DEMOS

LOCATION REPORT: GREATER MANCHESTER

MAPPING INFORMATION SUPPLY CHAINS AROUND LOCAL ASYLUM HOTEL CONFLICTS IN ONE REGION

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PART OF THE *FILL THE VOID* SERIES

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **PAGE 4**

ABOUT THIS REPORT **PAGE 4**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **PAGE 5**

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION **PAGE 8**

About Greater Manchester: a booming, but uneven city PAGE 8

Greater Manchester's asylum hotel policy backlash PAGE 10

SECTION 2: FINDINGS **PAGE 11**

2.1 An unpopular policy, but with varying motivations PAGE 11

2.2 There was uneven knowledge about the policy across Greater Manchester PAGE 12

2.3 Dwindling trust in institutional actors, but it's not all gone PAGE 13

People are increasingly frustrated with local news, but they're still engaging PAGE 13

National mainstream news had an uneven reception PAGE 15

Wavering belief in local government and councillors PAGE 16

Loss of faith in national government and their local MPs PAGE 19

2.4 Emergent information actors & spaces PAGE 19

Facebook as the new town square PAGE 20

Other social media platforms filling the gaps PAGE 22

There's high trust in other Mancs PAGE 22

SECTION 3. CONCLUSION **PAGE 27**

APPENDIX – THE SEVEN SEGMENTS PAGE 28

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Any errors remain the authors' responsibility.

Flynn Devine & Caragh Aylett-Bullock

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos is the UK's leading cross-party think tank producing research and policies that have been adopted by successive governments for more than 30 years. Our vision is for an upgraded democracy, to rebuild the broken relationships between institutions and citizens, and between citizens. Resilient information ecosystems are a vital enabler of this more trusted democracy.

This research is part of Demos Digital's Epistemic Security programme that focuses on securing the UK's information supply chains and building democratic resilience to adverse influences. This research programme is designed to ground our policy development and programme design into the lives and pain points of everyday people at the local level. Understanding how information is produced, distributed and evaluated within local communities is vital to supporting our understanding of the national information environment - not only because the local make up the national, but because it so clearly informs UK citizens' every-day lives and outlook on the country more broadly.

This report is published together with a comparative report, Fill the Void, and a further two dedicated location-specific reports for Epping Forest and Dudley.

These studies are informing the design of a series of further pilots that will be launched in 2027 in partnership with local community actors to trial the policy and programmatic approaches proposed in this paper. If you are interested in partnering on future work in local areas please contact: Demos Digital Director, *hannah.perry@demos.co.uk*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

People need trustworthy local information to understand their lives, their communities and our democracy. Across the UK the information supply chain is breaking down, leaving friendships, communities and even our national security at risk. Using mixed methods, this study diagnoses what is actually happening at a local level when information infrastructure breaks-down and misinformation intersects with real world conflicts. It takes the example of specific local clashes over the 'asylum hotel' policy and maps citizens' experiences in the local information supply chain that contributed to them.

This report focuses on the local information infrastructure of Greater Manchester specifically. It is one of three local studies conducted alongside Epping Forest and Dudley and should be read alongside the comparative report, Fill the Void, which reflects our triangulated findings and full set of recommendations. In Greater Manchester and specifically in Oldham, Altrincham and Fallowfield, our fieldwork included:[1] 5 focus groups with 42 residents in February 2026, reflecting key demographic and political attitudes criteria using More In Common's Seven Segments, plus pre and post discussion surveys; 7 follow-up resident interviews; 11 local stakeholder interviews and analysis of local social media channels.[2]

Greater Manchester is by far the largest and most diverse ecosystem in terms of information sources and infrastructure relative to other locations included in this research programme, and yet also saw strife over the asylum hotel policy. Local residents described difficulty finding trustworthy information on this contentious topic and on the issues that matter to them - often resorting to social media to fill the gap.

1 For full details of the methodology see the companion comparative report, Fill the Void.
2 More in Common. 7 Segments. See appendix on P28.. Available here: https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/seven-segments/

KEY FINDINGS

While Greater Manchester has a comparatively diverse information supply chain and fast growing local economy, the city is still experiencing the same broad trends identified in other areas of the country: declining trust in institutions, dwindling engagement with government and elected representatives, and a retreat from engagement with news media. The people in this research are also turning to social media and others in the community to stay informed. There is still enough trust between institutional actors and local people to rebuild the engagement and trust that residents told us they want, but battling against these tides won't be easy.

- **THE ASYLUM HOTEL POLICY CAUGHT MANY GREATER MANCHESTER RESIDENTS BY SURPRISE.**

  While the majority of participants felt intrinsically supportive of the UK taking in asylum seekers, the lack of advance communication caused unnecessary and avoidable division and provoked concerns about public safety and fair access to constrained resources.

  One resident said, *"I just think the lack of knowledge makes people negative and that generates dislike and hate and that's not good."*

- **COUNCILLORS DESCRIBED A STRONG RELUCTANCE TO POST ABOUT THE POLICY AND THE PROTESTS ONLINE.**

  One Councillor said, *"we…did everything we could to actively discourage other councillors from communicating... in a public domain because we wanted to... de-escalate."* Councils' Facebook and X accounts show very low coverage of the issue in their online posts; just 1-3 posts on Facebook over a two year period.

- **LACK OF DETAILS ABOUT THE ASYLUM HOTEL POLICY FROM COUNCILS AND REPRESENTATIVES LEFT VOIDS.**

  Even with knowledge that hotels were housing asylum seekers, many felt communication from their council and councillors was inadequate on the policy with details about plans, timelines, and ways forward. These gaps in information were easily filled with speculation and divisive conversations. Many were sceptical of online claims, but felt reliant on social media when institutional updates were missing.

  One resident commented,*"If I'm paying my [council] taxes, I would like to know what's happening"*.

- **THE LOCAL NEWS LANDSCAPE IS LARGE AND DIVERSE, BUT TRUST IN LOCAL JOURNALISM VARIES.**

  Residents drew attention to the variety of different local media outlets, such as Altrincham Today or the Oldham Times, and regional media, such as the Manchester Evening News, available to them. The trust in these outlets, however, varied considerably. Most were fairly trusting of hyper-local outlets. Yet, there was more scepticism of the regional publications. Questions around quality of coverage, user experience of websites, and bias in reporting were raised frequently.

- **TRUST IN INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION PROVIDERS HAS RECEDED, THOUGH WITH SOME VARIATION.**

  National mainstream news has a varied reception based on political leaning - with some avoiding it because it is depressing, biased or selective. The BBC was a partial exception. While it received criticism, many still used it to fact-check claims. Trust in elected representatives was also generally low. Many described their MPs as pushing political agendas or incompetent, but waning trust in local councillors wasn't quite as bad.

- **SOCIAL MEDIA, IN PARTICULAR FACEBOOK, IS THE DOMINANT WAY RESIDENTS RECEIVE LOCAL INFORMATION.**

  Facebook pages and groups like 'What's on in Altrincham' or 'Nosey Bastards Rochdale' are the primary ways people stay informed, combined with TikTok, Instagram, and other well-known platforms. Although there were concerns shared about misinformation, online hatred, and AI generated content, these channels are still by far the most trusted source for local information.

- **OFFLINE COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO INFORMATION SHARING IN THE CITY.**

  In-person spaces and places to chat to other locals is of vital importance. Community centres, on the street chat and religious communities all serve as vital touch points to hear about what's happening and deliberate with other local people to make sense of it. Talking about the asylum hotel policy, however, can be seen as too taboo by some to bring it up in these spaces.

In the next phase of this work, Demos will design pilots to support the local information ecosystem informed by these insights. If you are interested in partnering in the local area please contact **Hannah Perry**, Director of Demos Digital: *hannah.perry@demos.co.uk*

SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION

Local information supply chains are vital to the UK's democracy. The platforms, individuals, and sources people lean on to understand events in their community are the foundations for an informed and active citizenry. Demos uses 'the information supply chain' as a way of understanding the elements that make up information infrastructure - they are the production, distribution, acquisition and evaluation of information, and how that informs decision-making and the actions people subsequently take.

Across the country - from Southport, to Southampton, and Belfast - there have been an increasing number of incidents where information supply chain failure has exacerbated real world tensions and left communities feeling unsafe. There has never been a more important time to understand the vulnerabilities of the nation's local information infrastructure and to identify how it can better serve local people and a healthy and resilient democracy.

Greater Manchester is one of three local areas where this study was conducted to understand vulnerabilities in local information supply chains and their contribution to the decline of trust. This is demonstrated by evidencing, through the lens of local citizens, stakeholders, social media analysis and desk research, how the local information environment performed in relation to the 'asylum hotel' policy. This case study has been chosen not in order to examine that policy itself, but because immigration has become the dividing issue of our time, and this policy is one that plays out on a street by street level meaning the local information supply chain matters more than ever.[3]

ABOUT GREATER MANCHESTER: A BOOMING, BUT UNEVEN CITY

Greater Manchester is a large, multicultural city in the North West of England with a population of approximately 3 million people.[4] It is a vibrant city, known for its music scene, football teams, and northern hospitality. Historically, Greater Manchester has been an important centre for manufacturing and engineering trades due to the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in the late 1800s.[5] Today, digital, creative and media industries as well as manufacturing and technology top the list for the biggest industries in the region.[6] As of July 2026, it is also the home to the new UK Government Northern HQ, No10 North.[7]



3 For more information on the methodology and policy context see the parallel report, Fill the Void, Appendix 2.
4 In the 2024 census, there were 3,009,664 people in Greater Manchester. See: ONS (2024) 'Profile: Greater Manchester'. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E47000001-greater-manchester
5 Britannica (2026) 'Greater Manchester' Available at: https://www.britannica.com/place/Greater-Manchester
6 The Manchester College (2026) '7 Top Industries in Greater Manchester'. Available at: https://www.tmc.ac.uk/employers/blog/top-industries-in-greater-manchester/
7 UK Government (2026) 'No10 North open for business as the Government's new situation room for making Britain better'. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/no10-north-open-for-business-as-the-governments-new-situation-room-for-making-britain-better

The strengths of the city have been repeatedly emphasised by Andy Burnham, Greater Manchester's Mayor between May 2017 and May 2026 and now Prime Minister of the UK. The Mayor of Greater Manchester oversees the Greater Manchester Combined Authority which draws together all 10 councils and 247 electoral wards in Greater Manchester. Mayoral powers were granted in the 2014 Devolution Agreement which also extended the region greater control over housing, utilities, transport and education.[8]

During the last 10 years, the Manchester economy has grown by roughly twice the national rate - heralded by many as an example of fighting national stagnation and providing an example of a city turned around.[9] The city has seen increased population movement, reduced deprivation, increased house prices and increased wages.[10] While this is certainly positive for the region, the growth has been unevenly distributed and parts of the Greater Manchester region still experience severe deprivation, such as in the city's northern boroughs of Oldham and Rochdale.[11]

In a city that has experienced a series of high-profile incidents over the last decade - from the Manchester Arena attack in 2017 that tragically resulted in the death of 22 people, or the more recent attack on a synagogue in the summer of 2025 - many of those in Greater Manchester are incredibly aware of the importance of social cohesion and communities that feel connected and empowered, but its local information ecosystems still face challenges.[12]

The three areas of Greater Manchester in focus here - Oldham, Fallowfield and Altrincham - all have different histories and demographic profiles.

Altrincham

Altrincham is a market town and one of 21 wards in the Metropolitan Borough of Trafford, south west of Manchester, with a population of over 50,000 people.[13] It was described by residents as safe and affluent with a high number of families who move to the town partly due to its selective, state grammar schools. The integrated Greater Manchester transport network - the 'Bee Network' - has also enabled Altrincham to increasingly become home to commuters travelling into central Manchester.

Fallowfield

Fallowfield is located 3 miles south of the city centre, with a population of roughly 15,000 people and one of 32 wards in Manchester City Council.[14] It is home to a large student population within the University of Manchester's largest student housing complex based there. 54.7% of the population are students - a notably transient community of people - possibly less likely to engage with local bodies.[15]

Oldham

Oldham sits to the northeast of Greater Manchester in the Pennine Hills, between Manchester city centre and Huddersfield, with a large population of over 250,000 people.[16] It is largely a

8 GMCA (2026) 'Devolution'. Available at: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/who-we-are/devolution/

9 GMA (2026) 'Economic growth in GreaterManchester'. Available at: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/dwen3ltn/ifs-gm-economic-growth-paper-web-final-accessible.pdf

10 Common Wealth (2024) 'The Greater Manchester Gentrification Index'. Available at: https://www.common-wealth.org/interactive/the-greater-manchester-gentrification-index

11 MEN (2025) 'The 'bleak and shameful' problem facing Oldham in 2026' Available at: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/bleak-shameful-problem-facing-oldham-33147673

12 Manchester Attack Support (2026) 'About the attack'. Available at: https://manchesterattacksupport.org.uk/about-the-attack/

13 City Population (2026) 'Altrincham'. Available at: https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/northwestengland/greater_manchester/E63001395__altrincham/

14 Manchester City Council (2026) 'Fallowfield'. Available at: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/online-directories/the-council-and-democracy-directories/statistics-and-intelligence-directories/ward-statistics/search-by-ward/fallowfield/fallowfield

15 Manchester City Council (2021) 'Census 29021 Overview', Available at: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/statistics-and-intelligence/census-2021/census-2021-overview/ward-comparison-summary

16 ONS (2024) 'Oldham'. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E08000004-oldham

working class town with a notable South Asian community - 5.3% of Oldham residents were born in Pakistan (compared with 1% nationally) and 3.1% were born in Bangladesh (compared with 0.4% nationally).[17] Oldham also experiences high levels of deprivation as the 11th most deprived local authority in England.[18]

While Oldham has also benefited from the Bee Network, it has not attracted young professionals in the same way that Altrincham has. In the last year, two areas of Oldham have been chosen to receive £20m over ten years as part of the government's 'Pride in Place' scheme: Chadderton and Alts and Holts.[19]

Oldham has historically been known for its racial tensions. Racially fuelled riots involving fire and petrol bombs took place in May 2001 that injured over 20 people and 15 police officers.[20] Following the riots, a range of community cohesion initiatives were rolled out in the town, including the creation of youth centres.[21] This is not to over-emphasise the existence of existing tensions, but is noteworthy context for the strong backlash that unfolded against the asylum hotels.

GREATER MANCHESTER'S ASYLUM HOTEL POLICY BACKLASH

There have been multiple hotels throughout Greater Manchester used for contingency housing of asylum seekers. Altrincham, Fallowfield and Oldham have each been home to hotels that have hosted asylum seekers at points over the past 5 years: The Cresta Court Hotel and the Ashley Hotel in Altrincham have been used to house asylum seekers since November 2024 and 2023 respectively; Oldham Council confirmed the use of the Victoria Hotel for housing asylum seekers in December 2021; and the Best Western Hotel in Fallowfield has been used for such contingency housing since 2022.[22]

Greater Manchester experienced protests around this policy in all three areas. The biggest of these protests took place outside the Cresta Court Hotel in Altrincham. Protests began in July 2025 with clashes between far right groups, such as Britain First, and counter-protesting groups such as Stand-up to Racism.[23] These protests continued each week throughout the summer and into the autumn with around 100 protestors and 100 counter-protests in August 2025.[24] Tension escalated in October 2025 when protestors took two blow-up dolls, dressed in military-style uniforms with a hammer and sickle stapled to the front, with the printed out faces of Sadiq Khan and Keir Starmer and pointed small scale fireworks at them. Protestors then launched fireworks at the hotel and encouraged asylum seekers to jump out of the hotel windows.[25]

17 ONS (2023) 'How life has changed in Oldham: Census 2021' Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000004/ ; Migration Observatory (2026) 'Migrants in the UK: an overview' Available at: https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/

18 Oldham Council (2025) 'Indices of Deprivation 2025' Available at: https://www.jsnaoldham.co.uk/cms-data/depot/places-depot/IMD-2025-Oldham-briefing-v10.pdf

19 Oldham Council (2026) 'Chadderton Pride in Place'. Available at: https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201088/regeneration/3130/chadderton_pride_in_place

20 ITV News Granada (2021) 'Oldham Riots: Looking back twenty years ago'. Available at: https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2021-05-26/oldham-riots-looking-back-twenty-years-ago

21 BBC News (2016) ' Oldham riot lessons not implemented across country, says expert' Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-36369436

22 Oldham Times (2025) "Convicted paedophile' arrested at GM asylum seeker hotel" Available at: https://www.theoldhamtimes.co.uk/news/25589787.convicted-paedophile-arrested-hale-asylum-seeker-hotel/ ; BBC News (2025) 'Asylum seeker hostility' saddens church leaders'. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgy002lk3zo ; Oldham Evening Chronicle (2021) 'Council confirm use of hotel for asylum seekers'. Available at: https://www.oldham-chronicle.co.uk/news-features/139/main-news/143999/council-confirm-use-of-hotel-for-asylum-seekers

23 Sky News (2025) "Simmering' division in town where hotel for asylum seekers is beacon for unrest'. Available at: https://news.sky.com/story/simmering-division-in-town-where-hotel-for-asylum-seekers-is-beacon-for-unrest-13403750

24 MEN (2025) 'Rival protesters clash outside asylum seeker hotel'. Available at: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/rival-protesters-clash-outside-asylum-32231909

25 Hope not Hate (2025) '"Get one through the window": Altrincham protesters shoot fireworks at hotel and tell residents to jump from windows.' Available at: https://hopenothate.org.uk/2025/11/07/get-one-through-the-window-altrincham-protesters-shoot-fireworks-at-hotel-and-tell-residents-to-jump-from-windows/

Protests in Fallowfield and Oldham were comparatively smaller in scale. In Fallowfield, protests took place outside the Best Western Hotel throughout August and September of 2025 and in Oldham around 50 anti-hotel protestors attended a gathering outside the Victoria Hotel in August 2025.[26] Following these incidents, there have been no reports of further protests against asylum hotel policy in these areas in 2026.

SECTION 2
FINDINGS

This section sets out the findings of the research. It begins with the context: what matters most to local people, and how the asylum hotel policy has played out against that backdrop (2.1). It then examines how well residents understand the policy itself (2.2). The chapter then sets out which parts of information infrastructure they have stopped trusting (2.3) and which they actually use and trust (2.4), before turning to conclusions.

2.1 AN UNPOPULAR POLICY, BUT WITH VARYING MOTIVATIONS

People want to support those seeking asylum in principle

Broadly, the majority of Greater Manchester participants thought it was the duty of the UK to support those in need if they are escaping persecution. In the young persons' (age 19-22) focus group in particular, where around half were university students, there was an almost universal view that it was right for the UK to house asylum seekers. Relatedly, one Oldham stakeholder highlighted a notable absence of young people at the protests, indicating a possible age divide on the policy in the area.

> *"If people are coming here, if they're seeking asylum and we are putting 'em in hotels, I think it's fair enough."*
> ***(Miles, Established Liberal, 31)***

But people felt frustrated when the policy wasn't well communicated

Even with support for taking in people relatively high in the group, there was some frustration that no real plans or approaches to housing had ever been shared with local communities. This created friction for some respondents who wanted to be there to support those staying in hotels, but were angry about the division it had created in their communities to the extent that many felt unable to discuss it.

> *"I feel like if we'd have been told beforehand that this is going to happen - 'they're going to come here and do this and then integrate into the community and they can provide support in this way was all for it.'... But I think it kind of brought more divisiveness in because there was no plan"*
> ***(Mary, Progressive Activist, 29)***

26 MEN (2025) 'Protesters face off outside asylum seeker hotel in Oldham for second weekend'. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2378e403p3o

People want to ensure public services can function

Even if supportive of the general act of providing asylum, there were concerns raised about the perceived strain on local public services exacerbating hardship for local people. This was emphasised among Established Liberal, Incrementalist Left and even by some Progressive Activist residents. One noted that her sister had been waiting for a council house and hadn't been able to get one because, she believes, asylum seekers are being prioritised. Although this is not true - asylum seekers are not allowed by law to receive council housing - this perceived prioritisation of asylum seekers over local people in need fueled existing concerns people had about public service capacity.[27]

> *"Housing is such a big crisis at the moment, let alone these asylum seekers"*
> ***(Josh, 41, Incrementalist Left)***

In response, some even volunteered alternatives to what the government should do differently to the use of hotels or suggested means by which asylum seekers could contribute back to UK society, including the idea that asylum seekers should more actively work for a place to stay.

> *"[I would be] more in tune with them being put on farms to do voluntary work"*
> ***(Alan, 71, Established Liberal)***

Public safety was a top concern when there's 'strangers' in the community

Some, particularly Dissenting Disrupters, were more likely to raise concerns about safety - particularly for local women and children - as a reason they were against the policy. Members of focus groups would regale incidents they had heard about where people had been attacked or harassed by - real or perceived - asylum seekers. A lack of knowledge of who these people are or where they come from appeared to drive fears of being around them. A couple of respondents raised concerns that not all of those staying in the hotels had undertaken criminal checks.

> *"Are my children safe walking on their own in Hale? Because they've come from a completely different background to what we have"*
> ***(Gemma, 48, Dissenting Disrupter)***

Rhetoric online appeared only to fuel this speculation - even if many local people remained suspicious of what they might see on social media. One focus group member went so far as to describe suspicions he had read online that the hotel residents were *"sleeper cells"* ***(Nial, 49, Dissenting Disrupter)***. Whilst he didn't suggest he totally believes these ideas, it was clear that he was regularly shown this kind of content on social media and that others in the group shared this experience.

2.2 THERE WAS UNEVEN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE POLICY ACROSS GREATER MANCHESTER

Many local people were aware of what was happening in their community around hotels being used to house asylum seekers and the unrest this had caused - but a deeper understanding of exactly how this had all started or what plans were for those staying inside these hotels was much thinner.

27 Chartered Institute of Housing (2026) 'Dispelling myths about migrants and housing'. Available at: https://www.cih.org/blogs/dispelling-myths-about-migrants-and-housing/

Most knew enough about the asylum hotel policy in their local area to discuss it

Broadly, most people appeared to know about the asylum hotels in their area. For some, they heard about the hotel first after protests broke out in 2025 - whilst others shared they had been aware of this property use for years, hearing from others in their community, their work, or information online. Even those who did feel informed still exclaimed how fast the policy had come into force and the way this surprised them.

> *"We heard very late in the day because it was done very late in the day. The first people got wind of it was [when] the Cresta Court cancelled all bookings for with immediate notice going forward. And within 72 hours the hotel was full [of asylum seekers]."*
> ***(Andrew, Traditional Conservative, 53)***

> *"One minute it's a hotel the next, it's got these immigrants in."*
> ***(Rebecca, Traditional Conservative, 38)***

Knowledge gaps regarding the national policy were evident but highly uneven

While some seemed very or partially informed on the policy's UK-wide nature and the fact it was a central government policy - others knew just a fractional or very limited amount.

> *"I feel very poorly informed to be honest. I feel like our knowledge is quite bullet points. All we know is that there's asylum seekers being housed in hotels. That's pretty much it."*
> ***(Leon, Dissenting Disruptor, 24)***

Detailed understanding of exactly who the policy impacts - e.g. asylum seekers or migrants in a more general sense - was also uneven. Some residents made comments conflating asylum seekers and immigrants more broadly, using these terms interchangeably. Others had a very detailed understanding. These varied levels of knowledge suggest that, while most people were aware of the hotel use in their own community, a wide-spread understanding of the national state of this policy was very unevenly distributed. Specifying who is being housed in these hotels and why is a foundational piece of information needed to properly understand and assess a policy unfolding in the local area.

2.3 DWINDLING TRUST IN INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS, BUT IT'S NOT ALL GONE

This section paints a picture of decline in the supply of and trust in information from more formal information providers that most residents had historically accessed. More specifically, the section outlines: a large local media ecosystem with varying trust; a crisis in trust in national mainstream media due to perceptions of bias and dishonesty; accompanied by a broader erosion of faith in national politicians and political institutions; and relatively low levels of information production from local authorities and local elected representatives.

People are increasingly frustrated with local news, but they're still engaging

Residents of Greater Manchester have access to a fairly large and diverse local news media environment which includes both regional providers like the Manchester Evening News (MEN) and hyperlocal outlets such as Trafford Post, Altrincham Today and Oldham Times as well as regional branches of national broadcasters, newer investigative outlets and even independent TV channels catering to particular ethnic or ethno-linguistic groups. Such a plural local news supply is fairly rare across the UK. Availability of local news does not, however, mean residents are regular consumers.

Hyper-locals outlets have low readership, but high trust

Each of the three areas of Greater Manchester in this research had their own, hyper-local news outlets or are included in cross-area, hyper-local coverage from the likes of the Messenger.[28] The format and publication frequency of these outlets varies, but many offer both online and print editions. For example, the community-run Trafford Post is online and print, whilst Oldham Times has moved to print once a week, and Altrincham Today is now primarily online, whilst featuring a quarterly print magazine.[29]

Whilst readership of hyper-local news media wasn't incredibly high among participants, the minority that did frequently get information from hyper-local outlets tended to broadly trust it. Even more classically sceptical residents, such as Traditional Conservatives, shared that they thought most local news outlets were "pretty balanced" (Andrew, 53, Traditional Conservative).

Regional media is well known

As for regional news media, the most prominent mention was, by far, the Manchester Evening News. Mentions of the MEN, however, received a mixed response. Some described it as a reliable constant source of Greater Manchester news and spoke about it with a level of pride, whilst others criticised the organisation's approach to journalism or the quality of their readership experience - mostly faulting the number of ads or 'click-bait' titles on the website.

> *"I feel like the most trustworthy is Manchester Evening News."*
> ***(Louise, Dissenting Disruptor, 23-26)***

> *"It's [THE MEN] quite click bait. It's really sensationalist."*
> ***(Rachel, Progressive Activist, 43)***

Regional broadcast journalism was frequently mentioned across groups and, more often than not, viewed quite positively. Residents spoke about regional branches of national broadcasters, like the BBC's Northwest Tonight and ITV's Granada Reports, as credible sources.

New news outlets and new financial models

Across all residents, just one - a Progressive Activist - mentioned one of Manchester's newer investigative journalism outlets, The Mill. Launched in 2020, The Mill is a subscription-based, online outlet providing a user experience with few ads. It publishes stories on political issues in Manchester and focuses on long-read, in-depth articles.

While The Mill has a readership of around 54,000 people, however, one academic in the region pointed out that it widely caters towards"well-educated, well-off, graduate types" (Academic, Greater Manchester), which - if true - would limit its ability to tackle weaknesses in media provision across all groups in the region.[30]

Community-focused news and media were also popular

Independent TV channels catering to particular ethnic or ethno-linguistic groups are also valued in Manchester. For example, one TV channel caters specifically to particular parts of the Pakistani diaspora, whilst another is oriented towards local Iranians. Of those who mentioned it, these seemed largely trusted. Such channels demonstrate how local Manchester communities have built channels tailored specifically for particular community needs; second it demonstrates the

28 Messenger newspaper. Available at: https://www.messengernewspapers.co.uk/local-news/altrincham-news/
29 Altrincham Today. Available at: https://altrincham.todaynews.co.uk/advertising-on-altrincham-today/ ;
The Oldham Times (2022) 'The Oldham Times newspaper changing to weekly print edition'.
Available at: https://www.theoldhamtimes.co.uk/news/23194798.oldham-times-newspaper-changing-weekly-print-edition/ ;
Trafford Post. Available at: https://www.postnewspapers.org/our-papers/trafford-post/
30 The Mill 'Advertise with us'. Available at: https://manchestermill.co.uk/advertise/

complexity of a city region's information landscape with many different ethno-linguistic groups and communities and the impacts this can have in how information ecosystems consequently develop.

CASE STUDY: THE MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS

The Manchester Evening News (MEN) is a regional outlet with a national reach, founded in 1868. Since 2010, the MEN has been owned and operated by Reach PLC. In January 2026, it reported 11 million readers of its online version and is very well known across Greater Manchester. The outlet shares local news about the city, as well as reporting on broader national issues, through journalists across the region. This includes several reporters funded through the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service.[31]

On the ground reporters and senior leadership of the MEN have explained how the organisation has deliberately focused on strengthening the information ecosystem in Greater Manchester. For example, following the 2024 Southport attack, the MEN launched a live fact-checking blog where they encouraged readers to submit social media posts for verification. When a video of a 'police van on fire in Oldham' began to circulate, the MEN investigated and demonstrated that this was actually old footage from Rotherham. Similarly, the MEN sent reporters to Hyde Market to take photos proving that rumoured 'trouble' was not actually happening.

National mainstream news had an uneven reception

While Greater Manchester residents appear to engage to a degree with a range of national news sources such as newspapers, public service broadcasters and radio, persistent consumption and trust towards these outlets varied across segments - with higher levels of trust among Progressive Activists in 'mainstream media' and considerably weaker trust among Dissenting Disrupters. In post-group surveys, over half of focus group respondents said traditional national news media was one of the sources they looked to most to find information on their local area.

Varied consumption of national news media across segments

Consumption of 'mainstream news media' appeared to vary considerably between political segments in Greater Manchester. The Progressive Activist group was the most likely group to read mainstream national news sources such as The Guardian, among others.

Established Liberals and Dissenting Disrupters, on the other hand, were more likely to say that they rarely read the news. Not only did many disengage because they found the news *"ridiculously depressing"* ***(Luke, 31, Dissenting Disruptor)***, but they were also more likely to see this coverage as biased or withholding facts on certain topics.

> *"A lot of news agencies and news stations, they'll usually just present the side that they want to present and their audience that buys into that."*
> ***(Will, 23-26, Rooted Patriot)***

31 BBC (2025) 'LDRS'. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/lnp/documents/reporter_contract_distribution_2025_v3.pdf

The BBC as a fact-checking service

The BBC in Manchester appeared to be somewhat of an exception. While overall satisfaction with coverage wasn't high across the board among participants, the BBC did appear to be one of the go to sources for fact-checking things read online or heard from other local people. Whilst the national broadcaster did come under some criticism for various elements of its coverage, it was clearly still broadly seen as a reliable and trustworthy source for reporting.

> *"I don't necessarily think I fully trust the BBC, but I think compared to most it is like a bland version of events, isn't it? It's not sensationalised too much"*
> ***(Cameron, 44, Progressive Activist)***

Wavering belief in local government and councillors

Trust in local government across Greater Manchester varied. Generally, Incrementalist Left, Rooted Patriots and Progressive Activists showed fairly high levels of trust in local councillors and younger participants demonstrated a sense of trust based on the rationale that they saw no real reason the council would lie. These residents also often felt that their councillors were active in the community and had therefore proven themselves to be worthy of some trust.

> *"If it's coming from the council then I will consider it to be more trusted information"*
> ***(Sally, 39, Incrementalist Left)***

However, this was not echoed by many Dissenting Disruptors. Whilst a small minority did display some trust in local councillors and their local council, the vast majority shared the lowest levels of trust with one resident describing all local politicians as liars and others echoing similar sentiments throughout the conversations.

> *"Because they're [local elected officials] all lying… [They] just lie to get what they want. They don't care if they're Labour, Conservative, whoever they are, they're just lying people. I don't trust them as far as I can throw them"*
> ***(Peter, 58, Dissenting Disruptor)***

Councillors aren't sharing enough information

Even where residents felt high trust in local politicians, most segments felt these councillors, or the council, did not provide them with enough information about topics or issues in the local area. This was especially true with Incrementalist Left, Established Liberal and Traditional Conservative groups. Even the Progressive Activists, who seemed more willing to express a degree of sympathy for the job of the council, shared their strong frustration that information on topics that mattered to their communities was often nowhere to be seen - including on the asylum hotel policy.

The majority of residents felt that the council had not kept them informed on the asylum hotel policy to the levels that they would have liked. Some criticised the policy rollout as being delivered in a somewhat secretive way, developed without community consultation. The majority of all local residents felt that the council had a responsibility to share information regarding asylum hotels with them and to be more active on social media since that's where local people go to learn about things happening in their communities.

Councils use social media, but they're not posting about the asylum hotels

The three relevant Greater Manchester councils have an online presence and that they each have thousands of followers across X, Facebook, and Instagram. These may sound high at first, but have arguably limited reach into communities when considering the overall populations. Trafford Council has the best comparative reach, but shared across the three platforms it's hard to know if this isn't just the same smaller segments of their community following in all three locations.

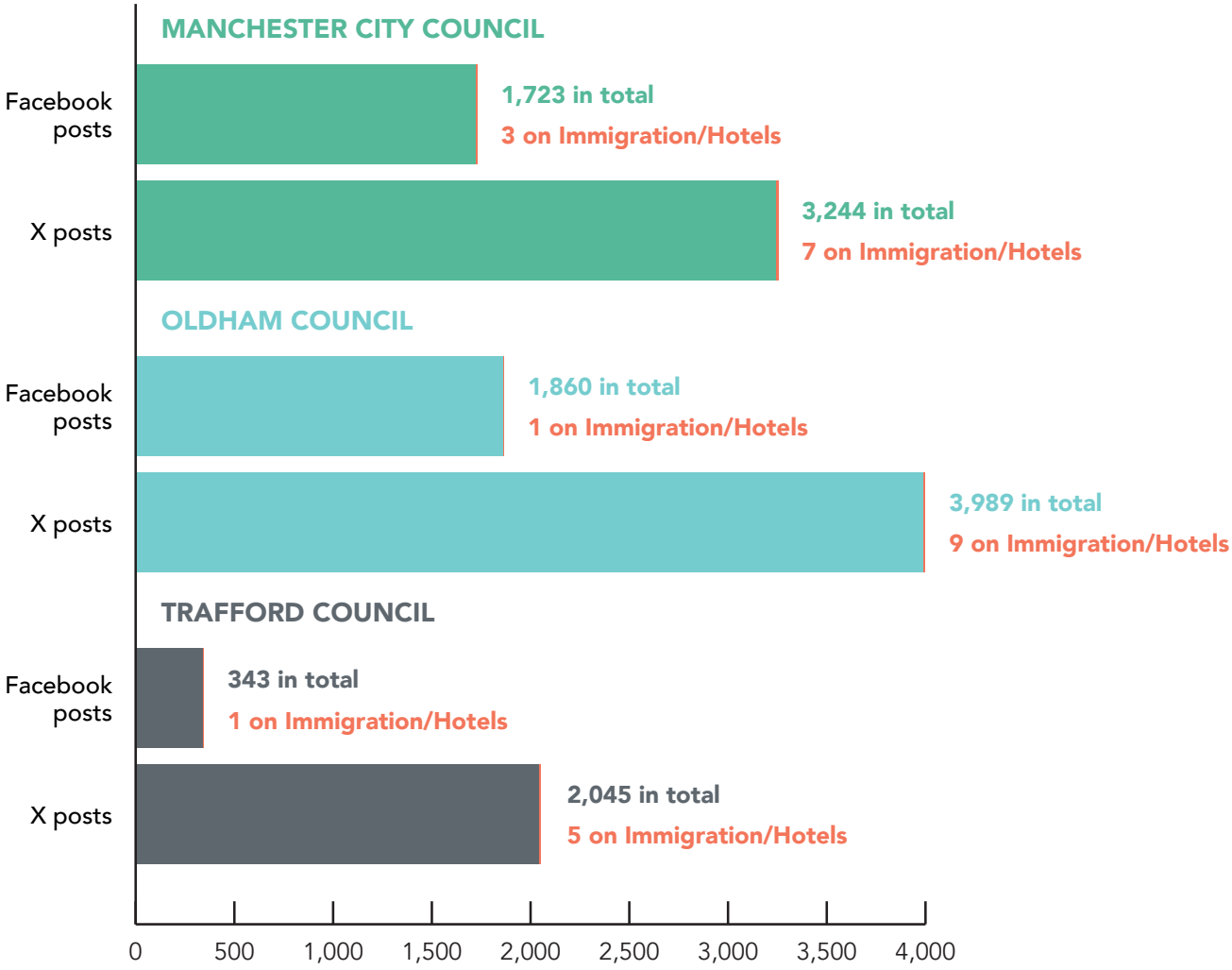
SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWING OF RELEVANT COUNCILS ACROSS X, FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

COUNCIL	PLATFORM	FOLLOWING[32]
Manchester City Total population[33] = 630,000	**X**	**203.9k**
	Facebook	**124k**
	Instagram	**34k**
	Total followers	**361,900**
Oldham Total population[34] = 251,560	**X**	**30.4k**
	Facebook	**43k**
	Instagram	**7.3k**
	Total followers	**80,700**
Trafford Total population[35] = 241,025	**X**	**27k**
	Facebook	**22k**
	Instagram	**2.5k**
	Total followers	**51,500**

Even with use of these platforms for general council messaging, online analysis found that these councils provided very little information about the asylum hotels on social media from January 2024 - December 2025, covering the two most heated summers of protests. The following chart highlights that councils shared between 1-3 posts about the issue on Facebook and between 5 and 9 on X over this entire period.

32 Noted 06.08.2026
33 Manchester City Council (2026) 'Our Budget 2026/27'.
Available at: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/budgets-and-spending/our-budget-202627
34 Office for National Statistics (2024) 'Oldham: Explore Local Statistics'.
Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E08000004-oldham
35 Office for National Statistics (2024) 'Trafford: Explore Local Statistics'.
Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E08000009-trafford

COUNCIL X AND FACEBOOK COMMUNICATIONS ON LOCAL HOTELS



Some councils adopted a strategy of silence

Whilst local public sector actors attributed communication limitations to more structural restrictions and challenges - e.g. funding, training, capacity - local councillors from multiple wards shared with us that - confirmed by the council in some areas and speculation in others - information provided to communities about asylum seeker hotels was deliberately limited. This was designed to prevent drawing more attention to the protest and *"playing into the hands of the far right"* ***(Councillor, Greater Manchester)***, as one councillor put it. This amounted to a strategy of silence.

A councillor in one location, for example, highlighted how their council took a purposeful strategy to prevent other councillors and interested groups from posting about the protest on social media to de-escalate the situation. Instead, councillors and council staff contacted local residents in more traditional and targeted ways, through emailing, calling and knocking on doors. Whilst this may have stopped certain repercussions, this strategic silence clearly left many local people believing the council weren't providing vital information when they wanted it most.

> *"So we basically did everything we could to actively discourage other councillors and other interested groups from communicating... in a public domain because we wanted to... de-escalate by limiting the amount of people who were attending... So we try to do that to keep, basically to actively take [attention] away..."*
> ***(Greater Manchester councillor)***

Loss of faith in national government and their local MPs

All residents, regardless of political segment, demonstrated relatively little engagement with, or fundamental trust in, government or their elected representatives at the national level, including the Prime Minister and their local MP. Many residents did not, in fact, know who their local MP was.

This resulted in fairly low trust in a lot of information locals did hear from national figures, or low desire to even try and hear what national government or their MPs had to say in the first place. Those who were higher consumers of mainstream media may naturally come across more information from central government through the mediums they consume, but this did not by any means directly translate into higher trust.

When it came to the asylum hotel policy in particular, locals felt they hadn't seen as much information from national government figures as they would have liked to and weren't sure how much they could take what little information they may have seen at face value.

Political agendas turn people off

A large number of residents felt that many MPs would 'spin' most information they shared to support one agenda or another. Locals raised this as pushback against trusting anything they hear from government, unsure if it's the whole truth and assuming it's been filtered to drive an angle.

> *"They [politicians] spin it the way that they want to spin it"*
> ***(Emma, 46, Dissenting Disruptor)***

A sense of transactional relationships

Some respondents stated their limited trust was due to concerns that any engagement with local people - e.g. leafleting, visiting local spaces, or speaking to residents - was purely a ploy for votes and that these MPs didn't really care about hearing local voices. Across the board, there appeared to be a longstanding scepticism based on politicians breaking promises, a lack of faith in the direction of the country and a sense that public services and other key elements were being underdelivered.

This wasn't universal across all conversations - one interviewee pointed out that they would be likely to trust the MP because they have a position of authority, or that they might trust a specific MP that they found to be relatable - however this was by far the minority view. Subsequently, national government and MPs were not seen as a reliable source of information for most residents.

This section has demonstrated the still alive, but shifting trust in the typical institutional pillars of information in local communities: local and regional news is broadly trusted, but read by few; mainstream media is still a source of information, but not without criticism; and declining trust in the national and local government, as well as elected representatives as trustworthy information actors.

2.4 EMERGENT INFORMATION ACTORS & SPACES

When people are less likely to trust mainstream media or government communications, locals across Greater Manchester are turning to more peer to peer, decentralised mediums. The dominant way in which people in Greater Manchester receive news about their local area is through social media platforms, in particular through Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram and Tik Tok. In general, respondents across Greater Manchester were far more likely to trust information they heard on various social media platforms than any information they may receive from mainstream media or governments and elected representatives. These platforms are not, however, without their qualms or challenges for local trust and information sharing.

Facebook as the new town square

Hyperlocal Facebook spaces are a primary means for locals to engage with information about their particular area in Greater Manchester. Residents explained that they use Facebook groups to hear about free activities, events happening in the town hall, information from the council such as parking and potholes, and minor, local annoyances and more. Many shared that a prominent source of information on the asylum hotel policy was these same Facebook channels.

Overlapping Facebook channels

These local Facebook channels form an ecosystem of overlapping digital spaces corresponding to channels at various local and hyperlocal geographic places - from city-wide, to borough or ward-level. Some local Facebook channels are pages (public, one-way broadcasting tools) and others are groups (two-way, community-focused spaces that more easily enable discussion and peer-to-peer engagement). Facebook channels mentioned by Greater Manchester residents, although we know this to be far from exhaustive, include:[36,37]

- ***Rochdale Borough Council*** - 39k followers - page
- ***Altrincham HQ*** - 21k followers - page
- ***Spotted in Rochdale*** - 3.9k followers - page
- ***Nosey Bastards Rochdale*** - 22.2k members - group
- ***What's on in Altrincham*** - 16.1k members - group

Across age groups, Facebook seemed consistently prominent - even if younger locals may mostly rely on other platforms. One resident said he regularly sees people in their 20s commenting on the platform, while another younger resident highlighted how, whilst they may not use Facebook much personally, they would often hear it through parents or other older family members who do. This demonstrates how even when people are not actively using the social media platform, they are still impacted by the information that circulates on Facebook.

Facebook as a primary source of hotel information

Information about asylum seeker hotels in the area was distributed on Facebook groups and, in some cases, became the initial way in which people learnt about the policy. Some even pointing to it as their sole source of information when various discussions and protests were unfolding.

Many shared that they knew posts focusing on asylum hotels gained a lot of attention on hyperlocal Facebook groups. Largely, these posts would gain such traction because of the conversations and debates that would unfold in the comments section. Posting on such a contentious topic appears to generate lively discussion and the, sometimes inflammatory, nature of comments would likely drive these posts even further via the platforms' algorithms - something a few focus group members gestured to.

> *"Once it gets on Facebook, it just spreads that wildfire then. And then everyone's throwing opinions out there. It's just everywhere within a day once, even if it's not true a rumour, it'll always find its way into these groups and stuff like that."*
> ***(Luke, Dissenting Disruptor, 31)***

36 All information on following/membership collected on 18.08.26

37 Rochdale Borough Council Facebook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/rochdalecouncil/?locale=en_GB ;
Altrincham HQ facebook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/altrinchamhq/?locale=en_GB ;
Spotted Rochdale facebook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SpottedInRochdale/?locale=en_GB ;
Nosey Bastards Rochdale Facebook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/2609224899302465/ ;
What's On Altrincham Facebook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/480700913254353/ ;
What's on Rochdale Facebook. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/265032163562120/

Anti-immigration discourse is prominent online

Social media analysis of Facebook groups across Greater Manchester shows that broader hotel-related discourse, including wider immigration discussions, is a repeatedly raised topic, but does not make up the majority of conversation in these local groups by any means.In Oldham, analysis showed only 4.2% of content in area-specific Facebook groups had explicit immigration-related language; in Altrincham, 4.7%; whilst in Fallowfield, the number was barely high enough to register.

In Fallowfield, the low number of immigration related content implies this topic didn't have real penetration into local online discussion despite the presence of Best Western Hotel. This could possibly be due to the largely transient student population of the area which means, not only would many have not been in the city during the summer when protests were at their height, but this element of the population may simply not be as engaged in local discussion as long-term residents in the area are.

Immigration discourse when raised, however, does appear to be largely negative in these local online spaces. When these pages were filtered to show ***only*** content about immigration, that sentiment was strongly negative and there were similar ratios across the board.

LOCATION	ANTI-IMMIGRATION : PRO-IMMIGRATION
OLDHAM	35 : 1
ALTRINCHAM	19 : 1
FALLOWFIELD	17 : 1

Further analysis of these anti-immigration Facebook conversations showed multiple prominent themes. Some, even if based on some kind of real evidence, are potentially harmful as they are often deployed in a context designed to cause harm or generate misgivings against refugees, asylum seekers, and sometimes ethnic minorities in general.

The most frequent harmful narrative terms in the dataset across Greater Manchester were: 'invasion' (322 posts), 'invader' (449 posts) and 'fighting age' (433 posts) - in reference to asylum seekers arriving being some kind of attack on the UK - and dehumanising language like 'scum' (246 posts), 'vermin' (116 posts) and 'parasite' (102 posts), implying that these narratives could often be deployed in ways designed to be harmful or sow division.

Facebook admins are the new gatekeepers of local information

Because many highlighted the importance of Facebook groups in communicating information about local communities, they drew attention to the now impactful role of Facebook admins in dictating these spaces. Facebook admins have the ability to decide what content can be discussed in what spaces and by who.

One church leader, for example, attempted to publish a statement regarding asylum seekers in hotels on the local pages, Altrincham Today and Altrincham HQ, but this wasn't accepted by the admins. One stakeholder had been told by one of these admins that he didn't want to associate the Facebook page with churches or a positive view of asylum seekers. In some areas, the names of the local Facebook admins were well known, demonstrating just how much notoriety some have garnered.

"It comes down to the admins of those groups and some of those admins, you know, some of them were basically, you know, anti the use of the hotel" ***(Councillor, Altrincham)***

This same influence extends to Facebook discussion of the asylum hotel policy. Many people administering these channels are every-day residents, with a large number of groups having no relation to the asylum hotels but becoming spaces for discussion after tensions rose.

The role of Facebook admins as a vital pillar in the local information environment creates a situation where every-day residents in many ways become gatekeepers of local information, as discussed further in the comparative report - which creates multiple challenges, but also opportunities to think about the future of local information supply chains in Greater Manchester.[38]

Other social media platforms filling the gaps

Whilst Facebook was by far the most prominent social media platform spoken about in focus groups and interviews, multiple other social media platforms were named as infrastructure people use to find information about their local area. In particular, interviewees drew attention to TikTok, Instagram, X, Reddit, and Snap. Apps like TikTok, and Snap were more frequently cited by focus group attendees under the age of 30, indicating a slight age difference in platforms people frequent, but Instagram and TikTok were also used by a fair portion of residents older than this as well.

WhatsApp as a network technology

WhatsApp groups across Greater Manchester connect parents in local schools, religious communities, families and residents of all kinds. Locals told us about WhatsApp chats that they used to connect with a couple friends and the few people on their streets, while others mentioned local chats that had over 300 members. WhatsApp chats appear to make up an emergent, ever-changing web of chats at different scales, based around different topics, localities, and groups, altogether forming a sort of online social web.

This platform is clearly a key element of the social fabric between various groups across every segment - with every focus group talking about WhatsApp at least once. When it comes to the hotel policy in particular, Whatsapp chats were a key way in which quite a few people heard about asylum seeker hotel policy and the associated protests and counter protests.

"[The protest] was pretty well communicated in Whatsapp groups and on social media, we think, from both sides, both the demo and the opposition" ***(Councillor, Fallowfield).***

Whatsapp trust is based on community trust

Trust in WhatsApp chats was mixed across segments and was closely related to who people knew within the groups. One resident pointed out that he tended to trust the groups that he was in since he'd agreed to be in the group with those people - however, in contrast, a couple others shared how they are wary of any message in a Whatsapp group where they know the message has been forwarded many times. The vast array of WhatsApp groups can make it hard to follow exactly who is in which group and can over time create the broad sense that these must be local spaces filled with local people, regardless of whether this can be verified or not.

38 See Fill the Void for more analysis

Additionally, one resident highlighted how, whilst WhatsApp groups are a helpful way to learn things about the local area, they can also be a place where rumours are generated and spread, making it hard to know whether a piece of information is a fact or the opinion of someone in the group.

> *"We've got WhatsApp groups as well, and I heard this happened. Well, I heard this happened. And everybody has their own view of, it's a bit like Chinese whispers"*
> ***(Charlotte, 38, Rooted Patriot)***

One stakeholder highlighted how WhatsApp groups can forge together a community of people who have not met in real life creating an illusion of trust in the group through a perceived community. This can be a force for good, bringing people together that are connected around a geography or interest, but can also result in people believing much of the information in the WhatsApp groups without knowing the true source of the information, making it a prime space for incorrect information to spread.

TikTok and Instagram for the broader view

TikTok and Instagram are both very popular platforms in Greater Manchester that are grouped together here based on their shared foundational offer of disseminating images and short-form videos and that, for the most part, locals would mention them in the same breath.

National, not local

Whilst both were popular platforms, they appeared less oriented as direct means to learn about Manchester-specific information and more towards national events, information, or news. In particular, residents mentioned using these platforms to learn about asylum hotel protests around the UK, but did not centre a focus on local protests. A few residents mentioned seeing videos of national protests on TikTok whilst a couple mentioned seeing videos of so-called 'hotel auditors' on the platform, who post videos going into hotels and asking asylum seekers about the conditions that they live in. While these platforms were presented as a space for information sharing, residents consistently highlighted that these platforms mostly consisted of national news rather than local issues.

These platforms are far from perfect

These platforms were not, however, without criticism. On Tiktok, residents shared concern around the increased distribution of AI-generated content and the difficulty in being able to identify this kind of content. This was true across all segments but Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disrupters were less likely to mention how they sought to verify information that Progressive Activists and Incrementalist Left.

One interviewee described how she had particularly noticed her grandmother believing information online that was in fact AI generated. This concern was also highlighted by community group leaders who emphasised how AI-generated, false information circulating online can make it very difficult to challenge assumptions that people may hold.

> *"disinformation is more of a concern for me, because it's so cleverly done by a variety of bad actors and people in good faith share stuff or repeat stuff and it feels like you're just fighting an uphill battle at times against that disinformation and then filtering into it is some very problematic misinformation, particularly in the asylum/ refugee space"*
> ***(Non-Profit Leader, Greater Manchester)***

Instagram content, on the other hand, was criticised by multiple younger focus group members for being seen as a platform full of paid promotional content and the way it advertised products made it harder to trust that the content was without commercial incentive. A different young resident criticised the algorithm of the platform, highlighting that during the Southport Riots they were pushed, what they called, right wing content on these apps despite not usually engaging with this kind of content.

> *"I had this conversation with a group of young people last week who were saying that they've lost faith in social media being able to tell them anything useful because they see them as giant advertising platforms"*
> ***(Theatre Practitioner, Oldham)***

X, Reddit and Snap join the margins

Whilst these other platforms were mentioned, they were sources of information for a minority of the group. X wasn't mentioned by very many locals as a trusted or common piece of information infrastructure, with only a few people talking about it as a platform they use. Thoughts on the platform were largely negative.

Multiple Progressive Activists shared their belief that X was full of negative comments that led to division, which they didn't find particularly useful or enjoyable. X was also mentioned as an example of a platform that was historically used a lot by local councillors until they stopped quite recently. This shows that, whilst there's broad-base awareness of the platform, it's not as prominent as many others.

Online scan filtered local X activity for immigration-related content to mixed results. Altrincham's immigration-filtered X posts are negligible, suggesting the area's immigration-related conversation operates almost exclusively on Facebook. In Oldham, X data showed that pro-immigration content outweighs anti-immigration content by more than 3:1 - one of the only social media ratios to actually tip towards pro-immigration content. The research could not produce an explanation for this beyond certain local charities and pro-immigration organisations perhaps utilising this platform a notable amount.

Reddit as a niche information source

Reddit was cited by a small group of locals as a common way to find information about the local area - one resident highlighted how specific Reddit threads can be very helpful in understanding what music or sporting events are taking place in Manchester City Centre, for example. It did not, however, seem to be a platform that any residents were using to learn about how the hotel policy was unfolding in the city or their area.

Snap connects young people

Snap, on the other hand, was only raised by a couple of younger focus groups residents, but one particular interesting example of local information impact arose from interviews. The Principal of a sixth form college highlighted the prevalence of Snap amongst young people. In particular, they raised a product feature of Snap where a person can login with a university or college email address which will create a group of the university or college cohort allowing those people to contact each other. They shared how, in their opinion, the feature risks giving the impression that the school has created the account and is sharing the information - this is a concern for teachers and parents as it creates the assumption that information on these accounts come from trusted sources when this is not true.

DIY fact-checking methods are the norm

Many residents appeared to have developed their own methods for assessing the information that they saw circulating online - as concerns about incorrect information on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok were prevalent across all segments.

> *"If I see something and I think 'is it true', I'll check on the internet, going to Google and check it, is that right or not? Because I don't hundred percent believe it on social media."*
> ***(Sara, Progressive Activist, 44)***

Many interviewees who wanted to fact-check mentioned using Google to search for a piece of information or checking what they had heard on mainstream, national, platforms such as the BBC or Sky News. One interviewee also mentioned that she would often cross-check information on other social media platforms. This demonstrates that many locals are sceptical of information that they see on social media and aim to address this by searching for other sources, however, it also seems to highlight that interviewees were not always aware of the best place to go in order to verify the information they were consuming

There's high trust in other Mancs

Space for community gathering and connection across Greater Manchester enable information to be shared - in workplaces, at the school gates and in community groups. A number of residents drew attention to how they were most frequently updated on the news by trusted friends and family, through word of mouth. Information about asylum seeker policy was shared in the same way.

> *"I heard [about the policy] from my sister"*
> ***(Jackie, 46, Dissenting Disrupter)***

> *"I think [hearing about the policy] was through fellow parents"*
> ***(Emma, 46, Dissenting Disrupter)***

People trust other locals, but with a little scepticism

People across segments tended to have more trust in information that they heard through word of mouth compared to the media or political actors. In particular, residents were trusting of information that they received from close people in their lives. Residents mentioned that they often received key information from family members or friends, including a couple of examples where friends or family worked for a Local Authority or a parent at their kid's school working for the BBC.

This was not, however, universally true. A minority mentioned that they do not tend to believe what a colleague or friend says until they have been able to check this with a legitimate source, due to a perceived propensity for rumours to spread around controversial topics. Another resident pointed out that hearing information from their friends is often repeated because *"they've read the same source anyway"* ***(Dan, 57, Traditional Conservative)***.

This trust tended to cut across segment groups but was raised more frequently by women than by men. Additionally, the Progressive Activist segment drew attention to word of mouth as a way to contextualise information that they had seen rather than only to gain new information. In interviews, two particular contexts emerged as prominent places for this kind of information sharing: religious communities and community centres.

Religious communities provide sense-making to its members

In Oldham, the local mosque was mentioned as a key source of information by a couple of residents. They highlighted how the recent celebration of Eid (March, 2026) was a key example in how their local British-Pakistani community had come together and was an opportunity to share updates within the community.

Some information actors also told us that religious leaders are a key connection and bridge for sharing information across communities, including non-religious ones. A headteacher at a local sixth from college, for example, identified how they have historically worked with the Mosque Council if there are repeated behavioural issues with muslim students, as the leadership of the Imam is well respected.

One Religious Leader highlighted how church communities share a bulletin and weekly newsletter updating parishioners on community updates and events. Information is also shared in notices, sermons and prayers commenting on societal issues from multiple faith groups. In Greater Manchester, cross-faith groups also communicate with each other through regular convenings of Manchester Faith Leaders, hosted by the Church of England leadership in Manchester - consisting of Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist representatives. Through regular meetings, the group has built a high level of coordination amongst multiple major faith communities, meaning they are able to put a statement out within 24 or 48 hours when something significant happens.

Community spaces are vital for information sharing

A space named by many in groups as infrastructure for information sharing were community groups of various types. In Altrincham, for example, 'The Hub' offers groups, activities and support - like Citizens' Advice - to a reported 900 people each week. The Cornerstone Day Centre in Hulme, Central Manchester, a space primarily focused on supporting people who are experiencing homelessness, was also mentioned, along with youth groups in Heywood, Rochdale and Middleton.

As well as providing spaces to interact and build community, these spaces create opportunities to discuss, and make sense of, key issues in the news - such as that of asylum seeker hotels. Two separate community leaders, one in Altrincham and one who worked across Greater Manchester, drew attention to how, what they called, 'dangerous, racist and far-right' narratives were challenged within their community centres and they sensed this had an impact on how their community responded to certain information and updates. They created space to raise these issues and to discuss them in a constructive environment.

Having these in person spaces for various communities to come together, share updates, and have some kind of safe place to discuss what's happening felt vital to respondents across Greater Manchester.

CASE STUDY: OLDHAM THEATRE WORKSHOP

Oldham Theatre Workshop, a theatre and performing arts organisation in Oldham, appeared through research as an important place for a section of Greater Manchester's children and young people to share information and make sense of the news. While Oldham Theatre Workshop is not a free community centre, it is council supported where children and young people can engage with each other outside school hours for a subsidised cost. The value of this space is that it provides children and young people with trusted adults outside of a school environment where

children and young people can discuss complex issues and create theatre that expands on these topics. In this space, theatre is deliberately used as a tool through which children and young people can explore and challenge beliefs and political ideas.

As one example of socially oriented engagement, in December 2025 young people the theatre co-created a piece of theatre which imagined what a social media ban and a phone ban would look like for children and young people.[39] The script for the play was generated through discussions that took place with children who would be affected by this kind of ban - it created space to open difficult conversations and discuss impacts of this policy.

SECTION 3
CONCLUSION

Greater Manchester doesn't have the same scale of challenges that we found in the other two locations studied - there is still a pluralistic and generally trusted local media ecosystem, some semblance of trust in government and politicians (even if its under strain), and an availability of spaces and places for local people to connect with each other and make sense of what's happening around them. This does not mean, however, the information supply chain in Greater Manchester is without challenge.

Local people regularly told us that they were not getting access to the kind of information they wanted about this policy and shared concerns around the quality of information and spaces available to them - polarising social media feeds, rampant speculation and AI generated content to name a few. Institutions that exist to serve these local communities were not cutting through in the ways many residents would like and this left voids for less trustworthy information to seep in.

> *"I just think the lack of knowledge makes people negative and that generates dislike and hate and that's not good."*
> ***(Gemma, Dissenting Disruptor, 48)***

Greater Manchester has the economy and physical and social infrastructure necessary as a foundation to rebuild these local information supply chains. It is key to ensure that - in the ways growth across the region has been uneven - there is not uneven development in how local information infrastructure serves the city's communities. Under a new Mayor and as the home of No10 North, Greater Manchester has the opportunity to tackle this challenge head on and demonstrate to the rest of the UK what can be done.

39 Oldham Theatre Workshop (2024) 'Guinea Pig'. Available here: https://oldhamtheatreworkshop.co.uk/js_events/guineapig/

APPENDIX: THE SEVEN SEGMENTS[40]



Progressive Activists

12% of population

Highly engaged group driven by concerns about social justice. Politically active but increasingly alienated from mainstream politics. Maintain a strongly held and sometimes uncompromising approach to their beliefs.



Incrementalist Left

21% of population

Civic-minded, community-oriented, generally left-of-centre but with an aversion to the extreme; prefer gradual reform over revolution. Trust experts and institutions yet are largely tuned out of day-to-day politics.



Established Liberals

9% of population

Prosperous, confident segment who believe the system broadly works and trust experts to deliver continued progress. Strong belief in individual agency which can make them less empathetic to those who are struggling. Maintain faith in democratic processes and have a strong information-centric way of engaging with issues.



Sceptical Scrollers

10% of population

Digitally-native group whose unhappiness with social contract means they've lost faith in institutions and seek alternative sources of truth online. Shaped by experience of the Covid pandemic, they prefer individual influencers over mainstream media and are increasingly drawn to conspiratorial thinking.



Rooted Patriots

20% of population

Patriotic but politically untethered, feels abandoned and overlooked by political elites and yearns for leaders with common sense, but does not want to overthrow the system. Particularly concerned about community decline and the pressures of migration. Interventionist economics but conservative on social issues.



Traditional Conservatives

8% of population

Respectful of authority and tradition, believe in individual responsibility and established norms that have served them well. Nostalgic for the past but optimistic about the future, they deeply sceptical of many forces of change such as immigration or the path to net-zero.



Dissenting Disruptors

20% of population

Frustrated with their circumstances with an appetite for radical solutions, crave dramatic change and strong leadership. Highly distrustful of institutions, opposed to multiculturalism and feel disconnected from society. Drawn to political movements promising to overhaul status quo.

40 More in Common. '7 Segments'. Available here: https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/seven-segments/

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