

Notts' Voice in Research

Notts' Voice in Research is a Collaboratory Research Hub initiative that seeks to understand some of the complex challenges that are important to our local communities and how research from our local universities should be shaped to address these. Through Notts' Voice in Research events, we aim to:

- Work with Nottingham(shire) residents, local civic and community professionals, community leaders etc., who have knowledge and experience of our diverse local communities.
- Collaborate with participants in our workshops to develop an informed understanding of what the Nottingham(shire) communities' priorities are and how these intersect and overlap.
- Use these mutually agreed priorities to direct the development of up to 15 new research projects that will be funded and delivered by Collaboratory, starting in April 2026.



What did our communities say?

Over the course of three workshops, **244 specific priorities** were put forward by local participants. Following these workshops, the Collaboratory team analysed these responses using what is called a thematic analysis approach, to identify broader common themes and to pull out specific and actionable priority areas. This makes it possible to see the bigger story in hundreds of seemingly very different responses. This report explores these **6 themes and 29 specific topics for action** in full detail.



Figure 1. 2025-16 Research priority themes word cloud

This word cloud gives a graphical overview of the main themes arising from discussions in our 3 Notts' Voice in Research workshops. The larger the word, the more common the theme was amongst the 244 priorities.

Overview of Priorities

By far the most common challenge to emerge from this year's workshops, which in fact has wide reaching relevance across multiple theme areas was that of social and community isolation. These points centred around a wide variety of systemic and structural factors which result in many different groups of people become isolated from their community peers and the happenings of wider society, and the resulting implications of that isolation. Many of the isolation-based challenges identified by participants also talk about the significant implications on the health and wellbeing of isolated people, and those connected to them.

Issues affecting people health and wellbeing were also very common, and in many cases were linked to poor experiences that people have had when trying to engage with local mechanisms and processes meant to help them find support for themselves or those in their community. Age, gender, and ethnicity specific experiences featured strongly as unique factors causing different local communities to experience common challenges in a unique way.

You can explore each theme and its specific topics for action in more detail on the following pages.

	Priority Theme	Specific Topics for Action
<p>Topics came up MORE frequently</p>   <p>Topics came up LESS frequently</p>	1. Inclusive communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Societal and community isolation 2. Culturally sensitive services and resources 3. Barriers to inclusion and integration into society 4. Physical spaces for communities' needs 5. Disabled peoples' participation in local society 6. Capacity for community building and leadership
	2. Inclusive growth and development of local economies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exclusionary local systems and processes 2. Inclusion in and support for local economies 3. Arts, culture, and local heritage 4. Sustainability of the community sector 5. Digital exclusion 6. Inclusive routes into employment 7. Community voices in problem solving
	3. Health and wellbeing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carer's wellbeing and support 2. Nutrition and lifestyle health 3. Homeless communities 4. Mental health challenges 5. Human health and the environment 6. Healthcare services
	4. Age, gender, and culturally specific experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker communities 2. Ethnic minority communities 3. Women's needs and societal roles 4. Needs and challenges of men and boys 5. Older age communities
	5. Education and achieving potential	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young people's needs and development] 2. Inclusive educational opportunities 3. Education that meets community needs
	6. Public safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crime and communities 2. Antisocial behaviours and narratives

Table 1. Summary of priority themes and specific topics for action.

This table shows a summary of the main themes and sub themes to come out of all 244 individual responses submitted by participants. Themes are ordered from most common to least common. For examples, themes numbered 1 were more commonly mentioned in submissions than themes number 6.

#1 Inclusive communities

1. Societal and community isolation

2. Culturally sensitive services and resources

3. Barriers to inclusion and integration in to society

5. Disabled people's participation in local society

4. Physical spaces for communities' needs

6. Capacity for community building and leadership

Theme details

Community building

- Communities collectively hold a lot of skills and knowledge. How can these effectively be shared between generations within communities, and outwardly across other communities.
- Where communities can and want to come together to create their own solutions to problems, often the increasing lack of physical spaces for them is a barrier. Many such spaces, clubs, and informal groups have been lost since COVID-19.
- The loss of specialist groups, services, and spaces has an impact on community cohesion and social isolation of groups more vulnerable to this such as single parents, carers, older age people, young people aged 16-25, etc.
- What impact is the loss of places/spaces for arts, culture, and music activities having on community building and community cohesion?
- How can community cohesion and collaboration be strengthened when times are tough?
- There are many passionate individuals in communities who can and want to lead change but may lack confidence, resources, or knowledge to be able to advocate effectively for their communities. How can we grow and nurture local leadership within communities.

Inclusive and cohesive communities

- Difficult to navigate local (and national) administrative processes create barriers for many communities (i.e., disabled people, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, lower income communities, overlooked communities, etc.) to be able to take part fully in local communities and economies, to access support, and to know how to contribute fully to local society.
- Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker communities have strong desire to integrate into local society but have no support to do this - must turn to other migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees communities and so can't look outward.
- How can international students be better empowered to integrate into Nottingham city?
- Barriers to specific communities (homeless people, migrant communities, vulnerable young men and boys, carers, those with disabilities, neurodiverse individuals) being more fully and actively included in local society leads to significant social and societal isolation, which creates further challenges.
- Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees want to access local educational opportunities but experience practical barriers.
- Concerns that an over reliance on digital approaches impacts social development through loss of social interaction.
- Many vulnerable or less privileged people can become excluded from basic services (e.g. applying for jobs, healthcare, etc.) due to digital inaccessibility.

Sustainability, resilience and skills in communities

- Local community/voluntary organisations are filling bigger gaps left by loss of local authority services and need support to become more resilient and sustainable.
- Increasing levels of unpaid work hours in community organisations negatively impacts community sector workforce.
- Challenges for local community organisations in securing and accessing sustainable funding.
- Local communities, particularly those often overlooked or left out, need a more meaningful voice in local funding decisions, problem solving, and general decision making to ensure community needs are met.
- The loss of local facilities like community and youth Centres (e.g., Marcus Garvey Centre) have knock-on effects in communities, affecting their resilience and sustainability, as well as that of the local community and voluntary sector.

#2 Inclusive growth and development of local economies

1. Exclusionary local systems and processes

2. Inclusion in and support for local economies

3. Arts, culture, and local heritage

4. Sustainability of the community sector

5. Digital exclusion

6. Inclusive routes into employment

7. Community voices in problem solving

Theme details

Local creative sectors

- Lack of long-term support and development resources for the local creative sector to support sustainable success.
- How can Nottinghamshire better retain its abundance of homegrown creative talent?
- In the face of funding cuts and the economic crisis, improvements to resilience and sustainability are needed for the local arts and culture infrastructure.
- There is a growing lack spaces for and of arts and music opportunities for local communities - how does this impact them?
- How does an increasing loss of arts and music opportunities and spaces impact community building and cohesion? How can this be addressed?

Transport

- Barriers to accessible public transport such as exclusionary digital approaches, high cost, lack of county-wide connectivity, isolates some communities such as SEND individuals, older age people, single parents and carers, etc.

Workplace and business culture

- Exploitation of people working “unpaid hours”, particularly within larger organisations, is a growing concern.
- There is a perceived lack of philanthropy from larger businesses. How can they contribute to supporting local communities?

Systems and economy

- Difficult to navigate local (and national) administrative processes create barriers for many communities (i.e., disabled people, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, lower income communities, overlooked communities, etc.) to be able take part fully in local communities and economies, to access support, and to know how to contribute fully to local society.
- Many national/local government schemes and systems that aim to encourage economic participation are not accessible and difficult to navigate, deterring participation.
- Economic challenges for single parents and carers, limiting their access to economic opportunities.
- Local independent shops/companies face major challenges trying to compete with large companies in the current economic climate.
- The current local and national economic and policy landscapes make it harder for individuals with motivation and ideas to to make a difference on their own i.e., more challenges and barriers to setting up their own businesses due to lack of local independent business opportunities/inability to compete with the resources and domination of larger organisation, companies who own/control a lot of commercial rented properties, etc.
- Local government support schemes (economic and healthcare ones) are not designed to promote community-led solutions, which could be more effective for long-term solutions.
- Those in need at out of hours services and facilities (e.g. families with young children, working families) often struggle to reach in-hours services. Often it is the most vulnerable people trying to access services out of hours (e.g. healthcare, local authority).
- Many vulnerable people are excluded from basic services, e.g. applying for jobs, healthcare, due to digital inaccessibility.

#3 Health and wellbeing

1. Carer's wellbeing and support

2. Nutrition and lifestyle health

3. Homeless communities

5. Human health and the environment

4. Mental health challenges

6. Healthcare services

Theme details

Disability and carers

- The health and wellbeing of carers and parents/carers of children with disabilities feels overlooked.
- Parents/carers of people with disabilities and people with disabilities are experiencing poor mental health from increasing social isolation due to a combination of local and national factors (i.e., local service cuts, cost of living crisis, etc.)
- Neurodiverse and autistic people (particularly adults) need more specific support to help them integrate better into society, work, education, etc.

Accessibility and inclusivity of healthcare services and support

- Culturally sensitive and accessible healthcare support and resources are needed for cultural minority and minority communities.
- Digital accessibility issues prevent many vulnerable people, especially those from marginalised communities, from accessing support.
- Greater awareness and support needed for some cultural minority communities who face stigma within their communities in relation to specific health conditions, such as mental health.
- Essential health and wellbeing education for newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees who may come without basic knowledge.
- Need for culturally appropriate social care for older age communities.

Health implications of homelessness

- Homelessness is becoming an increasing issue for vulnerable people, and is fundamentally linked to health challenges. What community-level strategies be taken to address this?
- Need for specific mental health support for those experience homeless. Particularly those who experience negative stigma in the street and related experiences.
- There is a perceived lack of empathetic social interaction between those experiencing homelessness and the public.
- Due to the challenges of the national migration system, many vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers who are left in "limbo" for a long time risk being unable to settle and integrate, and risk ending up homeless.
- Specific challenges faced by those leaving the homeless community.
- The judgement and stigma faced by homeless communities creates a barrier to accessing essential services.

Mental health challenges

- How can local armed services leavers be better supported to transition back into civilian life?
- Need for more targeted and appropriate mental health support for men, particular younger men experiencing isolation.
- Health impacts of gambling in vulnerable communities, particularly in light of national economic challenges.
- How can communities combat negative health impacts of current online environments (i.e., social media)?

Food and environment

- Communities are increasingly concerned about the effects of environmental pollution (forever chemicals, microplastics, etc.) on their food and their long term health.
- Need for better public understanding about food nutrition as it relates to long-term health conditions and general wellbeing.
- Addressing local food poverty for vulnerable people and the accessibility of affordable healthy foods.
- Can community eating projects support wellbeing issues such as social isolation (i.e., Sharing Sherwood Community Meals)

Healthcare services

- What impact is the loss of community level health and wellbeing related groups, services, and spaces on communities?
- Need for community level support for those living with long-term health conditions.
- What is the of high staff turnover/lack of staff retention on local healthcare services and the subsequent impact on communities.

#4 Age, gender, and culturally specific experiences

1. Migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker communities

2. Ethnic minority communities

3. Women's needs and societal roles

4. Needs and challenges of men and boys

5. Older age communities

Theme details

Culture & Ethnicity

- There is a need culturally appropriate mental physical health support to address disparities experience and outcome, and historical mistrust. This is needed at the local healthcare system level (i.e., targeted support, prevention, outreach, etc.) and at the resource level (relevant cultural contexts, languages, hospital in-patient and care service experience).
- Health stigma and judgement within local cultural minority communities (i.e., Afro-Caribbean) is a barrier to healthier communities.
- Nottingham's rich diversity of cultures presents an opportunity for learning to support community cohesion and more.
- Older age Black communities, Black women, and Arab and Middle Eastern women often feel overlooked in local society.
- Loss of local culturally specific clubs, social spaces, and services since COVID-19 pandemic is leading to social isolation.
- How can we best grow vibrant inter-community communities across the City and County.

Gender-specific experiences

- Men from migrant communities face challenges to integration, and their wellbeing, due to cultural and societal pressures. (i.e., pressure to provide for their families in completely new, unknown systems and contexts.)
- How can young men and boys be supported to find positive purpose and address their wellbeing in a society where they feel increasingly excluded from each other and communities. What social benefits do they miss out on due to this "crisis of masculinity"?
- How can communities combat negative influences from social media on young people, particularly young men and boys?
- People caring for adult children (with SEND) or adult family members, often women, need more support for their wellbeing.
- Women in local cultural and/or ethnic minority communities are perceived to be at the increased risk of social isolation.
- Need for inclusive opportunities to develop women as local leaders and change makers which take into account the challenges they experience in society and at home (i.e., societal expectations and home life responsibilities).

Age-specific experiences

- Need for older people to have greater accessibility to participate in local society to reduce their isolation.
- Increased move towards digital-first approaches and loss of in-person services impacting older populations in terms of participation in local societal and isolation from informal/incidental social experiences.
- Need for culturally specific dietary and lifestyle support for elders in minority ethnicity communities.
- Need for culturally appropriate social care for older age people accessing services.

Migrant communities

- In a multicultural city, more services like schools, councils, healthcare, etc, need greater awareness of cultural events and holidays, etc., to make sure their services are as inclusive as possible.
- Hostile narratives around asylum seekers and refugees (especially from traditional and social media) are having widespread negative effects on the migrant community as a whole, creating barriers to community cohesion and integration.
- Many challenges for local migrant communities can lead to increased social isolation, leading to impacts on their mental health/
- Some asylum seekers and refugees may lack basic health education, affecting how they look after themselves and others.
- New migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, have strong motivations and desires to integrate into local the local economy and society, but they struggle to know where to start. Local administrative processes for everything from education and job finding, to council tax/services and healthcare, are complex and difficult to navigate without prior knowledge - many cite these as significant barriers.
- Vulnerable individuals within migrant communities are especially impacted by complex, inaccessible local systems and processes.

#5 Education and achieving potential

1. Young people's needs and development

2. Inclusive educational opportunities

3. Education that meets community needs

Theme details

Parents and carer's of young people

- The needs of parents (often single parents) / carers of children with SEND needs often experience isolation from lack of support. How does affect them and their children as a consequence?

Challenges in local education

- Young people in education respond well to creative-focused approaches to teaching, especially in primary school. The loss of funding and support for arts-based approaches has a negative impact on young learners who need more variety in the ways that they learn.
- Nottingham City has below the national average attainment for pupils from early years foundational stages, all the way through to GCSE and College.
- Nottingham college-age students feel the need for more effective critical thinking skills to better understand and prepare themselves for wider regional, national, and global challenges.
- Young people who struggle and fall out of mainstream education, particularly young boys, are at a high risk of social isolation from their local communities, feel like they don't have a clear role and purpose in life, and are at a higher risk of poorer life outcomes.
- Young people who don't excel in traditional academic settings are experiencing barriers to finding sustainable and meaningful work, especially where a non-academic route to skills and experience development aren't available.
- Nottingham(shire) has a lot of passionate and committed people working in education, with a lot of knowledge and resources. There seems to be an untapped opportunity for more schools to be working collaboratively together to address local challenges in education.
- International students are keen to integrate more into local societies but feel limited by a lack of support for this.

The need for more inclusive education ecosystems

- Adults wanting to take on further education feel from standard education settings - they say they would feel ore comfortable attending classes in local community centres. How could this be achieved?
- Nottingham City schools in particular are host to a wide diversity of languages, cultures, and experiences that can be a rich source of knowledge to learn and grow from - it also means more culturally sensitive approaches to education are needed.
- Many educational opportunities are "one size fits all" which are increasingly leaves those with different needs behind.
- There is an opportunity for local further education colleges to play a role in community building, such as supporting the transition of local people back into productive society (mental health recovery, substance abuse recovery, etc.)
- Migrant communities have a strong desire to engage with local education opportunities but don't know how or encounter challenges in difficult to navigate systems.
- Despite local drives to engage adults in education, they still face financial barriers that limit their participation.

Preparing young people for the wider world

- Communities are noticing the impact that losing recreational spaces for 16-25's is having on them and their development. With a lack of physical spaces for this group to come together, questions arise about young people lacking informal opportunities to develop their social skills and networks, and about how they develop their individual sense of purpose.
- Communities members involved in educating young people (including parents) highlight concerns about the over reliance on digital approaches, generally. There are concerns about how this is impacting on young people's social development by removing social interaction opportunities.
- Current school curriculums are perceived to be too focused on academic skills and not enough on more holistic, practical knowledge that would better prepare young people for entering wider society as independent adults.

#6 Public Safety

1. Crime and communities

2. Antisocial behaviour and narratives

Theme details

Youth crime

- There's a lack of understanding about the needs and experiences of survivors of knife crime.
- Knife crime, particularly amongst young people - communities perceive the focus to be on enforcement where it should be on culturally relevant prevention and intervention.
- Too many young people who struggle with mainstream education become vulnerable to involvement in crime and other behaviours with long-term negative outcomes.

Ex-offenders in the community

- There is a need for more effective community-level support to help ex-offenders successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate into communities to become positive, contributing members of society.

Antisocial attitudes

- Increasingly hostile narratives around migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, especially in the media and on social media, is creating barriers between communities and degrading inter-cultural social relationships.
- A perceived lack of empathy and empathetic social interaction between those experiencing homelessness and the wider public fuels hostilities and negatively affects the mental health of homeless communities.