

DEMOS

BECOMING A NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

THE POLITICAL STORY FOR
NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL -
TOLD FROM THE GROUND UP

THE NATION OF NEIGHBOURS PROGRAMME

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POLICY LAB

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Nicola Stokes, Dan Goss and Lucy Bush

September 2026

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos works on ways to upgrade democracy, with a New Deal to repair the broken relationships between citizen and state and rebuild trust in our democratic system. We work on four pillars for achieving this: ***Everyday Democracy, Public Service Reform, The Citizen Economy, and Resilient Information Ecosystems.***

The New Deal cannot be built without politicians listening to and working with community organisations up and down the country. Community organisations sit at the intersection of all four of the Demos pillars. They are the informal welfare system that steps in where public services can no longer reach; the local infrastructure through which people access training, skills and economic opportunity; the space in which people are given a genuine say over decisions that affect their own neighbourhoods; and the everyday, face-to-face connection that underpins a healthy, trusting information ecosystem in an age of division and disinformation.

For their value to be recognised and nurtured by the state, community organisations need a strong, shared narrative about why they matter in Britain today. They need to tell a unifying story to the government about the impact they are having in communities, and the contribution they can make to local and national renewal. Drawing on extensive engagement, both with community organisations on-the-ground and with the national networks which connect community organisations across the UK, this report aims to set out that narrative.

FOREWORD

BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY COALITION

We have spent our careers, and in many cases our lives, embedded in local communities across Britain - as charity leaders, journalists, campaigners, and champions of the neighbourhoods we call home. We are not distant observers of the problems described in this report - we recognise them intimately, because we see them play out in the towns, estates and high streets we work in every single day.

The story this report tells will be familiar to many readers, even if the scale of it is sobering: communities across Britain feel increasingly isolated, disconnected from their neighbours, and distrustful of the institutions meant to serve them. And yet, running alongside this story of fragmentation is another, quieter one - of individuals and community organisations who refuse to give up on the places they belong to, and who are already, in ways large and small, holding their neighbourhoods together.

We know this because we have witnessed it firsthand, time and time again. We have seen the determination of a volunteer who shows up every week without fail, the resourcefulness of a small charity stretching a shoestring budget to cover a gap no one else will fill, and the sheer, stubborn hope of people who keep believing their community is worth fighting for. We have also seen the joy that comes from this work - the particular kind of happiness that exists in a community centre where people know each other's names, or in a street where a knock on the door is welcomed rather than feared. This joy is one of the clearest signs of a healthy society, and one of the surest foundations for a stronger one. That is why strengthening the fabric of community across this country matters so much to us, and why we believe this work deserves far more recognition and support than it has historically received.

This is also why we are proud to have supported this report, which shows how the government can prove its support for the work already being done by local people across the country. Politicians must be willing to speak to communities and community organisations in their own language - grounded in the everyday realities of people's lives, not the abstractions of Whitehall strategy documents. They must demonstrate, through tangible investment and genuine partnership rather than rhetoric alone, that they are serious about what is best for local neighbourhoods. And they must be willing to treat the people and organisations already doing this work not as a footnote to renewal, but as its engine.

The hope for a Nation of Neighbours is already alive in towns and cities across the country. It falls to the government now to help it grow.

- **Afzal Hussain**, Witton Lodge Community Association
- **Andy Jackson**, Heeley Development Trust
- **Anoosh Chakelian**, The New Statesman
- **Yvonne Dawson**, Association of Camerados
- **David Barclay**, Good Faith Partnership
- **Lee Pennington**, Open Door Charity
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- **James Baggaley**, UCL Policy Lab

FOREWORD

BY MATT HYDE



We want everyone to be in a good place – personally, in a home that’s a good place to live, and in a community that’s a good place to belong to. Over our 40-year lifetime we’ve seen people who care deeply about their community get busy making it better. They’re the people coordinating care packages for their neighbours, turning an empty space into a community garden, sharing online skills with people eager to learn. They understand their community, know the people within it, and what matters to them. That’s how they change lives.

But we know that across the country right now communities are divided. Poverty is deepening, homelessness is rising, and fewer people are giving time and efforts to change that.

This report shows what this looks like for people within our communities. People are feeling increasingly isolated and disconnected from those around them. There are fewer shared spaces and opportunities for people to meet. Communities are feeling increasingly fragmented. People are finding it harder to disagree with each other well. Social media and political tribalism are contributing to a sense that society is continuing to drift further apart.

Importantly, this report also highlights the strength of our communities and how we can back them to do so much more. What is abundantly clear from this report is that community organisations can be the bedrock for helping to draw people back together. We know that our communities hold the answers. They’re filled with hopeful, determined people who make the lives of their neighbours better. This is why we’re delighted to partner with Demos and UCL Policy Lab on this project – because backing the people who lead change in communities can help us to tackle the biggest challenges our society faces today.

Community organisations are already doing the work. We need Government to recognise their contribution and work in genuine partnership with them so that we can become a nation of neighbours.

Matt Hyde

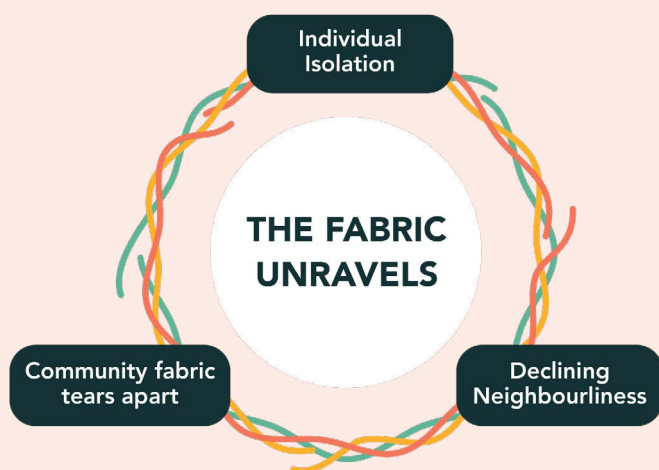
Chief Executive, Lloyds Bank Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The social fabric that once held Britain together is pulling apart as neighbours grow more isolated from one another, community spaces disappear, and the everyday bonds that once held local life together weaken. Drawing on visits to nine community organisations across the country, alongside focus groups and multiple surveys with the public at large, this report lays out how this fraying social fabric is being experienced by communities themselves. Critically, it also highlights the everyday strength and determination of ordinary people and local organisations who are striving to pull their communities back together.

1. THE CHALLENGE: A FRAYING SOCIAL FABRIC

Isolation is deepening. Community organisations are trying to stop the unravelling



Holding the fabric together

As more people are pulled into the cycle through gaps in the state, community organisations (COs) are stretched thin — trying to hold the fabric together with limited space, volunteers and funding.

This isn't just personal. A fraying social fabric ripples far beyond individual wellbeing:

Low trust in public services

High NEET rates

Heavy welfare burden

Higher rates of mental ill-health

Social polarisation

Communities see threads of hope — but challenges in rebuilding the social fabric



2. WHAT COMMUNITIES WANT TO CHANGE

Simple, everyday threads of connection — and the doubts standing in the way

What communities want	What's making communities sceptical
The small things matter. A chat, a gossip, a cup of tea — the small, everyday threads that bind neighbours together. Supportive, resilient communities. Small acts of neighbourliness, woven over time into real community strength.	Doubt it's achievable. Time, money, technology and apathy feel like insurmountable barriers to reweaving community life. Doubt about the government's commitment. Communities question whether politicians will really walk the walk on backing communities.

Community organisations are already weaving these threads together



3. THE POWER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Three strands that strengthen the social fabric

The role that community organisations are playing in neighbourhoods across Britain:

Empowering local people

Laying the foundation for connections in communities

Building confidence and social capital

Upskilling local people and empowering them to share their skills

Forging resilient communities

Remaining uniquely adaptable to changing local needs

Carrying communities' heritage and legacy

Strengthening the fabric of civic life

Providing a pillar of hope for the public

Building a hub of trusting and proud local people. 83% of community organisation participants trust their community vs 60% of the general public.

Representing hope and inclusivity to the public. Half of the public see community organisations as a source of hope to make things better, vs a quarter seeing them as a safeguard in hard times.

Three strands, woven into a stronger social fabric

The potential to fuel national renewal and optimism

- **Community organisations are seen as critical to public service delivery:** Community delivery commands as much public support as central government delivery for mental health services (41% vs 40%) and the same as the private sector for employment and skills (32% each).
- **Empowered communities mean a more optimistic Britain:** A community-centric model of devolution makes people more positive about politics and the nation than a council-centric model, not just their own neighbourhood.

How a community-centric devolution model would make the public more positive about public services, politics and Britain than a council-centric model.^{1,2}

A community-centric devolution model, vs a council-centric model, makes the public more optimistic about...



...reducing loneliness and mental health issues: +37% vs +25%

The boost to optimism is sharpest among the elderly, with a +12% boost for Boomers under the council-centric model vs +31% under the community-centric model.



...improving local opportunities for young people: +42% vs +33%

The benefit is felt by Gen Z too, with +47% optimism under the community-centric model vs +40% for the council-centric model.



...their ability to have a say in local matters: +26% vs +20%

The rise in optimism under the community-centric model is strongest in constituencies which we see as forming Burnham's 'Makerfield Test' (the third most deprived constituencies outside of London and the South East) at +33%, vs +18%.

¹ Drawing on A/B tests on a community organisation-centric devolution model vs a local and regional government-centric model, using a nationally representative survey in September 2026. The A/B test involved showing half the survey sample a section of text about a community-centric devolution model, and the other half a section of text about a council-centric devolution model, and then comparing responses across the two groups. All figures refer to net scores (the total percentage of respondents saying the model had a positive impact minus the total percentage saying the model had a negative impact)

² The term 'community organisation-centric devolution model' is used interchangeably with 'community-centric model' and 'local and regional government-centric model' is used interchangeably with 'council-centric model'.

A community-centric devolution model, vs a council-centric model, makes the public more positive about...



...Andy Burnham (+19% vs +16%) and the government (+12% vs +8%)

The boost to positivity in the government is strongest in constituencies that form Burnham's 'Makerfield Test' - at +17% for the community-centric model and vs +11% for the council-centric model.



...the future of Britain (+14% vs +12%)³

The boost to positivity is higher among Labour-leavers (2024 Labour voters no longer intending to vote Labour) at +35% vs +20%.

To unlock that power, political leaders need the right words, principles and actions

4. A NARRATIVE TOOLBOX

The language, principles and actions to weave the story together

Language	Principles	Actions
Frame it as an aspiration <i>"We should aspire to become a Nation of Neighbours" polls better than claiming it already is one.</i>	Convey togetherness, support & respect Model those values, or risk being seen as hypocritical.	Give community organisations public recognition Fund local organisations and public spaces. The public wants to see it, not just hear it.
"Neighbours" = "community members" Use them interchangeably, because not everyone welcomes closer ties with next door.	Be honest and down-to-earth Acknowledge real problems; talk about the small things and everyday life, not grand strategy.	Treat community organisations as equal partners Build the agenda as a shared endeavour, rather than simply deferring or dictating to community organisations.
Avoid rosy or grandiose claims The public spot political spin, and will snark at an over-painted picture.	Focus on future and past A social fabric which connects to the past, but is designed for what's next.	Offer a fair deal for services delivered If pharmacies are paid for prescriptions, COs should be paid for social ones.

³ The difference in positivity about the future of Britain achieves statistical significance at the 90% confidence level but not the 95% level.

INTRODUCTION

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

PESSIMISM IN BRITAIN IS RIFE

National pride has fragmented and shattered in recent years.⁴ Trust in the state has collapsed in parallel, and now 55% of Britons have low or no trust in national government.⁵ At the same time, polarisation is growing, with political and sociocultural debates increasingly dividing the public, be it on immigration, gender or free speech.⁶ Britain now faces a democratic doom loop: low public trust makes politicians and institutions more risk-averse and short-termist, leaving them less able to make the long-term, difficult decisions that effective delivery requires. This political paralysis then leads to declining public services, which erodes public trust even further.⁷

BUT THERE REMAINS HOPE - AND IT IS FOUND IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Despite the democratic doom loop, local trust and pride has remained resilient. As national and institutional pride have collapsed in Britain since 2011, the public's pride in their local community has risen by 11 percentage points. While trust in the British public as a whole has fallen from 52% to 45% since 2011, it's risen by two percentage points to 60% for people in the local neighbourhood.⁸ People are also generally trusting of local institutions, with 66% of the public trusting local community groups to act in the best interests of people in their local area, and 65% of people saying the same thing about local businesses.⁹ This shows that, at the local level, the British public still believes that the people and institutions around them are fundamentally on their side - a stark contrast to the cynicism and suspicion that colours so much of their view of the national picture.

Trust and pride in local community organisations is the bedrock for local optimism. Six in ten Britons (59%) believe that the state of community organisations in their neighbourhood is fairly or very good, compared with only 28% who would say the same of community organisations across the country. This reflects the increased trust and pride in local institutions, which are staffed and shaped by people embedded in the areas they serve.

4 Garrod, A. and Goss, D. A Place for Pride 2026: The collapse of pride in Britain - where to find it and how to rebuild it. Demos, 16 August 2026. Available at https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/A-Place-for-Pride-2026_Report.pdf

5 OECD. OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2026 Results: United Kingdom. 29 June 2026. Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2026-results_c88c8869-en/united-kingdom_1d0c63db-en.html

6 Bale, T. The two bloc polarisation of Britain's voters and Party members. LSE Blogs, 2 February 2026. Available at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-two-bloc-polarisation-of-britains-voters-and-party-members/>

7 Curtis, P. The New Deal: How to repair the broken relationship between state and citizen. Demos, 3 June 2026. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-new-deal-how-to-repair-the-broken-relationship-between-state-and-citizen/>

8 Garrod and Goss. A Place for Pride. 2026.

9 LGiU. State of the Locals 2025. April 2025. Available at <https://lgiu.org/state-of-the-locals-2025-2/#section-4>

DEVOLUTION OFFERS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO UNLOCK THE NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

Devolution promises to move power and resources closer to citizens - be it public services, assets, funding or decision-making itself - reversing decades of centralisation that have left local areas with little control over the issues that matter most to them. If local communities are able to truly feel this shift in their everyday lives, rather than experiencing it as another remote policy announcement, the impact would be significant: local people could be persuaded to extend their trust, respect and contribution to a state which desperately needs it. Communities are willing to trust what they see working for them; devolution is the mechanism by which the government could finally meet them there.

Greater Manchester's Live Well programme, launched by Andy Burnham in 2023, demonstrates the potential. The programme explicitly aims to change the way that local authorities work with local people and community organisations, giving them more power and treating them as the experts in what their community needs. Through co-production and community-led decision-making practices, Live Well has led to improvements in individual health and wellbeing while creating cohesive and resilient communities.¹⁰

BUT DEVOLUTION CANNOT STOP AT THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, OR THE TOWN HALL

Handing power from Whitehall to council chambers is a necessary step. But on its own, devolution to the Town Hall risks simply relocating the same top-down dynamic to a smaller stage. Communities themselves have to be part of the decision-making picture, not merely its beneficiaries. They know how to help themselves best: they hold hard-won assets that no institution can replicate from the outside, from long-standing local relationships, a sense of collective purpose, and an intimate understanding of what their area actually needs. And they will only truly respect and engage with the devolution agenda if they have a genuine hand in shaping it. To unlock the power of communities, the devolution agenda must therefore put communities at the front and centre of their own renewal.

GOVERNMENTS HAVE TRIED THIS BEFORE

From the New Deal for Communities to the Big Society, governments have worked to empower communities. There has been genuine ambition and, in places, real success. But these initiatives never received the public salience and durable political energy they needed to embed lasting change. This was, in part, a failure of narrative rather than of substance: the story told about these initiatives did not grip the public imagination. In the case of the Big Society, the project's aims were poorly communicated, with few people aware that it existed and even fewer what its purpose was.¹¹ Consequently, the public lost trust in the programme, with 57% believing that it was just an excuse to slash funding for local services, expecting volunteers to fill the gap.¹² Once the initial political momentum faded, the Big Society fizzled out.

More recently, Pride in Place is a bold and ambitious programme with the potential to make a real, tangible difference to the lives of tens of thousands of people throughout the country. As the government's flagship community programme, it promises to put local residents in the driving seat to determine how to improve their local communities. Yet, much like the Big Society

¹⁰ Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership. GM Live Well Stories of Impact and Change: Accelerator Programme Report. 2026. Available at <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/acwering/digital-live-well-stories-of-impact-and-change.pdf>

¹¹ Defty, A. Can you tell what it is yet? Public attitudes towards the Big Society. Cambridge Core blog, 17 March 2014. Available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/?p=10249>

¹² Ipsos. Majority of voters still do not know what the 'Big Society' means. 5 October 2010. Available at <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/majority-voters-still-do-not-know-what-big-society-means>

before it, Keir Starmer's government never quite told the story of why it should matter to the public.¹³ This is not the only issue hampering the initiative - the reality of project delivery has not handed power to citizens in the way the policy's wording promised, leaving people unconvinced that Westminster is working any differently. The consequences of poor communication and delivery are stark: even in areas that have already been allocated funding, public engagement with the programme has been strikingly thin - one council's local Pride in Place consultation, for example, drew just 112 responses from the almost 100,000 community members it was designed to serve.¹⁴ Without a clear, compelling story reaching people in their own communities, even a genuinely well-resourced and well-intentioned programme risks becoming largely invisible to the public it was designed to empower.

The lesson here is not that community empowerment cannot work. Rather, it is the confusion around Big Society and the lack of enthusiasm around Pride in Place, which clearly demonstrates how important it is for this type of initiative to have a strong, cohesive narrative about communities and neighbourhood renewal. In order to succeed, the government needs to be able to clearly articulate why strengthening communities is important to them, and how they envisage it happening. Only then can they hope to harness public trust and support.

THIS REPORT: BECOMING A NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

In May 2026, Demos and UCL Policy Lab laid out the narrative for community led-change, which can be found in full in Appendix 1. It describes this country as a Nation of Neighbours, where a million small acts by ordinary people across Britain make an invaluable difference to the lives of their neighbours and community members. From helping a neighbour take the bins out, to raising money for the local foodbank, to becoming a volunteer for a community organisation. It builds on the work of a coalition of community leaders from across the UK, providing guidance and expertise on how to build a story that reflects the hope they see embedded in communities up and down the country. That narrative represents a national story, but it must be anchored in citizens and communities across the country - in their day-to-day feelings, experiences, and conversations. This paper lays out how to secure that.

Drawing on a myriad of conversations across Britain with the public and community organisations, it provides the building blocks for a narrative that reaches the core of their hopes, worries and values. It lays out the evidence on why this narrative will capture the public's imagination. It uses the words and stories of communities themselves - relaying their concerns, and how they think their communities could create change. Lastly, it provides a toolbox for politicians to help them deliver the narratives about community-led change in a way that truly resonates with the public's hopes and dreams for the places they call home.

Our methodology was designed around an ambition to hear directly from communities themselves. It centred around semi-ethnographic research within community organisations up and down the country, speaking with staff, volunteers and participating members of the public to understand their lived experience first-hand. We explored community-led spaces to better understand local connection, as well as several community businesses to explore organisations delivering goods and services in a community-led way.^{15,16} The spaces we visited were all facilitated by either *Warm Welcome* (a network of over 6,000 spaces for community connection across the UK) and *Power to Change* (a charity and think tank supporting

13 Walker, A. Unpacking the pride in place programme. Bennett School of Public Policy. 10 October 2025. Available at <https://www.bennettschool.cam.ac.uk/blog/unpacking-the-pride-in-place-programme/>

14 Pendle Borough Council. Pride in Place Impact Fund Survey and Results. 8 March 2026. Available at https://www.pendle.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/31675/item_15_-_appendix_-_pride_in_place_impact_fund_survey_and_results_2026

15 Community businesses are defined by Power to Change as businesses that are "locally rooted, accountable to the community, trading for community benefit and creating broad community impact."

16 Power to Change. What is a community business? N.d. Available at <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/evidence-and-ideas/what-is-community-business/>

community organisations). These organisations create a national infrastructure for the local civic organisations, and play a critical role in connecting local groups to larger networks, sharing learning and providing support. More detail on each of the community organisations we visited as part of this research can be found in Appendix 2.

FIGURE 1
LOCATIONS OF RESEARCH CASE STUDIES



In most areas (shown on the map opposite), we visited organisations that are located in neighbourhoods that, while geographically close, are rated in either the highest or lowest decile of the hyper-local need measure developed by the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods.¹⁷ This enabled us to compare how people engaged with their own communities and with community organisations in areas with vastly different levels of need.

To capture the perspective of those who rarely engage with formal community structures, we also ran focus groups with members of the public who rarely engage with community organisations. To test and scale these findings across the country, we commissioned nationally representative surveys exploring what the public want from community organisations, testing the language of the narrative, and capturing the level of support for a new approach.

Overall, this paper draws on the views of around 60 people from nine community organisations across Britain, conversations with 16 people from two focus groups, and insights gained from three surveys, each with 2,000 respondents. Together, these layers of engagement have built a complex and multilayered picture of the public story on communities - what challenges they are facing, and how to build a Nation of Neighbours that can meet them.

¹⁷ Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods. Assessing the current state of England's neighbourhoods: A new measure of Hyper-Local Need. 6 February 2025. Available at <https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/hyper-local-need-measure/>

SECTION 1

THE CHALLENGES FACING COMMUNITIES IN BRITAIN - AS TOLD BY THEM

Communities across Britain are facing a crisis: a breakdown in local trust and social cohesion is being underpinned by the slow decline of local community organisations - the bodies which bring people together locally, fill the gaps in support by the state, and mobilise neighbourhoods. This section explores how communities themselves describe these challenges, the toll they are taking on the organisations trying to hold local life together, and why this matters for some of the biggest challenges facing the country today.

CHALLENGES FACED BY COMMUNITIES

We heard that communities throughout Britain feel worried about becoming caught in a vicious cycle, whereby individual isolation leads to declining neighbourliness and the breakdown of community infrastructure and support. When communities become fragmented in this way, people become lonely, alienated, divided and distrustful - deepening the problem of isolation.

People feel increasingly isolated and disconnected

The people we spoke to across Britain felt disconnected from those around them. We heard that where neighbours once joined each other in their homes for tea, now they spend their evenings alone. Where teenagers once hung out at the local youth centre, now they are inside on their phones. Where communities once gathered together at the local social club, now there is nowhere for them to go. The stark reality is that one in ten Britons now say they have no close friends at all.¹⁸ Two thirds of young people (16-29) report feeling lonely at least once a week. With fewer shared community spaces, people feel they have fewer opportunities to meet others from their communities.

18 The Great Friendship Project. The State of Friendship 2026: UK Report. 2026. Available at <https://friendship-project.co.uk/news/the-state-of-friendship-the-uks-friendship-recession/>

"That shop and post office closed about five years ago, and since then it has felt different because there's no central place."

- Focus group participant

Not only are these spaces closing, but the public feel greater barriers to joining those spaces, be it due to the rising costs associated with traditional community centres like pubs, or the fact that people are constantly feeling pressed for time. We heard that rising costs have also had an impact on the make-up of communities themselves, with participants telling us that increasing house prices meant that many people had been forced out of the areas they'd grown up in, leaving communities dispersed and fragmented. Some older people talked about how this broken sense of community stood in stark contrast to the friendlier, more open neighbourhoods they'd known growing up.

We heard how isolation is impacting people across the social spectrum - from NEET young people, to recent migrants, to elderly people living alone, to new mums on maternity leave. Community group staff told us that high levels of mental ill health, particularly in more deprived areas, mean that many people feel unable to leave their homes. We also heard about other 'unseen victims' - those who are struggling financially but not in desperate need, so are not picked up by, and don't feel they deserve help from, local support services who could help to prevent them falling into crisis.

Some people, on the other hand, admitted to choosing to remain isolated - often a practical response to the pressures of modern life. From being too tired to chat with strangers after a long day at work, to feeling unsafe in a place where they did not know their neighbours, opportunities to connect with others become challenging. Connection then becomes fleeting. Others pointed to the slow creep of technology into all aspects of our lives, with the ability to contact friends or relatives online or through a phone call eliminating their need to build face-to-face relationships with neighbours.

"Sometimes even volunteering is difficult because you've had a hectic week, and you don't even have time to give."

- Focus group participant

Individual isolation leads to fragmented, distrustful and divided communities

As individuals feel more isolated, they see this distance reflected in the society around them. People talked about there being an instinctive wariness when new people move into an area between the new arrivals and long-term residents. For example, we heard from one mother who found that in their whole neighbourhood, only two houses opened their doors to her and her nine year-old son when they were handing out chocolates one Christmas.

"I feel like people are concerned [about] what you're doing here. If you don't have a parcel, what do you want?"

- Focus group participant

Moreover, over a third of 16-24 year olds now say they find it hard to be friends with people who hold opposing viewpoints to them.¹⁹ This was a concern raised by the people we spoke with, who believed that political polarisation has also played a key role in deepening societal fragmentation. Both mainstream and social media were blamed for fuelling division and for fomenting feelings of tribalism. When people see frequent disrespectful and confrontational interactions online, and even between members of parliament, they instinctively become more distrustful of those around them.

"It's hard to say we're all neighbours when people find it hard to respectfully disagree with one another."

- Focus group participant

There was also some disagreement around the impact of social separation along demographic and identity lines. On the one hand, some believed that people with shared traits socialising (such as people of shared ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation) helps to bind them together and create a stronger sense of community. On the other hand, some saw this as more exclusionary than inclusionary, and felt that it accelerates fragmentation by embedding an 'us vs them' mentality within wider social groups.

Many of the people we spoke with believed that it has not always been like this: they harkened back to a 'golden age' where strangers would happily chat in the street, communities were tight-knit, and neighbours were there to support one another. There was a strong sense of nostalgia. Some people felt that this culture had survived in certain places, particularly across the North of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and that it made a temporary resurgence in all areas during the Covid pandemic.

"Where I live, in the north of England, it's a lot more community based and a lot more family based."

- Focus group participant

Yet the prevailing sense was that the underlying drivers of fragmentation - from rising housing costs and population churn to political division and the retreat into technology - are so entrenched that society is set to continue drifting further apart, not back together.

CHALLENGES FACED BY COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Community organisations - informal groups, charities or social enterprises with a focus on local needs rather than profit, supported by the assets and contribution of communities themselves - are working to tackle isolation and fragmentation. But they see how weak social support systems and strained public services underlie isolation and the breakdown in community fabric. As waves of people fall into the cycle of isolation through the cracks in the state, community organisations are struggling to patch the system's many holes and continue providing a safety net.

¹⁹ BBC. UNBOXD: Listening to younger audiences. 5 February 2026. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2026/unboxd-live-digbeth>

Community organisations are under pressure to step in where social support systems and public services are failing

Community organisations see the strain that local people are under. Young people lacking confidence or suffering from mental health conditions. Families struggling with their finances and unable to find support. Elderly people unable to manage their appointments due to difficulties with digital skills. Community organisations are attuned to the challenges these people face and adaptable in their response.

A community leader in North Tyneside Big Local, for example, told us how the local bank branch had closed, and elderly people therefore no longer had access to in-person financial advice. They told us about young people in the area struggling to find work and opportunity. A community leader in Liverpool told us about the neighbourhood not having an affordable launderette. They told us about the local library closing, and the local migrants' knitting group no longer having a place to host their meet-up. These community organisations wanted to help, but must work with the limited resources they have.

And community organisations expressed to us that they feel the responsibility to step in. For people who have fallen through the cracks of public services, are stuck on a long waiting list, lack trust in the state, or feel unable to navigate the complex bureaucracy, many do not get the support they need from the authorities. And in a society that has become increasingly isolated, fragmented and online, many people lack the social support systems that could otherwise come to the rescue - be it a helping hand from neighbours, a supportive conversation with a friend, or some respite support from a family member. Community organisations told us they feel a responsibility to do what they can to help.

"Because we have relationships with people and understand the community, we can often identify those wider issues early and connect people with the right support before they become much bigger problems."

- Fusion Healthy Living Centre staff member

This responsibility to take the strain off creaking public services is not specific to local organisations - regional and national charities are also trying to breach this gap to ensure help is provided for those in need. However, what is unique to the small, hyper-local organisations is that with so few staff and volunteers, they have to spend the majority of their time focusing on delivery. This means they rarely have the time or expertise to be able to seek partnerships, or spend the hours and hours needed to bid for funding that would help them grow. Being able to continue their work in spite of this, responding to the many and ever-changing challenges in the community, is no easy feat. Community organisations told us that they know how they could help, but need the space, time and funding resilience to do so.

"[The biggest challenges are] running costs, operational costs ... [and] volunteers - always having access to somebody who's going to come and open up."

- St Barnabas staff member

IMPACT ON NATIONAL POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Increasing isolation, declining neighbourliness and community breakdown are not only impacting individual wellbeing and local social fabric. They are also central to some of the most pressing challenges facing the government today.

Community fragmentation compounds inefficiency and low trust in public services

The stagnation in public sector productivity since 2019 is costing the UK £80 billion each year. If current trends persist, it will cost £170 billion each year by 2030.²⁰ That is a crisis. It is no surprise that half of the public see 'poor management/leadership' as a key driver of public service failure, 15 percentage points more than 'lack of funding'.²¹ This lack of trust in public services reflects the fact that the crisis of resources has caused a crisis in delivery, as the public faces longer waits for services that don't seem to be working for them.

It is this gap that community organisations are increasingly stepping up to fill, absorbing demand that public services can no longer meet. Not because they have been asked to, but often because there is nobody else left. However, by doing so they are effectively subsidising this trust deficit with volunteer time and informal goodwill. Without recognition or adequate funding, there is a risk that their capacity to run these services, as well as their goodwill, could erode, thereby removing one of the few remaining channels through which those who are unable to access public services can receive the support they need.

Increased isolation compounds poor mental health, high NEET rates and a heavy welfare burden

The link between poor mental health and withdrawal from community life we heard about from community leaders mirrors a significant and worsening national trend. The Milburn Review interim report identified the impact of work-limiting health conditions as the 'one stand-out change' that is contributing to the high levels of NEET young people that we're currently seeing in this country.²² It described how poor mental health leads to disengagement which limits an individual's propensity to find employment, and that in turn, worsens an individual's mental health.

This is an economic as well as a social problem, with the welfare system forced to absorb the costs of a rising tide of ill health. The OBR estimates that health-related benefits will be one of the main drivers of the anticipated rise in welfare spending over the coming years, with health and disability benefits for working-age adults expected to rise by 54%, from £58.2 billion in 2024-25 to £81.5 billion in 2030-31.²³ Our case studies suggest that the decline in informal, community-based support networks might be an underappreciated driver of this trend, with individuals developing fewer of the everyday relationships that might otherwise catch a decline in wellbeing before it becomes a long-term, state-supported exit from the workforce.

20 EY. Mind the productivity gap: The public sector potential. 22 August 2025. Available at https://www.ey.com/en_uk/insights/government-public-sector/mind-the-productivity-gap

21 Smith, M. Britons say public services are bad, but they aren't willing to pay more to fix them. YouGov, 29 October 2024. Available at <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/50820-britons-say-public-services-are-bad-but-they-arent-willing-to-pay-more-to-fix-them>

22 Department for Work & Pensions. Young people and work: interim report. 10 August 2026. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report>

23 Office for Budget Responsibility. Economic and fiscal outlook. March 2026. Available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69a6d7b62e1f4fbda4252208/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2026-web-accessible.pdf>

Community fragmentation and social polarisation are tightly connected

The 'us vs them' dynamics and distrust of strangers described by our participants are a highly localised expression of divisions that are now clearly visible at the national level. Four in five British adults (85%) believe that the country is divided, with 55% saying that differences in political views have become dangerous for society.²⁴ It is not just political views that are causing social rifts either, with 47% of people seeing the divide between migrants and UK-born residents as one of the country's greatest fault lines, while 45% say the same for the divide between rich and poor.²⁵

This national-level polarisation and the hyper-local distrust we heard about from the public and community organisations feed into each other. Feedback from participants indicated that their wariness of strangers is both cause and consequence of the hostility and confrontation that they see played out at a national level.

Local networks and communities can therefore be seen as key to many national-level problems that are facing the government today. Our case studies suggest that when communities lose the everyday infrastructure and relationships that allow them to support their own members, this erodes people's health, ability to work, and their trust in each other and in the government.

However, while this picture may look bleak, our research found many seeds of hope throughout the country. From grassroots initiatives, to neighbours trying to improve their local area, to community organisations that are pushing through their struggles to support members into employment, we found that community feeling is not gone in Britain - it is still there, and it can be nurtured and helped to grow. In the next section, we highlight some of the work that is being done across the country where communities are taking things into their own hands and learning to support each other.

²⁴ Ipsos. 85% of Britons continue to believe that Britain is divided as over half think differences in people's political views are so divisive that it is dangerous for society. 3 October 2025. Available at <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/85-britons-continue-believe-britain-divided-over-half-think-differences-peoples-political-views-are>

²⁵ O'Geran, L. The state of social cohesion in 2026. More in Common, 9 January 2026. Available at <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/research/the-state-of-social-cohesion-in-2026/>

SECTION 2

WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE HOPEFUL FOR - AND SCEPTICAL ABOUT

In the face of isolation and fragmentation, what communities want is not a utopia in which everyone is their neighbour's best friend. Not a street on which everyone spends all their free time volunteering. Not a nostalgic ideal from a by-gone era.

Communities told us that what they want most are the small moments of chatting with friends and neighbours. It is sharing news about what's going on in town. It is whinging about what was on TV last night. Everyone we spoke with in communities across Britain framed these small experiences as one of the fundamental joys and comforts of living in a shared society. Communities want the spaces that support these moments to be protected and expanded.

But people in our research understood that local connection is more important than moments of comfort. They know it is a foundation for local resilience. It is only once people feel genuinely connected to those around them that community support and empowerment can truly take hold. All communities have inspiring stories about local people going above and beyond to support their community or build something to make their neighbourhood better. These stories offered symbols of hope. The communities we visited across the country wanted that to become part of the fabric of their neighbourhoods.

Communities are not all hopeful about the possibility of change, however. People feel sceptical about whether a more tight-knit society is achievable. The barriers around time, money, technology, apathy - all these often seem insurmountable. People question whether the government is genuinely committed to supporting community cohesion.

Such scepticism creates challenges for community connection - but as Section 3 explores, community organisations are getting on with the hard work regardless.

WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE HOPEFUL FOR

The small things really matter

Narrative link

Far too often in politics, everyday acts are treated as if they don't matter... But, the evidence is that they bind us together as a country when so many other forces threaten to pull us apart

When neighbours and members of a community meet, chat, have a cup of tea, gossip, get stuff off their chest, and whinge about things, they escape the cycle of isolation and polarisation, if only briefly. Across all our engagement with communities, that need for small moments of connection was ubiquitous. These moments transcend both the stresses of everyday life and the chaos of national politics - building connections rooted not in shared ideology of identity, but simply in shared presence. They are a necessity for people, and a foundation of kind, considerate and supportive neighbourhoods.

"For people to feel as if they've got somebody to talk to, it's lifted their spirits. It stopped them feeling isolated ... They need to have the time to chat about nothing much, and then you feel connected to people"

- Focus group participant

Communities treasure the spaces in their neighbourhood which create the moments of connection. But as Section 1 detailed, many felt that the growing isolation and fragmentation of society was a sign that these spaces are too rare and fleeting. They did not want those spaces to go away. And they wanted everyone to have an opportunity to join those spaces.

"A lot of the libraries have closed down ... that's another hub that was used by communities from babies upwards. And to lose your local library is quite a serious thing when people used it, but they still closed it because it couldn't be funded."

- Focus group participant

Communities want to be supportive and resilient

Narrative link

Real and small acts of heroism already happen in Britain, every single day - because connected neighbours and communities help one another

Every community has its stories of neighbours and community members showing how ideals of community spirit are still alive and well. We saw people taking time out of their day to give a friend a lift, heard about someone helping a neighbour access online banking, and were told about people who'd checked in with a neighbour when they were going through hard times. These acts are not seen as trivial. They are seen as the texture of strong community fabric. As such, they are seen as the texture of a good life.

"[My dad] is frail and elderly. And he put a note in our group chat today to say that the upstairs neighbour rang on the bell to see if he was okay in the heat. We didn't know that they keep an eye on him because it's not like in the past where we've known our neighbours ... So that was kind of amazing because we don't [even] know their names."

- Focus group participant

While these acts may seem small, we saw that they provide hope for communities in an era of pessimism. They show that there is a genuine instinct towards neighbourliness that has not disappeared, even in a society that so often feels atomised and disconnected. People do not need to share a long history on the same street to look out for one another - the impulse to check in, to help, to notice when someone might be struggling, still persists. Communities want to preserve that.

Small acts of neighbourliness often evolve into more ambitious acts of community service. All across the country, people feel they have skills with untapped potential, and want to put them to use. We saw and heard about countless examples of ordinary people banding together with each other to improve the lives of those around them.

"We have a few weekends a year where we go around litter picking ... It's just between about six or seven or eight neighbours we have here."

- Focus group participant

These initiatives were often driven by specific members of the community who were particularly proactive and community-minded. For example, in a small village in Kent, one woman took over her local craft group when the original organiser was no longer able to attend. She then went on to spearhead a number of other local groups, including one aimed specifically at giving men in the area the opportunity to talk to each other to support their mental health. Stories like these are a reminder that community spirit rarely sustains itself by accident - it is built and maintained by individuals willing to step forward, often quietly and without recognition, to hold their neighbourhoods together. It is often these unassuming acts of litter picking, group organising, and looking out for one another that steps in for communities when formal services and institutions cannot reach everyone who needs them.

Communities want these morsels of hope - of neighbours banding together for the good of their neighbourhood - to become the norm, not the exception.

Communities want to be an asset to the nation

Narrative link

Strong communities are the hidden wealth of nations; building social capital means building our emotional wellbeing, making us stronger and fit for work. It promises future prosperity

What we see in supportive communities is a virtuous cycle: when people witness the tangible impact of community action, whether that's a cleaner street or a neighbour who no longer feels alone, they are themselves encouraged to act, drawing others into the same spirit of contribution and care. Communities value this deeply, and that is reflected in our polling. Seven in ten Britons think that 'people who are proud of themselves and their community behave in more positive ways', suggesting that pride and participation feed directly into one another at scale.

Stories of this virtuous cycle are sources of hope in communities across the country. This texture of community life, the everyday momentum built by volunteering in a local youth club or a running community-led craft group, is not something that is captured in Treasury models or OBR costings. But it is fundamental to the value communities feel in themselves - and the value they want to preserve and build upon.

"There's a culture [in this town] of people wanting to bring other people together, especially those who are marginalised ... which is really nice."

- Focus group participant

WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE SCEPTICAL ABOUT

Communities are sceptical about whether a more tight-knit society is achievable

Many people we spoke with simply did not think it likely that Britain will see a rise in community spiritedness any time soon. They saw the pressures of everyday life - such as time poverty, social isolation, and the encroachment of technology - as being so deep-rooted as to be almost irreversible.

"We used to be a nation of neighbours ... Now everyone's wrapped up in paying their bills and getting their kids into good schools ... and I just think it's going to be hard, well, impossible, really, to bring all that back together."

- Focus group participant

With technology in particular, there was a sense among some that, especially for young people, using digital platforms has shifted their idea of what 'connectedness' is. With instant messaging and social media enabling people to interact with others virtually, this has become the default way in which many people build their own communities. This has led to a feeling that real-world connections are unimportant or superfluous to the communities they are already a part of online.

For some, the sense of fatalism has led to apathy and hopelessness about the potential to impact their local community. For others, they were concerned that any attempt to build connections would lead to them getting 'some very strange looks' as those around them would not recognise the sincerity of their actions. People's growing lack of enthusiasm to get involved in their local community is identified by our survey research - 24% of the public volunteer less now than they did five years ago, compared with only 13% who volunteer more.

Communities do not believe the government is genuinely committed to supporting community cohesion

Several people we spoke with were sceptical that the government would ever make a concerted effort to build stronger neighbourhoods and communities. For some, this was because they saw politicians as partially to blame for the decline of community cohesion in the first place, particularly through the years of austerity and subsequent cuts to community infrastructure. For them, verbal promises and commitments from the government would not be enough - they need to see financial investment in their local area before they are convinced that politicians are taking this issue seriously.

"If there were grants, for example ... then it would restore my faith ... It would take so much for [the government] to convince me that this is actually what they were going to do."

- Focus group participant

Others told us they would see government rhetoric around being neighbourly as hypocritical, given that they often see politicians acting towards each other in antagonistic and uncooperative ways. As Burnham has pointed out, politicians often resort to finger-pointing and point-scoring before working together to fix the problems that are blighting the lives of everyday citizens.²⁶ People told us that, instead, politicians should be publicly modelling the type of behaviour that the Nation of Neighbours story would ask of citizens, otherwise any calls for neighbourliness would come across as entirely disingenuous.

"[Politicians are] not really showing an example of how it should be. It just seems every time you see them having a debate, they're just arguing with each other."

- Focus group participant

All this prompts the question: how can we give communities the small moments of connection they want and the resilience that follows - overcoming scepticism about whether this is possible or whether the government cares? The answer lies in community organisations.

²⁶ Burnham, A. Andy Burnham Speech at the People's History Museum, Manchester – 29 June 2026. 29 June 2026. Available at <https://andyburnham.org.uk/2026/07/20/andy-burnham-speech-at-the-peoples-history-museum-manchester-29-june-2026/>

SECTION 3

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TO CREATE A NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

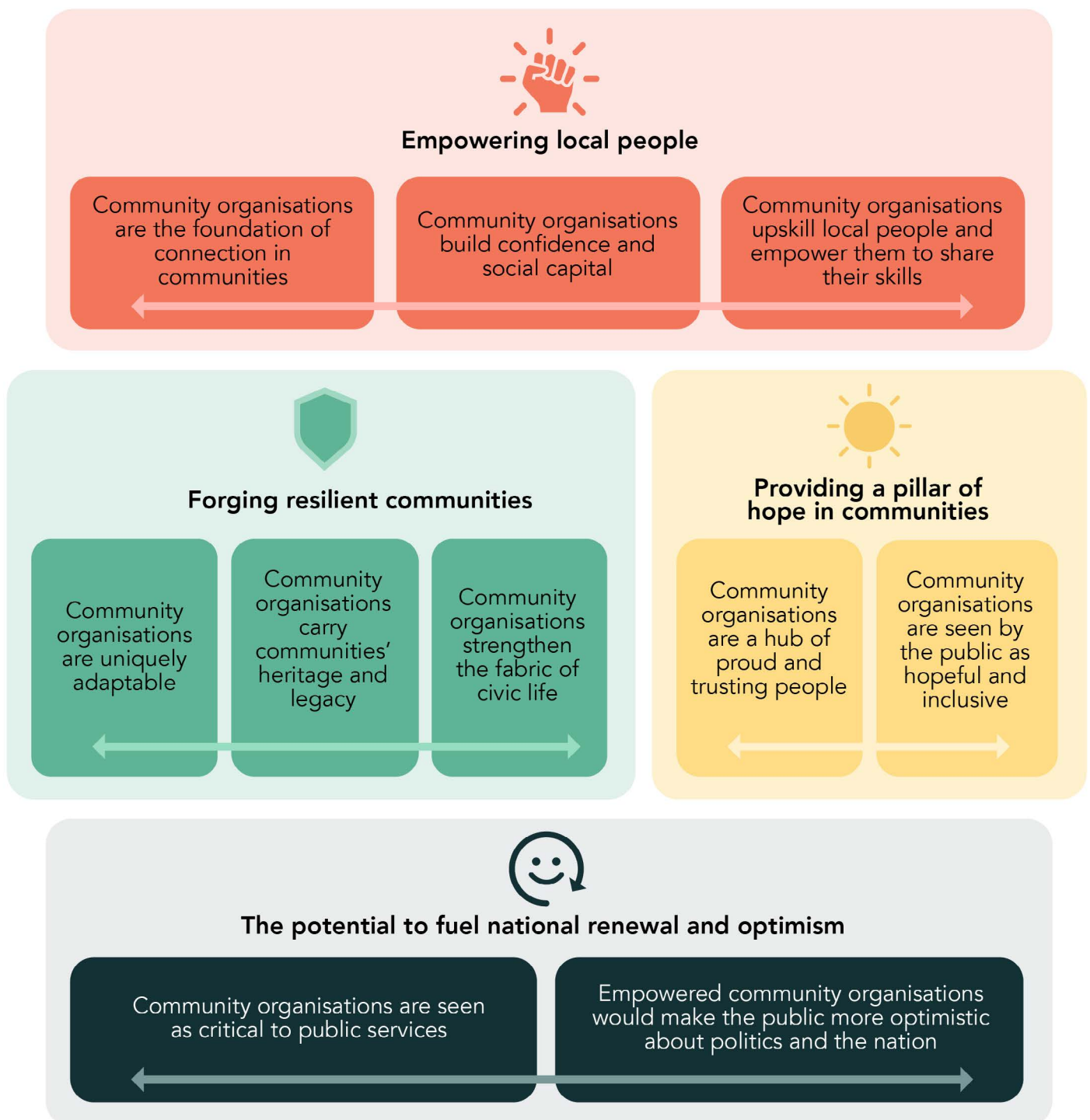
While there are deep challenges in strengthening community connection, communities have genuine power to help overcome those. Across Britain, neighbours and communities are already working hard to combat the increasing social fragmentation that they see around them. In the face of public concern about what is achievable, communities are proving they can make a real difference. Facing concern about whether the government will actually help, many communities are showing that they can do it themselves.

At the crux of that work - empowering communities, strengthening the social fabric, building hope - is community organisations. The community cafes. The faith-based organisations. The sports clubs. The pubs. The spaces to meet and chat. The community businesses - from volunteer-driven repair and reuse shops to affordable community laundrettes. The neighbourhood groups who pick up litter. The reading clubs. The cooking clubs. The exercise clubs. The advice drop-ins. The reading and writing classes. The digital skills classes. These organisations are getting on with the job.

But many of these spaces could not exist without the support of national infrastructure organisations. Bodies like Warm Welcome, Power to Change and Locality support local organisations up and down the country, providing the advice, training and resources that give ordinary people the confidence and know-how to run these groups. They also connect different groups together to form local and regional networks, which engenders a sense of local solidarity and helps community leaders to see how the work they do is part of something bigger. Additionally, infrastructure organisations often act as a bridge between hyper-local spaces and central government, ensuring that the needs and concerns of communities are heard at a national level. All the spaces we visited were supported by a national infrastructure organisation, and it was clear that this relationship was invaluable in ensuring that these community organisations were able to run smoothly.

From our visits to just a few of these places, we saw the impact that community organisations are having. Three key ways that community organisations can transform their neighbourhoods stood out: (1) empowering local people - through creating connections, building confidence, and upskilling people, (2) creating more resilient communities, through being adaptive and flexible, carrying communities heritage, and strengthening the fabric of civic life, and (3) providing a pillar of hope in communities, acting as a hub of trusting and proud local people, and being seen by the public as hopeful and inclusive. This section details these many hats that community organisations wear - and the impact they are having across the country.

FIGURE 2
THE ROLE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS PLAY IN BRITAIN



EMPOWERING LOCAL PEOPLE

We saw that community organisations are the lifeblood of change within the areas that they serve. They are the foundation of local connections, providing a platform that supports their members to develop and grow, to build new relationships, and to feel more at home in their neighbourhoods. They are also well-placed to fill the gaps that state support cannot reach, helping to ensure people in their communities can live dignified and fulfilling lives.

Community organisations lay the foundation for connections in communities

In all the community spaces we visited across the country, one thing was clear: attendees were there because they wanted to be with other people. In an increasingly fragmented and isolated world, these spaces were seen as oases of connection, where people could simply come along and enjoy each other's company. They facilitated new friendships, strengthened old ones, and helped to build a sense of collectivity in a neighbourhood.

"For many people, Deeplish is much more than a community centre. It is a place where people know they will be welcomed, listened to and treated with dignity. People come through our doors because they need help with welfare, benefits, employment, education or family issues, but what they often find is something equally important - connection and belonging."

- Deeplish Community Centre staff member

"Knit and Knatter means that I can make friends. It's a lifeline, it reduces loneliness and isolation. It's very welcoming."

- Participant at Fusion Healthy Living Centre

The opportunity to meet and connect with others - whether through craft activities, sharing a meal or just having a chat - was fundamental to many people's sense of wellbeing. For those feeling isolated, struggling with mental health, or new to a neighbourhood, the space for personal connection was a lifeline. Indeed, several people felt so comfortable in these spaces that they spent almost every day there, or planned their entire week around when they would be attending. Having the space to build these personal connections not only allowed individuals to thrive, but had positive impacts on the wider community as well.

"At grassroots level, we see the whole person, not just the problem they have come to us with. Someone may come in because they are struggling financially, but behind that there may be isolation, anxiety, family pressures or difficulties finding work. Because we have relationships with people and understand the community, we can often identify those wider issues early and connect people with the right support before they become much bigger problems."

- Deeplish staff member

The British public recognises the importance of empowered community organisations for local connection, and the broader impact this can have for mental health and tackling anti-social behaviour. In our nationally-representative sample, we tested two contrasting scenarios (with half of the sample reading about each scenario):

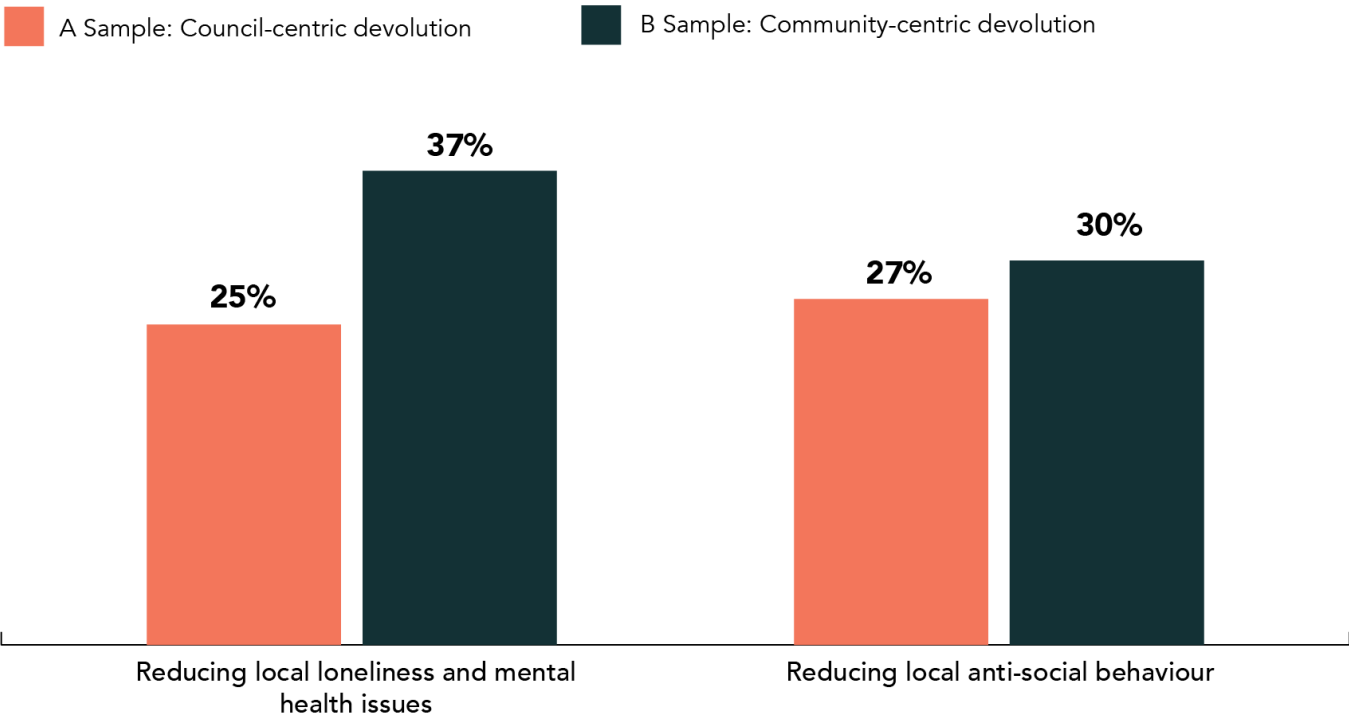
- **Empowered local and regional government scenario** - describing more funding for and better services by local community support staff, organisations and spaces.
- **Empowered community organisations scenario** - describing more funding for and better services by councillors and council staff.

Members of the public exposed to the ‘empowered communities’ scenario felt much more positive about efforts to reduce loneliness and mental health issues (a net 37% feeling positive) than people exposed to the ‘empowered local and regional government’ scenario (a net 25%). The effect is particularly pronounced among the elderly. While a net 12% of boomers (aged over 62) exposed to the ‘empowered local and regional government’ scenario felt more positive about reducing loneliness and mental health issues, the figure was 31% for those exposed to the ‘empowered communities’ scenario. The ‘empowered communities’ scenario also made people slightly more likely to feel positive about reductions in anti-social behaviour (by 30% to 27%).

CHART 1

A community-centric devolution model makes the public more positive about reducing loneliness and anti-social behaviour than a local/regional government-centric model

A/B test. Would this devolution model have a positive impact on selected outcomes. Net score



NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING PEOPLE FROM ISOLATION TO BELONGING

Deeplish Community Centre in Rochdale runs the Reducing Racial Inequalities Project, offering culturally appropriate support to residents from ethnically diverse backgrounds who often face extra barriers to mainstream services, including language, cultural pressures and a wariness of statutory systems. Staff and volunteers who share and understand residents' cultural backgrounds help people feel safe enough to come forward.

One woman, referred to as Ms B, came to Deeplish during a period of real difficulty. She had experienced controlling behaviour at home, leaving her isolated, financially insecure and unsure where to turn. Unfamiliar with the support available and reluctant to share her situation outside her family, she had been struggling alone. Through regular, trauma-informed sessions in a safe and familiar setting, Deeplish supported Ms B with welfare and financial advice, domestic abuse safety planning, counselling and creative wellbeing activities, all shaped around her background and pace.

The impact went beyond Ms B's immediate crisis. She reported feeling stronger, more confident and less alone, and began attending community activities and exploring volunteering. As she put it, she no longer felt alone, and knew there were people in her community she could turn to.



When I first came to Deeplish, I felt that I had nowhere to turn and I was struggling to cope. The staff listened to me without judgement and helped me understand what support was available. The advice, wellbeing sessions, and emotional support helped me feel stronger and more confident. I no longer feel alone, and I know there are people in my community who can support me."

– Ms B

NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AS BEDROCK FOR CONNECTION

The **St. Barnabas Self Reliant Group** was formed around a simple model of actively connecting and building a peer-to-peer support network for older people and those who might identify as isolated. Participants collectively decide upon creative activities they want to focus on, and through these create items of tangible value that can be sold, gifted, or used in community events. The core purpose of these activities is to bring recognition to the creators, helping them to build confidence in their own abilities while developing genuine connections with others.

This group is so important to its members that even when the church in which they meet had to temporarily close for renovations, they always endeavoured to find other places - including their own houses - where they could continue their activities. This is testament to the resilience and sense of purpose that this group has helped to foster in them. They have even offered to share their skills with a local youth group, building further community connections across generational divides.

Community organisations build confidence and social capital

We saw how community organisations are able to support a person to move from a path of low confidence, low skills, and low sense of self-worth, to one where they themselves are a community leader, providing skills for others.

It often starts with confidence. Staff and volunteers told us they often come across people who lack confidence, be it a young person who finds socialising hard, or a person facing language barriers. Other times, people who lack confidence seek out community organisations, knowing they could offer support. Community organisations then build a relationship with that person, or support them to build relationships with other local people. In time, people who once struggled to navigate society - to make friends, do job interviews, or simply to ask for help - develop the confidence to overcome their obstacles.

Every community organisation we visited had examples of this. We were told about community organisations encouraging people to join cookery classes or open-mic sessions to learn, meet new people, or show their talent. There are countless examples of community organisations encouraging their members to volunteer with them. We found that, even if the volunteering responsibilities are fairly light, the sense of responsibility that this gives to participants, along with the pride that they are 'giving something back' to their community, can have a big impact on their self-esteem.

NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS ARE A CATALYST FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE

At Expanding Horizons in Bootle, staff across the organisation's employability and retail mentoring programmes see, time and again, how far a genuinely personal relationship can take a young person who has lost confidence in themselves.

One young woman came to the employability programme too anxious to take her headphones off, and would only attend if her mum came with her. Rather than pushing her to engage before she was ready, staff let her set the pace, checking in gently and building trust session by session. Over time she began joining in discussions, then activities, and eventually started attending independently, becoming a very active member of the group.

Another young man spent his early sessions absorbed in his phone, seemingly disengaged. Rather than treating this as a lack of interest, staff took the time to understand what he was actually doing, and discovered a genuine passion for gaming. They built their support around that interest, helping him explore it as a career path. He went on to secure work experience at a gaming company, and was messaging a staff member with updates while we were visiting.

The same approach runs through Expanding Horizons' retail mentoring scheme at The Big Onion in Bootle Strand shopping centre, where 19-year-old Callum, who has learning difficulties and struggled with confidence at school, has been mentored by shop manager Eddie Holmes.²⁷ "The staff at The Big Onion are like a family to me and help me fill in applications and other forms," Callum said. "I still feel a bit nervous when dealing with customers, but I am getting better." Staff see this kind of retail mentoring as building transferable skills that can open up all kinds of opportunities for young people.

Staff repeatedly put these outcomes down to the personal relationships they build with young people. This stood in sharp contrast to what some young people told us about accessing support through DWP jobcentres, where even getting through security checks just to enter the building felt bureaucratic and impersonal, leaving many reluctant to engage at all.

²⁷ Simpson, F. #Chances4Children: Merseyside project offers opportunities to young entrepreneurs. Children & Young People Now, 19 July 2021. Available at <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/news/chances4children-merseyside-project-offers-opportunities-to-young-entrepreneurs>

In other cases, the support that we saw community organisations provide people with was more formal. Staff build enough trust with their members that they open up about some of their greatest challenges. This means that staff are able to connect them with adequate support, and facilitate a personalised pathway to a brighter future.

"A lot of people need support with a lot of things. But we won't sit there and do it for you. We'll help you do it, and I think that really enables people to learn that they can do it themselves, and it gives them that confidence to believe in themselves the next time."

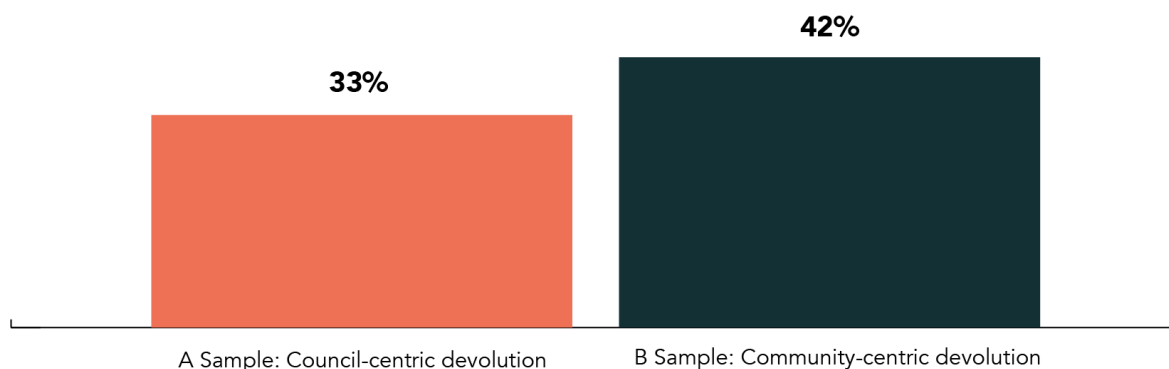
- Fusion Healthy Living Centre staff member

The public recognises the importance of community organisations for young people's opportunities; a community-centric devolution model makes Britons feel more positive about local opportunities for young people than a local/regional government-centric model. In our survey, a net 42% of respondents exposed to the 'empowered communities' scenario felt more positive about local opportunities for young people (including 47% of Gen Z respondents), compared to 33% of respondents exposed to the 'empowered local and regional government' scenario (or 40% of Gen Z).

CHART 2

A community-centric devolution model makes the public feel more positive about local opportunities for young people than a local/regional government-centric model

A/B test. After reading about the devolution scenario, would you feel more or less positive about the local opportunities available for young people? Net score



Community organisations can upskill local people and empower them to share their skills

All across the country, people feel they have skills with untapped potential. We heard countless examples of ordinary people who had skills that they knew would be helpful to their community - be it digital, electrics, finance, business, plumbing - but lacked the connections to people in need. Community organisations are bridging that gap - acting as a trusted go-between that connects people who want to give something back with those who need what they have to offer. In doing so, they turn what would otherwise be latent, invisible resources scattered across a neighbourhood into tangible, practical support.

"As a recently retired person, I felt that I still had a lot of energy to give and time to volunteer. I've been involved with Renew for 2 months now and in that time I've seen customer numbers and donations increasing consistently. Volunteering helps me to feel part of a community and that I can continue using my skills and knowledge to support others."

- Cath Allister, volunteer at Renew in North Shields

"Our volunteers are one of the strongest examples of how community support creates a cycle of empowerment. People who have themselves received support often come back wanting to help others. They become volunteers, share their experience and encourage others who may be going through similar difficulties. That creates trust that cannot easily be replicated by a service that has no local roots."

- Deeplish volunteer

NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS SPRINGBOARDING PEOPLE TO SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITY

Gillian first visited North Tyneside Big Local in 2020, during the second Covid lockdown. With her usual places to meet people closed, she had become increasingly isolated, relying on the phone as her only contact with others. Passing the building one day, she noticed an advert for a socially-distanced Knit and Natter group and decided to join, later adding a weekly Happy to Chat session and various art workshops, from pottery to screen printing. Friendships made through these groups soon spilled over into life outside the Big Local, from fashion shows to Christmas meals together.

The confidence Gillian built led her to volunteer as a receptionist in 2024, a role she still holds and excels in. The Big Local also supported her through financial challenges, when several appliances broke down at once: staff helped her secure a council grant and additional support, and cookery classes taught her to cook nutritious meals on a budget.

Gillian's mental health, physical health and finances have all improved. What began as a way to escape loneliness during lockdown has grown into a daily rhythm of friendship, volunteering and purpose.

Community organisations can play a critical role in building that pipeline of skilled and empowered people, ensuring neighbourhood governance is a success. Just as they already identify and connect residents' everyday skills to practical local needs, they are equally well-placed to spot and nurture the confidence, leadership, and civic understanding required for people to step into formal governance roles. If Pride in Place neighbourhood boards are to succeed, they will need skilled and empowered people across communities where social capital is often strained. The same applies to the neighbourhood governance structures announced in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.

While community organisations are upskilling the local community, national infrastructure organisations are upskilling community organisation staff. Staff members told us that one of the key benefits of belonging to these organisations was that it meant they were able to access advice and training that, as a small group, they simply would not be able to access independently.

"[Warm Welcome] provides really good training - a lot of things that we aren't necessarily able to provide ourselves or for our volunteers, but we can, as a team and volunteers, go and access their training. So I went to one on mental health support and general wellbeing ... and that was really helpful."

- Resound staff member

FORGING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Community organisations are uniquely adaptable

Local community organisations have a distinct advantage in responding to local challenges: they hold place-based knowledge that allows them to tailor services tailored to local needs, preferences and culture. Community group staff told us that their close relationship with members of the public means that they are acutely aware of local needs, and they can see how those needs change with time or are felt differently by different communities. The fact that community organisations tend to be small organisations with little bureaucracy means that they often have more flexibility, relative to organisations like the council or national charities, to adapt their services, filling gaps in local provision as they arise.

At Kitty's Laundrette in Liverpool, for example, the staff heard about the local library closing, and the local knitting group then no longer having a place to host their meet-up. They quickly decided to offer the space they had to the knitting group, safeguarding its continuation. Kitty's Laundrette - alongside thousands of other community organisations across the country - similarly responded quickly to the pandemic, ensuring local needs were not overlooked.

"[During the COVID-19 lockdowns] we had to navigate the best way to ensure we were still fulfilling our commitment to our community while remaining safe during the pandemic. We partnered with another local cooperative to operate a door to door free laundry service to those who were shielding and vulnerable."

- Kitty's Laundrette staff member

This local knowledge can also be supported by national infrastructure organisations, who have the resources to be able to identify and scale up what local communities need. Power to Change, for example, has used this approach to turn lessons learned in a handful of places into frameworks and funding programmes that other community businesses across the country can then draw on, such as through its Empowering Places catalyst model and the evidence base it built around Community Asset Transfers.^{28,29}

NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AS A CORNERSTONE OF LOCAL ADAPTABILITY

Resound in Emersons Green ran a weekly afterschool club for local families. This group had been running for several years when Resound staff, who would regularly chat with parents, started noticing that their needs were changing. Families weren't in need of afterschool support anymore - they were crying out for help during the school holidays!

They adapted their small afterschool club to start running activities for families over the school holidays. This group now welcomes over 100 families throughout the year for fun, respite, and to connect with wider support.

NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AS A CORNERSTONE OF LOCAL ADAPTABILITY

At North Tyneside Big Local, the staff saw the increasing cost-of-living pressures that local people were facing. While already providing emergency food, they wanted to do more. They wanted to provide more options for more people, and in a supermarket setting which offered more dignity for people than a food bank setting.

Motivated by a concern for the community, they drew on their civic assets as a community organisation, and their connection with local government. Drawing on funding from the local authority and forming partnerships with local supermarkets, charities and other

²⁸ Power to Change. Empowering Places. N.d. Available at <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/evidence-and-ideas/case-studies/empowering-places/>

²⁹ Bruni, F. and others. The Economics of Community Asset Transfers: An Economic Framework to define and measure Social Value in Community Asset Transfers. Power to Change, 12 December 2017. Available at <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/evidence-and-ideas/research-and-reports/economics-community-asset-transfers/>

organisations who could donate food, and formed a 'social supermarket' - a site in which shoppers could buy food and other goods at a reduced price. They offered reduced white goods - kettles, toasters and more - that had previously been broken but were repaired by community members. They offered gifts - toys and teddies - created by community members. And the staff were volunteers from the community.

"Charities like Whitley Bay Big Local are at the heart of communities in North Tyneside, offering a safe and welcoming space for our residents. The rising cost of living has impacted many of our residents, and we as a council are committed to offering as much support as we can, but this wouldn't be possible without organisations like The Big Local."

- Councillor Karen Clark, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing at North Tyneside Council

Community organisations strengthen the fabric of civic life

We saw countless examples of community organisations acting as conduits connecting different elements of civil society together. They connect people in need with the support services that can help them, and they connect support services with local policymakers, from counsellors to mayors, and with one another. In doing so, they tighten the social safety net that protects people in hard times - preventing people falling through the cracks.

"We've worked with the council and the local health providers and the local police ... we weren't remunerated, so we just stepped into the space to offer support when it was needed."

- St Barnabas staff member

All of the community organisations we visited acted as an essential node in a local network. The Fusion Centre in Maidstone, for example, has a Mind Wellbeing Worker attend their weekly Golden Friends session so that attendees can access informal mental health support for free. The Resound breakfast café in Emersons Green invites different organisations to the café each week to support the various needs of their participants, from Christians Against Poverty who provide finance and debt support to Mothers for Mothers who offer mental health and wellbeing support for pregnant women and new mothers. Deeplish in Rochdale draw on their relationships with local schools to connect young people with employment support, or draw on their relationships with local faith organisations to support cross-faith integration. Community leaders at the Big Onion in Bootle identify young people looking to start a business, connecting them up with one another on WhatsApp chats, and connecting them with advice and information on how to run their business.

"It's about bringing those services to people. So, for example, we have the NHS Eye Clinic that does the diabetic eye clinic here."

- Fusion Healthy Living Centre staff member

Community organisations carry communities' heritage and legacy

Beyond the practical support they provide, we saw how community organisations act as custodians of local identity and history - keeping alive the stories, traditions and struggles that give a neighbourhood its distinct character. In many of the places we visited, staff and volunteers spoke about actively working to preserve and share this heritage, whether through local history talks, intergenerational storytelling, or simply passing on knowledge of how their area came to be.

This matters because a strong sense of local history and identity underpins the pride people feel in the place they call home. By keeping communities' pasts alive, community organisations do more than simply inform people about where they come from - they help build the shared sense of belonging and continuity that pride in a place depends on.

"Community heritage is super important to us at Kitty's ... Earlier this year we did a programme of local history events looking at Liverpool's history from a more radical lens. It included talks on community newspapers, fighting fascism in the 1930s and early trade unionist Mary Bamber. Giving space to talk about these ideas, we hope that people will see how community and solidarity has always been Liverpool's superpower."

- Kitty's Laundrette staff member

The public recognises the importance of community organisations for strengthening local pride. Among people exposed to the 'empowered communities' scenario in our survey, a net 38% felt positive about the impact on local pride - slightly higher than for people exposed to the 'empowered local and regional government' scenario (36%).

Community organisations' role in carrying heritage often crosses generations. Just as we heard about older members passing on skills and stories to younger people in other community spaces, organisations that champion local heritage give younger residents a stake in a history that predates them - turning heritage from something abstract into something lived and shared. In Rochdale, we heard from Deeplish's director how his family had worked in manufacturing in the town, supporting its community and industrial heritage. He felt a need to carry that legacy forward by supporting the local community. Older participants at Deeplish spoke of the sense of responsibility to pass on their lessons and stories to younger generations, and how the centre provided a space to do that. Community organisations help ensure that a neighbourhood's legacy is not simply preserved in an archive, but carried forward by the people who live there today.

NEIGHBOURHOOD INSIGHT

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AS CUSTODIANS OF HERITAGE

Kitty's Laundrette in Liverpool takes its name from Kitty Wilkinson, an Irish immigrant credited as a pioneer of the UK's wash-house movement. During an 1832 cholera outbreak, Kitty opened her home - the only one in her street with a boiler - so neighbours could wash clothes and bedding safely, a step credited with saving lives. A decade later, public funds helped her open the country's first combined wash-house and public baths, on Upper Frederick Street.

Kitty's Launderette continues that legacy, both in name and in mission. The team worked closely with local historian Michael Kelly, author of a biography of Kitty Wilkinson, and keeps his and other local history books, including one on Liverpool's wash-houses, on a community bookshelf for visitors to browse. The launderette also ran an oral history project on Liverpool's laundry life, and hosts regular free local history evenings covering topics from dockers' humour to the 1981 People's March for Jobs.

By anchoring itself in this history, Kitty's shows how a community organisation can turn a shared local past into an ongoing source of connection and pride in the present.

PROVIDING A PILLAR OF HOPE IN COMMUNITIES

Community organisations are a hub of proud and trusting people

While pride and trust are in scarce supply in Britain today, community organisations represent a hub of those proud of trusting people. People who have taken part in, supported or helped with local community or neighbourhood groups feel considerably more trusting of people in their community than the public at large. A net 83% of participants in community organisations feel that people in their community are generally trustworthy, compared with 60% among the public as a whole.

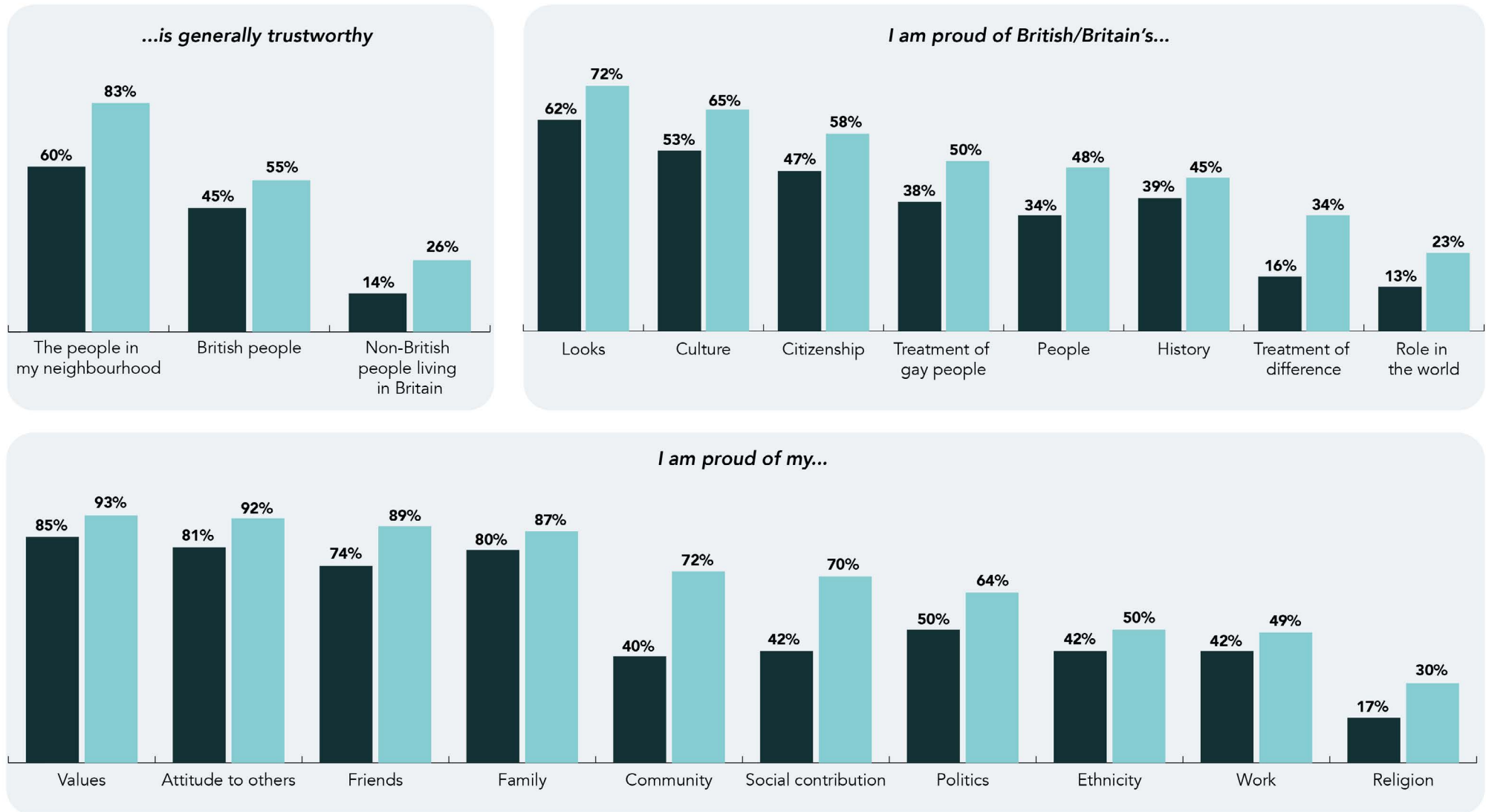
But the pattern extends beyond the trust in the community. People who engage in community organisations are also more trusting of British people as a whole, and more proud of both Britain and themselves. A net 55% of community organisation participants feel that British people are generally trustworthy, compared to 45% among the public at large. A net 48% are proud of being British people, compared to 34% in the public at large. That pattern of higher pride among community organisation participants is true across all measures of national pride, be it British culture, history or citizenship. Lastly, participants in community organisations are more proud of every personal criteria we asked about apart from pride in their possessions - from values (a net 93% vs 85%) and friends (89% vs 74%) to their religion (30% vs 17%).

CHARTS 3,4 & 5

Community organisation participants are more trusting and proud both of their community and the nation

Net agreement with the statement "..."

■ Total ■ Local community or neighbourhood groups



The concentration of trust and pride in community organisations makes them a valuable civic asset. As our visits to these spaces showed, participants often translate that trust and pride into action by seeking ways to continually support their community. Trust and pride can also be infectious - making the work that community organisations do to build people's confidence all the more impactful. It is one reason why community organisations are a critical foundation for building a Nation of Neighbours.

Community organisations are seen by the public as hopeful and inclusive

Alongside their invaluable support services for neighbourhoods across the country, community organisations act as symbols of hope and inclusivity, where such symbols often seem few and far between. Data from our survey shows that almost half of the public (49%) see community organisations as a source of hope to make things better, compared with 25% who see them as a safeguard when times are hard. There was also broad agreement that community organisations work best as inclusive spaces: 45% agree that community organisations work best when people with different values and ways of life come together, compared with only 27% who thought they work best when people with similar values and ways of life come together.

"We recognise the importance of being welcomed into a community where you are known and safe. Community organisations provide spaces for people to just be - to be received as they are and to truly belong."

- Resound staff member

"It's a proper community in Kitty's. I think back to when I was younger going to the youth club and that and how everyone knew everyone. That's what it's like in here and you definitely feel that when you are out and about in the area. Like, I know so many more faces and just feel more connected with more people."

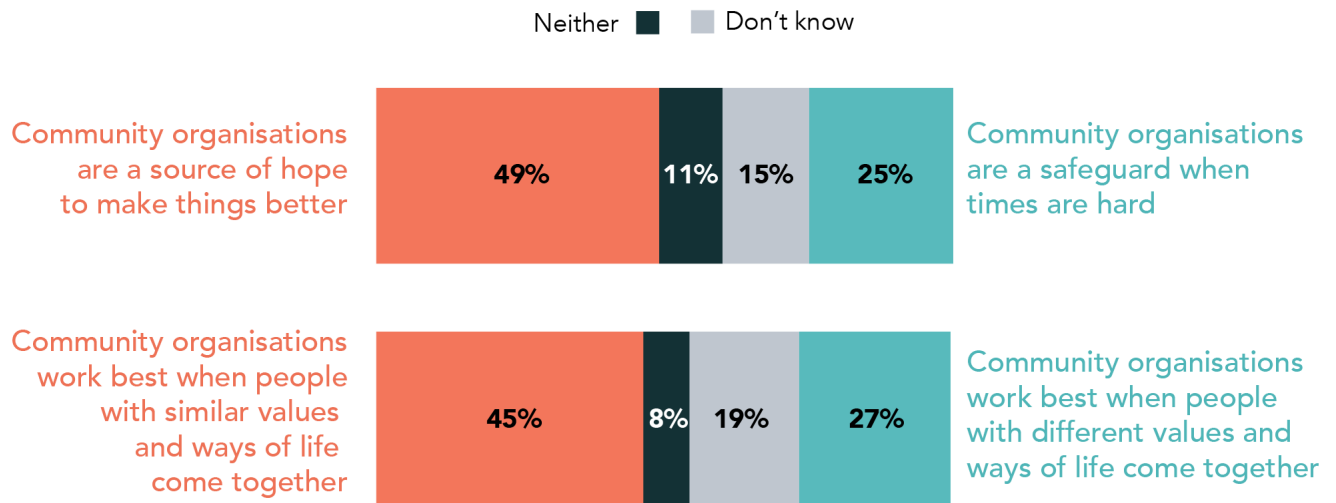
- Kitty's Laundrette staff member

Demos research, A Pride in Place 2026, makes the case that social bridging is central not just to connecting communities, but as a foundation for shared experience and sense-making of institutions and the nation. It is, in turn, an engine of shared national pride. As a rare site of social bridging, community organisations are critical for fuelling that.

CHART 6

Community organisations are seen as hopeful and inclusive

Which of the following statements do you agree with most?

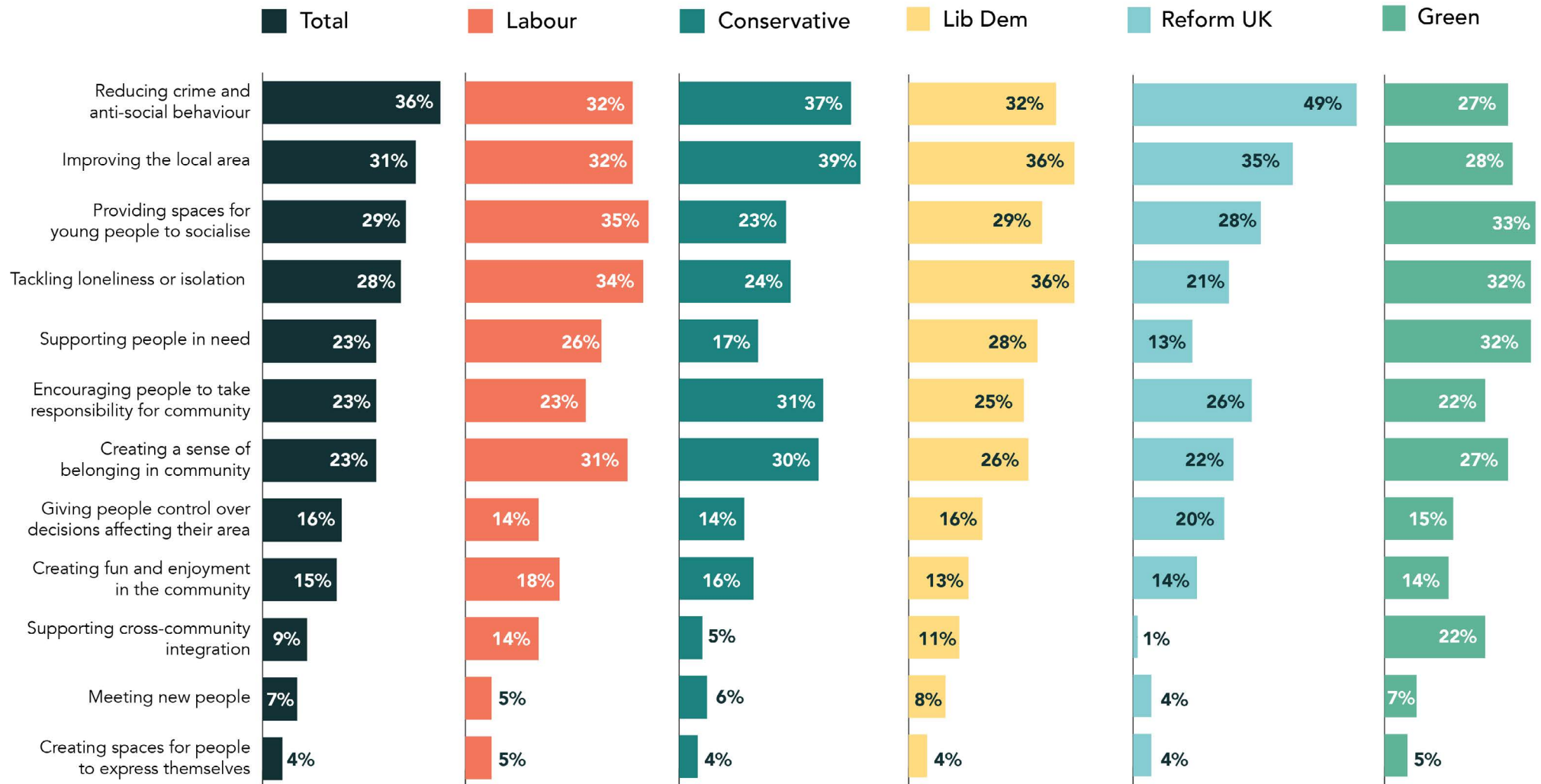


Community organisations are seen as having an important role in a range of support services for communities - and that perspective cuts across the political spectrum. Over a third of the public (36%) see community organisations as having a role to play in reducing crime, 29% say they have a role to play in providing spaces for young people, and 28% as helping to tackle loneliness and isolation.

CHART 7

Preventing crime and improving the local area is seen as the most important role of community organisations

Which of the following, if any, do you think are the most important for community organisations to do in your local area?
Please select up to three. By voting intention



THE POTENTIAL TO FUEL NATIONAL RENEWAL AND NATIONAL OPTIMISM

Community organisations are seen as a critical aid to public services

Public services in Britain today are under strain, often facing scarce funding and resources alongside rising demand. Easing the pressure is central to national renewal, and community organisations could play a role in supporting that. Given the wide-ranging assets that community organisations can offer to local places, it is no surprise that much of the public agrees.

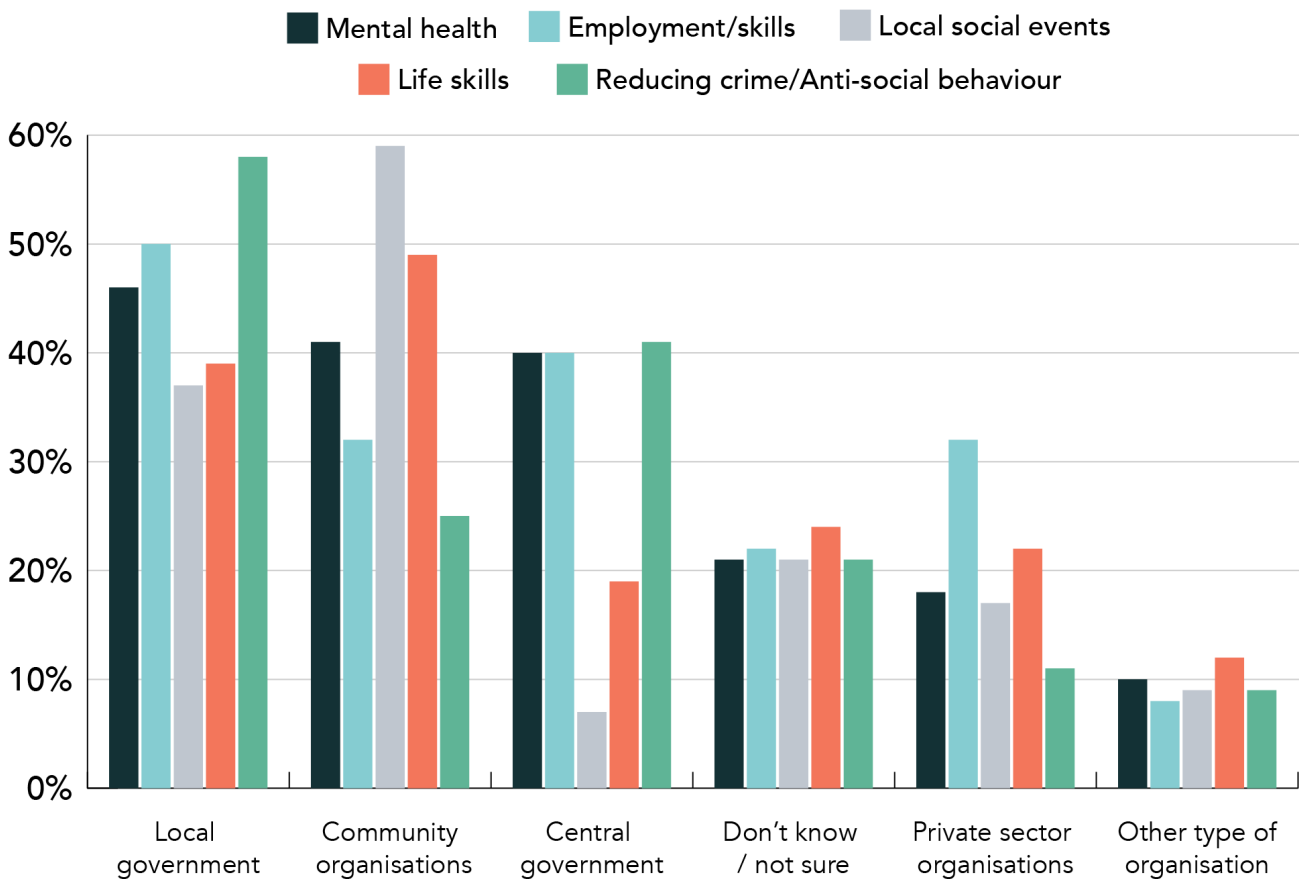
As our survey in September 2026 shows, public support for community organisation involvement in public services is highest for the delivery of life skills (60%) and local social events (49%). Support for community organisation involvement is substantially higher than support for involvement by local councils (37% and 39% respectively), central government or the private sector.

Yet, public support for community organisations delivering public services extends further than life skills or social events. For mental health services, often delivered currently by the NHS, the public are almost as likely to say community organisations should be involved (41%) as local government (46%), and equally as likely as central government (40%). For employment and skills support, the public are equally as likely to think community organisations should deliver these as the private sector (32% for each). This demonstrates the critical role that the public see community organisations as playing in supporting Britain’s strained public services.

CHART 8

Community organisations are seen as better suited to delivering life skills, local events and mental health services than central government

Please select all the organisations which you think should be involved in delivering the following services



Empowered community organisations would make the public more optimistic about politics and the nation

Empowered community organisations would not only benefit the communities in which they exist - it would make the public at large more optimistic about the state of politics and the nation. In our September 2026 survey, we tested two contrasting speeches about devolution (with half of the sample shown each speech):³⁰

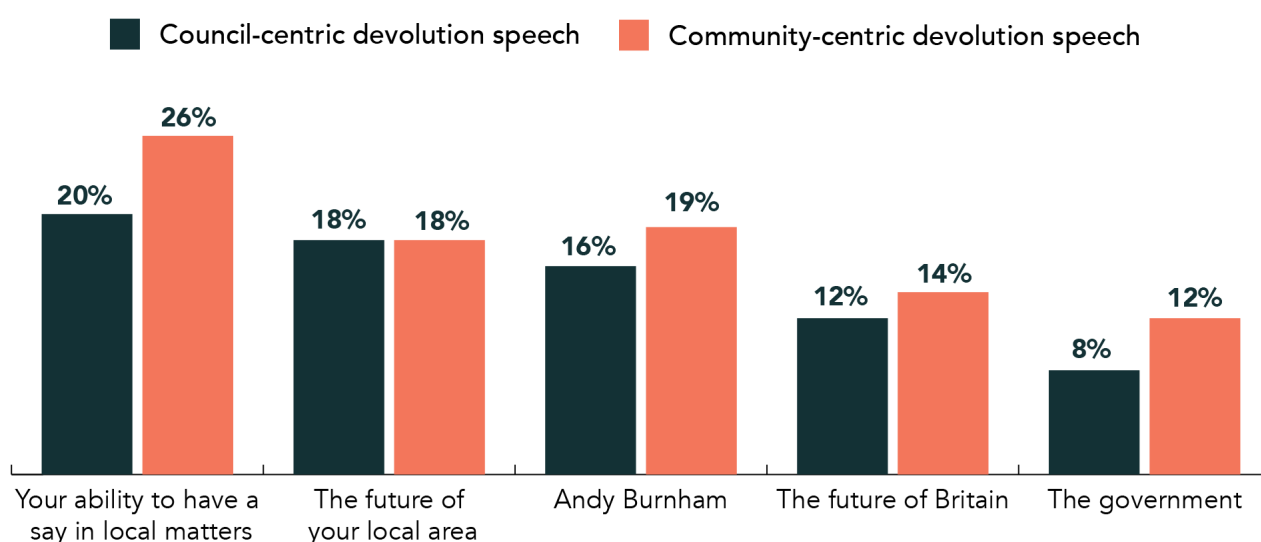
- **A local and regional government-centric model** - outlining how “councils and mayors are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times.”
- **A community organisation-centric model** - outlining how “ordinary communities, small charities and good neighbours are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times.”

People hearing about the community-centric model of devolution were more likely to feel positive about key aspects of politics and Britain than those hearing about the council-centric model. A net 26% felt positive about their ability to have a say in local matters after reading about the community-centric devolution model, compared to 20% of those reading about the government-centric model. People hearing about the community-centric model also felt, relative to people hearing about the council-centric model, more positive about Andy Burnham (19% net positivity vs 16%), the government in general (12% vs 8%), and the future of Britain (14% vs 12%).³¹

CHART 9

A community-centric devolution model makes the public more positive about their ability to have a say, and about the government, Prime Minister and the future of Britain

A/B test. After reading the speech, would you feel more positive or negative about the following aspects of life and the government? Net score



³⁰ The A test was: “We are moving power and resources out of Whitehall and into the hands of combined authorities and councils. Combined authorities and councils will have more power over decisions about public services, funding and local priorities. To make the most of the country we can become, we need those in power to recognise that councils and mayors are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times.” The B test was: We are moving power and resources out of Whitehall and into the hands of communities themselves. Combined authorities and councils will partner more extensively with local community organisations, and collectively have more power over decisions about public services, funding and local priorities. To make the most of the country we can become, we need those in power to recognise that ordinary communities, small charities and good neighbours are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times”.

³¹ The difference in positivity about the future of Britain achieves statistical significance at the 90% confidence level but not the 95% level.

The benefit of the community-centric model is particularly important for the government because the effect is pronounced among its key target groups:

1. **Labour-leavers** - 2024 Labour voters who no longer intend to vote Labour
2. **Constituencies in Burnham's 'Makerfield Test'** - reflecting Burnham's promise to think about 'the places Westminster has neglected', defined here as the third most deprived constituencies outside of London and the South East.³²

Labour-leavers hearing about the community-centric devolution model were, relative to Labour-leavers hearing about the council-centric model, substantially more positive about the future of Britain (net 35% vs 20%), Andy Burnham (net 39% vs 23%) and the government in general (net 33% vs 13%). For constituencies in the Makerfield Test reading about the community-centric model, a net 17% felt more positive about the government, and 33% about their ability to have a say in local matters. This compares just 11% and 18% respectively for constituencies in the Makerfield Test reading about the council-centric model.

The evidence suggests that a devolution model that stops at the town hall is a missed opportunity. Embedding the power of community organisations into the national devolution agenda would drive greater optimism among the public about politics and the nation.

32 Watts, M. Andy Burnham Makerfield by-election victory speech in full: 'Tonight could be the turning point'. The Standard, 19 June 2026. Available at <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/andy-burnham-makerfield-byelection-victory-speech-in-full-b1286753.html>

SECTION 4

A NARRATIVE TOOLBOX TO UNLOCK THE NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

The power of community organisations is clear. It is on our political leaders to tell a story about that which grips the imagination of the state, the public, and community organisations themselves. If Britain is to truly become a Nation of Neighbours, the government's agenda on communities cannot just end up as a brief on a ministers desk, fizzle into the history books, or alienate the community organisations that will drive it.

Local community organisations up and down the country are also central to the change. By coalescing around a shared story about the value they offer, community organisations can clearly and confidently articulate the vital role they play in their communities. Whether they are advocating to politicians for the recognition, funding and partnership they deserve, or speaking to the public at large about why their work matters and why it deserves support, that shared story can amplify the impact of community organisations across the UK. It is on community organisations to be part of that effort and strengthen that narrative.

But making a success of the narrative is not easy. There are challenges around the language political and community leaders use. The public are not all rosy about the state of communities in Britain today, and would snark at anyone trying to paint it as such. When it comes to our political leaders, the public are not optimistic about their principles, either. They feel that politicians do not convey the values they espouse, understand ordinary people's day-to-day experiences, or understand communities' history or aspirations. And community organisations do not feel that the government treats them with the respect they deserve, be it through public recognition, treatment as equal partners, or being offered a fair deal for the services they deliver.

Drawing on focus groups, surveys, and our conversations with community organisations across the country, this section lays out how the government and community leaders can overcome these challenges. It details the language in which they should deliver their communications,

the principles they should convey, and the actions politicians should commit to if they want to communicate in a way that will make the public listen. In doing so, it provides a narrative toolbox for how our political leaders and those already working to support their own communities can create a successful narrative about Becoming a Nation of Neighbours.

LANGUAGE

Words matter. As Sections 1 and 2 set out, the public are sceptical of anything that sounds too rosy about the state of communities today, wary of language that asks more of them than they are willing to give, and quick to spot hypocrisy from politicians who do not practise what they preach. To find language that avoids these pitfalls, we tested a series of potential government statements, then a full draft narrative, refining our approach with the public at each stage.

Finding the words that resonate: testing ‘Nation of Neighbours’

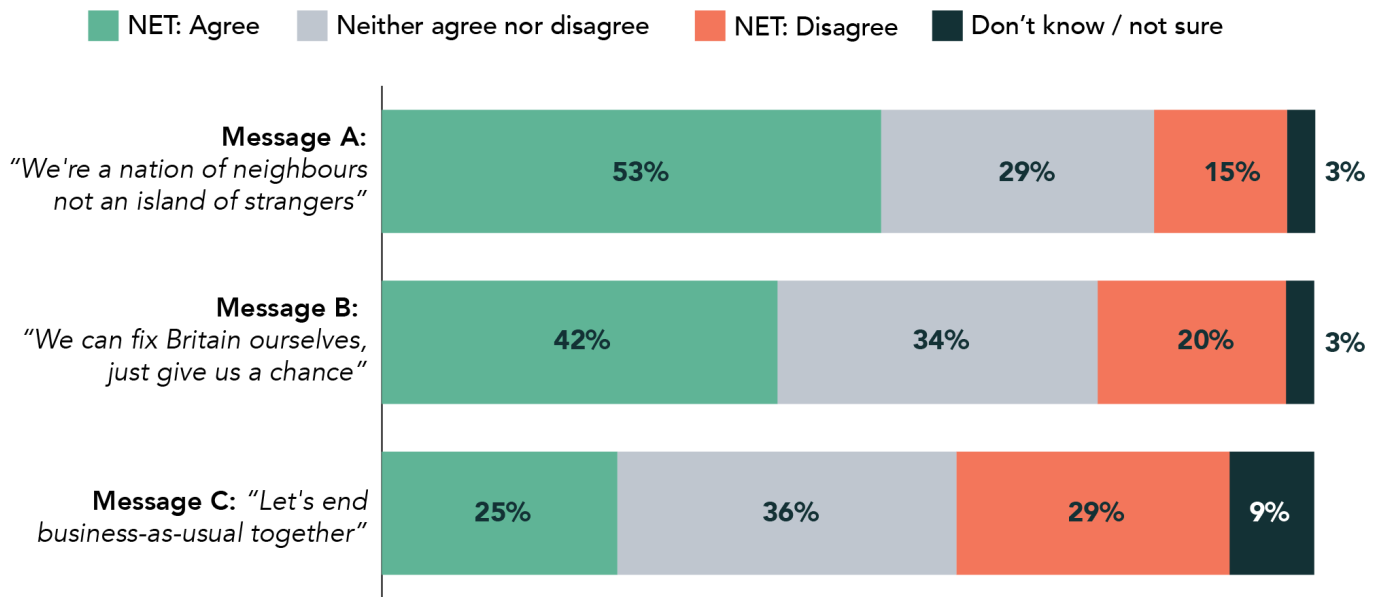
To test government statements relating to the Nation of Neighbours narrative, we carried out a survey in which we separated our sample into three sections. Presented one of the following statements to each section and asked them whether the message would make them feel more positive about community organisations.

- 1. Message A: “We’re a nation of neighbours not an island of strangers”
- 2. Message B: “We can fix Britain ourselves, just give us a chance”
- 3. Message C: “Let’s end business-as-usual together”

The message that had the biggest positive impact was Message A, which implies that the ‘nation of neighbours’ framing fits well with the narrative’s aim of connecting individuals with their local community organisations.

CHART 10

The public prefer the ‘Nation of Neighbours’ framing to alternative framing options
“This would make me feel more positive about community organisations”



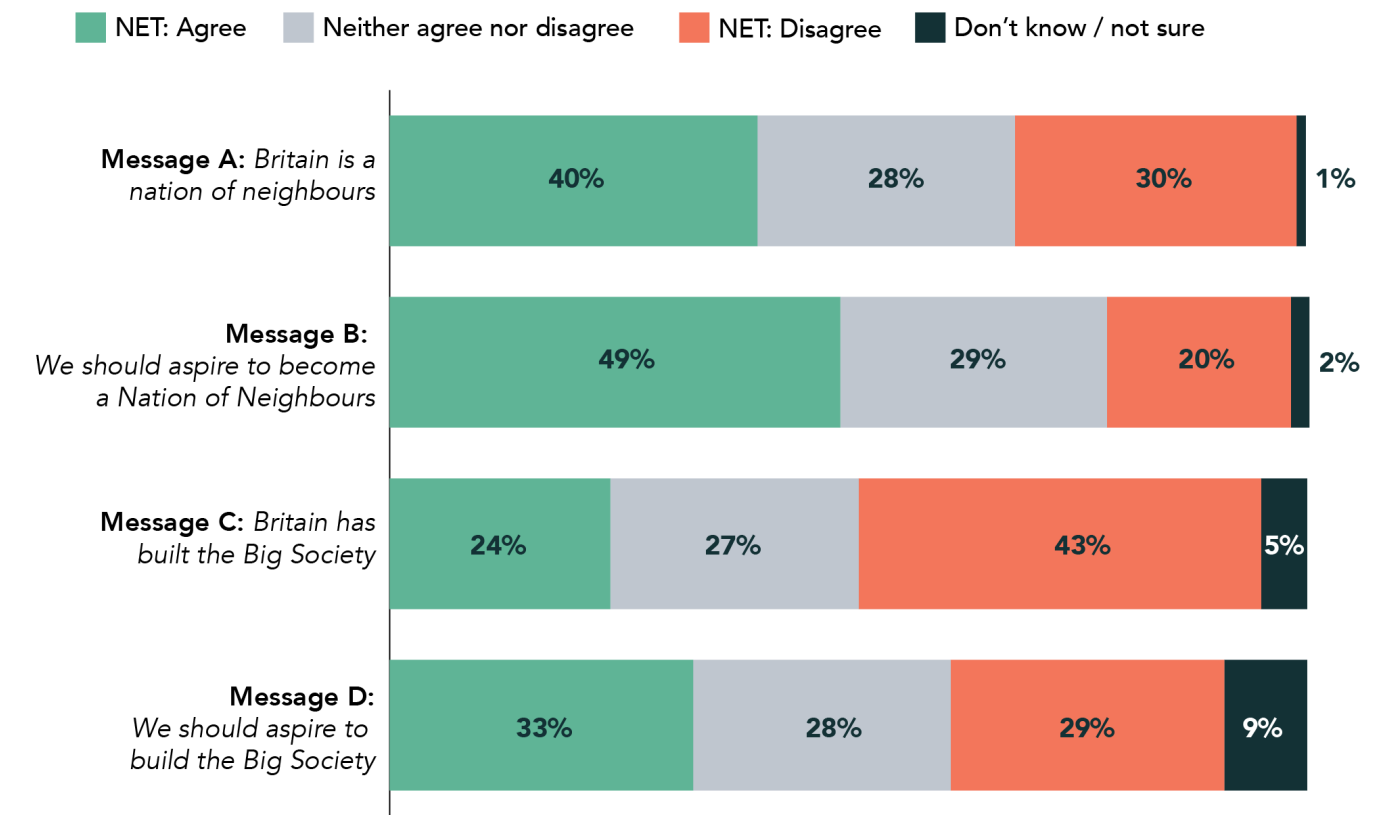
To further test potential government statements, we split the survey sample into four parts, and showed each part one of the following headlines:

- 1. **Message A:** “Britain is a Nation of Neighbours”
- 2. **Message B:** “We should aspire to become a Nation of Neighbours”
- 3. **Message C:** “Britain has built the Big Society”
- 4. **Message D:** “We should aspire to build the Big Society”

We used the Big Society as a comparative baseline against the ‘Nation of Neighbours’ framing, given that it is a recent UK example of a government attempting to advance a similar narrative.

Across the measures, the phrase that most strongly resonated was: We should aspire to become a Nation of Neighbours. This suggests that the ‘Nation of Neighbours’ framing does broadly resonate with the public. However, it also indicates that they see this as more of a goal that Britain should be working towards, rather than it reflecting the current state of British society - a finding that lines up with the scepticism about Britain’s current state of community that we heard directly in Sections 1 and 2.

CHART 11
The public prefers ‘Nation of Neighbours’ to ‘The Big Society’, but sees it more as an aspiration rather than description of Britain
“This reflects my view of Britain”



Testing the full narrative

We tested the full draft narrative in two ways:

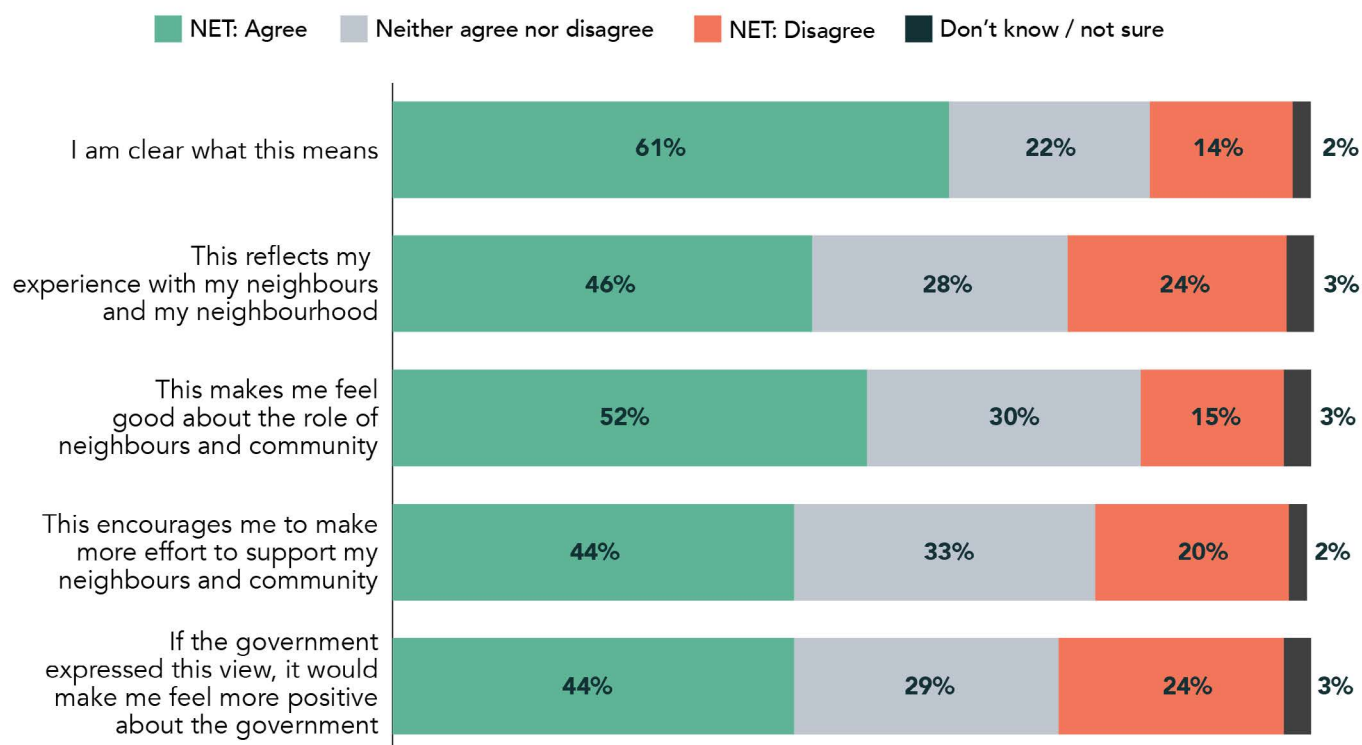
1. We asked a set of questions about the text – detailed above
2. We asked respondents to highlight sentences they did and didn't like – detailed in a separate document

The draft performs well - most people understand it, and it makes many feel good about their neighbours. It also reflects well on the government, with 44% of respondents saying they would feel more positive about the government if it expressed this view. However, a quarter of respondents feel the narrative doesn't reflect their experience with their neighbours - an echo of the scepticism we heard directly from communities in Section 2.

CHART 12

The full narrative text makes the public feel positive about their community and the government

Responses to full draft narrative



The full results of the highlighting exercise can be found in the Annex, which indicates the net positivity rating of each sentence. From this, we can see that the most popular messages within the narrative were:

- "Everyone knows Britain feels broken right now, but fixing it starts with the care and graft of people who refuse to wait for permission to improve their own patches."
- "Real acts of heroism already happen in Britain, every single day."
- "To make the most of the country we can become, we need those in power to recognise that ordinary communities, small charities and good neighbours are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times."

This implies that the type of language that most resonates with the public is that which centres people and their communities as being core to Britain's renewal. It emphasises the importance of local people, with words like 'heroism' and saying they 'are the answer' to the country's problems. In doing so, this framing reflects that this work is viewed with respect and admiration, and so people who are putting in effort to support their local communities not only feel recognised, but also valued.

These sentences also acknowledge that this work is already happening. They are not demanding extra work from the public, rather, they are celebrating the work that is currently being done. They highlight the agency of people within their communities, saying that they 'refuse to wait for permission', demonstrating that they are proactive in getting on with what needs to be done. Again, this shows a respect not only for the work they do, but for the can-do attitude with which it is done.

It is telling that one of the most well-received sentences refers to politicians seeing communities and charities as 'a barrier to be managed'. This suggests that this is how the public believes they are viewed by those in power, and that they are keen for this framing to be changed. That communities should instead be seen as 'the answer to the huge challenges' emphasises the fact that people are the experts in their own spaces, and they want to be treated as such.

Conversely, the sentences that performed least-well in this exercise were the following:

- "People across the country look at the headlines, roll their eyes, and then turn back to our communities, our neighbours, and start with the hard graft of making things better."
- "They show that we have the chance to reject the stale, business-as-usual model, where politicians say "you voted, we run things" and can replace it with something far better."

Both of these talk about the public rejecting the establishment - either turning away from the media or from politicians. The fact that the public did not respond so well to these sentences implies that they do not want to entirely reinvent the status quo. They might want change, but they don't want to outright reject the state or refuse their support, rather, they want to work alongside them to improve their communities.

It is also possible that the phrase 'start with the hard graft' in the first sentence was less palatable to respondents. At first glance, this might seem to contradict the enthusiasm for putting in the work to support their communities that is implied in the most well-received sentences. However, it could be that framing this work as 'hard graft' puts too much pressure on the public. Alternatively, suggesting that working with their friends and neighbours is difficult and arduous may not accurately reflect the enjoyment the public takes from this.

Choosing our words: 'neighbours' vs 'community members'

Relatedly, it is important to note that while the term 'Nation of Neighbours' polled well, we found during our site visits and focus groups that the public does not always welcome the idea of closer ties with the people who live next door. For some, this was because the pressures of living in close proximity meant there was more potential for conflict, while for others, they saw their homes as a place to focus on their own needs and switch off from the outside world. On the other hand, almost all of the people we spoke to welcomed the idea of living in more tight-knit communities. The term 'neighbours', therefore, should be used synonymously with 'community members' to avoid alienating large sections of the public.

PRINCIPLES

Convey the principles you're asking of the public: togetherness, supportiveness and respect

It is important for politicians to be clear that what they're asking of the public - to demonstrate togetherness, supportiveness and respect for those around them - are real, human values that underpin strong relationships. The potential to build connections with other people was the core motivator behind why most people we spoke with either were involved in their local community or wanted to be. Focusing on how these values lead to stronger connections with other people, and how that in turn can help to rebuild communities into more positive, friendlier environments, should be the core of public-facing messaging.

However, in espousing these principles, politicians must commit to modelling these values themselves to combat the distrust our participants felt towards them. People cannot be expected to make additional effort to support those around them if they do not see these values being reflected by those in power. Politicians must therefore show more courtesy, respect and support for those they work with when in the public eye.

Be honest and down-to-earth

Politicians should be open about the problems that communities are facing, rather than painting a rose-tinted image. The people we spoke with openly discussed the issues present in their communities, from poverty, to crime, to unemployment. In some communities, these problems are so prescient that for outsiders to ignore them would come across as disingenuous. Politicians therefore must acknowledge that these problems exist, but focus on how stronger communities can help to address them.

When communicating this idea, it's important to stay down to earth and talk about the importance of small, day-to-day interactions, rather than promote a grandiose vision. Few of the people who we spoke with connected what was going on in their community to a broader, country-wide narrative. They want to see change in their local area, improvements in their lives and those of their friends, and are usually not too interested in how that fits into a nationwide government strategy. Simple messages couched in simple language focused on the individual will therefore land better than those espousing national change.

There should also be acknowledgement that, while a connected community is a happier place to be, people aren't expected to get along with everyone. This does not diminish the strength of communities - we spoke to several people who enjoyed attending their community organisation or getting involved in activities despite not getting on with all the other attendees. It is only natural that individuals will find it easier to connect with some people over others, and the government should not imply that it expects people to build idealistic communities where everyone is close friends. It should instead focus on the idea that building more connections with those who you do get on with improves individuals' wellbeing as well as strengthens communities as a whole.

Focus on both the future and the past

The narrative told to the public needs to draw on the past as a reference point of what strong communities can look like, but it also needs to be clearly angled towards a more positive future. Many people we spoke with held an idealised image of a former Britain where people looked out for one another and community ties were strong. However, when asked in our survey how communities should develop now, 50% of respondents agreed that 'we need to build a community fit for the future', compared with 37% who aligned more with the view that 'we need

to restore what made our community strong in the past'. This implies that drawing on images of strong communities from earlier decades is useful in forming a vision of what communities can become, but the sense of direction should always be forwards rather than backwards.

ACTIONS

Give community organisations the public recognition they deserve

The impact of a public that is becoming more and more separated and distrustful of its neighbours is being felt by community organisations. While the organisations we visited had many regular members, several groups found it difficult to reach demographics outside of their core user base, and believe that some people see these sorts of groups as not being 'for them'. Community organisation staff also talked about how they're finding it difficult to engage volunteers in their work. With few local people willing to volunteer, their capacity becomes stretched thinly across multiple local organisations. We heard how, in areas of high deprivation, people feel 'battered by the storms of life' - draining their energy and limiting confidence in their own abilities. Volunteering in that context becomes particularly challenging.

An important way to further cement public trust and engagement is to demonstrate tangible ways in which the state will itself be supporting communities and community organisations. Many people we spoke with told us that they would need to see the government 'walk the walk' rather than just talk about how they value community strength. The public want to clearly see the government funding local organisations and developing public spaces like libraries and youth clubs. This is supported by our survey findings, with 53% of people believing the government and national organisations need to give community organisations more support to work better, compared with only 20% who think they need to 'get out of the way'. It would also mean representative MPs being more visible in the community and playing an active role in supporting community concerns.

"It's got to mean something. It's got to mean more than a slogan and just a few bits of tokenism."

- Focus group participant

Likewise, local authorities need to show that they are committed to bolstering local communities. When asked who was responsible for supporting community cohesion, many people in our focus groups pointed to local authorities as being key players. The public tends to see councils as a legitimate and important part of the community support system, rather than an organisation that should simply step aside. The council should demonstrate that it is collaborating with and supporting community organisations, rather than simply deferring to them and letting them carry out community support work unaided.

Treat community organisations as equal partners in a shared endeavour

A widespread source of frustration for community leaders is the lack of opportunities for collaboration with public institutions. Being situated so deeply within communities, many have a finely-tuned understanding of local needs and how these could be addressed. They could put this expertise to good use by working alongside their local MP, local council or statutory services like health and policing to radically strengthen community support. Yet in spite of their enthusiasm for external collaboration, community leaders found that these opportunities rarely arise and felt that this was a wasted opportunity to pool their combined knowledge and resources for the good of local people.

Politicians should be vocal in their recognition and appreciation of the work that community organisations do. While they are doing a lot of work keeping people's heads above water and holding communities together, some community organisations we spoke with didn't feel that their efforts are fully acknowledged by those in power. They were frustrated that the goodwill of staff and volunteers was, on occasion, being taken for granted.

One way in which those in central and local government can show that they respect community organisations as equal partners is by working collaboratively on joint projects. This could include, for example, co-designing or co-delivering services that support local communities, or giving community organisations a seat in the ongoing governance of these services. Part of this must include acknowledging that each community organisation operates in very different circumstances depending on the make-up of their local community, and that there cannot be a one size fits all approach. The government should respect the unparalleled local knowledge that community organisations have and follow their lead when deciding upon which interventions are needed in a particular area to support that community. They should see their role as providing the financial, logistical and administrative support that enables frontline staff and volunteers to carry out the work on the ground.

Offer community organisations a fair deal for the services they deliver

Many of the community organisations we spoke with felt stretched and disempowered by a lack of funding and institutional support. With operating costs having risen significantly over recent years, organisations feel like they're 'treading water' in trying to keep their services going. They see enhancing local value as a collective burden for many different actors, and would appreciate opportunities to improve funding relationships not only with local and central government, but with local businesses as well.

"The battle to get support is so immense, it almost ... takes us away from doing the core focus of addressing social need."

- Community group staff member

While financial challenges are a ubiquitous experience for community organisations, some, particularly social enterprises, did not want to be reliant on grants and charitable support. They instead took pride in the ability to build financial independence. Dependency represented not only vulnerability, but an undignified position. What is important to them, in contrast, was the work that they do being acknowledged and appreciated. Much of the time, the work these groups do is bridging the gaps that local public service provision is unable to reach. And yet while statutory bodies might signpost to their services, they often do not feel like the work they do is valued in the same way or that they are receiving a fair deal when it comes to recognition.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

FREE SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

Local GPs in the Whitley Bay area often socially prescribe attendance at North Tyneside Big Local for people experiencing depression. Yet, the Big Local receives no payment for this. Staff told us they are more than happy to be there for people who need their support, but the lack of payment left them feeling their work was taken for granted, particularly given that pharmacies are paid for delivering comparable services.

This is not a niche complaint. Across the country, the community organisations that GPs increasingly rely on for social prescribing - referring patients to activities and support in their community rather than, or alongside, medication - are rarely paid for this work, even as demand on them grows.

The National Academy for Social Prescribing has been leading efforts to change this. Its proposed National Community Health and Wellbeing Fund, developed with Social Finance and UCL, would pool funding from the public, philanthropic and private sectors into long-term funding pots for the community groups delivering this work, rather than leaving them to rely on short-term grants or goodwill. Early piloting is already under way in a handful of “early adopter” areas, including Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, where a dedicated fund is nearly ready to launch.

North Tyneside Big Local’s experience is a reminder of why this matters. It ensures community organisations who want to help feel they are being given a fair deal.

Where government and community organisations are not directly collaborating, community organisations still need to be treated fairly, given the services that they are providing. Social enterprises in particular, who are able to generate their own funds, do not want to be dependent on government, and recognise the limitation of government funding. Instead, all they ask is to be treated as other organisations are. If pharmacies are paid for medical prescriptions, community organisations should be paid for social prescriptions. As Andy Burnham has recognised, these types of organisations ‘should be embedded and resourced alongside public services, rather than seen as an ‘add-on’ or ‘nice to have’.³³

33 Burnham, A. From ‘sectors’ to ‘system’: partnership working and civil society’s role in tackling inequality. PBE, 20 November 2020. Available at <https://pbe.co.uk/insights/from-sectors-to-system-partnership-working-and-civil-societys-role-in-tackling-inequality/>

CONCLUSION

DEVOLUTION CAN'T STOP AT THE MAYOR'S OFFICE. HOPE IS LOCAL

The social ecosystem this paper has described has been damaged by years of neglect - by the slow closure of the third spaces where people once met, by the retreat of public services from local life, and by a political culture that has too often talked about communities rather than to them. But as our research has shown, the seeds of hope are already growing at the local level. We see them in the individual spearheading a local initiative to connect their neighbours, in the volunteer stocking shelves at a foodbank or serving tea in a community café, and in the community organisations working day in, day out to support the most vulnerable people in their area, often with little funding and even less recognition. These are not isolated acts of charity. They are the building blocks of a different kind of Britain - one that is more connected, more trusting, and more resilient.

What our research also makes clear is that this hope is conditional on belief. If the public starts to believe that change really is possible, that their communities are valued rather than overlooked, and that they can work together with others to make a tangible difference, many more people will be galvanised to start building the kind of community ties that the past decades have seen erode. This is not a passive hope that people should sit back and wait for; it is an active one to be unlocked. The public has told us, in their own words, what they need to see to believe it: honesty rather than spin, tangible investment rather than rhetoric, and politicians willing to model the same values of respect and cooperation that they ask of ordinary citizens. Where these conditions are met, our evidence suggests the public will respond in kind.

Community organisations sit at the very centre of this opportunity. They already hold what the government has struggled for years to rebuild: high levels of local trust, and an unsurpassed, hard-won knowledge of the needs of the people and places they serve. Crucially, they are not asking to be left alone to solve these problems by themselves, nor are they asking central government to take over and direct their work from above. What they want is to work together with local and central government as equal partners in a shared endeavour - to be treated with the same seriousness and fairness afforded to other parts of the support system, and to have their expertise genuinely drawn upon rather than merely acknowledged. Now is the time to unlock that potential.

Devolution offers a genuine opportunity to do just that - but only if it is allowed to take root beyond the mayor's office. Moving power from Whitehall to the town hall is a necessary first step, but it will not by itself rebuild the trust, connection and pride that this paper has shown still exists at the local level. That requires going one step further: putting communities themselves, and the organisations that already hold their trust, at the centre of their own renewal. **The hope for a Nation of Neighbours is local. It is now up to the government to meet it there.**

APPENDIX 1

NATION OF NEIGHBOURS NARRATIVE

Below is the full text of the Nation of Neighbours narrative, written by Marc Stears and Polly Curtis and published by Demos and UCL Policy Lab in May 2026.³⁴

WE CAN BE A NATION OF NEIGHBOURS, NOT AN ISLAND OF STRANGERS

Britain feels broken right now. After the few weeks we have just seen, we know that politics-as-usual is in no shape to put it right. But that should not lead us to despair. Because fixing the country doesn't actually start in Westminster or Whitehall.

It starts with the care and graft of people who refuse to wait for permission to improve their own patches. Britain's future does not need to lie in the doom and division of the headlines or the latest political plot, but in the quiet revolution of people simply getting on with it.

Across the country there are people who believe that they can make a difference, rather than those who believe nothing can be done. In fact, people look at the headlines, roll their eyes, and then turn back to our communities, our neighbours, and start with the hard graft of making things better.

Real and small acts of heroism already happen in Britain, every single day. Neighbours check in on one another, we stop for a chat at the checkout till, at the school gate, or in the canteen. Small acts add up. Ask people what they think about their own community and they will talk about the neighbour who takes the bins out for someone who can't, or the friend they call to pick up their friends' kids from nursery when they are running late.

They will talk too about the people they know who raise money for the local food bank, join a PTA, start a neighbourhood WhatsApp group, or become a volunteer. It's these people who can become community enterprises, local charities, or community groups that bond and unite us. These small wins and shared experiences add up to something powerful, but they have been overlooked by those in power for too many years.

This is the spirit of health by stealth and it is time we accepted that it is what truly holds the nation together – especially in difficult times.

Far too often in politics, these everyday acts are treated as if they don't matter. They're dismissed as not "big" enough or not the path to actual change. But, the evidence is that they bind us together as a country when so many other forces threaten to pull us apart. They also offer so much more for the future. They show that we have the chance to reject the stale,

³⁴ Curtis, P and Stears, M. A Nation of Neighbours: Rebuilding Britain from the Ground Up. Demos, 28 May 2026. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/NoN-May-26-UCL-x-Demos.pdf>

business-as-usual model, which hasn't worked. That's the model where politicians say, "you vote and we run things" and drone on about "cracking on with the job" or "delivering for the country" while everything descends into chaos around them. In London, it's the mindset which says "we know best", then fails to make a difference.

To make the most of the country we can become, we need a new start. We need those in power to recognise that ordinary communities, small charities and good neighbours are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times. The energy of life, the passions and the beliefs we share, the joy and love in our communities – that is the only way we can truly rebuild. That is not empty sentimentalism. It is the lifeblood of change.

All of this depends on accepting a truth the whole country outside Westminster already knows. Governments of all parties have let people down for years now. But that does not mean Government just has to get out of the way. Quite the contrary; local councils, mayors and national Governments still have a vital role to play. They shouldn't be meddling in everyone's 'daily lives', but they should be actively supporting and enabling communities and charities to make the changes we all want to see. Government must accept both risk and responsibility. Politicians should be fair and honest partners. They should always take on those responsible for the problems we face: the scamsters, bad employers and unaccountable foreign tech companies that want things their own way. Power should always be on the people's side.

Sharing power with communities opens up whole new ways of solving our nation's problems.. When it comes to health, for example, it recognises that prevention starts in communities, not hospitals. When people have power over their neighbourhoods, they can feel less lonely and more confident, often avoiding the ill health which now blights so many. When it comes to defence and security, an approach of this kind will make us safer and more united as a country. When national security is under threat, we need to act together, not at odds with one another. When we think this way, we realise that strong communities are the hidden wealth of nations; building social capital means building our emotional wellbeing, making us stronger and fit for work. It promises future prosperity.

There is a clear policy agenda to support this work as well. We need greater devolution – not just to mayors but throughout our communities so people feel involved and heard. We need reform of our major public services to ensure that they are freed-up from the top-down target culture that has led to micromanagement from the centre and undermined trust, faith and morale. We also need a much more urgent strategy for social cohesion and anti-extremism, and more experiments in involving people in real, thoughtful and engaging democracy at all levels. Power needs to be shared differently. People need to be heard. We all need a stake in the future.

And we need genuinely relatable politics, with leaders who listen to communities, look like normal people and in whom voters of all backgrounds share a belief that they understand their communities and care about their lives.

Behind the headlines this government has made some steps in this direction. There has been the Pride in Place initiative, which promises investment in local places combined with efforts to give local people more of a say in how that money is spent. There have also been reforming efforts in some public services, including the recently announced SEND reforms, championed by Georgia Gould, and the Test, Learn and Grow initiative encouraging innovation in local councils.

But as the Prime Minister himself recently accepted, now is not the time for incrementalism. It is time to insist as loudly as possible that Britain should never be described as an "island of strangers". We can, instead, be a nation of neighbours. It's in our DNA. And in that promise lies our social cohesion and political and economic salvation.

APPENDIX 2

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Visits to community-led organisations and community businesses across the country informed a large part of this report as we were able to observe how the sessions were run and talk to staff, volunteers and members about the role these organisations played in their local area. Below are summaries of each of the organisations we visited and what local support they provide.

St Barnabas Church, Knowle West

St Barnabas runs several community-focused activities, including a weekly food bank and a toddlers' group as well as its Warm Welcome space, which we observed in March 2026. In addition to providing a warm space for people of all ages and backgrounds, it offers a free lunch for its members as well as encouraging them to chat and get to know each other while doing puzzles and craft activities. It also runs an optional prayer group and invites external organisations to attend to provide additional advice and support to its members.

Resound Church, Emerson's Green

Running alongside a weekly foodbank session, Resound's Community Cafe offers breakfast to anyone in the area who wants to come along, using a 'pay-what-you-can' model to ensure that the breakfast is available to everyone in the community. They also run craft activities and welcome in partner organisations each week to offer wider practical and holistic support for their members.

Yalding Library

Yalding Library supports several activities attended by the local population, including the weekly Craft and Chatter group. This session provides space for residents of Yalding and the surrounding area to meet informally, catch up on local news and enjoy each other's company while taking part in craft activities like knitting or tufting.

Fusion Maidstone Healthy Living Centre

Fusion Centre in Maidstone is a community hub that hosts a range of different services, from NHS diabetic eye screening to a cafe staffed in part by local volunteers. The weekly Knit n Knatter session is an opportunity for local residents to get together, grab lunch from the cafe and have a chat while providing encouragement and advice on each other's latest knitting projects.

Kitty's Laundrette

A community laundrette and dry cleaners just outside Liverpool, Kitty's Laundrette not only offers affordable cleaning services for local people, but is also a welcoming space that provides a variety of social and creative activities.

Deeplish Community Centre

Deeplish Community Centre in Rochdale provides a range of services in its aim to support and empower the local community. This includes activities centred around art, education and health and wellbeing.

North Tyneside Big Local

North Tyneside Big Local is a community hub providing space for local people to gather through their cafe, garden, family play space and surplus shop. They also run community-led repair projects, which aim to reduce waste while also providing much-needed essentials, like school uniforms and electrical items, to those who need them.

The Big Onion/Expanding Horizons

Located in a shopping centre in Bootle, The Big Onion helps people to become financially independent through offering professional development and enterprise consultancy to those looking to run their own businesses. The store also hosts a cafe and market stalls for a range of local businesses.

Renew North Tyneside

Renew North Tyneside specialises in repairing and restoring donated items, and making them available at low prices for the community.

APPENDIX 3

NARRATIVE MESSAGE TESTING

The analysis below summarises the highlighting exercise that we carried out as part of our survey testing the narrative. Respondents were first asked to highlight the sentences that they found most powerful, then the sentences that they found least powerful. The net scores of each sentence were then calculated by taking the percentage of people who reported a sentence as being one of the most powerful and minusing from this the percentage of people who had thought that sentence was one of the least powerful. The results of this can be seen below, with the sentences highlighted in darker blue being those with higher net positive sentiment.

NET POSITIVE

Darker blue = higher net positive sentiment (% who selected as most powerful minus % who selected as least powerful).

Shade key: lowest (-5.2%) to highest (17.4%)

Everyone knows Britain feels broken right now, but fixing it starts with the care and graft of people who refuse to wait for permission to improve their own patches.

Britain's future does not need to lie in the doom and division of the headlines, but in the quiet revolution of people simply getting on with it.

Across the country there are people who believe they can make a difference, rather than those who believe nothing can be done.

People across the country look at the headlines, roll their eyes, and then turn back to our communities, our neighbours, and start with the hard graft of making things better.

1. Neighbours already hold this country together

Real acts of heroism already happen in Britain, every single day.

It is the decent, everyday work of a community.

It starts with just checking in — a chat at the check out till, at the school gate, or the canteen.

It might turn into taking out the bins for someone who can't on your street, noticing if their curtains are closed longer than usual, or picking up your friends' kids from nursery.

Then you raise money for the local food bank, join a PTA, start a neighbourhood WhatsApp group or become a volunteer.

They can become community enterprises, local charities, or community groups that bond and unite us.

These small wins and shared experiences add up but they have been overlooked by those in power for years now.

This is the spirit of health by stealth, and it is time we accepted that it is what truly holds the nation together - especially in difficult times.

2. Our communities could transform our country

These everyday acts of heroism matter.

They bind us together.

They also offer so much more for the future.

They show that we have the chance to reject the stale, business-as-usual model, where politicians say "you voted, we run things" and can replace it with something far better.

To make the most of the country we can become, we need those in power to recognise that ordinary communities, small charities and good neighbours are not a barrier to be managed or ignored but are the answer to the huge challenges of our times.

The energy of life, the passions and the beliefs we share, the joy and love in our communities - that is the only way we can truly rebuild.

That is not empty sentimentalism.

It is the lifeblood of change.

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DEMOS

Demos is a champion of people, ideas and democracy. We bring people together. We bridge divides. We listen and we understand. We are practical about the problems we face, but endlessly optimistic and ambitious about our capacity, together, to overcome them.

At a crossroads in Britain's history, we need ideas for renewal, reconnection and the restoration of hope. Challenges from populism to climate change remain unsolved, and a technological revolution dawns, but the centre of politics has been intellectually paralysed. Demos will change that. We can counter the impossible promises of the political extremes, and challenge despair – by bringing to life an aspirational narrative about the future of Britain that is rooted in the hopes and ambitions of people from across our country.

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