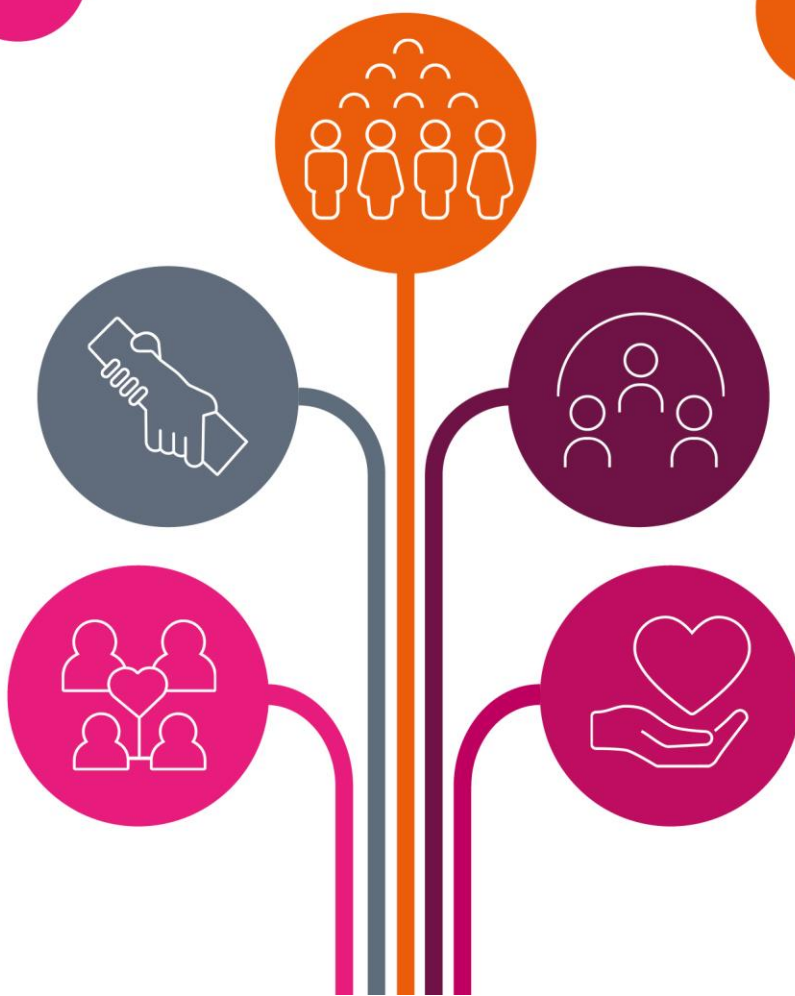


*A return to neighbourhood
regeneration? Reassessing the
benefits of a national strategy
for neighbourhood renewal*

November 2023



A return to neighbourhood regeneration? Reassessing the benefits of a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal

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Local Trust is a national charity set up in 2011 to deliver the Big Local programme. We believe that trusting communities and giving them more power will enable local people to significantly improve their quality of life and the places in which they live.

We support Big Local partnerships by helping them to manage their grants, network with their peers and develop the skills they need to deliver lasting local change. Local Trust also provides specialist technical support to Big Local areas, as well as monitoring and evaluating the overall programme.

Local Trust's work contributes to our wider aims of demonstrating the value of long term, resident-led funding. Using the learnings from the Big Local programme, we're working to bring about a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and other agencies engage with communities.

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60 second summary

Where people live matters to their life chances. There is extensive evidence that some neighbourhoods experience deprivation across a range of indicators including income, employment, education, health, and crime. This is more than just a function of these neighbourhoods having higher concentrations of people with lower incomes and fewer labour market opportunities living in them. The services and facilities offered in neighbourhoods also make a difference to people's lives. Left behind neighbourhoods which have high levels of deprivation and are also lacking in social infrastructure are associated with significantly worse social outcomes across a range of indicators.

These neighbourhoods are experiencing unprecedented stresses, including the cost-of living crises, poor environmental quality, crises in mental health and wellbeing, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the hollowing out of public services following austerity. In this context a renewed vision for neighbourhoods is needed, which can be informed by learning from past programmes.

Evaluations show that the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) and its two flagship programmes (the New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders) consistently generated positive outcomes for target neighbourhoods. These programmes were highly effective in achieving improvements to area satisfaction, improvements to area, and reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour. There were also improvements in indicators such as health and worklessness for those who participated in NSNR initiatives.

The most statistically significant positive impacts related to people's feelings about their neighbourhoods, and there were strong associations between these outcomes and improvements to mental health. This highlights the valuable role that neighbourhood regeneration can play in changing the way people feel about the place where they live and their sense of belonging - a key component of subjective wellbeing.

Big Local is a more recent community-led regeneration programme. Evaluation highlights the benefits of community-based funding mechanisms to support capacity building and social infrastructure and the value of building community wealth and assets.

The benefits of NSNR and Big Local programmes have economic and fiscal values which substantially exceed programme investments.

Learning from past programmes includes the importance of community-led decision making, resourcing community and service engagement, articulating the purpose of neighbourhood regeneration, laying the foundations before programme launch, aligning activities with strategies across different spatial scales, and measuring change effectively.

The evidence of the effectiveness of community-led neighbourhood regeneration in securing improved outcomes for residents living in deprived neighbourhoods supports the case for a new neighbourhood renewal strategy. Any future strategy will emerge in a new, and, potentially, more challenging political and economic context. Strengthening social fabric and infrastructure in neighbourhoods will be critical in supporting community resilience in hard times. A new approach to neighbourhood regeneration needs to be built on place-based factors that matter to residents and requires attentiveness to agendas around wellbeing and belonging, challenges associated with poor transport connections and new patterns of working and opportunities to provide more local services and amenities.

Executive Summary

Introduction

There is extensive and longstanding evidence that some neighbourhoods experience persistent deprivation across a range of indicators including income, employment, education, health, and crime. In addition, people living in deprived neighbourhoods are often exposed to poor quality environments and services, lack of opportunities for social interaction and low levels of community capacity and wellbeing. These things matter for their life chances. For example, research carried out by Local Trust and OCSI¹ has shown how ‘left behind neighbourhoods’ which have high levels of deprivation and are also lacking in social infrastructure are associated with significantly worse social outcomes across a range of indicators. Evidence also shows that people living in neighbourhoods which offer better opportunities and services, better environments, and better social infrastructure experience improved outcomes compared to those living in areas where these factors are not present.

In the UK, disadvantaged neighbourhoods are experiencing unprecedented stresses: they are disproportionately bearing the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, climate crisis, rising levels of mental and physical ill-health, the COVID-19 pandemic and the hollowing out of public services following austerity.

In this context a new strategy for neighbourhoods is needed. Recent policies which have aimed to ‘level up’ disparities between areas have emphasised the need for investment and a holistic approach which cuts across policy domains. However, the focus of funding programmes leans heavily toward the economic regeneration of cities and town centres rather than the issues facing residents living in deprived neighbourhoods.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) was launched by the ‘new’ Labour government, led by Tony Blair, with the vision that ‘within 10 to 20 years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live’. Flagship programmes included the New Deal for Communities (NDC) and the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder (NMP) Programme. Evaluation shows that these initiatives consistently generated positive outcomes for target neighbourhoods.²

The most significant neighbourhood regeneration programme post-2010 has been Big Local,³ under which the National Lottery Community Fund provided around £1m funding to each of the 150 neighbourhoods supported over the long term by Local Trust to deliver community-led regeneration in deprived areas. Big Local is innovative in its emphasis on community-led decision making. It offers an extensive and growing evidence base on the process and impacts of community empowerment in neighbourhood-based interventions.

Learning from these programmes provides important evidence on ‘what works’ in neighbourhood regeneration, which can inform future programmes.

What has neighbourhood regeneration achieved?

Evaluation of these programmes has identified:

- Substantial improvements in target neighbourhoods. These include improvements to employment and education as well as wellbeing, community safety and neighbourhood environments. Between 2002 and 2008, for example, NDC areas saw an improvement in 32 of 36 core indicators spanning education, health, worklessness, crime, community and housing and the physical environment. For 26 out of the 27 indicators where significance testing was possible, this change was statistically significant.
- A general 'closing of the gaps' between neighbourhood renewal areas and the rest of the country – outcomes in target areas improved more than local authority and national comparators on the whole.
- Target neighbourhoods improved more on some outcomes when compared to other similarly deprived areas. For example, NDC areas experienced greater improvements to mental health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as a range of 'place-based' indicators including area satisfaction, improvements to area, crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Significant improvements in mental health outcomes for residents in NDC neighbourhoods were strongly associated with a range of other outcomes including general health, social relations, transitions into employment, fear of crime, feeling part of the local community, satisfaction with accommodation, and perceptions about the local environment.
- Benefits to residents who participated in initiatives delivered by neighbourhood regeneration partnerships. They experienced significantly improved outcomes compared to residents who had not been supported by interventions across a range of indicators including employment and health. Programmes delivered a wide range of neighbourhood-level interventions including job brokerage and skills development, healthy lifestyle interventions, and improvements to local services which led to direct benefits to residents.
- In addition, residents who were involved in neighbourhood regeneration initiatives in any way (including programme governance, being involved in projects, or attending community events) were more likely to feel satisfied with where they live, feel able to influence local decision making, and feel that their neighbourhood was improving, express trust in others and local agencies and be involved in local voluntary activities.

These benefits have economic and fiscal value. The NDC evaluation identified monetisable benefits amounting to between five times and three times programme spend. Much of this was associated with improvements to area satisfaction and mental health.

Evaluations find that neighbourhood regeneration was consistently more successful at improving 'place'- (relating to neighbourhood environment and crime) as opposed to 'people'-based outcomes (such as employment and education). This is because larger numbers of residents in neighbourhood renewal areas experience the benefits of place-based interventions, and these benefits are more readily identified in area-based assessments of change. However, there are substantial individual benefits for residents who take part in neighbourhood regeneration initiatives such as job brokerage schemes.

There is a need for further evidence to understand the extent to which the impacts of neighbourhood renewal are sustained beyond the period of funding.

What are the key elements of successful approaches?

Evaluations have identified the factors which make improved outcomes more likely for neighbourhood renewal areas. Some of these, such as the characteristics of local populations and economies, are beyond the scope of influence of neighbourhood renewal partnerships

but provide useful pointers to the potential impacts of investments in different contexts. Others identify features which could usefully be adopted in future neighbourhood regeneration programmes:

- Higher levels of community involvement: programmes with higher levels of community involvement have achieved better outcomes.
- Attention to the scale and nature of relationships with public sector agencies, and the importance of good relationships based on communication and trust.
- Integrating neighbourhood level interventions with wider strategies for economic regeneration and social cohesion.
- Appropriate levels of resourcing and support for community partnerships.
- Proportionate and relevant evaluation and mechanisms for accountability.

The NDC evaluation identified the factors associated with positive improvement in the ten NDC areas that had achieved the most transformational change over the period of the programme:

- A significantly greater increase in the percentage of residents involved in NDC activities.
- Less per capita spend on education and management and administration, and more on health.
- More ethnically diverse populations and higher proportions of residents in social housing in 2002.
- Larger, growing populations.
- More employee jobs per head of population in the local authority district.

For residents in NDC areas, there were strong associations in improvements across outcomes. For example, a positive increase in thinking the area has improved in the past two years, was strongly associated with improvements in other outcomes such as satisfaction with the area, improvements in social relations, trust in organisations, lawlessness and dereliction, and reductions in the experience of being a victim of crime. This strength of association is a justification for holistic approaches to area-based regeneration: achieving change in place-related outcomes, is associated with change across a wide range of other inter-related outcomes.

The NSNR evaluation highlighted key lessons around:

- The need for a 'critical mass' of continued long-term investment in the most deprived areas without spreading resources too thinly.
- The importance of additional flexible funding to pilot innovative approaches, secure buy-in from local stakeholders and tailor interventions to local need.
- The importance of capacity in communities and public sector organisations to deliver change.
- The need for neighbourhood-level interventions to be co-ordinated with wider strategies for economic development given that some of the most significant determinants of socio-economic improvement broadly related to economic development.

Big Local evaluation provides an extensive evidence base on the 'how to' of community-led neighbourhood regeneration. It highlights:

- The importance of community-based funding mechanisms to support capacity building.
- The need for appropriate levels of support and skills development to enable communities to take part in local decision making, including paid roles.
- The importance of social infrastructure, including places and spaces that communities can come together to address local needs.
- How to establish successful relationships between communities and public sector agencies, based on trust and ongoing communication.
- How local evaluation can be used to support local partnerships.
- The value of improving digital connectivity and building community wealth and assets.

Analysis undertaken by Frontier Economics and commissioned by Local Trust identifies that in areas of high deprivation and low social infrastructure, every £1m invested in these sorts of activities generates £3.2m economic and fiscal returns.⁴

Towards a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration

Learning from past programme design and delivery

Articulate the purpose of neighbourhood regeneration

The rationale for intervening in neighbourhoods is clear but it remains important to articulate, and potentially reconsider, the purpose and value of neighbourhood level regeneration. There is evidence from past programmes that neighbourhood regeneration is more effective at improving outcomes relating to place than people. This suggests that place-focussed interventions should feature heavily in neighbourhood-based programmes. However, there is also evidence that investment in people remains essential, not just in the sense of maintaining or improving services and amenities (e.g., health and education) to drive up outcomes, but more fundamentally in terms of building capacity at the neighbourhood level. Evidence on the importance of the social fabric in sustaining community resilience and better outcomes (e.g., around crime)⁵ indicates the value of resourcing social assets and building social capital.

Lay the foundations before launch

The experience of the NSNR, NDC and Big Local shows the value in having time to lay the foundations on which to build the evidence base for interventions and to develop both the national and local infrastructure and the capacity of institutions and communities to deliver effective programmes. The importance of the work undertaken by the Social Exclusion Unit and Policy Action Teams for the NSNR highlights the potential value of developing similar mechanisms and processes to improve the development and implementation of any future neighbourhood regeneration programmes and build the capacity of agencies and communities as part of a 'year zero' approach.

Work across spatial scales and tiers of governance

Evidence gathered for this review consistently highlighted the importance of recognising the position of neighbourhoods as nested within wider spatial scales and impacted by policies at different levels of governance. While the case for neighbourhood-level intervention to inform place-based outcomes in particular remains strong, it is important to consider the limits of this scale of working, and how influence on, and alignment with, wider policies and strategies might be achieved and better secure benefits for residents.

Measure what matters

Past forms of monitoring and evaluation have tended to measure pre-defined outcomes against a narrow set of thematic criteria, such as changes in worklessness, educational attainment and population level health outcomes. This arguably missed some of the wider 'unintended' outcomes of neighbourhood regeneration and did not always, for example, capture wider benefits in terms of building the capacity and resilience of communities. While evaluations often measure area-wide outcomes that can be generated through a number of different interventions, evaluations of single programmes often fail to reflect the totality of programmes, services and activities operating within neighbourhoods.

This highlights the need for future evaluations to focus more on what 'success' might look like in terms which are meaningful to residents and explore outcomes and impact beyond a set of pre-defined thematic indicators. There is also potential to design research and evaluation as long-term evidence gathering exercises of change within neighbourhoods rather than just discrete studies of specific programmes.

Put communities in the lead

Evaluations have demonstrated the benefits of programmes which enable residents to lead strategies to improve neighbourhoods. This includes enhanced levels of collective wellbeing, improved trust in others and in agencies and increased capacity to respond to crises and external shocks. They have also highlighted the importance of effective learning and support frameworks, for capacity and skills building in communities and in local agencies which enables positive relationships to drive local change, and for investment in community leadership.

The economic and political context has changed significantly since the last major neighbourhood regeneration policies and strategies came to an end around 2010. Key developments include the implementation of 'austerity' in the wake of the financial crisis, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis linked to rising inflation exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine.

Any future round of neighbourhood regeneration policy needs to adapt and evolve to a changing context as well as wider changes in policy and understandings of how best to tackle social and spatial inequalities. Roundtable discussion with key stakeholders and wider evidence on past regeneration programmes as well as more recent policy literature was drawn on to identify what a new round of neighbourhood renewal might look like in a very different context to the more benign and stable economic and political context in which the NSNR was launched.

Five key principles were identified to inform future neighbourhood renewal strategies and programmes:

- Invest in strengthening social infrastructure to make neighbourhoods more resilient to the economic, environmental, and public health-led 'polycrisis' that has weakened the fabric of communities against a backdrop of shrinking public resources.
- Leverage new forms of governance to position neighbourhoods in wider spatial strategies and frameworks for addressing economic and social disadvantage. This includes forms of neighbourhood governance which devolve power to local communities.
- Embed new understandings of collective wellbeing into regeneration programmes and evaluation frameworks. These should be shaped by the needs of residents and go beyond economic goals to also respond to the challenge of climate change and environmental inequalities.

- Seek to enhance connectivity by addressing the challenges of geographic isolation driven by poor public transport and new spatial patterns of work while increasing the local accessibility of employment opportunities, services and amenities.
- Focus on understanding and restoring residents' sense of belonging and attachment in the context of politically fractured communities.

Introduction

1.1. About the report

September 15th, 2023 marked the 25th anniversary of the publication of 'Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal'. To mark the anniversary, Local Trust commissioned the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University to undertake a rapid review of significant neighbourhood regeneration and neighbourhood management initiatives.

The review took an integrative approach, drawing on past empirical data from quantitative and qualitative studies, and consultations with stakeholders, to help interpret the data and understand how learning could be applied to current policy challenges. It included:

- A literature review to establish evidence of the success factors associated with neighbourhood regeneration initiatives and learning in relation to 'what works' in community-led neighbourhood regeneration.
- Consultation with key stakeholders identified by Local Trust and CRESR as previously or currently involved in the development or implementation of neighbourhood regeneration policy and practice. Roundtable discussions and individual interviews were held to gather stakeholder's views on the implementation and impacts of past initiatives, and reflections on the development of a core set of principles and practices to inform a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration.
- Preliminary analysis of outcomes data for neighbourhoods that have benefitted from neighbourhood regeneration funding to understand the possibilities of using available data to assess changes in the prospects of their residents over time.

This report sets out the findings of the review. It begins by reviewing the rationale for neighbourhood renewal and summarising approaches undertaken in the past 25 years. It then summarises the impacts of neighbourhood renewal and the evidence of 'what works' in neighbourhood regeneration, before outlining the key building blocks, or principles, which can inform a renewed approach to improving the circumstances of deprived neighbourhoods.

Context

2

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal' (NSNR) epitomised an urban policy approach that sought to drive urban regeneration and tackle deprivation through area-based initiatives (ABIs) at the neighbourhood level.⁶ The NSNR was distinctive, both in the scale of its ambition for a comprehensive England-wide approach, and in its positioning of the needs of very poor neighbourhoods at the core of the then Government's policy strategy.

This chapter traces the development and implementation of neighbourhood regeneration from the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal to the present day. It pays particular attention to the role of, and focus on, neighbourhoods in urban regeneration policy, providing context for the ensuing analytical chapters. It achieves this by reminding readers of the development and implementation of the NSNR and its key programmes; and a small number of significant interventions aimed at improving outcomes for disadvantaged neighbourhoods. First it sets the context for discussion on the impact of neighbourhood renewal by addressing the question of why a focus on neighbourhoods is important.

2.1. The rationale for a neighbourhood-based approach

There is extensive evidence which shows that certain places within the UK, and internationally, are more disadvantaged than others.⁷ These are areas with multiple and persistent forms of concentrated deprivation across indicators such as income, employment, education, health and crime. Research carried out by Local Trust and OCSI⁸ has also shown how 'left behind neighbourhoods' which have high levels of deprivation and are also lacking in social infrastructure are associated with significantly worse social outcomes across a range of indicators.

One of the main political rationales informing neighbourhood-based regeneration programmes derives from the assumption of 'neighbourhood effects': i.e. places are argued to have impacts on individuals' outcomes above and beyond their individual characteristics.⁹ It is widely accepted that there are connections between neighbourhood poverty and individual outcomes in terms of employment, mobility and mean income; but debate continues as to whether this is caused by living in a particular neighbourhood, or because poor neighbourhoods are where people with lower incomes and fewer labour market opportunities tend to live.¹⁰

Some commentators have argued that applying regeneration policies to neighbourhoods based on the logic of area-effects comes from 'faith' rather than evidence.¹¹ However, in a recent review of literature focussing on geographies of social inequality, van Ham et al. (2022)¹² show that spatial context does matter in patterns of individual outcomes, and that where people live has impacts above and beyond individual differences. In the United States, researchers have shown how,

'childhood' neighbourhoods affect long-run economic and educational outcomes in a manner consistent with exposure models of neighbourhood effects'.¹³ In other words the characteristics of the neighbourhoods where children grow up matter to their future life chances. Area-effects are more pronounced in children because of a longer-term exposure to neighbourhoods with better opportunities and services – such as higher quality schools, less pollution and less aggressive policing.¹⁴

There is also debate about how best to tackle the problems faced by those living in 'deprived' areas, and over the last twenty-five years policy makers' interest in neighbourhood-based approaches to regeneration has waxed and waned. Different assumptions about neighbourhood effects can lead to different policy responses. In the UK and US, for example, approaches aiming to diversify populations in deprived neighbourhoods by establishing 'mixed-communities' have been seen as a way to bring deprived areas in line with better off neighbourhoods. Having a diverse range of housing type and tenure, alongside improvements to services and opportunities, is argued to lead to a more socio-economically varied range of residents, which can effectively 'dilute' concentrations of poverty in neighbourhoods and lead to a better quality of life for poorer residents. Whilst 'mixed-communities' approaches can impact on neighbourhood outcomes, evidence suggests that the social and economic costs of these interventions – in terms of the loss of social housing provision, the financial costs of demolishing and rebuilding housing stock and the displacement of residents – does not outweigh potential benefits such as improved social and cultural capital, and less demand on local public services.¹⁵ In addition, 'mixed-community' approaches are also no more effective than neighbourhood-based approaches to regeneration and tend to demonstrate less value for money.¹⁶

Alternative approaches focus on 'local', and smaller-area interventions as part of broader regeneration programmes operating at multiple spatial scales. This approach is typified by the NSNR and associated programmes, discussed further below.

One of the key criticisms of neighbourhood-level regeneration programmes is that they are more effective at tackling place-based issues than they are people-based issues.¹⁷ A focus on neighbourhoods as a standalone approach to urban regeneration limits expectations of what can be achieved in relation to some policy objectives which have localised effects but are primarily the result of processes which play out at wider spatial scales.¹⁸ In this scenario, deprived neighbourhoods are localised manifestations of wider structural problems. The appropriate policy response is therefore, more holistic, multi-scale and multi-domain approaches to regeneration¹⁹ which target specific policy interventions at the spatial scales in which these processes primarily play out and are experienced.²⁰ Rae (2011) develops a spatio-conceptual framework which understands area-based interventions (ABIs) as micro-spatial interventions that are capable of dealing with issues of 'inequalities, inefficiencies and inadequacies'²¹ such as housing problems, the local environment and crime. Small-area/neighbourhood-based responses can be reasonably expected to treat the effects of structural change – which play out at the meso and macro level – rather than structures themselves. It is often the case that these structural conditions and processes act as barriers to the real or perceived effectiveness of micro-level policies.²² This reinforces the importance of thinking about how neighbourhood regeneration needs supporting through action and intervention across spatial scales and different tiers of governance.

A neighbourhood approach to regeneration is generally seen to have a series of key benefits which can usefully support policy on a local scale.

- A neighbourhood-focussed approach can target highly localised concentrations of multiple deprivation which broader, area-based approaches can sometimes gloss over with interventions operating at wider spatial scales.²³

- One of the benefits of a targeted neighbourhood-based approach is that it secures direct and specific benefits for a particular target population. This ‘container model’ of regeneration is an effective tool to target hard to reach groups which may require support in the form of more locally specific and tailored interventions.²⁴ This is about narrowing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country, so the benefits of intervention are intended to be exclusive to areas where deprivation is most concentrated.
- Evaluation suggests that issues such as crime, community engagement and cohesion, housing management, public health and the environment are better addressed through a small-area, neighbourhood approach which creates interventions at the level these services and processes tend to engage people.²⁵
- Neighbourhood-based approaches are particularly valuable in establishing civic participation. This means designing programmes with residents as partners in decision making processes, acknowledging their localised knowledge and expertise, and recognising them as individuals and groups who have a stake in their local area.²⁶ The renewal of democratic participation can help repair relationships between local residents and regional political leaders.²⁷
- Neighbourhoods are key sites of ‘innovation’ in developing joined-up working and collaborative approaches.²⁸ Local leaders, stakeholders, agencies, and civil society organisations and groups are more likely to support local interests and priorities making the development of partnerships with common goals simpler.²⁹
- A neighbourhood-level approach can help create services which are more responsive to local needs and be more economically effective in addressing localised problems.³⁰ Neighbourhoods can act as physical hubs for local partnerships and agencies to come together to create and deliver more holistic solutions through information sharing, resource pooling, networking and the integration of planning expertise and resources.³¹

2.2. Current Challenges for neighbourhoods

There is little doubt that in the UK, disadvantaged neighbourhoods are experiencing unprecedented stresses. These areas have been affected by a series of external shocks which have impacted on the quality of life for residents and their collective capacity to withstand disruption and contribute to recovery. These include:

- The cost-of-living crisis, placing strains on household and neighbourhood resources and increasing need and demand for community-based responses, such as food, and hygiene, banks in deprived areas.
- The climate emergency, which particularly affects deprived urban neighbourhoods and leads to issues of poor air quality, degraded environments and reduced capacity to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events such as flooding and fire. Linked to the above, poorer households are also adversely affected by increases in the costs of energy.
- Increasing rates of mental ill health, the determinants of which are known to be associated with the physical, social and environmental aspects of where people live and correlate strongly with poverty.³²
- Ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, for which evidence of the disproportionate effects on deprived neighbourhoods is still emerging. These include increased likelihood of death or severe illness for residents living in poverty. Experiences during the pandemic also revealed the impacts of austerity which have hollowed out public services in deprived neighbourhoods. The Marmot report³³ investigating the impact of the pandemic on health inequalities in Britain identifies that net expenditure per person in local authorities in the ten per cent

most deprived areas fell by 31 per cent, compared to 16 per cent in the least deprived areas between 2009 and 2020. It suggests that long-term solutions, centred on equity, are sought at all levels of government, to emerge fairer from the pandemic.

- Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the potential for communities to deliver rapid and agile responses to community need. A (re)flourishing of community spirit has also emerged which has been described as a realisation of community power, and which may have the potential to deliver fundamentally changed relationships between individuals, communities and the state.³⁴

Whilst there are continued debates about the nature and function of community power in deprived communities, it is clear that neighbourhoods with a stronger social infrastructure and better resources are well placed to respond to external shocks and contribute to local economic development and improved public health outcomes.

In this context, there is a pressing need to look to earlier examples of neighbourhood regeneration, and extract evidence of what has worked in those programmes to create more resilient neighbourhoods with better opportunities and life chances for those living in them.

2.3. A summary of neighbourhood regeneration

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR)

The NSNR emerged from the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) established by then Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1997 to provide analysis and policy recommendations to inform the government's approach to tackling social exclusion. The SEU published over 50 reports on aspects of social policy including health, rough sleeping and teenage pregnancy, amongst which was a response to the Prime Minister's request for a report on:

*How to develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown and bad schools etc.*³⁵

The third report from the SEU, published in September 1998, set out the need for a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in England. A key feature of the NSNR was its commitment to evidence and evaluation. The work of 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs) informed the strategy, bringing together civil servants and external experts - including residents with experience of living and working in deprived neighbourhoods. Each PAT was championed by a Minister, embedding a cross-governmental commitment to addressing the needs of the poorest neighbourhoods.

Key features of the NSNR

The NSNR starts with the hypothesis that the failure of previous ABIs to reverse the decline of disadvantaged neighbourhoods is, at least in part, their failure to address fully the complex causes of the social and economic challenges facing those areas. Reasons included that mainstream agencies had not helped as much as they should have; there had been too little local co-operation amongst and between agencies and communities; and there had been inadequate integration across regional, urban and local strategies.³⁶ Consequently, the NSNR outlined an approach that is characterised by a set of core principles:

- Targeting of areas based on need.

- The enhancement of mainstream service delivery in deprived areas.
- Recognition of the key role for communities to work alongside public and private sector partners in the planning and delivery of local improvements.
- A co-ordinated approach, linking interventions at national, regional, and local scales.
- A comprehensive approach – encompassing ‘domains’ across work and enterprise, crime, education and skills and housing and the physical environment. (A sixth domain – ‘liveability’ was later added).
- Increased resourcing.
- A commitment to a long-term (10 to 20 year) approach.

The subsequent National Strategy Action Plan³⁷ was formally launched in 2001 with an ambitious vision to transform deprived neighbourhoods so that *‘within 10 to 20 years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live’*.³⁸ This was underpinned by two long-term goals:

- For all the poorest neighbourhoods to have the common goals of lower worklessness and crime, and better health, skills, housing and physical environment.
- To narrow the gap in these areas between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country.

The action plan sets out the three core pillars of the NSNR:

- National policies, funding and targets.
- The approach to empowering communities and joining up action locally.
- Structures to provide national and regional leadership.

Implementation focused on the selective application of additional public funding, combined with influencing mainstream service delivery in deprived areas. Key aspects of the plan included:

- Targets for each government department, articulated through Public Service Agreements and placing neighbourhood renewal at the heart of the agenda for all areas of government.
- The creation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), bringing together local authorities and public sector service providers with residents and voluntary and community sector and private sector organisations. The aim of LSPs was to join up action locally. Having an LSP was a condition (from 2002) of access to the £800m Neighbourhood Renewal Fund in the 88 most deprived local authorities.
- Resourcing for community involvement: The Community Empowerment Fund provided £35m to support community involvement in LSPs in each of 88 most deprived local authorities. A further £50m was committed to the set-up of local Community Chests, providing small grants for community organisations in deprived areas.
- The establishment of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) in the (then) Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to provide national leadership for neighbourhood regeneration, working closely with Neighbourhood Renewal Teams in Government Offices for the Regions (GORs) to join up national and regional activity, and provide oversight of local strategy and resourcing. The NRU was also responsible for a ‘skills and knowledge strategy’, providing

leadership development for neighbourhood renewal and the production and dissemination of knowledge and evidence in 'what works'. In addition, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) received additional funding to produce neighbourhood statistics to support the diagnosis and analysis of issues at the neighbourhood level.

Collectively, these elements of the plan provided the framework for the development and delivery of neighbourhood renewal. A range of partnerships were underpinned by mechanisms designed to achieve vertical and horizontal integration. These developed over time and included an extensive framework of targets national and local inspection regimes; and information and knowledge designed to build evidence and provide skills and knowledge to local partnerships.³⁹

The Strategy was also supported by dedicated funding packages. The largest was the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), followed by the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF), enabling the 88 most deprived local authorities in England to change the way mainstream budgets were used to improve services in the key domains of the NSNR – worklessness, education, health, community safety and the environment (including housing). Funding was supplementary and not 'ring-fenced'. The evaluation of the NSNR suggests that between 2001 and 2008 almost £3bn was allocated to local authority districts, but that reporting arrangements – and central collation of management information – were limited.

The largest funded programme was the New Deal for Communities (NDC), which was introduced in 1998, and, like NSNR, covered six policy domains (worklessness, housing and the physical environment, education, health, crime, and community). Other smaller programmes included neighbourhood management pathfinders and neighbourhood wardens. These were subsequently incorporated into the Safer Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF).

Key NSNR programmes

The New Deal for Communities (NDC)

The flagship £2 billion New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme (1999-2010) sought to reverse area-based decline through targeted funding and interventions in 39 deprived areas in England. In line with the NSNR, the NDC programme was intended to '*help turn around the poorest neighbourhoods*'⁴⁰ in order '*to reduce the gaps between ... [these] ... and the rest of the country*'.⁴¹ This was to be achieved through investment in neighbourhood-level initiatives, working with other agencies and placing communities 'at the heart' of the initiative. There was also an expectation that local impacts would be sustained beyond the funding period.

Five principles underpinned the NDC Programme:⁴²

- Achieving ten-year transformational change.
- Creating dedicated neighbourhood level agencies through which to drive forward programmes: the 39 NDC Partnerships.
- A strong commitment to community engagement.
- Working in partnership with other delivery agencies.
- Learning and innovation.

NDC was launched as a pathfinder programme in 1998, with 17 Round One pathfinder NDC areas. A further 22 Round Two NDCs were introduced a year later. Ten NDC areas were in London, two in Birmingham and the others in towns and cities across

England. Each NDC 'neighbourhood' contained an average of 9,800 people, identified by the drawing of boundaries in deprived areas containing approximately 4000 households.

In some NDC areas boundaries reflected local community understanding of neighbourhoods; in others an NDC area contained one or more natural neighbourhoods and/or it was dissected by infrastructure such as ring roads. The NDC areas were concentrated in the bottom deciles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores: 28 were in the most deprived decile, ten in the second, and one in the third most deprived.⁴³ Whilst all NDC areas were deprived, the 39 areas varied considerably in size (almost 21,000 residents in Hackney; less than 5000 in Plymouth), and characteristics. For example, Black and minority ethnic communities comprised around 26 per cent of the population of NDC areas overall at the start of the programme, but this ranged from over 80 per cent of residents in the Birmingham Aston NDC area to less than one per cent of residents in the Plymouth and Knowsley NDC neighbourhoods. Around 55 per cent of households across the programme were living in social rented accommodation: 85 per cent in Southwark NDC and less than 30 per cent in Hartlepool.

In each area, a partnership comprising residents and statutory agencies was responsible for the development and delivery of a ten-year strategy to transform their area. Total programme funding received directly from DCLG was around £1.7bn, equating to approximately £42m per NDC area, with a further £800m of 'match funding' secured mostly from public sector organisations.⁴⁴

The programme was subject to comprehensive evaluation between 2001 and 2010 and included implementation, impact and value for money assessments⁴⁵ reflecting Treasury Green Book guidance for evaluation at the time. Methods included:

- Household surveys carried out in NDC areas and equivalently deprived non NDC 'comparator areas' in 2002, 2004 and 2006 tracking residents' attitudes to change and outcomes across the six programme domains.
- Analysis of secondary data across programme outcomes; including educational attainment, recorded crime, benefit claims and unemployment rates.
- Surveys of the 39 NDC partnerships.
- Individual NDC partnership reports.
- Case studies on aspects of programme implementation including working with communities and agencies.
- Value for money analysis, utilising a novel 'shadow pricing' methodology to assess the value of the programme across economic and social outcomes.

The evaluation produced over 100 outputs, including seven volumes of the final evaluation report. A summary of the evaluation findings is included at Chapter 4. Further details of the evaluation, and outputs are at <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/>

Neighbourhood Management

Neighbourhood management was highlighted in the 4th Policy Action Team report from the SEU⁴⁶ as a mechanism to bringing local services and communities together to tackle local problems. Core elements of the approach were identified as:

- A neighbourhood manager (or equivalent) with responsibility at the neighbourhood level.
- Community involvement and leadership.

- Funding and resources to support delivery.
- A systematic and planned approach.
- Effective delivery mechanisms.

The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders programme invested around £100m in 35 local authorities between 2001 and 2007 to test this approach in deprived neighbourhoods. As with NDC, pathfinder areas varied in terms of their characteristics (a mix of inner and outer urban areas, coastal and rural towns). Also, as with NDC, specific activities in response to local need varied. Neighbourhood management approaches were widely adopted beyond the Pathfinder programme. An overview of Neighbourhood Management published in 2008⁴⁷ suggested that at least 27 per cent of local authorities in England were operating some form of neighbourhood management.

The evaluation of the Pathfinder programme⁴⁸ utilised household surveys in pathfinder areas (but not in comparators) to measure changes in outcomes including residents' satisfaction with area, crime and fear of crime, and improvements to the local environment. The evaluation report highlights the challenges in capturing area level improvements and associated small scale local initiatives.⁴⁹ Evaluation results are discussed at Chapter 3.

2.4. Neighbourhood Regeneration post 2010

The formation of the Coalition Government in 2010 marked the effective end of central government-led, area-based regeneration programmes or strategies targeting neighbourhoods. A 'Regeneration to Enable Growth'⁵⁰ strategy published in 2011/12 outlined an approach for finding solutions for tackling area deprivation which were to be designed and implemented by a range of local actors rather than central government. This 'localist' approach had three main elements:

- Promoting local economic growth through public-private partnerships (most notably through new Local Enterprise Partnerships) to encourage locally tailored interventions to rebalance economies away from a reliance on public sector spending towards private sector-led growth.
- Reforming public services to address complex and overlapping needs by encouraging multi-agency working across policy 'silos', pooling of public funds to tackle deprivation, and community involvement in determining how budgets should be spent.
- Series of levers or 'rights' designed to enable communities to take control of assets, services and planning in their areas as part of vision of a 'Big Society' promoted by the Prime Minister David Cameron. This shift was facilitated through the Localism Act 2011 which introduced a series of provisions for localised forms of community action. The Big Society agenda also envisaged, and sought to promote, a greater role for charities, social enterprises, and other civil society organisations to play a bigger role in public service delivery.

One notable exception to the end of neighbourhood-based programmes was the £140 million Estate Regeneration Programme (ERP) launched in 2014 to help regenerate 'run down' estates, increase the number of homes and improve the quality of life for residents. ERP funding was mainly loan-based and only covered the early stage of schemes (e.g., community engagement, feasibility studies, scoping of proposals and master planning).

There were few evaluations of the limited measures introduced through the Localism Act or the Estate Regeneration Programme. It is therefore difficult to identify the impact of post-2010 neighbourhood-based policies, with some exceptions:

- Our Place, which provided 'neighbourhood community budgets' to support residents, local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations to work together to improve public service delivery and reduce service costs in a number of neighbourhoods. The national evaluation of Our Place⁵¹ is largely focused on the process of engaging residents in the programme, rather than on outcomes for neighbourhoods. However, it identified the conditions which made success most likely which included a track-record of local authorities working collaboratively with communities, and existing service model propositions led by community organisations
- Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund programme: was an £80m programme to provide match funding for new or existing community groups in deprived wards. Evaluation work⁵² found that because of the programme, two in five local community groups were able to continue without making changes or compromises with the support of Community First (CF) funding; CF panel members were more confident in making funding decisions; CF acted as a catalyst for future community collaboration; and that community resources were used more effectively to meet local needs.
- Empowering Places: The Empowering Places programme to support community businesses has been found to create more jobs in local communities, improve social capital between residents and stakeholders, and improve financial resilience through the transfer of physical assets from public bodies to communities.⁵³ Challenges included difficulties in generating sufficient income through trading due to limited spending capacity among residents; and in effectively engaging the community in leading community businesses. The relationship between the catalyst organisation and community businesses supported was a key enabler of success, but there is an attendant risk that community businesses become overly reliant on catalysts' practical, financial and emotional support.

Big Local

The largest and most significant neighbourhood regeneration programme in England post 2010 is Big Local. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and delivered by Local Trust, Big Local offers residents in 150 areas significant flexibility to determine local needs and how best to meet these with 'no strings attached'. £1.15m funding has been allocated to each of these communities to support initiatives which respond to local priorities without being constrained by limited timeframes, prescriptive spending criteria and annual targets. Big Local involves both a commitment to financial resourcing and an accompanying support offer, designed to build capacity in communities for them to take action to improve their neighbourhoods.⁵⁴ Support mechanisms have included ensuring that Big Local Partnerships work with a locally trusted organisation which is responsible for financial management and accountability and, where appropriate, employment of personnel, delivery of activities and holding of leases; local and area-based co-ordinators appointed by Local Trust to provide direct support to partnerships and act as a point of liaison between Local Trust and Big Local communities; opportunities for skills development and peer learning, support and networking opportunities.

Big Local has been evaluated extensively and offers an unparalleled evidence base for the process and impacts of community empowerment. Community involvement in the design, governance and implementation of programmes is an enduring feature of neighbourhood regeneration seen to offer the potential for increased success through

targeted initiatives which respond to community needs. It also provides lasting benefits through the development of improved capacity in communities to sustain activities and outcomes.

NSNR programmes have been criticised for their emphasis on regulation and pre-determined outcomes and it has been argued that NSNR effectively co-opted communities into the delivery of professionally led programmes as opposed to offering genuine community empowerment. Independent evaluation⁵⁵ of Big Local has focused on the community-led nature of the programme, identifying in particular the process and impacts of ways of working in neighbourhoods which place communities in charge, and investments in social infrastructure and capacity building which enable communities to take greater control of their local areas.

Under more recent Conservative administrations there has been a renewed commitment to targeted investment in areas, to 'level up' so-called 'left behind' areas and support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by using investment to mitigate the economic fallout of successive lockdowns. The 2022 Levelling Up white paper⁵⁶ centres on 12 missions, framed within one of four overarching objectives, that combine a mix of traditional pro-growth policies with aspects of public service improvement, urban regeneration and community development, and a commitment to expand the coverage of devolution deals across England.

Specific recent initiatives include:

- The £2.4 billion Towns Fund (launched in 2019) provided investment in town centres and high streets to drive the economic regeneration of deprived towns and deliver long-term economic and productivity growth. One hundred towns were invited to develop Town Deals of up to £25 million.
- The Levelling Up Fund (launched 2021) provides £4.8 billion for investment in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK, including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport, and investing in cultural and heritage assets. There is no explicit focus on neighbourhoods although guidance suggests that investment should be targeted towards low-income areas '*where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life.*'⁵⁷
- The UK Community Renewal Fund (launched in 2021) supports local areas to pilot '*approaches and programmes that unleash their potential, instil pride, and prepare them to take full advantage of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.*'⁵⁸ It invited applications for projects that aligned with many of the priorities of former EU structural funds including support for skills development, local businesses, communities and places, and employment support. On 3 November 2021, 225 successful projects were announced in England across 52 councils, worth £125m. A review suggested that the funding provided addressed demands for revenue funding, limited opportunities to deliver business support and supported COVID-19 economic recovery ambitions. However, time and capacity to prepare, promote, assess, and work with partners to strengthen project bids were limited.⁵⁹
- The Community Ownership Fund (launched 2021) seeks to ensure that communities across the UK can support the local facilities, community assets and amenities most important to them and continue benefiting from them. As of February 2023 £17 million, had been announced for 70 projects which will benefit community centres, heritage buildings, pubs, and sporting facilities across the whole of the United Kingdom. The fund will run until 2024/25.

The new £2.6bn Shared Prosperity Fund (launched 2022), succeeds the EU structural funds and will invest in three local priorities:

- Communities and place.
- Support for local businesses.
- People and skills.

It is intended to align with, and complement, Levelling Up Fund priorities and spending.

These five programmes bear some similarity to area-based programmes prior to 2010 placing emphasis on investment in deprived communities and a holistic approach which cuts across several policy domains such as housing, transport, employment, and skills. However, neighbourhoods do not feature significantly in the prospectuses for the five programmes which focus strongly on rejuvenating the economic life of 'left behind' town centres whose economies have not seen the growth experienced by some of the UK's major cities. The spotlight is on economic regeneration in urban centres rather than the wider issues facing residents in low-income neighbourhoods.

At the time of writing, it is expected that evaluations for these schemes are currently being commissioned or are underway. However, many of these will not report within the timescale for this review.

2.5. Summary

This chapter has reviewed the rationale for neighbourhood regeneration and set out the key features of approaches associated with the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and subsequent interventions. It has argued that while the evidence for a neighbourhood approach is contested, recent analyses suggest that the quality of neighbourhoods **matters** in terms of outcomes. This goes above and beyond the effects of deprived neighbourhoods being places where larger numbers of people with higher levels of disadvantage live and presents a clear rationale for engaging in neighbourhoods in ways that go beyond diversifying populations.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and its associated programmes represented a distinctive approach in both the level of programme resourcing and in the foregrounding of the needs of deprived neighbourhoods across different areas of government policy. They presented an attempt to delivery holistic regeneration, which improved the circumstances of deprived neighbourhoods and closed the gap between those areas and better-off communities. The programmes committed to extensive involvement of communities in delivery and attempted to align neighbourhood level approaches with both mainstream service delivery and strategies operating at wider spatial scales.

Post 2010 there has been less strategic focus on neighbourhoods in Government policy although significant programmes funded by third sector organisations have tested innovative approaches to community-led regeneration in deprived areas. More recently, approaches to addressing the problems of persistent disparities between areas articulated through the current Government's Levelling Up agenda have re-emphasised the need for investment in deprived areas and the benefits of an holistic approach which cuts across policy domains. However, the focus of associated funding programmes leans heavily toward the economic regeneration of urban town centres, rather than the issues facing residents living in deprived neighbourhoods.

The next chapter looks at evidence from the evaluation of key neighbourhood regeneration programmes to assess what they have achieved.

What has neighbourhood regeneration achieved?

This chapter examines the evidence from evaluations of key regeneration programmes to summarise the impacts of neighbourhood regeneration. As outlined earlier the approaches adopted to the evaluation of neighbourhood regeneration initiatives vary widely. The New Deal for Communities evaluation compared change in NDC areas with that in similarly deprived neighbourhoods to establish a robust assessment of programme impact. Extensive household survey data for NDC and comparator areas supported statistical modelling to understand the factors associated with positive outcome change in NDC areas. Other evaluations, such as that of the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders utilised household surveys to track outcome change in Pathfinder areas but did not establish robust measures of change in non-Pathfinder areas and so did not provide high quality assessments of programme impact. Evaluations of the Big Local programme have focused on process and programme delivery, using multi-media methods to understand the benefits of community-led regeneration from the perspectives of those living in the target neighbourhoods.

The remainder of this section presents a summary of evidence on four programmes:

- An overall assessment of the implementation and impact of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.
- The New Deal for Communities.
- The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders.
- Big Local.

Each is discussed in turn, below.

3.1. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR)

Evaluation of the NSNR⁶⁰ identified positive change in outcomes in the target areas, associated with the interventions delivered through the strategy. The evaluation used administrative data to compare change across the national strategy domains of employment, health, education, and crime) for Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in areas in receipt of NSNR interventions and those that were not.

Generally, throughout the NSNR period, gaps in social and economic outcomes were closing, including educational outcomes, worklessness and deaths from cardiovascular disease, although gaps relating to life expectancy stayed roughly the same. However, the evaluation identified positive and attributable change in outcomes in

target areas, including some narrowing of the gap between NSNR deprived neighbourhoods and similarly 'non-NSNR' deprived areas, particularly in terms of education and worklessness.

There were also some changes in the level of neighbourhood satisfaction in NSNR areas. Between 1999 and 2007 there was a small, but steady and statistically significant, decrease in the gap between levels of neighbourhood satisfaction between the poorest areas and the rest. Before the launch of NSNR, the gap was around 16 per cent; in 2006/2007, after NRF and NDC had been in effect for five or more years, it had fallen to around 12 per cent. This gap widened in the last two years of Labour's tenure and the gap at the start and end of Labour's period of office was not significantly different.

In terms of the specific domains of the NSNR evaluation this played out as follows:

Worklessness

The evaluation identified Improvements in worklessness. Evaluators found that the most deprived LSOAs (lower layer super output areas) in NSNR areas were the most likely to improve and least likely to decline in terms of worklessness when compared to similarly deprived LSOAs outside of NSNR areas.⁶¹ The evaluation also suggests that the functioning of the local economy affected the impact of NSNR interventions. In addition, availability of lower skilled work (NVQ Level 2, or lower) within 5km of the intervention area correlates positively with reduced levels of worklessness in more deprived NSNR areas (relative to non-NSNR areas).⁶² However, the report says it is difficult to ascertain whether these changes result from NSNR policy or are more likely a consequence of the absorption of marginal labour as the economy expanded in the early 2000s.

Education

The NSNR mapped changes in attainment at Key Stage 4 for NSNR areas and similarly deprived neighbourhoods. Nationally, there were absolute improvements in educational attainment across all areas, over the period of the NSNR. There was also some narrowing of the gap between deprived areas and non-deprived areas. The evaluation also identified some benefits from NSNR – the rate of improvement at Key Stage 4 in LSOAs in NSNR districts exceeded that in non-NSNR areas.

Crime

Two LSOA indicators were used to identify changes in crime: violent crime and burglary. These two indicators showed very different trends, nationally: violent crime was increasing over the period of analysis and the gap between the most and least deprived areas was increasing. Burglary rates by contrast were falling, and the greatest improvement was in the most deprived districts. The evaluation also reports that NSNR areas performed better than non-NSNR areas on both indicators.

Health

The NSNR measured changes in standard mortality ratios (SMRs) between 1998-2001 and 2002-2005. SMRs in deprived areas increased over the period and those in the least deprived areas improved. The NSNR evaluation also reported that gaps in health outcomes between Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and non-NRF areas had widened over the period of the evaluation, particularly in relation to mortality rates.

3.2. New Deal for Communities (NDC)

The New Deal for Communities programme was evaluated extensively over a ten-year period. This work remains the largest ever commissioned evaluation of an area-based programme in the UK and as such provides an unparalleled evidence base on what works in neighbourhood renewal.

The evaluation combined analysis of administrative and household survey data for the 39 NDC areas, and bespoke comparator areas, with partnership level surveys and case study analyses to assess the delivery impact and value for money of the programme. The key findings measure outcome change across the six programme areas which the evaluation classified as 'people' - (health, worklessness, education) and 'place'-based (crime, community and housing and the physical environment) outcomes. They also identify the factors associated with positive impacts of the programme. Rigorous evaluation⁶³ of these schemes produced a rich and extensive evidence base on change in outcomes and 'what works' in neighbourhood regeneration.

Key findings revealed:

- NDC areas were transformed over the programme period. Between 2002 and 2008 NDC areas saw an improvement in 32 of 36 core indicators spanning education, health, worklessness, crime, community and housing, and the physical environment. For 26 out of the 27 indicators where significance testing is possible, this change was statistically significant.
- Indicators of people's feelings about their neighbourhoods saw the biggest improvements: NDC residents recognised change brought about by the NDC programme and were more satisfied with their neighbourhoods as places to live.
- When compared to similarly deprived areas NDC areas saw statistically significant positive improvements on 11 out of 36 indicators (see Table 3.1, below), providing the most robust assessment of the impact of the programme.

Table 3.1: Significant positive change in NDC areas relative to similarly deprived comparator areas 2002-2008⁶⁴

Percentage point change 2002-2008			
	NDC areas	Comparator areas	Difference
People outcomes			
SF 36 mental health index, High score	4	-3	7
Taken part in education/training in the last year (a)	2	-2	4
Health somewhat/much worse than a year ago	-2	1	-3
Place Outcomes			
NDC improved area a great deal/ a fair amount (b)	27	n/a	n/a
Lawlessness and dereliction, high score	-18	-9	-9
Area got much/slightly better in last two years (c)	18	11	7

Percentage point change 2002-2008			
	NDC areas	Comparator areas	Difference
Very/fairly satisfied with area	13	8	6
Involved in NDC activity (b)	6	n/a	n/a
Been a victim of crime in last year	-6	-3	-4
Problems with environment index, high score	-10	-7	-3
Been a victim of criminal damage in the last year	-3	-1	-2

Source: Ipsos MORI NDC and Comparator Household Surveys 2002-2008; SDRC; Base: All; (a) All working age not currently in full time education; (b) All heard of local NDC; (c) All lived in area two or more years.

When compared to similarly deprived areas then, NDC areas experienced relatively more positive change in relation to place-based outcomes than people-based outcomes, although there are notable relative improvements in mental health and people's perceptions of their own health amongst NDC residents. In relation to place, there were substantial relative improvements to NDC residents' perceptions of their local area, their experience of crime and the degree to which they identified issues associated with criminal activity, dereliction, and poor environment as problematic in their areas.

The evaluation notes that at least some of this apparent bias toward place-based outcomes is a function of the evaluation methodology:

- Place-based interventions such as environmental improvements benefit relatively large numbers of residents and will therefore be captured by large-scale household surveys.
- People-based interventions, on the other hand, (such as job brokerage schemes or healthy living projects) will impact on relatively small numbers of people and their impacts (such as taking up work, or long-term health benefits) may not be immediately apparent in area-level analyses.

There is also a question of the 'leakage' of benefits from neighbourhood-based interventions. It is possible that some residents who benefit from people-based interventions and whose prospects improve accordingly will then move out of the area, taking their improved outcomes with them, although there was no strong evidence from the NDC evaluation to suggest that this was the case. Analysis of those who moved out of NDC areas between 2002 and 2004 suggests that they did so for housing and environment factors, rather than because of individual benefits from NDC projects.

At the level of individual benefits, the evaluation of NDC confirms that these were positive for both NDC residents and those who participated in NDC projects. The evaluation drew on data from a household survey panel (3,544 individuals who remained in NDC areas between 2002 and 2008 and responded to household surveys) to assess outcome change for individual residents in NDC areas.⁶⁵ Combining scores on outcomes across the six NDC domains produced a combined improvement score. NDC residents reported an average indicator improvement score of 1.3 over the four waves of the household survey, which was statistically significantly higher than the score of 0.9 reported by residents in the comparator areas panel. In addition, people who saw themselves as having benefited from a range of specific NDC projects between 2002 and 2004 were more likely to have seen more positive changes than did those who had not benefited. For example, evaluation⁶⁶ shows that participants in

NDC funded employment schemes were more likely to make a transition from no employment in 2002 to employment in 2004 than non-participants. However, this did not translate into area level improvements in worklessness.

The NDC evaluation utilised a novel shadow pricing methodology to assess the value for money of the programme⁶⁷ by monetising the benefits of statistically significant changes in NDC neighbourhoods relative to comparator areas using quality of life measures (which may be seen as forerunners of later assessments of place-based wellbeing). Two models were developed, using data for people-based outcomes and single composite place-based outcomes (satisfaction with area – model one) or other significant area-based outcomes (model two). These two options identified monetisable benefits amounting to between five times (model one) and three times (model two) programme spend. Much of this is associated with improvements to area satisfaction and mental health.

Findings across the outcome domains of NDC were:

Crime

Interventions aimed at improving community safety included those to address crimes against property and vehicles and improvements to the physical environment and public space. NDC partnerships also aimed to reduce fear of crime amongst local people by implementing reassurance measures such as enhanced police service and neighbourhood warden schemes. Partnerships supplemented mainstream police budgets to fund additional police and police community support officers in NDC areas and provide flexible additional resources to improve responses to trouble 'hotspots' in NDC neighbourhoods.

Evaluation⁶⁸ shows that NDC areas improved more across 11 of 18 measures when compared to similarly deprived non-NDC areas. Six of these indicators demonstrated statistically significant changes: criminal damage; crime in general; lawlessness and dereliction; satisfaction with area; thinking area had improved; and problems with the environment.

Education

Education saw the least change of all six outcomes measured by NDC⁶⁹. The evaluation report argued that this problem may have arisen from collaborating with schools⁷⁰ which were not aligned to neighbourhood-based approaches in the way that other agencies (such as the police) were. There was evidence that schools acted as a 'valve' to meet spending targets for NDC partnerships, leading to an over-emphasis on using regeneration funding to supplement budgets for school-based resources (such as classroom-based teaching assistants) rather than more resources for wider community benefit, such as out-of-school activities.⁷¹

Health

NDC partnerships delivered a wide range of interventions aimed at improving access to services and supporting residents to adopt healthier lifestyles.

NDC areas experienced absolute improvements in most health outcomes, including trust in health services, the proportions of residents eating five portions of fruit and vegetables daily, improvements to mental health outcomes and access to GP services. Investment in community health services was common in NDC areas and many benefited from investment through the NHS LIFT programme.⁷² The gap between NDC areas and national benchmarks also reduced.⁷³ Improvements in area satisfaction and mental health outcomes for NDC residents were highlighted as two of

the most statistically significant impacts at programme level and these impacts were correlated.⁷⁴ Improvements in area satisfaction were associated with improvements in mental health outcomes for residents in NDC areas.

Worklessness

Worklessness interventions were primarily concerned with improving skills amongst NDC residents and linking residents to opportunities in local economies. Projects were typified by neighbourhood-based job brokerage schemes, careers advice and guidance and community-based support for job search activities. The evaluation⁷⁵ highlighted the capacity of small-scale community initiatives to transform employment opportunities for residents in deprived areas. However, whilst NDC areas outperformed comparator areas in terms of employment, worklessness fell by 0.4 percentage points less than in comparator areas⁷⁶ – the evaluation concluded that NDCs have not collectively made a significant impact on worklessness. This is partly because the impacts of small, hyper-localised initiatives are less likely to be reflected in area-level data. The evaluation also shows that areas with greater increases in local jobs experienced less improvement in employment rates and this may be because of a mismatch between the skill levels of residents and the skills required for ‘new’ jobs. New jobs may be taken up by commuters with higher skills levels; the task of regeneration programmes which create new jobs is to match skills and encourage residents into local jobs.

Community

Community involvement was a defining feature of the NDC programme and almost all NDC partnership boards comprised more than 50 per cent local residents. NDC partnerships committed substantial resources to a wide range of initiatives designed to engage residents in NDC activities and increase capacity in local communities, amounting to almost 20 per cent of total programme expenditure.⁷⁷ These included support for resident engagement in programme governance (including training for community representatives), communications to keep local people informed about plans and activities, community engagement and involvement teams, constructing new, or improving existing, community facilities and community based small grants and loan schemes. Around 44 per cent of NDC residents who remained in NDC areas for the duration of the programme participated in an NDC activity at some point, and around four per cent of all residents had volunteered for an NDC partnership.

The evaluation identifies the crucial role of resident involvement in shaping interventions and highlighting community needs and concerns. Benefits to those involved in NDC activities were also identified: community representatives on NDC partnership boards cited personal benefits including knowing more people in the area, increased confidence and improved work-related skills. When compared to the NDC population, resident board members and those who had been involved in NDC activities were more likely to feel satisfied with the local area, that it had improved in the last two years and part of their local community. And when compared to those who had not been involved in NDC activities, NDC residents who had experienced significantly greater improvements in a range of outcomes:

- Number of crimes experienced.
- Perceptions of anti-social behaviour and environmental degradation (lawlessness and dereliction).
- Feeling safe alone walking after dark.
- Satisfaction with the state of repair of their accommodation.
- Trust in local agencies.

- Being involved in local agencies on a voluntary basis.
- Thinking the NDC had improved their area.
- Thinking their area had improved over the past two years.
- Achieving a greater number of positive scores across all the outcomes studied.

The evaluation also assessed change in social capital outcomes⁷⁸ at the area level. It found that these outcomes improved across all NDC areas, but that these improvements were not significantly greater than those which had occurred nationally or in similarly deprived areas. The evaluation report suggests that this is due to the limitations of the household survey: about 20 per cent of NDC residents were involved in NDC activities in any given two-year period and it is unlikely that any benefits affecting a small percentage of residents would be picked up by area-level measures.

Housing and the Physical Environment

Housing and physical environment interventions varied in scale. Some NDC partnerships initiated large scale redevelopment projects involving the remodelling of residential developments or the demolition of properties to release land for creating new public spaces. Where this was not possible, or desirable, NDC partnerships focused on improvements to the quality of housing in the social and private rented sectors, environmental improvements and the employment of community wardens and multi-agency teams to provide rapid response to issues of environmental degradation and community safety.

The evaluation identified significant improvements in NDC areas around outcomes related to perceptions of the local environment and area, which increased more than in comparator areas. However, NDC residents' satisfaction with their accommodation improved at a similar rate to that in comparator areas.

3.3. Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMP)

The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programme (NMP) was introduced in NSNR areas to bring together local residents and service delivery agencies to improve services and increase access and take-up. Evaluation⁷⁹ found that Pathfinders improved community and voluntary activity and relationships between local people and service providers. Between 2003 and 2006 NMP areas reported improvements in community safety and environmental measures such as area satisfaction; perception of influence on local decisions; satisfaction with street cleaning; and fewer litter and graffiti problems.

Later analysis of the NMP has utilised large scale administrative datasets to identify the longer-term impacts of the programme.⁸⁰ It reported improvements to target programme outcomes including neighbourhood and housing issues, but that these were not sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme due to insufficient investment to maintain impacts. The analysis also identified improvements to non-target social outcomes including frequency of talking with local neighbours.

Neighbourhood Wardens, a programme designed to provide a visible presence to deter crime and anti-social behaviour and for improve environmental issues, had similar results. National evaluation⁸¹ found that between 2002-2003, Neighbourhood Warden areas reported more positive change in relation to measures of quality of life (e.g., satisfaction with neighbours, better place to live) and perceptions of anti-social behaviour/crime (e.g., fear of mugging) than similarly deprived comparator areas.

3.4. Big Local

Whilst the evaluation of Big Local has not made tracking outcomes in Big Local areas a priority, there is some discrete analysis of outcomes associated with the programme. For example, relationships between Big Local investment and individual and population level social and health impacts have been analysed.⁸² The study found tentative evidence of improvements in anxiety and mental health outcomes, and reduced burglaries, amongst populations in Big Local areas, where there were higher levels of spend and activity on the part of Big Local Partnerships. Those residents who were actively engaged in Big Local also experienced improvements in mental health outcomes – although these were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative data demonstrates improvements in collective confidence to influence decision making and improve local circumstances, and on mental wellbeing at individual and collective levels. The evaluation also identifies economic and fiscal benefits to the programme, drawing on monetisable benefits of health and wellbeing outcomes to demonstrate that, to date, Big Local has delivered a 30 per cent return on the original investment. At the time of writing, Big Local is still being delivered in communities and the programme is in a phase of ‘peak’ spend. Value for money assessments are therefore likely to improve, notwithstanding that, in line with other neighbourhood regeneration programmes progress varies over time and between areas.

3.5. Summary

This chapter has looked at the evidence of the implementation and impact of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and two key NSNR programmes: NDC and NMP. It has also assessed the evidence for Big Local, as the largest and most significant neighbourhood regeneration programme in England post 2010. It is important to note that the evidence covers different timescales and has been gathered using different methodologies. There are however, some headline findings that can be drawn from an overview of the evidence base studied.

At area level, the evaluations of the NSNR and NDC identified overall improvements in the target neighbourhoods over the evaluation period, and a general ‘closing of the gaps’ between neighbourhood renewal areas and the rest of the country. In relation to similarly deprived comparator areas, the NDC evaluation shows that residents in NDC areas experienced relatively better improvements to mental health and wellbeing outcomes, and a range of ‘place-based’ indicators including area satisfaction, improvements to area, crime and anti-social behaviour. Similarly, evaluation of the NMP and Big Local has demonstrated improvements to wellbeing, community safety and neighbourhood environments over the evaluation period. These benefits have fiscal value, and assessments of the value for money of neighbourhood regeneration programmes demonstrate that monetisable benefits significantly outweigh investment.

At area level, neighbourhood renewal can be seen to be more successful at improving ‘place’- (relating to neighbourhood environments and crime) as opposed to ‘people’-based outcomes (such as employment and education). This is because larger numbers of residents in neighbourhood renewal areas experience the benefits of place-based interventions. However, residents who are involved in neighbourhood regeneration programmes experience significantly improved outcomes (compared to residents who have not been involved) across a range of indicators including work and health related outcomes. Crucially they are also more likely to feel satisfied with where they live, able to influence local decision making and that their neighbourhood is improving, express trust in others and local agencies, and be involved in local voluntary activities.

The next chapter outlines factors identified in evaluations as contributing to successful outcomes for neighbourhood regeneration.

What are the key elements of successful approaches?

The previous chapter identified the outcomes associated with neighbourhood regeneration programmes. This chapter draws on evidence from programme evaluations to identify the key programme features associated with successful programme implementation.

The NDC evaluation identified the factors associated with positive change in NDC areas and for individuals.⁸³ At area level, regression analysis was used to assess the combined contribution to outcome change of both partnership and area characteristics. For place-related outcomes there was a negative association with educational spend, and a positive association with numbers of agencies with which partnerships engaged. For people-related outcomes, there was a negative association with an NDC being 'stable and homogenous', and positive association with low population churn, growth in two person households with no dependent children, and NDC areas accommodating larger populations.

Additional analysis identified the factors associated with positive improvement in the ten NDC areas that had achieved the most transformational change over the life of the programme:

- A significantly greater increase in the percentage of residents involved in NDC activities.
- Less per capita spend on education and management and administration, and more on health.
- More ethnically diverse populations and higher proportions of residents in social housing in 2002.
- Larger, growing populations.
- More employee jobs per head of population in the local authority district.

The evaluation suggests that, for individuals, improvements across outcomes are closely associated. For example, a positive increase in thinking the area has improved in the past two years, was associated strongly with improvements in other outcomes such as satisfaction with the area, improvements in social relations, trust in organisations, lawlessness and dereliction, and reductions in the experience of being a victim of crime. This strength of association is identified as a justification for holistic approaches to area-based regeneration: achieving change in place-related outcomes is associated with change across a wide range of other inter-related outcomes.

The NDC evaluation also highlighted findings in relation to the delivery of neighbourhood regeneration programmes:

- It is important to set realistic targets for regeneration schemes, commensurate with the level of investment: NDC Programme investment in these areas amounted to no more than ten per cent of existing mainstream spend over the funding period.
- Partner delivery agencies participated in NDC partnerships and influenced the way that NDCs spent their money, and there were associations between a greater level of agency involvement in NDC areas and outcome change. However, they were less inclined to bend their own resources into defined regeneration areas.
- It was vital to manage expectations about the scale and scope of neighbourhood regeneration programmes. NDC residents were sometimes disappointed by the speed at which projects were delivered (especially in relation to housing and physical redevelopment), and the degree to which benefits from regeneration projects will be distributed across all of those living in the area – small scale pilot initiatives often delivered significant individual benefits but reached only small numbers of residents.

The NSNR evaluation also highlighted key lessons for programme design:

- The need for a “critical mass” of continued long-term investment in the most deprived areas without spreading resources too thinly.
- The importance of additional flexible funding (in this instance the use of NRF/WNF) to pilot innovative approaches, secure buy-in from local stakeholders and tailor interventions to local need.
- The importance of capacity in communities and public sector organisations to deliver change.
- The need for neighbourhood-level interventions to be co-ordinated with wider strategies for economic development given that some of the most significant determinants of socio-economic improvement broadly related to economic development (such as levels of regional GVA, access to low-skilled jobs and skills at Levels 3/4).

Big Local provides an extensive evidence base on the implementation and delivery of community-led neighbourhood renewal. The multi-media evaluation of the programme, ‘Our Bigger Story’ has produced a large and rich body of learning on how to achieve community empowerment and the resulting impacts when communities are given the power to determine and address their own priorities.

Over 130 outputs from the ten-year evaluation demonstrate positive outcomes in neighbourhoods, including:

- Reducing social isolation.
- Boosting confidence and aspirations.
- Building new skills and employment opportunities.
- Developing community groups, voluntary organisations, and new ventures.
- Opening community hubs and spaces.
- Improving the physical environment.
- Helping to generate a greater sense of community spirit and cohesion.

High levels of community-led decision making are also apparent as local residents make up the membership of Big Local Partnerships (the decision-making board for each programme. Insights into the ‘how to’ of community-led neighbourhood regeneration highlight:

- The importance of community-based funding mechanisms to support capacity building.
- The need for appropriate levels of support and skills development to enable communities to take part in local decision making, including paid roles.
- The importance of social infrastructure, including places and spaces that communities can come together to address local needs.
- How to establish successful relationships between communities and public sector agencies, based on trust and ongoing communication.
- How local evaluation can be used to support local partnerships.
- Improving digital connectivity.
- Building community wealth and assets.

An important strand of the evaluation addresses resilience in deprived neighbourhoods, drawing on evidence from Big Local areas to explore the role of connected and empowered communities in withstanding disruption and contributing to recovery. Learning from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the potential for communities to deliver rapid and agile responses to community need, and a (re)flourishing of community spirit which has been described as a realisation of community power, and which some have argued has the potential to deliver fundamentally changed relationships between individuals, communities and the state.⁸⁴ Evaluation also highlights debates about the nature and function of community power in deprived communities, but the learning from Big Local is that communities which have stronger social infrastructure and resources are well placed to respond to external shocks and contribute to local economic development and improved public health outcomes.

4.1. Summary

Evaluations have identified the factors which make improved outcomes more likely for neighbourhood renewal areas. Some of these, such as the characteristics of local populations and economies, are beyond the scope of influence of neighbourhood renewal partnerships but provide useful pointers to the potential impacts of investments in different contexts. Others identify features which could usefully be adopted in future neighbourhood regeneration programmes including:

- Community-led decision-making which places residents in control of their own neighbourhood programmes.
- Higher levels of community involvement; programmes featuring this have achieved better outcomes.
- Attention to the scale and nature of relationships with public sector agencies; evidence from Big Local identifies the importance of good relationships based on communication and trust.
- Integrating neighbourhood level interventions with wider strategies for economic regeneration and social cohesion.
- Appropriate levels of resourcing and support for community partnerships.
- Proportionate and relevant evaluation and mechanisms for accountability.

The next chapter outlines the principles of a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration.

Towards a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration

The first chapter of this report highlighted the pressing challenges that are facing residents in deprived neighbourhoods, including cost of living crises, climate emergency and mental health. We have looked at the rationale for, and implementation and impact of, neighbourhood regeneration programmes and argued that there is a strong argument for a neighbourhood approach, which addresses the problems of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the context of wider strategies for economic and social regeneration. Evidence from the evaluation of major neighbourhood regeneration programmes suggests that when funding and programme support is in place, improvements can be achieved, most notably in relation to people's satisfaction with where they live, perceptions of environmental degradation and anti-social behaviour, feelings of belonging and trust, engagement and volunteering and mental health.

There is some evidence that in the case of some indicators, areas which have benefitted from neighbourhood regeneration programmes may have better resilience to disruption and shocks. This chapter draws on learning from past programmes to outline the principles of a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration, which can strengthen community resources to meet their needs and contribute to alleviating key policy challenges.

5.1. Principles of a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration

Learning from past programmes leads to a series of recommendations which can inform the development of a new policy approach to neighbourhood renewal. These include:

Articulate the purpose of neighbourhood regeneration

The rationale for intervening in neighbourhoods is well rehearsed but it remains important to articulate, and potentially reconsider, the purpose and value of neighbourhood level regeneration. There is ample evidence from past programmes that neighbourhood regeneration is more effective in improving outcomes relating to place than to people. This suggests that place-focussed interventions should feature heavily in neighbourhood-based programmes.

At the same time, more recent evidence of the importance of social fabric in sustaining community resilience and better outcomes (e.g., around crime)⁸⁵ demonstrates the value of resourcing social assets and building social capital. It shows that investing in

people remains essential, not just in the sense of maintaining or improving services and amenities (e.g., health and education) to drive up outcomes, but more fundamentally in terms of building capacity at neighbourhood level.

Put communities in the lead

Evaluations have demonstrated the benefits arising from programmes which put local residents in the lead of strategies designed to improve neighbourhoods. This includes enhanced levels of collective wellbeing, improved trust in others, and in agencies, and increased capacity to respond to crises and external shocks. They have also highlighted the importance of effective learning and support frameworks, for capacity and skills building in communities, and in local agencies, which enable positive relationships to drive local change, and investment in community leadership.

Lay the foundations before launch

The experiences of the NSNR, NDC and Big Local show the value of having time to lay the foundations for programmes; building the evidence base for interventions and developing the capacity of institutions and communities to deliver effectively. The importance of the work undertaken by the Social Exclusion Unit and Policy Action Teams for the NSNR highlights the potential value of developing similar mechanisms and processes to inform the development and implementation of any future neighbourhood regeneration programmes as part of a 'year zero' approach.

Work across spatial scales and tiers of governance

Evidence gathered for this review consistently highlighted the importance of recognising the position of neighbourhoods as nested within wider spatial scales and impacted by policies at different levels of governance. While the case for neighbourhood-level intervention remains strong, it is important to consider the limits of this scale of working, and how influence on, and alignment with, wider policies and strategies might be achieved and secure benefits for residents more effectively.

Measure what matters

Past forms of monitoring and evaluation have tended to measure pre-defined outcomes against a narrow set of thematic criteria. This arguably missed some of the wider 'unintended' outcomes of neighbourhood regeneration and did not always, for example, capture benefits around building the capacity and resilience of communities. While evaluations often measure area-wide outcomes that can be generated through a number of different interventions, evaluations of single programmes often fail to reflect the totality of programmes, services and activities operating within neighbourhoods.

This highlights the need for future evaluations to focus more on what 'success' might look like in terms which are meaningful to residents and explore outcomes and impact beyond a set of pre-defined thematic indicators. There is also potential to design research and evaluation as long-term evidence gathering exercises of change within neighbourhoods, rather than just discrete studies of specific programmes.

5.2. A new context for neighbourhood regeneration

It is important to note that much of the evaluation evidence presented here (with the exception of some of the data drawn from Big Local) is now more than ten years old. Inevitably, publicly funded evaluations of major policies and programmes reflect the priorities of the governments of the day and are informed by understanding and evidence available at the time of their development. The objectives of neighbourhood

regeneration programmes, how they are delivered, and what and how they are evaluated are contextually specific.

The economic and political context has changed significantly since the last major neighbourhood regeneration programmes came to an end around 2010. It is important, therefore, to consider key developments in the context for neighbourhoods and how these could shape any future round of neighbourhood regeneration. These key contextual factors are considered here, to revisit the evidence in the preceding chapters and ask what policy problems a renewed focus on neighbourhoods might need to address; what forms future regeneration programmes should take; and how these changes might shape and neighbourhood regeneration.

Collectively, these factors provide a framework for a revised approach to neighbourhood regeneration which is rooted not only in our understanding of what has been achieved in the past, but also in a considered and realistic assessment of the objectives of, and opportunities for, a new approach to neighbourhood regeneration in the future.

We look at five factors in turn: community resilience, wellbeing, belonging and attachment, new forms of governance, and connectivity. Of course, there are other factors that could be considered but the intention here is to provide an illustrative overview of how any future round of neighbourhood regeneration policy needs to adapt to and evolve in a changing context. The analysis presented here is based on the assessments of the review team, supported by wider evidence and conversations conducted with key stakeholders during June and July 2023 (see Appendix Two).

Building community resilience in a time of poly-crisis

The NSNR was launched in a relatively benign fiscal and economic climate and focussed on trying to narrow the gap to enable low-income neighbourhoods to experience the growing prosperity enjoyed elsewhere. Any new neighbourhood regeneration strategy would be delivered in very different context of ‘poly-crisis’ – a series of overlapping crises unfolding over different timeframes and spatial scales including:

- The long-term impacts of deindustrialisation and economic restructuring ‘megatrends’ such as growing social and spatial inequalities and the climate crisis.
- The medium-term impacts of the financial crisis (2008-09) and subsequent austerity and spending cut.
- The shorter-term impacts of Brexit, the aftermath of COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁸⁶

These events and trends all have significant implications for the economic and social wellbeing of individuals, households and communities; particularly in terms of the deterioration of public services⁸⁷ and sharp rises in the cost of living that have hit household living standards.⁸⁸ It also highlights new challenges that future neighbourhood regeneration programmes will need to address. This includes responding to the long-term impacts of the pandemic (particularly in terms of the on-going health issues presented by long COVID), and the knock-on effects on labour market participation.⁸⁹ The climate emergency also raises questions about if, and how, neighbourhood regeneration can address a crisis which is global in scale yet often experienced most severely in some low-income neighbourhoods, for example in terms of flooding or air quality.⁹⁰

No neighbourhood regeneration strategy could be expected to respond to and address all the impacts of these multiple crises on households at the neighbourhood level,

especially in the current constrained fiscal situation. Both main political parties are committing to tight spending constraints that will limit the scope for increased discretionary spend for neighbourhood regeneration. The current situation is vastly different from the far more benign fiscal climate in which the NSNR was launched. At the same time, one lesson from the NSNR is that an initial period of fiscal squeeze can be harnessed as 'year zero' to assess the evidence base and develop the strategic framework for policies and programmes that will support delivery once spending constraints ease.

Enduring austerity in the wake of the financial crisis has hollowed out public and voluntary sector capacity and the loss of institutional memory and expertise will take time and considerable resource to rebuild.⁹¹ The emergence of neighbourhood-level action and support groups during the pandemic, albeit to varying degrees depending on levels of social capital,⁹² indicates a degree of resourcefulness and resilience that, in the meantime, could underpin neighbourhood regeneration. Nonetheless, the capacity to do this is likely to vary by area, with some places lacking the necessary social capital and infrastructure to support neighbourhood regeneration without considerable investment.

Neighbourhood regeneration could play a key role in strengthening community resilience to help communities mitigate the impacts of the succession of 'shocks' that form the current poly-crisis. Notions of community resilience came to the fore in seeking to understand and identify pragmatic responses to the challenge of deploying shrinking resources to support communities exposed to social and economic disruption under austerity.⁹³ More recently, it has taken on renewed salience in understanding how communities can become more resilient to climate-related threats and disasters,⁹⁴ particularly in terms of flooding in the UK context. The COVID-19 pandemic also raised profound questions about the resilience of places to respond to a global health emergency.⁹⁵

The UK government has published its own Resilience Framework (2022) on how to 'strengthen our resilience in order to better prevent, mitigate, respond to and recover from the risks facing the nation'. 'Community' is one of six themes and focuses on how Government can enable communities to take action and support themselves during an emergency, working through the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and the VCS Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) in England.⁹⁶

The notion of resilience has particular relevance for neighbourhood regeneration in understanding how communities can mitigate, or adapt to, the negative impacts of the components of poly-crisis outlined above. In the current challenging context, neighbourhood regeneration may need to take on a more 'defensive' position, seeking to shore up a minimal level of community resilience. This contrasts with the ambitious and transformative, if not fully realised, goals of prior rounds of urban regeneration. It raises questions about the presence and durability of social infrastructure needed to support communities to weather the multiple challenges they face, especially given the loss of social infrastructure in many low-income communities.⁹⁷

Building community resilience by strengthening social fabric and enhancing neighbourhood governance can help support and sustain positive outcomes, especially at a time when the resources and capacity of public agencies are stretched. This includes social infrastructure such as shared physical spaces that support regular interactions and the development of relationships, trust and reciprocity between local people.⁹⁸ Supporting community ownership of assets can help create more enduring forms of support and social infrastructure than funding external support organisations whose presence may end when funding runs out.⁹⁹

As large-scale structural change can take decades to achieve strategies to build resilience and mitigate deprivation remain essential. Investing in the social, civic and cultural institutions that underpin communities can also, in the longer term, help to build a 'preventative state'¹⁰⁰ that reduces pressure on services.

Defining and enhancing wellbeing

New policy frameworks for understanding and addressing economic, social and, increasingly, environmental challenges have gained traction in recent years. The emergence of wellbeing as a policy approach in the wake of the Stiglitz-Fitoussi-Sen commission in 2009¹⁰¹ raises fundamental questions about what it means to 'live well' and how policy might support a far wider set of agendas beyond narrow economic concerns such as jobs, growth and productivity that do not always fully reflect the lived experiences and needs of those on low incomes.

The wellbeing agenda encompasses a range of social, economic, environmental and democratic concerns and has become increasingly embedded in national policy frameworks. This includes revisions to the Treasury's Green Book, as well as sub-national efforts to place wellbeing at the heart of local economic strategies e.g., the North of Tyne Combined Authority's Wellbeing Framework and Doncaster Council's Economic Strategy 2020.¹⁰² Place is a critical part of this framework.¹⁰³

Incorporating a stronger focus on wellbeing into neighbourhood regeneration has two implications:

- First, a wellbeing approach would underline the importance of co-producing priorities and definitions of 'success' with communities.¹⁰⁴ Unlike former rounds of urban regeneration, this definition would not be developed 'top down' and then operationalised through a measurable set of outcome indicators. Instead, it would encourage a more 'bottom-up' approach to translate residents' priorities into a set of measurable outcomes. It may, however, be unrealistic to expect that this more participatory approach would secure widespread support or involvement. Designing appropriate and proportionate mechanisms to involve communities in the design and delivery of neighbourhood regeneration will, therefore, be important. In practice, communities may propose a very different definition of wellbeing to existing frameworks (e.g., Carnegie UK's SEED domains¹⁰⁵).
- Second, it potentially broadens the range and nature of outcomes that neighbourhood regeneration might seek to achieve. In particular, 'wellbeing economy' and related approaches (e.g., doughnut economics) place environmental concerns front and centre, and also recognise potential trade-offs e.g., between investment in more carbon-intensive growth-related activities that may benefit communities (such as out-of-town retail centres) and longer-term environmental impacts.¹⁰⁶

It is important to acknowledge that some environmental goals and projects may seem abstract or raise concerns about the costs of transitions (e.g., Net Zero). They may prove unpopular (e.g., low traffic neighbourhoods or ultra-low emission zones (ULEZs)), especially when set against 'bread and butter' issues such as low incomes, the cost-of-living crisis and poor or inaccessible services. Surveys show that concern about climate change is lower in the most deprived areas but half of all residents in the most deprived areas still say they are concerned (somewhat or very) about the impacts of climate change.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, it is also essential to recognise the potential for localised forms of environmental injustices to occur where low-income groups and communities, including ethnic minorities in urban areas, suffer disproportionately from the actions and consumption patterns of high income groups e.g. in terms of the health impacts of air pollution from car use.¹⁰⁸ Increasingly, communities are integrating low carbon and climate resilience goals into wider strategies to address social and

economic need, and supporting the inclusion of often less heard voices in debates on climate action. An example is Ambition Lawrence Weston in Bristol, which is working with five other local community organisations to co-produce community climate action plans and has established a community interest company (CIC) to lead the development of an onshore wind turbine.¹⁰⁹

It is therefore important to look beyond economic objectives in neighbourhood regeneration to establish a wider set of goals around enhancing the wellbeing of residents. This requires asking what ‘good looks like’ and identifying a set of objectives that reflect residents’ needs for, among other things, feeling connected with and respected by others, a sense of purpose, being heard, and a sense of belonging to place (see also below). Applying a wellbeing lens to neighbourhood regeneration may help bring out these wider objectives and create the potential to embed environmental goals such as clean air, and better access and ability to benefit from, the natural environment. It could also include developing a better understanding of what ‘pride in place’ means and how this varies across neighbourhoods.

Fostering belonging and attachment

Enhancing residents’ social and cultural connections to the place where they live has long been a feature of government-led neighbourhood regeneration. However, it has, typically been considered through a narrow set of outcomes such as satisfaction with area and sense of neighbourliness. More recent voluntary sector-led programmes such as Big Local have also monitored levels of social isolation and social cohesion.

In the wake of Brexit and growing political marginalisation in the ‘places that don’t matter’,¹¹⁰ there has been an increasing drive to better understand and strengthen people’s attachment to the place where they live. Research highlights the severe psychological and emotional impacts of losing social infrastructure in communities experiencing de-industrialisation, yet also how attachments to place can remain enduring despite economic and social decline.¹¹¹

This has found expression through UK government efforts to restore ‘pride in place’ through the Levelling Up white paper and its proposal for a Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships. There have also been wider calls to use notions of ‘belonging’ and ‘attachment’ and their negative equivalents (e.g., sense of loss and loneliness) to better understand and measure the things that matter to people where they live, and recognise the forms of physical and social infrastructure needed to restore these attachments in ‘left behind’ places.¹¹²

For future policy this raises fundamental questions about what neighbourhoods mean emotionally to residents and how neighbourhood regeneration might restore or enhance forms of attachment and belonging that are critical to people’s wellbeing and community-level cohesion. These emotional relationships to place are not necessarily all shaped by place-based factors, at least not exclusively, but highlight the need for more nuanced consideration of what forms of belonging, attachment and security neighbourhood regeneration might seek to support.

Strengthening new forms of governance

The advantages of tackling problems related to urban deprivation at the neighbourhood scale are outlined elsewhere in this report. We acknowledge widespread recognition that area-based interventions alone may be limited in their capacity to address some forms of social and economic inequalities – particularly those related to people – which originate in, and require policy intervention at, wider spatial scales.

Neighbourhoods are part of complex systems¹¹³ operating at and across a range of spatial scales (national, regional, sub-regional, local, hyper-local) that shape social and economic outcomes. Any new neighbourhood regeneration programme will need to be clear sighted about precisely what can – and can't – be achieved at this spatial scale, especially given the multiple pressures bearing down on households as a result of the many crises playing out at different spatial levels.

One key change since 2010 is the emergence of new forms of spatial governance. The replacement of regional tiers of governance (Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies) with sub-regional institutions (most recently combined authorities) creates opportunities for new forms of collaboration and intervention. The shift to the city-regional scale is intended to more closely mirror functional economic areas that reflect the geographical boundaries and commuting patterns of local labour markets.

This opens up opportunities such as shaping the demand side of labour markets (i.e., the number and type of jobs available) beyond neighbourhood boundaries in a way that it is not possible within the smaller 'container spaces' of neighbourhood regeneration areas. Connecting demand-side growth and job creation strategies with supply-side skills employment and job brokerage policies at neighbourhood level provides meaningful ways of working across spatial scales to tackle worklessness.

.¹¹⁴ The responsibilities of combined authorities for other policy areas, such as skills and transport, also presents opportunities to improve access to jobs and connectivity in ways that could benefit households in low income neighbourhoods e.g. through expanding the scope of job searches through better, or more affordable, transport links.¹¹⁵ Conversely, the fragmented landscape and partial coverage of combined authorities limits capacity to work at this scale in many areas.

This may be partially addressed through plans for new Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) outlined in the Levelling Up white paper. However, recent analysis indicates that even if all current devolution deals were successfully negotiated this would still only cover half (52 per cent) of the population of the UK.

Restructuring of the governance and delivery of public services also creates potential for neighbourhood regeneration programmes to access and benefit from the spend of mainstream agencies. Past neighbourhood regeneration programmes have struggled to 'bend the spend' of these agencies into disadvantaged areas but this remains important in the context of on-going fiscal constraints. New cross-sector partnerships with place-based remits, especially Integrated Care Systems, provide fresh opportunities for voluntary and community sector organisations to advocate for the needs of, and influence spend on, disadvantaged areas in ways which recognise and address the social determinants of health driving health inequalities in the UK.¹¹⁶ Analysis of ICS plans¹¹⁷ show they have potential to address social determinants of health in deprived areas through a place-based approach. This would include, for example, supporting projects to increase access to employment and leverage the role of key health organisations and partners as large employers to provide jobs and training opportunities. It is critical that neighbourhood regeneration strategies can align with and strengthen these new partnerships, and that appropriate forms of neighbourhood governance are in place to reflect and respond to community priorities. This includes revisiting mechanisms for the transfer of community power in areas where existing neighbourhood governance is weak, or under-resourced.¹¹⁸

Enhancing connectivity

Location matters as it shapes the ability of residents living in a particular neighbourhood to access paid work, essential services and the social infrastructure

which supports social interaction and community wellbeing. However, improving transport infrastructure to better connect communities to other areas was usually a small component of prior neighbourhood regeneration strategies, often subsumed within other priority themes and limited to funding new bus or minibus services.¹¹⁹

This approach has been eclipsed by growing awareness of the importance of mobility in increasing access to services, amenities and economic opportunities. It raises important questions about the role and location of neighbourhoods within housing, transport and employment systems, and how transport infrastructure may better connect residents to opportunities.¹²⁰

The growing peripheralisation of employment and amenities outside of urban centres (e.g., out-of-town retail/leisure parks, industrial estates, warehouses and fulfilment centres) has made access to employment opportunities and social or leisure activities more difficult for people without private transport.¹²¹ This issue is all the more acute given the decline in both urban and rural bus services in the wake of cuts in public subsidy.¹²²

There are no simple solutions, and any new round of neighbourhood regeneration programmes is likely to lack funding, capacity and expertise to shape large-scale transport solutions. However, they could play a critical role in working with local transport authorities and providers, as well as wider partners, to help them understand and respond to the needs of communities and specific disadvantaged groups (e.g. the elderly or mobility impaired). These groups are currently poorly served by public transport that is all too often unreliable, slow, expensive, infrequent, poorly integrated between transport modes, or fails to connect to key sites.¹²³

The increase in people working from home during and after the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that connectivity is not just about mobility but also about how to enable people to live and work in a variety of locations. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed inequalities of income and occupation in who was able to work from home caused by variations in:

- The nature of work and whether it could be undertaken at home.
- The degree of employer willingness to allow homeworking.
- Access to the space and appropriate equipment to work remotely.

Neighbourhood regeneration could play a role in addressing this; for example, through supporting the creation or repurposing of community hubs to support more flexible forms of working.

The lack of effective and affordable transport to connect more peripheral neighbourhoods to jobs, services and amenities highlights a need for a more explicit focus on transport. Neighbourhood regeneration strategies could also place more emphasis on the role of transport in facilitating mobility, and how this can be addressed, both through transport policy and planning system decisions about the location of workplaces, homes and amenities. Experiments in greater regulation of public transport such as the launch of the Greater Manchester Bee Network may offer greater opportunity to reconfigure transport systems to make them more accessible, reliable and affordable for low-income households in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

At the same time, the notion of the ‘20-minute neighbourhood’ that has gained traction with councils such as Leeds exploring the potential to embed it within Local Plans¹²⁴ could provide a framework for understanding how neighbourhood regeneration could reduce the need for mobility by supporting the creation of communities where residents access what they need within a 20-minute walk or cycle ride.

There may also be opportunities to work with communities to improve connectivity through a range of actions. One recent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Left Behind Neighbourhoods highlighted the potential value of working with their local authorities to develop and feed into local transport action plans; working with local schools and businesses to support students and employees with journey planning; commissioning community transport schemes and running them as social enterprises; and setting up lift-sharing platforms.¹²⁵

5.3. Summary

This report has argued that there is a pressing need for a renewed approach to meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged and 'left behind' neighbourhoods. Evidence from neighbourhood regeneration programmes which have focused resources on the most deprived areas and have provided mechanisms for communities and agencies to work together to address community priorities shows that they have consistently delivered improved outcomes for residents living in target neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood regeneration is particularly effective at delivering improvements to area and environment and addressing anti-social behaviour, which leads to improvements in residents' sense of belonging, satisfaction with the place in which they live and mental health. Improvements to outcomes such as employment and health can also be achieved through specific initiatives, such as job brokerage and healthy living projects, which can be transformative for the people taking part, but do not generally scale up to produce area-level improvements. The economic and fiscal benefits of these improvements outweigh the costs of programme delivery by between two and five times.

Learning about what works in neighbourhood regeneration highlights the need for future programmes to:

- Have clear intended outcomes which then inform appropriate measurement and evaluation frameworks.
- Plan and resource interventions effectively.
- Put communities in the lead.
- Integrate neighbourhood level interventions with wider spatial strategies and governance mechanisms.

These principles can form the basis of a new agenda for neighbourhood renewal which supports residents in neighbourhoods to better respond to current challenges and contextual factors which shape their futures: including building community resilience, improving wellbeing, fostering belonging and attachment, strengthening governance and enhancing connectivity.

Appendix 1

Revisiting outcomes for neighbourhood regeneration areas

Funded evaluations of neighbourhood regeneration programmes have generally concluded their analysis before the end of programme funding. As a result, evaluations rarely encapsulate the whole period covered by programmes or consider their sustainability and longer-term impacts. This leaves a considerable gap in our understanding of the impacts of neighbourhood renewal funding and activities.

The analysis presented here represents a preliminary exploration of longer-term outcomes for neighbourhoods targeted by the New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programmes. In each case we have benchmarked the observed change against a suitable bespoke comparator. The purpose of these comparators is to provide a counterfactual scenario – that is, what is likely to have happened in these areas had they not benefited from the relevant neighbourhood renewal programme. This is important because it is likely that change – both positive and negative – will have occurred in the neighbourhood renewal areas anyway due to a wide range of economic, political, population, social and technological factors occurring at local and higher levels.

In the case of NDC the analysis has adopted the 39 comparator areas that were defined in the national evaluation. These were created by adding together adjacent Output Areas (OAs) one-by one until the combined total population of the selected OAs met a pre-defined population threshold. A number of rules helped ensure the component OAs were of a similar nature to their matched NDC in terms of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004: size of area, percentage of social housing, parent local authority, and not being immediately adjacent to the NDC area.

A very similar approach has been used to create new, bespoke comparator areas for the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programmes. For this programme we computed the average IMD score and population size for each neighbourhood area. We then created neighbourhood comparator areas by identifying a small cluster of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within the same local authority area with a similar average IMD score and population size. Where possible we have also considered change over time using a Difference-in-Differences approach, comparing differences in percentage point change between NDC and their respective comparator areas.

The analysis presented here utilises a limited number of administrative and secondary datasets that could be accessed and analysed within the timeframe of the evidence review study, to explore the value of this type of analysis. It is important to note however that this data presents an incomplete view of the impact of neighbourhood renewal programmes. This is because they focus on, or are weighted towards, aspects such as unemployment levels which were a limited focus of the programmes considered.

We recommend that further research is undertaken, utilising both primary and secondary data to fully understand how neighbourhood renewal areas have fared. An example is work by Roberts et al. (2022) which draws on large scale administrative datasets to assess the longer-term impacts of neighbourhood management and identifies non-programme outcomes such as wellbeing.

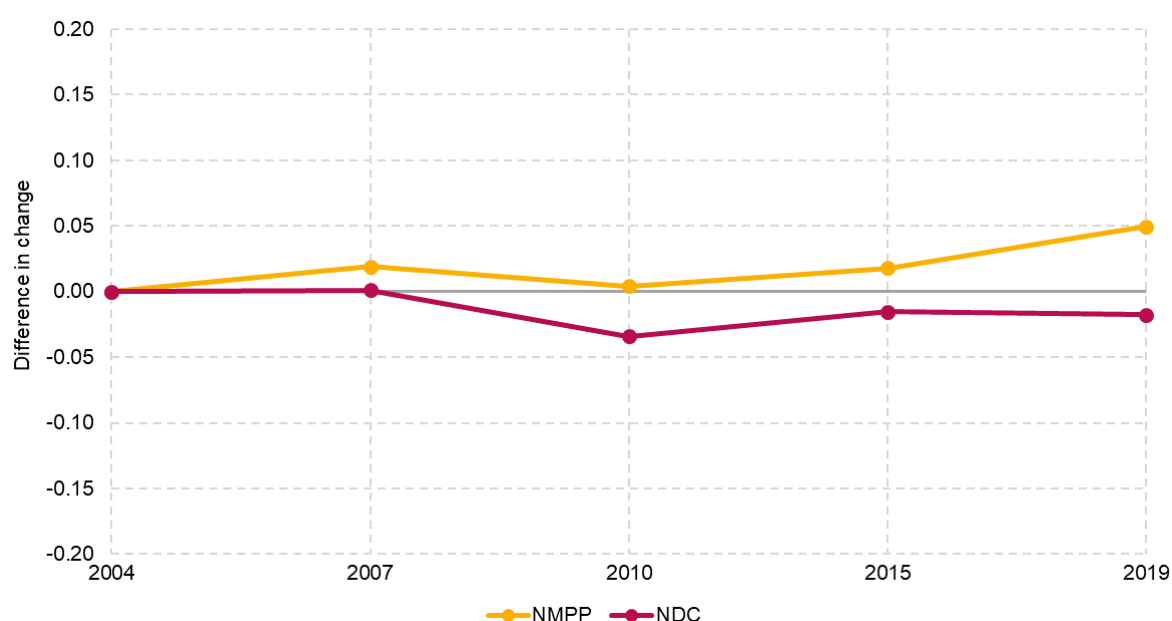
Indices of Deprivation

Figure A1 presents Difference-in-Differences change between programme areas and their comparators for NDC and NMPP across five Indices of Deprivation (2004, 2007, 2010, 2015 and 2019). The figures indicate the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation and the seven domains. In each case we have computed a synthetic population weighted score for each programme area and their respective comparator. We have then computed the average score across the neighbourhoods so that each neighbourhood contributed an equal weight. Finally, we gain a rank for this score by assessing where the score would fall amongst the (then) 32,844 LSOAs in England. Differences in differences are then computed by comparing differences in percentage change in rank between the programme average and its comparator for each index of deprivation year compared to the respective baseline. These have been visualised so that a positive value (above the zero line) indicates an improvement, relative to its comparator. Conversely a negative value (below the zero line) indicates a worsening relative to the comparator.

At a programme level for the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation:

- The NDC average rank has improved between the 2004 and 2019 releases. In 2004 the average rank was 2,431 which increased to 3,397 in 2019. However, Figure 3.1 shows that NDC areas compared slightly worse than their comparator during this period. Although the difference in rank between the NDC and comparator areas remained at a consistent level: 124 places difference in 2004 compared to 133 places in 2019.
- The NMPP average rank is very similar in 2019 to what it was in 2004; 3,798 compared with 3,721, respectively. However, NMPP areas have steadily improved compared with their comparator areas during this period, particularly since 2010.

Figure A1: Index of Multiple Deprivation, differences in differences compared to their comparator



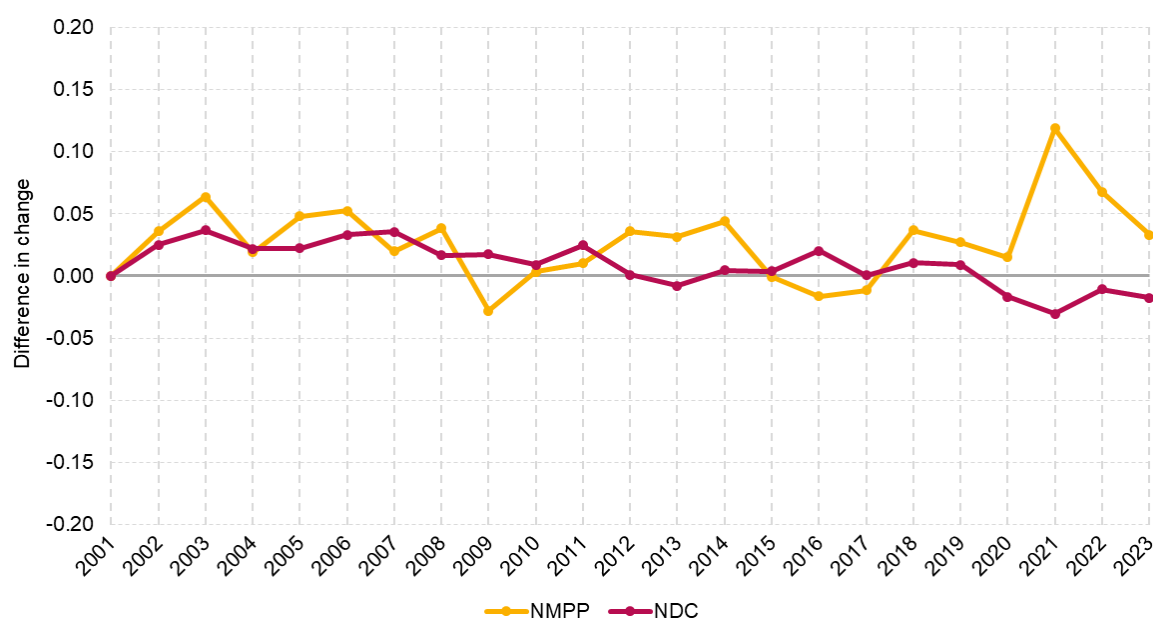
Claimant unemployment

This analysis compares claimant unemployment for programme areas compared to their comparator. The analysis uses a Difference-in-Differences approach. This is done by computing and comparing percentage change over time to a baseline unemployment rate compared to their respective comparators. The baseline is the 2001 unemployment rate for NDC and NMP. It is important to note that the underpinning measurement and recording of the unemployment data changed over time. However, the effect of this is minimised by using the differences in differences approach.

Figure A2 shows that at a programme level:

- NDC areas compared better than their comparator over the extended period 2001 to 2012. After this period the picture is more mixed. NDC areas compared similar to their comparator areas between 2012 and 2019. However, they have seen a worsening compared to its comparator since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.
- Overall, since 2001, NMPP compared better than its comparator except for small declines in 2008 and 2015 to 2017. In NMPP areas have compared especially well with their comparators around the start of the pandemic period in 2020.

Figure A2: Unemployment rate, differences in differences compared to their comparator



Appendix 2



List of contributors

With thanks to all those who participated in roundtable and individual discussions and whose experience, knowledge and insights have informed this report.

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Endnotes

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