PUBLIC**FIRST**

Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods

Opinion Research Summary

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Research Methodology

Polling

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

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

Questions covered topics including:

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

Focus Groups

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

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

- Method: 75 minutes, online
- Recruitment: 8 residents, working class

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

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

Key Points

Neighbourhood units are small

Neighbourhoods are perceived in hyper-local terms, especially in lower quintile communities.

Perceptions match reality

People accurately perceive whether their neighbourhood is in a better or worse state than others, showing that policy resulting in outcomes people can see and feel in their neighbourhoods is likely to be rewarded.

Driving divide issues are smaller + visual

The issues that divide perceptions of whether a neighbourhood is good or bad tend to be more cosmetic, like litter and vandalism, rather than structural, implying that perceptions could be easily improved.

Community pride and hope remains

Compared to national disengagement and cynicism, an albeit wounded pride in communities remains, providing strong foundations for enacting neighbourhood-level change.
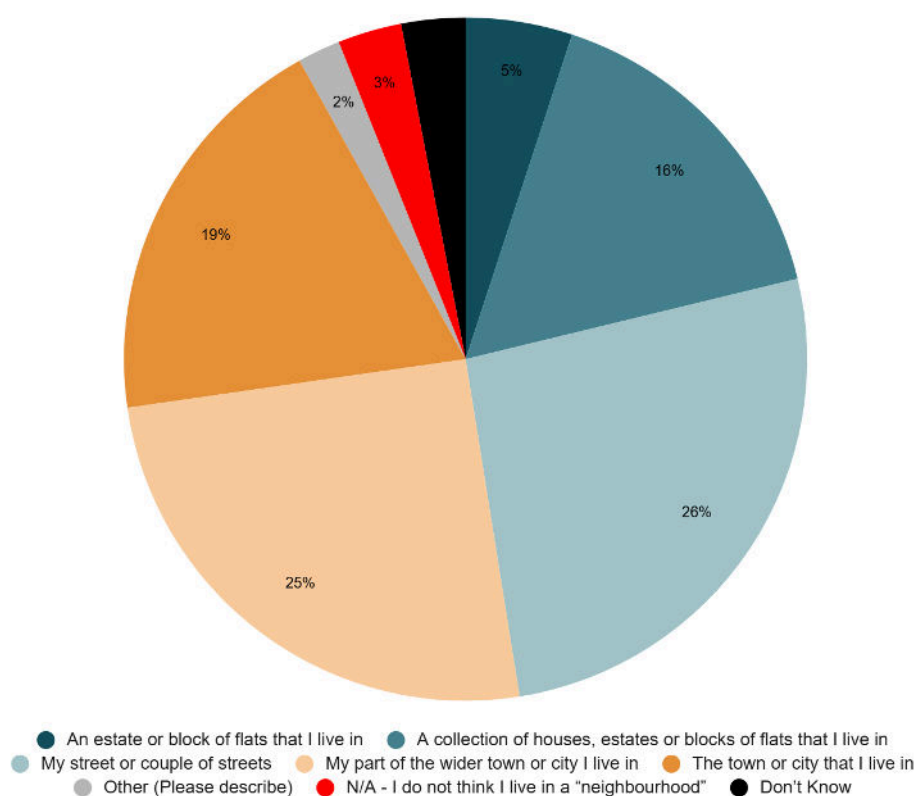
Political rewards possible

The political segment most likely to feel neighbourhood decline are Reform UK voters, so improvements at this level are a key part of winning back their trust.

Definitions of Neighbourhood

Across the polling and focus groups, participants were asked to consider their own neighbourhoods and define its boundaries.

Varying definitions of neighbourhood

There was no single definition of a neighbourhood that stood out, with a relatively mixed split of opinion across the different options. In our focus groups, participants also broadly found this difficult to consider and - with the notable exception of those living on estates - there was no shared clear definition.

Legend:
- An estate or block of flats that I live in
- A collection of houses, estates or blocks of flats that I live in
- My street or couple of streets
- My part of the wider town or city I live in
- The town or city that I live in
- Other (Please describe)
- N/A - I do not think I live in a "neighbourhood"
- Don't Know

Smaller scale definitions more dominant, especially in lower quintile areas

Despite no single definition standing out, it was clear that most people viewed a neighbourhood as being below the level of an entire town or city, with a majority split between the first four options - ranging from single estate or block of flats, up to a part of the wider town or city.

Notably, those in higher quintile (more deprived) areas were more likely to see their neighbourhood at a smaller scale than those in lower quintile (less deprived) areas. Whereas **42%** of those in Q1 viewed a neighbourhood as being one of the smallest three options (estate/block of flats, collection of houses, street/couple of streets), this figure was **54%** for those in Q5.

Our regressions showed that rural and urban areas were an important driver of this trend, as was age. Those in urban areas tended to have slightly smaller scale definitions of their neighbourhood. Those who live in flats were more likely to think of their specific estate or block of flats (**16%**). We also note that those who say they live in large towns were more likely to identify their part of the town as their neighbourhood, and those in a small town were more likely to identify the entirety of their town. The results indicate that those in larger population areas were slightly more likely to look at smaller portions of their population area as their neighbourhood.
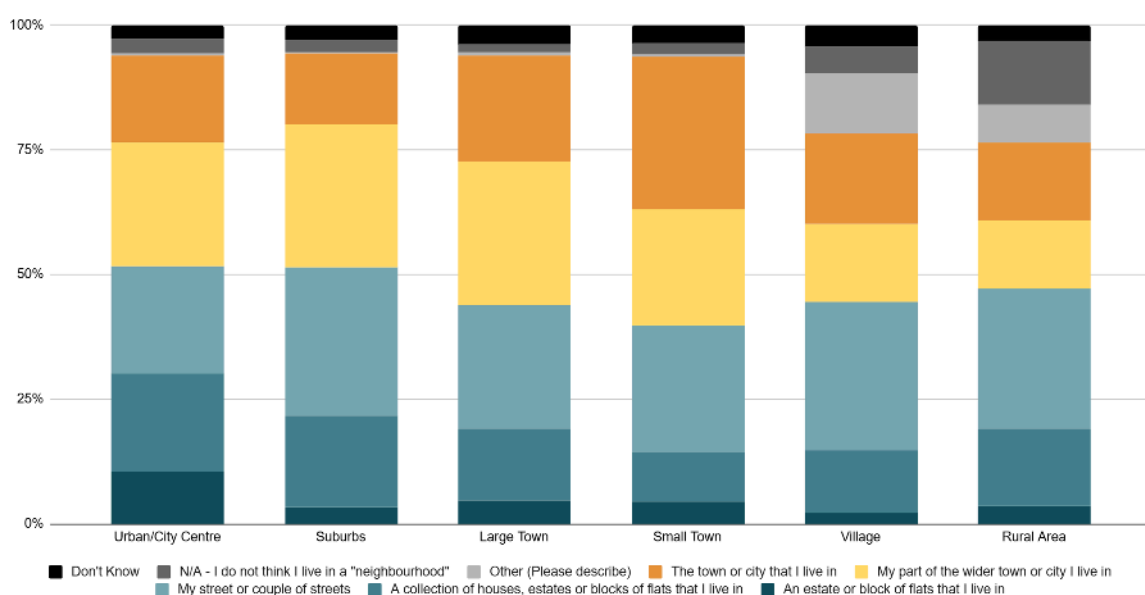
> *The immediate area, I suppose the local shops and the area around your house.*

Man, 30s
West Bromwich Group

> *I live in a cul-de-sac, and I regard the other people living in the cul-de-sac as my neighbours, the entrance to the cul-de-sac [is my neighbourhood boundary].*

Man, 60s
Wakefield & Rothwell Group

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

Man, 70s
Wakefield & Rothwell Group

Personal connections and function won out over formal boundaries

Predictably, people were less likely to define their neighbourhood by reference to official boundaries, like local authority areas. They were far more likely to define their neighbourhoods in the context of:

- **Personal connections**, like defining that they saw people from a couple of streets across as their neighbours, or that they saw the group of dog walkers in the park as a defining feature of their neighbourhood.
- **Function**, like seeing the parade of shops nearest to their house as the limit of their neighbourhood, or that the commercial outlet park on the outskirts of town was not part of their neighbourhood.

> *Friendships with neighbours where you can actually rely on people and you look after each other.*

Man, 50s
Leeds East Group

> *My neighbourhood is about getting to know people and the regular faces and stuff like that.*

Female, 50s
Wakefield & Rothwell Group
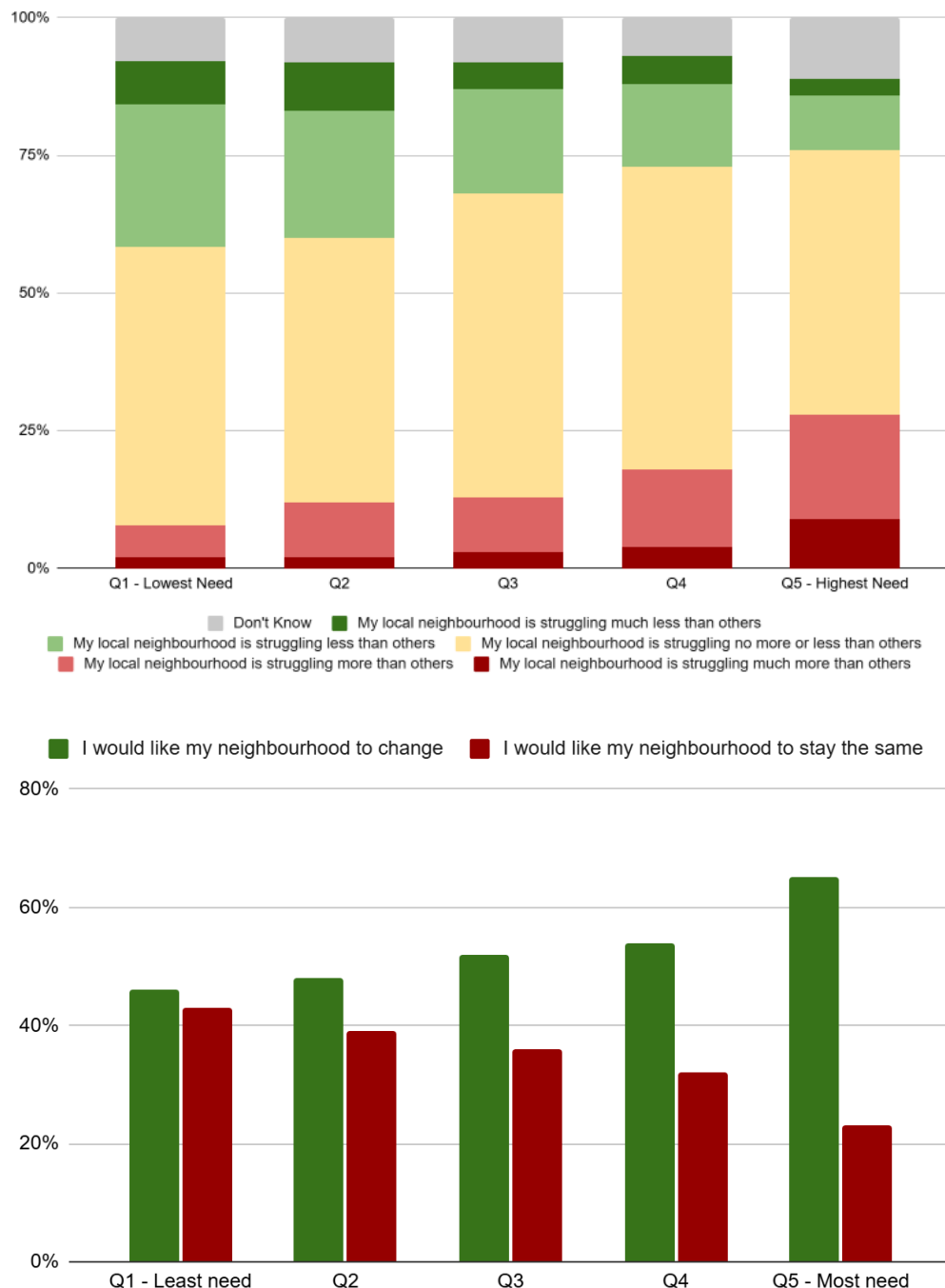
Perceived State of Neighbourhoods

Survey participants were asked a number of questions on the quality of their local services, on the biggest issues facing their local neighbourhood, and whether a range of things had got better or worse in their local neighbourhood since 10 years ago. In our focus groups, participants were asked to consider the state of their local neighbourhoods, considering whether they had changed in the past 20 years. They were also asked what they thought the specific issues in their neighbourhood were, and how it compared with other parts of the country.

Perception matches reality: those in struggling areas recognise this, and want change

As part of the polling process, we gathered the postcode data of respondents. This allowed us to get detailed geographical breakdowns of responses, and to map against ICON's Hyper-Local Need Measure. This enabled us to split all responses into quintiles based on this measure, with the Q1 being respondents in areas falling into the 20% of areas least in need, and Q5 being respondents in the 20% areas most in need.

This process allowed us to show whether people's perceptions of their areas were in line with ICON's index. The results show that people perceive their areas directly in line with the index, and are accurately able to perceive whether their areas are more or less deprived than other areas. They also show that those in the highest quintile, most deprived, areas are most likely to want change, whilst those in the lowest quintile, least deprived, areas are least likely to want change.

Although not altogether surprising, this is an encouraging result: people notice when things improve in their area. This justifies a 'deliverism' approach to neighbourhoods by implying that residents reward seeing smaller improvements by perceiving those improvements as positive change. Change is not going unnoticed.

Legend (top chart):
- Don't Know
- My local neighbourhood is struggling much less than others
- My local neighbourhood is struggling less than others
- My local neighbourhood is struggling no more or less than others
- My local neighbourhood is struggling more than others
- My local neighbourhood is struggling much more than others

Legend (bottom chart):
- I would like my neighbourhood to change
- I would like my neighbourhood to stay the same

Regression analysis showed that this relationship between the need index and feeling that the neighbourhood is doing worse remained significant when controlling for demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, income and education). However, both age and income also had significant impacts, with older and wealthier people less likely to feel their neighbourhood is struggling more. This effect in respect of the index remained significant even when we controlled for subjective evaluations of facilities, services and neighbourhood issues. In other words, the Hyper Local Need index is capturing something beyond people's own evaluations of the performance of their neighbourhood.

Wounded civic pride: widespread feelings of decline, particularly at national and high street level

Across all the research, there was a sense that there has been decline.

This was emphatically true at the national level, where there was a widespread sense of despondency. This covered both the scale of the issues faced by the country and the ability of the government to deal with these. Indeed, **35%** feel the Labour government is actively doing worse than the previous government, whilst only **25%** think the Government is doing a better job and **31%** that they are doing no better or worse.
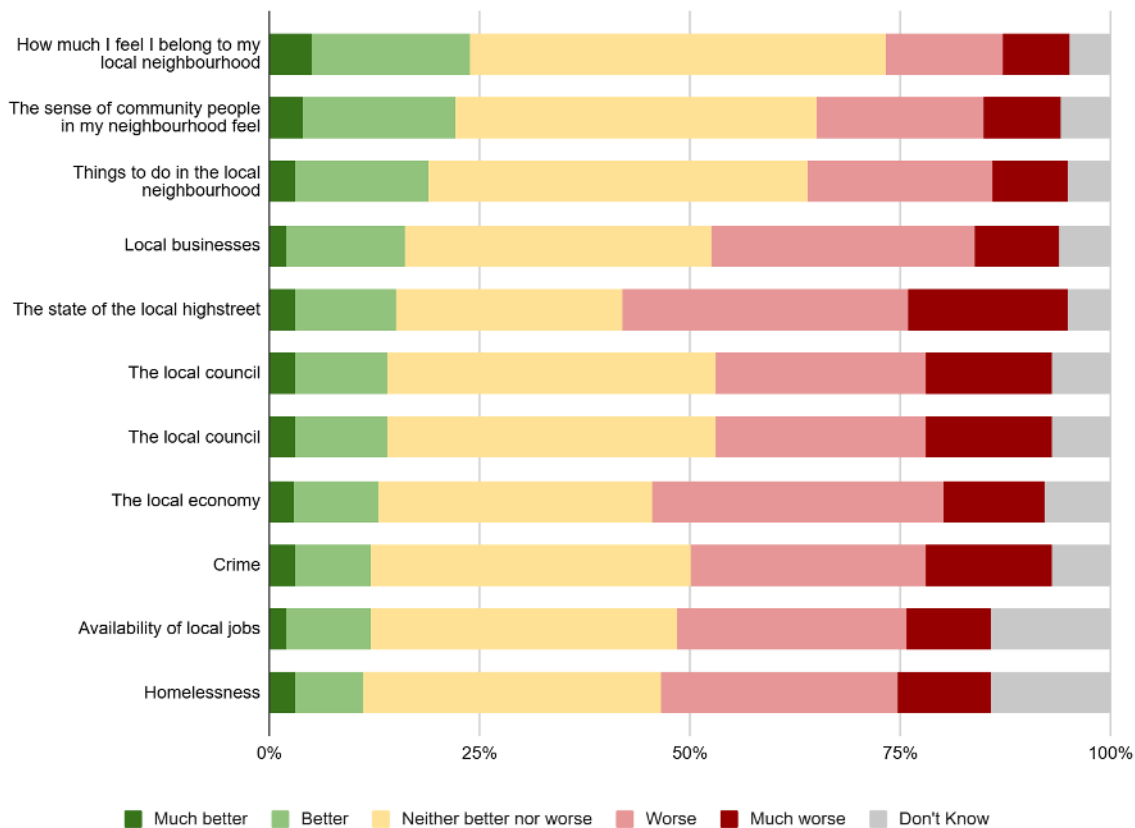
At a local and neighbourhood level, the picture was more mixed. There was a clear sense at a wider local level that there has been a significant degree of decline, especially around the highstreet (see graph below). At the level of geography below this - the hyper local neighbourhood level (like particular estates, groups of houses or streets) - whilst there was still a sense that things are difficult, there was also a clear sense of pride, belonging, community and personal investment that was distinctly lacking at higher geographic levels. Rather than the despondency of the national level, there was a feeling that people's civic pride in their hyper local community had been wounded by decline, but not lost altogether.

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

Woman, 30s
West Bromwich Group

Thinking about your local neighbourhood, would you say the following have gotten better or worse over the past 10 years?

Legend: Much better | Better | Neither better nor worse | Worse | Much worse | Don't Know

Categories (top to bottom):
- How much I feel I belong to my local neighbourhood
- The sense of community people in my neighbourhood feel
- Things to do in the local neighbourhood
- Local businesses
- The state of the local highstreet
- The local council
- The local council
- The local economy
- Crime
- Availability of local jobs
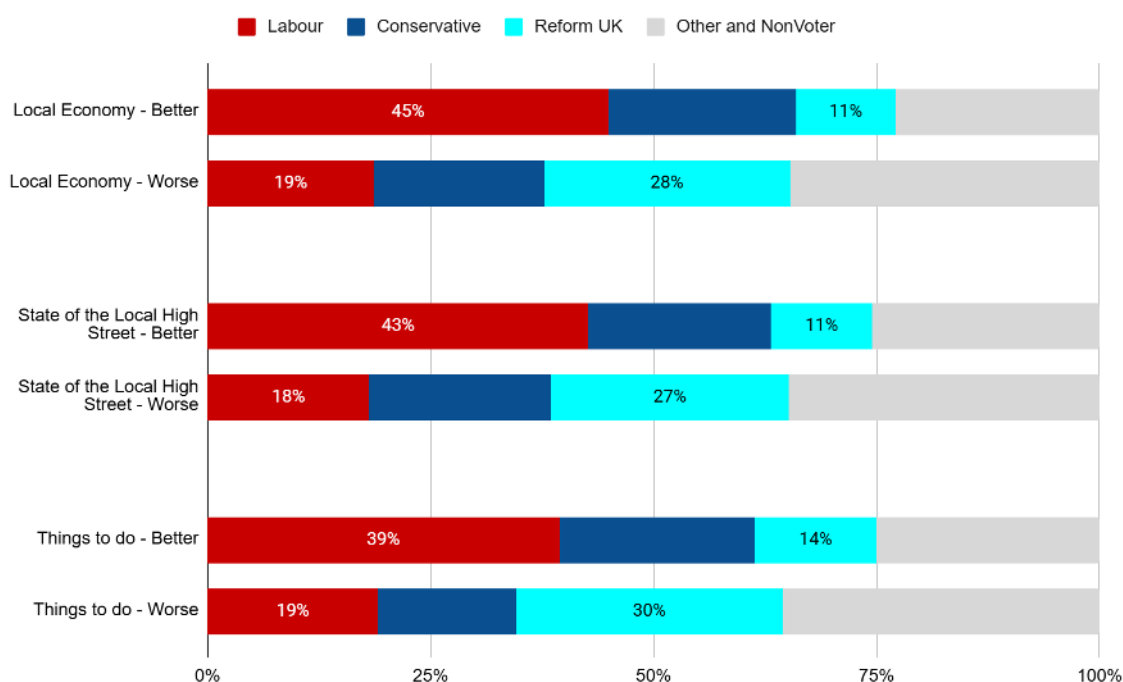- Homelessness

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

Woman, 40s
West Bromwich Group

Political trends

Our research indicates a relationship between the perceptions of decline in neighbourhoods and where people are considering voting for the Reform UK party. At the top level, Reform tended to hold a lead among those who perceived their local area to have gotten worse over the last 10 years. Labour would tend to lead among those who felt the area had gotten better.

Stated Vote Intentions split by those who feel things have gotten better, and worse

Legend: ■ Labour ■ Conservative ■ Reform UK ■ Other and NonVoter

| Category	Labour	Reform UK
Local Economy - Better	45%	11%
Local Economy - Worse	19%	28%
State of the Local High Street - Better	43%	11%
State of the Local High Street - Worse	18%	27%
Things to do - Better	39%	14%
Things to do - Worse	19%	30%

We find limited variation on vote intention on the hyper-local need index, with 20% of those in Q1 saying they would vote Reform compared to **23%** in Q5. Conservative vote share did decline across the index, with **22%** of Q1 indicating they would support the Conservatives, dipping to **14%** of Q5. The result is that the neighbourhoods with the least need are practically a three-horse race on vote intention, but those with the most need are contested between Labour and Reform.

Generally, Reform UK voters are an important part of the story of neighbourhood decline. We find a few local issues which are specifically of higher concern among Reform voters: potholes, high street shops closing and overdevelopment. On the other hand, the issues which are perceived more by Labour voters are a lack of housing and homelessness.
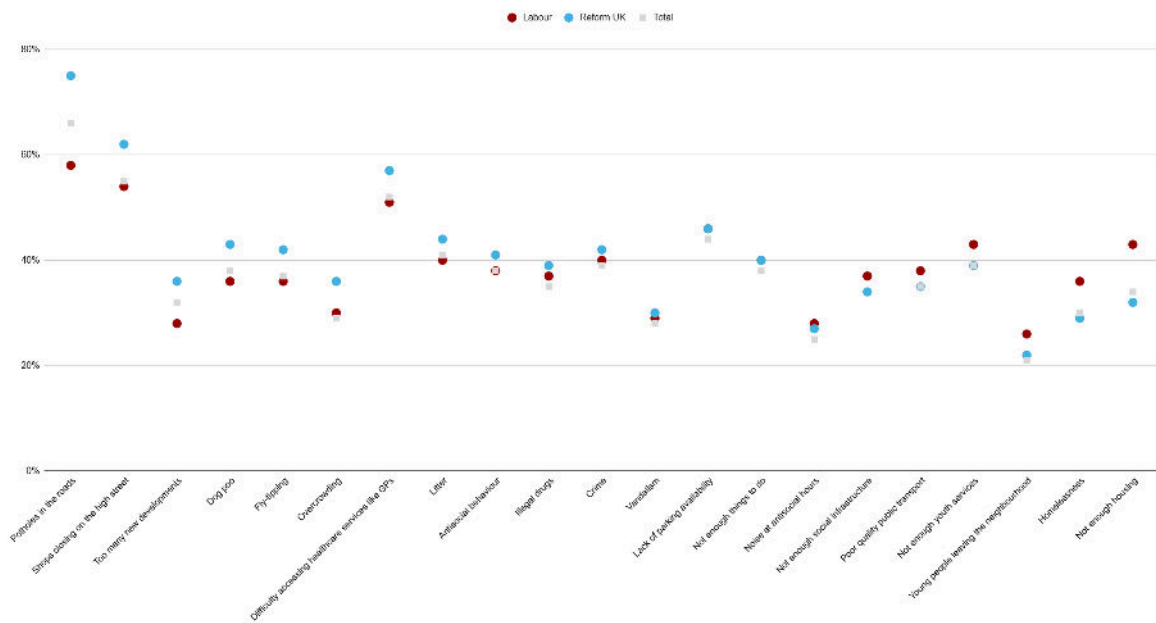
28% of Labour voters, and **27%** of Conservative voters, believe their neighbourhood is struggling less than others. This drops to **19%** of Reform UK voters. Most people believe their neighbourhood is in the same position as others around the country. However, whilst Labour holds a clear lead over Reform among those who feel their neighbourhood is doing better than others (**28%** to **18%**), this is considerably tighter in the neighbourhoods which people feel are doing worse (**29%** to **24%**). In the neighbourhoods which people feel are performing worse than others, the Conservative party again sees considerably less support (**15%**).

Net score on a 1-5 scale for local services

■ Labour ■ Conservative ■ Reform UK
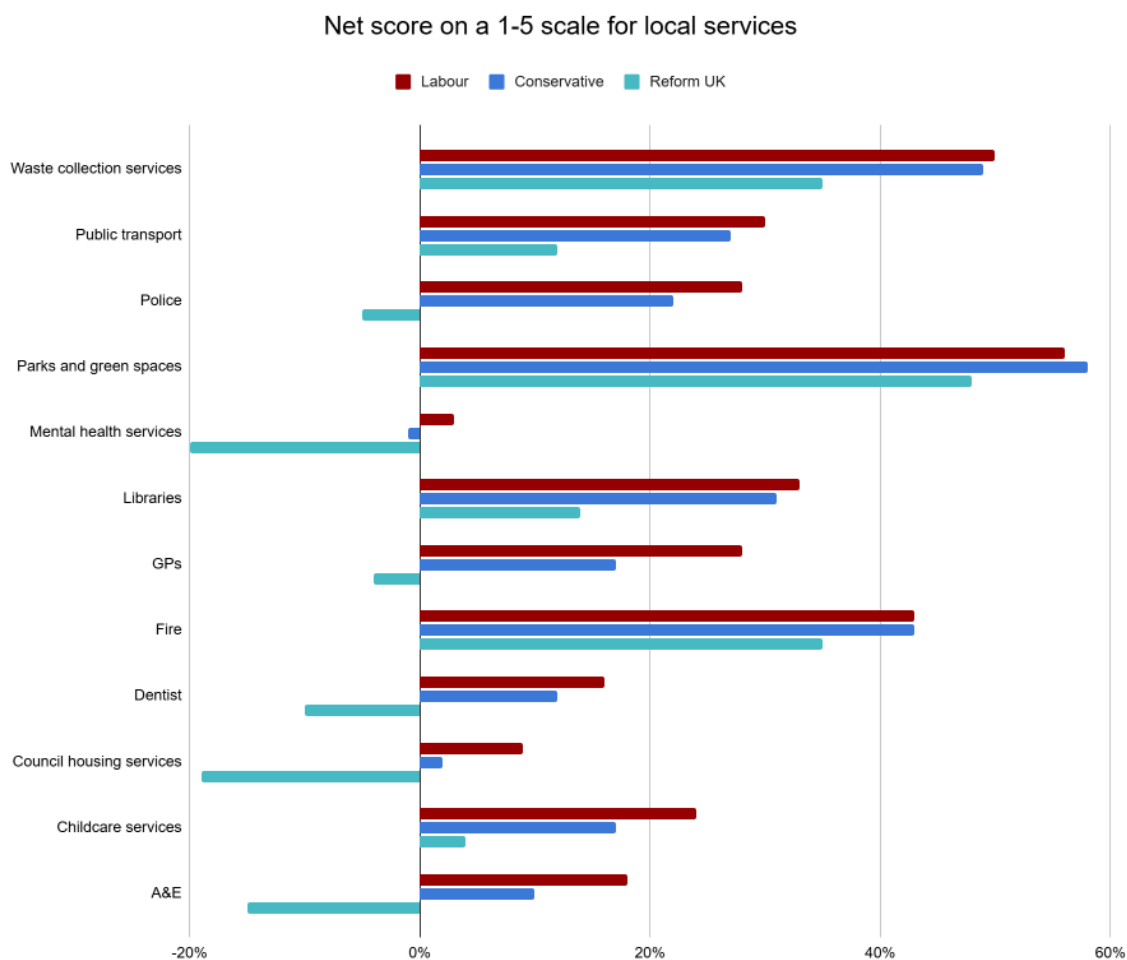
Our results show Reform voters are generally more critical of local services, though there are some areas where this criticism is particularly strong. Reform voters tended to be more critical than positive around healthcare in their neighbourhoods (including GPs, A&E, Dentists), around council housing, and of the police.

Core perceived drivers of decline

Across the focus groups, there was a strong sense that participants felt their neighbourhoods were becoming more transient, and that this was a significant driver of local decline. Residents talked of streets which had once been 'family orientated' now becoming Houses of Multiple Occupancy, and spoke about the shift away from owner occupiers to less stable rental populations.

Even more apparent was the perception that immigration was a significant contributor to neighbourhood decline, which was a theme in all of the focus groups with the exception of Brighton Kemptown & Peacehaven.

> *You've kind of got five times as many people vying for exactly the same amount of services which have been starved of funds. If all of these extra people are paying tax why isn't some of that going back into the environment that we live in, or to pay for extra doctors?*

Male, 50s
Leeds East Group

> *It's unrecognisable from the place where you lived 20 years ago, because there were more English people. And there's so many different races and cultures that it's just all mixed and multicultural, and you don't recognise it as being a neighbourhood in Britain.*

Woman, 60s
Wakefield and Rothwell group

> *When my children were younger, I used to go to the school, used to speak to everybody I walked past. Now I don't know one person, and there's so many different people.*

Woman, 50s
Wakefield and Rothwell group

Alongside these frustrations, participants lamented a lack of funding in their areas both from local and national government. Many felt there was little the individual or smaller groups could do to improve their neighbourhoods without the requisite financial backing from the Government.

A common example given by participants as to the pitfalls of insufficient funding was the role of young people in local decline. In the eyes of many participants, young people were the cause of a large proportion of local crime, and tend to hold bad attitudes towards their local areas. Interestingly, this was often linked to a lack of availability of youth services and opportunities for young people - so participants were not without sympathy for the younger generation that they were criticising.

> *They're living in estates where there's nothing to do because the councils don't provide anything. You've got young people selling drugs, doing what they want to do. The other half want to be famous. Nobody wants to go to work. Nobody's going to learn a trade.*

Woman, 30s
West Bromwich Group

Core issues

Most salient drivers between quintiles are small but visible signs of decline and crime

People felt there were a wide spread of issues that were negatively affecting their communities. The key trends we saw were:
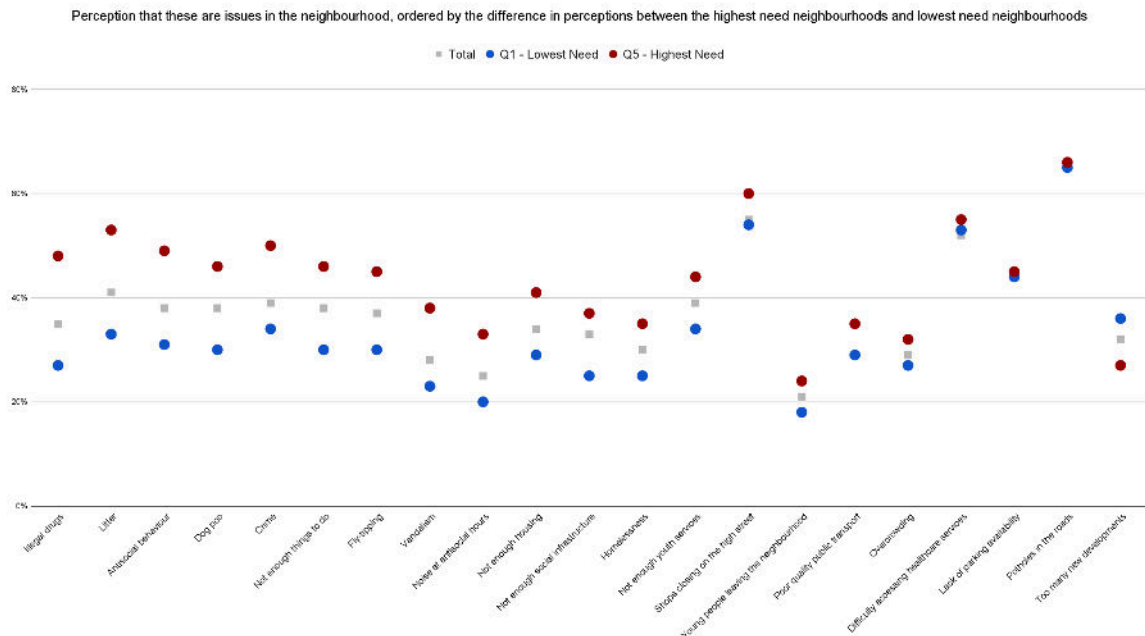
- **Some issues were seen by all groups as important.** Potholes in the roads, shops closing on the high street, difficulty accessing healthcare services, and lack of parking availability were the issues that placed highest across all groups, and saw limited divergence in views between quintiles.
- **The most salient drivers between low and high quintiles were small but visible signs of decline and crime.** These included illegal drugs, litter, antisocial behaviour, dog poo, fly tipping and vandalism.
- **'Too many new developments' was the outlier.** The only area where there was greater concern about an issue in a lower need community than in a higher need community was 'too many new developments'. In other words, those in better off, lower need areas want less housebuilding in their area than higher need areas.

These findings should be helpful in understanding which issues drive opinion between high and low need neighbourhoods. It is in some ways encouraging that the most salient drivers of divergence tend to be small but visible signs of decline rather than larger structural issues, with the implication that relatively small and cosmetic changes would have a significant impact on people's perceptions of their area.

📊	**Graph explainer**

- **Left to right**: highest level of divergence between Q1 and Q5 to lowest level of divergence between Q1 and Q5
  - *Example: 'illegal drugs' is the issue with the greatest divergence between Q1 and Q5 as to whether it is an important issue*
- **Top to bottom**: highest level of perception that something is an issue to lowest level of perception that something is an issue
  - *Example: 'potholes in the roads is the issue with the highest level of perception that it is an issue, with very small divergence between the views of Q1 and Q5*

Perception that these are issues in the neighbourhood, ordered by the difference in perceptions between the highest need neighbourhoods and lowest need neighbourhoods

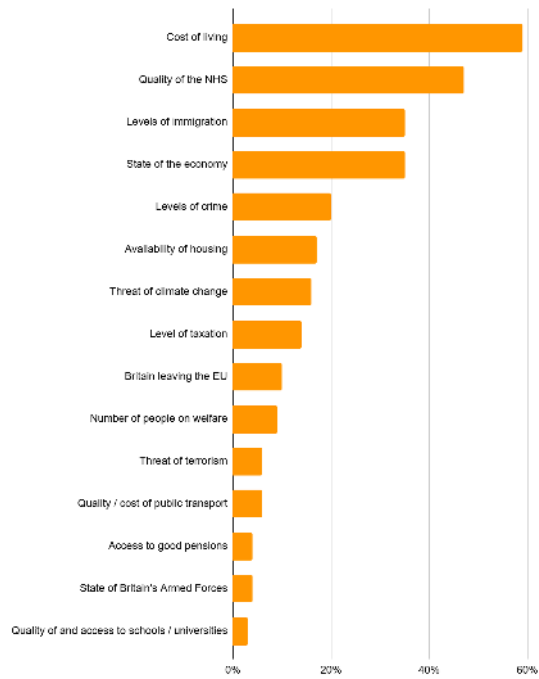■ Total ● Q1 - Lowest Need ● Q5 - Highest Need

National vs neighbourhood: people prioritise issues slightly differently

Although it is only worth making limited comparisons between how people viewed national and local issues (by definition, they were given slightly different options), it is nonetheless interesting to see how respondents ranked approximately similar issues across national and local levels.

Notable differences include that, at a national level, people prioritise the NHS as the second highest issue, whereas at a neighbourhood level the quality of local healthcare is lower down the list. Equally, although people are likely at a national level to rank the cost of living and the state of the economy highly, at a neighbourhood level people are more likely to conceptualise this as shops and businesses closing down, with the 'state of the local economy' framing falling lower.

It is worth using these differences in national and neighbourhood prioritisation when thinking about how to frame local neighbourhood issues in relation to salient national issues.

National level concerns

Concern	Percentage
Cost of living	~58%
Quality of the NHS	~47%
Levels of immigration	~35%
State of the economy	~35%
Levels of crime	~20%
Availability of housing	~17%
Threat of climate change	~16%
Level of taxation	~14%
Britain leaving the EU	~10%
Number of people on welfare	~9%
Threat of terrorism	~5%
Quality / cost of public transport	~5%
Access to good pensions	~4%
State of Britain's Armed Forces	~4%
Quality of and access to schools / universities	~2%

Neighbourhood level concerns

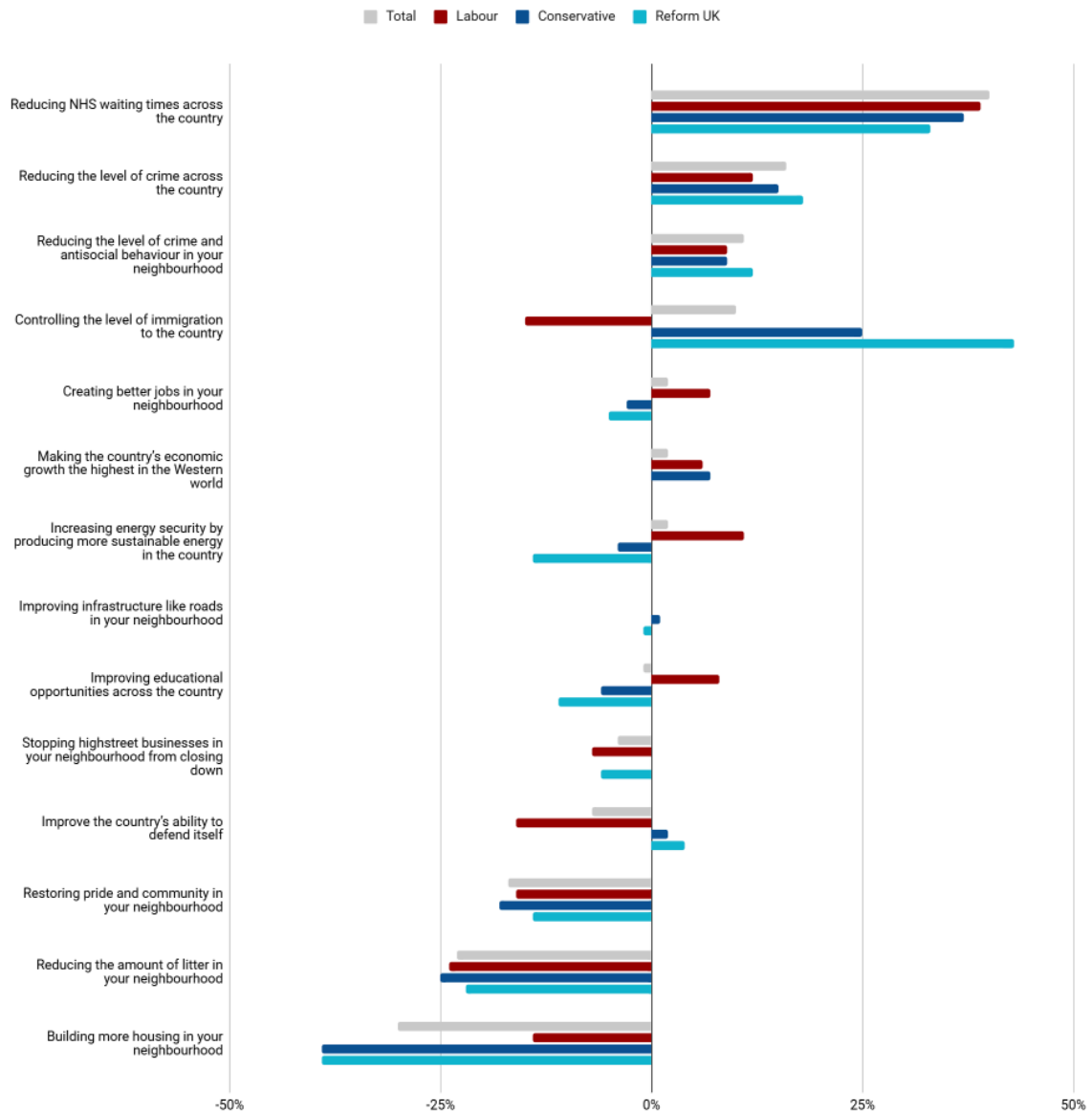| Concern	Percentage
Quality of the roads	~32%
Shops and businesses closing down	~27%
Availability and affordability of housing	~26%
Crime and anti-social behaviour	~23%
Quality of local healthcare	~21%
State of the local economy	~19%
Availability of good jobs and employment	~18%
Lack of activities and things to do	~14%
Quality and affordability of public transport	~12%
Too many local developments or infrastructure projects	~11%
Lack of community in the local neighbourhood	~9%
Lack of local leadership	~7%
Quality of education and schools	~7%
Too few local developments or infrastructure projects	~6%
Poor air quality	~5%
Access to and quality of nature / green spaces	~5%

Perceptions of Opportunities for Change

When forced to prioritise, people think at a national level

Our research shows a high level of negativity among the public. People are critical of a wide range of aspects of their local neighbourhoods, and express concern for a range of issues at both the national (orange in chart) and neighbourhood level (grey in chart). We sought to understand how the public trades off these concerns against one another, with a MaxDiff analysis (a method for ranking people's preferences by asking them multiple times to choose the best and worst option from a group of statements).

When forced to choose, people tend to prioritise national versions of changes they would like to see. However, it is worth noting that this does not mean that people do not want to see change at a local level - just that they are more likely to perceive national framings of an issue as more important. For instance, although reducing the level of litter in the neighbourhood falls relatively low on this measure, a framing of reducing crime and antisocial behaviour at both a local and national level scores well, suggesting this may be a more salient framing for an issue like litter reduction.
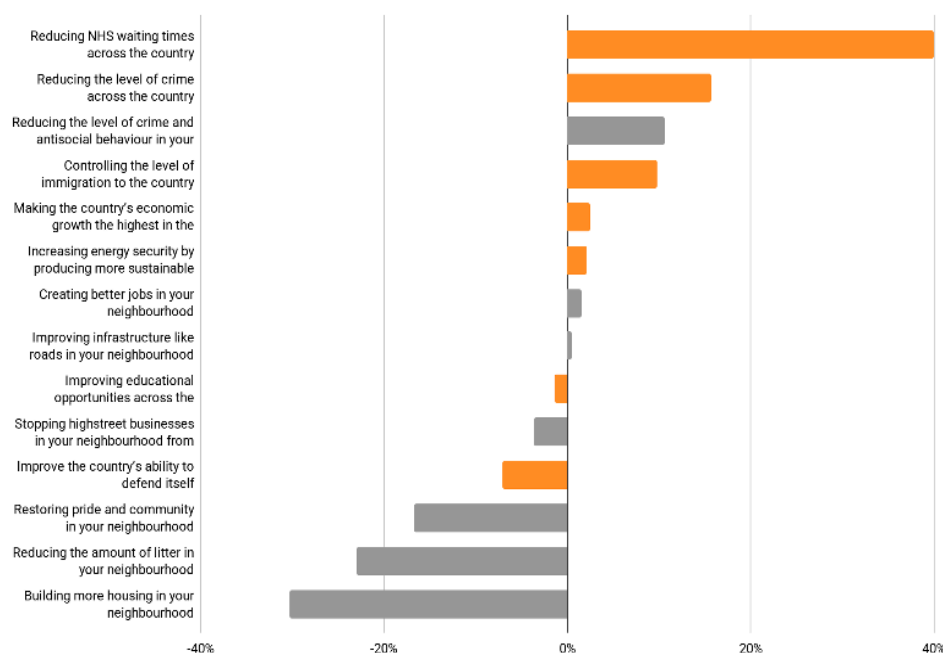
There was some significant variation on these priorities by political party, with Reform voters particularly likely to prioritise national level immigration control (the top priority for them, and among the lowest for Labour voters).

Legend: Total, Labour, Conservative, Reform UK

Categories (top to bottom):
- Reducing NHS waiting times across the country
- Reducing the level of crime across the country
- Reducing the level of crime and antisocial behaviour in your neighbourhood
- Controlling the level of immigration to the country
- Creating better jobs in your neighbourhood
- Making the country's economic growth the highest in the Western world
- Increasing energy security by producing more sustainable energy in the country
- Improving infrastructure like roads in your neighbourhood
- Improving educational opportunities across the country
- Stopping highstreet businesses in your neighbourhood from closing down
- Improve the country's ability to defend itself
- Restoring pride and community in your neighbourhood
- Reducing the amount of litter in your neighbourhood
- Building more housing in your neighbourhood

X-axis: -50%, -25%, 0%, 25%, 50%

> " *We need to get stability at the top [the Government]. You can't do nothing with the rest of it, until you've got the top sorted, because then there's a knock on effect coming down.* "

Woman, 40s
West Bromwich Group

> " *I think last year there was something like a million people came into the country, net. And you think, that million people has got to be housed. They've got to use hospital services, doctors, dentists.* "

Man, 30s
West Bromwich Group

> " *Everything's been stripped of the bone. You phone the police, and they might turn up in two days' time. You phone social services, and nobody answers, and the train services, the bus services, you phone for a doctor's appointment: it's [in] three weeks time. It's like the infrastructure of the country has fallen to bits.* "
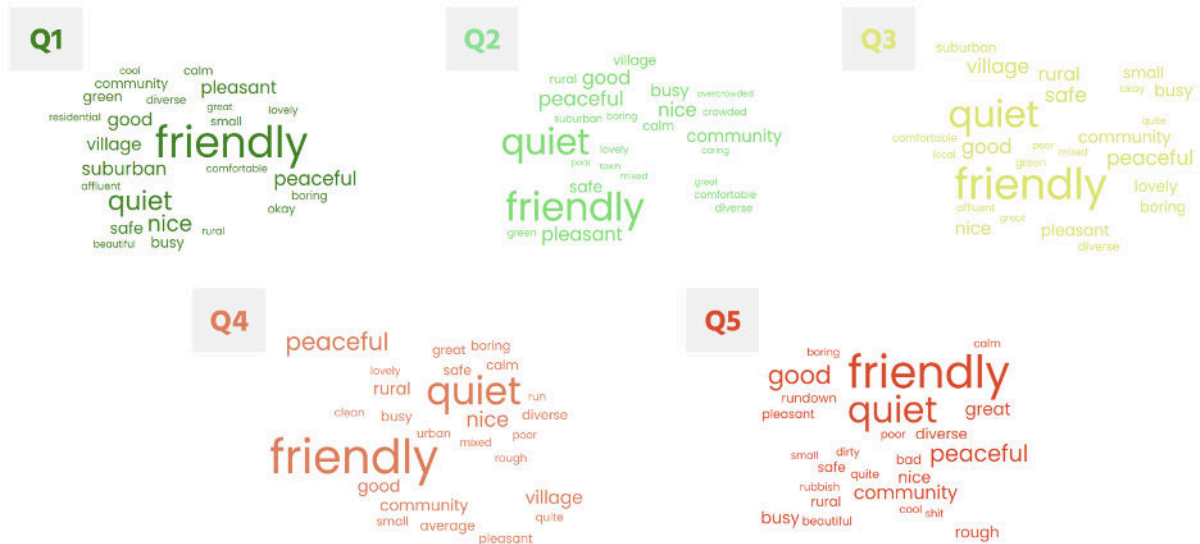
Man, 60s
Wakefield & Rothwell Group

But neighbourhoods, particularly at the hyper local level, are an important antidote to national decline

Although the national framing is important, a clear theme of the research was that the neighbourhood level - particularly at its smallest scale (individual estates, house groups and streets) - is a salient unit of scale for residents.

It is important not to underplay the extent to which people were very concerned about the level of decline at all levels, including neighbourhood level. However, throughout the research, the cynicism and disenchantment that was evident at national level and elements of the local level (like the highstreet) dissipated more when the hyper local neighbourhood level was reached. This may suggest that neighbourhoods as a unit of political change are important given there is an existing buy-in from residents that may not be evident at wider local or national level.

Hyper local neighbourhoods are a quiet, friendly safe haven from national issues

> " *It's tidy, people tidy their gardens. People are polite, there's no shouting and carrying on or arguing. You don't get any noise and people are friendly so it's quite uplifting.* "
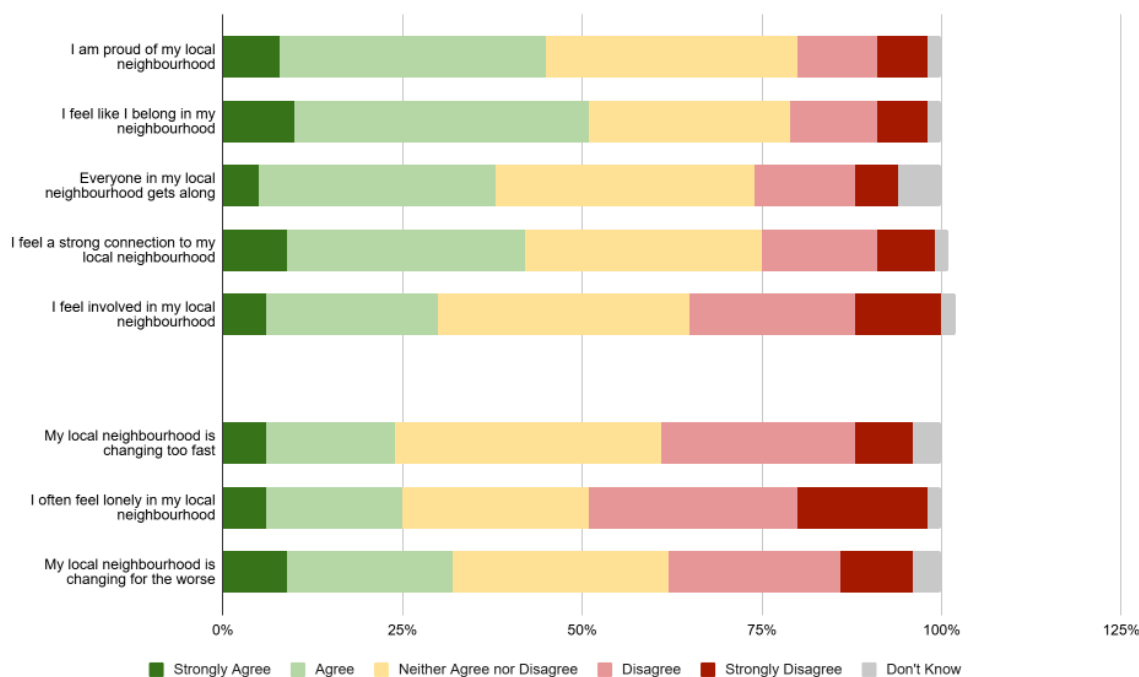
Woman, 60s
Leeds East Group

> " *All the neighbours, either side [of me], I know very well. Opposite [me], I know them well. Round the corner, I know that street very well. So there's about three four streets that I know practically everybody that's there.* "

Woman, 40s
West Bromwich Group

Despite seeing decline, many people still feel some pride and sense of community in their neighbourhoods

Some hyper local positivity remains

Despite a degree of feeling that neighbourhoods are changing too fast, or that they have been impacted by a sense of decline, there were clear trends in the quantitative and qualitative research showing that pride, belonging and connections around neighbourhoods is still relatively strong.

Legend: Strongly Agree · Agree · Neither Agree nor Disagree · Disagree · Strongly Disagree · Don't Know

> " *I'm very, very proud of my estate. Everyone knows everyone, we are friendly and have the keys to each other's front doors, and I'll let my kids go anywhere in the 300 meters or so outside.* "
>
> **Woman, 50s**
> Brighton Kemptown & Peacehaven Group

> " *I am proud to say I live where I do, and I feel blessed, and I don't take it for granted, but I do worry about how things are deteriorating, and I don't think it's going to be as magical as it is now in years to come.* "
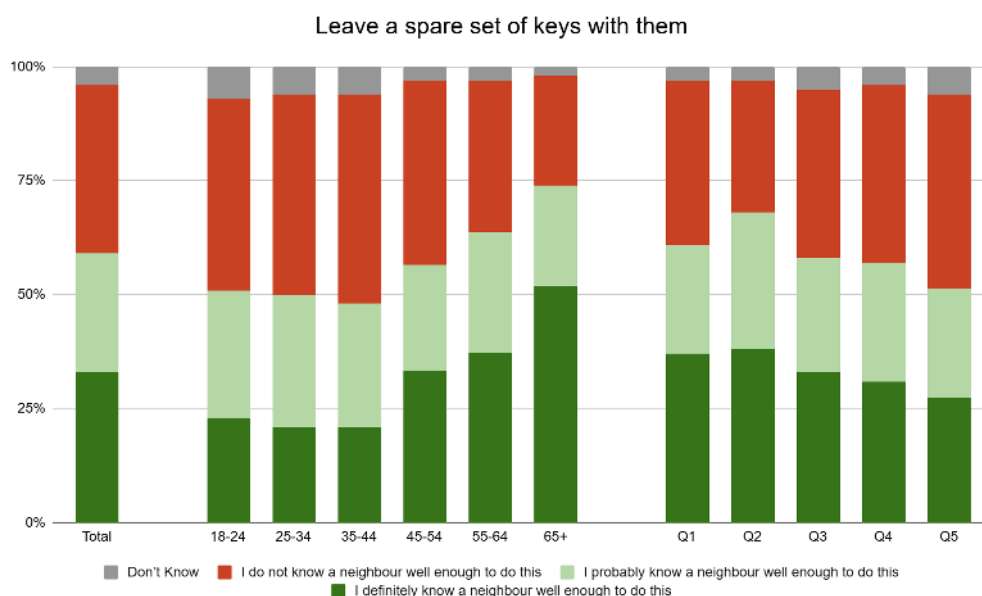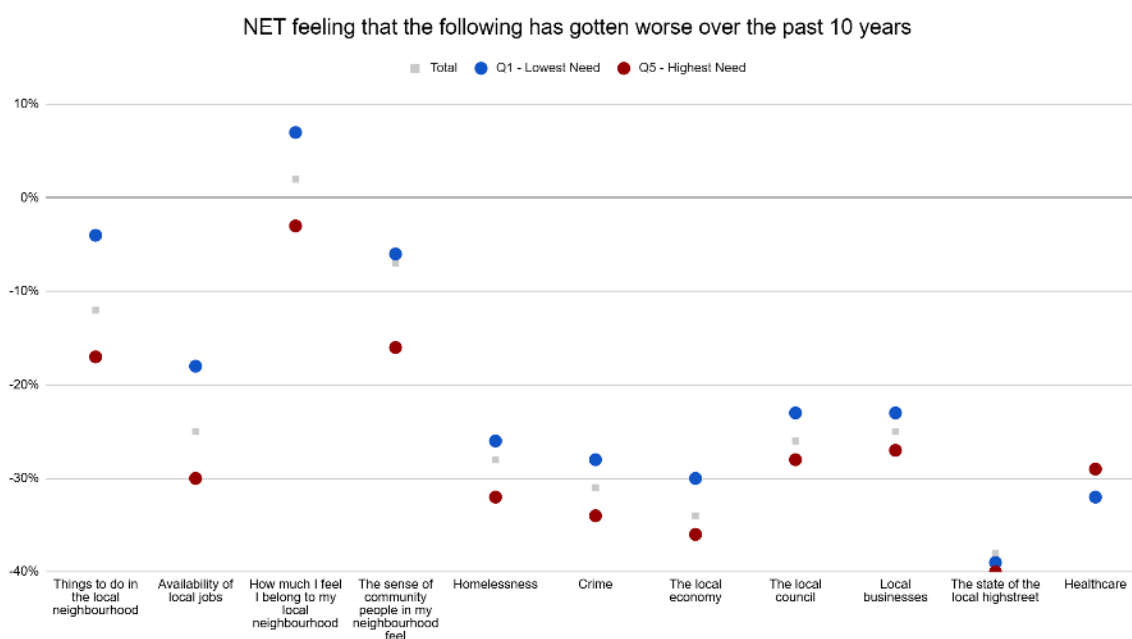>
> **Man, 80s**
> Wakefield and Rothwell Group

Older respondents were slightly more proud of their local neighbourhood, as were those in the highest social grades. **54%** of those in the AB social grade expressed pride in their neighbourhood, compared to **38%** of those in the DE social grade. Pride was quite consistent across regions of the country, and across partisan groups.

A sense of neighbourhood belonging has held out

Despite significant perceptions of decline over the past 10 years in most areas, how much participants feel they belong to their neighbourhoods saw the least negative outlook - and was the only area with a net positive score.

NET feeling that the following has gotten worse over the past 10 years

Legend: Total, Q1 - Lowest Need, Q5 - Highest Need

Leave a spare set of keys with them

Legend: Don't Know, I do not know a neighbour well enough to do this, I probably know a neighbour well enough to do this, I definitely know a neighbour well enough to do this

Many are taking matters into their own hands already

In focus groups, many told us that they were already coming together as a community to address issues, and that they felt this was a particularly strong element of their neighbourhood. It is worth noting, however, that whilst many felt this was positive - and the sign of a strong community - others felt they were having to step in where local services should really be providing services.

> *We've got a WhatsApp group if anything's happening in the area. It started in COVID times. If somebody's garbage gets broken into, or there's something happening at night time, it goes on the group to keep your eyes out and help each other.*

Man, 50s
Leeds East Group

> *I'm in one [a WhatsApp group], and I find it very beneficial. To be fair, not only do you get to know what's happening, but if you need an electrician, there's lots of recommendations on there, or I'll use so and so. So joining that Whatsapp group not only gives you security for your estate kind of thing, but it also is very informative.*

Woman, 30s
West Bromwich Group