

# Socially distant?

Community Spirit in the Age of Covid-19



# Contents

| Section  | Page      |
|--|-----------|
| <b>What is community spirit? .....</b>               | <b>3</b>  |
| Our Definition .....                                 | 3         |
| Methodology .....                                    | 4         |
| Why Community Spirit Matters for Public Health ..... | 5         |
| <b>2: Community Spirit Over Time.....</b>            | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3: Covid-19's Impact on Community Spirit.....</b> | <b>7</b>  |
| Social activities .....                              | 9         |
| Trust .....  | 9         |
| Impact on Health Inequalities.....                   | 9         |
| Impact on People with Mental Health Conditions.....  | 10        |
| <b>4: Where Next for Community Spirit?.....</b>      | <b>12</b> |
| Calls to Action .....                                | 13        |
| Conclusion .....                                     | 18        |
| <b>References .....</b>                              | <b>19</b> |



# Executive summary

- We investigated how community spirit in the UK changed during the first Covid-19 lockdown, and the impact that has had in turn on health and wellbeing. This follows a two-year project, in partnership with Locality and supported by the Health Foundation, to create and test a framework to define and measure 'community spirit'.
- On the whole, community spirit increased over the Spring lockdown, with nearly half the public saying they chatted more with their neighbours (48%), that people in their neighbourhood had come together for the common good more than before (47%), and that they had supported local businesses more (47%).
- But many people were fearing for the future of community spirit in their area with over half concerned that venues used for community events and activities as well as businesses on their local high street will close because of Covid-19 (56% and 60% respectively).
- Drawing on our project work in developing the community spirit framework, we developed a series of policy recommendations building on the experiences of our case study communities. These calls aim to safeguard and strengthen the community spirit and feelings of solidarity which communities saw emerge. The three that received most public backing when polled were:
  - More investment in green spaces, like community gardens and play parks, to be used for activities and socialising;
  - Public sector institutions, like local councils and schools, to purchase goods and services from local businesses to stimulate the area's economy;
  - Setting up community hubs to provide activities and services focused on health and wellbeing.
- The rise in community spirit was felt disproportionately by high earners, home-owners and those living in rural areas. Renters, urban-dwellers, and those in low-skilled occupations experienced less of an increase. This is likely compounding the health inequalities that both pre-date the pandemic and have been exacerbated by it.
- People reporting mental health problems were hit hardest by the psychological effects of lockdown, and they benefited the least from the general rise in measures of community spirit.
- Three in ten (31%) reported the psychological toll of lockdown had affected their relationships and this rose to over half (54%) among those with mental health conditions.
- Nearly three in five (57%) reported experiencing anxiety about socialising with people outside their household, rising to four in five (79%) among those with a disability.
- Measures to mitigate Covid-19 have also frayed the social fabric, with three in four (75%) of the public saying they do not trust others to observe government guidance on social distancing and hygiene measures.

# 1: What is Community Spirit?

We all want to live in an area with ‘community spirit’ – somewhere where neighbours look out for each other and have fun together; somewhere where people feel safe, accepted and valued. Yet, although we might know community spirit when we see it, it can be hard to precisely define and measure, and, as a result, intentionally improve. In December 2018, the Royal Society for Public Health, in partnership with Locality, was supported by the Health Foundation to create a framework for measuring community spirit and to develop a series of resources to enable individuals, groups or organisations to co-produce a plan for improving it in their area. As we began piloting these tools with six grassroots organisations, Covid-19 hit the UK and soon revealed in stark terms the need for solidarity and social trust, not just for their own sake, but also as vital foundations for a collective response to external shocks.

Covid-19 has also had an impact on our relationships and sense of community: social lives have been disrupted, large gatherings cancelled, and working from home and restrictions on travel abroad have grounded many people in one place for months at a time. Local and regional lockdowns have also meant that certain areas have been hit harder, both by the virus itself and the economic, social and psychological effects of lockdown.<sup>1</sup> But, at the same time, there has been much talk of the UK’s ‘Blitz spirit’ with neighbours working together to meet the needs of the vulnerable who had to shield in their own homes.

We decided to further investigate what these changes meant for community spirit for people across the UK by surveying the public about how they related to their local area before the UK went into lockdown in March, and what had changed over that time. Looking to the future, we proposed a series of policies intended to build community spirit – growing from our engagement with grassroots organisations – and asked another set of survey respondents to assess how effective they thought each would be in supporting and sustaining a positive community spirit. This report brings these findings together with the framework developed in our broader Community Spirit project, which is explained in full in our report *The Community Spirit Level: A framework for measuring, improving and sustaining community spirit*.

## Our Definition

The first step of our project with Locality was to develop a working definition of community spirit. Although ‘community’ can refer to groups which share an interest, or a professional, religious or ethnic identity, for instance, our focus has been on place-based communities. This process began with a literature review to identify previous attempts to operationalise and measure community spirit, and to find related concepts and indicators. We then conducted a survey, with 657 respondents, to identify what meanings people attached to the phrase ‘community spirit’ and to test the measures identified from the literature. The working definition we arrived at was:

“THE FEELINGS OF CONNECTION AND BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY AND OUR ABILITY TO COME TOGETHER TO IMPROVE WELLBEING FOR EVERYBODY.”



It also became clear that community spirit looks different in different places and contexts and that people should be able to reflect collectively on how it is manifest in their area. To enable this process, we also identified through the survey and literature review four domains that make up community spirit and ways of appraising each:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>SENSE OF BELONGING</b></p> <p>The feeling of fitting in and having a place within a group or community and, as such, they are willing to support its improvement or development.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Feelings of belonging to one's immediate neighbourhood.</p>   | <p><b>QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <p>The feelings of connection, reciprocity and mutual support between members of the community.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> Feelings of loneliness and isolation; frequency of face-to-face contact with family, friends and neighbours; perceptions of the extent of social support one can call upon.</p>   |
| <p><b>COHESION AND INCLUSION</b></p> <p>The ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together, rather than in conflict. Individuals in an area are treated equally (in terms of their access to services and medical care, for example) and the diverse nature of communities is respected and appreciated.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> Feelings of trust in people in the neighbourhood; perceptions of diversity in the neighbourhood; the level of integration of people from different backgrounds.</p> | <p><b>COLLECTIVE ACTION</b></p> <p>People coming together to tackle an issue, support others or improve their community. It involves people giving their time and/or other assets for the common good, for example through voluntarily running a community service, or peer support scheme.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> Level of involvement in civic engagement (participation in democratic processes, consultations and activism) and social action; rates of volunteering.</p> |

## Methodology

For this report into the impact of Covid-19 on community spirit, we used the framework and measures for assessing each domain to frame a series of questions to put to the public. We commissioned Yonder to survey 2,000 adults, who made up a representative sample of the UK population with regards to country, region and social class, between 11 and 13 September 2020. Respondents were asked to assess the community spirit in their area before the UK went into lockdown in March and to evaluate how that had changed since. We also asked specific questions relating to the effects of that lockdown on, for instance, their mental state and their social activities. In a second survey, carried out by Yonder between 30 September and 1 October, we put a list of ten policy proposals to strengthen community spirit to another 2,000 representative members of the public and asked them how

much difference they thought each would have on the community spirit in their area. The full list of questions posed in the first survey and the ten policy proposals included in the second, along with further detail about our methodology, are included in the annex. Also included in this report are case studies from organisations involved in our Community Spirit pilot project run in partnership with Locality.

## Why Community Spirit Matters for Public Health

Community spirit is not just a nice-to-have; it is increasingly recognised as pivotal for health and wellbeing. Social relationships have a profound effect on our health behaviours: loneliness is a risk factor for obesity<sup>2</sup> and people are more likely

to smoke and less likely to be physically active when feeling lonely.<sup>3</sup> Loneliness has also been shown to be connected to depression, poor sleep quality, accelerated cognitive decline, increased risk of stroke and coronary heart disease, and impaired immunity at every stage of life.<sup>4</sup> A 2019 study, based on data from over 580,000 adults in the U.S. found that social isolation doubled the risk of premature death among Black participants and increased it by 60-84% among White participants.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, people who have strong social relationships are, on average, 50% more likely to survive life-threatening illness than people with weaker social relationships.<sup>6</sup> The physical environment and socio-economic make-up of neighbourhoods also has a bearing on public health. People living in the most deprived neighbourhoods spend more of their lives with disability and die earlier than people living in the most affluent.<sup>7</sup>

The power of community spirit to impact health can also be seen as an opportunity, as it can help to reduce health inequalities. In areas affected by poverty and other forms of social disadvantage, strong and supportive relationships have been found to be a buffer against worse health outcomes.<sup>8</sup> However, there is robust evidence to suggest that community spirit is weakest where it is most needed: among disadvantaged groups who typically experience worse health. People

living in deprived areas, on average, rank lower on measures of civic participation, social and political trust than do those living in wealthier areas. The 2010 Marmot Review showed that just under one fifth (19%) of people living in the most deprived areas of England have a severe lack of social support, compared to 12% in the least deprived areas.

Similarly, recent editions of the Government's annual Community Life survey (which covers England)<sup>9</sup> have found that people in more deprived areas, compared to those in less deprived areas, were less likely to:

- Agree that their area was one where people from different backgrounds get on well;
- Agree that people in their neighbourhood pulled together to improve the area (75% compared to 88%);
- Chat with their neighbours (66% compared to 79%);
- Feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood (57% compared to 70%);
- Have taken part in a civic consultation (15% compared to 25%), social action (11% compared to 19%) or formal volunteering (33% compared to 44%).<sup>10</sup>



## 2: Community Spirit Over Time

As well as being unevenly distributed, various markers of community spirit have been in decline over recent decades, and despite interventions by governments and the voluntary and community sector, this trend has continued. The declining rates of social and political trust and civic engagement point to what U.S. sociologist Robert Putnam considered a decline in 'social capital' (networks of relationships characterised by trust and reciprocity).<sup>11</sup> One effect of such a decline, according to Putnam, is that communities are less able to deal with emergency situations, such as the Covid-19 outbreak. Therefore, how community spirit has changed over time is important background to understanding the significance of the events of 2020 and interventions for the future.

One facet of community spirit identified in our framework is collective action, and one indication that this has declined over recent decades comes from the drop in membership of institutions which were the backbone of mid-twentieth century society. For example, membership of tenants' and residents' associations fell by 38% between 1993 and 2017, to just 6%, and over the same period, membership of working men's and social clubs has fallen by one quarter to just 10%.<sup>12</sup> Party-political engagement, another marker of collective action, has also reduced. Despite the UK's population having grown by 17 million since the mid-1950s, the number of people belonging to a political party has fallen by 75% since 1953, from 3.8 million to 983,000. Voter turnout has also been in long-term decline since its peak in 1950 at 83.9%, reaching a historic low of less than 60% in 2001 and now standing at 67.3%.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the proportion of workers belonging to trade unions has halved since 1979, to just 23.5%.<sup>14</sup>

More vividly, events ranging from the Pennine mill town riots in 2001 to the EU referendum in 2016 have seemingly revealed Britain to be a fractured, even polarised, society. Accordingly, political and third-sector initiatives like former Prime Minister David Cameron's 'Big Society', the Jo Cox Foundation's 'Great Get Together' and the Eden Communities Project's 'Big Lunch' have aimed at improving community cohesion. Yet there is evidence that these efforts have failed to turn back the tide. Findings again from the Community Life survey<sup>15</sup> show a decline over recent years in the number of people in England who:

- Feel people in their neighbourhood can be trusted, from 48% in 2013-4 to 40% in 2019-20;
- Believe the people in their neighbourhood pull together to improve the area, from 77% in 2008-9 to 59% in 2019-20;
- Borrow things from, or exchange favours with, their neighbours, from 42% in 2013-4 to 35% in 2019-20;
- Report being involved in social action (including, for example, setting up a new community service, running a local service on a voluntary basis, stopping the closure of a service or something happening in local area, or helping to organise a street party or community event) at least once in the last 12 months, from 23% in 2012-3 to 15% in 2018-9.

It might be hypothesised that this change over time is a result of younger generations emerging who hold to different values from their forebears, thereby diluting the strength of the nation's community spirit. However, our survey found that 18-24 year olds were the **most** likely to have been engaged in social and leisure activities, social action and volunteering in their community. For example:

- Nearly half (49%) of respondents said they had never volunteered in their local community, but this figure was highest amongst 55-64 year olds and those aged over 65 (52%) and lowest amongst those aged 18-24 (40%);



- 57% of people said they have never been involved in activism in their community (e.g. signing a petition, writing to their MP, or taking part in a demonstration about a local issue), but this average masked a 20 percentage point difference between 18-24 year olds and 55-64 year olds (44% vs 65%).

The factors involved in the decline of community spirit are thus broader than generational difference, and targeted interventions at improving it need to include people of all age groups. Some suggestions of ways forward are included in the final section of this report.

Alongside this appreciable decline in measures of civic participation, there is often the perception that community spirit was stronger in the past, and a lack of confidence in the extent of solidarity today by comparison. For instance, 68% of respondents in a 2014 poll by the Fabian Society believed that community spirit in Britain had declined over their lifetime. Likewise, Edelman's Trust Barometer (2020) found that the UK public's biggest concern – selected by 39% of respondents – was that people were becoming less tolerant of others and more extreme in their views.<sup>16</sup> This was rated higher than uncertainty about the UK's trading relationship with the EU, the divide between rich and poor getting bigger, and climate change. When the focus shifts to people's local neighbourhoods, as recorded in the Community Life survey (2020), nearly twice as many people say their area has become worse to live in over the last two years than the number who say it has improved (26% vs 14%). The proportion who think their area has become worse has increased from one in five in 2013/14 to one in four in 2018/19.<sup>17</sup>

**49%** of our survey respondents said they have never volunteered in their local community and **57%** said they have never been involved in activism with their local community.

One 'collective memory' embedded in British folklore which is relevant to how the public perceives the change in community spirit is that of 'Blitz spirit'. During the Second World War, it is widely believed, the people of Britain 'kept calm and carried on' through nine months of bombing, continuing to go to work even when it meant walking through streets which had been obliterated the night before. This sense of solidarity lies largely dormant in normal times – as the narrative runs – but when crisis strikes the resolute spirit is recalled, and the British people's ability to pull together for the common good is revived. This story certainly gained traction when Covid-19 hit the UK.<sup>18</sup>

However, 'Blitz spirit' should not be so quickly applied to understanding contemporary events – not least because the narrative is poorly supported by the historical record.<sup>19</sup> Our survey, based on the more granular approach of our framework, offers a more nuanced view, and it is to those findings which we now turn.



# 3: Covid-19's Impact on Community Spirit

On the whole, we found an increase in community spirit in the months following the initial lockdown on March 23<sup>rd</sup>:

Respondents reported an increase in the measures used for the Sense of Belonging, Quality of Relationships and Collective Action domains of community spirit. For example:

- Nearly half (48%) said they had chatted more with their neighbours, that people in their neighbourhood had come together for the common good more than before (47%) and that they had supported local businesses more (47%);
  - One in three (32%) said they felt a greater sense of belonging to their community than they had before and a similar proportion (31%) said the number of people they could count on for help had increased;
  - As a result of this increased collective action, the majority of respondents thought local groups had served the needs of the vulnerable people in their area better than Government initiatives had done – only one in ten respondents disagreed.
- Higher levels of community spirit were reported from respondents in rural villages than those in urban areas before the pandemic, and they also reported a greater increase over lockdown:
  - Nearly two thirds of village residents said the people in their neighbourhood had come together more for the common good, while a quarter (24%) of urban dwellers said the same;
  - Two in four (42%) reported that their sense of belonging to their area had increased, compared to 26% among respondents living in urban area with a population of over 10,000;
  - Six in 10 (59%) reported having chatted more to neighbours, compared to 46% of respondents in urban areas;
  - One third reported trusting the people in their neighbourhood more – 13 percentage points more than respondents in urban areas.

Only **one in ten** thought that Government initiatives had served vulnerable people better than **local community groups**.





An illustration of how communities were able to pull together seemingly against the odds comes from two Lincolnshire towns in the most deprived 1% of neighbourhoods in England with regards to employment, income, health and disability, and education, skills and training.

### East Lindsey, Lincolnshire: Pulling Together for the Common Good

The residents of Mablethorpe and Sutton on Sea, two small coastal towns in Lincolnshire involved in our Community Spirit pilot project, were especially vulnerable to both Covid-19, and the social and mental effects of shielding. The towns have a high proportion of elderly and disabled residents - with 40% of patients registered at the local population aged 65 and over and 75% with a long-term health condition. Mablethorpe was ranked as the fifth most socially isolated town in the country, and the one with the worst social wellbeing and greatest absolute deprivation in the Centre for Towns report *The Effect of the COVID Pandemic on our Towns and Cities*. Yet when the District Council's Communities Lead consulted with other stakeholders in the area, as part of RSPH's project, she identified a widespread feeling that Covid-19 had strengthened their community spirit.

When the pandemic hit, a Good Neighbour Scheme was set up, co-ordinating volunteers in running errands, helping with practical tasks and befriending. Recognising that there are high levels of digital exclusion in the area, the District Council sent all

residents a community support leaflet and telephoned all residents on the social housing and 'assisted bin registers' to inform them of the scheme. Other charitable and voluntary groups produced booklets listing offers of support from local residents while volunteers knocked on neighbours' doors to offer help. As a result, participants in the consultation suggested that levels of participation, mutual support and neighbourliness had all increased during the outbreak of Covid-19.

The Council also provided financial support to the community response with funds going to local community larders, food banks and through the Covid Councillor Community Grants scheme, to local projects or charities in each ward. In addition, forty of its staff were redeployed to Wellbeing Lincolnshire to support highly vulnerable residents who were shielding. But like all local authorities, East Lindsey District Council is facing a large deficit and without further funding from the Government, discretionary spending on non-statutory services and projects will likely face cuts.

**Although we found that these aspects of community spirit increased during lockdown, at least in the short-term, our survey also uncovered some grounds for concern.**

## Social activities

One dimension of community spirit which unsurprisingly fell victim to Covid-19 was participation in social and leisure activities in the community – while 9% said they had been involved in more of these, three times as many (27%) said they had been taking part in fewer such events. This suggests that online activities were not able to fill the gap created when social distancing measures put an end to large gatherings. However, of greater long-term concern was the fact that over a third of respondents (34%) said they had **never** been involved in social or leisure activities in their community.

## Trust

The measures put in place to limit the spread of Covid-19 also appear to have had a corrosive effect on social trust. The Government encouraged people to report on neighbours who broke restrictions on household mixing, for instance, and the attitude of people who do wear face masks towards those who do not (for reasons other than medical exemption) and those who stockpile was found by Demos to reveal more social division than that caused by Brexit.<sup>20</sup> Our survey supported this as three in four respondents said they did not trust others to follow Government guidance on social distancing and handwashing.

## Impact on Health Inequalities

As noted above, there is growing evidence that deprived areas experience lower levels of community spirit, and this was borne out by our survey. One of our key findings - and the most concerning - is that the benefits of community spirit are being felt disproportionately by the well-off, which may therefore be compounding health inequalities.

**65%** of respondents who were unemployed, in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations said they had never been involved in local activism and **46%** said they had never been involved in social or leisure activities in their community.

When surveyed on the level of community spirit in their area before the Covid-19 outbreak, respondents with the highest incomes ranked higher than average on various measures of social capital. We compared people in higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations (classified as ABs) to those in supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative, professional occupations (classified as C1s), skilled manual workers (classified as C2s) and semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and those unemployed (classified as DEs). We found that a higher proportion of people defined as ABs reported:

- Having pride in their area;
- Trusting the people in their neighbourhood;
- That the people in their neighbourhood pulled together for the common good;
- Involvement in social and leisure activities in their community;
- Involvement in civic activism.

Home-ownership seemed to be an important mediating factor in explaining this difference as for example:

- Seven out of ten home-owners said they took pride in the place they live before the Covid-19 outbreak, compared to 56% of renters;
- Over half (58%) of home-owners felt that people in their neighbourhood could be trusted – 16 percentage points more than the number of renters;
- Nine percentage points more home-owners than renters described a sense of belonging in their community (43% vs 34%), often chatting with their neighbours (62% vs 53%) and feeling people in their neighbourhood pulled together for the common good (43% vs 34%).

These figures were all highest among those who owned their home outright (as opposed to those who had a mortgage), pointing towards the importance of residential stability to community strength. Indeed, studies have shown home-ownership to be positively correlated with bonding social capital (a term which encapsulates trust, exchanges among neighbours and sense of belonging to one's community).<sup>21</sup> Living in the same community for a long time has also been linked to deeper relationships, higher levels of community participation, lower levels of crime, and greater psychological attachment to the area.<sup>22</sup>

As well as starting from a higher base, those classified as ABs also reported a greater increase in every measure of community spirit since lockdown than all other social grades. For example, twice as many respondents in managerial or professional occupations as those unemployed or in semi-skilled or unskilled roles said they had been more involved with activism in local community since the lockdown (14% vs 7%). In fact, two thirds (65%) of the latter group said they had **never** been involved in local activism.



Rather than Covid-19 stimulating community spirit in such a way as to lessen inequalities, it seems to have exacerbated them. This is especially concerning given that the health impacts of Covid-19 have also hit deprived areas hardest, with mortality rates there double those in the most affluent regions.<sup>23</sup> While these findings are concerning, we know that strong community organisations in areas of deprivation have been vital in coordinating community responses, demonstrating the benefit community hubs can have on resilience and health.

### **Patchway, South Gloucestershire: the health harms and benefits of lockdown**

Southern Brooks Community Partnership, a community development organisation in South Gloucestershire, surveyed 66 residents of Patchway, a priority neighbourhood in the county, to measure the overall strength of the community and the specific impact of Covid-19:

- Nearly half said their mental health had significantly worsened;
- 27% said their financial situation had been negatively impacted because of Covid-19, and the same proportion said their diet had changed for the worse;
- One third said they were feeling more lonely.

But Southern Brooks were also able to identify what people had appreciated about the changes to their lives caused by Covid-19, which included being able to spend more time with their family, improved community relationships and having more time in green spaces. Residents wanted to see this stronger sense of community built upon once the outbreak has passed, with events like street parties and community gatherings, more social hubs in the area and a community orchard among respondents' suggestions.

## **Impact on People with Mental Health Conditions**

Lockdowns have limited our ability to spend time with friends, family and larger groups. We found that those with mental health conditions, who were already reporting the lowest levels of social capital with regards to their life before Covid-19, were most negatively affected by the psychological effects of the Spring lockdown:

- Over half (54%) of respondents who reported living with a mental illness and 42% of those with disabilities said that the effect of lockdown on their mental health affected their relationships, compared to one in three (31%) of respondents overall;
- Rates of anxiety around socialising outside their household were also significantly higher among those with mental health problems and disabilities than average: 72% of people with a mental health problem and 79% of those with a disability said they had felt anxious about such social situations, compared to 57% overall;
- Eight out of ten people with a mental or physical health condition or disability said they did not trust others to observe social distancing measures or wash their hands properly.

These findings suggest that as much as people rallied around the vulnerable to make sure their material needs were met, those with mental health conditions have not benefited as much from the general increase in community spirit and, in turn, the potential health benefits which that entails for both the present and the future.

## 4: Where Next for Community Spirit?

Community spirit needs proactive maintenance both to meet the needs of people requiring support in the present and for the public's health and wellbeing in the long term. We cannot rely on national emergencies alone to bring people together for, as Robert Putnam has argued, such spikes in community feeling after tragedy are almost always short-lived and, as our research has shown, Covid-19 has had a mixed effect on the public's sense of solidarity.<sup>24</sup>

We asked survey respondents about their predictions for the future of community life in their area and identified further threats to sustaining high levels of community spirit in the future:

- More than two in five (43%) said they were worried that the community spirit built up during Covid-19 would not last once people's social and working lives return to normal;
- Over half (56%) said they were concerned that venues used for community events and activities in their area will close because of Covid-19;
- Three in five (60%) said they thought businesses on their local high street would not recover from the economic impact of Covid-19, with just 15% not sharing this concern.

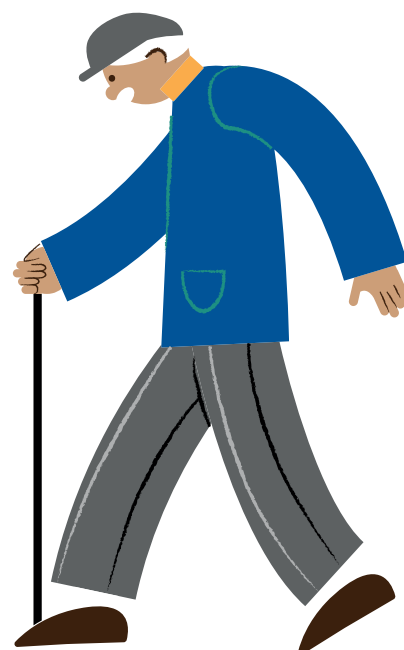
We need to invest in communities' ability to work for the common good because, as we saw when the pandemic took hold, local community organisations and groups could respond with greater agility and speed than could centralised volunteer-management initiatives like the NHS First Responder app. 3,500 mutual aid groups emerged almost overnight to support people in their area unable to leave the house by picking up prescriptions, and delivering groceries and other essentials.<sup>25</sup>

Many local community organisations also pivoted their ways of working to help meet the daily needs of the 2.5 million people shielding.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, although 750,000 people signed up to become First Responders<sup>27</sup> only 100,000 tasks were put into the system within the first month, leaving a huge amount of capacity untapped and people

having to look elsewhere for help.<sup>28</sup> The local knowledge, networks and trust with residents which they had already won could simply not be replaced. But it takes intentional effort and investment to build this kind of community spirit – as can be seen by the experience of Armoy Community Association in Northern Ireland.

Policy-makers at local, regional and national levels should therefore be actively seeking to strengthen community spirit. This is vital for the sake of people's present and future health and wellbeing, and to ensure that neighbourhoods have the resilience and cohesion to be able to support each other through the process of recovery from the negative psychological, economic and social effects of the pandemic.

To identify recommendations for national and local governments, as well as community organisations and individuals, we drew upon our case studies' experience and asked members of the public which policies would have a positive impact on the community spirit in their area. Below are some of the ways both the general public and the community organisations we worked with believe can best build community spirit.



## Community Spirit Doesn't Happen by Accident: Armoy Community Association, Northern Ireland

Armoy, a village in Northern Ireland, suffers from high levels of poverty and social isolation - it is ranked in the 6% most deprived neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland for income levels and access to services, and in the 9% most deprived for poverty affecting children. But shortly before the Covid-19 outbreak, the village took part in a Participatory Budgeting process where residents could vote for twelve projects to receive £500 of funding, which had a galvanising effect on community spirit. The Neighbourhood Plan consultation process the year before had managed to engage between twenty and thirty people, with just four attending a drop-in event. But the voting night for the participatory budget drew in 350 out of a village of 1,000 residents including some who had never been to the community centre in its 20-year history. People who had previously engaged only on issues which touched them directly began to take an interest in other causes, and the process inspired connections across the Protestant-Catholic divide in the village.

It was enthusiasm from the Participatory Budget which the team at Armoy Community Association think inspired an unprecedented number of volunteers to come forward to support vulnerable residents with shopping and befriending during Covid-19 and local businesses to donate food to the Meals on Wheels service without even being asked.

The fact that the Participatory Budget was associated with clear outcomes and gave villagers a say in how money was spent in their area, rather than having funding decisions in the hands of statutory and grant-making bodies, seems to have accounted for the increased participation. When it came to the Neighbourhood Plan, Armoy Community Association was asking residents what they wanted to see in the area but ultimately didn't have the funds to realise their aspirations. As a result, the process risked causing residents to feel powerless to achieve change in their area. The two contrasting experiences thus show the power of involving the community in funding decisions and the importance of financial investment to community spirit. Without that support, events and activities cannot take place and residents can end up feeling left behind.



## Calls to Action

- More investment in green spaces, like community gardens and play parks, and funding for organisations to run activities in those spaces which promote health and wellbeing.

Frequent exposure to green space has been found to have a wide array of physical and mental health benefits, and to have the biggest impact on the most deprived groups, thereby helping to reduce health inequalities. These include lower blood pressure, cholesterol and incidence of type 2 diabetes<sup>29</sup> as well as reduced anxiety, depression and fatigue.<sup>30</sup> Access to green space has also been associated with health-promoting behaviours like increased physical activity and active travel. This effect alone could save NHS England £2.1 billion per year.<sup>31</sup> Green space also indirectly improves public health by strengthening community spirit as such environments have been shown to lead to reduced isolation and loneliness, increased feelings of belonging, community cohesion and social networks and, when well-designed and maintained, reduced antisocial behaviour.<sup>32</sup>

Yet unequal provision of good quality green space, with those in economically deprived areas having the least access, means those who are at greatest risk of poor physical and mental health are the least able to reap these benefits.<sup>33</sup> The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds estimates that UK households with an annual income under £10,000 are nearly four times more likely to have no outdoor space where they live, and about 40% less likely to live within a ten-minute walk of any public natural green space than people with a household income of £60,000 or more.<sup>34</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic exposed this inequality of access when photographs of crowded public parks after their re-opening in mid-April were published: while residents in more rural settings, or those able to afford homes with gardens, could easily and safely access green space, many people living in overcrowded urban areas did not have this available to them.

Accordingly, the need to invest more in green space was recognised both by the 2,000 members of the public we surveyed and the community organisations involved in our project. With 83% of survey respondents saying they thought that greater investment in green spaces would positively impact the community spirit in their area, this was the policy recommendation with the greatest public support. It was also mentioned by respondents to the survey of local residents conducted by Southern Brooks Community Partnership, who used the Community Spirit framework to identify the impact of Covid-19 on the local community and what residents wanted to see included in the area's recovery from the pandemic. Respondents noted that one of the benefits to have come from the Spring lockdown was that they were able to spend more time outdoors and, wanting to see this extended beyond the pandemic, one of their suggestions was for a community orchard to be set up so that local residents could come together to enjoy being in nature.

Similarly, Armoy Community Association have plans to build cohesion and inclusion in the area by bringing old sports pitches back into use. One of the sensitivities in the region, caused by the religious divide, is how resources are apportioned to each community. Accordingly, the fact that Armoy's sports pitches have been left to fall into disrepair, while a nearby town with a largely nationalist, Catholic identity has seen theirs regenerated has the potential to reignite sectarian tensions. Armoy Community Association are therefore hoping to secure funding to redevelop this facility and use it for American Football – a sport with no historic association to either religious or political identities. This project would bring health benefits to local residents by increasing the level of physical activity but could also be a focal point around which the whole village could come together to support.

What makes public green spaces conducive to building social cohesion and inclusion, the Chair of Darnall Well Being (a community health hub in Sheffield) noted, is that they are not owned by any one organisation. As a result, different groups can come together to run activities like Family Fun Days, Litter Picks, and Dog Walks, and all participants feel they have an equal right to be in that space. But, it was also noted that funding is required for more than simply redeveloping and maintaining green spaces: there also needs to be investment in activities like health walks, cycling and outdoor exercise classes in order to maximise the health-promoting and community-building benefits of green space.

- **Public sector institutions to support local businesses by procuring goods and services from them to stimulate the local economy, and to commission community organisations to deliver services aimed at improving health and wellbeing.**

As we have seen, the majority of survey respondents are fearful about the future for the local economy in their area. One way of supporting local businesses which proved highly popular in our second survey was a strategy of localised procurement or community wealth building: four in five people (79%) thought that public sector institutions, like local councils and schools, purchasing goods and services from local businesses would have a positive impact on their local area's community spirit.

Even before Covid-19, the UK was Europe's most geographically unequal economy with a growing North-South divide on both median earnings and household wealth. The pandemic has revealed this inequality, as Covid-19's mortality rate has been higher in the north of England than in the South, and it is also set to widen the divide it owing to the economic cost of local lockdowns, higher levels of restrictions, and of the excess mortality rate.<sup>35</sup> The 2020 Marmot Review, in light of this growing regional divide, recommended that the 2013 Social Value Act be innovatively deployed through community wealth building.<sup>36</sup> This Act requires those who commission public services to consider how they can secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits through

their purchasing power, rather than making decisions solely based on financial cost.

By harnessing the purchasing and investment power of 'anchor institutions' like local councils, hospitals, schools, and higher education institutions, this community wealth building strategy aims to create stronger, more resilient local economies and reduce regional economic inequalities. In this model, local businesses and supply chains are boosted by being given contracts for goods and services like security, catering and cleaning by large organisations rooted in the community. This keeps the economic power of these institutions within the locality rather than having it drained elsewhere, creates secure sources of employment for people in the area, and strengthens the capacity of local small and medium sized enterprises.<sup>37</sup>

This community wealth building strategy can apply not only to local businesses but to community organisations as well. Doing so could address the fear noted by over half of our survey respondents for the future of community assets in their area as one way to put community organisations on a sound financial footing is for Local Authorities and commissioners to commission them to deliver health and wellbeing services. We therefore recommend local councillors and commissioners make use of our partner Locality's Keep It Local resources, which support councils in commissioning local community organisations to deliver services.<sup>38</sup> This approach not only makes long-term financial sense by dealing with social problems at their source and preventing demand for services elsewhere in the system, but also by putting public resources into the local economy. The financial advantages of working with the voluntary and community sector is especially crucial given that the move to business-rate retention means local authorities' financial futures are increasingly dependent on that of their local economies.

For example, Southern Brooks Community Partnership is commissioned by the local authority to provide youth work services, and run a health champions initiative and the county's Dementia Action Alliance. Their Head of Employment, Skills & Youth and Safeguarding Lead noted that the



voluntary and community sector can often deliver these services competitively, saving money for the council. Moreover, by employing local people, the community organisation boosts the area's economy, while having a staff team who are familiar with the issues affecting the area also enhances the quality of their service. She also observed that voluntary and community organisations can be particularly flexible in the delivery of services: "If we provided art therapy sessions and had no young people attend, then we could quickly change the session (within a week) to something like sports to attract new young people. The statutory sector would have to go through a lengthy process (up to four to six weeks) to enable this to happen."

Commissioning community organisations to deliver services can thus provide services that are holistic, adaptable and responsive, provided by people with extensive local knowledge, who already have the trust of local people.<sup>39</sup> In line with these benefits, East Lindsey District Council is looking to community organisations to serve as 'spokes' in their 'hub and spoke' model for a new community mental health service. By enhancing resources which already exist and upskilling local workforces, they are able to work to a much smaller budget and to build upon existing relationships of trust. This is especially significant for a sensitive issue like mental health, in an area where there is widespread distrust of statutory organisations. By integrating natural community hubs into county-wide NHS services, the Council hopes to establish a mental health service which is of a high quality, sustainable, and easily accessible.

- **Community hubs providing activities and services focused on health and wellbeing to be set up.**

Community hubs are multi-purpose centres, which host a range of services to meet the needs of local residents. They may take the form of community cafes and gardens, arts venues, faith buildings, libraries or healthy living centres. Often owned and managed by a community-led organisation so that they can respond effectively to the needs of that area, they typically deliver services which address health or the wider determinants of health

such as social prescribing schemes, employment and skills training, community gyms, social support groups, financial and housing advice and outreach.<sup>40</sup> Community ownership models of key assets increase participation in the governance of these spaces, and provide a financial base from which to develop other community activity.<sup>41</sup>

Community hubs have been shown to not only have a positive effect on individuals' wellbeing but also on the community spirit of the area. By enabling people of different ages, and social and ethnic backgrounds to mix, community hubs have been found to promote social cohesion and increase residents' social networks.<sup>42</sup> This, in turn, can increase people's sense of belonging and enable them to access new opportunities.<sup>43</sup> There has also been evidence of community hubs leading to more pride in an area,<sup>44</sup> greater social participation<sup>45</sup> and increased skills, knowledge and confidence.<sup>46</sup>

Southern Brooks Community Partnership, for instance, manages a community hub in a neighbourhood in Bristol. As their Head of Employment, Skills & Youth observed, the benefit of this facility is that it can help meet multiple needs at once, so there is no need for someone to access various services for related issues. By providing a 'one stop shop', it is easier to ensure that someone is signposted to all the relevant support they may need, rather than overlooking any because of 'tunnel vision'. This kind of multi-faceted support also means that the relationship built between the individual and the community support worker is much deeper, and that level of trust means they are more likely to seek support for problems they encounter in the future.

In addition to these proven benefits, we also found the idea of setting up community hubs to be popular with the general public. Four in five (79%) of the 2,000 we surveyed believed that this policy would improve the community spirit in their area. It was also suggested by residents of Patchway surveyed by Southern Brooks Community Partnership as a way of enhancing the local area after the pandemic, demonstrating the value of the community hub which the organisation already manages.

- **Measure your local area's community spirit.**

Community spirit is a dynamic concept and will take a different shape in different areas, depending on its demographic make-up, local socioeconomic forces and community assets. Rather than transplanting what works in other areas, therefore, we recommend that any individuals or organisations interested in increasing their area's community spirit make use of the tools we have developed together with Locality, to better understand the strengths and needs in this respect of their area. These resources include a self-assessment tool and a guide for planning and running a community workshop and developing an action plan for community development.

After Southern Brooks Community Partnership produced a survey based on our framework to measure the community spirit in a priority neighbourhood, South Gloucestershire Council decided to roll the survey out across the county

every year. The Council's Head of Safe, Strong Communities explained that the council had been "trying for years to come up with an effective way of monitoring community cohesion and community spirit" and that the ability to drill down into specific domains to get nuanced detail was especially valuable. In addition, the Council is planning on using the Community Spirit framework as part of its commissioning process, instead of relying solely on activity-based measures.

As noted above, our survey of the public revealed a stark difference in the level of civic participation by social class. Accordingly, we would encourage any research into the level of community spirit, and initiatives to increase it, to be co-produced with as representative a cross-section of that community as possible. One example of an inventive way of exploring what community spirit means to people, and ensuring that the views from a wide range of participants are heard, comes from Darnall Well Being.

### **Measuring Community Spirit Together: Darnall, South Yorkshire**

Darnall Well Being became involved in the Community Spirit pilot project as a way of demonstrating the strengths of a neighbourhood which is usually defined by what it lacks in material terms. They found a creative way to involve local residents in the project. At a Covid-safe 'Fun Palace' day, they asked visitors to the community allotment to write what 'community' meant to them on paper luggage tags and to hang them on a fishing net. The same question was asked as part of an activity pack posted to people who would usually attend their dementia café, and they were invited to respond either with an image or in their own words.

Those responses are being compiled together in a book by Darnall Well Being while the local Library and Archives Department will keep the fishing net and tags in their collection as an artefact recording how local people experienced the Covid-19 outbreak.

Measuring community spirit also allows for community organisations to demonstrate their impact. Darnall Well Being therefore also intend to incorporate the indicators of the four different domains into how they assess the outputs and outcomes of their activities. This information can then be used in future funding bids.







## Conclusion

The impact of Covid-19 has exemplified pre-existing health inequalities, but it is clear as well that the measures taken to tackle the virus have in turn exacerbated them. In January, the ONS reported that in the most deprived 10% of areas, the Covid-19 mortality rate was almost three times that found in the least deprived regions from the period of March to December 2020.<sup>47</sup> The rate among disabled people was two to three and a half times higher than that among non-disabled people from January to November 2020,<sup>48</sup> and it was higher among males and females of South Asian ethnic background than those of White ethnic background in both the first and second waves of the virus.<sup>49</sup> Those inequalities have been deepened further, analysis by the Health Foundation has shown, as intense financial hardship caused by job losses and business failures has its own impact on people's health.<sup>50</sup> The need for urgent action to improve the health and wellbeing of those experiencing poverty is abundantly clear.

Of course, this needs decisive action and investment from Government. But given the potential of community spirit to reduce health inequalities, and the importance of empowering people as agents of change in their own neighbourhoods, we see a part for everyone in the recovery from Covid-19 – from policy-makers to individual residents. We have seen the pain of social isolation and the power of kind neighbours so vividly since the outbreak began. But, even after the pandemic has passed, loneliness will still hurt people's health and wellbeing and strong communities will still have the potential to save lives. We hope the recommendations in this report, along with our framework and toolkit for community organisations set out in the companion report *The Community Spirit Level: A framework for measuring, improving and sustaining community spirit*, will go some way to building healthy and resilient communities of the future.

# References

- <sup>1</sup> Bambra, C., Munford, L., et al (2020) COVID-19 and the Northern Powerhouse, Northern Health Science Alliance, Newcastle.
- <sup>2</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316
- <sup>3</sup> Shankar, A., McMunn, A., Banks, J., & Steptoe, A (2011) Loneliness, social isolation and behavioural and biological health indicators in older adults, *Health Psychology*, 30, pp.377 - 385
- <sup>4</sup> Hawkley, L. C., & Capitanio, J. P. (2015). Perceived social isolation, evolutionary fitness and health outcomes: a lifespan approach. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 370(1669). doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2014.0114; Grant, N., Hamer, M., & Steptoe, A. (2009) Social isolation and stress-related cardiovascular, lipid, and cortisol responses, *Annals of Behavioural Medicine*, 37(1), pp.29-37; Hawkley, L.C., Thisted, C.M. and Cacioppo, J.T. (2010) Loneliness predicts increased blood pressure: 5-year cross-lagged analyses in middle-aged and older adults, *Psychology and Ageing*, 25(1), pp.132–141; Valtorta, N., Kanaan, M., Gilbody, S., Ronzi, S., & Hanratty, B. (2016) Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies, *Heart*, 102, pp.1009-1016.
- <sup>5</sup> Alcaraz, K. I., Eddens, K. S., Blase, J. L., Diver, W. R., Patel, A. V., Teras, L. R., and Gapstur, S. M. (2019). Social isolation and mortality in US black and white men and women. *American journal of epidemiology*, 188(1), pp.102-109.
- <sup>6</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316
- <sup>7</sup> Stafford, M., & Marmot, M. (2003). Neighbourhood deprivation and health: does it affect us all equally?. *International journal of epidemiology*, 32(3), pp.357-366.
- <sup>8</sup> Bartley, M.P (ed). (2012). *Life gets under your skin*. UCL Research Department of Epidemiology and Public Health.
- <sup>9</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Community Life Survey 2019/20, 14 July 2020. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-life-survey-201920-neighbourhood-and-community/neighbourhood-and-community-community-life-survey-201920>. [Accessed 14 September 2020]
- <sup>10</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Community Life Survey 2018/19, 25 July 2019. [Online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/820610/Community\\_Life\\_Survey\\_2018-19\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/820610/Community_Life_Survey_2018-19_report.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster, New York, NY.
- <sup>12</sup> Tanner, W., O'Shaughnessy, J., Krasniqi, F., Blagden, J., September 2020, *The State of Our Social Fabric*, UK Onward. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/The-State-of-our-Social-Fabric.pdf> [Accessed 6 October 2020]
- <sup>13</sup> Uberoi, E., July 2019, *Turnout at Elections Briefing Paper*, House of Commons Library [Online]. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8060/> [Accessed 6 October 2020]
- <sup>14</sup> Machin, S. (2000). Union Decline in Britain. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38(4), pp.631-645; Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, *Trade Union Membership, UK 1995-2019: Statistical Bulletin*, 27 May 2020. [Online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/887740/Trade-union-membership-2019-statistical-bulletin.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887740/Trade-union-membership-2019-statistical-bulletin.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, (July 2020), *Community Life Survey 2019/20*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-life-survey-201920-neighbourhood-and-community/neighbourhood-and-community-community-life-survey-201920>. [Accessed 14 September 2020]
- <sup>16</sup> Edelman, (January 2020) *2020 Trust Barometer UK Results*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.edelman.co.uk/research/2020-trust-barometer-uk-results> [Accessed 11 September 2020]
- <sup>17</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, *Community Life Survey 2019/20*, 14 July 2020. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-life-survey-201920-neighbourhood-and-community/neighbourhood-and-community-community-life-survey-201920>. [Accessed 14 September 2020]
- <sup>18</sup> Withers, P. (3 April 2020), "Coronavirus Blitz spirit: 'NHS reaction is best in 50 years of medicine'", *Express Online*. Available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1264614/coronavirus-uk-latest-news-nhs-staff-nightingale-hospital-covid-19-peak-deaths> [Accessed 21 September 2020]
- <sup>19</sup> Bent, S., *The Blitz Spirit, Historic UK*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Blitz-Spirit/> [Accessed 8 October 2020]
- <sup>20</sup> BBC News, 14 September 2020, *Coronavirus: Report 'rule of six' breaches, minister urges*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54142699> [Accessed 19 October 2020]; Demos, *New research finds social fractures caused by Covid-19 are more divisive than Brexit*, 11 September 2020. [Online] Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/press-release/new-research-finds-social-fractures-caused-by-covid-19-are-more-divisive-than-brexit/> [Accessed 17 September 2020]
- <sup>21</sup> Leviten-Reid, C., & Matthew, R. A. (2018). Housing tenure and neighbourhood social capital. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 35(3), pp.300-328.
- <sup>22</sup> Oishi, S., Rothman, A.J., Snyder, M., Su, J., Zehm, K., Hertel, A.W., Gonzales, M.H. and Sherman, G.D. (2007). The socioecological model of procommunity action: the benefits of residential stability. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 93(5), pp.831-844; Oishi, S., & Schimmack, U. (2010). Residential mobility, well-being, and mortality. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 98(6), pp.980-994.
- <sup>23</sup> Caul, S. (28 August 2020), *Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 31 July 2020*, ONS. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvedcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand31july2020> [Accessed 8 October 2020]
- <sup>24</sup> Benson, E., *Investing in Social Capital*, American Psychological Association, November 2002. [Online] Available at: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/nov02/investing> [Accessed 9 September 2020]
- <sup>25</sup> <https://covidmutualaid.org/local-groups/>;
- <sup>26</sup> People's Health Trust, 10 July 2020, *Working Alongside Local Communities Responding to COVID-19*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk/impact/reports/working-alongside-local-communities-responding-covid-19> [Accessed 20 October 2020]
- <sup>27</sup> NHS, *NHS army of volunteers to start protecting vulnerable from coronavirus in England*, 7 April 2020. [Online] Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/04/nhs-volunteer-army-now-ready-to-support-even-more-people/> [Accessed 21 September 2020]
- <sup>28</sup> Butler, P., 3 May 2020, *NHS coronavirus crisis volunteers frustrated at lack of tasks*, *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/nhs-coronavirus-crisis-volunteers-frustrated-at-lack-of-tasks> [Accessed 20 October 2020]

- 29 Twohig-Bennett, C. & Jones, A. (2018). The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. *Environmental research*, 166, pp.628-637.
- 30 Lovell, R., White, M.P., Wheeler, B., Taylor, T., Elliott, L. (2020) A rapid scoping review of health and wellbeing evidence for the Green Infrastructure Standards European Centre for Environment and Human Health, University of Exeter Medical School. For: Natural England, Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Public Health England, and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, England.
- 31 Public Health England (2020), Improving Access to Greenspace: A New Review for 2020/112
- 32 Public Health England (2020), Improving Access to Greenspace: A New Review for 2020; Bagnall, A., South, J., Di Martino, S., Southby, K., Pilkington, G., Mitchell, B., Pennington, A., Corcoran, R., (2018), A systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure (places and spaces), What Works Centre for Wellbeing [Online] Available at: [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-full-report-MAY2018-1\\_0119755600.pdf](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-full-report-MAY2018-1_0119755600.pdf) [Accessed 17 September 2020]
- 33 Allen J, and Balfour, R. (2014) Natural solutions for tackling health inequalities. UCL Institute of Health Equity; Schüle, S. A., Hiltz, L. K., Dreger, S., & Bolte, G. (2019). Social inequalities in environmental resources of green and blue spaces: A review of evidence in the WHO European Region. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(7), 1216.
- 34 Masefield, R., (10 June 2020), New research reveals huge public support for putting nature at the heart of Coronavirus recovery plans, RSPB [Online] Available at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/nature-and-a-green-recovery-from-covid-19/> [Accessed 19 October 2020]
- 35 Bamba, C., Munford, L., et al. (2020) COVID-19 and the Northern Powerhouse, Northern Health Science Alliance, Newcastle.
- 36 Marmot, M., Allen, J., Boyce, T., Goldblatt, P., Morrison, J., (2020) Health Equity in England: the Marmot Review 10 Years On, The Institute for Health Equity, p.73 [Online]. Available at: [https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/upload/publications/2020/Health%20Equity%20in%20England\\_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On\\_full%20report.pdf](https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/upload/publications/2020/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_full%20report.pdf) [Accessed 20 October 2020]
- 37 Lockey, A., and Glover, B., (2019), The Wealth Within: The Preston Model and the New Municipalism, Demos. [Online] Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/June-Final-Web.pdf> [Accessed 8 October 2020]
- 38 Locality, (2020), Keep It Local: How local government can plug into the power of community. [Online] Available at: <https://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/LOC-Keep-It-Local-Report-40pp-WG08.pdf> [Accessed 20 October 2020]
- 39 Field, R., & Miller, C. (2017). Asset-based Commissioning: 'Better Outcomes, Better Value'. National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work and Professional Practice.
- 40 Public Health England and NHS England, (February 2015), A Guide to Community-Centred Approaches for Health and Wellbeing.
- 41 Locality, (2020) In Community Hands: lessons from the past five years of Community Asset Transfer, Available at: <https://locality.org.uk/about/key-publications/in-community-hands-report/>
- 42 Bagnall, A., South, J., Di Martino, S., Southby, K., Pilkington, G., Mitchell, B., Pennington, A., Corcoran, R., (2018), A systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure (places and spaces), What Works Centre for Wellbeing [Online] Available at: [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-full-report-MAY2018-1\\_0119755600.pdf](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-full-report-MAY2018-1_0119755600.pdf) [Accessed 17 September 2020]
- 43 Claridge, T. (2 January 2018), What is the difference between bonding and bridging social capital?, Social Capital Research. [Online] Available at: <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/difference-bonding-bridging-social-capital/> [Accessed 8 October 2020]
- 44 Armstrong, D. (2000) A Survey of Community Gardens in Upstate New York: Implications for Health Promotion and Community Development. *Health & Place* 6(4), pp.319-27.
- 45 Wells P, Hickman P, Dayson C et al. (2012) Village SOS Project Evaluation. Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research [Online] Available at: <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ouexpertise/village-sos-evaluation> [Accessed 9 October 2020]
- 46 Bagnall, A., South, J., Di Martino, S., Southby, K., Pilkington, G., Mitchell, B., Pennington, A., Corcoran, R., (2018), A systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure (places and spaces), What Works Centre for Wellbeing [Online] Available at: [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-full-report-MAY2018-1\\_0119755600.pdf](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-full-report-MAY2018-1_0119755600.pdf) [Accessed 17 September 2020]
- 47 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathsduetocovid19bylocalareaanddeprivation>
- 48 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/>

## Annex A: Methodology for Survey about Changes to Community Spirit

We commissioned Yonder to survey a representative group of 2,067 adults from across the UK between 11 and 13 September 2020 with the questions listed below. This survey involved asking respondents to reflect on their feelings about their local area before the UK went into lockdown, and we recognise that this means we were dependent on respondents' memory, which may have been influenced by subsequent events. But as discussed in Section 2 of our report, Community Spirit Over Time, how we perceive community spirit in the present is influenced by our memories of it in the past, regardless of the objective veracity of those memories.

### **Q1. Thinking about your life before the UK went into lockdown due to Covid-19 on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- |                               |                      |                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| a. Strongly agree             | b. Slightly agree    |                      |
| c. Neither agree nor disagree | d. Slightly disagree | e. Strongly disagree |

- ☐ 1. I felt a sense of belonging in my community
- ☐ 2. I took pride in the place I live
- ☐ 3. There were people in my neighbourhood who I could really count on to listen to me, help me or socialise with
- ☐ 4. I often chatted with my neighbours (saying more than just hello)
- ☐ 5. I took part in social/leisure activities in my community
- ☐ 6. My community was welcoming of people from different backgrounds
- ☐ 7. I felt the people who live in my neighbourhood could be trusted
- ☐ 8. People in my neighbourhood pulled together for the common good
- ☐ 9. I volunteered in my local community
- ☐ 10. I was involved in activism in my local community (e.g. signing a petition, writing to my MP, or taking part in a demonstration about something happening in my community)

### **Q2. Thinking about your life since the UK went into lockdown due to Covid-19 on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- |                               |                      |                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| a. Strongly agree             | b. Slightly agree    |                      |
| c. Neither agree nor disagree | d. Slightly disagree | e. Strongly disagree |

- ☐ 1. My sense of belonging in my community has increased
- ☐ 2. The number of people in my community who I can count on for help has increased
- ☐ 3. I have chatted more with my neighbours (saying more than just hello)
- ☐ 4. I have become more trusting of those in my community
- ☐ 5. The effect of the lockdown on my mental health has affected my relationships with family and friends

- ☐ 6. My confidence in using digital technology has limited by ability to socialise virtually
- ☐ 7. I think vulnerable people in my community were better served by local community groups and informal volunteering than by Government initiatives
- ☐ 8. My community has become more welcoming of people from different backgrounds
- ☐ 9. People in my neighbourhood have come together for the common good more than before

**Q3. Still thinking about your life since the UK went into lockdown due to Covid-19 on March 23rd, for each of the following, please tell us if you have done these things more, less or about the same compared to before lockdown.**

- a. A lot more      b. A little more      c. About the same  
d. A little less      e. A lot less      f. Prefer not to say      g. I have never done this

- ☐ 1. Volunteering in my local community
- ☐ 2. Getting to know my neighbours
- ☐ 3. Arguing with my neighbours
- ☐ 4. Taking part in social/leisure activities in my community
- ☐ 5. Being involved with activism in my local community (e.g. signing a petition, writing to my MP, or taking part in a demonstration about something happening in my community)
- ☐ 6. Being involved in religious services and activities (online or in person)
- ☐ 7. Spiritual practices (e.g. prayer, meditation, devotional reading)
- ☐ 8. Having conversations about issues relating to health and wellbeing
- ☐ 9. Supporting local businesses

**Q4. Thinking about your life since the easing of lockdown restrictions on 4 July (when people from two households became allowed to meet and businesses in the hospitality and leisure industry began to reopen) and going forward, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- a. Strongly agree      b. Slightly agree  
c. Neither agree nor disagree      d. Slightly disagree      e. Strongly disagree

- ☐ 1. I have felt anxious about socialising with people outside my household
- ☐ 2. I do not trust others to follow government guidance about social distancing and handwashing
- ☐ 3. I would prefer community events and activities to stay online
- ☐ 4. I have avoided attending outdoor events and activities in my community because of concerns about the spread of Covid-19
- ☐ 5. I have been volunteering and/or helping neighbours less than I was doing in the first stage of lockdown

- ☐ 6. My neighbours have not been offering me as much help as they did at the beginning of lockdown
- ☐ 7. I have not been speaking to people in my neighbourhood as regularly as I was doing during lockdown
- ☐ 8. I am concerned that venues used for community events and activities in my area will close because of Covid-19
- ☐ 9. I am worried that the community spirit built during the Covid-19 outbreak will not last once our social and working lives return to 'normal'
- ☐ 10. I think businesses on my local high street will not recover from the economic effects of Covid-19

## Annex B: Methodology for Survey about Policy Proposals to Enhance Community Spirit

To identify which ten proposals to put to the public, we consulted evidence reviews into policies which have been used to strengthen community cohesion and social relationships. Our list of ten proposals was then approved by a policy expert external to RSPH and was put to another 2,096 representative members of the public by Yonder between 30 September and 1 October. The full list of proposals, and the proportion of survey respondents who thought they would have a positive impact on the community spirit in their area is presented on the next page. It is worth noting that each proposal was thought to be effective by at least three in five respondents, making them all valid options for any policy-makers or local leaders to consider. Equally, there was little division on which policies would best improve community spirit. On nine out of ten policy proposals, there was no statistical difference between the different social grades in the level of support they received. The sole exception was the suggestion for businesses to give employees one day a month off to spend volunteering in the local area – which was more popular among people in managerial and professional occupations than with those in low-skilled occupations or out-of-work. Nor did any of the proposals have statistically significantly less support from people with physical or mental health conditions or a disability compared to those without. Quite the reverse, in eight out of ten cases, this group was more likely than average to think the proposal would make a difference to their area's community spirit.



| <b>Policy recommendation</b>   | <b>Proportion who said it would make a positive difference to their area's community spirit</b> |
|--|---|
| Investment in green spaces, like community gardens and play parks, to be used for activities and socialising.  | <b>83%</b>  |
| Public sector institutions, like local councils and schools, to purchase goods and services from local businesses to stimulate the area's economy.                       | <b>79%</b>  |
| Community hubs providing activities and services focused on health and wellbeing to be set up.   | <b>79%</b>  |
| Local community groups which have been most involved with the response to, and recovery from, Covid-19 to receive funding so they can continue operating.                | <b>78%</b>  |
| Schools, higher education institutions and care services to run intergenerational befriending schemes between young and old residents, when safe to do so.               | <b>76%</b>  |
| Businesses to give employees one day a month off to spend volunteering in the local area.  | <b>71%</b>  |
| Regular Citizens' Assemblies to better involve local people in the decisions made about their area including how budgets are allocated and community assets are managed. | <b>70%</b>  |
| For more local assets (such as land, community centres and libraries) to be owned and managed by the community, instead of by the local authority.                       | <b>65%</b>  |
| A local awards event to celebrate individuals in the community who made significant contributions to the response to Covid-19.   | <b>62%</b>  |
| A new "community bank holiday", for people to celebrate with events run within their local communities.  | <b>61%</b>  |





For more information, please contact  
**info@rsph.org.uk**

**Royal Society for Public Health** John Snow House, 59 Mansell Street, London E1 8AN  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7265 7300 **www.rsph.org.uk**

© RSPH 2020 Charity Registration Number 1125949