



Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper:

Summary of Consultation Responses and Policy Testing Exercise

Independent Commission
on Neighbourhoods

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The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods

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

About this report

In May 2025 the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) launched its Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper, Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal: Proposals for Change.

This contained 20 policy options, which we committed to testing in line with four tests: strategy, evidence, scale, and community empowerment. We also launched a public consultation on the policy options, which closed on 25 July 2025.

Since then, we have been analysing the 20 policy options in line with the four tests, informed by the consultation responses received and wider relevant evidence. This report contains the findings of that process and is published alongside ICON's Main Report, No Short Cuts, which draws on this exercise and make ICON's recommendations.

Acknowledgements

ICON would like to thank everyone that has contributed to our analysis of the Green Paper's policy proposals, whether formally or informally.

We would like to thank all the organisations that responded to our consultation; to every individual and organisation that attended the two-days of policy workshops we held in April 2025 to inform the development of the ideas in the Green Paper; to all the experts that have participated in our lived experience, research, funders and civil society advisory groups; and to everyone that responded to our initial call for evidence when we launched last year. The organisations that responded to the consultation are listed at Annex 1.

Just as importantly, we are especially grateful to everyone that has been involved in hosting one of our many visits across the country this year. Your local expertise, insights, feedback and challenge have been invaluable to the overall process of refining our ideas and proposals.

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Introduction

In May 2025 the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) launched its Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper, Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal: Proposals for Change.

At a time when the government was conducting its Spending Review, we hoped to make a positive contribution to discussions inside and outside government as to the future direction of neighbourhood policy. We are delighted that our proposal for a new generation of area-based interventions and the need to focus on social infrastructure investment was taken forward through the government's *Pride in Place* programme.¹

Alongside the publication of the twenty policy options contained within the Green Paper, we stated that we would analyse and refine those options. As part of our commitment to open and transparent ways of working, we welcomed consultation responses until 25 July 2025. We also consulted on these ideas as part of a two-day policy workshop at Church House in Westminster in April 2025.

The Green Paper identified four policy tests – detailed below – needed to carry out a robust evaluation of the proposals: strategy; evidence; scale; and community empowerment. This paper will explore each policy through the lens of these four policy tests, using the consultation responses submitted by individuals and organisations to complement this analysis.

ICON is grateful to everyone who has submitted a response to the Green Paper. A list of organisations that responded to the consultation can be found at Annex 1.

The four tests

Strategy

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

Evidence

Evaluating neighbourhood level outcomes can be challenging. At ICON's evidence gathering sessions in St George's House there was considerable debate about what evidence can be reasonably obtained at a neighbourhood level. However, we have seen through evaluations of the New Deal for Communities that policies can be effectively measured. There are also several ongoing academic research programmes and ICON itself is contributing to strengthening the evidence base for neighbourhood policy. Amid a challenging fiscal environment, government needs to be careful about where it invests time and resources. Priority should be given to those solutions that can demonstrate the most robust evidential base.

¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Government announces 25 "trailblazer neighbourhoods" to receive long-term investment – details, 11 June 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-announces-25-trailblazer-neighbourhoods-to-receive-long-term-investment/government-announces-25-trailblazer-neighbourhoods-to-receive-long-term-investment-details>

Scale

Every individual neighbourhood is different and it is important that policies are adaptable to conditions on the ground. We need to identify models of policy delivery that can be replicated at scale given the number of neighbourhoods that are lagging behind on the government's mission priorities. Policies which can demonstrate their ability to operate across a range of areas and circumstances should be prioritised. For example, we have seen through our visits how the model developed through the Big Local programme is both something that can be delivered across dozens of places simultaneously and is also open to local adaptation. We need more policies of this type, if we are going to make significant progress on improving outcomes at a neighbourhood level.

Community Empowerment

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

Consultation responses and policy testing exercise

Policy Option 1 – a new national neighbourhood intervention

Summary of responses

Respondents to the Green Paper's consultation were almost entirely in favour or strongly in favour of our proposed new national neighbourhood intervention

Since the publication of ICON's Green Paper, the government has announced the Pride in Place programme, a new national neighbourhood intervention.

The positive response received to our proposal suggests that, if delivered effectively and in accordance with the right principles, Pride in Place has significant transformative potential for England's disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Detailed summary of feedback:

Objectives

Respondents generally agreed that an outcomes-based approach should be used to define the intervention's objectives. This would deliver greater flexibility for those on the ground delivering the interventions, which generally respondents recognised would be crucial for the intervention's success. Outcomes-focused objectives were seen as more restrictive. For example:

"...it is more flexible, person centred and dynamic. As such it is best suited to people's and communities' experiences and their emergent and evolving needs".

Defining neighbourhoods

Almost all respondents agreed with our proposed approach: start with statistical definitions of neighbourhoods, because these are broadly consistent throughout time and can support evidence-gathering, flexing the definition in response to residents' feedback on-the-ground. This was recognised as crucial because neighbourhoods in people's minds and communities do not always, or indeed often, correspond to statistical geography.

Scale of interventions

Some respondents recognised the value of LSOA level interventions. For example:

"The LSOA level is a practical and evidence based starting point however resident input should help shape boundaries. Research has identified that for residents their community may actually only be the street they live on and the local shops/schools they attend."

However, some respondents called for a larger scale for the proposed intervention. For example:

"Research commissioned by Local Trust, examining lessons from previous hyperlocal programmes, suggests that areas work best with a population of 6–8,000. Populations larger than 10,000 are thought to hamper community engagement and be beyond the realm of reasonable civil activity."

In addition, many respondents recognised that because 'Mission Critical' Neighbourhoods (MCNs) cluster, it may make sense to operate interventions at a bigger scale than the LSOA, effectively targeting multiple MCNs in one place-based intervention. Indeed, this is the approach being pursued by the government through the Pride in Place programme.

Identification of sites

All respondents agreed not to use competitive bidding to determine the location of interventions. Reasons given included a waste of resources in the preparation of bids; the unfair pitting of areas against one another; the negative legacy from Levelling Up and the need for a new approach for place-based programmes.

Governance and accountability

There was very strong support for the principle of resident-led change. This was felt to be essential for effectively delivering for communities – i.e. it had instrumental value – and it was also felt to be the right thing to do, especially when the intervention is operating in communities that have often been marginalised by the state and market – i.e. it had intrinsic value. Typical comments included:

"Communities themselves are the biggest resource available for regeneration. Each community faces different challenges which can vary significantly within a short distance and these are understood best by local people – when local people are listened to then public services are better able to support them in tackling the issues that matter most."

"For an ambitious programme of neighbourhood renewal to succeed, it must be locally directed and allow time for change."

"Many coalfield communities feel a sense of "engagement fatigue" from external public sector organisations "parachuting in" to deliver plans without sufficient community involvement which leads to a situation where local authorities are required to step in and appoint a committee which often contains the same people who worked on the last plan for their local area. It is important that Neighbourhood Boards break this pattern, and they should be empowered to experiment with new and different ways of recruiting members, we would encourage a particular focus on strengthening the role for community organisations operating within that local area as representatives on Neighbourhood Boards."

There was also strong support for working with trusted-local organisations. This was because this was seen as the most efficient way of working; better to work with what already exists in neighbourhoods, rather than creating new institutions. This is particularly important when social capital and local knowledge were often identified as key ingredients for neighbourhood renewal; trusted local organisations are likely to possess these resources in abundance. Respondents also highlighted that existing institutions are likely to already have the trust of local people and/or would be more trusted than a new institution. Typical comments included:

"Where capable institutions exist, they should be leveraged to avoid duplication and ensure continuity. Where gaps exist, new institutions may be necessary but should be co-designed with local community to ensure relevance."

"So, if there's already social infrastructure there, why do we have to create something new? about strengthening what's already there - that seems a better way forward. Obviously if there isn't anything then yes, but in my experience, most communities have something there, so it's a case of supporting them."

"There are several advantages to using existing institutions. First, they have a regular income, from rent or providing services so they are there for the long term. Second, they will have a management structure, a community ethos and an ability to deliver change. Third, a lot of time is saved by not having to set up a new body."

Some respondents highlighted the need for any anchor institution to be genuinely hyper-local, for building trust and effectiveness:

"It is critical that organisations based in the identified neighbourhoods play the role of anchor organisation to enable maximum effectiveness and we believe our role can also be to support those community organisations to grow their capacity and resilience to take on these responsibilities."

Some respondents also raised concerns about basing the intervention in Local Authorities. This was often because the LA might not be viewed as an independent or impartial. It also related to trust. Some respondents argued that if any element of the public sector is required, for accounting and administration perhaps, then the relevant resident-led partnership should be able to choose which part of the public sector, based on their community's experience and differing levels of trust in different parts of the state.

"Almost all respondents argued that the anchor organisation(s) should be independent From the local authority".

"There are pitfalls in making local authorities the home of neighbourhood programmes, both in relation to size and politics. the selection of areas must be based on need rather than political considerations. When it comes to managing neighbourhood interventions, autonomous partnerships, with LA involvement, have been proven to work well in previous programmes. The Local Strategic Partnership model under New Labour seemed to work well..."

Timescales

There was a very strong consensus among respondents that the intervention should last at least ten years, with some respondents arguing for longer.

Activities

There was strong support from respondents for the intervention's primary focus to be investing in social infrastructure. For example:

"Social infrastructure and social capital are not just important; they are foundational to any meaningful and lasting neighbourhood renewal. Without them, even the best-designed public services struggle to take root. Yet too often, investment is skewed toward physical infrastructure or service outputs, with too little focus on the relational and cultural scaffolding that enables communities to flourish."

"Social infrastructure is the foundation for resilient, empowered communities. Investing in it:

- Builds trust and cohesion.
- Enables better uptake of services.
- Supports long-term economic and social outcomes."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

ICON analysis shows that the government's missions cluster at a hyper-local level.² As a result, delivering the missions requires hyper-local interventions, such as this proposed national neighbourhood intervention.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

High quality international and national evidence shows that neighbourhood interventions work to deliver improved socioeconomic outcomes. In a review of the relevant literature, Frontier Economics conclude that:

"A deep-dive review of six neighbourhood programmes from within the UK and abroad were found to be successful at tackling socio-economic deprivation and represent excellent value for money."³

In addition, the two models which we are drawing from – New Labour's New Deal for Communities and the Big Local programme – have been rigorously evaluated and shown to be a success.

The NDC is perhaps the best evaluated neighbourhood regeneration programme in the world. The landmark evaluation of the NDC carried out by Sheffield Hallam University concluded that "... in many respects these neighbourhoods have been transformed in the last 10 years.", recording statistically significant improvements to health, crime and resident satisfaction.⁴

ICON analysis published this year of the Big Local programme found similarly powerful results, with significant crime improvements and labour market.⁵ We estimate that the £102mn invested in social infrastructure through the Big Local programme between 2014-2020 may have contributed to £323mn in direct fiscal savings, with the potential wider benefits to society being worth around £1.1bn over 5 years.



TEST 3 – SCALE

Neighbourhood interventions have proven to be effective in a wide variety of contexts in England.



2 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, Think Neighbourhoods, 2025. Available at: <https://www.neighbourhoodcommission.org.uk/report/interim-report-think-neighbourhoods/>

3 Frontier Economics, The Evidence for Neighbourhood-Focused Regeneration, 2025. Available at: https://www.neighbourhoodcommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/FE_ICON_Report.pdf

4 Elaine Batty, Christina Beatty, Mike Foden, Paul Lawless, Sarah Pearson and Ian Wilson, The New Deal for Communities Experience: A final assessment, Communities and Local Government, 2010. Available at: <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/A%20final%20assessment.pdf>

5 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, Progress and Pressure, 2025. Available at: <https://www.neighbourhoodcommission.org.uk/report/progress-and-pressure-understanding-economic-and-social-change-in-englards-neighbourhoods/>

TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Is this possible to be delivered through community-led organisations and will it build up the capabilities and capacities of community-led organisations and social infrastructure within a place?

Yes. Past experiences of running resident-led neighbourhood improvement and regeneration programmes, primarily the NDC and Big Local, have been possible in recent history. We are applying similar principles here.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Consultation respondents often highlighted that where areas have limited social infrastructure in place already, it may be necessary to develop new community institutions. This will not be without its challenges.
- Ensuring that different parts of the public sector cooperate to make the neighbourhood investment as effective as possible will be a challenge; getting public services to work across siloes is notoriously difficult.



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy meets the four tests in the Green Paper and had an overwhelmingly positive support from consultation respondents.

While some respondents disagreed on the detail, there was a broad base of support for an intervention targeted at around 5,000-10,000 residents; that is resident-led; that is focused on the most disadvantaged places in England; that seeks to build social infrastructure; that is housed in existing charities or community infrastructure, where they exist; and is genuinely long-term.

Policy Option 2 – Neighbourhood Test

Summary of responses

Some respondents felt that this proposal had value, with the Neighbourhood Test having the potential to be a useful tool in getting Whitehall to 'think neighbourhoods' and could play a role in culture change. Indeed, some respondents were so enthusiastic that they suggested the test be not just a single stage in the policy development process but embedded throughout. For example:

"We very much agree with the idea of this test and believe it should be included at several points throughout the policy development process – including initial proposal and reviews of plans."

However, other respondents had concerns that this might become a 'box ticking' exercise. Others also flagged the relatively poor evidence base for similar interventions, e.g. the Family Test.

Overall, there was much less enthusiasm for this proposal than others in the Green Paper.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

ICON has clearly evidenced that neighbourhood working is crucial to meeting the government's five missions. As a result, trying to get Whitehall to 'think neighbourhoods' – the primary goal of the Neighbourhood Test – is a sensible goal which aligns with the government's strategy, if the policy can be made to work.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

Is there high-quality evidence underpinning the proposed policy?

The evidence base for the Family Test, which the Neighbourhood Test is modelled on, is relatively weak.



Parliamentarians have commented on the lack of available data on the implementation of the Family Test and accused it of being a 'tick-box' exercise, rather than a rigorous review of how policies can affect vulnerable populations.⁶

In response to the Centre for Social Justice's review of the Family Test, the Treasury confirmed that they do not collect data on the use of the test, so a proper evaluation of its impact could not be made.

TEST 3 – SCALE

This policy could be introduced across central government, getting all government departments to change. However, it is very hard to envisage how this could be facilitated to work across other tiers of government, e.g. local government, the NHS etc.



⁶ <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/mp/fiona-bruce/debate/2019-03-13/commons/westminster-hall/application-of-the-family-test>

TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The policy is very focused on the formal policy making process, which typically excludes communities and does not have a strong emphasis on community empowerment.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Ensuring central government departments adopt and actively use the Neighbourhood Test.
- Defining the Neighbourhood Test in a way that can be used in practice is likely to be a challenge, given the breadth of issues that might pertain to it.

A teal circular icon with the text '>£5m per year' inside it.



CONCLUSION

Overall, the policy fails to meet the evidence test and partially fails the scale and community empowerment tests.

Policy Option 3 – Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework

Summary of responses

There was broad support among respondents for using the Hyper-Local Need Measure, which measures how far each LSOA in England is from the government's five missions, as part of a wider Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework,⁷ which would seek to rank and prioritise which places need to support.

Many respondents welcomed the HLNM's interweaving of a range of issues, spanning social and economic policy, which are all intricately connected, but typically treated separately by policy makers. For example:

"The Hyper-Local Need Measure is a useful approach and speaks to the interaction of different types of need, all of which we see reflected in the complex needs which WEA learners often reveal in everyday engagement with our courses and in responses to our learner impact surveys. Unless areas of need such as education, economic growth and health are all seen as interlinked then policy and practice will fail and it is often this narrow single-issue approach which we see as a risk factor in national and regional skills policy."

"The HLNM is a robust, multidimensional tool that aligns well with the government's five missions. It provides a transparent and evidence-based method for targeting resources."

However, one respondent did challenge the HLNM's focus away from London, arguing that poverty rates remain high in London, despite it also being a place of significant prosperity. An additional respondent also questioned whether there was a need for the HLNM, given the wide use of the IMD already and its usefulness.

Another respondent also suggested that a form of 'watchlist' may need to be operated for the places that are at risk of becoming 'mission critical'. This aligns with ICON's concept of 'mission priority' neighbourhoods. They also suggested a need for flexibility – while the focus on places is to be welcomed, this needs to be complemented by a readiness to change in the face of major shocks, such as recessions or demographic change.

Finally, respondents recognised the need to align the data with insights from the ground to sense-check that the data aligns with reality.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The MDPF is based on ICON's Hyper-Local Need Measure, which is based on the government's missions.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

The approach being taken with the MDPF mirrors other indices of socioeconomic reality, such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Research tells us that such indices do shape policy makers' decisions in reality. For example, Oxford University researchers have identified that as much as 1% of government spending is allocated using the IMD.⁸



⁷ Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, Assessing the current state of England's neighbourhoods: A new measure of Hyper-Local Need, 2025. Available at: <https://www.neighbourhoodcommission.org.uk/report/hyper-local-need-measure/>

⁸ <https://ocsi.uk/2016/03/24/why-the-imd-is-still-important-in-the-open-data-age/>

TEST 3 – SCALE

We have primarily designed the MDPF for use at a national level, for every LSOA in England, but it could also be used for regional and/or local tiers of governance.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The MDPF could be used in an entirely data-driven fashion, in which there is little community engagement or consultation. However, this would be a mistake. Use of the MDPF could and should be used in conjunction with community insights from the ground, supplementing the quantitative data provided by the HLNM.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Ensuring the MDPF is used widely in government.

Comparable to the production and maintenance of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. ICON has not been able to find a public estimate of this cost, but we do not expect it to be significant.

A teal circular icon containing the text '>£1m per year' in white, sans-serif font.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy meets or partially meets all the Green Paper's tests, has received broadly positive consultation responses.

We recognise that there are existing useful measures, for example the Community Needs Index and the Index of Multiple Deprivation. As a result, the Hyper-Local Need Measure should of course be used in conjunction with these existing measures. However, we do think that the HLNM measure, the basis of the MDPF, complements these alternative measures. In particular, the concept of Mission Critical Neighbourhoods should focus policy makers minds and force prioritisation on the most in-need places.



Policy Option 4 – Civil service neighbourhood 'tours of service'

Summary of responses

We received a mixed response to this proposal. Overall fewer respondents commented in detail on this proposal. This suggests a lack of enthusiasm for the proposal.

One respondent in favour of the proposal suggested twinning departments to specific Mission Critical Neighbourhoods, as a way of building up deep understanding of a small number of places over time.

However, some respondents felt that 'tours of service' could undermine trust in the communities they were being 'sent' to operate

in. This was of particular concern when the sorts of communities that might receive 'tours of service' are often highly disenfranchised and lacking trust in government processes already; any steps need to be very carefully considered. Indeed, one respondent went as far as describing the proposal as a "poverty tour" which should be avoided. As another respondent put it:

"The method/s need to be carefully considered if seen to be 'parading' around an area with complex needs."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The proposal is partially modelled on the government's "tours of duty" for technology workers to join the public sector.⁹ Given this, there is some alignment with the government's wider strategy of changing civil service culture and exposing officials to a broader range of contexts and influences.¹⁰

For example, the former Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office, Georgia Gould MP, has called for reform in the way the civil service engages with the public, noting that it is "too remote from people's lives" and suggesting "civil servants needed to be more familiar with the day-to-day problems in frontline services".¹¹



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

We have not been able to identify high-quality evidence to support this proposal.



TEST 3 – SCALE

As detailed above, some communities have such low faith in government that it might be very challenging to operate a civil service 'tour of service' in those areas. As a result, this proposal might not be possible to scale to every appropriate community in the country.



⁹ Cabinet Office and Pat McFadden, Reform of the state has to deliver for people, 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/reform-of-the-state-has-to-deliver-for-the-people>

¹⁰ Rowena Mason, Civil service is 'too remote' from people's lives across UK, says minister, The Guardian, 2025. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/14/civil-service-is-too-remote-from-peoples-lives-across-uk-says-minister>

¹¹ bid.

TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Respondents to our consultation were concerned that 'parachuting' civil servants in would ride roughshod over existing communities and cultures.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges

- Ensuring that the 'tours of service' are meaningful and have an impact on policy making decisions
- Building trust in communities, especially when many communities have little faith or trust in government.



CONCLUSION

Overall, this proposal fails to meet all the tests laid out in the Green Paper and received a generally mixed or negative response in our consultation.



Policy Option 5 – Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre (NAEC)

Summary of responses

Respondents were generally in favour of the proposed NAEC. Respondents typically agreed that this should be based in central government – because of the national importance of its work and the need for national dissemination. In addition, respondents often felt that it should be based in the centre of government, given its cross-government purview. Some respondents highlighted the need for going

beyond 'typical' sources of evidence and to include lived experience and research within communities. As one respondent described:

"...evaluation needs to be broader than policy and include local evidence based examples of 'what works'. The real lives of real people including the voices of public sector partners, VCFS, stakeholders and the public."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

ICON has repeatedly shown that neighbourhood interventions are required to deliver the government's five missions. This is because the missions cluster at a neighbourhood level. Yet, as detailed in our Green Paper, ICON has often struggled to access granular socioeconomic data at a neighbourhood level. Addressing this, as the NAEC seeks to do, in turn would aid neighbourhood interventions, in turn aiding the government's five missions.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

NAEC is partly modelled on 'What Works' centres. These centres have been effective at shifting real-world policy outcomes, in particular the Education Endowment Foundation.¹² However, researchers have highlighted that these centres "face challenges, to some degree, in impacting" the complex political systems that exist outside of research.¹³



TEST 3 – SCALE

Local or regional NAECs could be established, based on the national NAEC proposed.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Communities and those with lived experience of the challenges NAEC are setting out to address should be consulted and put at the centre of NAEC's analysis, including the setting of its strategic direction.



¹² <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/the-7-things-100-rcts-tell-us-about-the-attainment-gap>

¹³ David Gough, Chris Maidment, Jonathan Sharples, UK What Works Centres, UCL Institute of Education, 2018.

Available at: <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Portals/0/PDF%20reviews%20and%20summaries/UK%20what%20works%20centres%20study%20final%20report%20July%202018.pdf?ver=2018-07-03-155057-243>

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Based on comparable 'What Works' centres, we estimate that the NAEC would cost between £2 – 3 million per year to administer.¹⁴

£2 –3m
per
year

CONCLUSION

Overall, this proposal meets or partially meets the tests laid out in the Green Paper and received positive support from consultation responses. However, we recognise that the NAEC should be based in the Neighbourhood Recovery Unit (see policy option 7), a key theme in consultation responses.



¹⁴ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-02-06/HL5466/>

Policy Option 6 – Social infrastructure definition and need assessment

Summary of responses

There was a strong interest among respondents in social infrastructure, with many agreeing with ICON's assessment of its vital importance for neighbourhood renewal. As one respondent noted:

"Social Infrastructure is vital – we know that exclusion, isolation, traumatic experiences all contribute to poorer health outcomes. Creating spaces and relationships that are close to people's homes that are safe and trusted makes a big difference and mean that people who have limited access to transport whether through lack of money or poor mental health can more easily access them."

There was also broad support for a shared definition in government of social infrastructure. This was perceived to help deliver a more consistent approach to policy making in this space. As one respondent put it:

"A shared definition is essential for consistent investment, evaluation, and policy alignment."

In addition, many respondents stressed that an appropriate definition of social infrastructure must span physical and non-physical assets. The latter were often perceived to be just as important as the former, and many respondents warned of the perils of only conceiving of social infrastructure in physical terms. For example:

"Whilst observing the work of Big Local areas to kickstart neighbourhood-level action, we saw that it is not just the bricks and mortar spaces that mattered but the groups, networks and organisations who fill them and make them come alive."

"In order to do this, it is essential to think of social and cultural infrastructure as being made up of both physical assets and intangible assets – the social connections, social capital and strength of relationships."

"While much of our work on social and cultural infrastructure explores the role played by physical assets in a community, our work has also considered how intangible elements, such as the provision of services and recurring events, from local markets to music festivals, form a key part of this infrastructure alongside more tangible neighbourhood elements such as buildings or parks. We therefore have not attempted to overly constrain or prescribe the elements that constitute this infrastructure as we believe there is value in a flexible definition that different stakeholders can approach and use in different ways."

"We strongly support ICON's emphasis on social infrastructure, but we urge a widened and more nuanced understanding of what it entails. Social infrastructure is not just about buildings or facilities, it's about:

- The relationships that hold communities together through bonding social capital, and connect them to wider networks, opportunities, and systems through bridging social capital.
- The rituals, practices, and spaces (formal and informal) where people connect
- The values and narratives that shape belonging and mutual care
- The networks of trust that make collective action possible"

Indeed, since the publication of our Green Paper, we welcome that the HM Treasury's 10-year Infrastructure Working Paper acknowledges the importance and value of social infrastructure.¹⁵

¹⁵ HM Treasury, 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy Working Paper, 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-infrastructure-strategy-working-paper>

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

Rebuilding social infrastructure will be essential for delivering the government's five missions. This is because we know that social infrastructure builds social capital, and social capital is essential to delivering the government's five missions, particularly growth¹⁶, crime¹⁷ and health.¹⁸



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

There is strong good evidence that social infrastructure builds social capital, in particular bridging social capital which appears to have the most powerful positive socioeconomic effects.¹⁹



There are existing examples of similar social infrastructure policies in other countries: in Australia, social infrastructure features as a specific section of the federal Australian Infrastructure plan. This means international examples can act as a blueprint and provide evidence for how social infrastructure investment can improve outcomes.²⁰

TEST 3 – SCALE

This policy is primarily focused on getting central government to adopt a shared definition of social infrastructure, but it would be very feasible to scale this regionally and locally.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The definition of social infrastructure should be assessed by and developed in consultation with community groups.



¹⁶ Andy Haldane and Professor David Halpern, The Hidden Wealth of Nations, Demos, 2025. <https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/>

¹⁷ Crest Advisory, Why Place Matters, Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 2025. Available at: <https://www.neighbourhoodcommission.org.uk/report/why-place-matters-neighbourhood-effects-on-crime-and-anti-social-behaviour/>

¹⁸ Adam Coutts, Shuting Xia and Senhu Wang, Reinforcing the bedrock of the nation's health, Demos, 2025. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-reinforcing-the-bedrock-of-the-nations-health/>

¹⁹ Timothy Fraser, Osama Awadalla, Harshita Sarup, Daniel P. Aldrich, A tale of many cities: Mapping social infrastructure and social capital across the United States, Computers, Environment and Urban Systems, Volume 114, 2024, 102195, ISSN 0198-9715, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compenvurbsys.2024.102195>.

²⁰ The British Academy, Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure. Available at: https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/4536/Space_for_community_strengthening_our_social_infrastructure_vSUYmgW.pdf

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Getting relevant stakeholders, inside and outside government, to agree on a shared definition of social infrastructure. However, as detailed above, there appears to be a fairly strong consensus with respect to what this should look like, i.e. spanning physical and non-physical assets.
- Ensuring that all of government accepts, implements and actively uses this shared definition in its work. This can be a challenge given siloed working across government.
- Measuring non-physical aspects of social infrastructure, to inform the assessment of social infrastructure need, may be methodologically challenging, particularly at a hyper-local scale.

>£1m
per
year

CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy meets the tests laid out in the Green Paper and received a positive response in our public consultation.



Policy Option 7 – Neighbourhood Recovery Unit & Neighbourhood Recovery Strategy

Summary of responses

Respondents were broadly in favour of the creation of a Neighbourhood Recovery Unit and the publication of a Neighbourhood Recovery Strategy. Several respondents highlighted the previous success of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, in particular its ability to coordinate and bring together across government the different strands needed for neighbourhood renewal, given the inherent cross-sectoral and cross-policy nature of working in this space. For example:

"A Neighbourhood Recovery Unit (NRU) would bring neighbourhoods back to the centre of government – demonstrating clear intent and practical action to bridge the gap between the richest and poorest areas."

Respondents often highlighted the need for any strategy to be written in partnership with communities and those already engaged in neighbourhood renewal across the country, in particular those operating in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods.

There was also support for the Unit being based at the centre of government, as opposed to in a delivery department, for example the MHCLG. As one respondent describes, *"A cross sector/cross departmental strategy is one thing – one department writing it by themselves is another and not something we think is terribly effective."*

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

Delivering the government's missions will require neighbourhood renewal. Establishing a clear strategy to deliver that and a unit accountable for its delivery is an important step towards delivering that. In addition, the government has recently taken steps to upgrade the delivery capacity available at the centre of government. This change would further reinforce that direction of travel.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University has rigorously evaluated the effectiveness of both the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Neighbourhood Recovery Unit; "Evaluations show that the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) and its two flagship programmes (the New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders) consistently generated positive outcomes for target neighbourhoods."²¹



²¹ Richard Crisp, David Leather, Joe McMullan, Sarah Pearson, Ian Wilson, A return to neighbourhood regeneration? Reassessing the benefits of a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, 2023. Available at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/centre-regional-economic-social-research/publications/a-return-to-neighbourhood-regeneration>

TEST 3 – SCALE

The Unit and Strategy would be based in central government, but they could be scaled to a regional or local level.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

It is essential that communities are put at the heart of the development of any strategy.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Administration costs of establishing a Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the production of a Neighbourhood Recovery Strategy – costs of the policies proposed by said strategy are excluded/considered elsewhere in this paper. Assuming 50 staff in the Neighbourhood Recovery Unit, we estimate that this would cost at least £5m beyond staff costs already incurred by the Exchequer. For reference, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit appeared to have around 100 staff.²²



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a very positive response in our public consultation.



²² Community Care, News analysis on neighbourhood renewal and agency workers, 2001. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2001/07/05/news-analysis-on-neighbourhood-renewal-and-agency-workers-4>

Policy Option 8 – Commissioner for Neighbourhoods

Summary of responses

We received a mixed response to the Green Paper's proposed Commissioner for Neighbourhoods. Overall fewer respondents commented in detail on this proposal, suggesting a lack of enthusiasm for the idea.

Some respondents felt that if high profile and able to raise awareness of the challenges facing

Mission Critical Neighbourhoods, would be a positive development. Describing the potential activities, one respondent stated:

"The Commissioner should constantly be in the media about the mission, promoting success stories and the importance of social infrastructure..."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government has expressed an interest in reducing the number of quangos and non-departmental public agencies. As a result, it might not be interested in creating a new government Commissioner.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

We have not been able to identify strong evidence relating to the effectiveness of existing UK government commissioners.



TEST 3 – SCALE

N/A



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

It would be possible for relevant community groups to be empowered in the operation of the Commissioner for Neighbourhoods.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Ensuring that the Commissioner has reach and influence across government.
- There are implementation and organisational challenges in setting up any new institution.



The cost would likely be similar to the budget of the Children's Commissioner²³ or other government Commissioners, we estimate around £3 million p/a.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this proposal fails to meet all the tests laid out in the Green Paper and didn't receive an enthusiastic response in our public consultation.



²³ <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2024/07/Annual-Report-Accounts-Childrens-Commissioner-for-England-2023-24.pdf>

Policy Option 9 – Neighbourhood Recovery Zones

Summary of responses

We received a mixed response to the Green Paper's proposed Neighbourhood Recovery Zones.

Those in favour of the proposal recognised that the Zones could give real power and force to the task of neighbourhood improvement, at a time when other powers have been perceived to have been weakened, for example neighbourhood plans.

Respondents who supported the proposal highlighted the need for extra powers and force in relation to land use and planning policy, with some calling for calling for communities to have access to compulsory purchase orders. One respondent described how:

"As another example, one of the two shops that's in the village that we're working in and has been bought by a London-based investor and when the price of housing goes up, I think they'll probably convert it into a house, but for now it's just shut".

However, respondents also raised concerns about the proposal. These centred on the 'top down' nature of the NRZ's operation,

which was perceived by some respondents to run counter to the spirit of resident-led neighbourhood regeneration promoted by the Green Paper. In addition, some respondents felt that the NRZ promoted an over-emphasis on structure and process. For example:

"... there is a risk that the spirit and commitment to neighbourhoods outlined at the start of the paper, become steeped in structure and processes, which then become the 'raison d'être' of this work, rather than the neighbourhoods themselves. 'A package of interventions' feels like we're veering towards people being 'done to' rather than 'done with'..."

In addition, several respondents raised concerns about the lack of clarity and detail on how the Zones would operate, as set out in the Green Paper. As a result, given the boldness of the proposal, they felt there were real risks proceeding given the level of information provided. For example:

"The description of this proposal is rather vague, and we would appreciate further information on what this would look like and what those powers would be."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

NRZs would be targeted at Mission Critical Neighbourhoods. Given that MCNs are furthest from the government's five missions, there is good alignment between NRZs the government's overall strategy.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

Recovery Zones are partly inspired by Urban Development Corporations (UDCs). Evaluations show that the creation of "single-purpose bodies... had dramatic effects in helping to reinvigorate local property markets", evidencing that a bespoke approach, paired with extraordinary powers and clear objectives can be successful in changing neighbourhood outcomes.



TEST 3 – SCALE

N/A as a deliberately targeted policy – i.e. it is not intended to work everywhere.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

There is evidence that Urban Development Corporations, which provide a loose model for Recovery Zones struggled to promote harmonious working with City Councils and other players.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Forming an appropriate board with the right skill sets and local knowledge to lead and oversee the NRZ.
- Ensuring that the NRZ has an appropriate amount of resident and community input to its operation, including proper empowerment of the Residents Assembly.



CONCLUSION

Overall, this proposal fails to meet all the tests laid out in the Green Paper and didn't receive an enthusiastic response in our public consultation.



Policy Option 10 – Neighbourhood Expenditure Audits

Summary of responses

Respondents were generally in favour of this proposal.

Respondents highlighted the benefits of this proposal. These often include greater accountability for the delivery of public services and public service outcomes; crucial when many disadvantaged neighbourhoods have been let down historically by poor public service performance. As one respondent put it:

"An NEA would provide transparency, accountability, value for money and allow risk management to take place."

However, some respondents noted that while the principle behind the NEA makes sense, there is a need to ensure that the principles deliver in reality. As one consultation response describes:

"All respondents agreed with Neighbourhood Expenditure Audits in principle, though some were doubtful about their practical application".

Finally, some respondents highlighted the need for NEAs to be carried out independently of government, to avoid any bias or skewing of results:

"Someone independent of Government – otherwise you could get 'confirmation bias' to evidence the story we want to tell about neighbourhoods".

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

If we are to turn Mission Critical Neighbourhoods around, we will need to transform existing public service spending in those neighbourhoods. NEAs are a potential first step towards that; by 'following the money' we can start the shift to prevention and build services around users and communities.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

This approach was tried before during the last Labour government's 'Total Place' programme. For example, government evaluated public service spending in Bradford's New Deal for Communities area.²⁴ Given this has been done before, it suggests it is possible to do it again. However, it is likely to be costly and/or time consuming.



TEST 3 – SCALE

NEAs should be possible everywhere.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

NEAs should be carried out with proper community consultation, and it is reasonable to expect this to be possible.



²⁴ Mike Foden, Peter Wells and Ian Wilson, Assessing neighbourhood level regeneration and public expenditure: Findings from the Bradford New Deal for Communities Area, 2010, Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20120920020805mp_ / <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1425131.pdf>

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Data access.
- Data identification.
- Liaison with elements of the public sector that might hold the data, if data is not held centrally.

Tens of millions per year

We have not been able to estimate a precise cost, but we expect each audit to be relatively time consuming and potentially challenging to conduct, given the challenges we have experienced at ICON accessing hyper-local data.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes or partially passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in the public consultation.

In addition, we recognise that Policy Options 10, 11 and 12 would work best in conjunction, so will not be considering them in isolation in the future, but as part of one Total Neighbourhood intervention.



Policy Option 11 – Neighbourhood Agreements

Summary of responses

Respondents were generally in favour of Neighbourhood Agreements. Some highlighted the positive legacy of Total Place as a reason for this, with Neighbourhood Agreements being an important part of that wider programme:

"Support the idea of Neighbourhood Agreements. These agreements offer a practical mechanism for aligning public service delivery with the specific needs and priorities of local communities."

Benefits identified by respondents included: better collaboration between local authorities, different public service providers and communities; the possibility for more accountability in public service delivery, because the relevant players would be at the table; the possibility for genuine public service reform, due to the greater prospects for co-production and community voice. These benefits were felt to be particularly important for MCNs, who have often been let down historically by poor public service

performance and outcomes. One respondent highlighted the need for any Neighbourhood Agreements to be properly communicated to local residents:

"The agreed priorities and service standards should then be documented and available to the public as a reminder of what has been agreed".

However, some respondents felt that Neighbourhood Agreements were insufficient in the face of transactional, non-responsive public services. For example:

"Several respondents believed that neighbourhood Agreements do not go far enough and that a more fundamental shift in how power is shared with civil society is needed".

One respondent suggested that Parish Councils would have an important role to play in supporting and partnering with any Neighbourhood Agreements locally.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government has committed to the reform of public services.²⁵ As a result, this proposal is well-aligned with the government's wider public service reform agenda.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

Evaluations of previous pilots of the Neighbourhood Agreements paper have found improved outcomes where pilots have taken place. The Home Office reported that following implementation of Neighbourhood Agreements "service providers felt that they gained a much better understanding of each other and the needs of the local community".²⁶

More recently, it appears there are valuable lessons to be learned from the Place Standard tool used by the Scottish government, as one consultation respondent highlighted to us:

"The Coalfields Regeneration Trust has successfully carried out community consultations in line with the Place Standard tool used by the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland to develop Place Plans



²⁵ Cabinet Office and Georgia Gould MP, Communities across the country to benefit from 'innovation squads' to re-build public services, 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-across-the-country-to-benefit-from-innovation-squads-to-re-build-public-services>

²⁶ Home Office, Learning from the Neighbourhood Agreements Pathfinder Programme, 2012. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a756a30ed915d6faf2b2ce9/occ107.pdf>

for each neighbourhood tailored to the needs identified by people living in those communities. This approach could be shared as a template for the Neighbourhood Agreements as outlined in the ICON Green Paper to structure the delivery of neighbourhood interventions in England.”

TEST 3 – SCALE

There appears no good reason why Neighbourhood Agreements could not be applied anywhere. Evaluations of the Neighbourhood Agreement pilot programmes carried out during the last Labour government found that ‘neighbourhood boundaries did not accurately fit with service delivery boundaries’, meaning some areas found collaboration more natural than others. Furthermore, analysis at the beginning of the programme to define an area based on resident perceptions and local delivery resulted in better outcomes.²⁷



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Under the Total Place programme in the late 2000s, Neighbourhood Agreements were supported by a wide range of community consultative activities, including focus groups, polling, and town hall style forums to inform development.



Residents involved in the Neighbourhood Agreement Pilots reported that the process “had provided opportunities for them to get involved in local decision making” which in turn increased capacity within the community.²⁸

Following the pilots, community groups reported strengthening through their involvement, including increased membership, and more meaningful relationships with both service providers and residents.²⁹

Evaluations of the pilot recommended delivering ‘quick wins’ (removal of fly tipping, improving street lighting) within communities, so residents were able to see the tangible benefits of the Neighbourhood Agreements, stoking trust and engagement.³⁰

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

Getting all relevant public service providers to collaborate.

Accessing the relevant data and information required to support the development and success of the Neighbourhood Agreement.

Where public service boundaries do not align locally, it might make collaboration between different providers harder.

Based on the place-based solutions pilot outlined by MHCLG in 2021, we estimate a cost of around £100,000 to £200,000 per neighbourhood area.



27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in the public consultation.



Policy Option 12 – Neighbourhood Budgets

Summary of responses

Respondents were generally in favour of Neighbourhood Budgets. Typical comments included:

"They improve the understanding of all parties about the total place, what public expenditure is being spent in the place, and how making the case for leverage could make a difference."

In terms of what principles Neighbourhood Budgets should adhere to, most respondents felt that the budgets should be long term, often at least ten years. Some respondents also highlighted the need for Neighbourhood Budgets to include the NHS, given what a large proportion of public spending locally the NHS will be responsible for.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government has committed to the reform of public services, including reducing the barriers and siloes between different public services.³¹ As a result, this proposal is well-aligned with the government's wider public service reform agenda.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

Evaluations of Whole Place found that if the programme was scaled up, the potential 5 year net benefit of Community Budgets could have been between £9.4bn and £20.6bn.³² Evaluations of Total Place have found a continued commitment to the programme could have saved government up to £20bn within ten years. Furthermore, an evaluation of the pilot in Birmingham saw better outcomes for residents, with less funding requirements on the public sector. Birmingham estimated that £2m investment into the programme could, over 15 years, reap between £62m and £97m in cashable benefits for the council alone.³³



TEST 3 – SCALE

Neighbourhood Budgets should in theory be operable anywhere in the country.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

- Is this possible to be delivered through community-led organisations and will it build up the capabilities and capacities of community-led organisations and social infrastructure within a place?



³¹ Cabinet Office and Georgia Gould MP, Communities across the country to benefit from 'innovation squads' to re-build public services, 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-across-the-country-to-benefit-from-innovation-squads-to-re-build-public-services>

³² Ernst and Young, Whole Place Community Budgets: A Review of the Potential for Aggregation, 2013. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/whole-place-community-bud-99a.pdf>

³³ <https://www.mutualventures.co.uk/post/revisiting-total-place>

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Getting all relevant public service providers to collaborate.
- Accessing the relevant data and information required to support the development and success of the Neighbourhood Agreement.
- Where public service boundaries do not align locally, it might make collaboration between different providers harder.



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in the public consultation.

Policy Option 13 – Neighbourhood Respect Duty

Summary of responses

We received a broadly positive response to this proposal in our public consultation. Several respondents saw the Duty as being an important part of a wider shift towards greater neighbourhood working and empowerment. As one respondent put it:

"The ICON Green Paper proposals of a 'Neighbourhood Respect Duty', a 'Neighbourhood Right to Control', and a 'Right To Request' would reinforce the role of neighbourhoods."

For many, this was a sense of ethics and justice, as much as effective delivery of social and economic change. As one respondent put it:

"If a neighbourhood wants to speak to those in power, should have the ability to do it."

There was a sense among respondents that the Duty could be of most value when local stakeholders have reached a stalemate situation:

"Continued failure to produce tangible results or changes or a stale mate situation where

stakeholders are not able to reach consensus on what is needed or able to deliver on an action plan."

One respondent argued that the duty does not go far enough and must be supplemented with legal powers for the community to hold the local authority to account:

"The community needs access to their own legal power resources...The representation will often become corrupted unless it is held accountable, power needs to be explicitly exposed."

Finally, some respondents noted the need to consider how the Respect Duty would operate alongside other Respect elements of the government's agenda, for example the introduction of Respect Orders, which will amend elements of how the police and authorities deal with anti-social behaviour and crime. They highlighted the need to expound how this interaction would operate to avoid any potential confusion.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government is seeking to put communities in the driving seat of their own destiny, partly through legislative change such as the English Devolution and Empowerment Bill. However, the government has also spoken about its desire to reduce and remove 'red tape' and a new Respect Duty could be seen, potentially, as adding new burdens to relevant authorities.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

The Respect Duty seeks to build on the approach taken by the Localism Act 2011, which created a number of community rights.

This approach has led to a range of positive outcomes. As Locality describes:

"The Community Rights have enabled communities to make real change in their neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood planning has seen over 2,000 communities, representing approximately 12 million people, developing plans for new homes, shops and green spaces in their local area – and once passed through local referendum these plans are given statutory weighting and must be taken into account by decision makers. The Right to Bid has seen iconic local buildings put into community hands, and has given communities a route to mobilise against the sale of such assets, knowing there is a formal process to back them up."³⁴



³⁴ Locality, People Power. Available at: <https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/People-Power-summary-report.pdf>

The Community Trigger is a mechanism in policing, where victims can ask for a review of their cases and bring together relevant agencies to find a solution. Some evaluations of the Community Trigger have found it provides 'a mechanism for multi-agency accountability which cannot be achieved through single agency complaints processes'.³⁵

TEST 3 – SCALE

While the Duty might be more or less effective in some places, for example it may operate more effectively in areas of higher community capacity, there is no reason the Duty could not be applied universally.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The very essence of the proposed Neighbourhood Respect Duty is community empowerment.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Ensuring that community organisations have the ability and capacity to make full use of the Respect Duty.
- Ensuring that public sector authorities are aware of the Duty, are compliant with the Duty and co-operate effectively with the Duty when it is in action.



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes or partially passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in our public consultation.



³⁵ <https://www.college.police.uk/support-forces/practices/community-trigger-coordinator-anti-social-behaviour-case-reviews>

Policy Option 14 – Right to 'Call In'

Summary of responses

Those that responded were in favour of the proposal having a wide scope. One described how the scope of the Right should cover "Local councils, Mayors, local authorities, other local services and stakeholders, elected and unelected representatives."

In terms of what the result of the Right to Call in should look like, one respondent suggested:

"That all relevant stakeholders have collaborated to look at systematic failures

to deliver outcomes in their neighbourhoods and would share information, resources and learning to develop a plan of action that all stakeholders have contributed to and are committed to delivering."

Similarly, another respondent commented:

"Actors would be required to come together to develop a common plan that would be administered by the local authority".

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government is seeking to put communities in the driving seat of their own destiny, partly through legislative change such as the English Devolution and Empowerment Bill. However, the government has also spoken about its desire to reduce and remove 'red tape' and a new Respect Duty could be seen, potentially, as adding new burdens to relevant authorities.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

The concept of a 'Right to Call In' is partially based on how local government scrutiny operates.³⁶ Given this, we have some evidence base on which to assess the effectiveness of this proposal.



TEST 3 – SCALE

The impact of the policy is likely to vary across neighbourhoods; this will be dependent on local capacity, representative engagement with residents, and public agency willingness to participate.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The proposal relies on elected representatives, at a Local Authority or Strategic Authority, initiating the Right to Call in process. These representatives will be in dialogue and engage with the community, but because they are not direct community groups, the scope for community empowerment may be particularly limited. It will also depend on the quality of the community engagement of the relevant local authorities.



³⁶ <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/call-in.pdf>

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- There may be issues if the relevant local authorities appeal to the Secretary of State for the 'right to call in', but the SofS has a different view of the need or potential benefit of doing so. How would this conflict be resolved?

>£10m per year

CONCLUSION

This policy did not receive an enthusiastic response in our public consultation, nor did it fully pass any of the Green Paper's tests.



Policy Option 15 – Neighbourhood Right to Request Time

Summary of responses

We received a mixed response to this proposal. Overall fewer respondents commented in detail on this proposal. This may suggest a lack of enthusiasm for the proposal. Those against the proposal felt that it was “a bit cumbersome”, describing how:

“Any arrangements need to recognize that residents do not always know who can best provide them with the support they need and that outside experts do not always know how to work productively with residents.”

Among Community Organisers’ respondents, there were a range of views. Some strongly supported the Right to Request Time, however others raised concerns. These often centred on five days not being enough time. Some respondents also argued that council officers or equivalent should have a duty to spend time in the community – that it should be an obligation on their part, not a right that communities have to exercise to gain access to.

Some respondents also suggested that anyone connected to their local community should be able to request time, if they are able to demonstrate support. In terms of how much support is required, one respondent suggested:

“Depending upon the size of the neighbourhood, 100 signatures may be too few, or it could be too many so we suggest it should be a percentage of the neighbourhood population.”

Among some respondents, there was also less support for our proposal that the relevant local authority should be compensated, perhaps by central government, for the time they give up in response to requests. This was because assisting the community was felt to be a core part of their role – something that should be part of the organisation’s core operating offer.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government is seeking to put communities in the driving seat of their own destiny, partly through legislative change such as the English Devolution and Empowerment Bill. However, the government has also spoken about its desire to reduce and remove ‘red tape’ and a new Right to Request Time could be seen as adding new burdens to relevant authorities.

In addition, the government recognises that local authorities are in a tough financial position; as a result, they may not wish to increase the burdens on them, which this proposal would do.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

The Right to Request Time seeks to build on the approach taken by the Localism Act 2011, which created a number of community rights. This approach has led to a range of positive outcomes. As Locality describes:

“The Community Rights have enabled communities to make real change in their neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood planning has seen over 2,000 communities, representing approximately 12 million people, developing plans for new homes, shops and green spaces in their



local area – and once passed through local referendum these plans are given statutory weighting and must be taken into account by decision makers. The Right to Bid has seen iconic local buildings put into community hands, and has given communities a route to mobilise against the sale of such assets, knowing there is a formal process to back them up.”³⁷

However, certain elements of the Right to Request Time operate significantly differently to the Localism Act’s rights. As a result, there is not a strong evidence base for grounding this proposal in.

TEST 3 – SCALE

The Right to Request Time could feasibly operate in any community in England. However, its ability to operate effectively would be heavily dependent on the existence of community infrastructure; otherwise neighbourhoods might not have the capacity to make use of the Right.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The policy should empower communities by giving them greater access to time, a precious resource.



However, there are risks that the Right might make local authorities see the support of communities in a more transactional way or should wait to do so until they receive a Right to Request Time. As a result, there is a risk that this proposal undermines a culture of ‘community power’ currently developing among local authorities.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- How would local authorities handle competing requests for time? How would they fairly prioritise a request from one group over another?
- How would communities and local authorities effectively collaborate once a Right to Request Time has been approved?
- Whose time would communities gain access to? The most junior officer or the time of the Chief Executive? How would disagreements or misunderstandings of the calibre of the time being offered be handled?



ICON has not been able to make an accurate assessment of the likely cost of this proposal, due to a lack of relevant evidence or research.

CONCLUSION

This policy did not receive an enthusiastic response in our public consultation, nor did it fully pass any of the Green Paper’s tests.



³⁷ <https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/People-Power-summary-report.pdf>

Policy Option 16 – Neighbourhood Right to Control Investment

Summary of responses

We received a broadly positive response to this proposal in our public consultation. Several respondents saw the Right as being an important part of a wider shift towards greater neighbourhood working and empowerment. Typical comments included:

"Residents should be involved in the oversight of the work as well, like when big projects happen. So, people are involved across that investment, rather than just deciding whether it happens or what the money is spent."

"You could use professionals to help local people to understand the right to control investment when government investing in an area, so local residents can help to decide how the money is spent."

However, some respondents were concerned about whether communities would be able to make full use of the right. As one respondent put it:

"How will the proposed rights (e.g. Right to Control Investment) be made accessible to all?"

In addition, others questioned whether the three months proposed for communities to

respond to development proposals locally was enough time, while recognising that it might not be possible to overly delay development:

"For example, is three months adequate for residents outside these neighbourhoods to respond to the Neighbourhood Right to control investment, and will they be able to access support and resources? However, I appreciate that it is important not to delay new initiatives too long."

Some respondents also questioned whether residents or community groups should have to 'petition' to be involved; instead, if they wish to shape the investment, anyone should be able to get involved. They also highlighted how restrictive capital/revenue split are on the ground, with a call for much greater local determination of these details which are crucial to how investment plays out on the ground:

"It would also help enormously if the decision to make funding available to neighbourhoods didn't decide a capital/revenue split without asking neighbourhoods what is needed."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government is seeking to put communities in the driving seat of their own destiny, partly through legislative change such as the English Devolution and Empowerment Bill.

However, the government has also spoken about its desire to reduce and remove 'red tape' and a new Right to Control Investment could be seen, potentially, as adding new burdens to relevant authorities.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

The Right to Control Investment is partly inspired by participatory budgeting, a concept that has been tested fairly extensively in recent decades. The Scottish Government piloted a participatory budgeting programme in 2015 as a way for 'local people to have a direct say in how public funds can be used to address local needs'.³⁸ Evaluations



³⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluating-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-interim-report-year-2/>

of the programme found enthusiasm and commitment from council officers, and evidence of transference of decision making power over local priorities.³⁹

TEST 3 – SCALE

The impact of the policy is likely to vary across neighbourhoods; this will be dependent on local capacity, representative engagement with residents, and public agency willingness to participate.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The very essence of the proposed Right to Control Investment is community empowerment.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Are communities able to develop appropriate proposals in the three months they are given to respond to development proposals?
- How would community groups collaborate effectively on the community response to development proposals? What would happen where there are significant tensions between relevant community groups?



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes or partially passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in our public consultation.



³⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2019/05/evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018/documents/people-communities-places-research-findings-no-14-2019-evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018/people-communities-places-research-findings-no-14-2019-evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018/govscot%3Adocument/people-communities-places-research-findings-no-14-2019-evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018.pdf>

Policy Option 17 – Neighbourhoods Mobilisation Formula (NMF)

Summary of responses

We received relatively few responses relating to this proposal, though the responses received were positive. Respondents felt that this could begin to shift the dial in public spending.

One respondent highlighted the need for the formula to be set over a period longer than a year. This is because "...annually is too volatile for local social infrastructure to be able to plan effectively and work with others to be most effective."

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government is already interested in reviewing how and where it spends money, ensuring that disadvantaged areas get their fair share of public funding, for example through its review of local government financing and the Health Secretary's proposals for changing NHS funding.

In addition, given the fiscal constraints on the government, this policy could be designed to be fiscal cost-neutral, which would also aid their focus improving disadvantaged communities in a harsh fiscal environment.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

Alongside the Barnett Formula, the policy would look similar to the Pupil Premium, which allocates additional budget to schools based on the number of disadvantaged pupils they have. Following the introduction of Pupil Premium, the majority of schools surveyed, said they had introduced new support for disadvantaged pupils, as a direct result of the programme.⁴⁰ Evaluations also show that the Pupil Premium has had some successes in narrowing the attainment gap.



TEST 3 – SCALE

The Formula is inherently national. Our proposal focuses on England.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The Formula would fund a Neighbourhood Activation Fund which could distribute resources to social infrastructure in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods. In doing so, it would be seeking to empower communities in the most disadvantaged parts of England.



⁴⁰ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c8811ed915d48c2410633/DFE-RR282.pdf>

IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Ensuring that the Neighbourhood Activation Fund is spent effectively.
- Identifying which spending is in and out of scope of the Formula.

>£1m per
year to
administer

The Formula could be fiscally revenue neutral, or could come at a cost to the Exchequer, depending on its design.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes or partially passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in our public consultation.



Policy Option 18 – Neighbourhood ‘Match’

Summary of responses

This proposal generally received a positive response in our public consultation. As one respondent noted:

“...we believe this is a key element of how Trusts and Foundations and philanthropy should operate”.

Several respondents recognised that philanthropy is currently often skewed away from the types of places Mission Critical Neighbourhoods are likely to be found in. As one respondent noted, “Philanthropic initiatives are skewed towards London.” That respondent went on to suggest that “charitable action zones” could be established, expanding on the concept of the Neighbourhood ‘Match’, in places that lack a high degree of philanthropic action today.

As one respondent noted in their consultation response:

“Our research shows that it is likely to be the places with the highest deprivation that also

have the lowest density of charities and lower levels of donations in absolute terms (though some of the most deprived parts of the UK are some of the most generous when considering giving as a proportion of income).

The figures below show substantial overlap between what ICON has identified as mission critical neighbourhoods and areas that CAF’s research has modelled as being those where fewer than half of people give to charity, or have fewer charities per capita- what we term charity deserts.”

“...It may need some early adopters to work with Government to scope this out and make this happen in a few areas as a PoC.”

However, one respondent argued that it would be better for the government to focus initially on its own policy and resources, rather than seeking to also shape philanthropy:

“Not immediately. Get the strategy underway first and then commission an optional appraisal and follow up.”

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government already recognises the potential for achieving wider government objectives through its Civil Society Covenant, which seeks to reset the relationship between the government and civil society and to work cooperatively on achieving the government’s five missions.⁴¹

For example, HM Treasury launched in July 2025 the £500 million Better Futures Fund which aims to break down barriers to opportunity and plans to raise another £500 million from local government, social investors, and philanthropists.⁴² POLICY PASSES



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

NCVO evaluations of the Civil Society Covenant found broad support for its principles, suggesting there is a general consensus for more collaboration between civil society and government⁴³.

In addition, similar ‘match’ approaches have already been taken recently in relation to the UK government. A match approach was taken



⁴¹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Civil Society Covenant Framework launch, 2024.

⁴² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-fund-of-its-kind-to-support-vulnerable-kids-families>

⁴³ <https://ncvo-app-wagtail-mediaa721a567-uwkfinin077j.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/ncvo-acevo-civil-society-covenant.pdf>

with the Community Wealth Fund (CWF), with £87.5m provided by the government through dormant assets and £87.5m being provided by the National Lottery.⁴⁴

TEST 3 – SCALE

It might be necessary to start with a smaller number of trust and foundations, before scaling the 'Match' across the sector – which should be possible if the initial phase is deemed a success.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Trusts and foundations often put communities and lived experience at the heart of their operation. As a result, if government works more closely with these organisations, for example through the Neighbourhood 'Match', this should support greater empowerment of communities.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Getting a significant number of trusts and foundations to agree to the Neighbourhood 'Match' will be the primary implementation challenge.
- Determining how the Match is spent may also be a challenge, especially if the trusts and foundations involved have a range of views which do not align.

N/A

CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes or partially passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in our public consultation.



⁴⁴ Local Trust, The Community Wealth Fund. Available at: <https://localtrust.org.uk/policy/the-community-wealth-fund/>

Policy Option 19 – National Neighbourhoods Endowment

Summary of responses

Respondents were generally positive about the proposed Endowment. Respondents supported the proposal because it seeks to address a lack of investment in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods, and because of its inherent long-term nature. Typical comments include:

"Finally, the idea of a National Neighbourhood Endowment is a strong one as the size and longevity (even if it isn't permanent) speaks to a meaningful commitment to supporting neighbourhoods. There is the added benefit of learning from previous endowments, which have generally been seen to have made a real difference in their areas of investment."

"There are intractable challenges which other sorts of funding programmes have failed to dent – the persistent issue of millions of adults lacking essential numeracy and literacy skills, for example. These probably require the kind of long-term commitment which only an endowment model (in the absence of long term investment direct from Government) can make a difference to."

In particular, respondents highlighted the long-term nature of the endowment as a key part of its appeal:

"If we truly want to change the fortune of our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, that will take time because it will need to not only support work at neighbourhood level but change the way government works and fund so in time, this work is not needed – or needed in fewer neighbourhoods."

"There is evidence that what ICON terms "mission-critical neighbourhoods" in England correlate with those areas which currently suffer from a lack of philanthropic investment, and a lack of philanthropic infrastructure to encourage and engage with giving."

For some respondents, it was essential that the endowment was truly and genuinely independent, away from political interference. There was also support among respondents for focusing the endowment's activities in MCNs.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government is committed to improving neighbourhoods in the most disadvantaged places through its Pride in Place programme. The Endowment would complement the work, leveraging additional resource to these places.



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

This would learn from the fact that many of the most durable policy innovations of modern Britain have relied on institution building and, crucially, allowing such institutions to operate independently, away from the whims of Whitehall. As Oakley et al note in reference to the last Labour government:

"Although the New Labour period witnessed a high degree of institutional formation in the United Kingdom, many of its initiatives, from regional development agencies to the Film Council, have not survived."



TEST 3 – SCALE

Our proposed endowment would be national, but it would be possible to scale at a regional or local level.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Community organisations would be put at the heart of determining how the endowment's funds are spent. POLICY PASSES



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Implementation challenges:

- Establishing a new Endowment will come with the challenges that establishing any new institution brings.
- Ensuring that the money is spent effectively.



Estimated cost to the government:

- The exchequer cost would depend on how large an endowment is received. For context, Nesta's initial endowment 1998 was £250 million.



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes the Green Paper's four tests and received a generally positive response in our public consultation.

Policy Option 20 – Mission Bonds

Summary of responses

Overall fewer respondents commented in detail on this proposal. However, some respondents argued that the proposal

aligned well with wider government objectives to leverage non-government funds into disadvantaged areas.

TEST 1 – STRATEGY

The government already recognises the potential for achieving wider government objectives through its Civil Society Covenant, which seeks to reset the relationship between the government and civil society and to work cooperatively on achieving the government's five missions.⁴⁵

For example, HM Treasury launched in July 2025 the £500 million Better Futures Fund which aims to break down barriers to opportunity and plans to raise another £500 million from local government, social investors, and philanthropists.⁴⁶



TEST 2 – EVIDENCE

Mission Bonds are based partly on Social Impact Bonds, which have been extensively evaluated with mixed results. In some places they were a real success; in other areas they proved to be much less effective.



TEST 3 – SCALE

This policy could be piloted initially then rolled out at a much bigger scale.



TEST 4 – COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

It should be possible to put communities at the heart of defining the potential outcomes and what the bonds' primary activities should be.



IMPLEMENTATION AND COST

Estimated cost to the exchequer:

- As of 2018, the government had spent roughly £53.65m on Social Impact Bonds.⁴⁷



CONCLUSION

Overall, this policy passes most of the Green Paper's tests.



⁴⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Civil Society Covenant Framework launch, 2024.

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-fund-of-its-kind-to-support-vulnerable-kids-families>

⁴⁷ <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/185070/social-impact-bonds>

Annex 1

Organisations that responded to initial call for evidence

- AdFree Cities
- AllChild
- Charities Aid Foundation
- Church Works
- Community Land Trust Network
- Community Organisers
- Data for Action
- Durham University
- FoodSEqual-Health - Research and Report
- Frontier Economics
- Future Governance Forum
- Groundwork UK
- Hull City Council
- Key Cities
- Libraries Connected
- Locality
- London Borough of Camden
- Local Trust
- Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group
- (MUARG) - University of Manchester
- Manchester Urban Institute (MUI)
- Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH)
- National Association of Local Councils
- National Trust
- Neighbourhood Democracy Movement
- Neighbourlylab
- Northern Housing Consortium
- Northumbria University
- Pathway Housing Solutions
- Power to Change
- Public First
- Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH)
- Sovereign Network Group (SNG)
- Sport England
- StreetGames
- Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)
- University of Manchester
- Volunteering Matters
- Young Foundation
- We're right here
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
- #BeeWell - University of Manchester

Organisations that attended policy workshops

- Brereton Big Local
- CEVA Global
- Clore Leadership
- Community Land Trust Network
- CONTINUUM CIC
- Crest Advisory
- Department of Health and Social Care
- Dover Big Local
- East Marsh United
- Gloucestershire Gateway Trust
- Greater London Authority
- Impact on Urban Health
- IMPOWER Consulting
- HM Treasury
- Innovation Unit
- Institute for Government
- Islington Council
- Kings College London
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Local Trust
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- NCVO
- Newcastle University
- North East Combined Authority
- People's Health Trust
- Plymouth University
- Power to Change
- PPL
- Centre for Progressive Policy
- Public First
- Public Service Consultants
- Sheffield Hallam University
- University of Reading
- WEA

Organisations / individuals that responded to Green Paper Consultation

- Amanda Spalding
- Chair Bungay Town Council
- Charities Aid Foundation
- Citizen Network
- City of Doncaster Council
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust
- Community Organisers
- Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council
- Heartflood Ltd
- Johns Hopkins University
- Jon Bright
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Local Trust
- London Development Trust
- Mandy Wilson
- Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing
- North East CA
- Rayne Foundation
- Social Benefits Consortium CIC
- Social Life
- South Tyneside Council
- The British Academy
- The Coalition for Personalised Care
- The Connectives
- WEA
- Wiltshire Council
- 3NI

