



# Future Places

**How community  
organisations can drive  
post-Brexit renewal**



# Introduction

When Britain voted to leave the European Union, politicians from all parties – whether they supported the decision or not – recognised Brexit as a moment of profound change. Beyond the complex technical mechanics of disentangling a 40 year old relationship, Brexit shone a light on the extent to which our economy and our politics have not been working for many people. Policymakers have known for many years that we live in an age of spiralling inequality and deepening social divides; now it was time to do something about it.

And yet, while much has happened in politics since 23 June 2016, we are still waiting for a bold programme of reform to address these fundamental challenges. Whitehall's capacity – much reduced anyway since the austerity programme of 2010 – is being consumed by negotiations. Parliamentary time is almost exclusively reserved for Brexit bills; and the government has no majority to pass reforming legislation anyhow.

This process will last until March 2019, and it's difficult to project with any certainty exactly what will happen next. If a deal is agreed, in all likelihood we will enter into some kind of transition period, followed by a general election. If it's no deal, all bets are off. What we do know is that all the while, politics will be stuck in stasis and the huge challenge of creating a fairer Britain will remain unaddressed.

We cannot just wait patiently while Westminster and Whitehall sort themselves out. We know that we can rely on the incredible resourcefulness of our communities. By establishing community organisations that are rooted in and focused on the local area, local people can respond to local need and drive their own neighbourhoods forward. Locality members do this in a range of different ways, bringing local people together to create the services their community needs most in spaces where everyone belongs. Every week over 400,000 people walk through our doors, and ultimately lives are transformed.

Ever since the referendum, we've been speaking to our members about how their communities are feeling, and what they think the challenges and opportunities are for their area at this crucial moment in our national life. Our members are spread all over England, from the areas that voted Leave in huge numbers to the Remain heartlands. Indeed we've found the Brexit divide

reflected within our member organisations themselves: conversations about Brexit can go very differently depending on whether you talk to a CEO or a local trustee.

What we have discovered from these conversations is that there is a specific relationship between the work community organisations do and the big divides in our society the referendum revealed. A growing sense of inequality, driven by an economic model that has not benefited all communities. A disempowering democratic deficit, with people feeling they lack agency and control over their lives. And an unease about demographic change, with people living increasingly separate lives across age, class and ethnicity, made toxic by a strident immigration debate.

These are the big challenges our country needs to take head on. And at Locality, we believe that our members provide many of the answers. They can be powerful local economic agents, using assets and enterprise to drive regeneration, often in the most disadvantaged areas. Through community development and community organising, they give local people a voice and strengthen community involvement in local decision making. And they bring communities together by providing inclusive places and services.

Brexit offers us an opportunity to harness this power of community, by localising the economy, building power at the neighbourhood level, and providing positive support for integration.

But it is far from inevitable that this will be the Brexit we get. We could well end up with further inequality, driven by an economic model that seeks to win a global 'race to the bottom'; greater disempowerment, with repatriated

powers hoarded in Westminster; and increased community tensions, with immigration returned to the forefront of political debate, and tough border controls causing displacement.

Our Future Places Network has brought Locality members together to discuss this and think through collectively how we build a better future for our communities. We organised three network meetings - in Leeds, Bristol and Birmingham - to learn how community organisations are building community power, promoting community cohesion and driving community economic development. We wanted to know what our members do, how they can do it better, and what Locality can do to create a more supportive environment.

Here we present our key findings, which show the huge contribution our members make - and what we need to do to ensure we maximise the impact of the power of community.

Tony Armstrong, Chief Executive, Locality



# Community power

## Putting communities in control

'Take back control' is probably the most successful political slogan of recent times. Partly it captured many people's concerns about immigration, but it also spoke to a more general sense of powerlessness; that many of the most important decisions about our lives are taken in places we cannot influence. As the New Economics Foundation have put it: "too many of us feel powerless, left out of politics, left behind by the economy and too often conclude we have nothing left to lose."<sup>1</sup>

Over the last decade, a number of different government initiatives have recognised the resonance of 'taking back control'. The coalition government's Localism Act, for example promised to give people "the opportunity to take control of decisions that matter to them"<sup>2</sup>. Yet these policy initiatives clearly failed to empower local people in a meaningful way.

We believe Locality members truly put communities in control. By being community-led; through community development and community organising activities; and by taking on ownership of community assets: community organisations give local people a voice and strengthen community involvement in local decision making.

How do community organisations put communities in control? What we learnt from the Future Places Network

Understanding the community. Communities are complex and community organisations bring together self-defined communities in ways that make sense to them. People decide who their community is and how they want to engage, be it based on interest, faith or place. Communities of place are often more clearly defined in rural settings, whereas in urban settings, scale can be more fluid: your community could be a street, a housing estate, or a borough. Ultimately, what makes a community is purpose: getting people in the same place at the same time, to talk, build trust, develop empathy and take action together.

Doing it for themselves. In many of our poorest areas, people don't perceive that government makes much difference. Indeed, policy debates now term these places 'left behind', highlighting the gulf between the scope

of government action and people living on the sharp end of entrenched social disadvantage. So it is communities themselves who have to make that change and find their own solutions. Community organisations motivate people to realise that communities can be powerful if they come together and share their voice.

Forging a local common good. Community organisations support the development of a local common good: bringing divergent opinions to the fore, helping people clarify what they think, supporting people who have not been heard for a long time to realise what it really is they want in their community. Some communities don't know what they want, have never been asked and have no sense of the opportunities. Some communities can be divided and mistrustful. So it's the role of community organisations to provide space for deliberation, to enable the community to negotiate the future it wants for itself.

Providing trusted information. Communities need a baseline of unmediated information, to be able to focus on a common purpose. Community organisations can provide this, sharing information across the community and being a trusted gatekeeper.

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<sup>1</sup>New Economics Foundation (2016), Building a new economy where people really take control: An agenda for change, London: NEF ([http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/BUILDING\\_A\\_NEW\\_ECONOMY.pdf](http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/BUILDING_A_NEW_ECONOMY.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2011), A plain English guide to the Localism Act, London: DCLG ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf))

Challenging authority. Community organisations exist to take power and exercise it on behalf of local people. This sometimes means taking power from those who currently have it and challenging vested interests. So while community organisations often work in partnership with local authorities or businesses, they also confront them when needed, holding power to account and taking power into the community.

Top tip:

Decisions are made by those who turn up. Go to meetings where decisions are being made that affect your community. If people can see you, they are less able to ignore you – don't let people do things that will have an impact on your neighbourhood without knowing you exist.

How can we do this better? Lessons for community organisations

You need to have legitimacy. Organisations need to reflect their community and be clearly accountable to them, and so community control needs to be evident at the top of an organisation, with trustees who are local residents. Organisations need to be accessible to all members of the community. The key question is whether an organisation is trusted enough to show leadership for the area without being controlling.

Key debate:

Can people still relate to the structure of a board? Is that an accessible form of local accountability? Or are there better ways?

Top tip:

Consider the value of a flat management structure, deploying the energy and talents of as many minds as possible, rather than just one leader, with the community invited in at every level.

You need to listen. An organisation that really listens is one that is open to change and communicates often, in a language that everyone understands. We need to not become institutional: it's important that community organisations are open to change and the evolving needs of the community, listening to them and responding. Understand your community and how people want to engage.

You need to reach out. An organisation needs to communicate well and let people know they're there. Doing this effectively requires a mix of the old and the new: word of mouth has real power and deep influence; social media is good for getting the message out, especially about local events. Have an open door policy, and use a mix of formal consultation exercises with informal mechanisms to engage people.

Top tip:

Show, don't just tell, by using volunteers to run the organisation. This spreads the word about what you do with a larger group of local people, and makes sure your organisation is closely interconnected with the community.

Scale matters. Community control is easier to achieve in smaller areas. Members of a community must know each other. When communities that are trying to be in control become too large, they're removed from what a community wants. So organisations need to be mindful that as they grow, there is a risk that community control will become diluted. This needs to be carefully weighed up and if expanding the scale at which you operate is the right decision for your community, be clear about how you will maintain, not weaken, community control.

**Don't let a crisis go to waste.** A powerful sense of community spirit often comes to the fore in response to a crisis. Some organisations we heard from talked about a 'blitz spirit' that emerged in response to local flooding, for example. The same might happen when an important local service or building is under threat. It is important to capture this energy and not allow it to dissipate after the initial stimulus has subsided. This is not about established organisations co-opting new energy or seeking to control it, but combining with it, amplifying it and supporting new leaders to emerge.

**It's people who matter, not organisations.** Community organisations are part of the community – they don't lead but they allow leaders to emerge. They create a space where activism can happen and people realise their power. Groups can come and go; organisations emerge depending on a need. So don't allow path dependency, ego, or institutional interests to get in the way of what the community needs right now; your organisation might have been the answer to a different problem 20 years ago. Merge when there is a crisis and support each other. New leaders emerge, and are followed by

people who speak to them in a way they understand and agree with.

People in the community can have different views from community professionals. If you are working in a well-established community organisation, you need to be aware that your personal views might not be the same as your community's. It is important to manage this dichotomy and embrace the value of differing opinions. Divisive opinions can form new opinions, and much can be learnt by challenge.

## Case study

### Tadcaster and Rural Community Interest Company

Tadcaster & Rural is a community interest company which works in Tadcaster, North Yorkshire and the surrounding area. In 2015, flooding led to the collapse of Tadcaster Bridge - the main road link between the east and west of the town. This physical break between the two halves of Tadcaster made existing socioeconomic disparity more prominent, with the west more materially privileged than the east.

However, the regeneration and rebuilding process has gone some way to the healing this divide, as the community has come together and recognised the unique skills possessed on both sides of the River Wharfe.

Tadcaster & Rural see their role as driving forward ideas that come from the community and can be then delivered in and by the community, and have been involved in a number of community projects prior to, and following, the flood.

The organisation has supported three local parish councils in their neighbourhood planning process. Appleton and Roebuck received approval for their neighbourhood plan at local referendum in November 2017, while Ulleskelf and Church Fenton are midway through the process. Throughout, Tadcaster and Rural have helped to ensure that all members of communities affected by the plans are involved in decision-making.

One example of this is the work Tadcaster & Rural did to recruit younger people to the neighbourhood planning committee. At a sixth form information evening, their CEO David Gluck spoke about the value of having such experience on one's CV. Two 17 year-olds subsequently signed-up, and both continue to play an active role on their local committee.

Tadcaster & Rural also see their role providing the community with unmediated information as an important aspect of community empowerment. They edit and produce the community magazine, Tadcaster Today, which includes quarterly updates on all that is going on locally and the ways in which people can get involved.

The Trustee Board at Tadcaster & Rural is made up of local people, and this goes some way to providing the organisation with legitimacy in the local area. However, direct engagement on specific projects - and the involvement of new groups according to the project - is the process local people cite as that which gives the group its true community legitimacy. In addition, the ad-hoc role Tadcaster & Rural plays in acting as a link between the community and town and county councils is recognised as important in providing an alternative, non-political, voice for local people.



Image credit: Tadcaster and Rural CIC

“ Direct engagement and the involvement, growth – and even creation – of new groups is the process local people say has given projects their true community **legitimacy.**”

David Gluck, Chief Executive Officer, Tadcaster and Rural Community Interest Company

# Community cohesion

## Bringing places together

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the EU referendum campaign was the social tensions that it brought to the surface. Home Office figures showed that in the month following the referendum, there were 5,468 hate crimes – 41% higher than in the previous year<sup>3</sup>. The think tank British Future said that **“Foul graffiti on the Polish centre in West London came to symbolise this deeply worrying spike in hate crime in the immediate aftermath of the referendum.”**<sup>4</sup> And the trend has continued into 2017, with terror attacks in London and Manchester leading to further surges in racist incidents, particularly against Muslims.

This is not all about race: Britain is in the grips of a deep unease about wider demographic change, with people living increasingly separate lives across age, class and ethnicity. As the Social Mobility Commission warned, ‘Britain is a deeply divided nation’.<sup>5</sup>

We believe Locality members bring places together. Community organisations can offer safe and welcoming spaces and provide inclusive services, where people from different backgrounds and with different experiences of life can come together, meet their neighbours and build trusting relationships.

How do community organisations bring places together? What we learnt from the Future Places Network

Through community development. Cohesion is complex and not just about race or ethnicity. It is an issue of power; there is a need to identify who has the power, and who is willing to rescind power to allow others to be heard. Community development work is therefore imperative – but it takes time and money. Many of the grassroots organisations who are most trusted by their communities struggle for funding to keep going and don’t get their voices heard in policy debates.

### Top tip:

Larger organisations with more capacity can support and mentor smaller organisations, such as by providing the space to have difficult conversations.

Providing a genuine shared space. Community spaces are needed that are available and accessible to the whole community, where people can meet, get to know their neighbours and mix with people they wouldn’t normally see. Community organisations who own or manage local buildings can provide this and are in a position to facilitate activities which can lead to people of different backgrounds recognising the things they share in common.

Crucial to getting this right is to understand the dimensions where people can connect: you need a leveller, whether it’s music, games or food, which enables people to start conversations with different people. Where people have begun to recognise what they share in common, it is also easier to have difficult conversations in these safe spaces, in which people can speak their minds with no fear of retribution.

<sup>3</sup> O’Neill, A (2017), ‘Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2016/17’, in Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 17 October 2017, London: Home office

([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> Katwala, S (2016), Challenging Hate Crime effectively, London: British Future  
(<http://www.britishfuture.org/articles/challenging-hate-crime-effectively/>)

<sup>5</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2017), State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain  
([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/662744/State\\_of\\_the\\_Nation\\_2017\\_-\\_Social\\_Mobility\\_in\\_Great\\_Britain.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf))

Providing leadership during difficult conversations. As well as providing space for people to come together, political leadership is required to acknowledge the issues, and competing views, that are there in the community, so as to ensure all voices feel able to contribute and be listened to, and to make a stand to ensure equality for newly-arrived members of the community.

#### Top tip:

Get people to think about the future. What do you want this community to look like in 5 years, what can we do about it?

Tackling poverty. An apathy and exhaustion can take hold in poorer communities, which can make it more difficult to participate in community life. If you are about to be sanctioned by the jobcentre and are struggling to put food on the table, you might be less likely to attend local meetings or events. Multi-layered inequalities are entrenched in some people's lives, driven by a combination of: unequal access to good education or jobs; socioeconomic deprivation; and a lack of cultural capital. Without a commitment to tackling this, communities will never stand a chance of standing together. Just providing a neutral space is not enough - it is community organisations' foundational commitment to social justice that enables them to promote social cohesion.

Good will. Having the trust of the community is not something you can fake - and is very hard to achieve if you are not from that community. Locality members are locally-led, deeply rooted in a sense of place and are run by the community, for the community. So whereas government interventions or private sector initiatives will always be treated with suspicion and have to work very hard to gain local trust, community organisations should have a head start, if they are truly embedded in their community.

How can we do this better? Lessons for community organisations

Work in partnership. A great strength of multi-purpose community anchor organisations is that they host a range of different organisations, who provide a range of different services. This means different and diverse communities will come into the same building. However, it doesn't mean that they will use the same services or

necessarily speak with one another. It is therefore important for organisations to collaborate and provide holistic support, to ensure that community anchors are truly multi-purpose and not simply providing a number of siloed services under one roof.

**Don't just talk, take action.** We need more than conversations: we need action to make our places more resilient. People power can result in radical change. Community organisations need to organise: be the fulcrum of the community and support people to make the change they want to see.

Challenge yourself. Difficult conversations shouldn't be comfortable for anyone, including the organisation who might be hosting it. Community organisations need to challenge themselves and check their privilege, to really understand the issues, how someone else might perceive them, whether they are truly trusted and really on mission.

Challenge the community. Communities are colluding in hate crime if they are not standing up and challenging hateful views. The community needs to make crystal clear when behaviour is unacceptable and ensure that minority groups have a powerful voice.

Keep connected. Smaller organisations often feel that larger community anchor organisations do not always have the same depth of reach. It is time and resource intensive to build relationships with grassroots organisations - but it is worth the effort to build strong local partnerships and ensure maximum community coverage. Creating a culture of acceptance and providing a welcoming space for shared values with a diverse range of groups, cannot be done in isolation. Good relationships are needed with organisations that have direct access to the community.

## Case study

### Southern Brooks Community Partnerships

Southern Brooks Community Partnerships (SBCP) are a community development organisation, which brings people together to build strong communities. Since 1988, they've been working with people of all ages to help them live happy, healthy lives.

Based in South Gloucestershire, the organisation works in established neighbourhoods such as Kingswood, Filton and Patchway and newer communities and developments such as Charlton Hayes, Lyde Green and the Filton airfield development. This area is characterised by its diverse population, with a recent increase in the number of people from different backgrounds and faiths who call the area their home.

Of late, there has also been an increase in community tension and incidents of hate crime. Accordingly, South Gloucestershire Council sought out ways to boost levels of community cohesion. Recognising the roots SBCP has laid down across the area, the council asked the organisation to support them in the development of their latest community cohesion plan.

The document lays out plans for: a number of 'safe space conversations' targeting different sectors facilitated by community development workers; the coordination of a network of organisations and agencies with a role in community cohesion; and regular monitoring of hate crime data and community tensions to inform reactive activity.

In recent years, SBCP have run - and continue to run - a number of successful initiatives which demonstrate the role a community anchor organisation can play in building cohesive communities.

Their anti-hate crime ambassadors scheme is one such initiative. The ambassadors are located in secondary schools, and undergo training on discrimination and how to take action in their school and community. The ambassadors become leaders in their school - on inclusion and prejudice based bullying issues - and help run community events celebrating diversity and challenging prejudice. The initiative was piloted in 2016, and in 2017 SBCP received Home Office funding to roll the scheme out to 12 schools across South Gloucestershire.

The council also provided funding to SBCP to lead on multi-faith work over the next three years. Several exciting projects are planned, including the co-design of programmes with the Muslim community aimed at helping people of other faiths and none to better 'Understand Islam'.

The presence of community development workers in five of South Gloucestershire's six 'Priority Neighbourhoods' - places where people don't have the same opportunities as in other areas - is also part of SBCP's approach to building cohesive communities. They aim to build capacity and rebalance power in these communities, often through working with smaller, grassroots community organisations and commissioning them to deliver the community development offer in some of these areas.

**“ The anti-hate crime ambassadors have become leaders in their school on inclusion, and helped run community events celebrating diversity and challenging prejudice.”**

Julie Close, Director, Southern Brooks Community Partnerships



Image credit: Southern Brooks Community Partnerships

# Community economic development

## No neighbourhood 'left behind'

For years, policymakers saw globalisation as a rising tide that would lift all boats. The EU referendum, however, brought home to many that this was a fallacy. A clear divide has emerged between the big cities who seem to be experiencing the benefits of globalisation and voted remain; and the towns, suburbs and villages who feel the economy hasn't been working for them and voted to leave.

As the JRF's analysis of the Brexit vote noted "whereas some areas are thriving, others are in decline". This decline, the JRF explain, "consists of numerous factors such as population loss, those with higher skills moving out, economic restructuring and de-industrialisation, shrinking labour markets, unemployment, low education and skills, poor health, deprivation and poverty, physical blight and declining tax bases."<sup>6</sup> Consequently a narrative of places being economically 'left behind' has taken hold.

Our economic model has not been of equal benefit to all communities – and we believe that community organisations are a crucial countervailing force to this trend.

Community organisations can be powerful local economic agents, using assets and enterprise to drive regeneration, often in the most disadvantaged areas. These are places where public sector regeneration struggles to gain traction and the private sector generally isn't interested. By supporting community organisations and community economic development, we can address the growing sense of inequality that Brexit highlighted.

How do community organisations ensure no neighbourhood gets 'left behind'? What we learnt from the Future Places Network

Represent communities. At every level, councils and people in positions of power see themselves as representing communities. But no matter how well they engage, there will always

be a gap. Community organisations really know the people they serve because they are one and the same. They give the community a stronger voice in economic decision making.

Stimulate economic activity in areas that policy forgets. Community organisations are formed by local residents who have had enough of waiting for someone else to do something to improve their area and decide to do something about it themselves. This might be a neighbourhood that the benefits of a big infrastructure project have failed to reach, or a small town whose major industry the government hasn't been able to prevent from becoming obsolete.

“ What the residents on this estate did was: band together and say this isn't good enough. No one else is going to help us. No one else is bothered. We've got to do it ourselves. Let's not talk about it: let's do it.”

Stuart Spandler, Goodwin Development Trust, Hull

<sup>6</sup> Goodwin, M and Heath, O (2016), Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Work in areas of deprivation. Locality members overwhelmingly operate in areas that are struggling with high levels of deprivation: 80% of our members work in areas of the country that are considered deprived, with many working in the most deprived electoral wards in the country.

Create positive money flows. By employing local people in good jobs and using local supply chains, community organisations act as economic multipliers. They keep money flowing around the neighbourhood, attracting inward investment and keeping it there, ensuring the benefits of economic growth reach the people in the community who need it most.

Bring social value. Locality members provide a huge range of services, depending on what their community needs. Over 400,000 people benefit from Locality members' services each week<sup>7</sup>. The economic value our members bring is a huge additional 'social value', alongside the essential services they provide.

**Use what they've got.** By focusing on global competition and economies of scale, policymakers are often missing the huge assets that are already within places. There are often lots of good things already happening in our communities; and what's more, working with a small number of people in a defined area brings a strong sense of pride and control. Community organisations tap into the power that often lies untapped in our communities and maximise its potential.

Put communities in control. By owning community assets and through democratic ownership structures, community organisations put local people in direct control of the important economic activity happening in their neighbourhood and give them a tangible stake in the local economy.

Create networks. Community organisations are not islands - they are a deeply embedded part of a local ecosystem. They incubate other micro businesses and entrepreneurs, provide space for people to meet and join up with other social enterprises and community businesses, and work interdependently with the local public and private sectors.

Clarify context and values. Policy debate is filled with new terms and buzzwords like social value and inclusive growth, which often make sense at a high level but lack definition in practice. The areas where community organisations work and the people they work

with show the impact these aspirations need to have if they are going to mean anything in practice.

How can we do this better? Lessons for community organisations

Demonstrate impact. Collectively, the VCS needs to get much better at demonstrating impact. This is particularly important in the context of Brexit, with European structural funds being repatriated. These are critical funding streams for tackling area based disadvantage - but are likely to be watered down by the Treasury over time if it is not clear the government is getting bang for its buck. Organisations need the capacity and resources to demonstrate economic and financial impact.

#### Key debate:

There are lots of impact measurement approaches out there and different funders have different regimes. Do we need standard metrics across the sector to maximise our voice?

Be realistic. At the moment, we are swimming against the tide of an economic model that seeks to centralise power and profit, and where inequality is growing. We need to be hugely ambitious about the places where we're working and know that, in the long-term, we can change the world. But we also need to be realistic about where we're starting from and where it's realistic to get to in the short term.

Focus on apprenticeships. Community organisations can provide opportunities for people who might not be getting a chance elsewhere and who might feel they are a long way from the labour market. Not only does this create social value - improving people's skills, health and life chances - but it makes the most of the local labour force and harnesses the talents of the local community that might otherwise be overlooked by other employers.

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<sup>7</sup> Locality (2016) Our Impact. (<http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/LOCALITY-IMPACT-REPORT.pdf>)

Think about the future and make your voice heard. There is currently an ongoing debate about the nature of any 'successor fund' that will replace EU structural funds after the UK leaves the EU. We heard from members that this funding has been hugely important in supporting economic development work in disadvantaged areas. Yet we have also heard about the huge flaws in these funding streams – which often sit at a scale that community organisations find very difficult to access and are often surrounded by so much red tape that the focus becomes administrative rather than citizen-centric. Community organisations need to make their voices heard and let policymakers know the importance of existing EU funding – and how a successor fund could be better designed so funding is deployed more effectively in the future.

#### Key debate:

Locality is working with other voluntary sector bodies to make the case to government about what a successor fund should look like. We'd love to hear your views! Please get in touch with our policy team - email [nick.plumb@locality.org.uk](mailto:nick.plumb@locality.org.uk) with examples of where EU funding has supported you to make an impact on your community – and where it's held you back.

## Case study

### Skills Work and Enterprise Development Agency (SWEDA)

SWEDA was founded in 1989 by local women who saw a need to address the barriers faced by women getting into training, employment or business. Since then, the organisation has shifted its focus from solely women to all communities across Sandwell and the Black Country.

Their charitable mission is to “encourage, inspire and promote the personal and professional development of its clients to achieve their goals regardless of age, intellect, talent or heritage”. This is in pursuit of SWEDA’s vision of a society where “all deprived communities have access to equal opportunities for employment”.

SWEDA’s target clients are likely to be those who find it hardest to access decent work or get into self-employment, including young people

not in education, employment or training (NEET), mothers and women returners, lone parents, carers, black and minority ethnic individuals, and people needing to retrain or upskill themselves.

The support SWEDA provides to individuals, including, but not limited to: training to boost confidence and motivation; job search support; interview preparation; and assistance with CVs and application forms aims to enable those at risk of economic exclusion to play an active role in the local labour market.

Working in a holistic way with NEET young people (aged 18-24) has been part of SWEDA’s offer to the local community since 2006. Dedicated, experienced and qualified advisers provide one-to-one support to individuals and make use of SWEDA’s network to signpost young people to further support and/or employment opportunities. Their current programme for NEET young people has a 90% retention rate.

Most of the employability and skills training offered by SWEDA is free at the point of use to service users, and funded through a number of sources and organisations including Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, the Department for Work and Pensions and European funds. The organisation also provides enterprise and business support to local individuals and organisations, which plays a vital role in building a more resilient local economy. As part of this work, SWEDA seeks to build local enterprise networks to encourage cross-pollination of ideas and joint-working and collaboration between new businesses in the area.

SWEDA’s key objective is to support and encourage individuals to develop new skills, confidence and to fulfil their potential. Through their holistic service provision each year SWEDA supports over 1,400 individuals from diverse communities.

SWEDA prides itself in providing a unique warm and sensitive approach with on-going, long-term support. Their support is responsive to local needs and enables their clients to increase their self-esteem, confidence, personal and professional development.



Image credit: SWEDA

“ At SWEDA we have supported over 1,400 individuals from diverse communities – developing new skills increasing confidence and finding **employment.**”

Davinder Kaur, Chief Executive Officer, SWEDA (Skills Work and Enterprise Development Agency)

# Conclusion

The Future Places Network has highlighted the huge contribution Locality members make to communities across the country – through putting local people in control, building cohesive communities and boosting local economic development. Many of them operate in areas living at the sharpest end of entrenched disadvantage – those areas characterised by complex social challenges and which central government policy increasingly struggles to reach.

The EU referendum campaign and its aftermath shone a light on these so-called ‘left behind’ areas, and on the level of division many feel is present within our country today. While government focuses on negotiating our exit from the EU, we must remember the social and economic dynamics that drove the leave vote in the first place.

We must ensure that the vital good work done in communities pushing back against the rising tide of inequality isn’t jeopardised by Brexit; but that instead we capitalise on this moment as an opportunity for national renewal.

We’d love to hear from members on the contents of the report and with examples of how you are tackling these issues in your community. These insights are vital in supporting our engagement with policymakers on behalf of our network.

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Policy Officer, Locality

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Locality is the national membership network for community organisations that bring local people together to meet local needs. Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful, helping them to build a fairer society. Locality provides specialist advice, peer-learning, resources, and campaigns to create better operating conditions for our members.

Unlock the power in  
your community with us

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