

# Community Wellbeing

## *A Wellbeing Public Dialogue*



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**Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd**

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**What Works  
Wellbeing**



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## Executive summary

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### The public dialogue

This report is one of a series of four reports resultant from a public wellbeing dialogue commissioned by the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) (the Centre) from [Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd](#) (HVM) supported by Sciencewise, Public Health England, the Cabinet Office and the founding stakeholders of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing. This document reports on the findings of the community wellbeing dialogue strand. The other two strands focused on sport, culture and wellbeing and work, learning and wellbeing. In addition HVM has written a fourth report in which the emerging cross-cutting themes from the three dialogue strands are drawn out. This report can be read independently or in conjunction with the other 3 reports. Each of the wellbeing dialogue reports is supported by a separate Technical Appendix in which all the materials, resources and presentations used for each dialogue are set out. These are key tools for those who wish to understand how the dialogue was planned and executed.

Each dialogue followed a similar pattern of a 2 round process with round 2 held four weeks after round 1 to allow time for reflection by participants and stakeholders.

The aims of the wellbeing public dialogue were to:

- Increase the effectiveness of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing by ensuring its design and policy priorities are informed by members of the public.
- Ensure that the knowledge mobilisation strategy for the centre is informed by how public decision-makers want to receive and use evidence.
- Significantly increase the likelihood of the centre's success in using effective evidence format and channels that will be used by the public and thus increasing the percentage of people accessing the centre's advice and guidance.

### The community wellbeing dialogue strand

The community wellbeing dialogue strand aimed to answer the question:

*What makes for good community wellbeing? And how can we make communities work for wellbeing?*

Participants were recruited using a detailed specification to ensure that they were in line with a broad demographic and had a range of interest in and experience of community wellbeing. 20 participants were recruited in Bristol and surrounding rural areas, all of whom were retained for both sessions. 20 people were recruited from the Belfast Metropolitan Area for sessions in Belfast 18 of whom were retained for both rounds. An expert team of facilitators guided participants in each location, using a range of reflective dialogic methodologies (see Technical Appendix pp. 11-20 and pp. 27-41) to draw out rich findings.

The following main points were made during the dialogue:

### *How people define community wellbeing in the context of their own lives*

The concept of community wellbeing was tested in the broader context of what constitutes a good quality of life. Connections with other people were identified as fundamental to everyone's wellbeing with community groups playing a significant role in cementing links between people living in a community. For a good quality of life participants said that it is important to feel safe where they live and to have access to affordable good quality homes, open spaces, a reliable public transport system, health services, local

schools, jobs and childcare. Although having a say in the community was not proactively cited as contributing to higher community wellbeing by the majority of participants in Bristol, it was a significant concern for Belfast participants. However, in Bristol concerns were raised about a lack of information about community decision making and a sense that minority groups and young people are excluded from community governance processes. Basic requirements for a good quality of life were seen as being money and stability, a good work/life balance, education, good health/ healthcare and access to good quality affordable food.

### *Essential elements of a good quality of life at each life stage*

An analysis of the essential elements of a good quality of life at each life stage demonstrated that participants believe good quality housing, reliable and affordable public transport, access to local health services and good quality food have to be in place throughout life to ensure a basic level of community wellbeing. For them, the very young benefit from parents and carers with access to support services and an environment which is conducive to play and social interaction with other children. School age children and young people were seen to need a good education including support for those with special educational needs, career advice, good role models, things to keep them occupied and some money to enable them to socialise with others. The wellbeing of adults of working age was seen to benefit from access to support and guidance about work and learning, particularly in the context of career change; emotional support in coping with change and affordable childcare. Older people were seen to need a sense of purpose, connections and things to do in the community and a local support structure. Inter-generational activities were identified as essential to community wellbeing as they help foster respect between the old and the young.

### *Community resilience*

In round 2 of the dialogue participants discussed how communities emerge from difficult times. A sense of belonging to a place and neighbours working together or supporting each other were identified as the strongest components of community resilience with family, friends, work and school providing the backbone people need. There was a significant difference between the experiences of participants in Bristol and Belfast. Although the Bristol riots were discussed as a period of unrest the discussions about negative events in Bristol centred mainly on bereavement, (road) accidents and issues as a result of infrastructural changes. In Belfast the Troubles were front of mind for most people and the differences in life pre and post-conflict. Community events such as street parties rated highly amongst positive events as a vehicle for community cohesion, whereas national events including sporting events were identified as having a positive effect on feelings of pride, belonging and an important indicator of community wellbeing.

### *Ways to improve community wellbeing*

In the final session of the two day process participants in the dialogue considered what a thriving community looks like. They were invited to draw pictures based on their own examples of what enables them to lead happy and fulfilled lives in their communities. Factors that need to be in place to make a community work really well were cited as being, for example, positive interaction with people, effective communication, inspiration, fun and intergenerational programmes. For many participants their engagement in the public dialogue was such a positive experience that they felt dialogue is a useful tool to help communities thrive.

### *Who can do what to improve community wellbeing?*

There was recognition amongst participants that community wellbeing benefits from individuals taking an active role in their communities, whether it is looking after the old or young, or being part of a community group. Those who took part said that communities benefit from community leadership; support from

government for voluntary sector organisations; and information and advice services targeted at different life stages. They said that investment in housing, the living environment and the transport infrastructure are also essential. Participants identified an important role for voluntary sector organisations in providing services targeted at particular segments of the community and expect community investment from private sector companies. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing was seen as an important advocate for community wellbeing with opportunities to communicate community needs to policy makers and ensure that affordable housing and adequate funding for community groups is included in wellbeing policies. The dialogue also looked at the What Works Centre for Wellbeing as an organisation that could collate and disseminate community wellbeing best practice.

### Concluding remarks

The four community wellbeing dialogue sessions in two locations demonstrated clearly that community wellbeing hinges on strong connections between people who care about their community and are willing to invest time in engaging with other community members to improve the quality of life for everyone.

Key points for the What Works Centre as it develops its work programme are to:

- Be an advocate on behalf of communities speaking up for an ongoing dialogue between policy makers and the public;
- Highlight the importance of, for example, affordable housing, to wellbeing and the need for effective funding streams for existing community groups who work every day to improve both individual and community wellbeing.

Participants cautioned against a one-size fits all approach to policy making for community wellbeing, stressing that each community has its own needs best identified and articulated by community members themselves. All participants were encouraged by the dialogic approach and expressed the hope that the Centre will take the findings resultant from their fruitful discussions further.

# 1. Community wellbeing: introduction

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The following is an introduction to the dialogue on community wellbeing. Sessions were held in Bristol and Belfast on 6 June and 4 July 2015 using the two round / four week cycle described in section 1.

## 1.1 Scope of the overarching wellbeing dialogue

The overarching dialogue builds on the work of the [2014 public dialogue](#) on wellbeing commissioned from the New Economics Foundation by the Cabinet Office, supported by Sciencewise<sup>1</sup>, designed and delivered by HVM. This subsequent dialogue was also co-funded by Sciencewise with support from Public Health England and the Cabinet Office.

The aim of the dialogue commissioned by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing was to:

- Increase the effectiveness of the centre by ensuring its design and policy priorities are informed by members of the public who:
  - Will be affected by decision making resulting from guidance issued by the centre;
  - Are potential users of guidance from the Centre.
- Ensure that the knowledge mobilisation strategy for the centre is informed by how public decision-makers want to receive and use evidence.
- Significantly increase the likelihood of the Centre's success in terms of:
  - Producing evidence in formats and through channels that are most likely to be accepted and used by the public;
  - Increase the % of people accessing and acting upon advice and guidance issued by the Centre.

This, and each of the other dialogue reports, can be read independently from each other or as a suite of information on all the dialogue findings. A cross-cutting themes report has also been written to highlight recurring points made across the three policy areas. Each report is intended to support the work of the academic teams commissioned by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to inform their *voice of the user* reports ensuring that the views of the public are taken into account as the centre develops its work programmes.

## 1.2 Public dialogue partners

The following organisations worked together on the overarching public dialogue.

The [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) aims to improve the wellbeing of the people in the UK by bringing together the best evidence, making it easy to use and easier to make. A new organisation, launched by the Government in October 2014, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing is dedicated to understanding what national and local governments, along with voluntary and business partners, can do to increase wellbeing. The Centre is supported by 16 founding partners<sup>2</sup>, which are, in aggregate, funding a research programme of £3.5m over the next three years beginning from June 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> [Sciencewise](#) is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues

<sup>2</sup> The founding partners are: Economic and Social Research Council, Public Health England, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Health, Cabinet Office, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Food Standards Agency, Local Government Association, Office for National Statistics, Big Lottery Fund, DCMS, Arts Council England, English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund.

The [Sciencewise](#) programme is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Sciencewise aims to improve policy-making involving science and emerging technology across government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate to ensure public views are considered as part of the evidence base.



[The Cabinet Office](#) supports the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and ensures the effective running of government. It is also the corporate headquarters for government, in partnership with HM Treasury, and takes the lead in certain critical policy areas such as national security and government efficiency, transparency and accountability.

[Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd](#) is about engagement to gain insight. As expert dialogue facilitators the team creates safe, neutral and productive spaces in which to access people's views on the content that matters to them. HVM bridges the gap between policy and decision-making and the views of communities and members of the public for whom policies and decisions are made.



The wellbeing public dialogue was supported by an Oversight Group comprising the following members:

- Robin Clarke\*, Dialogue and Engagement Specialist, Sciencewise
- Alison Comley, Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods, Bristol City Council
- Professor Kevin Daniels, Evidence Programme Lead (Work and Learning), Professor Organisational Behaviour, University of East Anglia
- Balgit Gill, Department for Communities and Local Government
- Nancy Hey, Director, What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- Dr. Susan Hodgett, Senior Lecturer in the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies and Deputy Chair of the Research Excellence Framework, University of Ulster
- Alison Humberstone, Mental Health Strategy, Department for Work and Pensions
- Nina James\*, Policy Adviser, Wellbeing Programme, Analysis & Insight, The Cabinet Office
- Professor Peter Kinderman, Evidence Programme Lead (Community), Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Liverpool
- Dr. Paul Litchfield (Oversight Group Chair), Chief Medical Officer and Director of Wellbeing, Inclusion, Safety & Health for BT Group
- Anna Macgillivray (Evaluator), Ursus Consulting\*
- Simon McKee, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Catherine Mottram, Principal Research Officer, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Andrew Mowlah, Senior Manager, Policy and Research, Arts Council England
- Catherine Parker, Health & Wellbeing Programme Lead, North East Public Health England Centre, Public Health England
- Lucy Smith, Public Health Manager, Mental Wellbeing, Lambeth and Southwark Council
- Dr. Dawn Snape\*, Head of Evidence and Analysis, What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- Andrew Spiers, Strategic Lead Research, Evaluation and Analysis, Sport England
- Jude Stansfield, National Adviser, Public Mental Health, Public Health England
- Francis Stuart, Research and Policy Adviser, Oxfam Scotland
- Andrew Taylor, Knowledge Manager, BIG Lottery Fund
- Dr. Richard Thurston, Deputy Chief Social Research Officer Welsh Government
- Dave Wall, Director, Department of Social Development, Northern Ireland Executive
- Jennifer Wallace, Head of Policy, Carnegie UK Trust
- Professor Christine Victor, Evidence Programme Lead (Culture and Sport), Professor of Public Health / Vice-Dean Research, Brunel University London

\*Wellbeing Public Dialogue Project Team

The sub-committee supporting the work of the community wellbeing strand of the public dialogue comprised the following members:

- Saamah Abdallah, Community Evidence Programme What Works Centre for Wellbeing, Senior Researcher & Programme Manager, New Economics Foundation
- Robin Clarke, Dialogue and Engagement Specialist, Sciencewise
- Nina James, Policy Adviser, Wellbeing Programme, Analysis & Insight, The Cabinet Office
- Professor Peter Kinderman, Evidence Programme Lead (Community), Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Liverpool
- Dr. Susan Hodgett, Senior Lecturer in the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies and Deputy Chair of the Research Excellence Framework, University of Ulster
- Baljit Gill, Department for Communities and Local Government
- Alison Comley MBE, Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods, Bristol City Council
- Dave Wall, Director, Department of Social Development, Northern Ireland Executive
- Jen Wallace, Policy Team Leader, Carnegie UK Trust
- Liz Zeidler, Founder and Director of Strategy & Production, Bristol Happy City

The HVM delivery team for the programme was as follows:

- Anita van Mil, Project Director and Lead Facilitator
- Henrietta Hopkins, Lead Designer and Lead Facilitator
- Emma Cranidge, Facilitator
- Mike King, Facilitator
- Jemima Foxtrot, Data Analyst and Event Administrator
- Mamun Madaser, Data Analyst and Event Administrator
- Tisna Westerhof, Event Administrator

The following is an introduction to the dialogue on community wellbeing.

### 1.3 Scope of the community wellbeing dialogue

This part of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's dialogue project aimed to answer the questions:

*What makes for good community wellbeing?  
And how can we make communities work for wellbeing?*

Using the round 1 process plan (see Technical Appendix p. 11), facilitators took participants through a range of exercises and discussions to begin to test the question. These explored issues such as:

- What are the things that contribute to a good quality of life?
- What is essential for each life stage to have a good quality of life within the community?
- What is needed to support the community to achieve these essential things at each life stage?

The context for the discussion in round 1 was provided by two videos, one in which a range of stakeholders explained their interest in community wellbeing and a second in which Nancy Hey, the Director of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing introduced the work of the Centre (The films can be viewed from the Technical Appendix p. 22). In addition in each location presentations were given on the local context for policies which affect people's wellbeing. In Belfast the presentation was delivered by Joe Reynolds, Assistant Secretary, Equality & Strategy Directorate, Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. The presentation *Community Engagement: involving citizens in policy development* focused on the work of the Northern Ireland Executive (see Technical Appendix p. 23). It was supplemented by an introduction to community wellbeing given by the Lead Facilitator focusing on:

- Social networks (relationships between people within communities)
- Community governance (systems for determining what happens in our communities and whether we have a say)
- Living environment (housing, physical environment, natural environment, amenities, transport)

In Bristol Alison Comley, MBE, Strategic Director Neighbourhoods, Bristol City Council spoke about *The importance of community wellbeing*, using images to illustrate where and how social networks, community governance and living environment have an impact in Bristol (see Technical Appendix p. 24).

In round 2 the discussions focussed on:

- What helps communities to cope in difficult times
- The factors that help a community to thrive
- Who should do what to ensure a community can flourish

Case studies were presented by community groups working in the workshop locations. In Belfast these were:

- A presentation from the North Belfast Partnership on their very active Men in Sheds programme which operates in Belfast through a scheme called Rejuvenate. The presentation included reflections from a member of Men in Sheds on the wellbeing benefits in his participation for both him and his family (Technical Appendix p. 44).
- A vivid description of the impact of the successful Maximizing Access in Rural Areas (MARA) programme which supported individuals from very rural communities to improve their quality of life (Technical Appendix p. 46).

In Bristol participants heard case studies from:

- Trinity Arts Community Centre in which their work to improve physical and psychological wellbeing and to promote community cohesion was highlighted (Technical Appendix p. 47).
- Happy City Initiative on their work offering a process and a range of tools to spotlight and celebrate the best of what is working in cities, so more energy, time and resources go into doing more of that and learning from it, to overcome big issues faced by society (Technical Appendix p. 49).

At the end of each dialogue round a selection of policymakers and experts in the room reflected on what they had heard and what they had learned from the participants. The full process plan for round 2 is included in the Technical Appendix on p. 27.

## 1.4 Dialogue methodology

The wellbeing public dialogues were devised using a tailored process based on that initially tested by HVM as the dialogue contractor for the *Embedding Wellbeing Science in Policy Making*<sup>3</sup>; a public dialogue commissioned by the New Economics Foundation (NEF)/ the Cabinet Office and supported by Sciencewise in 2014. The 2014 dialogues demonstrated that a two round process was effective in considering policies through a wellbeing lens. HVM dialogues follow the best practice set out in the Sciencewise Guiding Principles<sup>4</sup> and as such consider a two round process to be important. It gives time for all those involved on the dialogue to have a space for reflection enabling richer findings from discussions. It enables trust to be

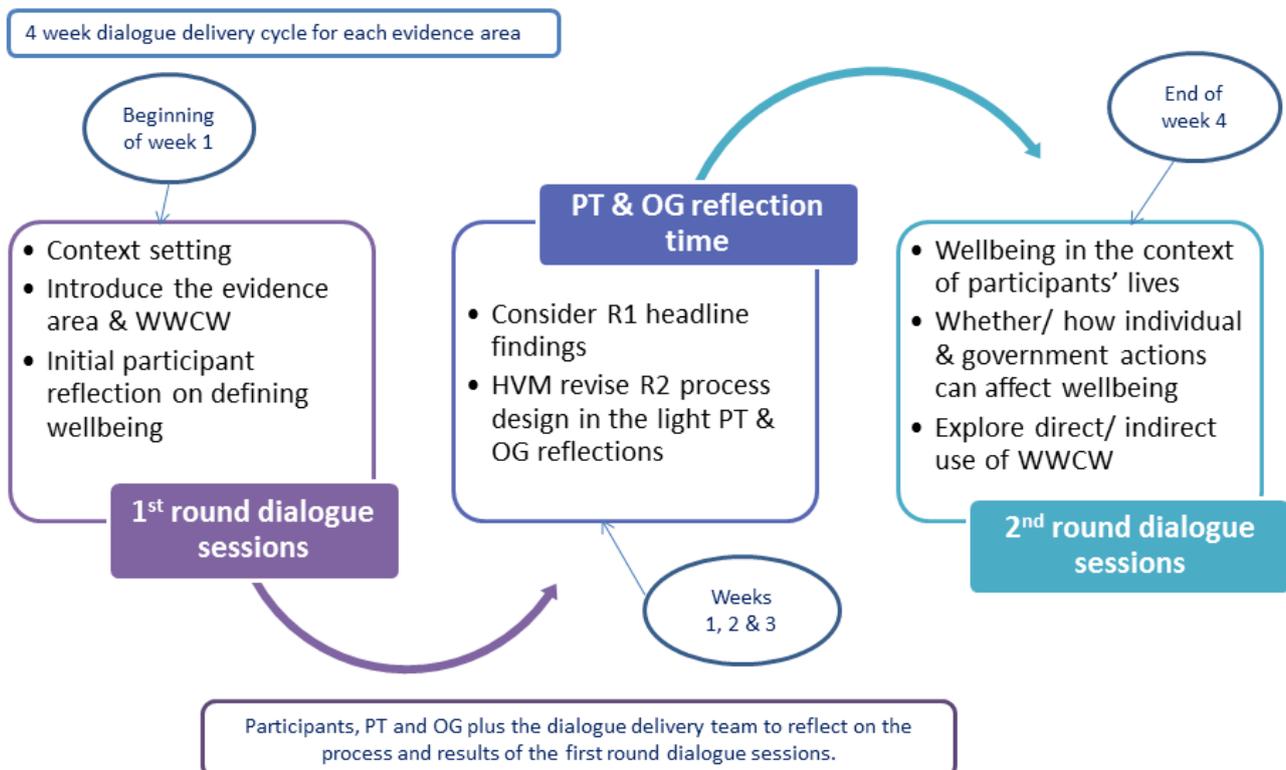
<sup>3</sup> Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd – Dialogue Findings report (November 2014) [http://bit.ly/HVM\\_NEF\\_WellbeingFindings](http://bit.ly/HVM_NEF_WellbeingFindings) and Technical Appendices (November 2014) [http://bit.ly/HVM\\_NEFTechnicalAppendix](http://bit.ly/HVM_NEFTechnicalAppendix)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>  
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built so that an effective interaction can take place between dialogue participants, policy makers and stakeholders around the wellbeing policy context. In addition this structure allows for:

- Momentum to build in the discussions from the first round focused on context to the second focused on in-depth consideration of wellbeing in response to participants’ lived experience
- Time for the Centre and other stakeholders to reflect on participant views in between each round
- Flexibility in workshop design to allow new thinking to emerge in between rounds and for the round 2 process plan to be amended in the light of this period of reflection.

For each of the dialogue workshops participants were allocated to one of two small discussion groups with up to 10 people in each. They stayed with the same group, and the same dedicated HVM facilitator, for rounds 1 and 2. This meant that in each round participants were able to reflect on the issues as individuals, within a smaller group or as a whole group. Sometimes participants discussed the issues with policy or topic specialists where they needed more clarification on a particular aspect of the dialogue, but for the most part the latter were present as observers. The same lead facilitator managed the process for all the dialogue sessions in each location. Consistency in small and whole group facilitation is important to the process. It enables a sense of trust to build up between participants and the facilitation team so that the discussions can tap the rich experience of those taking part. It also means that retention of participants between rounds 1 and 2 is higher than it otherwise might be. The discussions were guided by facilitators using a detailed process plan devised by HVM in collaboration with the Oversight Group and Sub-Committees for each policy area. The dialogue process plans can be found on page 11 and page 27 of the Technical Appendix which supports this report. The following flowchart describes the four week dialogue delivery cycle and explains how the process plans evolve during the design development with input from the sub-committee throughout:



At the sessions HVM facilitators, based on their experience and training, knew when to probe further; when to prompt with additional questions; when to challenge the first response given by participants and when to allow the conversation to take its natural course if this was likely to make a richer contribution to the dialogue. The Lead Facilitator managed the session overall, kept everyone to time and dealt with any specific challenges that arose.

The design for the community wellbeing dialogue was intended to draw out the lived experience of participants. As such it was agreed by the sub-committee that it was unnecessary to provide any wellbeing science pre-materials in advance of the session. Participants were simply emailed a ground rules document, called *Points to help the discussion* and a programme. These documents gave those involved an understanding of what would happen at the session and how it would be run. The *Points to help the discussion* are included on page 7 of the Technical Appendix. The programmes for round 1 are on page 9 and for round 2 on page 25.

At the sessions exercises included the use of tools such as listing and grouping all the items participants could think of that lead to a good quality of life; events mapped on to a life stage flip chart paper through which participants considered the impact of their community on their wellbeing; creating images of an ideal community; and, throughout the sessions, reflecting individually and in groups on lived experience in communities and the impact this has had on wellbeing.

### 1.5 Recruitment

Acumen Fieldwork recruited 20 participants in Bristol and surrounding rural areas, who were retained for both sessions. 20 people were recruited from the Belfast Metropolitan Area for sessions in Belfast 18 of whom were retained for both rounds. More information is available on the process on page 1 of the Technical Appendix and the full recruitment specification is included on page 5. In summary those who took part in the dialogue met all recruitment criteria. The criteria, set with advice from the community wellbeing sub-committee of the Oversight Group, specified that the group should be 50% male and female with a good age distribution from 18 year olds to 66 plus. In Bristol the fieldwork team recruited an appropriate proportion of black and minority ethnic participants, while in Belfast they recruited a proportionate range of participants from Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. In both locations targets for ethnicity and religion were in line with current population figures for the area.



Both locations had participants from each adult life stage and from both deprived and affluent areas. The principal difference in recruitment in each location was that in Belfast the sub-committee advised that the most significant criteria was to include those who had lived through the Troubles as well as those who had been very young or been born after the ceasefire in 1994. For Bristol participants were asked the test question, *To what extent are you interested in activities, developments and networks within your community on a scale of 1-5 where 1= not at all interested or aware, 5=extremely interested and aware?* This ensured a balance of participants with high and low levels of interest in community development.

## 2. How people define community wellbeing in the context of their own lives

The concept of community wellbeing was tested in the broader context of what constitutes a good quality of life. Connections with other people were identified as fundamental to everyone's wellbeing with community groups playing a significant role in cementing links between people living in a community. For a good quality of life participants said that it is important to feel safe where they live and to have access to affordable good quality homes, open spaces, a reliable public transport system, health services, local schools, jobs and childcare. Although having a say in the community was not proactively cited as contributing to higher community wellbeing by the majority of participants in Bristol, it was a significant concern for Belfast participants. However, concerns were raised about a lack of information about community decision making and a sense that minority groups and young people are excluded from community governance processes. Basic requirements for a good quality of life were seen as being money and stability, a good work/life balance, education, good health/ healthcare and access to good quality affordable food.

The initial session of the dialogues began by asking people the best thing that had happened to them this week. This enabled facilitators to introduce the concept of place-based communities and communities of interest. Subsequent presentations about community wellbeing policies in Bristol and Belfast were intended to make participants more aware of the role of community governance as perceived by local and national governments. This fed into a small group session about the things that contribute to a good quality of life, whether in a community or not. Towards the end of this session, participants worked together with the facilitator to group elements that could create a good quality of life under: 'Relationships between people within communities' (community of interest); 'Where we live' (living environment); and a 'System for deciding what happens in a community' (community governance). Some things were identified as being at the very heart of a good quality of life. These are described later in this section, as are observations about participants' views on a sense of belonging.

### 2.1 Communities of interest

Connections with other people were seen as fundamental to a good quality of life. Participants reported on a wide range of contexts in which connecting with others take place. People spoke about meeting up with family and friends, often to catch up with each other or to experience something together and they reported on social networks at work, in school, at local allotments, in pubs, sport and other clubs. All groups referred to love, friendship and respect as the linchpin of wellbeing and the knock-on effect on an individual's confidence if those elements are not in place. A summary of headline points from this section is in figure 1.



Figure 1: communities of interest

Participants reported that being part of a social group increases a feeling of self-worth. As someone said about family,

*One of the things I think you need is support from your own family. If you have that support you are more confident.* – Belfast

And another participant said,

*I'm going to pick family because if without my family I ain't got nothing really.* - Bristol

Despite the importance of family connections participants stressed that it is important for mental wellbeing to have a community of interest outside the home. The following comment resonates with the view of some of the women in the dialogue who were the primary carer role at home,

*The first few years I was a stay at home mum and it really just wasn't for me, mental health wise, I wasn't in a good place with being at home. Once I got back into employment it made such a difference I think for my mental health. If that's okay then the rest of you is okay as well.* – Belfast

This tied in with a comment from a male participant in Belfast who said that it was important for a good quality of life to have a range of communities of interest to relate to in order to have a varied social circle,

*If you're someone who is only friendly with the guys at the football club it might get a bit boring, but if you're friends with guys at the football club and the cricket club [you have a more varied social circle].* – Belfast

## Community groups

It became apparent in the dialogue that community groups fulfil an important role in providing opportunities to connect with others. Some participants spoke about how helping others through community groups makes them feel good about themselves and life in general. Participants with experience of working or volunteering for the Women Centres and SOS Bus in Belfast spoke about how this benefits their own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of beneficiaries of their services,

*Trying to make a better society by getting involved with society. We're trying to make things better for people who it's not good for out there at the minute.* - Belfast

The positivity experienced from communities of interest stems from having a shared interest and common goal, which reinforces a feeling of connectedness,

*I work with a company slightly outside of Belfast in a very neutral part of town which wouldn't be a very neutral town. They bring together children between the ages of 6 and 20 in an arts project where they all have a shared goal. By creating a shared goal there is a shared sense of community and a shared interest.* – Belfast

## Sport and culture

In both locations sport was mentioned as a context in which togetherness can be experienced in communities. Some participants, particularly in Belfast, spoke passionately about a sense of belonging as a result of being part of a sports club,

*I think sport is a big community of interest especially for young people. Because I think if you like football you're going to support Ireland or Northern Ireland and that links you up with so many other people with a common cause or a common enemy, so you're bound together.* – Belfast

*I'm involved in a club that is part of the Gaelic Athletic Association [GAA]. We have male and female members from ages six and seven right through to 80, 90's. We regard ourselves as part of one big family - we go to each other's funerals, each other's weddings, christenings...we share problems, so it's not actually just a sporting organisation.* - Belfast

Equally cultural activities were seen as a vehicle for connections and the ability to increase a sense of belonging, particularly when people share a minority language,

*The arts help people express themselves through music. I can speak the Gaelic language and my kids can speak it as well. For a lot of my friends it's their first language so that's something that's important to us. Language and art are important – it's something that binds us. - Belfast*

Although most of the discussion about communities of interest focussed on face-to-face connections, online social networks were seen as important communities of interest as well. A participant in Belfast wondered if social media dilutes the community aspect of real life networks and as a result creates a false community for younger people. A young person in the same group replied that social media can create new communities with other wellbeing effects, including a sense of being able to express oneself in a way that is not hindered by the social cues that play a role in real life communities,

*Social media is creating a new space for communities that wasn't there. Some of the games people play online, the hours that they put into those games and the friends they make through them, it really is a community on its own. And it's a community where you can be whatever you want and you can do whatever you want, you can express yourself however you want. It's not as easy if you are into pirates, walking around Belfast in a pirate outfit, but you can go into a game and make yourself a pirate for a couple of hours. – Belfast*

## 2.2 Communities of place

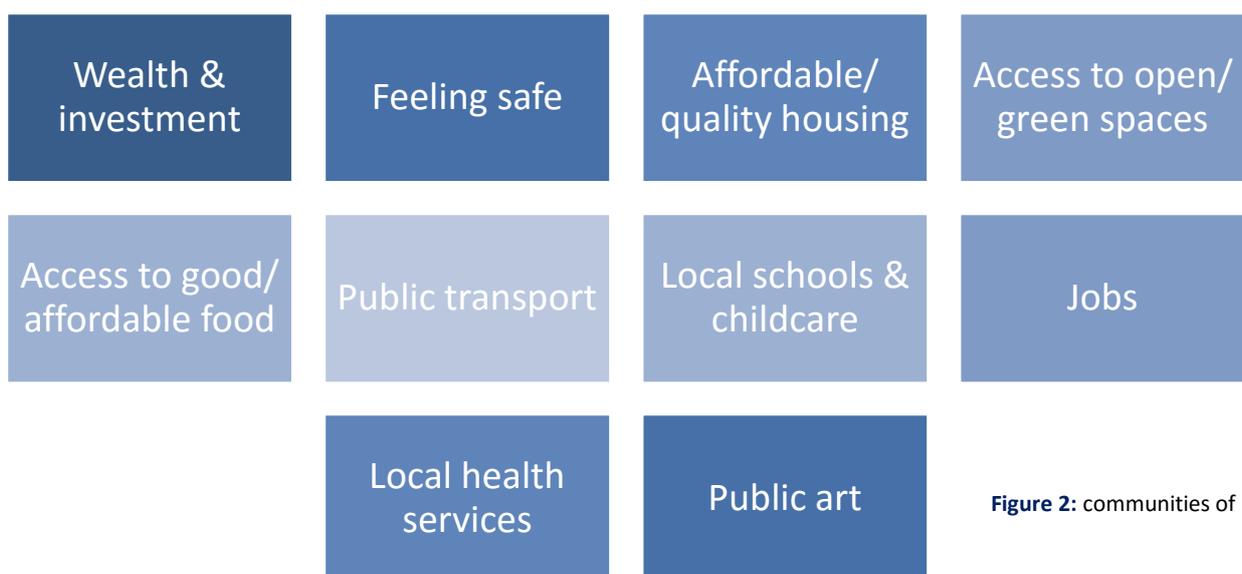


Figure 2: communities of place

It was apparent in the dialogue that the quality of the living environment has a clear impact on people's sense of wellbeing. A summary of headline points within this section is given in figure 2.

As a participant in Bristol said,

*I don't want to live in a deprived area like I do because it makes my quality of life worse. - Bristol*

Her group discussed the importance of wealth in the community,

*[Wealth in the community is] important because if you live in a deprived area then morale is low. - Bristol*

They said that living in a poor and deprived area holds people back and potentially affects our mental health

*I think it makes you feel depressed if there's nothing there. - Bristol*

For them wealth in a community is about,

*Everything. Having more money being put into the community, better surroundings, looking better, public transport, everything comes under wealth in the community. - Bristol*

This group felt strongly that people are happier when there is more money invested in their environment. They said it feels safer and that people living in the community are more likely to invest in it because they appreciate their environment more.

### **Feeling safe**

A basic requirement for a good quality of life was seen in both locations as feeling safe from threat,

*Feeling safe in your property, without having to go out the door and seeing all these boys down the corner or whatever drinking and not feeling safe in your own home. – Belfast*

*People want to feel safe and not vulnerable whether it's coming to your door or stopping you in the street. You don't always know who is coming to your door if someone's coming to read your meter. Are they here to read you meter? – Belfast*

Some participants had direct experience of not feeling safe in their homes and often referred to the importance of having good neighbours to alleviate some of their concerns,

*It's got to be safe in the community and in your home because I live alone so it's very important to me. I have CCTV, I have lighting and I have a dog because my house has been attacked. I've had a car driven off my drive when I was fostering. So it's about when you wake up at two in the morning and if you haven't got a good neighbour or someone to phone. – Bristol*

For some participants in Belfast the peace walls, although not seen as being good for community cohesion, were felt by some to be important for people's safety,

*But if you were living there you wouldn't say that. I mean the peace walls are built where the war was. There's a reason why they are there, I'm not saying it's justified. I'm just saying it's understandable. If you were living there and getting bricks through your window every night of the week, you'd have a wall there. - Belfast*

In Bristol one of the groups discussed the impact of gang violence on people's wellbeing. Neighbourhood Watch schemes were cited as a useful way to increase a feeling of safety in the home and the community environment,

*My main thing is a good neighbourhood watch system in the area where you live, it's very active in my area and it seems to work. – Bristol*

### **Access to good and affordable homes**

In Bristol a presentation by Alison Comley of Bristol City Council provoked angry comments about the impact of what participants perceived as a lack of affordable housing and no effective planning for it,

*We need better transport so they build that and then they can build the houses wherever that transport is, then you can have social housing somewhere that's connected. But there's no big vision saying this is what we need to achieve. Back in the 60s they had it, but they built tower blocks which didn't work. – Bristol*

Participants highlighted that in their experience property prices and rents are going up and as a result young people and families struggle to find appropriate accommodation,

*There are people out there who work and can't afford housing and there are people out there who don't work and can't get access to social systems that way. They don't have enough houses in Belfast for people who don't work and have no means of income. - Belfast*

The view was expressed that young people often have no chance of getting on the housing ladder or on housing associations lists and as a consequence pay extortionate rents. A lack of affordable housing for young people was seen to impact negatively on the wellbeing of families, with parents supporting their children well into their adult years, either financially or by continuing to provide space in the family home with potential overcrowding and a lack of personal space as a result. Younger participants spoke about the stigma they feel is attached to living with their parents as adults,

*And also there's that stigma as well, if you're 30, 35 years old and you're still living with your parents you don't want to tell everyone, I'm still living with my parents. - Bristol*

Most participants believed very strongly that inadequate housing impacts negatively on mental wellbeing. As someone in Belfast said,

*A lot of people are living in awful housing. That has a knock on effect on everything else, their mental health and within the community. - Belfast*

It was also felt to be important that people should have an opportunity to stay in their community should they wish to, so that they can draw on existing support networks particularly for those living in an environment with an inadequate transportation infrastructure,

*They move people away when all their support is in the local area. To look after the baby, she would have to get a bus and the transport is so bad to go from one side of town to the other. – Bristol*

This highlights wellbeing trade-offs that have to be made in many examples. Is it better, for example, to live near your support and social networks or to seek better housing elsewhere? As the previous quote points out, sometimes people are not in the fortunate position of having a choice, but rather are forced to choose good housing and social dislocation when a balance between good housing and retaining existing social networks would be preferable.

In Belfast the point was made that housing ought to be appropriate to the needs of individuals, including those with physical disabilities,

*We talked about appropriate housing, adequate housing. It would also mean facilities for physical disabilities and those kind of things. - Belfast*

### **Access to open and green spaces**

In all groups participants mentioned access to green and open spaces as something that contributes to a good quality of life. Many made the link to health and wellbeing,

*A good physical environment like trees, meadows and nature. There is medical evidence that shows that in people who grow up with no exposure to soft natural environments ill health is so much more common. That's something that is quite important. – Belfast*

*Surroundings, parks and greenery, because it's your wellbeing isn't it? – Bristol*

A participant in Bristol talked about the wellbeing benefits of man-made open lakes,

*There's not enough lakes and I was saying there's a lot of kiddies who would like to go fishing and there are a lot of people who like going running around lakes and things like that to keep fit. –*

Bristol

In both locations participants emphasised that only access to clean open space with friendly and welcoming facilities contributes to a good quality of life, whereas run-down open spaces with lots of litter do not,

*There's a park by the pub that's lovely – you go there on a summer's day and it's packed with people having picnics, just going there for the day. And there's a café in there, that's really important to meet people. – Belfast*

*Parks that are clean because the one by us is a tip, that's what everyone calls it. I wouldn't go there unless when I need to take my dogs for a quick walk. – Bristol*

In Belfast participants had noticed a significant improvement in their environment when investment had been made in local parks,

*One of the key things in the last couple of years in the City Council has been regeneration of our parks. We've still a long way to go but getting better. Parks throughout Belfast 10, 20 years ago, if you imagine, people didn't go near. But I heard a good story...this lady and her grandchildren cycled to the park, in an area of Belfast that normally she wouldn't travel down to... and the first thing that struck her was that there are families picnicking on the green, which again, wouldn't have been thought possible 10, 20 years ago. There's been about £3-4 million put into the park, kind of landscaping...and she had no hassle - which sounds very, very insignificant, but she came away with a great sense of atmosphere in the place and enjoyed her experience. - Belfast*

For some participants in the dialogue the environment is fundamental to all wellbeing. Making reference to Naomi Klein's book 'This changes everything'<sup>5</sup> a participant in Belfast pointed out that respect for the natural environment might need to be at the heart of all policy making for community wellbeing,

*Building sustainable communities means respecting nature, it's where you get your food from, it's where you get your art from, and your water, all of this, and the [current] focus is all about economic growth....Perhaps [the environment] should be the key element of any kind of policies that are developed for community wellbeing. - Belfast*

### **Reliable and affordable public transport**

For many participants a reliable, efficient and affordable public transport would contribute to a better quality of life.

*Where you live if you need to get anywhere, you need the transport to enable you to do it. To park in Bristol centre is very expensive and I don't use it. I use a park and ride because the buses are useless where I live. - Bristol*

Participants cited important local amenities that are poorly accessible with a lack of transport connections to the main hospitals and car parks of insufficient capacity, particularly in Bristol,

*My wife works in one of the main hospitals in town, there's no way she can park. She has to leave home an hour and a quarter before she's due to work to go 2.5 miles on a bus to guarantee getting to work [on time]. If you've got any further to travel than that then you're in trouble a lot of the time. – Bristol*

A number of people in Bristol talked about the anxiety experienced by families for whom school times and work clash due to a lack of transport connections or long travel times. School busses were deemed to be too expensive (see section 3.2).

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<sup>5</sup> Naomi Klein, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate, USA/ UK 2014

### Local jobs, schools and childcare provision

The majority of participants agreed that a lack of local schools and jobs in the areas in which people live impacts negatively on people's quality of life. If a substantial number of children, parents and employees commute out of their local area there is perceived to be less of a sense of community than in the past,

*I think communities were stronger back then because the main person in any household was a woman and in those days it wasn't common for women to work, women were home all day long. They talked to each other and looked after the kids, they went out together, and everybody knew each other's business. That doesn't happen now because quite rightly women have the same equality as men and go to work. They're out at work all day, men are out at work so you haven't got the community spirit that you did years ago. - Bristol*

To improve the wellbeing of young families communities of place need affordable local childcare provision,

*Good, affordable childcare and local too. I mean it's no good having it at the other side of the city even if it is really cheap, if you can't get there, there's no point in it. - Bristol*

### Access to local health services

Participants said that a living environment that is conducive to high community wellbeing should have accessible local health services including support for those affected by mental health issues. They stressed this as being particularly important, but not exclusively so, when communities are under pressure as a result of societal and economic change. A participant in Bristol said,

*I think there needs to be more emotional support put in because with all the cuts and everything that's happening a lot of people are breaking down and can't cope with it. Suicides are on the rise, self-harm is on the rise, drink and drug use is on the rise. – Bristol*

In Belfast many people voiced experience of mental health issues in their immediate environment as a result of coming to terms with a community in the transition from the Troubles and trying to find new ways of living post-conflict. They stressed the importance of support for people coping with seismic changes in their lives,

*I think there's an awful lot of conflict going on inside of people...self-harm, mental health any amounts of issues that are worse than before. You mentioned that mental issues would have been worse during the conflict. But actually it is quite the opposite, I think that the stats back it up, that when conflicts end, traditionally suicides go up, everybody has a new sense of where we're going and there's uncertainty. - Belfast*

### Access to good quality affordable food

In both locations participants recognised that access to good quality and affordable food contributes to higher wellbeing,

*I think that it's crucial for a good quality of life that you have a healthy and balanced diet so you can actually go and do the things you want to do. If you're unable to afford good quality food and can just afford the literal minimum it's going to affect your life, it's going to affect your health, it's going to affect your mental wellbeing. - Belfast*

*Good health is dependent on having a good environment isn't it? You've got to have access to good food and...to good health care for a start, you've got to have access to a lot of this stuff to have good health. – Bristol*

However, some felt there are a number of communities which lack local shops where good quality food is available at affordable prices,

*Good food that's locally available, nutritious and affordable. If you've got an estate with a convenience store selling tins of stuff it's no good. You need to be able to buy fresh stuff. - Bristol*

*Poorer people can't afford to go out and buy fresh food because it's more expensive, it doesn't last as long, so they'll go to Iceland and buy frozen meals for their kids and stuff. - Bristol*

This means that families resort to unhealthy options and as a consequence children don't learn what a healthy diet looks like,

*If you just grow up with that's all you've ever tasted, that's all you've ever eaten then you're not likely to want to change [your eating preferences] later in life. - Bristol*

### **Community activities**

In discussion it emerged that for participants communities with a good quality of life provide affordable community activities which enable people to develop their existing or make new connections and spend time with family,

*I put down more affordable family activities, more things you can do together, things that pull people a bit closer together. I think that makes you happy but you can't always afford to do it. - Bristol*

Street parties were mentioned as an excellent vehicle to galvanise wellbeing in a community with a resultant feeling of connectedness to a place,

*It was just nice for everyone to get together, after that everybody was a bit friendlier and you knew that you could then go to those people. Once my dog escaped after the street party and a neighbour knocked on my door and said, "We've found your dog". Now she wouldn't have known who I was until the street party. We all have a chat now. – Bristol*

### **Public art**

In Belfast one of the groups discussed the role of public art in communities of place. They said that public art increases a sense of identity and as such increases the quality of life,

*I suppose in Northern Ireland public art has traditionally been used in ways to mark territories. But it also marks an identity for a country and I believe it raises the quality of life for everyone. Some people may consider the sculptures in Belfast to be a waste of money that could be spent somewhere else but I personally believe that it's just as important to have an identity as a nation to show who we are and where we're going. - Belfast*

## **2.3 Community governance**

Unprompted most participants in Bristol did not mention things to do with decision making in communities as important elements of a good quality of life in the first round of the dialogue. For participants in Belfast this was a much more front of mind issue from the very beginning of the discussion. In Belfast people felt passionately about making community work from the ground up as we see in subsequent sections of this report. For both locations it was a significant feature of round 2. Headline points for this section are given in figure 3.

The importance of being heard and listened to in communities often became apparent only when people reflected negatively on something they felt was missing in their community. For instance, a discussion about a perceived lack of affordable housing in Bristol prompted a participant to say,

*I think for the people in my community they need to have a sense that they actually matter and that they're not just a number and not something that can just be brushed aside. - Bristol*

## Access to information

Across the locations participants emphasised that having access to information about what is happening in communities to be able to make informed decisions is vital for community wellbeing. For them, information should go out to everyone in formats that work for different groups in the community including isolated and harder to reach people who are frequently disconnected from what is happening around them, to address issues of inequality in communities,

*There's a lot of inequality, especially in my BME community, people don't do stuff because they're not empowered or they don't know about these things. – Bristol*

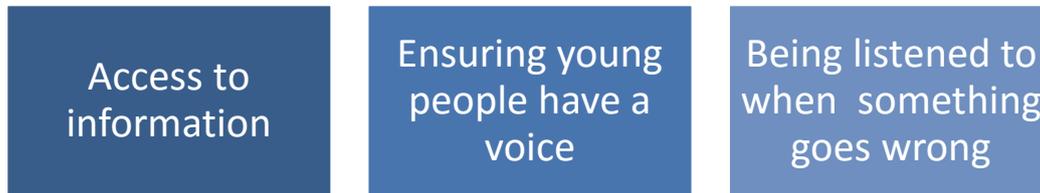


Figure 3: community governance

In Belfast it was suggested that the information that is available is very fragmented, making it harder to find and use,

*There's quite a lot of information here, and there's quite a lot of needs identified, but unfortunately to access them, there's multiples avenues to it. Do we not need a more centralised hub? Every OAP needs heat, housing, community. Is there not one centralised place they can go to, rather than access all these multiple things which is confusing at the end of the day? I'm just looking at all these needs and they're all genuine but we need to have one centralised thing to do it. – Belfast*

There was a belief that if information cascades down to all community segments it is more likely that local participation in projects and shared planning decisions will increase the wellbeing of communities in the UK.

## Local voluntary organisations working on behalf of community members

In both locations an active voluntary sector was identified as a factor that contributes to a good quality of life for the public. Particularly in Belfast where participants shared positive experiences of local organisations that had played an important role in voicing the concerns of those who lack the confidence to speak up for themselves, or to get involved in decision-making processes in communities. As one participant said,

*It wasn't always like that because I don't have any family here. But because I was able to go the Shankill Centre that gave me the confidence. That's why I'm so passionate about the local groups sector, they do so much to help improve things. – Belfast*

Equally Belfast participants were clear that for them community groups were able to provide a platform for moving forward through conflict when others could not find an effective way of communicating. As one participant expressed it,

*I think the communities over the last 30 years in Northern Ireland were trying to come together. The communities on the ground always work together and always interlink with each other. There is loads and loads of cross-community work, while the politicians say "I'm not talking to you" or "I'm not talking to you", you know. The community still talked and got on with the building and reconciliation work - Belfast*

## Ensuring young people have a voice

In Belfast participants said it was particularly important for young people, as the leaders of the future, to have a voice in communities,

*You do need to sort of pay respect to what young people want, what their desires are, what their demands are. You're not going to keep the leadership, so maybe you want to follow who the leaders are, the young people with new interest. - Belfast*

*I think a lot of young people, a big thing for them is having a voice and...freedom of speech and choice. A lot of young people feel they are put to the end of the queue when it's important that they should be looked after first because even though they are not probably economically adding that's the next generation that will be. - Belfast*

A discussion between dialogue participants about feelings of community depending on whether you were born before or after the 1994 cease fire resulted in one young person, born after that date, reporting that for him and his peers it was important to identify themselves as being one community, Northern Irish. , However they felt that this created a tension within a political and social structure which is built on Catholic and Protestant faith groups living in two separate communities. He said,

*Everything in this country is geared towards the two communities. And I think that gets a lot of the young people very annoyed and very passionate because they do feel they are getting soused in terms of having a voice. – Belfast*

He was concerned that those young people who view Northern Ireland as one community instead of two could not get their voices heard. This view was confirmed by the observations of others in the dialogue,

*There's a new community coming through and because it's not set up for a new community, it's only set up for two communities, then that's a lot of people who have just sort of thrown in the towel and given up on it. They withdraw themselves from social life because of the state that [society] is in. – Belfast*

## 2.4 Basic requirements for a good quality of life

For participants at the heart of a good quality of life are sufficient money, stability, work-life balance, confidence, education, good health and to achieve the latter access to good food, improved local health services and opportunities to be active. These are summarised in figure 4.



Figure 4: basic requirements

### Money and stability

Social stability, a healthy work-life balance and a secure income were cited by participants as essential to a good quality of life,

*Balance, whatever that is so work you're not spending too much time in one place you're not burnt out. You've got enough money to do the things that you want to be able to do. – Bristol*

*Stability, and where we started going with that was job security - we expanded that because it doesn't necessarily mean just job security, it could be access to housing, that basic need, so we expanded that more to stability and having the basics that you really need. – Belfast*

Sufficient money to provide at least the basics and, ideally, some extras is equally important,  
*Without [money] you can't live so it's probably one of the most important things that contribute to a good quality of life I'd say. – Bristol*

*You do need money to do things like go to places and get out of your environment. I would have to go a fair distance to go to parks where my kids could play football, or go to the church. - Belfast*

For most participants it wasn't about having a lot of money. They identified that for wellbeing it is more important to have enough and feel comfortable,  
*If you're not comfortable, you're not happy. – Bristol*

They reported feeling happier if they could afford more than the basic needs,  
*When you work you get a wage and you can do things you wouldn't be able to do. So I've been saving for a holiday and I'm going away to Spain for two weeks. Without money I wouldn't be able to do it. - Belfast*

Issues around support for households in which two working adults struggle to make ends meet was a recurring theme under money and financial security. They may have financial security, however their family income is too low to have a good quality of life,  
*We've a huge hidden population of people who work and who are struggling big time, if not struggling more than people who don't work as such because they can't tap into financial help. – Belfast*

Participants feared that without support for those families community wellbeing will deteriorate,  
*There are lots of working poor out there at the moment not just people on benefits. I think there needs to be more cross community investment. Because I fear you're going to go back into a really dark place. – Bristol*

On a personal level participants said that financial struggle impacts on people's confidence with a knock-on effect on their sense of wellbeing. This was illustrated by a participant in Bristol who made reference to Channel 4's programme about people living on benefits<sup>6</sup>,  
*There's that benefits programme and that woman Dee, when you see her on at first she comes across quite rough, you could see she had no confidence, but then as a result of being on that programme, you see her in an interview afterwards and she's all dressed up, smart and full of confidence. So you can see a lot of these young people and they're on the dole...Is that a choice they're making - "Oh I want to be lazy for £47 a week"? I don't think so, they've not got confidence. - Bristol*

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<sup>6</sup> Benefits Street, Channel 4  
Facilitating engagement to gain insight  
[www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk](http://www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk)

## Education to open up opportunities

The majority of participants in both locations acknowledged that education is a vehicle to boost confidence and therefore essential for a good quality of life as it opens doors to opportunities. As someone in Bristol said,

*I couldn't wait to get out of school at 16, but then later I needed something behind me and...I started to go to night school, did some courses and improved myself so I could get to where I wanted to go. But some people have got no interest or self-drive and I was one of those people. I wanted to just doss through life, but the reality is you can't doss through life if you want nice things.*

– Bristol

This individual subsequently reported that what made him change was seeing other people around him progress and finding himself being repeatedly unsuccessful in job applications,

*All my friends were passing their driving tests and I was like, "I've got not money for a car or any of this stuff." So then I started applying for jobs and it was like, "Well you've got nothing, you've got no skill, what have you done since you left school?" So then I went out. It's surprising when you make that decision to improve, whether it's a night-school or whatever, it makes you feel better and it does boost your confidence and you become more driven as well.* - Bristol

Others said that life-long education needs to be promoted better to ensure more people benefit from it,

*Education crosses all boundaries, so it's not necessarily people who work or don't work. Everybody should be encouraged, should show them where it is, what it is, how to access it, what the opportunities are, what the benefits are at the end of it.* - Belfast

For participants it's about encouraging an openness to learning, which they view as something that can happen in many places,

*Social networks, community centres, [community] organisations, it's going to higher education to talk to other people, meeting people from all over the world, at all different life stages. It's about educating yourself as well.* – Belfast

*Education is not just academic, it's education learned about life and preparing yourself really at the end of the day...You can't dictate to someone who doesn't want to learn, so show people the benefits of learning.* - Belfast

## A healthy diet and access to good food

One of the groups in Belfast discussed how future community wellbeing would benefit from educating children and young people about broader life skills including mental wellbeing and the value of looking after oneself in terms of diet,

*It's about broadening the education for where we are going in to the 21st century, broadening on how to keep themselves well, like counselling or mentoring in schools about how to eat healthy, how to cook your meals, life skills.* - Belfast

Participants felt that at the basis of good health is good food,

*I think that it's crucial for a good quality of life that you have a healthy and balanced diet so you can actually go and do the things you want to do. If you're unable to afford good quality food and you can just afford the literal minimum it's going to affect your life, it's going to affect your health, it's going to affect your mental wellbeing.* – Belfast

Some felt that the value of good food and its effect on people's wellbeing is not recognised enough,

*I think good food is overlooked when it come to the GDP and money, it's always about the economy and output. - Belfast*

Access to good, fresh food was seen as important for all generations,

*Good, fresh food so that children learn from an early age what nutritious food looks like. - Bristol*

The point was made that parents need to learn about nutritious food too and that schools, colleges and universities have a role to play. One group in Bristol felt strongly that all school age children should have access to free healthy meals at school to remove the stigma perceived as being attached to receiving free school meals currently and to ensure children learn about a nutritious diet from a young age.

*You know, your parents are on benefits, you're poor, welfare – that's what everyone's saying and that goes back to the point that you girls raised about confidence. If you're getting picked on because you're having free school meals because your parents aren't working, you're being segregated and singled out and potentially that can knock your confidence... They should all be treated the same and if that means they all get a free meal and it's a hot meal then good and we're not talking chips or something, we're talking a proper hot meal. - Bristol*

### **Access to local health services**

In both locations access to local health services scored very high on the list of essentials for a good quality of life. Participants in Belfast said that communities are under attack, with reduced funding available for healthcare, social care and education.

*Well I just think that the policies that are, whether it's local government or the actual government at Westminster, [the] policies are the same. There is a need for a good healthcare system and education system. But because of the cuts they're under attack. - Belfast*

In Bristol one of the groups said that there is a need for an awareness raising campaign on different health conditions and how to prevent them,

*More awareness and campaigns about different health conditions. - Bristol*

All participants agreed that good health is a cornerstone of wellbeing and that being active is part of a recipe for good health. Access to activities to keep fit should be available in all communities,

*It's the option to have it [exercise] in the first place isn't it? That's what's important. – Bristol*

### **Good quality housing**

As previously stated (see section 2.3 on page 14) good quality **housing** at an affordable price was seen as fundamental to having a good quality of life for participants in both locations. This was important for everyone, but they felt that young people were in particular need of support so they could move away from the parental home and establish their own autonomous lives. This exchange in Bristol typifies the kinds of discussion held in both locations.

M: *More affordable housing because it's impossible to get on to the property ladder nowadays.*

M: *And when you can get a mortgage banks ask for a huger deposit, like 15% deposit so you have to save up like £25,000 if you want to buy a decent house, you can't afford that.*

F: *We need more houses.*

F: *Yeah because there's so few houses that's why the value goes up, they're not going to give a young person a house so where do they fit in? – Bristol*

## 2.5 Sense of belonging

Contemplating communities of place and interest brought out memories people had of times when home, work and life all happened in the same community with a subsequent stronger feeling of belonging as a result. A summary of the headline points is at figure 5.

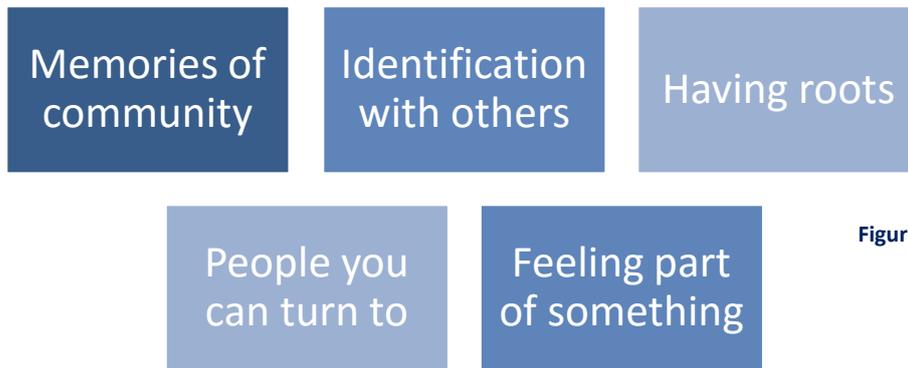


Figure 5: sense of belonging

One participant expressed the views of many in Bristol by saying,

*30 years ago you had your home, you worked just round the corner, you've got everything you need right there. I know it can't go back, because you've got jobs further afield, but there was a time when everyone lived and worked in the same sort of place, everyone would go to the same pub and they'd all chat and go to the same restaurants with the same sort of people and I'm not saying you want to stay with those people all the time, but back in the 80s there was a lot more community. - Bristol*

Although having a sense of belonging was not identified as a basic requirement that has to be fulfilled for a good quality of life, many participants said it does contribute positively to one's experience of wellbeing,

*If you don't feel a part of any community I think that's extremely detrimental. You need to be able to identify with people who share your culture, your heritage, all that sort of thing to make yourself feel as if you do belong there. It's crucial to respect other cultures and communities but it's also crucial that you're part of one as well and it doesn't matter the size of it, but community is crucial. - Belfast*

For some participants a sense of belonging to a place is more important than wealth. One participant said that he was married to a Canadian partner and could have chosen to swap his life in Belfast for a much more comfortable lifestyle in Canada, however he had chosen to stay where he is. For him it is important to feel connected to the community he knows,

*I am rooted to this place, I like this place, I love this place. This place has got great character, great personality. I would not leave it. For me that is more important than any amount I could have in my bank account. So even though I'm skint, wearing second-hand trousers, I am happy to a certain extent, that I'm living here. – Belfast*

And someone in Bristol said,

*It's nice to feel that you're part of something and that you've got people you can turn to even for trivial things you know it's nice. – Bristol*

Those who spoke about their feelings of belonging to a community said that that was one of the reasons why they liked to be actively involved in their communities,

*It's a sense of belonging. - Belfast*



### 3. Essential elements for a good quality of life at each life stage

An analysis of the essential elements of a good quality of life at each life stage demonstrated that participants believe good quality housing, reliable and affordable public transport, access to local health services and good quality food have to be in place throughout life to ensure a basic level of community wellbeing. For them, the very young benefit from parents and carers with access to support services and an environment which is conducive to play and social interaction with other children. School age children and young people were seen to need a good education including support for those with special educational needs, career advice, good role models, things to keep them occupied and some money to enable them to socialise with others. The wellbeing of adults of working age was seen to benefit from access to support and guidance about work and learning, particularly in the context of career change; emotional support in coping with change and affordable childcare. Older people were seen to need a sense of purpose, connections and things to do in the community and a local support structure. Inter-generational activities were identified as essential to community wellbeing as they help foster respect between the old and the young.

After the initial discussions about what constitutes a good quality of life participants were asked to consider what the essential elements are for a good quality of life at every life stage. This was followed by a consideration of what is needed in communities to enhance the wellbeing for all.

#### 3.1 Early years

To provide young children a good start in life participants identified a wide range of needs. These were eloquently summarised by a participant in Belfast who said,

*The whole spectrum has to be right. You've got to have the right nutrition, you've got to have the right housing, you've got to have near you open spaces. The structure has to be there for us to be able to raise the next generation to go on to do better things than us. If they've got poor housing, or there's still domestic violence, those things need to be supported, they are very fundamental. -*

Belfast

A summary of headline points made by participants about needs in early years is included in figure 6.



Figure 6: early years

#### A stable home

Stability was seen as a very fundamental need for the early years' life stage,

*They need a stable home...So I think a stable home in one place. It doesn't necessarily have to be with two parents or a mum or a dad but that stable home is very important. - Belfast*

## Practical and emotional support for young parents/ carers

Participants pointed out that wellbeing in the early years is entirely dependent on the wellbeing of parents/ carers,

*When you are that age, when you are pre-school, your life revolves around the gate-keepers of your life. Even the food that comes into the house is bought by your carers, whoever they may be. - Belfast*



At the same time young parenthood was identified as a key transition stage in life during which access to practical and emotional support for parents is important for the wellbeing of both parents and young children,

*The parents need to have good support and they need to have good networks, it's linked. If the parent isn't in a good place that's going to have a knock on effect on the kids. - Belfast*

*One of the things we said was more advice when you have a new born child about basic things like taking their temperature, what to do if they're ill, that sort of thing, because nowadays they just send you out of the door. But we were saying what if a woman got pregnant and she had no parents or the bloke didn't want to know it, she'd be in trouble. – Bristol*

There was agreement that in the past there used to be a lot more support for young parents,

*Years ago it was different, they'd teach you how to bath a baby. - Bristol*

Parent toddler groups were seen as an essential vehicle for social contact for young parents and as a way of learning parenting skills,

*A lot of parents are quite isolated so a parent and toddler group is a chance to meet other adults. It's something in the community that a new parent can go to meet other parents. These mothers just alone with kids, they get depressed. - Bristol*

*Could you add parent and toddler groups? Because a lot of parents of first time children [need them]. I can remember when my first child came along and I was trying to feed him food out of a jar, cold, you know? - Bristol*

## Opportunity to play and socialise with others

Other basic needs for early years children include opportunities to play with other children and access to open spaces and parks,

*Open spaces, places to play, kick a ball, whatever that might be. - Belfast*

In Bristol one of the small groups discussed that pre-school children need different things from a park than school-age children and that provision for the younger ones would increase their wellbeing and that of their parents,

*Often you go into the parks and the big kids take over. It's all for ages 5 and up. There's nothing for the young ones to do. [Perhaps] stuff with different smells so you can go up and smell... like sensory type learning. – Bristol*

## 3.2 School age children

A summary of headline points made about the needs of school age children is included in figure 7.

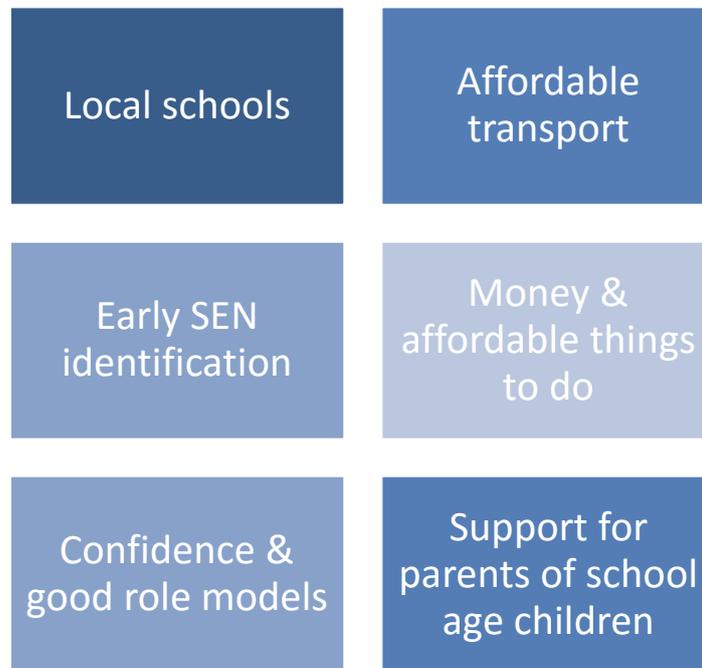


Figure 7: school age children

### Access to local schools and affordable transport

For school age children access to education and opportunities to play were identified as a basic element for a good quality of life. For the wellbeing of the children and their families participants stressed that there should be school places available in the community to avoid long journeys to and from school which were seen as having a negative impact on wellbeing,

*The first one and most important was access to school and play. I know some people have kids and they can't even put their kids in a school that's close to them. They've got to get on the bus and spend two hours travelling to school and then two hours travelling home when there's a school just up the road from them. - Bristol*

*It starts you off in life, you need to have a good education to then go on and get a good job and obviously the better degrees you have, the better A-levels, GCSEs you have the more likely you are to get a better job and more higher paid job. - Bristol*

Free school transportation would relieve a lot of anxiety for families of school age children, according to participants, particularly for those who have no choice but to use school buses,

*But it costs hundreds to get a school bus, much, much more than going on a normal bus, I'm talking hundreds. It's happened to me, it's frightening and if you haven't got the money, you can't afford it, what do you do, you apply and you can't afford it and then the head goes down. – Bristol*



Equally, others reported very complex systems for getting to school which they felt were a challenge for a school-age child,

*I remember at my last school, and I had to take a community-run bus to the Translink bus stop, then get another Translink bus to the main bus stop, and then go to school. But if that first one hadn't been there, because I lived in the middle of nowhere, I couldn't have said to dad, "Do you mind going into work an hour later to drop me at the bus stop?" You know you can't do that, so unless that bus was there, it was actually the*

*bus for the local primary school and they let us get on it to take us into Belfast, and without that, because the road networks, and the bus networks aren't great out there, we would have been really stuck.* - Belfast

### **Early identification of Special Educational Needs**

In both locations participants discussed the importance of early diagnosis and intervention for children with special educational needs including autism, Asperger's syndrome or dyslexia,

*Identification of abilities or disabilities identified early so that the appropriate systems and support can be put in place.* – Belfast

There was recognition that late diagnosis has a negative knock-on effect on the wellbeing in later life stages,

*If children at this stage, when they are quite vulnerable, aren't getting the help or the support that they need there's a knock on effect that doesn't go away. That does long-term damage.* - Belfast

### **Money and affordable things to do**

The view was expressed that school age children need affordable things to do in their communities,

*Keeping them busy really so they don't just get bored, like after school stuff and breakfast clubs, but it needs to be on a low cost budget really so that everybody can use it, not just the people with money.* - Bristol

Some participants said they need money to be able to go out with friends and make the connections they need for a good quality of life,

*They need some money because they need a social life whether it's pocket money, it's not really a part-time job, but they do need money to do certain things like going to the cinema and they need street cred. If they're not in the group you can become isolated.* – Belfast

In discussions around play and things to do for school age children participants in both locations discussed how children no longer have the opportunities to explore, find out for themselves and learn from mistakes when they're playing. As long as there are safety nets in place, exposure to risk was seen as an essential element of a good quality of life for school age children,

*It is about giving them space to take risks.* - Belfast

### **Confidence and good role models**

One of the groups in Northern Ireland discussed the importance of children having the confidence to speak up about what support they need to bolster them for later life,

*I think it's confidence, building the confidence. From the early years right through to the school years so that the school child is able to say what it needs and if there's difficulties, what it isn't getting... Building resilience, because life's difficult.* - Belfast

For both school age children and young people it was seen to be important to have good role models to make them more self-confident. Participants in the dialogue expressed concern about the lack of responsible adults in some children's lives and the potential influence of a celebrity culture which portrays lifestyles and behaviours that are not always compatible with the reality of daily life,

*Good role models, good people modelling how to be in your society. It could be elders, neighbours or even teachers, male teachers for young boys.* - Belfast

Some participants in Belfast reported how they had benefitted from being part of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) when they were young men,

*Just that small conversation benefitted us as young men growing up, we learned things from other people. We had mentors, not just on the playing field but mentors within the club also watching out for us, looking after us. – Belfast*

Association with these kind of group offers opportunities to broaden children’s social networks. As another participant in Belfast said,

*Opportunity to us didn’t just mean your ability to move socially and economically up and down, but we also thought opportunity meant organisations, such as the scouts, that would give young people an opportunity to broaden their network, socially...So it might be social and economic mobility as well as it means social networks. - Belfast*

Others, however spoke about how organisations like GAA might hinder school age children learning about other communities,

*That’s where the issues arise with entrenchment into the community, because the likes of the GAA are such an important aspect to so many lives, and especially in the early years, that about a whole 50% of the community are missing out on it completely because of what it is. - Belfast*

For participants it is important that children learn at home that working for an income is important for their independence and feeling of self-worth. Instilling a good work ethic is a role for the family or main carers of school age children and young people. As someone in Bristol said,

*If parents don’t push children, then they don’t realise that they need to work they just don’t think they need to work. - Bristol*

### Support for parents of school age children

Parenting school age children requires skills some parents don’t have in the eyes of some participants. They said that the wellbeing of school age children would benefit from their parents receiving practical and emotional support to deal with behavioural issues or practical issues such as homework,

*Sometimes the parents don’t know how to help their kids with their homework. – Belfast*

Equally, school age children with caring responsibilities need support in their communities,

*There are an awful lot of kids that are also carers for their parents. My daughter at 11 was my carer because I had a back problem so that’s a lot of responsibility for her. - Belfast*

### 3.3 Young people

A summary of headline points made about young people’s needs is included in figure 8.



Figure 8: young people

## Education, opportunities and careers advice

For young people access to education and opportunity was seen as one of the most essential element of a good quality of life. Young people's wellbeing was seen as being affected by the prospect that it might be challenging to find a job,

*For the young people the most important things we were talking about for them is going to be their employment opportunities and the economic outlook...You want to know that there are actually jobs there for you to take and to fill. – Belfast*

A group in Bristol pointed out that the education system is for them too focussed on academic output rather than the future of students. They saw this as being due to competition between schools for funding and reputation,

*The whole thing's focused on them getting to and passing an exam. There's no end game, it's purely about doing exams which is again down to league tables and SATs and all that kind of stuff because schools are in too much competition with each other. - Bristol*

This group felt that an emphasis on school results can impact negatively on the wellbeing of some young people,

*This is why you get so many children coming out of school feeling useless, because they think, "I can't do anything with that." – Bristol*

Instead, as far as participants were concerned, it would be much better for the wellbeing and self-confidence of young people if they received adequate career advice to provide them with a sense of purpose,

*Someone telling them they can, "You can do this and you can feel proud". – Bristol*

Young people making the transition from secondary school to post-16 education were seen by participants as needing access to tailored education and career advice to enable them to take advantage of opportunities and give them a sense of direction,

*Well when you leave school, whether they're going into uni or work placement, they need good advice as to what to do. – Belfast*

*I think we need careers advice if you come out of school and don't have good results you speak to someone who says, "Here are the options", help them make decisions...Pick something useful. - Belfast*

In Bristol a person who had worked in education felt it important to point out that careers advice should involve the parents or carers of young people so that support can be reinforced at home and a commitment made to following up on the advice given.

## Life skills

Young people need to be taught a wide range of life skills to increase their wellbeing in later life. As someone in Bristol said,

*I wasn't very well informed. You go through school just learning random facts like biology and chemistry and geography and stuff like that, but you don't actually learn any life skills. You're not very prepared, like I had no idea how to get on to the property ladder or how to take out a mortgage or how to pay my taxes or any of that stuff do I. – Bristol*

## Money and free travel

The value of money for young people was discussed in the context of travel and opportunities to meet with friends. In Bristol a number of young adults referred to the anxiety they had experienced when they left education and were looking for a job. At this transition stage they found that they were no longer entitled to free or subsidised travel and as a result they struggled to get to job interviews and afford appropriate clothing,

*So if you want to go somewhere you need to get a taxi and things. But if you don't have a job, you can't afford to get a car, you can't afford to get a job and you can't afford to do anything.* - Bristol

In Belfast participants talked about the importance of small amounts of money for their social lives, ensuring young people don't get isolated,

*It is at this age when they are going out and start to socialise and things so they do need money for beer or fashion, or else they become very isolated.* - Belfast

### Political awareness

In Belfast a number of participants felt very strongly that political awareness for young people was essential for a good quality of life,

*I think [young] people need to be better educated in their politics as well. Because with my two at the last election I was like, "You are going to vote" and they were like, "I don't know anything about politics. What do I want to go down there for? It's a waste of time".* - Belfast

This should be nurtured at home as well as in school to avoid ongoing silo-thinking as a result of growing up in either a Catholic or Protestant environment. Participants in Belfast shared an openness to move away from what they perceived as being the entrenched views of the past. They wanted young people to be politically aware through education which they felt would demonstrate the desirability of having and expressing their own views, not simply rehearsing the views of previous generations. This is clearly expressed in one exchange between Belfast participants,

F: *My father normally votes for the same person that he has voted for for the last 70 years, and no matter what I say, it will not make a difference. If I was to tell him who I voted for he would have a heart attack.*

F: *They will not change, and so hopefully in the next generation it comes along.*

M: *Ultimately, if that's the case, you're responsible then for making sure that generation is more aware of what goes on. But I mean they will vote for whoever they choose to.* - Belfast

Together with the view expressed below,

*I think there should be mandatory political education especially somewhere like Northern Ireland.* – Belfast

So for a number of participants young people personified hope for the future, where political education and encouragement to form their own opinions of the political system will bring about long-lasting positive change for communities. As one participant put it,

*That's because of the communities we live in. We have two communities based on religion. If you're in one that is how you shape. A lot of people can't stand out of the box and say, "I want to have my own opinion no matter what side of the fence I'm on". I think that's where education comes in.* -

Belfast



[28]

## Support for parents of young people

Some participants with experience of living with teenagers said it would benefit their own as well the young person's long term wellbeing if there was someone they could turn to for practical and emotional support,

*They can be very difficult and how well you get through that with a child, it can either make or break a relationship between a child and parent sometimes. I think there needs to be parental support where they can go and say, "He's doing my head in at the moment staying up until 2 in the morning".* – Belfast

[Mumsnet](#) and [Familylives](#) were cited as useful resources for parents.

## 3.4 Adults of working age

A summary of headline points made about the needs of adults of working age is included in figure 9.

### Emotional support for those coping with change

Participants in both locations were clear that the economic recession has had a negative impact on the wellbeing of adults of working age. Throughout the dialogue participants expressed repeatedly that adults need access to support and guidance to have a good quality of life,

*[We need] mental health services, particularly now people are worried about the future of their work. Some are in jobs that are so stressful now that they just take it on the chin. So mental health is a completely new thing, particularly amongst males.* - Belfast

A participant in Belfast described the changing context of work as an amalgam of work, caring and learning commitments,

*Work is being redefined. It is not uncommon to be on benefits and working; to be caring for someone and to*

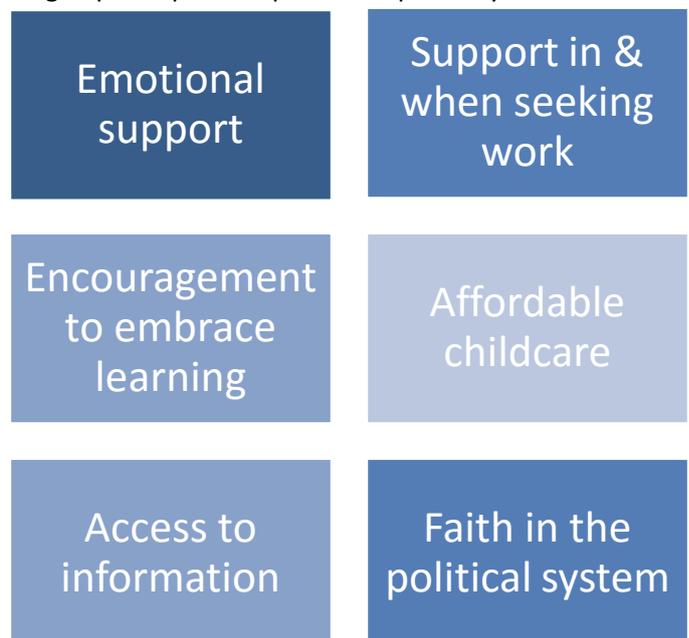


Figure 9: adults of working age

*be in education all at the same time. To be partly employed, there is a new wave, there are no more jobs for life. In certain communities in Northern Ireland for instance, people just went straight into the shipyard or whatever and didn't need to stay in school. That has changed. The whole range of your job forever and ever. The change in technology. People need to be re-educated, re-skilled.* – Belfast

And someone else said, that,

*Being an adult of working age is also heavily changing identity and it is probably one of the most difficult areas in your life to be involved in change. When you are in your 30s or 40s it is more difficult to accept these changes...Because what you always knew doesn't exist anymore.* - Belfast

All of this leads to anxiety and stress with a knock-on effect on people's confidence,

*Like your job for life is gone and you need to be on benefits to support the wages. There are a lot of different stresses.* - Belfast

## Support for those in and seeking work

For participants support has to be in place for those out of work as well, whether they are unemployed, trying to reintegrate into the work after a career break or trying to move to another job,

*Help for those who don't have jobs helping them get into jobs, or volunteer, or whatever. Something to help them.* – Belfast

Participants said that their confidence is often low as things have changed a lot since they were first in a job and in increasingly uncertain working environments new skills are required. As one participant, going through a difficult time at work said,

*I haven't been to an interview in 14 years and now I've got to re-apply for my job and it used to be just 1 person and now it's a panel of 6 people.* - Bristol

One of the groups in Bristol talked about how an applicant's self-confidence would benefit from having someone to talk to who's familiar with the new company,

*It would be good for someone to talk to you just before you go in to give you that bit of confidence back. Say if you're going for a job in a factory, just someone who works there so you can have a couple of hours just to chat about the job so you're more prepared when you go in there, so support from someone already in the job.* - Bristol

## Encouragement to embrace learning

In Belfast one of the groups discussed the need to encourage all adults of working age, not just particular sections of the community, to consider further and higher education opportunities, whether employed or unemployed,

*For unemployed people, continuing education to kind of show them that education doesn't just kind of stop when you leave secondary school. This blends into the people who are employed. A big problem is that sometimes people work and they are not encouraged to go to higher education because they are already at work.* - Belfast

Learning opportunities were also seen as a way to defeat boredom in uninteresting jobs, as an enrichment opportunity to help people when they are not stimulated at work,

*We said education and skills so you're always learning so you've got skills training always being challenged in some way so you don't get bored with what you're doing.* - Belfast

Participants in Bristol emphasised the need for low cost training opportunities to support a career development,

*There needs to be more career support for adults for career progression or career change without these extortionate fees, they need to fill that gap.* - Bristol

*I think there needs to be a place where you can have support for career changes and courses. So if someone's got a degree in something when they're young they can change their mind and think, "I want a career change". But they can't go back to uni because it costs so much money. There should be support for that, for career change. Both training and financial support.* – Bristol

## Affordable childcare

For participants in both locations adults of working age need access to affordable childcare for a good quality of life. Knowing their children are looked after in a safe and stimulating environment at a reasonable cost provides people with the peace of mind they need to live well.

*I would say childcare, as well. And if you need to work, and you are able to work, you need to be supported. Your children need to be looked after in a good quality standard of childcare support.*

Belfast

For them it is also essential that there are available childcare spaces as a lack of places, together with high prices is seen as being very bad for the wellbeing of adults of working age.

*Childcare is a very important thing as you said there's a bit of shortage of childcare, certainly of spaces that people going into work can get. So, because there's a shortage of it, it's extortionate. And then what's the value of going back to work, on one hand, if you're having to pay it all back, in childcare. So to lower the cost of childcare, there needs to be more childcare spaces. - Belfast*

A view echoed by participants in Bristol,

*Good, affordable childcare and local too, I mean it's no good having it at the other side of the city even if it is really cheap, if you can't get there, there's no point in it. – Bristol*

One participant brought the experience of her daughter to the discussion, highlighting the challenges of juggling the care of small children with work or learning commitments.

*Yes when my daughter was going to college it was difficult to go and pay for the child care, she did see the point but it was a struggle, she really struggled because she was less better off and not only financially but because they were very young children. If one of them was sick, or this, or that, so you've got added pressure and then trying to study and then financial so it all adds up. – Bristol*

### **Easy access to a wide range of information for adults**

In Bristol in particular participants talked about the difficulty adults often have in finding relevant information, particularly when it comes to essential things like housing, benefits, job seeker support and health services. Some participants said that the wellbeing of citizens in Bristol would benefit from a central Bristol specific website with up-to-date information or local information hubs as it would reduce the frustration people often experience when accessing support services,

*It would be nice to have somewhere you can go directly, a bit like Citizen's Advice I guess but somewhere more local. We've got a Home hub near ours and you can go over there and ask for help, but it's only to do with housing, council houses and stuff like that. It would be nice to be able to go somewhere where you can get help with everything, like mortgage advice, health, across the board. And if they don't know they can pick up the phone. It seems so hard to find information out these days. – Bristol*

There is a sense in these remarks that people were keen to gain support from a person they could react to face-to-face rather than through an online support mechanism. Participants frequently felt that the connecting with others who could help them would benefit their wellbeing more than downloading information sheets or accessing information online that they couldn't question or interact with.

### **Faith in the political system**

In Belfast the discussion around adults of working age touched on the importance of not having to deal with discrimination in the context of religion, social class or sexual orientation,

*You can do what you want without being discriminated against for who you are as an adult of working age, so whatever life choice you make you can still do what you want. Belfast*

People said that having faith in the political and justice system would benefit their wellbeing positively,

*We meant if you had a faith in your political system that helps your wellbeing. For instance if you're a victim of a hate crime there will be a way for you to get the support. - Belfast*

With reference to the political context in Northern Ireland one group said,

*What goes on in the political system has an impact on everyone and their mental wellbeing. And all this fighting. They don't seem to worry about the effect it has on the communities out there and how they get by day-to-day. – Belfast*

Participants in the discussion in Belfast felt there continues to be a sense of uncertainty following the Troubles and the economic climate, both of which negatively impact on everyone in the community, but they felt it particularly strongly when discussing the wellbeing of adults of working age. They said that communities need, and indeed have at a grass roots level, a sense of hope that things will get better,

*The wellbeing of the community is to have a sense of hope and not to be sitting in the situation we are in now where there is just so much uncertainty. - Belfast*

### 3.5 Active retired people

A summary of headline points made about the needs of active retired people is included in figure 10.

#### Good standard of living

For a good quality of life active retired people, participants (of whom some were in this age bracket) were clear, need a good standard of living. The prospect of not having enough money in retirement is daunting for those approaching this life stage,

*A good standard of living. To me there would be nothing worse than to be retired and to not have enough money to try and get you through. – Belfast*

A good standard of living includes a secure living space, free travel, and access to affordable food and health services.

#### Connections and things to do

As at other life stages, participants felt that connections matter a lot to the active retired, particularly those who are dependent on others for transport and might have lost social networks as friends and family move away or die. To have a continued sense of belonging in their community they need things to do. The general feeling was that there isn't enough on offer for people at this life stage,

*A lot of people go on day trips with the church and they do love it. There should be far more of that, because it gets them out of the house, gets them to interact with other people when they are still more than capable to do that. At that sort of age, you do need more of a community around you. – Belfast*

*The grandparents I've got, if they didn't have clubs to go to they'd be incredibly bored so there needs to be stuff for them to do. Obviously they don't just want to go and drink tea because they're active and they want something more often. There isn't much available for them to do. - Bristol*

In Bristol the suggestion was made that volunteers could help engage the active retired with, for example, sporting activities,

*A group of 60 year olds might feel self-conscious going for a jog but if a few younger people got into it with them and ran with them they'd feel a lot more at ease with it. - Bristol*

#### Targeted information

As at other life stages tailored information about community services and activities was identified as essential for retired adults,

*Does the council retain information on people who are in that category of retired adults? Because if it does, why can't they send some sort of information flyer out? Numbers, useful information, if you need the community bus to come and pick you up from your address, make a phone call and they can pick you up on and take you to Tesco's.* - Bristol

### Respect and a sense of purpose

Respect for older people and the need to have a sense of purpose were two other main themes in the discussions about a good quality of life for the active retired,

*Respect. The older you get you seem to be getting less respect from the younger ones coming up nowadays.* – Belfast

Participants in the dialogue said that a sense of purpose might come from staying in employment for longer or making the transition to self-employment,

*The active retired, their brain is still active but maybe there are some physical difficulties, but if you look at the knowledge and what's been gained over life, they could work in those areas. Even working from home more. So they can set up their own business at home or whatever.* – Belfast

It was also felt that active retired adults could be the main source of support for older retired adults. Some warned though, that the active retired are in danger of becoming a 'sandwich generation' with caring duties for elderly relatives as well as grandchildren,

*Even though they are retired, they may not be not as retired as they would like to be.* – Belfast

It was felt that having too many responsibilities for the active retired could lead to stress, lack of time and undermine their wellbeing.



Figure 10: active retired people

### 3.6 Older adults

A summary of headline points made about the needs of older adults is included in figure 11.

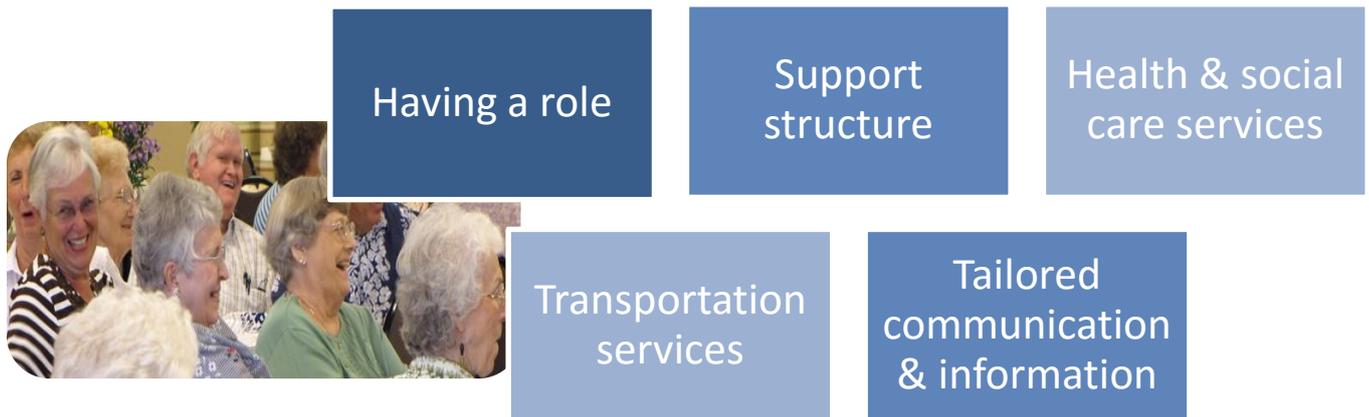


Figure 11: older adults

#### Fostering respect through intergenerational learning

Participants in the dialogue said they often feel as if older people are looked down on. An older person in Bristol made a comparison to cultures in which older people are respected more,

*Older people in the community feel nervous, people look at you and think you're old and that you don't know what you're talking about and actually in a lot of countries older family members are very much respected. Not in this country, you're put down more...You're not viewed as a person in the community, they think you're brain dead. – Bristol*

Some participants said that respect for older people should be fostered through inter-generational learning. As someone in Belfast said,

*I think, respect for your elders, that would be the education coming from the older people to the younger ones. That's where they would gain the respect, because of a lot of them probably think they are over the hill and stick them in the scrap heap. Creating awareness and education and their attitude would be different. – Belfast*

For community wellbeing the added benefit of more integration between older and young people is that it would help build respect both ways,

*Respect works two ways it has to be that older adults aren't looking down on younger people thinking you always make trouble. That's why there needs to be a joined up approach with older and younger adults. – Belfast*

Therefore, inter-generational activities would benefit the wellbeing of older as well as young people in the community,

*There have been some projects done with older and younger where they learn from each other and I think they're brilliant ideas. Because the older people can sit with the younger ones and tell stories or learn about things. The amount of wisdom that the older people have that they can share with the younger ones. - Belfast*

#### Having a role in the community

Older participants in the dialogue said that feeling useful is essential to their wellbeing,

*It's not just feeling valued, it's feeling as if you've got something to give back. It's an active thing, being useful is something you can do yourself. - Bristol*

Social isolation or loneliness were identified as being a cause for declining wellbeing of older people. It was felt that they need access to activities appropriate to their age,

*That would just be pensioner clubs, tea parties and things like that to keep them socially active. – Belfast*

The closing of local community assets such as post offices and pubs were seen as detrimental to the wellbeing of older people,

*The old people from up the road used to get the bus down to the village and do their shopping and meet up and that but now they can't do it anymore. - Bristol*

Communities could make better use of older people who do not get out as much as they would like, for example by giving them a role in caring for children in the community,

*I had a neighbour who was wonderful. She'd look after the kids, she'd have the kids in and it gave her something and she helped the mums getting the shopping in. It made such a difference to her life that somebody cared about her... If only people would use older people more. - Bristol*

### **Support structure close to home**

Older people need a support structure close to home. In Belfast participants reported more positively about neighbours looking out for each other than participants in Bristol. They spoke about neighbours caring for and checking in on each other,

*It's different here [in Northern Ireland]. We have that family based social network even neighbours who care for each other. We might not interact very much but you would notice if something was up. I think that's a bit different from England. I have family in England and they would tell me they don't know any of their neighbours because they just don't interact. - Belfast*

In Bristol the majority of participants said they didn't know their neighbours very well. They might say hello to each other in the street without knowing their names or ever finding out anything about each other's lives,

*I've got new neighbours moved in opposite me about 2 years ago and they always say good morning but I couldn't tell you their names. They're both young couples, they've got cars and they go out to work quite naturally and I'm sure they're very friendly, they just haven't got time to get into their community. - Bristol*

This particularly impacts on older people. As an older lady said,

*But now no one knows their neighbours. They go to work and come home and pick the kids up from school...I feel alone during the day and it's a main road but it's so quiet. - Bristol*

Many participants spoke about the importance of a local support network for a good quality of life in later life,

*I spend a lot of time with my granny, she lives in Belfast as well but she lives on her own and one thing that she would probably say contributes to a good quality of life for her would be support networks. Whether that be the church group or the example that [participant name] gave of the lady going to bingo once a week. - Belfast*

The same participant said that it makes a big difference to his grandmother and people of her age to have people coming around to check in on her,

*It makes a big difference to them, getting out of the house and having people even come around and speak to them, even things like the housing executive. My granny loves it when they come round because she's going to get to talk to someone for half an hour and walk around with them*

*and it's great for her. For a good quality of life I think that's pretty important, that you feel a part of something and that there are support networks for you. – Belfast*

### Accessible and adequate health and social care services

Participants in both locations said that older people should be able to access healthcare services whenever they need them to avoid doing further harm to deteriorating conditions,

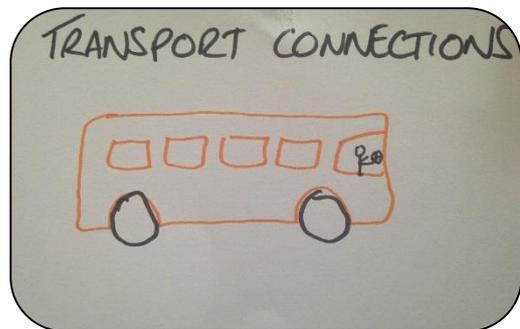
*Waiting times in the hospitals are long so older people could've died by the time their time comes round on the waiting list. So they need to be seen. Everybody should be seen fairly but for the likes of cataracts it's something where people lose their sight, so if the waiting time is long for that...So a quicker service for elderly people, if it can improve their life. - Belfast*

Experiences of social care for older people varied within each location. Some older people felt safe and secure with the systems put in place in their area,

*In the local community where I live they go to great lengths in making sure that if you have anything wrong with you, if you were to fall over, they have an alarm system and that is rigged back to, if there is someone in the local office it goes there but if it's out of hours it goes to the central [doctor on call]. – Belfast*

Whereas others expressed concern about the lack of time professional carers have to provide the support older adults need.

*There is not enough support for the older generation from my opinion, no, because they get carers to go in and they get 15 minutes in the morning and 15 in the afternoon. Obviously it's a struggle to see everyone but some people are too proud to take help, obviously there are not enough opportunities for them to be looked after if they're on their own or whatever. - Bristol*



For a sense of self-worth and a good quality of life there was a view that older people should remain independent as long as possible,

*If they were to put them into a nursing home, they've taken a lot away from them and that's just going to send someone backwards instead of letting them still try and do what they can do. - Belfast*

### Reliable and friendly transportation services

Equally important to the wellbeing of older people is access to reliable and accessible public transport, *Public transport has to be very good for the older people. Because they obviously don't go that far, the length they can walk for. – Belfast*

A patchy public transport network was a concern in both locations. Participants in Belfast shared experiences of older adults outside Belfast where a lack of reliable public transport increases social isolation,

*In Northern Ireland there is a very Belfast-centric approach to everything. There's a lot of older people, where I'm from, back home. The public transport just isn't there for them and they just get isolated that way. My older grandmother lives down near Lurgan, she's entitled to the same things [as older people in Belfast], but because the infrastructure is not there, she can't just jump on a bus and go somewhere. I think public transport is a very, very big one. - Belfast*

The dialogue showed that it's not just about the availability of appropriate transport services but also about support to ensure older people can make best use of them, as they often lack the confidence to use services they are not familiar with,

*My nan lives on her own and she's a widow. She wouldn't dream of getting on a bus on her own even though it's right outside her house. Not knowing where it's going to go, how to stop the bus, even how to pay, things like that she gets really nervous about. So I think there needs to be something to encourage the people to get out and start using the bus and getting their lives back. -*

Bristol

A lack of confidence, knowledge and experience of the system holds many older people back from using public transport,

*We've got a bus that comes round our way and you can book it and it will stop at your house and pick you up, but people don't use it because they haven't the confidence, they don't know some people on the bus maybe and things like that. - Bristol*

It was suggested that older people need a reliable and friendly service to overcome this barrier,

*If you've got a small minibuss company targeted at these people you know that it's going to turn up and you know you're going to get a friendly service. - Bristol*

Encouraging older people to use transportation services requires a more supportive attitude from staff and clear information about what exactly is available,

*Because when you get on the bus the bus driver just sits there, "£3.40 please" and that's it, nobody helps her get on or off the bus. - Bristol*

*But if there was more information would she feel more confident to go out and do it? This sort of pamphlet or booklet, targeted at [older] people even. - Belfast*

Again, the suggestion was made that there might be a role for the active retired adults in providing a transportation service for the elderly on a voluntary basis,

*From what I've seen, from my son's experience, who drives a bus for the health service. He picks up the non-active retired people, if the active retired people could become part of that network with buses and that. - Bristol*

### **Tailored communication and information**

Participants discussed the view that lot of older people feel that they're not linked with other groups because technology has moved on so much. Some participants argued that the internet offers opportunities for older people,

*It's like what we said earlier about communities almost being sort of replaced by social networks. But you can argue, if anything, it makes the potential for older people to be connected even greater, you know so, as you mentioned there, it used to be years ago. You know, if you need your garden done, the person that's 5/6 doors down's a gardener. Well now you've got the internet, where everybody's on it, so there's thousands of gardeners you'd be able to choose from now. - Belfast*

However, in reference to older relatives others said that some older people lack the confidence to go online and feel more comfortable in face-to-face situations or when using the telephone,

*More info about things they can get involved in, but not through the internet because a lot of elderly people don't want anything to do with the internet. Maybe give them the information by a different means, go to them directly perhaps or over the phone? The internet is no good because of lot of them don't like to use it. They're stuck in their ways and they don't want to learn it. – Bristol*

This raises a point about how people view the wellbeing needs of others, objective wellbeing, in comparison to how people feel about their own, subjective, wellbeing. In Belfast one older participant was very clear about his own reliance on the internet and its importance in his life in sheltered housing as is shown in this exchange with another participant,

*M: So many older people are now getting to grips with computing.*

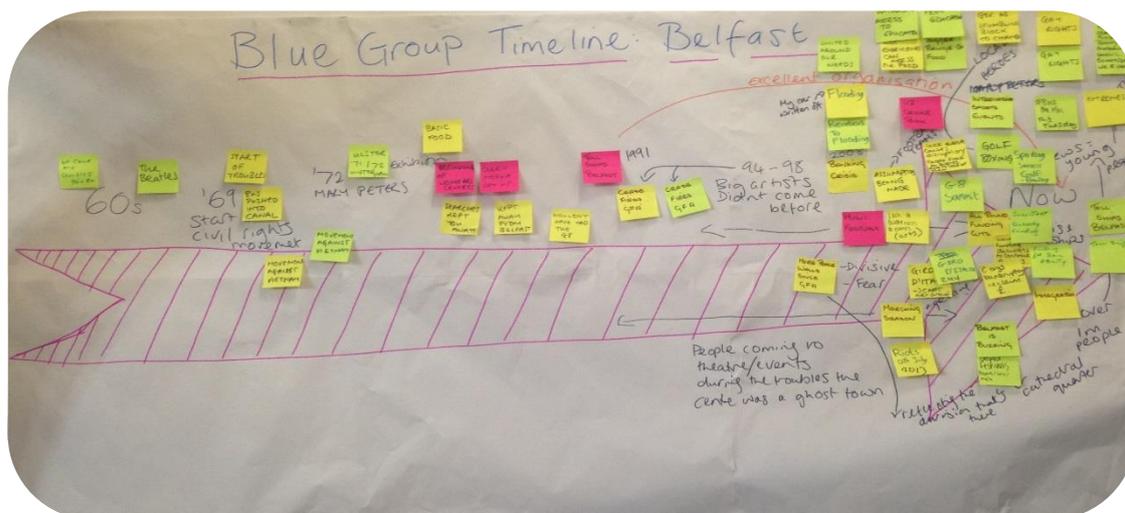
*F: And I think people who aren't mobile, they can still communicate through Skype and the Internet and Twitter.*

*M: That's right, that's what I do, and I help other people in my Fold to do the same. I do printing and things for them. - Belfast*

## 4. Community resilience

In round 2 of the dialogue participants discussed how communities emerge from difficult times. A sense of belonging to a place and neighbours working together or supporting each other were identified as the strongest components of community resilience with family, friends, work and school providing the backbone people need. There was a significant difference between the experiences of participants in Bristol and Belfast. Although the Bristol riots were discussed as a period of unrest the discussions about negative events in Bristol centred mainly on bereavement, (road) accidents and issues as a result of infrastructural changes. In Belfast the Troubles were front of mind for most people and the differences in life pre and post-conflict. Community events such as street parties rated highly amongst positive events as a vehicle for community cohesion, whereas national events including sporting events were identified as having a positive effect on feelings of pride, belonging and an important indicator of community wellbeing.

The concept of community resilience was tested through the development of a timeline of events. Participants were asked to think about all the positive and negative events that had happened in their communities ranging from relatively minor to major incidents, listing them on post-it notes. As the timeline developed participants considered what the impact of the events had been on their communities, on themselves and their families.



### 4.1 Impact of going through difficult times

#### Greater sense of belonging

During the session participants discussed why people do not tend to move away from a community in which they are experiencing difficulties. Most participants in the dialogue said that it is in fact harder to make a significant change in such stressful times. In Bristol one group discussed that it's easier to live with,

*The devil you know.* – Bristol

In Belfast participants talked about living through the Troubles with,

*A funeral every week, in the '80s.* - Belfast

They said that because of the long-length of the conflict people became immune to the feelings you might have if violence was less frequent. As one person expressed it,

*If someone was to say to you, "Well I'm coming to Belfast, should I be scared?" Your reaction would be, "no", we're used to it sort of thing. - Belfast*

Their view was that it is better to get on with life in less than ideal circumstances instead of moving away from a community and not knowing what life will be like somewhere else. However, people recognised that difficult times often lead to lower wellbeing as a result of stress and anxiety, which for many people means they don't have the strength to make change even if it was theoretically possible.

In difficult times participants viewed where they live and the community around it as an important anchor to regain balance. It is,

*Home, not just a house. – Bristol*

And,

*A lot of people just love where they are from. - Belfast*

As participants clearly stated, your community is a place where memories, friendships and connections all forge a strong sense of belonging which contributes positively to individual wellbeing. As a Belfast participant said,

*I left, I left for 5 years and came back. I was keen to go, because alright things aren't good. But things aren't good anywhere. That's a really negative thing to say, but like the problem is unique to Belfast, that doesn't mean that wherever you go there aren't problems there too that are just as significant. But I came back here because there is a sense of belonging to where you are from. - Belfast*

### **Length of the effect of difficult events**

When prompted to consider the length of the effect of difficulties in the communities there was a stark contrast between Bristol and Belfast which seems to correlate to the type of difficulties cited. In Bristol participants generally said that as a result of a difficult event in the community, such as a bereavement or a fatal accident, the effect was short-lived because people generally don't know each other very well,

*Everybody obviously got together and paid their respects and everyone was sad, but the community just forgot and moved on because unless you actually know the people, it doesn't affect you personally. - Bristol*

They put this down as a result of fragmented communities in which fewer people know each other well,

*If you had a much closer community and a child went missing, it would be in the community for much longer because the wider community knew the child and the parents and the family. Because it's more fragmented nowadays there were maybe a few people who knew them. - Bristol*

In Belfast however, participants discussed that for communities traumatised by violence the effect lasted longer and had more profound impacts such as a prevalence of mental health issues. They felt that these negative impacts are continuing today as people strive to find a new purpose for their lives. They also saw that the difficulties experienced had given communities a sense of direction and shared goal,

*It's like when we were in the Conflict we had a much greater goal and all that and all of a sudden it's over and everybody's looking forward to this big whatever and then it's all over. It's like somebody who is an alcoholic...when they stop drinking the blur is gone. The whole hate is gone and then they are like, is this what I give up drink for? - Belfast*

In Belfast it was made quite clear that communities are strong, with neighbours looking out for each other, and a recognition that this is different from other communities,

*It's the people in Northern Ireland. I have a friend she was born and bred in London and she's living over in Belfast, she moved actually for 10 years, she would never dream of going back to England. She says it's totally different. She says people over there don't care about you. People in Northern Ireland there's always somebody to talk to. - Belfast*

However, the effects of Troubles were seen by participants as continuing to have a long-lasting impact on the whole community. A discussion on the peace walls in Belfast is a clear example of this. For some participants the walls reinforce community divisions and they saw this as detrimental to the wellbeing of the whole community,

*F: To me it's [peace walls] dividing people and that just shows that even since the Good Friday Agreement and there are no Troubles, there is still that fear.*

*M: They are more reflective of the division like that, there is more of the fact of the division that is there. The division is there. – Belfast*

## 4.2 Catalysts for change

### Community standing together and supporting each other

For all participants the key thing that was needed to help their communities through difficult times was going through it together with neighbours and friends. In Bristol participants discussed how difficult times were tackled by community members coming together and making a stand against something they considered undesirable happening in their community,

*Coming together, standing together – for instance they didn't want the Tesco so everybody came together and rioted. – Bristol*



*Like with the parking permits I know a lot of people have protested against them...in their community as opposed to complaining about them but doing nothing about it. - Bristol*

The group acknowledged that those who are willing to take up the baton need to be supported by their community,

*There might be someone in your community who thinks differently then you should go and support them and say something rather than not doing anything about it. – Bristol*

In Belfast a strong thread through both rounds was about community members and groups supporting each other. One participant described what happened as a result of a recurrent flooding in his area,

*Maybe the first year, I think was quite hard and as it started happening, make sure the drainage was right, or the city park, which is right beside us, was out of operation for a couple of years, pretty much taking the river back 30-40 feet away from the houses to stop it happening. Once it had happened, the next time a lot of people sandbagged and people were going around helping. So there was a good community kind of reaction to it, even making sure that when it does happen again we're ready for it. – Belfast*

Another described the importance of community support, in this case through sporting associations, in the alleviation of mental and social challenges,

*Me, my brother and a few friends were talking about people who we grew up with, when we were teenagers and the things we would get up to and the conversation then went round to people who we knew who had maybe ended up in jail, ended up doing this and that, committed suicide, things like that. It was actually my brother who turned around and said, "You know what the connection is? It's that none of them belonged to sporting organisations" and we discussed that as well, that through our club, that was an interest for us, that was somewhere to go twice a week and meet up with friends, and make friends and become part of a bigger family. It was just that small connection that people who we knew who ended up in jail, armed robbery, things like that, people who maybe were depressed [hadn't had this support]. – Belfast*

As in Bristol, Belfast participants also reported action by community groups which brought about positive change,

*Certain community groups are very active especially around this time of year with bonfires and things like that. There was a campaign for signs to be put up in the High Street like, "Don't kill one of our kids, kill your speed" and stuff and that was brought through by a community group. - Belfast*

### **Talking to each other and appreciating difference**

Although difficult times have the capacity to bring people together in a community, participants stressed that it is essential that people continue to talk to each other once the initial trauma has passed. They gave clear examples of when community wellbeing benefits from ongoing contact between neighbours,

*People sometimes are just so nice, I would actually be overwhelmed with how nice, because I've been through tragedy and gosh, I think back and like, I would have never gotten through it only for the people in the community who really helped us as a family. They honestly, it's overwhelming, like how good and kind people are. - Belfast*

In Bristol one participant gave an example of a community member making an effort to appreciate difference,

*In difficult times, instead of saying you're different appreciate everyone's differences. I live in Easton and when it's Eid my Muslim neighbours bring round food and when it's Christmas we give them a box of chocolates and vice versa so it's nice to be able to celebrate and learn about each other's cultures as opposed to being segregated. That will help you stand together in tougher times. -*

Bristol

### **Community events**

Street parties were mentioned in both locations as excellent catalysts for change. Most participants were familiar with the concept and talked about the value of meeting one's neighbours in an informal setting,

*[Street parties] tend to be more inclusive than ordinary parties because there's a real age range and a real community feel isn't a street party, you tend to behave better because it's your place, you've got it marshalled. - Bristol*

In Bristol one participant spoke about how a street party for the Jubilee changed her life. One of her neighbours had not spoken to her for ten years because her daughters used to bounce a ball outside the house which impacted on his wellbeing,

*He said, "All I can hear is the ball bouncing and it drives me insane". Then when we had the street party and we were organising it he came round with £20 in an envelope saying, "Can I donate this to the street party?" Now he's my best friend in the world. Every morning he's like 'Morning! How's your day?' and before he wanted to kill me. – Bristol*

In Belfast one group specifically mentioned how commemorations for the 1971 introduction of internment moved from annual bonfires in the street to street parties,

*So what came up was how can we change that whole perspective of it? Keeping the interment angle, but making it more of a community thing rather than burn bonfires. So what happened was they said. "Well ok we'll have like street parties" and from that it then kicked off. The community came together to say, "let's broaden it, let's bring in some music groups" and then over the years built it. – Belfast*

### **Events attracting national media attention**

Participants also identified a positive spin-off locally from national events and local events which attract the attention of the national press. In Bristol the Golden Jubilee celebrations were discussed together with the presence of Wallace and Grommit around town and events around the 2012 Olympics were mentioned as events which got people talking to each other,

*I think [national events] make people happy because when the Jubilee was here they had big street parties and with Wallace and Grommit, they were in the news, on the telly, in the paper, people were talking about them because they've been to the Houses of Parliament...The Olympics...brought everyone together because there was a big theatre showing in Millennium square. It brings people out because it's a good feeling for the whole country. - Bristol*

In Belfast participants vividly described the importance of national and international events coming to the city, something they describe as not having been conceivable during the Troubles. For example the G8 Summit was cited by one participant,

*I think it was last year. I think it was quite impressive that Northern Ireland was selected for the most important get-togethers that you can have really. Everyone was kind of overboard. We were saying 10 years ago you wouldn't have gotten, well 20 years ago you wouldn't have gotten a rock band coming to Belfast so if you are actually getting the most important people in the world and they think it's safe enough and good enough that shows improvement. – Belfast*

And another cited the time when Mary Peters won a gold medal,

*Probably the first one would have been Mary Peters. Ulster '72, Ulster '71 anybody remember that? It was like a big event in Minster Hall. [To celebrate her winning the] pentathlon. I remember everyone going mad about it when I was a kid because she was from Belfast. The hype and buzz by it. And it was such a difficult time otherwise. – Belfast*

## 5. Ways to improve community wellbeing

In the final session of the two day process participants in the dialogue considered what a thriving community looks like. They were invited to draw pictures based on their own examples of what enables them to lead happy and fulfilled lives in their communities. Factors that need to be in place to make a community work really well were cited as being, for example, positive interaction with people, effective communication, inspiration, fun and inter-generational programmes. For many participants their engagement in the public dialogue was such a positive experience that they felt dialogue is a useful tool to help communities thrive.

*I drew a tree, the tree is on a stage because of the arts and because the environment is important. Then off the tree there's like branches. So here's there the judicial system, this is the growing economy, then there's the health service. Education came out squiggly. This is a swing because there's activities and things to do in the community. Then housing, as housing should always be available, and amenities. At the top of the tree is a phone and wifi because I feel like communication is key. - Belfast*



### 5.1 What a thriving community looks like

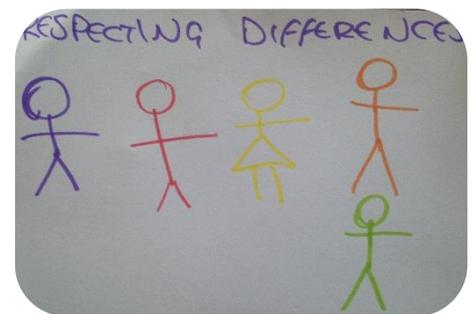
#### Positive interaction between people

As expressed at the dialogue, participants felt that at the heart of a thriving community are people from all walks of life and ages connecting with each other, helping each other and working together.

They said that communities thrive when people respect difference and appreciate each other's cultures, *Respect for your community. In South Belfast we have a wide range of people living in the community so we need to respect people's culture and live with that in mind when we're going about our day to day [business]. – Belfast*

Participants in both locations acknowledged that a lack of respect for difference holds communities back from making the quality of life better in difficult times. Participants felt that those who feel excluded often don't want to make things worse by sharing the issues that they face as that impacts negatively on their personal wellbeing,

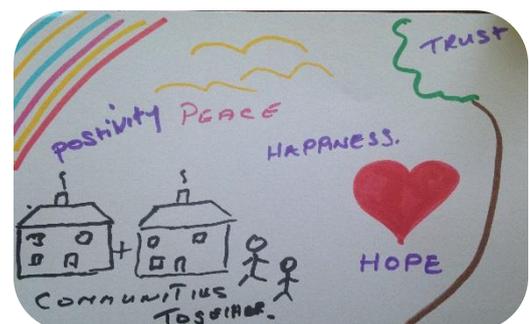
*If you're out-casted already from your community due to your religion, or race, or whatever, you might not want to cause tension or friction. - Bristol*



#### Places and opportunities to meet

To enable community members to come together they need good quality welcoming local facilities where they can meet,

*It's...a place to meet and come and share. Like the Men in Sheds, just going to have a cup of coffee with someone. – Belfast*



As stated before (see section 2.2) participants in the dialogue reported a link between increased wellbeing and the quality of their living environment. They spoke about the value of local amenities including pubs, parks and clubs, particularly if they are well maintained. Having a nice place to meet others increases an appetite for going out and making connections. Someone in Bristol said about her local park,

*There's a park by the pub that's lovely – you go there on a summer's day and it's packed with people having picnics, just going there for the day. And there's a café in there, that's really important to meet people.* - Bristol

Community events such as street parties and the Big Lunch together rated highly as opportunities to bring people together and therefore help the community to thrive,

*It was just nice for everyone to get together, it brought everyone together – after that everybody was a bit friendlier and you knew that you could then go to those people.* - Bristol

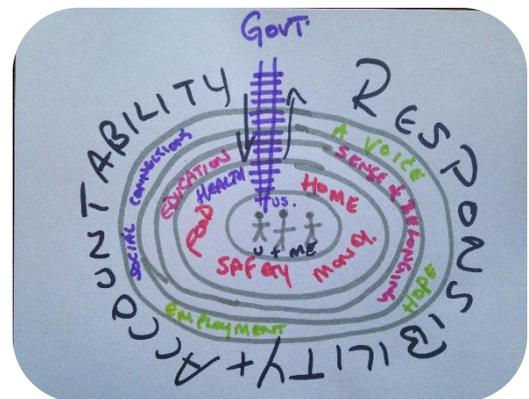
A participant in Belfast said that people behave better at parties in their own locality,

*Street parties tend to be more inclusive than ordinary parties because there's a real age range and a real community feel. You tend to behave better because it's your place, you've got it marshalled.* - Belfast

### Effective communication

Thriving communities feed off a strong communication system, which enables community members who live in the community to communicate with each other and those who've moved away from the community to stay in touch,

*I feel like for everything between communities, whether it be communities in government, whether it be bodies or whatever, it should always be communication at the top of it all, however it is done.* - Belfast



In a thriving community people have access to education and range of cultural activities to widen to inspire community members. Online communication was seen as a catalyst as well as a barrier. Some participants felt that there are untapped opportunities,

*We can communicate worldwide and it would be nice if we could get more and more people doing things like Skyping from Australia to Belfast. That helps to keep the community together.* – Belfast

In Bristol a participant recommended the use of [www.streetlife.com](http://www.streetlife.com) as a social media tool which provides communities across the UK a platform to connect to others and to what is going on in their local area.

This was balanced by a group of participants who strongly felt that face-to-face communication benefits a thriving community more than online communication,

*I think face to face contact, there's hardly any of that now is there? People don't go out as much now because everything is online or on the phone, they don't go out to meet each other.* – Bristol



In Belfast effective communication with government was mentioned as a prerequisite for thriving communities. One participant drew a ladder to visualise how an ideal community would have the both community and government working up and down the ladder with accountability and responsibility for achieving community wellbeing,

*There's this wee ladder needs to be between us and the government, but it needs to be a two-way street. – Belfast*

### Inspiration and fun

Participants said that in a thriving community people have access to education and a lively programme of activities and events for inspiration,

*Education to allow us to prosper and feed our minds and music to feed our soul and keep us uplifted, it's not always going to be sunshine. – Belfast*



They cited the Tall Ships races which reached Belfast during round 2 of the, as an exciting event which inspired young people,

*The fact that the crews are all young people who are coming together, they are on the ships as crew...And young people from all areas come along. You get on the boat and sail back with them to Norway then you have to fly home... it's international and all you hear is just different accents, people coming from everywhere. Almost all the Belfast hotels are booked out. – Belfast*

Another Belfast participant emphasised in his drawing the idea of having fun within the community,

*Like you need to have fun, you need to have a balance, it can't all just be about [work], just needed something that you want to do yourself. Then kind of like family, people, network, whatever around that. – Belfast*

One participant explained through his drawing that the community had moved away from using guns and now had culture, fun food (such as pizza), music and were striving for a good environment with flowers instead of violence.

### Intergenerational programmes

In both locations participants were convinced that community cohesion and community wellbeing benefit from the old and the young working together to foster mutual respect and understanding,

*Respecting your elders but the older have got to respect the younger ones as well because some people have still got attitude and I think we need to get that respect back and work together. – Bristol*

Incentivising or rewarding the young when caring for the older generation was seen as a potential solution,

*Older people, we can learn from our children for the future – this is what I said we used to do years ago. Especially in the winter with old people dying if they would allocate young people to the old people just to check, but out of that they get a reward, or something towards their exam marks, anything to show that they've done it. It's got to be noticed what they've done. - Bristol*

### Dialogue as a tool to help communities thrive

In Belfast participant were quite despondent about the current distribution of government support for community projects,

*It's when you ask for the extra assistance to build your community you will not get the answer you want. – Belfast*

Another participant said,

*There are an awful lot of organisations out there that are actually on the brink of bankruptcy because they are waiting their payments. And you're talking maybe 6, 8 months ago. Some organisations actually, disability organisations are getting in real difficulties and you're not talking £200 or £300, you are talking lots of money. And the Minister is just ignoring it, he's just walking away. People have to send the claims in and this is just sitting on civil servants desks and they are not releasing the money. – Belfast*

Some participants said that the funding situation in Northern Ireland was a very good reason for having more public engagement with decision-making,

*That's what happens, and that's why you need these kind of platforms and seminars and talks and tribunals, because maybe they keep people switched on. – Belfast*

For others the public dialogue was a very positive experience which some would like to see replicated across communities in Northern Ireland to, not only help community groups, but more broadly to help communities to develop and grow,

*Things like this. Platforms, giving people a platform. Create an opportunity. – Belfast*

They urged the What Works Centre for Wellbeing and other stakeholders to bear in mind that communities in Northern Ireland have specific wellbeing requirements, different from those in other parts of the UK,

*Talking to people in Belfast and Bristol you're going to have a totally different perspective because we're coming out of a country that was conflicted. While I've heard politicians on the TV say we're not going to treat this place as a special place, they need to see that there is difference here. There is an awful lot of mental health and there's a legacy in this for the people who were affected and lived through it and their children. - Belfast*

As one participant said when being interviewed for the short film about the dialogue,

*I think it's very important to sit and discuss community wellbeing on whatever platform you can. Because the community, it's all of us and it affects everyone. Whatever is going on in the community we need an opportunity to voice things and to share things and to learn from each other. - Belfast*

This view was shared by another interviewee who stressed the importance for the communities of Northern Ireland to continue to have a meaningful dialogue,

*Sitting in this environment and listening to other people speaking, I can see how people who I am with and I would probably disagree with on a certain fundamental level, I can also see how we can sit and agree on key themes. - Belfast*



## 6. Who can do what to improve community wellbeing?

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There was recognition amongst participants that community wellbeing benefits from individuals taking an active role in their communities, whether it is looking after the old or young, or being part of a community group. Those who took part said that communities benefit from community leadership; support from government for voluntary sector organisations; and information and advice services targeted at different life stages. They said that investment in housing, the living environment and the transport infrastructure are also essential. Participants identified an important role for voluntary sector organisations in providing services targeted at particular segments of the community and expect community investment from private sector companies. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing was seen as an important advocate for community wellbeing with opportunities to communicate community needs to policy makers and ensure that affordable housing and adequate funding for community groups is included in wellbeing policies. The dialogue also looked at the What Works Centre for Wellbeing as an organisation that could collate and disseminate community wellbeing best practice.

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Having discussed what a thriving community looks like participants were asked to consider who should do what to ensure a community can flourish and those within it have a good quality of life. They were prompted to discuss a wide range of options, including local organisations; national support and advisory organisations; local, regional and national government; and private/ commercial sectors, as well as what individuals can do for themselves and their communities.

### What individuals can do for themselves and their communities

Participants generally recognised that individuals have a significant role to play in community wellbeing, *I think that underlying all this the individual has to take responsibility for his own actions. Then he can expect and demand more from the government.* - Belfast

Communities benefit from individual community members looking out for each other, in particular for the elderly and children in a community,

*Looking out for each other, looking out for the kids if they hurt themselves or seeing if they're getting bothered.* – Belfast

In Bristol providing intergenerational support was seen as something individuals can do for their communities,

*Young mums getting together with older adults is a great idea because it gives them something to do to look after the children.* - Bristol

According to some, communities are more likely to be able to work together if individuals see themselves as stakeholders in their communities,

*You have to be a stakeholder, really, at the end of the day, in your own community. Through being a stakeholder, you have a belief in your community, you know where it wants to go, you act as a community, as one group, and then you can make decisions and plan ahead.* – Belfast

In Belfast most participants shared the view that communities must not rely on government to resolve all issues. They were fully aware that communities and individual community members have taken, and need to continue to take, responsibility for community wellbeing. They described a situation where individuals and community groups had resolved issues and talked in positive cross-community arenas when political parties are unable to find solutions.

Some saw this as their own responsibility,

*We all create our society. I don't think you can turn around and vote for someone and the government and say, "By the way you're responsible for everything now". - Belfast*

Others saw it as a default position when politicians in their eyes had failed to achieve the kind of peace and reconciliation measures that the community were seeking,

*[The Women's Centres] were a result of conflicts, yes, because women in the communities, women in all communities started up the Centres. It was cross-community work going on before the parties would even talk to each other. - Belfast*

Drawing on examples of where community members had effectively pulled together to make positive change in the community participants pointed out that some issues can be resolved when a small group of people initiate community activity and receive some financial support from their local authority,

*[In my area in Bristol] a group of people have all got together and revamped all the greenery round near where the train station is, voluntarily. They've planted their own plants and there's all signs up saying, "Come and join our gardening on a Sunday night"...They've really tidied it up now, it looks lovely. It was a mess before but that area now is quite a nice area. - Bristol*

### Community leadership

Building bridges in and between communities requires one or more individuals to take a leadership role. As someone in Belfast said,

*In my experience, many leaders maybe from one area make a conscious decision that they don't want the community to be like this anymore. [They] step forward and [decide to] be that leader and show leadership to the others. A true leader can draw people in, and that's most of the community groups I've seen, that's how they develop. It doesn't necessarily have to be one leader, it can be maybe several leaders for the whole thing, so it's people reclaiming their community and saying we're going to dictate what we want, what we see as best. – Belfast*

There was a strongly held view that thriving communities hinge on having informal or formal community leaders in place. Although most of the discussion in Bristol was focussed on an elected community leaders there was mention of the positive role community members such as teachers, the clergy play because of their extensive networks and position in a community.

In Belfast there was a concern that the role for community leaders had changed over the years with perhaps some respect being lost,

*But I think that is society changing. I know when I was growing up you would have had respect for your teachers. And your doctor. You would have said "Doctor". I now go in and say "Hi Gavin". It's the same with the Minister. You would've referred to him as "Reverend"...I think all that stuff has started to diminish. - Belfast*

In Bristol participants had little faith in local MPs. There was a sense that MPs are not as approachable as they should be and that they're more interested in national agendas than local issues,

*They'd have to change completely from what they are now because a lot of them put up barriers and give the impression of an elitist attitude. – Bristol*



*They're only interested in major world- wide stuff, not anything local and they're party led. It's what the agenda of the national party says. - Bristol*

A minority of participants in Belfast reported positive experiences of local councillors and the role they had played in moving community issues forward. The point was made though that many people do not make full use of MPs and local councillors,

*Not many people would even think of going directly to the politician involved. – Belfast*

But for many in the groups in Belfast, whether local or national, politicians are not perceived to support community wellbeing, and in some cases are seen as a barrier to it, partly due to a lack of trust,

*It's very hard to find trust with the current politicians we have. I'm not politically minded or anything, but they're not doing their job. – Belfast*

But also because of a perception that their views are too entrenched to make positive change,

*I think there is an extreme. I think there is obviously our divides and there is an extreme Protestant and an extreme Catholic. That's the problem. That's the government as well, that's the people who are governing us. – Belfast*

A group in Bristol said that good local MPs,

*Represent us, need to ask us what we need, make connections, attend Neighbourhood Watch meetings, have greater visibility. Not only at election time. – Bristol*

The lack of engagement from MPs led one of the groups in Bristol to the conclusions that an elected community leader funded through council tax would be better for community wellbeing than MPs and local councillors. In their view a community leader must be independent of party politics and more grounded in the community,

*Electing a leader or something? So that they can correspond with your MP, they can get you organised and get information to elderly residents who don't use Facebook and stuff. Just so that they feel involved and know what's happening. - Bristol*

A community leader should be someone who is respected by the community,

*We need a leader, somebody who everybody is going to take notice of not just an everyday person. Someone people will listen to, like a vicar or a teacher. - Bristol*

An important role for this person would be to take communicate community concerns in a language appropriate to MPs, local authorities and other stakeholders,

*We say something to them, it's just a common word but then they find a word that they [MPs/ local authorities] understand. Someone who's down to earth but can talk to MPs, got the same language as them. - Bristol*

Although there was acknowledgement in Belfast that a community leader might have the capacity to pull individual community members together in a group there was a strong note of caution as well,

*It [sometimes] ends up elevating people who aren't representative of that community and aren't leaders of that community or speaking for that community. [They might be] using it for their own personal aim. – Belfast*

### **Collaboration between local groups**

In Bristol the point was made that a lot of local groups, including faith groups, often work in parallel rather than collaboratively. It was felt that stronger connections between those groups would make them more

effective in the context of community wellbeing as together they would be able to facilitate cross community events which would benefit more members of the public and foster community cohesion,

*Utilising the groups that are there already whether that be religious groups [or other groups], there is a huge swathe of that to focus on...Being able to utilise people from other areas so getting people to come in and assist us. - Bristol*

This was felt to be particularly important as a mechanism to reach out to isolated people in communities. In Belfast there was a sense of anger that community groups who are doing the leg work to cross the divides between communities are being undermined by the government with funding cuts and an extensive administrative system attached to grant funding. Local groups, who were seen by participants as forming the bedrock of community cohesion, should be appropriately funded and supported to continue playing a vital role in community wellbeing in Northern Ireland,

*It's not just about cutting the money it's about the way that they are asking you to work your project through. The limitations are unrealistic. The stuff that they're coming up with which is decimating the community. But again with politicians it suits them to have communities divided because it keeps the communities divided and them in a job. - Belfast*

### **Multi-agency approach for effective communication and information sharing**

One of the recurring themes for all life stages was the need for information and advice about anything to do with leading a life well, ranging from Citizens Advice type guidance to access to information about support groups and community activities. In Bristol one participant made reference to a useful multi-agency advice and community hub,

*See where I live, there's a place called the hub, there's a few ones in different areas of Bristol. You can go over there and enquire about stuff to do with council houses, forms for housing benefit, council tax reduction, and things like that...I think that it would be really good to have a centre in each area or close to where you live. - Bristol*

Others added to this that they'd like to see these local hubs have an even wider remit so that they can advise communities on all things that help lead a fulfilling life, such as legal issues, financial matters, housing, health, education and indeed community activities,

*And so in those areas where you go to they could also have more leaflets and advertisements about the [free] swimming admissions [for children] and things like I was saying, that could be a place where you could get those tickets. - Bristol*

For many face-to-face advice is more effective than online advice, particularly when a community member needs support with something they feel anxious about, such as filling out a form,

*It would be nice to go somewhere face-to-face. – Bristol*

Information sharing and communication about community services and events is a role for all community stakeholders. Local authorities might instigate and coordinate a multi-agency hub, but at the same time community members and community organisations could help source and disseminate information. In Bristol one of the groups produced the following list of potential actors in community communication, which provides a good reflection of the thinking across the locations:

- Residents Associations
- Local churches
- Third sector organisations
- Street/ community representatives (one on each road) who find out what people want/need

## Private sector

The private sector wasn't at the forefront of people's mind when considering who could be doing what to improve community wellbeing. Participants only saw a role for businesses when prompted. Someone in Belfast spoke about how the company he works for encourages employees to volunteer in the community,

*My company are doing quite a lot of community days where we go out and volunteer. Even at weekends and during work hours we do different activities. We clean the beaches, clean the parks, housing and stuff like that.* - Belfast

Others spoke about building programmes in Belfast where local community groups had ensured that 20% of the workforce has to be sourced locally.

## What Works Centre for Wellbeing

One of the groups in Bristol saw a role the What Works Centre for Wellbeing in building bridges between communities, MPs and policy makers and making the case for community wellbeing. They felt that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing could translate community concerns into a language that is understood by stakeholders in local and national government,

*They [What Works Centre for Wellbeing] know how to voice things or put them in writing, we don't. We go in there mad and angry and it all comes out wrong. We all swear, which we would if we're angry, but they know how to word it properly.* - Bristol

Advocating for affordable housing in communities so that generations can support each other was mentioned as an example of an issue participants would like the What Works Centre to take up,

*Are our children going to be okay when they need to get a house? No, they're not, because there's no houses about.* - Bristol

The What Works Centre could,

*Really push policy makers. Fight for us, speak up for us.* - Bristol

In Belfast participants said they didn't need the What Work Centre for Wellbeing to advise them on wellbeing issues. In their view communities in Belfast have learned what they need to do to sustain or improve their wellbeing due to their experiences of living through difficult times. What communities in Belfast are seen by participants to need is an advocate who can help them to retain and access funding for community work,

*Keeping funding in the community groups, because it's really the community groups [who contribute to a thriving community].* - Belfast

Equally, the What Works Centre as an intermediary, to reinforce the messages of the community was also seen as a key role. As one participant said when being interviewed for the short film about the dialogue,

*I think that any information that's gathered at these workshops needs to be shared as widely as possible and it needs to go up to government. Governments need to know. Those who have the power to make decisions and make changes need to actually hear it, because there is too much disconnection at the moment between politicians and what is actually happening on the ground. If the What Works Centre for Wellbeing can in any sort of way be an intermediary that would have a very positive effect.* - Belfast

In Bristol it was seen that the Centre is well placed to help communities help themselves, for example in providing best practice in electing community leaders,

*Or work with local communities to help us organise our process and elect a leader, really just helping communities to help themselves.* – Bristol

*It's putting you on the right track with how to start it otherwise you get a headache, you think where am I going to start? But if someone can start you off and say, "I'm on the end of the phone if you get stuck or if you need any more help then they'd be there". - Bristol*

The dialogue participants urged the What Works Centre not to reinvent the wheel and only conduct research that hasn't been done before. There was a lot of appreciation for the Centre's initiative to conduct a public dialogue to inform their strategies for the future,

*I think they've made a damn good start by asking not telling. – Belfast*

Participants in Belfast said they'd hope the What Works Centre will act on the findings of the dialogue so that trust is established,

*Come and ask us, but if nothing happens at the other end, then there's no trust. There has to be an outcome. – Belfast*

And participants in both locations look forward to hearing how findings from the community wellbeing dialogue will be taken forward,

*It was very interesting to hear everyone's point of view. The topics were good. I'm interested in what's going to happen to this report and to hear more about it and everything else. - Bristol*

For those in Belfast it was important that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing diversifies its approach and conducts research to tailor wellbeing services to specific needs,

*If you want to know and help the people of Northern Ireland, don't apply what applies in the rest of the UK or the rest of Ireland. If you want to know about people in Northern Ireland, ask those people, because, we're different. – Belfast*

It was hoped that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing can help identify what works in terms of information sharing in communities and subsequently advise on what's the best way to give information in different formats to different groups of people.

### **Local, regional and national government**

Participants in both locations talked about a breakdown of trust between communities and policy makers. In Bristol they expressed disappointment and anger towards the Mayor and Bristol City Council, particularly with regards to policies around housing and public transport. In both locations people felt that those representing local authorities and government need to be held to account and talk to communities. In Belfast someone said that social contracts should be drawn up between government and the public,

*You need to create legislation that ensures that government policies are considered as social contracts...You could almost create an Act of Parliament saying, "Listen, if you don't stand on an election manifesto that you made, you will be sued by the people"...If I don't do my job right I don't have a job. They're continuing on, still getting their wages and giving themselves a ten percent increase in wage. There's no accountability there, there's no responsibility. - Belfast*

This was illustrated in a drawing of a number of concentric circles and a ladder showing a prevalence of a top-down approach rather than a two-way approach in which government consistently seeks interaction with members of the public.

Participants felt that the breakdown of trust could be resolved if policymakers engaged more with communities and get real (as opposed to staged) tasters of what life is like at grass roots level,

*Decisions are made by government and departments, by managers who don't actually come down to the ground and speak to the people here supplying the service or the users. - Belfast*

*They could take off their suits and go get their hands dirty every so often. – Belfast*

*I think they need to see how things really are in situations that are not staged for them. - Belfast*

## **Role models**

Role models popped up in all small group discussions about ways to increase the wellbeing of individuals in communities and the wellbeing of communities as a whole. Parents and carers need to model to children what a good work ethic is (see section 3.2), whereas sports celebrities were commended for their ability to unite people across religious and class boundaries. In Belfast participants discussed the role of Karl Frampton, the boxer,

*Karl Frampton, the boxer, I think he unites the community so well. He's from Tigers Bay and is Protestant, but his wife is a Catholic and they've got a beautiful daughter. So I think he's the sort of poster boy for the new Northern Ireland. – Belfast*

Role models such as Frampton demonstrate how sport can unite communities,

*Karl Frampton was in City Hall last year after he won the world title and I remember standing watching and there was thousands of people. It didn't matter if you were Catholic or Protestant...you were just there to see one person, the world champion. So sport is a really big thing in this country. - Belfast*

*And Rory McIlroy as well. He's working class. Golf was a rich, wealthy man's game so he and his mammy and all took on other cleaning jobs and stuff to get him through. That's a voice for the working class, he's a good role model for young boys. - Belfast*

## 6.1 Key messages for stakeholders

The key messages for stakeholders are listed in figure 12.



Figure 12: Key messages

## 7. Concluding remarks

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The four community wellbeing dialogue sessions in two locations demonstrated clearly that community wellbeing hinges on strong connections between people who care about their community and are willing to invest time in engaging with other community members to improve the quality of life for everyone. The level of wellbeing people experience in their communities depends on the extent to which basic wellbeing needs are met. These were identified as being safety, affordable housing, reliable public transport, well maintained amenities and access to good quality food. Alongside this individual wellbeing needs ranging from love and respect to good health are also very important. Thriving communities build on those basic elements and become places where people have opportunities to meet and have fun against a backdrop of friendship and togetherness. Crucially for participants in Belfast a re-invigorated dialogue between government and the population was seen to be essential in improving community wellbeing.

Participants in the dialogue were clear that there is an opportunity for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to be an advocate for community wellbeing, for funding for community groups and to highlight the importance of affordable good quality housing for wellbeing. It was felt very strongly that the Centre could translate community needs, initially as expressed through this report, and supporting material, to policy makers. They felt that commissioning ongoing academic research to investigate some of the findings in more depth would be beneficial. They cautioned very strongly against a one size fits all approach to policy making for wellbeing explaining that what would work in one location will not necessarily work in another. They stressed that each community has its own needs best identified and articulated by community members themselves.

They appreciated the What Works Centre's approach to informing their future strategy by listening to the voice of the public. They expressed the hope that dialogue between communities, with lived experience, continues to be undertaken so that their views are taken in to account in the formulation of local, regional and national policies. Some participants looked to the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to provide advice and guidance. Others, with more experience of community wellbeing over decades (particularly in Belfast), felt that they did not need guidance but they did need strong advocates at a national policy level for the work they were already undertaking within their own communities to make them stronger and better for nurturing wellbeing.

All participants were encouraged by the dialogic approach and expressed the hope that the Centre will take the findings resultant from their fruitful discussions further.

## 8. Acknowledgements

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HVM is enormously grateful to the public dialogue participants in Belfast and Bristol. They made a great contribution to the programme in honestly and openly sharing their experience of community wellbeing, particularly when talking about living through challenging times. All participants were engaging and committed to giving up their Saturdays to take part. Some of their voices can be heard, talking about their experience of the process, in the short film: *What we are saying about community wellbeing counts* [http://bit.ly/WhatWeAreSaying\\_CW](http://bit.ly/WhatWeAreSaying_CW).

The specialist contributors to the programme who gave their time and knowledge to both the delivery team and the participants helped us all reflect meaningfully on community wellbeing. Dr Susan Hodgett of Ulster University who attended both the sessions in Belfast giving insight from her extensive work in the field to participants which they found very valuable. Susan also gave generously of her time to the delivery team by being interviewed on a number of occasions to inform the process, attending Oversight Group meetings and sharing with us the work she and her colleague, Dr. David Clark of the University of Cambridge, have done on capabilities<sup>7</sup> on which we were able to draw as we designed the dialogue sessions. Dave Wall of the Northern Ireland Executive was an insightful collaborator supporting the delivery team with contextual information on the political situation in Northern Ireland currently and through the troubles. He also attended the round 1 sessions providing additional information and reflections to participants as required. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of all other presenters and advisers in both locations including: Liz Zeidler and Sam Wren Jones of Happy City; Alison Comley, Bristol City Council; Joe Reynolds, Northern Ireland Executive.

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We are equally grateful to those presenters, and others, who agreed to be filmed for the stakeholder voxpops available here: [http://bit.ly/stakeholders\\_CW](http://bit.ly/stakeholders_CW) including Gregor Henderson, Public Health England; Dave Wall, Northern Ireland Executive; Nina James, The Cabinet Office; George Ferguson, Mayor of Bristol and Councillor Jim Dickson, Lambeth Borough Council.

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Hopkins Van Mil has been greatly impressed by the wisdom of the public and the What Works Centre's genuine interest in their views. We wish the Centre the very best for its future.

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<sup>7</sup> Hodgett, S. and Clark, D. A. (2011), 'Capabilities, Well-Being and Multiculturalism: A New Framework for Guiding Policy', *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 44, pp. 163-184.  
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# What Works | Wellbeing

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