

# **Think Neighbourhoods:** A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges

Interim Report of the Independent Commission  
on Neighbourhoods

## **The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods**

The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) was launched with the support of Alex Norris MP, Minister for Local Growth, in September 2024. The Commission aims to address the significant challenges faced in England's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and how tackling them could generate significant social and economic improvements in the lives that live in them. The initiative aims to build on existing research, generate new insights and propose concrete actions that could improve the lives and prospects of people living in these areas.

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The evidence and analysis presented in this report are the collective view of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods and should be not ascribed to any individual Commissioners or organisation. The Secretariat take responsibility for any errors or omissions within the report.

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# Foreword

**The world is very different to when I served in the last Labour Government. Covid, austerity, Brexit are just some of the things that have affected people's lives, for good or ill. But too many people in our country still experience crime, unemployment, poverty.**

Most of my life, I have worked to try to understand the lives people in our most deprived areas experience, and how to change those experiences. The new government's missions are aimed at tackling the challenges the country faces, and the work of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods unlocks, tackling the missions in areas that need them most. For too long, we have seen people living in places where there are few opportunities and little support for them to produce their best and fulfill their potential.

Even though things have changed, there are lessons to be learned from the past. National drive and commitment are needed, but what worked was a neighbourhood approach, putting communities in the driving seat of reform. Unfortunately, these lessons were not implemented by the last government, and we now see the cost of that. New Deal for Communities, which came out of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, did work, it reduced crime, opened up opportunities, and saw people's satisfaction with where they were living rise. It was cost effective too.

Of course we can't just repeat previous initiatives. A new neighbourhood programme has to take account of the changes in the population, - more older people, the use of social media, particularly by young people, the increase in mental health issues, and major cutbacks in public services.

De-industrialisation and loss of manufacturing jobs continue to present challenges that are really difficult. Yet, in the visits the Commission has been making, we've encountered people determined to bring lasting change to their neighbourhood, and I've heard inspiring stories from of those coming together to renew their neighbourhood.

This report makes the case for the government, civil society, and the changing picture of service delivery to have confidence that working with people in their neighbourhood will be the most effective way of long lasting change, and is the best way of delivering the missions. I hope that this first report can start a national conversation on how we can put in place the foundations for of neighbourhood renewal.



**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top**  
Chair of the Independent Commission  
on Neighbourhoods

# Executive Summary

The country faces severe challenges. There is an increasing realisation that change is required.

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This report argues that a neighbourhoods-approach is essential for delivering that change, including the government's missions, and to restoring a sense of renewal and purpose to the country.

## The mission critical neighbourhoods

ICON commissioned Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to develop an index that measured data across all the five key mission areas in England and identify which places had the relatively highest need to deliver the missions. We call this the Hyper-Local Need Index (HLNM). We tested our hypothesis that 'mission need' (i.e. places which most need progress on the government's missions) would be clustered in a small number of neighbourhoods.

There are 613 neighbourhoods that score 80 or higher in the HLNM. These "mission-critical neighbourhoods" require the most urgent attention and will need to change to make

substantial progress on the government's missions. Approximately, 920,000 people live in these neighbourhoods. They are the "mission million", the 2% of the population where resources need to be targeted to deliver the missions and achieve the decade of national renewal that is the current government's overarching objective.

Neighbourhoods with the highest levels of need are largely concentrated in the North of England—particularly around cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Sunderland and Newcastle—as well as other post-industrial regions like the West Midlands (including Birmingham). Some of the most acute need is concentrated in coastal towns such as Blackpool, Clacton, and Great Yarmouth, with considerable concentrations of high need spread across the Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Kent, and Essex coastlines. There is also pockets of mission disadvantage across the South West coast and Isle of Wight. Conversely, the neighbourhoods we identify as having some of the lowest need are typically clustered within more affluent areas in the South East—particularly across Wokingham, Guildford, and Hart.

	Hyper-local Need Index Score	Proportion of neighbourhoods	Number of residents
Mission Support Neighbourhoods	<40	80%	41 million
Mission Priority Neighbourhoods	40-80	15%	8 million
Mission Critical Neighbourhoods	>80	5%	920,000

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## Problems cluster, a neighbourhood focus is the most efficient route to mission delivery

The danger is that government will seek broad-national scale interventions to deliver the missions, but resource is not adequately targeted towards those areas with the greatest need, leading to a lack of progress in delivering the missions. A 'trickle down' approach to the delivery of the missions will not build momentum to enable the delivery of the missions.

A 'trickle down' approach also means that limited fiscal resources are not efficiently deployed, further slowing progress in delivering the missions and carry significant deadweight costs, by providing resources to areas that do not need significant additional support. Practically, it is not possible for government to seek to improve outcomes in every neighbourhood. Some form of prioritisation is necessary, particularly given the current fiscal environment.

This does not mean pitting areas against each other or ignoring the challenges in those places which have multiple disadvantages not simply in relation to the missions but across other policy challenges.

Longer term, we need to find ways to create the conditions for every neighbourhood to flourish. However, given the fiscal challenges facing the new government, some form of prioritisation is inevitable.

Every neighbourhood will require support to deliver the missions, however, different areas will require different types.

The government must focus on our mission critical neighbourhoods. This means developing a comprehensive strategy that invests in social infrastructure to make these places 'mission ready', alongside joining up public services, public investment and supporting economic development to transform places street by street.

## A 'lost decade' for neighbourhoods, particularly for crime and safety

The financial crisis, austerity and the triple shock of Covid-19, war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis have all contributed to a 'lost decade' for neighbourhoods. Original analysis conducted by Public First for ICON, finds an overall sense that things have got worse across the board but more acutely in 'mission critical' neighbourhoods:

- 45% of the public believe that changes in their neighbourhoods have been for the worse over the past ten years, compared to just 27% who believe that it has got better.
- People who say they plan to vote for Reform UK, people aged 55-64 and those that only have a GCSE or equivalent qualification are more likely to say that their neighbourhoods have changed for the worst.
- 54% of people that live in the highest quintile of mission disadvantage say that their neighbourhood has changed for the worse, compared to 42% of those in the highest quintile of mission disadvantage.

Economic and infrastructure concerns are shared with those with the lowest levels of need, but residents in the highest need neighbourhoods were distinctly more concerned about litter (53%), antisocial behaviour (49%) and illegal drugs (48%) than in other neighbourhoods. Four times as many people in high-need neighbourhoods called illegal drugs a "major issue" compared with those in the lowest-need places.

Many of these issues are caused by places lacking access to a diverse range of social capital. The sad truth is that where social capital is most needed it is weakest. Richer areas can rely on their financial wealth to make up for weaker social relationships, in the most disadvantaged areas, we rely even more on each other.

A lack of social infrastructure, the places and institutions where we meet and organise together, is also at the core the problems we face. Social capital and a lack of social capital is at the core of the. Those areas that lack social infrastructure perform significantly worse than other areas in terms of mission need. We face not just a decline of the public realm, but our social infrastructure.

**Figure 1 - Breakdown of Hyper-Local Need Measure by levels of neighbourhood deprivation and social infrastructure**



Source: ICON analysis of OCSI Hyper-Local Need Measure; Indices of Multiple Deprivation; OCSI Community Need Index

## Reservoirs of hope

Yet despite these challenges and the disorder we saw in some of our neighbourhoods last summer, we found that for the public, neighbourhoods are enormous sources of pride – and hope. Throughout our visits, focus groups and polling we have found people that feeling belonging and pride in their local neighbourhood. Just over half of people feel like they belong to their local neighbourhood. Although somewhat lower, 41% of people living in the most mission disadvantaged neighbourhoods still feel belonging to their local area.

We believe neighbourhoods could resolve the ‘expectations paradox’ that haunts British politics today: that the public says it wants real change but often balks at proposals for this. Rooting change in neighbourhoods, places the public are clearly passionate about and committing to changing, is likely to garner more support than grandiose national visions of transformation.

## ‘Think neighbourhoods’

The good news is that this is not unrealisable or unrealistic hope. It has been possible to make improvements at a neighbourhood level in relatively recent history. For example, between 2002 and 2008 neighbourhoods that were part of the New Deal for Communities saw an improvement in 32 of 36 core indicators spanning crime, education, health, worklessness, community and housing and the physical environment. For 26 out of the 27 indicators where significance testing is possible, this change was statistically significant.<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities found a benefit-cost ratio of between 5.08 and 3.13 depending on the methodology used.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics,

<sup>2</sup> Demos, Social Capital 2025 series, December 2025 – February 2025

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Unless government makes a determined effort at a neighbourhood level, there is a danger that increased investment to improve outcomes or centrally driven reforms will fail to deliver results.

The good news is that there are early signs that the government is *thinking neighbourhoods*. The Home Secretary has spoken about the need to rebuild connections between neighbourhoods and the police. The Health Secretary is developing proposals for a neighbourhood care service. New family hubs are coming on board to provide access to important social infrastructure for the most disadvantaged. These are positive noises, but they need to be formed into a comprehensive, coherent neighbourhood strategy.

We propose that the government develops a **Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework (MDPF)** to provide a transparent process for allocating resources and developing targeted investment programmes for neighbourhoods. It would also provide a tool for combined authorities, local authorities and other public agencies to coordinate resources at a hyper-local level where it can have most impact.

Alongside this, mission critical neighbourhoods should see a **Neighbourhood Expenditure Audit (NEA)** to track how public services such as the NHS, schools and other public investment programmes are distributed at the hyper-local level. This will also help to identify how existing public expenditure can be leveraged on the ground and whether it is effectively targeted.

Crucially, government should prioritise investment in social infrastructure *simultaneous* with government programmes and investments as well as improving public services to make sure that the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods can become mission ready.

There are a number of quick wins that can be made immediately, for example, taking existing government programmes such as the Long-Term Plan for Towns, and making them more targeted a hyper-local level.

We are calling for the biggest shift in government policy development in a decade, thinking big by thinking neighbourhoods.

There is not a moment to lose if we want to make progress towards renewing the country and tackling growing tides of political disaffection.

Our greatest asset in this endeavour is in unleashing the latent power within our neighbourhoods. Our urgent challenge is to create the conditions for that power to be realised.



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# The case for neighbourhoods

**“ I don't think there's a specific, big issue anywhere. I think there's lots of smaller issues that are all contributing ... Nobody likes to go out on an evening, no more, because you don't feel safe ... And then you've got your local shops closing, and litter. It all has a knock-on effect.”**

**Woman, 40s, West Bromwich**

We are living in a period of intense economic, social and geopolitical instability. Policy makers are under pressure to deliver change and restore prosperity and security. It is tempting given the grand scale of the challenges facing the country to design policies and investment plans at a similarly grand scale. This would be a mistake. Whilst the problems facing the country are large, long standing and structural, they are the manifestation of tens of thousands of smaller issues within our homes, our streets and neighbourhoods.

Take getting people into work. There are 1.57m people unemployed and actively looking for work. This is a big number. However, people are not abstract, isolated individuals. They live in neighbourhoods, often with friends and family, with physical and social environments that have a profound influence on their lives and the decisions they make. As a recent series of papers published by the think tank Demos has identified, in many cases, outcomes in areas such as employment, health and crime are influenced by social capital.<sup>3</sup> Social capital is typically forged at a family and neighbourhood level, showing the need for hyper-local approaches. Yet the sad truth is that where social capital is most needed it is weakest. Richer areas can rely on their financial wealth to make up for weaker social relationships, in the most disadvantaged areas, we rely even more on each other.

In recognising the difference between places, policy makers talk about differences between regions or, in recent years, towns. For example,

you are more than three times more likely to be unemployed in Middlesbrough than you are in Stratford-upon-Avon. But regions, local authorities and even towns are still relatively 'big' units.

Take Clacton, a seaside town with a population of just over 50,000 with well documented economic challenges, including in terms of employment. According to ICON's Hyper-Local Needs Measure (HLNM) it is one of the places that is furthest behind in achieving the government's five missions – containing ten of what we call in this report “mission critical neighbourhoods”.

Yet even within Clacton there are significant differences within neighbourhoods that are walking distance from each other. In West Clacton & Jaywick Sands, 27% of those not in employment have never worked, above the national average. Over one in ten houses are deprived across three or more dimensions of deprivation (e.g. health, education, employment or housing), more than three times the national average.

A walk along the seafront to St Batholomew's in East Clacton, you will find just 13% of those not in employment have never worked and just one in thirty-two houses are deprived across three or more dimensions of deprivation. A short walk to the north of Jaywick, Rush Green contains the neighbourhood which is furthest away from the government's mission of supporting higher levels of sustained growth. Yet despite having similar economic challenges to Jaywick, its population is very different, with a significantly higher proportion of young children and families. Within Rush

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<sup>3</sup> NOMIS, Labour Market Profiles, Middlesbrough & Stratford-upon-Avon, accessed February 2025

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Green itself, there is a gap of over 1,600 places between the worst performing neighbourhood in Rush Green and the best performing neighbourhood in Rush Green, showing that even within the space of a few streets, there are significant differences and challenges.

We also know that problems tend to cluster. The same streets in Rush Green that face the biggest economic challenge also suffer from lower levels of social mobility and higher levels of ill health. Analysis across all neighbourhoods in England has found that areas which are mission-disadvantaged in terms of economic growth and health were strongly correlated. Areas which have higher levels of crime are also more likely to be mission-disadvantaged when it comes to health and economic growth. Policy makers working on one problem, like employment, know that there are links to other challenges, yet we continue to operate in operational silos that ignore the realities of people in our neighbourhoods.

Our neighbourhoods have gone through a difficult decade. From austerity to the pandemic, a series of hammer blows have hit our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Alongside this our society is changing. Digital technology that seen businesses close on the high streets and the conditions for their replacement has not yet emerged. Our population is ageing creating new demands for services and accessibility, whilst at the same time our young people are having to navigate a constantly changing and unsettling environment.

James C. Scott in his bestselling book *Seeing like a State* outlined how the state in the 19th Century and 20th Century sought to make their societies "legible" by compartmentalising people into units that are easier to administer.<sup>4</sup> In attempting to make the country easier to administer, the state has created its own blind spots. Despite significant improvements in data and research, we still design policy solutions at an abstract, aggregated level. Organising investment, infrastructure and services in a way that is easier to administer does not necessarily make it effective in delivering better outcomes.

The need to help improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of people would be urgent at the best of times, but the accumulative build-up of policy challenges means that we simply cannot afford to go on as we have done. Moreover, for a new government with an ambitious agenda to tackle the fundamental structural economic, social and environmental problems facing the nation, a fresh approach is essential. We must break the policy deadlock.

Another reason for the state to take neighbourhoods seriously is their potential to be quicksand for the government's missions, sucking in resources with little improvement if they are not deployed in a way that meets local need.

We have identified 613 'mission critical neighbourhoods' across the country which are furthest behind achieving the government's mission objectives containing around 1m people. These are the mission million and are the places which will determine whether the government succeeds or fails in its attempts to deliver its missions.

Investments to boost economic growth, spread opportunity and reform public services need supportive environments to flourish. We often fail to take into account the forces and factors at work within neighbourhoods when designing policy, giving too little focus on the implementation of policies on the ground. In the past, investments and interventions have been put in place but they have failed to take root because they have operated in areas with low levels of social infrastructure and social capital.

The evidence is clear that higher levels of social capital are linked to better outcomes across a range of outcomes, from health, education and employment. Robert Putnam defined social capital as the social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.<sup>5</sup> Social capital not only makes interventions more effective, through encouraging the right norms and behaviours, but it also gives people the support network they need to access the help they need and to stick with changes that they make.

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<sup>4</sup> Scott, J, *Seeing Like A State*, Yale University Press, 1999

<sup>5</sup> Putnam, R. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000

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Social infrastructure has a critical and often underappreciated role. It is the “physical and community facilities which bring people together to build meaningful relationships.”<sup>6</sup> Not only does it create social capital, but it plays an often unseen but vital role in connecting those that need help with the services that they require, putting boots on the ground that can build trust and give people agency over their own areas and their own lives.

The good news is that we have found ways to successfully build and sustain social infrastructure and social capital, to drive better outcomes. But there is no silver bullet, as our focus group participant from West Bromwich outlines, it is the accumulation of many things that need to be fixed. At their core is giving people the power and confidence to mobilise and organise themselves effectively.

If we can rebuild the social infrastructure within neighbourhoods and strengthen social capital, we have a chance to break the cycle and put the country back on track.

A new government has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the way that we seek to tackle the biggest challenges facing the country. But we need policy makers to readjust their vision, bringing neighbourhoods back into focus. It is there that the battle to deliver its missions will be won and lost.

Grand challenges require creative solutions, but as we argue in this paper to truly think big, we must **think neighbourhoods**.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenny, M & Kelsey, T, *Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure*, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2021

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# The call for neighbourhoods

## People perceive their neighbourhoods have changed for the worse

**“ I walk out the front door and my immediate street is quite nice, neat and tidy, but then you sort of go further into your local shops and actual West Brom itself, it's very rundown and there's sort of no care. And because there's no care, then nobody else cares!”**

**Woman, 30s, West Bromwich Focus Group**

Democrat Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, famously said that “all politics is local”. It is a mantra that is often repeated during elections. Yet, ICON has found in our work a disconnect between the public and the state within neighbourhoods. Politicians often speak the language of neighbourhoods, but rhetoric does not make a difference to people on the ground.

According to our Hyper-Local Needs Measure, a way of measuring how much support an area needs to deliver on the government's five missions, 97.8% of Blackpool's population live in neighbourhoods that are high need. These are neighbourhoods in the top quintile of places that are disadvantaged in relation to the government's five missions. In our focus group with working age people living in the town, we found fatalism and dissatisfaction with the state's performance over the past decade.

This chimes with polling by Opinium in April 2024 which found that nearly two thirds of people (59%) think people's lives in their local areas have worsened in the last ten years.<sup>7</sup> Just one in ten people (11%) think that their local area has improved in the past ten years. A plurality of people also hold central government with 40% putting the blame at the feet of Westminster and Whitehall.<sup>8</sup>

These are not isolated comments, but sentiments repeated across our focus groups and on our visits across the country.

A 4,000-sample national poll and complimentary focus groups commissioned by ICON and carried out by Public First, found that 45% of the public believe that changes in their neighbourhoods have been for the worse over the past ten years, compared to just 27% who believe that it has got better.<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 shows that across the country, some groups have received the changes more negatively than others. People who say they plan to vote for Reform UK, people aged 55-64 and those that only have a GCSE or equivalent qualification are more likely to say that their neighbourhoods have changed for the worse.

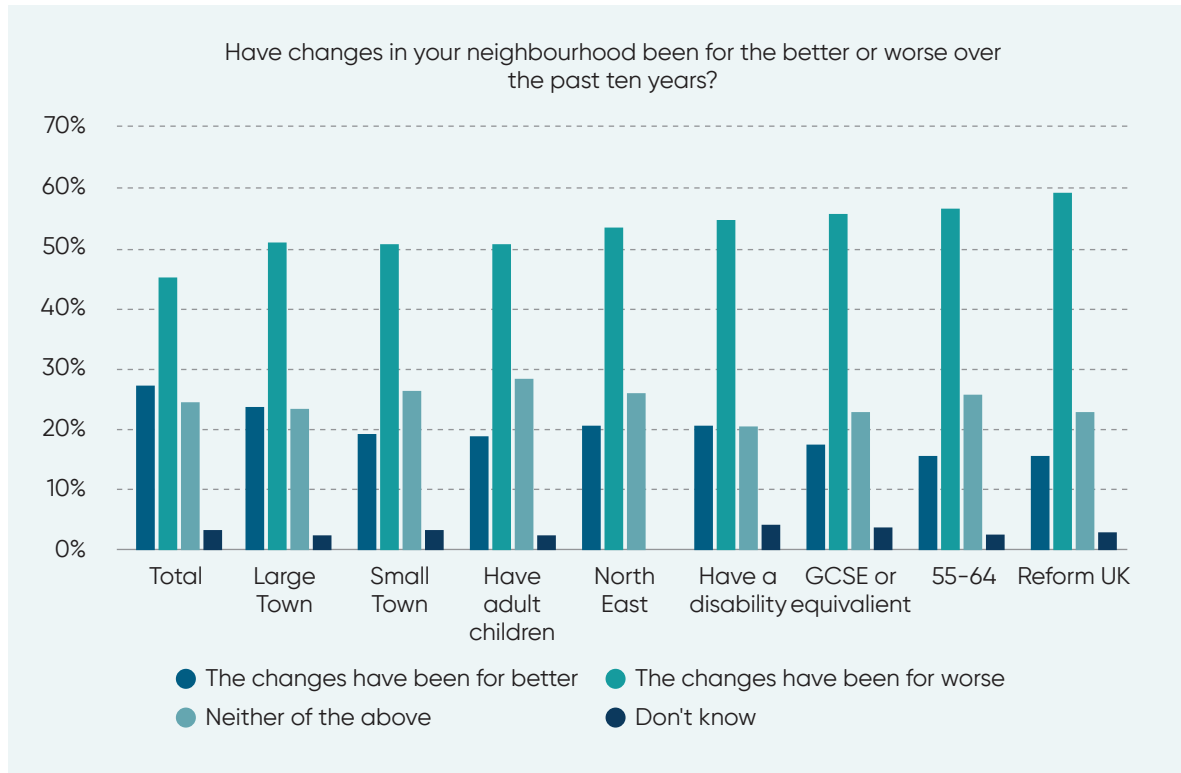
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<sup>7</sup> New Economics Foundation, Voters twice as likely to trust local politicians to improve their area, polling shows, 25 April 2024

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Public First, online survey of 4051 English Adults between 31st January – 5th February 2025

**Figure 2 – Groups that are more likely to say that changes in their neighbourhood have been for the worse over the past ten years**

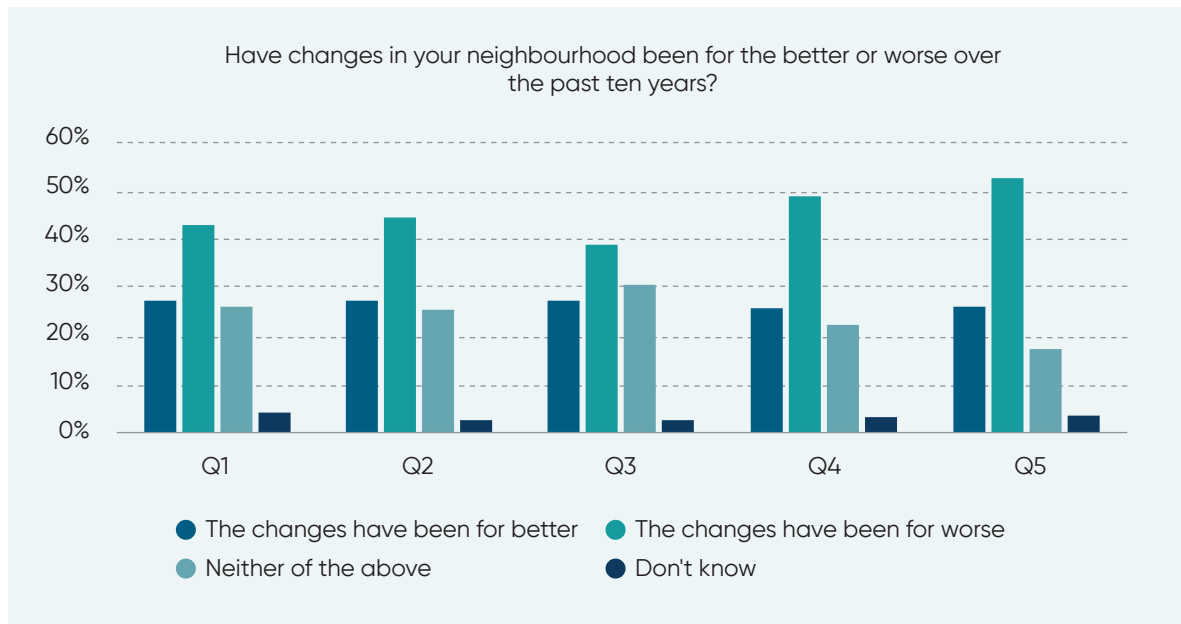


Source: ICON analysis

Figure 3 shows that the areas that are most mission-disadvantaged are more likely to say that their area has changed for the worse. Quintile 1 is those areas with the least need for progress on the government’s missions and Quintile 5 is those areas with the most need for progress on the government’s missions. 54% of people that live in the highest quintile of mission disadvantage say that their neighbourhood has changed for the worse, compared to 42% of those in the lowest quintile of mission disadvantage. Interestingly, our polling indicates that perceptions of worsening are not solely

related to deprivation. Among people in decile of most deprived places measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 47% believe their neighbourhood has changed for the worst over the past ten years. However, people in the decile of least deprived places also believe that their neighbourhood has changed for the worse over the past decade. This aligns with our visits and focus groups where perception of neighbourhoods are not simply related to deprivation, but also to a range of factors from crime and anti-social behaviour to access to transport and social infrastructure.

**Figure 3 – Groups that are more likely to say that changes in their neighbourhood have been for the worse over the past ten years by Hyper-Local Need Index quintiles**

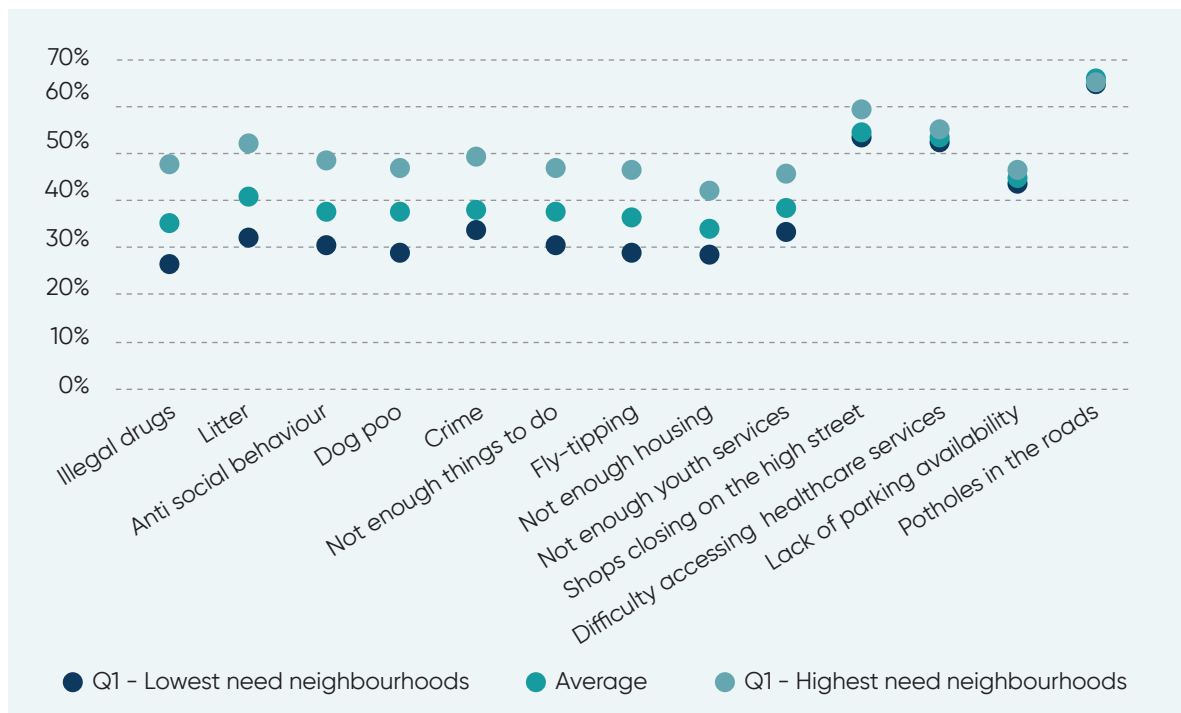


Source: ICON analysis

Figure 4 shows that challenges in the highest areas of need across the missions have a broad range of concerns. Economic and infrastructure concerns are shared with those with the lowest levels of need, but residents in the highest need neighbourhoods were distinctly more concerned about litter (53%), antisocial behaviour (49%) and illegal

drugs (48%) than in other neighbourhoods. Four times as many people in high-need neighbourhoods called illegal drugs a “major issue” compared with those in the lowest-need places. There are concerns about the physical environment and urban realm, particularly in relation to potholes and the local shopping parades / high streets.

**Figure 4 – Ranking of the biggest challenges in their neighbourhood by hyper-local need area**



Source: ICON analysis

People in these neighbourhoods share similarly high levels of concern about shops and businesses closing, and roads, as we see in neighbourhoods with lower levels of need. Yet there are other areas in which their concerns stand out compared to lower need neighbourhoods, particularly on the conditions of their local economy. For instance, people in high need neighbourhoods demonstrate a significantly higher level of concern around the availability of good jobs and employment opportunities, versus a comparatively lesser level of concern about “too many local developments or infrastructure projects” compared to lower need neighbourhoods.

**“ Don't you think they're all the same? They're all going to promise us, all the world, vote this. We'll give you this. When they get into power, they give us nothing”**

**Man, 60s, Wakefield Group**

There are high levels of dissatisfaction with the state at all levels, but particularly with the centre which is perceived to have ignored these neighbourhoods for decades. Across our focus groups, there was a widespread belief that politicians had allowed local neighbourhoods to deteriorate and a lack of trust that they would do anything to improve the situation.

## ICON Engagement

Starting in December 2024, Commissioners (led by Chair, Baroness Armstrong) have been visiting neighbourhood projects across England speaking with residents, community organisers, local councillors, MPs and other public agencies.

At the time of publication, five visits have so far been undertaken across five regions of England with a further six visits to be completed by Summer 2025. By the end of the visits programme, every administrative region in England will have been visited.

These visits have formed a critical part of the work of the Commission and provided an opportunity for Commissioners to directly understand how things are working on the ground.

Alongside this programme of visits, ICON was pleased to host in collaboration with St George's House a consultation event on *The Future of Neighbourhood's Policy in England*. This two day event brought together over thirty participants from central and local government, academia, civil society and communities directly.

From September 2024 to January 2025, ICON also ran a call for evidence from external partners alongside commissioning our own bespoke research. Commissioners are grateful to the forty-one organisations (listed in Annex A) that have contributed to its work as well as the many other individual conversations and meetings that have taken place.

**The more challenges in your area, the smaller you perceive your neighbourhood**

**“ We’ve got friends down the road and family down the road and we go to Church up the road....That’s probably what we consider our neighbourhood”**

**Man, 70s, Wakefield & Rothwell**  
Focus Group

**“ The immediate area, I suppose the local shops and the area around your house”**

**Man, 30s, West Bromwich Focus Group**

Neighbourhoods mean different things to different people.

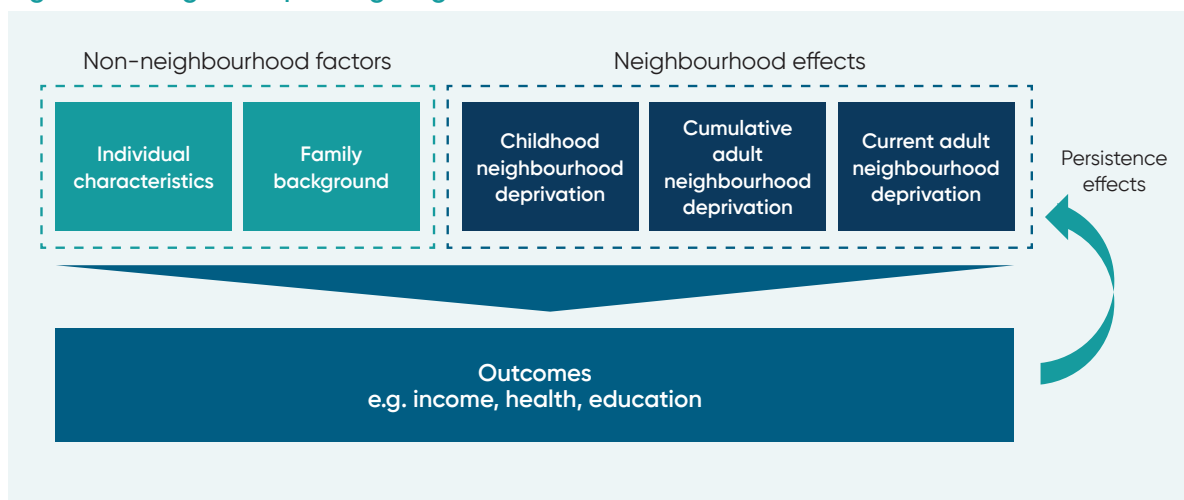
ICON commissioned Frontier Economics to review the academic literature on defining neighbourhoods and they found that a “universal and generalisable definition of neighbourhood does not exist.”<sup>10</sup> For example, neighbourhoods can be administrative units, like wards or villages that have set

geographical boundaries. In our work, we have used Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs) as a proxy for neighbourhoods to gather data. Neighbourhoods can be defined by residents or communities themselves, with boundaries overlapping with each other. Ultimately, whilst neighbourhoods are fluid, to adapt art historian Kenneth Clarke’s famous quote on defining what is civilisation: “I don’t know... but I think I can recognise it when I see it.”

Whilst there can be a range of different approaches, form should follow function. For policy makers that wish to transform places, neighbourhoods should be *hyper-local*.

Firstly, neighbourhoods are the level at which we can see so-called “neighbourhood effects”. These are the causal effects that living in a neighbourhood has on the outcomes of individuals. We commissioned Frontier Economics to review the academic literature and they found that there is emerging evidence that neighbourhood effects exist.<sup>11</sup> For example, studies in the Netherlands have found that moving from a deprived neighbourhood to a higher income neighbourhood can improve the income of individuals moving into it.<sup>12</sup> Similar studies around the world and in the UK have found evidence that these neighbourhood effects can be identified.

**Figure 5 – Diagram explaining neighbourhood effects**



Source: Frontier Economics

<sup>10</sup> Frontier Economics, The evidence for neighbourhood-focused regeneration, February 2025

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Petrović, A. et al, Where Do Neighbourhood Effects End? Moving to Multiscale Spatial Contextual Effects. Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 112(2), 581–601, 2021



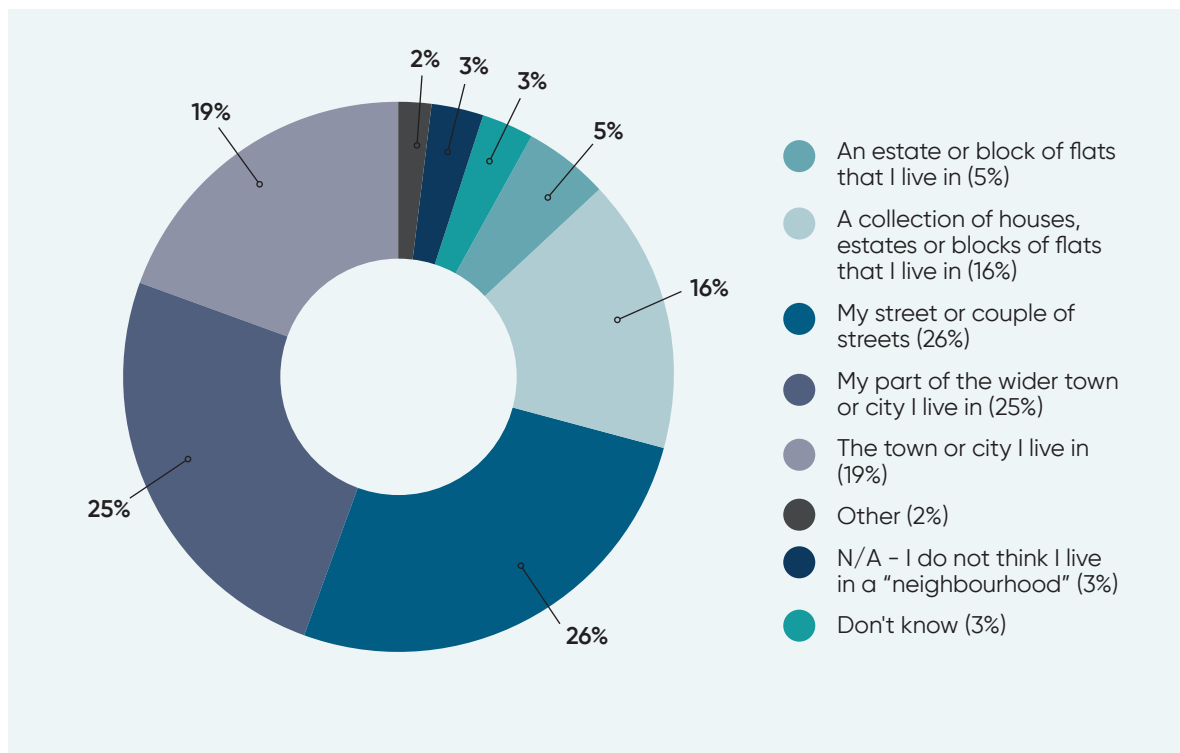
Evidence suggests that neighbourhood effects are best observed at the hyper-local level, covering small geographical areas and populations, though effects depend on the age and type of impact being observed. For example, research from Japan found that neighbourhood effects were strongest when neighbourhoods were considered as being between a couple of hundred residents.<sup>13</sup> This indicates that neighbourhood level interventions are best designed at a hyper-local level.

Secondly, neighbourhoods are motivational spaces. They are that area where a sense of community and belonging can be fostered, creating an emotional connection that can encourage people to mobilise and make sacrifices for the good of their neighbours and themselves. This is most effectively achieved if people define the neighbourhood themselves and feel a sense of ownership. It is likely to be a small enough unit that people can build

meaningful connections and relationships, again this is likely to be hyper-local. Robin Dunbar famously estimated that people can sustain, at most, around 150 meaningful relationships.<sup>14</sup> Although we can dispute the exact number, the point remains that policy makers cannot reasonably expect people to develop deep meaningful connections with people across areas spanning tens of thousands of people.

As Figure 6 shows, a large portion of the public see their neighbourhood as being hyper-local. When we asked people to consider a range of potential definitions that might be used to describe a neighbourhood, no one single option stands out. That said, we see that nearly half (47%) of people describe their neighbourhoods as *hyper-local* – that is, that they perceive “their neighbourhood” to fit within an estate or block of flats, a collection of houses or a few streets around them.

**Figure 6 - Breakdown of responses to “When you think about your neighbourhood, which of the following best describes what you think about?”**



Source: ICON analysis

<sup>13</sup> Janssen, H. People and place effects: Workshop presentation. Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, 2019

<sup>14</sup> Dunbar, R. *How Many Friends Does One Person Need? Dunbar's Number and Other Evolutionary Quirks*. Faber & Faber, 2010

Further analysis of responses suggests that geography – specifically the type of area that people live in – is an important driver of certain perceptions of what people see as their neighbourhood. For instance, we saw that those who live in large towns were more likely to identify their part of their town as their neighbourhood, whereas those living in small towns were more likely to identify their neighbourhood as the entirety of their town.

We believe that neighbourhoods are a useful way to frame policy making. If the goal is to help the most disadvantaged areas to thrive and to deliver on the transformational mission objectives that have been outlined by the new government (or enable the delivery of any cross-cutting objectives identified by any government), then the research indicates that we should develop a few clear criteria for defining neighbourhoods:

1. **Community-led** – wherever possible neighbourhoods should be defined by the populations within them.
2. **Hyper-local** – small populations and geographies to enable deep and meaningful attachments to be developed between people and to the neighbourhood. Sometimes these could be a few hundred people, sometimes a few thousand.
3. **Diverse** – recognising that neighbourhoods are diverse in their form and do not need to conform to an exact size or geography, and that policy makers need to be comfortable with a diversity of forms.

These principles are akin to those identified in the last major government neighbourhood approach, *The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, published in 1998. This strategy also pursued a flexible approach to defining neighbourhoods but concentrated on populations of a few thousand people.<sup>15</sup> This strategy led to the development of the New Deal for Communities, a programme which was later judged to be a success in the subsequent evaluation.<sup>16</sup>

## Despite the challenges, there remains a pride in neighbourhoods

**"I'm very, very proud of my estate. Everyone knows everyone, we are friendly and have the keys to each other's front doors, and I'll let my kids go anywhere in the 300 meters or so outside."**

Woman, 50s, Brighton Kempton & Peacehaven Group

**"I am proud to say I live where I do, and I feel blessed, and I don't take it for granted, but I do worry about how things are deteriorating, and I don't think it's going to be as magical as it is now in years to come."**

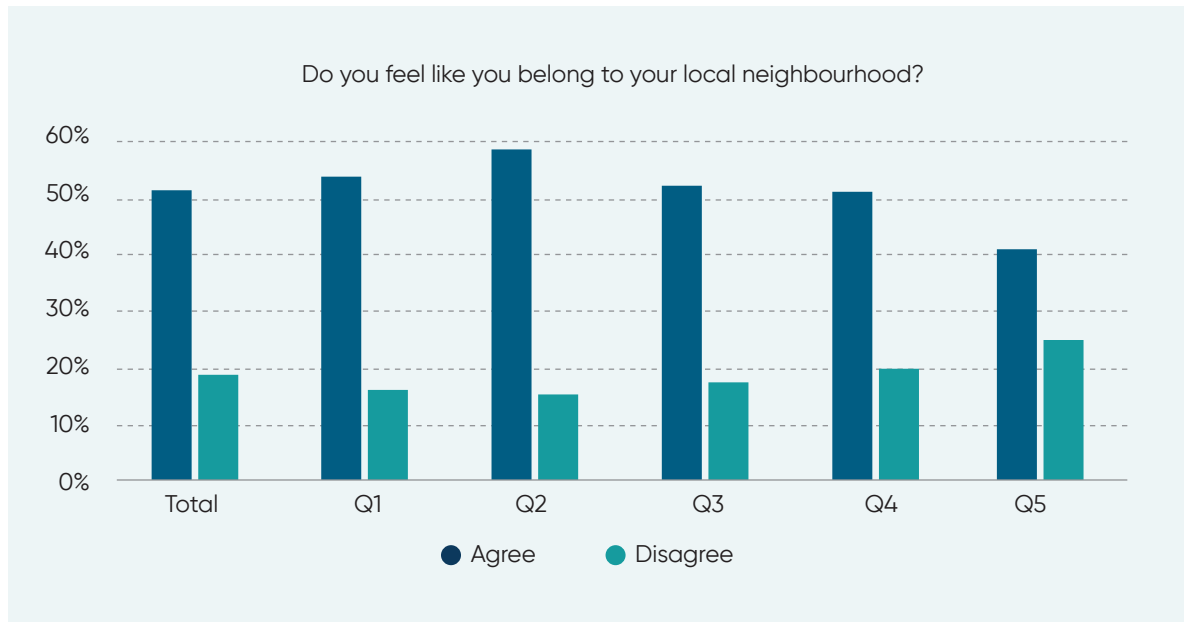
Man, 80s, Wakefield and Rothwell Group

The good news is that throughout our visits, focus groups and polling we have found people feel belonging and pride in their local neighbourhood. Figure 7 shows that across England as a whole, just over half of people feel like they belong to their local neighbourhood. Although somewhat lower, 41% of people living in the most mission disadvantaged neighbourhoods still feel belonging to their local area.

<sup>15</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, *Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*, September 1998

<sup>16</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *The New Deal for Communities Experience: A final assessment*, March 2010

**Figure 7 – Perceptions of belonging to local neighbourhood across England and by Hyper-Local Needs Measure quintile**



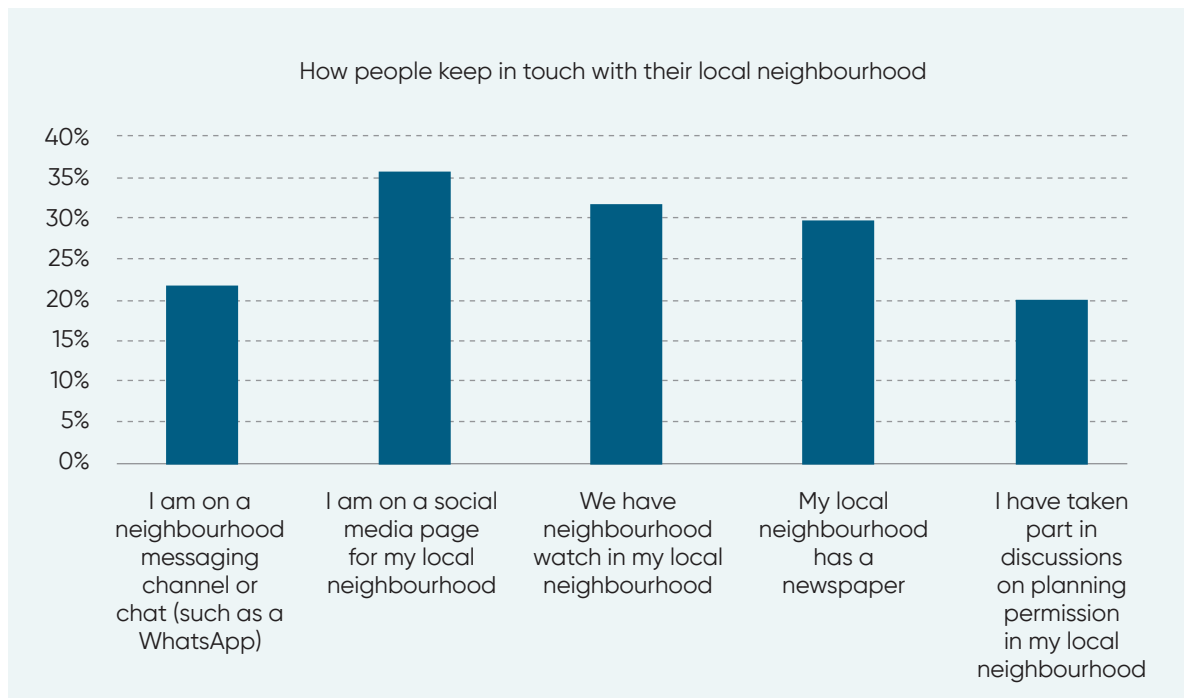
Source: ICON analysis

Across the country people are continuing to keep in contact and engage with what is going on in their local neighbourhoods. Over a third of people (36%) are on a social media page for their local neighbourhood and a fifth of people are on neighbourhood channels

or chats. For context, 39% of adults in the UK read a newspaper and 18% of the public use the BBC News Website or App.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout our visits and in our focus groups there is a clear sense of attachment to local

**Figure 8 – How the public keep in touch with what is going on in their local neighbourhood**



Source: ICON analysis

<sup>17</sup> Ofcom, News consumption in the UK: 2024, 10 September 2025

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neighbourhoods, even those areas that feel left behind. These are the foundations on which we can mobilise people to improve their areas and provide partners for government to work with as it embarks upon transformational policy change.

However, there remain significant challenges within neighbourhoods, particularly in terms of providing social, civic and cultural institutions within which people can mobilise.<sup>18</sup> Despite over half of the public feeling that they belong to an area, less than a third (29%) say that they feel involved in their local area. In the most mission disadvantaged areas, 40% of the public do not feel involved.

ICON has found a clear message from our neighbourhoods.

People care deeply about their neighbourhoods, particularly the streets and shops close to them that they feel that they have gotten worse over the past decade. This is not simply about poverty or living standards, it is a broader sense of decline.

The public are calling for the government to give them the tools to help them to improve their neighbourhoods.

Not only can this help to combat the rising tide of political disaffection, it is essential in delivering the government's five missions.

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<sup>18</sup> A O'Brien et al, The Preventative State, Demos, 2023

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# Mission critical: neighbourhoods and mission-driven government

Mission challenges are not evenly spread across the country

The government has outlined five major national missions to deliver a “decade of national renewal”.

- (1) **Kickstart economic growth** – to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7 – with good jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country making everyone, not just a few, better off.
- (2) **Make Britain a clean energy superpower** – to cut bills, create jobs and deliver security with cheaper, zero-carbon electricity by 2030, accelerating to net zero.
- (3) **Take back our streets** – by halving serious violent crime and raising confidence in the police and criminal justice system to its highest levels.
- (4) **Break down barriers to opportunity** – by reforming our childcare and education systems, to make sure there is no class ceiling on the ambitions of young people in Britain.
- (5) **Build an NHS fit for the future** – that is there when people need it; with fewer lives lost to the biggest killers; in a fairer Britain, where everyone lives well for longer.

Although the missions are national in scope, ICON's hypothesis was that ‘mission need’ (i.e. places which most need progress on the government's missions) would be clustered in a small number of neighbourhoods. These are places where economic and social challenges have clustered, creating ‘sticky’ places, where it is difficult to make improvements due to negative neighbourhood effects and feedback loops.

To test this hypothesis, ICON commissioned Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to develop an index that measured data across all the five key mission areas in England and identify which places had the relatively highest need to deliver the missions. We call this the Hyper-Local Need Index (HLNM).

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### *Hyper-Local Need Measure (HLNM)*

The Hyper-Local Need Index is a composite scoring exercise that pools various data sources across each of the missions available at a neighbourhood level. Mapping has been done at both a Local Super Output Area (LSOA) level and local authority level.

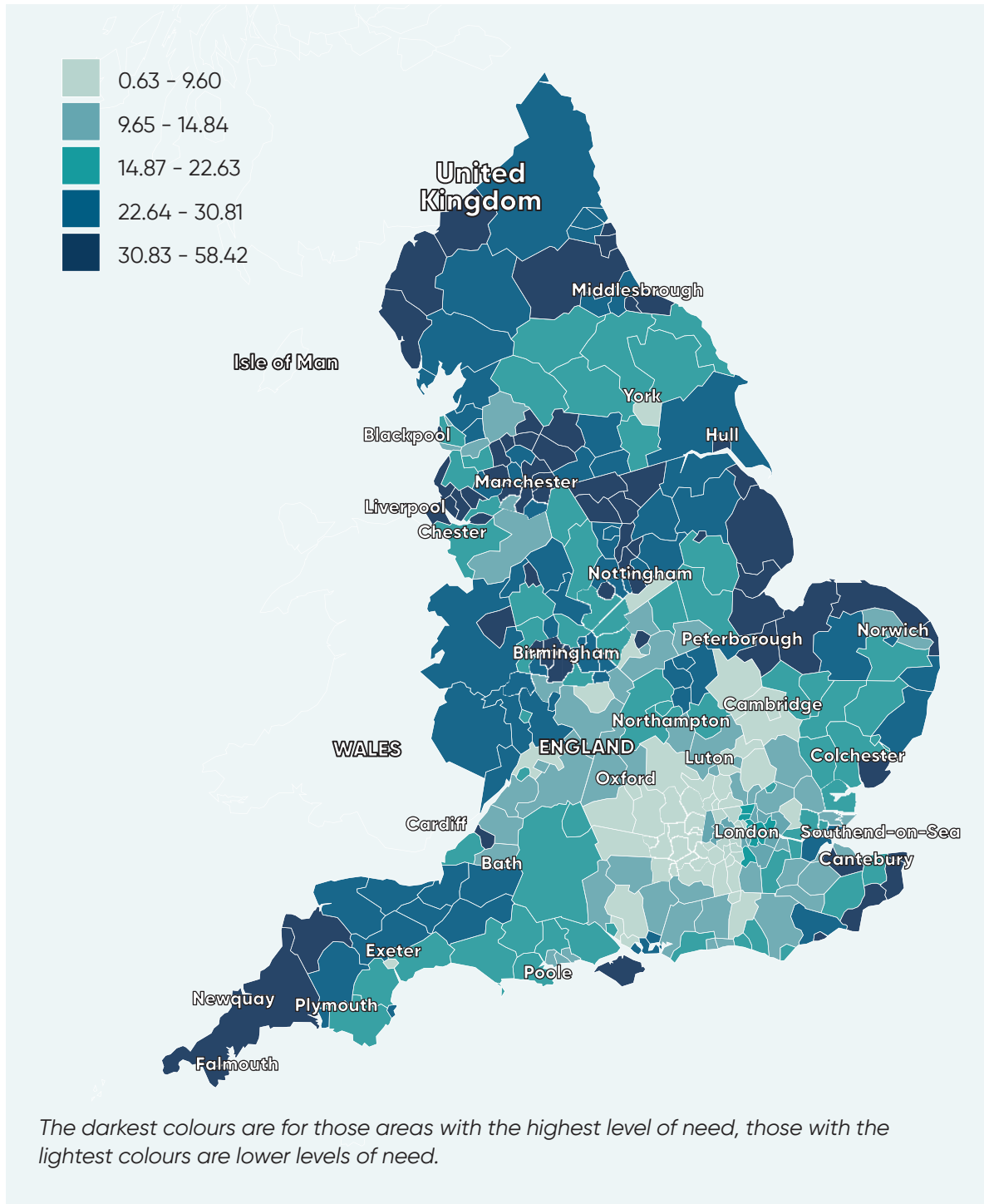
This new measure provides a snapshot of the condition of different neighbourhoods against five different types of need, each reflecting the main benchmarks of success that sit beneath the government's five missions:<sup>1</sup>

- 1. Economic growth:** This domain reflects the economic conditions of different neighbourhoods, and includes, for instance, levels of worklessness, access to high quality jobs including in high-growth industries, levels of labour productivity, and skills
- 2. Opportunity:** This domain reflects the extent that different neighbourhoods experience child poverty, deprivation affecting children and young people; limited access to childcare services; low educational attainment in Key Stages 2 and 4, as well as the general quality of local schools
- 3. Health:** This domain reflects the quality of neighbourhood health and health services, including the prevalence of disability and adult social care need; life expectancy and mortality rates; ill health; and levels of access to health services
- 5. Crime:** This domain reflects the extent that different neighbourhoods experience high levels of crime, and includes violent crime, burglary, theft and criminal damage.
- 6. Energy:** This domain reflects the extent that energy is a barrier to progress across different neighbourhoods, and includes the proportion of households in fuel poverty; dwellings with low energy efficiency; as well as a carbon footprint measurement

Neighbourhoods with the highest levels of need (shaded darker on the map) are largely concentrated in the North of England—particularly around cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Sunderland and Newcastle—as well as other post-industrial regions like the West Midlands (including Birmingham). Some of the most acute need is concentrated in coastal towns such as Blackpool, Clacton, and Great Yarmouth, with considerable concentrations

of high need spread across the Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Kent, and Essex coastlines. There is also pockets of mission disadvantage across the South West coast and Isle of Wight. Conversely, the neighbourhoods we identify as having some of the lowest need are typically clustered within more affluent areas in the South East—particularly across Wokingham, Westminster, Guildford, and Hart.

**Figure 9 – The density of mission disadvantaged neighbourhoods in local authorities across England**

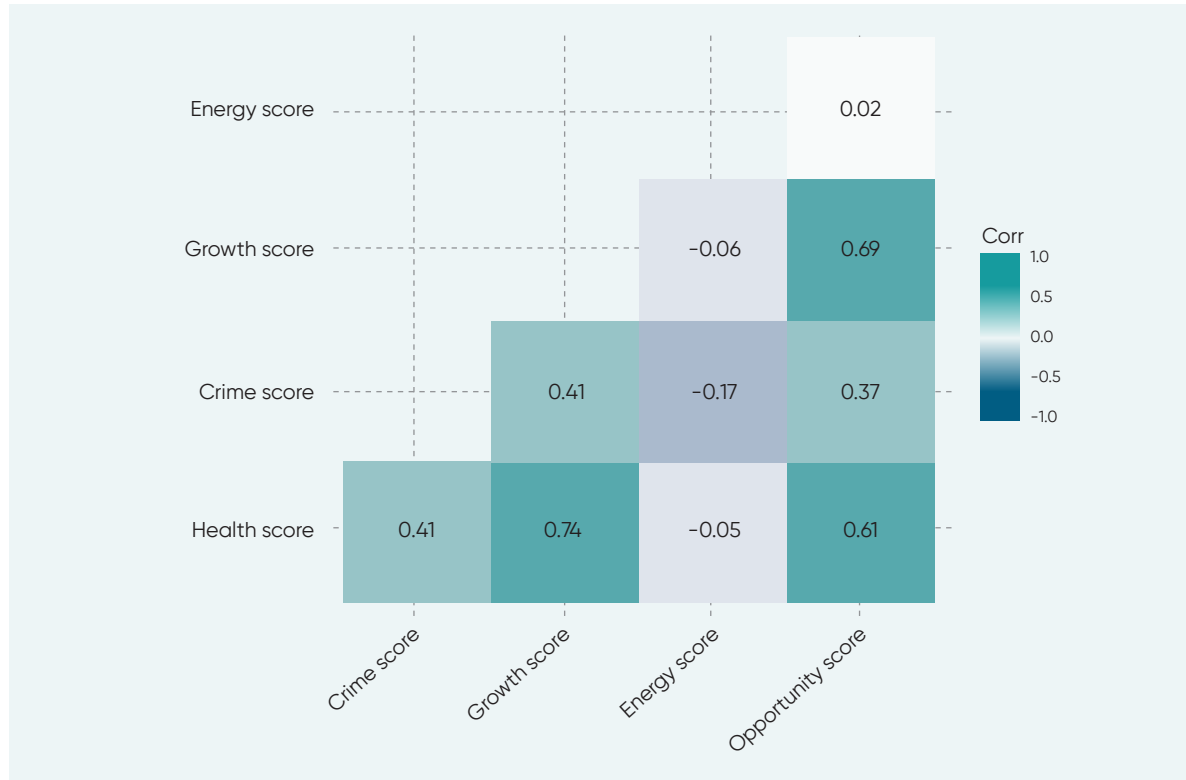


Source: OCSI

Figure 10 compares correlation across the five mission domains identified in the HLNM. The energy domain is least linked to the other four mission areas. Effectively, targeting neighbourhoods that score poorly in terms of progress towards the government's clean power mission is unlikely to help achieve progress across other mission areas. By contrast, neighbourhoods that

are disadvantaged in terms of the health mission are more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of growth and opportunity. Therefore, we believe that the government should not use neighbourhoods as a lens to achieve its energy mission. Focus should be given to the other four missions which are more closely correlated.

**Figure 10 - Correlation matrix of the five "mission domains" of the Hyper-Local Need Measure**



Source: ICON analysis of OCSI Hyper-Local Need Measure

These overlapping patterns of need across the different mission domains also highlight how certain types of disadvantage cluster together – with poor health and health services, economic underperformance, and a lack of opportunity for younger people frequently reinforcing each other. Looking ahead, addressing these interconnected challenges will be critical to the government ensuring that the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods see direct benefit from the ambitions of the government's mission's agenda. This will require a coordinated approach that goes beyond treating any

one issue in isolation, ensuring that policy interventions tackle multiple challenges within neighbourhoods, and lay stronger foundations for lasting improvement.

We can also dig a level below to see why neighbourhoods, and the social networks within them, are so critical to achieving the government's missions.

The majority of healthy life years are lost from factors such as smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise.<sup>19</sup> These risk factors are highly concentrated in more deprived areas and are embedded in social networks. If those in your

<sup>19</sup> Yildizer, G. et al, "The Association of Various Social Capital Indicators and Physical Activity Participation Among Turkish Adolescents." *Journal of Sport and Health Science* 7 (1): 27–33, 2018



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network get overweight, then it is much more likely that you will too. Similarly, if the friends of your teenage children smoke, it is massively more likely they will too. On the other hand, having someone who you can talk to or will support you when you need it, enormously improves your health and well-being: social isolation – which is more common in low social capital neighbourhoods – is worse for your health than smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>20</sup>

Crime, and fear of crime, is highly uneven. People living in deprived neighbourhoods are more than three-times more likely to describe their area as not being safe compared with more affluent neighbourhoods. Previous work has suggested that neighbourhood watch schemes can lower crime (and the linked concept of ‘collective efficacy’) – but it is hard to get such schemes to work in areas that lack pre-existing social capital.

Similarly, social mobility is highly contingent on your social networks. Recent work from the US (currently being replicated in the UK) shows that a child’s life-chances are strongly affected by ‘bridging’ or ‘economic connectedness’ in their social networks.<sup>21</sup>

The common link across all these examples, and the missions they are linked to, is that such health, crime and mobility outcomes are all strongly affected by the individual’s or family’s social networks. This is true for everyone, but for those from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods it is even more sharply felt: they disproportionately lack both the ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital of more affluent communities. Trying to address each of these mission outcomes in isolation without addressing the social poverty of the milieu that links them together is unlikely to be effective.

## **Mission critical: the neighbourhoods that will make or break the government’s missions**

Practically, it is not possible for government to seek to improve outcomes in every neighbourhood. Some form of prioritisation is necessary, particularly given the current fiscal environment.

The danger is that the state will seek broad-national scale interventions to deliver the missions, but resource is not adequately targeted towards those areas with the greatest need, leading to a lack of progress in delivering the missions. A ‘trickle down’ approach to the delivery of the missions will not build momentum to enable the delivery of the missions.

A ‘trickle down’ approach also means that limited fiscal resources are not efficiently deployed, further slowing progress in delivering the missions and carrying significant deadweight costs, by providing resources to areas that do not need significant additional support.

We need to learn the lessons from the failed levelling up agenda and find ways to ensure that we create the right mechanisms to build momentum around the missions, building capacity and resilience within those places that need it most. This means taking a neighbourhoods approach to missions.

So where should the government focus in making progress on its missions?

Over 80% of neighbourhoods in England score 40 or less in our Hyper-Local Needs Measure, putting them at relatively low need for the government’s missions. These neighbourhoods need to be continually monitored for mission outcomes to ensure that they do not fall behind, but progress towards the missions in the short term is unlikely to make a significant difference to these places or to people’s perceptions of their neighbourhood. Approximately 41m people live in these neighbourhoods.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Daoust, P, “The Loneliness Trap: It Is Said to Be as Bad as Smoking. So Will It Shorten My Lifespan?” *The Guardian*, June 16, 2024

<sup>21</sup> Chetty, R. et al, Social capital II: determinants of economic connectedness. *Nature* (608), 122–134, 2022

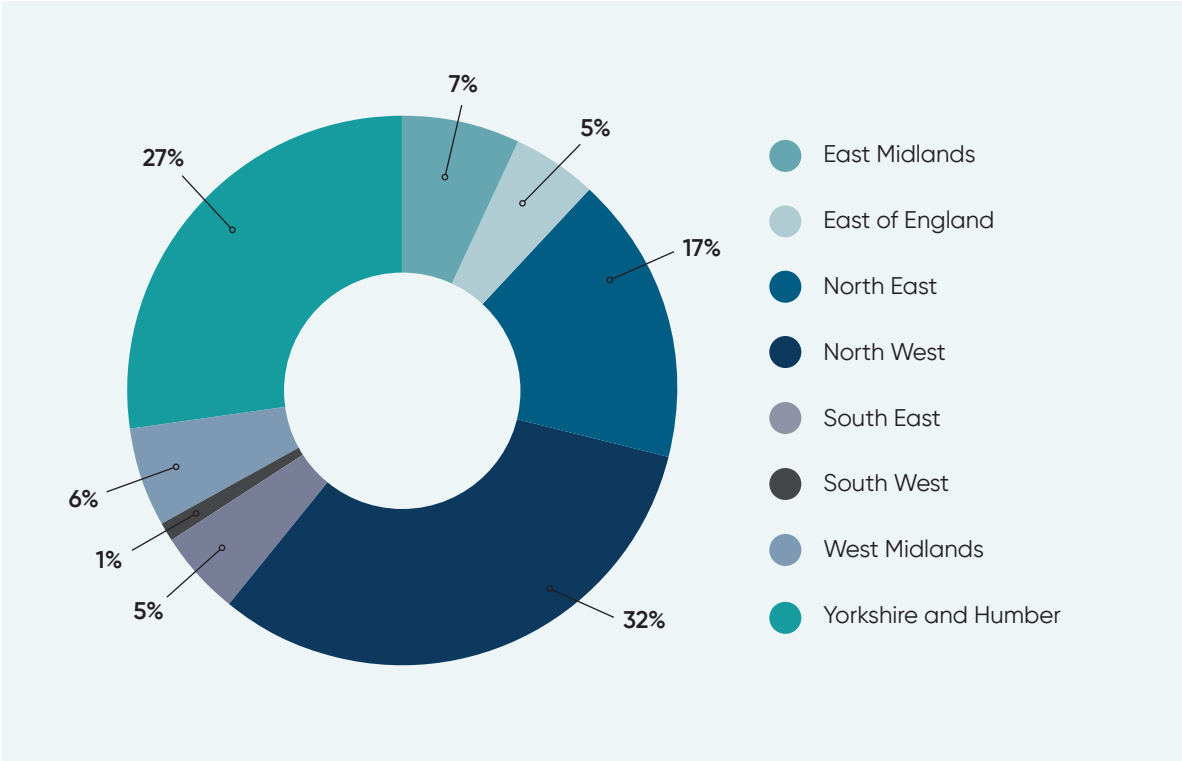
<sup>22</sup> Based on the ONS average size of LSOA level of 1,500 people

Another 15% of neighbourhoods in England score between 40 and 80, these are the middle tier of neighbourhoods that do need further support in delivering the missions. Approximately 8m people live in these neighbourhoods.

Finally, there are 613 neighbourhoods that score 80 or higher in the HLMN. We call these the "mission critical neighbourhoods". These are the neighbourhoods that require

the most urgent attention and will need to change to make substantial progress on the government's missions. Approximately, 920,000 people live in these neighbourhoods. They are the "mission million", the 2% of the population where resources need to be targeted to deliver the missions and achieve the decade of national renewal that is the current government's overarching objective.

Figure 11 - Mission critical neighbourhoods by region



Source: ICON analysis

Figure 11 shows that over three-quarters (76%) of the mission critical neighbourhoods are in the North of England, with the North West and Yorkshire and Humber having particularly large numbers of mission disadvantaged areas. The North East region has the highest proportion of mission critical neighbourhoods as a proportion of its population, with 3.9 mission critical neighbourhoods per 100,000 of population, compared to 3 and 2.7 for Yorkshire and Humber and North West respectively.

As we have identified through our mapping exercise, mission need is clustered. A trickle down approach to the missions, assuming that broad based economic and public service investments will have an impact on the ground, is unlikely to succeed.

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## 'Sticky' neighbourhoods could frustrate the government's missions

Trickle down missions are risky because they ignore neighbourhood effects and the negative feedback loops within places.

Longitudinal research funded by The Nuffield Foundation found that neighbourhood effects do have an impact on individual outcomes because of stickiness of neighbourhoods.<sup>23</sup> This is because socioeconomic need clusters at the hyperlocal level. Those who are poorer and sicker are forced to stay put and become trapped in certain areas, whereas people who do better and earn more money tend to move on and out.

Policies are put into effect and investments made into public services, but they fail to consider the challenges within neighbourhoods that can prevent them from taking root. On our visits, for example, we have seen first hand how hard it can be for traditional public services to reach the areas that need them most and this makes it harder to tackle the structural problems driving poor policy outcomes. According to Frontier Economics analysis of the academic literature, "there are early indications that neighbourhood deprivation is 'sticky'...however this needs to be studied further. Coupled with the impacts of cumulative deprivation and the large significant effects for children, there may be a particularly sizeable role for neighbourhood deprivation to affect an individual's outcomes."<sup>24</sup>

This is not the first government to enter office with an ambitious programme of national renewal and the current ministry should learn from its predecessors. Although there are some unique features to the current government's mission-driven approach, in broad terms, the government's five missions cover priorities that have been shared by other previous ministries particularly around improving economic outcomes, improving health and reducing crime. There are clear parallels with the previous Labour Government and its desire to tackle social exclusion across a broad range of metrics.

Figure 12 shows the 44 local authority districts that were identified as having the highest levels of deprivation across key metrics such as unemployment, teenage pregnancy, poor educational outcomes and poor housing.

As can be seen, there is significant overlap between these areas and those identified in our Hyper-Local Needs Measure. Outside of London, Preston is the only local authority that was identified in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal that does not currently have one of the most mission disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England. This is despite the different metrics for progress identified in 1998. Some of the neighbourhoods identified through our maps, such as Kirkdale in Liverpool, also featured in the government's Urban Programme in the 1960s.

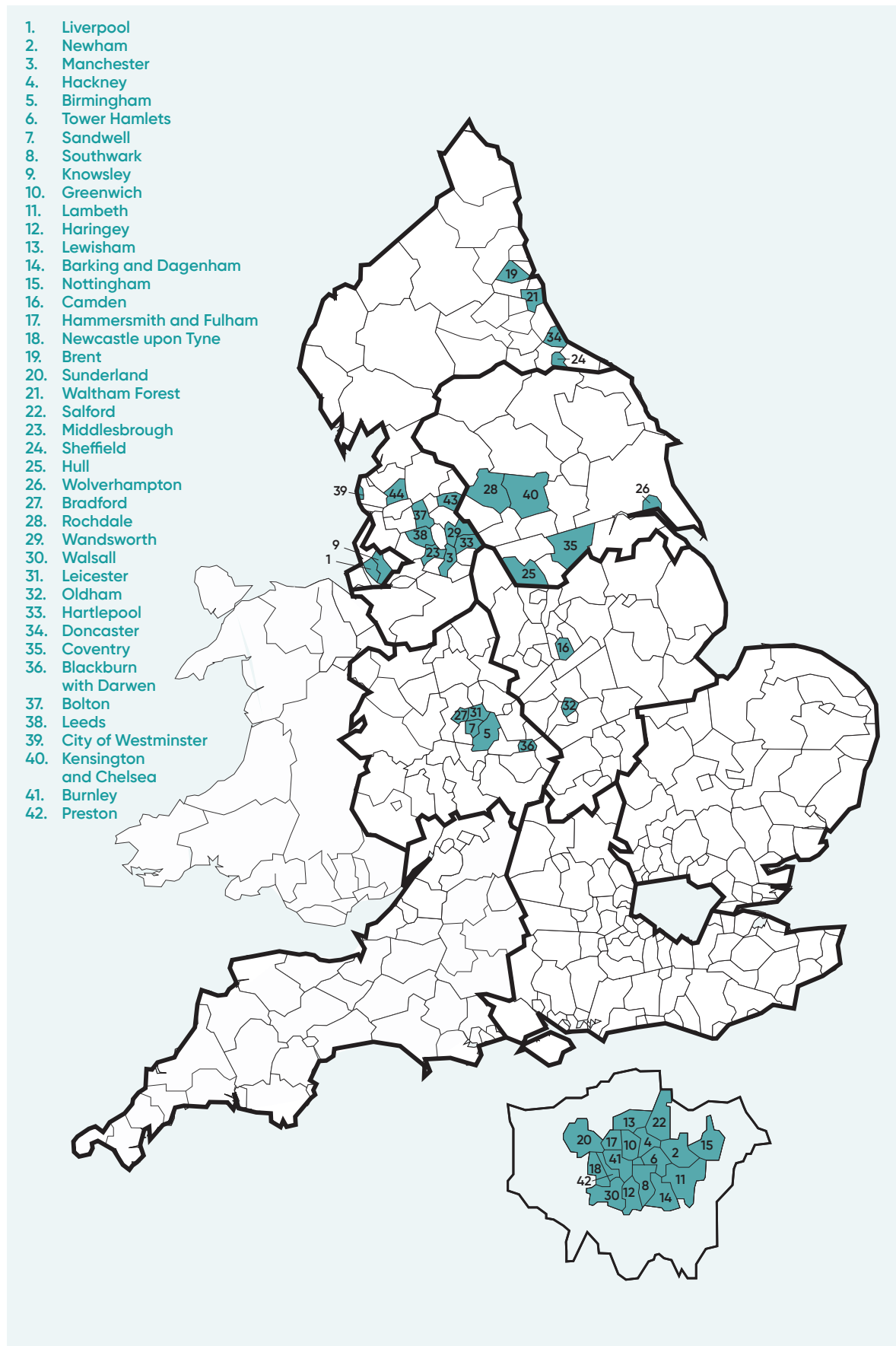
This is not a counsel of despair, however, it has been possible to make improvements at a neighbourhood level. As can be seen from the map, London which is over represented in the areas of greatest need is not at the core of our Hyper-Local Needs Measure. Although this is partly because of a more balanced set of objectives (New Labour was particularly focused on crime), it is also because there have been genuine improvements made in London. Economic growth was higher in London than in the rest of the country during the 2000s and educational attainment in London has significantly improved. Alongside considerable investment in transport and cultural infrastructure, neighbourhoods saw genuine improvements. Our national polling found that 39% of people in London said that changes in their neighbourhood have been for the better, compared to 21% in the North East, 27% in Yorkshire and Humber and 29% in the North West – where our mission critical neighbourhoods have clustered.

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<sup>23</sup> van Ham, M et al, Geographies of socio-economic inequality. IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities, 2022

<sup>24</sup> Frontier Economics, The evidence for neighbourhood-focused regeneration, February 2025

Figure 12 - Most deprived local authority districts according to the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation (in descending order of deprivation)



Source: National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

A positive difference was also made outside of London between 2002 and 2008 in neighbourhoods that were part of the New Deal for Communities. These neighbourhoods saw an improvement in 32 of 36 core indicators spanning crime, education, health, worklessness, community and housing and the physical environment. For 26 out of the 27 indicators where significance testing is possible, this change was statistically significant.<sup>25</sup> Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities found a benefit-cost ratio of between 5.08 and 3.13 depending on the methodology used.<sup>26</sup>

Similar positive progress was made in Northern Ireland through its own neighbourhood-based regeneration programme, although a less thorough evaluation means that direct comparison with the New Deal for Communities is not possible.<sup>27</sup> International area-based initiatives such as the East Lake Initiative in Atlanta City and Communities for Children in Australia also show that neighbourhood level interventions can improve outcomes.<sup>28</sup> New evidence has emerged that neighbourhood-based initiatives such as Sure Start have also had a positive effect.<sup>29</sup>

### The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal & New Deal for Communities

The last major neighbourhood policy initiative occurred under the 1997–2010 Labour government, with the development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. This programme began in 1998 with a Social Exclusion Unit report taking stock of what the government had already done to tackle the problems of poor neighbourhoods, both through national programmes and new area programmes such as the New Deal for Communities.<sup>30</sup>

The report kicked off a programme of strategic development and collaborative policy making through 18 Policy Action Teams focused on issues affecting deprived neighbourhoods such as anti social behaviour, unpopular housing, lack of opportunities for young people, and poor access to shops. Two years later, when all these teams had reported, the final National Strategy emerged, supported by new funding allocated in the 2000 spending review.<sup>31 32</sup>

There is a wealth of evaluation evidence and research on the National Strategy, and its component elements. A key headline of these is that during Labour's time inequalities on several targeted outcomes narrowed somewhat between poorer and richer areas.<sup>33</sup> Value for money calculations were also positive: the NDC evaluation (see below) estimated savings at between three and five times the amounts invested and evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund concluded that estimated savings from reductions in worklessness were five times the money spent on this issue.<sup>34</sup> Other evidence on the performance of some mainstream programmes during the 2000s also highlights narrowing gaps between deprived and less deprived areas – for example in relation to teenage pregnancy,<sup>35</sup> and health inequalities.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *The New Deal for Communities Experience: A final assessment*, March 2010

<sup>26</sup> Frontier Economics, *The evidence for neighbourhood-focused regeneration*, February 2025

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Carneiro, P et al, *The Short- and Medium-Term Impacts of Sure Start on Educational Outcomes*. Edited by Judith Payne. London: The Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2024

<sup>30</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (London: SEU, 1998)

<sup>31</sup> Cabinet Office, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal*, 2001

<sup>32</sup> HM Treasury, *Prudent for a Purpose: Building Opportunity and Security for All*, 2000

<sup>33</sup> AMION Consulting, *Evaluation of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Final Report*. (DCLG, 2010); Lupton, R et al, *Labour's Record on Neighbourhood Renewal in England: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 1997–2010: Social Policy in a Cold Climate Working Paper 6* (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), 2013)

<sup>34</sup> York Consulting and others, *Impacts and Outcomes of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund* (Department for Communities and Local Government,

<sup>35</sup> Wallace, M., *Trends in Adolescent Disadvantage: Policy and Outcomes for Young People under Labour, the Coalition, and the Conservatives (1997 to 2019)*. SPDO Research Paper 15. London: London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2023

<sup>36</sup> Barr, B et al, 'Investigating the Impact of the English Health Inequalities Strategy: Time Trend Analysis', *BMJ (Online)*, 358.July (2017), 1–8

The NDC marked a departure from previous initiatives in a number of respects.

1. The NDC was **more targeted** than previous area-based initiatives (ABIs) which were often criticised for being too thinly spread between different places.<sup>14</sup> Only 39 places in England were selected to be part of the programme, each with around 9,900 residents. At the same time, it was also a more **national strategy**, with efforts to be found across the country, not just in a small number of cities.
2. The NDC was more **long-term** than previous ABIs, designated to run for at least ten years, with the hope that a long-term commitment might make more difference, given the policy failure seen in recent decades.<sup>16</sup>
3. The NDC was targeted at a **neighbourhood level**, a more hyperlocal focus than previous initiatives, which had instead sometimes focused on the whole of a city, for example.<sup>1</sup>
4. The NDC would have its own funds, a significant part of the programme sought to influence existing, '**mainstream**', **public services** in a locality. This was driven by two insights.<sup>18</sup> First, though the funds allocated to the NDC were significant, being able to leverage the multitude of other government spending occurring locally would lead the NDC spend to have a much higher 'multiplier' effect. Second, an interest in 'joined up government' in public policy circles at the time; driven by the recognition that government too often worked in isolation when trying to solve problems which are all inevitably intimately connected.
5. The NDC worked **alongside other social infrastructure** such as Sure Start which helped to build the conditions within neighbourhoods to make effective policy change. This infrastructure worked alongside national programs to reduce disadvantage, exclusion and improve schooling, all of which further helped to improve outcomes for those in more disadvantaged areas.

Importantly, for the current government, neighbourhood approaches were critical in the previous Labour Government achieving success in several key social policy outcomes such as youth crime and justice, teenage pregnancy and school absence.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the progress that was made under the previous Labour Government dissipated as policy shifted away from neighbourhoods towards cross-cutting centralised reform programmes. For example, reforms were made to the welfare system through the introduction of Universal Credit, relying on changing incentives at the national level and funding reducing for policies such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund that supported targeted employment programmes (and other service improvements).

These policies also showed that there are some challenges that can only be effectively addressed at a hyperlocal level. For example, we know that diverting young people at risk

of crime requires local social infrastructure such as youth clubs.<sup>38</sup> Although these services require support from the central state, they require local delivery.

Unless government makes a determined effort at a neighbourhood level, there is a danger that increased investment to improve outcomes or centrally driven reforms will fail to deliver results. The stickiness of neighbourhood effects means that the areas we have identified through our mapping exercise could be the quicksand for the government missions. This is why the government needs to take a neighbourhood-based approach to mission delivery, focusing on the mission critical neighbourhoods identified through our mapping exercise.

Government needs to both apply a neighbourhood lens to existing policies as well as develop ideas for how to improve outcomes at a neighbourhood level. This is the subject of our next section.

<sup>37</sup> Wallace, M., Trends in Adolescent Disadvantage: Policy and Outcomes for Young People under Labour, the Coalition, and the Conservatives (1997 to 2019). SPDO Research Paper 15. London: London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2023

<sup>38</sup> Villa, C, *The Effects of Youth Clubs on Education and Crime*. Working paper 24/51. Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2024

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# Think Neighbourhoods – embedding neighbourhoods into policy making

## Putting mission critical neighbourhoods at the heart of policy making

New governments coming into office are often told to think big, but we think a better way is to *think neighbourhoods*.

At the forefront of this shift must be **prioritising the mission critical neighbourhoods** that we have identified in our analysis. Over six hundred neighbourhoods is too many for any government to transform at once, but it should be possible to begin developing a policy agenda that focuses on 100 – 200 neighbourhoods in this first Parliament.

This does not mean pitting areas against each other or ignoring the challenges in those places which have multiple disadvantages not simply in relation to the missions but across other policy challenges.

Longer term, we need to find ways to create the conditions for every neighbourhood to flourish. However, given the fiscal challenges facing the new government, some form of prioritisation is inevitable.

The previous government was criticised because of a lack of clarity around the selection of areas being prioritised for “levelling up”.<sup>39</sup> There was also a lack of clarity about the size of areas being targeted, sometimes these were regions, sometimes cities or towns, sometimes individual town centres or high streets. This not only created considerable confusion but also meant that policy changes and investment programmes were not coherent, dissipating resources and reducing the impact of interventions.<sup>40</sup>

Every neighbourhood will require support to deliver the missions, however, different areas will require different types of policy interventions. Given the scale of the challenges as well as multiple interlocking policy problems in the mission critical neighbourhoods, these places will require comprehensive packages of support to invest in the social infrastructure and public service capabilities to improve outcomes. Policy makers will need to work with local people to build and strengthen the neighbourhood assets on the ground. By contrast, mission support neighbourhoods will still require enabling policy interventions focused at identifying and providing wrap-around support for people and households at a neighbourhood level, but are working from a stronger starting point. A Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework will help policy makers to understand what neighbourhoods need and begin work on developing typologies for policy development for different types of neighbourhoods.

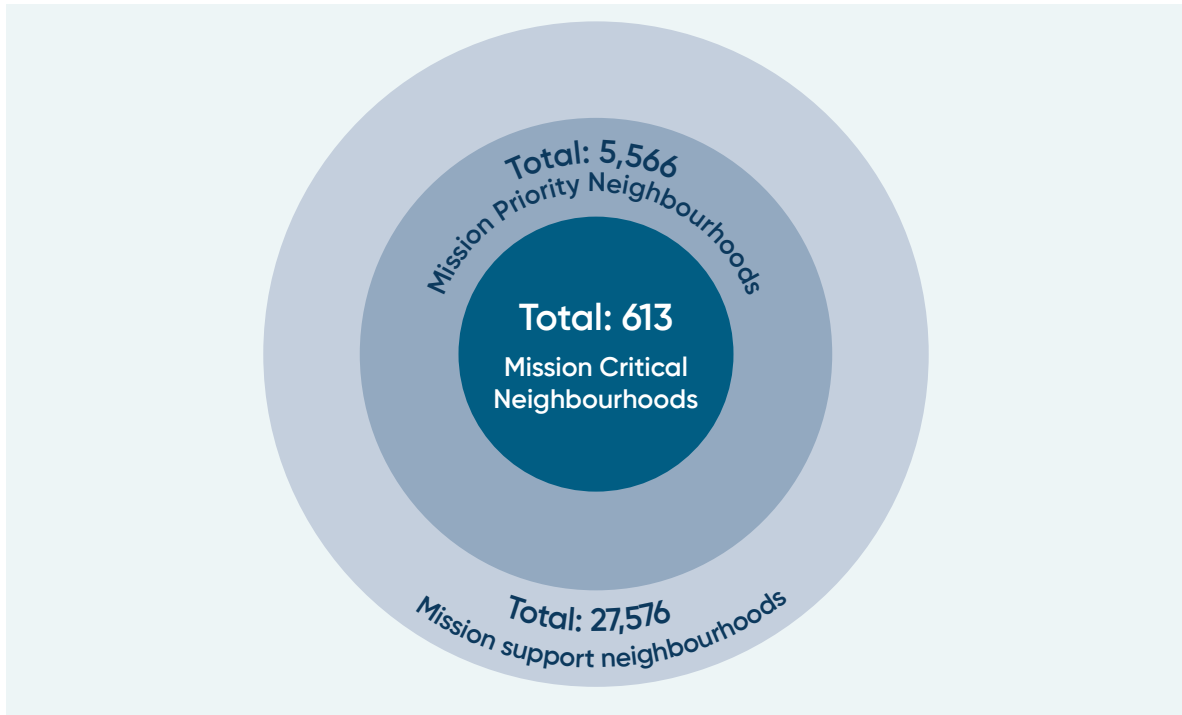
We must not repeat the mistakes of the past learn the lessons from the and put in place a clear framework for identifying and prioritising places that need support for mission delivery. We propose the government should develop and publish a **Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework (MDPF)**.

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<sup>39</sup> House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee. *Funding for Levelling Up: Sixth Report of Session 2022–23*

<sup>40</sup> Pope, T et al, *What Levelling Up Policies Will Drive Economic Change? The Need for a Long-Term Focus on Skills and Cities*. Institute for Government, 2022

Figure 13 - Proposed Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework



Source: ICON analysis

This would rank all neighbourhoods across the area according to the scale of the challenge they face in delivering the government's missions. This would provide a transparent process for allocating resources and developing targeted investment programmes for neighbourhoods. It would also provide a tool for combined authorities, local authorities and other public agencies to coordinate resources at a hyper-local level where it can have most impact.

The government should take a phased approach to mission delivery at a neighbourhood level, ensuring that resources are concentrated at a sufficient scale within neighbourhoods as well as giving time for interventions to bed in and develop the necessary social infrastructure to make places "mission ready".

Data should also be published through a Neighbourhood Mission Delivery Dashboard to enable the public and other stakeholders to hold all parts of the state to account for delivery of the missions within their area. Given the scale of the state, we know that it is challenging for the state to concentrate on smaller neighbourhood level interventions. A

Neighbourhood Mission Delivery Dashboard would help to keep the state's feet to the fire and make it harder for it to drift from the need to improve outcomes at a neighbourhood level.

### **There is no shortage of evidence or ideas on how to improve neighbourhoods**

According to Frontier Economics' comprehensive literature review on behalf of ICON, "the evidence suggests that well-designed neighbourhood interventions can have significant, positive impacts across an array of socio-economic outcomes: reduced crime, improved health, better educational attainment, greater pride-in-place, higher sense of community, and improved housing."<sup>41</sup> We can also learn from a wide range of programmes from the UK (e.g. New Deal for Communities and Big Local) as well as international programmes, there is no shortage of inspiration. Despite their varying objectives and country-specific contexts, we can learn lessons from historical and international examples, including the importance of capacity building, empowering the voice and decision making of local residents and building social capital.

<sup>41</sup> Frontier Economics, The evidence for neighbourhood-focused regeneration, February 2025



Figure 14 – Policy recommendations for effective neighbourhood interventions

Policy recommendations for effective neighbourhood interventions		
Programme structure and management	Community engagement and capacity building	Proportion of neighbourhoods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide <b>clear programme goals and criteria for inclusion</b></li> <li>• Create a <b>baseline and collect data from the start</b> to ensure high-quality monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>• Consider <b>succession planning</b> from the start of the programme</li> <li>• Include <b>flexibility</b> and learn from what works</li> <li>• Provide <b>long-term</b> (10+ years), <b>multi-year funding settlements</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate <b>community views</b> when setting neighbourhood <b>boundaries</b></li> <li>• Undertake significant and ongoing levels of <b>community engagement</b></li> <li>• Consider how best to engage <b>hard-to-reach groups</b></li> <li>• Build sufficient <b>capacity in anchor institutions</b></li> <li>• Build <b>capacity in local residents</b> and clearly <b>define their role</b></li> <li>• Devolve <b>decision making to anchor institutions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Displacement effects</b> should be mitigated where possible</li> <li>• Link neighbourhoods into economically successful areas and <b>wider economic strategies</b></li> </ul>

Source: Frontier Economics

Figure 14 provides some initial insights from Frontier Economics’ review of previous neighbourhood level interventions. This evidence review has found that programme structure, community engagement and capacity building as well as integrating neighbourhoods into economic strategies have a pivotal role to play.

We must not just see policy purely through the lens of specific funded neighbourhood-based programmes, although they have a critical role to play. We must also consider how we can encourage all parts of government to *think neighbourhoods* through the way that we fund and deliver existing public services which can have a significant impact on the outcomes. The last ‘golden period’ of neighbourhood policy in the 1990s and 2000s was as much about embedding neighbourhood thinking across government policy, through vehicles such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, and embedding neighbourhood level analysis into funding distribution as it was specific neighbourhood programmes.

In the mission critical neighbourhoods that we have identified, the state will be already spending tens of millions, in some cases hundreds of millions, of pounds on public services and investment programmes which we must leverage to improve outcomes at a neighbourhood level. Moreover, there are opportunities to collaborate with local

authorities and combined authorities to find ways to identify and support improvements at a neighbourhood level. In some cases, local authorities are further ahead in their thinking about neighbourhoods with areas such as Stoke, Wigan and Camden developing approaches that think neighbourhood.

In our work, we have found it hard to access data to enable us to understand the level of resources being put into individual neighbourhoods. If the government is going to target resources at mission critical neighbourhoods, it needs to understand the flow of funding and resources already going into these places. As part of the Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework, the government should also commission a **Neighbourhood Expenditure Audit (NEA) for mission critical neighbourhoods** to track how public services such as the NHS, schools and other public investment programmes are distributed at the hyper-local level. This will also help to identify, similar to the New Deal for Communities, how existing public expenditure can be leveraged on the ground and whether it is effectively targeted. It would also provide a framework to trial Total Place-style funding arrangements, bringing together multiple funding streams at a neighbourhood level and creating opportunities to pool resources at a neighbourhood level to improve outcomes.

## Building social capital to make neighbourhoods mission ready

As we have noted, previous governments have tried to numerous programmes to improve outcomes that are related to the new government's missions. Whilst there are multiple factors that can impair the ability of neighbourhoods to thrive, there is strong evidence to suggest that the biggest barrier is a lack of the right kinds of social capital.

For example, there is overlap between those places that we have identified as mission critical neighbourhoods and areas of fraying social fabric.<sup>42</sup>

The table below summarises some of the key evidence on the importance of social capital across four of the government's five missions and why boosting social capital is necessary to make progress across the missions.

Mission	Impact of social capital
<b>Kickstart economic growth</b>	A study by UK economist Paul Whitley in 2000 found social capital could have an even bigger effect on rates of growth than national differences in human capital. <sup>43</sup> A report by Professor David Halpern and Andy Haldane has found strong evidence that increasing social capital leads to higher rates of economic performance. <sup>44</sup>
<b>Take back our streets</b>	A major study found that social capital reduces crime by influencing public norms that affect the emotional components of morality. Specifically, they argue that social capital fosters feelings of guilt and shame about criminal behaviour, which raises the perceived cost of committing crimes and thus deters individuals from offending. <sup>45</sup> Research from the Netherlands has also found that higher levels of social capital reduce overall crime rates. <sup>46</sup>
<b>Break down barriers to opportunity</b>	An academic study in England found that higher levels of social capital, in the form of family social support, were significantly associated with higher odds of achieving good GCSE results. <sup>47</sup> A comprehensive review of social capital's influence on the labour market in 2005 found that it had a significant positive impact on finding work. <sup>48</sup>
<b>Build an NHS fit for the future</b>	A major review of 145 studies on social capital and physical health found a positive relationship between higher levels of social capital and health. <sup>49</sup> There is also evidence from the United States that increasing social capital can tackle growing levels of obesity. <sup>50</sup> Mental health can also be improved through improving social connectedness, a key aspect of social capital. <sup>51</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Tanner, W et al, *The State of our Social Fabric: measuring the nature of community over time and geography*, Onward, 2020

<sup>43</sup> Whiteley, P.F., *Economic Growth and Social Capital*, Political Studies 48, 443–466, 2000

<sup>44</sup> Halpern, D & Haldane, A, *Social Capital: The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, Demos, 2025

<sup>45</sup> Buonanno, P. et al 'Does Social Capital Reduce Crime?', *The Journal of Law and Economics*, 52(1), pp. 145–170. 8 2009

<sup>46</sup> Akçomak, I.S. & ter Weel, B. 'The impact of social capital on crime: Evidence from the Netherlands', *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 42(1), pp. 323–340, 2012

<sup>47</sup> Rothon, C, et al, 'Family Social Support, Community "Social Capital" and Adolescents' Mental Health and Educational Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study in England'. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47 (5): 697–709, 2012

<sup>48</sup> Brook, K. 'Labour Market Participation: The Influence of Social Capital'. *Labour Market Trends* 3 (1): 113–23, 2005

<sup>49</sup> Rodgers, J et al, 'Social Capital and Physical Health: An Updated Review of the Literature for 2007–2018'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 2019

<sup>50</sup> Kim, D. et al, US state- and county-level social capital in relation to obesity and physical inactivity: A multilevel, multivariable analysis, *Social Science & Medicine*, 2006

<sup>51</sup> Wickramaratne, P. et al, Social connectedness as a determinant of mental health: A scoping review, 2022

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If a lack of social capital risks undermined progress on the delivery of the missions, we need to find a way to create and distribute it effectively. Social infrastructure is the means to generating social capital and the foundation for neighbourhoods to mobilise themselves to become mission ready.

The government must put rebuilding social infrastructure at the neighbourhood level at the centre of its approach to mission delivery. Crucially, rebuilding social infrastructure needs to happen simultaneously with government programmes and investments as well as improving public services to deliver the missions. This is because social capital is essential to both ensure these programmes, services and investments reach those people that need them most but also to create the shift in norms and behaviours that make improved outcomes self-sustaining.

Social infrastructure is critical in building the social capital that places need, including leveraging resources from other parts of the community and beyond such as bidding for government or philanthropic investment. The New Deal for Communities was successful in part because it was able to build the capabilities of local areas to be able to engage with other public agencies and investors in places.

## Putting neighbourhood policies to the test

Prioritisation, data and expenditure audits will help to lay the foundations for delivering the missions at a neighbourhood level. However, more will need to be done to make neighbourhoods mission ready. It is critical we identify those policies and approaches that are more effective in creating the conditions for progress, particularly in building the social capital and social infrastructure that places need.

As we carry our work forward, ICON proposes to identify potential policy solutions that meet four policy tests to ensure that we focus resources on those policies with the most promise.

These tests are:

### 1. Strategy

Policies to improve outcomes at a neighbourhood level should address the core priorities of the government (e.g. the missions) so that they can be effectively integrated into the Spending Review and other aspects of government policy making. Neighbourhood policy should not be isolated or seen as a 'luxury'. Although there are strong moral and ethical reasons for neighbourhood interventions, policies must be able to compete on the basis that they can effectively deliver on the core priorities of the government of the day.

### 2. Evidence

Evaluating neighbourhood level outcomes can be challenging. At ICON's evidence gathering sessions in St George's House there was considerable debate about what evidence can be reasonably obtained at a neighbourhood level. However, we have seen through evaluations of the New Deal for Communities that policies can be effectively measured. There are also several ongoing academic research programmes and ICON itself is contributing to strengthening the evidence base for neighbourhood policy.

Amid a challenging fiscal environment, government needs to be careful about where it invests time and resources. Priority should be given to those solutions that can demonstrate the most robust evidential base.

### 3. Scale

Every individual neighbourhood is different and it is important that policies are adaptable to conditions on the ground. We need to identify models of policy delivery that can be replicated at scale given the number of neighbourhoods that are lagging behind on the government's mission priorities.

Policies which can demonstrate their ability to operate across a range of areas and circumstances should be prioritised. For example, we have seen through our visits how the model developed through the Big Local programme is both something that can be delivered across dozens of places simultaneously and is also open to local

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adaptation. We need more policies of this type, if we are going to make significant progress on improving outcomes at a neighbourhood level.

#### 4. Community empowerment

All the evidence is clear that policies which do not give local residents a voice and a say over decision making are less effective. We have seen through our visits, our focus groups and our polling that people are crying out for their views to be taken seriously. Moreover, the theory of change that underpins a neighbourhood approach to policy delivery relies on being able to leverage the energy and ideas of people living in the most disadvantaged places. It is only possible to do this if policies are designed in a way that truly empowers the community.

#### Quick wins for mission critical neighbourhoods

ICON will be making its final report later this year. However, government does not need to wait for our final report before making changes to think neighbourhoods. We believe that there are a number of 'quick wins' that the government can make.

There are existing policies which could be reformed immediately to embed a neighbourhood approach. For example, Budget 2024 committed to reforming the £1.5bn Long-Term Plan for Towns which was first announced under the previous government. Although the Long-Term Plan for Towns has a number of admirable features, for example its long term funding commitment, we think that there are significant opportunities for improvement. At present, the funding is spread over much too wide an area and not enough focus is being given to targeting at a neighbourhood level and embedding neighbourhoods into the decision making process. As the government seeks to reform this programme it could do more to give guidance and support to local authorities to *think neighbourhoods*.

A similar approach could be taken with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, if the government decides to continue with this fund, or as part of a new community-led regeneration programme as has been recommended by Local Trust.<sup>52</sup> This could be targeted at building social infrastructure within the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, supporting cross-sector collaboration between residents, local services and civil society organisations to better understand and address hyper-local need.

Further analysis by ICON of the HLMN suggests that doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods – those that are highly deprived but also experience a severe lack of social infrastructure and social capital – are typically furthest behind on nearly all of the different mission domains as Figure 14 shows.

On economic growth and health, doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods typically demonstrate far higher levels of hyper-local need even when compared against other neighbourhoods that are ordinarily highly deprived but are not suffering from a severe lack of social infrastructure or social capital. Conversely, neighbourhoods that are not deprived but experience a lack of social infrastructure and social capital tend to demonstrate higher levels of need compared to neighbourhoods that are neither high deprivation or low social infrastructure and social capital.

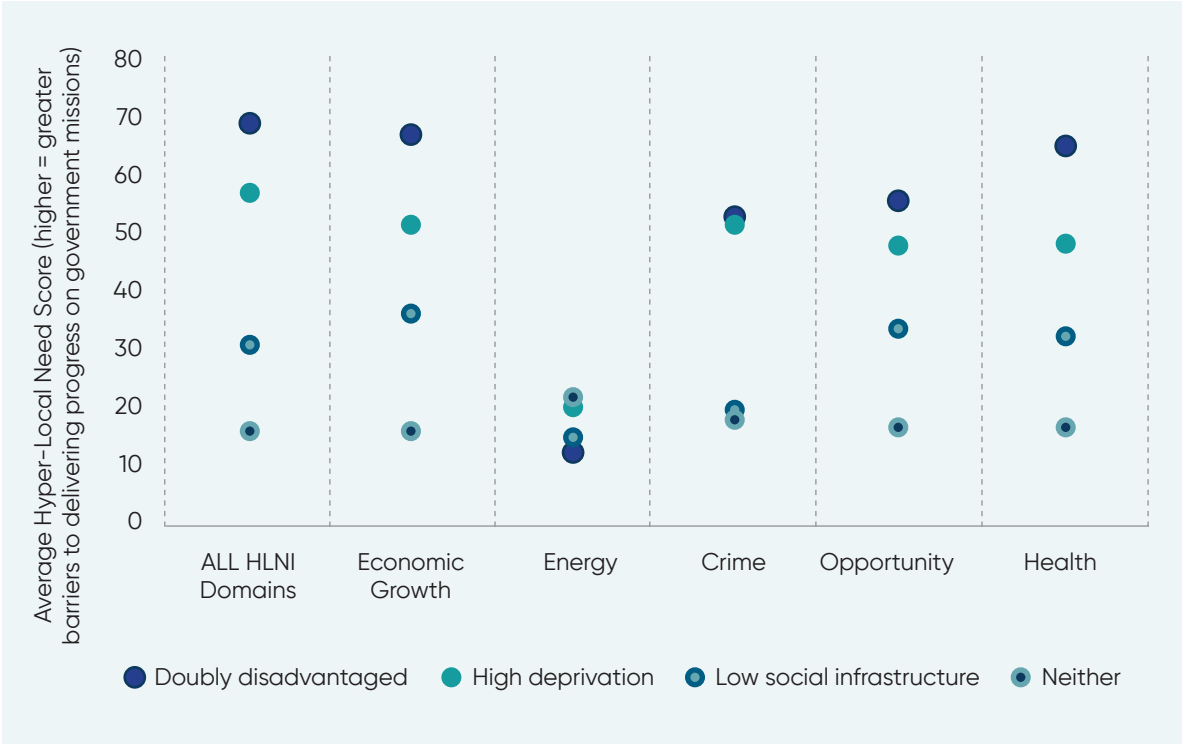
The NHS' new 10-year plan also provides an opportunity to embed neighbourhood thinking in the service of one of the biggest challenges facing the country, growing levels of ill health. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has called for a shift to prevention and a neighbourhood care service to help deliver this. It is vital that this involves a truly neighbourhood based approach, creating dedicated structures at a neighbourhood level and devolving power and funding to the neighbourhood level as proposed by the NHS Confederation, Local Trust and PPL.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Local Trust, Evidence to the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, February 2025

<sup>53</sup> NHS Confederation, Local Trust & PPL, Delivering a neighbourhood health service: policy proposals, February 2025

**Figure 14 - Breakdown of Hyper-Local Need Measure by levels of neighbourhood deprivation and social infrastructure**



Source: ICON analysis of OCSI Hyper-Local Need Measure; Indices of Multiple Deprivation; OCSI Community Need Index

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# Unleashing the potential of our neighbourhoods

Throughout our initial work, we have found considerable enthusiasm both within government and, more importantly, within local communities for a renewed focus on our neighbourhoods.

Our current approach to policy change is simply not working.

We believe that there is strong evidence that by overlooking the neighbourhood dimension, policy makers have ignored critical information and missed an opportunity to leverage the most powerful resource for renewal: our people. We must unleash the potential within our neighbourhoods.

Research has found that investments in neighbourhoods, particularly social infrastructure, can make a positive return relatively quickly, with some effects being felt within the current Parliament.<sup>54</sup>

However, this does not mean that we should take our time.

We need to make our neighbourhoods 'mission ready' if we are serious about delivering a decade of national renewal. Every moment we delay, the harder delivering progress on the missions becomes.

We have also seen first hand the call from people living in our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods for government to give them the tools by which they can improve their local areas. Ignoring this would not only be a waste but it also risks stoking the rising levels of political disaffection that we have seen in recent years.

We have been heartened by the engagement of people and organisations from across the private sector, civil society and from people directly. There are no shortage of willing partners to engage with the government if it decides to embark on an ambitious programme for neighbourhood renewal.

Thinking neighbourhoods is not simply a question of money, it is shift in culture and mindset.

We know that we are making a big ask from government to undertake the biggest change in state policy development for over a decade.

It is hard because the state has a blind spot when it comes to neighbourhoods, with these places being obscured as bigger institutional actors make their case. Politicians and senior policy makers need to make an extra effort to *think neighbourhood*.

However, the prize if we can get this right is enormous.

We know that many of the barriers in resolving the big policy challenges of our time are to be found at the neighbourhood level, from feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence to the lack of access to the infrastructure and support needed to make a change.

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<sup>54</sup> Frontier Economics, The Impacts of Social Infrastructure Investment: A Report for Local Trust, June 2021

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If we can redesigning the way that we govern to consider neighbourhood need, targeting resources at those areas that need it most and putting investment into policies that create that unleash the power of our neighbourhoods then we can achieve a decade of national renewal, deliver the missions and give people confidence in our politics once again.

We think that every policy or funding proposal should have to answer a simple question: will this work in our mission critical neighbourhoods?

We have seen in recent weeks how government can be buffeted by unforeseen events. No one knows what might happen in a few weeks time, let alone a few months.

Now is the time to take the initiative and seize the neighbourhood moment.

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# Annex A: List of evidence submissions

AdFree Cities  
AllChild  
Charities Aid Foundation  
Church Works  
Community Land Trust Network  
Community Organisers  
Data for Action  
Durham University  
FoodSEqual-Health - Research and Report  
Frontier Economics  
Future Governance Forum  
Groundwork UK  
Hull City Council  
Key Cities  
Libraries Connected  
Locality  
London Borough of Camden  
Local Trust  
Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group (MUARG) - University of Manchester  
Manchester Urban Institute (MUI)

Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH)  
National Association of Local Councils  
National Trust  
Neighbourhood Democracy Movement  
Neighbourlylab  
Northern Housing Consortium  
Northumbria University  
Pathway Housing Solutions  
Power to Change  
Public First  
Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH)  
Sovereign Network Group (SNG)  
Sport England  
StreetGames  
Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)  
University of Manchester  
Volunteering Matters  
Young Foundation  
We're right here  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
#BeeWell - University of Manchester



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# Annex B: List of ICON visits

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## Newington Estate, Thanet (South East) – 6th December 2024

Commissioners in attendance:  
*Baroness Hilary Armstrong*  
*Matt Leach*



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## Podsmead Estate, Gloucester (South West) – 7th February 2025

Commissioners in attendance:  
*Baroness Hilary Armstrong*  
*Matt Leach*  
*Angie Wright*



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## Scotlands and Bushbury Hill, Wolverhampton (West Midlands) – 10th January 2025

Commissioners in attendance:  
*Baroness Hilary Armstrong*  
*Matt Leach*  
*Professor David Halpern CBE*

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## Braunstone and St Matthews, Leicester (East Midlands) – 17th January 2025

Commissioners in attendance:  
*Baroness Hilary Armstrong*  
*Matt Leach*  
*Professor David Halpern CBE*  
*Angie Wright*



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## Blackpool (North West) – 28th February 2025

Commissioners in attendance:  
*Baroness Hilary Armstrong*  
*Matt Leach*  
*Alun Francis*

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# Annex C: Polling and Focus Groups Research Methodology

## Polling

Public First conducted a nationally representative survey of 4,051 adults in England, between the 31st January and the 5th February 2025. Results were weighted to be representative of the England population on interlocked age, gender, socio-economic grade and region. Participants provided their postcode in order to link their attitudes with ICON's Hyper-Local Needs Measure.

Results presented in this report, unless otherwise specified, reflect the findings of this survey.

Questions covered topics including:

- Demographics of the respondent
- Political attitudes of the respondent, and the issues they are most concerned about
- The community spaces and facilities that exist in their neighbourhood
- How they feel about their neighbourhood; whether it is declining, whether they are proud
- Levels of community involvement, including how much they interact with their neighbours

## Focus Groups

Public First also ran focus groups alongside the polling. We selected constituencies which included neighbourhoods with a high level of hyper-local need - selected using the Hyper-Local Need Measure - in a range of areas. These included coastal, town and city locations across England.

All seats selected were also deemed as electorally important 'swing seats'. Participants in Leeds East, Wakefield & Rothwell, West Bromwich and Blackpool South voted Conservative in 2019, Labour in 2024 and are now open to voting for all of Reform, Labour and Conservatives. Brighton Kemptown & Peacehaven participants voted Labour in 2024 and are now open to voting for all of Labour, Green and Lib Dems. All participants were working class (C2D), in a range of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs.

Method: 75 minutes, online

Recruitment: 8 residents, working class

Completed Groups, Location & Age:

- Brighton Kemptown & Peacehaven (50-75)
- Leeds East (50-75)
- West Bromwich (25-49)
- Wakefield and Rothwell (50-75)
- Blackpool South (25-49)

The discussions focused on how they saw the state of their neighbourhoods, the causes of perceived neighbourhood decline, and priorities for change.



