

# The Community Spirit Level:

A framework for measuring, improving and sustaining community spirit



# Acknowledgements

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# Table of contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Why is community spirit important for better health and wellbeing?</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>The Community Spirit Level</b> .....	<b>8</b>
What is Community Spirit?.....	8
A conceptual framework for measuring community spirit.....	9
<b>Step-by-step guide for measuring community spirit</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Step 1 – Think about your rationale and aim for improving community spirit</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Step 2 – Engage the community</b> .....	<b>13</b>
2.1 Top tips on how to engage with the community to reflect on community spirit.....	15
<b>Step 3 – Developing the case for improving community spirit</b> .....	<b>16</b>
3.1 Gather some evidence about the state of your community’s community spirit .....	16
3.2. Present information and evidence in interactive and eye-catching manner .....	18
3.3. Building consensus around your local definition of community spirit.....	18
3.4. Identify what can be done to improve community spirit.....	19
<b>Step 4 – Provide leadership, plan and monitor</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Building a plan.....	21
<b>Step 5 – Keep communication going</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Annex 1– Methodology.....	27
Testing the framework during COVID-19.....	27
Annex 2 – Defining Community Spirit.....	28
Annex 3 – A topic guide for exploring community spirit.....	30
Annex 4 – Assets mapping guide .....	31
Annex 5 – Stakeholder’s power mapping tool .....	32
Annex 6 – Example of Community Spirit survey questions .....	34
Annex 7 – Community Spirit self-assessment form .....	38

# Foreword



**Chief Executive of the Royal Society for Public Health**

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly changed our experience of the places in which we live. For those of us working from our home, the absence of a commute has meant all of our time has been spent in one place. Far from being able to freely travel across the world, the Government guidance has been to ‘stay local’ – with debates in the press about how that should be defined. Good neighbours have been a lifeline for those shielding or recovering from a COVID-19 infection, bringing groceries and other essentials to the door.

At the same time, limits on gatherings and household mixing has meant that many of the social events and activities which give life to our communities have been paused or moved online, and the effects on our wellbeing of not being able to meet friends and family are undoubtedly pervasive.

It could not, therefore, be a better time to think about how we can build community spirit. The value of supportive and strong communities has been made unquestionably clear, but so too has their fragility, with the economic impacts of lockdown being felt by local businesses, charities and community groups.

This framework and toolkit will help anyone looking to strengthen the community spirit in their area, and I especially commend it to community organisations, commissioners, and community leaders. It offers a definition of community spirit, and lays out what we believe are its component features, and, most importantly, a step-by-step guide to measuring it in your area and developing an action plan to increase it.

I am incredibly grateful to the six community organisations who helped us build this framework and toolkit in their area amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. Their commitment to the wellbeing of their communities has been truly inspirational, and it can give us all hope that there are similar organisations up and down the country, seeking to make their localities welcoming and compassionate places to live. I hope that these resources support that excellent work which is already underway, so that everyone experiences the benefits to health and wellbeing that being part of a strong community brings.

**Christina Marriott**  
Chief Executive, Royal Society for Public Health



# Introduction

This document is intended for any individual, group or organisation with an interest in, or remit over, improving the health and wellbeing of communities.

Whether you are working in a community organisation, a commissioner, or community leader, we encourage you to use this framework to improve your community's wellbeing.

In December 2018, the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) in partnership with Locality, were supported by the Health Foundation to develop and test a framework that helps those interested in developing communities understand the barriers to, and factors which underpin, strong and healthy communities, with a particular focus on community spirit.

The project involved exploring what community spirit is, and how it may be measured through reviewing the existing literature, and gathering the views of experts and those of the general public and the experiences and ideas of community organisations.

This report brings together:

- A rapid literature review discussing what is known about community spirit; how it can be defined and measured, and why it is important for health and wellbeing
- A place-based framework (the Community Spirit Level) to aid the development of local definitions and measurement and local action plans to improve and/or sustain community spirit
- Practical examples about how to use our framework, including links to existing materials, data sets, tools and other relevant frameworks

This document synthesises this work into one toolkit to provide communities and those working with them (such as grassroots organisations, anchor institutions, NHS teams and local authorities) with practical guidance and inspiration about how they can reflect on, and improve, community spirit in a systematic way. For example, NHS teams and local authorities can use it to measure community spirit as an impact indicator of their work; community organisations can use it to develop their engagement with residents and groups within their communities; and private sector organisations can use it as part of their social responsibility work.

We have published separately *Socially Distant? Community Spirit in the Age of COVID-19*, a policy report which describes the effects of COVID-19 on community spirit, and presents a series of recommendations for strengthening communities beyond the pandemic.

When RSPH designed this project with our partner Locality back in 2018, we were conscious of the need to explore community spirit as a key characteristic of wellbeing. Little did we appreciate the extent to which community spirit would emerge as a key protective factor for us all during the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope our learnings from this project will help maintain and intensify community spirit by providing a flexible framework to measure and improve it.

# Why is community spirit important for better health and wellbeing?

Our literature review found an extensive body of research demonstrating the role that place-based communities have as a determinant of health and how health inequalities originate at a population level. We will briefly discuss some of the key findings and ways in which community spirit could add value.

Place-based communities are areas where people live, defined by geographic boundaries, for example, wards, neighbourhoods, boroughs. The environmental, economic and social conditions of these communities have an impact on residents' health outcomes. For example, it is well established that neighbourhood deprivation increases the risk of poor physical and mental health (Mai Stafford, 2003) and that people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods die earlier and spend more of their lives with a disability than do people living in more affluent areas (Marmot, Allen, Boyce, Goldblatt, & Morrison., 2020) (Marmot, et al., 2010) (Curtis, 2004). The stability, quality, safety, and affordability of housing also has an effect on health outcomes (Gibson, et al., 2011).

In areas with higher social fragmentation<sup>1</sup>, residents tend to have lower levels of cohesion<sup>2</sup> and attachment to their neighbourhoods. Social fragmentation is higher in areas with high numbers of non-family households, and this is associated with high residential turnover and temporary housing (Curtis, Congdon, Atkinson, & Peasgood., 2019).

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing centre carried out a large, longitudinal study on this topic in England. The study combined indicators such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation (as a proxy of local socioeconomic conditions) and a Social Fragmentation Index (as a proxy of cohesion and attachment to local community), to identify different patterns of wellbeing by types of place. The study concluded that inequalities in wellbeing in local communities are associated with higher levels of deprivation, and lower levels of social cohesion and neighbourhood attachment (Curtis, Congdon, Atkinson, & Peasgood., 2019). This is consistent with the conclusions of the 2010 Marmot review, which highlights how health is affected by relational communities and social dynamics (Marmot, et al., 2010).

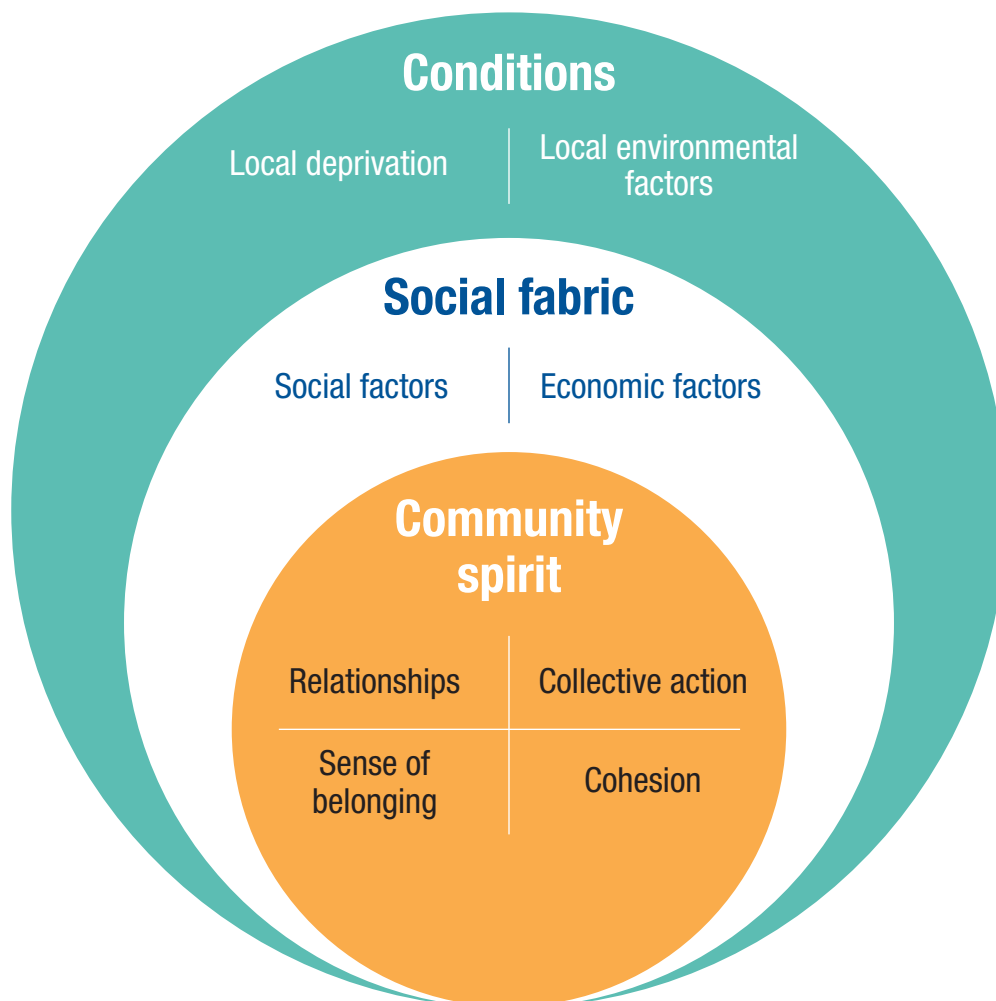
It is also well established that there are strong associations between neighbourhood environmental factors (built and natural), and individuals' behaviour, such as participation in community activities . These factors, in conjunction, can be catalysts for collective action<sup>3</sup> (Hanlon, 2010; Leyden, 2003; Long & Perkins, 2007; Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush., 2001; Sampson, 1997). Access to communal spaces is shown to have an indirect effect on grassroots participation, by facilitating the development of place-based supportive relationships (social capital) and neighbourhood attachment, particularly in urban areas.

1. Social fragmentation can be understood as the absence of connections between individuals and society.
2. The ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. It implies that individuals have the right to equality (of treatment, access to services etc.) and involves respect and appreciation of the diverse nature of communities. Adapted from The Home Office Seven Steps to Community Cohesion (The Home Office, 2005).
3. The ability of people to come together to tackle an issue, support others or improve their community's conditions. It involves people giving their time and/or other assets for the common good, for example through volunteering to community owned service, peer support schemes and leading initiatives (New Economics Foundation and the Office for Civil Society, 2016).

But what does all this mean in tangible terms for our communities? As researchers at the think tank Onward note, the UK suffers from the effects of long-term deterioration of the social networks and institutions that make up the fabric of communities. This deterioration has been driven by social and economic factors. Fewer people volunteer with or support local groups, attend community activities, or go on trips with their families now than they did ten years ago. Support for charities, and trust in civic institutions has also seen a decline while the number of single-person households, and people experiencing unstable housing tenure, debt, and insecure employment have all increased (Tanner & O’Shaughnessy, 2020).

Policy-makers have often focused on addressing the economic factors that have an influence on the social fabric (for example, through establishing new infrastructure and direct investment) but less resource has gone into keeping individuals closely connected and supported within their place-based communities. Nurturing community spirit as part of a regeneration or development process can foster those relationships that can drive better wellbeing. Bringing residents together can improve health and wellbeing through, for instance, improving access to education and job opportunities, sharing health information, and expanding support networks in times of need. This has been clearly demonstrated, and on a large scale, during the COVID-19 pandemic: community spirit has been pivotal to generating effective individual and collective action to protect and support the health and wellbeing of local community members, particularly the most vulnerable.

Figure 1: How does community spirit sit within the determinants of health and wellbeing?



# The Community Spirit Level

This framework provides communities, and those who support them, with a practical tool to collectively reflect on the factors which underpin strong and healthy communities, with a particular focus on community spirit. It also seeks to identify the barriers that can be faced by communities in their efforts to develop these social assets. It provides:

1. A proposed definition of community spirit informed by a literature review and the views of the public, which has been tested with community organisations. Please refer to [Annex 1](#) for further details of the methodology.
2. A conceptual framework for community spirit, outlining its component parts and ways in which they can be measured.
3. A suggested set of tools or templates for organisations wanting to measure their community spirit and develop plans to improve wellbeing within their neighbourhoods.

## What is Community Spirit?

Drawing from a review of existing literature, views of representatives of community organisations, a group of experts and a survey with 710 members of the public, we developed the following definition of community spirit:

**“The feelings of connection and belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody.”**

In other words, community spirit involves four key elements: a sense of belonging to a community, cohesiveness and inclusion, good relationships with other members of the community and collective action for the common good. This framework proposes that community spirit within a place-based community can be measured by exploring these elements. Please refer to [Defining Community Spirit](#), for more details on how this definition was formulated.

Community spirit is a dynamic concept and is subject to a variety of influences, including an area's demographic make-up, local socioeconomic forces, and the community's assets. Every area is unique with its own assets, needs and strengths. So, individuals or organisations interested in increasing their area's community spirit should lead a consultation process that is inclusive, open and constructive to find out what those strengths and needs are.



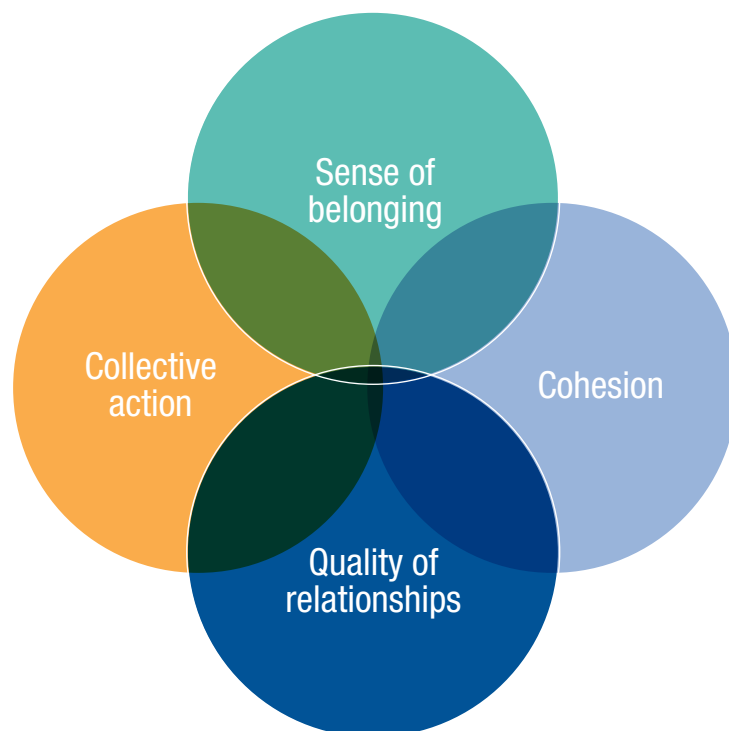


Figure 2: Community spirit characteristics

## A conceptual framework for measuring community spirit

Here we suggest a number of existing definitions for these characteristics and current indicators, validated tools and methodologies, and questions which can be used to measure them.

Characteristics of community spirit	Indicators	Methodology
<p><b>Sense of belonging</b>            People expect to feel and believe they fit and have a place within a group or community and, as such, they are willing to support its improvement or development            Adapted from Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory (Chavis, 1986).</p>	<p>Feelings of belonging to one's immediate neighbourhood</p>	<p><b>Quantitatively</b>            Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'In your immediate neighbourhood, how strongly do you feel you belong?'</li> </ul> <p><b>Qualitatively</b>            Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with members of the community exploring questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'How would you describe the sense of belonging there is within your community?'</li> </ul>

Characteristics of community spirit	Indicators	Methodology
<p><b>Cohesion</b></p> <p>The ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. It implies that individuals have the right to equality (of treatment, access to services etc.) and involves respect and appreciation of the diverse nature of communities. Adapted from The Home Office Seven Steps to Community Cohesion (The Home Office, 2005).</p>	<p>Feelings of trust in people in the neighbourhood</p> <p>Perceptions of diversity in the neighbourhood</p> <p>The level of mixing of people from different backgrounds</p> <p>Observed group diversity</p>	<p><b>Quantitatively</b></p> <p>Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘How much do you agree that you can trust the people living in your neighbourhood?’</li> <li>• ‘How much do you agree that this area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?’</li> <li>• ‘What proportion of your friends are of the same ethnicity, religion, level of education and age as you?’</li> </ul> <p><b>Qualitatively</b></p> <p>Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with members of the community exploring questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘How would you describe the relationships of trust and respect between the members of your community?’</li> <li>• ‘What groups of people are part of the community?’</li> <li>• ‘What are your thoughts in terms of the diversity there is in your community?’</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality of relationships</b></p> <p>The feelings of connection, reciprocity and mutual support between members of the community.</p>	<p>Feelings of loneliness and isolation in adults, children and young people, with and without disabilities</p> <p>Face to face contact with family or friends once a week or more</p> <p>Perceptions of the level of social support available</p>	<p><b>Quantitatively</b></p> <p>Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘How often do you feel lonely?’</li> <li>• ‘How often do you chat to any of your neighbours, more than just to say hello?’</li> <li>• ‘How often do you meet up in person with family or friends once a week or more?’</li> <li>• ‘To what extent do you agree that there are people you can really count on to listen, help or socialise with you?’</li> </ul> <p><b>Qualitatively</b></p> <p>Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with member of the community. Key questions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘How would you describe the relationships of support within your community?’</li> <li>• ‘How does the community look after the senior citizens, sick and disabled people?’</li> </ul>

Characteristics of community spirit	Indicators	Methodology
<p><b>Collective or social action</b></p> <p>The ability of people to come together to tackle an issue, support others or improve their community's conditions. It involves people giving their time and/or other assets for the common good, for example through volunteering to community owned service, peer support schemes and leading initiatives (New Economics Foundation and the Office for Civil Society, 2016).</p>	<p>Extent to which people are involved in civic engagement (participation in democratic processes, consultations and activism)</p> <p>People's involvement in social action to, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improve or create a new service/amenity</li> <li>- stop the closure of a service/amenity, or</li> <li>- organise a community event</li> </ul> <p>Extent to which people take part in formal volunteering</p>	<p><b>Quantitatively</b></p> <p>Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'How much would you agree that people in this neighbourhood pull together to improve the area?'</li> <li>• 'In which of the following have you been involved in the 12 months?'</li> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Setting up a new service/amenity</li> <li>- Stopping the closure of a service/amenity</li> <li>- Stopping something happening in the local area</li> <li>- Running a local service on a voluntary basis</li> <li>- Helping to organise a street party or community event.'</li> </ul> <li>• 'How much would you agree that when people in this area get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that the area is run?'</li> </ul> <p><b>Qualitatively</b></p> <p>Mapping local community assets, including local groups, community spaces, events and campaigns. Identifying strengths AND opportunities. and places of value to the community.</p>

Caution is needed when interpreting the results of measuring community spirit. For example, when measuring cohesion in a community, it may seem that its members all share the same ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics and so you might conclude that there is little mixing across different demographic groups. But this does not necessarily indicate low levels of cohesion – it could just reflect that the people who participated in your survey or community event represent a reasonably homogenous group. It is important to discuss your results with members of the community and stakeholders to identify any biases such as underrepresentation from specific age groups, geographic areas, ethnic minority groups or faith groups, for example. The limitations of the results can be then acknowledged and addressed going forward.





# Step-by-step guide for measuring community spirit

We suggest you begin by thinking about your rationale and aims for improving community spirit, before moving onto the second step of engaging with the community. In the third step, we guide you through the process of developing your own evidence base to identify ways in which the community spirit could be improved or maintained. Step four involves implementing a co-produced and co-owned community spirit plan, and step five is about open and constant communication to ensure the efforts grow and become more inclusive.



Please note that this guide is not prescriptive: it is meant to provide you with a set of suggested steps and principles around how best to collectively define and assess community spirit through a participatory process. We also have attempted to provide you with a selection of tips, tools and resources that may assist you.

Each community is unique and complex, so your journey through this process will take its own course. It is therefore essential that this process is iterative and involves all relevant individuals, sectors or groups within your community. You should use both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather input from different perspectives and voices within your community.

This guide has a particular focus on helping place-based communities (groups of people brought together by geographic boundaries e.g. neighbourhoods or boroughs). However, it could also be used within other community contexts - for example groups which share an interest, identity or ethnicity who are not necessarily limited to one geographic area.

## Step 1- Think about your rationale and aim for improving community spirit

### What is community spirit and why it is important?

The feelings of connection and belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody.

Before you embark on a journey to raise community spirit within your community, it is important to articulate why you want to do this and with what objectives. Having a clear idea of your aims and intentions will help you identify where to focus your efforts and to communicate your ideas with others who may be able to help with this work.

Improving community spirit involves strengthening connections and relationships between members of a community for the purpose of supporting wellbeing. In this sense, community spirit can be valuable for:

- Building or renewing communities e.g. in areas going through change or regeneration
- Encouraging strong collective or social action to resolve a particular issue e.g. stopping the closure of a local service
- Tackling social isolation and loneliness
- Facilitating community integration and including particular groups in community life e.g. refugees and migrants, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, older people
- Addressing social exclusion and inequalities

Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, our communities have proven extraordinarily resourceful in working for the common good in the face of unforeseen challenges. The overwhelming response to the call to volunteer for the NHS, the emergence of thousands of local mutual aid groups, and the new partnerships between local authorities and grassroots groups, all demonstrate the importance of community spirit as a force which must be maintained and nurtured.

Where the pandemic has brought people together to support each other, that community spirit must be maintained to help us to recover from COVID-19 as a society. Our community spirit framework provides an evidence-based framework to explore how to do this.

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## Step 2- Engage the community

Community spirit is a bottom-up and dynamic concept, so any attempts to measure, define or improve it at local level, need to be driven by the community's views, ideas and lived experience. As such, community engagement is a pivotal part of this work.

At the time of writing, the need for physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has challenged traditional ways of engaging with our communities. Nevertheless, such engagement remains essential given the importance of community spirit to recovery from the pandemic. Therefore, community engagement activities should still be pursued, whilst ensuring the safety of everyone involved.

Because community engagement is an essential process of meaningful and sustainable change, it must also be pursued over the long-term, and woven into organisations' ways of working.

Community organisations are in a prime position to identify and implement creative and effective ways of engaging with their communities. The case studies in this report provide inspiration for how to do this. For example, Darnall Well Being asked people to describe what community means to them, either in their own words or with an image, in activity packs posted to their service-users with dementia and their carers, and emailed to others on their mailing list.

## Darnall Well Being: Measuring community spirit to engage with the community and show impact

Darnall was the traditional heart of the Sheffield steel industry and its decline has left the area with high levels of deprivation and unemployment. The population of the ward is one of the most culturally diverse in the city with 54% of the population coming from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds including significant Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengal, Yemeni, Somali and Roma communities. In the 2011 census, 41% of the population identified as Muslim, 37% as Christian and 15% as having no religion.

The area, as well as neighbouring Tinsley and Acres Hill, is served by [Darnall Well Being](#), a local community health hub, which runs a wide array of groups and activities including English language conversation clubs, a dementia café, diabetes peer support, cycling and craft groups and a community allotment. The Darnall Well Being team sought to be involved in the Community Spirit Project in order to better understand how to measure and promote community spirit across their services. They additionally wanted to show that, while Darnall is often described by what it lacks in material terms, it also has an array of community assets, including strong relationships between people and cohesion across different ethnic and religious communities.

To measure community spirit in the area, staff and board members of Darnall Well Being participated in a self-assessment and found an innovative way to discover local residents' views. At a Covid-safe 'Fun Palace' day, they asked visitors to the community allotment to write what 'community' meant to them on paper luggage tags and to hang them on a fishing net. Darnall Well Being also asked people to answer that question, either in their own words or with an image, in an activity pack posted to their service-users with dementia and their carers, and emailed to others on their mailing list. Those responses are being compiled together in a book while the local Library and Archives Department will keep the fishing net and tags in their collection as an artefact recording how local people experienced the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the [self-assessment](#), Darnall Well Being's staff observed that local residents, despite their relative deprivation, excel at sharing their time and resources to support each other. This has been clearly evident during the COVID-19 outbreak as people joined mutual aid groups and made donations to food banks. Darnall Well Being itself played its part by keeping in touch with vulnerable and isolated service-users, and supporting them with shopping and collecting prescriptions. They also made information from the Government, the local authority, and the NHS easier to understand and translated it into different languages, and have been involved in delivering a Community Contact Tracing service.

Darnall Well Being plans to measure community spirit again with stakeholders, residents and staff in the future, to explore what has changed and how external circumstances affect the different characteristics of community spirit. What it means to feel a sense of belonging to an area, for example, will inevitably look different during a period when you cannot socially interact with neighbours to one when you can. Similarly, external factors may bear upon each domain differently – not all the measures will increase or decrease as one.

Darnall Well Being hope that applying the indicators in the Community Spirit framework to assess the outputs and outcomes of their services will help them in future funding bids, as it allows them to show their impact on not just individual service-users' wellbeing but on a public good which, as has been clearly shown during the pandemic, is invaluable to everyone in the neighbourhood.

## 2.1 Top tips on how to engage with the community to reflect on community spirit

Community engagement can take place in-person or remotely by phone, post or online. It should be inclusive and equitable, making sure those who are less likely to participate get enough support to do so.

We suggest starting with a few different activities that would be appropriate and appealing for a good proportion of the community. Examples include: craft activities for those shielding or families with young children; an online workshop for those with access to the internet; or a paper survey for those who do not have those facilities or lack the confidence to use them. When in-person engagement is possible, one could work with specific community groups, attend events, or knock on people's doors to ask them questions. The aim is to hear from a wide range of people within your community of place.

When choosing your activities, it is important to consider that there are groups who are often excluded from traditional engagement processes. These can include, but are not limited to: senior citizens; ex-offenders or people on probation; people with limited access to the internet or with limited digital literacy; recent migrants; people experiencing homelessness; people with physical and mental disabilities; people on low incomes, people working several jobs; and people who find it difficult to communicate in English.

### **When planning engagement activities, consider the following principles:**

1. **Make it relevant to people:** show how improving community spirit will make a difference to them and their goals
2. **Make an effort to listen to, and involve,** as many stakeholders and individuals as possible
3. **Demonstrate** to people that you value their time
4. **Make it easy for people to get involved.** Make sure you have thought about people's needs and that your event or activity is accessible to attendees. For example, being aware of people's:
  - a. Access to, confidence or skills in using, the internet and/or digital devices
  - b. Literacy levels – some people may not be able to read or write confidently, or have English as their first language
  - c. Language and communication needs – some people may require a translator
  - d. Housing situation – there may be people who do not have a stable address and so may not be contactable by post
  - e. Mobility issues – is your venue wheelchair accessible?
  - f. Time constraints – parents or carers of young children may not be able to attend an event which clashes with their childcare responsibilities.
5. **Keep it simple.** Avoid the use of jargon and complicated information. The questions to be discussed or answered in a workshop or a survey should be easy to understand.
6. **Plan participatory and interactive activities.** Icebreakers and interactive activities get people moving and talking to each other.
7. **Listen** carefully to what people are saying and promote participation.
8. **Improvise and adapt.** Things may not go as expected on the day of an activity and some follow-up and additional work may be necessary to gain a higher level of participation. You might create small iterations of an event or try to talk to people in cafes, parks or even on the street.
9. If **conducting** your community engagement activity while COVID-19 restrictions are in place, follow the Government's guidance making venues COVID-secure, and any restrictions on the size of gatherings.
10. **When it is appropriate and safe to do so,** think about hosting an event with food, as eating together can promote a feeling of togetherness. But be mindful of people's dietary needs, allergies, and religious beliefs about food.
11. **Share** what happened at the event with the wider community – it might inspire others to get involved at a later point.

### **Additional sources that might aid your community engagement:**

[Top tips for community engagement](#), from Locality

[Community Organisers UK](#), to find out more about Community Organising.

## Step 3 – Developing the case for improving community spirit

Building the case for improving community spirit involves collectively discussing what community spirit is, why it is important, and how it can be improved and sustained. Here we suggest a number of activities that could help:

1. Gather some evidence about the state of your area's community spirit
2. Present the evidence and information
3. Build consensus with community members about what community spirit means to them, its current state and how it could be improved
4. Identify what can be done to improve community spirit.

### 3.1 Gather some evidence about the state of your community's community spirit

Good-quality, clear and concise information which provides a snapshot of your area's community spirit can be shared with the community and stakeholders as the basis of your engagement process.

More often than not, you may find it difficult to find studies or data specific to your neighbourhood and you may have to use regional or city-level evidence. If you can, it is worth spending some time gathering data on people's views and reviewing literature specific to your locality to act as the basis for action on community spirit. Our [topic guide for exploring community spirit](#) provides some guidance on how to do this.

You can use the Community Spirit framework to describe what makes up community spirit to those you engage with by, for example, presenting evidence and information about the elements that make up community spirit in relation to your area. For a holistic exploration of community spirit, we suggest you address each element separately and then bring it all together.

**TIP** **Share the framework**  
Share the framework document with your experts so together you can cover all aspects of community spirit.

You might want to ask: how do we compare with a similar area, or what is the national average? Some sources of relevant information include:

The Office for National Statistics measures of wellbeing explores societal and personal well-being in the UK by investigating issues such as health, relationships, education and skills, neighbourhoods, finances and the environment. These reports provide insights at national and regional levels.

Understanding Society's Insights 2020, led by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex, this report covers three key themes: social integration, work and health, and geographical mobility.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency report on the National Wellbeing Programme which explores relationships, perceptions of neighbourhood environment, and health and wellbeing.

The Community Life Survey, commissioned by the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. This study is conducted annually in England to track trends and developments in areas that encourage social action and empower communities.

The Scottish household survey, led by the Scottish government, this study explores a range of issues that shape localities in Scotland, and the country as a whole, including loneliness, neighbourhood perceptions and volunteering.

The National Survey for Wales about community cohesion and safety in the local area. Led by the Welsh government, this report looks at how satisfied people feel with their local area, whether people are that they live in a cohesive community, and how safe they feel in their local area.

Public Health Profiles, produced by Public Health England, provide a rich source of indicators across a range of health and wellbeing themes that has been designed to support Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and commissioning to improve health and wellbeing, and reduce inequalities.

Some of your stakeholders may be able to help to gather this information and evidence. For example, the public health team based within your Local Authority may be able to provide evidence as to why building stronger community spirit is important for health and wellbeing at an individual and collective level. A local charity working with the elderly may be able to provide information about social isolation and why it is important to improve the quality of relationships within the community.

Asking local stakeholders for their insights is a good way of involving them and gaining their support. For example, East Lindsay Council's stakeholder consultation provided an opportunity to gather information from local community organisations which can then be involved in a future mental health project managed by the Council.

## East Lindsey District Council: Community spirit as a buffer against the effect of COVID-19

Mablethorpe and Sutton on Sea are two small coastal towns within the District of East Lindsey in Lincolnshire. The area has high levels of multiple deprivation, with Mablethorpe and Sutton on Sea amongst the 1% most deprived neighbourhoods in England for employment, income, education, skills and training, and health and disability. The Centre for Towns Report *The Effect of the COVID Pandemic on our Towns and Cities* ranked Mablethorpe as the town with the worst score for social wellbeing<sup>1</sup>, the fifth most socially isolated town in the country and the highest for absolute deprivation.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the report suggested that the town was the least able in the country to recover well from COVID-19.

However, when East Lindsey Council's Communities Lead applied the Community Spirit framework to the area through a stakeholder consultation with thirteen community organisations, a more nuanced picture emerged. This process identified a strong sense of belonging among residents and a good level of mutual support and neighbourliness in the towns. Most participants also considered there to be a good level of local participation and believed that COVID-19 may have increased these aspects of community spirit, as people pulled together to ensure the needs of vulnerable residents were met. The Good Neighbour Scheme, for example, brought together volunteers to support the elderly, disabled or otherwise vulnerable people in their community, by running errands, helping with practical tasks or befriending.

The Council played a central role in co-ordinating and financially supporting the community response to COVID-19. Forty staff were redeployed to Wellbeing Lincolnshire to enable that organisation to support residents who were shielding or unable to leave their homes for food and other essentials. The Council also conducted 'community health checks' on organisations to ensure protocols around volunteer safety, insurance and safeguarding were being met; and they provided funding for local community larders, food banks and, through the Covid Councillor Community Grants scheme, to local projects or charities in each ward.

There were concerns raised in the stakeholder consultation, however, about how COVID-19 had exacerbated isolation among the elderly, especially those who lived alone, and their access to, and confidence in using, digital technology.

The Council plans to use this insight to support future funding bids for place-based innovation around health inequalities, including the Towns Fund Investment Plan and the Strategic Partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better.

Furthermore, the Council is hoping to use these responses to feed into their place-based approach to mental health support. This will take the form of community-led mental health 'spoke' sites, connected to a central hub building funded by the NHS, which will enable people experiencing low level mental health problems to connect with, and be supported by, their community.

## TIP

**Three stakeholders who may be able to support you gather local information and evidence**

- Your local council's public health team. Call your local authority's general enquiries number and ask to speak with a public health consultant in their public health team. They can provide you with content for your event, useful contacts from other stakeholder organisations, and may even be able to help with practicalities such as finding a venue or sending invitations to local stakeholders.
- Regional or local charities, or representatives from national organisations, working on issues such as social isolation, mental health and wellbeing and community development. Examples include Age UK, Mind, the People's Health Trust and Locality. Call or email the general enquiries team and ask them for a regional or local contact. These organisations may be able to provide you with speakers for your event, information related to the community spirit of your area, or further useful contacts.
- Your local universities, as often they do research on their local area which may be able to help you.



## 3.2 Present information and evidence in an interactive and eye-catching manner

Gathering information is useful for generating discussions that can lead to action. Whether you are hosting an online workshop, putting a stand outside your town's train station or sending an online survey, it is important that you use information or evidence to frame why developing community spirit is important.

It is crucial to note, however, that presenting complex information to generate engagement from different audiences and different levels of literacy requires creativity.

# TIP

## Some suggestions for presenting information and evidence

- Use audio and visuals such as videos, photographs and fun infographics.
- Involve the audience by inviting them to take part in a quiz or a game. You could build these using websites such as [Kahoot](#) and [BookWidgets](#). You could ask people to guess some statistics such as the percentage of people in their area who have said they often or always feel lonely according to the latest Community Life Survey. You could then reveal what the audience members said and contrast it with the survey's findings.
- Encourage people to engage with your presentation by using their experiences to exemplify your points. For example, when talking about social action, you could ask the audience to raise their hands or stand up if they feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area, or if they volunteer on a regular basis.
- Explore lived experiences with participants to exemplify the need to raise community spirit in the locality. You could, for example, invite them to share about their experiences of the community during lockdown.

## 3.3 Building consensus around your local definition of community spirit

Although we have provisionally defined community spirit as related to our feelings of connection to a place or group and our ability to come together to improve the wellbeing of all, we know that this concept means different things in different places, and can be influenced by many factors. As such, it is important to ask the question 'what does community spirit mean to you?' and listen to how people respond.

There are many ways of doing this, but the key principle is to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to contribute.

A word cloud is a visual representation used to highlight popular or trending terms based on frequency of use and prominence. It is very effective for communicating ideas at a glance and very easy to set up. For example, you could ask people to write down what "community" means to them on sticky notes, a flipchart, or on social media, then bring all the responses together in a word cloud. You can present this to members of the community and together build a definition of what community spirit means to the residents of your area. Some websites that can help you do this include [Wordle](#) and [TagCrowd](#).

# TIP

## Use "word clouds", sticky labels, flipcharts, social media posts





Once you have gathered people's input, try to identify some of the common words and ideas to create a rough definition of community spirit and present it back to your community to see whether it resonates with them. Then move onto discussing the state of each element of community spirit (sense of belonging, levels of cohesion, quality of relationships and levels of collective action) as it applies to your area.

### 3.4 Identify what can be done to improve community spirit

By looking at the identified priorities and the assets in your area (these include the connections, decision-making powers, skills, time, and material resources present in your community) you can ask people to identify a small set (between three and five) of specific, concrete and achievable actions that could improve community spirit. Our [Assets mapping guide](#) includes some considerations for doing this.

Some of the actions which you propose should be easily achievable while others should represent more of a challenge. Having ones that are well within reach means that you can soon start to see progress, which can motivate people to work towards the more challenging actions. These priorities should be mapped against stakeholders who have the power, in terms of access to resources and influence over decisions, to make the desired changes. Our [Stakeholder power mapping tool](#) provides some guidance on how you may go about doing this. Southern Brooks Community Partnership's case study provides a good example of achieving change by influencing different stakeholders.



## Southern Brooks Community Partnership, South Gloucestershire

### Shaping services with community spirit at heart

Southern Brooks Community Partnerships is a community development organisation working across South Gloucestershire to provide a variety of services including social prescribing, community gardening, job clubs, play schemes, training in youth work and parenting, wellbeing workshops and resources and memory cafes.

Using the Community Spirit framework, Southern Brooks produced a survey to measure the strength of community spirit in the area, focusing on a particular priority neighbourhood, Patchway, which falls in the lowest and second lowest quintile on various measures of deprivation. (Our [Example of Community Spirit survey](#) questions provide a sample questionnaire). Responses from 66 residents revealed that the area's community spirit was strongest on the domains of belonging and quality of relationships:

- 68% of people felt they belonged fairly or very strongly to the neighbourhood
- Over half of respondents agreed that they had people to listen to them, help them, or socialise with
- Half of people agreed that people in the neighbourhood came together to improve the area, and only one fifth of respondents disagreed with this proposition
- Half of residents said they never felt lonely

However, community cohesion and social action could be improved upon:

- 4 in 5 said that half, or more, of their friends were the same as them in terms of ethnicity, education, religion, education and age group.
- Only 1 in 5 had been involved in community activities in the past 12 months, like running a community event, stopping the closure of a service or amenity, or setting up a new one.

Southern Brooks also extended the survey to include questions about the effect of COVID-19 on residents' health and wellbeing, which enabled them to identify areas of concern as they unfolded. For example:

- Nearly half of residents said their mental health had significantly worsened because of COVID-19 and around a third felt it had exacerbated their feelings of loneliness.
- One quarter of respondents said their financial situation had been negatively impacted because of COVID-19, and the same proportion of respondents also said their diet had become significantly worse during the outbreak.

Southern Brooks were also able to identify what they would like to see in the community once the outbreak has passed. Having appreciated the stronger community relationships built up during the lockdown, residents wanted to see this sustained with events like street parties and community gatherings, more social hubs in the area and a community orchard. Southern Brooks will use these survey responses as they develop their services.

The findings were also shared at an online conference with other local community organisations and the Council to generate a coordinated response. At the event, South Gloucestershire Council expressed their intention to measure community spirit on an annual basis to identify what specific geographic areas and facets of community spirit need more work. The Council also plans to complement activity-based measures in their commissioning process with these findings, so that the way projects are evaluated is more closely aligned to the Council's primary goal, which is to build healthy and resilient communities.

## Step 4 – Provide leadership, plan and monitor

The community engagement process should result in key actions and priorities that can form the basis of a community-led plan. While the plan is a collective endeavour, to be developed and delivered by many, it is important that someone has responsibility for providing ongoing leadership and support to the overall initiative. This could be any individual, group or organisation at a local level that has the capacity and enthusiasm to drive the work forward. For example, in South Gloucestershire, Southern Brooks Community Partnership leads their local community spirit plan, supported by the local authority, elected members and local charities.

Ideally, this plan should be integrated into, or complement, any other plans you and the other stakeholders may have so that its development is sustained, and time and resources are used efficiently.

### Building a plan

Your plan will consolidate the actions agreed during your engagement process and will further specify who will be responsible for those actions, timescales, and how you will measure success.

An action plan should include:

- ✓ An aim: a broad statement and ultimate goal for this work. For example, Armo Community Association in Northern Ireland aimed to measure community spirit as an essential step in developing a shared future vision for their mixed religion community.
- ✓ Objectives that are clear and achievable. Each one should be: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Objectives are smaller tasks that directly contribute to the aim. We suggest that you have an objective attached to each characteristic of community spirit.

For example, Armo Community Association identified the following activities:

Characteristic of community spirit	Objective
Sense of belonging	To design a volunteer-led plan of activities to reach out to people by Christmas 2020.
Cohesion	To explore the development of a local leisure facility to strengthen community cohesion.
Quality of relationships	To create opportunities for interaction between groups who can no longer meet due to COVID-19 restrictions, such as online events and activity packs at key times of the year.
Collective action	To pursue opportunities for Participatory Budgeting projects which allow the community to have a sense of ownership on investment decisions in their area.

- ✓ **Milestones**, directly related to objectives, indicate when objectives have been achieved or tangible progress has been made towards objectives.

For example, Armoj Community Association's objective for improving collective action 'to pursue opportunities for participatory budgeting projects' would have milestones related to the number of project proposals they submit to grant-makers.

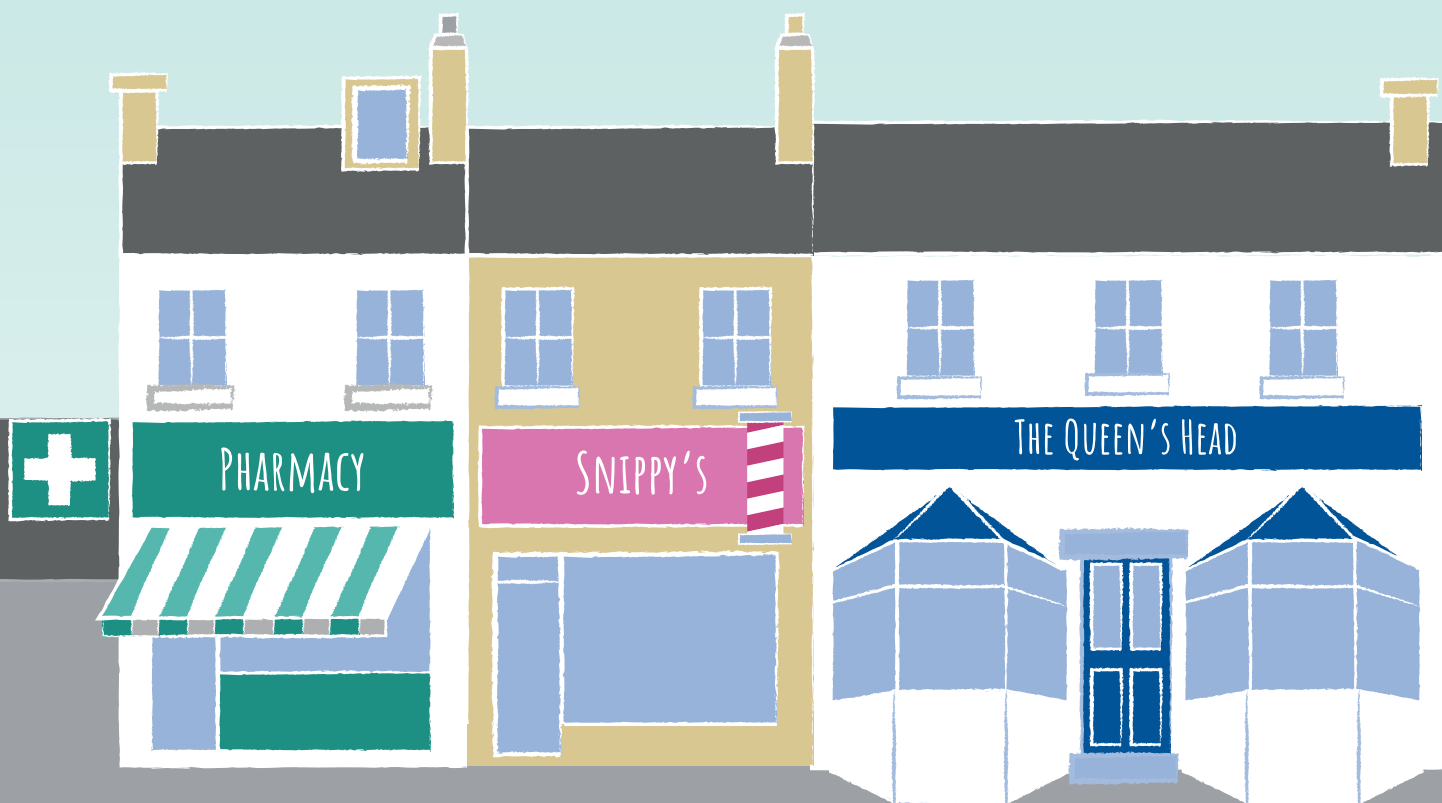
- ✓ **Actions** that are concrete and lead to the achievement of milestones. These should have deadlines attached.

For example, Armoj's objective for improving collective action will include activities such as drafting and discussing bid proposals by certain dates, which would relate to deadlines set by the organisations commissioning the Participatory Budgeting projects.

- ✓ **Assets** or resources which will be used to undertake the tasks, including who has specific responsibility for each of the tasks. Most of these assets will have been identified in the asset-mapping stage.

Once ready, your plan should be shared with everyone who is named as responsible for actions within it to make comments and suggestions. You should then set review dates to check on progress and provide updates.

Remember to record and gather data while you deliver your plan's activities. These should help you monitor progress and to measure the impact of your work. Examples of the kind of data you should record include: the number of attendees at an online workshop, any feedback they provided, and any outcomes from this process, such as new connections with other organisations which were developed.



## Armo Community Association: Community spirit to enable cohesion and social action

Unlike the surrounding villages which are single-identity, Armo in Northern Ireland has a mixed population – with half identifying as Protestant and half as Catholic. These different groups live peacefully alongside each other, but with separate primary schools, sporting and cultural activities for each faith group, there is not full integration. The community as a whole suffers from poor access to transport and other services, putting it in the 6% most deprived neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland for income levels and access to services, and in the 9% most deprived for deprivation affecting children. With the Protestant community less affluent than the Catholic, socioeconomic disparity also divides the two groups.

Both the level of poverty and social isolation in the village have been exacerbated by COVID-19. With many families reliant on a single income, that sole earner being put out of a job or being furloughed had a dramatic impact. The social networks of older people were also badly hit, as they were unable to attend religious services, the 'Over 55' club or go to the shop for themselves.

Armo Community Association (ACA), was able to support these residents with a meals on wheels service, and by providing food boxes. An unprecedented number of volunteers came forward at the start of the outbreak to support residents who are clinically vulnerable or have mobility issues, which ACA attributes to the success of the recent Participatory Budgeting (PB) process, which was drawing to a close at that time. Local businesses donated food for this initiative without even needing to be asked and the local council provided a small grant which enabled each family in the village to receive a voucher to spend at a local shop. ACA found that their meals service to the elderly was serving more than just a material need: knowing that someone would be dropping off food twice a week meant they would have a friendly chat and kept them feeling connected to their community.

While reflecting on their community spirit using the self-assessment form, ACA has been able to identify that whilst they have strong foundations for belonging, collective action and quality relationships, the factors of cohesion and inclusion could be improved within their community. Whilst Protestant and Catholic residents live side-by-side, the two communities are not fully integrated. As an example, sporting and cultural activities aimed at adults tend to still be held separately. Going forward, ACA aims to facilitate.

To this effect, ACA is working to secure funding for regenerating a local facility which could be used for American Football – a sport with no historic association to either religious or political identities. If this project is successful, they are planning to use the Community Spirit framework and tools to shape the project and to measure its impact.



## Step 5 – Keep communication going

Send regular updates to stakeholders and the wider community, providing opportunities for people to provide feedback, and to get involved in the project. Encourage people to send you ideas or relevant information, and assess your reach – particularly with groups or communities from which you don't get much engagement. Be prepared for your work to expand and to seek further resources as more people come on board and new ideas for actions are proposed.

### Môn Communities Forward, Holyhead: Community spirit leaves none behind

Holyhead lies on Holy Island, off the Isle of Anglesey on the Welsh Coast. Of Holyhead's 12,000 residents, 58% are of working age, 19% are over 65 and 23% are under 18. 97% were born in the UK, with around 1% being born in the Republic of Ireland, 1% from other EU countries and another 1% from countries outside the EU.

Môn Communities Forward currently runs a project called the Local Conversation, where individuals and groups are empowered to make a difference within their own community. The 'difference' takes many forms, such as a bustling Youth Café, a Knit & Natter group, a mental health support group, parents and toddler mornings and many more services, which are community-led by volunteers who want to tackle isolation within the community.

When COVID-19 hit, the community pulled together. The Town Council set up a volunteer group which helped with delivering food parcels and essentials to those unable to leave their home, while other volunteers offered help via social media. The extent of these efforts was recognised when a partner organisation, Cybi Events, launched Holyhead Hero's Award and received over 100 nominations for acts of selflessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals ranged from a 7-year-old who posted videos of herself dancing online to raise money for the NHS, to a couple in their seventies who picked up prescriptions for their neighbours who were shielding.

Môn Communities Forward is also working to support local businesses by running the Totally Local campaign Fiver Fest in the town, which is designed to increase consumer spending in local, independent shops. Participating businesses offer special £5 offers for a fortnight to generate more business for themselves, but also promote others in the area through 'disloyalty cards', maps and trails so that the whole high street can benefit.

As part of the Community Spirit self-assessment, the integration of ethnic minority groups into the wider community was identified as an area in need of improvement. It was also noted that the demand for mental health services has risen steeply as a result of COVID-19, which will put more strain on already very limited service provision.

Having seen such powerful collective action in the town since the outbreak began, Môn Community Forward intends to consult with other stakeholder organisations to identify any other issues which may be affecting the community as well of ways of working together to address them. They hope also to survey residents on their views about Holyhead's community spirit when the national lockdown measures have eased so that they reach those who do not usually engage with the organisation and those who lack the equipment, skills or confidence to participate online.

# Conclusion

**Community spirit is a bottom-up, dynamic concept which is unique to each community. Any attempts to measure and improve it should have the community's ideas, aspirations and assets at their heart.**

Community spirit is an important part of individual and collective wellbeing and can be nurtured by addressing its key elements: sense of belonging, cohesiveness, relationships between members of the community, and collective or social action.

The framework and tools presented in this report are intended to support and facilitate local efforts to improve and sustain community spirit, and our case studies provide good examples of a variety of approaches which can be taken. These case studies also clearly demonstrate why community spirit is an essential part of our lives, particularly for our collective resilience in the face of crises like that caused by COVID-19.

## **Considerations for next steps:**

- a. Community spirit is influenced by the social and physical conditions in which people live and work. As such, it needs to be embedded within the decision-making processes of our local systems, for instance, through the commissioning, design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives and services. Southern Brooks' case study shows how this can be achieved.
- b. Initiatives to build community spirit should involve systematic ongoing engagement with members of those communities, and adequate resources. Participatory budgeting and community action plans are excellent ways of achieving both, as Arroyo Community Association's experience exemplifies.
- c. Nurturing community spirit is an equitable endeavour, which leaves no one behind. For Mōn Communities Forward, the process of reflecting about their local community spirit has identified gaps in their engagement with particular ethnic groups.
- d. We will continue working with community organisations to evaluate how this framework and toolkit are implemented, and what impact they have, in the coming years. We would welcome hearing from other grassroots organisations, local authorities, and research institutions, with an interest in supporting this work.

A recent study on the state of the UK's social fabric identified while both social and economic factors influence the condition of our social fabric, there has been an imbalance in the attention given at a political level, with economic factors at the forefront of the debate and action (Tanner, O'Shaughnessy, Krasniqi, & Blagden, 2020). The social factors are yet to be treated with the same level of importance. This is where addressing community spirit in a systematic way adds tangible value to our society and our framework offers a way of doing this. We hope to see it put into practice as widely as possible, and for its continuing development to be shaped by a variety of communities and stakeholders.



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## Annex 1 – Methodology

**This project used a number of different strategies to develop the community spirit framework.**

Firstly, we set up an advisory group made up of representatives from organisations with expertise in community development, health and wellbeing. The group provided comment and advice in relation to the development of the community spirit conceptual framework and measuring tools.

To inform the development of the definition of community spirit and framework, and to identify measurement tools, we undertook an iterative literature review. We found through this that the features of community spirit can be associated with factors of community wellbeing such as community cohesion and belonging, and community assets such as social capital and community resilience.

We also engaged with twenty grassroots organisations through Locality's Health and Wellbeing network event in May 2019, in order to test the draft concept. Through this activity, we discovered that community spirit means different things to different communities, according to their context and the characteristics of its members. Nevertheless, across the board, we found that the concept of community spirit carries positive connotations, that it is highly valued by the public, and it is seen as instrumental to communities working together for the common good. We were advised by those attending the event that the framework we developed needed to be flexible enough to encompass a diversity of interpretations of community spirit and different applications.

Between 12<sup>th</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019, RSPH and Locality conducted a public survey to gather people's views on the meaning of community spirit and its importance for health and wellbeing. 710 responses were collected and a thematic analysis of the responses helped to refine the framework that was then validated by seven community organisations. The aim was to ensure the framework was coherent and accessible to communities and those who work with communities..

Those seven community organisations were recruited through a call for expressions of interest, aimed at organisations with an ability to test the community spirit framework as part of their existing initiatives. We selected organisations in areas of high deprivation and with a variety of demographic and geographic characteristics across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Community organisations were brought together at an event in March 2020 to discuss the framework and ways in which it could go on to be validated at a community event. However, because of the lockdown for COVID-19, these community events could not take place. Instead, the organisations applied the framework through surveys, online stakeholder consultations and internal self-assessments. The results of this process have informed the framework and tools presented in this report.

### Testing the framework during COVID-19

The community organisations participating in this project were first responders within their localities during the initial crisis provoked by the pandemic. Their work was a lifeline for many and pivotal for coordinated local responses. As such, it is important to highlight these organisations' resilience and commitment to the project and, above all, to their communities' wellbeing. They were able to integrate the framework within their responses to the pandemic, demonstrating how community spirit must be prioritised as part of health and wellbeing.

## Annex 2 – Defining Community Spirit

Community spirit is not a term that has been formally defined, though it is often used to refer to relationship dynamics that drive action within communities.

To develop an initial concept, we began with what can be considered a comparable term: ‘sense of community’. In social psychology, a sense of community has been defined as the feelings of membership or belonging to a group, including an emotional connection and a commitment to collaborate to meet the needs of all the members of the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The literature links the sense of community with: feelings of mutual trust; social connections; shared concerns and values; attachment to a place (McMillan & Chavis, 1986); and participation and collaboration (Lynne C. Manzo, 2006).

Community spirit as a term used in everyday life evokes images of people coming together to support each other, or organising themselves to take action for or against something which they think might impact their community.

Drawing from these ideas, we carried out a survey and asked the public how they defined community spirit. We did a thematic analysis of the 710 responses we received, identifying the most frequently recurring words and ideas. From that, we developed a definition of community spirit as:

**“The feelings of connection and belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody.”**

Participants’ responses indicated that community spirit involves four key elements: a sense of belonging to a community, cohesiveness and inclusion, good relationships with other members of the community and collective action for the common good.

In addition, the literature review, the project advisory group and engagement with grassroots organisations all highlighted the fact that community spirit is a dynamic concept which is ‘bottom up’. That is to say, it originates from the community, and is shaped by its unique features, such as its demographics, geographical location, economy, social issues and assets (including the skills, knowledge, and connections of its residents). As such, a methodology to define it should be iterative, place-based, and fully involve members of the communities themselves.

Diagram 2 – What is community spirit?

## Community Spirit is dynamic, bottom-up, place/community-based and iterative.



**Community Spirit means different things in different communities, but in general it can be defined as the feelings of connection, belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody.**

## Annex 3 – A topic guide for exploring community spirit

The below is an example of a topic plan for measuring community spirit and identifying ways to improve it at a community event.

Characteristics of community spirit	Indicators	Method
<p><b>Sense of belonging</b></p> <p>People expect to feel belonging and believe they fit and have a place within a group or community and, as such, they are willing to support its improvement or development. Adapted from Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory, (Chavis, 1986).</p>	<p>Feelings of belonging to one's immediate neighbourhood</p>	<p><b>Discussion in small groups.</b></p> <p>Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Discussion generator questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the sense of belonging within our community?</li> <li>• What would make our sense of belonging even better?</li> </ul> <p><b>Troubleshooting</b></p> <p>Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Low – and high-hanging fruits activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some easy, quite-easy and not-so-easy things that could be done to improve it or make it even better?</li> <li>• What should be prioritised?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cohesion</b></p> <p>The ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. It implies that individuals have the right to equality (of treatment, access to services etc.) and involves respect and appreciation of the diverse nature of communities. Adapted from The Home Office Seven Steps to Community Cohesion (The Home Office, 2005)</p>	<p>Feelings of trust in people in the neighbourhood</p> <p>Perceptions of diversity in the neighbourhood</p> <p>The level of integration of people from different backgrounds</p> <p>Observed group diversity</p>	<p><b>Discussion in small groups.</b></p> <p>Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Discussion generator questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the relationships of trust and respect between the members of our community?</li> <li>• What would make our relationships of trust and respect even better?</li> <li>• How well do people with different ethnicities, age groups, or religions mix within our community?</li> <li>• What would make our integration even better?</li> </ul> <p><b>Troubleshooting</b></p> <p>Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Low – and high-hanging fruits activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some easy, quite-easy and not-so-easy things that could be done to improve it or make it even better?</li> <li>• What should be prioritised?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality of relationships</b></p> <p>The feelings of connection, reciprocity and mutual support between members of the community.</p>	<p>Feelings of loneliness and isolation in adults, children and young people, with and without disabilities</p> <p>Perceptions regarding the level of social support available</p>	<p><b>Discussion in small groups.</b></p> <p>Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Discussion generator questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the level of support and reciprocity within our community?</li> <li>• What would make the levels of support and reciprocity within our community even better?</li> <li>• How does our community look after the sick, the elderly and people with disabilities?</li> </ul>

Characteristics of community spirit	Indicators	Method
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would make us a more caring community for the sick, the elderly and those with disabilities?</li> </ul> <p><b>Troubleshooting</b> Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Low – and high-hanging fruits activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some easy, quite-easy and not-so-easy things that could be done to improve it or make it even better?</li> <li>• What should be prioritised?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collective or social action</b></p> <p>The ability of people to come together to tackle an issue, support others or improve their community's conditions. It involves people giving their time and/or other assets for the common good, for example through volunteering to community owned service, peer support schemes and leading initiatives (New Economics Foundation and the Office for Civil Society, 2016).</p>	<p>People's involvement in social action to improve community spirit</p>	<p><b>Discussion in small groups.</b> Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Discussion generator questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What assets can I/my group/organisation bring to the efforts to improve community spirit?</li> <li>• Who else has the power and willingness to help?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assets mapping</b> Asset mapping tool in <a href="#">Annex 2</a> Stakeholder mapping <a href="#">Annex 3</a></p> <p>Alternatively, make a list detailing events, campaigns, skills, experience, time, venues, and sources of funding which are present in your community and which could support your action plan.</p>

## Annex 4 – Assets mapping guide

Every community has assets that can be harnessed to improve collective wellbeing. These include time, skills, knowledge, experience, connections, financial resources and material resources.

By identifying and using assets, you build on the strengths and resources within a community to develop sustainable ways to achieve community wellbeing.

A simple way of mapping assets is to ask people to list valuable things they or the group they represent can contribute to the efforts. You could use the headings:

Figure 1: Community assets to consider



## Annex 5 – Stakeholder’s power mapping tool

Identifying and engaging with key stakeholders is an important step for any community development process.

The aim is to involve individuals and/or organisations on the basis of their relevant knowledge, skills, assets as well as any connections to funders, authorities or other groups (such as minority groups) which they might have.

Figure 2: Potential stakeholders

- Elected local councillors
- The Health and Social Care directorate at the local authority
- The public health team at the local authority
- Public Health England regional centres
- NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Community groups such as residents’ associations
- Local shopkeepers, businesses, major employers and business associations, including chambers of trade or commerce
- Local societies, wildlife trusts, local history groups or sports groups
- Local charities and voluntary organisations including those representing discrete groups e.g. the elderly, those with disabilities, young people, low-income households, LGBTQ+ groups, faith groups and Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups
- Landowners of key sites or organisations with significant property holdings and property developers
- Local trusts and project groups, such as community development trusts
- Education institutions such as schools, colleges and universities
- Community leaders, influencers, facilitators or activists
- Other local institutions such as art centres, performance venues, sports centres

Source: Adapted from Locality’s guide [How to consult with your community](#)

The process of selecting stakeholders could start by mapping people and organisations who have a stake in improving community cohesion, the sense of belonging, the quality of the relationships and/or collective action in the community. This list will include members of the community, local groups and organisations, councillors and other decision-makers.



Once a thorough list has been created, you should classify each of the stakeholders by interest and influence using the following categories:

Figure 3 – Stakeholder classification

	Less interested	Highly interested
High influence	<p>Stakeholders in this category are influential but may be less interested in supporting you due to their current priorities.</p> <p>However, it useful to put in enough work to gain their support, and keep them informed as they may have the power to block or enable your efforts.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Invite them to your community spirit workshop, ask them for support in disseminating the marketing materials with other stakeholders.</p>	<p>Stakeholders in this category are highly influential and very interested in helping you improve community spirit.</p> <p>It is important to fully engage with these people and organisations, and make the greatest effort to involve them and meet their expectations.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Invite them to your community spirit workshop and involve them in both the planning and delivery of the event.</p>
Low power	<p>These stakeholders have low influence and, although relevant in some way, improving community spirit may not be a priority to them at the moment.</p> <p>It may only be necessary for you to keep them informed of your efforts in case an opportunity for collaboration should arise in the future.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Keep them informed, involve them in communications about outcomes and opportunities to input in the future.</p>	<p>These stakeholders may be perceived to have low influence but are highly interested in your work. Collective engagement with these stakeholders may strengthen your community power.</p> <p>You should keep them informed and involved at an appropriate level</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Adequately involve them in the planning and delivery of your community spirit workshop and subsequent plan of action.</p>

Adapted from Mendelow, A.L. (1981). 'Environmental Scanning – The Impact of the Stakeholder Concept,' ICIS 1981 Proceedings, 20

The best use of your time and effort is spent on identifying and contacting people and organisations who are highly interested and have the power or ability to support your initiative. The objective is to galvanise support from organisations who are already interested and undertaking work which relates to your project. This can be done by highlighting to stakeholders that community spirit is helpful to a variety of purposes, including:

- Increasing participation in initiatives that improve community wellbeing
- Improving community cohesion and integration of different groups of the community, for example vulnerable migrants, Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, faith groups, older people etc.
- Strengthening accountability of local authorities
- The establishment of a new local group
- Fundraising for a local need.

# Annex 6 – Example of Community Spirit survey questions

## Introduction

This is a survey about community spirit and its impact on health and wellbeing in our area. We would like to find out your thoughts to help us better understand how we can improve the cohesion, sense of belonging, relationships and ability to take action in our community.

Participation is, of course, voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point.

The entire survey should take between 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

Your responses are both anonymous and confidential, meaning that your personal data will not be linked to your responses and we will handle it in line with current data protection legislation

## Demographic questions

### 1. Age

- 17 or younger
- 18 – 20
- 21 – 29
- 30 – 39
- 40 – 49
- 50 – 59
- 60 or older

### 2. Gender

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Ethnicity

- White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- White: Irish
- White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian
- Asian/British Asian: Indian
- Asian/British Asian: Pakistani
- Asian/British Asian: Bangladeshi
- Asian/British Asian: Chinese
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean
- Other ethnic group: Arab
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

## Sense of Belonging

4. In your immediate neighbourhood, how strongly do you feel you belong?

- Very strongly
- Fairly strongly
- Not very strongly
- Not at all strongly

5. Roughly how many years have you lived in your current neighbourhood?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Cohesion

6. On a scale where 0 (zero) is not at all and 10 (ten) is completely, in general how much do you think people can be trusted?



7. To what extent do you agree that this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. To what extent are your friends similar to you in terms of ethnicity, religion, education and age groups?

- All the same as me
- More than a half
- About a half
- Or less than a half

## Relationships

**9. How often do you feel lonely?**

- More than once a day
- Once a day
- 2 – 3 times per week
- About once a week
- About once a fortnight
- About once a month
- Less often than once a month
- Never

**10. How often do you chat to any of your neighbours, more than just to say hello?**

- More than once a day
- Once a day
- 2-3 times per week
- About once a week
- About once a fortnight
- About once a month
- Less often than once a month
- Never

**11. How often do you meet up in person with family or friends once a week or more?**

- More than once a day
- Once a day
- 2 – 3 times per week
- About once a week
- About once a fortnight
- About once a month
- Less often than once a month
- Never
- Less often than once a month
- Never

**12. How much do you agree or disagree there are people you can really count on to listen, help or socialise?**

- Definitely agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Definitely disagree

## Social action

**13. How much do you agree or disagree people in this neighbourhood pull together to improve the area?**

- Definitely agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Definitely disagree

**14. How much do you agree or disagree that when people in this area get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that the area is run?**

- Definitely agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Definitely disagree

**15. In which of the following have you been involved in the 12 months:**

- Setting up a new service/amenity
- Stopping the closure of a service/amenity
- Stopping something happening in the local area
- Running a local service on a voluntary basis
- Helping to organise a street party or community event.

## Annex 7 – Community Spirit self-assessment form

This self-assessment tool has been designed to help community organisations, and organisations working with communities map their current work against the four key components of community spirit, to then develop action plans and ways of measuring progress towards improved community spirit.

Doing this is an attempt to systematically plan how to develop community spirit as a strategy for improving health and wellbeing for everyone in the community.

General details		
Date of self-assessment:		
Name of organisation:		
Community/locality of place:		
<b>Short description of the community</b> e.g. location, ethnic groups, faith groups, levels of deprivation, main assets, main needs.		
<b>Names and roles of those who participated in the self-assessment:</b>		

## Section 1 – What does community spirit look like in your community?

<p><b>Key ingredient</b></p>	<p>Describe your community with regards to each element of community spirit.</p> <p>Please consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is already happening that promotes community spirit?</li> <li>• The indicators of community spirit.</li> <li>• The impact of COVID-19 and health inequalities on community spirit, for example increased social isolation, levels of volunteering, increased demand on your work.</li> <li>• Who are those most marginalised from the benefits of community spirit, for example, digitally excluded groups, BAME communities.</li> </ul> <p>Please also consider these specific exploratory questions...</p>
<p><b>Sense of belonging</b></p> <p>People expect to feel and believe they fit and have a place within a group or community and, as such, they are willing to support its improvement or development.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> feelings of belonging to immediate neighbourhood.</p>	<p>In general, how would you describe the sense of belonging within your community?</p> <p>Has this changed since COVID-19? If so, how? And in whom?</p> <p>What are the biggest threats or risks for the sense of belonging within your community now and in the future?</p>
<p><b>Cohesion</b></p> <p>Describes the ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. It implies that individuals have the right to equality (of treatment, access to services etc.) and involves respect and appreciation of the diverse nature of communities.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> Feelings of trust in people in the neighbourhood; perceptions of diversity in the neighbourhood; the level of integration of people from different backgrounds.</p>	<p>How would you describe the relationships of trust and respect between the members of your community?</p> <p>How well do people with different ethnicities, age groups, religions mix within your community?</p> <p>What has been the impact of COVID-19 on community cohesion?</p> <p>What are the biggest threats to, or risks for, community cohesion within your community now and in the future?</p>
<p><b>Quality relationships</b></p> <p>Refers to the feelings of connection, reciprocity and mutual support between members of the community.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> Feelings of loneliness and isolation in adults, children and young people with and without disabilities; face to face contact with family or friends once a week or more; perceptions regarding social support.</p>	<p>How would you describe the level of mutual support within your community?</p> <p>How does your community look after the sick, the elderly and people with disabilities?</p> <p>Have there been changes in the quality of relationships (such as neighbourliness and levels of social isolation) within the community as a result of COVID-19?</p> <p>What are the current challenges and opportunities?</p>
<p><b>Collective action</b></p> <p>Refers to people coming together to tackle an issue, support other people or improve their community's conditions. It involves people giving their time and/or other assets for the common good, for example through volunteering with a community owned service, peer support schemes and leading initiatives.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> Extent to which people are involved in civic engagement (participation in democratic processes, consultations and activism); volunteering; involvement in social action.</p>	<p>How would you describe the levels of participation from the community of initiatives for the common good?</p> <p>What makes people participate?</p> <p>What changes (if any) have you observed in community participation since the COVID-19 outbreak began?</p> <p>What role will collective action have in decisions about the local area in the recovery phase from COVID-19?</p>



## Section 2 – What can you do to improve community spirit in your community?

<p><b>Key ingredient</b></p>	<p><b>Propose key actions or priorities to address each element of community spirit.</b>  <b>Please consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who needs to be involved?</li> <li>• What partnerships, relationships, experience, expertise, skills do you have that will help you with this work?</li> <li>• What do you think you will achieve with this work (your outcomes)?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sense of belonging</b></p>	
<p><b>Cohesion</b></p>	
<p><b>Quality relationships</b></p>	
<p><b>Collective action</b></p>	

<p><b>How will these priorities be implemented and embedded within your approach?</b></p>
<p><b>How will these priorities be measured and how often?</b></p>
<p><b>What resources would be needed and how would they be obtained?</b></p>
<p><b>What capacity building needs does your organisation have in order to initiate/develop this work?</b></p>



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