

Making Ends Meet: The lived experiences of poverty in the south

Research Team

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Executive Summary

This report seeks to give voice to the lived experiences of poverty on the South Coast of England. It draws on rich qualitative stories of what it is like to 'make ends meet' in one of the wealthiest parts of Britain, based on 45 interviews and 6 focus groups with local residents on low incomes and/or in receipt of government benefits. The research thus offers a timely corrective to prevailing and reductive narratives of a North-South divide within England, highlighting the presence of 'hidden' deprivation in affluent areas. In doing so, it also offers depth and nuance to existing understandings of the broader effects of deprivation, particularly within the context of 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.

The report overall unveils a visceral sense of vulnerability among those living in deprivation on the South Coast. Though personal stories 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. This context of vulnerability reflected and reinforced key patterns emerging across the study:

- 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 a 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.

More specifically:

- People experience extra layers of housing and transport deprivation living in the affluent South Coast region; better job opportunities, only available in parts of the region, may not be compensating them.
- Furthermore, some people in the south experience an extra layer of nested deprivation, living in smaller pockets of deprivation in rich and idyllic market towns and villages whose shops they cannot afford and whose employers do not seem to want to hire them.
- A lack of cheap public transport may put rural people in the south at even more of a disadvantage than in other, less rural, regions.
- 'Community' is perceived and experienced by those living in deprivation in complex ways, with some in the south feeling their community is a thing of the past while others feel a closeness to local communities but are geographically isolated and therefore cannot escape them when they would wish to temporarily.
- There are nuanced experiences of contemporary social status, where the relationship between income education and generations is complex and varies with geographical settings.
- Finally, most people living in nested pockets of deprivation feel alienated from the State, and that their experience of encounters with government services often reinforce and reproduce distrust and disaffection.

These insights have significant implications both for potential policy priorities and for the manner in which policies and programmes are pursued. These implications include:

- An emphasis on 'Southern Policy' which takes into account the complex context of deprivation in the region. There are particular ramifications for historically 'hard' issues like housing and employment, but also for rather less explored priorities around the provision of

cheap and convenient transport and the maintenance of an inclusive and affordable 'high street' as a hub of community life.

- A greater recognition of the challenges associated with the encounter between citizens and the providers of policies, programmes and services in the context of nested deprivation. Our findings suggest renewed emphasis on sensitivity in the interaction with vulnerable individuals and communities, on open communication with these individuals and communities, and follow-through in the implementation of programmes and promises.

Rationale

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. Here we set out to understand whether experiences and expectations of poverty are affected by being nested within a wider context of affluence. 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?

We systematically selected 8 neighbourhoods across the South Coast that vary in both their remoteness and their levels of deprivation. We engaged 5-12 participants living on low incomes or in receipt of government benefits in each neighbourhood, generating in total 45 in-depth interviews and 6 focus groups. Our extensive fieldwork aimed to give voice to local people who experience deprivation, allowing them to tell their stories about living out their lives and finding ways to make ends meet.

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 tended to draw 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 helped those groups to find 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. In our study, we wanted to understand what it was like to live under relatively severe economic strain when most people nearby, either in neighbouring towns and suburbs or even those living next-door and on the same street, are relatively affluent. This is what

we call 'nested deprivation'. It is the deprivation that hides among affluence. Some of the cases we select are examples of relatively large neighbourhoods suffering deprivation nested within the more affluent South, but others represent very small numbers of households themselves nested within affluent neighbourhoods. We compare different types of nested deprivation to understand the consequences of that variation on individuals and families' struggles to make ends meet.

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 residents 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 - 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.

The prevailing conditions in a community have been shown to colour the expectations of its inhabitants. Comparing the experience of deprivation within varying levels of local affluence allows us to identify what differs significantly and what remains the same across these contexts.

Why Interviews and Focus Groups?

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 real stories and voices of individuals most familiar with nested deprivation provide vivid insights into the hurdles faced in making ends meet in central southern England. 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. 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. Taken in their entirety provide fresh nuance such that broad policy approaches can also get it right when adaptation to local conditions is needed.

Background

Research on the causes and effects of deprivation reveals some areas of consensus and plenty of ongoing debates that have yet to reach their conclusion. This section provides a brief outline of the state of the art in established research on deprivation effects in the UK as a prelude to our unique approach and findings. The literature reviewed here is organised across four areas of concern (isolation, precarity, alienation and expectation), the importance of which are reinforced the data w collected in the field.

Isolation

The psychological feeling of isolation (rather than an objective geographic observation), has prevalent effects on the lived experience of deprivation. The idea that 'place matters' or that there are 'area effects' on individuals is closely tied to the concept of 'geography of opportunity' which "suggests that where individuals live affects their opportunities and life outcomes" ([Rosebaum 1995](#), p.231). There is a consensus that these area effects might manifest through supply of neighbourhood resources such as local services and access to jobs; model learning from social ties and social networks; socialisation and collective efficacy relating to local norms and values; and residents' perceptions of crime and disorder ([Friedrichs 2003](#)).

The idea that stable neighbourhoods tend to lead to stronger social bonds and greater psychological wellbeing is troubling for many deprived neighbourhoods, since these areas are often presented as having a higher turnover of residents ([Smith 1991](#)). For instance, in interviews conducted by [Buffel et al. \(2013\)](#) in socially deprived areas of Manchester and Brussels, respondents commonly brought up the changing composition of their local area, noting that many of their social contacts had moved away, impacting on the sense of togetherness.

While isolation may be felt as a result of transience in neighbours, it is reinforced by lack of opportunities for mobility in those who remain. The existing literature about the issue of social deprivation suggests strong associations between the factors related to the individual (age, disability, gender), factors related to social area (like transport services) and more global ones (like global economy or structure of the labour market) ([Lucas 2012](#)). While a limited mobility is not the only factor which could lead to social deprivation, it can definitely negatively influence employment, health-care or education, issues recognised as related to deprivation ([Social Exclusion Unit 2003](#)).

Being able to access key public services is critical to achieving a decent standard of living in some areas. A previous report prepared by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which analysed people's access to libraries, hospitals, post offices (classified as public services), corner-shops, banks and pubs (private services) revealed that 24 per cent of the respondents were excluded from two or more services because they were either unaffordable or unavailable, while only 54 per cent have access to all services, both public and private ([Gordon et al. 2000](#)). However, as the authors indicated, the main barrier for the people was not lack of affordability but rather lack of availability of those services.

Psychological feelings of isolation as well as the practical consequences of changing patterns in the necessity and provision of transport were mentioned time and time again by our respondents and our report strongly suggests that a better understanding of the way isolation is experienced will help policymakers more effectively intervene to alleviate unnecessary hardships where geographic and societal isolation interact.

Precarity

Alleviating deprivation naturally requires understanding the interactions between citizen and the market and citizen and the state, because long-term deprivation can be seen to be a direct result of situations where these relationships fail to meet the ideal. As these failures occur to those already experiencing deprivation they have a number of knock-on effects which increase their vulnerability.

There is a lack of comparative qualitative research examining experiences of acquiring employment for poorer people across different neighbourhoods, and the evidence that there are specific neighbourhood effects on employment remains rather contested in quantitative studies in the UK. Escaping low income and social exclusion can be achieved in rural areas through acquiring employment, increasing the number of hours worked, greater job stability and security and increasing the number of adults with employment in a household. One clear way in which the neighbourhood in which one lives can have impact on employment opportunities is through neighbourhood reputation, stigma and labelling. Job seekers may find themselves discriminated against in the job market due to the stigma attached to the area in which they live ([Forrest 2008](#)).

Differences between impact and experience of rural and urban employment is something we wanted to explore carefully in our study. Indeed, unemployment might typically be lower in rural areas, but in 2017, residence-based median annual earnings in rural areas were only £400 higher than urban areas once London was excluded ([Office for National Statistics 2017](#)). Perhaps more telling is that employee-earnings are £1500 per annum lower in rural areas, indicating that for many residents commuting to urban areas may be the only way to increase their income, which in itself has associated transport costs ([Office for National Statistics 2017](#)). One noted difference is that lower unemployment figures in rural areas “have served to mask the low-waged, low-quality, part-time, seasonal and sometimes informal nature of work in the countryside” ([Clope et al. 1997](#), p.220). There are likely to be fewer opportunities for career advancement in rural areas where lack of employment options may also mean having to accept part-time or informal work when full-time, secure employment might be preferable ([Farmer et al. 2001](#)). Often, rather than utilising welfare benefits, people experiencing poverty in rural areas are more likely to alleviate some of their economic issues by relying on insecure, informal employment. Wealthier households may establish themselves in these areas where they can commute to well-paid jobs; while those that are restricted to lower-paid, local employment, may find themselves in increasingly precarious positions.

Many studies have provided evidence that the health of people living in deprived areas is worse when compared to those from more affluent ones. Using survey data to compare the impacts of living in a socially deprived or socially mixed neighbourhood in Glasgow and Edinburgh, [Atkinson and Kintrea \(2001, p.2277\)](#) offered support for the negative impact of place deprivation upon the health and employment status of residents; “people in similar positions were less likely to be in work and more likely to be sick or disabled if they live in the deprived area” ([Atkinson and Kintrea 2001, p.2295](#)). Several studies maintain greater likelihood of heart disease ([Crombie et al. 1989](#)) infant mortality ([Stockwell et al. 1995](#)) certain types of cancer [Devesa and Diamond \(1983\)](#) among less advantaged residents. Many studies also suggest that those living in deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to smoke ([Duncan et al. 1999](#)).

Existing research also indicates a link between socioeconomic status and mental health. Indeed, [Delgadillo et al. \(2015\)](#) show not only are people from poorer areas more likely to need mental

health support but also they are less likely to access any support and their chances of recovery are lower. Indeed, it has been reported that people from deprived areas are more likely to show symptoms of depression, anxiety, as well as being suicidal when compared with those from more affluent places ([Mental Health Foundation 2016](#)).

The failure of both market and state is exacerbated because the knock on effects on mental and physical health make it even more difficult to provide correctives. Many of our respondents gave quite moving accounts of their feelings of precarity which make the findings above and their varied consequences more tractable.

Alienation

Closely related to precarity, deprivation can foster a feeling of alienation from communities both national and local and therefore present huge barriers to re-engaging in 'normal' or 'expected' interactions with the market and the state. As outlined in the previous section, employment status has significant effects on mental health. Our study sets out to build on existing research to understand the particular alienation presented by nested deprivation.

It is clear that there is a spatially uneven distribution of high-skilled or well-paid employment across the country with some neighbourhoods, towns, cities and regions disproportionately affected. A significant proportion of British research on the geography of employment has focused on the links between areas that experienced industrial decline in the 1970s and 1980s and difficulties in accessing the job market that still persist today (for example [Willis 2009](#); [Lever 1991](#); [Parry 2003](#); [Fieldhouse and Hollywood 1999](#)). Many of these areas, largely based in the north of England, Wales and the Midlands, were experiencing job losses and high levels of unemployment into the 1990s, with marked impacts on not only family incomes but also on "feelings of pride, identity, security and purpose", particularly in areas where the major employer in the area played an important role in social activities ([Lupton 2001](#), p.30). There is undoubtedly an interconnectedness between stable, meaningful employment and a sense of wellbeing, satisfaction with the local neighbourhood and mental and physical health. However, these factors, and the local experiences of unemployment are less explored in areas that have not been heavily industrialised, particularly in suburban and rural areas of the south of England.

Nostalgic feelings have been strongly associated with areas that have experienced de-industrialisation and urban decline, such as the valleys of South Wales described by [Walkerline \(2010\)](#) or the West Midlands where "living memories of de-industrialisation have translated into a feeling of the "depressing present" ([Popov and Price 2013](#)). As we outline in the report, we found nostalgia present in various guises in different sites in which we spoke with respondents. Some authors indicate that the level of satisfaction amongst the users of public services is lower in more deprived areas. Social services are less likely to meet the demands of people living in deprived areas, with higher demands placed upon them, but also overall poorer overall quality of those services ([Duffy 2000](#)).

Finally, without influence on decisions it is difficult for those living in deprived areas to effect pressure for collective action to improve their opportunities. Using as an example one of the poorest areas of Newcastle, where only one in ten people vote, [Power and Willson \(2000\)](#) suggest that one of the reasons behind low turnout is "being poor in an area with many poor people and poor

conditions generates a gradual loss of confidence in the system". Indeed, the most important factors influencing people's political activity seem to be resources they have access to, such as money or education ([Power and Willson 2000](#)).

Thus, it is not surprising that the most politically engaged are those who already are well- resourced, wealthy and high-educated people ([Pattie et al. 2004](#)). Looking at the level of civic engagement [Gordon et al. \(2000\)](#) discover that from a list of civic activities respondents have to choose from to indicate in which they engage themselves, only voting (in local and general elections) drew more than 1 in 3 respondents. As the authors indicate even though political activity was still popular amongst deprived populations, the results still indicate that 30 per cent of the population group are completely politically disengaged ([Gordon et al. 2000](#)).

Expectation

It follows that we might find deprived members of our communities are more negative about their futures, but the picture is more mixed. Our findings in subsequent sections provide more nuance to the assumptions that have come from the existing research.

Although qualitative research has been less prevalent in studies of place-based deprivation, where it has been conducted such research has tended to highlight greater diversity in residents' experiences and expectations of living in deprived or more mixed areas. In interviews with voluntary workers and practitioners in deprived areas [Atkinson and Kintrea \(2004\)](#) found that "inter-generational responses to isolation and worklessness, given extra weight by the prevalence of these experiences in a deprived neighbourhood, had led to the transmission of values that were fatalistic and introverted" ([Atkinson and Kintrea 2004](#), p.452). Yet residents typically associate with the cultural environment of their local area that may govern the way that they understand what is a 'good' or 'bad' neighbourhood or what constitutes 'failure' or 'success' in their lives ([Bauder 2002](#)). As such, it is unsurprising that many people who live in deprived areas might see their area in a more positive light than those from the outside.

The intersection of rurality and deprivation remains under-researched. Up until the late 1980s, there appears to us only one significant piece of research conducted to examine the prevalence of rural deprivation in the UK. According to [McLaughlin \(1986, p.291\)](#): "the concept of rural deprivation per se lacks credibility in English culture. Deprivation as it is popularly presented by the media and as it is generally understood in both the academic and policy contexts is an urban experience and describes varying circumstances of interlocking social, economic and cultural malaise within the clearly-defined spatial parameters of the inner city".

As a result of the idyllic imagining of rural areas, rural people might be considered 'deprived' of facilities compared to their urban counterparts, yet often "they cannot be viewed as impoverished because of the perceived compensation inherent in rural life and the lower expectations which follow" ([Clope et al. 1997, p.354](#)). This narrative can be internalised by impoverished rural residents themselves, who may adopt lower expectations or even hide their own lowly economic state in order to continue upholding the imagined geographies of the idyllic and quintessential village ([Clope et al. 1997](#)). This, for [Clark \(1997\)](#), contributes to the 'dark underside' of rural life.

Even today, the vast majority of geographical studies of poverty focus on spaces of the inner city, often overlooking the experiences of people living in poverty in suburban areas or rural areas ([Milbourne 2010](#)). In contrast to urban areas, rural areas are typically presented as affluent and affording their residents a high quality of life. Indeed, village life in the UK is frequently understood as idyllic. From the drawing on the box of Yorkshire Tea to the Country Life magazine, cultural constructions of rural life in England in particular serve to “(re)produce and (re)negotiate arcadian and pastoral idylls about rural life”, in doing so limiting even the recognition of the existence of poverty in rural areas ([Cloke et al. 1997](#), p.354). Area-based measures of deprivation or socioeconomic status produce somewhat meaningless area averages that obscure the heterogeneity of the population and finer-level deprivation (Farmer et al., 2001). This adds to the invisibility of rural poverty ([Milbourne 2010](#)).

In our report we try to disentangle the meaning of expectations for those experiencing nested deprivation by putting their own expressions centre-stage allowing for a greater understanding of the explained relationship between experiences of isolation, precarity, alienation and expectations.

And so...

Taken as a whole, despite much good research, a lot of the key questions we have about the causes and effects of deprivation have not been conclusively answered. There is little recent research on deprivation outside major urban centres. Research has been concentrated in Scotland and the North of England and there is little recent research on rural deprivation. Most research has relied on official statistics and survey data and the voices of those experiencing deprivation have not always been able to influence the policy landscape. The report here provides a systematic and rigorously researched correction to allow more informed and nuanced policy formulation.

Approach

We used rigorous quantitative techniques in order to systematically select Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) across Hampshire and Dorset that match certain criteria regarding their geographical context and their relative levels of deprivation. The table below demonstrates the criteria for case selection allowing comparison of urbanity/rurality and levels of deprivation. The selection criteria for each category are then explained.

	Relatively Deprived	Not Deprived
A. Inner City	Case A1	Case A2
B. Suburban	Case B1	Case B2
C. Town Fringe	Case C1	Case C2
D. Rural dispersed	Case D1	Case D2

Creating the geographical classification

The geographical classifications above (A-D) are not used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to classify LSOAs. Instead, they utilise a 2011 measure that, in the dataset that we attained, classifies LSOAs as either *City and Town*, *Rural Town and Fringe* and *Rural village and dispersed* (E1) based on the construction of a 'density profile' for each hectare (100m x 100m) cell of the United Kingdom (Bibby & Brindley, 2013). We have recoded this data from these three categories into the four categories (A-D) above in the following way to better reflect the different categories of neighbourhood as they present along the central southern coast where rurality is less pronounced than in other parts of the UK:

Inner City: LSOAs that have the ONS classification *City and Town* and are located less than 5km from any city centre in Hampshire or Dorset with a population of 100,000 or greater.

Suburban: LSOAs with either the classification *City and Town* or *Rural Town and Fringe* that are located between 5 and 15km from any city in Hampshire and Dorset with a population of 100,000 or greater.

Market Town/Fringe: LSOAs that have the classification *Rural Town and Fringe* and are not located between 5 and 15km from any city in Hampshire and Dorset with a population of 100,000 or greater.

Rural Dispersed: LSOAs that have the classification *Rural village and dispersed*.

This method of measuring the distance from each LSOA to the nearest large cities (Southampton, Portsmouth, Bournemouth, Basingstoke, Poole) was performed using *ArcGIS*. The distance 5 to 15km was chosen as an effective proximate measure representing the suburbs that are relatively urban and likely have significant connections with a larger urban city. For example, in this definition, most areas in the Eastleigh local authority are classified as a suburb of Southampton.

Definitions of deprivation

Once the LSOAs in Hampshire and Dorset were recoded, it was important to determine how we would capture their relative levels of deprivation. For this, we use ONS data that first ranks every LSOA in the country on an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and then gives each LSOA a decile to reflect where they are situated in the overall distribution of multiple deprivation. For example, LSOAs that have an IMD decile of 1 are in the top 10% most deprived LSOAs nationally, whereas those with an IMD decile of 10 are in the bottom 10%. In order to classify LSOAs as relatively *Deprived* and *Not Deprived* we used the following method:

Deprived: Any LSOAs that have an IMD decile of between 1 and 3. This is those LSOAs that are in the top 30% most deprived nationally.

Not Deprived: Any LSOAs that have an IMD decile of between 8 and 10. This is those LSOAs that are in the 30% least deprived LSOAs nationally.

From this classification system, we attained a subset of the dataset representing each category from A1 to D2. From there, using a randomisation technique performed with Microsoft Excel, we randomly selected five potential case studies from those that fell in the category. We then made further inquiries as to the viability of each of potential case study in terms of costs and access for recruitment of participants, and fit with the overall aims of the project. Where potential cases were

deemed equally viable a final randomisation procedure was used to select the case. For the D1 category of rural dispersed and relatively deprived only one location was attained on the Isle of Wight. This is due to the relatively low levels of multiple deprivation across rural areas in Hampshire and Dorset. Therefore we made every effort to include that case to represent the D1 category.

The table below reveals the outcome of the case selection. The next section introduces the study sites in more detail.

	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)

Pen Portraits: Rural and Market Town LSOAs

Chale Green, Isle of Wight

Chale Green is the northern settlement of the dispersed rural village of Chale, 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.

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.

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.

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.

Pen Portraits: Suburban and Inner City LSOAs

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.

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.

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.

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.

Approach

The participants we hoped to speak to are notoriously ‘hard to reach’ in social science research (see Bonevski et al. 2014) —a fact that made the research particularly timely and important, but which obviously presents challenges in the field. As a consequence, the research team put a lot of collective energy into recruitment. We made multiple site visits to each setting, approached local community leaders, food banks, posted on community Facebook pages, dropped flyers, posted letters, and knocked on doors. We also drew on relationships with initial research participants to ‘snowball’ through neighbourhood networks (see Wagenaar 2014). This range of recruitment strategies enabled us to get a diverse sample, with variation in age, ethnicity and gender across the overall sample and across most individual sites as well. The diversity of this sample ensures that we have captured a rich variety of experiences. It provides the basis for ‘plausible conjecture’ (see Rhodes 2014) – we have confidence that the patterns we have found in the responses and reflections of participants offer plausible and authentic accounts of nested and un-nested deprivation on the South Coast.

Interviews were semi-structured, ranging in length from around 25 minutes to two hours. Most interviews were one on one, but a small handful were with couples, siblings, friends or multiple generations of the same family. We followed up the initial round of interviews with focus groups – 6 in total – which enabled us to elicit rich reflections on emerging themes. Participants were paid a small honorarium for their participation, in light of the fact they were giving up their time. We were also aware that participants were consenting to sharing with us sometimes challenging or harrowing experiences. The study was examined and approved by the University of Southampton Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences Ethics Board ref: 24804. One key condition of this approval was that individual participants would remain anonymous. We have, therefore, done our best to de-identify the quotes we draw on—attributing them anonymously and altering some contextual detail. This approach allows us to draw out authentic local voices in these specific communities while still preserving the anonymity of participants.

Findings

As we might expect, there is significant variation in perception both within and across each of the eight neighbourhoods in our study. The overwhelming impression from the field was one of *vulnerability* - 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. Yet, the particular nature of this vulnerability, and the manner in which it inflected the experience and perception of individual participants, varied greatly. We encountered stories of connectedness and isolation, anxiety and contentment, empowerment and disaffection, optimism and pessimism, all in different shades across each

site. That said, certain trends or patterns in the responses of our participants have emerged, and common themes have taken shape.

One core finding is that none of these themes is unique to the South Coast. In the analysis that follows, we identify and focus on feelings of *isolation*, *precarity*, *alienation* and *expectation*, each of which links to existing work on poverty in the UK cited in our thematic review earlier). So the salient features of South Coast exceptionalism that make it such an interesting region to conduct work on deprivation do not extend or translate to a categorical difference in experience.

Nevertheless, we can tease out subtle qualitative differences in *accent* and *emphasis*. Particularly noticeable, in this sense, is that these common issues or concerns tend to manifest differently in different contexts across the study. In other words, the themes our participants keep coming back to are the same, but their experience or perception is usually inflected by the particular local conditions. 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 nested 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 this combination of factors, unique to the geography and demography of the South Coast, that plays a crucial role in shaping the individual experience of deprivation – and any efforts to alleviate it.

The upshot is a nuanced account of deprivation on the South Coast that reflects this diversity of experience. It is one that can, of course, offer a timely corrective to prevailing and reductive narratives of a North-South divide within England. But it is also one that can offer depth and nuance to existing understandings of the broader effects of deprivation, particularly within the context of ongoing debate about the 'Left Behind' in Britain and the drivers of social upheaval and political disaffection. Most crucially of all, this variegated depiction can act as a crucial resource for policy actors seeking to promote pathways out of deprivation, underpinning contextually sensitive and locally responsive modes of support and intervention.

Isolation: Geography

One key theme emerging from the fieldwork was that of isolation. For our participants, the lived experience of poverty on the South Coast produced or reinforced a feeling of isolation, albeit the form in which that feeling manifested was different across our different areas. Some manifestations of isolation were common across the research sites; for example while a number of residents had close family ties, many spoke with loneliness of increasing estrangement from close family or the

premature death of loved ones. There was, though, some recognisable difference in the isolation experienced in rural and urban settings.

For participants in rural areas and small towns, and for those in more deprived areas, the sense was typically a tangible one of *geographical* isolation. In other words, participants commented at length on how they felt that they and their area were cut off or physically disconnected from the broader region.

It is important to acknowledge that for many participants isolation in this sense has its attractions – linked in particular to a pride or enjoyment in natural beauty, a relaxed lifestyle or a strong sense of community. Participants in Chale Green spoke fondly about the pace of life. Those in Wellow reflected on it being ‘a nice little bubble’. Those in Portland joked about the ‘Portland whispers’ that spread local gossip, share stories and ultimately (if sometimes infuriatingly) bind the community together:

So if I went to the pub and had a pint and spoke about somebody, the next day my next-door-neighbour would knock on my door. It’s Portland Whispers, that’s what they say it is; it’s like one big family up here so everyone knows everyone.

Yet on the flipside this geographical isolation also raises important challenges for those on a low income. Particularly crucial here is transport. In less populated areas, infrequent, inconvenient and expensive bus services mean that younger and older people especially feel trapped at home. Importantly, this claustrophobic anxiety is not a standalone issue. It is intimately intertwined with a host of other concerns.

While participants in urban areas were often positive about the opportunities for entertainment, social and physical activities available to both adults and children, the combined experience of deprivation and rurality is something of a double-whammy when it comes to seeking these outlets. In our rural and small town areas especially, the difficulty in ‘getting out’ is seen as a key problem for younger people, contributing to a sense of boredom and associated social problems with substance and alcohol abuse. One participant from Chale Green, for example, commented on the ‘troubles’ that dogged Spanners Close in his own teenage years:

I think it was a small community and people got into that institutionalised sort of state, like it was just that estate and nothing else existed, so people get bored. And the buses weren’t that often, back then, and you had a bus at like eight o’clock in the morning, that was the first one, then there would be a couple in the day, and then the last one going out would be something like six o’clock, so there would only be four buses running. If you didn’t have your own transport you were stuck here, in that little zone, and that’s what causes the boredom and people start drinking.

Older isolated residents often could only cope with boredom by taking on the expense of keeping pets or maintaining expensive television subscriptions even if they longed for more human interaction. And for those of a working age, geographic isolation affected the capacity of residents to find and commute to employment. One from Wellow explained:

They used to be every hour. However the County Council over at Winchester had some bright idea and made it every two hours, and it really did affect the elderly. Most of all it

affected people working and students at college, because the way they made it every two hours it didn't coincide for the nine o'clock starts, eight o'clock starts and things like that, or for getting back home.

For older people isolation is linked to growing concerns about physical and mental health associated with active ageing and social interaction. One from Alresford—where relatively speaking many participants were complimentary about the bus service—said that recent cutbacks to services were difficult for her:

The only thing I don't like, they have taken the service buses off. We used to get the buses come round this way, but now I have to walk right down to New Farm Road... It takes me about 20 minutes... I have problems walking.

Inevitably, then, our participants consistently reflected the common wisdom that running a car is an essential cost. One that counts among the top expenses for most of our participants and one that can be subject to sudden and unexpected problems that stretch already strained and insecure finances. A focus group participant in Alresford explained:

It's easy for the majority who have money to have 3 or 4 cars to a house. I've got a job to keep mine on the road!

A participant from Chale Green echoed this sentiment, explaining how a problem with the car could throw her into a spiral of debt:

I have to take from Peter to pay Paul. It's very, very difficult, because I owe my mum and I owe my sister money, and I probably will owe my mechanic some money as well.

In deprived urban areas, too, the concern was that the convenience of car ownership (which most had enjoyed previously) was becoming progressively harder to afford and more inconvenient. The lack of density resulting from suburban sprawl has affected the efficiency of public transport beyond city centres, and fermented a dominant car culture in the South. One participant from Fareham explained, for instance, that space was becoming more and more squeezed in incremental moves to increase housing density, joking that it made getting a convenient parking space a significant challenge:

[My neighbour's] got two 'no parking' red cones, and when he goes out, he puts two cones out [laugh] and everybody respects him! And I just laugh because I think, 'Well, good for you!' He puts two cones on his and he saves his space!

Geographical isolation, in this sense, represents a key window into a much broader range of challenges facing those struggling to make ends meet on the South Coast, intersecting in crucial ways with employment, public health, mental health, housing and beyond. In fact one thing that was common across almost all our respondents was poor health, with many survivors of trauma or abuse and coping with chronic mental and/or physical conditions. Our field observations and diverse recruitment strategies suggest this was not an artefact of our sampling strategy and is a shared burden more generally. We therefore return to these intersections in our concluding discussions when we consider the concrete policy implications of our findings.



The Car Conundrum

Nowhere is the Catch 22 of car ownership for those struggling to make ends meet on the South Coast more apparent than in the isolated town of Portland. Our participants here joked about apocryphal sightings of the No. 6 Bus – the only bus service that links the town to Weymouth or the rest of Dorset. The No. 6 is infamously inconvenient and unreliable.

Figure 1: Map of Car Ownership in Portland



One of our participants explained:

They [buses] disappear down the black hole of Southwell, as we call it, because you'll get three buses go down to Southwell and then they won't appear for 20 minutes and you're like 'well, where's one of these gone?.. 'I do this every day, day in and day out.' It gets a killer and it just gets tedious and boring.

Worst of all is the expense. One of our participants explained incredulously:

I mean you need cars in Portland because there's nothing there. To entertain kids there's nothing. So you've got to always go to Weymouth. And the bus fares are going up and it's costing a bomb.

This context makes car ownership a necessity, albeit one many of the poorer residents here cannot afford (see Map above). What the data do not reveal is the financial strain and anxiety that this essential cost imposes even for those who can afford it. Across all our research sites, but most

evidently in rural areas respondents explained how (the lack of) transport curtails opportunities for employment and entertainment with knock on effects on the quality of life of communities.

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Isolation: Society

Struggling to adapt to significant change was a dominant feature of our interviews and focus groups, although references to resilience through borrowing and ‘mucking in’ within the community was more common in more rural and more deprived respondents. Isolation tended to manifest in quite a different way for many of the individuals we spoke to in more urban and in less deprived areas on the South Coast – these participants spoke of experiencing less a tangible form of geographical isolation and more an intangible sense of social or cultural isolation. Rather than speaking about strong communities as our rural respondents often did, our urban respondents talked about ‘lost’ communities. There was, in other words, less sense of community or place in these areas, and a greater feeling of dislocation from the broader or dominant culture of the neighbourhood.

Particularly noticeable here was a narrative of decline in social cohesion and sense of community. Reflections in more rural and more deprived areas tended to be mixed on this point—some, especially in Chale Green and Wellow, were adamant that the neighbourhood had got better, while others that they had stayed the same or got worse. But in more urban and less deprived areas there was a tendency to bemoan a loss of neighbourhood. One participant in Fareham explained:

They’re not as nice as they used to be. People don’t seem to be ready to talk to people. I haven’t spoken to my right-hand neighbour, mind you she is 100ft away, but I haven’t spoken to her in the last 20 years.

Some blame this loss of community cohesion on shifting demographics, reflecting a broader identity politics in England linked to concern about immigration, a huge rise in population, and support for Brexit. A quote from one focus group with three retired women in Fratton was especially revealing:

I’ve lived there 23 years and it’s changed massively. It’s not very friendly now. A lot of little bedsits and a lot of immigration. In my road it’s a very, very, very mixed community so there’s not really a lot of interaction with other people. They don’t want to know. [Others nod in agreement]

Others linked the decline more closely to changes in the social fabric wrought by inexorable market forces. They spoke of the hollowing out of local businesses at the heart of communities (more of which below). They also spoke about a more subtle shift in demographics - from a community of families to one of multi-occupancy tenancies, as avaricious landlords seek higher and more stable rents. One participant from Fareham explained:

I think if every house that comes up for sale is grabbed up by this multi-house, whatever it’s called, it will turn it into a ghetto instead of a proper community with families. That’s how I feel. We had a flyer through the door from some woman, ‘If you want to sell your house, I’ve

got cash', and her name and address. These properties are cheaper to buy and do up...
They're laughing, laughing.



The Local High Street - Alresford

Perhaps the best symbol of this loss of community and drift into social isolation are the local shops in Alresford. Disappointment about shifts in the make-up of local business districts is a common theme across our sites, often linked to concerns about the homogenisation of the High Street and the rise of large conglomerates at the expense of small retailers. But in Alresford the dynamic was starkly different. Participants here bemoaned the prevalence not so much of generic retailers but of trendy or boutique establishments seeking to cater to the top end of town. The problem, in their view, is not just that these shops have colonised the pragmatic shopping centre that had once been the hub of community life—one that made them feel welcome and which sold things they actually wanted and could afford. 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.

This problem also speaks to a broader one of employment and opportunities. Participants in a focus group described these establishments as being not the least bit interested in employing locals:

I can't get a job. I hand in a CV but I don't hear nothing.

To be clear, it was not just in Alresford that we encountered this story. In Chale Green, many of our participants feel especially embittered about the local shop which they perceive as catering to the tourist market. In Wellow, too, the attitudes of business owners to locals seeking opportunity remains a source of immense frustration. One participant explained:

But all I know is, one thing is, I have gone round on two separate occasions every single shop, and asked if I can do voluntary work or have a little bit of work, and they've all said ... they all basically said no.

But in Alresford this development takes on particularly poignancy because the High Street is front and centre of any idyllic portrait of market town life in southern England. For those living on low incomes or benefits in the small pockets of deprivation, the shops are a site of subtle prohibition from the rest of society; a stark symbol of their own social dislocation.



Precarity: The individual and the State

Another key theme across the research sites is precarity—one that dovetails with recent emphasis in both research and policy on those ‘Just About Managing’ across the UK (see [Finch 2017](#)). Precarity, in this sense, entails 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 such as heating and food which are often forgone by parents for their children’s benefit. Many of our participants were often at their most desultory in tone when talking about the anxiety and nervousness associated with their own dependence on assistance and fortune.

Interestingly, the most counterintuitive finding here is that not everyone feels precarious. Many of our participants who are ‘objectively’ deprived (based on the sorts of measures used by ONS) exude a calm reassurance and contentment about their economic position. Most take pride in being frugal, in budgeting conscientiously, in living within their means, in not needing frivolous or material possessions. One Leigh Park participant explained:

I budget to the absolute T every week. Like, I write a food shopping list and if it’s not on the list I don’t buy it, sort of thing. I make sure bills are paid, then I do food shopping, and then what’s left is left... I factor in [unexpected bills]. I also do keep a bit aside because I do run a car and I’m aware that there’s always something that may crop up on that. I don’t go out drinking. I don’t drink. I don’t smoke. So it goes on either the kids, the house or food.

For some the security of pride despite insecure work, was more valuable than security of welfare. The majority of participants, however, did confess to having trouble making ends meet, or to facing worries about the future. We devote the bulk of this section to disentangling the different drivers of this sense of precarity and the way it manifests differently across the South Coast.

For those living in more deprived areas, this sense of precarity was exhibited especially in anxiety about dependence on the state. In particular, participants reflected that benefits were under attack, with ever-restrictive, demanding and demeaning governance around social welfare. Perhaps the most shocking illustration comes in the form of repeated horror stories from Chale Green about the local Job Centre at Newport. For at least 3 of our participants, the 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. This represents a win for short-term targets in the ‘gaming world’ of contemporary social service provision, but a deep concern for the long-term welfare and wellbeing of the actual people involved. The added bureaucracy of self-help or hand-up type schemes was a common theme among our respondents. One participant, for instance, reflected on how a particularly traumatic trip to the Job Centre triggered her long-standing mental health condition:

They treat you like dirt. Whatever you say is not right... 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.

Among those who are able to navigate and withstand the benefits process there is an abiding worry – namely a fear of dependence that makes returning to work and achieving self-sufficiency a difficult and frightening prospect. In the words of one participant:

Sometimes you think, 'What is the point?' Because you get moaned at when you go to work and do extra hours, and then if you tell them, 'I was offered these hours but I didn't do them,' 'Well, why didn't you do them?' And you think, 'You told me to stick to so many hours,' but then again, you don't like to say no to your employers because that puts you in a bad light, saying, 'No, I can't,' when you know damn well you can but you know you're going to get penalised for it. So you're literally banging your head against a brick wall.

But, for many, dependence on benefits is not sufficient anyway. To make ends meet they need to seek out work in the informal cash economy. Not all participants were willing to elaborate on this point but the few that were provided penetrating insight into the anxiety that this measure can feed and reinforce. For a start, there is the issue of actually obtaining that work reliably, especially in a context where employers hold all the cards. One participant explained that it was especially difficult for women in this situation:

It's alright for a man because I think that you guys can go out and get a cash-in-hand job, whereas I don't personally know of anywhere that I could go and get a cash-in-hand job... My ex-brother-in-law was a bricklayer and my ex used to go and help him, per day getting something like £50 cash-in-hand, couldn't interfere with the benefits and stuff like that. Whereas we can't. I don't feel us women can do that.

But the retreat of the State is not just felt in the form of changes to the benefits system. It is also something our participants experienced more broadly, particularly in the wake of local government austerity. Local schools such as the infant school in Chale Green have closed down; social housing is being sold off or prepared for sale in estates in Wellow and Fratton; local amenities get more and more rundown in the drab Leigh Park shopping precinct. Perhaps the starkest example, however, is the proliferation of homelessness in urban areas like Portsmouth and Bournemouth (see next page). One of our participants in Fratton drew on her experience working in the mental health sector to explain:

I've seen mental health people on the streets because the support has gone... They haven't had the support because they've taken a lot of staff away and they have no community support. They've lost it all.

We will return to the consequences of wavering or shrinking state support in the next section. However, many respondents were equally sceptical about state governance. Some spoke of 'corruption', and despite laughing at the suggestion that they might try to get some political influence, a large number bemoaned the lack of democratic consultation or even appreciable communication to forewarn of closures and reductions to education and transport services. Although in theory representation through the political system should provide our participants an opportunity to make changes to their collective fortunes, they have no trust in the idea.

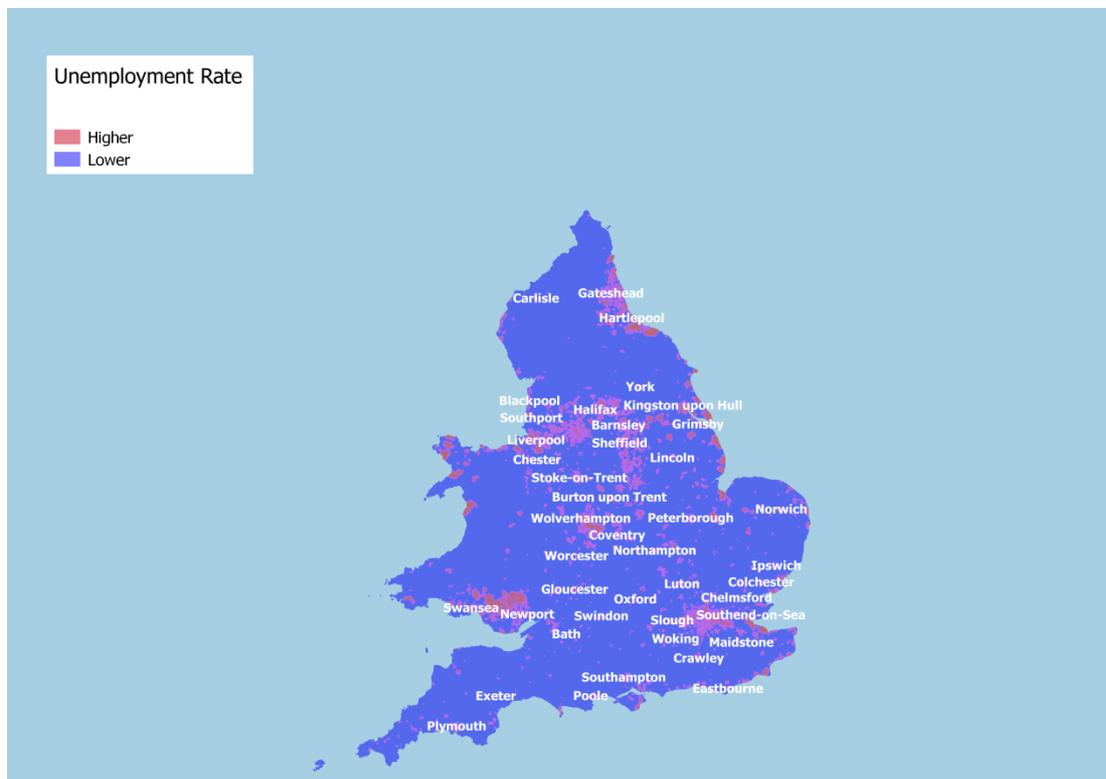


Dilemmas of Un(der)employment

The precarious nature of contemporary employment was a feature across all of our sites. We see in Fratton, for instance – which open data reveals to be among the highest unemployment rates in the country (see Map above) - confusion over local employment opportunities and the readiness of workers to travel out of the close vicinity for their job; and from the older participants a mass shift from a highly focussed local economy to one in which local people become reliant on larger corporations with large-scale workforces who employ from a city-wide radius (or beyond).

Overall, across both nested and un-nested settings, the narrative was one of a shift away from traditional work in agricultural industry and shipping in the South Coast. New forms of employment have emerged, especially old age care throughout the region (known as a retirement spot). But this work is symptomatic of modern ills of the workforce—casualisation, anti-social hours and depressed wages.

Figure 2: Map of Unemployment Rates in Fratton LSOA



Take this exchange from our focus group in Alresford:

Take (x) here. You're a support worker. You're in Winchester, which is a top notch town, and earning minimum wage.

It's terrible, isn't it?

He's on minimum wage, and he's like in his 40s.

Nearly 50.

It's all through the care system, isn't it? All care workers and social workers. They're all on minimum wage.

They need to pay more.

Tourism remains a big regional employer too, but obviously that work is even more variable and vulnerable. From a focus group in Portland:

This place doesn't give a damn about young people. They pay low wages. The only work here is holiday sites. You don't get a career in that. ... If he wants to work, it's not going to be full-time. It's the world now. It's no hours contracts.



Precarity: The individual and the Market

If precarity among residents in more deprived areas is often linked to a dependence on the state, then in less deprived areas on the South Coast it is as often down to the vicissitudes of the market. In the context of a steeply rising cost of living, many of our participants confessed to feeling especially vulnerable.

The obvious issue, referenced repeatedly throughout interviews and focus groups, is housing. The South Coast, of course, is home to some of the most expensive real estate in the UK (and indeed the world). But the South's 'hot' property market presents significant problems for those living in poverty.

First is an abiding sense of frustration, among working age or younger people especially. Few had any expectation of ever being able to buy or own property anyway. Many could not even afford to rent. Siblings in Bournemouth, for instance, spoke to us about their sense of shame and anger at having to live with their parents well into their 30s – a glimpse into a generational divide that overlays social and economic disjunctures.

Second is a tendency towards property speculation, absentee landlords - a general culture that sees homes as business opportunities. Of particular concern—as noted earlier—is a shift away from renting out family homes to homes of multiple-occupancy. As well as the long-term effect of changing local cultural mores, this has an immediate impact of pushing up rents and squeezing those already struggling to make ends meet. A participant in Fareham explained:

The houses that go up for sale are being grabbed up by landlords and turned into multi-occupancy houses, such as next door. That is a five-bedroom house now... They're charging £110 a week each, and by five. Work it out.

Third is a growing shortage of social housing to cool down the market or provide for those unable to pay market rents. Local authorities under immense financial strain are forced to sell off existing stock. The effect is that social housing waiting lists in 'desirable' locations get longer, and even those already in homes feel anxious that they will be sold from under them. A participant in Wellow explained:

There's a six-year waiting list with Test Valley for people, for all of these villages going all the way round, all the way up to Romsey, all the way down and it's the same in the whole country as you know. The whole country has got massive waiting lists. Now they've decided that they're on a void list – while there's a huge waiting list for housing association houses...

Skyrocketing rents also generate anxiety about making payments and meeting obligations. Participants especially in less deprived areas made repeated reference to the importance of 'putting a roof over your head' and the existential threat that eviction might pose. Rent, therefore, becomes top of a hierarchy of bills—in 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' (another common refrain) they might have to be late on other payments, turn off the heating in their bedroom, or forego any of the little luxuries they still like to enjoy. A participant in Bournemouth summed it up this way:

I've got to run this house by myself. Just with the money you get for what you've got to buy, especially with Bournemouth being more expensive to live in, it's just not enough money. I tried going through my bank the other day, because I'm in the middle of sorting my banking, and I tried telling them my income/expenditure, and they couldn't even take a payment plan off me because my expenditure exceeded my income. (Young woman, Bournemouth)

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The Park Bench - Bournemouth

The effects of the South Coast's housing shortage and rent prices are most acute in Bournemouth among the sites we canvas. Many of the participants we spoke to here complained bitterly about rising rents and crippling Council Tax hikes. Not only do they face a hand-to-mouth existence and threat of being in arrears, but they are confronted with the precipitous consequences of eviction on the street. A particularly harrowing symbol of this visceral precarity is the recent move to install bars on park benches in the evening in the public spaces of this attractive coastal city—an initiative to prevent the growing numbers of local homeless from sleeping there, and one that has subsequently garnered negative press attention (Baynes 2018).

For people on the margins, the effect of seeing those in worse situations than them treated in a hostile manner was to increase their anxiety about making ends meet, particularly where they were dependant on others or had dependents of their own to support.

Figure 3: Park Bench in Bournemouth



Source: The Independent, January 30, 2018

Alienation: They are letting us down

Another key theme to emerge is alienation. A near constant feature of interviews and focus groups is a depiction of a 'they' or 'them' (as distinct from 'me' or 'us'). 'They' closed the schools. 'They' are selling off social housing. 'They' won't give people like us jobs. 'They' won't go near this estate. This construction of an alienated identity, however, tends to manifest especially in two dominant and distinct ways. In one account, more common in our more deprived areas, 'they' are the insidious elites in business, government or the local community who look down on, neglect or undermine the normal working-class folk. In the other account, more common in less deprived areas, 'they' are the normal middle-class folk and it is 'us' strugglers in the rough pockets of deprivation who let the side down. In the former, the sense is that 'they are letting us down', in the latter it is that 'we are letting them down'. We focus on each in turn.

In our deprived areas, many participants express a strong sense of having been 'left behind'. Prevailing narratives about social and economic changes discussed at length in the previous sections—a loss of community, a retreat of the state and a vulnerability to market forces—render local neighbourhoods as victims of elite negligence (at best) or malfeasance. Services are in retreat, and communities are left to fend for themselves. Moreover even where services are provided they

are provided 'by them, for them'. A couple in Leigh Park exchanged in some dark humour to sum this mood up:

A lot of people are telling me they think this government is purposefully trying to take us back to the 1930s.

My aunty thinks they're killing us! [Laughs]

We've got the 1930s' community spirit, so we might happen to be okay.

Perhaps the starkest example of this is GP services. Participants across all of our areas bemoan the difficulty in getting an appointment, the rushed and impersonal nature of consultations. Booking in advance is a waste of time, and 'emergency appointments' are the only port of call. All are quick not to blame those providing the service, but the cutbacks behind these shortfalls:

They need many, many, many more doctors. We haven't got enough for the population of Portsmouth now. There's not a doctor in Portsmouth that is so busy that you can never get an appointment, and I think that's all doctors now.

'The government' in general and local councils in particular are frequently fingered for blame for many of these ills. Take this example from a focus group in Fratton:

They closed the local shops down making you go to the local supermarkets. There are no really corner shops that you used to be able to pop in and go to.

Who do you think is making them close down?

I think it's the government.

Yeah, it is the government.

And they're just pulling everything down to put up flats and whatever.

This is not to imply that ill-feeling and alienation are unfounded, or that government acts as a mere scapegoat for broader socio-economic ills. For many participants, disaffection actually stems from direct experience and intimate knowledge. 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 did affect a lot of people here. People were really upset, really upset, because it was such a lovely little school. It was small, the teachers were able to give enough time and effort to each student and it was not these huge classes, it was these lovely little classes and it was a really, really nice school, a 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. It did impact. I went to that school, my sister went there, my nieces and nephews went there.

The upshot is a widespread—though not universal—contempt for and disinterest in politics. A few of our participants across deprived areas were politically engaged, and expressed enthusiasm or

rejuvenation due to recent developments in British politics (eg. renewed political discussion around Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party). Nevertheless, most of our participants laughed off any suggestion of becoming politically involved or recounted stories of frustration and disappointment with personal engagement. One, for instance, explained:

They just got disheartened and came away. It works for those that have got the money... There’s a farmer across the way and we know he’s a millionaire. I think he put up a barn up, or something and it was turned down. So he went down to the meeting and had a go and had his say, and he managed to get it up...

And when asked if she would fight for outcomes at similar meetings, the response was emphatic:

It wouldn’t make a difference.



The Green Hut – Chale Green

The little green hut at the bottom of Spanners Close estate is in many respects a symbol of local alienation. Long-time residents explained that the hut was built as part of a green energy public-private partnership in the early 2000s. The Isle of Wight council, in league with Mitsubishi and an energy firm, set about outfitting each property with a state of the art solar energy and water heating system. One of the residents explained:

They started up the project to get people involved. Because they were using Spanners Close as a test piece for their solar panels and the air source heat pumps they were getting other housing associations throughout the country coming down and looking around. So, basically what they did they started up the project so that we could inform people, and the understanding was that five residents were taken off the estate to be trained up as service engineers for the air source heat pumps.

But what happened was they went on the training course, to the point they had to go to the Mainland to get the qualifications, and [the contractors] pulled the plug. So, there’s nobody here on the estate, even though they know how to do it, they haven’t got the piece of paper to say they can go and service the air source heat pumps, so they can’t do it basically.

The residents were left high and dry. The solar panel systems remain, but are not adequately serviced. There are mixed reports from residents as to how well it works. One explained:

Some do, some don’t, depending on who you speak to. There’s a lady up there thinks it’s the worst thing she ever did, and there are a couple of people up around the estate best thing since sliced bread.

The green hut, meanwhile, was ‘gifted’ to a foundation and then on to the local parish council. Some locals are happy to make use of the hut for youth group and book club events, albeit it is (at time of writing) increasingly dilapidated and not fit for purpose. For most others, though, it stands as a symbol of broken promises and negligent governance. The final straw for them has been an initiative

to install computers and Wi-Fi there so that local residents can process Universal Credit and otherwise move their engagement with the authorities online – an initiative which respondents tell us has met with significant opposition from many of the older people affected who understandably lack trust in e-governance initiatives and fear that their personal information might be harvested for nefarious ends.

Alienation: We are letting them down

In less deprived areas, this narrative of anti-elite or anti-government alienation is still present. For example, one of our participants in Wellow expressed the most strident anti-government views we encountered. At the end of an impassioned account of the need to protect social housing he demanded of power elites:

Are they going to sit happy in their ivory towers, their little glass houses, counting their money, you know, and eating their Michelin starred food whilst people are hungry on the streets?

However, we also detect an alternative (but not necessarily incompatible) form of alienation related to an internalised rather than external stigma. This was particularly noticeable in the way participants spoke about their neighbourhood in response to a common question across our interview protocol: “When someone asks you, where do you say you live?” This seemingly innocuous question revealed a common thread of shame or stigma about living at the ‘rough’ end of the street or the only social housing in the area. One of our participants in Bournemouth, for instance, explained:

I’d just say Bournemouth. I don’t really specify what part of Bournemouth. I just say Bournemouth because it’s a big place and you don’t have to pinpoint that you live in—like for me, personally, I don’t have to pinpoint that I live in a bit of a dodgy area.

Another in Fareham put it this way:

I say I live on the estate behind the shops. But if I know that they live in a really nice area, I’m a bit embarrassed to say I live on an old council estate. I shouldn’t be, though.

This sense of stigma also extends to being out of work or requiring assistance. One of our participants in Leigh Park explained why she had gone into private rental accommodation:

I’m very stuck. Some of it was pride I think: I didn’t want to go on the council list with two children, and be seen as the typical girl at the time – a young girl with children on the council list. I didn’t want to be stereotyped.

Notwithstanding such exceptions, participants in more deprived and urban areas tended to be matter-of-fact about dependence on social housing and benefits. There was a stronger sense of shame or abnormality in less deprived and more urban areas. One participant in Bournemouth exhibited this anxiety quite acutely:

...my mum has done such a good job, but I feel like I’m the complete opposite to my family sometimes, and like the stigma or the perception of council housing jobs, foul-mouthed

chavs, I go out of the way to be the complete opposite so I'm not classed like that, so people don't look at me and think 'council house' or 'benefits'.

A flipside here is strong opposition among participants in work in less deprived areas to the provision of benefits for members of the community who are out of work. One of our participants in Fareham was especially indignant on this point:

They don't help the people that work, but they help the people that are on drugs or drink or on benefits fully. But what about the ones that are going without because they work?... It's a struggle because of the amount of help they take away when all of a sudden, you had things paid for you, you start getting an income and they say you don't need it no more. But the income's low. My husband takes home £200 a week. We get no help.

In this sense, the pervasive stigma around 'deservingness' reinforces the greater cracks or divisions in the social fabric of less deprived communities, as discussed earlier. As compared with the more deprived areas we looked at, there is still a 'them', but not such a clear or unified 'us' in the construction of local identity.



A 'Gurnays Meader' – Wellow

Nowhere is the extent and effect of this internalised stigma more apparent than in Wellow. Wellow was the non-deprived setting in which our participants exhibited the most obvious sense of place and pride in their community. Participants boasted of long family histories in Wellow, and of a deep network of personal connections across the community.

The pride is very distinctly about Wellow as a larger community, however, and not the Gurnays Mead estate on which our participants lived. In fact, there is a clear social implication to living on a social housing estate amid wealthy retirement and commuter properties. A 'Gurnays Meader' is a label or pigeonhole both that other residents we encountered in our fieldwork would readily use and that the residents of Gurnays Mead tended to use themselves. One explained very clearly – 'I'm not really a Gurnays Meader'—and proceeded to set up this social hierarchy in fairly stark terms:

[People] would say 'don't go up Gurnays Mead' or 'just be wary of people up there.' ... You get people walking down in their pyjamas to the shops and they don't care. And, like, [outsiders] think it's terrible. I just think it's whatever.

But Wellow also exemplified the social division that such stigma can perpetuate. Particularly salient here is the sizeable Irish Traveller community both in properties on the Gurnays Mead estate and in temporary encampments nearby. Traveller communities in England are typically subject to discrimination and localised disputes (see Burchardt et al. 2018) —Gurnays Mead is no exception, and indeed some of our participants reinforced long-standing prejudices in their comments. In part, this is driven by the nature of social dynamics on the estate. Local Travellers are seen to represent a 'community within a community'. But in part it is also driven by resentment that the discrimination and sense of stigma extends to the whole estate. People we met on field sites to the community casually used racial slurs to refer both to the Travellers and to the part of the Estate they were clustered in.



Expectations: Accepting the Odds or Beating the Odds?

The final theme emerging from the fieldwork surrounds expectations. There is compelling evidence that deprivation is a significant handbrake on social mobility and health and life chances across the UK. Our research reveals the complex human side of how the experience of deprivation colours and inflects people's aspirations in practice.

As with our other themes, it is important to begin by acknowledging significant variation across and within each of our settings. There is a spectrum between optimism and pessimism and we encountered individuals at different points of this spectrum in each of our sites. The pattern that emerged, however, was that these expectations tended to be channelled or projected in different ways. In more deprived areas, this spectrum of expectations spans from merely existing, at one end, to beating the odds, at the other; in less deprived areas, aspiration was channelled more in feeling trapped at one end to seeking escape at the other.

In more deprived areas, some of our participants expressed little sense of aspiration or expectation of things getting better. For these participants, the financial strains they and many people they know are under mean that life represents a treadmill of balancing work and family commitments and paying bills. Just getting by is the best they can hope to achieve. One in Chale Green put it this way:

You don't live and you just exist when you're on a low income. It's not living.

Another in Leigh Park was more forthright still:

I would call it bitch! [Laughs] It's the biggest bitch! No, it is. It can be tough making ends meet.

These are two of many pithy remarks among our participants expressing a similar sentiment across the central south coast. And yet some participants in deprived areas were far more optimistic about their own personal aspirations, or at least those for their children and grandchildren. They understand that the odds are stacked against them. But they hold on to hope that they can beat those odds. The vast majority, for instance, expressed earnest faith that their children could succeed with the support of local schools. Our focus group in Chale Green included mothers and grandmothers, and it became obvious in the discussion that education is a priority across the board. One participant explained:

I know statistically, growing up in social housing and in a rural area, that the odds are against her, I appreciate that, but I'm hopeful, because I've got some experience in education and her dad works and she's got a good relationship with him, and I'm hoping that because she's got the right support we can get her into it. I want her to do something really good with her life because she's got this brain, so I don't want her to waste it.

In fact, perceptions of the role of education as a driver of social mobility reflected the key dividing line between optimism and pessimism here, and we dwell more on that below.

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The Engine of Social Mobility

Education has long been regarded as the engine of social mobility. Comparing available open data on our matched suburban or satellite pair of settings reveals a stark contrast. The map for Fareham places it above the national average for Level 4 Qualifications. The map for Leigh Park, however, reveals this area to be among the lowest in the whole of England. Yet the dynamics here are not as simple as suggesting that education is valued in less deprived areas and not valued in more deprived areas. The value individuals place on education reflects their level of optimism about their own future, which is inflected by local conditions.

Figure 4: Map of Education Levels in Fareham LSOA

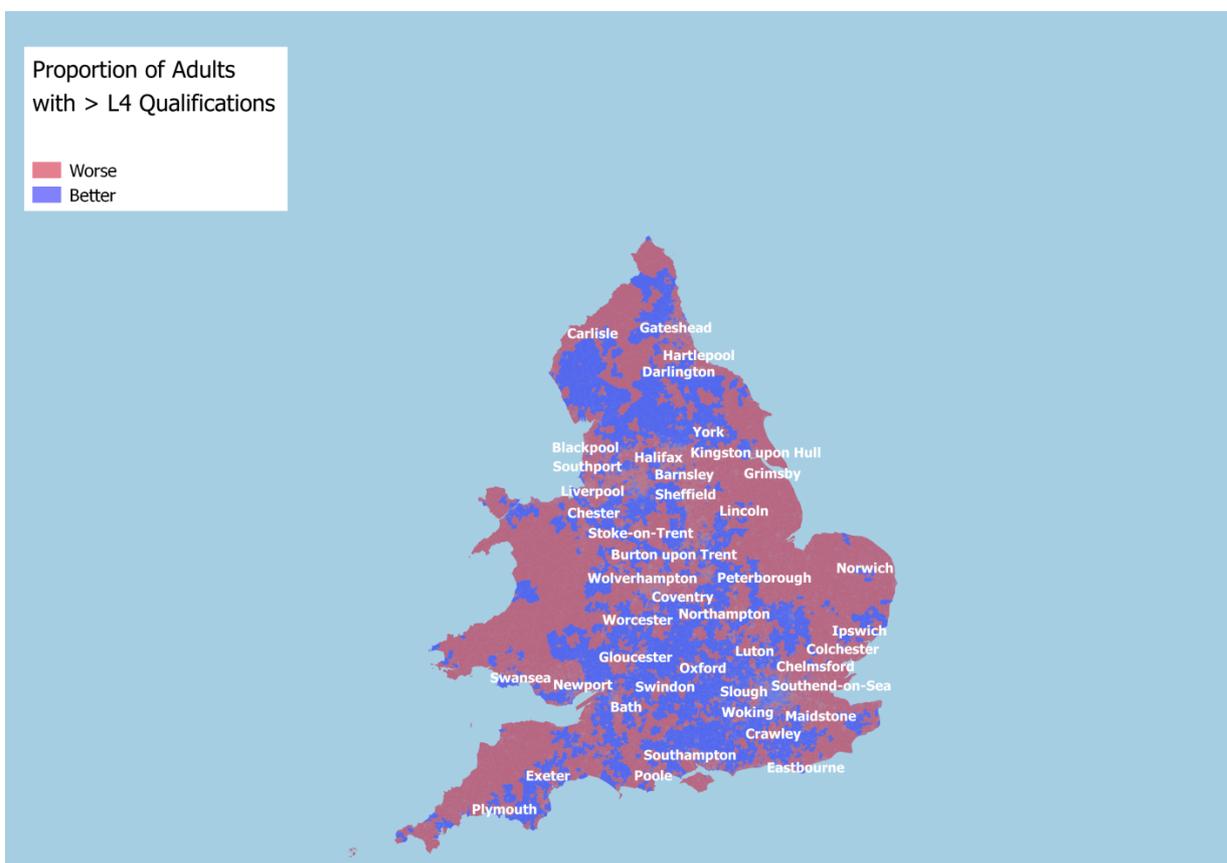


Figure 5: Map of Education Levels in Portsmouth LSOA



For pessimists in our deprived areas, education is symbolic of futile effort and wasted resources that keep their communities down. Take, for example, this sample of discussion from a focus group in Fratton:

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.

I agree. I think the younger generation is going to find it really, really hard.

They do all this higher education and at the end of it they haven't got a job.

They don't get a job. They go to university. My son went to university; he's a taxi driver. He spent like six years. I think the youngsters are going to have a real, real problem in the future.

I think it's sad because all it costs to go through university and really there's nothing at the end.

There's nothing.

In fact, some participants reflected that in their experience the pursuit of education could be actively damaging. A participant in Chale Green put it this way:

Mates of mine, they went all through their GCSEs and exams and all of that, but I didn't do a single thing and I've got nothing at all. But I went to a job that I loved, and I found that some of those couldn't even get a job. They went all through that, college, but I didn't do any of

that... I was working and they weren't, and it was funny, it was weird, because they put so much into their schooling.

Yet an equal number of participants in deprived areas adhere to the opposite view. For them, education is the solution for struggling communities. Most interestingly of all, the Leigh Park parents we spoke to represent the most strident supporters of education in our sample. One mother stressed that she had moved into the area because of the good reputation of local schools, explaining of her son:

I said I'd be happy if you do your exams at school, get good grades and go [on to a good career] because he's got the intelligence to pass exams. He's quite academic like that. So there's no reason why he can't do well ...

Another was more emphatic still, reporting that she tells 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 less deprived places, in contrast, education represents a form of compensation or investment. Good schools, in this sense, are a key trade-off for coping with high rents and high cost of living. One participant in Alresford put it this way:

The school here's got a really good outcome... As I say, I think children are fortunate who live here because of all the facilities.

There are, then, no simple diagnoses but many subtle nuances in the way people living in deprivation view and experience education as an engine of social mobility. We suggest that individual values play a role as much as more proximate environmental stimuli.



Expectations: Escaping or Entrapment?

If expectations in more deprived areas remain channelled and understood locally—either by just getting by or by beating the odds—then our participants in less deprived areas tend to believe getting ahead may depend on getting beyond their current conditions first. In other words, they aspire not to exist or exceed expectations, but to escape.

For optimists, escape is the solution: deprived on the South Coast equals comfortable elsewhere in the country. In this sense, the South Coast's 'hot' housing market provide 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 who are actively plotting their escape put it this way:

It's just got to the point where we can't afford to live down here. And a lot of my friends are in the same boat and a lot of my friends are actually—after we said, 'Oh, we're moving up North'—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, escape can seem impossible. The financial and personal upheaval is not worth the price. These constraints can entrap them in a hopeless context from which they can see but not touch an alternative. One of our Fareham participants, for instance, concluded the interview by fantasising about winning the Lottery:

I wouldn't mind a flat overlooking Lee seafront, over the sea, that's what I would like. ... Yeah, I'm going to win the Lottery. That's what I would like. I walk down there most weeks and I think, 'If I win the Lottery I'm going to have one of those apartments.' [Laughs] That would be my ideal, but that ain't going to happen. I do the Lottery every week! [Laughs]

Perhaps the starkest example, though, is from a participant we spoke to in Bournemouth—one who was not 'objectively' deprived but who responded to our flyers because the project resonates with his experiences and concerns. He explained how a spiral of debt has yoked him to his current hand-to-mouth existence. He cannot afford to leave not just because of inevitable personal and family ties, but because his debts make him dependent on the high income he can only earn on the South Coast:

It seems like we're living in an affluent area but it's all relative. It's not—it's not like we can sell up and be in the money... Relocating anywhere would be difficult, especially after working for somewhere for so long and progressing up the ranks and what have you. Yeah, I'm sure there would be opportunities in other areas but not necessarily in the industry I'm based in. So it's always been a bone of contention that it's kind of an anchor.

Finally, across all our respondents, when asked what they would do if they could get just a little more than enough money to make ends meet the response was near universal: travel somewhere on holiday. Most of our respondents had not travelled for a holiday in many years.

Poverty in the South – The Need for Southern Policy

Our investigations vividly depict that deprivation and hardship is unfortunately alive on the South Coast and we can claim to present an improved understanding of where and how acute concern and interventions should be targeted. The resultant picture of deprivation on the South Coast is complex, manifesting in ways that are not easily tractable for universal policymaking at national level. Nested deprivation in particular does not appear easy to tackle using the broad brush strokes of national policy. An overarching recommendation, then, is that representatives in the region – MPs, Councillors, LEAs and others take regional policymaking for the south very seriously and put in place institutions that can allow effective problem-solving that is bespoke to the circumstances and issues we outline. We have provided a template for the identification of the areas of nested deprivation in the South and an in-depth account of the variance between different types thereof. Policymakers can build on this approach to target efforts aimed at alleviating the problem of the 'never acknowledged' when regions are gazed at through the lens of national statistics.

We turn now, however, 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. We divide

the implications into two types – one set are about what policies need acute attention, the other about how policies are delivered in these contexts. We outline each in turn.

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: Buses, Parking and Car maintenance

Perhaps of greatest surprise, 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. Key here is that transport is so 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, bingo, playgrounds, 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

Rather more predictably, concerns about housing were 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 rent market; 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 up-market 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 casualization and depressed wages in the nascent sectors such as retail, services and old age care left 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](#)).

Perhaps more important than what policies say, however, is how they are interpreted and implemented on the ground – the degree of estrangement, distrust and alienation we encountered suggests that much greater attention needs to be paid to not just what services there are, but how they are delivered.

Delivering effective policy

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

Sensitivity

First and foremost is 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. We were repeatedly told, for example, that claiming benefits was a demeaning and dehumanising experience. In the wake of the rolling Windrush scandal nationally, then, 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. Where alienation has created a gulf in trust between both public and private service providers and communities, influencers will need to think about how to bring these communities back into the fold. 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. Many of our participants have effectively used the internet to get information. But at the same time as online support can be inclusive and enlightening it can be exclusionary and alienating. Targeted communications, and a welcoming invite aimed at establishing the existing funded services that residents could and should avail of is perhaps one of the lowest-hanging fruit on offer to policymakers. 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 it has petered out. Community schemes were abandoned. Local schools closed. Health services 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](#)).

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