

Making ends meet

The lived experience of
poverty in the south

Southern
Policy Centre

A white outline map of the southern region of England, showing the coastline and major regional boundaries. The map is positioned to the right of the text 'Southern Policy Centre'.

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Summary

Despite its perceived affluence relative to other parts of the UK, pockets of severe multiple deprivation exist across the South Coast region. This research offers a timely corrective to over-simplistic ideas of an English North-South divide by highlighting the significance of 'hidden' deprivation in affluent areas. It also provides some depth and nuance to our understanding of the broader effects of deprivation, which is relevant to the ongoing debate about the 'left behind' in Britain and the drivers of social upheaval and political disaffection. Most crucially it provides some valuable pointers to public and private service providers and policy makers who want to promote pathways out of deprivation. It emphasises the importance of support and intervention that is sensitive to the very local context.

Recommendations

- Public policy in the South needs to have an explicit regional recognition and regional response to deprivation. A bespoke approach is particularly important where deprivation is widespread in the region but those living in deprivation may be only a small but very vulnerable section of the local community. The research has highlighted many instances where such people feel neglected and let down by public policy that does not reflect their interests.
- Public policy must respond to a wide range of issues. These not only cover well-recognised challenges such as the provision of social housing and the need for a labour market that can offer better opportunities for progression and more secure employment, but also relatively neglected issues such as the provision of cheap and convenient transport and the maintenance of an inclusive and affordable 'high street' as a hub of community life.

Public policy must be tailored sensitively to the different contexts and communities in which deprivation is experienced. Our findings suggest frequent breakdown in relationships between vulnerable individuals, families and public bodies. Sensitive and local engagement is needed to rebuild trust. The current lack of trust means that programmes and promises which are initiated must be followed through to a recognisable completion.

Background

Recent research on deprivation in the UK has been concentrated on major urban centres, and often in Scotland and the North of England, neglecting 'hidden' deprivation in affluent areas. Moreover, most of the recent high-profile research in the UK relies on official statistics and survey data. The considered opinions of those experiencing deprivation have been less able to influence the policy landscape.

Despite its perceived affluence in relation to other parts of the UK, pockets of severe multiple deprivation exist across the South Coast region. What is more, these pockets of deprivation present in very different contexts. Some exist in dense urban settings, some on the edges of market towns, and some in coastal areas experiencing economic stagnation. This project asked whether experiences and expectations of poverty are affected by being nested within a wider context of affluence. This is what we call 'nested deprivation'. It is the deprivation that hides among affluence. Some of the cases we examine are examples of neighbourhoods nested within the more affluent South where relatively large numbers of people in the

neighbourhood are suffering deprivation. Others represent very small numbers of households themselves nested within affluent neighbourhoods. We compare different types of nested deprivation (both apparent and hidden) to understand the consequences of that variation on individuals and families' struggles to make ends meet. Is the experience of deprivation better, worse or just different depending on the area in which you and your neighbours live? And, what does it mean for policies targeted at improving the chances of the most deprived members of our communities?

Why the South?

Recent studies of deprivation in the UK have increasingly focused on places that have been 'left behind' by economic globalisation, juxtaposing them with thriving cosmopolitan areas. Yet these 'place-based' explanations of economic decline have only drawn attention to large areas of the UK that have experienced rapid and loud economic decline. For example, in the north of England, in Wales and more recently in Eastern coastal towns, the effects of economic stagnation on large numbers of those living in these areas have found political expression, receiving renewed attention in the press, and in media and political circles. Southern politicians and representative groups have often argued that deprivation and inequality in the South is politically neglected because of a prevailing narrative of affluence and economic prosperity from which all citizens in the South are assumed to benefit. Aggregate statistics present the South of England as an area of high employment, with rising house prices close to London benefiting the South's relatively high proportion of homeowners. This project asks what it is like to live under relatively severe economic strain when most people nearby, either in neighbouring towns and suburbs or even those living next-door, are relatively affluent.

Why compare?

Investigations of deprivation and its effects tend to concentrate on deprived areas and seek general lessons about the differences between those areas and the UK average. These studies, typically of declining industrial towns, or coastal seaside resorts, do not necessarily shed light on the deprivation that really does exist in the countryside and small towns. In addition, they do not explore whether there are regional variations to the experience of poverty. We lack in particular any understanding as to whether the experience is different in areas that are seen as wealthy or even 'idyllic' places to visit and live. Within some of the most affluent areas of the south, there are individuals experiencing economic hardship that can be overlooked when comparing aggregate data on wealth and prosperity.

Many national renewal policies in the past twenty years have focused their efforts (not illogically) on those towns and suburbs where large proportions of the citizenry are deprived. But all across the country there are wealthy areas where one in ten or so inhabitants - a small block of flats or a row of houses

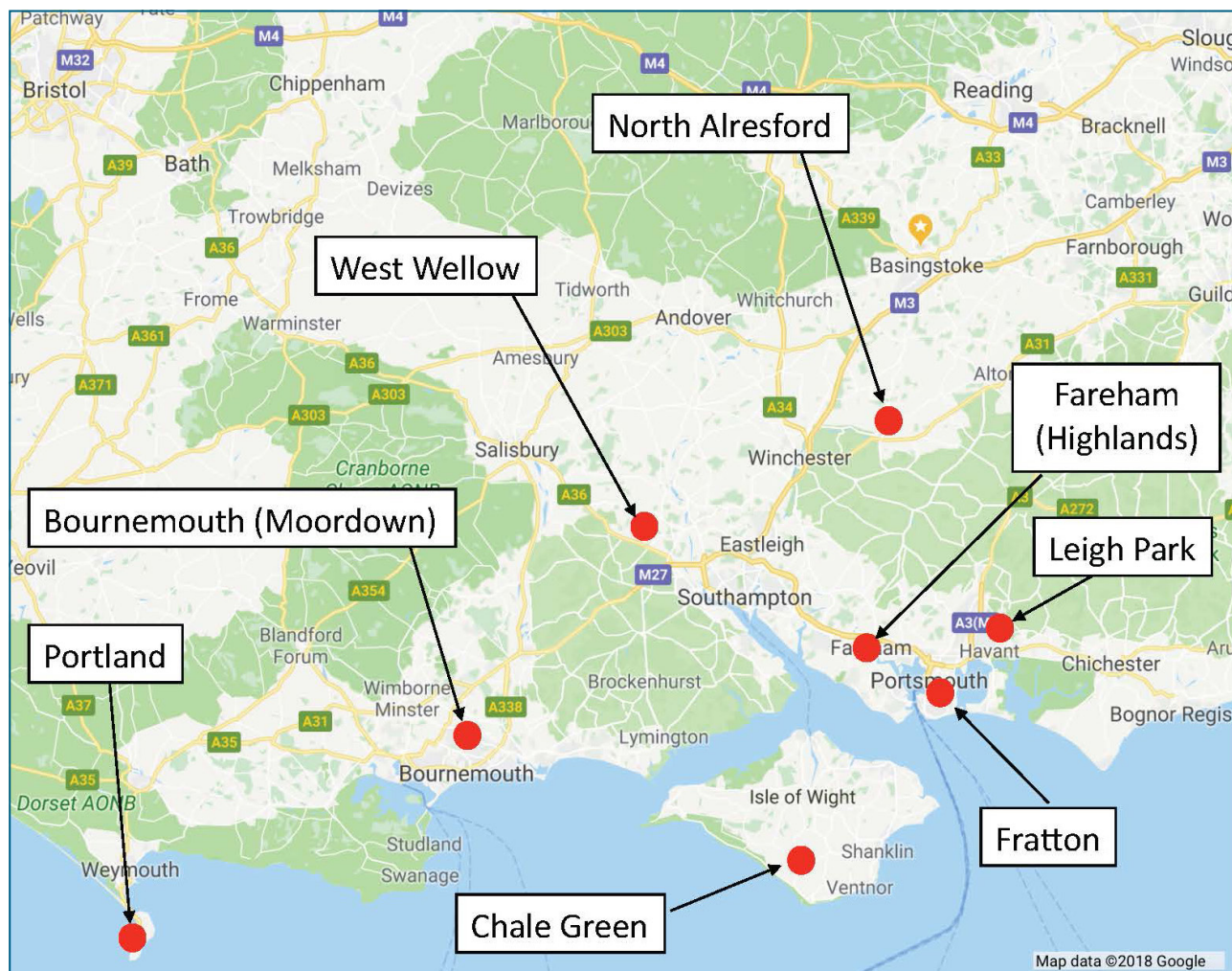
CHALE GREEN, ISLE OF WIGHT

Chale Green is the northern settlement of the dispersed rural village of Chale, roughly equidistant from Newport and Ventnor. The area is a thoroughfare for tourists visiting Blackgang Chine in the summer. Deprivation here centres particularly around the large Spanners Close social housing estate. Developed in the late 1970s, the estate was described to us by locals as a planning 'disaster' that, in relocating and concentrating 'problem families' from across the Island in a rural area poorly served by transport links and amenities, exacerbated social problems and generated considerable antipathy between the old village (Chale) and the newcomers (Chale Green). The consensus is that the problems associated with this planning move have mellowed over time, but Spanners Close retains something of an aesthetic and social disconnection from the surrounding area. It is the only objectively deprived rural LSOA in the Hampshire and Dorset area.

- are suffering deprivation. These areas are not so much 'left behind' as 'never acknowledged' by national statistics because they appear less salient to those interested in the development of underprivileged communities. When taken together, this group can add up to a large constituency of people whose voice and circumstances have been overlooked by policy.

The prevailing conditions in a community colour the expectations of its inhabitants. Comparing the experience of deprivation within varying levels of local affluence thus allows us to identify what differs significantly and what remains the same across these contexts. As such, we compare pairs of neighbourhoods across the South Coast that vary both in their socio-economic composition and their geographical context. Combining ONS data with experiential knowledge of local conditions, we have identified eight neighbourhoods that collectively captured the different environments in which deprivation exists in the central South Coast region (see below).

	1. RELATIVELY DEPRIVED	2. NOT DEPRIVED
A. Inner City	Central Fratton (Portsmouth)	East Moordown (Bournemouth)
B. Suburban	Leigh Park East (Havant)	Catisfield (Fareham)
C. Market Town/Fringe	West Portland (Weymouth and Portland area)	North Alresford (Winchester area)
D. Rural dispersed	Chale Green (Isle of Wight)	West Wellow North (Test Valley)



Why the lived experience?

While macro-level explanations of deprivation based on census and other survey data highlight broad differences by place, there is some absence of the authentic voice of those experiencing deprivation from research and policy debates. The stories and voices of individuals most familiar with nested deprivation provide vivid insights into the hurdles faced in making ends meet. Beyond imposing only external definitions of 'income poverty' or 'neighbourhood effects' we want to understand what feels good or bad about a community for those living in deprivation, what they count as their neighbourhood and how it shapes their perceptions of their lives.

We poured energy into recruiting from this traditionally 'hard to reach' demographic. We conducted 45 interviews and six focus groups with participants spread across our eight settings. The stories that our participants tell in this report provide the exemplars that allow a deeper understanding of how macro-level trends play out on the ground. They show that public policy responses to the problems they face will only be fully effective if they are carefully adapted to meet local circumstance.

PORTLAND, DORSET

Portland is a small town on an isolated peninsula southwest of Weymouth. It is home to a mix of retirees, working age people and families. Deprivation in this area centres especially around a couple of large social housing estates developed in the 1960s built to house naval and quarry workers. As with Chale Green above, the predictable outcome of this planning decision to build social housing in a remote and sparsely populated area generated antipathy in the wider community, and Portland subsequently developed a reputation as a 'rough' area. Our participants reflected that it retains this to some extent, describing one part of a neighbouring estate as 'Beirut' and referencing ongoing social and health issues related to drug supply and use in the community. Nevertheless, Portland's geographical remoteness, coupled with its close proximity to attractive coastline, give it an 'island' feel, reflected in a friendly and laid back local culture.

Key findings

Our analysis focuses on feelings of isolation, precarity, alienation and expectation. Those themes, which we elaborate on below, should be seen in light of two over-arching impressions.

- First, there is a visceral sense of vulnerability among those living in deprivation on the South Coast. Though personal stories were many and varied, a high proportion of participants opened up about struggles with mental health, about histories of violence and abuse, and about estrangement from family and other pillars of community life.
- Second, the experience or perception of deprivation, is inflected by the mix of local factors. For example, local residents in Chale Green, Wellow, Portland and Alresford, communities which varied in the proportions of residents suffering deprivation shared much in common as all are shaped by a shared geographical remoteness. Yet, the shared experience of concealed deprivation in affluent areas of Wellow, Alresford, Fareham and Bournemouth, gave rise to common perceptions of living on low income that were distinct from some of our other study areas where deprivation was locally more widespread. It is the combination of different factors that shapes the individual experience within distinct communities.

Isolation

The lived experience of poverty on the South Coast often reinforces a feeling of isolation, albeit the form in which that feeling manifested was different in rural and urban settings.

WEST WELLOW, HAMPSHIRE

Wellow is a wealthy rural village to the west of Romsey, near the Hampshire-Wiltshire boundary. The area has traditionally been home to wealthy retirees and provided seasonal work in agriculture. In recent times, it has also become an area popular with commuters to London and Southampton. Deprivation here centres around the Gurnays Mead social housing estate, which is populated by a mix of older people and families. Notable in particular is a sizeable Irish Traveller community within the estate (and with links to temporary settlements nearby). Social housing in Gurnays Mead is in high demand, and, with a proportion of houses already transferred into private hands, there is a strong perception locally that these properties are being earmarked for private sale. These perceptions feed distrust or concern for official institutions among the local population - which made recruitment in this area especially challenging for the research team.

For participants in rural areas and small towns, the sense was typically a tangible one of geographical isolation. Participants felt that they were cut off from the broader region. Many were highly critical of sporadic bus services. For most, running a car was essential to get anywhere, giving rise to a significant added cost for those who could, and an even more significant hindrance for those who could not. This isolation is not merely a geographical inconvenience; it represents a key factor in a much broader range of challenges facing those struggling to make ends meet, influencing their interaction with employment, public health, mental health, housing and many other issues.

For participants in affluent urban and suburban areas, isolation is often more a social phenomenon. There is, in other words, a feeling of dislocation from the dominant culture of the neighbourhood. Although prevalent in accounts from Fareham and Bournemouth the feeling is perhaps best symbolized by the High Street in the pretty market

town of Alresford. Here, our participants bemoan the prevalence of boutique establishments seeking to cater to the top end of town. One joked:

It's way up there for the rich, Alresford is. Well, the shoe shop that we were standing by, their shoes are about £300, so I don't go in there. And the dress shop next door, their dresses are about £500, £600, £700, £800, and their hats are about £1,000.

For those living on low incomes or benefits in the small pockets of deprivation in affluent villages and small towns, the local shops can be a site of subtle prohibition from the rest of society.

Precarity

Another common theme is precarity - an anxiety about maintaining the status quo, a fear of losing a job or a house, worries about paying bills and being able to afford essential items.

For those living in more deprived areas, this sense of precarity often stems from dependence on the state. In particular, participants reflect that benefits were under attack, with ever more restrictive, demanding and demeaning governance around social welfare. Participants reflected that the

NORTH ALRESFORD, HAMPSHIRE

Alresford is a pretty market town near Winchester. The town is a visibly wealthy one that conforms to common stereotypes about Hampshire. It is home to many professionals commuting to London or elsewhere, and many wealthy retirees. The pockets of deprivation here are very small and are clustered around condensed areas of social housing and ex-social housing. These are located nearby leafy streets lined with large 'mansions'. The town's amenities represent the idyllic view of life in a market town, largely catering to the needs of the upper middle class and older residents. Many of our participants, especially younger people, joked about Alresford being in a 'timewarp' - with little recognition of diversity and old-fashioned stigmas attached to the minority of residents who remain economically and socially vulnerable.

process - the inconvenience of getting there, the onerous and confusing paperwork, the lack of meaningful support, the demeaning culture and environment - is so unpleasant they simply do not bother with it, opting to get by on meagre savings and support from friends and family.

One participant, for instance, reflected on how a particularly traumatic trip to a Job Centre triggered her long-standing mental health condition:

They treat you like dirt. ... That building frightens the life out of me, and it's not just me, there are a lot ... there is a demonic influence in that place, because a lot of people go in there, they're scared, they're fearful, and some shouldn't even have to go in that building.

LEIGH PARK, HAMPSHIRE

Leigh Park is a large suburb north of Havant, built in the post-war era by Portsmouth County Council to house displaced residents from the Portsmouth area. Our research concentrated on the area to the North-West of the Park Parade shops. The area has a varied demographic profile with a mix of young families and pensioners. Many of the residents we spoke to are attending food banks. They expressed a nostalgia for a time when the estate was more 'well looked after' and many mentioned the closing down of shops in Park Parade. There is a feeling that the area is a little cut off from the rest of the urban sprawl stretching along the coast. One young teenager mentioned his excitement at having recently visited the beach for the first time ever despite living only some 10 miles away.

For those 'hidden' in more affluent neighbourhoods, precarity is more often attributed to vulnerability in the face of market forces - especially due to the increasing casualisation of labour and inexorable rises in rents.

In the context of a steeply rising cost of living, most of our participants confessed to feeling especially vulnerable. Many express anxiety about 'keeping a roof over their heads', and reflect on 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' just to afford basic necessities.

Alienation

Another key theme is alienation. In deprived settings, many participants (though not all) express a strong sense of nostalgia for the past and a feelings of having been 'left behind'. The perception is that services are in retreat, and communities are left to fend for themselves. In interviews and focus groups, disaffection towards the authorities often took the form of an ill-defined or nebulous sense of antipathy - where 'government' became the scapegoat for numerous ills. But it also stems from direct experience and interaction. For example, the recent closure of the infant school in Chale Green, and the perception that this was handled in a haphazard way, left a raw impression:

It was a really, really nice school. It had been there since the 1800s and it was a village school. What happened was, the Isle of Wight council, in their infinite wisdom, they were looking at obviously saving money, so they decided that they would carry on paying their chief executive £400,000 a year but close our village schools, so that's what happened.

Where deprivation was pepper-potted in largely affluent neighbourhoods, some of this sentiment was present, but we also encountered an internalised form of alienation - a stigma associated with deprivation. This was noticeable in the way participants spoke about their neighbourhood, revealing a common sense of shame associated with living at the 'rough' end of the street or the only social housing in the area. This stigma extended to shame around being in receipt of benefits or simply unable to 'keep up' with affluent neighbours.

Expectation

The final theme emerging from the fieldwork surrounds expectations. There is, of course, a spectrum between optimism and pessimism and we encountered individuals at different points of this spectrum in each of our sites. The pattern that emerges, however, is that these expectations tend to be projected in different ways.

FAREHAM (HIGHLANDS), HAMPSHIRE

The town of Fareham lies to the north-west of Portsmouth city. The population has expanded rapidly in the area since the 1960s as part of housing development along the southeast Hampshire coast stretching between the two major cities. Many of the residents are commuters and Fareham boasts the highest density of car registration in the UK. Our research concentrated on the Highlands area in the north-east suburbs. The estate is primarily made up of council houses with older tenants and families. Recently many of the properties have been purchased by private landlords and turned into HMOs. In addition to this property developers have built new houses on the outskirts of the estate where small council estates and clusters of lower grade housing are hidden behind avenues lined with trees and larger detached houses.

In more deprived areas, many of our participants have given up on the prospect of social mobility. A participant from Fratton concluded:

I feel sorry for the children nowadays, I really do. I honestly feel sorry for the children nowadays. I don't think they've got any hope, I don't.

Yet others retain hope. There is particular emphasis among these more optimistic participants about the value of education. One mother in Leigh Park, for instance, reported telling her children:

If you want to be Prime Minister, why can't you be Prime Minister? Just because we come from Leigh Park doesn't mean you can't do this, this or this.

In more affluent areas, optimists hope not to improve their circumstances but to escape them. The South Coast's 'hot' housing market provides a relative advantage, with the promise of vastly

reduced rent and living expenses for anyone willing to vacate the region. A Bournemouth couple we spoke to are actively plotting their escape:

It's just got to the point where we can't afford to live down here ... A lot of my friends are now looking at going themselves because they want to be able to give themselves and their one-day children a better quality of life.

For pessimists, however, the high cost of living on the South Coast represents a form of entrapment, rendering people dependent on accessing the relatively high wages available locally to sustain a hand-to-mouth existence.

Poverty in the South - the need for southern policy

We turn now to some of the more specific implications emerging from the research - drawn both directly from participant voices (when asked 'what needs to change in your community?'), and indirectly inferred from common patterns and findings in the research.

Interviews and focus groups threw up issues relating to a vast array of specific policy domains. We focus here only on the most common patterns encountered across our settings.

Transport

The issue that cropped up earliest and loudest in the field was one of transport. In rural areas, expensive, unreliable and inconvenient bus services were a universal bugbear. In urban areas, the lack of convenient

parking for residents was flagged as a significant issue. Throughout the research we found that the availability of affordable and reliable transport is intimately linked to other aspects of life - the capacity to get to work, to get to college, to do the shopping, to stay out of trouble, to get out and meet people and do things. So investment in better and more agile bus services and car maintenance support schemes in rural areas, and for protected resident concessions for parking in urban areas, were among the top priorities for our participants seeking feasible changes to their quality of life - a finding consistent with earlier research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the benefits of public transport for deprived residents (Lucas et al. 2008).

Housing

Concerns about housing were also front and centre across our sites. Many younger people especially were deeply pessimistic about the prospect of being able to gain independence, let alone own their own homes (consistent with eg, Resolution Foundation 2018). As with transport, too, precarity in housing manifested clear links to economic and personal insecurity. Specifically, there is concern for: (a) protection of existing council housing stock, particularly in wealthy areas; (b) provision of new council housing to relieve overcrowding and cool the private rental market; and (c) careful monitoring and enforcement of zoning to ensure sufficient space for families. Greater security in housing will enable greater individual autonomy as well as maintenance of cohesive communities.

The affordable High Street

The loss of the high street and access to affordable and varied shops was a huge issue

for our respondents, with both practical and psychological consequences for their quality of life. High streets across the country are often in decline in response to changing retail habits. Our participants may experience these market changes both in the loss of established local shopping and in the existence of viable upmarket businesses in which they cannot afford to shop.

We recognise the difficulty of effective public policy in this area but, consistent with the principle that responses to poverty should start with the way our participants perceive their problems, we suggest exploring a mix of legal tools that could be used to incentivise the provision of diverse and distinctly local shops and services - from revisiting zoning regulations and their application to subsidising social enterprises and cooperatives. Such measures can cater for deprived residents as well as everyone else, and enable the High Street to once again act as a welcoming 'hub' of community life.

Secure employment

Many of our participants had been adversely affected by long-term shifts in the nature of work and employment. They reflected that declining opportunities in traditional sectors and rising prevalence of casualisation and depressed wages in the nascent sectors such as retail, services and old age care left

PORTSMOUTH (FRATTON), HAMPSHIRE

Fratton is a large area of post-industrial residential terraced housing in the city of Portsmouth. Our respondents, some of whom had lived in the area for many decades spoke again of nostalgia for the past and a feeling that the area had changed beyond recognition, particularly highlighting the replacement of local shops by large supermarkets and many betting shops, as well as houses of multiple occupation replacing family homes. Homelessness was identified as a major issue in the area by almost all respondents with many mentioning the change from a time when everyone's door was open to a current climate where many homeless camp out in tents on the streets. Residents in Fratton were positive about the many opportunities for entertainment and 'liveliness' of living in a city close to the water. The proximity to Southsea, a more affluent area by the sea was also highlighted by many interviewees.

them feeling precarious. These insights reinforce the chorus across the UK more broadly to strengthen job security and increase wages in key sectors like care which are historically undervalued - dovetailing particularly with work highlighting the gendered impact of existing disparities (see *Himmelweit and Land 2008*).

Delivering effective policy

Perhaps more important than what policies say, however, is how policy is made and delivered.

It is obviously not possible to do justice to all the policy challenges identified in our research and, to some extent, to attempt to do so, would be to miss the most important conclusion of the research. While similar issues were raised in different communities, the variation between the experiences, expectations and outlooks between and within those communities means that generic, one-size-fits all policy solutions are unlikely to work. Such approaches may fail either because the local problems vary significantly or because past attempts to engage with local people have left a legacy of mistrust and scepticism.

For this reason, we suggest public policy in this region needs to have an explicit recognition of and response to deprivation and that public policy must be tailored sensitively to the different contexts and communities

BOURNEMOUTH (MOORDOWN), DORSET

The East Moordown area of Bournemouth is on the Western side of the Charminster road and does not include the shopping centre of Moordown itself. Therefore it does not have a clear heart or focal point but consists of largely residential streets of detached and semi-detached owner occupied houses on gently sloping streets.

There are a variety of occupants, from elderly to students. It has good transport links to all parts of the city, from Castlepoint shopping centre to beaches. However it does not have many green spaces.

Most residents say it lacks a community feel even among long-term residents.

The most deprived part nests at the edge of the area, in a small housing estate consisting of low rise and terraced properties, many of which are now privately rented.

in which deprivation is experienced. We argue for a distinctive set of relevant principles that are sensitive to the regional context, to go along with local adaptation and implementation that can deliver for residents.

Visibility

First and foremost, there is an urgent need to 'mainstream' the concerns of deprived communities and individuals in the region. In other words, it is essential that public agencies and private providers of public services begin to explicitly consider the impact of policies and programmes on this demographic, particularly in relatively affluent and rural areas where it has long been neglected, and where it manifests in an acute and distinctive manner.

Sensitivity

Another key implication concerns the nature of the encounter between citizen and state. Our research participants were overwhelmingly vulnerable individuals. Some two-thirds opened up to reveal histories of mental health problems, personal trauma and abuse. Most feel further estranged and alienated because of the nature of their interaction with official institutions. Distrust and disaffection with the provision of services was nearly the default position. These findings offer a timely and penetrating insight into the importance of sensitivity and humanity in the management of these encounters, and the potentially vital role that third sector organisations can play as conduits of engagement, support and solidarity in these encounters (see *Brodie et al. 2011*).

Communication and engagement

The areas we studied benefited from strong community identities and pride of place but our respondents severely lacked any sense of collective agency. Their lives are stories of adaptation to decisions made elsewhere. Trust with service providers has been broken. Many communities will be sceptical about efforts to re-engage them in service use because there is a feeling that services are being hollowed out rather than provided for deprived members of a community. Many councils may already be running services of benefit to communities and individuals within them but they are perceived as being 'not for us' and channels of communication have been broken. Improvements in communication will need to be targeted and sustained but could pave the way to greater democratic engagement, particular if sustained and sensitive attention to these people and their places rebuilds trust (see *Chwalisz 2017*).

Follow through

The final key point is about an emphasis on follow through. Participants commented at times that they had had encouraging encounters or positive communication with official sources - the issue being that over time attention and effort to alleviate their hardships petered out. Community schemes were abandoned. Local schools were closed. Health services were withdrawn. Gaps and flaws in implementation can stall a range of promising policies and programmes. The effects of austerity at local level, then, are not just in cutting back on vital services. They also plant and fertilise the seeds of distrust and disillusionment among the most vulnerable people in the region. Delivering on old promises and giving attention to follow through, then, can help to demonstrate commitment and regain trust (see *Norris et al. 2014*).

Further information

This summary briefing is part of the project Making Ends Meet: Poverty in the South funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and produced by researchers at the University of Southampton and Southern Policy Centre. The cover report that has been summarised here, Making Ends Meet: The lived experience of poverty in the South is available as a free PDF from www.southernpolicycentre.co.uk under the heading Publications & Events.

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