We analysed all the questions, comments and data using qualitative content and thematic analysis.

The coded data yielded 52 issues which we grouped into 14 main themes. This data was then analysed quantitatively.

We also identified several crosscutting themes and important issues which could be brought together into new over-arching questions.

Distilling

The data was refined and reduced to a set of questions which reflects the breadth of community priorities.

Themes and questions outside the Top 40 were excluded.

You can read more about the methodology in the Appendix to this report.

40 **40 community priorities were grouped into**

6 **6 master themes with**

6 **6 leading research questions.**

Methodology

Design

Our approach to co-creating a UK-wide research agenda with communities was designed to close the gap between the commissioners and users of such research, and the people and places on which it focuses. Communities typically have little direct influence on research agendas, usually set by 'experts' or reflecting the personal interests of the researcher (REF). Similarly, the development of policy largely relies on the insights obtained from such research, and traditional consultation approaches which are far from inclusive and likewise reflect a 'top-down' approach to determining the issues on which input is valued.

As such, the methodological and analytical approach was designed based on a number of principles:

1. To place the priorities and questions of people and communities at the heart of the agenda – a focus on what matters to them.

2. To be as inclusive and representative as possible - across all nations and regions of the UK, and reflecting the diversity of people and places in demographic, socio-economic terms, and avoiding exclusion which might arise due to the digital divide or other barriers to participation.

3. To recognise and respect that at every scale, communities have unique characteristics and needs, and to balance that against the many commonalities that people share in terms of hopes and fears, questions and priorities.

4. To create an agenda in which the questions are specific enough to reflect the nuance of community priorities, while reflecting the breadth of the underlying issues, leaving scope for more narrowly focused research questions to be developed (e.g. investigating the issue through a specific theoretical, geographic, or thematic lens).

5. To hone in on the issues which matter most to communities, and where engaging communities can add genuine value in answering 'what works?' in finding the solutions.

Our approach to creating a UK-wide research agenda, based on what matters most to communities, was built on the Institute for Community Studies (ICS) commitment to co-creation and ensuring that the voices of people in our cities, towns and villages are heard and prioritised.

Priority setting with communities: the challenge

Priority setting and the creation of research agendas in collaboration with the people directly affected by the issue has gained substantial momentum over the last decade, with healthcare leading the way. Our approach was inspired by (add links):

6. The James Lind Alliance model of Priority Setting Partnerships (PSPs)

7. The Living Knowledge Network

8. The Dialogue Model

9. Other models for understanding what matters to people, outside formal agenda setting processes (including Citizen Science and Mass Observation)

We innovated and adapted from these models to address two significant challenges: in comparison to typical priority or agenda setting activities, our topic is 1) significantly broader in scope, and 2) less 'immediate' or tangible for the majority of people.

One of the main differences between our research agenda and the majority of those produced through these methods is its breadth of scope: what matters in a community could range from the relatively prosaic maintenance of the public realm, through to issues around social mobility or changing the balance of power at a local, regional or national level; 'community' is also relevant to each and every one of us. As such, it stands in sharp contrast to more typical priority and agenda setting topics, such as "Childhood cancer" or "Eczema" which have a narrow focus and more limited group of people directly affected (e.g. patients and carers).

A further consequence of the broad scope is that while most people intuitively know what matters to them or what worries them or excites them about the future, the subject of 'community' is not a tangible one which most people think about on a daily basis, and much less in terms of specific research questions. Patients and carers affected by a specific health issue are much more likely to be engaged with the specificities of their condition and more readily able to identify clear questions to which they would like an answer, perhaps to improve their quality of life, prognosis or to help with prevention for others in the future. This influenced our final approach.

Our methods

Our methodology was designed to include quantitative methods to obtain a large-scale and representative set of views in a manageable format, alongside the rich insights and opportunity to explore topics in detail provided by qualitative methods. In total, over 2,800 people contributed questions and issues. The qualitative methods also provided for a debate, discussion and activities to reach a group consensus, to help inform the final prioritisation. We held 16 focus groups across eight locations, and our Community Advisory Board conducted 30 oral history interviews.

Across all methodologies we used a range of techniques to enable people to engage with the issue from a perspective that was easiest for them, and encouraged consideration from different stand-points. For example, people were given opportunities to generate their own questions, and to respond to and prioritise questions generated by others. People were also invited to think about the questions they have about what has happened in the community over the last ten years, what is happening now, and what may happen in the future.

If participants felt unable to formulate a question, they were able to share the issues that mattered to them as a simple statement, expression of frustration, or positive reflection on community life.

As a result, we also recognised that the scope and scale of the agenda would require a more in-depth level of data analysis compared to a typical priority or agenda setting process. Rather than simply synthesising and reducing questions down to a smaller set for further prioritisation, we wanted to use the full set of data to understand what it was telling us as a whole. Content and thematic analysis, alongside statistical analysis where appropriate, thus informed the final agenda.

Finally, while the research agenda is intentionally community-led and reflects the priorities communicated through the process, we also put in place a system of checks and balances to ensure we stayed true to the data. We were guided and supported by the ICS Community Advisory Board and tested and validated our findings and conclusions with professionals from civil society, the public sector and academia who work in and with communities across the UK.

Full details of the methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

A Research Agenda by Communities:
The Questions

Community in the 2020s

- How does community manifest and to what purpose?
- Why do some places have strong communities and others don't?
- How does the role of community change across stages of life?
- How does a sense of belonging and community affect and impact young people?
- How does the use of digital technologies for community organising change communities?
- How can we fully understand how national and global policies and trends enhance or destroy community life?
- How do we invest in communities in ways that ensure they will thrive?

Whose role is it anyway?

- Where does responsibility lie to support people who need help and assistance? How far does community commitment to this extend?
- In a society emerging from Covid-19, what is the most equitable and effective balance of responsibilities for supporting people who need care and support?
- What determines whether a community comes together to act on an issue which affects their collective safety and well-being?
- What role does community play in supporting mental health challenges exacerbated by Covid-19 and recession?
- Where are the successful new models for combining the power of community and remit of local government?
- How do we build informal community capital at local and national level?

Lost in Place and Local Economy

- How can we reinvent and reinvigorate the geographic 'centres' of our communities? What does a reimagined high street really look like?
- How can in-place inequality be addressed? How can communities and those in power work together to mitigate divisions 'by place'?
- How do we create community in changing & transient populations?
- How can we better understand the proven and emerging ways to involve communities in designing places which support lifelong wellbeing?
- How could community and local authorities engage better together to co-produce and continually connect on issues and priorities for a place?
- How does the strength of a community support and improve local economic resilience?
- What factors affect a community's ability to take part in and strengthen local economic resilience?

Bedrock of Inequality

- How can models for greater social inclusion start from within local communities?
- How can transition and change in local and national economies be prepared for and seized by local communities?
- How can structural investment understand and deliver community-level value when 'levelling up' local places?
- How can communities make sure that a strong community is not unintentionally exclusive to 'others'?
- How do communities recognise diversity as a strength and not a risk?
- What is the role of a community in tackling inequality and racism within a place?
- How can community and authorities work more effectively together to make people be and feel safe in a place?

Voice & Power

- How can trust be rebuilt between local communities and government? What can be done to strengthen when and how they connect with those in power?
- How can we effectively include new and marginalised voices in local strategies and priorities?
- How could government spending strategies be informed by local community priorities alongside national and regional policies?
- How can 'conflicts' in local priorities be resolved in a way which does not leave people feeling disenfranchised?
- How can people with diverse opinions come together and take action on community priorities?
- How do we mitigate competition over funding between different organisations and sectors to create local change that is greater than the sum of its parts?

Uncertain Futures

- How can communities be supported and empowered to look towards systemic, longer-term and less immediate challenges? And how can this be sustained?
- How can communities' awareness of and readiness for 'shocks' be strengthened?
- How can the local narrative about global issues and macro risks - such as environmental change - be developed/made visible and what is the local role communities can play?
- How can communities' lived experience of systems such as welfare or policing be fully understood and used valuably to identify needs and change the shape of system-based change?

Understanding What Matters

This is What Matters: The top 7 things people care about

Safety:

Across all the questions posed by people, safety was the biggest single issue. This broad theme covers the full spectrum of concerns and reflects people's anxieties and feelings of insecurity, or fears for others, as much as – or even more – than it reflects personal lived experience of crime. Worries about drug dealing and abuse, gang and knife crime among young people, and frustrations with community policing come up repeatedly, but so too do lower-level annoyances around anti-social behaviour, graffiti and littering. Time and time again, however, people also connect their feelings of insecurity to a sense of alienation from others; simply not recognising neighbours on the street.

Public services:

Almost a quarter of the questions asked under this theme related to the impact of cuts to public services, with people asking both why some cuts to some services have been so deep, whether those in power truly understand the impacts of those decisions, and when investment might start to flow again. Worries about the NHS and education systems in particular were accompanied by frustrations about more daily concerns such as waste and recycling services, or sports and leisure. While much of the blame for problems with public services is placed at the door of the 2008 government's economic policy, rapid development is also seen as a major cause, with population growth outstripping that of public service provision; a resulting fracturing of neighbourhoods and communities.

Local economy:

The decline of the high street and vacant shops, offices and commercial units are the visible signs that stoke anxiety about the decline of a local community and raised many questions about if and how it can be reversed. Very little was mentioned with regard to national and regional funding programmes to support local economic growth and this is clearly invisible to most people. While less front of mind, people also had questions about the future - what impact will new technology have on jobs and how can more investment be attracted into the area? In the face of an unprecedented recession and job losses we can expect these concerns to have grown exponentially since March 2020.

Social cohesion:

The simple fact underlying this theme is that people generally want to be part of a community where people get on with each other, and respect each other and the place they live. Questions focus on how problems such as discrimination and anti-social behaviour can be tackled, and how population changes, arising from regeneration, development and immigration, can be managed in a way that is for the benefit of all.

Community building:

The unprompted expression of questions about how community can be strengthened and (re)built stemmed from concerns about an inconsistent *sense of community* and calls for '*improved community life*'. Demonstrating that even pre-Covid-19, there was an evident and vocal yearning for a sense of community, often dismissed as nostalgia, but now being powerfully reimagined through the crisis felt in every community across the UK.

Roads, transport & infrastructure:

No study asking the people of the UK what questions they have about community life would be complete without a deluge of replies about the state of our roads. Cries of "*Why are there so many potholes?*" and "*Why is there no (free) parking?*" echoed from all four corners of the land. More substantively, however, it speaks to a need for looking at existing, local infrastructure, rather than a desire for major new national infrastructure or aviation expansion. It reflects questions about connectivity within and between places, yes, but with a clear demand to design this in response to the expressed needs of people who live there.

Planning & the green belt:

The need to balance demand for new housing, the provision of affordable housing, and protection of green space has long been a contentious issue in many communities across the UK. The strength of response through this theme reflects the many questions people have about how these needs are prioritised and the decision-making processes behind them.

The 14 themes dominating questions about community

Planning & the green belt **14%**

Roads, transport & infrastructure **17%**

Local economy **11%**

Brexit **2%**

Employment & cost of living **2%**

Care for the most vulnerable **8%**

Community building **9%**

Safety **19%**

Housing **5%**

Other **5%**

Provision of public services **18%**

Social cohesion **10%**

Discontent with politicians **6%**

Environment **4%**

Figure 1: What issues matter most to your community? Primary Themes generated unprompted by 2,800 adults across the UK.

What matters to communities?
Primary Issues with Sub-Issues

Planning & the green belt 14%
- regeneration & development 5.9%
- green space 4.1%
- cleanliness & maintenance 4.1%

Roads, transport & infrastructure 17%
- roads, transport & parking 10.2%
- public transport 3.6%
- developments straining infrastructure 2.9%

Local Economy 10%
- decline of the high street 4.2%
- impact of technology 0.6%
- lack of amenities 3.0%
- no investment in area 2.1%
- vacant sites 0.8%

Care for the most vulnerable 8%
- services for young people 1.7%
- homelessness 0.9%
- services for children 1.6%
- accessibility 0.5%
- care for the elderly 0.9%
- other vulnerable groups 1.5%

Community building 9%
- improved community life 5.6%
- sense of community 3.6%

Safety 19%
- ineffective policing & justice system 8.3%
- general safety 8.2%
- drug abuse 1.5%
- knife crime & gangs 1.0%

Housing 5%
- lack of affordable housing 3.8%
- gentrification & displacement 1.4%

Employment & cost of living 2%
- lack of jobs/ opportunities 2.0%
- increase in living costs 0.3%
- economic hardship 1.0%

Other 5%
- general negative outlook 1.0%
- general hope for improvement 0.7%
- "I am content" 2.2%
- "nothing ever happens" 1.5%

Provision of Public Services 18%
- developments straining services 4.2%
- sports & leisure <0.1%
- education 0.2%
- concerns over privatisation <0.1%
- concerns over austerity 4.0%
- bins & recycling 0.1%
- access to the NHS 3.5%

Discontent with politicians 6%
- discontent with local council 2.1%
- party politics 0.2%
- unheard & forgotten 1.6%
- lack of transparency of government 1.3%
- discontent with elected representatives 1.0%

Environment 4%
- climate change 1.2%
- pollution & care for the environment 1.2%
- sustainable solutions 1.3%

Social cohesion 10%
- foreign immigration 1.5%
- discrimination 0.5%
- anti-social behaviour 5.2%
- general safety 3.0%

Figure 2: What matters to your community? Responses from 2,800 nationally representative voices across the UK.

Regional Variations

Safety emerged as the number one priority issue in most regions of England and Wales, and in the top three of all regions except Scotland. In Scotland and the South West, *Provision of Public Services* is most important, and this makes the top three of every region except the North East.

Seven regions share the same three top priorities, albeit in slightly varying order: *Roads, Transport and Infrastructure, Provision of Public Services*, and *Safety*. These priorities are shared by the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England, the South East, and Wales.

The North East diverges most, with both *Social Cohesion* and *Planning and the Green Belt* in the top three, alongside *Safety*.

In Northern Ireland, *Community Building* emerged as the priority, reflecting a continuing focus on healing communities once sharply and physically divided.

In Scotland, the *Local Economy* is in the top three, while *Planning and the Green Belt* is more important than *Safety* in the South West, and more important than *Roads, Transport and Infrastructure* in Greater London.
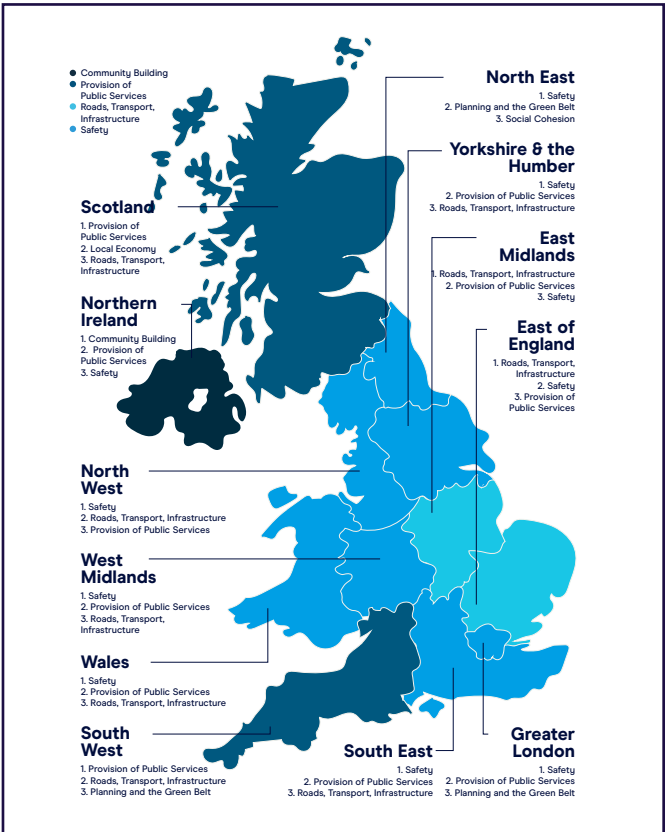
Figure 3: Regional Poll.

Why do some places have strong communities and others don't?

As evidenced through the community involvement that underpins this report and by other studies, it is clear that in some localities have high levels of community and social action, and others do not. Our Community Strength Index published in 2019 showed very clearly national variations of community action, and very little correlation between levels of activity and deprivation, or investment. As many begin to question how the high levels of community action seen throughout the Covid-19 pandemic might be 'harnessed' or sustained, this becomes a critical question.
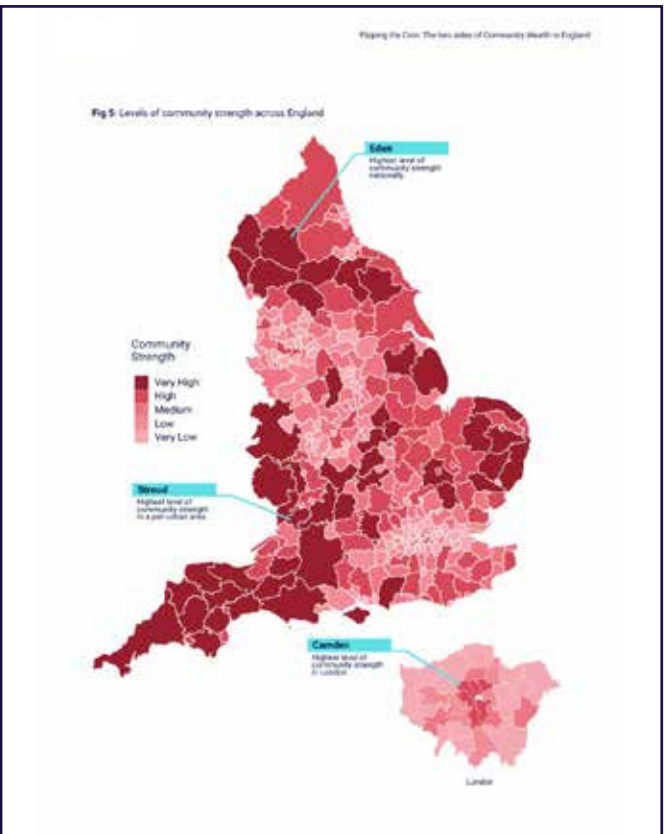
Community Plant Sale" (Wendy)

Fig 5: Levels of community strength across England

How does the role of community change across stages of life?

Inevitably, people's priorities for their community vary to some extent across different stages of life. Older people, for example, are more concerned by the decline and reduction in local public services and care for the most vulnerable than younger age groups, often because maintaining independence and a good quality of life is more dependent on needs being met closer to home.

"Will the community comprise of 100% pensioners? How will existing services be maintained?" (Male, 72, West Midlands)

It was also evident that during certain stages of life - when we tend to be more reliant on others - community building matters more. Thus it is a greater priority for young people, those most likely to be raising a family, and for older people.

"How will they (local council) cater for older people needing to downsize - and provide affordable housing for all types of people?" (Female, 53, East of England)

Figure 4: Importance of different issues - age variations.

How does a sense of belonging and community affect and impact young people?

What can be done to support young people in the community? was the most agreed issue and is a highly important issue to people across the UK. There was especially high agreement on supporting young people in areas where they felt there were particularly limited economic and social opportunities – including in Bradford, Glasgow and Swansea.

There is general agreement across groups that when young people are not supported by the community, it can lead to societal problems. Anti-social behavior, teenage pregnancy or homelessness were all referenced as possible negative outcomes of a lack of all-round support for the next generation. People were as a majority sympathetic to the difficulties faced by this generation.

'If you support young people early on, then you might get less homelessness later on.' (Female, Weymouth)

Younger people (18 – 25yrs) have different concerns to the other age groups when asked 'what matters' to a community. Young people were most concerned about the environment and safety – to an extent that was significantly higher

than other age groups. They often also had a very different perspective to the older age groups in terms of suggestions of *how* issues could be resolved. There is a concern however that this generation - which now faces a disproportionate risk and impact from the recession, if not from the Covid-19 virus itself - will be too burdened or indeed disconnected from their communities to find easy entry points to readily support them, and to play a role. How young people experience and engage in community life, what to them matters within it and how a community supports better outcomes for young people are crucial questions.

"It's important to support young people. Crime is something tangible we can see, but we're gonna have a generation of people who are going to find it difficult to make eye contact during conversation, they're gonna find it difficult to communicate, they're going to be a generation that is stuck to their smartphones, the tables, technology, etc. So youth centres, youth clubs and scouts, BMX parks – a lot more needs to be done. This is the generation that is going to be potentially taking care of me when I'm older." (Male, Bradford)

"Young people need activities that are not online led to bring them into the community and actually understand what a community is and their places within them." (Male, 47, South East)

Can I count on others?

Community in the 2020s

"If you develop the sense of community then other things will flow from it. But I just don't think people are doing it. Because I think it needs a motive. It's almost like saying trying to recreate the church or to recreate an old sort of thing that just doesn't exist or isn't quite relevant, but just the definition of community is changing."

(Female, 53, Weymouth)

What is community today? Prior to the huge outpouring of community activity resulting from Covid-19, community seemed a nebulous or distant concept for many people. Those of us working in the community and voluntary sector can fall victim to thinking that the world we experience is the only one that's out there, but we should not be at all surprised that for very many people, involvement in community life is a distant concept; something connected with an annual event in a park or school; or one which is only experienced in fragments and parts of their daily life. For others it remains a foundation on which families and friendships are built, a source of security and support when times are tough, and a cornerstone of pride, identity and belonging.

This Agenda asked the question 'what do you think of when you think of community?' seeking to understand what 'community' means to people in the 2020s in their own words. These different sentiments resonate in the questions collated through this process. In the responses to our study, 54% of people identified a place-based community and a further 5% described a connection to a place mediated by socio-economic experience such as poverty or inequality. For 8% of people, they felt isolated or disengaged from their community, or felt ambiguous towards it. And 28% were unable to locate a specific community or identify exactly what 'community' meant to them.

"My community is a suburb of Edinburgh. While Edinburgh is wealthy, my area is not with poor housing… Local residents want to feel valued."

(Female, 52, Scotland)

Within these responses, often community was described in terms of decline or 'loss', while for others, it was less about 'loss' than about a lack of relevance or importance. There were also those for whom community is not primarily connected to place, but about affiliation with others of shared interests, beliefs or culture.

"Loss' in the context of community is hard to quantify and there is no unequivocal picture of what community meant ten years ago against which to benchmark. It is simultaneously unique to each individual and their experience, yet it is clear is that these shifts away from a 'traditional' idea of community reflect the pace of change that many have seen in recent decades; the physical environment of the places people live, a progressive shift of economic and social activities to a digital world, and in changes to local populations as they grow or shrink, age, and weather varying economic fortunes.

"Community is not a space. It's not a centre. It's a feeling of looking out for each other. And I think that's what we have lost. I've lived up in a London borough, and I know what it feels like out there; when people see people attacked in the street, turn a blind eye … you're looking at strangers. So, I don't want to see that happening down here and it does to a certain extent. I think that the sense of community has room for reform."

(Female, 43, Weymouth)

A significant thread running through the questions posed was struggling to grasp what the role of community is in the 21st century – and what prompts or catalyses people to seek or to build a greater sense of community.

How does community manifest and to what purpose?

Nonetheless, people do have a strong sense of what they feel makes a community in terms of the way in which the people who live there connect to and feel about each other: When asked to rank a long list of issues (Figure 6), tackling **'Loneliness and isolation'** and the extent to which people **'feel a sense of belonging'** came out in the top five most important to people in communities in every region of the UK.

There is regional variation in which issue came out top overall, with people getting along with each other, or people trusting each other - a clear nod to a greater level of social cohesion - ranked highest in seven out of twelve government regions. In Scotland, people having a voice in their community was rated most important.
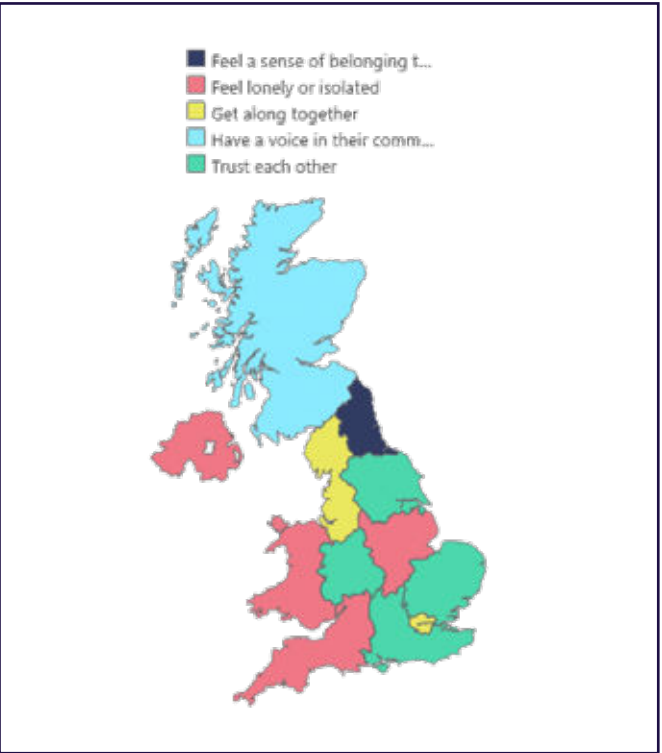

Figure 6: What qualities matter to your community? Limited selection choice asked of national representative sample of 2,800 adults in the UK

How does the use of digital technologies for community organising change communities?

When people think about community in the 2020s, their questions frequently reflected a rapidly changing world in which the nature of community and their relationship to it is constantly evolving. Accounts about the state of community and how it is changing fell into three areas.

Firstly, a sense that *interaction* has decreased between individuals who are not related or 'networked', particularly in local neighbourhoods and areas. The sense that the majority of people's networks and interactions were in closer circles of family, friends and perhaps hyper-localised to neighbours or a specific street was prevalent

Secondly, that *assets* - such as village halls, playing fields and public events or activities - that would once have symbolised the 'heart' of a community and facilitated interaction have largely disappeared.

Thirdly, the increasing *insularity of individual life* over recent decades was raised as a factor affecting community life. People commented that behaviours focused on 'self', 'home' and the digital sphere make it harder to connect with others, or to establish ties within a local place.

Together, these factors are felt to have affected the strength of *belonging* in many communities.

"Why have we lost so many places where we as a community could have met, which avoid loneliness? The community is not the same any more as people do not know each other like they used to. Is there something that can be implemented to re-kindle that community spirit?"

(Female, 56, North West)

For the majority, positive engagements with community were not characterised by participants by deep contact and sustained interdependency, but by friendly, consistent yet non-intrusive interaction, digital or otherwise, and how individuals' needs are met by a local ecosystem of welfare, economy and wellbeing – or not. However, central to the questions asked in the data were many voices seeking reassurance that community will manifest in stronger, mutually supportive ways when needed. Data from our study finds that the digital sphere has transformed interaction and

supplemented organizing structures within communities - but has not fully replaced how people view the possibility of community in the offline public sphere.

How the last two months have changed this experience – or not – for individuals across the UK is a significant area of interest to understanding how community can manifest in times of crisis and how crisis changes connectivity in communities. The role digital has played in the Covid-19 crisis is hugely significant: of even greater importance is what the legacy of this heightened digital engagement may be. This Agenda found that individuals' sense of *belonging* or *inclusion* within communities is moderated, positively or negatively, by interactions and relationships within the virtual spaces of that community.

How can we fully understand how national and global policies and trends enhance or destroy community life?

"Will the austerity measures introduced ever be reversed? People are losing the ability to participate in community activities and it is increasing loneliness in society"

(Male, 33, Northern Ireland)

The impact and fallout of the 2008 crash is still felt today; and we are now entering an economic climate which is substantially worse, from which we will be still feeling the effects in a decade's time. – Speaking pre Covid-19, people held strong fears that the infrastructure which supports strong community life would not be re-created - that the investment would not be made. The availability and quality of tangible places to meet, and services in a place are viewed through a lens of a decade of cuts and people can feel how this has exacerbated their experiences of stark inequality, poverty and debt.

"In rural communities, people have always depended on one another ... But I think the cuts, the economic problems make outward looking people quite scared and worried about their lives."

(Female, 46, East Midlands)

"I started off thinking locally then realised all the problems in Britain are national and related to inequality which has got, and continues to get worse day by day."

(Male, 61, Yorkshire & the Humber)

Austerity was *frequently* referred to as having weakened the 'social fabric' of community itself; problems of social cohesion and scarcity of resources mean communities are less able to support themselves. It has also resulted in scepticism among many about the likelihood of regional or national strategies led by central government 'reversing' or 'rectifying' the consequences of austerity, or mitigating the consequences of other risks to communities; those in power are viewed as too distant from – or lacking – the perspective and experience of communities.

This clear and stark message - that a lack of policy interest or investment in supporting communities to create, commune and act together - is detrimental to social and economic recovery from shock, should not go unheard as we seek to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

"How will the looming financial crisis impact people? How will they react and will they fight back?"

(Male, 27, Greater London)

"I think you need to find out what a community wants and then help them deliver that. Imposing stuff on them doesn't work"

(Male, 52, North West)

A future for community: How can we invest in communities in financial and social terms to ensure they have the capacity to thrive?

"What will happen in the future? Will everyone support and help each other?"

(Male, 20, East Midlands)

Far from disinterest or apathy, people across the UK asked whether and how community could play a greater role in the lives of individuals in the 2020's, and in the face of significant national and global challenges. Within this, questions focused on how a stronger sense of community could be built; how greater interactivity, support and solidarity could be achieved; and what this might facilitate in terms of greater cohesion, mutual support and *safety* in local life. Our case study *Safety* shows the heightened risks people perceive to their community at the moment and how this insecurity is permeating so many aspects of the experience of communities in the UK.

"What can we do to be more open as a society – to be more empathetic?"

(Female, 20, North West)

The accounts of how community is changing raise important questions about what community might mean for meeting our material and emotional needs in future. There is a widespread recognition that many towns and villages are not well-placed to support an ageing population. With families not always in close proximity and the future accessibility and availability of certain public services in doubt, many question who will provide support for older generations. The groundswell of social action resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the new connections and networks made through the crisis are likely to become an increasingly needed - and flexed - muscle in the coming years.

Within this, exploring how communities can reach a shared understanding about what matters, and how to resolve differences and manage conflict, meet shared needs and negotiate and interact with local government is essential.

Boarded up pub with community graffiti (Tim)

Safety – The Top National Issue
Case Study

20%

Issues relating to safety comprised almost one-fifth of questions posed, making it the most frequently addressed topic. What is it about issues of safety in the UK in 2020 that means it appears to matter more to people than any other issue?

Feeling safe is a basic human need. It is impossible to feel safe unless we have what we need to survive - food, water, shelter and rest. It also indicates a state in which we feel we have (access to) the resources we need to maintain our health and wellbeing, and in which we do not fear for our personal security.

Safety is also a highly politicised concept in modern society - it is associated with the role of our legal system (and how that changes with shifting social norms), policing and, increasingly, the privatisation of security services in public spaces. Individual safety is viewed in both objective terms (such as rates of crime or anti-social behaviour) and subjective terms - quite simply how safe we *feel*, which is shaped by our identity, past experiences, culture, the media we consume and what people around us think. Someone can feel safe in a place which most would objectively identify as dangerous, and vice-versa.

Since the initial field work to create this research agenda, crime has dropped by about 28%; however the chief cause of that drop has been due to a public health crisis so severe, that fear of (either ourselves or loved ones) catching Covid-19 has internalised these feelings of insecurity at an even more fundamental level. It will be almost impossible to undertake any research questions set out in this agenda, without addressing the immediate and long term impacts of a society where fifteen million people with underlying health conditions feel - and often are - at risk from Covid-19; where people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to die from Covid-19; where children have been in fear of giving or catching covid-19 for sustained periods of time and where the 'rules' to keep us safe are interpretable, and thus interpreted differently. It will be impossible for any government, employer or health system to 'guarantee' that any individual is safe resulting in as yet unknowable psycho-social impacts on our well-being and how we relate to each other. This context, set against a backdrop of huge community and social action to provide mutual aid during the worst phases of the health crisis, requires a critical focus on local community connectedness, cohesion and neighbourhood support, as much as any pre-existing (and while muted through lockdown still prevalent) issues around local crime and larger scale safety issues such as terrrorism.

Perceived lack of safety dominated the questions raised, with very few reporting direct experiences as a victim of crime. Most people reported feeling less safe due to rising levels of violence, knife crime and effects of drugs in their area. The sense of crime being worse locally is compounded by the awareness of larger scale safety issues, for instance terrorism, which adds to a general feeling of being unsettled and less safe than in previous times. For those in places that have experienced terrorism, questions are asked about the impact that has had on the community, for instance, *"how has the Manchester bombing changed the dynamic of the city?" (Female, 23, North West)*.

Questions around safety take many shapes and forms – at one end of the spectrum, people want answers to questions around policing and the wider justice system, while at the other end, they have queries about more localised safety concerns such as street lighting. *"Why are our street lights shut off at night, when this has been proven to make crime worse?" (Female, 52, East of England)*

A large number complain about ineffective policing, and in group discussions people often agreed that police strategies in their local areas are unsuccessful. Opinions, however, diverge when discussing the strategies in detail. Some people are concerned about the drop in numbers of police 'on the beat' and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who used to be more visible, as well as the closure of local police stations.

"I don't understand why the police station was shut - crime, especially violent crime, in the local area has spiked since this." (Female, 50, Greater London)

"I definitely think we need more policing and to increase the presence of them in certain areas. They cruise the streets in the morning and then don't come back. I don't think they really care." (Female, Swansea)

Others say that while there are sufficient officers, the communities' experience is that racial profiling is prevalent, which leads to wrongful arrests and mistrust, particularly in BAME communities.

"The police are not doing the right job at the right time. It's mainly targeted at young black boys. They do stop and search when it's not needed sometimes" (Female, Birmingham).

"I wonder why police don't investigate some crimes" (Male, 25, North West)

Many people wondered about the effect of drugs on safety and are particularly worried about the links to gang violence and its close proximity in the community, *"In my area it's visible. It affects me every day. When I pick the kids up from school, when I go to the mosque, there's a drug dealer. Everyone knows he's doing it, yet he never gets caught" (Female, Bradford)*. The shared experience of these issues not being taken seriously by the police or the council results in residents feeling they cannot rely on their support when needed, *"The issue about police not doing anything about drug dealers is that you know if anything serious does happen, you know you're not going to have the police coming" (Female, Bradford)*.

People from all backgrounds raise concerns about the way crime affects particular groups, for instance women, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, and young people. Crime and discrimination are sometimes grouped together, with a sense that previously people could move around local areas without fear: *"Earlier it was safe for women to move safely anytime of the day but now have to think twice before going out alone." (Female, 32, Greater London)*. This feeling is often linked to a changing local population and the sense that local community relations are deteriorating as a result. People want to see strategies designed to improve safety in communities address these underlying issues.

While some pose questions about why crime rates have increased, others discuss possible causes for young people in particular becoming involved in criminal activity. *"Sometimes I don't feel safe walking around in the night. Young people are sat drinking and stuff. They need something to do." (Male, Glasgow)*. Communities are aware that a lack of opportunities can cause criminal behaviour and make the link between high crime levels and increasing inequalities and poverty. *"I think people don't fear committing a crime because they're better off in jail anyways." (Male, Bradford)*.

Nevertheless, many people find a sense of hope in what could be done collectively in communities to make people feel safer, for instance supporting each other more and creating stronger community bonds or mutual support. *"There's currently an increase in crime in the area and I'd like to think we all come together and look out for one another." (Female, 40, West Midlands)*.

Whose role is it anyway?
Responsibility & Community

Introduction

> *"The heroes of the community are energetic individuals. It's not sustainable. Government should be delivering more …"*
>
> *(Female, 50, South East)*

Across communities of every type, the question of whose responsibility it is to tackle many of the most pressing challenges faced today looms large. Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, people felt communities were already bearing a heavy burden, plugging gaps in local provision left by austerity, or taking leadership on issues when local or national government action is perceived as too slow or insufficient.

Being involved in local action and taking on responsibility is a positive opportunity to grow and create change for some; our research shows however, that for the majority, it is very distant from their understanding of what the social contract in the UK should be. Responsibility in the context of welfare in communities emerged strongly as a potentially uncomfortable or overwhelming burden and an area of significant uncertainty. The divide is by no means generational, but rather is dictated by an individual's needs, priorities, values, resources and capacity.

> *Caring for elderly parents… it's a full time job. All these (social care) agencies say it's a full time job. I could be honest enough to say, well, I've got four kids and a home to run. It's not selfishness …I've got finite hours in my day.*
>
> *(Female, Birmingham)*

Where does responsibility lie to support people who need help and assistance? How far does community commitment to this extend?

Peoples' deliberations on almost every issue involved consideration of who should be leading or taking action, and what could reasonably be expected of citizens and communities. While there were clear expressions of community capability, and of communities being well-placed at times to tackle a particular challenge, it was not the case that communities expressed a desire for more responsibility or to take ownership of social issues and challenges. This resonated particularly strongly on those issues where people fear the future: tackling climate change, caring for the vulnerable, resolving complex social problems like homelessness, or bringing people back together in the wake of divisions arising from the EU referendum.

> *"As bad as it sounds I'm inclined to deprioritise 'can we do more for others'? As a millennial, we're just trying to fend for ourselves and do what we can on the side, whilst keeping ourselves afloat."*
>
> *(Female, Oxford)*

Research Questions

Where does responsibility lie to support people who need help and assistance? How far does community commitment to this extend?

What determines whether a community comes together to act on an issue which affects their collective safety and well-being?

What role does community play in supporting mental health challenges exacerbated by Covid-19 and recession?

Where are the successful new models for combining the power of community and remit of local government?

How do we build informal community capital at local and national level?

Tensions frequently emerged around what communities should be doing, and how much of the social safety net should lie in their hands. Far from seeking greater power, communities are concerned about how responsibility in many parts of public and private life has shifted from state and local authorities (or major employers) to families and individuals, and question the sustainability and long-term impact of this trend on the public's wellbeing and resilience.

The biggest challenge often centred on those issues which are collectively agreed to be 'important' but where people feel ill-equipped to respond adequately and fear setting a precedent of communities being given a collective responsibility they cannot fulfil. The shift to part-privatisation and outsourcing of service delivery has also left many people feeling unclear about who is responsible for the availability, delivery and quality of services. Likewise, the move to online delivery of many public services is changing the extent to which people feel their needs and those of others in their community are being met. Both these changes are commonly linked to people having a more negative perception of local provision and an increasing sense of being ostracised from decision-making processes in both local and national government.

Caring for the most vulnerable in society emerged as an urgent priority for communities, and the priority placed on this seems to be reflected in the upsurge of mutual aid activity during the pandemic. Concern for groups traditionally and easily identifiable as vulnerable – such as the elderly or homeless – is complemented by a growing concern about young people, who in many places are now seen as facing major hurdles to obtain a quality education, job and standard of living.

> *"I think the test for the standard of a community is how we treat our most vulnerable"*
>
> *(Female, Birmingham)*

> *"It's always been a cared for community; it goes back to industrial times. It was a Mill Town where everything including the workers and their houses was owned and looked after by the Mill owner; and a factory town the same. Then it was all sold to the Council and they took care of people … it's now government policy that the 'caring' has gone."*
>
> *(Female, 71, Scotland)*

There is also increasing awareness of those less visible, such as 'sofa surfers' and people struggling to make ends meet, be that due to poorly paid and/or insecure work, or the insufficiency of welfare provision. While not identifying with the contentious language of 'vulnerability', many identify that they, their family or friends only get by due to the support of others, from informal childcare, to the local food bankk.

Only a small minority state that communities should have *no* role to play in tackling complex social, economic or environmental issues; hesitancy was usually focused on one specific group deemed undeserving, rather than a blanket rejection of solidarity and community spirit. This is explored further in the context of homelessness in our case study *Care for the Most Vulnerable*.

In a society emerging from Covid-19, what is the most equitable and effective balance of responsibilities for supporting people who need care and support?

However, there is a very real fear that communities could be left with the 'largest share' of responsibility, particularly adult social care. Above all other issues where there is debate around the role of communities, there is a sense of urgency and importance around care for vulnerable adults and older people, underpinned by awareness of our ageing population.The outpouring of support for NHS and care workers during the

Covid-19 pandemic is reflective of the huge value that people place on such institutions and those working in them, and recognition that services are operating at or beyond capacity. But there is frustration that the sector has been underfunded and that political and strategic choices mean responsibility has landed with families or the wider community where the care system does not have resources to support those in needy.

> ### "Social care costs are eating up the savings of many families."
>
> *(Male, 71, South East)*

The experience of the education system in communities echoed similar aspects of frustration and concern. Cuts to both statutory and third sector children and youth services means that the education system and, in some cases, the healthcare system are picking up the burden of responsibility to provide young people with the range of opportunities and support they need – and where this is not possible, inequalities are being widened between more affluent and more deprived areas and/or families.

> ### "Funding cuts for children's centres - huge impact on families in need and then that impact being transferred to schools."
>
> *(Female, 50, South East)*

Some people are also worried about other consequences for the community: either seeing or fearing an increase in anti-social behaviour and crime, and expecting that community would be on the frontline of addressing these challenges.

> ### "For me a main focus would be teenagers and what we can do - what community can do- to prevent boredom and then prevent antisocial behaviour. The kind of snowballing effect of that."
>
> *(Female, Oxford)*

What determines whether a community comes together to act on an issue which affects their collective safety and well-being?

With Safety the most important issue raised by people in the UK and now of greater, ongoing importance to public health, the need for individuals to act collectively for the protection of all has never been more urgent. Yet the question of where responsibility sits was a prominent one. People strongly felt assuring communities' safety needed to be led by authorities - but with closer connecting points in the community where strategies were visibly being upheld and where those enforcing it were accessible in terms of communication and negotiation.

The majority of people feel that communities have a growing responsibility, and indeed *need*, to establish stronger relationships and build mutual support at the local level. Most want to do *something more* in terms of support for each other and to have stronger networks that are local to them. For the majority of people, they were compelled to act through reciprocity – from the urge to feel reassurance and a greater sense of security and shared belonging in return.

Yet uncertainty persisted over the fragility of these – often quite new – relationships and interactions and how to sustain them. Central to this was the sense that substantial *distance* existed between communities and authorities, whilst people worried about *disconnect* between groups at local level. As the current climate continues, finding the best way to sustain a collective community response will be essential. Analysis of the UK local government sectors strategies for building support networks for vulnerable people during Covid-19 is a critical piece of research to be undertaken; preferably mapped to health outcomes for those areas, and to overall levels of well-being.

> *Can we have PCSO's back, they really make a difference to an overall sense of safety and wellbeing?*
>
> *(Female, 54, South West)*

> *"(How can our community) be strong together, to look out for one another, to protect and help one another when needed, to have a sense of belonging?"*
>
> *(Female, 50, Wales)*

> *Unite together against issues that affect the community...which rarely happens these days so what matters is finding a way to get people to stand together and interact with each other."*
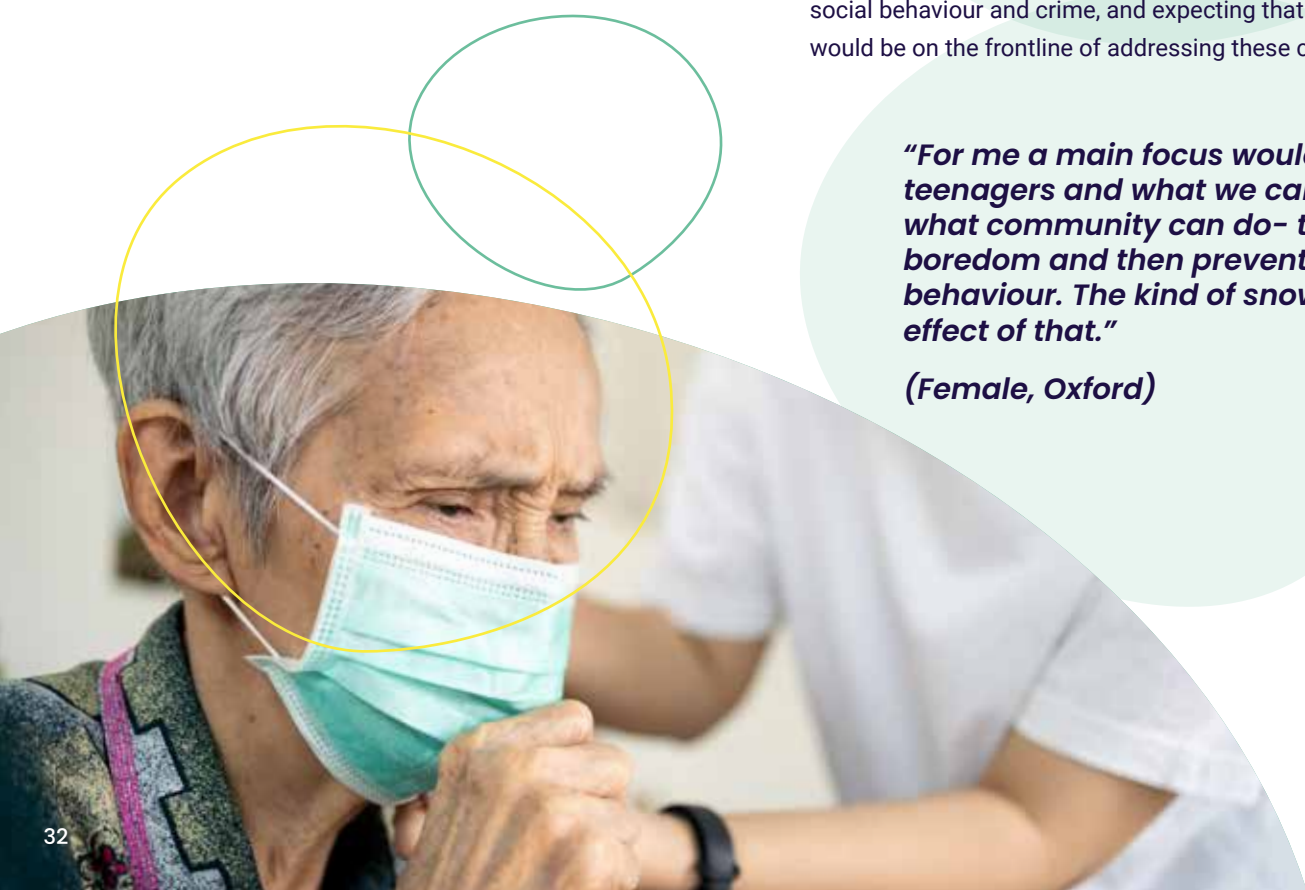>
> *(Male, 45, East Midlands)*

What role does community play in supporting mental health challenges exacerbated by Covid-19 and recession?

Broadly, there was a shared belief (that will have been strongly exacerbated by Covid-19) that communities have an important role to play in facilitating greater individual and collective wellbeing. There was reference to many creative ways in which communities do and could combat loneliness and isolation, for example, or can be positive sources of information, care and resources for those experiencing challenges.

Mental health in particular is an issue that has touched many families and individuals and there is a strong sense of desire for the community to do their part in creating awareness and reducing stigma, to ensure people seek help before reaching crisis point. This shared responsibility for creating a supportive environment for people sits firmly in the context of recognising that specialist services are required for those with more severe mental health problems; such services are much needed but frequently few and far apart.

Where are the successful new models for combining the power of community and remit of local government?

In looking for who *should* take responsibility, many people struggle to see a clear path between local authorities, civil society, and a more grassroots approach, built upon informal, non-institutionalised community capital. The question of responsibility and the commitment to it in practice is perceived as falling between these three 'systems'. As chains of decision-making and service provision extend, for example due to part-privatisation and mixed funding, the connection to responsibility at national policy level becomes even more remote and intangible.

Local authorities have seen their agility and ability to respond to local needs weakened by budget and resourcing cuts, while also still being heavily relied upon by central government to support delivery of national programmes such as Universal Credit. There is widespread frustration at what local authorities can no longer do and how this affects people's access to and experience of public services, housing and facilities.

As a young person, unemployed, and struggling with mental health, why is my local mental health team over 10 miles away?

(Female, 22, East Midlands)

"The city is just suicide city. With the river there, it's just a river of souls who have taken their life. We need to attend to mental health as well as people being well in all aspects - financial health, physical health…."

(Male, Derry)

"Why do we have to have volunteers to run a very busy and well used library?"

(Female, 54, West Midlands)

Where communities have the capacity to 'step in' - they worry about the sustainability or ethicability of relying on 'good will' models, particularly where a service is seen as an essential cornerstone of local life. Restoring budgets and negotiating capacity with local authorities for services such as libraries is an area where communities see clear priorities for actions.

"Why should you feel guilty for wanting public services? This is where the mind-set is going now."

(Female, 29, Scotland)

How do we build informal community capital at local and national level?

"Why do people assume that they have no part to play in community success?"

(Male, 46, South East)

People often talked about local residents and volunteer groups trying to plug the gaps in terms of services previously delivered by the public sector but recognised that this has its limitations. Questions were raised about how you 'do it alone' if there is no active civil society locally, or spare capacity – such as in remote towns and rural villages or, conversely, in marginalised urban areas where the work of charities has to focus on 'fire-fighting' and providing frontline care. Likewise, there were many questions about the ethics and sustainability of volunteer-led approaches, particularly in relation to how inclusive and accessible such opportunities are.

"There's a lot of people who need to be 'allowed' to get into volunteering and help; maybe it's because they saw I wasn't one of the usual suspects that more people came to volunteer to clear the garden square."

(Male, 35, Scotland)

People often reflected that taking action is easier between like-minded groups and demographics. Those who feel a high level of mutual support and belonging in their community tended to describe a homogenous sub-section or to look first to people 'like them'. This reflects the prevalence importance of bonding social capital in the context of responsibility in communities taking action, but raises difficult questions about how diverse communities bridge and cross into different groups to offer sources of near neighbourly support and grow inclusive social action in times of need.

"I personally don't see any future in the community among the younger generations as nowadays only the older ones want to know and help each other."

(Female, 63, Northern Ireland)

Whether and how new informal community organisation is sustained beyond the Covid-19 crisis, which saw at least 4,000 new mutual aid groups set up and an unknown number of 'WhatsApp' groups is a critical question in whether it can be maintained and translate into sustainable community capital. Furthermore - how this *community capital* can be supported to avoid what has been called 'moral exploitation' of communities, is also a critical question. Where the responsibility of a growing informal system of aid should – justly and fairly - start and finish – will be increasingly important to how the UK moves to a 'new normal' after the current crisis, in an environment where, due to recession and unemployment, the need will arguably be far greater, demands the attention of every funder, investor and policy makers.

Not so much a question as an observation - none of these things (all of which are important) can only be done with central or local government involvement. The people who make up a community need to recognise their role in making it a better place. This means getting out of their house and doing things together for each other, not just for themselves.

(Male, 45, North West)

Caring for the Most Vulnerable
Case Study

10%
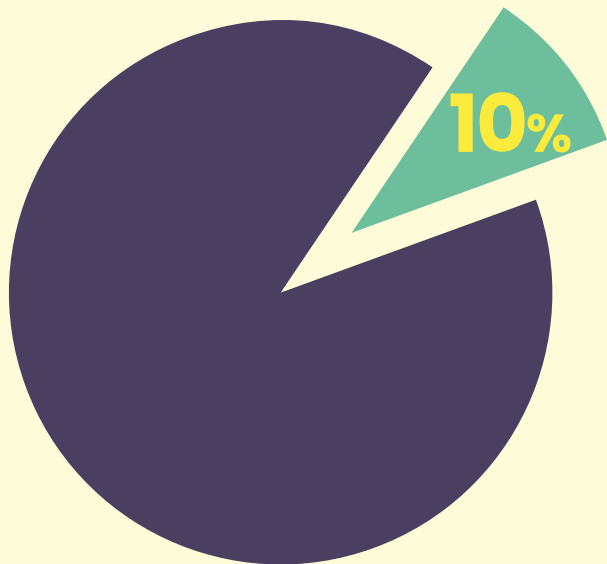
Questions directly related to care for the most vulnerable groups in society make up almost one-tenth of the total. What support should be provided and by who, however, varies substantially depending on which groups are being discussed, and how it affects people on a personal level?

Caring for the most vulnerable was consistently identified as one of the most important challenges facing communities today. Definitions and interpretations of who is 'vulnerable' naturally vary, but most commonly are seen to include the elderly, children and young people, people with disabilities, people with limited financial resources, and those who are homeless. Many people also recognised that vulnerability is not a life-long 'trait' assigned to members of a certain group but rather a temporary 'state' which can change depending on circumstances and potentially affect anyone at different points in their life..

There is a broad consensus that vulnerable groups should be supported, and that the support provided should reflect

people's needs. There is widespread support and demand for more disability friendly public and private spaces to ensure accessibility.

In many parts of the country, people want to see more opportunities which expose young people to new perspectives and prevent them from getting involved in illegal or anti-social activity. *"You see all the time that there are young people on the street, getting into trouble. But that's because there is nothing for them to do, no clubs, nothing. Young people need to be creative, to be interested, to be inspired, there needs to be something exciting for them. But there's nowhere to go for them." (Female, Bradford)*.

While there is protest that young people are unfairly judged and that anti-social behaviour is by no means an inevitable consequence of boredom, this kind of narrative reflects the importance of addressing what is becoming a widening gap between supply and demand in support for young people. A lack of structured opportunities for young people (and the wider community) was discussed as creating many negative knock-on effects in a community; equally, providing greater support for young people can have positive effects in addressing other issues.

"If you had somewhere for the kids to hang out would you reduce crime? If you had somewhere for the older people to go would you reduce loneliness? To me these [issues] all kind of go hand-in-hand." (Female, Birmingham)

While there was high agreement on the need to support vulnerable groups, there was far more debate about who would be responsible for doing so and what, if any, role communities should play.

"I think [the vulnerable] are the people who can't help themselves. If people can't help themselves then we as the community should be the ones to help." (Male, Weymouth)

Homelessness is particularly contentious in this regard, with a significant proportion of people laying responsibility at the door of statutory authorities. A small minority go further and argue that homeless people have usually been responsible for the precarious situation they find themselves in, and as such are loath to pay for support, either indirectly through taxation.

"Why doesn't the government care that homelessness has increased tremendously?" (Male, 41, South East)

"There's a lot of homeless people around. I think sometimes it's out of choice, they do have options to have a roof over their heads" (Male, Birmingham).

A small number of people do, however, see the community as a network that can and should help people experiencing homelessness. Regardless of where they fell on the responsibility for solving it, communities were highly aware that homelessness is a complex and not always visible issue. In Weymouth, one person argues that the invisibility of an issue should not mean that it is evaluated as less important.

"Homelessness is not just the ones that live on the street. There's sofa surfing as well. Just because I don't see them it's still a problem." (Female, Weymouth).

Similarly, there are differing views on the responsibility of caring for the elderly. Discussions around caring for the elderly predominantly concern loneliness and social isolation in this age group.

"Older people may have housing, but you may feel really lonely. That may be because of a lack of community. As a community we have become increasingly isolated and people don't necessarily know their neighbours." (Female, Birmingham)

In this person's view, it is the community's responsibility to make sure their elderly members do not feel isolated. Others disagree. On a societal level, people worry that it is simply not feasible for them to take on this responsibility, and wonder what the impact will be if communities become more divided along generational lines, with young families living in some areas, and older people in others.

Issues such as adult social care and care for the elderly affect large sections of society, yet there are huge and growing inequalities due to the limited availability and high cost of professional care, and whether or not informal help is available. One man in Birmingham explained that he lives in an affluent area with many care homes and personally found it easy to obtain care for his grandmother before her passing. Arguing why care for the elderly is less important to him he says:

"Ultimately, it's about what affects you directly. As a decent human being, of course I am worried about the elderly but I wonder - is this going to affect me now? No. So at the end of the day, I am more worried about other things." (Male, Birmingham)

Are we worlds apart?
Lost in Place

Introduction

The relationship of place to a sense of community, identity and belonging is one that is constantly in transition in the modern era but nonetheless has a significant impact on everyone's life. It is where most people access the majority of amenities and services they need; it determines local health, education and social outcomes and service provision; and it affects the local physical environment and connectivity to other communities – both geographic and digital.

> *"My community is an aging population whose amenities are being stripped back, instead focussed on unaffordable housing"*
>
> *(Male, 53, West Midlands)*

People reported a strong sense of uncertainty over the future of the places they live. These concerns focused on whether and how much needed infrastructure would be developed; if and how local economies could survive and whether in the face of these challenges communities could find cohesion, prosperity and stability.

Just under a quarter of problems under this theme (22.6%) were raised as related to the austerity agenda and a 'hidden loss' in terms of the identity and assets of communities beyond what the statistics can show. Where there had been intervention or investment in a local area – there were concerns the focus of funding and infrastructure had been misplaced. The loss of a strong sense of *place* and the sense of uncertainty over how places would be supported in the future was reported to have a negative impact on whether people can build a sense of community, and on individuals' ability and indeed willingness to participate in local life.

> *"Facebook … that's where I personally log into my local area. That's what people see as the community. That's where you've got a great sense of your community. So, I mean, I think you should go around the room and ask everybody what is the centre of the community. If that's important anymore because I think times have changed."*
>
> *(Male, Birmingham)*

Research Questions

How can we reinvent and reinvigorate the geographic 'centres' of our communities? What does a reimagined high street really look like?

How can in-place inequality be addressed? How can communities and those in power work together to mitigate divisions 'by place'?

How do we create community in changing & transient populations?

How can we better understand the proven and emerging ways to involve communities in designing places which support lifelong wellbeing?

How could community and local authorities engage better together to co-produce and continually connect on issues and priorities for a place?

> *"I worry it will be more online than a place"*
>
> *(Male, 31, Greater London)*

"Over the back of my window we have a community garden that the local residents look after. It's a ground where people used to dump rubbish or abandon cars – and even though I don't enjoy gardening myself, […] it's a focal point. There's a lot of young people there as well." (Lynne)

How can we reinvent and reinvigorate the geographic 'centres' of our communities? What does a reimagined high street really look like?

Many people described the loss of spaces and organisations that formed 'the centre' of communities: whether a busy high street, public library, youth club, or green space. The consequences of such change has had a negative effect above and beyond practical considerations of accessibility or connectivity - damaging the *identity* of places and the connection to them for those who live there.

In particular, the ongoing decline of the high street is lamented throughout the country, from local shopping streets in large cities through to market towns and villages. As a time-honoured vestige of place-based communities for centuries, it is unsurprising that many people see decline in their use and the closure of shops and businesses as highly visible symbols of change, which further reduces the opportunities for people to commune and 'be' together in a place. This is explored further in our case study: *Local Economy*.

> *"How can small towns be maintained and compete against online and supermarkets? Why is there little support for local business; it seems the town centre is dying away."*
>
> *(Male, 40, North West)*

The impact of marked change in our villages, towns and cities was discussed at both the individual and collective level. Many questioned whether trends over the last ten years of growing individual isolation and the polarisation of communities could be mitigated if the community had "*more places we could have met, and encountered each other*". A strong, shared sense of community identity was frequently described as being bound up with the availability and accessibility of places where people can connect, and public spaces where people 'bump into each other' in less formal ways. The decline of these emerged strongly as a factor in whether or not communities feel cohesive, resilient and able to thrive.

> *"The death of the local pub, the death of the local high street – we're becoming more isolated and more polarised all the time."*
>
> *(Male, Birmingham)*

There is a strong desire to see the traditional economic heart of a community survive and thrive. When recognised, this raises questions for people about how the idea and purpose of a 'centre' has shifted in a community. If not focused on commerce, people want to know how the traditional geographic core of a community can be reinvented in a way which still serves to bring people together and foster a shared identity. In the context of targeted public investment into towns and high streets, there is a huge, currently unsupported need for social and economic innovation and reimagination of these public spaces and streets; something that sits beyond capital investment in hard infrastructure, and lies within the imagination of the community.

In many places, there is also significant disconnect between national government's vision of priorities and what matters in the day to day lived reality of people across the UK. People raised more questions and interest about how local solutions can be found to challenges around (for example) public transport than they did about related national conversations, such as inter-regional high-speed rail links. People are also sceptical about the likely benefits of large infrastructure projects such as HS2, with many questioning how the Government could be trusted to deliver on promises to improve areas when smaller scale, local infrastructure and systems are of poor quality and fail to meet local need. Rather than 'grand, national projects', many urged authorities to 'look local' at how they could invest in refurbishing or repurposing existing assets.

Reflecting the economic inequalities in many places, the availability and quality of infrastructure and housing keenly affects how excluded or included people feel *within* a place and also *between* places. New housing developments are often seen as targeted at only a specific segment or profile of people, resulting in a 'mono-culture' which lacks diversity within itself, and is often starkly different to the existing communities it adjoins.

"Will our community be taken over by the monied class thus making the locals feel isolated in their community?"

(Female, 61, South East)

There's a school 2 streets away from me. It's been unused for years. That could be doing something, it could be a youth club, a leisure centre. It's the perfect place for something positive to be happening. Why is it still empty?"

(Female, 41, Northern Ireland)

"The lack of extra facilities is a problem. Then there are the houses that are already there. There are people already living there. It creates a them-and-us. It creates an inequality."

(Male, Bradford)

Further, in many suburban and rural areas people feel 'cut off' by the way transport or infrastructure has been designed, provided or stripped away; or by the way types of housing have been planned which are inaccessible to those on low incomes, or leave certain groups isolated. There are also concerns that housing and infrastructure, from parks to cycle paths and public transport, are often not accessible to all and make it challenging for those with disabilities or mobility issues to participate in the community. Some communities also reported being marginalised by failing economies, leaving remaining populations isolated and feeling 'forgotten', away from the centres of commerce and power.

How can in-place inequality be addressed? How can communities and those in power work together to mitigate divisions 'by place'?

People often raised concerns about how local authority-led strategies around place-based development are felt to be unequal. In particular, certain areas are seen to be privileged in terms of infrastructure provision – whether transport, amenities or cultural centres – while other areas are seen as a 'problem' or neglected. In many cases, the strategies of local authorities have been experienced as something which rather than alleviating social divisions, has led to rising divides along lines of wealth and opportunity. The concerns also reflect uncertainty about the way interventions in a place are determined and decided – with people questioning why certain places, areas or communities seem to bear the brunt of challenges or be continually 'left out' of both central and local government schemes and funding priorities.

"Our town was dumped into a council area along with valley communities which have very different needs. The town has always been seen as a cash cow for them and what development is available with austerity hitting hard always goes to them first. If only we could escape to a more suitable council area."

(Female, 66, Wales)

It is not just investment in infrastructure and amenities however that people see as a cause of rising divides. Though not consistently discussed in the language of regeneration or gentrification, the transformation of existing housing stock, along with policies which determine new build housing, can be equally powerful in determining the shape and identity of a community. A clear example of this is in places where there is a deficit of housing provision for the poorest or low-income households, including a lack of social housing, alongside a rise in developments targeted at more wealthy renters or owner-occupiers. The resultant effects on housing prices can determine whether or not local people are able to remain living within their communities.

"It feels as though my area of town is neglected and seen as a dumping ground for all of the council's problems. Housing is constantly being crammed in which is low quality with no space for parking leading to an increase in noise and constant arguments breaking out over parking spaces. Whenever they are looking to site 'problematic' new buildings or services like homeless shelters or drug rehabs it always seems to be in our area, while other services like hospitals, new doctors or specialist care are moved further and further away."

(Female, 40, South East)

This was raised as a challenge of 'in-place' inequality: namely who is left-behind or kept-behind within a place, and raises important questions for the nationwide 'levelling up' agenda. How communities experience the imbalance of government presence and interest, is not solely between North and South or urban and rural, but most acutely in how different communities are provided for within their local area.

"I see growing inequality, rising prices, and a lack of government presence."

(Male, 30, South East)

does my community feel safe?

Why in an age of Modern communication are important decision makers so difficult to get hold of

How do we create community in changing & transient populations?

A two-mile stretch near Preston overlooking Weymouth, Portland, and Chesil Beach: *"I took it because this is a very small town, but we seem to be fragmented in lots of different ways and places. We need to be a much stronger community. I took it to say that we're all within capture of one photograph, yet we seem to live separately."*

(Female, Weymouth)

The changes in population that lead people to experience divides within their local area have further impact: how safe people feel within a place is intimately linked to how connected people feel to it. The expansion of towns, suburbs and what were once small villages is a strong point of unease and contributes to whether or not the people in such communities feel a sense of belonging and shared identity, and thus security and social cohesion. You can see the impact of this loss of connectedness when looking at The Young Foundation's Community Strength Index. The commuter belt around London and Manchester show starkly low levels of community activity, in relation to other places where people's economic and emotional attachment to the place they live is stronger.

"Excessive development breaks up the community. A priority is ensuring the involvement of newcomers."

(Female, 70, South East)

"In such a dynamic city, a sense of community is hard to preserve. It's so transient. Part of that is the university."

(Male, Oxford)

Often the concerns of long-standing residents convey a sense of alienation – feeling distant or different from others in the community; to not knowing your neighbour; and of exclusion from the processes and decisions relating to the rapid change they have witnessed. A smaller but significant proportion of concerns also relate to the depopulation and contraction of communities, primarily in rural areas.

How can we better understand the proven and emerging ways to involve communities in designing places which support lifelong wellbeing?

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, people were worried about the future of their community. Many of the questions asked reveal that the economic and social resilience of communities was already at risk, with communities feeling the impact of ten years under austerity alongside an uncertain economic climate. People were concerned about how places would withstand future economic shocks or ruptures in society, with fears about stretched livelihoods, the burden of caring for family members, and insecure welfare provision.

"We're not even making it possible (through housing) for families to be close to each other and support each other … the mix of family and kin support is being disrupted by unaffordable, badly planned housing"

(Female, 65, Scotland)

"Never hear about what is going on as we are a bit isolated from the local community; we are also not getting any work in for the last year or so."

(Female, 66, Wales)

A growing concern before the crisis was how well set up and resourced places communities were to support lifelong wellbeing and healthy communities for all. Many have seen first-hand how the social determinants of health have been adversely affected by austerity cuts and questioned whether local systems and infrastructure are set up to proactively address these trends. Many also questioned whether those in power have demonstrated they *care*, and if so - whether it is enough or in the *right way*.

"And the council does tend to forget about us … they increase the council tax by saying that we're going to put the money into the elderly. So I've got a friend in social work and he has a job with a fellow in the house, elderly gentlemen, early signs of dementia, taking care of him. He's worked all his life, and he paid his tax, yet the value of his house will be used to pay for his care. And he's paid into the system."

(Male, Bradford)

The level and quality of provision of social and civic services, including welfare, mental health and community policing contributes significantly to the relationships between authorities and communities. It is 'civic' as much as 'social' or 'welfare' related. Transparency and genuine engagement on the part of authorities and decision-makers can help alleviate collective insecurities and increase people's sense of safety. Yet there is a shared belief that communities are increasingly abandoned in the face of the uncertainty, risks and vulnerabilities around them.

"Will cuts in social care destroy my community fabric?"

(Male, 55, Yorkshire and the Humber)

"This represents family - a place where my son who has special needs can go to play." (David)

How could community and local authorities engage better together to co-produce and continually connect on issues and priorities for a place?

"Why does the Council waste money on vanity projects when it can't get the basics right?"

(Male, 44, East of England)

The implications of stretched resources raised urgent questions about how those with the power for ensuring that local needs are met – whether services, affordable housing and amenities - can better understand exactly what that 'need' is, and have access to the necessary evidence to take into account population changes. Beyond existing forms of local democratic engagement, there is a consistent plea to listen to people's stories and experiences to guide changes to policy and practice. And yet many of the models most in use are outdated and solely consultative. The assessment of UK local authority approach to community involvement undertaken by the Institute for Community Studies last year, showed that narrow forms of consultation and transactional forms of engagement dominate the local government landscape, missing opportunities to co-create change with communities.

Can investment return the density of community that used to exist?

(Female, 50, Yorkshire & the Humber)

Much needs to be done to resolve the overwhelming sense that many places have been neglected by authorities in the last ten years and the feeling that the interventions into local areas have been opaque. Despite the challenges, people see huge value in asking how place can truly be the lens through which better programmes and policy can play in supporting individual and collective health and wellbeing, and social and economic resilience – and how best models of this can be designed and realised.

Local Economy & The Community
Case Study

10%
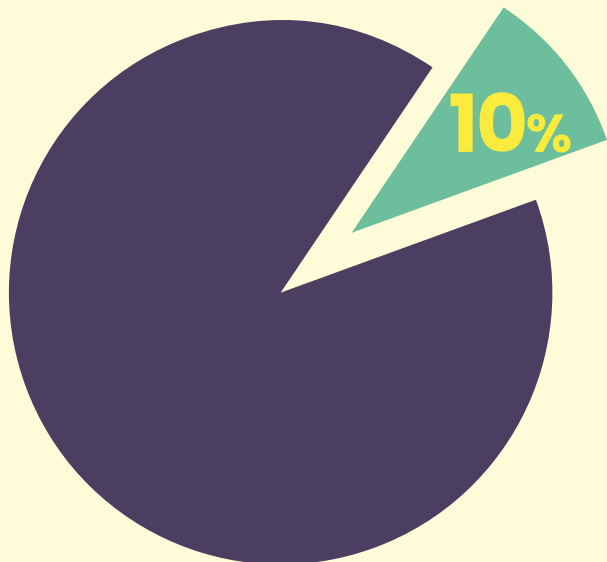
Concerns about the local economy were the focus of just over one-tenth of the questions asked. They reflect worries about local retail, employment opportunities and social mobility, and the future prospects of their community.

How does the strength of a community support and improve local economic resilience? What factors affect a community's ability to take part in and strengthen local economic resilience?

Across the UK, communities lament the decline of their high streets, the closure of amenities and a general lack of investment and access to opportunity. Questions asking how the local economy can be supported are many and varied.

Jobs, Employability and Precariousness

Many communities link the decline in their local economy with the risk and experience of economic hardship and a lack of employment opportunities, particularly for young people. People expressed concerns over the precarious state of employment and difficult livelihoods they observed or had personally experienced around them. Some reported working multiple jobs to pay the mortgage or rent and expressed concerns about the longer term implications of unstable or contract work and the implications for other sources of support in older age, such as pensions.

"Yeah, I agree. I think when I was thinking about that question, I was thinking about the increase nationally. And of course, like, there are contract workers. And so there's not that stable employment, which will, you know, in the future lead to issues with pensions, insurance perturbations, return from general taxes…" (Male, Bradford)

Poverty is a subject which is experienced in close quarters in communities but which many felt powerless to address. Distinctions were even drawn between 'real poverty' and the experience of low wages for people who could be considered as the working poor in many local communities. 'In work poverty' was widely acknowledged, and normalised - with some people questioning whether if you are working for low wages 'it qualified as real poverty' and uncomfortable to acknowledge this, despite many personal experiences of struggling to make ends meet. For others, it was seen as an issue which could and needed to be acted upon by local employers and businesses: *"Poverty is low wages as well. We have all these call centres paying minimum wage" (Male, Derry)*.

Choosing between social mobility and community?

In many cases, the lack of employment prospects leads to people moving out of the community or struggling with low prospects for career development. The lack of social mobility in many local areas is seen as a significant problem, with the need to support young people in particular prioritised consistently across all locations where we held discussions, with few dissenting voices.

"I was lucky enough to get a job right out of university. But I know that I'm a minority in that because all my friends I've graduated with me are currently working in like, McDonald's, Burger King, and there's nothing, absolutely nothing, wrong with that - they get paid. And you know, they bring home something. And that's great but they didn't study the three years to be stuck there because nowhere in Swansea will take them. So they're being stuck in the same job that they've had during University, just they've gone full time now. But they are applying literally everywhere and in jobs that they are way overqualified for and they still aren't taken. And I know that there is that conception that you know, as you said before, that some people just don't want

to get jobs…but it's not true". (Female, Swansea)

The lack of local job opportunities not only impacts on young peoples' lives but on the sense of community and the generational divide in the area. Residents reflect that "you have to look at what we've got down here. It's mainly families and old people… You're missing out the 20-35-year old's that don't have a family. They can't really stay down here. And if they do, they're working out of the area." (Female, Weymouth)

Many young people have concerns about finding employment after university. *"If I finish studying and go for a job in the degree I'm studying they will tend to pick someone older with more experience. So that will have a knock-on effect and I will have to move somewhere else and I don't want to." (Female, Birmingham,)*. What people describe as mattering to a local economy is for there to be sufficient good quality jobs, and sufficient diversity of jobs in terms of the skills and qualifications required that those working - and particularly young people - are able to stay in the community where they grew up, if they so wish.

The loss of the younger generation in many communities contributes to low levels of what has been called *community resilience*. Areas where previously the sense of community was sustained by the presence of employment and affordable housing, and by the resulting input of wealth back into local economies, are now struggling, static or in decline.

"The people in this community are getting older, and younger ones have little chance of purchasing dwellings here because wealthier 'outsiders' prevent this from happening. Ultimately, this will adversely affect the structure of what was once a vibrant village." (Male, 72, West Midlands)

The lack of suitable employment can also pose challenges for people who leave but later wish to return, either to care for elderly relatives or to reconnect with places where they feel a strong sense of belonging. It can be difficult to maintain a career outside of the large urban centres, but it can also be hard for people to reintegrate as they straddle the divide between 'old' resident and 'new'. This is a growing challenge for those in their 30s and indeed 40s, creating generational chasms within the structure of local communities.

Increasingly, people of all ages described a working life that could thrive closer to home. This was connected to discussions about quality of life, about having a sense of *belonging* to a place, but was also due to frustrations with poor connectivity between places and failing transport systems. The need to transfer or revive economic growth from concentration in urban areas to a diversity of local economies is an issue which the current pandemic is likely to have compounded and is a vital issue for policy makers, businesses and authorities to consider.

Investment and reinvestment

"A lot of things are happening. And we know we know that getting investment, but what's the best way for them to invest? Is that a good question? Yes. So the second part of questions really makes it important (Male, Oxford)

Specific challenges exist for different types of local economy and community, caused by the loss of different industries and the struggle for communities to recover and find other sources of livelihood. Communities were vocal about these challenges and uncertain about whether and how those in power would act to support struggling communities with reinvestment and state-led support. Concerns were raised about what impact an anticipated recession and the unresolved context of Brexit would have on certain companies and on the local market for international industries. Communities were concerned that they saw little evidence of proactive attempts to protect local economies from these challenges.

"What is the projected economic growth for the city? How will further development plans attract businesses? Local as well as national" (Male, 29, West Midlands)

In places such as Sunderland, communities are highly aware of economic risk in the reliance of the town on major employers such as Nissan, while the successive arrival and dissolution of different industries has left a marked impact on community life in parts of rural Scotland and coastal towns like Weymouth. The green economy is recognised as an opportunity for rural and coastal post-industrial areas, but people are repeatedly concerned that often jobs coming from investment into the local area do not go to the local community.

"What will be the effects of new technology beyond jobs and lifestyle now in the community? I think this is high priority because of the new development they're doing, I don't know what that's going to bring. Is that actually gonna bring money jobs - are the jobs going to be for people in our community? Or going to bring more people in? So I think it's quite an important issue, especially since they're in the development stages of it. I would be interested to know like, if you bring in 500 jobs to this sector, are you going to work with the university and the people in the surrounding area?" (Male, Swansea)

Where tourism was replacing industry – particularly in rural communities such as parts of Scotland and Wales, there were (pre-Covid) concerns about detrimental impact on the identity and sense of community; on public services; and on the environment. Many described how villages and towns were overrun with holiday makers in certain months and ghost towns the next –with short termism and holiday lets shifting the cohesion of the population as well as affecting the cost of living and the quality of community life.

This was said to be affecting cohesion and tradition and needed careful community-informed management, if tourism was to be a success for the community in social and community terms as well as bringing economic benefit. Connected to this, it was frequently questioned whether tourism and commerce were sustainable in the context of the wider challenges – such as the environment - to the way we live now.

The capacity to take part in a local economy

The barriers to communities participating in transition, investment and innovation happening in local economies fell commonly into two parts. Firstly – the lack of skills, education and capacity building to enable local people to take part. Secondly, questions of whether innovation and investment can take into account the need to bring a return or dividend to communities – and in turn, how to ensure change really brings a benefit back into the community. These are important questions in the context of ensuring economic transition for local communities is inclusive, fair and furthermore – sustainable.

"The community benefits from £35000 per annum from a wind farm fund. This income has been received for the last 12 years and has 13 years to go. Unfortunately it has been squandered and there is nothing to show what it has been spent on. Hopefully there will be something to show in the next 13 years" (Male, 70, Scotland)

This sense that decisions in and about communities in relation to their economies are made in isolation and frequently not in favour of the community 'benefit' is common. Politicians are often described as detached from the community and people feel there should be more accountability for public spending and that it should be more reflective of local opinion - as should decision making about how local investment would affect communities and what kind of benefit it would create. This extends to part-privatised models of investment, which people felt further contributed to the lack of transparency and risk of low accountability.

"People want to see the authorities listening to the community rather than sitting in their suits making decisions. People want to see them out on the streets and not only during elections" (Male, Bradford).

Politicians were often described as detached from the community and to seem to not understand what chain of barriers needed to be removed to enable people to take part in economic opportunities. Questions of accessibility; suitability and sustainability were frequent in the discussion of how those in power could and should invest in the future economic prosperity of communities.

"Is it about the amount of jobs or is it about having the job that is open for - you know - to create jobs and opportunities for people to progress and community. Yeah, there might be jobs, but not the kind of jobs that people here would get access to. So it doesn't help us if there are 15 positions in the community for doctors and we can't be doctors, you know, so it's about that as well." (Male, Birmingham)

"Is our council going to continue to let our shopping area deteriorate to the point that the millions spent on tourists will be wasted because we will look like a slum?" (Female, 63, South West)

People also were keen to be engaged in decision-making about the future of local centres so that the 'need' for communities could be fully understood. For many, the need for thriving local high streets is not necessarily 'essential' for shopping or other services. Rather, it relates to whether or not individuals perceive their local area to be 'successful' and a reflection of the community's success. The value of high streets lies as much in their 'social' or 'cultural capital' value as in their economic contribution.

"How are you going to stop the area becoming dead when there's no shops left?" (Female, 44, Scotland)

"How we can encourage people to use the high street?" (Female, 59, Greater London)

There are however signs of hope in the connection made between the local high street and the sense of community. A number of voices expressed a strong connection to local businesses - old or new, so long as seen as 'independent' - and a growing interest in their success. This connection is now being tested in real time: many are turning to local businesses - either out of necessity or from a desire to be supportive - and social enterprises, community shops and community organisations are playing vital roles at a time of national crisis. How far independent businesses, social enterprises and community businesses can grow their (digital) reach into local communities, and sustain this after the pandemic, will provide a clear indication of how deep-seated commitment is to supporting a local economy as part of the 'new normal'.

"How many of the businesses that already exist will remain?" (Female, 21, Greater London)

Getting by or passed by?
A Bedrock of Inequality

How can models for greater social inclusion start from within local communities?

"Half of us are scraping for rent and the other half have several cars…"

(Female, 19, Greater London)

"What can be done about inequality in the community? Because there's so many different inequalities. So I think that's a massive factor in the whole world"

(Male, Oxford)

The visibility of stark divides in wealth, living standards, and opportunity were ever-present in the discussions which led to this Agenda. This extended to rising concerns of discrimination in communities on the grounds of race and 'otherness'. How to create an inclusive community is therefore one of the highest priority questions raised in this Agenda. Concerns about high levels of exclusion cross-cut many of the issues raised, but a shared concern echoed clearly: that communities in the UK are sat on a ever-growing bedrock of inequality.

"Why do we allow poverty to continue in one of Britain's most affluent counties?"

(Male, 43, South West)

In the majority of communities, economic inclusion comes up as a primary concern, most of all in terms of who thrives and who loses out as a result of inequalities in education, skills training and employment opportunities. There are particular challenges for local places which are not large-scale urban or affluent centres of mixed types of industry - but even in urban contexts, questions of inequality of living conditions and standards persist.

In small market towns and more rural areas, people often aspire to be like places they see as similar in size and assets, but with very different local economies. In Weymouth, for example, Bournemouth – just 30 miles along the coast – is seen as a model for what a successful coastal town can be, with higher education institutions, a thriving town centre, and a relatively strong tourism sector.

"This is the way society is going at the moment you know, the gap is increasing between the rich and the poor and then you've got gaps between the rich and the rich and then you've got gaps between the poor and the poor. You know, if you look at the social hierarchy, the makeup of our city - those that were once working class are now under the working class, so there's new boundaries - there's this new level being created you know … Now you've got inequalities within inequalities."

(Male, Bradford)

However, even within the most successful cities in the UK, vast inequality exists between and within local boroughs and wards. This inequality can be seen not only as between those who are barely 'getting by' or 'getting on' – but in terms of communities 'passed by' by economic opportunity and transition, and those who have the capacity to capitalise on it.

"In my area we don't have that issue [poverty] at all. But I think if there is people that are experiencing poverty that are having to use the food banks that you know, that are financially unable to look after themselves without our support, then the government should be doing something."

(Male, Birmingham)

Research Questions

How can models for greater social inclusion start from within local communities?

How can transition and change in local and national economies be prepared for and seized by local communities?

How can structural investment understand and deliver community-level value when 'levelling up' local places?

How can communities make sure that a strong community is not unintentionally exclusive to 'others'?

How do communities recognise diversity as a strength and not a risk?

What is the role of a community in tackling inequality and racism within a place?

How can community and authorities work more effectively together to make people be and feel safe in a place?

How can transition and change in local and national economies be prepared for and seized by local communities?

"If everyone gets jobs - then the community is fine."

(Male, Weymouth)

The transition to new forms of economy – such as those built on digital skills and technological innovation - risks the exclusion of whole communities within the UK unless the ways in which communities are under-resourced and ill-equipped to meet this challenge are better understood and a commitment to tackling inequality internalised by decision makers and power holders. The pressure to increase the availability of any form of employment or improved education or training opportunities is often acute. With attention focused on urgent needs, many people and communities risk being further 'left behind' as the skills and investment needed to be successful in the changing global economy are beyond their immediate line of vision.

"I don't worry about technology affecting jobs locally because we don't have any jobs to lose."

(Male, 32, Weymouth)

Financial precarity, at both the individual/household and community level, diverts attention from the structural issues which often underlie the situation: from poor broadband access to the provision of local colleges offering future skills training. This was often exposed by what people didn't talk about or identify as important to their community, and through the de-prioritisation of questions about issues such as the impact of technology or Brexit on the local economy. Rather, people are focused on near-term solutions, from which they can see immediate relief, such as increasing wages for existing jobs, or improving connections to other places which offer better employment opportunities.

"Somebody mentioned there being a 'default lifestyle' here, and you're not going to get a community improving unless people feel that they can contribute to the community and have a safe, secure job where their earning sufficient money and you know, they've got the expertise to be able to contribute to the community either in time and effort or finances or whatever. So yeah, the whole of the community has to be based on a strong financial foundation."

(Male, Birmingham)

In communities where the local economy is struggling, inequality is predominantly experienced through comparison with other places around the country which are seen to be benefitting from investment in a way which they are not. In other places, where the local economy is ostensibly flourishing and opportunities for employment, education and social mobility are more abundant, the experience of inequality is more sharply felt within the community. In Oxford, for example, many people are acutely aware of the contrast between many of the UK's elite in terms of qualifications, skills and business, and the levels of poverty and homelessness they see in many parts of the city.

How can structural investment understand and deliver community-level value when 'levelling up' local places?

Frustrations about a lack of quality jobs and opportunities can be hugely compounded when major public (or public-private) investment is channelled into an area to deliver on a national policy or programme, but with promises of local economic transformation.

"In 2010 (before the Olympics) they closed down a load of facilities, shut them down, and then they stayed shut. It was a damp squid. They shut down this beautiful brewski and they built this Italian restaurant for the Games - which hardly anybody went to."

(Male, Weymouth)

"Why did City of Culture in Hull not benefit local acts? Why was all the money spent in year 1 , why was entertainment brought in at a price and money lost to the local economy by not pushing local acts to visitors?"

(Male, 72, Yorkshire & the Humber)

In both East London and Weymouth, people talked about the lack of legacy from the 2012 Olympics, as did people in Glasgow in relation to the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Those living in the outer suburbs of Birmingham are equally sceptical about the 2022 Commonwealth Games, while those living along the HS2 line are seeing (and anticipate) little benefit to them or their communities. Initiatives like the European/UK City of Culture are also felt to have had fewer sustained benefits than hoped for. In some instances, people even feel that these large, one-off investments instead brought significant disruption and even long-term harm to their community.

"The building of the nearby new nuclear power station has led to a deterioration in the quality of life in this rural backwater... although we all appreciate it is needed, the traffic on what are narrow roads which were previously quiet has led to a sense of being trapped"

(Female, 58, South West)

Tourism divides many communities whose economy is heavily connected to it. For example, people in Oxford, along with others in many places around the UK, struggle to reconcile the impacts of tourism on their community – the tension between recognising the huge economic contribution tourists make, and the impact it can have on aspects of community life such as the affordability of housing, or the pressure on local services can be difficult to reconcile.

IInstead, people want to see the kinds of investment that will genuinely enable a 'levelling-up' of communities across the UK – responsive to local need whether that be for increased provision of higher and further education, improved local infrastructure, or investment to support the development of skills and businesses appropriate to the future economy.

How can communities make sure that a strong community is not unintentionally exclusive to 'others'?

"It is a mix of people, with very different life outlooks, which can often lead to clashes."

(Male, 46, East of England)

Economic inequality is only one dimension shaping whether or not a community feels inclusive. The concept of an inclusive community is firmly linked to ideas of there being a strong *sense* of community – a shared identity - but the connection is by no means straight forward. Building a stronger sense of community emerged as the sixth most important issue for communities nationally and *Social Cohesion* ranked as the seventh highest concern.

Across the UK, people worry about how far their community is divided by social, economic, racial or religious backgrounds, by political beliefs, or an individual's ability to take part in society because of poverty or physical or mental

health conditions. Many feel that building community is a daunting or uncomfortable prospect given the divisions they observe in society.

"It's not like this where I live. There's no real sense of community, I wouldn't say that. It seems everybody is so different like, different jobs, different way of life - it's just like there's nothing to relate to with it like this."

(Male, Bradford)

"What matters? Inclusiveness; a sense of belonging; awareness that we are all part of a community not individual silos."

(Female, 56, Yorkshire & the Humber)

How do communities recognise diversity as a strength and not a risk?

While only a small minority of people (2%) explicitly identified 'Brexit' and the consequences of the EU referendum as a priority issue that would affect their community, the knock-on effect of the media narrative of 'two sides' was very present in how people describe and experience their community and their relationship to it. Some of the messages used in the referendum campaigns were explicitly referenced during the research process and have permeated into the debate about what is important within communities, creating a highly polarised picture.

"My community is modern, urban, Scottish European. Not racist, xenophobic, anti-expert, anti-fact, anti-reality England."

(Male, 48, Scotland)

"There is no community for White British where I live as it is all set up for Asian and Black communities".

(Male, 49, West Midlands)

"I don't want this area to be saturated with foreigners like the last town I lived in. What is being done to preserve MY culture, traditions & values?"

(Female, 54, North West)

There is recognition that the divisions between 'Leave' and 'Remain' voters are deeply rooted and that over the course of the EU referendum campaign these stances came to encompass a wider set of beliefs or concerns about the state of UK society. It is these divisions that are at the forefront of peoples' minds in terms of the challenges facing local places. It was not out of an interest in Brexit per se, of which people were tired of grasping what it might mean for their community. Rather it is out of concern for the risks these divisions pose locally in moving forward with a new chapter of community life in the UK.

"Mass immigration is changing the local community"

(Male, 37, South East)

A common theme across many of these questions was an acknowledgement of an increase in diversity within communities – whether in terms of age, family structure, ethnicity, or faith. Although some view this change as partly responsible for the decline in community, the majority of questions explore how diverse communities can be encouraged to forge a strong sense of community and belonging.

"How many people of different cultures live around here? What can we do to make the sense of community stronger?"

(Male, 26, Greater London)

These concerns fall into two highly oppositional camps: one of those focused on concerns about how foreign immigration is affecting communities; the other of people anxious to mitigate where they fear a negative reaction from those who resent immigration into their community. Related to this, rising experiences of racism and discrimination were key concerns raised commonly across communities in the UK, prior to the current action in many communities in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

What connects these very different viewpoints is the sense of whether or not people feel comfortable with how certain parts of society have changed and how this *is perceived* to affect a new 'identity' or 'norm' in local communities. Often, the awareness of 'difference' between groups in the community is connected to a sense of loss of what people felt gave them belonging or identity in their local area, which resonated as strongly as long-standing concerns over the impact inbound populations were having on competition for services and resources. People lacked confident entry points to engage with other identities and cultures - or felt that doing so would be to risk losing their own sense of belonging and status.

What is the role of a community in tackling inequality and racism within a place?

People have become more racist or more comfortable showing their racism following the EU referendum results. There is more intolerance from adults."

(Female, 41, South East)

Whether or not the reality of immigration figures supports this perception of shifting demographics in communities. The influence of social media 'echo chambers' as the dominant place where people interact were mentioned as exacerbating these divisions; while the lack of mixing in local places means there may be few opportunities for people to meet with those 'other' to them.

There were many accounts of experiences of racism by people within communities, whether from other people, institutions or indeed from authorities. Racist and discriminatory views were also heard in many parts of the country against different ethnic minority groups. People felt little support was available locally to address these issues within communities, with the sense that government was not doing enough to reduce conflict and eradicate racism; and perceptions that they either did not know how best to act - or that it was not a priority for them. People were often unsure or at a loss as to how to approach the issue of race and differences in their local areas where they were not formally connected or in proximity to BAME and supporter groups, organisations or campaigns working to address the issue. The issue of polarisation and prejudice in communities was not restricted to large urban contexts but is one that is affecting towns, suburban and other local areas across the UK.

These experiences do not excuse racism which is a deep rooted issue needing urgent attention. However with the increasing evidence emerging of how inequalities have been exacerbated due to Covid-19, including the disproportionate impact of the virus in public health and socio-economic terms on BAME communities, the connections and tensions between the many inequalities felt in the UK are never more critical to address.

Lots of eastern Europeans moved in thinking they own the place and can do as they please which puts strains on local infrastructure like school places, availability of healthcare and parking spaces!...local authorities/ government seems slow to address the impact of all these extra people"

(Male, 45, East Midlands)

Social, economic and political differences strongly affected how safe individuals feel in a community, regardless of official statistics on local crime or anti-social behaviour. Rising awareness of who is excluded or included, and the multitude of reasons why, is having a growing impact on local social cohesion while in turn reducing the sense of individual security. There was an acknowledgement that increasing polarisation and discriminatory attitudes were connected to the mounting experience of poverty and instability in local communities.

"Why does the community feel unsafe? I think it's because poverty is rising."

(Female, Bradford)

How can community and authorities work more effectively together to make people be and feel safe in a place?

How to respond to the divisions people see in communities is a question which further divides people, but there is widespread desire to act sooner rather than later. The sense of insecurity caused by feeling alienated or excluded within communities was a further catalyst for many to ask what could be done to bridge gaps and bring communities closer together.

"We need a more concrete version of the sense of community. When you go to events you invariably encounter others and you make a link with somebody in an involuntary way."

(Male, Greater London)

While tensions between communities are frequently characterised along ethnic, religious or national lines, divisions between 'newcomers' and 'outsiders' to a community are equally salient; the 'displacing' effect new residents are felt to have on an existing community is also highly emotive. They often reflect inequalities in wealth, or significant changes in the profile of the population in terms of age, social or cultural 'class', or results in changes to the local environment and the physical shape of the place which reflect the needs and preferences of new residents.

"Equality in religions, jobs, economy, relationships - I just wish everyone could be seen as the other and people can stop judging each other."

(Female, 20, Greater London)

"In our area, integration is important. There are a lot of different faiths. Our area is predominantly Muslim and the places of worship, everyone tends to go to their own. I think there should be more open days, more events to integrate people. Because our children growing up need to integrate."

(Male, 43, Bradford)

Ultimately, where strong divisions exist, the experience can create or exacerbate personal feelings of isolation, and leave some groups feeling marginalised. It can result in residents feeling disempowered and ambivalent about participating in their community, or even about caring and contributing to its success or decline.

The provision of mutual support is overwhelmingly seen as a positive foundation on which a strong sense of community often rests; the surge in mutual aid groups and other community-led initiatives since the start of the Covid-19 crisis would appear to confirm that this is indeed the starting point for many people – but the strength, sustainability and inclusivity of this is yet to be tested as the pandemic moves into subsequent phases and the inequalities of its impact become increasingly evident.

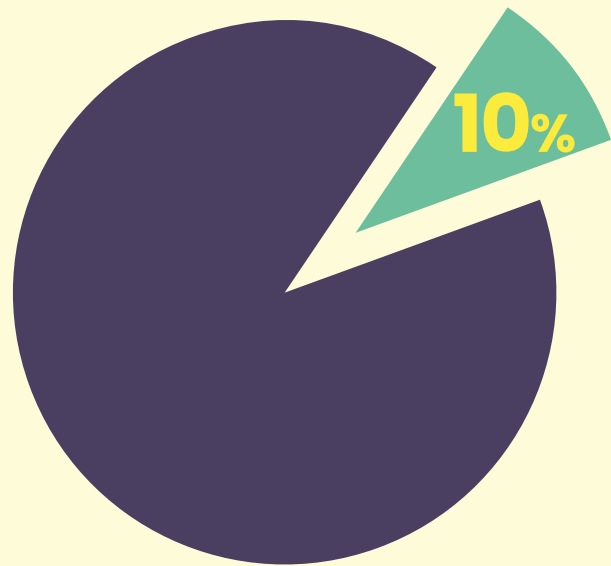*"What matters in a community is … Equality, respect, morals, collectiveness, solidarity, and unity."*

(Male, 28, East Midlands)

Maypole Youth Centre, Idminston Croft, Birmingham

Community Building
Case Study

10%

Almost one in ten questions raised were about how communities can be strengthened. They reflect worries about local retail, employment opportunities and social mobility, and the future prospects of their community.

Many people across the country raised questions about how stronger, more inclusive communities can be built, with a focus on understanding the barriers and what is most effective in creating change.

While some individuals primarily reflect on the factors that contribute to improving the social dimensions of a community - how people meet, connect and relate to each other, or build a shared sense of identity - others are more pragmatic in their thinking, looking for specific approaches to improve community life and thus creating – indirectly – a sense of togetherness and belonging.

There was a great sense of nostalgia for a community that had once been – although real examples and detail on what this means were often absent. This was often described as 'protecting' a sense of community that many find intangible. In these comments and questions, there is

a sense that the rate at which communities are changing is one of the biggest barriers to feeling connected in a community. This is exacerbated by an increased use of digital communication which has shifted the extent to which people have the need to feel connected to their local community in the first place.

"This idea of community to begin with, like how do we bring back this feeling of community, well first off I think that community is dead. The world is such a big place now and we're all connected through the internet. This idea that we have these arbitrary lines that separate us, or that that's our community – that's not it anymore. Our community, besides being geographical are the groups that we associate ourselves with and what we do within these groups." (Male, Weymouth)

However, for the majority who attached value to experiencing community in their local area, the importance of neighbourly relationships and mutual support is repeatedly highlighted. This was true even before Covid-19 and the immense community response that materialised across the UK at the start of the pandemic. For some, having friendly interactions is enough to experience a strong sense of community: *"In Swansea, you could literally say hi to anybody and they'll respond back with a smile or say hi back. It's a very nice community." (Female, Swansea)*. Others suggest that a certain level of closeness between people is necessary to support social cohesion: *"How can the community be changed so we all interact more and come closer together?" (Female, 16, East Midlands)*.

How to build community?

Many questions focused on the potential to enhance community life by improving local opportunities for people to meet and interact with one another, through local events, formal groups or activities. There is a recognition that community assets and activities create a strong support for building closer communities. There has been a consistent and growing call for re-investment in social and civic infrastructure; places for people to be to 'be together' and participants voiced this call loudly. *"How has the revival of the local social club impacted on the sense of cohesiveness and community spirit in my area?" (Female, 56, Yorkshire and the Humber)*

There are stark regional differences in the prioritisation of community building. In Northern Ireland this issue emerges as the top priority, with some communities

reflecting on both the past conflicts and the potential implications of Brexit on future social cohesion and community wellbeing. *"There can be times where one side can be made to feel unwelcome. Will there be more cross-community activities available?" (Male,, 36, Northern Ireland)*

People in Greater London, Wales and the North East of England are similarly concerned with issues around connectivity and togetherness, whereas communities in the East Midlands rank it relatively low.

In particular, intergenerational connectivity is seen as a valuable solution to some local problems, including facilitating and enhancing the participation of elderly people in community life, and helping to keep traditional cultures and skills alive - seen as having benefits in terms of reducing isolation and mental health difficulties for all age groups. The typical age for volunteers and those who participate in 'community organising' - typically female and over 55 years of age - led to questions being raised about how to embed that commitment, skill-set and capacity into other generations; or what new kinds of social and community organising are most attractive to people outside that demographic.

That community building emerged as a high priority for so many young people runs perhaps counter to many popular narratives about "Millennials" but there is undoubtedly an appetite for a different future, with greater emphasis on environmental and social justice, and tackling the inequalities which are deeply ingrained in many communities. People ask how the younger generation's appetite for change can be mobilised and their opportunities for contributing *locally* tailored to their priorities.

"We need opportunities for young people to take responsibility - small steps." (Female, 50, South East)

Many feel that local councils should be doing much more to create a supportive environment for community-led initiatives. This includes resourcing activities that would support stronger social cohesion and recognising that this is the foundation of many of the national agendas focused on 'levelling up' and 'strengthening' communities across the UK, as well as for collective wellbeing and peace.

Yet community activity and community building can also be exclusive of some groups. Even prior to the pandemic, the digital divide was under ever-growing scrutiny, not least fuelled by the shift to online as the primary route to accessing essential public services or support such as Universal Credit.

People are also divided by the lack of information and visibility of what is at stake for their local community when key decisions are being made, at least in part because such information is now primarily provided online. A further challenge is to ensure inclusivity of different groups and individuals within the growing trend of communities organising online – which has been accelerated by the physical distancing requirements in the face of Covid-19.

"What matters is connection to other members of the community, fundraising opportunities and actions that bring the community closer". (Female, 23, Scotland)

Those who are involved in leading and organising community initiatives are concerned that the barriers to participation often start with neither having financial nor personal capacity to engage with issues as people are occupied fulfilling the basic needs they face. The ecosystem of "community" is also complex and can be hard to navigate. Many people don't see 'entry points' or feel they lack the skills to take up 'formal' roles in their community. This affects the feasibility of broad participation in community action and enterprises and raises questions of whether elements of 'formal' community organisation demand certain invisible 'entry requirements' despite their best intentions. These can include needing an understanding of the mechanisms of civil society, or speaking a shared 'language' around taking action. There is, however, hope in how people feel informal - smaller scale - community activity could make a significant different to people's lives in creating small, positive changes.

"For initiatives such as the community development trust, you are relying on people being interested and educated in these subjects to make it work" (Male, 35, Ayrshire)

"I believe in community work. Community should come together to help each other out. Regardless whether that be charity work or just little bits of nice behaviour on the street, just something like that." (Male, 26, Oxford)

What do we want? Influence.
Voice & Power

"I can be heard, but nothing will happen. I can write emails, I can send a letter, but nothing will happen."

(Male, Oxford)

How can trust be rebuilt between local communities and government? What can be done to strengthen when and how they connect with those in power?

Discontent with politicians is in the top ten most important community issues and is cited as a major force driving people to want a greater say in the future of their local areas. Discontent with local and national politics includes negative perceptions of individual elected representatives, the collective way in which many parties, councils and governments work, and the lack of transparency in decision-making processes more broadly. This sits alongside frustrations over negative experiences of local services, public transport, infrastructure and housing. Within this theme, there was a resounding message that people feel local communities and their needs have gone 'unheard and forgotten' over the last ten years by those in power.

"Why do those that are in the position to do good for those they are supposed to represent, do only what is good for themselves instead. Then blame the same people they represent when things go wrong?"

(Male, 54, Greater London)

Time and again, people spoke of their lack of confidence Time and again, people spoke of their lack of confidence in politicians arising from experience of 'short-termist' or 'election-focused' engagement between elected representatives and communities. Promises of investment in the local area or infrastructure are always welcome in principle, but scepticism abounds about the likelihood of those promises being realised, or the ability of 'distant' or

Research Questions

What are the different ways in which people with very different views and power come together to agree and take action on shared priorities in a community?

How can 'conflicts' in local priorities be resolved in a way which does not leave people feeling disenfranchised?

How can we effectively include new and marginalised voices in local strategies and priorities?

How could government spending strategies be informed by local community priorities alongside national and regional policies?

How do we mitigate competition over funding between different organisations and sectors to create local change that is greater than the sum of its parts?

'absent' local leaders to effectively implement such plans and deliver the intended benefit. These issues cross-cut party politics and are linked to all aspects of local and national representation; residents often refer to 'those in power' as a single body - saying they see elected representatives as having very different lives and experiences to them.

"I worry - do we have people running this country and making decisions about people and circumstances that they know nothing about, nor care about?"

(Female, 50, Wales)

Such an extended period of suspension for the Northern Ireland Assembly over the last three years created high levels of uncertainty and stalled action and progress on many issues important to communities. People pointed to how it had affected the readiness of the country and particularly local communities for large scale challenges that are ahead, including Brexit and the future of the economy. Questions were also raised as to how it had affected the interest in, and capacity for, participation in democratic and local social, environmental or community action.

"What impact will not having a sitting parliament have in the long term for my community?"

(Female, 52, Northern Ireland)

Commensurately, there are frequently low levels of trust in authorities to fulfil the role expected of them by communities. There is widespread acknowledgement that the context for local authorities has been challenging because of the cuts they have experienced but, nonetheless, the ease of access to and quality of basic services is an area where local authorities are seen as having consistently failed communities. The removal of or change to amenities and service provision is perceived as reflecting a huge lack of understanding about the scale of challenges and needs in the community, giving rise to huge frustration and compounding distrust.

"Can we trust the local government to protect our community now and can we trust the government to properly fund our services?"

(Female, 53, South East)

How can we effectively include new and marginalised voices in local strategies and priorities?

"Being able to be represented as a group, to achieve a greater good for all."

(Male, 75, South West

Ensuring fair and equal representation of diverse voices in the community is an area where many people see a shortfall in effort, and perhaps even political will. This was particularly discussed in terms of the safety of communities; many people feel that minority ethnic and youth voices are excluded from discussions about policing strategies – despite these parts of the community being disproportionately affected by violence and crime, or issues such as stop-and-search.

Those from minority backgrounds also feel under-represented and rarely listened to in terms of decision-making around public services and community building, despite expressing interest and willingness to contribute. The risk of it always being the 'same voices' that are heard in 'representing' the community resonated strongly – regardless of background.

"They will not listen to anybody, only if you are white - so I don't have anything I can change."

(Female, 54, Greater London)

"The photo is about children's work in Oxfordshire and "I believe communities should help each other out and this photo epitomises community work for me in Oxfordshire."

How could government spending strategies be informed by local community priorities alongside national and regional policies?

Having a voice is particularly important to people when it comes to issues where people feel those 'in power' cannot or fail to see the full spectrum of challenges at local level. For example, how the deterioration of the local environment – from roads to parks and public buildings - affects the sense of identity, belonging or pride in local communities; or how the day-to-day reality of living somewhere lacking in social cohesion impacts individuals' sense of security and capacity to grasp opportunity.

"Why is the council absent in issues facing the public spaces?"

(Male, 30, South East)

Beyond this, the need for communities to have a greater voice in the future and fate of their local economies is communicated loud and clear. Restoring investment in local places cross-cut all of the top five priority issues raised by communities and creating jobs and employment prospects is seen as the means to enabling individuals and communities to play a greater role in a community's success. However, many emphasised that ensuring strategies for investment tackle the local experience of issues and targets the most urgent needs is essential - but an area where they have little confidence in local or national government.

Equally critical, and where people feel particularly powerless, is around decisions relating to local planning - housing development, the availability and shared use of public services, and how public, particularly green, spaces including parks, natural surroundings and the green belt are used and valued.

"Why are normal residents' opinions being disregarded on developments?"

(Female, 28, South West)

People living in communities which have seen significant population growth frequently feel that there has not been a commensurate growth in the provision of local resources, services or facilities, or that meeting the need has posed

"I care about the local facilities that my community uses in their daily lives. For example, the maintenance of local parks and educational facilities such as libraries. These facilities allow families to have fun days out, and also promote the social wellbeing of our community."

(Female, 17, Yorkshire & the Humber)

a threat to green spaces or to existing public amenities. Tensions also run high between communities and property developers, with the local authority seen as collaborators in unwanted growth. The part-privatisation of housing and services and how those in the supply chain engage, ignore or exploit communities, has a powerful effect on the relationship between communities and local government.

"The housing association has changed too many times (inefficiency from the council who are the freeholders)"

(Female, 40, Greater London)

There were frequent references to how local development planning processes are opaque to the majority in a community. This is an area where many consider that better, more inclusive engagement with communities could mitigate some of the negative impacts of current decision-making processes. It is an area in which people are particularly interested in a greater and more sustained level of participation and in playing a more active role

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How can 'conflicts' in local priorities be resolved in a way which does not leave people feeling disenfranchised?

Conflict in communities is often characterised as tensions between those resistant to change and those willing to embrace it. Sometimes, in places that have seen rapid growth, it can be between 'old' and 'new' residents but fault lines can arise across many parts of a community where there are differing priorities in a time of scarce or limited resources.

"In the last 10 years we have seen many changes. The farm now has fewer employees due to the advance of large machinery that can do the job quicker than manual labour and the farmyard now becoming a microbrewery and several small workshops. People now see that things have got to change. The old WW1 mess hut that has served as the village hall for so many years is slowly deteriorating and now the Church that has very few attendees is in question about its future, should we now take it on and use it as the community centre? Some are opposed to this, thinking it should just be closed. Others think it would be a great idea to use it although it would be a great expense."

(Female, 61, East of England."

However, many feel that the underlying causes are more basic; problems stem from how people have become isolated from others in the community, from the sense of insecurity about interacting with others that can arise as a result, and from how many people are simply overstretched and struggling. This is seen as affecting peoples' willingness or capacity to share their voice and views with others, though more people seek to have a stronger voice where they see decision-making by authorities is creating conflict or negative consequences for particular groups in the community – especially those who are elderly or vulnerable.

The online sphere, particularly community Facebook groups, now serves as a vital source of information about and route to engagement in local activities and happenings – but online groups are also widely recognised as deeply unconstructive for debate. How digital spaces could offer opportunities for more expansive conversation and discussion between individuals in communities, and between communities and those who work to support and govern them, is an interesting opportunity and one which reflects the preferences of those who lack the time, ability or motivation to participate in traditional consultation activities.

How can people with diverse opinions come together and take action on community priorities?

"Why are people not asked about what they would like to see in their community?"

(Male, 46, North East)

Unsurprisingly, people are most concerned with increasing their voice and influence on the issues where they feel change has not happened despite protracted or worsening problems, or where there is local conflict about priorities or solutions. However, for very few does this translate into a desire for 'communities' to take on the responsibility for leading or delivering change. As is explored in the chapter on the roles and responsibilities of community, despite growth of community leadership to take on ownership and responsibility for shared spaces and other civic assets, in general, most people do not feel that this is their role, or one which they have the skills, capacity, or power to take on.

On the contrary, our research shows that communities are typically looking for authorities – local, regional and national - to reset their relationship with communities. What they look for is greater transparency, collaboration and accountability. Having positive power in communities is, for the majority of people, framed as having influence – a place where everyone can contribute and is listened to, and where priorities are collectively agreed and acted upon. What is more - it is about accountability to local people and to communities. The majority of concerns voiced about elected representatives were that they were not - and could often not easily be - held to their promises.

In this context, cuts to both public and private investment in communities also represent a critical underlying problem. Particularly in places where austerity has been felt hardest, people feel disempowered and deterred by the seeming futility of active involvement in trying to shape local decision-making; if the available funding will only make small in-roads to solving locally entrenched and complex, people feel decreasing motivation to invest their own time and energy in such programmes.

As has been shown in the ringing support from the public for the NHS and social care system during the Covid-19 crisis, people also want their views on what society should provide, heard. There is a common frustration that a gap exists between what mattered to communities in this regard and whether those in power share the same values.

"What is the vision for the future of our centre, and our Borough - let's see a 5 year, 10 year plan and a 20 year plan and be allowed to give our views. At the moment we have token consultations and are largely ignored."

(Female, 70, Greater London)

"Just puppet politicians - they care nothing for the constituents when they're closing down the local hospital. Doesn't matter how many times you see these people when they're running."

(Male, Oxford)

Soup and Rolls from Butch Salad Kitchen

How do we mitigate competition over funding between different organisations and sectors to create local change that is greater than the sum of its parts?

The route to increasing the influence of communities towards the issues that matter to them is seen as highly complex from the perspective of many local people. It requires the navigation of the multiple systems that exist for and interact with communities. In today's landscape, communities are shaped by myriad public sector, civil society, and private sector operations, or consortia working across these traditional boundaries. Many people also find the *scale* of some of the issues and causes needing attention daunting when trying to influence those in power. Resolving issues of concern or influencing future plans is often caught between different figures of authority and organisations or the balance of power seems uncertain - which people found was alienating when trying to push forward a particular agenda or resolving a specific issue.

"Person A: But they just have so little power. What more do we want from them?

Person B: I want a lot more from them to be completely honest. Personally, I think a lot of us do, which is totally normal. Answering these questions through our own experience lens - and we're not really answering it from a person who would say, you know, I need to be educated or I'm part of the LGBTQ community or disabled - I'm trying as much as I can to kind of see it from a more universal lens. Why has the council forgotten people with mental health? Or people who can't afford to live in the city? Is that right or is it just as if they (the council) decide they're part of the community?"

There was one notable exception, where many people do welcome the opportunity to take direct power and control, rather than just have greater influence. This is the use and repurpose of community assets, where people can see genuine benefits of bringing these under local control so that they can be more directly responsive to local needs.

"When is the government going to wake up to the crying need for funding a coherent community strategy?"

(Female, 50, South East)

The challenge for communities benefiting from these opportunities, however, is usually one of capacity. In the cuts to many local councils and services it was frequently commented that it was often roles with 'community' in the title that tended to be the first cut. This has resulted in the loss of expertise and capacity in community development and means that where people have a willingness to take on assets, but lack the skills and experience to operate them as a successful enterprise, the support is not available.

An online photo of the Roar Festival: "it's for young disabled people and it represents inclusivity and that's really important. That is what community is to me – making sure everyone is included." (Jack)

"How much funding is going into the community projects?"

(Female, 19, West Midlands)

"I am fed up of people saying 'it is because of'... instead of blaming, get doing"

(Male, 39, East Midlands)

Digital and Community
Case Study

The role of digital was present in all the issues raised in this Agenda – both as an enabler of community life and as a cause of additional problems within communities. Predominantly it is seen as having transformed interactions and supplemented many traditional structures within communities - but it has not replaced them.

"I see that our community is fairly tight knit and local residents do help each other out on many occasions, largely over the Internet and social media." **(Male, 20, Greater London)**

"You don't make eye contact in the community because you have the blue light of a phone in your eyes" **(Male, 63, Scotland)**

Pre-Covid-19, our data suggests that for a large proportion of people, online was the most common touch-point with the local community; and we can anticipate that this has increased exponentially as people self-organised through their phones, desktops and laptops. The powerful presence of digital platforms within communities cannot be underestimated; community Facebook groups; housing-based or neighbourly whatsapp groups and local online forums were the first point of reference for many pre-Covid and these may have become an even stronger influence during the period of lockdown.

Digital platforms are a vital source of knowledge and information about what is happening in local communities as well as now being the principle mediums of community organising. Beyond this, digital is now also the main route to engaging with the public sector - from council services to benefits, and to democratic participation - creating new challenges in terms of inclusivity and accessibility, and raising questions about how this is and will further change

the relationship between local or national authorities and communities. The necessity and command to lockdown an entire country due to Covid-19, has shown us that connectivity, kit and digital skills are a basic human need in a 21st century society.

"A mate of mine is struggling on Universal Credit. They penalise him, he's not very good with computers. He misses an email they fine him like £70 and then that's his food budget. It's making the poor get poorer and the rich get richer." (Male, Weymouth)

The role digital has played in the Covid-19 crisis is hugely significant: of even greater importance is what the legacy of this heightened digital engagement may be. The questions asked by people suggest that an individuals' sense of *belonging* or *inclusion* within communities is moderated, positively or negatively, by interactions and relationships within the virtual spaces of that community. For many communities – specifically the rural and remote - digital facilitates routes to employment and services that would otherwise be hard or impossible to obtain, but the inconsistent coverage of Broadband is an obstacle.

"As so much more is done online, people cannot afford to work from home unless they have good internet, there is so much that cannot be done without internet and yet in rural communities, we really need it, it's a real, real problem. We don't have reliable service, and you have to pay a lot more for it, for very slow speeds. Some areas have no mobile phone reception. So you can be very, very cut-off. When our landline goes down and you call up and they say can you do things and we say no... you can be left very isolated." (Female, 48, North England)

"Small communities like us require basic things such as around transportation and a Post Office. People still use these services and not everybody has gone online for all the stuff, hence having such facilities will help the community." (Male, 34, Scotland)

Digital is seen as an agent of both isolation and connectivity; of enabling greater participation and presenting further challenges of exclusion. The focus of questions was on how the digital sphere could support the experience of community in local places - and more frequently, on how community can continue to thrive offline, in spaces where strangers are increasingly less used to meeting.

"You've got your Facebook community, you can try to infiltrate that community there, that hub there, get it out into the open and get people out and being more active" (Female, Weymouth)

Despite strong interest in an *improved community life*, and some concerns about the rising influence of technology, few questions ask how communities can return to a 'nostalgic' pre-digital model, but ask instead how digital is changing community life and what the *balance* should be of community interaction online and offline. The question of how digital affects young peoples' connection to their local community is a particular source of interest – out of a concern that the first point of reference for 'net natives' might be communities online and further afield.

"My community is my immediate environment, my city, the people around me and the wider community discovered online." (Female, 57, South West)

Connectivity, privacy and safety

The concept of *privacy* in community becomes more complex in the digital age, where the growth of community Facebook groups and neighbourhood or interest based whatsapp groups means the interaction with community does not start and finish at individuals' front doors. It has also taken on a prescient concern for the role of technology in tracking and intervening in individuals' lives during the Covid-19 crisis. People are uncomfortable with feeling there could be anonymous or hidden members of a community – which partly prompted discussion of the need for a balance between the virtual and physical life of a community.

"Like, you know, your neighbour, is that really important in this day and age? If it isn't, is it because we create our communities now through digital shared interests … but people still yearn for the old fashioned meaning of the word community, which is when you go out in the street and you talk to your neighbours; that has changed. So there is a community there (online), they're getting that emotional need … but still … everybody still wants the geographical community of the village." (Male, 27, Swansea)

People are divided about whether local information shared in communities online represents a trusted source of knowledge, or exacerbates divisions, including through fake news. The role of the media and particularly social media in shaping local narratives about communities and access to trusted sources of information *about* communities is an underexplored area which people feel will be important for the future.

'There's a lot of issues that social media has got a big part to play with things that you may think are going on in your community.' (Female, Birmingham)

The majority experience is that digital serves as a means of mutual support and connection within the community; and furthermore – a means of sharing information and indeed misinformation for those seeking to *influence* communities. Digital was not frequently discussed as a means of communities 'speaking truth to power', despite the calls for people to have a greater voice on the issues affecting them.

"Why can there not be an online portal for the local government where members can vote on polls regarding issues?" (Male, 24, South West)

"Can we have more community meetings, or a safe space online for people to talk?" (Female, 23, Wales)

Restart, Renewal – or Risk?
Uncertain Futures

How can communities be supported and empowered to look towards systemic, longer–term and less immediate challenges? And how can this be sustained?

This Agenda focuses on what matters to local communities. As *Understanding What Matters* shows, the issues that matter most to the majority of local people are very localised, if not hyperlocal. There are huge challenges that people see in their day to day lives and right in front of them in their local areas. As we heard repeatedly, many are longstanding, and seem a long way from resolution. This affects whether people can look towards other national and global challenges - and with what capacity, energy and confidence.

> *"It's (poverty) a problem in all communities, not just Oxford. Communities are watching people crumble away because of the effect of how much it costs and how much more it's going to cost us. How are they going to get to and from work now because the rent is so high? The disparity in the cost of living does create a poverty situation where you end up with people who can't afford to think."*
>
> *(Male, Oxford)*

Priority setting in partnership with communities provides a valuable insight into how 'community' can be a lens through which to gain fuller understanding of vulnerabilities, risks and indeed strengths in local communities. What is more, it exposes how national and global trends are variably experienced in local areas. Asking what has happened to communities in the last ten years starts to reveal how national policies have and are permeating local ecosystems and the social, economic, environmental and civic impact at local level; and how global trends and narratives are affecting what people agree - and disagree - is important to act upon at local level.

How can communities' awareness of and readiness for 'shocks' be strengthened?

That we were sitting on shaky foundations before the Covid-19 crisis has been discussed in earlier chapters. Policies which strip away resources from communities damage their readiness to respond and to act in response to sudden shocks and risks is compromised. In the face of what can seem acute and overwhelming challenges, people can find it hard to look towards priorities and trends which will affect their community in the medium to longer term. Certain issues - such as entrenched inequality - can seem too complex or large scale to solve at the local level, or to only affect a limited few, often resulting instead in apathy, a feeling of disempowerment, or a sense of being overwhelmed.

There is significant hope, however, in how the majority of people want to mobilise to influence and improve life in their communities. Often, this is about identifying where small changes could make big differences to local people, whether in infrastructure, people-based or activity terms. Communities had many suggestions but doubted their capacity to act or influence in whether they could actually create change on a small scale.

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How can the local narrative about global issues and macro risks – such as environmental change - be developed/made visible and what is the local role communities can play?

While there is a plethora of community-led initiatives and community action around the country, people's sense of their ability to effect change also determines where they feel responsibility lies. Few issues are seen as isolated challenges at the community level.

Instead the inter-connectedness of issues and the potential domino effect of changes at the individual, family, community, national or even global level are tangibly felt. The sense of being part of a wider chain or system was one obstacle in communities taking action on some of the most grave challenges: it was hard to isolate factors and see where and how they could make a difference, with people struggling to disentangle problems of housing, employment, education,

Research Questions

How can communities' awareness of and readiness for 'shocks' be strengthened?

How can the local narrative about global issues and macro risks - such as environmental change - be developed/ made visible and what is the local role communities can play?

How can communities' lived experience of systems such as welfare or policing be fully understood and used valuably to identify needs and change the shape of system-based change?

How can community capacity be developed to identify and address future challenges?

How can communities' resilience to risks and shocks be improved and how can they be best supported to recover?

and mental health, for example. Determining the appropriate strategies to tackle these issues is thus felt to be a challenge outside the remit of local communities, and are felt to be inadequately addressed by politicians.

Priorities are also dominated by needs which are more salient on a day to day basis: many national or global issues are a lower priority for communities compared to the insecurity or absence of employment, the accessibility of local healthcare and mental health services; or indeed basic needs for adequate food and housing.

In that light, it *is* perhaps unsurprising that significant national or global trends and events which will have an impact on local places were commonly ranked as low priorities for local communities. These issues ranged from the political, such as the implications of Brexit for local economies, to the effects of climate change. This was equally true for communities where a more immediate or detrimental impact is expected, and hence a greater prioritisation of such issues might have been anticipated.

Yet at the same time, it *is* surprising – the majority of the research was carried out during high profile, unprecedented climate strikes across the UK, and in the run-up to the anticipated 31st October 2019 date for leaving the EU.

Discussions revealed three main reasons for the de-prioritisation of these issues:

- A lack of *local narrative* and/ or *experience* connecting a global issue to their specific locality
- A perceived *lack of urgency*, with the impact of some issues expected less imminently or frequently than others
- A *sense of complete powerlessness*, such that to worry about or prioritise the issue is fruitless because communities feel they lack capacity or agency to change them.

The high level of more immediate insecurities and challenges in many communities seemed to present a clear barrier to being able to consider the relationship between large national or global challenges and local vulnerabilities. We see a scarcity of capacity to engage with, prepare for or respond to these in the face of more immediate concerns. The following issues explore these uncertain horizons in greater depth.

How can communities' lived experience of systems such as welfare or policing be fully understood and used valuably to identify needs and change the shape of system-based change?

The disproportionate impact of issues such as safety or welfare on certain communities has long been a point of contention in how to create policy that inclusively supports all communities. How people from different walks of life have experienced the intensely difficult and disruptive period of lockdown and the particularly heavy impact of the pandemic on certain communities may be additional factors which in themselves are points of tension with increasing significance in the aftermath of Covid-19.

The evidence of low levels of bridging capital in UK communities raises questions of who may be left out from the patchwork of support, and how communities can organise inclusively towards shared goals and avoid the risk of 'leaving behind' those they do not feel (as) connected to. This Agenda indicates that the relative priority of some issues are strongly contested in communities; namely the environment, the response to Brexit; and strategies for caring for certain groups, such as the homeless.

There are some issues that people agree as high priorities, for example 'What can be done to support young people in the community?'. For other issues, there is consensus that they are less important, for example 'Why have communities been displaced?', e.g. as a result of new developments, usually because this is not an issue that people have observed locally.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are some highly contested issues. Though very different subjects, there are commonalities in *why* certain issues create conflict or divide communities which are a point of significant interest to people engaging with and working for the future of UK communities.

What can be done about homelessness in the community?

"I was in a shelter when I was 17. And there is a big stigma that [homelessness] is just people begging on the street who don't have a job. And I did have a job, I just had nowhere to stay"

(Male, Swansea)

Ways in which care for the homeless could be improved was the most contested issue - though it was also raised in every location visited as a growing point of concern. The visibility of an issue on a day-to-day basis appears to have a strong effect on whether or not some people assess it as important. Additionally, and particularly in the case of homelessness, where people apportion 'blame' for the problem determines the importance they place on collective responsibility for solving it. Thus there is a huge gulf between those who have experienced homelessness first hand, or see it as a failing of the 'system' which has caused a national housing crisis, others attribute failure and responsibility to the individual themselves .

"Why are we having people sleeping on the streets when there are empty, en-suite rooms, laying empty. These people could utilise this building. They are in an unfortunate position, but could be helped."

(Female, 63, South East)

"This represents the homeless population camped out on Oxford Universities doorstep. It represents a lack of concern for the homeless in a city with the richest university in the country. We're one of the richest cities in the world... and goodness knows they're rolling in it – and they have homeless people on their doorsteps, their literal doorstep." (Sarah)

What effect will Brexit have on my community?

Considering the divisive nature of the topic, it is unsurprising that there is strong disagreement on whether or not the impact of Brexit is going to be important for their community. However, this depends on where you live and how much a particular issue affects your local community. In Derry, Northern Ireland where people will be strongly affected by Brexit, there is consensus about its importance to the community:

"With Brexit I thought about the whole community of the city because we're so close to the border. We're at the furthest extremity of Europe and I think it will have a seriously detrimental impact"

(Male, Derry)

There is a heavy split between those who rank it as a top priority and those at the lowest possible ranking. There is a further spike at those who rank it at zero – 20 people say they think Brexit is neither important or not-important to their communities, often explaining that this is because they do not know whether Brexit is going to have an effect on their community and have little or conflicting information about the consequences.

People are divided between those who say, *"I'm not really worried. I just don't want to think about it anymore" (Male, Weymouth)*, and the ones who think *"it's a high priority. No matter what the outcome is, it's a high priority" (Male, Birmingham)*; the latter argue that Brexit will inevitably affect the day-to-day reality of communities in the UK.

Generally, people understand Brexit as a national concern but are insecure about how it will manifest locally, *"I wonder whether Brexit will affect things on a local level... [The] amount of non-British in the area or whether it will affect schemes provided by the local council." (Male, 45, East Midlands)*. People mention difficulties conceptualising what Brexit means for their communities and when they would notice its effects: *"People are preparing, but they don't know what they are preparing for … It's a big question mark after we leave. I'd just like to know what I'm preparing for" (Female, Swansea)*.

A few people have more specific worries about aspects of life that could be affected, *"[What is] the effect of Brexit on the area's biggest employer?" (Female, 42, North East)*. This is particularly the case for those who live in areas with large employers.

A few people have more specific worries about aspects of life that could be affected, *"[What is] the effect of Brexit on the area's biggest employer?" (Female, 42, North East)*. This is particularly the case for those who live in areas with large employers.

"I don't live far from Jaguar Land Rover, and they're all waiting to see what happens with Brexit. If JLR decides to close, that's going to wipe the area out. All the shops will go [which] we rely on."

(Male, Birmingham).

Brexit appears to be of higher priority for those who expect to be directly affected: *"The reason I put Brexit as 5 is that I can actually see the difference before and after" (Female, Birmingham)*. In other areas, where people think they will be less impacted by the outcome, the issue is typically de-prioritised: *"I think Oxfordshire as a community is relatively Brexit-proof. We don't have many global companies or European companies" (Female, Oxford)*.

Many people cannot envision how Brexit will affect their individual lives - let alone their communities. This undeniably opens the question of whether people would prioritise the issue if they were given information on how it will affect their local community, for example its impact on jobs and supply chains or on wider systems of welfare and care. Our research reveals an imperative need to inform and consult communities on the outcome of Brexit locally.

"Brexit is going to be a car crash and includes people's mortgages and that's their homes – everything they've bet their lives on. In this community of people how do we support those people? How do we ensure that they don't fall through the cracks and go on the streets of the city?"

(Male, Oxford)

What can be done to protect our community against the impact of climate change?

The importance of climate change divides the political spectrum in the UK and this is mirrored in our research by being amongst the most contested issues.

"I understand the effects of climate change nationally and globally, but I couldn't really bring it down to a local level"

(Male, Bradford).

There were several referenced consequences of the majority of people conceptualising climate change as a global issue rather than as one with local impact. Many people highlighted how communities could contribute by recycling. "As a community, we recycle about 82% of our rubbish. As Weymouth, we're doing it already" (Male, Weymouth). However there was a limited view in the majority of communities about *what role* the community can play in mitigating environment change – especially where the natural environment is not visibly directly affected.

"I think climate change is going to affect everyone. You can't protect a particular community from it. It's similar like Brexit, you can't protect a particular community from either of those things"

(Male, Glasgow).

People in certain parts of the UK also highlighted the localised 'trade offs' in terms of the transition to economic and system models that may mitigate climate change. Whilst there was not an extensive discussion, there was awareness of the possible impact on industry and indeed - jobs - and uncertainty about whether changes of this nature would be carried out with the impact on local communities and individual livelihoods in mind and mitigated.

"It's catch-22 that if you get rid of these high emission producing industries like round here, you don't have the jobs and if you don't have the jobs that you don't have anything - you don't have taxation, which impacts more largely... you don't have the local economies or local communities

(Male, Bradford)

People argued on the whole that it is the responsibility of elected representatives to take actions to reduce the impact of climate change and any fall out from policies taken to mitigate it on their communities.

"I question how the representatives of our community aren't acknowledging the growing problem of climate change, or making any significant [effort] to reduce carbon emissions as a community, as climate change is something that will affect all of us, both the community and the world"

(Female, 17, Northern Ireland).

Annual Christmas carolling in Bradford (Alex)

How can communities' resilience to risks and shocks be improved and how can they be best supported to recover?

Issues appear to be contested when people have diverging experience and knowledge of a topic. Someone who has experienced precarious housing or sees people rough sleeping in their community will more likely see this as important. Similarly, having a local narrative around climate change allows people to break a global issue down to the local level. Lastly people need sufficient information about how an issue - such as Brexit - will impact on their local community in order to make an informed decision.

Whether or not the community feels empowered to respond is another crucial factor. In most places, climate change in particular can feel very distant in terms of a timeframe for local impact - this despite the increasing frequency of flooding that certain communities are experiencing, for example. In discussions it often fell to one or two lone voices to identify how their area is already feeling the effects or to raise concerns about how it is affecting other places.

How to understand divisions and how to overcome them, both to achieve a *stronger sense of community* and to enable communities to take action on critical issues must be seized as a vital question over the coming years. The experience of deliberation and discussion across all four nations of the UK supports that whilst certain issues may be contested, people find more priorities in common than they might have expected.

Conclusion

This Agenda is an agenda for change, rooted in the voices and lived experiences of communities across the UK. It offers a point of orientation and guidance from communities - directed at those who profess to want to support them.

Creating this agenda has involved listening to thousands of people from across all nations of the UK and from all types of community, engaging with often-researched and under-researched communities to hear their priorities in their own words.

'How can we feel safer?' is a bridging concern for individuals from many walks of life, just as 'How can we look out for and do more for others?' is a rallying opportunity. These questions, both ranking within the top five on this agenda, fall in an even harsher light now than they did before the pandemic began. Across every region, people have told us what matters most to the experience of community: a sense of belonging; mutual support; accessible services and resources which plan for the acute and longer term risks to communities; and a high level of reciprocal trust between people, and between people and the institutions there to serve them.

But we know that the experience of these challenges is not equal. Communities in the UK are doing what they can to build relationships and structures of support from the foundation of a bedrock of inequality. This inequality is starkly visible in e

peoples' daily lives, creating social fractures and further challenges for support systems. The questions about why efforts to address these inequalities are ineffective or do not go far enough are becoming louder.

Amid the shared issues, there are distinctive areas of urgent concern. While the opportunities for connecting with each other, products and services online have grown exponentially, an increasingly digital lifestyle has contributed to the unravelling of our high streets and disconnection from local services and institutions embedded in communities. In some places there are distinctive challenges in how fast and in what ways local economies have declined, and the implications for communities when they fail. The legacy of the disappearance of different industries is felt through the decline in livelihoods, opportunities for people to fulfil their aspirations and potential, and indeed hope for whole families and communities as they struggle to break cycles of limited and precarious employment and poverty. Nonetheless, the majority of people still want to feel connected to and supported by their local place. In many ways, this Agenda explores how ordinary people are reweaving back together a sense of place-based communities – and points to what is required to enable this to be a successful social and economic exercise.

What this Agenda exposes is that identifying the issues is not the challenge. The challenge, put forward by all the people participating in this study, is grounded in finding solutions. Questions of '*whose* responsibility' it is, "*which* voices" are heard, '*how* inclusive' an approach can be and "*where* power can be influenced" resound in the discussion over every issue in this Agenda and point to a populace reaching for and needing answers that have practical application and impact. It is here, then, that the mission of the Institute for Community Studies begins it's work. Working with our partners to share what is working to address these challenges, forging an alliance between innovation, academic evidence and lived experience; to seek out and support the ways in which communities are involved in shaping (and leading) the change they so want to see.

The question raised by communities in this Agenda is how they actually achieve change. The questions raised in this Agenda ask how far and how holistically those who hold institutional or political power understand communities and the conditions they are experiencing - and believe in a more equal society. Concerns that the basis for intervention all too frequently start from a national or distanced perspective were raised as often as the view that 'nothing ever happens / changes' despite the many interventions into a place.

 People frequently spoke of frustration at short termist engagement and 'over consultation' without follow up. Communities spoke of development-led interventions that provide the opportunity for renewal but without local design and legitimacy - with the results bearing little resemblance to how local people experience community or their needs.

The question of how to transfer more power to communities was raised in the Agenda, albeit with no clear consensus by communities and experts. This is an unfolding phenomenon - where the Institute for Community Studies sees its purpose and mission. Communities feel categorically that questions of social care, healthcare, education, infrastructure and public services should be a matter of state responsibility, and pride. But where there is interest in taking greater responsibility - over assets, activities or to share responsibilities over planning,decision making and economic renewal -this raises questions about how the necessary skills and capacity can be brought into and embedded sustainably within communities, or activated where they exist already.

The current public health measures in response to Covid-19 bring the role and resilience of local economies into even starker focus. The standstill in whole parts of the economy has grave implications for the future of many industries and for an even greater number of jobs and livelihoods. The insecurity experienced by many, and the fragility of many local economies before the pandemic, now has new dimensions and will be further exacerbated. Whether the present collective focus on risk and needs within local communities will sustain or change, and whether the moments of community action that catalyse in crisis can convert into much needed longer trends of community resilience, initiative, economic innovation and solidarity, are not known. The current context puts the vulnerability and strengths of local places to the test in ways that will need to be better understood as the UK moves into phases of what will be a long economic and social recovery. If we are to move safely towards this highly uncertain future, the strength, connectivity and cohesion of the UK's communities will be a foundational part.

Taking Action

***Safety in Numbers?* is a call for collaborative action for all those who care about supporting communities to thrive, now and for the future.**

The sharing of this agenda is only the first step. Each of the questions prioritised with communities needs further exploration, through research, engagement, policy or practice. We hope those working with and for communities across the many different areas of social policy and civic life will take up this challenge, listen to the priorities that communities have

identified, and use their voices as a guide to focus their research expertise, funding, policy development and interventions.

The involvement of communities is paramount in the next steps of this agenda if we are to build on the opportunities highlighted and respond faithfully to communities' calls for greater influence and shared responsibility. The ICS has at its heart a core mission: to research and contribute meaningful ways to engage communities in understanding the issues that matter, and to build community capacity to take part in finding the strongest solutions. To this end, we are developing an open access repository of best practice in community-engaged research and evidence, and a national community research network, to support others in their work.

But we cannot and should not do this alone. In collaboration with communities, we suggest the following calls to action:

For Researchers and Research Organisations: to recognise the questions in this agenda as entry points to further investigation and an opportunity to shape community-engaged research strategies, and to work collaboratively with us and other partners to help deepen the understanding of the core issues.

For National Government: to hear the calls that recovery, renewal and 'levelling up' at national level has to start from listening deeply to the fears and challenges of local people and addressing the inequalities and stretched capacity within local places. To respond to calls for a sustained, long term strategy for investment in communities that is co-created, accessible and more closely accountable to communities themselves.

For Civil Society and Charities: to join and deepen the conversation about what matters and what's working with communities from your positions of expertise and experience, and to work in partnership with researchers, policymakers and ourselves on the issues and questions that are most relevant to your sector and practice.

For Local Authorities: to listen to the calls for greater voice and influence from communities in local planning and decision-making, and to draw upon resources and partnership to innovative in local public involvement, bridge gaps within and between communities and those who act for them, and build strategies for long term, sustained engagement.

We are building a nationwide consortium of commitment to take action on the issues in this agenda. If you are interested in partnering with us on a single question or funding further exploration into a particular issue, please contact us at icstudies.org.uk.

Appendix 1: Detailed methodology

Prior to starting the process of co-creating the research agenda, we held five focus groups around the country to determine the 'language' to use about communities and to test public perceptions and understanding of (and interest in) 'community issues'. The groups were held in London, Birmingham, and Cwmbran (Welsh valleys).

The core of our approach comprised four phases: Gathering to capture questions and issues from a large sample of people; Analysing to group, classify and explore the contributions; Validating to test our analysis and emerging set of priority questions; and Distilling to hone in on and refine the final set of questions.

Gathering
National survey

We conducted a nationally representative survey of the UK between 28th August and 4th September 2019 using the Ipsos Mori omnibus service. The sample was structured to include a Northern Ireland boost to ensure adequate representation of all four nations, and include both an online and face-to-face survey (Capibus).

- 2,2284 online surveys
- 28 face to face surveys

Seven questions were included on the survey, in addition to a range of standard demographic and socio-economic profiling questions.

- Three open questions exploring "what matters to you in your community?" and what questions people have about what has happened in their community over the last ten years, and about what matters for the future

- Two questions asking people to rank a range of issues that may matter to communities according to their personal priorities, and an open question for an explanation of why the most important issues were selected

- A final open question on where/ who or what community people were thinking about when answering the questions

The issues included in the ranking questions were developed based on the indicators included in various UK community

wellbeing frameworks, such as the Co-Op Community Wellbeing Index (Hill-Dixon et al., 2018), the Thriving Places Index (Centre for Thriving Places, 2016), the Scottish Place Standard (Scottish Government, 2015), and a conceptual review by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (Atkinson et al., 2017). These indicators are all based on research with people in communities across the UK to understand what a strong, flourishing community looks and feels like to those who live and work there.

The reach of the survey was extended through a publicly accessible version which was available for people to complete between August and September 2019. The survey was promoted via social media, through the ICS Community Advisory Board and in The Young Foundation newsletter. This generated an additional 67 responses.

Focus groups

To supplement the nationally representative survey, we held focus groups in seven locations across the UK. There were two groups in each location, involving 101 participants in total. Groups were held between 4th September 2019 and 20th September 2019.

Locations were selected to ensure coverage of all four nations and several English regions, and a mix of large and small cities and market towns with rural catchment areas. We also aimed to ensure diversity in terms of relative affluence and levels of deprivation, and political preferences in terms of the most recent General Election and the UK Referendum on membership of the European Union. The locations were:

- Bradford
- Birmingham (participants from across the metropolitan area)
- Oxford (including participants from rural hinterland)
- Weymouth
- Glasgow, Scotland (participants from across the metropolitan area)
- Swansea, Wales
- Derry-Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Participants were recruited using a specialist recruitment agency and designed to include a mix reflective of the local population by age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic group. All participants received a modest cash incentive to thank them for their participation and reflect the costs of taking part. The groups comprised three main activities:

- A warm-up photo elicitation task, based on an image selected by participants in advance

- A group discussion focusing on what community means to them and what makes somewhere a good place to live

- Adapted Q-sort tasks to produce individual prioritisations of question sets, plus a shared group prioritisation

For the Q-sort task, participants were given 32 cards with questions such as 'What can be done to support young people in the community?' or 'What will the effect of Brexit on my community be?'. They were then asked to rank these on a scale from -5 to +5 according to how important they thing an issue is for their community. They could also add questions they felt were missing. Following this individual task, there was a group discussion where reasons for placing particular issues under +/-5 were shared. The group then worked together to create a shared sort based on group consensus, with the number of questions placed at +5 limited to ten.
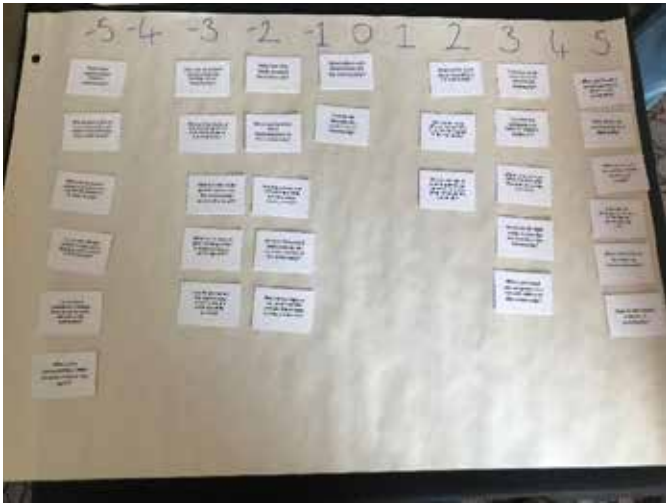
Analysing

For the purposes of analysis, almost the full set of data was treated as qualitative data. This included all free text responses from surveys, plus the transcripts from the focus group discussions. The only data excluded was the ranking questions from the survey, and the Q-sort data from the groups.

All data that explicitly or implicitly framed a research question or priority issue (generated either through the groups or surveys) was analysed using content analysis. Content analysis was selected as it is a flexible methodology suitable

for mixed data sources requiring analysis from multiple perspectives. The idea of "Combined Content Analysis" (Hamad et al., 2016) enables incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative analyses, and the combining of both inductive and deductive methods.   It was important that our coding of the data went "beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings … [which] can represent either explicit communication or inferred communication" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

A coding pilot (Schreier, 2012) was used to establish a core set of codes using an inductive approach, reviewed and agreed by the coding team, with additional codes identified and agreed throughout the coding as required. In total, over 4,000 questions plus content from the focus group discussions were captured and classified into a final set of 52 codes (which we refer to as "issues" throughout this report). These were then aggregated into 14 higher order categories (which we refer to as "themes"). Due to the volume of content, it was not possible to double-code all source text. Therefore, to test the validity and reliability of the coding we looked at an indicator of reproducibility and accuracy – that is, the extent to which the distribution of classifications by our two coders statistically corresponded to each other. These proved to be strongly correlated (r=0.91).

The coded question set was then analysed from a quantitative perspective to produce descriptive statistics on the frequency with which codes and categories are mentioned, with the potential break this data down by nation and region, and core demographic variables. Additional descriptive analyses exploring what type of questions were being asked (e.g. why, who, when) supplemented this breakdown of priorities.

The data was then further analysed from a qualitative perspective to identify additional, latent or relational cross-cutting themes within the data.

A final set of data was identified through the analysis as not representing questions per se, but as reflections on the context which was driving the questions and priorities people were raising; insight into why certain questions are ranked more highly than others.

Finally, the data from the Q-sort activity was also analysed quantitatively, to identify the most and least contested issues. In total, 98 participants completed the task fully, and we selected those items where the standard deviation was at least 1.0 larger than the smallest standard deviation as the "most contested".

Validating

Stakeholder survey

In parallel with the citizen survey, a similar version was made available to professionals and volunteers working in or with communities from any sector. This was done to a) ensure that we could differentiate responses from people answering in a professional rather than lay capacity, b) potentially capture priorities, questions and issues from a professional and potentially more strategic vantage point, and c) to provide a form of 'check and balance' for the main survey, for example, to ensure that crucial issues raised by stakeholders were not entirely absent from the views of communities. In total, 156 people contributed to this survey between September 2019 and February 2020 but the participants are not representative in terms of their sectors of work or UK region and as such, we treat this data with caution.

Stakeholder discussions

The data from communities, regional variations in priorities and draft question sets for each category and theme were tested with stakeholder reference groups across the country. Participants were also able to identify other questions and issues which they felt were a priority in their area, or they consider important to improve the way in which they operate in and work with communities.

The groups were arranged by ICS Community Advisory Board members and included representatives from civil society, academia and the public sector – including across health, emergency services, education, children and families, housing, arts and culture, the public realm, local authorities, philanthropic funders and more.

Groups were held in Birmingham, Bristol, Sunderland, Edinburgh, Ayrshire, Belfast, Cardiff and Brockweir. In total, 72 people participated and discussions took place in January 2020.

Oral histories

The final stage in the agenda development process was to take the findings back to communities, both as a process of validation, and to further illuminate the priority questions with additional qualitative insights. The approach chosen was oral history, recognising an oral history is itself a co-creative process - between the participants' narratives and the results of the researcher's work. They not only illuminate the context of the participants' lives, in this case as representatives from different communities across the UK, but can also serve as tools of empowerment, giving "back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place" (Thompson, 2016, 2, 34)

The 13 members of our Citizen Advisory Board were presented with the same data as the stakeholder reference groups to review; an interview was conducted with them by a member of the ICS team using an oral history informed approach.

The Community Advisory Board were then trained in Oral History interviewing and five members subsequently recruited and interviewed 2-3 members each from their local community. The interviews undertaken by these peer researchers lasted approximately 30 minutes and were audio-recorded, then downloaded and emailed to the ICS team. Summaries were produced by a member of the ICS team in consultation with the peer researchers.

Participants ranged in age from 24 to 85 years and were located across all four nations of the UK; representing urban, rural, market town and coastal communities. They included five interviews in each of Wales and Northern Ireland, and eight interviews in Scotland; in England the interviews were with participants in London, Sunderland, Birmingham, Basingstoke, Torbay, Derbyshire and Ipswich. The interviews were conducted via phone, video call and face-to-face in February 2020.

The interviews explored in more detail: broader understandings and perceptions of "community"; changes in community in terms of how people live and the places and spaces in the last ten years, as well the sense of community, identity, cohesion and belonging; the challenges facing a community now and in the future, and the role and capacity of a community to address them. The participants then fed back on the national data through reflections on its variations or similarities to their own experience of community.

Distilling

Building on the analysis and validating phases, the data was reviewed for a final time. This stage included refining the wording of individual questions and reducing the set to 40 community priorities which fall within the scope of work for the Institute of Community Studies. We then aggregated these into six "master themes", driven by the cross-cutting thematic analysis conducted previously.

Appendix 2: Themes & sub-themes

Breakdown

Safety
Drug Abuse
General safety
Ineffective policing and justice system
Knife crime and gangs

Provision of public services
Access to NHS
Bins and recycling
Concerns over austerity
Concerns over privatisation
Developments straining services
Education
Sports and Leisure

Roads, transport & infrastructure
Developments straining infrastructure
Public transport
Roads, traffic and parking

Planning & the green belt
Accessibility
Cleanliness and maintenance
Green spaces
Regeneration and development

Primary themes
Sub-themes

Other
General hope for improvement
General negative outlook for the future
I am content
Nothing ever changes

Housing
Gentrification and displacement
Lack of affordable housing

Environment
Climate change (concerns)
Sustainability (solutions)
Pollution & care for the environment

Employment & the cost of living
Economic hardship
Increase in living costs
Lack of jobs and/or opportunities

Brexit
Brexit

Local economy
Decline of the high street
General lack of amenities
Impact of technology
No investment in area
Vacant Sites

Social cohesion
Anti-social behaviour
Changes in population
Discrimination
Foreign immigration

Community building
Improved community life
Sense of community

Care for the most vulnerable
Care for the elderly
Care for the most vulnerable
Homelessness
Services for children
Services for young people

Discontent with politicians
Discontent with elected representatives
Discontent with local council
Lack of transparency of government
Party politics
Unheard and forgotten

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Acknowledgements

Community Advisory Board

This research agenda was created with the guidance, support and critical friendship of the Community Advisory Board for the ICS. The Advisory board have been recruited from across the country, and keep us true to our mission to place communities right at the centre of our work. They are a vital part of our deep routes into communities and without them, this agenda would not have been possible.

They are:

Gillian Davies	Alison Macklin
Ranjit Dhillon	Robert McAdam
Kevin Dixon	Louise McLaughlin-Borlace
Steve Donkon	Tom McNeil
Islam Jalaita	Baldev Singh-Bain
Andrea Kemp	Esmee Wilcox
Ryan McKay	

Further details about the ICS Community Advisory Board can be found on our **website**.

External Advisory Board

We would also like to thank the ICS External Advisory Board for their critical comment and review of the approach and methods of the research agenda and their support with where the questions and challenges of this agenda go next. The External Advisory Board includes representation from the sectors – academic, civil society, business, policy and funding – who work to support communities and who care about taking action on the issues that matter to them.

They are:

Prof Anand Menon, Kings College London

Dr Penny Bernstock, University of West London

Lord David Blunkett, University of Sheffield

Mark Fisher, Chair – Grenfell Enquiry

Fiona Garvan, Scottish Community Development Centre

Abigail Gibson, Friends Provident Foundation

Richard Harries, Power to Change

Dan James, Eden Project

Dr Molly Morgan-Jones, British Academy

Professor Mike Savage, LSE

Stian Westlake, Royal Statistical Society

Also supported by Professor Laura McAllister, Cardiff University

how can we be more inclusive

how can a feeling of neighbourhood

will central government realise that their policies have detrimental effects

will there be more services provided to meet the needs of new

there are many people moving here from outside the local area

there's so much disharmony within

local industry has been sold off many are

they closed the local school which was the heart of the community

housing built for young families made the area come alive again

many young people have moved from the area   why is there a huge lack of funding for small buisnesses

how many people of different cultures live round here

where a

many young people have moved from the area

will the empty shops be replaced on the high street

expensive for locals now a rich commuter town

there is a high rate of poor people and this is not because o

immigration

no parks or youth centres anymore   how will special needs provision be improved in future years

more public opinon on whats good for the community rather than from the elected few

local pubs closing down

what is being done about homelessness in the

how many more initiatives or extra restrictions are to be made

appens

council do not care about this area though they care about other areas   why do we have to travel miles for gp services why have they not helped improverished people in our local community

what opportunities are opening

things change in the future to help the vulnerable be

how can jobs be more readily accessible   what is being done to bring employers to the area

why is the government's not spending more money on renewable power

why is our town a

ill my neighbours be helped to get into work

the short lets market is destroying my local community

why have job opp

hen use going to wake up

there's too much racial discrimination

will this area be looked after wh

how can small towns compete aga

g improve the service

please no

how can public spending be more for the public not politics

why did they shut

isn't there more support

why isn't more money being inve

when will better recycling facilities become a

ats being done to preserve community   how mental health resources can be improved

why are industrial areas not protected   will we get to work within a better distan

plans to update the roads and pavements

will the neighbourhood be sa

someone going to invest in this community

ake the area a nicer place to live   we have a neighbourhood watch scheme that helps

how can we create more opportunities to combat isolation

could the railway station be opened again to connect us up

where the safety of the community is heading

why are we closing schools and pushing kids out of town

why are street lights not replaced

the community is not a disabled friendly space   why does criminal behaviour go unchallenged   my area has become much poorer

how do we move away from the status quo that keeps us all down

why doesn't the community talk to each other

hat will be done to decrease poverty

the future of our high streets

owhere to go anymore   why do i feel like an outsider in my own neighbourhood

will the local plan be upheld or over-ruled

stion - will they act

do people feel socially excluded

what local changes can we make to reduce our environmental impact   who will look after the residents when they become elderly   how busy and different will this place be soon

what are the council's priorities for the area

why is there no events organised for the village to bring everyone together   what have the impacts of continuous government budget cuts been

why were we not listened to when we objected to a new estate being built