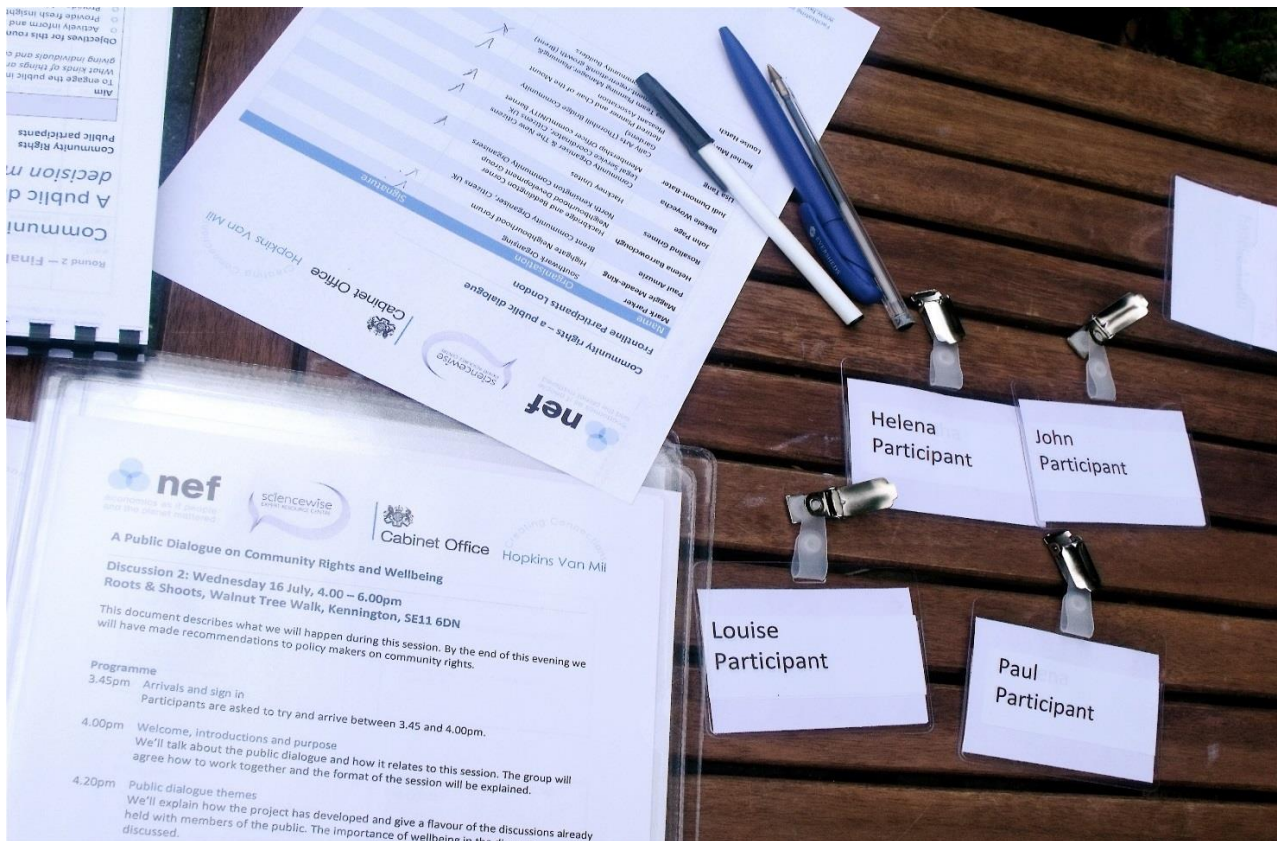# Embedding wellbeing science in policy making

A public dialogue process

Appendix 1: Dialogue findings

Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd
November 2014

Contents

Introduction to the dialogue process

This appendix gives more explanation of the dialogue process, and outlines the findings of each of the dialogues in more detail. It was prepared independently by Hopkins van Mil.

[Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections](#) (HVM) led on the design and facilitation of the dialogue process. HVM is about engagement to gain insight. As expert dialogue facilitators the team creates safe, neutral and productive spaces in which to access people's views on the content that matters to them. HVM bridges the gap between policy- and decision-making and the views of communities and members of the public for whom policies and decisions are made. HVM and associates work flexibly and build trust using best practice guidance including [Sciencewise-ERC principles](#)[1].

Public dialogue collaborators

Although responsibility for the delivery and content of the dialogue remained with the New Economics Foundation and HVM, input was gratefully received by the following collaborative team:

- Saamah Abdallah, New Economics Foundations (Well-being Adviser)
- Andrew Acland, Sciencewise-ERC (Dialogue and engagement specialist)
- Adam Coutts, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (Topic specialist – active labour market)
- Steve Harry, Department for Work and Pensions (Policy lead)
- Arianna Haberis, Department for Communities and Local Government (Policy lead)
- Henrietta Hopkins, Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections (Lead facilitator)
- Kate Jopling, Campaign to end loneliness (Topic specialist - loneliness)
- Anita van Mil, Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections (Project manager and facilitator)
- Maria O'Beirne, Department for Communities and Local Government (Policy advisor)
- Lisa Ollerhead, Cabinet Office (Policy advisor, National Well-being)
- Annie Quick, New Economics Foundation (Policy analyst, Centre for Well-being)
- Tracey Robbins, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Topic specialist - loneliness)
- Stephen Rolph, Locality (Topic specialist – community rights)
- Robert Rutherfoord, Department for Communities and Local Government (Policy lead)
- Charles Seaford, New Economics Foundation (Head of the Centre for Well-being)
- Allison Smith, Centre for Social Action, Cabinet Office (Senior policy advisor)
- Tom Tolfree, Department for Communities and Local Government (Senior policy advisor)
- Alice Wilcock, Community Development Foundation (Topic specialist – community rights)
- Nicola Woodward, Social Action Team, Cabinet Office (Policy officer)

For this project the HVM partners Henrietta Hopkins and Anita van Mil worked with associate facilitators Hally Ingram and James Martin-Jones and Administrator Jemima Foxtrot Martin.

Timetable and locations

A project inception meeting was held on 24 February, the first workshop on 6 May and the last on 17 July. The dialogue for each policy area was designed around a three week cycle described further in section 2.

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[1] http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Publications/Guiding-PrinciplesSciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf

The timetable was as follows:
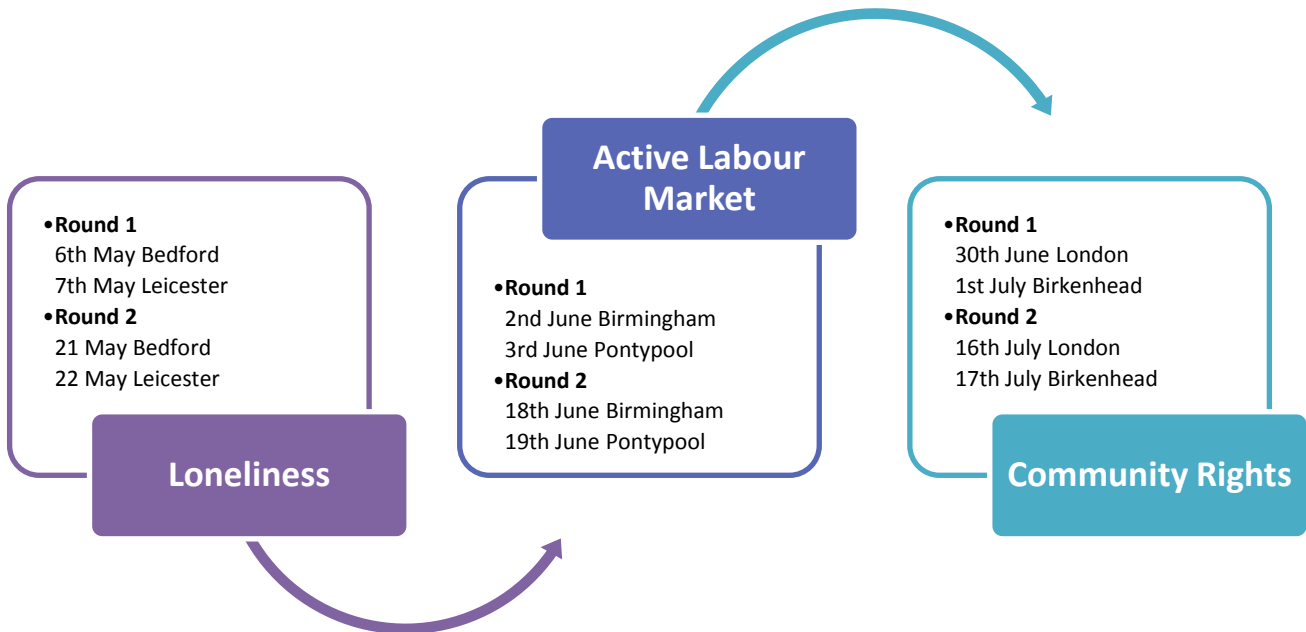
The locations for each of the dialogues were agreed as a result of discussions at the inception meeting – details of these are given in each section below.

Summary methodology

Each policy area for the overarching dialogue was developed around a three week process. The structure allowed for:

- Momentum to build in the discussions with the public;
- Retention of public participants between the two dialogue rounds;
- Policy makers reflecting on participant ideas between the two rounds;
- Flexibility in design to allow for new thinking to emerge.

The final structure is illustrated over the page:

3 week cycle for each policy area

Week 1

- Context setting
- Introduce the policy area & wellbeing science
- Public reflection on and development of policy ideas

1st round dialogue sessions: public participants

Nef, CO, policy leads, topic specialists

- Refine policy proposals
- Undertake research
- HVM to develop a second round process plan

Week 3

2nd round dialogue sessions: public participants

- Testing ideas against professional experience
- Developing recommendations to government

2nd round dialogue sessions & frontline workers

- Testing ideas against further research
- Developing recommendations to government

Week 2

Participants, commissioning organisations, topic specialists and facilitation team to reflect on the process and results of the first round dialogue sessions.

Preparation

HVM worked in close collaboration with NEF and the Cabinet Office to agree the parameters of the dialogue and the detailed design for each workshop. This included agreeing 'help points' and ground rules for the discussion (see online technical annex). In two of the three dialogues (loneliness and community rights) participants were given information in advance on the subject to help them make best use of the workshop time. The Centre for Well-being at NEF worked closely with topic specialists on presentations for each of the policy areas to help participants' understanding of the issues being discussed.

A crucial step in the framework was that policy leads from the relevant government department, the Cabinet Office, NEF and HVM discussed the round 1 findings very quickly after the first workshop set to agree:

- Which of the public's ideas should be taken forward in round 2 because either they were an innovation for the policy area or they were already used but further discussion by the public would add value and identify policy improvements;
- The process plan and pre-materials for round 2 discussions;
- The content for the round 2 presentations.

This research and reflection period also led to the development of a process plan for the discussion with frontline workers which happened just before the round 2 discussion with the public for each policy area.

Recruitment sample

HVM worked with Acumen Fieldwork for independent recruitment of members of the public to participate in each of the dialogues. For this a recruitment screener was devised for each policy area. For all dialogues the specification asked for 50% male and 50% female participants. As with all HVM recruited dialogues

participants were required not to have taken part in a focus group or public dialogue in the last six months. Those recruited for the workshops were asked to commit to attending two sessions. Recruitment and retention rates were high. 137 of the expected 150 participants attended both sessions.
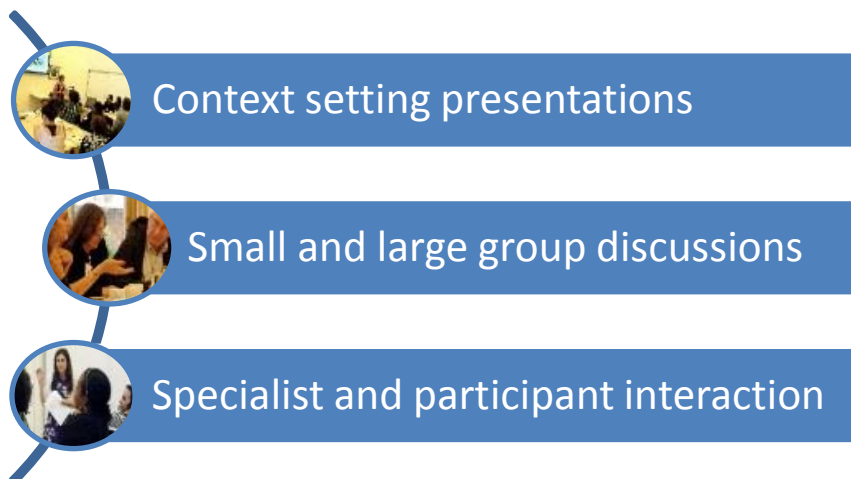
In addition 36 people (3 groups of 12) were recruited by the HVM team to attend the one of three frontline worker workshops held for each policy area. Participants were drawn from organisations who work on implementing existing policies for loneliness, active labour programmes and community rights. The specifications for public and frontline recruitment for each dialogue are described in the online technical annex.

Incentives of £150 were paid for each of the public participants involved in the process. £70 was paid to the majority of frontline worker participants. Department of Work and Pensions employees such as Job Centre Plus staff attended the session as part of their paid employment and were not paid an incentive.

Dialogue process

For each of the dialogue workshops participants were allocated to one of three small discussion groups with 8 or 9 people in each. They stayed with the same group, and the same dedicated HVM facilitator, for rounds 1 and 2. This meant that in each round participants were able to reflect on the issues as individuals, within a smaller group or as a whole group. Sometimes participants discussed the issues with policy or topic specialists where they needed more clarification on a particular aspect of the dialogue, but for the most part the latter were present as observers. The same lead facilitator managed the process for all the dialogue sessions. Consistency in small and whole group facilitation is important to the process. It enables a sense of trust to build up between participants and the facilitation team so that the discussions can tap the rich experience of those taking part. The discussions were guided by facilitators using a detailed process plan (see the online technical annex). The process plans were devised by HVM in collaboration with NEF and in consultation with the Cabinet Office and Sciencewise.

Each of the dialogues ran along similar lines combining:

Context setting presentations

Small and large group discussions

Specialist and participant interaction

Dialogue tools and recording

The team used a number of ways of gaining and recording participant views. These were designed to enable facilitators to engage in meaningful conversations with a public group about the challenges they have experienced or could imagine in relation to each of the policy areas. Individual and group reflection techniques were employed including:

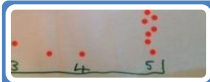|	Post-it note individual / paired reflection to allow considered responses
	Roving ideas storm - sub-groups moving around the room to comment on ideas & build on others'
	views
	Thinking hats - sub-groups taking positive / negative / information gathering roles
	Brainstorming - gathering immediate views and challenging the group to innovate
	Prioritisation using sticky dots to highlight preferred ideas
	Any other thoughts cards - a way of capturing views which particpants do not feel comfortable or able to say to their group

As a result of this mixed methodology approach the HVM team were able to capture views in participants' own words and by summarising what they had heard on flip charts. Use of the flip charts helps participants to understand that their views are being taken seriously and enables the group to work with the facilitator to reflect on what they have said, making sure it is a true reflection of their views and to summarise their main points. In addition all small group discussions were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Analysis

HVM uses a process for analysing the data which ensures that the starting point is the views of the public as articulated in the dialogue sessions, rather than a hypothesis for which evidence is being sought. The team's aim is to look for patterns of similarity and difference of views which can be analysed per dialogue session and across each of the rounds for the policy area. Using this approach, the steps for analysis were as follows:

1 Identification of key themes:

In which each of the HVM team members separately reviewed the data write-ups noting their understanding of the headline themes around which the data can be collated.

2. Agreement on themes, codes and categories:

Once each team member had clear themes in mind the team discussed them coming to agreement on codes which define similar content around which the data can be grouped and clear findings can emerge.

3. Proposing a theory:

HVM has, in this report, identified the key themes and action proposed by the groups to address the policy areas under discussion.

Working both as individuals and a group to produce the coding frame and the categories and testing them as the process evolves works well with a public dialogue. It allows the findings to emerge from the data and those findings to be validated in an iterative sense through group discussion. The dialogue findings are presented in the subsequent sections of this report.

Introduction: Increasing the income of low earners

The following is an introduction to the dialogue on well-being and active labour market. Sessions were held in Birmingham (2nd and 18th June) and Llanhilleth, recruited from Pontypool, (3rd and 22nd May) using the two round / three week cycle described in section 1.

Recruitment sample

Acumen Fieldwork recruited 25 participants in Birmingham who were retained for both sessions. 25 people were recruited for the Llanhilleth sessions, 16 of whom were retained for both rounds. The full recruitment specification is included in the Technical Annex. In summary those recruited fulfilled the following specification:

Birmingham: urban – central and greater Birmingham Llanhilleth participants: rural / semi-rural from Pontypool and environs
Good age distribution from 18+ including 20% of 18-35s
13% (or current population figures for the area) black and / or minority ethnic
20% single parents (children over 5)   **20% couples with children over 5**   **20% single people who are under 35**   **20% 55-67 year olds**   **20% 35-55 year olds**
100% of participants in work   **50% in work but earning less than £230 per week and claiming means tested benefits**[2]   **50% in work earning over £230 but less than £400 per week, not claiming means tested benefits but have experience of living on benefits**
Test question: 'To what extent do benefits form part of your weekly income?' and 'For how long has this been the case?'

Recruiters found it challenging to identify participants who fit all the criteria for the Llanhilleth session due to high levels of unemployment in the area.

Dialogue scope

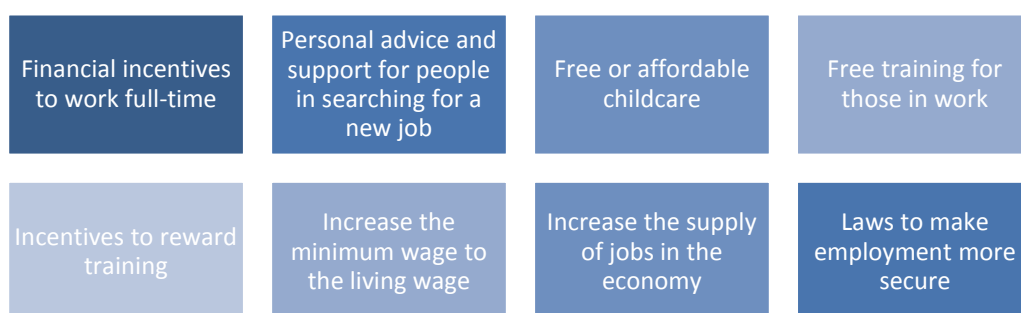This part of the dialogue project aimed to answer the question:

What policy levers can stimulate claimants to try to increase their income, and to do this voluntarily, without the threat of sanctions?

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[2] *Including* working tax credit, child tax credit, housing benefit, council tax reduction, job seeker's allowance; and to a limited extent employment support allowance. E*xcluding* child benefit

Using the round 1 process plan ([see online technical annex](#)) facilitators asked participants a range of open questions to begin to test the question, these explored issues such as:

- The elements of a good / bad job;
- Motivations and barriers to finding a better paid job;
- The differences for people in full or part-time employment;
- Participants' experience of active labour market programmes;
- The extent to which these experiences are, or have potential to be, helpful to participants;
- The extent to which a range of active labour market programmes are perceived to be good for improving well-being;
- New ideas to support those who do wish to move to new better paid jobs.

The context for the discussion was provided in round 1 in a presentation from NEF on the impact of work on well-being. In addition NEF worked on a set of cards which described a particular active labour market programme and provided the evidence, where available, on its impact on well-being. These were as follows:

Financial incentives to work full-time	Personal advice and support for people in searching for a new job	Free or affordable childcare	Free training for those in work
Incentives to reward training	Increase the minimum wage to the living wage	Increase the supply of jobs in the economy	Laws to make employment more secure

As a result of the discussion with this contextual information the following themes were identified by participants as new initiatives which could help them and people like them to work more hours and or secure better paid jobs. The specific interventions proposed under each theme are described in detail in findings sections and in the [online technical annex](#).

Skills bank / skills credit award system	Bridge courses	Apprenticeships for all ages	In-house childcare
Flexible working	Increasing tax credits the more hours you work	Increasing the tax threshold	Contracts with commitment
Support for expenses to travel to and from work	Financial planning advice	Provide more jobs that people would be interested in doing	Tie employers into our local economy for a period
	Creating a level playing field for pay for immigrants	Incentivise commitment and loyalty	

In round 2 NEF gave frontline workers and public participants presentations summarising the key points that came from the policy review meetings and work done by NEF, topic specialists and policy leads in

between rounds 1 and 2. The presentations explained that the ideas that participants identified at the end of round 1 had been filtered to focus on those where further input from the dialogue participants could really add value to active labour market policies.

As a result of the review process the ideas on which frontline workers and public participants were asked to focus in round 2 of the active labour market dialogue were as follows:

Apprenticeships for all ages	Taster in a new job
Encourage employers to make work more rewarding	Extra benefits if you lose your job after moving to a better position
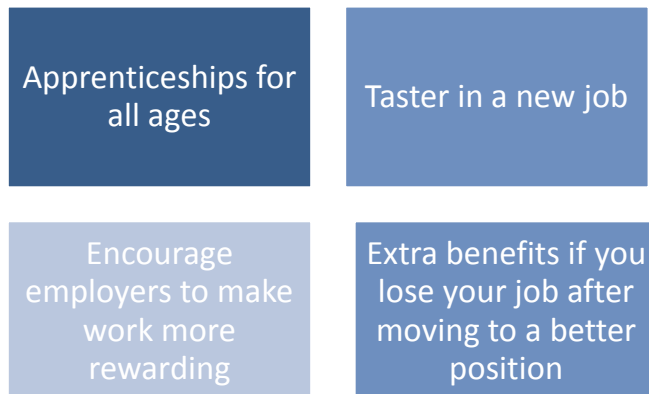
Frontline workers were asked to discuss:

- The extent to which the policy category (and related ideas) seem effective to support people to work more hours (for part time workers), or to move to better paid work should they wish to;
- The impact this policy area and related ideas would have in the communities with which they work if it were to be piloted there;
- Their views on the areas raised by participants in terms of usefulness for their own work.

Public participants were asked to reflect on:

- The challenges of zero-hour contracts;
- Each of the four ideas being discussed in terms of:
  - Making them as effective as possible in supporting people to work longer hours and / or move to a better paid job;
  - The barriers to people taking up active labour market schemes such as these;
  - Ensuring the fairness of workplace interventions;
  - The contribution that the idea might make to people's well-being;
  - Making sure that well-being is considered in the development of such policies.

The dialogue ended with participants feeding back on what policy makers should think about in terms of key points that they should take on board when implementing schemes to encourage people to increase their income.

Findings: Increasing the income of low earners

In this section we describe the results of the discussion on well-being and active labour market for both the public participants over two rounds and one session with frontline workers.

Why people go to work

In both locations public participants agreed that their prime motivation to work is earning money. Putting food on the table and paying the bills are the reasons to go out to work. If there is anything left over,

> *"To be able to have nice things"*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Even on low wages,

> *"It's about having a better lifestyle for yourself, your family, for your children."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Some participants said that they were aware that they would be better off financially if they stayed at home and signed on. However, a sense of pride, concern about what the neighbours would think if they didn't go out to work and setting an example to their children motivates them to put up with low wages,

> *"It's that ethos that you aren't getting anything for nothing. So you've got to go out and earn it."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"I like working hard and buying something I want from my money. I feel proud when I do something like that."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"Dignity. For me it's showing my kids that that's what you do."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

In both locations participants talked about how working increased their feelings of well-being,

> *"To go to work, you give yourself value […] and you can apply yourself, you can achieve things, which is a very positive thing, and you feel good about yourself."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Well-being and work

Before having been presented with the well-being evidence some mentioned a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction and the positive effect of being appreciated for what you do. Others said that connecting with colleagues or customers makes them feel good,

> *"I work for Thomas Cook as a trolley dolly. It's good talking to people, to have adult conversations."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"We've got really good staff morale. That means we're happy. We all get along. We all help each other out. We all pull together to get things done."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Feelings of well-being increase if there is greater flexibility,

"It's the human factor. You don't want to turn up and they think that you're just a robot. Some days you just don't feel very well or you're tired because of a bad night."
Public participant, Pontypool

And praise for a job well done was important for all,

"If you don't feel appreciated at work, your morale starts to go down and then you don't want to work hard because you don't think your employer really cares about you. It's just a downward spiral."
Public participant, Pontypool

This is balanced by comments about low pay, which for some contributes to low self-esteem,

"It's almost like under-achieving in a way when you're not getting the right amount of pay."
Public participant, Pontypool

75% of dialogue participants were full time employed. For some this was not out of choice but to make ends meet. They would prefer to work fewer hours to have a better life,

"I find you have to make time for yourself though. You do need downtime, otherwise you just become a workaholic and all you obsess about are the bills."
Public participant, Pontypool

Barriers to increasing hours or pay

When discussing what stops people from increasing their hours or pay, participants in Wales were more pessimistic than those in Birmingham about job opportunities. The following sums up a shared reaction,

"I think a lot of people feel grateful to be working these days [...], especially in the Valleys and in Wales generally."
Public participant, Pontypool

Participants in Pontypool all talked about the lack of full-time jobs in the Valleys and many emphasised that the full-time jobs that are available attract hundreds of applicants and usually don't pay well,

"There's nothing here. It's part-time, temporary work. They keep closing the major workplaces down and they're not providing new opportunities..."
 Public participant, Pontypool

"My son's a contract electrician […]. Last year […] he was working over near Norwich coming home once a fortnight to see his family because there's no work in South Wales."
Public participant, Pontypool

Participants in Pontypool and Birmingham shared feelings of frustration about the lack of jobs for life and the re-introduction of zero hours contracts, which make it easier for employers to steer away from offering full time work,

"All work's uncertain, so bosses have got the upper hand as everyone wants a job."
Public participant, Birmingham

Already working full time

In both locations 60-75% of the participants worked full-time already,

"The only thing that's stopping me from working more hours is they don't provide sleeping bags. It might as well be a second home."

In Pontypool a number of participants talked about feeling trapped in a full time low paid job,

> *In the Valleys, they know that people are short of money. They know that they'll do it for a minimum wage.*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"I work full-time but I'll be honest. Over the last, I'd say six years, I've struggled to pay my mortgage."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

In some cases low pay had forced people to take on more hours,

> *"Because the pay's so bad, you have to do overtime […] doing fifteen hour days just to earn a normal wage."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Others combine two part time jobs to make up for low pay with subsequent long working weeks as a result,

> *"I only have two days off a month because I work every day. I'll often go for up to nineteen days without a day off."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Full time job not attractive

Some participants in part-time jobs said that they wouldn't want to work full time because of the negative effect on their work/life balance,

> *"I wouldn't want to increase my hours because I think a work/life balance is really important.[…] When I'm doing 50 hours a week and sometimes it's, like, 60 hours - I never get that time with my son back."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

There was a widespread perception that people are financially better off by keeping their working hours below 16 and using tax credits to top up their income,

> *"I know a number of people who've said, 'I can't work more than sixteen hours a week or my child or working tax credit is taken off me. That's very important..."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Skills set and/ or experience not matching job requirements

Many participants explained that a lack of jobs means that they often apply below their level of skills and experience,

> *"Not easy at all, there was nothing that I could match my experience and qualifications with, so I ate humble pie and just went for anything that even replied."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Cost of childcare and travel prohibitive

Many participants in both locations referred to the lack of childcare provision and the cost of childcare as barriers to increasing their working hours,

> *"For me to work more hours, it'd be childcare for my daughter because I have nobody to have her when she's sick. She's been off quite a few times, it's really awkward."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"About pay and what you've got left at the end of the week once you've paid childcare costs. Then you feel almost like, what's the point?"*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"Childcare needs looking at. I've got three children. It's £550 a week. I think that's an absolute joke. My mortgage isn't that much."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Equally, the cost of travel impacts on people's decisions to move jobs,

> *"If it's going to cost you a third of your wages to get to work and back home, is it really worth it?"*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Time spent on travelling and the unreliability or absence of public transport was brought into the mix as well, more so in Wales than in Birmingham,

> *"He doesn't drive, he has to catch the bus, and the buses aren't that reliable. There's no guarantee that you can be at work at nine o'clock if you catch the bus or train."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"Even if they have got their own transport, sometimes they can't afford it because their wages are so low. If you take into account the amount of petrol you have to put in the car."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

However, some participants in Birmingham shared similar concerns. As one said,

> *"I'm toying with the idea of cutting my hours back so I'm not paying as much for petrol or after school clubs."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Perception of increased stress and worry

The public dialogue also revealed that some people don't aspire to higher wages as they fear that it would lead to greater responsibilities and therefore stress,

> *"I think as well if you did ask for a pay rise, the chances are they'd probably give you more responsibility, which means you're going to get more workload, which means you're going to get more stressed and you think, Why did I bother in the first place?"*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"There's nothing worse than waking up in the morning and having butterflies in your stomach before you even go to work, you're stressed before you get there."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Policy ideas favoured by the public

Making work financially and personally rewarding

The majority of participants in round 1 of the dialogue said that they would be more likely to consider increasing hours or moving to a better paid job if the work in question was financially and personally rewarding. Two policy ideas were discussed in more detail in round 2 as participants expect both to impact positively on their well-being: 'Free or affordable childcare' and 'Encouraging employers to make work more rewarding'.

> *"A lot of those things go towards feeling appreciated at work. A happy workforce is a more productive workforce. Often people work better for the carrot rather than the stick."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

The idea: Free or affordable childcare
To provide free or affordable child care to enable people to work full time while also bringing up young children.

In general this idea was more relevant for those who had children already. For those with children, unaffordable childcare is a real barrier to progressing at work.

> *"It would be nice if you've worked all month and you haven't got to pay most of it out for childcare."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

A mum of 3 in Birmingham said that she would have to pay £96 a day to have her 3 children in childcare during school holidays. As a consequence she didn't feel she could take on a full-time job. Due to the cost of childcare many rely on informal support networks. This leads to feelings of guilt and stress as people worry they are asking too much of their friends or family,

> *"I feel like I'm putting it on my parents. They're in their 70s. Although they like it, I rush to get home so they can go home. That stresses me out, the fact that I'm putting it on my family."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Public participants appreciated the idea of free or affordable childcare as an opportunity to work more hours or re-train to move to a better job,

> *"When I was first separated from my husband and had no job, Sure Start had my children and put them in nursery while I retrained as a nursery nurse, NVQ Level 3 Childcare."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"I'd like to work a few more hours. The childcare would appeal to me in the six weeks' holidays, as me and my husband have to have every other week off to cover the holidays."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

The availability of free or affordable childcare would enable people to better their lives by increasing their income.

> *"You could be in control of your life knowing that that's in place, you can then structure your working pattern more knowing that you've got reassurance with that."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Dialogue participants said that they would worry less and feel less anxious knowing that their children are taken care of. As a result they feel they would be more focused on the job and perform better. For some

families this intervention would increase their financial security as both parents would be able to work full-time.

It's important that free or affordable childcare would be made available 24 hours a day to ensure all employees can benefit from it no matter what their shifts are. Ideally it is provided close to work or at work so that it doesn't take parents long to get to their children should they need to,

> *"Yes, so if there's a problem, it's immediate. That would alleviate some concern for me."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Another option suggested by participants is childcare as an extension of school provision, with a breakfast club and after school club provided on the school premises.

One group in Pontypool discussed free or affordable childcare requiring standard induction programmes for parents to reassure them of the quality of the provision,

> *"So you can actually see what's going to happen, what they're going to be doing with your children, what staff is there. If it's free, you think they hire anybody, you want to make sure your children are getting the safety and everything."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Frontline workers called free and affordable childcare,

> *"A no brainer, really."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

They said,

> *"You'd have more employee retention and lower levels of absence."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

For those who had children this policy idea was seen as being very important for people's well-being. Even those who did not have children could see that support in this area would improve well-being. It would reduce the pressure of making other childcare arrangements and enable people to focus more on their job. Some expressed the view that this would help them have time in the week when they weren't at work, but could do domestic jobs so that they could better enjoy their time off with the children at the week-ends. The second policy intervention presented to dialogue participants in round 2 picked up on new ideas generated in round 1.

The idea: Encourage employers to make work more rewarding
Government would encourage employers to reward loyalty and commitment at work. Interventions could include: an attendance bonus; 5 duvet days a year to be taken up at short notice; an extra day off to reward good performance; company shares to reward loyalty.

Public participants and frontline workers were generally positive about rewarding employee commitment and performance. They said it would increase loyalty and create a positive working environment as long as there is transparency about the process and the rules are clearly defined, either in the form of a contract or an employee handbook,

> *"You just need it set in stone. So you know that you are going to be rewarded with either your extra money or your extra day off."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"If you've got a financial carrot dangling in front you, you need to know what the parameters are for you to work towards to get that."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

In both locations participants discussed that incentives don't have to be financial,

> *"It could be earned time off, holidays, little perks, [or] a couple of vouchers for Asda, I don't know!"*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Others talked about how they would appreciate a turkey for Christmas, tickets for a show or a voucher for a meal as an acknowledgment for their work. They said that it would increase their loyalty to the company and give them something to work towards, which in itself could lead to a sense of achievement. A participant in Pontypool talked about working towards a Christmas bonus,

> *"You would earn up to £500 in bonus every Christmas, and there were several different sets of criteria. No sick days, things like that. Every year everybody would earn something."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

And someone else suggested,

> *"Relaxation and downtime is important. It's been piloted in some very stressful office environments where they actually go and have a twenty minute nap. It does make a difference."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Feeling appreciated at work would rub off positively on the well-being of families,

> *"You go home happy, you're nice to your children."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

For frontline workers financial and other incentives come under flexible working and investment in people.

> *"I'm your boss, I want what I'm paying for, how do I get the best out of my workforce?' You'd have more employee retention and lower levels of absence."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

They shared a view that it would increase employee productivity. Both public participants and frontline workers expressed concern though that this type of policy would be less feasible for smaller companies in financial and practical terms. They said that the short term notice element of 'duvet days' for employees who for whatever reason wish to stay at home for a day would be a challenge to sustaining business operations,

> *"I think a duvet day has to fit in with operational requirements for the business, sometimes it's just not feasible."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

A small business owner said,

> *"We won't do duvet days; it's the impact on everyone else. You give someone a bottle of wine, or [...] next Tuesday, Costa Rica against England, I've said from 3:30pm they can go off to the pub, I'll provide a kitty, go and get the first round. It'll cost me very little but will benefit massively in good will."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

Should Government decide to develop a policy to encourage employers to reward loyalty and performance it will be important to provide evidence on the benefits of increased productivity as opposed to members of staff taking sick leave,

> *"Obviously there needs to be some sort of study in comparative businesses.[…] Say, these two companies are identical, this company undertakes all these employee rewards, and six months down the line they've seen 10% [more] turnover."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

The idea: Personal advice and support for people searching for a new job
To provide personal support, including practical support in finding and applying for jobs and social support to help job-seekers bounce back from a disappointment when looking for jobs.

Dialogue participants in round 1 had mixed feelings about this policy area. Their views were tainted by the advisory service they had experienced provided by Jobcentre Plus staff and agencies, which participants felt is not appropriate, tailored or relevant to their skills and experience. Participants were not convinced that the staff would ever be inspiring or empathetic and move beyond ticking boxes. Therefore they didn't rate it highly when they were asked to indicate to what extent they felt the advice and support would help them personally or increase their well-being,

> *"What actually happens and what you'd like to happen are two different things."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

However, the point was made that a programme of personal advice and support could increase their well-being if the support was tailored to individual needs and led to the right job, particularly if interventions are focused on bringing out the potential in people and raises their self-esteem,

> *"If all of it is delivered properly, you gain some confidence, which then affects your whole well-being. You have to have confidence to have good self-esteem."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

On the flipside, inadequate support and being pushed around was seen as being negative for well-being and dented people's confidence. There were very strong feelings around the negative impact of being treated as an object rather than a person by those to whom you have turned to for advice,

> *"It's a conveyor belt of people."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"There isn't a one-to-one feeling that you, or they matter, it's just a process."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Due to its current image, a frontline worker said,

> *"There does need to be a tailored support, I just don't know whether there'd be a take up if Jobcentre Plus delivered it."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

This tied in with the views of participants in Birmingham who said that going to a Jobcentre Plus is embarrassing and degrading. They proposed a rebranding exercise for Jobcentre Plus,

> *"You need to make it look like a place that's about getting you into work. […] Make it more into a place of growing and learning, and a place of giving."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

The majority of dialogue participants said that in order to move to better paid jobs or increase their hours they would need support in CV writing, interview skills but most of all guidance on what job to go for building on their transferable skills.

Participants talked about their frustration of either being forced to take on jobs which don't match their skills or interests,

> *"They told my daughter, who's a trained teacher, to go and get a job in a pub when she was on job-seekers, it's ridiculous."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"It's about finding the right job, not just any job. If you're an IT consultant, you don't want to work stacking shelves."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

This was felt to be a waste of employer's time as well,

> *"We had a girl come into our office; she was seventeen, 'Why are you here Katie? What interests you about construction?' 'It doesn't interest me, my job advisor told me to come.' I said, 'You're wasting my time, you may as well go'."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

The support available doesn't allow people to explore different avenues,

> *"I told them I'd rather try and change my career, perhaps gain some new skills, but all they wanted to help me look for was jobs in the field I'd been made redundant from because that's where I had the experience....They just wanted to channel and funnel me into the same area."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Participants said that taking on an inappropriate job is only acceptable if they are offered ongoing support to find the right job,

> *"If you are forced to take a job, say shelf stacking or something like that, you can have on-going advice to get you to the job that you actually want, even though you're employed. If you're not happy with where you're working, you can get more support to reach your certain career."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

In Birmingham the issue of sanctions was raised with one participant saying that a friend of his was sanctioned for not taking the advice provided. He didn't feel the job being offered in any way matched his skills, but by refusing he had to pay back benefits. This was used as an example of something very detrimental to well-being.

There was agreement amongst dialogue participants and frontline workers that Jobcentre Plus and agency staff need to be properly trained, well informed and specialised in a particular sector so that they can provide more effective support.

> *"You want to feel like the person is qualified, as well as them having your best interests at heart."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Participants in both locations said that they don't want to be pushed around from one support worker to another and would prefer having an individual account manager,

> *"If I went in I would want to see the same person every week so you build up a relationship. They know that I don't want to go for a job in roofing […] and how many hours a week I want to work."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Advisors need to listen and start from the positive rather than the negative. Participants said that they like to be asked what it is they would like to do and be probed on what their transferable skills might be.

> *"So you're giving them a positive. 'I think you'd be good at this'. Or you say, 'Why don't you try this?' Give them a different avenue to get forward."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

This chimed with the view of frontline workers,

> *"It's not only about tailoring it, it's about aspiration. They need to have a dialogue."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

In both locations there was support for the idea of free mentoring support for those who want to progress towards a better paid job or increase their hours. This could be delivered by people who've had similar experiences,

> *"When you've been through it yourself you have some empathy for what they're going through, and I think that's what's missing."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Or internally by a colleague,

> *"Good employers should have some mentors, people in the business who you can go and talk to informally and say, 'How do I get from being the toilet cleaner to the managing director.' Those individuals are allowed time, a few hours a week or something, and they have all the knowledge but it's very, very informal so that you can be honest."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Frontline workers were also positive about mentoring as part of a support package,

> *"If they've been in the same job for twenty years they probably haven't got the confidence, might need some mentoring and motivational support as well as the practical, brushing up on interview skills and so on."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

They acknowledged that people in work need to be treated differently from those who are unemployed,

> *"They are in work, they are earning a living, they're already making that effort, and they're showing that motivation."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

And as they are all in work, public participants said that Jobcentre Plus' opening hours should be extended or that services should be provided in other locations which are open beyond 9-5, such as walk-in centers, Citizen Advice Bureaux or libraries.

Amongst dialogue participants there was a strong preference for face-to-face contact for tailored support and mentoring. Frontline workers acknowledged though, that this was unrealistic given the current budgets,

> *"When people want guidance they want face-to-face, the fact is we're moving away from that, but you can do a bit better than just having a website by actually having an interactive area, where you can go and chat to somebody. Even the police are doing that now."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

 The idea: Laws to make employment more secure

The government introduces employment legislation so that people's jobs and income are more secure. This could include: making it harder for businesses to fire staff or put them on temporary contracts; increasing redundancy pay; banning zero hour contracts.

This policy area sparked a lot of debate amongst public participants. In both locations it was a topic that scored highest in terms of how people thought to what extent it would help them personally and improve their well-being.

In the first dialogue session many dialogue participants shared experiences of the lack of contracts, inadequate contracts and having to re-apply for jobs every six months, which all lead to stress and anxiety. Zero hour contracts in particular were referred to as being very bad for well-being.

> *"They've got to do something about that, because it's just not fair. You can't expect people to live and work on short or zero hour contracts."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"If ever they told me I was moving to a zero-hour role, at six months I would be having a heart attack. If one of us lost our jobs, we could only live for two months on what we've got. I want security in the job."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Better job security was referred to as one of the main ways of increasing well-being through work,

> *"You wouldn't be as anxious all the time [...]."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

In round 1 some participants also shared concerns about the risk to job security of moving to a better paid job. One participant in Birmingham had left a very secure job to improve his financial position and was made redundant within 2 weeks of starting the new job. This led to the following policy proposal being developed in the review period between the two dialogue sessions.

The idea: Extra benefits if you lose your job after moving to a better paid position

If you are in a secure job, moving to a better paid job can be a risk. If you lost that new job, you would be worse off than when you started. One way that government could reduce this risk is to provide extra security for people moving into a new job.

This policy idea received a lukewarm response. Although of concern to some, it was not front of mind for the majority of dialogue participants. Frontline workers discussed the pros and cons in a bit more detail. They confirmed the findings of round 1,

> *"You want to make the new job more secure for the person going into it. You get clients coming in who've been in a job and just dismissed for whatever reason. [...] What puts people off looking for a new job is redundancy pay. 'I'm not really looking at moving because I haven't got the same level of security'."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

They argued that,

> *"[..] This two year nonsense should be scrapped, being in a job for two years to have any employment rights."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

Zero hour contracts were of much greater concern to dialogue participants as all agreed they impact very negatively on people's well-being.

> *"The biggest thing that came out was lack of security. Take all the other things away and give me security."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Not knowing how many hours you will work and therefore not knowing whether you will be able to pay the bills at the end of the month was cited most of all alongside the inability to plan for bigger expenses such as holidays, gifts or treats, which are important for people's well-being,

> *"Can you imagine having that worry over your head? Will I get any work this week? That would be awful for your health."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"I'm anxious all the time. Am I going to get enough hours this week?"*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Dialogue participants said that employees on zero hour contracts have to make trade-offs between being in employment and having the security of benefits. Some shared experiences about how stressful it is to sign on and off benefits, including working tax credits and child tax credits, as it can take months before the benefits are paid in again,

> *"We've all got bills to pay. I think that's why people won't give their benefits up really. At least they know they're having a set amount of money."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Other issues included the absence of holiday, sick and maternity pay entitlements and experiences of being offered unsociable hours only. Participants in Birmingham had a solution for the latter, which would give people a greater sense of agency,

> *"What about letting them pick their hours... I only want to work in the morning, […] give me priority on those specific days. The power's coming back a little bit on the employee."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Asked what else could make zero hour contracts better the majority of public participants was sceptical,

> *"They should be outlawed."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"I can't think of any way to improve them, they're horrid."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Instead, it would be a lot better for people's well-being if zero hour contracts were turned into minimum hour contracts,

> *"A minimum amount of hours, you can budget if you've got ten hours a week."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Others said that it should be made easier to sign back on to benefits in weeks employees on zero hour contracts are not given sufficient work,

> *"There should be someone you can contact to say, 'I'm on a zero hour contract. I've had no work this week,' and then you can claim benefits so at least you can afford to feed your family."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

In Pontypool someone suggested on an *Any Other Thought* card that government should consider capping the number of employees an employer can have on zero hour contracts,

> *"Limit the number of people in a 'working' group to say 10% allowed to be on zero hours. All after must have minimum hours."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

The idea: Free training for those in work

Employees have access to free training opportunities. This might be funded directly by the government, or if it is delivered through work, the government might support employers to offer training.

In round 1 participants were asked to give their views on how to access free training opportunities or being paid for attending training would help them increase their pay or hours.

In both locations participants acknowledged that it is good to keep learning and build a CV,

> *"It's nice to have a day where you're doing something different and learning a new skill. Something fresh."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"If you're interviewing employees, then maybe you'll pick the one with qualifications over the ones that don't."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Some participants were sceptical though and said that training and qualifications had made no difference to their job prospects or income level,

> *"I've done training. I've got loads of certificates and every imaginable qualification and it's made no difference to my employment prospects."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

> *"It used to be you had an NVQ2 and you went and did an NVQ3 and you got a rise in pay. Now you get paid the same, irrespective of which level you hold."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

A number of participants felt training was for the benefits of the employer and not the individual,

> *"I think it's to the employer's benefits, and not the employees. I've gained all these extra qualifications, but I don't get any extra pay, plus there's no position for me to be moved up to."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

They said they would be interested in training only if it is relevant to them and their career,

> *"If people want training, allow them to go and do it themselves. Some people in the benefits offices make people do training they don't want to, which is a waste of tax money."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

> *"If you're training you want the security of knowing you will get a job at the end of it.*
> *You don't want your long-term prospects to be the same as what they were before you trained."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Public participants felt strongly that undertaking training out of work hours is a real challenge. As one participant in Pontypool said,

"My mum's doing her NVQ3, and she does two jobs. She tries to do assignments when she comes home from work, and sometimes she's knackered. You're just adding more work for yourself."
Public participant, Pontypool

Frontline workers made a distinction between training that is relevant to the current job and training to make the transition to another sector,

"You've got the in-work training to up-skill somebody in their current role, then you've got a separate bit of training to help people move sectors. If it's to change career, do it in your own time."
Frontline worker, Birmingham

Due to the challenging job market in the Welsh Valleys, participants in Pontypool were less convinced that free training would help them personally. However, if as a result they would be guaranteed a better paid job they felt that it would increase their well-being. In both locations participants said that successfully completing training leads to a sense of achievement and pride and that being well-trained has the potential to reduce stress levels,

An important condition for well-being is that training is relevant to the individual, tailored to individual learning styles and offered in work hours as otherwise it impacts too much on family life and childcare expenses.

"If you're given the right training it changes your confidence which then changes how you feel."
Public participant, Birmingham

"If you can go to work and know you can handle anything that's put in front of you, it will make you feel better about going. You don't have to rely on other people to help you succeed. You have that independence."
Public participant, Birmingham

The idea: Apprenticeships for all ages
An apprenticeship is a job where you also receive training. It often ends in a qualification such as an NVQ. Apprenticeships should be easily available for all ages, including those who want to change jobs. Apprenticeships are usually funded partly by the employer, and partly by government.

In round 1 apprenticeships were discussed as the most effective way of training people as participants felt that gaining experience is as important, if not more important than qualifications, particularly in the current labour market in Wales,

"I've done training but there aren't any jobs. I have 20 certificates and 600/700 applications in 12 months. It's down to experience as well."
Public participant, Pontypool

This was confirmed by frontline workers in Birmingham,

"Nowadays employers want both, experience as well as that qualification. Sometimes when you work that's the hardest thing you can get."
Frontline worker, Birmingham

Apprenticeships should be available for people of all ages. As someone in Pontypool said,

"Obviously to be fair for all, everyone deserves a chance regardless of your age or what you're willing to achieve in life."
Public participant, Pontypool

As a consequence, the public was asked to consider the introduction of a new apprenticeship scheme in round 2.

Both frontline workers and public participants were very positive about the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme for all ages for those in work as a way of gaining the experience needed to move to a better paid job. Public participants in both location shared experiences of younger family members and friends who found better jobs following an apprenticeship.

One frontline worker summarised what seemed to be the view of others as well,

> *"You've got the best of both, experience and working towards a qualification. Maybe for people who are in a job they're not totally happy with an apprenticeship is a way to gain work experience they need."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

Public participants said that an apprenticeship would be good for their well-being if it leads to a recognised qualification and a job at the end,

> *"A certificate, as long as it's recognised elsewhere, you feel better about yourself."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

The security of two years guaranteed pay was appealing to many,

> *"People would go for that, wouldn't they, because they can budget, they can keep the roof over their heads."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

This chimed with the view of frontline workers,

> *"If it's practical, individually tailored, hitting our needs as an employer and our employee's needs […], that's linked to well-being. They'll feel better, more confident, and more productive."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

Frontline workers raised concerns though about the lack of data about skills gaps in the local economy,

> *"We're sending all these sixteen to eighteen year olds to college to do hairdressing, business admin and the vacancies aren't there. It needs to be much more joined up and focused."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

> *"There is a role for government to do lots more research around where the skill gaps are. We get employers coming to us looking for tool makers, you can't find them."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

And they emphasised that an apprenticeship is only effective if trainees have the right attitude,

> *"If you want to go up, your employer's going to help you, but you've got to invest and prepare. It shouldn't just be given to you."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

This resonated with the view of public participants. In Pontypool one group proposed a trial period for apprentices to ensure those embarking on a scheme are motivated to learn and better themselves,

> *Have a trial in place, at an agreed time. That way, then you can see if that individual is committed. […] By putting a goal or timescale in place, I think that's more than fair."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Frontline workers and the public agreed that accommodating free training and apprenticeships will be more challenging for small and medium sized companies than for larger corporations. They said that employers need to be made aware of how a better trained workforce will benefit their business and have guarantees that an employee will stay in the job for an agreed period of time,

> *"If you look at the employer, he doesn't know, very often, that his business would be enhanced. I come from a catering background, people think, 'I need my dishwasher to stay my dishwasher,' but what you need is your dishwasher to progress to be the head chef."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

> *"I think you need to put caveats in it though for the actual employer's point of view. I wouldn't want to train you and then next month you go and I get nothing off it."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Frontline workers said that it is essential to involve employers in the dialogue,

> *"If we want messages to go to the policy makers, first thing, employers need to be involved, it can't be dictated down. Anything red tape or bureaucratic will turn us off, and we can't afford it."*
> **Frontline worker, Birmingham**

The idea: Increase the minimum wage to the living wage
Increase the minimum wage, so that employers are legally required to pay employers a 'living wage'. The living wage is calculated to be enough to cover basic living expenses. The living wage is currently £7.65 outside London, £1.34 more than the minimum wage.

Of all the policy interventions presented to the public in round 1 of the dialogue, increasing the minimum wage to the living wage scored very high in terms of the extent to which participants expected the intervention to help them personally. Only laws to make employment more secure scored higher.

Particularly in Pontypool there was a lot of interest in an increase of the minimum wage to the living wage as a means to increase earnings as the minimum age was not seen as 'fair',

> *"People should get the living wage. My wife's on the minimum wage. You've just got to get yourself into debt just paying stuff off when all you're doing is paying for the roof over your head. There's no room for anything else."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

A very stark choice was being regularly faced by some participants to either buy food or heat their home. They said that they didn't aspire to wealth, but wanted enough money to eat, pay their bills and have one week's holiday a year. This was not seen as possible on the minimum wage,

> *"People don't want to be wealthy, wealthy, they just want to have a good standard of living where they can afford to pay the bills and have money for food. At the moment it's either pay the bills or eat."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

The idea was therefore seen as important for well-being. People would feel well if they were able to afford their bills, not have to make impossible choices and could live within their means. Some said this option would contribute to a person's dignity which is damaged when you can't pay the bills. Participants in Pontypool expressed concern though that even the living wage is not enough to lead a decent life,

"Who decides on a minimum wage? Who decides on a living wage? In my opinion, that's still not enough."
Public participant, Pontypool

Others talked about the potential impact of a wage increase impact on income tax and tax credits. Uncertainty around that would minimise the effect of this programme on well-being,

"You're going to pay more tax, so they give it to you in one hand and take it out from the other."
Public participant, Birmingham

In both locations participants felt that an increase to the living wage would be unsustainable for smaller businesses and an insistence on it by Government could lead to those businesses folding and then more people would lose their jobs,

"I know small businesses wouldn't be able to sustain the increase. If they go out of business there goes your job."
Public participant, Pontypool

This would be detrimental to their well-being.

Messages for policy makers

When asked to summarise key points for Government about what is required to help people increase their pay and hours participants in the dialogue presented nine sets of recommendations:

- Helpful, sector specific support available beyond office hours;
- Rebrand Jobcentre Plus into a centre for learning and achieving goals;
- Free training relevant to the individual, including apprenticeships for all ages;
- Free or affordable childcare using local providers;
- Turn zero hour contracts into minimum hour contracts;
- Get employers on board and ensure a win-win situation;
- Make tax system more accommodating for those in low paid jobs;
- Use inspiring communication demonstrating the benefits of working more hours;
- Act on outcomes of this dialogue.

Each of the recommendations was inspired by discussions about what would improve the well-being of people on low paid wages who wish to better their lives.

Helpful, sector specific support available beyond office hours
There was a strong sense in both locations that personalised and inspirational support will lift people up and make them realise they can do more and achieve more,
"It's having the correct people dealing with these changes. They've got to be inspiring in what they're doing."
Public participant, Birmingham

Of key importance is that people on low incomes want to be treated as an individual,

"We are human, not a statistic."
Public participant, Pontypool

This was felt to be very important for people's well-being,

What if it's a case of you address us individually? What if you take that time and think, 'you know what, you're not a number? We can't help you, we'll tell you why, but if we can, this is what we'll do.' If anything, that makes us feel a bit more important, a bit more wanted."
Public participant, Birmingham

In addition to practical support in CV writing and interview techniques dialogue participants said their well-being would benefit from access to a work coach or mentor as it would be reassuring and uplifting to talk to someone who can put him/herself in the mentee's shoes.

Advice has to be tailored to the individual and be provided by someone with an extensive knowledge of the sector the candidate is looking to work in,

> *"Everyone's different, we're all individuals."*
> **Public participants Pontypool**

> *"If I want to be a butcher, I don't want someone saying well, you're no good to be a butcher, I can put you in at an undertaker. It's about the right advice."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Tailored advice, support and mentoring should be available beyond office hours as people who work can't afford to take time out of their working day.

> *"We're thinking as well about having a portable or a mobile advice centre. [...] It could be parked in a car park at Sainsbury's. I haven't got the time in the week, I'm working, but if there's something there out of hours, and if Government is going that extra mile for me, I'd feel appreciated, I'd want it.*
> **Public participants, Birmingham**

Rebrand Jobcentre Plus into a centre for learning and achieving goals

Participants in the dialogue talked about the stigma attached to attending a job centre. If Jobcentre Plus is going to provide the tailored personal advice and support it has to become a place of aspiration,

> *"If you go in the job centre people look down at you. We want people to think of it as a place of learning and development rather than taking money."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Free training relevant to the individual including apprenticeships for all ages

People on low incomes need to be empowered to take on better paid roles. For this they need the right qualifications and relevant work experience.

In both locations there was strong support for a programme of free training relevant to the individual. Participants said that relevant training which fits someone's aspirations and areas of interest has the potential to improve self-confidence, provide a sense of achievement and enables people to connect with others beyond the workplace.

The free element was important, particularly for participants in Pontypool,

> *"There has to be free training because people working can't afford paying."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

In Pontypool there was also agreement that training should be free for those who currently work part-time and want to sign up for full-time training to gain full-time employment,

"If someone's working part-time and they want to train for another job through full-time education, it should be free."
Public participant, Pontypool

Apprenticeships were seen as a useful way of gaining experience alongside qualifications whilst in work. The point was made that they should be available for people at all stages in their career as a job for life no longer exists.

Free or affordable childcare using local providers

Due to the costs of childcare in the UK, parents can only work full time if their family and friends are willing to help out with their children. Those who lack an informal support network and work fulltime face childcare bills which leave them out of pocket compared to being signed on. Therefore free or means-tested childcare provision was welcomed by participants in both locations.

"If they could introduce childcare that could be free or subsidised, they could look at the household income to negotiate, that would be excellent."
Public participant, Pontypool

It would increase people's well-being knowing that they don't burden others with the responsibility. The point was made that free or affordable childcare should be provided close to home, close to the place of work or in case of larger employers, at the place of work.

Turn zero hour contracts into minimum hour contracts

In both Birmingham and Pontypool dialogue participants had very strong feelings about the detrimental effect on well-being of zero hour contracts. Zero hour contracts clash with a desire to have a sense of agency as they disempower people to budget and plan their lives.

Dialogue participants said zero hour contracts should be banned completely and in Birmingham the suggestion was made that they should be replaced by minimum hour contracts,

"Contracts [should be issued] immediately on starting work, not 3 – 6 months later. One with actual, reasonable hours on it."
Public participants, Birmingham

At the same time employers and employees should be educated about employment law and the suggestion was made to list legal obligations of both the employers and employee in contracts.

Get employers on board and ensure a win-win situation

Public participants and frontline workers agreed that Government should do more to involve employers in the active labour market dialogue. There was a strong sense that changes will not take effect if employers don't buy into new policy. They should be shown how the proposed policy changes benefit their business as well as their employees.

"Government would have to get the employers on board for all those points. The workforce is already on board so the government has got to be able to negotiate that with the employers."
Public participant, Pontypool

In Pontypool participants felt that the Government should make it a legal requirement for employers to sign up to Investors in People,

> *"There's a scheme called Investors in People that some employers use. Something like that should be something that all employers should have to embark upon."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Another recommendation from a group in Pontypool was that employers should be rewarded for moving their business to areas of high unemployment and staying there,

> *"There should be something in place that when a company comes to an area, and they've had a grant from the local government to set up a business there, as long as they are a profitable business, they shouldn't be allowed to take the business out of that area."*
> **Public participant, Pontypool**

Make the tax system more accommodating for those in low paid jobs

The current tax system was perceived as being counterproductive for those who are keen to increase their pay or working hours. Dialogue participants raised many concerns about losing working tax credits and/ or family tax credits when moving to a job that is slightly better paid. They feel punished for being ambitious and said that the system holds them back as it is inflexible and slow. Three recommendations emerged from the discussions:

- Avoid penalties for working more hours;
- Increase the tax allowance threshold from £10,000 to £12,000 per person
- Introduce a period of 'grace' when people find a better paid job so that they are not immediately taxed on a higher income.

Use inspiring communication demonstrating the benefits of working more hours

Public participants urged Government to ensure that communication around policy changes in the labour market is inspiring. The campaign should,

> *"Show that hard work pays off"*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

and use images of people employees on low pay can identify with. Messages should be directed at young people who are still in education as well as people like the public participants in the active labour market dialogue who are willing to work hard to improve their lives.

Act on dialogue outcomes

A key message of one of the groups in Birmingham was that Government should act on the dialogue outcomes as it would be bad for their well-being if this wasn't the case,

> *"The first thing that comes to mind is that whatever comes out of this meeting or these group meetings, they are acted on, not put on a shelf. There is an election next year. Whoever gets in, whatever is collated should be acted upon."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

They continued,

> *"Even if it's a no, give us a reason why, make it public. Don't cover it up, that's not good for our well-being."*
> **Public participant, Birmingham**

Introduction: Reducing loneliness

The following is an introduction to the dialogue on well-being and loneliness. Sessions were held in Bedford (6th and 21st May) and Leicester (7th and 22nd May) using the two round / three week cycle described in the [Introduction to the dialogue](#).

Recruitment sample

Acumen Fieldwork recruited 25 participants in Bedford of whom 23 came to both rounds. 25 people were recruited and retained for both of the Leicester sessions. The full recruitment specification is included in the [online technical annex](#). In summary those recruited fulfilled the following specification:

Bedford participants: urban – central and suburban Bedfordshire Leicester participants: rural Leicestershire
Good age distribution from 18+ including 30% of 55+
13% (or current population figures for the area) black and / or minority ethnic
40% single people aged 18-60   **40% 60+ older people**   **20% raising families –in a marriage/partnership as well as single parents**   **40% in employment**   **40% unemployed**   **20% retired**
100% have experienced loneliness in the last five years, of whom 50% have experienced a life changing issue (such as bereavement / loss of employment)

Potential participants were all asked, 'how much of the time during the past month have you felt lonely?' where 1=none or almost none of the time / 5=all or almost all of the time. All needed to score 3-5 to be included in the sample.

Dialogue scope

This part of the dialogue project aimed to answer the question:

What interventions, and by whom, could best alleviate high levels of loneliness, particularly those which can occur on a neighbourhood level to increase social connections?

Using the round 1 process plan ([see online technical annex](#)) facilitators asked participants a range of open questions to begin to test the question. These explored issues such as:

- The main reasons for loneliness;
- What a place without loneliness might be / look like;
- How loneliness is affected if the Five ways to well-being[3] are brought in to the discussion;
- Ideas for things that could be done to prevent or ease people's loneliness.

The context for the discussion of these areas was provided in round 1 in two presentations. NEF described the *Dynamic Model of Well-being*[4] as a way of examining how different aspects of well-being interlink and

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[3] http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being
[4] http://www.NEF-consulting.co.uk/our-services/training-capacity-building/resources-toolkits/a-dynamic-model-of-well-being/
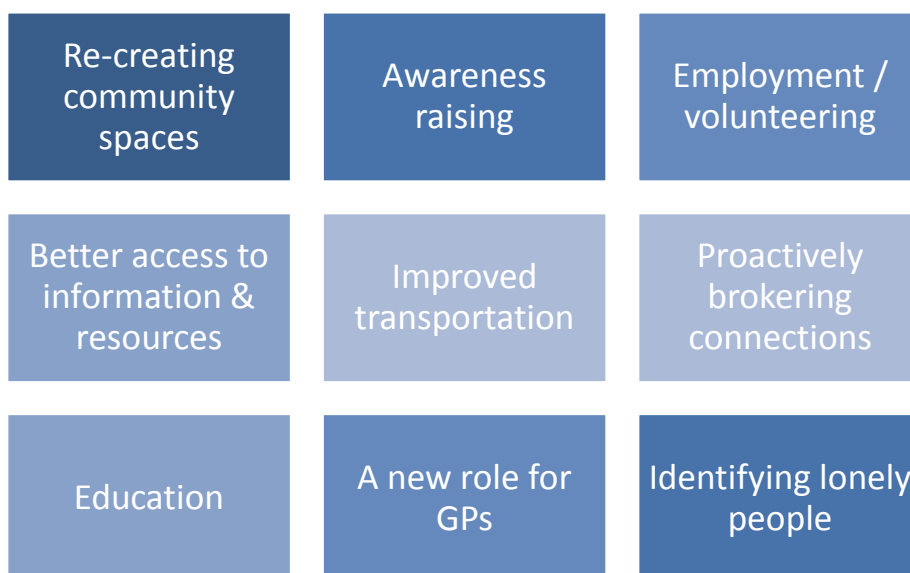
how improvements in one area influence other parts of an individual's experience. The topic specialists worked together to produce a presentation to give participants a sense of why the topic is important, help people feel more comfortable talking about their loneliness, and give definitions of loneliness and social isolation.

As a result of the discussion with this contextual information the following themes were identified by participants as areas where things could be done to prevent or ease loneliness. The interventions are described in detail in the Reducing loneliness findings section and in the online technical annex:

'Come by yourself and meet someone' events	National awareness raising campaign for loneliness	Using databases to identify people at risk of loneliness and provide help
Advertising opportunities in GP surgeries	GPs giving a voucher 'for you and a friend' activities	Reducing loneliness at work

In round 2 with public participants, and for frontline workers, NEF gave a presentation summarising the key points that came from the policy review meetings, work done by NEF, topic specialists and policy leads in between rounds 1 and 2. The presentation explained that the ideas that participants identified at the end of round 1 had been filtered to focus on those which were either completely new in combatting or preventing loneliness or were not new but had scope for further development through discussion at the dialogue.

As a result of the review process the ideas on which participants and frontline workers were asked to focus in round 2 of the loneliness dialogue were as follows:

Re-creating community spaces	Awareness raising	Employment / volunteering
Better access to information & resources	Improved transportation	Proactively brokering connections
Education	A new role for GPs	Identifying lonely people

Frontline workers were asked to consider each idea and reflect on:

- The extent to which the policy ideas seemed effective to them as a way of stopping / easing loneliness;
- What would need to be in place for it to work if this idea was to be tested in their area;
- How they felt about the ideas in terms of their applicability to their work.

Public participants were asked to consider each idea in turn and reflect on:

- The extent to which they felt that the idea seemed to them to be effective as a way of stopping or easing loneliness;
- Whether they would personally find this idea appealing and would therefore like to get involved in it, for example a national awareness raising campaign;
- What would need to be in place in their communities for the idea to be effective;
- What the effect on well-being would be of getting involved in such schemes;
- The positive and negative aspects of the scheme and any new information that would be needed before such an intervention could be implemented;
- The ideas in relation to the Five ways to well-being to identify the ideas they felt would really be effective in combatting and easing loneliness.

The dialogue ended with participants feeding back on what policy makers should think about in terms of positive interventions to prevent and alleviate loneliness and how this affects well-being.

Findings: Reducing loneliness

The following is a summary of the main findings of the two rounds of public dialogues in Bedford and Leicester. Responses from frontline workers in Bedford are incorporated in the section on Policy ideas to alleviate loneliness.

Causes of loneliness

Following presentations by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Campaign to End Loneliness and NEF giving the context to the loneliness issue, participants worked in small groups. They considered a community, real or imagined where people feel connected. This led to a discussion about the causes of loneliness and what makes communities in which people interact well with each other work.

Image 1: Drawing by public participant

In one of the groups a discussion about holidays revealed some of the common causes of loneliness. For some participants a holiday is a place where people are able to connect well. On holiday they can decide where they want to be, choose somewhere sunny to go and because they have saved for it, they have the money and transport to do what they wish to do.

> *"[On] holiday, everyone's happy, people with their families, you socialise more because people care about why you're there. It stands away from your daily life. The sun puts people in good moods. Nobody worries on holiday, it's all about enjoying themselves, being happy and relaxing."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Being on holiday takes people away from their everyday lives where they have little control over external factors which affect their ability to combat their own loneliness. Dialogue participant said these factors include the weather,

> *"The weather and the climate does get you down. When it's raining, it's miserable, and that leads to depression and loneliness."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

They also include money. A number of participants felt that their loneliness was in part caused by having insufficient funds to do what others were able to do,

> *"Work colleagues could say, 'Come out,' but you might not have the means to do it. You feel you should do, but you end up in debt."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

For some cost is a substantial barrier to taking part in activities that have the potential to reduce loneliness, such as formal training or informal learning activities,

"There is always a cost. I know loneliness is not always to do with poverty or being skint, but it can put people off."
Public participant, Bedford

Low income and long working hours were discussed as barriers to the participation of lonely people in local events. Participants discussed the need for funded events programmed twice (during the day and in the evening) so that those who work but have low incomes are enabled to take part, be active, learn something new and connect better with their community.

"Free clubs for all ages. Quite often I don't think people have the money to go and pay for extra things other than living."
Public participant, Bedford

"You can still be lonely even if you work. If [those events] are at ten o'clock on a Tuesday and you're at work you're kind of locked out of those type of things."
Public participant, Bedford

Equally transport was raised as an issue particularly for people who have disabilities and or who live in rural communities,

"I'm disabled and I used to be able to go down to London to visit my family and friends on the train, since I've become disabled I can't. It's very difficult to get on and off trains, I need help even on buses and things."
Public participant, Bedford

Many participants referred to a disappearing or lost community spirit when discussing their loneliness. They said that local communities had changed significantly and that there was nowhere obvious for a person experiencing loneliness to go. In their view this was caused in part by a closure of community spaces, particularly in rural areas,

"Close your pubs and local shops and you've got a smaller community. Especially in rural communities, although it could happen in a housing estate. You haven't got anywhere to really pass people."
Public participant, Bedford

They also felt that the loss of a sense of community was the result of people's fear of the unknown, for example because of concerns about crime if they go out,

"A lot of older people are fearful of going out on their own. I know friends who go, 'You're not there till 9:30 tonight are you?' They're fearful of coming into Leicester at 9:30. A crime situation could be making you isolated."
Public participant, Leicester

Both sessions were attended by a number of people who said that their loneliness was caused by life changing events, for example,

"I went through a divorce and all my friends were married with children, my family were busy. Although they were there on the phone and everything, they couldn't come out or come around all the time. So you'd come home, it would be just sitting in front of the TV on my own."
Public participant, Bedford

"When my wife died I went to the GP in January with chronic depression. The GP told me to go home and make models. I tried to commit suicide on January the sixth of this year."
Public participant, Bedford

For many participants, whether they had experienced life changing events or not, a significant cause of their loneliness was a feeling that they had nothing in common with those around them.

Communities where people connect and interact well

Public participants in the loneliness dialogue felt that in their ideal communities there would be an awareness of people's state of mind and life events, which would encourage others to rally round and help to ease their loneliness. In these communities people share experiences and common ground and there are facilities, green spaces and safe areas for chance meetings.
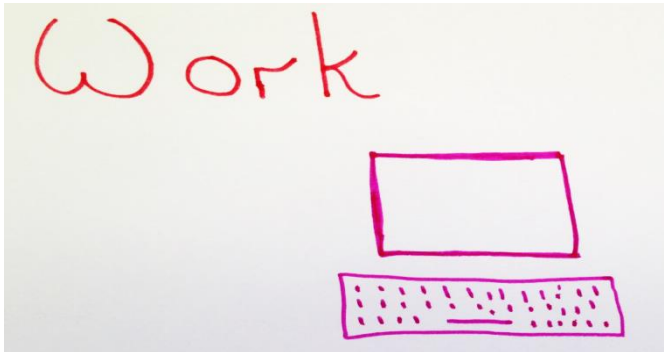

Image 2: Drawing by public participant

Some participants described their ideal community as their workplace. Somewhere where friendships are ready made, or where they are so busy that they don't have the time to consider their own loneliness.

"When you're working, you've got colleagues to socialise with. They become friends. So I think work's quite an important thing."
Public participant, Bedford

> *"When you work with people, you, sort of, go there, people speak to you during the day. It's a friendship and you are working for the same goal."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

The challenges come when people leave work and go home where they are faced with their own loneliness. Although their working day may have gone very well and included a lot of interaction with others, they nevertheless feel lonely. One participant put it this way,

> *"Once you become isolated, you realise how unimportant you are on your own or how much a lack of importance you have, no matter how well you were functioning within the group."*
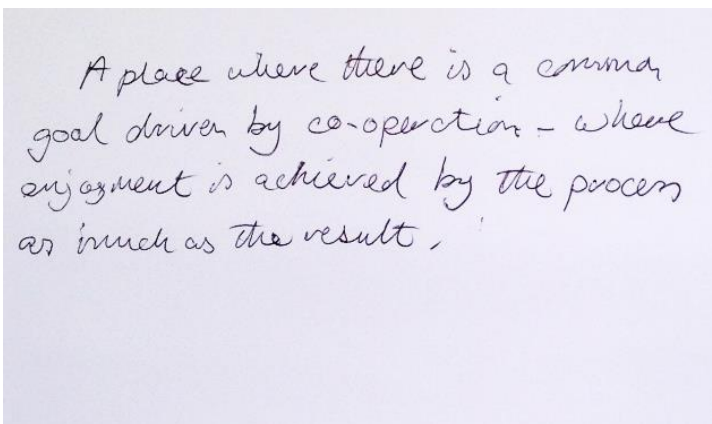> **Public participant, Leicester**

Image 3: Drawing by public participant

The loneliness dialogue demonstrated that people feel less lonely when they are linked to others by a common goal. In many participants' statements and drawings of their ideal community having a common purpose around which to gather was very important. One participant spelled it out,

"I thought the people there [in the imagined community] would have common aims, common struggles or shared values."
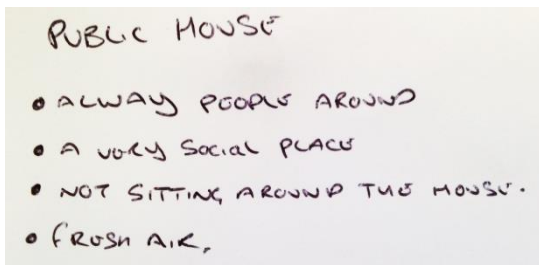**Public participant, Leicester**

Image 4: Drawing by public participant

In participants' ideal communities there would be a space where common ground could be identified. For some this is around a physical place such as a pub where the proprietor might be really good at creating an environment where common ground could be found. As one person said,

> "The landlord or the bar staff could make a pub, because some are good at involving people and being a common denominator from one person to the next. I think [the ideal community is] a social place."
> **Public participant, Bedford.**

And another,

> "You can guarantee with pubs there'll always be people there, there's always somebody to talk to. It gets you out of the house, and you're going to walk there in the fresh air with exercise."
> **Public participant, Leicester**

For others this is the school playground where the link is the children, or a library where you might discuss books or take part in an activity.

Image 5: Drawing by public participant

Some participants were less concerned about the physical space within a community and more concerned with having common experiences. Particularly older participants felt that their loneliness had been caused by having no one with their experience of, for example, war. As a male participant in his eighties said,

> "Mine's easy, just an old people centre, you can all meet and have a chat. They've got to be of my era, I'm 80. Wheels and carts doing the milk round, the Korean War, things like that."
> **Public participant, Bedford**

For those participants an ideal community would involve regular reunions of those with a common experience, or a place where those people could gather such as an old people's centre or home.

The most frequently cited ideal community in both areas was one in which people pull together bonded by the neighbourhood in which they live. This is a place where people have shared values and recognise each other's worth. There are free and affordable local facilities and focal points for people to meet and get to know each other, not only in formal gatherings, but also when going about their business because people are more likely to strike a conversation in the street.

For many participants this ideal is encapsulated in a village environment. One participant explained their drawing as follows,

"It's just a happy village with a pond with fish. Somewhere where there are lots of places for chance meetings."
Public participant, Bedford

Image 6: Drawing by public participant

There was a sense of nostalgia amongst some participants for a passed age where village life naturally prevented loneliness. One participant recalled their childhood,

"My Gran and Granddad used to have a farm years ago, so when I was younger I spent all my summers there. It was a proper community. There was a village hall there, they had concerts, a village shop."
Public participant, Leicester

For other participants the community in which people connect and loneliness is eased and addressed, is not an imaginary ideal and not necessarily rooted in the past. They saw it as something practical and achievable building on and improving the institutions that already exist in communities,

"It is practically creating a local social group in your vicinity for people to contact each other, discuss all of their problems, including eradication of the feelings of loneliness. Location could be in a local village hall or the local library."
Public participant, Leicester

Image 7: Drawing by public participant

The Five ways to well-being and loneliness

The majority of participants found NEF's Five Ways to Well-being a useful way of thinking about well-being in the context of their loneliness. At the start of the second round dialogue a number of participants referred to them,

"I'd never heard of NEF but I thought the five points were a brilliant and simple explanation of things, and how you could encapsulate that really."
**Public participant, Leicester**

"I was still thinking about it days afterwards. [..] You don't look at things around you, [you don't] appreciate as much as you should. I even spoke to my friend about it. I found it helpful, informative and interesting."
Public participant, Leicester

One participant told us that he had shared the cards with a neighbour, who he discovered was lonely too,

> *"[I was] saying if you take the five little steps and how they can help. It was really positive."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**
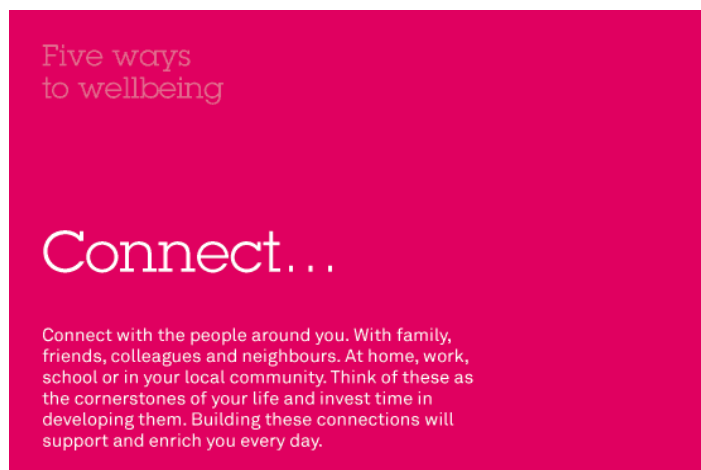
Connect was seen as an essential concept which leads to a feeling of being welcome and included. Participants said a personal approach is important in breaking down the barriers many lonely people experience and that community events have to be advertised widely.

They felt that the most effective ways of targeting lonely people are door knocking and personal invitations in the post,

> *"Then they're more likely to go because they don't feel like they have to go with another person."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

> *"Just getting an invite makes you feel included, a chance to meet new people, just to see people that you already know in a safe environment."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Dialogue participants said that connecting face-to-face is more effective for alleviating feelings of loneliness than connecting online,

> *"With a computer, you're still just sitting there on your own, so it's not real life."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**
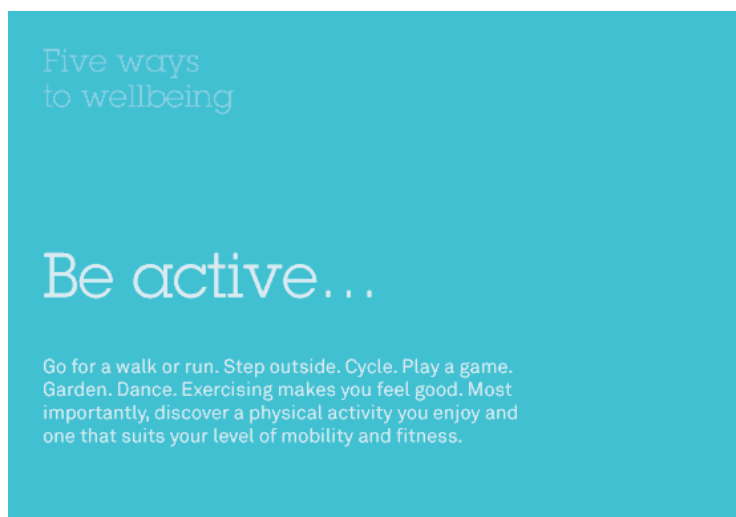
Be active was seen as an important vehicle for creating friendships and support.

Participants talked about how group exercising and joining activities in a local library, village hall or community centre are helpful but emphasised that it is important to take away the fear of facing people and making friends.

Tying activities in with people's daily routine was seen as a way forward, as one participant said it would be useful if,

> *"From the parents' perspective, once they've dropped their children, [there would be opportunities] to go for walks, cycle rides, exercise classes, dance groups."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Participants stressed that activities have to be enjoyable and achievable,

> *"You can give people certain goals but it has to be achievable. […] It's got to be something where they can think 'I could do that' and it gives them a sense of well-being and self-worth."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Keep learning - many participants mentioned how learning with others and sharing skills is useful for people who feel lonely. It allows people to build on individual strengths and have a common goal which in turn make it easier to connect to others.

"At the community college we've got a University of the Third Age, if somebody knows something they can run a class […]. That is something I'm going to do when I get more time."
Public participant, Leicester

Some groups talked about how intergenerational learning between older and younger people might boost self-confidence and lead to a better society.

"When you help someone it increases your own self-worth. People who are lonely have low self-worth. A practical way of doing this is displaying retired people who've got skills they can't use anymore. You could have a directory of people with all these skills, decorators, bricklayers."
Public participant, Bedford

Helping each other, that should be encouraged somehow. Get your neighbour's kids to teach you how to use Sky+."
Public participant, Bedford

"If you get children at a young age [helping out older people/ sharing skills], it will become a way of life."
Public participant, Bedford

Give – This way to well-being had most traction with participants in the dialogue. Giving time was seen as a useful vehicle for easing loneliness. Many participants mentioned volunteering as a positive step although some said that they were not sure where to go if they wanted to give their time,

"Identifying what's needed in order to give. That's half the battle."
Public participant, Bedford

"It just needs to be advertised more, people need to be aware of where they can go to find out where they could volunteer."
Public participant, Bedford

Even if they did know where to go, for a lonely person the fear of what volunteering will be like would be a barrier to them doing it,

"I think everyone is willing, it's just fear sometimes why people wouldn't do something. Fear of the unknown."
Public participant, Leicester

This chimed with the view of some that lonely people perhaps need to give a bit of themselves,

> *"You have to give a bit of yourself as a person to leap into something. If there was anything that could take away the fear of facing strangers and saying 'hello', that would be great but I don't think there is."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Others stressed that lonely people will not come forward if it isn't obvious that their involvement is needed and valued. One idea was to have leaflets with three questions:

> *"Do you feel lonely? Could you benefit from some time with other people? Do you feel you could give a couple of hours a week?"*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Policy ideas to alleviate loneliness

In this section we present the embryonic policy ideas which emerged from discussing loneliness and well-being with public participants and frontline workers.

Less medicine, more guidance: a new role for GPs

All groups in Bedford and Leicester emphasised that they see an important role for GPs in alleviating loneliness, one that they are not fully meeting as yet. The majority of people said they would expect more guidance from their GP on how to tackle loneliness and increase their well-being. They don't want to be treated for depression (unless they are suffering from that as well as loneliness), nor do they expect glib answers to the challenges they have in life. They would like GPs to include an eye-catching message about loneliness on repeat prescriptions and signpost patients to volunteering opportunities, local events, groups or buddy schemes.

Dialogue participants shared the view that GPs should proactively probe patients in search of signs of loneliness. In the main they felt that GPs are in a good position to do so as they often know a lot about their patients' lives and health and are generally perceived as a trusted person in the community,

> *"It's [about] knowing that that person is lonely or depressed. The only people that would actually know that are doctors."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

> *"We think people are more confident in front of the GP than an awful lot of other people in society, including their own family."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

To increase the evidence base, GPs should ask about loneliness at each health appointment. If they suspect that a patient is lonely participants would expect more guidance on where to go for support rather than being prescribed anti-depressants,

> *"Less medicine, more guidance. [...] It isn't a simple prescription for diazepam, it's a route into some form of group or therapy, counselling, guidance."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

> *"GPs should refer lonely people, because often that is the first port of call. Rather than give tablets out, they could refer them to organisations as part of their treatment, or have information on the boards in the waiting room."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Dialogue participants saw a role for GPs in raising awareness of the issue in the community with leaflets, posters and an animation of the Five Ways to Well-being on a screen in waiting rooms.

> *"That could be done through GP surgeries, advertise it on their big screens. That way you're not putting your hand up in the air and saying, 'I'm lonely'."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

> *"People are vulnerable at the doctor's, perhaps more likely to take the information on board."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

The majority of dialogue participants were positive about this policy idea and reiterated how the GP practice is already for some of them, and has the potential to be for others, a barrier-free focal point in communities. In their view advertising in waiting rooms would reach many people from all walks of life. On the negative side, those working with and supporting lonely people in the community felt that GP practices aren't genuinely paying attention to what information is being provided,

> *"They redecorate the surgery and they take all the posters down without you knowing. You put leaflets out but they don't replenish them. Very difficult to get them to do it effectively."*
> **Frontline worker, Bedford**

Equally frontline workers were concerned that the idea might raise concerns about the quality of the organisation advertising. Frontline workers felt that there would need to be some overarching body who would vet the information so that GPs could trust it as a bona fide resource for people who are lonely and need help. Their solution was described by one participant as follows,

> *"If you went to the Health and Well-being board in the council, or even NHS England, if there was one single leaflet that had gone through the quality control, there would be less of a barrier."*
> **Frontline worker, Bedford**

The view was expressed that advertising in waiting rooms should tie in with a national awareness raising campaign so that those attending a GP surgery are reminded of the message over and over again and are clear about what they might do to help themselves.

They agreed that messages for people wishing to overcome loneliness have to be clear and communicate the evidence of the effect of loneliness on health. They were also concerned that the messages should not be delivered exclusively in printed communication as this could exclude people with lower literacy skills and those for whom English is not their first language.

Participants in Leicester spoke about a free telephone line and how they preferred text messaging over making a telephone call,

> *"We might be too frightened to phone up, but why not text to say 'I'm lonely' and they'll ring you back."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Some groups discussed how advertising in GP surgeries could be more effective if each practice had a dedicated member of staff available for lonely people at clearly advertised times.

In general public participants were more optimistic about advertising in GP surgeries than frontline workers who could see the barriers in encouraging take up amongst GPs. However, even amongst the public who liked the idea, and thought it had potential, there was a feeling that GPs would need a great deal of training to make sure that they really understood the loneliness issue and could act accordingly, whether by offering better support for patients they see, or by advertising messages to alleviate loneliness in surgeries.

The majority of participants were surprised by the evidence that 1 in 5 people from all ages and walks of lives are affected by loneliness. There was a strong sense in both locations that their well-being would benefit from greater awareness of loneliness in communities and society in general. They expressed the view that it would make people feel less alone if loneliness was de-stigmatised.

Dialogue participants felt very strongly that government should raise awareness of the issue,

> *"Maybe you are lonely and you are willing to do something about it but it's the community around you that is a bit closed off to loneliness. They don't know what you are feeling, they may not be approachable."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

They considered one way of doing this was to include loneliness and social skills in the school curriculum. Participants in both locations talked about the need for discussions at schools about loneliness at different life stages, how to spot the signs of loneliness and what you can do to help someone who is feeling lonely. This should go hand-in-hand with lessons about social skills and lessons about the limitations and opportunities of social media in the context of forming meaningful relationships.

> *"You've got to cut the loneliness. The only way you're going to do that is by education and training."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

> *"Teaching social skills at school is a big part. At fifteen, sixteen you don't actually think there is a risk of being lonely. […] If you could target that, you would probably find that a lot of people didn't turn to alcohol and drugs etc."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

There was an overwhelming support for the idea to launch a national loneliness awareness campaign. For the public the primary role of the national campaign should be to make people more aware of how widespread loneliness is and how it can be overcome.

> *"Normalise loneliness, get it talked about."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Dialogue participants and frontline workers shared the view that a strong campaign would increase the well-being of lonely people in two ways. It would make lonely people realise that there are many others with similar feelings, and it would give them an increased understanding of the issue. It was felt that the idea has the potential to contribute to communities in which people pay more attention to signs of loneliness.

> *"[A national campaign] takes the stigma away. It's a national problem, not just you. You don't feel so isolated."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

There was a sense amongst some that the campaign should focus on helping to make the world a better place with the emphasis on well-being rather than loneliness,

> *"The initiative can be for loneliness, but the campaign focuses on well-being."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

> *"Don't call it loneliness, just call it 'building a better, happier life.'"*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

"You say something's for people who are lonely, they won't touch it. If the focus is on well-being, or making the world a better place, or having a positive effect on society, it's a lot nicer."
Public participants, Leicester

Participants had mixed feelings about how loneliness should be pitched. Some said that it is important that loneliness is not treated as an illness,

"You can be lonely but you don't have a mental health issue."
Public participant, Leicester

Others compared loneliness to an injury,

"It's no different to breaking your leg. It's an injury, but an injury to the soul. […] The only difference is you get no sympathy."
Public participant, Leicester

Frontline workers' opinions ranged from those who believe it's helpful if the campaign pitches loneliness as a mental health problem and those who feel the word 'loneliness' should be avoided.

"When someone recognises they're lonely, half the problem's gone. If you acknowledge mental health, it can cut the problem down by 50%."
Frontline worker, Bedford

"It could create a greater stigma about lonely people recognising that they're lonely and they've got a campaign about them. We're not sure if the actual title 'Loneliness' is a good word."
Frontline worker, Bedford

It was agreed by all that if the initiative was taken up then key campaign messages should all have a positive tone. They should be welcoming, light-hearted and focused on what you can do to help yourself and support others. Frontline workers emphasised that the national campaign should reflect that solutions are local. It is about communicating what people can do in their communities,

"If the awareness thing was, 'Do you have time to help somebody else?' That would be a positive thing."
Frontline worker, Bedford

It was felt that a national campaign should include images and stories of people of all ages with a focus on the positive effects of conquering loneliness and how that impacts on all other areas of life. It was suggested that it should use all communication channels, from television and radio to social media, banners and posters. It should be supported by talks in places of worship, schools, community centres, libraries and hospitals and have celebrity endorsement, much like other successful campaigns, such as Dementia Friends[5] or Time to Change[6],

"There are big campaigns for dementia, depression and high profile celebrities like Stephen Fry who suffered from depression. It just brings it to the forefront of people's minds."
Public participant, Leicester

Some groups discussed that a campaign should be sustained by a central co-ordination team with local branches which would work in partnership with a wide network of organisations to mobilise support for the lonely. Other groups linked the campaign to an umbrella website with ideas from all over the country to combat loneliness. They suggested that features of such a portal would include links to other organisations;

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[5] www.dementiafriends.org.uk
[6] http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/

a chat room for all age groups; a confidential advice line; tools for lonely people to help themselves; and access to local events, resources and support.

> *"You could have a national website that gives you access to different health guides, different groups and maybe a postcode finder to give you things that are going on in your community."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

The website would signpost to best practice,

> *"On the website [you would have] different ideas [to combat loneliness] from all different parts of the country where people have run groups, sessions, meetings that have worked."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

In Leicester one group discussed very positively one participant's idea of having a yellow band as a campaign symbol,

> *"I had the thought of the yellow bands campaign and it came to me after the first session we had. I feel so passionate that it would work and establish a common ground whether you suffer from loneliness or want to support it."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Key to this proposal is that it is not to identify and stigmatise people who are lonely, but rather to create a yellow band network of people who support the prevention and cure of loneliness, whether they are or have been challenged by it in their life or not.

Others in Leicester brainstormed a campaign title and came up with 'Connect in'. There was a lot of buy-in for this idea amongst the public participants.

Other ideas that could feed into and be supported by the national campaign included a national 'meet your neighbour day' and 'find a friend week'. The national 'meet your neighbour day' originated in Bedford where participants said that people should be encouraged to knock on neighbours' doors, give something to, or do something for a neighbour. Participants in Leicester discussed the national 'find a friend week'.

Using existing databases to identify people at risk of loneliness

To increase the effectiveness of interventions, dialogue participants in both locations said government should actively seek out the lonely.

Participants listed a range of ways to pro-actively identify people at risk of loneliness, including collaboration with registrar offices, family courts, social services and possibly supermarkets holding customer data. Other access points might be found by establishing partnerships with libraries, neighbourhood schemes, funeral parlours or crematoriums and housing associations. In Leicester one group talked about targeting the lonely through council tax bills,

> *"The reason why I said council tax is that I know everybody gets one. If there's a leaflet in there of certain groups listed within this area. […] Perhaps they could advertise 'We can bring you along'."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Re-creating a sense of community

A disappearing or lost sense of community was a recurring theme throughout the two dialogue sessions. Participants acknowledged the need for funding and support to bring back some of the community values that they most associated with their own childhoods. They came up with a number of ideas to facilitate greater community cohesion.

One group in Leicester came to the conclusion that every community should have its own 'super community centre'. They described the 'super centre' as a place in the community for chance meetings and planned activities. It has a wide ranging programme of events, some of which will be specifically targeted at lonely people. Services include a library with a book club; a cinema room; hobby rooms; chill out areas; and a coffee hub. Leisure at the centre is broadened out to all five ways of well-being, not just exercise. The centre would be funded by sponsorship through a coffee chain and other local businesses.

> *"We're going to get in with Costa Coffee, they're going to fund it all. They'll have a nice hub in the middle, like Borders did with Starbucks. They're going to fund it because it's going to need funding, you can't just have people there for nothing. […] This is going to be a great community centre with lots of different things for different ages."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

There was support for the idea of a paid community officer for each community. The paid community officer might be based at the super centre and facilitate local activities that help address loneliness. He or she would be the first port of call for the community; a safe person to talk to for people who are lonely; someone who knows the area and community well and can therefore broker connections. The community officer would work closely with GPs and other existing support groups.

> *"What's needed is a focal person within the community and a budget attached to them."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Others discussed how open community groups for all ages with free food and drink might encourage lonely people to get out of the house and socialise with others. These groups could possibly be funded through the 'community coffee' idea, which a participant understood originated from Canada where people can opt to buy a coffee for themselves and a community coffee for the community coffee fund. People who can't afford to buy a coffee can order a community coffee instead. They felt this would alleviate feelings of social isolation as a result of a lack of or low income.

> *"They will say 'Can I have a community coffee please'. It makes their day."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Some groups expressed concern about the lack of affordable community spaces for hire, the high cost of attending ticketed events or exercise classes and the feeling of isolation that brings. They felt that the availability of free or affordable activities and community spaces would make a positive difference to their well-being.

> *"Twenty years ago we didn't have the problems we have now. Now it's a nightmare, it costs a fortune to do even the simplest thing."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

In Bedford one group discussed how society should make better use of the unemployed to create communities in which people feel better. To reduce a sense of isolation of lonely people with poor access to public transport it would be useful if there was a community jobs scheme to improve transportation links. It could provide a 'bus-to-doorstep' service to elderly people and those living in rural communities.

> *"My mum can't get to the bus stop. I've got a friend who drives old people around […] so that they can get out and not be so lonely and do the things they want to do"*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Participants felt this scheme should be managed by a Job Centre Plus,

> *"What they do with the unemployed people now, you have to do six months free work to get your benefit. Rather than send them into a factory chopping up bits of plastic or something, they could be putting it back into the community for old people."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Another option would be a community scheme for taxi companies who could sponsor a ride in exchange for free publicity.

In Leicester one of the groups talked about what would make it easier for lonely people to connect with others in public spaces. They said that street architecture should reflect the needs of lonely people,

> *"The design of public spaces, there is a lot that can be done to make it more conducive to people meeting, talking and being together."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

They agreed that most lonely people find it less intimidating to use benches or seats where they know they may only need to liaise with one or two others. They therefore proposed the installation of more seating areas in twos or threes. Another idea was to equip more parks with permanent barbeques creating a communal space outdoors for social events and informal get-togethers.

Reducing loneliness at work

In both locations there was agreement that work and volunteering offer opportunities for lonely people to connect better with others and that employers need to be made aware of the loneliness issue and the effect it might have on staff morale and productivity. Although some participants identified work as an ideal community where friendships are ready made because people connect around a common goal, loneliness at work was an important theme for many. Dialogue participants felt that greater recognition of the issue would alleviate some of their feelings of loneliness.

Participants acknowledged that at work it is sometimes difficult to overcome social barriers. This can be due to age, ethnicity and language barriers or the sheer nature of the job. We heard from home carers who attend to a large number of clients a day without opportunities to share their experiences, and factory workers with repetitive jobs in which interaction with others is limited or non-existent.
Dialogue participants shared the view that employers who manage to raise employee self-esteem and confidence in the workplace will see a reduction in the number of sick days and increased productivity,

> *"If you've got happy employees then you've got a good workforce."*
> **Frontline worker, Bedford**

Frontline workers raised the point that this intervention is not without challenges as it depends on how organisations are structured and what their policy for lone working/ team working is. Some expressed concern about the likelihood of employers taking the message on board and felt it unlikely that they would be interested in developing a programme to support lonely people in the workforce,

> *"Employers are always going to prioritise the commercial aspect over the individual aspect, even though you don't want them to. They're under pressure too."*
> **Frontline worker, Bedford**

Dialogue participants said that this policy would only work if government managed to sell the benefits of reducing loneliness to employees in terms of increased productivity and sales. Some groups felt that an employer award or kite mark might be useful,

"The government should do something with the top 50 employers. Having their own loneliness reducing initiatives should be one of the criteria to get within the top employers."
Frontline worker, Bedford

Increasing well-being at work would also require an employer training programme which would teach employers how to recognise signs of loneliness and advise them on what they can do to alleviate loneliness in the workplace.

"Training for Department Heads to recognise social interactions and reduce loneliness. It's training, really. You'd need someone skilled in identifying it."
Public participant, Bedford

Public participants and frontline workers came up with a range of ideas about how to alleviate loneliness in the work place, including company outings, lunches, matching employees to buddies, induction days for new employees and a tax relief scheme for employers who implement loneliness reduction schemes,

"Our firm used to pay for us to go to the theatre twice a year, so that was a good thing because if somebody wasn't doing anything there would be at least one day every six months."
Public participant, Bedford

"You could get a lonely person to work with someone they get on with. It's identifying it and that's a skill."
Public participant, Bedford

In Bedford one group discussed the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme to match retiring employees with a young apprentice in the final year before their retirement to pass on their skills and knowledge,

"People are being made to work longer now because the retirement age is going up. [In this proposal] they finish work at the normal age and take a young apprentice out of school to learn a trade."
Public participant, Bedford

For the young unemployed there should be a guaranteed job with the company at the end of the apprenticeship,

"If the person was still in employment, the young person could go and do it voluntarily if there was a guaranteed job at the end of it."
Public participant, Bedford

As far as the majority of participants are concerned, tackling loneliness in the workplace would require an organisation-wide approach, led by Human Resources teams. Should an employee not feel comfortable about sharing their issue internally they would need to know where to go for confidential advice, which links in with ideas around the national loneliness awareness campaign.

"A confidential phone line that you could ring if you don't want to go to your manager."

Public participant, Bedford

Brokering connections

Many participants acknowledged that lonely people are often locked up in their own seclusion. They talked a lot about initiatives that would make it easier to overcome personal barriers and make connections. The following is a summary of ideas aimed at brokering connections.

Participants proposed a new style buddy system which would be used by GPs, NGOs and community officers. It would match people with similar experiences (i.e. bereavement of a partner; job loss; recently retired) as well as people who can fill a gap in each other's lives (i.e. empty nester with a young mum or dad for example). It would be a bit like a good neighbour scheme too.

> "You'd put a leaflet through their door and let them know, so you could buddy people up. Say a single parent who is lonely might want to be with another single parent."
> **Public participant, Bedford**

> "I know people that are extremely lonely and would not go to any of these things unless they were taken by a relative, friend or something. They've lost the self-esteem. They've shut themselves away."
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Another option put forward is a light-touch buddy service offering lonely people companionship for a first trip to an event/ venue, potentially supported by a safe and friendly meet-up website, which could a friendship equivalent of a dating site. This online facility would match people who are looking for a friend. It has to be sufficiently sophisticated to ensure lonely people will not feel set back if a first meeting is not successful. Dialogue participants proposed a theme based approach and the use of vouchers for those who are bringing new friends to the scheme which would be hosted by trustworthy organisations, perhaps through government or local authorities,

> "You have dating websites, almost having a friendship equivalent, looking for somebody to do common interests with as opposed to looking for somebody to date. Looking for somebody that wants to go and see films, wants holidays, or likes going out, chatting and having coffee."
> **Public participant, Leicester**

A note of caution to this idea was struck by some,

> "People could be vulnerable to that as well, maybe people would take advantage […] of lonely singles."
> **Public participant, Leicester**

A community bartering scheme would enable community members to offer a skill, a thing or their time and receive an equivalent offer from someone else in the community. Participants in the dialogue talked about 'paying forward', e.g. babysitting in exchange for taxi services.

> "Starting small and then maybe moving on to bartering. […] Maybe just getting shopping for someone. Clubbing together to get buy one get one free things. Trying to always think of other people and what you can do."
> **Public participant, Bedford**

> "I was talking to someone today. They went to the gym but then the person training said, I'll be your personal trainer, could you teach me guitar?', because this guy could play the guitar. Exchange, so it's healthier."
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Participants came up with the idea of running 'Come by yourself and meet someone' events, possibly from the super community centre and linked into the new style buddy system. These events would be targeted at people who have no one to accompany them to community events. They would be targeted at people with either age, life experiences, or interests in common.

> "Have events that encourage you to come by yourself, and you can specify an age range to establish common ground. So for one, an over 50s event and an under 50s event. […] You don't feel like you

need to take someone with you. Everybody there is going to be on their own, so you're going to strike up friendships quickly."
Public participant, Leicester

Come by yourself and meet someone events were seen as a useful intervention for the bereaved,

> *"People who are very lonely because of the death of their partner […] wouldn't go to any of these things. They wouldn't have the courage to go unless I took you there. The first weeks I would be with you and you'd meet other people then."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Other ideas included building on the success of the Big Lunch[7] and street party events. Participants in Bedford felt that an annual community sports event would be a draw for lonely people who would feel comfortable engaging in an activity that doesn't require sitting around a table. A community sports day would be coordinated by volunteers who would provide guidance on how to engage community members who wouldn't normally leave their homes for a Big Lunch or street party.

Key points and recommendations for policymakers

In the final plenary session each of the small groups presented recommendations for policymakers about positive policy interventions to alleviate loneliness. There was general agreement that a new role for GPs, a national awareness raising campaign, re-creating a sense of community interventions in the workplace to reduce loneliness and brokering connections would provide a useful focus for government when considering policies to reduce loneliness in communities.

When given the opportunity to share their key messages with policymakers, participants formulated the following recommendations:

- Do not delay, start now – society as a whole benefits from tackling loneliness;
- Remove the stigma and raise awareness of loneliness;
- Focus on well-being in campaigns as a positive message rather than 'loneliness', which is negative;
- Empower lonely people to help themselves;
- Recognise that there is no quick fix, Government needs to commit to a long-term strategy;
- Keep talking to the public.

Do not delay, start now

Dialogue participants were pleasantly surprised by the presence of policymakers at the sessions as they did not know that loneliness was an issue of concern to the Government.

> *"I wasn't aware that the Government was bothered whether anyone was lonely or not."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Everyone acknowledged that it is hugely important that the issue is recognised and that there is immediate commitment to finding ways of combatting and easing loneliness.

Remove the stigma and raise awareness of loneliness

In both locations public participants agreed that an increased awareness of loneliness in society would contribute to their individual well-being. They were all strongly in favour of a national campaign to raise

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[7] http://www.thebiglunch.com/

awareness of how widespread loneliness is and to present a portfolio of solutions to support people experiencing loneliness.

The perceived stigma around loneliness dents many lonely people's self-confidence. A focus on how it affects people of all ages and backgrounds is the key to ensuring loneliness is no longer classified as something which affects 'sad' people. A group in Leicester said it's an injury to the soul and therefore no different to breaking a leg.

In Bedford someone said that a campaign would make it easier to talk to people,

> *"Getting people to open up about it [is positive], you could say, 'Did you see that campaign on loneliness?' and then that would start you talking, 'Have you ever felt it by the way? You don't have to sell it as an illness on the campaign, it's just an awareness."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

Focus on well-being rather than loneliness

For many dialogue participants the word 'loneliness' is off-putting. They preferred a focus on well-being and said that a national campaign should make use of NEF's Five Ways to Well-being as a way of promoting a happier life and curing loneliness.

> *"If we give them these cards, it will make them think if they're lonely, without giving them this word loneliness."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

Others felt that it was helpful to use the word loneliness but to make sure that in doing so it is accompanied by the national awareness raising campaign,

> *"We need to use the word loneliness even though it is stigmatised. Education is needed, loneliness is a stigma but it can happen at any time, teach people the signs."*
> **Public participant, Bedford**

One group proposed to use the word 'Connect-in' in the campaign title.

> *"We really don't like the word loneliness […]. Make it positive, friendship, we thought of the word connecting, or connect-in."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

And another group supported the idea of the 'yellow bands',

> *"The one thing we think is the winner of the night was for people who are lonely, looking for friendship to be encouraged to wear a yellow band."*
> **Public participant, Leicester**

The yellow bands would also be worn by those in support of the campaign, as an expression of solidarity, support and awareness.

Empower people to help themselves

Dialogue participants and frontline workers shared the view that alleviation of loneliness starts with empowering individuals, which contributes to their well-being. They recognised that there are many types of loneliness and that one size doesn't fit all. Therefore interventions which increase self-awareness and inspire people to help themselves are more likely to be effective.

"I take responsibility for me and my well-being. Not the NHS, or somebody else. I have to do that. Its turning that light switch on inside me and making me want to do it. It is about that word, 'empowering', people."
Frontline worker, Bedford

Commit to a long term strategy

Dialogue participants emphasised that alleviating or curing loneliness takes time. As loneliness comes in many shapes and forms there is no quick fix and any interventions Government might introduce to alleviate loneliness will need to be sustained for the longer term. One group in Leicester said,

"Act on policies once they have been developed, sustain interventions and monitor their implementation for ongoing improvement."
Public participants, Leicester

Keep talking to the public

Participants in the loneliness dialogue genuinely enjoyed the process and expressed the hope that Government will continue talking to the public in this manner. Some would happily remain involved in further conversations. As one participant said,

"I am sad these sessions are over but would love to be actively involved in contributing any future ideas. Please keep in touch."
Public participant, Leicester

Introduction: Increasing community control through the community rights

The following is an introduction to the dialogue on well-being and community rights. Sessions were held in London (30th June and 16th July) and Birkenhead (1st and 17th July) using the two round / three week cycle described in section 1 of this report.

Recruitment sample

Acumen Fieldwork recruited 25 participants in London, 24 of whom were retained for both sessions. 25 people were recruited for the Birkenhead sessions, 24 of whom were retained for both rounds. The full recruitment specification is included in the online technical annex. In summary those recruited fulfilled the following specification:

London: urban – central and greater London Birkenhead participants: urban / rural Birkenhead and environs
Good age distribution from 18+ upwards
13% (or current population figures for the area) black and / or minority ethnic
A broad range of life stages from young professionals, raising children to the active retired.
A broad range of individuals with three specific requirements: **Individuals from one or more areas where community rights initiatives are in place**   **Individuals from relatively deprived areas**   **Individuals from more prosperous areas**
Test question: 'To what extent is it important for you that your community is given greater control over delivering and budgeting for local services? 1=not at all important / 5=very important.'
40% have direct experience of community rights having an impact on their lives   **40% would answer 3 or more to the test question**   **20% would answer less than 3 to the test question but are nevertheless interested in the issue of community rights.**

Dialogue scope

This part of the dialogue project aimed to answer the question:

What is needed to encourage more people to consider exercising their community rights, or take control of their communities in other ways?

Using the round 1 process plan (see online technical annex) facilitators asked participants a range of open questions to begin to test the question, these explored issues such as:

- How much influence in their communities participants currently have compared to the amount of influence they would like;
- The importance of being able to take up their community rights;
- Other ways in which communities might wish to influence local decisions;
- Measures which would motivate communities to take up their rights and take other steps to change things in their local areas;
- The support participants would need to exercise the kind of influence they would like for local decisions, services and or assets.

The context for the discussion was provided in round 1 in a presentation by the topic specialist, who explained four of the Community Rights defined within the Localism Act: Right to Bid, Right to Build, Right to Challenge and Neighbourhood Planning and gave examples of the rights being used by communities. This was followed by a presentation by the Department for Communities and Local Government on take up of the rights across England. NEF also presented on community rights and well-being research to give participants an overview of the possible impact on well-being of exercising influence of local decisions. As a result of the discussion within the context set by DCLG, the topic specialists and NEF, participants identified the following as things which would motivate people to take up their community rights. These points are described in detail in the findings section and in the online technical annex:

Fixing local issues	Changing things for the better that affect them personally	Being inspired by other communities	A group of effective leaders
Greater awareness of the rights	A local one-stop shop and designated support contact	Increased likelihood of winning a bid	A recognition that all community members have something to contribute
Awareness of local opportunities and projects	Incentives for participating in community rights projects	Community rights embedded in education	Access to advice and support

In round 2 the contextual information given to frontline workers and public participants covered:

A) NEF presentation on the outcomes of round 1
1) Key themes from round 1
2) Support available

B) NEF presentation on well-being
1) Summarising points from round 1 presentation
2) Reflecting back what participants said in terms of well-being and community rights in round 1

Additionally public participants were given two case studies to consider:
1) Right to Bid: Saving the Ivy House Pub (London) and Saving Tranmere Rovers FC (Birkenhead)
2) Neighbourhood Planning: Sudbury Town (London) and Heathfield Park (Birkenhead)

During the frontline worker session, those working on community rights issues in London were asked to think about:
- The first steps that would be needed for the communities they work with to take forward their community rights (Bid / Challenge / Build / Neighbourhood Plan) if they wished to;
- The kinds of support, in addition to that already available, that would be needed to help people to achieve their goals;
- How getting involved (either as a leader, one of the team, or as someone who is consulted) in community rights would affect the well-being of those involved.

Public participants, working in three separate groups in the round 2 workshops were asked to focus on different aspects of influencing local decisions. The first group looked at Right to Bid, the second group at

Neighbourhood Planning and the third at imaginary social action within their communities. They considered:

- What would need to happen to get their communities ready to exercise their rights;
- On what areas they would wish to lead, be involved, be consulted as community rights or social action were taken forward;
- The role of local authorities, councillors, MPs and others in leading such activities;
- The effect on well-being in getting involved in local decision making;
- The kinds of words, images, action and communication that would inspire people to get involved.

The dialogue ended with participants feeding back on two 'dos' and two 'don'ts' for Government as they encourage people to exercise the rights / influence local decisions taking in to account the potential impact on well-being.

# Findings: Increasing community control through the community rights

In this section[8] we describe the results of the discussion on well-being and community rights for both the public participants over two rounds and one session with frontline workers.

Current and desired community influence

Sense of community

In London participants' expressed their sense of community in terms of home and activities undertaken either by themselves or their families and friends. These include housing associations and tenancy / residents associations; libraries; churches; pubs; allotments and schools / nurseries and parent groups.

In Birkenhead community was seen as something involving close family and friends,
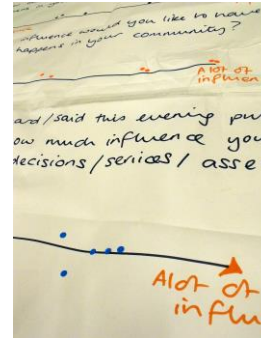
> *"Everyone who lives around me, my neighbours we are all in the same boat. We have that community level, but to be honest my main community is my family."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For some community meant an attitude that had been lost to neighbourhoods,

> *"There is no community spirit anymore."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"For nineteen years I was in service at schools and I saw the area lose all its sense of community. It is very deprived and it is getting worse not better."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Frontline workers in their discussions echoed participants' view that there is a lack of community spirit. As one Community Organiser said,

> *"I do knock on doors and ask what people's loves and concerns are. I get a lot of 'What community? There is no community.'"*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Frontline workers suggested that people need to be listened to so that community spirit is reignited. As one said,

> *"[Community members] will say no one has ever listened to them. This is what a community needs. It's somebody that has gone and listened to them."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Community influence

More participants in London felt that they had an influence in the community than in Birkenhead. However, in both locations the

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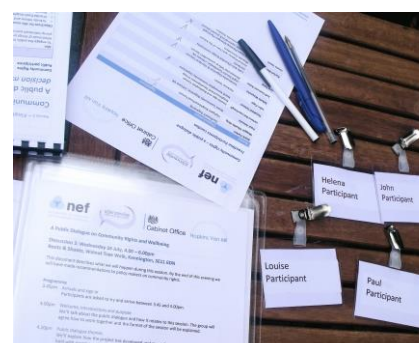
[8] All photographs are ©Tisna Westerhof

sense of personal agency over what happens in their communities was limited.

Those who felt they had influence expressed this in terms of having local connections which enable them to express their views. For some this is because they have a relationship with local councillors and officers,

> *"We have three councillors who listen to us as much as possible because we represent the people they are meant to be representing."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"I understand the organisation chart within my local authority. I know who to contact for whatever issue. I've got good relationships with officers."*
> **Public participant, London**

One local authority employee said at the frontline worker session that she welcomed an association with community groups,

> *"From my point of view, if we've got the community on board with decisions and it's something they want, then it makes our job a lot easier."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

For others they feel that they have influence because they have taken action themselves and galvanised others around them,

> *"I feel like I can make a big change if I do things and I educate those around me and I learn along the way myself."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"I know people say when they decide to do things in their community, nobody comes to you and says, `We're doing this. What do you think of it?' they tend to just do it."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

The majority of participants felt that as an individual they have very little influence over what happens in their community, particularly in Birkenhead. One participant reflected how little people know each other where she now lives,

> *"I feel like there's no communication, there's no influence…I literally don't know what my next door neighbour's name is, or anyone round here."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"It's like you said before about the community spirit. You've got to have the people to come together to have a community in the first place."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For others simply being an individual meant that they felt their power over local decisions was limited,

> *"I'm an individual. I can't see what I can do as an individual."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"I feel like I've got none because I'm not involved in anything that's big enough to have an influence as a group of people. One person doesn't seem to make much difference. If you get a lot of people together you've got more influence."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

The power of the group as a lever of change was recognised, and that is where the majority wished to have an influence. As one participant in Birkenhead said,

"My opinion's not necessarily what someone else wants so I think to be the sole person to influence everything you've got to be able to understand everyone's point of view."
Public participant, Birkenhead

This was supported by frontline workers, one of whom said,

"People feel powerless. The more you listen to them, they'll be interested in something. What we normally do is to bring those people's interests together and they all have the same issue. Everybody wants to be heard."
Frontline worker, London

A significant number of participants felt that the key issue is that even if they did want to make changes in their community they wouldn't know where to begin. They expressed concern that they wouldn't be able to get others to listen to their point of view and some said they lack confidence in motivating others to get involved. Some also felt that they would not know who to talk to help them make the desired change,

"I don't know how to have an influence."
Public participant, London

"I don't think a single voice can make much of a change. I wouldn't be in much of a position to galvanise lots of people to have some opinion."
Public participant, London

"There is no communication in my community, so it's hard to have influence. No one speaks about things."
Public participant, Birkenhead

A view was expressed that it would be particularly hard for young people to get involved in a community rights initiative. As one participant put it,

"Especially for young people who are out of work, there's no involvement in the community at all. How would you get involved?"
Public participant, Birkenhead

In both locations those that potentially would like more influence in their community said that they do not necessarily want to be the decision makers but they would like their voices to be heard. For some their views changed over the course of a session from feeling that they did not want an influence in local matters at all, to thinking that there were some issues on which they would like to express a view and contribute to a needed change. Some put this change in their thinking down to having the opportunity to understand community rights a little more during the dialogue.

"I was one of those people who didn't want any or very little influence. I've moved over a little bit. It's probably to do with a better understanding of what it all means and how it operates and what it could mean."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Public views of the Community Rights

Awareness of Community Rights

The majority of those taking part in the dialogue in London and Birkenhead expressed surprise that they were not aware of the Rights before being invited to attend the session. A minority were aware of some of the Rights, with very few participants stating that they had taken part in Neighbourhood Planning or another form of community rights process. Participants in Birkenhead said,

> *"If you want something to happen in the community everybody needs to know about [the Rights]."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"It's important, but it's actually knowing about these different things. I didn't know anything about this at all…A lot of people won't I suppose?"*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

And in London the discussion followed similar lines of thought,

> *"How are the people in the community meant to know their Rights? We know because we're here and we've been told. Our neighbours aren't here tonight. There's no big publicity about this."*
> **Public participant, London**

Frontline workers supported this view,

> *"When you talk about Community Rights, how much do the communities themselves know about them? That's an issue. Even if they know their Rights, are they [a] strong enough [community] to make it work?"*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Another participant felt the issue was that people are not thinking about how they can influence local decisions. They said,

> *"Most people in the country don't even think about it. Until you reframe it and get it out there it's never going to work."*
> **Public participant, London**

A number of participants, particularly in Birkenhead, also felt that they were not aware enough of current initiatives in the community, and without this knowledge they did not know which new initiatives would be of value to the community, what they can and can't influence, and how they might best use the Rights. Two participants in Birkenhead said,

> *"The danger is there's a lot happening that we're not able to influence because we don't necessarily know about it."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"I think people need to be more informed as well about what the plans are for their area in advance so you've got time to contest it or get together and say, 'Well we don't want that."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"How do you find out when these proposals are put forward?…Bad decisions have been made where nobody's aware that people power counts. How do you find out what's going to be done before the planning permission?"*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Once they had an opportunity to hear about the Rights a significant majority of people felt that exercising them had the potential to positively affect their well-being. They felt that the Rights had the potential to bring the community together around a common issue, lead to a sense of achievement and ultimately a better quality of life,

> *"I think they seem to be very tied in with quality of life. I think they are very important."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"If you get involved with anything and you're part of a group, no matter how big or small, and you achieve something, you know you're going to get a great sense of satisfaction out of that, irrespective of what it is."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"[The rights are] the promise that I won't see another eye-sore, huge multi-national chain like Starbucks or something. The assurance and the promise of a slightly better quality of life."*
> **Public participant, London**

For some in both locations the Rights are extremely important as an expression of people's control over their lives and the right level of freedom to make local decisions. As a London participant said,

> *"I think [exercising your rights is] of the utmost importance, because we are moving towards the individual taking personal responsibility and then towards… giving people a voice and creating the space for that to happen."*
> **Public participant, London**

Others felt the rights were important in giving their children a stake in their own future,

> *"It's going to benefit our children more than anything because what you put in to the children now we reap later."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

A minority in Birkenhead were less positive about the Rights because they hadn't been aware of them and felt it was not appropriate that their establishment in the first place had not been something on which the public were consulted. One participant said,

> *"The thing that I probably remembered most from the last session was, 'Do we really want it?' That was asked at the very end and it made me think about it. We haven't been asked about it."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Motivations

There were a number of reasons given for participants to think that they might take up their Community Rights in the future. These were principally that they had identified a need or an issue around which the community could muster local support. This might be a proactive need for something new in their area, or wishing to prevent a development or action in their community. One participant said,

> *"If there was something I felt really passionately about. If I thought, 'I really want to start a gardening club and I want that land to do it on,' that would be one thing. If you see things that you don't like happening, like when we got some of the houses pulled down because there were some alcoholics."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Those that were motivated by wishing to prevent a service they loved being closed or lost to the community said that they would be motivated to take forward a Right to Bid by a range of feelings many of which had a strong focus on social justice,

> *"Injustice really and [preventing] people suffering…Anger."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"Discrimination and segregation of members of my community."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"Poverty is the most important. We're one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and the government do not take enough interest in poverty."*
> **Public participant, London**

Participants stressed the need for a clear objective and a shared understanding of what needs to be achieved,

> *"If there was a project where everyone had a shared idea. If we all had the same shared idea, we'd all want to be involved."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"Understanding there is something that is being achieved. It could be that they want to build something, and I might want to be a part of that because it might be something that will end up being something that means something to me."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

The importance of identifying a shared goal which the community could get behind was stressed in the frontline worker discussion. One participant focused on moving from a general desire for change to very specific initiatives,

> *"You have to assume there are individuals who have an interest in tackling something. Often that's expressed in very general terms like we've got to tackle vandalism. There's a real need at the early stages to get from the problem to something that's specific, clear, time-related."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Another focused on ways of reaching that common goal that truly gives a voice to all community members, given that each individual within a community will have different needs. They discussed a wide range of these needs from a parent who doesn't want their housing block to be demolished to an elderly lady who is fearful of leaving her home. They said,

> *"Talking to [each] of them openly and allowing them to explore their concerns, issues and problems gives you an agenda that's rooted in the community."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

For a number of participants well-being was linked to the idea of a common goal. One participant summarised the views of their group as follows,

> *"Well-being around communities is largely to do with the common purpose. Everyone supporting the same football team, when they get together there's a sense of well-being."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Right to Bid

There was a balance of views in both locations about the Right to Bid. People did perceive a value in the possibility of nominating local community assets for the benefit of future generations, and to ensure that land and buildings of importance to the community do not get bought by larger corporations. As one participant said,

> *"If it's a building that they are going to say is for the community and they would want it protecting for the community for all of us for the future, I would like some input in to that. I don't want someone coming from the back door and privatising it for their own means. If it's for the community it's got to come from the community, it can't come from a business."*
> ***Public participant, Birkenhead***

For others the benefits of being involved in a Right to Bid were less clear, particularly where it is felt that this gives the Council an opt out from allocating a budget to buildings or land which are felt to the community to be rightly paid for by their local taxes,

> *"I feel that the council would feel that they would no longer be liable for the maintenance of the building and they can get rid of it by passing it on to the community."*
> ***Public participant, Birkenhead***

Some also expressed the concern that it would be difficult for a community to muster the required leadership and vision to make a successful Right to Bid. As one London participant put it,

> *"For communities to be able to have the Right to Bid they have to be very strong structured groups already, and to have a clear vision and leadership. The majority of community groups don't [have that], it's a contradiction within itself."*
> ***Public participant, London***

Neighbourhood planning

The majority of participants were generally positive about Neighbourhood Planning as a means of making changes in a local area. This included having more control over the kinds of shops and businesses that could come in to their area as described by these participants,

> *"I think the greatest advantage of this is residents can say if there are too many betting shops in a road, they can oppose it."*
> ***Public participant, London***

> *"It's about creating a vision for the high street about the businesses, the shops and the empty buildings."*
> ***Public participant, London***

Participants were very positive about having a say in local developments and being involved in planning decisions. As one participant put it,

> *"This process…gives you the right to actually put your own planning things forward, subject to agreement of course, and to maybe challenge some of the issues that are being put forward."*
> ***Public participant, Birkenhead***

The majority felt that the theory of it sounded very good for their well-being, the quality of their lives and for taking control of community developments. The only significant concern about neighbourhood planning was whether or not it would work in practice,

> *"In theory it's great. In practice, whether it works or not, who knows?"*
> ***Public participant, London***

Right to Challenge

The Right to Challenge was not used as a case study in round 2 discussions. In round 1 it provoked more discussion in Birkenhead than in London. Those that felt it was a helpful initiative thought so because they saw it's potential for enabling local knowledge to be used for the benefit of the community. One person said,

> *"I think it's important that communities have the Right to Challenge if they think they can run the service better. If it's being run in a way that the community wants it run, if someone's got local knowledge…when it goes to tender the community knowledge and trust should be a bigger part of who gets the tender in the end, rather than just budget."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Concerns about Right to Challenge were predominantly raised in Birkenhead. They focused on two main points. Some participants were concerned that Right to Challenge was a mask for enabling privatisation of local assets,

> *"It's privatisation under another name."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Whilst seeing the value in the community being enabled to deliver local services, the other main concern was that local people would not necessarily have the skills, or the same level of skills as companies competing for the same service delivery, in order to put together a professional tender document and to deliver the service if successful. A participant expressed the views of a number of people when they said,

> *"My concern is that the ideology of empowering local communities to have a say in the policy-making bit is a bit difficult. […]You've got a local community group who are hashed up together with very good will and want to empower themselves for a community, but don't necessarily have the business savvy-ness and skills to communicate that to the stakeholders that make the decisions."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Another group member echoed this view,

> *"I don't have an issue with local communities taking control of something that is dear and close to them. That sounds really good. It's the skills element and lack of oversight. Who is making sure these people have the right skills?"*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Right to Build

The Right to Build was not used as a case study in round 2 discussions. In Round 1 it generated discussion in both locations. One participant had seen what a community group had been able to achieve in an unused entry space in Liverpool and was amazed at the transformation that was possible. She said,

> *"My mum showed me a picture of it in the paper and I thought it was in some street in Paris…I would love to have the courage to knock on everyone's door and get permission to do something like that. It's just a wasted area and they made it absolutely lovely and all the kids were playing and everything."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Others felt that the biggest value in Right to Build initiatives is that they are community led,

> *"It's the community coming together and asking what they're going to do…It's a good idea."*
> **Public participant, London**

Those that felt that Right to Build would not work in their community were those who felt it would be a lot for volunteers to take forward. One person said,

> *"I think logistically it's just too much to ask the communities."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

As with other community rights, concerns were raised about the ability of a community group to compete with larger companies, with the infrastructure already in place, in the tendering process. One participant who regularly works with architects on tenders said,

> *"You find that a lot of tenders go to very big construction companies. For a smaller company, or an individual or a group to win that tender are very minimal chances… So why go through the grief if you are not going to get it anyway?"*
> **Public participant, London**

Use of the Rights and influencing local decisions

Right to Bid

For participants in Birkenhead improving local services and facilities would be a primary reason for using the Right to Bid. They felt that they would use them to make something of a derelict space or building,

> *"Do something with these old derelict buildings, turn them into something positive."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

They discussed the Byrne Avenue Swimming Baths at Rock Ferry on the Wirral as a specific example,

> *"It [could have] the facilities in there to be used for the community and updated. It's just a shame it's going to waste. It could be used for a youth centre, or anything."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

There was a particular interest in providing spaces for children and young people to play in and around Birkenhead, partly as a solution to children and young people being in the spotlight for bad behaviour. One participant expressed the views of many of the Birkenhead participants,

> *"That's the sad thing about it, there is nowhere for these children to play. We've got no land for them to go on, no community centre, no nothing. That's why they end up getting into trouble. They get told off just for playing out."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For London participants the goal of a Right to Bid project would be,

> *"Serving or enhancing the local area."*
> **Public participant, London**

London participants also placed a high value on educational attainment in order to take forward a Right to Bid. One participant said,

> *"If you were educated you'd know what you should expect and it gathers momentum. A lot of people just take what they get really, because they don't have the power of speech."*
> **Public participant, London**

Another supported that view,

"In order to take a lead in that, you have to be educated and supported in the [Right to Bid] process."
Public participant, London

Giving people the skills they need to take forward a Right to Bid initiative was seen as equally important,

"I think it's very important to give people the skills and the confidence to prioritise their interests and be able to lead on those, in order to support other people within their communities."
Public participant, London

Frontline workers also felt that using the Right to Bid, or other Community Rights, as a means to develop communities' capabilities and skills was an important aspect of the legislation. They said,

"The whole process is about teaching communities the art of bringing about change. That's a huge outcome from this. [...] Even if they don't change anything, they learn about how to change things. It therefore makes them more confident."
Frontline worker, London

Neighbourhood planning

Participants thought developing a Neighbourhood Plan would be a useful way of improving or saving existing facilities as well as creating new ones for the community. For some its role was clear and easily stated,

"It's all about saving something or sharing something."
Public participant, London

Another participant added,

"Preserving and enhancing as well."
Public participant, London

As with Right to Bid there was a focus on facilities for children,

"You might want a safe place for children to play. Perhaps, you know, clean up a playground, re-open a playground and put fences round it."
Public participant, London

A participant in Birkenhead emphasised the importance of having a clear objective when developing a Neighbourhood Plan and focused on the idea of using a plan to preserve assets of value to the community rather than creating something new,

"You have to have a goal. Your goal would be the local Post Office is closing. Or it might be that something is closing down, finishing, and you want to carry it on. Or you want to replace it."
Public participant, Birkenhead

For others a neighbourhood plan should focus on local improvements,

"It's all about improvements. Local facilities. Make it feel safer. Get those kinds of shops away. It depends on the area. A lot of areas are improved by new housing coming along, new shops."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Participants in Birkenhead also focused on using a Neighbourhood Plan to make changes in their High Streets, enabling a range of shops to establish themselves and to develop derelict urban spaces.

"There are about ten chip shops. They've got to get planning permission. So the planning department are the wrongdoers for granting that many licenses to open that many chip shops."
Public participant, Birkenhead

One participant said that you could apply a Neighbourhood Plan to,

"Most of the Wirral. Not West Wirral, but everywhere else. Most of Wallasley's pretty run-down. I never realised, living here all my life, but when you go to other places you realise it's pretty poor."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Influencing local decisions

Some participants in Birkenhead and London were asked to consider how they might make use of other ways, to influence what could happen in their local community. For these people a starting point would be finding a group of like-minded people who could rally round a common goal,

"You have to have that likeminded group, and then you have to identify the skills within the group, and then you have to identify the challenge you're going to take on."
Public participant, London

For some, particularly in Birkenhead, identifying people is a challenge when they don't feel they have any existing links with their neighbours,

"You've got to get to know the people around you before you can actually suggest and start."
Public participant, Birkenhead

"I didn't know anything about it, so talking to neighbours about it and then it carries on through word of mouth. You need to get to know your own neighbours before you can move on to other things."
Public participant, Birkenhead

In both locations, if a group of like-minded people and a common goal could be identified, it was clear that many people would wish to make local changes. As discussed in more detail in the next section, and as with the take up of the Rights, these issues include giving safe spaces for children and young people to play and just be together, tackling social justice issues including poverty, crime, better education provision and providing skills sharing opportunities. There was a balance between people who would wish to influence local decisions to protect an asset and those who would wish to influence services and facilities to create something new for community use.

Barriers to taking up community rights

Time

A very significant barrier to people taking up their community rights and influencing local decisions was the perception that it would take up too much time in already very busy lives. It was mentioned in the majority of sub-groups in both locations,

> *"The reason being is that first of all I don't have the time to have that much power in my hands. Time is a big thing. I think it needs to be a full time job for someone who wants to influence proceedings."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"How much can you actually afford the time? Is it going to get you in trouble? That's what puts people off getting involved."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Some frontline workers emphasised the amount of time taking forward a Neighbourhood Plan, for example,

> *"It's a long and hard process for people who are all volunteers. We're lucky that we have some people who are newly retired who bring knowledge from our working lives and energy and time. A lot of the people working with us have full-time jobs and children. It's a life."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Another frontline worker supported this view,

> *"I think it's really important that we recognise the work volunteers actually do and the time they've given up. Some of us are paid."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Negative impacts on well-being

For some participants a concern that exercising community rights had the potential to have a detrimental effect on well-being was a deterrent to taking part in local action. This is related to time factors for some, in that trying to fit in anything else with work and family was not seen as good for well-being,

> *"In terms of working full-time, if they've got children, they're not going to have the time to go and find out what's happening in their local communities."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For others the barrier around well-being was about a fear of not succeeding with the change they wished to make in the community,

> *"The fact of well-being [is a barrier] for me. I think you get a little bit scared if it doesn't work out and you feel more of a failure and more of a let-down."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Frontline workers took this issue very seriously and were concerned about the negative impact on well-being if projects do not go as planned,

> *"The sense of denting confidence is crucial. Too many groups start, fall at the first hurdle and then it collapses and disappears."*

Frontline workers agreed that taking time to get the initiative right before taking any action was a vital step in the process without which well-being could be affected,

> *"Barriers include if we jump to the big things too early. Actually, it will take a long time, people will get dispirited and probably lose out in the end and go away worse off."*
> *Frontline worker, London*

Frontline workers also considered the issue of maintaining control within a person's well-being. Participants came to the view that in trying to achieve a common goal, some people's desires would not be met and that could lead to a loss of control for them which would be detrimental to their well-being. This is how they put it,

> *"If people have a limited amount of power, they are much more likely to be defensive about it. Within communities you take away the power of some folk before you can bring it back together again. It's that sense that there's a challenge to the well-being of some in the community before you can make it right."*
> *Frontline worker, London*

Fear and conflict

Fear of gangs and crime was seen as significant barrier to instigating some form of local action. People expressed the view that people are scared by everyday life and are therefore unlikely to get more involved in community decisions.
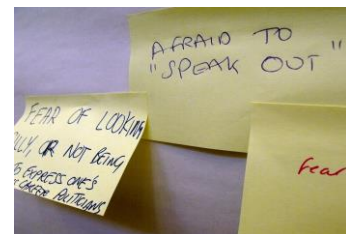
> *"People are scared. I mean they can't even pluck up the courage to go and make an enquiry, let alone get involved in the more proactive effort."*
> *Public participant, London*

> *"If you are going outside and there's a gang of lads or a gang of girls….you feel intimidated about going out, so you don't want to go and mix because you don't know what you're going to be confronted with. As you get older it gets a bit more scary as you see all these groups and I think that's a big thing where people don't want to venture out."*
> *Public participant, Birkenhead*

Clearly for those in communities where both deprivation and perceived levels of crime are high, fear of what might happen on the streets is a barrier to making proactive changes in the community.

Some people described their fear of exercising community rights as a lack of confidence in being able to articulate their views effectively. People talked about their concern at "looking silly" in front of others who might be more practiced in community engagement or who work in the area professionally such as councillors and MPs.

> *"We're all fearful of making the wrong comment or the wrong decision."*
> *Public participant, Birkenhead*

Some participants expressed a concern that getting involved in one of the community rights might cause local conflict and generate mistrust of the people leading the scheme and this made them less interested in participating in a project or programme. For example, one participant in Birkenhead who had experience of a neighbourhood planning process said,

"For this to work you've got to have the people who are running it, who are going to be extremely tolerant and understanding of everybody else's wants, needs and requirements. By the very nature of the people who go forward with these things you get to a position, rightly or wrongly, where the people who are running the neighbourhood planning...nobody likes them, nobody trusts them and nobody wants to talk to them."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Bureaucratic process

An even spread of participants expressed the view that perceived or real bureaucracy would be a barrier to them taking part in any community rights initiative. The majority based this view on previous dealings with local authority systems and officials which they found confusing, lacking in transparency and unhelpful.

"In the past I've attempted to find out from my council, but sometimes I found it very confusing."
Public participant, London

"The Council is the barrier, we had a big fight over double yellow lines in our street which we lost. There is no point in the lines, but we had to keep them."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Some specifically saw that arduous processes were challenging to their well-being,

"They transfer you around to different departments. I requested something very specific and I just went in a big circle...Your well-being had gone."
Public participant, London

This is a view well understood by some of those who took part in the frontline worker session, they talked about the complicated organisational structures they had experienced within local authorities. As one participant put it,

"There are some serious old-fashioned departmental rivalries inside local government. If somebody doesn't know and relies on finding somebody inside the local authority, they can be put into the wrong direction with someone who only has one focus. Generally departments are weak about the way they see a whole issue."
Frontline worker, London

Others had tried to make changes in the community in the past, but felt that the bureaucracy prevented them achieving their goal,

"When I've tried to deal with something in my life and my neighbourhood, I just hit bureaucratic resistance and I just made a judgement that it's easier for me to just continue my life and endure the problem."
Public participant, London

"People think if it's too long-winded then it's too much, they see no end to it."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Technological and social barriers

Participants expressed concern in both locations that having information about community rights online and using digital communications was and would be a barrier for community members to get involved.

"Someone like my mum doesn't know how to go and send an email. She'd rather go and speak to the person behind the counter."
Public participant, London

> *"The process is such that they say it's all available on line. Not everyone's got access. That's why you don't always know what's going on in your area."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For some access to social media meant that social interactions had changed over time. They saw that people have a large number of interactions online but were less likely to get involved in an initiative which involved physically meeting others,

> *"The evolution of where we are now is we're more connected than we've ever been, yet we communicate with people less face-to-face. I don't talk to my neighbours. I don't need or want to talk to them, and they don't want to talk to me."*
> **Public participant, London**

Participants in both locations saw that the high number of non-English speakers in some communities as being a barrier to the success of taking forward one of the Community Rights. They saw this as a challenge for communication and for understanding the issues and the cultural context,

> *"You can have things like the language barriers and a lot of people coming from different areas and the multi-cultural aspect of it as well. Obviously there is that lack of knowledge and understanding if you come from a completely different community."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"The diversity within the community [is an issue], that there are many people that haven't got good English on the allotments. But that is the same on the street that I live in. That is the one reason why I don't think the community really gels in that particular area."*
> **Public participant, London**

In Birkenhead they raised a number of issues such as social deprivation which would affect people's ability to get involved in any of the Community Rights. They highlighted their view that people from certain social backgrounds are not taken seriously,

> *"I was involved in rebuilding the North End. We put groups together…to stop crime, and social housing being wrecked. My feelings were because of their social background [people] were ostracised or not taken seriously."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

They thought poverty would equally effect people's desire and ability to get involved,

> *"People have got a lot of issues going on in their lives that are more pressing than what's going on in their local area. How to get money and survive, I think that tends to be more important."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Another issue which was only raised in Birkenhead was a lack of spaces and facilities in which to meet and work on a community rights focused initiative. Spaces such as church halls were seen to have been closed down in the area. As one participant put it,

> *"There are a lot of places [which have] been lost, where if you still had them in the areas people could say well we could have that as our meeting place."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

It was felt that this lack of places to meet was a barrier to those in Birkenhead to getting a community rights led initiative off the ground.

Support needed

Participants considered what would be needed to encourage them and others like them to take up their Community Rights, to influence decisions being taken in other ways about their local area and the support they would need to take advantage of opportunities offered.

Local communications

Participants expressed the view that local communications whether through social media, in print, via leaflets and through a range of word of mouth mechanisms were vitally important in supporting people to exercise their rights and make local decisions. They felt that these communications should include information to help people understand that it is possible for local people, without specialist knowledge, to make progress on a local initiative,

> *"With the knowledge and empowerment and knowing where to reach this information, it's just an average person. You don't have to be a councillor…It's just the average person to just have the desire."*
> ***Public participant, London***

In Birkenhead participants said that using all communication channels to raise awareness of the potential for making local changes was important,

> *"We were saying not everybody has access to the Internet, most people have access to the radio, just getting that out there and making people aware using any means possible."*
> ***Public participant, Birkenhead***

Some participants were keen to maintain traditional methods of informing people of local initiatives such as knocking on doors and leaflet distribution, in addition to social media which they considered inaccessible to some,

> *"Before a voting process, any changes to any community, there needs to be a little leaflet through every household's door to say, `this is what we propose'."*
> ***Public participant, London***

> *"You need to call people together, put leaflets out. The people who are really interested to go along and then those people to spread the word."*
> ***Public participant, Birkenhead***

The clarity of information provided is also important,

> *"If there was some kind of catalogue, something that comes out in the post giving you an idea of bids that are going on in your local area, and the point of contact."*
> ***Public participant, London***

A number of people in both locations expressed the view that the target for the information on local action should include school children so that they become aware from a young age that they have a role to play in decisions about developments in their local area. Participants felt that informing school children would have a snowballing effect enabling their parents and teachers to hear about initiatives of which they would otherwise be unaware. The following quotations show three participant voices on this subject which echo the views of many,

> *"They could start these systems in schools and start to teach them that school children have a voice."*
> ***Public participant, London***

"I thought if you approach a local school with something positive about their community, and I would imagine them to be quite positive about it and help spread the word."
Public participant, Birkenhead

"Via schools. It's a good capturing net to get the community."
Public participant, London

In Birkenhead a particular emphasis was put on local consultation and referenda. As one participant said,

"If something's going to affect the community, then you should be asking them what they think and what their views are."
Public participant, Birkenhead

"You could do it on a voting system where your community goes along and does a voting, 'Do you want this to happen?'. Or a number of things on a list and you pick which one you'd like...different options for different plans."
Public participant, Birkenhead

For a number of people the most effective way of getting messages across about what was happening in a local area would be to have public meetings in pubs, church halls or wherever the community would feel comfortable meeting. One participants summed it up by saying,

"I think the key to all of this is people actually getting together to actually get involved in this in the first place, or it's never going to happen the way it should."
Public participant, Birkenhead

MPs, local authorities and government

The area which elicited a lot of comments was the support expected in designing Community Rights initiatives from local authority councillors, officers and from Members of Parliament. For some people the first port of call in any local decision would be the local MP, however, there was some debate about how effective this would be in making a local change,

"How many people here believe in their own MP to make decisions for them? Although we vote for MPs, we don't believe in them."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Others felt that MPs were a vital source of guidance,

"You would need to show [your MP] what you're proposing to do. So you would have to start off with your proposals to go and show them, so you do need that backing from the MPs."
Public participant, Birkenhead

For others local councillors are the key to information and support,

"I think the local councillor should be involved because he's the one who's got the pride in it. He's been voted to look after us, so he should be the one to tell us and explain to us."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Having a council officer, or other local official, available to the community to advise, support and signpost sources of funding was also put forward as a means of support that would be welcome.

"[We need] more of an involvement with the local authority, closer and more transparent. Literally sit with the officers and get involved in making decisions."
Public participant, London

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"It's a bit like going to the bank manager and asking for advice for setting up a business. I believe that governments could provide some sort of assistance."
Public participant, Birkenhead

One Birkenhead participant was clear that local government had an important role in helping the community work through the process of Neighbourhood Planning in particular,

"Do get local government involved, because you need a facilitator to enable these things to happen."
Public participant, Birkenhead

People made a plea to have time with the right person to advise them, and for that person to remain consistent throughout the process,

"I want to be able to sit in a room with the decision-maker. I want John to deal with me every time I call. I don't want John and Michael and Sarah, then I have to go over the same thing over and over."
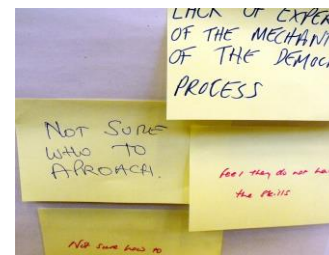**Public participant, London**

Process and resources

In both locations a clear, un-bureaucratic process was called for to support the exercising of Community Rights and local decision making.

"Don't make it complicated. Don't tie it in too much with red tape."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Participants particularly wanted to ensure that there is somewhere where local views can be gathered on the issues that matter to them,

"It should be a national principle that's the same everywhere. There is a process where people have an email or a phone number, they can voice their concern. Whatever it is, it is categorised."
Public participant, London

Those people who might make the difference were seen to be local community members, but it was considered only possible if there was a clear process from taking a local issue from being a talking point, to something on which decisions could be made and action taken. One person reflected on the discussions she had locally,

"I always find myself with my corner shop people or in my local businesses talking about things we would like to see changed…but no one really feeding it back into anywhere…into something productive."
Public participant, London

The resources required to support the application of the Community Rights are described in the following section using participants own words:

a) Fundamental information

Participants stressed that as most of them had been unaware of the Rights before they attended the first workshop they did not know about the support currently available, but felt that it was not promoted widely enough or they would know more about it. One participant said,

"The support needed is a lot because there isn't any support available at the moment or if there is it's invisible. We need to see how it works for us, how other people's processes have happened, how their concepts started and how they've been fulfilled…We need to be told how to get the support."
Public participant, London

For others the information required was as simple as knowing that the Rights are available,

"Knowing my rights. I never knew anything until tonight."
Public participant, London

Participants wanted access to basic information online, in the spaces that they use within the community, through the local media channels, and discussed openly in the community,

"There's a community centre across the road from where I live. Just as much as I'm talking about being online, there must be people there who do something similar."
Public participant, London

"I suppose also having a newspaper advert saying you want to setup a working group to use the Rights so that they are not wasted or the opportunity lost. An ad campaign."
Public participant, London

"I think back to basics by meeting people and getting out there in to the community and making yourself aware, they say actions speak louder than words."
Public participant, Birkenhead

People want information on the kinds of local assets available and general information on the initiatives that others in the community are trying to get off the ground.

b) Case studies

Many participants in both locations asked that case studies of communities successfully, and indeed unsuccessfully, taking up the Rights would be made available, some thought this should be via their local council,

"Groups that have been successful at putting a bid on something, they are then put on a register, and then say, 'I am looking to do that,' so I could go to the council and look it up and then go to [the project organisers] for advice."
Public participant, London

Others were not specific about from where the case studies should be drawn, but were clear that they needed to have access to examples of ways of taking forward the Rights which are likely to work, or to show what pitfalls to avoid in making local decisions,

"Evidence that it works, and initial end result. There's got to be a beginning and an end, and it's got to be visual otherwise no-one's going to really buy in to it and no-one's going to be interested."
Public participant, Birkenhead

"Using case studies and working out what went wrong and what's going right. How we got there. We don't know how to get there [at the moment]."
Public participant, London

The purpose of the case studies would also be to reassure people, perhaps unused to working in this way, that they were capable of taking on the amount of work required and of achieving something positive for their community,

"To prove that it works would be a big factor. If you can't see the end product, it's more nervy and unsure to take it on, so you might enjoy doing it and it won't work."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Participants in London stressed the need for information on how to make applications for any of the Rights to be clear, simple and jargon free,

"I think things being laid out in a clear, easy to understand manner and not looking so daunting. A lot of the reasons people fail or will not bother – too much jargon. It looks like a massive project to take on."
Public participant, London

"Ease of understanding for everyone and easy access to the information. That includes steps in the process and the timeline and no waffle."
Public participant, London

c) Brokering connections and skills exchange

Participants felt it would be useful to have support to broker local connections to make sure the initiatives could have the right level of community support behind them. As one participant put it,

"More networking. If I have an idea, put me in touch with other people that have that idea. I know you can do it on Facebook, but more of a register, yes, buddy systems."
Public participant, London

Participants said that they would find it useful to learn from others who had exercised their community rights. Ideas to facilitate this included a skills bank of people in their community, and further afield, who have relevant skills to support the taking up of the rights, including those who have already made proposals under the Rights and could act as mentors. Some likened this to an online forum such as Mumsnet,

"Using technology to give people access, for example, Mumsnet is more than people talking about being mums. We could use forums where people can communicate."
Public participant, London

For the majority of frontline workers the key to success in developing a project under the Community Rights was support for community groups to broker appropriate connections with other decision makers. For example, relationships with Transport for London (TfL) was important for many frontline workers who were all based in Greater London, and who had to negotiate with TfL when trying to create safer cycle routes, achieve something with their Neighbourhood Plan, or manage community expectations on transport provision generally.

"If only you could say that people like TfL (Transport for London) had to talk to communities, instead of going through the motions of talking to us and not listening."
Frontline worker, London

Working with developers was also seen as very important,

"One big thing that would be wonderful is if developers were forced to talk to communities at the start. At the moment [only] the good developers will do that."
Frontline worker, London

Another participant stressed the importance of communities being able to collaborate with business on local initiatives,

"I'd like to focus on the business relations to the community. Big businesses have no relationship with the community all too often. They don't consult, they don't talk. They get on and make decisions which run counter to the community's interest. For businesses over a certain size there could be a requirement to engage with their communities."
Frontline worker, London.

d) Advisers

Participants were clear that any Community Rights initiative would benefit from a dedicated adviser who understood the application and tendering process and who could support the community in skills development. They said,

"I think you need specialist support, specialists within whichever area you're going for. It has to be of the same calibre as the mega-bucks companies."
Public participant, London

"The actual process as well of setting it up is quite involved and complicated and I think that would be better facilitated by somebody coming to the group and saying, 'Right we will assist you in setting this up."
Public participant, Birkenhead

For some this advice and support should be from an external advisor,

"You can't do it on your own. You need help to go about doing it, so free advice, legal advice, architects for any construction products."
Public participant, London

"We need outside knowledge to come in and give us a hand and show us the way, because we don't know all the things."
Public participant, Birkenhead

The frontline workers agreed that it was very difficult for new community groups to get things going without advice and support,

"Communities are apathetic and frustrated and suddenly given all these powers. It's hard for them to move from that position to [being] organised and having energy. That's a link that's missing and would help people to use these powers more effectively."
Frontline worker, London

Others felt this specialist adviser should come from their own community,

"It's got to be someone in that community who you've probably seen around that knocks on your door and can explain what it's about."
Public participant, Birkenhead

"If you have someone in the community who's available at the CAB or another community venue that you can see to talk you through it, just to clarify everything before you decide whether you want to dive in or not."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Some people specified that these advisers, whether from the local authority, a government body or an external consultancy, should play an advocacy role,

"We need community-based advocates who really know how our community works. So someone in the community should be empowered by local authority or government to talk about community rights, and be able to give that guidance to the community."

And still others felt this advisory role rests with the local authority, who might help them to get the initial community group together,

> *"To set up the group so that people can channel stuff through that group. I think the danger is you've got a lot of individuals who have got thoughts, but nobody's pulling it together. If the local authority is serious about it, then help us set those groups up"*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Equally they felt there was a role for local authority offices to share their own professional experiences with the community,

> *"There are people in local councils who have done that sort of work before who can provide guidance and support. Finance, legal these are things they're going to have to face as challenges and barriers. You're not going to find that in the local community unless you're really lucky and you've got bankers and lawyers."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

In addition some frontline workers saw a role for external advisers to facilitate initial meetings and help to develop community members' skills. One participant said,

> *"Enabling meetings to be participative and not dominated by one or two. There's a whole set of abilities and skills and experience that many people lack in their day-to-day lives that I think this sort of opportunity provides."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Others agreed and emphasised the importance of objective and neutral advice to support communities. Two frontline workers put it like this,

> *"In terms of support, I think one of the fundamental things we've learnt is the vital and central role of somebody who will go to your door and listen face-to-face without an agenda."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

> *"How can we have somebody that has no self-interest in what people want? All they want is to help them do it and facilitate it. That person can't be a councillor because they do have self-interest."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

e) Toolkits with templates

In London particularly participants were very keen to emphasise the benefits of having toolkits of resources available to potential community groups with 'how to' guides and templates for the relevant application processes. One participant said,

> *"I think there should be clear instructions so people have an understanding of what is required from them. Clear instructions on how to utilise these new rights."*
> **Public participant, London**

And another,

> *"I think templates are a great idea. There should be a folder of documents that are already there."*
> **Public participant, London**

Frontline workers agreed that templates and guidance would be of help to the communities with which they are engaged,

"Practice notes, guidelines [should be] produced before legislation, that pointed to the way people ought to be thinking…Would you be able to produce those? Would you put it down as something we would value?"
Frontline worker, London

f) Places to meet

As mentioned before, participants in Birkenhead felt that they lacked places to meet to plan for Community Rights initiative. They would like support to identify and make available safe, neutral spaces for such planning meetings.

"If you are wanting to go for a neutral type of place, you'll always have difficulties…because sometimes a social club is a neutral place, but some members of the community may not be comfortable about going in to a social club for whatever reason."
Public participant, Birkenhead

They felt there was the potential for one community to take the initiative and instigate meetings in their own home, but they were not sure that this was appropriately inclusive to all community members,

"To get it started we value everybody as an equal. We'd do it in a neutral place where everyone felt comfortable, not in someone's house."
Public participant, Birkenhead

g) Funding

Of concern in both locations was the need to have funding to get any Community Rights initiative, or local decision, off the ground. For some this was not an unsurmountable issue,

"Not too much money is spent, there are ways to utilise our community resources and skills already there, buddying up and providing that agreement with the empty shop to make it work and making sure those results are seen and learned from."
Public participant, London

For others, not having funds could be a stumbling block to the initiative getting off the ground from the beginning,

"How do you go about getting the funding? To start off to send leaflets out you would have to have money to even get the leaflets made to make people aware of it, so it's got to come from somewhere."
 Public participant, Birkenhead

For a minority there was a risk in applying for external funding to support the initiative that it would mean the community would relinquish some of their control over the decisions being made,

"If 21 ordinary people in the community are going to do this, they're not going to have the funds to pay for it. They're going to have to go to some other organisation. That organisation will own it, not the community."
Public participant, Birkenhead

For others, funding should come government and pay for support to the community to enable them to make local decisions,

"We need government funding. Some money needs to be spent on giving support enlisted by local government, but perhaps recharged to central government."
Public participant, London

Governance, leadership and involvement

Leadership

Discussions on who might, should and would take a leadership role on a Community Rights initiative were widespread. For frontline workers this is a fundamental issue for all those involved,

> *"Leadership is a real problem."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

> *"I think leadership is essential...It can be very inclusive, it doesn't have to be one voice, but you need leadership. That's been an issue for some of our voluntary sector organisations. It's a lot of people, very fragmented, all doing their own thing."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

In Birkenhead participants agreed with this view. They felt they would be more motivated to take up their rights if they knew that there was a group of trusted people from the community who would lead the programme of work. They were wary of one person taking the lead as they felt that this could lead to mistrust and increased tensions in the community if there ended up being personality clashes.

> *"To get that community together to get an even keel...It can be a personality problem, in that people will either like you or not like you, hidden agendas or whatever."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Equally they sounded a note of caution on how the Rights might be used by some in a leadership position if those people were not motivated by the best interests of the community. They were concerned that there might be financial abuse or that it could lead by the back door to privatisation of community assets.

> *"I don't believe it's done for the right reasons [...] It's made out it's going to be for us and our children, but if we can't maintain it it's an opportunity for someone on the outside to come in and take over."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Others were wary of giving a leadership role to those who were not capable of taking the initiative forward and when the leadership role is in their view best given to a local authority,

> *"Beware of devolving the management of things to people who may not have the constitutional ability to deal with them. The authority might have the responsibility."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

The counter discussion to that was that Community Rights had the potential to have the best interests of the community at heart if the right leader or leaders were found. As one participant said,

> *"You need to find a community champion that's going to be a representative of the group. It's trying to find the leader to get everything co-ordinated."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

In the frontline worker session participants discussed the characteristics of a good leader. They said it was important that they had a group of people around them that trusted them already and could represent them effectively. One participant said,

> *"It should be somebody worth following. Somebody with a loud voice is not necessarily a leader. Say you have a church and a number of people are following the head of the church. If you contact him you're contacting the community. You're certain that he is going to pass it on to his community. If there was an action to happen tomorrow, you [would know] you could rely on this person."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

The public participants identified other characteristics that they felt were important for someone who would take on a leadership role in a Community Rights initiative. A small number of participants felt that a leader should be decisive,

> *"You've got to have someone of a strong character to say, 'Right, this is what's happening.' You've got to be 100% positive on what you want."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"You need a legitimate authoritative figure, otherwise nothing gets done."*
> **Public participant, London**

Others saw the most important characteristic of a leader should be having the necessary vision and passion,

> *"You're taking a bigger role in leadership and you've got a broader look on everything haven't you? You tend to say a lot more and need a lot more skills but that's never bothered me because if you believe in something you can always get advice and help."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For frontline workers the leadership role would vary depending on the stage the project had reached and who else needed to make decisions. Two participants said,

> *"Part of the role of the leader is to be constantly looking for other leaders."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

> *"The leader might take different forms in different places. I don't think there has to be one particular sketch of this type of person."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

By far the majority of participants in London and Birkenhead did not wish to take on a leadership role. They gave examples such as,

> *"We were asked by the police if we wanted to form a Neighbourhood Watch. We said we didn't really want to take the responsibility."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"Leadership is something big. This is a job. It will become like a full-time job. You don't want to lumber somebody with it. You might write a one-off letter to the council, but you wouldn't want to do everything."*
> **Public participant, London**

Others had already taken on a community leadership role and felt it was overly burdensome, particularly in having to listen to people's complaints and to take too much responsibility. One participant said,

> *"I introduced myself as chair of a local allotment association and I hate it. I hate the idea of this organisation. For a start, people complaining to me all the time about other people, you know, doing things."*
> **Public participant, London**

Another said,

> *"It's the responsibility, whether you feel you've got the skills to take on or not the responsibilities of a leadership role. The thing is, is that some people think they've got the skills but not necessarily have the leadership role."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Others, who had not taken on such roles, felt that it would be difficult to manage and would be better done as a group of people co-operating,

> *"I wouldn't want to be the one everybody comes to. I would feel overwhelmed. It is not just my fight. That is why it is a community. So let's do it together."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Involvement

Participants who were less convinced that they had the time, desire, confidence or skills to take on a leadership role expressed an increasing interest over the two sessions in being involved in a Community Rights initiative. They said,

> *"It's become much more interesting. I think everybody's now going to get in some way involved. We're going to start looking into it because we've heard things we never knew before."*
> **Public participant, London**

> *"I'm not a born leader, I'd like to be very involved though."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Some people specified the value in being the person who would do the work, but not necessarily have a decision making role,

> *"I'm a campaigner. I'm happy to go and leaflet. I just don't want all the stress of the complaints and all the rest, but I'm happy to do all the work for the people above me."*
> **Public participant, London**

Others wished to take a 'wait and see' approach to their involvement. Whilst happy to be consulted they would wait and see what the issue was and who else was involved before taking on any role themselves. One participant said,

> *"I'd like to be consulted and then make my decision on [involvement] depending on what it was. I'd see how my role would fit in with that and how I'd make a change."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Consultation

Some participants, particularly those who had some experience of Community Rights, felt that communities must be consulted from the very beginning and the danger was that the people who take the initial first steps tend to get on with the work without consulting a broader spectrum of the community. As one 93322participant said,

> *"It takes somebody to actually start it, but I think the person who was instrumental in starting it should have called a community meeting. I think that has been possibly the biggest mistake [where I live]. They didn't consult at the beginning."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

For some consultation was essential for taxpayers and to know where and why funding was being allocated as it was,

> "Irrespective of whether we are involved, we should be informed as taxpayers anyway. This is our money going towards this."
> **Public participant, London**

Impact on well-being

In both locations there was a strong sense that the effect on well-being of taking up Community Rights was potentially both positive and negative. As one participant put it,

> "In terms of impact on well-being, a double-edged sword. It potentially can be very good, but there are a lot of issues, if it goes wrong it can be badly wrong. It can affect people's well-being."
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**
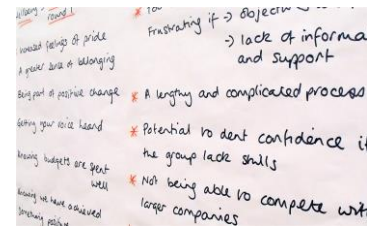
In considering well-being further participants felt it significant that being involved in the local community more, exercising Community Rights and making local decisions had the potential to engender local pride; make people feel good about themselves; give them a sense that they are part of something more important than their immediate family's concerns and gives the community a common sense of purpose.

One participant expressed the view of a number of participants when they said that well-being should be the priority first, it should be the root from which community initiatives could grow,

> "Why not try and promote one thing, without promoting something else, the general well-being in the community first and foremost to gain that trust and then to build on other things that you need to achieve from there on. It's not that they're going to knock that playground down to build loads of houses."
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Sense of purpose, pride and self-worth

For areas which are deprived the sense of purpose in making a positive change in your community was seen as particularly significant,

> "You can be proud of your area. It can be run-down, but you can still be proud of it. That can happen after you've done something…Well-being will be generated by community involvement – there it can be measured and improved upon."
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

This was expressed by participants in terms of how involvement would make them feel,

> "How it made you feel. That would be important. The impact it had on you."
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> "In the long run it will give you three things, well-being, happiness and peace…When you've achieved something you feel at peace."
> **Public participant, London**

The sense of pride in both your location and your achievement was important for participants,

> "Neighbourhood planning makes people look after their own area. Something's getting done. It encourages people to get involved and feel proud."

Feeling good about yourself was raised as an important aspect of getting involved in a Community Rights initiative.

> *"It gives you a sense of worth. If you see it working… it does have that effect of it's worth doing."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Inclusive action

For some participants knowing that you had worked to encourage members of the community who would not normally get involved, in decisions that affected them would increase their well-being,

> *"It would be good for well-being if it was perceived as a thing for everybody."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

As one frontline worker put it,

> *"It's getting the right parts of the community, the ones that normally don't engage in the process. It's the other people that you need to get involved."*
> **Frontline worker, London**

Sense of achievement

Participants also expressed the view that well-being would be enhanced by seeing the fruits of their labours and knowing they had been part of making a positive change. As two participants put it,

> *"If you feel you can go somewhere and do something, it's a happy place and the children are happy to go, it has a knock on effect. Everyone in the community would be happier, more comfortable to go and walk on an evening"*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

> *"A sense of achievement when something, like a community project, follows through. People can have a playgroup or an amenity that people can use. Their well-being will increase because they will feel they had something to do with creating that space."*
> **Public participant, Birkenhead**

Another participant expressed this sense of achievement in terms of being able to use their own skills,

> *"The impact on well-being and getting involved [is that] you're achieving something or using your own skills to achieve something, and personally feeling better at the end of the quest that you've achieved your goal."*
> **Public participant, London**

The negative aspect of a sense of achievement is, for some participants, the time the work would take and the unwelcome responsibility it would give them,

> *"We are potentially talking about an inordinate amount of time, responsibility to do this, on top of our everyday work and family. So for me, it would be completely stressful if I was to take this in the capacity of a leader or even of a team member because it would detract from my home life. It wouldn't assist or aid my well-being."*
> **Public participant, London**

There was also a fear that a group might be blamed for a lack of achievement, as two participants stated,

> *"We could bite off more than we could chew and get burnt and become a scapegoat."*

"There's culpability as well. You're putting yourself at the forefront of what could essentially be a complete disaster. There's that responsibility."
Public participant, London

Failure to achieve would definitely, in the view of participants' in both locations, have a very bad effect on their well-being,

"It could make you feel really bad, so that you no longer want to get involved or take part or make a difference because each time you've tried to, you've failed miserably."
Public participant, London

As we have seen throughout this Community Rights discussion participants were very clear that bureaucracy, an overly complicated administrative process and technical jargon are all bad for their well-being.

Well-being and Community Right summarised

For many participants the idea that communities might come together around a common goal and achieve change was very empowering and for most the principle well-being element of the Rights. For some this sense of community and a clear objective has the potential to give the community back lost hope which they saw as positive for everyone's well-being,

"I'd like to see the community getting hope back. I feel like everybody's given up. It makes you feel like there's no point, because nobody's got respect for the streets, let alone the community. It just makes you think, 'If everybody else is like that, why bother?' It's stupid, it should be a nice area, but it's not. It shouldn't be like that."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Equally the lack of a common goal had the potential to create conflict and would potentially be harmful to people's well-being. One participant used the example of diverse communities to illustrate this point,

"Like we said before about the different cultures in the area, not everybody wants the same thing which could be a negative."
Public participant, Birkenhead

Others thought if the goal achieved wasn't sustained this would be damaging to well-being. They said,

"At the end you're doing this in the community to make a difference and you don't want it to just last five minutes. You want it to be like that all the time. It's achieving it, but it's trying to keep that level of achievement up, isn't it? That's the problem."
Public participant, Birkenhead.

A very vivid example of having to take a long time to achieve a goal was given in Birkenhead,

"It took 25 years for the Hillsborough people to get somebody to listen to them. Lots of people in Liverpool know that, and that's a big negative thing isn't it? 25 years is a long time to wait for somebody to listen to you and do something."
Public participant, Birkenhead

For participants in Birkenhead and London therefore a sustained initiative, with support from external advisers and relevant guidance, templates and case studies all being used for a common goal were the key elements in ensuring that well-being could be achieved.

Final remarks

Dialogue and well-being

For HVM the embedding well-being science in policy making dialogue has been a remarkable experience. Having run dialogues across many policy areas we were aware of the empowering and uplifting nature of the process but we've never seen as much evidence of how involving the public in policy making contributes to the well-being of individuals.

Participants were genuinely interested in being able to contribute to the policy making process,

> *"I was excited to come and find out from the ideas we came up with last week what has been produced with it."*
> ***Public participant, Leicester***

Some even expressed feelings of pride,

> *"I almost felt a bit proud to be part of something that's hopefully going to make a difference"*
> ***Public participant, Leicester***

Particularly in the loneliness dialogue we noticed that the dialogue made people aware that they could take control of their circumstances,

> *"I've become more aware of loneliness as a whole as well as my own. For the last two weeks I've tried to make sure that I'm doing something to stop myself falling down that hole again. Because I'm more aware of it now I'm more prepared to do something about it."*
> ***Public participant, Leicester***

Empowerment and the positive impact of being listened to were central themes throughout the three dialogues. Frontline workers in the Community rights dialogue said,

> *"When people feel powerless their well-being is at risk. [t is good] you are giving some power back to them."*
> ***Frontline worker, London***

and,

> *"For me, it was a real sense that the well-being of that group had been enhanced by just working together, finding out that different people had different views and they could overcome the diversity of their experience."*
> ***Frontline worker, London***

Using well-being to frame the three dialogues provided a lever to sharing personal experiences. There was surprise about how a shared common ground and a personal perspective enabled people to easily connect with others,

> *"It's amazing that people here have spoken as much as they have about the very great problems they have in their lives."*
> ***Public participant, Leicester***

In the loneliness dialogue connecting with people in the form of a facilitated dialogue was appreciated by many. Some said that dialogues for lonely people would be an effective policy intervention,

"These sessions have made me less embarrassed about talking about loneliness. I realise now that I am not alone and there is something I could do about it. There needs to be more of that sort of discussion."
Public participant, Bedford

One participant expressed the view of many across all three dialogues,

"Thank you for listening policymakers. As we live and breathe our lives it's good to know we're being listened to."
Public participant, Leicester

Acting on the dialogue findings and providing feedback

Participants' enthusiasm for the process and enjoyment of the evenings was balanced with concern about how serious Government will take the findings of the dialogue,

"Do you want to know what I honestly thought when I walked out of here? I wondered whether the ideas would actually go anywhere. Whether things will be implemented, where changes will be made. […] Will it really make a difference?
Public participant, Leicester

Participants in all three dialogues expressed the hope that their views will be taken into account. A group in active labour market dialogue linked this to well-being,

"It would be good for our well-being to know that this [dialogue] isn't shelved but acted upon."
Public participants, Birmingham

The policy leads involved in the well-being dialogue all committed to informing participants of the outcome of the dialogues, and how they are being considered in policy making.

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