

THE  
CONDITION  
OF BRITAIN

IPPR

THE CONDITION  
OF BRITAIN  
BRIEFING 4:

# LIVING IN A GOOD HOME AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

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Institute for Public Policy Research

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABOUT IPPR

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## ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

IPPR's flagship Condition of Britain programme is examining the state of British society in order to understand how politics, institutions and policies need to change in response to the major social pressures facing post-crash Britain.

As part of this programme, IPPR is talking to people across the country about their everyday experiences, the stresses and strains they encounter, and what is needed to help them to live more fulfilling and less pressured lives. Combined with rigorous analysis of the latest data and trends, we hope to generate new insights into the condition of British society, and define the central challenges for social policy over the coming decade.

The Voices of Britain website is a vital part of the Condition of Britain project: through it, and with the help of People's Voice Media reporting from across the country, we are inviting everyone to inform and shape our work by sharing their experiences.

We would love to hear your story:

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# INTRODUCTION

Despite major changes in the way we live, our local neighbourhoods remain important places for most people – they shape our everyday lives, our identity and our relationships with others. And although neighbourhoods face some common problems, every neighbourhood is different, with its own particular character, assets and challenges. Yet public funding and decision-making remain highly centralised and local leaders have too little control over what happens on their patch, despite their local knowledge and relationships. This paper considers the major pressures facing Britain's diverse neighbourhoods and examines what powers and responsibilities would enable local people to drive improvements in their own cities, towns, villages and communities.

## **The Condition of Britain programme**

This is the fourth in a series of briefing papers to be published as part of IPPR's Condition of Britain programme. This programme is examining the state of British society in order to understand how politics, institutions and policies need to change in response to the major social pressures facing post-crash Britain. Briefing papers on family life, young people and older people were published in October and November 2013, and this paper is accompanied by one on jobs and social security.

In each briefing paper, we draw on a range of sources to identify the central pressures on the social fabric of Britain. To ensure that our thinking is rooted in the everyday experiences of people across the country, we have conducted a series of visits to neighbourhoods around Britain. To hear more about the challenges facing Britain's neighbourhoods, we visited Luton in August and Swindon in October to talk to community leaders, young people, council officers and local politicians. These visits are complemented by an ongoing community media project called Voices of Britain, which is gathering short film essays from people across Britain in which they discuss the sources of strain and strength in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

*This series of briefing papers is designed to stimulate a debate about the best way forward for policy and action. Each of the policy lessons set out in chapter 2 of this paper concludes with a set of questions to which we will seek answers in the next stage of the Condition of Britain programme. We welcome responses to all aspects of this briefing paper from anyone with experiences or expertise to share. Please send your thoughts to [conditionofbritain@ippr.org](mailto:conditionofbritain@ippr.org). We cannot guarantee a personal response to everyone but we will do our best to reflect all the comments we receive in the next stage of our work.*

<sup>1</sup> See <http://voicesofbritain.com/>.

# MARSH FARM OUTREACH

## ESTATE SOCIALISM IN LUTON

Marsh Farm Outreach (MFO) is a community development organisation based on the Marsh Farm estate in north Luton. Marsh Farm is one of the poorest estates in south-east England and home to around 10,000 people from many different ethnic backgrounds. In the summer of 1995, it suffered three days of rioting.

MFO evolved from the Exodus Collective, a group of community activists who, in the early 1990s, organised free community parties on the estate and squatted empty homes so that local people could have a place to live. Most members of MFO live on the estate and are closely tied into the neighbourhood and know many of the other residents.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Marsh Farm received significant amounts of public money through successive government regeneration programmes. Members of MFO share a concern that much of the money and power attached to these programmes has flowed out of the estate to consultants, contractors and public sector professionals. They argue that this reflects a belief that local people cannot be trusted with public money or lack the skills and knowledge to improve their own neighbourhood.

MFO's alternative proposition is that the people living on the Marsh Farm estate should be leading efforts to improve it, with both the power and the responsibility to change things. One member calls this 'estate socialism' rather than 'state socialism': local people with the resources and responsibility to solve their own problems. Local and national government could support this local action, they argue, by helping to build up the capacities of local people and making some of their rules more flexible.

Working with other local organisations (and with considerable public investment through the New Deal for Communities programme), MFO has helped to set up a new community and business centre on the estate. The centre hosts local social enterprises, small businesses and public services, including a 'mini town hall' and a police station. Rent from these organisations helps to make the centre self-sustaining, while having local services on the doorstep helps to keep them accountable to local residents. MFO is also focused on helping local people to set up small businesses that tap into the needs of people living on the estate, and on connecting local people to jobs elsewhere in Luton.

MFO's local relationships on the estate have proved invaluable when identifying what services and support local people want. The council and other local agencies tend to hire expensive consultants to run traditional consultation exercises, which achieve a low response rate. By contrast, MFO goes house to house and organises street parties to get residents involved.

# 1. HOW STRONG ARE BRITAIN'S NEIGHBOURHOODS?

The energy and commitment of organisations like Marsh Farm Outreach confirm that many people in Britain are dedicated to working with others to improve their neighbourhoods. But neighbourhoods face a series of challenges, from entrenched disadvantage to a lack of affordable homes to rapid population change, all of which play out very differently across the country. In this chapter, we consider the strengths of Britain's neighbourhoods and identify the major pressures bearing down on our diverse communities.

## People are working together to improve their neighbourhoods and help others

Many neighbourhoods in Britain are flourishing because neighbours work together to solve local problems and make theirs a better place to live. In places like the Marsh Farm estate there are still many problems, but strong local organisations are working to make services work better for residents and to get more jobs into the local area.

Two-thirds of adults believe that people in their neighbourhood pull together to improve the local area (Cabinet Office 2013).<sup>2</sup> These efforts often rely on the energy, knowledge and leadership of local people rather than vast amounts of public money or administrative bodies. In some neighbourhoods, social bonds remain strong and people know their neighbours well.

**'Some of us older ones are looking out for the kids on the street, maybe keeping them for half an hour while mum goes to the shop or something. We're all aware of who is vulnerable in the street. I think we are starting to rely on each other a bit more, which is nice.'**

Audrey, 61, Salford (via the Voices of Britain project)

In other places, these kinds of spontaneous relationships have been eroded by population churn, changing working patterns (particularly among women) and the breakdown of extended families. What these neighbourhoods gain in dynamism and vibrancy they can lose in the lack of stability and strong social bonds that make people feel more secure. In some places, and for some people, this gap is filled by community groups and local services, many supported by major national charities or government.

**'Age UK covers such a lot of things for people. They come for a coffee morning once a week and I've been asked to get involved with knitting, sewing and crochet, if anybody's interested in learning that.'**

Rosemary, 81, Erith (via the Voices of Britain project)

These organisations and networks tend to rely on volunteers or people informally giving their time to run clubs and activities. Just over one in five adults (22 per cent) say they regularly volunteer in local community or neighbourhood groups (ibid). However, the richness of local support networks and organisations varies considerably across neighbourhoods. A relatively small number of people, often concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, dedicate a significant amount of their time to local volunteering or helping with community activities (Mohan and Bulloch 2012). Local voluntary organisations and community associations also tend to be less prevalent in more deprived neighbourhoods, where their support is likely to be most needed (Clifford 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The Cabinet Office's Community Life Survey 2012–13 found that 19 per cent of adults 'definitely agree' and 43 per cent 'tend to agree' that people in their neighbourhood pull together to improve their neighbourhood.

## Too many neighbourhoods continue to experience entrenched disadvantage or segregation

Despite the richness of local networks and neighbourhood life in many parts of Britain, a significant number of neighbourhoods continue to experience a range of complex and interlocking problems that make life more difficult for local people. The recession and slow recovery combined with significant reductions in local public spending have added to these underlying challenges in many places. Even in the buoyant economy that preceded the 2008 crash, some neighbourhoods continued to be plagued by longstanding problems such as high levels of worklessness. These are concentrated in parts of northern England, the West Midlands and London, although there are pockets of deprivation in most parts of Britain (Cox et al 2013).

Worklessness and economic disadvantage often run alongside difficult social problems. Some neighbourhoods have more than their fair share of individuals and families with multiple and complex problems, which might include addictions, serious mental health problems, involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour and children who persistently play truant from school. The people who face these challenges are often housed in less affluent or popular areas, leading to concentrations of families and individuals with the most serious problems. This can be a particular challenge in seaside towns like Blackpool and Margate (ibid) and in smaller or more isolated towns and villages.

**‘A lot of housing associations and local councils put people from their at-risk register and those who really need support into low-cost housing in small villages like ours. It makes it very difficult for them to be able to conduct a good and normal life – the last bus is at twenty past three in the afternoon and there’s no playground.’**

Roy, 62, Well, North Yorkshire (via the Voices of Britain project)

Living close by people with a mix of serious problems can make life hard for neighbours, who may find their day-to-day life disrupted by the difficult behaviour of others. Meanwhile, the people experiencing these complex problems often feel cut off from family and neighbours, and unable to make a positive contribution to their neighbourhood or move to neighbourhoods with more opportunities – ‘it’s like sitting on the outside looking in’.<sup>3</sup> Large amounts of public money are tied up in services for families and individuals experiencing multiple problems that often fail to address the root causes of difficult behaviour.

In some neighbourhoods and parts of towns and cities, people with different ethnic backgrounds or levels of income live relatively separate lives. People living close together sometimes have few opportunities to get to know one another and to share a common life. In some neighbourhoods, this is the result of rapid population change or the way the local housing market works. Newcomers are more likely to settle in areas that offer cheaper housing and which may already be facing considerable social pressures. This can foster a sense of unease or resentment among existing residents, driven by small grievances about different habits and lifestyles.

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<sup>3</sup> From a participant at a discussion group with service users from Revolving Doors Agency and St Mungo’s, 24 April 2013.

**‘It’s fair to say that the constituency I represent has, at times, been the fastest changing community in Britain, because of patterns of migration. There have been huge changes in terms of people’s patterns of life, which have been radically overhauled. That has huge implications in terms of what people perceive their community to be, how exchanges take place, and how people get on with their neighbours and the people in their streets.’**

Jon Cruddas, 51, MP for Dagenham and Rainham (via the Voices of Britain project)

There are many neighbourhoods where people have learned to share a common life successfully, despite their differences. But even in some settled communities, different interests and lifestyles may mean that people from different backgrounds lack opportunities to meet and talk. In some neighbourhoods, local institutions like schools or children’s centres struggle to attract a good mix of people from across society. Segregation can breed mistrust between different groups, making it harder for people to work together to improve their neighbourhood, while occasionally resentment can escalate into conflict and violence.

### **People can feel unsafe in their neighbourhood because of threatening or nuisance behaviour**

Experiencing intimidating or nuisance behaviour like excessive public drunkenness or harassment from neighbours can leave people feeling unsafe and reluctant to engage with those around them. In Britain, levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, including violent crime, have been in decline since around the mid-1990s, and are now lower than in the early 1980s (ONS 2013a).<sup>4</sup> The number of young people committing offences has more than halved since it peaked in the mid-2000s, down from just over 300,000 offences in 2005/06 to 137,000 in 2011/12 (YJB 2013). Levels of antisocial behaviour within local communities have also fallen since the mid-2000s, as have reports of experiencing or witnessing individual acts of antisocial behaviour (ONS 2013b). There have been particularly sharp falls in reports of vandalism, graffiti, abandoned cars, and teenagers hanging around on the street.

Despite these considerable improvements, problems remain. Around one-third of adults still say they have experienced or witnessed an incident of antisocial behaviour in the last 12 months; just over one in 10 adults (13 per cent) feel that levels of antisocial behaviour are high in their local area. Importantly, there has been less progress in tackling noisy neighbours, drug-taking and drunkenness in public places than some other forms of antisocial behaviour (ibid). These sorts of behaviours can have a particularly damaging effect on people’s feelings of security and control in their neighbourhood and home.

**‘There are quite a lot of drugs and a lot of alcohol consumed. Quite often, people will be walking around in the streets quite drunk and there’ll be a lot of noise from the local pubs. That can be quite threatening at times.’**

Terry, 62, Leeds (via the Voices of Britain project)

Experiences of antisocial behaviour are not confined to the poorest neighbourhoods. In fact, being a victim of or witnessing antisocial behaviour is more commonly reported among wealthier households and people in higher-level jobs (ibid). This may in part be linked to differences in expectations of good behaviour.

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to people’s experiences of crime, not police-recorded crime.



Experiencing antisocial behaviour is much more common among people living in densely populated neighbourhoods, particularly those living in flats and terraced houses. Living close to our neighbours can be difficult at times, putting strain on relationships and testing the boundaries of reasonable behaviour. Antisocial behaviour is also much more likely to affect younger people and those in early middle age than older people: one in three people aged 16 to 24 has experienced antisocial behaviour in the last year, compared to one in five aged over 65 (ibid).

### Too many people struggle to secure a decent home in their local area

Living in a decent and secure home allows people to put down roots and settle into stable family life. Young people who are struggling to own their own home say that renting or living with parents can have a negative effect on their relationship with their partner (Lawton 2013). If a person's home feels temporary, they are less likely to care what happens in their neighbourhoods or invest in making connections with neighbours. This makes it harder for neighbours to work together to address local problems, which in turn can make it more likely that those who can will move away.

Yet finding a secure and decent home is becoming increasingly difficult in Britain. Homeownership is moving further and further out of reach for younger generations, especially for those whose parents are unable to provide financial support. The affordability of homeownership has fallen in all parts of the UK over the last decade but is most difficult in London and many parts of southern and eastern England (Keep 2012). Towns like Luton lack the space to build enough new homes within their boundaries but can find it difficult to work with neighbouring councils to meet the housing needs for their residents.

Stalled housebuilding also means there are insufficient affordable homes in the social sector (those owned by councils or housing associations) for families and individuals for whom homeownership is not appropriate. The number of homes in the social sector has fallen in the last decade despite growing demand, and there are over 2 million families on local authority waiting lists in England alone – including over 300,000 who need to move because they are living in overcrowded or insanitary homes (DCLG 2012). Long waiting lists are a particular problem in London and growing towns like Reading and Swindon, as well as towns and cities in northern England and the West Midlands (ibid).

The squeeze on homeownership and social housing has led to a big increase in private renting over the last 10 years, after a long period of decline, with the number of homes for private rent nearly doubling since the early 2000s (ibid). Many towns and cities across Britain have neighbourhoods like Bury Park in central Luton, an ethnically diverse area with densely packed terraced houses, many of which are privately rented. The area suffers from overcrowding, rising rents, poor-quality homes and a lack of open space; many local landlords own only a few properties and lack experience as professional landlords.<sup>5</sup> Seaside towns like Margate and Blackpool have an oversupply of large properties, often former B&Bs and hotels, which have been converted into flats and are often used to house vulnerable or transitory people. This can lead to concentrations of social problems and rapid population churn in particular streets or neighbourhoods (Cox et al 2013). The prevalence of insecure tenancies in the private sector makes it particularly difficult for people to put down roots and feel part of their neighbourhood.

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5 From conversations with officers and councillors at Luton Borough Council and representatives from Luton Town Football Club.

## 2. WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD TO THRIVE?

Britain's neighbourhoods benefit from the energy, passion and knowledge of local leaders and residents, but local people often lack the powers they need to create real change. In this chapter, we consider what it would take for every neighbourhood in Britain to become a great place to live and work, stressing the need for local control and responsibility to enable more cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods to thrive.

### Devolving power and responsibility to local areas to solve complex social problems

Local leaders need more powers and resources to solve complex social problems and improve their neighbourhoods. While national government needs to retain responsibility for setting core priorities and basic citizen entitlements, a major devolution of power, money and responsibility would allow the detail of solutions to be tailored to particular local needs and plans to change more rapidly as conditions change. It would mean that decisions are taken by people who know an area best and care most about what happens there, and it would give local areas more control over their future, rather than being dependent on Westminster and Whitehall. It would make it easier to bring together different pots of funding to innovate and improve services for local people and to make sure public money is spent more effectively. However, the precise form that devolution might take will need to vary depending on the particular set of problems under consideration and the capacities of different local areas.

The previous Labour government invested significant resources into a range of social and place-based neighbourhood renewal programmes, but relied too heavily on large central grants and increasingly centralised decision-making. New public money was often laid over the top of existing, poor services, with little attempt to systematically redesign these services or to build up institutions capable of sustaining local action. Although many of these programmes helped to ameliorate entrenched disadvantage, some of the gains turned out to be unsustainable in the face of recession and public spending cuts (Cox et al 2013).

The Coalition has largely abandoned public funding for specific neighbourhood regeneration work. At the same time, it has dramatically cut back local government budgets. There has been no real shift in the balance of power and resources between the centre and local areas; if anything, with the abolition of regional government and the reduction in local government capacities, power has shifted further back towards the centre. The lack of local control over much of the public money flowing into local areas is making it doubly difficult for local government to absorb large spending cuts imposed from the centre, which look set to continue.

Devolving specific powers and resources to local areas offers the prospect of mobilising local energy and expertise to make progress on a range of social and economic problems. Devolution will need to take several forms, driven by stronger, more stable and more democratic institutions of local government, rather than the constant reorganisation of Whitehall agencies and quangos. In areas like housing (as well as employment, skills and transport) local needs are often best addressed by local areas working together as combined authorities that cover whole city-regions or as large counties, which gives them the scale to invest directly and make strategic decisions. Some places, like greater Manchester, have already proven themselves capable of managing large shared budgets and driving reform, while others are building up their capacity to take on new responsibilities. Longer-term financial settlements and pooled budgets would enable local areas to make strategic decisions based on clear priorities and to find genuine savings in public budgets, rather than simply absorbing more cuts.

On other issues, like crime, antisocial behaviour, social exclusion and integration, where very local knowledge and expertise is required, action on a smaller scale is often more appropriate. Devolving specific powers and responsibilities to rejuvenated town and parish councils could help to mobilise local capacities to tackle problems rooted in particular neighbourhoods. Local leaders also have a role to play in creating the conditions for local people and non-state organisations to build the neighbourhood-level institutions and networks (like support groups, social clubs and community centres) that enable people to overcome segregation and isolation and to seek mutual support.

#### Questions

- *How can we build strong, accountable institutions of local government, including combined authorities and counties, that are capable of addressing the big social and economic challenges facing their cities and regions – including on housing?*
- *What specific powers and responsibilities would underpin the rebuilding of active town and parish councils that are capable of tackling complex social problems in their local areas?*
- *How can we build local institutions and networks at the neighbourhood level that help overcome isolation, segregation and disadvantage, and foster mutual support?*

### Strong city and county leadership to solve local housing problems

Meeting the housing needs of everyone in Britain requires major institutional reforms that put power and responsibility in the hands of city-regions and counties to enable them to solve their particular housing problems. Housing pressures play out very differently across the cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods of Britain, reflecting enormous differences in local housing stock, population and economic performance. Yet funding and policy priorities have been set at the national level (in England at least) for decades. Most of the public money for housebuilding is distributed directly to individual housing associations by a Whitehall quango, while the ability of councils to borrow against their own assets in order to build more homes is severely constrained. The basic rules of housing benefit and for allocating social housing are set centrally, while councils have little power to drive up standards among private landlords.

Equally damaging has been the reliance on national benefit expenditure instead of local building to meet the housing needs of families and individuals. This reflects a preference among political leaders from all parties over the last 30 years for the state to subsidise rents rather than build new homes. Spending on housing benefit has increased eightfold in real terms since 1980/81, up from just £3 billion that year to an estimated £24 billion in 2013/14 (DWP 2013).<sup>6</sup> The 2008 financial crash caused levels of homebuilding to drop – but they have been too low for the last 30 years. The fundamental problem is the decline in publically funded housebuilding. This has left Britain reliant on a volatile and uncompetitive private development industry, which has proved incapable of filling the gap.

The previous Labour government did too little to challenge the institutions and thinking that have underpinned housing policy for the last 30 years. Although housebuilding increased, Britain continued to build too few homes to meet demand, and few powers to solve housing problems were devolved to local areas (Schmuecker 2011).

<sup>6</sup> All figures in 2013/14 prices.

More recently, the Coalition government has focused on boosting demand for homes rather than improving supply, through its Help to Buy scheme, which is likely to push up house prices. The Coalition's attempts to crack down on the housing benefit bill have impoverished families and individuals yet have failed to address the underlying causes of rising benefit spending.

To ensure that city-regions and counties have the resources they need to tackle local housing challenges, money that is currently held centrally (especially housing benefit and public cash for housebuilding) needs to be brought together and handed over to combined authorities and county councils. With tough accountability arrangements in place to make sure public money is well spent, this devolution of funding would allow city-regions and counties to make their own decisions about how to meet local housing needs. Longer-term financial settlements would give local areas the certainty they need to plan for the future, while lifting current restrictions on borrowing would allow city-regions and counties to reap the financial and social returns of building new homes. Councils also need more powers to work with landlords and lettings agencies to make private renting more affordable, decent and secure.

#### Questions

- *What powers, responsibilities and incentives do city-regions and counties need to drive up levels of housebuilding?*
- *What powers do local areas need to make sure that private renting is affordable, decent and secure?*

### Addressing the root causes of antisocial behaviour

To generate lasting solutions to antisocial behaviour, we need tough interventions that require people to sort out their underlying problems with the support of local services that work together to build meaningful relationships with individuals and their families. The previous Labour government was the first to put antisocial behaviour on the political agenda, handing new powers to local police forces and other agencies to tackle bad behaviour, including new tools like antisocial behaviour orders (known as ASBOs). This helped many neighbourhoods by moving people on and creating some welcome short-term relief.

However, Labour's agenda became increasingly focused on curtailing bad behaviour through legislative tools (and mopping up after things had gone wrong) instead of requiring people to address the causes of their behaviour. At the same time, the different services designed to help people deal with their problems (including the police, probation, social services, housing advice and health services) have often failed to work together, with people cycling through lots of different interventions without getting to the root cause of their issues. The result was that the authorities had more success in dealing with the symptoms of relatively simple problems – like cleaning up graffiti and removing abandoned vehicles – than in resolving ongoing problems rooted in complex behavioural issues.

The Coalition government has allowed antisocial behaviour to fall down the political agenda, and has focused much of its efforts on a bureaucratic reorganisation of existing legislation rather than giving neighbourhoods practical help to tackle bad behaviour. One positive step, however, has been the trialing of neighbourhood justice panels, which rely on local volunteers to help offenders take responsibility for their actions and work through their problems, rather than simply imposing a short-lived punishment. Offenders are referred by

the police or their social landlord, and are required to sign up to a good behaviour contract designed to address the underlying causes of their behaviour and repair the damage done to the victim. If they breach the contract, they will be handed back to the police or their landlord, which could result in an ASBO, action through the courts or eviction. In Swindon, for instance, the local council and police credit this approach with helping to find a long-term solution to the issues caused by problem drinking among a small number of homeless people in the town centre.<sup>7</sup> Town and parish councils could be given responsibility for running neighbourhood justice panels, including the recruiting and training of sufficient volunteers. Creating a clear set of offences that must be referred to a neighbourhood justice panel would ensure that this problem-solving approach is used systematically to address the lower-level offences that blight some communities.

For young people, youth offending teams (YOTs) have had significant success in bringing down levels of first-time youth offending, providing a model that could be extended to adults at risk of involvement in criminal behaviour. YOTs bring together professionals from different services (including health, education, social work, probation and the police) to work side-by-side in local teams, which helps to overcome institutional barriers (Muir and Parker 2014 forthcoming). Young offenders and young people who are considered at risk of entering the criminal justice system are given the opportunity to develop a strong relationship with a dedicated caseworker who can guide them through the different kinds of support they might need to get back on track. The preventative focus means that young people are more likely to be diverted towards more positive activities, rather than getting help only after they have been sucked into the criminal justice system. Greater local control of public budgets could make this kind of preventative, joined-up working easier for local areas to organise and extend to other vulnerable groups.

### Questions

- *How do we make sure people face up to their poor behaviour and get the support they need to address underlying problems?*
- *What powers and resources need to be devolved to local areas to make services work better together to address problem behaviour?*

### Addressing the root causes of social exclusion

Services for people with complex, overlapping problems (often some combination of mental health problems, offending, homelessness and addiction) often fail to tackle the root causes of people's problems, leaving them excluded from mainstream society. Sometimes, this is because services are designed from the centre, with insufficient local control over budgets and decision-making. People with complex problems also have to access several different public services (including housing, benefits, employment, health services and probation), each of which addresses only one part of their difficulties (McNeil 2012). Typically, each service is designed around bureaucratic structures and professional boundaries rather than the needs of the people using the services, making it hard for individuals to build trusting relationships with those who are trying to help. Despite being heavy users of public services, people with complex problems are regularly left out of their design and delivery. This means that we miss opportunities to improve services, don't make enough of people's capacity to contribute by improving services or helping others, and don't create the social bonds that help motivate people to pursue a better life.

<sup>7</sup> From conversations with officers at Swindon Borough Council.

The previous Labour government attempted to tackle these problems through a series of new place-based and national programmes, largely organised from the centre. There are valuable insights to be gleaned from some of the more successful interventions, including that people do best when they can develop strong relationships with a dedicated caseworker who has the power to bring together a range of services around individuals and families (Lloyd et al 2011). This lies at the heart of the Coalition government's troubled families programme, which is helping local areas to pool budgets and provide more dedicated one-to-one support, often in neighbourhood-based teams.

However, the Coalition is also increasingly relying on market mechanisms like 'payment by results' to drive action among both local government and private contractors (for example, in the work programme and planned reforms to probation services). This often requires large, centrally organised contracts with simplistic performance measures that fail to account for the complexity of what drives social exclusion, while leaving service users feeling frustrated and ignored (Lowe 2013). This is also an area plagued by short-term measures and initiatives that often are given insufficient time to bed in, are unable to address the failure of existing services and don't link up with wider services like employment programmes (Wilson and Gallagher 2013).

National leadership is important to ensure that people with complex problems remain on the political agenda and that every local area has effective services in place. But the basic work of enabling people to take responsibility for their problems and overcome exclusion requires intensive relationships of trust that can only be forged in the neighbourhoods where people live. Working to national minimum requirements and priorities, local areas should have greater responsibility for helping people to address complex problems by bringing together local services around individuals and their families. Charities and voluntary organisations, especially those with local roots, are often best placed to develop these kinds of relationships and to mobilise people's own capacities to change their lives. These organisations often have a culture, which is sometimes missing in statutory services, of encouraging people to take responsibility and regain their sense of control by making decisions about their own recovery and supporting others, for example through user forums, volunteering and mentoring.<sup>8</sup> Local areas and national government should consider how best to harness this expertise, for example, by designating particular services to be run by local or national charities and making user involvement more systematic in a range of public services.

#### Questions

- *How can we bring together local services to help people solve their complex and deep-rooted problems more effectively?*
- *How can we mobilise the capacity of people with complex problems to change their own lives and support others?*

### Supporting neighbourhoods to overcome segregation

Britain's neighbourhoods are more diverse than ever, but this can mean that they need help to build positive relationships with neighbours from different backgrounds. The previous Labour government attempted to advance greater integration, with stronger requirements for English language skills among new migrants, citizenship tests and ceremonies to foster

8 From a discussion group with service users from Revolving Doors Agency and St Mungo's, 24 April 2013.

a sense of belonging, and new resources for local advice and guidance. However, the focus tended to be on migrants achieving minimum benchmarks to signal their integration (like passing an English test or gaining citizenship) rather than a concern about people's day-to-day interactions within their neighbourhoods and workplaces. And increasingly, emphasis was placed on tackling extremism among a minority of individuals rather than addressing broader experiences of disadvantage and segregation.

The Coalition has withdrawn most government support for neighbourhoods that are receiving large numbers of new arrivals or which need to build stronger relationships across more settled communities. Key sources of funding have been cut, such as the Migration Impacts Fund, which provided practical help for neighbourhoods seeing an increase in new arrivals. These cuts stem from a concern that this kind of support will simply attract more migrants. In practice, however, it means that neighbourhoods have been left to cope without support.

Realistically, people will continue to arrive in the UK, particularly from other European countries, and we need to make sure they can make a positive contribution to their neighbourhoods. Some settled communities could benefit from stronger local institutions and informal networks capable of bringing together people from different backgrounds. Local councils should have a responsibility for helping new arrivals to settle in and for building relationships across communities, with devolved powers and resources to lead this. But public budgets in this area will always be limited and the hard work of forging lasting social bonds rests on local people and organisations. Popular institutions with strong local roots and which are able to reach out to people from across society can provide places where neighbours learn to know and trust each other, but these kinds of institution still need to be built up in some neighbourhoods. Strategic oversight from national government would help to predict where new arrivals might settle and make sure that particular neighbourhoods have the help they need to deal with the immediate consequences and to develop new social bonds to help guard against segregation in future.

### Questions

- *What powers and resources would enable local areas to address segregation in their neighbourhoods?*
- *How can we mobilise local institutions and people to forge social bonds across diverse neighbourhoods?*



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