



# Adapting to change: the role of community resilience

Commissioned by the  
Barrow Cadbury Trust





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# About the Barrow Cadbury Trust

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# 1 Introduction

Communities are dynamic and complex systems in a constant state of flux and all are used to adapting to some form of adversity. Yet, the reality is very few neighbourhoods, towns or cities completely shut down and die, although some fall into decline and dramatically shrink.



This report is about resilience. More particularly, it asks what it is that makes communities not just bounce back from adversity but thrive when faced with long-term challenges. The Young Foundation pioneered research and practice in this area and has developed the Wellbeing and Resilience Measure (WARM), a new tool designed to help communities understand their underlying needs and capacities. This report, commissioned by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, seeks to build on this work, deepen our understanding of community resilience and bring our learning together in one place.

Much thought has been given to the resilience of *individuals* and a lot of the existing literature on *community* resilience focuses on how they respond to environmental catastrophe or natural disaster. Understanding what makes individuals resilient and why communities respond to shocks is critical. However, we wanted to look in more depth at how already vulnerable communities react to shifts that occur over longer periods of time. Our work shifts the focus away from a purely deficit model of deprived communities – the things that they do not have – and directs attention towards what assets do exist within communities, and how these can be amplified and used to cope with change and even thrive.

The Young Foundation's work has always sought to go beyond theory and apply our thinking to social innovation and policy design. There is broad consensus that individual resilience can be learned and enhanced. Some areas have introduced resilience classes into the school curriculum; some agencies have integrated it with help in finding jobs; and some are beginning to integrate it into health care, and in particular coaching and support for people with long-term conditions, recognising that physical fitness is as important to life as psychological fitness.

Here we argue that resilience can also be enhanced in communities. Our research suggests that community resilience is built primarily through relationships, not just between members of the community but also between organisations, specifically between the voluntary sector, the local economy and the public sector. This report identifies both the factors that support resilience within communities and act as a barrier. We outline the practical measures that can be taken to bolster community resilience and explore how local and national governments, as well as communities themselves, can evaluate resilience.

This is no easy task. Change, whether social, political or economic, is, of course, always present. Communities are dynamic and complex systems in a constant state of flux and all are used to adapting to some form of adversity. Yet, the reality is very few neighbourhoods, towns or cities completely shut down and die, although some fall into decline and dramatically shrink. On the other hand, some communities do well in the face of quite rapid and profound change: some even thrive, reinvent and renew themselves. The aim of this work is to contribute to our shared understanding of what makes that difference.

Demographic changes, labour market upheaval, movement of people, climate change, and economic uncertainty are patterns of change that are set to continue. Much of the existing analysis investigating the impact of such trends looks on the macro impact but rarely highlights the situation at the local level.

This report is based on research carried out in Birmingham, a city that has experienced long term shifts in its economy and population as well as much more rapid change in recent years. We focused in two wards: Nechells and Shard End. Both areas have suffered the consequences of de-industrialisation and are among the most deprived areas in the city. Like much of the Young Foundation's work, our focus is on ethnographic research. We have here primarily drawn on qualitative research on the perceptions and experiences of people living in these areas.

Such an approach brings new insights to our understanding of community resilience and broadens our understanding of what it means to people's actual lived experience. While the particularities of the communities we have worked are important, our findings have a wider resonance. To this end, we explored a number of central questions that are relevant to all communities. First, how does resilience play out in terms of attitudes, expectations and peer group pressures? Second, how do local institutions influence the ability of communities to be resilient in the face of adversity? And third, what role do voluntary sector organisations play in building resilience in communities?

These are important questions to ask in good times, particularly in areas where deprivation proved stubborn in the face of growth, regeneration and higher levels of public spending. They become even more pressing at times of public funding cuts, reduced services, high unemployment, rising inequality and increases in the cost of living. It is far from clear how rapidly the UK's economy will recover or to what extent different regions and localities will continue to suffer the long-term consequences of the financial crisis that began.

But what is clear is that community resilience will have an important part to play in protecting communities from the worst impacts of recession and helping them to overcome adversity. It is in this context that this report examines the usefulness of community resilience as a concept and offers a more expansive definition, looking at the factors that enable communities not just to *survive* but respond and *adapt* in such a way that brings about positive social change.

As austerity and recession bite, we are seeing impacts on communities across the country. We face high unemployment – particularly youth unemployment and long term worklessness – and there are growing pressures on family life and household resources.<sup>1</sup> More must be done to alleviate some of the immediate hardships being faced by the most vulnerable in society. However, we must also guard against the long-term effects of the economic downturn and cuts to public spending. We need to ensure that the resources that enable communities to be

resilient are not withdrawn and the areas that are most in need are targeted and supported as they adapt to change. Unless we act now the recovery will be much harder and slower and many communities will suffer the consequences for many years to come.

## 2 What does resilience mean?

“ It’s a deprived area so people are hardy. The main quality is resilience. Life constantly throws things at them. Life isn’t smooth here for people. But they have learnt to overcome and move on, and brace themselves and they move on to the next thing. It’s necessity that makes them resilient; they get used to dreadful things getting thrown at them.

— Community Gardener, Shard End

The term resilience derives its origins from the Latin *resilire*, meaning ‘to rebound or recoil’ and was used initially in physics and material sciences to describe the ability of material properties to withstand large forces, shocks or stresses.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1940s, the application and meaning of the term was expanded when resilience gained currency in social psychology and psychiatry. Much of the early work in this field was centred on child coping strategies, and the ability of children to bounce back after difficult or traumatic events in their lives, such as the death of a family member or the separation of their parents. This led many to inquire into why certain children were psychologically more adept at dealing with adverse periods in their lives than others, and what were the ‘protective factors’ that enabled them to do this.<sup>3</sup>

Work on resilience was further popularised in academia by Crawford Holling, who introduced the concept to an ecology audience, providing us with the link between resilience, stability and equilibrium, and defining resilience as the capacity to stabilise after a shock or stress.<sup>4</sup> Since then the term resilience has enjoyed growing currency and use from a varied number of academic and policy related fields, including development studies, disaster studies, climate change and environmental studies, business management, genetics, and social and economic policy.

Despite the diverse range of disciplines that use the term resilience, each adding their own interpretations and unique insights, the earlier work on child psychology and ecology have to a large degree framed the most popular currently used definitions of resilience. This can be seen in two ways. First, following in particular the child psychology literature, resilience has come to be associated predominantly with ‘defensive’ qualities that enable people or systems to cope, survive and get by in the face of adversity.

Following this theme, we often hear about ‘protective’ factors that can help ensure survival or mitigate the damage of an adverse event. The second theme concerns a tendency to focus on one-off externally originating stresses and shocks against which people may or may not be resilient. Examples of this include dramatic environmental disasters (such as earthquakes), emotional trauma (such as bereavement or divorce) and, increasingly since the events of September 11 2001, terrorism.

Resilience, has frequently been understood as the ability of the subject in question – people, ecological systems, businesses and so on – to cope with an adverse event and then in time bounce back, returning to a ‘business as usual’ state. This is what we will refer to here as the ‘survival’ understanding of resilience. That is to say, a way of framing resilience to simply mean the ability to survive through adversity, or as the former UK Intelligence and Security Coordinator David Ormand, put it; the “capacity to absorb shocks and to bounce back into functioning shape, or at the least, sufficient resilience to prevent stress

fractures or even system collapse”.<sup>5</sup> This survival approach to resilience also underpins current mainstream understandings of community resilience.

## Community resilience

*“It’s a deprived area so people are hardy. The main quality is resilience. Life constantly throws things at them. Life isn’t smooth here for people. But they have learnt to overcome and move on, and brace themselves and they move on to the next thing. It’s necessity that makes them resilient; they get used to dreadful things getting thrown at them.”*

— Community Gardener, Shard End

Resilience is a familiar and much used term. In everyday conversation, a variety of media reports, recent public policy documents and academic papers, resilience enjoys liberal usage. Perhaps inevitably, the potential slipperiness of this concept increases as we move away from a scientific and technical usage of the term, towards an exploration of what resilience might mean in the human realm of the social sciences.

This is certainly the case with the term community resilience, which, despite growing interest and numerous pages being devoted to it, lacks coherency, clarity and consistency of use. There is a danger of this concept becoming an imprecise buzzword that loses potency.<sup>6</sup> More significantly, there is a risk that the term resilience can be used to avoid addressing difficult, complex or structural problems: that an individual or community should be expected to put up with things; that somehow they are to blame for not being resilient enough.

The Young Foundation has developed a holistic understanding of resilience. Our understanding of community resilience is made up of a number of features incorporating cultural, human, political, financial and social resources. These may include ‘hard’ assets such as good transport links, access to services and amenities. Also important are local buildings, organisations that enable communities to come together, allowing people to access support and to have their voices heard in relation to local issues. It includes ‘softer’ assets such as relationships with family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and the support of the wider community. It encompasses links with voluntary and state organisations and the private sector. Most importantly, it not simply about exhorting communities to ‘pull themselves together’ but about giving them the capacity to identify assets and utilise them.

Not all types of resilience are equally useful. Resilience, it is argued, takes two shapes: the ability to *survive* change and shocks; the ability to *transform* in the face of shocks. A truly resilient community learns how to thrive in the face of change and adversity and adapts to fulfil potential; not surprisingly, it is this area we focus on here. But it does not learn this alone: increasing levels of community resilience requires the participation of the state and various sectors of civil society, including the private sector. It means systematically working to strengthen the capacity of a community, enabling people to steer towards the future they chose.

## Community resilience as ‘survival’

The majority of work concerning resilience and society takes the individual as the preferred unit of analysis. The problem with this individualistic approach to resilience is that it lends itself to losing sight of the complex systems, institutions and structures – the family, religious organisations, ethnic affiliations, and the nation-state and so on – within which individuals are embedded. The community, both as a geographical territory and as an emotional attachment to a place, is important to understanding resilience. Whether or not a person is resilient will in part depend on the resilience of the community in which he or she lives. From this perspective a community is both a context that may variously facilitate or constrain resilience, and an agent for change in and of itself, a potential locus for resilient activities.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance the growing literature on community resilience seems diverse. However, current mainstream understandings of resilience share two important limitations. First, community resilience has become associated primarily with defensive attributes, limiting our ability to imagine a more optimistic and adaptive form of resilience. Secondly, resilience is frequently defined in relation to one-off, exogenous events, stresses and shocks. This approach has limited focus on the less spectacular, yet perhaps more relevant, changes that communities are undergoing in the longer term.

In short community resilience has come to be defined through a ‘survival’ lens. A good example of this is the 2011 Cabinet Office’s *Strategic National Framework on Community Resilience*.<sup>8</sup> Community resilience in that document is understood in relation to ‘emergencies’, such as severe weather or the spread of diseases, and what communities can do to prepare, manage and mitigate risk. This can make the analysis of easier as it establishes a clear moment from which it is possible to determine a before and after (a definite break) and gauge how well a community is coping.

## Resilience through a wider lens

This approach narrows the field of view with regards to the types of challenges that communities face. In particular, it ignores those challenges posed by longer term, more permanent changes, such as the economic recession and high levels of population churn. It gives a misleading impression that the risks communities face are external to the communities themselves. Yet communities do not exist within a vacuum. We cannot begin to understand community resilience without appreciating the broader local, national and global structures within which communities are embedded. Broadly speaking we can identify three types of challenge facing communities.

First, there are those macro global forces operating beyond the control of national actors such as governments. In recent decades arguably the most influential of these forces has been the shift from an economic model characterised by traditional industrial development and manual intensive work (employing a large low-skilled work force), to one that with less manual labour and increasing emphasis on technology and highly skilled tertiary employment. Another similarly important force has been demographic, as local communities become the setting of dynamic population churn and the steady increase in population diversity. This has led some social commentators to predict a crisis of community as traditional bonds are eroded, and some communities have struggled to cope with rapid change.

Second, the impact of policy and planning exerts a significant influence over local communities, providing support in certain instances or furthering adversity in others. Actions by the public sector, private sector and civil society all have the potential to improve or inadvertently worsen community development and cohesion, local investment, job creation, the built environment and well being.

Thirdly, as much of the community resilience literature stresses, communities are at risk of natural hazards existing beyond the control of human influence. These may be periodic and high-impact events, such as flooding or earthquakes, or they may be gradual and incremental processes, such as global warming and climate change.

### Box 1: Definitions of Community Resilience<sup>9</sup>

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Brown, 1996 | The ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or sustained life stress   |
| Sonn, 1998  | The process through which mediating structures (schools, peer groups, family) and activity settings moderate the impact of oppressive systems |



|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Paton, 2000       | The capability to bounce back and to use physical and economic resources effectively to aid recovery following exposure to hazards   |
| Ganor, 2003       | The ability of individuals and communities to deal with a state of continuous, long term stress; the ability to find unknown inner strengths and resources in order to cope effectively; the measure of adaptation and flexibility |
| Ahmed, 2004       | The development of material, physical, socio-political, socio-cultural, and psychological resources that promote safety of residents and buffer adversity  |
| Kimhi, 2004       | Individuals' sense of the ability of their own community to deal successfully with the ongoing political violence  |
| Coles, 2004       | A community's capacities, skills, and knowledge that allow it to participate fully in recovery from disasters  |
| Pfefferbaum, 2005 | The ability of community members to take meaningful, deliberate, collective action to remedy the impact of a problem, including the ability to interpret the environment, intervene, and move on.                                  |

The long term and systemic nature of these changes forces us to question the currently limited scope for understanding resilience. Change is continual, and therefore resilience also needs to be seen as a constant and continual process of reinvention, not simply a response to a specific event in time. Whilst downplaying the importance of systemic and gradual change, and in line with the quotes above (see Box 1), the *Strategic National Framework on Community Resilience* also takes a survival approach to their definition of community resilience.

The UK government has attempted to look at community resilience with a somewhat wider scope. Following the Demos publication *Resilient Nation*,<sup>10</sup> the UK Cabinet Office defines resilience as: “The capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure, and identity.”<sup>11</sup> This definition involves the notion of adaptation, which recognises the ability of people to learn from and through adverse events, and as a result, alter practices taken in the future accordingly. However, this definition is still inherently defensive and potentially limiting. Indeed it limits the scope of resilience to a sort of base line, an ‘acceptable level’, at which communities can function and maintain their basic structure. This restricts our ability to think beyond simply surviving through change, to a potentially more expansive and transformatory notion of flourishing through change, adapting not only to stabilise, but also opportunistically to better the current situation.

This limitation is especially important when thinking of community resilience in relation to this paper's case study areas, Shard End and Nechells, both of which face the challenges that flow from entrenched deprivation or poverty. Clearly there is something very unsatisfactory about simply aiming to survive through deprivation and poverty.

## Adaptive resilience

The survival focus in resilience literature is not without its rationale or merits. However, when change proves long term and systemic, a sole focus on survival may potentially entrench a besieged attitude (see Box 2). It limits our understanding of the capacity for communities to ensure positive outcomes in spite of adversity, or indeed through adversity by opportunistically turning "crises into opportunities" for change.<sup>12</sup> So, what might flourishing through change look like?

### **Box 2. Middlesbrough: The least resilient place in Britain**

In an Experian report published in September 2010, Middlesbrough was identified as being the least resilient place in Britain in light of the upcoming government spending cuts. The reason for this vulnerability is to be found in the recent economic history and development of the region. Like many large British cities, including Birmingham, Middlesbrough was once a strong industrial hub. William Gladstone once famously recommended the city as an 'infant Hercules'. However, the apparent strength of Middlesbrough's economy did not last. Global markets soon turned away from heavy industry and investment was poured instead into lighter, more footloose means of accumulating capital. National and local government responses to these changes came primarily in the guise of large amounts of public investment to replace funds lost from private sources and to regenerate the area's flailing economy. Today the combined result of both global market forces and public policy is that the city has become unsustainably dependent on the government. Indeed, Experian data suggests that 42 per cent of the workforce is employed by the public sector. In turn, it is not difficult to see why, in the face of swinging public sector cut backs, the future for Middlesbrough is less than certain.

— Source: [www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston)

In recent years there has been new work on social exclusion, which begins to chart an alternative approach to resilience.<sup>13</sup> Rather than limiting their analysis to understanding the capacity to survive or 'adapt to ensure system functioning' this work stresses the positive outcomes that can be gained in spite of, or indeed through, adversity.

A simple and illustrative example of this thinking is provided in the story of Abraham Lincoln and his rise from a log cabin to the White House. Not only does Lincoln's rise to presidency encapsulate the American Dream, but it also adds credence to the idea that people can show extraordinary resilience to life situations, and in doing so improve their lot in life.<sup>14</sup>

History is replete with such cases. British women during the First World War demonstrated considerable resilience to the outbreak of war and the departure of many thousands of men, adapting to new circumstances by joining the work force and boosting war time productivity. Moreover, in joining the work force, this generation of women contributed to the process of challenging gender stereotypes, myths and inequalities entrenched in British society. In this case therefore more structural transformation was achieved, culminating eventually in the female vote.

**Box 3: *New Orleans: Flourishing Through Change?*<sup>15</sup>**

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 media reports were replete with headlines lamenting the death of New Orleans. The extent of human, financial and physical destruction was such that the *Atlanta Constitution* assured us New Orleans was a “city left to the dead”, whilst the *Washington Post* ran the headline “A Sad Truth: Cities Aren’t Forever”. Yet five years after the event, these gloomy predictions have been proved wrong. New Orleans has hardly gone the way of Pompeii, Carthage or Monte Alban. Instead, New Orleans has become “a symbol of resilience, of community, of the fundamental responsibility we have for each other... New Orleans is blossoming once more,” as stated by US President Barack Obama in his speech marking the fifth anniversary of the disaster. Hope is emerging through disaster, and the potential to flourish through change is presented as a citizen- and community-led urban renewal process emerges. New Orleans’ problems run deeper than the disaster wrought by Hurricane Katrina. The event in 2005 compounded pre-existing socio-economic issues; the regional effects of economic downturn, government neglect and entrenched deprivation. However Katrina has also proven a catalyst for resilient, innovative and adaptive change, promising that the city will emerge as a stronger and more inclusive city than before. As the New Orleans Institute for Resilience and Innovation encouragingly notes “New Orleans had a jump-start on facing its destiny, hastened by failing infrastructure and a lack of political will. What has emerged is an engaged citizenry, determined to cultivate local solutions. We are learning every day what works, and what does not, in building the resilience of this city”.

These examples demonstrate particular and sometime singular cases of individual resilience, but it is not too much of a stretch to consider that groups of people can exhibit a similar agency and come through hardship in more positive positions than they began (see box 3).

# 3 Community resilience in Birmingham

“ When the estate was built it was a modern, attractive and fantastic place to live, with a new shopping mall and a car park built there. If you got a house there, you were one of the privileged few. Now though it's full of problems – rough problem families get sent there.

— Local resident group in Shard End

The City of Birmingham is the regional centre of the West Midlands and second largest city in the UK, with a population of million people. The city grew to world prominence during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it was at the heart of the industrial revolution. The city prospered on the basis of its diverse manufacturing economy, characterised by thousands of small specialised workshops and factories. However, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like many other cities across the UK, Europe and the United States, Birmingham experienced the decline of its manufacturing industry.

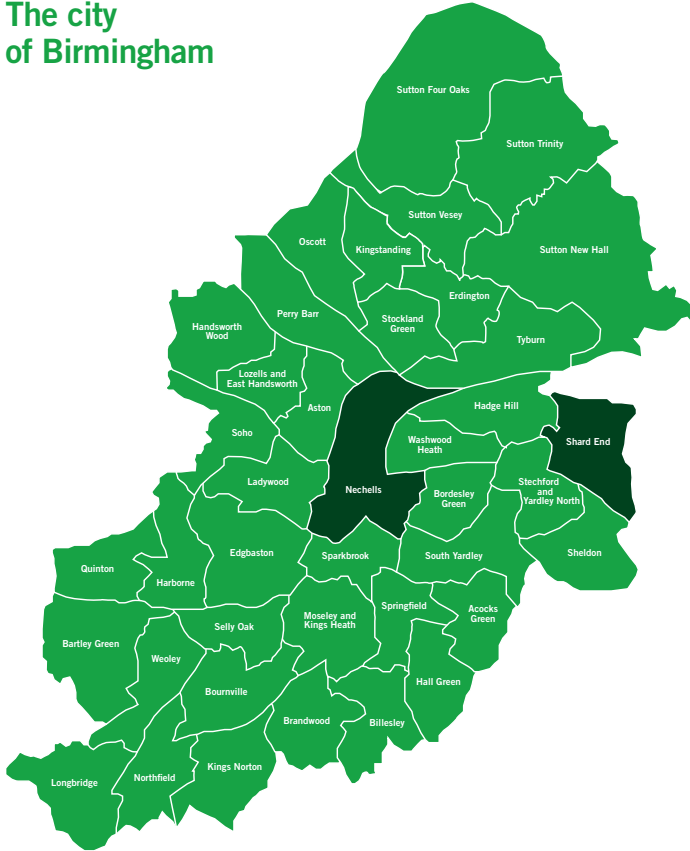
Job losses in the industrial sector have been significant, with over 200,000 redundancies between 1978 and 2007. Of all the industries affected by deindustrialisation in Birmingham, the decline of the automobile industry has been the highest profile, epitomised by the closure of the MG Rover plant at Longbridge. During the 1990s and 2000s, the city undertook an ambitious programme of regeneration and economic restructuring, with rapid growth of jobs in the public and service sectors. A number of flagship projects were completed throughout the 1990s and 2000s, including the International Convention Centre and Symphony Hall, costing £180 million and the National Indoor Arena, costing £57 million.

The most significant redevelopment of in the city centre was the Bullring Shopping Centre at a cost of £500 million, which opened in September 2003. In recent years Birmingham City Council invested £276 million to restructure the economy around the high value-added and high-skilled service sectors. Birmingham has rebranded itself, shedding its image as the ‘workshop of the world.’ Birmingham’s economy is now dominated by the service sector, which accounted for 86% of jobs in 2008.

However, the growth of the service sector has not benefited everyone in Birmingham. As with other areas that have experienced industrial decline, those who were employed in the manufacturing sector have not just walked into the jobs created in the service economy. Those who were made unemployed during the industrial decline were the least prepared to enjoy these new opportunities, having few relevant skills or qualifications. Furthermore, the jobs that were created for lower skilled workers were poorly paid and insecure. Many communities suffer from high levels of unemployment and economic deprivation. And, like every other city in the UK, Birmingham is experiencing the effects of the economic downturn. Unemployment is rising and the city council is cutting its spending by £300 million over the next four years.

In looking at resilience in communities we spent time speaking to residents, community organisations and businesses in the two wards of Nechells and Shard End. Both these areas have been affected by the economic changes that have affected the city and have high levels of deprivation and unemployment.

## The city of Birmingham



## Nechells

Nechells is an inner city ward with a population of about 27,000 (2001 Census). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of Nechells increased rapidly as the industrial development of the city. Between 1842 and 1901 the population rose three-fold from 20,000 to 65,572. Housing the increased number of inhabitants was an immediate issue and one that was solved in the short term by the rapid construction of poor quality housing, densely terraced with few onsite amenities.

By 1901 much of the Nechells population lived in some of the city's worst slums. In 1937 the majority of the area was declared a site for redevelopment, although work was delayed in the area for 10 years as a result of the Second World War. In 1947 a mass clearing of the worst housing stock took place. Being in such a central location, land prices were high and subsequently much of the new housing stock took the form of high-rise tower blocks.

More recently many, though not all, of these developments have been demolished as the social problems associated with this housing type have become more apparent. Alongside these changes in the built environment, the post-war years also brought change to the area with the arrival of West Indian and Asian economic migrants seeking opportunities in the expanding industrial sector. Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ethnic minority population increased greatly. Today over half of the resident population are of black and ethnic minority heritage.

During the 1980s, the economic restructuring and deindustrialisation in Birmingham greatly affected the communities in Nechells. The majority of working residents were employed in industry, with most having few alternative skills or qualifications. As the factories and workshops closed, unemployment and deprivation levels increased. Today, Nechells continues to suffer from disproportionately high levels of worklessness (29.1 per cent), unemployment (at 20.2 per cent) and deprivation – 83 per cent of Nechells residents fall within the 5 per cent most deprived Super Output Areas in England.

## Shard End

Shard End is on the eastern edge of the city and has a population of 23,000. It was a rural area on the fringes of the city until 1931 when the City Council started planning to build houses for residents displaced by the extensive inner-city slum clearances. Building of the estate started in the late 1940s and was added to in stages producing some variety in the housing. Shard End became the city's largest municipal development with nearly four thousand houses built eastwards from Hodge Hill Common between the Coleshill Road, Bradford Road, Chester Road and the River Cole. Like many post-war developments, communal facilities initially lagged behind the building of the housing. A village centre was created around Shard End Crescent with shops, library, a public house and a church and this remains an important focus for the community.

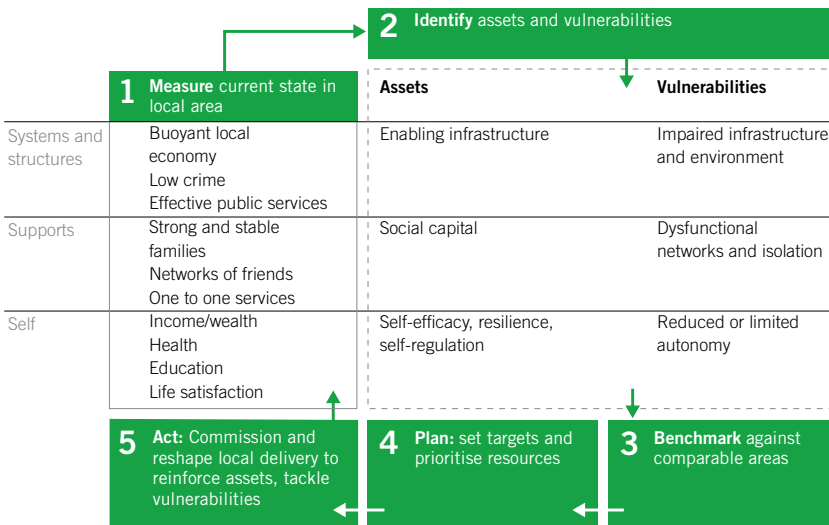
Today, Shard End has a slightly older age profile than the City average. The percentage of ethnic minority residents is below the city average. Despite the area's proximity to some of the city's new developments, such the National Events Centre (NEC) and Birmingham airport, unemployment and worklessness are above the city average. Outer East Birmingham, of which Shard End is a part, has twice the level of benefit dependency than the city average. Rates of worklessness in Shard End are 29.3 per cent, compared with the Birmingham average of 20.2 per cent.

# Measuring wellbeing and resilience

The first stage of our research was to use existing data to develop a detailed profile of each area in terms of people living there, their assets and vulnerabilities. To do this we used the Wellbeing and Resilience Measure (WARM) tool, which has been developed by the Young Foundation.

WARM is a new tool that has been designed to help communities understand their underlying needs and capacities. It brings together a wide range of indicators to measure wellbeing (how people feel about themselves and their communities) and resilience (the capacity of people and communities to bounce back after shock or in the face of adversity). WARM captures both a community's assets, including levels of social capital, good schools and public services, or high educational achievement; as well as vulnerabilities, including levels of depression and unemployment. Unlike conventional 'deficit' models, which assess what is needed in a community and focus solely on what is wrong (factors like crime or homelessness), WARM also captures what is going well. The focus is on subjective as well as objective data. WARM combines measurements of social capital – assessing the strength of local relationships – with how people feel, such as whether they see themselves as belonging in an area and general psychological wellbeing. It also captures the availability of services and quality of infrastructure.

**Figure 1: The five stages of measuring wellbeing and resilience**



WARM has five stages (see Figure 1).<sup>16</sup> The first stage is to measure wellbeing. To do this we look at three domains:



- Self, the way people feel about their own lives;
- Support, the quality of social supports and networks within the community; and
- Structure and systems, the strength of the infrastructure and environment to support people to achieve their aspirations and live a good life.

Three types of data are particularly useful at this stage:

- Trend data for key indicators, such as health, education, income and incapacity benefit. These are useful measures for objective conditions within the area, which can be broken down to neighbourhood level (lower super output level).
- Any local surveys which capture data on levels of life satisfaction. These could be included in local annual opinion surveys or as one-off initiatives by local authorities or health agencies. Some local authorities include the following question in annual surveys: Thinking about everything which affects how you feel about yourself and the place where you live, how satisfied would you say you are with your quality of life overall?
- A proxy 'WARM estimate' of life satisfaction, which uses British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data to construct an indicator of levels of individual life satisfaction in areas with similar demographic profiles, to predict likely levels of life satisfaction where no primary data exists.

The second stage measures resilience, by creating a map of assets and vulnerabilities in the community. Accurately identifying the assets - for example social capital - and the vulnerabilities - for example social isolation - helps estimate the capacity of a community to withstand shock and pinpoint where support should be targeted.

The third stage is a benchmarking process. We use national and local authority wide data to draw out local trends in life satisfaction. Applying a benchmark helps:

- Distinguish between community-level and wider trends. It is important to disentangle what is happening at the very local level from broader trends across a local authority area, a region, or even nationally
- Identify which members of the community are vulnerable and why, and those who are not vulnerable
- Make a realistic assessment of what local interventions can and cannot achieve

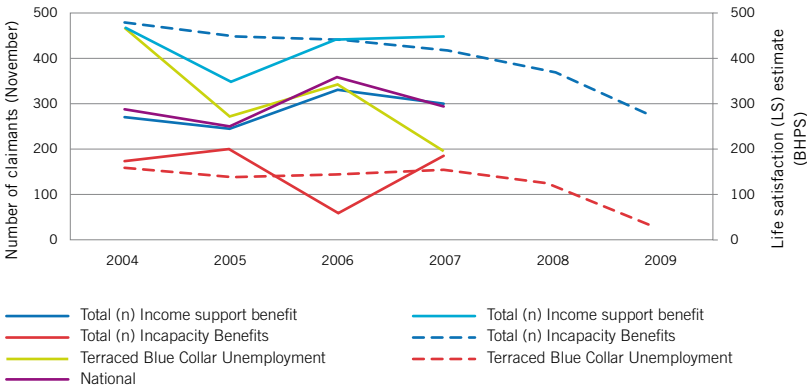
There are two parts to this stage. First, we have compared data at a local level with data drawn from local authority level to identify differences in wellbeing. Second, we have used data drawn from BHPS, the same starting point as the

WARM estimate of life satisfaction. We have used the BHPS data to estimate how communities with similar demographic profiles fare across selected variables (for example, employment, retirement) that correlate with life satisfaction. We have used BHPS data to present all the variables on the same scale by standardising all averages as a proportion of the national total.

The fourth and fifth stages are about planning and action, working with communities, commissioners, and partnerships to look at where interventions are needed and then creating or redesigning local services. We did not go as far as stages four and five in this piece of work, as it was designed as a research project looking at community resilience rather than a commission from service deliverers. The WARM analysis for Nechells and Shard End is presented on the next two pages.

## Box 4: Nechells WARM Analysis

### Stage 1: How has Nechells fared?



Satisfaction with life: Life satisfaction is lower than the Birmingham average. Estimated level of life satisfaction suggests most prevalent group – Asian communities unemployed – have lowest level of life satisfaction in the area.

### Stage 2: Measure assets & vulnerabilities

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Self                   | EDUCATION<br>HEALTH<br>MATERIAL WELLBEING   |
| Supports               | STRONG & STABLE FAMILIES  |
| Systems and structures | LOCAL ECONOMY<br>PUBLIC SERVICES<br>CRIME & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR<br>INFRASTRUCTURE & BELONGING |

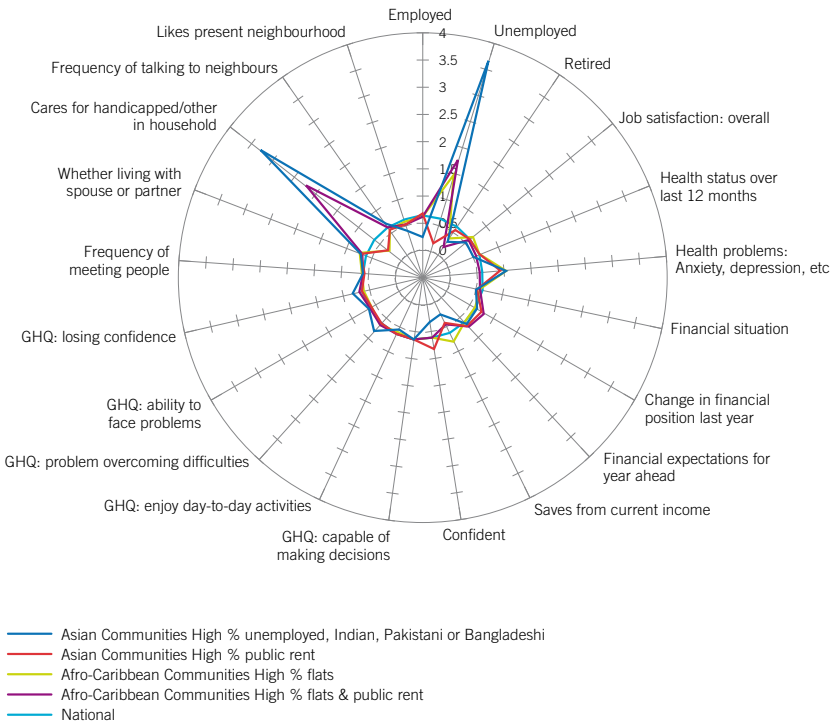
**Main assets**

- General good health and low anxiety/depression score
- High level of participation in tenants organisations and local crime prevention initiatives

**Main vulnerabilities**

- High proportion of people with low or no qualifications and low post 16 participation
- High claimant count and long term unemployed
- Lone parents and carers
- High levels of ASB
- Low sense of belonging

### Stage 3: Benchmark Nechells against national trends



## Stage 4: Understand and plan

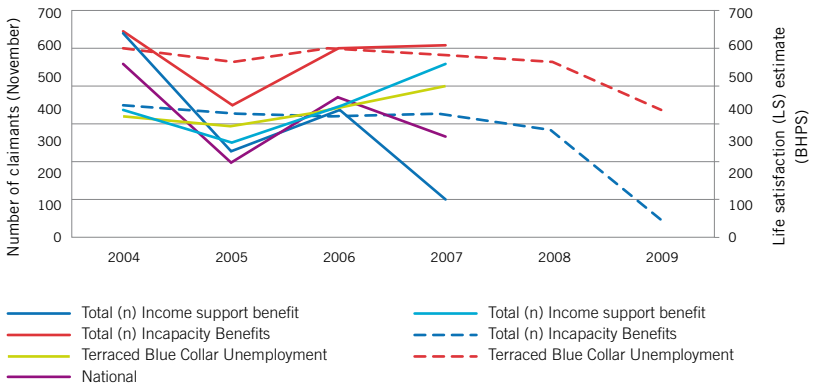
There are differences in the way that different segments of the community are faring. Asian communities have seen a decrease in life satisfaction. In contrast Afro-Caribbean communities have experienced improvements in their life satisfaction. The main group in this community – Asian communities – are estimated to experience high unemployment and are likely to care for a member of their family. Also, we estimate that levels of poor health and anxiety are comparatively poorer. This cohort are also less likely to ‘like their present neighbourhood’. All factors that contribute to low levels of life satisfaction. In contrast, according to our estimates, Afro-Caribbean communities fare better in terms of unemployment rates and health problems, particularly anxiety and depression.

### **Main priorities and how they can be addressed:**

- There is a high claimant count in this ward and our estimates suggest that Asian communities are most likely to be unemployed. The local economy does not have the capacity to absorb workers – given the high number of vacancies in this ward. This community also has a low rate of saving, making it particularly vulnerable to financial shocks.
- There is low post 16 participation and high proportion of residents have low or no qualifications. Asian communities (as well as Afro-Caribbean communities that live in social housing) are more likely to have caring responsibilities, which are associated with lower levels of wellbeing. This community is also marginally less likely to meet people frequently, which suggests residents feel isolated. This community is similarly likely to experience depression and anxiety. Satisfaction in public services and lack of sense of belonging may restrict capacity to moderate feelings of isolation and anxiety.

# Box 5: Shard End WARM analysis

## Stage 1: How has Shard End fared?



Satisfaction with life: Estimated level of life satisfaction suggests blue collar workers fare better than older residents and those from minority ethnic communities.

## Stage 2: Measure assets & vulnerabilities

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Self                   | <b>EDUCATION</b><br><b>HEALTH</b><br><b>MATERIAL WELLBEING</b>  |
| Supports               | <b>STRONG &amp; STABLE FAMILIES</b>   |
| Systems and structures | <b>LOCAL ECONOMY</b><br><b>PUBLIC SERVICES</b><br><b>CRIME &amp; ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR</b><br><b>INFRASTRUCTURE &amp; BELONGING</b> |

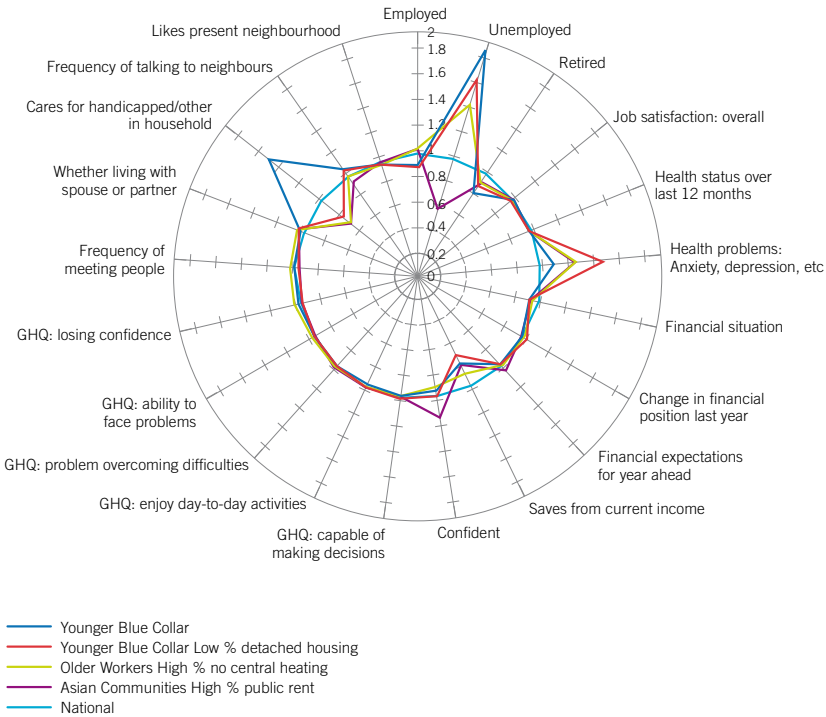
### Main assets

- Low number of carers
- High level of participation in local decision making bodies focused on crime
- Good level of satisfaction with GP's
- Comparatively low level of crime – including ASB

### Main vulnerabilities

- Poor performance at GCSE and low level participation post 16
- High proportion of people have disabilities and long term illness but poor mental health score
- High number of people aged 50+ on benefits
- High proportion of single pensioner households
- Low number of vacancies in the area

### Stage 3: Benchmark Shard End against national trends



### Stage 4: Understand and plan

The estimates of life satisfaction show improved levels of life satisfaction amongst blue collar workers. In contrast, Asian communities and older workers fare less well.

Younger blue collar workers are the most likely to experience unemployment, but the least likely to experience anxiety and depression. Though there are comparatively few carers in the ward, younger blue collar residents are most likely to have caring responsibilities.

The majority of output areas in this ward are formed of older workers. This will present some challenge given the comparatively large proportion of people aged 50+ who are claimants. Similarly, older workers experience the least confidence.

Older people may face isolation given the large proportion of single pension households in this ward.

### The priorities and how they can be addressed:

- There is low attainment and post 16 participation in education and skills but potentially limited capacity in FE college.
- There are high levels of unemployment but limited capacity to absorb unemployed workers.
- Poor mental health outcomes could be reduced by targeted provision building on the high levels of satisfaction with GP provision.
- Isolation of older people could be addressed by the strong social networks.

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## What the people say

The statistical analysis shows that the communities living in both Shard End and Nechells are vulnerable. However, we were keen to complement the statistics with the lived experiences of local residents. During our interviews we asked them what they thought about the communities they live in.

The high levels of worklessness and unemployment dominated residents' description of both Nechells and Shard End. They had little doubt that the changes to Birmingham's economy since the 1980s have damaged the prospects and lives of people living in the areas. In Shard End one of the male residents we interviewed described the impact of many of the factories closing, especially those associated with the car industry:

*“The closures created a lost generation of people who never worked. There was no support for getting people into work. Unemployment was so widespread that there was nobody to question the young people’s attitudes towards work and lack of aspiration ....With Leyland DAF going down and Land Rover not taking people on, it can’t be good. Job prospects are very low. ASBOs are common. There’s not enough for people to do. The lads around here have no prospects, there are no other options. In the last year, five of the most boisterous lads have signed up. The army is a way out for young lads and pregnancy seems to be a way out for the ladies.”*

One of the women we spoke to in Nechells described the high levels of unemployment as causing trauma and having a corrosive impact on the whole community:

*“We have gone from thriving, vibrant community – an area with working class people, with a strong work ethic. People were working here and they had pride and a working class ethic but that really has changed. What has*

*happened is a vicious circle where one generation of people not working passes it on to the next. It's very difficult to get that back."*

These sentiments about the area changing for the worse were shared by one of the members of a local resident group in Shard End.

*"When the estate was built it was a modern, attractive and fantastic place to live, with a new shopping mall and a car park built there. If you got a house there, you were one of the privileged few. Now though it's full of problems – rough problem families get sent there"*

While residents in both communities felt that Birmingham's move away from its manufacturing base has been hugely damaging to the lives of people living there, they also feel that their communities have not been able to make the most of the opportunities offered by the rapid growth of the service economy in the city. One of the leaders of a community organisation in Nechells was frustrated that although the area is close to many of the new shopping centres and leisure facilities being built in the centre of Birmingham, very few local people are being employed.

*"All this development taking place on our doorstep but we are not part of it. I want to know why my community can't get jobs there. Why are we excluded? Why are we not benefiting when everyone knows that our area has very high unemployment? Of course we are consulted and all the right boxes are ticked. But no one knows what it feels like to be long term unemployed? Who really listens?"*

People talk about feeling 'forgotten' with decades of economic growth and the benefits of regeneration bypassing the communities. Residents describe feeling excluded and not involved. A member of staff in one of the voluntary sector organisations in Nechells said citizens were excluded from local decisions.

*"Decisions are being made about housing, new developments, employment in the area and we are not part of that decision making process. We are barely aware it is happening"*

There is a heightened awareness that those outside have very negative perceptions which are disempowering. Certain areas are admittedly deprived and got a name for petty crime, but these negative perceptions fail to take into account anything positive.

*"I don't think people think about us at all. I don't think people would know this place existed. It probably does not conjure up a good picture for people. Sometimes I don't admit to coming from Shard End."*



*“When you go elsewhere and talk to people there is this perception that the area they think crime, drug problems, alcohol problems etc. But the reality is not all about that. There is more to the place. People who live here do not want to move out of the area, there is a real sense of community and identity.”*

The frustration at these negative labels is evident. Many people say that it is not representative of the majority of people in the area but once an area gets bad name such stigma can further limit the opportunities and life chances of households living within it.

*“I imagine people think it is a dreadful place. The name is synonymous with a sink estate where they would not want to walk at night. But that’s just not the case; most people in Shard End are decent people. But it has got that reputation.”*

The changing economy in the area has clearly had a major impact on the people living in the two communities. The loss of the jobs and the changes in the labour market has resulted in a widespread loss of confidence and hope in the communities. One resident described the situation as a “spiral of decline”, which the communities are struggling to get out of.

Building levels of resilience in a community is key to halting this downward spiral. In the next section we look in detail at what can make a community resilient and then we go on to look at how these factors can be enhanced and increased.

# 4 What makes a community resilient?

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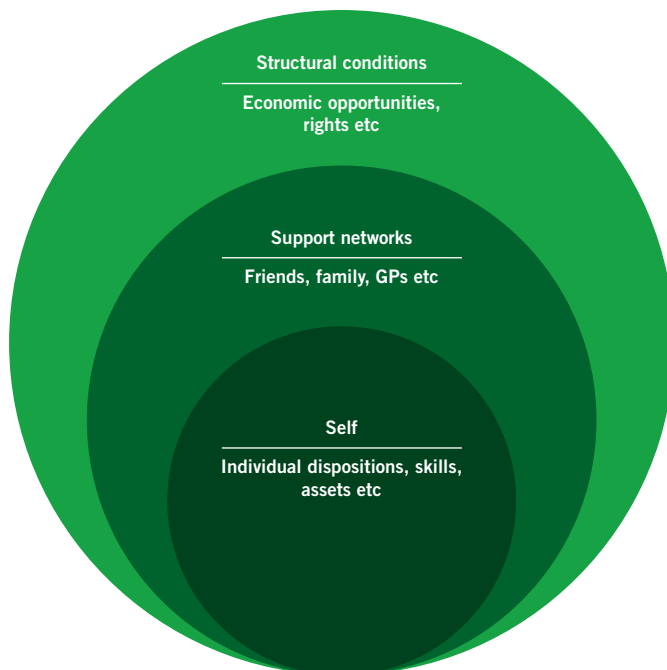
It's a very old community, with people that have lived here for four or five different generations. It's a little community. I moved here for my wife who is from here and she wanted to be near her family.

— Interviewee in Shard End

By focusing on *community* resilience we emphasise the important role of the community both as geographical territory and as an emotional attachment to a place, in understanding resilience. As we have seen, whether or not individuals are resilient will depend not only on personal attributes and skills, but also on the resilience of the community. This includes the nature of relationships between citizens and neighbours, local authorities, housing associations, voluntary groups and will have a profound impact on quality of life and the capacity of the community to contribute to positive social change. These contexts are internal and external to the community and raise the importance particularly for deprived communities, of the institutional context in which they are embedded. A community can both facilitate and constrain resilience, and it can be an agent for change in and of itself.

Much of the negativity and pessimism expressed by the people we spoke to in Nechells and Shard End was directly related to macro economic context: the structural conditions in which they live. Such structural conditions are usually beyond the control of local communities, and sometimes out of the hands of local government. The residents of Shard End and Nechells are not in a position to reverse the decline of the heavy manufacturing industries in the West Midlands. However, these structural conditions are not the only level at which needs are met. People's ability to meet their needs is influenced by factors at three different levels and the structural conditions are the broadest level (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: The three levels which influence people's ability to meet their needs**



Individuals and communities – like many of those we spoke to in Nechells and Shard End – often feel powerless to influence the first level. However, there is much more potential for intervention and action at the second and third level.

The second level is that of support networks: the friends, family members, people in the community, such as GPs or religious leaders, who can offer support and assistance. The third level is that of the self: the individual's skills and assets as well as attitudes and dispositions. These can make a big difference to people's life chances as well as how they cope with a shock, change or crisis. Support networks also play an important part in building resilience in a community. If large numbers of people within a community have the skills, knowledge to adapt and have savings, low levels of debt and so on, then that community is going to be in a better position to respond to change than a community that lacks these individual assets and resources.

In terms of practical action, this would direct local people and agencies to target, create and support networks – through social relationships as well as public agencies and voluntary sector groups – in particular communities. Similarly, individual skills can be taught and encouraged, people's abilities and confidence can be nurtured and developed and people's outlook can be changed.

## Community Resources

In Nechells and Shard End, there was a widespread preoccupation with economic problems. However, it also became clear that financial resources were not the only factor which contributed to the level of resilience in an area. Clearly, economic resources are important, but they are one of many factors. The discussions we had shed light on an array of different resources that communities can draw upon to respond to change including the skills, abilities and relationships of the people themselves as well as physical infrastructure such as buildings and transport.

Communities need to draw on their social, cultural, human, political, physical resources to build and improve resilience (see Figure 3). Community resources are dynamic; they can be depleted and destroyed but they can also be developed and expanded. Their development contributes to a community's capacity not only to respond to stress and crises but also to take advantage of opportunities.

Community resilience is facilitated through identifying, developing and engaging diverse resources. Citizens can serve as active agents in the development of wider local resilience and can collectively and strategically engage these resources to respond to change.

**Figure 3: Resources communities can draw upon.**



|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Natural resources</b>   | The geography of an area – including where it is (isolated or well-connected), the open space, physical features (lakes, rivers etc.).  |
| <b>Built resources</b>     | The housing stock, public buildings, transport infrastructure etc. which exist in a community.  |
| <b>Financial resources</b> | The financial resources available to invest in community capacity-building, to underwrite the development of businesses, to support civic and social entrepreneurship, and to accumulate wealth for future community development.   |
| <b>Cultural resources</b>  | The way people “know the world” and how they act within it. Cultural capital influences what voices are heard and listened to, which voices have influence in what areas, and how creativity, innovation, and influence emerge and are nurtured.                          |
| <b>Political resources</b> | Political resources refer to the access to power, organizations, connection to resources and power brokers. Political capital also refers to the ability of people to find their own voice and to engage in actions that contribute to the well being of their community. |

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**Human resources** Human resources include the skills and abilities of people to develop and enhance their resources and to access outside resources and bodies of knowledge in order to increase their understanding, identify promising practices, and to access data for community-building. Human capital addresses the leadership's ability to "lead across differences," to focus on assets, to be inclusive and participatory, and to act proactively in shaping the future of the community or group.

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**Social resources** Social resources, or social capital, are the connections among people and organizations or the social "glue" to make things, positive or negative, happen.

## Physical infrastructure and the environment

In Nechells and Shard End, both the natural and built resources of the physical environment were frequently referred to in our discussions. The physical geography of both areas was perceived to offer opportunities to the people living there, but also to contribute to some of the problems.

Nechells is a central ward and has much easier access to the amenities and opportunities of Birmingham City Centre. However, it is very build up and lacks open space. Shard End, on the other hand, is situated on the outer edge of the city and residents complain that they feel cut off from the rest of the city. At the same time Shard End has much more open space with less dense housing as well as woods and the river. A number of people we spoke to commented that they did not feel that community was taking full advantage of these resources that were right on their doorsteps.

Residents in both communities complained that the geography and physical infrastructure compounds the fragmentation of groups within the area, cutting people off and causing divisions within the community. Such spatial segregation, coupled with a lack of public transport provision creates feelings of isolation, with distance constituting a physical and mental barrier. One resident commented that Shard End was physically cut off from regional job opportunities, but also was internally divided.

*"Cause a lot of jobs, you need to have a car to get there. It's a social barrier and a barrier to employment. People from Tilecross can't even get here 'cause there is no transport. If we call a meeting over there people can't get there."*

Residents in Shard End spoke about how the lack of buses to the community centre meant that they could not attend meetings or take up opportunities to get involved.

*“We have a geographic problem in this ward, the river cuts it in two and the buses do not help. Tilecross is still in our ward, but the Tilecross people, listening to them, do not feel part of the community, they don't have libraries they don't have a community centre. The bus does not go between the two places. The more that we do to include them though, the more they raise the cut-off banner, they are not really willing to meet us half way. Getting Tilecross people to come here and be board members is very difficult”*

Physical barriers within communities were also a concern in Nechells as one community worker and another resident outlined to us.

*“Nechells is divided into three distinct areas and has been distinct by the Heartland Cooperation who decided to pull down old flats, make it look busy and build two stonking great motorways through it. So now people do not need to come into Nechells anymore. People drive around. Now it's divided, north Nechells, Bloomsbury, Duddlestone and Vauxhall. So people become a lot more territorial and if they want go from A to B or B to C they have to cross a dual carriageway.”*

*“People that live in this end, it was always seen as the posh end but you talk to families in other areas and they find out that I live down here they say ‘oh well you live in the rough bit’. Now actually people down there think that's the rough bit, these perceptions are all about what people hear of the places. People outside of Nechells have a negative image of the place, you tell people where you live and you can see it in their face, it changes into one of fear and horror. ‘Oh I went through there and lived once.”*

Spatial segregation is a concern because of the severe limitations it places on quality of life. There is clearly a relationship between spatial segregation and social exclusion; the physical and social mobility of residents is affected. It has real consequences for people's lives and their ability to participate and integrate in their community.

## Social capital

Physical infrastructure and built environment are important factors that contribute to a community's resilience. However, we found social capital to be the most critical aspect of community resilience. Human resources (people's skills, expertise, and leadership ), political resources (how well connected people are to

power, organisations and government) and, most importantly, social relationships between people, are what allows communities to thrive.

Social capital in its broadest sense gets to the core of how a community functions; how people in a community get along with each other, including questions of trust and understanding; how people in the community collaborate and work together (involving questions of collective efficacy); what links exist between people, organisations and institutions within a community as well as links with people, organisations and institutions in wider society.

Social capital is at the centre of any understanding of community process and change. It can bring together the other types of resource, such as individual human capital, it can coordinate groups, facilitating political mobilisation, it can network people in into flows of political power and influence, and it can tap into financial resources that can be used for the development of further human capital.

Although social capital is a key component in building community resilience, our research showed that it is not the case that a close-knit community is necessarily a resilient one. Residents in both Nechells and Shard End described a strong sense of community and belonging as very important, saying that it gives support, strength and identity. Many people have lived in the area for a long period of time and they talk of the importance of family and close friends who live nearby. High levels of trust and dependence have been built up over generations and this was highly valued. As one interviewee in Shard End told us:

*“It’s a very old community, with people that have lived here for four or five different generations. It’s a little community. I moved here for my wife who is from here and she wanted to be near her family.”*

Another described a very close-knit local community:

*“In the area, or part I live, on my road I am very lucky because its very family oriented. There are no trouble causers on my road. Mums and dads with children, and the kids are not causing trouble; they do as they are told. Someone will take a delivery for you, keep an eye on out if you are away, take care of the garden.”*

This closeness and mutual support at first glance appears perfect; exactly what one desires from a community. There are strong relationships with neighbours and family members, all of whom can look after each other in times of crisis. These support networks are important. However, this form of social capital, known as ‘bonding capital’ might seem to provide a sense of stability through adverse situations, on its own it can be potentially harmful. American sociologist Mark Granovetter argues that an overdependence on these strong social ties in a community can inhibit the ability of a community to work together. The strong



ties reduce the individual's and a community's capability to develop, innovate and flourish through change.<sup>17</sup>

In Shard End we found that these strong ties between families and old neighbours made it hard for new residents to integrate and feel part of the community. Residents themselves are aware that it can be hard for people newcomers to integrate and gain trust. Their descriptions paint a picture on the one hand, of small pockets of the community tightly bound together but on the other hand, of fragmentation between people living in the same neighbourhood:

*“There is not much interaction with people who are new, you're happy to keep them at an arms distance. The forty houses on my road, they all know each other, we can all say hello to each other. Everybody interacts with each other but that's because we know each other for the last 20 odd years.”*

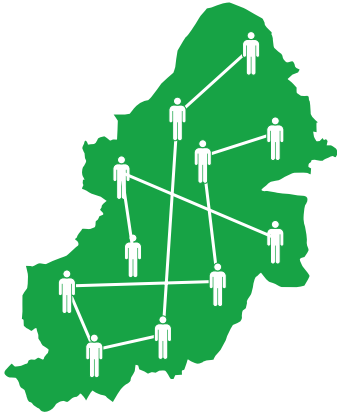
*“You know who you can trust, if someone was loyal to you 20 years ago you remember it and that's still around. Trust has to be gained over a 20-30 year period because people don't move out of the area, that trust is built up and if you don't have that trust you are not really part of the community. It's very hard for people to move into the area, maybe impossible as there are no houses in Shard End for sale, they are passed from family to family.”*

*“It's like being a part of a culture. I moved in with my wife and have become part of a big family. When someone moves in they might talk to them and they might pass the time of the day, but you don't trust people until you have known them for 20 years in Shard End. It's an old community and new comers beware.”*

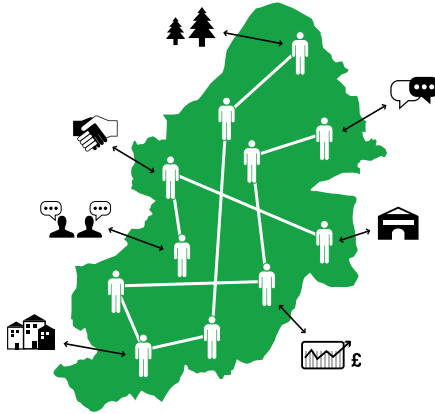
It clearly takes time to be accepted as a member of the community and these comments highlights fragmentation; groups of people living in the same area not interacting. This can lead to tensions and conflict between different groups within the community.

Over dependence on these strong bonding ties between similar individuals with a social group will result in strong survival resilience, but will impair adaptive resilience. One young man we interviewed described his difficulties in getting a job because everyone he knew was out of work. This contrasted with the experiences of another who explained that when his was made redundant, a friend of a friend in other town had heard of a job going elsewhere. He applied and was successful. Weaker bridging and linking ties between people from different backgrounds are important. Granovetter refers to this as the strength of weak ties.<sup>18</sup>

## Survival resilience



## Adaptive resilience



These weaker relationships that extend beyond the community can link people and communities at much broader levels. By providing the channels through which ideas, influences, or information flow, weak ties can be manipulated and used by individuals to tap into resources, such as knowledge, finance and power, in order to better attain their goals, such as improved housing, better job prospects, more community activities and environmental sustainability.

One of the consequences of the lack of these weaker ties stretching out beyond the community is that problems and tensions can go unnoticed or unobserved by others until they build up into a real crisis. Such communities can lack a voice and can appear invisible to policy makers and decision makers. It is important, therefore, not to ignore the quiet areas. While these areas may appear to be coping, if they lack the links to outsiders all sorts of problems can build up and become much harder to address.

# 5 The role of the voluntary sector

“ There is a huge drive in this community to the work hard for the community.

We have looked at what makes a community resilient, focusing on the importance of social capital in bonding and bridging a communities internally and externally. Successful social capital can be a spring-board for more systemic positive change, that can in turn engender the accumulation of various other important capitals that together may make a community more resilient.

Of course, actually facilitating this process can prove to be a more complicated challenge. In this section we look to the actual, and potential, role that the voluntary sector can play in promoting resilience in communities, focusing again on the importance of social networks and ties.

Understanding this potential is difficult for two reasons. First, the nature of voluntary sector is diffuse and nebulous. Unlike the public sector, the voluntary sector is not a centralised body with any sense of coherent form. Rather, it is comprised of a diverse set of organisations, ranging from large scale global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Oxfam, World Vision and Amnesty International, to very localised ‘below the radar’ organisations, run out of people’s homes in their spare time. Second, quality research on the voluntary sector is still a relatively emergent phenomenon, and specific studies assessing what it can do to promote community resilience are scarce.

## The voluntary sector in Nechells and Shard End

There is a considerable difference between the levels of voluntary sector activity in Nechells and Shard End. The voluntary sector in Nechells is much larger, with many more well-established organisations serving the community. In Shard End, there are far fewer organisations and those that are there are much less well-known. In fact, when we were discussing this research with officials from the city council and health authorities, very few could name any examples of voluntary sector organisations in Shard End. However, through our research we came across many informal civil society activity operating ‘below the radar’: groups that are not registered with the charity commission, do not have a permanent base and often lack stable funding. We came across a number of residents associations, activities run for elderly people and a diabetes support group. None were officially registered or recognised as being part of the formal voluntary sector. When asked about what is going on in the area many residents mentioned the informal activity before mentioning the more established organisations.

*“There is the drama club at Stars Centre, Boys Club, Sea Cadets, Community Centre. There is the diabetes support group and the local history group... There is a pensioners group, for a small area, and it is managed by a women who works so hard to make sure no people in the area are left out. It’s not very formal, but she organizes, you know, trips up*

*to Blackpool and that sort of thing. And a group will say yes and the coach is paid for."*

There are various reasons behind the difference in the two areas. Voluntary sector infrastructure is far more established in city centre areas compared to newer areas like Shard End. Central Birmingham has had a long history and tradition of voluntary sector activity and Nechells, being a central ward, has benefited from this influence.

In Nechells the voluntary sector was very much part and parcel of the social infrastructure of the area. Nechells Baths (see Box 7) is a community hub. The building has recently been regenerated and hosts numerous organisations, and offers space to others to run activities. There are numerous refugee community organisations based in the local authority-run Wardlow Road Refugee Centre. The manager of the Bloomsbury Children's Centre lives and works in the area and she says this influences one's approach.

*"This gives you a different perspective. You are doing it because it is your community, you live here, go to school in the area and you are thinking how you can make it a better place for them. It is different if you just come into the area from 9 until 5 and then leave to go somewhere else. You don't have the same attachment and it makes a difference to what you do. When you are connected at the ground level you know what the problems are and what the needs are. You understand people. My kids have come to this nursery, my sisters kids and my neighbours kids."*

In Nechells there appears to be a well co-ordinated organised formal community sector. Voluntary groups are plentiful and many take a professionalised approach to their work. At very least, groups seem to have a good knowledge of what other groups are doing. We came across quite a few examples of groups working closely with each other and collaborating often based on strong relationships between staff members.

## **Building social capital**

When we spoke to those involved in the voluntary sector in both Nechells and Shard End the most important point to emerge was the strength of the relationship with the residents in the community. Almost everyone we spoke to, whether they worked within the sector or whether they were just occasionally involved in voluntary sector activity, spoke about the quality of the relationship with the community as being vital in building resilience. Those who work in the voluntary sector self-consciously distinguish themselves from the statutory sector by these relationships and especially when talking about their work with vulnerable or hard to reach groups:

*“NEETS, young offenders, asylum seekers have been let down by so many agencies and by so many people. They are often dealing with several different agencies and individuals but nobody is engaging with them at a personal level. They are being pushed through a system that is rigid and target focused.”*

Trust came up time and time again. The people we spoke with in Nechells and Shard End differentiate themselves from the statutory sector, emphasising that they are interested in people and interested in the community and say this means they will put the extra – often unpaid – effort in. This relationship between service and community builds trust.

*“They feel like they can come and ask for advice, even when the children have grown up. We had refugees that have been moved from the area and they walk all the way back to us because they haven't been able to afford transport. One lady did that when she wasn't sure about enrolling her son in secondary school or how to even go about doing this”.*

The passion, commitment and energy of the voluntary sector cannot be underestimated. People are willing to work hard and put in time, above and beyond what is necessary.

*“There is a huge drive in this community to the work hard for the community”.*

#### **Box 6: Ben, Youth Worker, working with Neets**

Ben is 28 years old and currently working on a small project with 11 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), trying to re-engage them and help them on the path to employment. As a young person, growing up nearby Ben had been very much involved in his local youth group and sees it as a formative part of growing up. His experience of being part of a youth group influenced his decision to become a youth worker. After going to university and spending a year working in IT he still remained involved in his local youth group. He says he could really see the impact this was having within his community and wanted to contribute more.

A career change followed and Ben found himself a job working with the Local Youth Reoffending Team. He found this experience deeply frustrating. His experience there led him to believe that the individual needs of these young people were not being catered for and many were falling through the cracks in the system: “There were so many people dealing with these young people that nobody was actually taking responsibility.”

Ben felt many his colleagues were more focused on their own careers than the young people they were meant to help, and that often vulnerable young people get lost in the bureaucracy: “A lot of what happens is exercise in form- filling and box ticking. It’s dehumanising.” Frustrated and disillusioned, he decided to change to the voluntary sector. He has found the experience much more fulfilling and believes the impact he is having on the lives of the young is much more real and tangible.

Many of the young people simply don’t know what it is like to have positive relationship with an adult. Much of his work involves building that kind of relationship with the young people and helping them to engage and trust again. He can now give them the time and the personal attention they need. This type of work is time-consuming, frustrating and challenging but ultimately can be quite rewarding. He says building long-term sustainable relationships is the most important aspect of what he does: ‘If these kids trust you, if they believe what you say then they will make an effort to work with you. If that trust isn’t there then forget it.’

## Raising Aspirations

Investing in human capital requires a long-term vision but it can pay off. Lack of ambition and poverty of aspirations are known to have a devastating effect on communities like Nechells and Shard End. Many of the voluntary organisations involved in this research see their role as encompassing showing young people what is possible and what can be done. It is clear that they see broadening people’s horizons, raising aspirations and skills development as central to their work.

Nechells and Shard End suffer from high levels of worklessness and the voluntary sector plays a key role tackling this problem, offering skills development and support. The importance of local information in finding out about job and training opportunities is widely acknowledged. Where few people in an area have jobs, this has an impact on the likelihood of obtaining information about work and the voluntary sector can often go some way to filling this gap.

In both communities there are high numbers of people who are out of work and this affects more than just the economy. It impacts what people think is possible and their motivation:

*“You can’t change people’s attitudes. There’s no work ethic. Kids around here are being brought up without it.”*

Staff at the Bloomsbury Children’s Centre see their role very much as providing opportunities to the whole community:

*“It’s about getting people to recognize that they can do things and that they have skills. The volunteers have trained and they get certificates. It was the first time they ever got a certificate and it means a lot”*

One of the girls on work experience at the nursery had been attending when she was three years old. Two of the volunteers are mothers themselves and had children in their teenage years. They never worked but have raised a family and they have skills and abilities but not the confidence to use them:

*“I was never good at school. I just couldn’t believe that it would all fall into place like this”.*

Sasha, a hairdresser in Shard End was inspired to go college by a Connexions youth worker who was based at the local boys club. She then got work at the hair salon, which she heard about through a friend. She is a good example of the right connections between the voluntary sector, the local economy and the statutory sector helping someone into training and employment. Unfortunately Sasha’s story is not the norm.

But no matter what efforts the voluntary sector makes to tackle worklessness, whether through signposting, skills development and training or job creation, it cannot solve the problem alone if there are simply no jobs. At a time of economic downturn and high unemployment, jobs are hard for anyone to come by and some of the youth workers in the area commented on the fact that even when the aspirations are there, they may be constrained by circumstances.

*“You have those who aspire, who want to go on but where are they supposed to when the opportunities just aren’t there. Not anymore they aren’t”*

And even for those with high aspirations the backdrop of the recession is having a detrimental impact as a local youth worker in Nechells explains:

*“One lad qualified for a degree in graphic design, but can’t get a job. Another young lady has a degree in videos, movies and CGI and she can’t get a job. We have two lads who went to Uni in North Wales to do a diploma in music production and they can’t get jobs either. There are people with ability but if the jobs aren’t there, the jobs aren’t there.”*



**Box 7: Nechells Baths: Alchemy of people and place**

Nechells Baths, which was constructed in 1902, like many amenities from the period, was closed during last century, unable to compete with the new, modern leisure centres. Many towns and cities still have their own ‘baths’ or ‘lidos’, some still in operation, but most disused.

The Baths closed to the public in 1995 and fell into major disrepair. Following a £5.5 million refurbishment, with funding from Advantage West Midlands, the Heritage Lottery Fund and ERDF this former public liability was restored to its former glory, not as baths, but as a much needed community facility. Work began in late 2002 and has included retaining the pool area but covering it with a floor to create office space, converting the former viewing gallery into mezzanine-style offices and converting the men’s changing rooms into more offices.

For years the area had not had a community centre. The refurbished building, which is owned by the Birmingham Foundation, now provides crèche and nursery facilities, training facilities, a training kitchen, café, internet café, heritage training workshops, as well as office accommodation for several local not for profit community organisations. During the evenings, the facility is home to a host of activities including a youth club, community bingo, and a thriving dance group. It has become a prominent feature in the community:

*“Everyone knows the baths. Many come to take part in the various activities, use the credit union and come to the café. There are neighbourhood managers in the building. We have time for everyone and everyone is listened to. Before the baths regeneration people felt that Nechells was forgotten. That nothing was happening in Nechells. The projects and activities in the centre made a big difference to how people feel about living in the area. It was like a light on, a new door open to opportunities.”*

The project is as much an investment in infrastructure and the built environment as it is an investment in people; that is in human, social and cultural capital. The buildings story highlights the transformation and show what can happen when groups work together. The building serves a hub and central node. It fosters relationship within the community but also links the community to outside channels and resources. The whole regeneration effort has made people feel about their area. It has put Nechells on the map and has proved to be an important conduit channelling resources (particularly financial and political capital):

*“Before the baths people felt that Nechells was forgotten. There was nothing happening in Nechells. The centre made a big difference to how people feel about living in the area. It was like a light being switched on and a new door open to opportunities”*

## Community leadership

Those within the community with the vision and capacity to lead play an all important role in developing community resilience. Many of the community leaders we met were very ambitious for their communities, wanted to help achieve positive change and worked tirelessly to make things happen. Most of them know their communities intimately and have extensive networks within the community, having lived and worked there all their lives. They realise that cultivating the right relationships is key part of their job.

*“Networking is a really important part of my job. I walk the streets meeting people. I have to get out of the office. I need to see what is going on, to understand.”*

On a walk around Nechells with the manager of the community centre and it is clear the manager of the centre knows and understands their neighbourhood very well. She is more than just a community leader but also a community broker, leveraging resources within the community. Everyone knows her and she knows everyone else. Her family has a history of involvement on the community. When they first arrived from Ireland there were signs saying ‘no Irish allowed’ and she has vivid memories of her mother working with Church members to help and support members of the Irish community through difficult times.

Not all leaders are from within the community. Many residents from Shard End spoke about the appointment of new neighbourhood managers who are originally from outside the areas. The most successful leaders also realise the importance of relationships with other stakeholders, with other outside organisations, with the council and other statutory providers. They can channel the voice of the community members to those who are in a position to make change happen.

### **Box 8: Eden Project and Allotments in Shard End**

The site that now hosts the Eden Project and allotments was nothing more than a burnt-out scout hut on land containing more than 130 tonnes of contaminated waste. This two-acre site in Shard End has been turned into an eco project that has helped local children learn more about how to grow fruit and vegetables as well as renewable energy. An old derelict piece of land was identified as an asset and has brought about real transformation in Shard End with schools, voluntary and private sector organisations involved. Investment has come from the local council as well as interested corporate sponsors.

It has already won several awards, including the UK’s Best Green Community Project, a Heart of Birmingham Award and a Green Hero Award. Another boost was a sponsorship of more than £12,000 to create a solar panel roof, which will allow the project to be energy self-sufficient for the next 25 years.

There are further ambitions for development with plans for farmers market to be held in the area. Those involved are linking up with like-minded organisations outside of the area and have been on learning visits to the Eden Project in Cornwall to learn and draw inspiration. As well as the Eden Project an allotment project has been developed in the area. One of the local founding members describes his motivation to get the project off the ground: “Well I looked at the area and it is too small for an allotment, but one thing that does concern me is that school children cannot identify basic vegetables, cause they only ever see processed vegetables, they don't understand the nutritional value of fresh vegetables, so my passion was to get young school children to come along... We have 20 people on the waiting list, hammering to get a plot. The place is beautiful”

The Eden Project is a hive of activity and a real and positive development. It has transformed an area once known for drinking and antisocial behaviour into a safe space for members of the community of all ages and backgrounds can come together to mix and mingle with each other, learn and develop new skills and also to transform the natural environment.

*“The great thing is that it is no longer a divided place from the community, what we have done is open it up to the community. The amount of families now (is nice), young families and women, not just grumpy men now. The place is alive. It's bringing people together. We had a community open day the other day. We had stalls, food, face painting and all of that. We invited the public into the allotments. The allotment has done a tremendous amount in the community, bringing people together. We also had people from another allotment in Shard End come to the open day and they were inspired to do their own too, so we went over and helped them set theirs up and spent the day together. It brings us together. They had been having a lot of social problems there with people coming and using it as a drinking den”*

### **Box 9: Birmingham Community Foundation**

The Birmingham Foundation is a charitable trust set up in 1997 raising funds from businesses and individuals to promote and support local community groups and projects within the area of Greater Birmingham. The foundation creates an important link between businesses in Birmingham who donate funds and local community groups working on the ground.

The foundation is an important conduit of financial resources between business and local community groups. The organisation provides a vital link between these groups and offers a platform and collaboration and has been instrumental in the regeneration of Nechells Baths which now operates as its

base. The foundation works to help local people find local solutions to local problems and on average, the foundation supports nearly 700 groups across Birmingham and the Black Country.

Often the type of grassroots organisations the foundation helps do not have a formal constitution or haven't registered with the Charity Commission. Without legitimacy groups like this often find it hard to access important financial capital in order to develop and grow. The Birmingham Community Foundation has a number of schemes that administer small grants between £250 and £5000. Despite being small, grants such as these can go a long way in a community if used strategically.

We are told of a group of pensioners living in a tower block who got together from time to time to socialise. They applied to the Birmingham Community Foundation and received a small grant of £80 to buy a tea urn. The group began to meet more regularly for tea and then decided to arrange a lunch club. They have since gone from strength to strength with more people attending and contributing.

This example highlights the cumulative effect of an injection of a small amount of financial capital has a cumulative effect on other capitals and has developed social capital and human capital. Importantly it highlights how crucial the links to the private sector are and what a difference such links can make to small grassroots community groups.

Our findings show that community resilience can be encouraged or impeded by the context and structure within which a community operates. The commercial sector, the public sector and the voluntary sector all have a role to play in promoting resilience and it is relationships between these sectors that can ultimately determine a community's resilience. The strength and quality of relationships between these sectors has a part to play. Weak or non-existent connections between these sectors are ultimately disabling for a community. If the right connections are made between all sectors, then all sorts of resources and capital can be mobilised and potential unleashed.

## 6 Building community resilience

“ We Brummies are adaptable. We don't give up. At least we used to be like that. I wonder about things now. A proper Brummie got up and did something. Attitudes have changed.

*“Life constantly throws things at us. Life isn't smooth here for people. But they have learnt to overcome and brace themselves and they move on to the next thing. We get used to things getting thrown us. What I admire about it is that people bounce back, they find a little spark of hope from somewhere.”*

In recent years the concept of community resilience has gained much traction amongst policy makers around the world. However, all too often community resilience is understood as how communities respond to single shock events and plans and procedures are drawn up for how public services and other agencies can cope in such times of emergency.

In this report we have argued for new thinking about community resilience that goes beyond how communities cope with one-off sudden emergencies to how they can manage and adapt to more gradual changes. This becomes more important as communities face increased economic pressures in the short to medium term, but is also pertinent to longer term changes from demographic shifts to the impacts of climactic change.

Our research in Nechells and Shard End in Birmingham highlighted how different resources contribute to building levels of resilience in communities. These resources include the financial assets available to people, the natural resources that are present in an area and the physical infrastructure, such as transport links, public buildings and housing. While these material assets were clearly important in helping shape a community's ability to respond to change, we found that the social relationships that exist in communities to be the most critical aspect of what makes a community resilient or not.

The relationships that exist between different members of a community are important, as people can turn to friends, family and neighbours for support and help. Strong local relationships can provide a good sense of local identity and belonging. However, we found that very close-knit communities are not necessarily the most resilient and not necessarily in the best position to be able to adapt to change.

We argue that where these strong local bonds become overly dominant, a community can become isolated and cut off. This can become problematic in times of difficulty or change. For example, one of the people we interviewed described how everyone he knew had lost their jobs or were unemployed and he did not have the links or connections to people outside his immediate neighbourhood who might provide contacts to find work elsewhere. This contrasted with the experiences of a different interviewee, who was able to find a new job when he had been made redundant through a friend-of-a-friend in other town. These weak ties, or links, are particularly important when thinking about resilience.

Weak ties and relationships that reach beyond one's immediate community are important if communities are to do more than survive during times of crisis. The connections that extend beyond the neighbourhood provide channels through which information and resources can flow in and out of local areas, helping communities adapt to change. We term this 'adaptive resilience.'

The problems and tensions that exist in communities that lack the weaker ties can go unnoticed by others until they build up into significant crisis. Such communities can lack a voice and go unnoticed by policy makers and decision makers. It is therefore important to pay attention to the quiet communities, those in which people are not making a fuss or voicing concerns. Often, problems can be simmering away and unless addressed early can boil over as much more significant events.

Our research found that voluntary sector organisations play an important part in building the social networks and ties (both strong and weak) that are required for a community to be resilient to change and cope with crises. The voluntary sector organisations that we saw in both Nechells and Shard End fulfilled a number of important roles including providing space for people to meet; broadening a community's access to wider networks; providing leverage by linking up services and being able to signpost people to positions of power and authority.

In practical terms our work in Birmingham stopped short of the final stages we set out in our WARM model. However, what seems clear is that when thinking about building community resilience in the long term, both central and local government should consider the five key points below when developing their plans:

### **1. Do not ignore the quiet communities.**

Just because problems are not being voiced does not mean that they do not exist. For example, we were alarmed at the lack of awareness of the issues and activities that were going on in Shard End. As one public sector official said it was 'off the local authority's radar.' In Nechells there was a far more organised and active voluntary sector and this regularly enabled the community to engage with public officials, councillors and funders. Consequently, all of those we spoke to in authority were aware of many of the issues facing that community and were able to channel resources.

### **2. Develop localised micro funds to seed voluntary sector activity.**

Small amounts of investment can make a big difference and send important signals to communities. They can provide bolster fragile community organisations and can prove important in building up new organisations and community resilience.

### **3. Invest in community leadership.**

Where the voluntary sector activity is absent or weak, activity can be kick started through neighbourhood managers to build up the capacity of community leaders.

**4. Focus on places *and* people.**

Community resilience does require public spaces but it is more than about building a new community centre, you need the people to run them. This means investing in both capital needs and human resources.

**5. Strengthen public and voluntary sector partnerships.**

As cuts impact both public and voluntary sector services, it is more important than ever forge new links and protect existing ones between the sectors. Strengthening community resilience can not be done in a traditional top down way, but neither can communities 'go it alone.' Public and third sector organisations continue to have a vital role.





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**As austerity and recession bite, we are seeing impacts on communities across the country. We face high unemployment – particularly youth unemployment and long term worklessness – and there are growing pressures on family life and household resources. More must be done to alleviate some of the immediate hardships being faced by the most vulnerable in society.**

In this report we argue that resilience can be enhanced in communities. Our research suggests that community resilience is built primarily through relationships, not just between members of the community but also between organisations, specifically between the voluntary sector, the local economy and the public sector.

We identify both the factors that support resilience within communities and act as a barrier. We outline the practical measures that can be taken to bolster community resilience and explore how local and national governments, as well as communities themselves, can evaluate resilience.

