

# **Communities in the balance**

**The reality of social exclusion on housing estates**

**David Page**

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# Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction</b>	v
<b>PART 1: THE DEBATE</b>	1
1 The social exclusion debate in the UK	3
2 The welfare debate in the US	8
3 Poor people, poor places	11
4 The research in outline	15
<b>PART 2: LISTENING TO THE EXCLUDED</b>	19
5 Estate life	21
6 Work and welfare	25
7 Families and children	30
8 Education and training	34
9 Crime, vandalism and drugs	37
10 Black groups and 'achievers'	40
11 Joined-up problems	45
<b>PART 3: WIDER PERSPECTIVES</b>	51
12 Joined-up government	53
13 Service providers' perspectives on estate and community life	57
14 Service providers' perspectives on tackling social exclusion	63
15 Community workshops' perspectives on estate and community life	70
16 Community workshops' perspectives on tackling social exclusion	77
17 Different perspectives	82
<b>PART 4: OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	89
18 Excluded communities, isolated neighbourhoods	91
19 Vision, resources, management	100
<b>Bibliography</b>	109
<b>Appendix: Methodology</b>	110



# Introduction

When the New Labour government was elected in May 1997, it set in train a number of new projects that could have an important impact on British social policy and its renewal and modernisation. One was to initiate a comprehensive review of government spending across all spending departments, to evaluate how resources were being used and how they might be better targeted to achieve the new government's objectives. Another was to review the condition of the welfare state and begin its renewal: 50 years on from Beveridge, was it doing the job it was designed to do, or did the profound changes in work and in family life since then require it to change too? Yet a third project, rather different in kind from the first two, but with connections to both, was to set up the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) as a social policy think tank within the Cabinet Office. And a fourth was to start the modernisation of local government, which, despite changes in scale and boundaries, has operated in much the same way for more than a century.

All these projects have important implications for social housing estates and the way they are run. While most estates are good places to live, some have become unpopular places in recent years where only those who most need a home and have no other alternative will accept an offer of housing. These estates already represent a huge financial investment, and many require substantial extra funds to bring them into a good state of repair, but it is difficult to argue the case for further spending on estates where few people would choose to live. And it is not just the worst estates that are causing concern. Over the last 20 years, social housing has increasingly been targeted on those with no other choice of housing, dependent on

means-tested benefits. The process of allocating social housing has grouped together in one place those experiencing poverty and disadvantage who are most vulnerable to social exclusion. It therefore came as no surprise when one of the first tasks given to the new Social Exclusion Unit was an examination of the 'worst' social housing estates.

As part of its own contribution to the debate on social exclusion, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) agreed to fund a programme of qualitative research among those most vulnerable to social exclusion on social housing estates. Beginning in March 1998, a series of discussion groups was held on estates in three very different areas to hear young people, those without work, parents and older people talk about their own experiences of social exclusion. These discussion groups were followed by a round of discussions with front-line public service providers on the same estates about their perceptions of social exclusion and their prescriptions for how it should be tackled. Later, these insights were presented to community workshops in each of the areas, comprising a representative sample of residents living on the estates studied, to see if, with the participation of the local communities, solutions could be developed which the communities themselves would then support.

This is the report of that research and it falls into four main parts.

Part 1 sets the context for the research by outlining the background to the debate now taking place about social exclusion and welfare reform. What is social exclusion? Why do we need to consider reforming welfare? Is work the panacea? Are there lessons we can learn from America?

Part 2 introduces the main themes from the qualitative research. What do those most likely to experience 'social exclusion' think about where they live, about the life chances for their children, about work and welfare, or about crime and drugs? Are things getting better or worse?

Part 3 investigates the perceptions of service providers and the wider community on each estate. How do they differ from those of the socially excluded? Why have the public services allowed social exclusion to develop and what can they now do to tackle it effectively? Is more 'joined-up' government the answer, or is the problem really a lack of resources? What do the communities themselves think are the solutions to estate problems and how prepared are they to get involved in them? This part also considers the changes now being made to the role of local government – to become strategic orchestrators of services, rather than service providers, managed by directly elected Mayors. Are these changes helping councils improve the delivery

of effective services to social housing estates, or making the task of neighbourhood management more difficult as councils continue to withdraw from the direct provision of services?

In conclusion, Part 4 then looks at the findings of the qualitative research in the context of the social policy changes outlined in Part 1 and asks if the strategies of the New Labour government are the best way forward. Does recent Social Exclusion Unit research help to point the way through more 'joined-up' solutions; or is more adequate funding of the welfare state the key to tackling social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal?

This report is intended to contribute to the national debate about disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the role of public services within them. It aims to help policy makers, both at a national and at a local level, and housing practitioners who are engaged in managing social housing estates day to day, to understand better the nature of social exclusion on social housing estates and what can be done about it.

# **Part 1**

## **The Debate**



# 1 The social exclusion debate in the UK

Fifty years on from Beveridge, the welfare state is up for review. Since 1948, huge steps have been taken to keep Beveridge's five giants of idleness, want, ignorance, squalor and disease at bay. There have been substantial improvements in housing conditions, advances in health care and the virtual eradication of absolute poverty through the deployment of the 'safety net' of Beveridgean social policy. There is good evidence that we are better housed, better educated and in better health than 50 years ago. And, with a better quality of life, we also live longer. For most people, the post-war period has meant greater affluence for each generation, and each generation has benefited from the improved living conditions and greater wealth of the one before. But, as these giants have retreated, others have emerged from the shadows, which the Beveridgean welfare state cannot control so effectively.

The welfare state we have now was designed to operate within a very different economic and social context. Full employment for all heads of households was not only an expectation, but also the basis on which the welfare state was devised; Beveridge said 'without full employment, all else is futile'. It was structured around a household type in which a father worked and a dependent family – mother and children – were supported by a family wage. Fifty years on, this model is no longer adequate. The changes in employment and unemployment over the last 20 years, and the radical changes in the pattern of family formation and dissolution, have made Beveridge's model family and the means by which it is supported much less commonplace, and this has placed great strains on the welfare state. More than a quarter of the population is

now reliant on means-tested benefits, which were originally designed to be a temporary and marginal expedient in people's lives. And income inequality, which fell steadily in the first 30 years of the welfare state, rose again sharply throughout the 1980s. Now almost one in five households (compared to only 6 per cent of households in 1977), and one in three children, live beneath the poverty line.

These changes in employment, family structure and income inequality have made the state system of support 'from cradle to grave' more expensive and the case for reform a pressing one.

## The pressure for welfare reform

The rise in inequality during the 1980s created a paradox for the 1990s. How could it be, when the living standards of the majority have got so much better, that the cost of welfare is growing, not falling? And, if absolute poverty has been eradicated, why is the welfare bill so high? Despite the increase in affluence of the majority, insistent questions are now being asked about the cost of maintaining the welfare state.

As living standards continue to rise, so do aspirations: for better housing, education, health care and for an even better standard of living. But, in the climate of the 1990s, aspirations appeared to outrun our willingness to pay higher taxes for a better welfare state, and governments are now looking for new ways to manage and fund it. At the same time, demographic change is also affecting our ability to fund welfare because fertility rates are dropping well below the replacement rate of the population in most of the Western world. Consequently Western democracies are now

faced with ageing populations and worsening ratios of those in work to those who are dependent on them.

In the UK, the USA and countries of the European Union, new ways of structuring and paying for welfare are under consideration, to avoid creating 'perverse incentives' for those dependent on welfare, and to reduce dependency. And new questions are now being asked about the role of the state in sustaining – or in combating – the 'social exclusion' of parts of the population from the mainstream, which increases the cost of welfare and further decreases the number of those funding it as taxpayers.

### What is social exclusion?

Social exclusion is a term that began to be used in the UK only a few years ago, but is now used by government and appears widely in the media. It describes how people can be pushed out of the mainstream of society through the interaction of different factors of disadvantage, including unemployment, single parenthood, poor skills and poverty. One reason for the speed with which it has been taken up may be that it describes a phenomenon that already existed, but lacked a suitable name. There is no single widely accepted definition of social exclusion. Like 'poverty', it is a term that describes a concept that is recognised intuitively, but is much harder to define. So what is it and how is it different from poverty?

When Seebom Rowntree attempted to define 'poverty' in the early part of this century, he did it in absolute terms, as a measure of a subsistence income that would allow a family merely to exist. Since then, it has become

generally accepted that poverty should be measured relative to the society in which it exists and over the years there has been a great deal of debate about how this measurement should be made. Some analysts have priced a 'basket of goods' to set a poverty level, while others have used market research techniques to find out what society at large generally thinks is a reasonable minimum standard of living. The most commonly used current definition of poverty is that used by the European Union: it is a relative measure and is set at half the national average income of the country to which it is applied.

What all these measures have in common is that they are to do with *income* and how it is distributed. Professor Peter Townsend broke new ground in 1979 by proposing a much broader definition of poverty, to be established by investigating ordinary social behaviour and identifying as poor those who could not afford to live in that way. This ordinary behaviour might include, for example, holding a party for a child's birthday, eating a cooked breakfast regularly and one week's family holiday a year. While these elements could be reduced to a money income level, the real focus was on the ability of that family to take part in what was generally regarded as 'ordinary life'.

*Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when ... their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.*  
(Townsend, 1979)

This comes close to the idea of social exclusion: that, through lack of money, or lack of

work – which provides both income and social interaction – or (more controversially) through their behaviour, individuals or families can end up living a life which differs significantly from the mainstream.

In France, former President Mitterand talked of the ‘social exclusion’ of industrial workers who lost not only their jobs, but also their way of life, as well as experiencing a breakdown of traditional workplace ‘solidarity’ when the French economy made its post-industrial switch from manufacturing to service industries. Mitterand made the connection between loss of work and the inability to participate fully in the institutions of society. Here in the UK, Graham Room makes a similar connection in his definition of social exclusion:

*Social exclusion is the process of becoming detached from the organisation and communities of which the society is composed and from the rights and obligations that they embody. (Room, 1995)*

So, social exclusion is about more than just poverty; it is about the effect that lack of income and lack of work have on social relations. It is about the ability to participate in the organisations and communities that make up the very essence of society and so, therefore, it is also about social cohesion. The ability and willingness to participate in society may well depend on resources, which in turn relate back to income and employment, underlining the importance to individuals and communities of the availability of jobs.

Central to the debate on social exclusion is the idea that the adverse social effects of disadvantage are linked: that different factors, such as unemployment, low skills, lone

parenthood and poor housing, interrelate in a spiral of cause and effect. The consequence of this interlinking of cause and effect is that individuals and families can get caught up in disadvantage in ways it is increasingly difficult to escape.

One example of this is the connection between poor educational attainment and single teenage pregnancy. A teenage girl with few or no educational qualifications is statistically much more likely to become pregnant than a girl with better skills and job prospects. A teenage mother without income from a partner or a job is likely to be poor and experience poor housing. A child brought up in poverty and poor housing by a parent with low educational skills is more likely to be disadvantaged educationally, whatever the quality of the local schools.

Similarly, evidence of households being trapped in disadvantage is found in studies of long-term unemployment, with the finding that the longer an individual is unemployed, the less likely they are to obtain employment. A number of explanations have been found for this; long-term unemployment can mean that skills become outdated and it can damage self-esteem; and there is also evidence that the social network of unemployed people tends to be more restricted (to other unemployed people), reducing the likelihood of word-of-mouth recruitment to jobs. Although the causal relationships are hard to disentangle, the overall effect is that of a barrier that perpetuates disadvantage. Former Minister for Welfare Reform Frank Field described it as being like a ‘drawbridge’ that some people find increasingly hard to cross.

One of the early acts of the New Labour

government when it came into office was to set up the Social Exclusion Unit within the Cabinet Office. This unit, whose members are drawn from inside and outside government, is charged with examining different circumstances in which people are vulnerable to social exclusion, and in particular to see whether government social policy could do more to help individuals escape its effect. It defines social exclusion in terms of a process that derives from multiple disadvantage and can affect people *or neighbourhoods*:

*Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998)*

The first three issues to which the Unit was directed – truancy and school exclusions, rough sleepers and the worst housing estates – illustrate the range of the problem: school exclusion is a reliable indicator of low educational attainment and poor employment prospects in later life, so intervention here could profoundly affect a young person's life chances; rough sleepers frequently have needs which span different statutory services (health, housing, employment) which are poorly co-ordinated; and the 'worst' housing estates concentrate disadvantage spatially. A particular concern of the Unit is to get a better understanding of the way different services provided by central and local government interact at a local level, so that services can be designed and co-ordinated to make maximum impact.

Despite the difficulty of lacking a precise

definition, the term 'social exclusion' has certain advantages. Most importantly, it focuses attention on the *process* through which people experience multiple disadvantage, rather than the outcome in terms of any particular social group. This sidesteps much of the argument that has occurred in America about the *causes* of social disadvantage. All sorts of different groups can experience social exclusion for all sorts of reasons. More positively, it encourages the search for ways of intervening in this process, and carries with it the inference that it is the majority, the mainstream, who are doing the excluding, and who therefore have some obligation to act. Crucially, it is a term that has no pejorative implications.

### **Increasing inequality, growing poverty in the 1980s**

The debate on social exclusion in the UK has been given impetus by new evidence that the problems of multiple disadvantage and poverty have increased significantly over the past 20 years. The trend towards greater equality of incomes in Britain, which had persisted over the first 30 years of the welfare state, dramatically changed in 1979. Between then and 1991, average incomes rose by over 40 per cent in real terms, but this increase was not shared equally. The richest tenth of households saw their incomes rise by over 60 per cent, while the poorest tenth saw an actual fall in theirs, once housing costs had been taken into account.

There are a number of reasons why inequality grew in this way over the 1980s. Increased unemployment, rising from 6 per cent to 13 per cent of the workforce, was of course one; but John Hills (1998a) in *Income and Wealth*:

*the Latest Evidence* cites others, including:

- increased wage differentials between those in work
- increased numbers of pensioners, many of whom were reliant on the state pension
- the decoupling of benefits and pensions from earnings
- changes to taxation which reduced its redistributive effect.

A similar trend to greater income polarisation can be seen in the USA and in other European democracies, but in the UK – partly as a consequence of government policy on benefits and tax – the result was much more extreme. International comparisons between indices of income inequality show that the increase in inequality in the UK between 1979 and 1995 was exceeded only by that in the USA. The UK now has a greater differential between the highest and the lowest paid than France, Germany, Italy, Australia and Japan, and its rate of inequality is exceeded only by Austria, Canada and the USA (Hills, 1998a).

The consequence in the UK of increased average earnings combined with greater inequality has been to increase the proportion of

households living below the poverty line, from a 'low' of 6 per cent in 1977 to a 'high' of 20 per cent in 1991/92, settling back to around 19 per cent today. A disadvantage of these statistics is that they represent only a 'snapshot' in time; they don't tell us whether the same people are poor from one year to another, or whether different groups are poor at different times, but only for a short period. However, information now coming out of the British Household Panel Survey, a longitudinal study of incomes and poverty, is beginning to provide an answer. It shows that, while the incomes of poor households did change over time – half of those in the poorest tenth of the population in 1991 had moved up to the second poorest a year later – this movement was short term and short range, and the likelihood was that a household in the poorest fifth of the population would stay there for a considerable period of time. Indeed, the early results from the survey show that over a third of those in the poorest tenth of the population in year one were still there four years later. So, although upward income mobility might provide an escape route from social exclusion for some, the evidence suggests that most poor people in Britain are poor for a long time.

## 2 The welfare debate in the US

Two themes from the welfare debate in the USA have a particular relevance to the social exclusion debate in Britain. One is about where poor people live, the 'poor ghettos' in the seriously deprived inner areas of the great American cities, and the other is about how they support themselves and their families, the 'Welfare to Work' programmes that are replacing federal welfare support for poor families. Over the 1980s and early 1990s, two main social policy analysts in America, representing two very different points of view, gained prominence for their thinking about these issues.

The first of these is Charles Murray. Murray took as his starting point the relationship between the state and the poor, examining the ways in which the financial and other support which the state provides may influence the behaviour of those who receive that support, and in particular may provide 'perverse incentives' to behave in a way of which society at large disapproves (Murray, 1984). The particular example that he often uses is that of lone parenthood; he argues that, because of state welfare, lone parenthood is a rational choice for poor women, who would prefer the security of dependence on the state to the insecurity of dependence on a poorly skilled or unemployed husband. To validate his case, he points to the increase in the numbers of lone parents dependent on benefit.

In Murray's view, the unsatisfactory outcomes that result from this rational choice are many. The women themselves are trapped in benefit dependency, unable to get a job at a rate which would pay for child care; children grow up in poverty, without fathers or other significant male role models; and young men,

who Murray once characterised as 'essentially barbarians, civilised by marriage' remain uncivilised outside the institution of matrimony. So, an 'underclass' grows, with different behavioural and moral norms from the mainstream. These behavioural norms set the 'underclass' apart even from other poor people: as Murray puts it, 'the underclass does not refer to *degree of poverty, but to type of poverty*'.

### A 'cultural' analysis

In 1990, and again in 1994, Charles Murray visited the UK at the invitation of *The Sunday Times* to examine whether there was a British underclass. He decided that an underclass was emerging, characterised by a high and growing rate of births outside marriage; by high unemployment rates especially among young males; and high crime rates. When he revisited, he estimated that between his two visits the underclass had grown in size, and that Britain, though still worryingly complacent about this 'new rabble' within its gates, had begun to take seriously the central issue of the breakdown of the structure of the family which Murray believes to be at the heart of the problem. (Both Murray's essays and a selection of commentaries on them can be found in Lister, 1996.)

Murray has attracted a good deal of criticism, on both sides of the Atlantic. Some of this is concerned with his factual accuracy; it can be shown, for example, that rates of illegitimate births in the US have not followed increases or decreases in welfare spending in Aid to Dependent Children (the American programme that aided lone parents), and that more generous states do not have higher rates of

illegitimacy than less generous states. There is also some suspicion of a political agenda, when social policy arguments are used to justify cuts in welfare spending – Murray’s remedy for the growth of the underclass is to eliminate all welfare benefits for unmarried women.

For many liberal thinkers, the language that Murray uses is difficult to take. Even those commentators who share much of his concern at the breakdown of the traditional family see this as a development that pervades society through all social classes rather than one which defines an underclass: ‘we are one society’ and the remedy must be ‘comprehensive and fair, not divisive and vindictive’ (Melanie Phillips in Lister, 1996).

Despite these criticisms, Murray’s thinking has undoubtedly helped to shape the political agenda in the US, and some elements of the 1996 reforms in the US welfare system are consistent with it. Federal welfare programmes have been devolved to individual states and they have been given greater freedom to set their own rules for spending money on TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families); as the name suggests, they are able to time limit how long families can receive welfare, and they can also limit welfare to a prescribed number of children per family.

### A structural explanation

A different analysis of what is happening among the American poor comes from William Julius Wilson of Harvard University, a former advisor to President Clinton. The focus of his work has been the people – mainly black – living in the poor areas of American cities especially in the North and East, those he

originally called the ‘underclass’ but later came to call the ‘ghetto poor’. While he agrees with Charles Murray about the social characteristics of this group, whose ‘behaviour contrasts with the mainstream’, Wilson argues that it is not this behaviour that creates the ‘ghetto poor’, but rather the profound structural change that has taken place in the employment market.

His primary argument is that:

- the US has seen a radical shift from a manufacturing to a service economy
- service industry jobs are less accessible to those living in the inner city, and demand higher skills and qualifications than manufacturing jobs used to
- as a consequence young black males in the inner cities have no work; and
- their numbers are swelled by internal migration from the South to the North.

Wilson goes on to argue that the problems of increasing unemployment and poverty in the inner city have been made worse by the exodus of middle class and ordinary working class people from the inner city. The consequence, he believes, has been the loss of spending power and therefore of shops and leisure activities; and also the weakening of institutions such as the churches and voluntary organisations which provided structures and alternative role models for young people growing up in the inner cities. The growth of lone parenthood he sees as an understandable response by young women to the growth of unemployment among young males, which renders them undesirable as marriage partners.

Since Wilson published *The Truly*

*Disadvantaged* in 1987, further research has borne out the detail of his primary argument: census and other data have been examined to show that, in the US, there are more 'poor areas' than before, black people are over-represented, there has been a decline in manufacturing jobs and an increase in service jobs, and service industry employers are requiring higher qualifications. Wilson's conjecture about the turnover of population in inner city areas leading to the loss of facilities, institutions and social stability is less easy to prove, but is consistent with observation.

An important dimension of Wilson's concern is with the interaction of factors of disadvantage in a particular neighbourhood – a 'neighbourhood' or 'concentration' effect which intensifies the pressures on the households who live there. In *When Work Disappears* (1996), he uses poor areas in Chicago as a case study to explore further how areas become poor, how they lose employment and the consequences for children growing up there in a culture of joblessness.

One important aspect of the work of Wilson and Murray is the large measure of agreement between them about what is happening in the ghetto areas of American cities. Where they

disagree is over what has caused this to happen and what should be done about it. The importance of Wilson's approach in the 'underclass debate' is that he offers a *structural* explanation for concentrations of disadvantage – the loss of work – to set against Murray's *cultural* explanation – the behaviour and morality of the poor. As to what should be done about it, Wilson wants better and more effective government intervention to counter the effects of joblessness, Murray wants less intervention, and preferably none at all, so that jobless people are forced to find work to support themselves and their families.

While Murray and Wilson take different approaches, the underclass debate itself has focused attention in the US on the overall outcomes of social policy, and the way in which the interaction of different policies can affect individuals and communities. The same appreciation of the larger consequences of detailed policy decisions can be seen emerging in the social exclusion debate in the UK and, while social exclusion is a European concept, the debate about it in Britain has been considerably influenced by the American debate about the 'underclass' and the US Welfare to Work programmes.

## 3 Poor people, poor places

The work of Wilson and Murray has many resonances in Britain in the debate about social exclusion and the regeneration of deprived areas. While there are significant differences between the tax and welfare systems in Britain and America, the social and economic drivers of the ghettoisation process in American cities have their counterparts in Britain, and the outcome in terms of the attitude and behaviour of Wilson's 'ghetto poor' has echoes in the deprived housing estates and neighbourhoods here.

The same global economic forces that hit blue collar workers in the USA also led to the industrial restructuring in Britain that lost three million blue collar jobs here in the 1980s. Here, too, our economy has seen a radical shift from manufacturing to service industry, generating a problem for young men who left school with few, if any, qualifications, poorly equipped for higher skill or knowledge based work. And here, too, there has been a steady drift of able populations away from the old industrial areas (particularly in the North) in search of jobs, and away from deprived estates and urban neighbourhoods in search of better homes in safer suburban areas with less crime and better schools.

### Social housing estates

In the US, the mechanism of internal migration kept topping up ghetto areas with a constant supply of jobless from the South. In Britain, the process has been different. Here, tenant selection processes for social housing have filled empty homes on social housing estates with new households in which only one in four household heads has a job. If the ghetto areas of

the great American cities took the main impact of economic restructuring in America, social housing estates and deprived neighbourhoods did the same in Britain. The collapse of household incomes in social housing tells the story. In 1979, a quarter of the households with the highest 40 per cent of incomes lived in social housing; by 1994 this had dropped to less than 5 per cent. Meanwhile, the proportion of social housing tenants at the bottom end of the income scale grew, from only half in the lowest 40 per cent of incomes in 1979 to well over three-quarters by 1994 (from General Household Survey data in Hills, 1998b). And the average income of households living in social housing fell over ten years from three-quarters of the national average in 1980 to less than half (below the European Union poverty threshold) by 1990.

So, in Britain too, albeit through different mechanisms to the US, the growth in inequality and rise in poverty that followed de-industrialisation is spatially concentrated in social housing estates and deprived neighbourhoods of towns and cities. Unlike America, where public housing projects have long been among the poorest, it came as something of a shock in 1996 to find that in Britain more than half the homes in the most deprived 10 per cent of census enumeration districts were owned by local authorities and housing associations (DoE, 1996). When the Social Exclusion Unit began looking at the intractable 'wicked problems' of long-term unemployment, poverty, high crime rates and poor schools, social housing estates were a good place to start because half of the problem could be found concentrated in these areas.

The American welfare debate and European thinking on social exclusion have both

significantly influenced the new British government thinking on welfare reform. In a synthesis of these strands of thought, the government is now seeking positive ways of tackling social exclusion through two main strategies:

- reforming welfare
- neighbourhood renewal.

### Tackling social exclusion by reforming welfare

Reform of the tax and benefit systems holds the promise of constraining growth in welfare spending while at the same time making a serious attempt to help as many people as possible escape from poverty. To achieve this, the government wants to 'bend' existing spending programmes away from ameliorating the effects of poverty, towards the prevention and cure of that condition by helping poor people support themselves through earnings gained from work. As in Europe, the focus is on those who are socially excluded; as in America, the approach is about managing the transition from welfare to work with a special emphasis on preventing new claimants from becoming attached to benefit.

The first public manifestation of the new approach appeared as the New Deal for work, initially targeted at young people under 25 years of age, closely followed by the New Deal for lone parents, again a programme to help claimants support themselves through work. An important aim of both programmes is to prevent new claimants from becoming dependent on benefit, or less ready for work through time spent in unemployment, by helping them find

work or training when they first come to sign on, an approach that has been pioneered successfully in the USA. The New Deal is now being extended to older claimants, including the long-term unemployed.

Providing fiscal support for these programmes, Chancellor Gordon Brown has made constraining welfare spending through getting jobless adults back into the labour force a consistent focus of his budgets. To do this, he uses a stick and carrot approach. Working Families Tax Credit helps to make work pay, while staying on unemployment benefit or income support is not an option for fit young men capable of working. Economically inactive single mothers, too, are being encouraged to take a job by tax credits and an allowance for child care. For those capable of working who have families, the Welfare to Work programme deals directly with poverty by putting more money into their pay packets once they get a job. Subsidising low paid employment for jobseekers in this way promises to achieve a number of worthwhile aims: it supports employment, rather than unemployment; it makes taking a low paid job an option for people with families to support who otherwise would have been better off on benefit; and it makes a psychological link between being better off and being in work.

Work is seen to be the key, not just to reducing the cost of welfare, but also to tackling social exclusion. There are good arguments that getting a job is not just a way of providing an income and supporting a family. If becoming detached from the labour market is a cause of social exclusion, then getting jobless people back into the workforce not only tackles poverty but also makes connections with mainstream

society and its rules, rights and obligations. Having a job provides a structure to the day, week and year, and a place to meet and interact with people other than family and neighbours.

It is further argued that reducing joblessness could also help to bring about a change to the deprived neighbourhoods where poor people live. To sociologist William Julius Wilson, there was a qualitative difference between the old poor working class districts in American cities that existed up to the 1970s and the unemployed ghettos that are there now. The difference was jobs. Areas can be poor, but still a good place to live, but few people choose to live in an area with a high level of joblessness.

The reason for this, according to Wilson, is that 'High rates of joblessness trigger other neighbourhood problems that undermine social organisation, ranging from crime, gang violence and drug trafficking to family break-ups and problems in the organisation of family life' (Wilson, 1996). A formidable list of problems, all of which have been associated in recent times with the new urban poverty in social housing and deprived areas in Britain. However, nobody really knows whether this process can be reversed, and if reducing the rate of joblessness will also reduce crime, drugs, family break-ups and all the other neighbourhood problems.

### Tackling social exclusion through neighbourhood renewal

The second government strategy to tackle social exclusion is to deal with the effect that lack of income and lack of work have had on social relations in the most deprived communities and neighbourhoods. While the Chancellor's reform of the tax and benefit system attacks poverty

directly by getting more money to individuals and families through work, a second group of policies championed by the Prime Minister Tony Blair is targeted at the renewal of neighbourhoods and the communities who live there. Thus, both aspects of social exclusion – poverty and the lack of an inclusive local social infrastructure – will be tackled simultaneously in programmes designed to benefit both individuals and communities vulnerable to exclusion.

This second set of programmes has been developed by the Social Exclusion Unit after two years of intensive consultation and policy development. The brief for this programme was outlined by the Prime Minister in his introduction to the SEU report *Bringing Britain Together: a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (SEU, 1998) in which he identified two main goals:

- to bridge the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest of Britain
- in all of the poorest neighbourhoods, to reduce crime and joblessness, and improve health and educational attainment.

These goals will be achieved through the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2000), the framework for which is built upon four principles:

- reviving local economies
- reviving communities
- ensuring decent services
- leadership and joint working.

### Reviving local economies

Because of the relationship between joblessness

and social exclusion, it is important to address the high rates of unemployment and economic inactivity that exist in deprived neighbourhoods. The government's Welfare to Work programme is seen as an integral part of neighbourhood renewal but more can be done through schemes which prepare jobless people to become 'work ready' and by establishing better links with labour markets in work rich areas elsewhere. Local retail strategies could also help to encourage shops and services back into deprived areas and new business activity could also generate local jobs.

### Reviving communities

Excluded communities threatened by crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour are often those that also lack social organisation. Membership of, and participation in, local institutions helps to create the social networks essential for effective informal social control. By tackling the threat of crime and anti-social behaviour, and by developing local institutions, communities can be helped to take control of their own neighbourhoods and foster better social relationships.

### Ensuring decent services

The welfare state at a local level is not working well. Mainstream public services like schools, health, housing and employment are often worse in the poorest areas, where they should be the government's main agencies to counter deprivation. To raise the standard and improve the effectiveness of core public services in deprived areas, the government proposes to set *outcome* targets – better health, less crime, more

jobs, better educational attainment – which will be implemented locally through partnership working between government departments, local authorities and other service providers.

### Leadership and joint working

Central to the renewal strategy is the idea that social exclusion requires a co-ordinated and coherent response from service providers and that this will mean public agencies working together in new ways at all levels – from a central focus in Whitehall, through regional co-ordination to local strategic partnerships and integrated neighbourhood management. All this will be supported by better information, including an accessible national database of neighbourhood statistics and evidence of 'what works'.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is an ambitious and far-reaching programme. Taken together with the Welfare to Work reforms, it comprises an impressive two-pronged attack on poverty and social exclusion. But will it all work? What do jobless people feel about being reinserted into the labour market? And what are the barriers for them getting a job, particularly in the old industrial areas where traditional industries have closed? Since less than one-fifth of Britain's poor live in the families of the unemployed, will the Welfare to Work approach make any serious dent in the problem of poverty? Most of all, will measures like those proposed in the National Strategy make a serious difference to the problems on the worst housing estates and in the most deprived neighbourhoods?

## 4 The research in outline

The first part of this report has summarised the debate on social exclusion and government initiatives for tackling it. The last chapter ended by posing a series of questions. To find the answers to these questions, and others, about the nature of social exclusion, the JRF funded a programme of qualitative social research focused on socially isolated communities living in deprived council estates in three different areas. Each of the areas chosen is typical of other areas adversely affected by the impact of economic restructuring. The characteristic features of the areas relevant to this research are described below. To preserve the anonymity of the estates, and of the respondents who took part in this research, the names of the estates and the areas in which they are situated have been given a fictitious identity, but the descriptions of the estates and their surrounding areas are real. This chapter profiles the study areas and outlines the research objectives and design.

### A profile of the areas

The first study area was an estate in *Coalton*, which is an old mining area in the Yorkshire coalfield. The areas hardest hit by the de-industrialisation of the 1980s were traditional manufacturing, ship building, mining and port areas which had a high proportion of blue-collar workers, a large number of them living in estate-based council housing. Coalton is typical of these areas where work disappeared over a ten-year period. The main industry was coal mining and there were 20 working pits near Coalton in the 1980s. Now there is just one and it has been privatised. Work was at the centre of this local community: mining provided not just

a place of work, but most social life was organised around it. Although work was hard, wages were good and the area attracted workers from other parts of the country. When coal mines in Scotland were closed, miners were encouraged to come to the Coalton area to work in new pits which had 'enough coal to last a hundred years'. Now, after the pit closures, the Scottish workers and their families have returned to Scotland, leaving behind an estate with boarded-up houses and few shops. The buses which once served this and other coal communities to take miners to work and their families to shop now run no more. Despite the enterprise of the local authority and its success in attracting service and distribution industry into the area, the old mining communities around Coalton seem deeply scarred, not just by the debris left behind by the coal industry (now being cleared and cleaned up by the council and English Heritage), but by the loss of a way of life. Children now play football on playing fields reclaimed from the pit heads where their fathers used to work.

*Thames Green* is the name given to an estate in a London borough in which the second study area is located. The estate was built by the former Greater London Council to accommodate households from slum clearance areas close to the river. Many of the men in these households worked in the London docks: the tough nature of this work and the men who did it gave the estate a reputation for roughness, which it has never lived down. When the docks closed, after freight handling shifted to container terminals, the employment base for the estate switched to service industry. Jobseekers on the estate now look for jobs in the wider London labour market, but the estate is

isolated and the transport links to central London, though regular, are slow. Because most of the homes on the estate are walk-up flats, only a small proportion of tenants have exercised the right to buy and middle income households have tended instead to leave the estate to buy in the private sector elsewhere. The estate is multi-racial in a borough that has given a home to a large number of refugees and asylum seekers, and works hard to develop its multi-cultural identity.

The third study area estate is in *Barminster*, a generally prosperous city that reflects the economic progress, and the problems, of the 1990s. The closure of a major engineering works created blue-collar job losses in an industry which had been a traditional employer of labour from the nearby council estates. In its place, the city attracted service industries and the relocation of government offices. The council itself is now the largest single employer in the city. So, while job opportunities increased for jobseekers with skills and qualifications, and the unemployment rate for the city as a whole is low, job opportunities for the less skilled in Barminster have diminished and there are pockets of poverty amidst a general pattern of hard-working prosperity. The study estate comprises traditionally built houses and there has been a relatively high take-up of the right to buy. This has not made the estate a more affluent area, but rather a mixed tenure area in which relatively low income owners live alongside low income tenants. The estate is well kept by the council, with lots of green space and a community centre. Despite being 'poor', the estate appears the least deprived of the three.

### Research objectives and research design

The broad research objectives were to:

- explore the nature of social exclusion and identify its causes
- gauge front-line providers' perceptions of social exclusion and their views of possible solutions for 'worst estate' residents
- compare and contrast the views, attitudes and aspirations of groups vulnerable to social exclusion with those of the wider estate communities
- explore the nature of the relationships between individuals and service providers
- identify practical solutions to the problems facing social housing estate residents
- investigate new institutional forms that might improve individuals' access to services.

The main focus of the research was the nature of social exclusion, its causes and its consequences, in deprived neighbourhoods. Since most of the literature on social exclusion takes a top-down, 'looking in from the outside' approach, it was decided to choose research methods capable of getting inside the problem, by giving those vulnerable to social exclusion, and the front-line service providers who deal with it, an opportunity to describe their experience and views in their own words in discussion groups (focus groups). These were supplemented by informal interviews with front-line staff unable to attend the discussion

groups, and subsequently by meetings with local authority senior managers who gave an initial response to the research findings.

The research was carried out in three consecutive phases between March 1998 and November 1999.

- *Phase 1: listening to the excluded* concentrated on groups in all three areas who were vulnerable to social exclusion. Extended discussion groups were held on each estate (the detailed composition of the groups is set out in the Appendix). These discussions explored the respondents' views and attitudes to a variety of issues related to social exclusion including living on a poor estate, unemployment and welfare, families and children, education, crime and drugs. A total of 17 discussion groups were held: four each at Barminster and Coalton, and eight more at Thames Green where separate discussion groups (four each) were held for white and black residents in order to compare and contrast their perceptions. Additionally, at Thames Green, a mixed race 'achiever' discussion group of working residents was held in order to cross-check their perceptions against those of the socially excluded groups. (The views of non-excluded residents were further explored in the community workshops).
- *Phase 2: the service providers' perspective* was obtained from extended group discussions held with public service providers involved day to day with residents on each estate. The front-line staff who participated included youth and community workers, housing and

social workers, health workers, teachers and police officers, and employment service providers. The objectives of the Phase 2 discussion groups were, first, to obtain the views of front-line public service providers about the problems associated with social exclusion; and, second, to explore with them some possible solutions.

- *Phase 3: the whole community perspective* comprised three day-long community workshops (one on each estate) with local residents recruited to include a cross section of each estate in terms of employment status, age, gender and length of residence. At Thames Green, white, black and ethnic minority residents were included. The day-long workshops were used to compare the Phase 1 perspectives of residents vulnerable to social exclusion with the views of each wider estate community; and to explore with them the possible ways forward identified by the front-line service providers in Phase 2.

The findings from Phase 1 are reported in Part 2 of the report, and the findings from Phases 2 and 3 in Part 3. With the consent of the participants, all the discussion groups were recorded, allowing the respondents' own words to be used where appropriate in this report to articulate their views. Within this report, a résumé of the group discussions in each phase is presented, followed by analysis and comment. Quotations from respondents are used liberally in the report, both to illustrate a general point and to give an insight into the experience of living or working in a neighbourhood in which social exclusion is a reality.



# **Part 2**

## **Listening to the Excluded**



## 5 Estate life

This part of the report sets out the findings from the first phase of the research, which concentrated on residents in all three areas who were vulnerable to social exclusion. Employment status was taken as the main indicator of social exclusion, and all respondents had either been unemployed for at least six months or were economically inactive. Four extended discussion groups were held on each estate (the detailed composition of which are set out in the Appendix). These discussions explored the respondents' views and attitudes to a variety of issues related to social exclusion including living on a poor estate, unemployment and welfare, families and children, education, crime and drugs. The findings from these groups are reported in this chapter and Chapters 6 to 9; and Chapter 10 reports the findings from the black African and African Caribbean, and 'achievers' discussion groups.

### Different places, similar problems

When the research was being planned, it was expected that opinions and attitudes might be differentiated according to age, gender, marital status, position in the household, and whether or not the respondent is a parent. It was also thought that there might be differences because of location, between London and elsewhere, between urban and rural districts, or between areas with predominantly industrial, as opposed to service, jobs. In the event, the results confounded expectations because similar problems, issues and attitudes were found in all three areas and spanned differences in age, gender and marital status, though not always between different generations.

Respondents in all three areas reported a broadly similar experience of high neighbourhood crime and vandalism, significant levels of drug trafficking, low educational attainment and expectation, high proportions of households dependent on benefit, family break-ups, parenting problems and disaffected youth. Data collected by the local authorities about social conditions in the three areas served to confirm these perceptions. But, in other ways, estate residents vulnerable to social exclusion did not see their estates as others did: for instance, they did not perceive high rates of joblessness or disrepair on the estate as significant problems, nor did they see themselves as 'poor' or in any way socially isolated. Instead, most people seemed fairly content with where they lived and their main problems were concerned with their relationships with others who also lived there – their family, friends and neighbours – rather than their relationship with their physical environment or the world outside the estates.

Many people in all three areas found their own estate a friendly place to live. Some had three generations of their family living there, others just parents or grandparents; they felt they had roots on the estate and that their community was close knit:

*Families have been here a long time. My gran lives here and all her kids were born here. Everyone knows everyone else.*

*We're a very close family. Dad was one of 16 and they are all on the estate. We all see each other.*

Older people had many happy memories of life as it used to be on the estate with trusted neighbours, a sense of mutual responsibility and

many long-standing friendships. Young people felt that they had a lot of friends on the estate and that 'everyone is in the same boat together'. For them, lack of work had its compensations because all their friends were around to spend time together during the day.

### Connectedness

Respondents were asked to describe a typical day in their lives, starting with the time they got up, what they did at breakfast time – for instance, did they read a paper, listen to the radio, watch television – and so on through the day. They were also asked where they might go in a typical day. The aim was to establish patterns in their activities and in their travels in order to find how well connected they were to the world outside their estates – by personal contact, through the media, or by meeting others who were themselves better connected.

The general pattern, but with variations between the estates and between age groups, was that most respondents spent much of their time within the estate and its immediate environs: at home, with friends, shopping locally – 'five minutes to shops – butcher and betting office' – or using the estate facilities. Estate life was therefore important to most respondents because it occupied such a large part of their lives; and they seemed content with this: 'there is no need to go anywhere. You have everything you need in Coalton'. Friends and social contacts were mostly others from the estate; many also had their families living locally. Social networks appeared to be largely estate based.

Of the three estates, the one at Thames Green was less inward looking than the others because

it offered relatively easy access to life outside for anyone wanting it – better shops, a wider variety of social life – and young people in particular made use of the better leisure facilities off the estate. Also, fewer respondents at Thames Green had other members of their family living on the estate (although a number did), but they still spent much of their time with friends and neighbours locally. Older people, because their sons and daughters had been unable to obtain a home for themselves on the estate, had a reason to travel further afield to visit them; even so, much of their time was spent at home or with neighbours and friends from the estate.

Pensioners seemed altogether better connected than others to the world outside the estates. They were more likely to use public facilities like parks, libraries, health centres and community centres; they used concessionary travel on public transport to get about; and they kept up with the news on radio and television and by reading newspapers. Other age groups seemed less well informed, less familiar with news and current affairs, less likely to read books or newspapers. As an illustration of this, some of the focus groups were held at the time the 1998 budget was delivered but, in a week when the media was crammed with public debate about the budget announcements on welfare reform, little of it seemed to have got through to the people most affected: young people did not know about the New Deal for work; and most low income parents had not got the message that Working Families Tax Credit would offer help to people like themselves.

So how well connected were the respondents from the three estates? Older people seemed to be most in touch with the world outside

through personal contact and by keeping up with the news in the media. Young jobless people and parents of school-age children were most isolated in Coalton, least isolated in Thames Green, but generally seemed not well connected to networks and news in the world outside their estate. The general picture was one of inward-looking communities whose members spent much of their time within the estate where they lived and its local environs, and had social contacts mainly with people from the same area.

### Estate problems

For children and young people growing up there, and for economically inactive or unemployed adults who are at home for most of the day, it seems that the estate is a more important place than the world beyond it. Most respondents identified strongly with their estate and had positive feelings about their own homes and the built environment in which they lived. But, when they were asked to identify the negative aspects of estate life, a long list of social problems flooded out – family breakdown, neighbour disputes, drug abuse and trafficking, violence, crime, vandalism, disaffected youth, gangs, nothing for bored teenagers to do. When they were asked what could be done to make things better, what they would change, there were few constructive suggestions. Everyone felt something should be done for older children and teenagers, but most had no idea what that might be. The teenagers themselves had high (but unrealistic) expectations of what their local council should provide – an ice rink on the estate, a motor car rally track, with cars and motor bikes supplied. Older people felt that

what was most needed was a change in parents' attitudes to raising their children.

Most striking was the lack of confidence that anything could be done to make things better. There was a sense that people felt individually powerless to make things change, and they were sceptical that anyone else could.

Even if improvements were made, nobody expected them to last:

*They've tried to make the place nice, but it just doesn't work.*

*We could go and clean it up, but it would be wrecked tomorrow. It's not worth our time.*

*If it was nicer, people might treat it nicer. No, somebody will always trash the place.*

### The estate effect

This combination of a recognition that serious social problems exist, a feeling of powerlessness to do anything about it, and a lack of confidence that anyone else could, may have contributed to the feeling of apathy that ran through many of the focus groups. It's a waste of time to worry over things that can't be changed. Instead, there is an acceptance of many things that most people on the estate feel should not be tolerated – like drug dealing and the disturbance and violence that accompany it, vandalism, teenage gangs and crime. And there is a feeling that those who challenge these things get little support and may find themselves or their family threatened:

*I keep myself to myself. If I report anything, my kids get picked on.*

Social conformity can produce perverse

results in a close-knit community where there is a toleration of aberrant behaviour. Informal social control is difficult to exercise without consensus, and with little social organisation, antisocial or delinquent behaviour is likely to go unchallenged. It then becomes difficult for parents to instil positive social values in their children when there is peer group pressure to behave like everyone else. Unsocial behaviour is much more likely to be copied when everyone else is doing the same; more so when public authorities and social organisation seem powerless to prevent it. The focus groups of young people provided evidence of the power of peer group pressure: 'I started stealing cars to be part of the crowd'. If you live in a difficult area, one strategy for personal survival and acceptance is to do what your friends do, even if the wider community disapproves or feels threatened by it.

Many parents were concerned about the effect that living on the estate was having on their children. In particular:

- they felt their children were likely to get sucked into delinquency or substance abuse
- there was a culture of low attainment that discouraged making an effort at school and mocked educational success

- job expectations and career aspirations were low
- crime presented a lucrative alternative lifestyle to work – there was no shortage of young men willing to show new recruits how to hot-wire a car or deal drugs.

Faced with this, some parents developed strategies of deliberate social isolation to limit their child's contact with other children from the estate, and to encourage and help develop contacts with children living in other areas. Other parents, similarly concerned, felt it would be impossible to restrict the activities of their children in this way and, for them, moving away from the estate was the favoured option. Many parents felt that their children stood little chance of getting a good education unless they moved out of the area, but recognised that there was little likelihood they would be able to do so. The 'estate effect' influences the attitude of respondents to welfare, work, crime, drugs and education. The following chapters explore the focus group responses to these issues in greater detail.

## 6 Work and welfare

One main focus of the study was the experience, attitudes and behaviour of young people in relation to the group of issues that feature as factors of social exclusion. All of the young people in the focus groups were aged between 16 and 24 and were unemployed or economically inactive (in the case of lone parents) at the time of the group discussions. Their experience of work varied: some had not done any kind of work since leaving school; others had held casual jobs for a brief period; a few were undergoing training; most were in receipt of some kind of benefit. Issues of work and welfare were also raised in the groups of parents and older people, and their responses related both to themselves and to how their sons and daughters, and other young people living on the estate, might be affected.

### Barriers to employment

Most jobless young people acknowledged that there were jobs to be found but felt that there were real barriers that prevented taking them, including the following.

- *Eligibility:* most job vacancies in the papers and at the job centre require experience, skills and qualifications that they did not have.
- *Low pay:* most of the vacancies for which they might be eligible paid very low wages so that, when travel costs and meals were taken into account, they would be no better off in work than out of it.
- *Short-term work:* much of the work on offer was insecure, short-term work

which would mean coming off, and returning to, benefit. Because there is a waiting time after employment ceases before unemployment benefit can commence, short periods of work would mean longer periods with neither pay nor benefit, and so taking short-term jobs was not considered worthwhile.

- *Travel time:* jobs were available in labour markets elsewhere, but the travel time by public transport could add considerably to the working day.
- *Type of work:* some of the jobs on offer were not only low paid but also boring or demeaning (like washing up in hotels or cleaning).
- *Bad references:* some applicants had a bad work record, quitting jobs or getting sacked, or a criminal record which stood against them in getting work.
- *Work doesn't pay:* some felt that any job they were likely to get would not pay enough to make working worthwhile.
- *Risk to benefit:* some, particularly lone parents, felt that taking any job would threaten their entitlement to benefit.
- *Child care:* where lone parents wished to work they cited the non-availability and cost of good child care as a barrier.

This is an impressive list of barriers for unemployed young people. The older age groups added another: any job they were likely to get would not bring in enough money to meet their needs, unlike the benefit system where financial support is geared to needs. A

breadwinner with a family to support needs more money to survive than a single person living at home. In the labour market they must compete for the same jobs at the same rates of pay, while if they are not at work, the benefit system provides each with a different income related to their different needs. In a labour market that increasingly requires higher levels of knowledge and skill, household heads with few skills, or skills that are no longer valued (like ex-miners) find there is no work available to them that would pay enough to meet their needs, so any job they take is likely to pay less than they would receive on benefit. (Since the focus groups were held, the government has begun to address this issue through the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit scheme which adds, in effect, a second pay packet to bridge the gap between earnings and needs for those on low pay who have a family to support.)

### Attitudes to work

In many young unemployed men who had never worked, low morale, lack of motivation and a generally low level of aspiration were apparent, all widely recognised effects of lack of attachment to the labour force. Their main feeling was of resignation and apathy: 'we've been on the dole so long it's hard to get back into the swing of things, so you end up sleeping all day' (21-year-old male). Some members of this group did not feel they had a responsibility to work, nor did they see any value in work other than as a source of income.

A marked difference in attitudes to work was apparent in young people with a family background of stronger labour force attachment.

Those whose parents, usually fathers, were working, or had worked for most of their lives, tended to have different, more positive attitudes to work. They were more likely to:

- express real interest in work
- currently be doing some work, or have worked in the past
- have realistic expectations of the sort of jobs they could get
- have a greater sense of a responsibility to work and a duty to stick at it
- feel that being in any job was more likely to lead to better work
- be prepared to undertake training and invest the time required
- recognise that earning money is not the only benefit of working.

But these young people with a more positive attitude to work were not helped by the estate culture, which is clearly not conducive to seeking work. Most of them had friends 'in the same boat' who appeared content to live on benefit.

In between these two extremes there was a third group who wanted to work but needed help and encouragement. Some had tried, taking the only jobs available – ones they clearly did not relish – and had not stuck with it: 'I got a job as a washer up at a hotel. I did it for one day and then walked out'. Others identified a career they wished to follow but did not want to start at the bottom: 'I want to be a hairdresser, but I'm not going to sweep up the hair all day'. And others still clearly needed much more guidance, direction and encouragement about

how to prepare themselves for careers for which they had an interest but no training or qualification. There were a number of young men who wanted the kind of work their fathers used to do, particularly in Coalton (coal mining). That work was now gone, but they still wanted 'manly' work in which their main marketable attribute – muscle power – was valued. Some spontaneously raised joining the army as a possible alternative career.

Only a few unemployed young people appeared to recognise the benefits of having a job for reasons other than money, like self-esteem, building self-confidence, independence and stimulation:

*You get self-esteem and self-confidence if you work.*

*My partner is only £25 a week better off by working for a 40-hour week, but she feels much better in herself for working.*

### Lone parents

Lone parents on benefit generally wanted to be allowed to continue to look after their children at least until they reached school age. Some young mothers who had only one or two children at the moment saw themselves training for a job when their children went to school. Many lone mothers were anxious about the prospect of transferring from welfare to work. They saw the benefit system as providing an income which was not generous, but secure. Lone mothers who had young children felt strongly that taking a job would be taking a risk in two respects: first, their children might not get the love and care they needed from a childminder; and, second, their income from

work could be insufficient and insecure.

*People feel much more secure when they're on Income Support. If they go to work, they have to find money for so many things like Council Tax, rent, dentist, prescriptions, school uniform, school meals. They will be much worse off if they have to go to work.*

Lone parents with several children were also concerned that work would not pay because there was a gap between what they could earn in the labour market and what they needed to support their family, and so they would not be able to earn enough to compensate them for loss of benefit:

*I've got no qualifications so I'll never be able to earn much. I'd be much worse off if I had to come off benefit. I'd need £250 a week take home pay to make it worth while working.*

There was concern about the quality of child care available and this was sufficient to deter some single mothers from seeking work until their children were old enough to go to school. Others, however, were interested in getting a job and they saw two barriers:

- they needed to be sure they would be left no worse off by making the transition from welfare to work
- a prerequisite would be reliable, trustworthy and affordable child care provision.

### Making ends meet

Anyone living on benefit for a long time has few opportunities to raise additional income through legitimate work. Short-term work, if it

is declared, can lead to suspension of benefit, so there is an incentive not to declare it. Some unemployed or economically inactive respondents in all three areas admitted working short term or part time in the informal economy in order to make ends meet. Some did seasonal work in hotels and restaurants in support of tourism for 'cash in hand'; others did more regular part-time evening work behind the bar in pubs or clubs.

In Barminster, there was seasonal cash-in-hand work in hotels and restaurants:

*I work as a waitress cash in hand.*

In Coalton, where there was less opportunity for casual work, there appeared to be a much higher incidence of people claiming sickness, invalidity or disability benefit, some as a consequence of working in the pits. But there was also evidence of these benefits being claimed by apparently able-bodied people:

*My mum is on disability allowance. I don't know what's wrong with her – arthritis or something. You'd have to ask her, she works here.*

In London, with access to a much larger labour market, there were more opportunities for casual work and also more networks through which to pursue moneymaking activities in the informal economy.

*My mum gets the dole, but she works in a pub.*

*They've all got plenty of money, videos, half a dozen kids, on the dole, loads of cars, selling drugs ...*

Making ends meet through benefit fraud did not offend against estate culture, especially if others were thought to be doing the same:

*Yes, I'm guilty, on the fiddle. It's disgusting, but everybody does it.*

### Training

There was a general scepticism about the value of training, careers advice and youth employment schemes. There was little awareness of new developments or initiatives that could help unemployed young people find work. It was also clear that there was a lack of any personal advice tailored to the needs of young people. Schools career advice was seen as of little use or help.

Emphasis on academic training, gaining qualifications or going to college put off those with no or few qualifications, many of who lacked even basic skills or experience of school after the age of 14. These tended to be more interested in learning practical skills in a work environment (as in an apprenticeship), which would equip them for a proper job.

Some had a real concern about how they would survive financially if they undertook training. They also felt that the estate culture would not give them any support and they were concerned about the lack of any real help, support or guidance from their parents. There was little sense that learning was worthwhile for its own sake, not just as preparation for a 'proper job'.

### Conclusion

For those looking for work, the worth of a job was measured principally in financial terms and so, for many respondents, it was a good weighed against the corresponding loss of entitlement to benefit. In addition, there is a real

anxiety about having to take responsibility for all the practicalities, like budgeting and financial organisation, that would be involved in the move from benefits to an earned income. Transition from benefit to work after many years can be a daunting prospect; and some clearly thought that it would have a detrimental effect on their lives. For those interested in work, further attractions were getting out, meeting people, 'camaraderie' and an additional interest in their lives.

Those who were not looking for work cited low pay and the short termism of many jobs as disincentives. They were reluctant, or felt they could not afford, to train or learn new skills. Some felt there should be options other than 'college', which they associated with theoretical study and academic work rather than gaining practical skills. They seemed unaware that there were indeed other alternatives, and clearly would have benefited from more information

and guidance. Although many respondents seemed to want more structure in their lives, they did not necessarily associate this with work.

Some young men – particularly in the North – expressed a strong desire for the kind of 'man's work' that had been traditional in those areas. There was doubt about the value of gaining qualifications, when there might be no job at the end.

Parents with child-care responsibilities generally wanted to continue to look after their children until they reached school age. At this point, some envisaged training for work. However, from mothers and lone parents who were interested in entering the labour market, there was a demand for flexible working and trustworthy child-care provision, and a requirement that they be left no worse off by making the transition from welfare to work.

## 7 Families and children

The main objective of the focus groups was to find out about the experience, attitudes and behaviour of residents most likely to suffer the effects of social exclusion on 'poor' council estates, particularly in relation to the 'wicked issues' of unemployment, poor educational attainment, crime and drugs. However, from the first groups held, the issue of relationships within the family, particularly parenting, was raised spontaneously. Discussion then, and subsequently, was allowed to run on because it was clearly something that respondents were concerned about and wanted to discuss.

One finding that emerged was that most of the young people sampled from the three estates who had been jobless since leaving school had also had a troubled upbringing and an unstable family background. The strength of this association was surprising because the only criteria the young men and women in these single-sex discussion groups had been recruited to meet were those of gender, age and employment status:

- all had left school (but could be in some sort of training)
- all were aged 16–24 years
- all were single, never married
- none was working, or had ever held down a full-time job (that was not casual work or temporary employment).

In addition, a separate group of teenage mothers also met two further criteria:

- they had one or more children
- they lived as a separate household (but not with the father) in their own accommodation.

The selection criteria for these groups of young persons therefore did not allow anyone who was married, successfully earning a living, or still receiving full-time education to be included; the groups which, according to demographic data, consist of the majority of young people on the estates.

It was found that, among the young respondents selected for the groups because they were jobless, most:

- came from broken homes
- were brought up by multiple parents, usually one or other birth parent with a succession of partners
- had poor educational attainment, including a poor standard of literacy
- admitted truanting from school, some persistently over long periods.

Only a small minority had two parents who were still married and living together, and these young people emerged as having more positive attitudes towards relationships than the others.

Many young people had an unstable upbringing with one parent and a succession of partners.

- Usually the principal carer was the mother:

*I live with me mum and dad, but he's her third one.*

- But sometimes the mother had left children in the care of their father:

*She just disappeared when I was two. My stepmam used to cook for her own children but not for me, so me dad cooked for me.*

- And some had ended up living with their grandparents:

*When my mam and dad split up, he was violent. My mam started going out with Wanda. I was ten, then my mam and dad got back together again. I got really mixed up. (Teenage girl living with her grandmother)*

*I love my nan and grandad, but I don't feel love for my mum – my mum didn't bother with me when I was younger.*

In some cases, the parent(s) had relinquished their child-care responsibility when their children were too young to look after themselves, and:

- Young people were left to fend for themselves:

*I share with my sister [aged 15]. My mum moved to Edinburgh to live with someone else. She pays all the bills. (Teenage girl)*

- Or, young girls were allowed to move out and set up home with a boyfriend:

*I moved out of my parents when I was 14 and moved in with my boyfriend. It was a big mistake.*

- Or, young people were thrown out of the family home:

*When I got booted out of the home, I wouldn't talk, eat or smile. I'd be angry, screaming or shouting.*

*I was really frightened when my mum threw me out. I ended up drinking seven bottles a day. I went into rehab.*

Some of the stepfathers were violent against

their partner and her children:

*The third one used to go to the pub and come home and take it out on me. He put a knife to my throat.*

*My mum believes she asks for it. For the last 19 years, lots of men have knocked her about.*

*My stepfather is violent, but my mum gives as good as she gets. She smashed his face with an ashtray.*

One young man had tried to intervene to protect his mother, but with disastrous results:

*He used to beat hell out of my mum, but when I was older I got sent to prison for two years. I tried to do him in with a scaffold pole.*

And there were undertones that suggested that some might have suffered sexual abuse, although there was naturally a reluctance to admit the experience in a group. One admission came from someone whose mother had had a series of partners:

*The second one sexually assaulted me at nine. My mum didn't believe me.*

### Teenage motherhood

Each of the groups of young women included some lone mothers, and a discussion group of single teenage mothers was held separately. Responses here are taken only from the women's groups. All participants were single, aged 16 to 24 years; some were mothers, others were not.

Most teenage mothers said they had not intended to become pregnant:

*The pill didn't work for me.*

*The [day-after] injection doesn't work.*

At the same time, some teenage women who were not themselves mothers said that single parenthood on their estate was almost the norm:

*Everyone [who was] in my class has babies. I'm the only one who hasn't. I feel very left out. Only one is in a stable relationship and none are married.*

*I just imagine the child with me because I know lots of lone mums.*

Teenage mothers had mixed feelings about their own situation. While some said they regretted having had children at so young an age, others found it emotionally rewarding:

*It's something you can look after.*

*You won't be lonely because, when the man leaves, you'll still have the kids.*

For some older lone parents, who had themselves been teenage mothers, the children had become a reason for living:

*If I didn't have kids, I don't know what I'd do. I don't know where I'd be.*

*When you're down and depressed, you'd end it all if you didn't have kids.*

On the whole, there was a great deal of scepticism about marriage:

*Marriage is meaningless. You're better off on your own.*

*If you get married, everything goes downhill. My mum has been married three times and the relationship always goes down.*

*If you get married, when he leaves you, you'll be stuck with the kids.*

There were mixed views about whether the mothers and their children would benefit from having a male partner around. Some recognised how difficult it is to bring up children on their own and wanted emotional support and help with child raising:

*It's tougher looking after kids on your own.*

*They take more notice of a man.*

But others thought it would be better for them to raise their child, or children, on their own because men were not reliable, or might be violent:

*I won't rely on any man. I want to do it myself.*

*I think you can do a better job [of child rearing] without a violent man around.*

But some women, whose own parents had stayed together, had more positive feelings about relationships:

*It's too easy to walk out on relationships now.*

*People have unrealistic expectations – they think it's a fairy tale. Relationships need to be worked at like everything. My parents stayed together despite arguments.*

## Conclusion

While it is striking that so many jobless young men and women in the sample came from unstable family backgrounds, it is not known from this research the extent to which these respondents share a troubled upbringing with others from the same estates who nevertheless went on to find full-time work, or a place in further education. But these findings do suggest that the connections between the factors of

social exclusion are likely to be extremely complex, and they support the likelihood of links between childhood experience of family dysfunction and social exclusion in later life.

## 8 Education and training

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the young people who had not held a full-time job since leaving school turned out to be poorly qualified and skilled. There were few examples among them of anyone who had received any further education. Indeed, levels of literacy were poor, particularly among the younger age groups, and there was some evidence of illiteracy among all age groups. Older people appeared to be better educated than the younger groups, and some said that they had children who had gone to university and settled away from the estates.

### Truancy and exclusion from school

A large proportion of parents and younger people had regularly truanted from school, been suspended, not taken their exams or left school altogether before the age of 16:

*I stopped going to school at 14 when I moved in with my boyfriend.*

*I left school at 14. I was always going off to stay with friends. I stayed away for months.*

In addition, some young people had been encouraged, or forced, to work on a regular basis, either instead of going to school, or in the evening after school:

*I bunked off school and worked on a market stall with my mum.*

*I worked every night in a club from five until midnight.*

*My mum took me out just before my exams and put me straight into a job with her in the launderette. I do regret it because I've nothing behind me now.*

### Discipline at school

It was commonly felt by young and old that there should be more effective discipline in schools:

*You don't learn in school because all the other kids fool about flicking pens.*

*The school we went to had the attitude that you can learn if you want to, but if you don't ...*

*They should be much harder and tougher. They're too soft. (Young person)*

*Teachers don't have the power they used to. (Older person)*

### Parental support

Most parents claimed to recognise the importance of education:

*Education makes all the difference, particularly now you need qualifications. You need them even to get an interview.*

But some parents with children at school seemed unaware of the importance of parental commitment in their children's educational achievement. For example:

- with regard to truancy:

*No matter what you do, you can't stop kids bunking off.*

- or school discipline:

*Most kids muck around at school. We all did.*

- or homework:

*I don't think they have homework. If they do, I think they do it in the lunch hour.*

And some took their children out of school at exam time, because family holidays were cheaper then:

*SATS are compulsory, but we go on holiday when they are being taken and he will get an automatic failure because he's not there. It's the only way we can afford a holiday.*

### Estate culture

Negative peer group pressure and the culture of the estate do not help. It was clear that there was tremendous pressure on young people to conform to estate norms and that learning is not part of the estate culture:

*My oldest was very bright, so he got bullied at school.*

*My kids say 'I don't want to be a bloody swot, the other kids will laugh at you'.*

Some parents felt that, no matter what they did, peer group influence on the estate would prevail in its effect on their children:

*You can do your best with a child, and if they get into the wrong crowd round here, they go off a different way.*

*If they are brought up here, that's what affects them.*

Parents who themselves did not grow up on the estate mostly felt that their children would not get a good education locally, and that their best chance of a good education would be for the family to move away from the estate; but they did not think this was likely.

### Further education

There appeared to be a rapid maturing of young people on the estate in their late teens. Boys particularly, faced with the difficulty of making their way without skills or qualifications, tended to regret missed opportunities:

*I used to bunk off a lot. I'm brain dead now.*

*I skived off. My mum was too soft. I can say now to my kids 'look at my life, don't be like me'.*

*I really regret no education. I'll beat it into my kids.*

But those wanting a second chance saw obstacles in their way, for example:

- They wondered what course they might take:

*I want to go to college, but I've no idea what I want to do or how to go about it.*

- Or whether they could afford it:

*I don't know how you can afford to go to college to learn, if you don't have a wage coming in.*

- Or if their parents would support them:

*It's difficult if you're doing exams and you've got no emotional support or sympathy.*

- Or whether there would be a proper job at the end of it:

*Even if you've got a degree, you could still be sweeping the factory floor.*

And they were concerned about how their mates would see them:

*It's all right having these classes, but people do take the mick.*

Significantly, the very few who were engaged in training, or were serious about their further education, mentioned the influence of their parents (fathers especially) and came from families where the work ethic was evident:

*My dad wants me to go to college. He went to retrain when he was 50 [an ex-miner] and he has a job now.*

*I wouldn't have got through college if it hadn't been for the help of my mum and dad.*

*You need someone to support you when you are down, to egg you on.*

### Conclusion

In summary, truancy, indiscipline at school, lack of parental commitment and the negative effects of peer group pressure and estate culture were all associated with lack of attainment at school and later prolonged youth unemployment among the respondents. It was striking how many young people had truanting regularly from school, or simply not attended at all from the age of 14, and had ended up years later jobless and reliant on benefit. It was common for them to regret the missed opportunity of a better education, but they were inclined to put

this down more to a lack of authority and discipline from their teachers than any indiscipline or inattention on their own part. While more parents claimed to recognise the importance of education, in many cases either this did not seem to correspond with their actions, or they felt powerless to overcome the negative effects of peer group pressure and estate culture.

However, the groups which included parents and grandparents reported that some of their offspring had gone on from the estates to university, but they had settled elsewhere after they had graduated. Also, there were clearly other young people from the estates who had left school and found jobs or gone into further education, and, while there was scepticism about the value of a degree or other qualifications in securing a job, it was significant that there was actually no evidence of well-qualified young people who were jobless. From this, it would appear that the young people from the estates who were better qualified, or had a higher level of motivation, were able to overcome the obstacles and find jobs or secure places in further education, leaving their unqualified and less highly motivated contemporaries behind them.

## 9 Crime, vandalism and drugs

Many respondents, particularly younger ones, said they were regular users of drugs and some said they had been involved in drug dealing. Some young male respondents admitted that they were, or had been, involved in crime, including stealing cars, dealing drugs, theft and violent behaviour.

### Behaviour of children and teenagers

On all estates, and across all age groups, the biggest single issue identified by respondents was the antisocial behaviour of children and teenagers, including:

- vandalism
- drug and alcohol abuse
- theft.

Large numbers of unsupervised children and teenagers who gather in groups were a feature of all of the estates. Older people find their behaviour intimidating, others merely disrespectful:

*Most of the kids don't have respect for anyone.*

Some are often involved in drug/ drink abuse and petty crime:

*Kids go sniffing and drinking down the alleyways. There's loads of glue sniffing round here.*

*Seven and eight year olds, out all night with cans of lager, is common.*

*They light a fire under the bridge and sniff gas.*

It was widely felt that solving the problem of 'out of control' children and teenagers was the key to improving the quality of life on estates. Most parents hoped for a better life for their

children and shared a common desire to keep their children out of trouble, but there were real fears about the negative effects of estate culture and peer group pressure. Some parents felt that the only way to overcome this was to move off the estate.

### Drugs

Most respondents appeared to accept that drugs and petty crime were an increasing feature of everyday life on their estate. While parents hoped that their children did not take hard drugs, many felt this was largely outside their control. Drug dealing, and the violence and disturbance that accompanies it, is not hidden on these estates. Most people, particularly parents and young people, said that the use of drugs was extensive and most felt it had become endemic:

*Drug users, we all live near them. They live opposite, or next door, or a few doors down on the same street. There are more drug users than normal people.*

*It's everywhere. There's nowt you can do about it.*

*It's getting to the stage that more are doing it, than not.*

Some respondents, particularly in the younger groups, were regular users of cannabis, which is generally felt, even by parents, to be acceptable:

*It is less harmful than alcohol and cigarettes. That has been medically proven.*

*I don't think soft drugs are bad. I think they should legalise them. (Parent)*

Some younger people associated alcohol with the violent aggressive behaviour of a parent or step-parent and felt that using soft drugs was less damaging to those around them. Some talked positively about the soporific effect of cannabis and felt that it was calming and stress relieving:

*I smoke cannabis every morning before I go to school. It calms me because I get very stressed.*

*I come in in the evening, have a puff, and don't feel like stealing cars.*

Others talked about its negative effects:

*You go a bit slow on dope. You can't be bothered to do anything.*

But only a minority thought it would lead to regular use of hard drugs, even though most people accepted that there were growing numbers of users of 'heavy' drugs on their estate:

*There are quite a lot of people taking smack. Quite a lot of young mothers around here are doing it.*

*There are loads of smackheads here, but not as many as at [another local estate].*

Most young people felt that drug education was largely ineffective:

*They do talk to you at school, but we know much more about it than they do.*

And the media is thought to dramatise and exaggerate in its portrayal of drug dealer stereotypes:

*They're not all dirty drug dealers. Some are my mates. They look like ordinary people, not villains.*

But those with friends who had become addicts were more concerned and critical about the use of hard drugs:

*My friend will sell her clothes to get speed. She is really bad. I've seen what it does to people.*

*You see your mates who used to have a laugh with you, all on heroin, with drawn faces. They've sunk really low. They go round and nick off their mates.*

In all three areas, there was irritation at the disturbance caused by the trade in drugs:

*The drug dealers live on the corner. The noise of vehicles as they speed by at 3 a.m. is a real nuisance.*

*Gangs of kids harass you on the street outside shops [demanding money].*

*Drug dealers are on every street.*

## Crime

Some types of crime were present on all the estates, while other crimes seemed more prevalent in some areas than in others. In Coalton and Barminster, forms of youth crime associated with boredom or not having enough to do – like vandalism and stealing cars – were prevalent, while, in London, there was a greater incidence of violent behaviour and crime against individuals. Older age groups felt the most vulnerable to becoming victims of crime, particularly muggings.

A moral code of 'acceptable limits', which has little to do with the law, appeared to exist.

Breaking the law was not always seen as a crime, particularly if it involved:

- stealing from those who were well off
- taking 'soft' drugs
- benefit fraud
- 'non-personal' types of crime, for example stealing from cars or garden sheds, rather than from homes.

Under this code, people living on the estates drew the line at stealing 'from your own kind' but would find it acceptable if local people took the law into their own hands in response to a wrong done to them, for example to 'punish' burglars. Those who wished to follow a more law-abiding approach felt powerless because of the relative ineffectiveness of the police to deal with low-level crime, and they feared intimidation if they were seen to be co-operating with the authorities:

*The police haven't got time for people like us.*

*I keep myself to myself. If I report anything, my kids will get picked on.*

Respondents from all age groups and in all three areas blamed boredom and children/teenagers having nothing to do as a cause of misbehaviour:

*There's nothing for younger kids after they come home from school. There's nothing for them to do. (London parent)*

*There's nowt for kids to do. Just hang around street corners or sit on a park bench. (Coalton parent)*

*There's nothing for teenagers to do. It was the same for us. I used to drink in the park and sniff stuff. (Barminster parent)*

*We nick cars to get a buzz because there's nothing to do. (Teenage boy)*

And some young men mentioned the effect of peer group pressure as an initiator of their own criminal behaviour – joining others to steal cars, just to be 'part of the crowd'.

### Conclusion

Reflecting what is happening elsewhere in mainstream society, the use of drugs has become commonplace on these housing estates. Soft drugs were viewed in the same way as alcohol, and some people thought they were less damaging. Anti-drugs campaigns at school and in the media were felt to be ineffective. Hard drugs were viewed differently – less sympathetically – and were associated with loss of control.

There was toleration of a level of 'non-personal' crime within 'acceptable' limits, which had less to do with the law and more to do with an acceptance that low-level criminal activity was a useful source of additional income for some people living locally, and that open disapproval of these activities would be dangerous.

Parents said they found it difficult to instil positive social values in their children when the authorities appear unwilling or unable to prevent the crime, vandalism and drug dealing that takes place openly on estates. Peer group pressure intensifies the problem, and many residents feel intimidated when children and teenagers associate in large groups on estates, with the result that vandalism and antisocial behaviour is likely to go unchecked.

# 10 Black groups and 'achievers'

A further four discussion groups of black African and African Caribbean residents vulnerable to social exclusion were held on the only estate, Thames Green, with a significant ethnic minority population (at Barminster and Coalton, ethnic minorities comprise less than 2 per cent of the estate populations). The purpose of these discussion groups was to identify whether, and how, the perspectives of unemployed and economically inactive black residents differed from the views of the majority white population sampled separately. Also at Thames Green, an additional focus group was convened of 'achievers' – estate residents who are not socially excluded and are in regular work or full-time education. The results from these discussion groups are summarised below.

## Socially excluded black groups

The group discussions with black African and African Caribbean residents of the Thames Green estate vulnerable to social exclusion revealed some marked differences from the other Phase 1 focus groups. The most significant differences flowed from the apparent lack of assimilation and integration of black residents within the wider community on the estate. In this respect, the estate at Thames Green would appear not to be typical of mixed race London social housing estates in that clearly there remain unresolved tensions between the racial groups; and in that these, in some cases, have become institutionalised in estate organisations. Thus, some amenities are seen to cater for white residents and others for black residents; few seem able to provide the common ground where black and white groups can meet on equal terms.

This has brought some unexpected consequences: because many black residents feel they are not welcomed by the white community at Thames Green, they socialise away from the estate with friends and relatives who live elsewhere. For this reason, while unemployed and economically inactive white residents form part of a close-knit community, often with three generations of family members living nearby, inward looking and not unhappy with estate life, jobless black residents tend to be much better connected through regular contact with friends and relatives elsewhere in London, and are less likely to accept the norms and values of estate life. Some of the key differences are summarised below.

There is very little integration between the black and white communities at Thames Green and there are marked differences between the lives of black and white residents:

- white residents' lives revolve much more around the estate itself
- sometimes with several generations of family living locally
- black residents are much more likely to leave the estate to see friends elsewhere, and feel little connection to the estate's social life.

Black residents identify significant social distance between the black and white communities on the estate, who often choose to use different services and amenities:

- black residents see many of the estate's services as 'just for white people'
- white residents seem less conscious of this distance, or less prepared to discuss it.

*You go into [named estate facility] and it's supposed to be for everybody, but they don't make you feel welcome at all. They don't want you to be there.*

*It's the same group and the same families running everything, and certain people feel excluded. At one point, black people were going to get together and sit in on the social club because people felt it was racist.*

*The only conversation I have with a white person is the woman who works in the chip shop.*  
(Female residents)

Black residents have a higher level of dissatisfaction with the quality of life on the estate:

- they are angry about the lack of services and opportunities
- they believe that 'people deserve better' in terms of facilities and services
- some see leaving the estate as the only way of improving their circumstances.

*Black people see the estate as a transient place. They see it as a stopping place. If they thought they would be here for a longer time, they would invest more in it.* (Male resident)

*There is nothing round here at all. Kids of 15 or 16 don't want the youth centre or community centre. They get bored with it. They want to be on the streets. They get fed up with table tennis. They want money, clothes, gold, big cars.* (Teenage boy)

By contrast, socially excluded white residents in the earlier focus groups tended to be more apathetic, with little expectation that

things would improve on Thames Green, and little sense of other options available to them personally:

*My mum was born here, I've been here all my life. I don't know anywhere else.* (Female resident)

There was little difference between the black and white communities in their attitudes to work and benefit, and estate residents of both communities seemed equally likely to have had a troubled upbringing. However, there were marked differences between the communities in their views on education and responsibility for child rearing.

- Black parents are more likely to see value in education for their children.
- Younger black residents appear to have more confidence about their futures than their white counterparts.
- They are more optimistic about their job prospects.
- They appear more willing to enter further education or training and more prepared to stick at it.

Black parents felt more responsible for their children's behaviour.

- They maintained stricter discipline within their own home.
- They blamed other parents for lack of parental control.
- Many were worried about the effects of peer pressure.
- Some with young children refused to let them play out on the estate.

Older unemployed black residents felt more pessimistic about their futures and were more likely to blame forces outside their control – mainly new technology rendering old jobs obsolete. Amongst middle-aged black residents, a clear gender difference emerged: middle-aged black women were anxious that their men should get jobs, while middle-aged black men appeared less confident that they would be able to find work, and more discriminating about the kind of work they would be prepared to do.

- If jobs were available, they would take them.
- But they would not go far afield to look for a job.
- They don't see 'any kind of job' as a way forward.
- There was a feeling that changes in the labour market had left them behind.
- Many felt resigned to a future living on benefits.

One other difference is that black groups at Thames Green feel more isolated from 'mainstream society' in a more profound way because of their ethnic origin. They describe an 'anti-police culture' within their community, which they feel is defensive. They also feel that many of the estate's facilities are run by, and for, the white population, although most of the older residents say that this situation has improved significantly compared to ten or 20 years ago.

### 'Achievers'

One additional group discussion was held at Thames Green with 'achievers', residents who

had escaped social exclusion, whether through work, learning or participation in community initiatives. This group included a mix of black and white residents, men and women, and different ages. Though themselves in work, it is likely that the problems of living in, and working from, a deprived area affect them too, and that they have to overcome obstacles which people in better neighbourhoods do not face.

The 'achievers' focus group at Thames Green and, more importantly, the three day-long workshops, allowed comparisons to be made between the views and attitudes of socially excluded groups and those of non-excluded estate residents. From census data, it was estimated that just under half of the adult population of the three estates was vulnerable to social exclusion in the terms of this research, while a majority on each estate was not. Two important questions are therefore:

- 1 Where are the norms and values of the non-excluded estate majorities located between those of the socially excluded minority and those of wider mainstream society?
- 2 If there are clear divisions between socially excluded groups and the rest, is work the dividing line?

The main impression from the groups of non-excluded estate residents is that socially excluded people do not form a distinct group cut off from others on their estates with a different set of norms and values, but instead are at one end of a continuum of subtly changing variations running through estate communities. Achievers had often grown up with those who now found themselves excluded, gone to the same schools and played

in the same playgrounds. They were differentiated by family background, aptitude, persistence and sometimes luck, from their less fortunate contemporaries, but there is no obvious fault line running between them. There is much more evidence of social fault lines circumscribing whole estates, of communities being socially isolated because of their perceived disadvantage, with the process of stigmatisation and the effect of the estates' reputations actively reinforcing that social divide. In this sense, social exclusion may be seen as a process that isolates communities as well as individuals.

While work might not be a definitive dividing line in terms of social values, there are clear linkages between lack of work and social exclusion, not least because work is related to income and the lack of income (poverty) is closely related to the raft of social problems found on estates. So, jobs are a path to higher incomes, which in turn offer a way out of the social problems connected with poverty. Similarly, on a neighbourhood basis, higher rates of employment could offer a route out of social isolation.

A clear message from the groups is that work needs to bring adequate rewards. There was very little difference between socially excluded groups and achievers in their view of low-paid work. Very few people in any group saw work as a worthwhile activity in itself; almost everyone saw work as a means of gaining an income and felt that the income had to be sufficient to make going to work worthwhile. Many people, both in work and out of it, assessed their income by comparing it to benefit levels. Many felt that it was not worth working for just £20 a week more than was

obtainable on benefit, whereas most thought that working for an extra £50 or more would be worthwhile.

There was some evidence of people slipping from social exclusion into low-income work and back again, partly because of the narrowness of the difference of income between the two states. For example, one of the respondents in the 'achievers' group was a bus driver who, between being recruited for the focus group and it taking place, had left his job:

*I drove a bus and got £180 a week and paid £68 rent. I packed it up because I was no better off working than being on benefit. After paying rent, council tax, fares and meals, at the end of the week I was only £20 a week better off through working.*

Self-esteem is clearly related to work and the rewards it brings. For this reason, people look down on volunteering as an option under the New Deal:

*The word 'volunteer' stinks because people want you to do something for nothing. But give people money on top of their dole money, then they can hold their head up.*

In all three areas, whether in or out of work, people tended to focus on the short-term benefits of work and they did not perceive other advantages of being in employment. In particular, there was little recognition of the role work can play in building confidence and self-esteem.

### Moving on

One clear insight that came from the 'achievers' group at Thames Green was into the

mechanisms that drive the spiral of decline on unpopular social housing estates. The achievers were all estate residents in employment or full-time education who had escaped social exclusion. Most were better connected to mainstream society and had better future prospects than their counterparts in the previous groups. And most of them expected to move off the estate to better places at some time in the future. They saw living on the estate as a stopgap until a better opportunity arose.

A number of reasons were given to explain their wish to move.

- Most felt there was a connection between 'getting on' and 'moving off' (leaving the estate).
- Some seemed to say that they could not feel they were genuinely succeeding in their lives until they had left the estate behind.
- Others felt the estate was going downhill and they wanted to move out before it got worse.
- Some expressed the desire to leave in terms of their concern about their children's safety and future.
- But they also reflected a perception that, to the rest of the world, the estate was not a place where 'decent people' lived.

This finding is consistent with accounts, given in previous focus groups, of achievers leaving the estate while non-achievers stayed. It is significant that a wish to become a home-owner did not feature among the main reasons for wanting to leave the estate, although some

saw home-ownership as their most likely escape route. The 'push' to leave the estate was clearly much more important than the 'pull' of any other place or tenure.

What would make would-be leavers stay? Two things were mentioned. First, the *physical* condition of the estate was reckoned to present a poor image to the outside world, so physical improvement would do a lot to raise morale and make the estate feel more like a place where people want to stay. Second, and probably more important, would be a change of the *social* conditions on the estate and a determined attempt to tackle the social problems that provided a daily reminder of how disadvantaged a place it was. In this respect, the achievers were expressing a view, frequently heard in the socially excluded groups, that residents did not want to be reminded all the time that they were poor, unemployed, socially excluded, single parents or disadvantaged by being surrounded by others who are in a similar position. The difference between the two groups is that the 'achievers' feel able to do something about it, whereas those who are socially excluded feel frustrated and powerless.

This finding also suggests that the hope pinned by government to employment as a key agent of estate regeneration might be misplaced because, for people living in a troubled estate or neighbourhood, getting a job and a regular income could provide the means to move to a less troubled area, further impoverishing the estate or neighbourhood. This is an argument for improving whole neighbourhoods rather than just the economic status of some of the individuals who live in them.

# 11 Joined-up problems

What do the Phase 1 research results tell us about the links between the factors of social exclusion on housing estates in Britain; and can they help to answer the questions set out at the end of Chapter 3? This chapter concludes the reporting of Phase 1 by highlighting the patterns of responses that emerged from all three estates and the linkages that can be identified between the factors of social exclusion. Lastly, it discusses the light that the research has shed on the process of social exclusion and the means by which its outcomes might be changed.

## Patterns of response

As already stated, the views and attitudes of respondents did not vary significantly with location. However, three distinct patterns of response emerged across all the estates, which can be characterised as follows.

- *Older people*: those over the age of 55 tended to have a different set of opinions and attitudes to key questions about work, welfare benefits, crime and education. Two formative influences characterised this group. First, they had grown up in times when expectations about work, family life, education and state provided benefits were different. Most had a background of strong attachment to the labour market; they came from families that had stuck together through thick and thin; and they had the post-war faith that, if their children studied hard and worked hard, they would do well – and many had done well. Second, they remembered that the estates had seen better times, when people helped each other more, there was

less crime and no drugs; and as a result, they had a clearer idea of how things now could be different.

- *Estate people*: those who had spent most of their life living on their present estate or a similar one. These included young people who were born and had spent their formative years there and adults who long ago moved to the estate and had no recent memory of life elsewhere. This group was the largest and comprised a majority of respondents. The group was characterised by a strong association with the estate and its inhabitants, and an acceptance of its way of life.
- *Outsiders*: people who had moved to the estate only recently or had lived elsewhere long enough to have assimilated standards, aspirations and expectations that were different from those mostly found on the estate. Members of this group were more likely to have different views about the value of work and the opportunities offered by education, and were less likely to feel a strong association with the estate. Some adopted a protective strategy for their children by discouraging contact with estate children and encouraging the cultivation of friendships elsewhere in order to prevent them being sucked into delinquency and substance abuse, both prevalent on the study estates. This group was the smallest, but it had the sharpest perception of estate problems and its members were most likely to feel that an escape from social exclusion was dependent on an escape from the estate.

In each of the three areas, the largest group – those who had lived on the estate for most of their lives – identified with the area and had many friends who also lived there. This group poses a challenge to the concept of ‘social exclusion’ because it is clear that its members are mostly well integrated with their local community, even if they are less well connected to mainstream society by an attachment to the labour force or through membership of any wider social institutions.

### Linkages between problems

From the research, there is evidence of the clusters of problems of the kind that William Julius Wilson noted occurring in deprived neighbourhoods in America, and which are now focusing the attention of the Social Exclusion Unit in Britain – high rates of joblessness, low educational attainment, high crime rates, drug problems, family breakdown and problems with the organisation of family life. Also, as Wilson and others have noted, there are linkages between these problems, so it is no coincidence that they are found together in areas of multiple deprivation.

This research has found three types of linkage.

- *Spatial*: there is a geographical cluster of the problems listed earlier in each of the three social housing estates studied. This supports the findings from statistical sources that many social housing estates are becoming areas of multiple deprivation, alongside older inner city areas.

- *Individual*: the focus groups found that a number of the problems were experienced by the same individuals: in effect, that it is not just neighbourhoods, but also individuals, that experience multiple deprivation. One example of this is the unemployed young men who admitted stealing cars, took drugs, had poor levels of literacy, came from broken homes and had experienced multiple parenting. Another is the teenage mothers who had truanted and left school at 14, again with low levels of educational attainment and, again, having experienced family break-up and multiple parenting.
- *Over time*: by selecting respondents for the discussion groups through a filter of contemporary problems, it was possible to track back over time to ascertain the experience of the same individuals at earlier times. From this, a sequence of experiences can be linked over time for these individuals in a way that is not possible with a ‘snapshot’ of problem issues at any one time. For instance, the ‘individual’ links set out above connected experiences which might have occurred over decades: it was the same youths who truanted from school who later left with few qualifications, did not go on to further education and then experienced a prolonged period of youth unemployment. This research does not tell us how many other children in similar circumstances also truanted from school and left with few qualifications but nevertheless overcame these obstacles,

succeeded in finding work and subsequently prospered. It would take a broad longitudinal study focused on young people growing up in deprived areas to tell us the statistical links between these events and experiences over time. Working backwards from the present, this study can report only one part of the story: the higher than expected level of linkage between current social exclusion and a range of earlier social problems dating from childhood identified among focus group respondents.

### Social exclusion as a process

For children growing up on a social housing estate like those featured in this study, the estate and its immediate surroundings is an important place. They spend much of their early lives there and most of their friends live nearby and go to the same schools. Few children playing out on one of the estates could fail to be influenced by the estate culture, or be oblivious of peer group pressure to conform to estate norms which may be different from those held in mainstream society. Unless the influence of home and family is very strong and positive, children learn to accept and tolerate behaviour different from – and sometimes unacceptable to – mainstream society. The estate continues to provide most of their social contacts well into teenage years; for some, as this study has shown, this continues into later life.

The open areas of estates are where most social interaction between children occurs. A recent study by Whewey and Millward (1997) shows that children who grow up on social

housing estates spend more of their time playing outdoors than those living in houses in traditional streets, because parents feel estates are relatively safe places for children to play and children can find friends of a similar age to play with. It is not hard to see how estates become a focus for the activities of so many of those who live there.

The research for this study has identified some of the problems and problematic situations that occur on estates at different stages in the life cycle of their residents, and these have been reported in previous chapters as *outcomes* of social exclusion. A better idea of social exclusion as a *process* might be gained by rearranging some of the episodes described earlier in the order they would occur over a life cycle, as follows.

- *Pre-school*: researchers found children as young as two years old playing unsupervised outdoors on the estate. It was common practice for pre-school children to play unsupervised until very late at night in estate common areas.
- *Five years old*: the deputy head teacher of one estate primary school said at a discussion group of front-line staff that children came into the school's reception class unsocialised and unable to settle to learning:

*These kids have a short fuse. They have two ways of resolving minor disagreements: one is knuckles, the other is a head butt.*

- *Seven years old*: some seven-year-old children are experimenting with sniffing glue and drinking cider in the common areas of the estate. Some stay out all

night. A minority of children are falling badly behind at school; some are beginning to truant.

- *Early teens:* some boys become involved with petty crime – stealing from cars or from garden sheds. Boys and girls ‘bunk off’ from school. Some parents are becoming concerned about preventing their children getting involved in crime or drugs; other parents feel powerless to stop it.
- *Mid teens:* some children have stopped attending school; and a small number of children have left home – some because their parents threw them out, others to move in with boyfriends.
- *Sixteen:* at the age of 16, there is a parting of the ways for estate children. Some go on to take A levels, undertake training, or find a job; others leave school with poor GCSE results and low levels of literacy. Some teenage girls have become pregnant; some teenage boys are into criminal activity for fun (stealing cars, joyriding) or for profit (burglary, robbery, or stealing from cars).
- *Late teens:* by late teens, the career paths of estate children have diverged still further. One track leads on to further education; some go on to university and when they graduate settle away from their parents and the estate they grew up on. The other track leads back to the estate: girls leave home to set up families of their own (recruiters for the focus groups found very few girls in their late teens still at home with their parents), often on the

same, or a similar, local housing estate; boys who left school with few qualifications find it difficult to obtain worthwhile jobs and some have now been unemployed, apart from casual work, for some years, living with their parents or with their girlfriends.

This sequence illustrates the career paths that might be followed by young people growing up on estates like those in this study. The main difference between these and the career paths of children growing up in traditional streets is the amount of activity and social interaction that is centred on the estate, with its own culture and with peers who have grown up in the same place, gone to the same schools and been exposed to many of the same influences. Where the estate environment includes high levels of joblessness and crime and a culture of low achievement, it is unsurprising if some estate children fail to achieve and become jobless or get involved in crime, or that others, who manage to overcome these obstacles, tend to move away.

### Changing the outcomes

The findings of this report suggest that significant changes in outcome will be achieved only through much earlier intervention in the process. Chancellor Gordon Brown in Britain, and William Julius Wilson in America, both think that tackling joblessness is the key to tackling social exclusion, but it will not be easy to tackle joblessness – one outcome of the social exclusion process – using only the measures currently proposed in the New Deal and through changes to tax and benefit. And, even if

they work, solving the problem of joblessness alone will not solve issues of family dysfunction, poor parenting and low school achievement, although it could help.

In the now familiar phrase used by the Social Exclusion Unit, joined-up problems need joined-up solutions. This means that a co-ordinated and coherent set of measures will need to be employed to tackle simultaneously the problems of joblessness, crime and education in areas of multiple deprivation. To this formidable

set of issues, this report has added one more of primary importance – that of how to help families and children in dysfunctional households to break the link between early disadvantage and social exclusion in later life. Unless better ways are found to support families and help them raise healthy children in the difficult circumstances of deprived housing estates, all other approaches to tackling social exclusion will be that much less likely to succeed.



# **Part 3**

## **Wider Perspectives**



# 12 Joined-up government

The second part of the report represented and analysed the perspectives of those vulnerable to social exclusion, on their lives, their expectations and their neighbourhoods. This part gives an account of the remaining two phases of the research: Phase 2 which sought the views of front-line public service providers on social exclusion and some ways in which their role might be redefined to help combat it; and Phase 3 in which the views of a representative cross-section from each estate community were sought, about the problems faced by residents of their estates and the solutions proposed by the front-line providers. By way of an introduction to these wider perspectives and to set the scene for them, this chapter outlines the way in which government thinking has developed – and is continuing to develop – about the best ways of providing public services.

## Wicked issues

The set of social problems identified by the Social Exclusion Unit in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal – a poor housing environment, poor health, low academic achievement, high unemployment, low incomes, high rates of vandalism and crime, high levels of substance abuse – have been called the ‘wicked issues’ because they have defied attempts to tackle them over many decades, and now appear intractable. One reason these problems are so hard to solve is that they are not stand-alone issues, capable of a single solution. The problems are linked, therefore solving one problem without solving the rest might be merely to tackle a symptom without tackling the cause. Wicked problems attacked in a piecemeal fashion have a habit of

reappearing some time later. For this reason, the government recognises that holistic solutions will need to be found to deal with these problems.

Another reason for the persistence of the wicked problems is that their interlinked nature means that they do not lie within just one professional domain, but many. These are problems that cross the boundaries between different departments of local authorities and indeed between different ministries of national government. Initiatives to solve them will therefore involve not just co-operation between departments but also some measure of pooling departmental and ministerial budgets. This demands a degree of cross-sectoral working that is uncommon in local and national government in Britain. A government serious about tackling the interlinked raft of social problems linked to poverty and social exclusion, therefore needs to find ways for departments and agencies of government at all levels to work together in a more co-ordinated and coherent fashion than they have done in the past. To do this, the structures of central and local government need to change.

## Unfinished business

The present government’s reform of the welfare state continues a process that began under the previous administration, with a new model of public management first appearing in legislation in 1988/89. This built upon ideas based on changes that had occurred in America as a response to the market-based reform of central and local government introduced under the presidency of Ronald Reagan. These ideas later appeared as a coherent agenda when

written up by David Osborne, a senior advisor to Vice President Al Gore, and Ted Gaebler in *Reinventing Government* (1992).

This model for reform was based on the idea that the business of government is to develop and manage *policy*, not to deliver *services*; that most, but not necessarily all, services can be better delivered by non-governmental agencies, chiefly in the private or voluntary sectors; that competition between service providers is essential to ensure value for money; that customers are the best judges of service quality; and that they (when provided with information through performance measures) will reward good performance and penalise inefficiency.

In Britain, these ideas led directly to the Citizens' Charter (redefining people as customers, notions of empowerment, requirement to publish performance information) and the introduction of the internal market to the welfare state in the reform acts of 1988/89. Under these reforms, some government departments were hived off to become 'next step' agencies and the 'purchaser/provider' split was introduced in health, education and housing.

Although these measures were radical in themselves, they formed only half of the 'reinventing government' agenda. The parts of the model not yet fully developed in Britain deal with decentralising authority, embracing participatory management, changing government culture to make it entrepreneurial rather than administrative, focusing on outcomes rather than outputs, preventing problems rather than curing them, and creating a mission to drive government in place of rules and regulations. The half completion of this agenda leaves local and national government

caught in a state of transition between the old traditional public sector way of doing things and a new, not yet quite discernible, coherent alternative way. Much of the New Labour government's agenda for modernising local government is about dealing with this unfinished business by continuing the reforms and developing a new operational model for government.

### Modernising local government

New Labour's vision for modernising local government is set out in its 1998 White Paper *Modern Local Government – in Touch with the People*. It argues that the old UK model of local government has now been going for more than a hundred years and is therefore due for modernisation. Since local councils spend some £75 billion each year, around a quarter of all public expenditure, improving their efficiency could provide substantial gains. The White Paper proposes a set of measures to 'reinvent' local government, including radical changes to its political management structure. Under the new arrangements, the executive role of councils will be placed in the hands of a directly elected mayor (or indirectly elected leader) working with a small cabinet of councillors. Competition and performance measurement will remain as the means of achieving value for money, and cross-sectoral working is to be encouraged by the introduction of a 'single capital pot' for local authorities in place of separate service-specific credit approvals. The White Paper identifies that one purpose of this change is to 'allow councils to take greater responsibility for the internal allocation of their resources among services and a greater

opportunity to address cross-cutting issues such as social exclusion effectively’.

The White Paper acknowledges another important influence for reform – the emerging discourse concerning issues of community governance. There are two reasons why this is emerging now. First, the changing role of local government towards enabling and facilitating and away from the direct provision of services means that local government structures also need to change. The old structures were built around departments and committees providing services. With this role diminishing, major new issues like crime, unemployment and regeneration have emerged for which there is no direct council provision and hence no place in the departmental or committee structure. The underlying problem is that local authorities in the UK have no overarching responsibility for the well-being of their area as a whole. This is in contrast to what is found elsewhere in the European Community where the dominant model gives local government a general power to act (within the law) on behalf of its local community.

The second reason is a growing concern that local government has lost touch with the people it represents. The very low levels of turnout at local elections suggest that apathy and alienation have blighted the relationship between local government and local people. There is also a problem that councillors, as a body, often do not reflect the diverse makeup of their local community.

To tackle the first of these issues, the White Paper proposes the introduction of legislation to place on councils a new duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas. And, to deal with the second, the

White Paper suggests a range of measures designed to improve local democracy through better engagement with local communities. While legislation for this package of changes is going through Parliament, councils are advised they can begin now the process of modernisation towards the new model in advance of the necessary statutory underpinning. Many councils, including those in the three case study areas of this report, have already begun to make this change.

### Crossing the boundaries

Stopping halfway through the modernisation process, as the last administration did in the run up to the 1997 election, has arguably left public services less well placed than before to tackle cross-sectoral issues like social exclusion. Made leaner and more tightly targeted by a decade of budgetary constraint and centralised policy direction, mainstream public services have little spare time and money to devote to inter-agency working. The space for doing this is currently provided in some specific areas by the special challenge fund initiatives – including the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), health and education action zones, and New Deal for Communities – which bypass main spending programmes to provide additional funding for project-based inter-agency working and participatory management. Special projects funded by this means have the potential to cross departmental boundaries and involve public, private and voluntary sector organisations in partnerships which are focused on achieving outcomes (rather than outputs).

There are, therefore, two avenues for funding work on social exclusion and socially

isolated neighbourhoods: first, through mainstream spending programmes slimmed down after a decade of stripping out non-essential spending; and, second, through additional special initiative funding for which providers must bid competitively. The prospects for tackling social exclusion and neighbourhood deprivation in any particular area may currently therefore depend critically on whether this additional special funding is available.

### Will new ways of working be enough?

Under the previous administration, most special initiative funding was not really additional money, just a recycling and recasting of existing budgets to cover some of the inadequacies of public service provision in the most deprived areas. The largest of these programmes, the SRB, was made up from the former budgets of 20 urban programmes, including Estate Action, which itself was originally top-sliced from councils' Housing Investment Programme (HIP) programmes. It is clear that the money thus made available for funding special programmes did little to redress the cuts to basic service

levels made over two decades of financial stringency, except in those areas where bids for challenge funding were successful.

Yet, there is no indication from the present government that spending on the provision of public services will be restored to former levels. Instead, New Labour is looking at more innovative ways to tackle social exclusion, by 'bending' existing mainstream programmes, pooling budgets and encouraging service providers to integrate their efforts through new ways of collaborative working. The aim is to provide 'joined-up solutions' which will be more effective, less wasteful through duplication of effort, and therefore more efficient and economical than the existing methods of working, which failed to prevent social exclusion. But will smarter ways of working be enough on their own to turn deprived areas around? Or will a higher level of core funding for mainstream services also be necessary? This part of the report now turns to the findings of the second and third phases of the research, to try to find some answers to these questions.

# 13 Service providers' perspectives on estate and community life

This phase of the research was constructed to assess how public service providers in the study areas respond to the problems of social exclusion identified on the three estates. Front-line workers involved day by day with the estates from housing, health, social services, police, education, employment, youth and community services were asked to attend one of a series of discussion groups held at locations close to the estates. Members of each group were provided with the following materials: an explanation of what the research was about; a short summary of the findings from Phase 1; and, later in the session, three short case studies of socially excluded young people. In order to encourage free expression, participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and, for this reason, direct quotations in the sections that follow are either attributed to a generic job (like teacher or social worker), or to the district in which they work, but not to any combination of the two that might identify an individual.

## Estate and community life

To check the perceptions of front-line service providers, each group was asked if they could identify the main social issues on the estate with which they were connected. All groups had no difficulty in spontaneously listing the problems, and these were very similar to those identified by residents in the Phase 1 research:

*What are the problems on the estate? Well, we've got drugs, youths on streets, intimidating families, known families going around and causing trouble to everyone else, poverty and the*

*benefits trap, truancy, exclusion from schools, teenage pregnancy, poor parenting, lack of pre-school facilities, lack of child care facilities. Oh, and low expectations. (Front-line worker)*

*The current problems are crime and fear of crime, drugs, unemployment, debt problems, vandalism, lack of play provisions and provision for young people, and low personal aspirations. (Front-line worker)*

Some of these issues were then discussed in more detail.

## Work

Service providers had a much broader view than estate residents of the value of work. People living on the estates generally saw work only in terms of the money it brought in. This view was held equally by those in and out of work. Only a minority saw any added value in work in terms of building dignity, self-respect and confidence. By contrast, the service providers saw very clear connections between having a job and having self-confidence and self-esteem. Conversely, they also saw clear links between unemployment and many of the other social ills of their area. This was most clearly the case in Coalton, but similar connections were made by providers in the other two areas:

*You can't imagine how people's priorities and perceptions change when they're in long-term unemployment. (Front-line worker, Coalton)*

The idea that the habit of work can change social norms and behaviour makes it worth

setting out in some detail the link between work and social exclusion in the Coalton case study. It is a clear illustration of how a thriving community can be transformed into an excluded one in the space of only ten years by the widespread sudden and prolonged absence of work. This suggests that, if values, social norms and behaviour can be changed adversely by the need to adapt to a different way of living as a result of long-term unemployment, then the reverse might also be true – that the structure and discipline provided by a regular job and wider social interaction within the labour force actually do play a significant role in maintaining the norms and values of mainstream society.

Coalton used to be a mining community where, until the late 1980s, there were 20 working pits. The mining industry was both a source of work and the centre of social life in the area. Men who worked together also socialised together with their families in the pubs and working men's clubs. Miners' pay supported the local economy, maintaining a steady demand for shops and services. Transport was laid on to take the miners to their work and their families to the shops. When there was full employment, crime rates were low and the use of drugs in the community was virtually unknown.

When 19 of the 20 local pits closed, the impact was felt not just by the miners and their families, but by the social institutions, shops and suppliers that depended on miners' incomes. Over time, shops closed, bus services were withdrawn and social organisations faltered. Drugs came on to the estate and drug use proliferated. Able young people who could get jobs elsewhere left the estate with their families. Houses became vacant and subject to

vandalism. Once they had been stripped of anything sellable, they were often set alight. As the number of vacant houses grew, the remaining residents felt unsafe and many wanted to move to other parts of the estate where there were fewer voids. With increased drug use – police reckon that as much heroin is now consumed on the estate in a week as was taken in a year a decade ago – crime increased to pay for feeding the habit. As the local environment worsened, more people left the area. A new generation of young men who in former times would have worked in the pits found their lack of qualifications a barrier to finding work, so they grew accustomed to living on benefit. After ten years, most of those with 'get up and go' had gone, leaving an area depleted of its vitality, confidence and reputation. House prices plummeted – a batch of eleven right to buy repossessions was sold in 1998 at auction for under £30,000 – while drug dealers and criminals moved into vacant properties.

Front-line service providers in Coalton who participated in this research were in no doubt about the effect that the lack of jobs had on their community. They described with great clarity how their once flourishing neighbourhood was transformed into one racked by poverty, crime, drugs and family breakdown when the jobs disappeared. Now, many families have no earners at all. Some households have three generations jobless, all at home and grown used to living without work:

*Out of all her family and friends and acquaintances and wide circle of peers, she was the only one who was working. (Front-line worker, Coalton)*

The apathy and lack of hope that had been so striking in the Phase 1 (socially excluded) focus groups was a well-known phenomenon to the front-line workers. When asked to describe the effect of joblessness on estate residents, they cited the following:

- lack of structure and routine in daily lives
- apathy and lack of self-esteem
- problems adapting to coping on a low income
- lack of confidence and ambition
- lack of working role models for children.

*If there's no jobs, there's no point. (Front-line worker, Coalton)*

*If you live in a community where there are no role models whatsoever, the leap of the imagination is too great and you're extrapolating about what you've got no experience of. (Front-line worker, Coalton)*

*It's the jobs thing. If there aren't going to be any more jobs then you can do all these other initiatives but they won't make any difference. At the end of the day, it's jobs that are needed. (Front-line worker, Coalton)*

The connection between joblessness and other social problems was less marked in the other two areas but still very real. Service providers in all three areas said they thought there were jobs available, but at low wages. However, they thought that those made unemployed in mining or manufacturing industries would find neither the kind of work, nor the wages – much less than they had previously earned – acceptable. This was partly

a question of the level of wages on offer being much less than was needed to keep a family and partly a matter of dignity. There needed to be a margin between take-home pay and what was obtained on benefit to make work worthwhile.

*People expect a real wage. They are not going to work for £60. If the only jobs that are on offer are low paid, they are not going to do it. (Front-line worker)*

*Some families I know would have to clear £250 a week to get more than what the government are giving them. When you are actually getting £200 from the state and they expect you to work for £75 a week – come on, who is going to do that? (Front-line worker)*

This attitude seemed to be transmitted through the generations so that unemployed young people had expectations of wage levels similar to those that prevailed in manufacturing or mining industries now long gone:

*It's got to be on a decent wage as well. Young people know what their dad earned and what their grandad earned and they won't work for £70 a week. (Front-line worker, Coalton)*

However, front-line workers were realistic about the future employment prospects in their area and, in particular, were clear that there was little chance of a large number of well-paid blue-collar jobs re-emerging, even as the result of regeneration programmes. Much more likely, they thought, was a growth in low-paid service sector work and also in specialised high-skill jobs for which qualifications and high-level training were needed, neither of which options would do much to get long-term unemployed estate residents back to work.

Service providers had a good level of understanding of the barriers – particularly the lack of good quality child care – facing single parents who wanted to work. They were also clear about the social isolation and depression that came as a consequence of those who wanted to work feeling trapped at home, dependent on benefits:

*I don't see how my mums or dads in one-parent families can even consider employment if they can't find good quality child care for their children. In terms of children being looked after so that people can go to work, you've still got a long way to go. (Front-line worker, Barminster)*

*We have a number of cases recently referred by their GP. They are very depressed and isolated. It's made a major difference to them when they are able to either start work or go back to college. It's the young women who are lone parents, there are so many out there who want to do that, but again it comes back to the child care. One young woman we worked with had a job to go back to after her maternity leave but, because she couldn't find the child care, she couldn't go back into that job. Hence the depression and she felt her whole world was falling apart. I mean, that's just one person, but this is coming out time and time and time again. (Front-line worker, Thames Green)*

### Family support

Front-line workers were familiar with the problems and issues that families on disadvantaged social housing estates had to face. It was widely accepted that families moving into these estates had to cope with a level of social problems and difficult social

relationships not generally experienced elsewhere. These included an estate culture that tolerated crime and made policing difficult, a small hard core of estate residents engaged in criminal or anti-social behaviour, and peer group pressure upon adults and children to conform or, at the very least, turn a blind eye:

*I know a family where Mum has given up, where the older brother didn't go to school and is heavily into drugs, and where this child of 12 has virtually moved in with another family because he doesn't feel he's looked after at home. That child is very clever, but he's of an age where the peer group pressure will be from the other kids who aren't attending school. (Teacher)*

Children growing up on the estates were likely to see the norms and values of estate life as 'normal' and not accept or associate themselves with the values of mainstream society:

*Children are being brought up now in a particular environment where drugs are rife and unemployment is rife and they develop that attitude towards society which makes them even more vulnerable to drug abuse and anti-social behaviour. In this social climate or environment where they find themselves, youngsters become adjusted to it very quickly and accept it as normal. (Community police officer)*

Some front-line workers felt that social exclusion was a *product of estate life* to a large degree and that, when councils allocated families to such estates, they were setting them up to fail:

*By placing a family within these estates we are actually setting them up to fail because of the environment they are moving into. (Social worker)*

And there was an increasing appreciation that many of the problems of the area were linked, and that solving one problem without tackling the rest was likely to fail:

*Unemployment isn't the only problem. Some of them create their own problems as well, so if you try to help them in one way, then the next time you go back they have still got all these other problems that they have created for themselves, like they might say 'well, I'm not going to do that course you arranged for me now' – when we have probably arranged child care and got funding and all sorts – or they say 'I have got a boyfriend and I am pregnant again' or the next time you see her she might say 'I am on heroin since I last saw you' and she might be. It is not having the confidence to feel they can do anything else.*  
(Social worker)

Among front-line providers, teachers and social workers were most likely to feel that their work made a difference; but they felt that only their failures were ever noticed, never their successes:

*We are very much judged on the negative publicity of some of the cases we deal with, but the successes are the ones that don't hit the headlines. The successes of the families, the kids that do achieve, the kids that keep out of crime. Nobody hears about them.* (Social worker)

### Education

The failures included some children who dropped out of education at an early age and began to be alienated from mainstream society. The primary school teachers thought they could identify with a fair degree of accuracy the children who would subsequently drop out of

education after they transferred to secondary schools:

*These children we are talking about are children who are not included in the system, because they have made the decision to opt out. At the age of 12, they have actually made that decision not to go to school and I think that is the beginning of being excluded and not finding a way back in.*  
(Primary head teacher)

*I could look at my current Year 6 and tell you the six children who won't go to school next September. I could tell you now.* (Teacher)

One of the estate primary schools manages to obtain above-average pupil standard test results despite having a disadvantaged intake. Among other things, it puts a high priority on full attendance and setting high standards and expectations for its pupils. For instance it:

- regularly rounds up truants from the estate:

*I am close enough to open my office window and yell at them over the balcony – 'Look, get into school or otherwise I will come and get you' – but I'm afraid that is not really the way to do it.* (Head teacher)

- raises expectations of what the children can achieve:

*It's about creating a feeling of yes we can do it, you know, yes we are great. Even for our weakest children, I say to the parents – 'When your child goes on to secondary school, tell him he's wonderful, tell him he's fantastic, let him go from here feeling he's absolutely wonderful, he's got everything in front of him.*  
(Head teacher)

### Crime and drugs

The rise in crime and the increase in drug use were seen as linked to wider issues of unemployment and disadvantage:

*You have to address the social problems and you have to ask yourself why are people taking drugs and why do they feel the need to take drugs.*

*(Social worker)*

Drug abuse was seen as a serious and growing problem:

*I'll take you to a three-year-old boy and he can tell you more about heroin than I can, and I'm a police officer. He sees his mum and dad injecting ...*

*There are eleven year olds that are using cannabis but are not going to be far short of using heroin in future because it is available on the street for them to buy at £10. (Police officer)*

*A person that I arrested for the possession of heroin admitted he can get it from at least four sources on the estate.*

# 14 Service providers' perspectives on tackling social exclusion

Front-line workers showed they have a good understanding of the range of social problems that exist on the estates with which they are connected. Their perception of estate issues closely reflects those raised by residents, but they feel their ability to tackle estate problems is constrained by resource limitations. At a time when problems of unemployment, crime, vandalism, drugs, family breakdown and youth disaffection are increasing, the resources to tackle them are still being cut, except in areas selected for special initiative funding from central government. Thus, for instance, while extra police in one SRB area were able to reduce estate crime by an estimated 40 per cent, the single community police officer in another (non-SRB) area was withdrawn; and while community services were being developed with SRB funding, neighbourhood offices which had been a community resource in the same area were set to close as a result of mainstream budget cuts. If joined-up working is to be successful, greater consistency will be needed over a longer term on service levels and budgets.

## Resourcing services

Front-line service providers felt that inadequate resources were a real barrier to effectively tackling estate problems. Budget cuts to basic services emerged as a major issue. Although local government is in a constant state of change, it has not fully, or adequately, adjusted to the budget cuts of the last two decades. Basic service levels are considered inadequate; and many service providers have a problem in

covering the ground:

*At some point we have actually to say there is a consequence to stripping somewhere between 25 to 30 per cent of the local authority's budget in the last 20 years, because all the things, the bits that have gone, are the bits that go to make a decent civilised society. We are not going to be able to put the clock back 20 years, certainly not in the next year or so, and if we could the world has changed in the last 20 years. If we had the resources we probably wouldn't put them back in exactly the same way as they were. I am not asking for it to be 1979 again, what I am asking is that we get the resources, the commitment, we had then. (Front-line worker)*

There was consensus that basic services had been withdrawn from estates, leaving those that remain to deal with issues outside their remit. For instance, local housing offices are often the last remaining physical estate presence after youth, community and social services have been withdrawn, but residents see them as the local representatives of the council and expect to access a full range of council services from them. Gaps in provision exist, not because providers do not understand the needs to be met, but because resources are sometimes spread so thinly that the gaps are exposed:

*When you're actually trying to strengthen communities, strengthen the support for those communities, neighbourhood offices which have been a community resource are going to close down. (Community worker)*

In some cases, challenge funding initiatives like SRB, New Deal for Communities, Health

and Education Zones topped up resources to the required levels in the areas covered by the bid while, at the same time, council budget cuts were causing the withdrawal of other mainstream services in the same area:

*The SRB is putting extra money into the area, but at the same time the area is still suffering from budget cuts. It's like you're giving with one hand, and with the other hand you're taking away.*  
(Housing officer)

*We've got SRB coming in, but at the same time this area is suffering from having to make cuts to the mainstream council budget; so, for example, it is likely that social services are actually going to be pulling out of the area.* (Social worker)

*A few years ago, maybe about ten, social services had an office on the estate. That was removed, you know, all those community links, social workers near the families, all that was spoiled. Now we're trying to get back in there.*  
(Social worker)

One consequence is that many front-line public service workers have become demoralised. The organisations they work for have been repeatedly restructured to cope with reduced levels of staffing and cuts in resources. While they remain committed to their jobs, many feel their work is not valued.

- They joined local government because they believe in public service, but now feel they do not have the resources to match their responsibilities.
- They cannot therefore deliver the quality or level of service that residents require and expect.

- Outsiders, particularly those in the media and in central government, perceive this as a performance failure of their service, for which they are blamed, not a consequence of inadequate resourcing.

*We haven't got the staff. We can't get social workers, nobody wants to go into the job any longer. Because we can't get people in posts, there are a whole lot of things happening at the moment that we can't get involved in.* (Social worker)

*What I'm saying is that I don't believe that even Tony Blair or the Social Exclusion Unit are serious about addressing the issues in the way we are talking about them. I am not arguing for a massive rise in anyone's budget, what I am arguing for is a change of ethos, a change of philosophy and a change in the way you view people who are working class and who live in areas that are regarded as problematic. Unfortunately, the moral agenda of the present government will not allow the kind of work that we are talking about because it means actually spending more money on basic provision.*  
(Service manager)

The reaction of central government to this apparent lack of performance by local government is greater prescription as to how the available resources should be used. Services are specified and targeted more tightly. Performance indicators (PIs) and Best Value are examples of this. Some front-line service providers resent the extra level of bureaucracy introduced by these regimes and the time spent filling in forms that they feel could have been better spent in front-line provision work:

*The forms we have to work with, when they*

*brought them in a few years ago we were told it would save time, it would help us, but they have now become so numerous that we are inundated – files are falling down around our heads on top of us because of all this paper. It is a major problem with social workers because they spend so much time doing forms and form-filling that they can't get out there and do their real job. (Social worker)*

*Our job is paperwork. (Social worker)*

Other criticisms of target-driven work are that:

- the highest priority is given to work covered by PIs and performance measurement, while other important work gets done later, if at all
- the performance measures may give an entirely false impression of how well a service is performing; good PIs might mask poor levels of service on the ground.

*Some of our priorities are perhaps wrong and need to be refocused. So too are some of the priorities against which we are judged by the government. We may seem to be doing quite well on certain performance indicators, but the perception from the users out there is that we are providing a lousy service. (Housing officer)*

Overall, service providers feel they are losing the battle on troubled estates. Things are getting worse, not better; problems like drugs and crime are not being contained. There is a perception from some providers that families moving to the estates are being set up to fail; and the life chances of successive generations are affected:

*What concerns me is I don't see how we can stop the problem [drugs]. We seize more drugs, we arrest more people, but over the last few years it is just getting worse and worse. (Community police officer)*

### Accessing services

The front-line service providers had concerns that, where services were provided, they were not necessarily accessible and estate residents may not be aware of them. It was thought that some agencies did little to publicise their services through fear that demand, if stimulated, would exceed their capacity to meet it. Additionally, there was a recognition that many residents needed help to make the most of the services available.

One suggestion was that there was a need for a 'trusted intermediary' with an advocacy role to act on behalf of local residents, champion their cause and seek solutions to their problems. Further, there should be better information-sharing links between agencies; this would help avert crises, though there would need to be safeguards to avoid diminishing privacy and confidentiality.

Supporting families and young people was seen as having a key role in tackling social exclusion and there were particular concerns among front-line workers about the lack of services and support for these groups. Some felt parents needed to regain their confidence in themselves and in their parenting abilities through parent advice schemes, or similar initiatives to provide support for their children. For the children themselves, they suggested the following:

- for under-fives, high quality affordable child care; and the adoption of a whole family approach in dealing with children (by including their parents and immediate family)
- for children of five to 11 years, a range of engaging and accessible leisure facilities; involvement in the design and development of facilities; a monitoring system at primary school to identify children likely to drop out of education after the transition to secondary school
- for 16 to 18 year olds, leisure facilities that involved learning a skill, like motor cycle maintenance, computer skills training, an internet café; and the introduction of work/training disciplines to prepare for a job.

### Engagement and trust

The withdrawal of services, and difficulty in accessing them, had a number of further consequences. Front-line workers in each area thought the council was held in low esteem by estate residents in part because of its past inability to deliver estate improvements and quality services:

*There was very low aspiration, very low expectations of the council here and it was felt that we weren't doing anything any more, and they didn't expect anything of us. (Front-line worker)*

*I think it would help if there was money for improvements and capital works. That happened on [named estate] and the whole estate just looked better, and that underpinned anything else*

*that was going on because people took more pride in the area they lived in. It is quite a morale booster. (Front-line worker)*

*I think there is a very low opinion of the council ... not even a low opinion, just no opinion at all. (Front-line worker)*

*They didn't have any expectation of us, and we thought that there was no interest. (Front-line worker)*

The amount of consultation with estate communities varied considerably between the three estates. However, service providers from all areas, and all services, were worried about the narrowness of the range of local people who had any involvement with the council. Some central government funded initiatives require partnership with local communities, but true community involvement was proving elusive. There was a sense that the council was engaging only with a small group of residents while the majority were neither involved nor represented. They were concerned:

- about the lack of representativeness and accountability of those who came forward
- about the state of local democracy when so few residents got involved
- that services and information were not reaching socially excluded groups.

*I think that you get this everywhere. There is always some people that will do everything, be on every committee and be very vocal. (Front-line worker)*

*There's a lot of talent out there, but it needs to be extracted from people and they need support to enable them to gain the confidence to take on*

*and deal with some of these issues. When we're turning to residents and people from the community, we're turning to the same people all the time, when in fact the reality is that we need to broaden the base of the people we consult and to encourage their participation and involvement. There's eight or nine project groups wanting to work with the community and they're all going to the same people and they get overloaded. I think what we've got to do is try and broaden the involvement of members of the community.* (Housing manager)

Most front-line workers felt that the people who were most excluded had least access to services and were often among those who were not involved with agencies trying to deal with their problems:

*It is the same people that you see, and the same people who come to you in your surgeries, and the same people getting involved in the community, while the people that most need the services are quite often the people who don't access them.* (Front-line worker)

*The people who have been most involved in these projects have been the least socially excluded. It was the same when we organised this summer activities programme, the kids we reached were not the kids that we most needed to reach.* (Community worker)

They felt there was a need to develop outreach work as a way of reaching the most excluded. They recommended that there should be more front-line workers on the ground and specialist outreach workers to target the socially excluded.

In general, front-line workers felt that there was a widespread lack of trust in service

providers and that estate residents were often suspicious that the providers had a 'hidden agenda'. They considered that developing trust requires a level of continuity and consistency that is hard to maintain when there is a rapid turnover of staff, and that it was therefore important to commit staff to a neighbourhood for a period of time – 'at least five years'.

Most front-line workers believed problems on the estates could not be solved without engaging local residents and building on local pride. They suggested that there would be value in a whole range of initiatives, including:

- involving residents in local authority decisions about the estate to create a sense of ownership
- providing funding for community initiatives led by local residents
- encouraging community activists on the estates to lead community initiatives
- mobilising residents around problems
- engaging in high-profile community activities
- generating a positive image of the estate in the local press and through newsletters.

### New ways of working

Service providers thought that front-line services were not well co-ordinated at present. There were diverse groups providing different services with little or no integration or co-ordination, and different providers were frequently unaware of one another's services. SRB may not be the answer: there were concerns

about its dynamics, which was felt to be top-down and officer-led with little real community involvement; its poor co-ordination; and the fact that it was driven more by the need to meet performance targets (tick boxes for inputs and outputs) than any real vision about lasting outcomes.

All front-line providers agreed on the need for joined-up working, but multi-agency meetings took up scarce time which not everyone thought was time well spent, and some thought it would have been better spent doing what they saw as their main job:

*I went to a multi-agency meeting two weeks ago with social services and I have yet to discover what we were there to discuss. (Housing worker)*

*Multi-agency meetings don't help somebody who can't fill in their family's income support, or who doesn't understand how the system works for her child. (Health worker)*

All three local authorities are modernising their council structure and introducing new ways of working, but old departmental boundaries are still there, if less visible:

*If I talk about sharing information between social services and housing and so on, the departmental barriers immediately come down and questions of confidentiality and so on arise. (Social worker)*

New ways of working will require a broader range of skills and knowledge from local government officers than they may have at present:

*The role of the estate management officer and the issues and problems on the estate have changed significantly over the last ten years. The structures that we have in place at the moment*

*and the way we have traditionally worked are really not appropriate for tackling the issues that are out there today. The skills that we need from our estate management officers are different to what they possessed ten years ago. (Housing officer)*

*What I have learnt about the multi-agency thing is that the only way these things work is through individuals and their own networks ... somebody you know, someone by name, who you can ring up and say 'Look, I've got this family, can you help?'. (Teacher)*

*I will be quite honest and say that out of the eight staff in my office, there are only possibly two or three that have anywhere near the level of understanding about the work of other agencies. (Service manager)*

What was the solution? Front-line service providers thought that better co-ordination and integration would be helped by having:

- a local neighbourhood manager, or service co-ordinator
- a local neighbourhood presence; ideas for this included a neighbourhood centre, a local one-stop shop, or a drop-in café/ advice centre
- a well-indexed and up-to-date directory of services to help front-line service providers know about the full range of services provided locally and who to contact
- better training for front-line workers in partnership working and in order to understand the role of other agencies

- local offices staffed by people from different services who understood residents' needs and how to make the system work to their advantage.

# 15 Community workshops' perspectives on estate and community life

The first two phases of this research considered the perceptions and views of estate residents subject to social exclusion, and the perspectives of front-line public service providers. The final phase investigated the point of view of whole estate communities, through day-long demographically representative community workshops held on each estate. Local residents were recruited to include a cross-section of each estate in terms of employment status, age, gender and approximate length of residence. At Thames Green, the sample was also representative in terms of ethnicity (at Barminster and Coalton, ethnic minorities comprise less than 2 per cent of the estate populations). Because each workshop had been recruited to comprise a cross-section of the whole estate population, it included a minority of people vulnerable to social exclusion as well as a majority who were better connected to mainstream society through work.

The workshops had two main functions. First, to check the perceptions and attitudes of a cross-section of whole estate communities about estate and community life against those of the socially excluded groups who participated in Phase 1. Second, to consider the issues raised by the groups of front-line workers and the recommendations and solutions they proposed to tackle social exclusion and estate problems. This chapter reports the salient points from the discussion on estate and community life; the next chapter describes the workshops' response to the issues raised by the service providers.

## Estate problems

The workshops identified broadly the same raft of social problems that had been identified first in the 'excluded' discussion groups and again by the front-line service providers. Unlike the respondents in the 'excluded' discussion groups, participants in the whole community workshops were more likely to view estate problems as things that could be tackled, given the will and the money. They were much more critical about the appearance, state of repair and unmodernised condition of their estate and said that the quality of their housing reflected badly upon themselves. They felt the council had been negligent or remiss in not modernising the inter-war interiors, or improving the 'tatty' look of the exterior and common areas. Accessing special funding like SRB was seen as the only way to ensure the physical improvement of estates:

*The council's got no money. That's why it's the way it is. (Man, Barminster)*

Participants felt that the appearance of a neighbourhood has a powerful symbolic importance because it sends signals about the people who live there. Outsiders make judgements about the people who live on an estate by the way it looks:

*They think that decent people wouldn't live in a place like this. (Woman, Thames Green)*

But participants also recognised the difficulty of making improvements last. Often things on their estate got fixed but did not stay fixed. At Coalton, where SRB-funded regeneration was well under way, new features

provided by the council were soon vandalised:

*As part of the regeneration, the council put these little lay-bys in, and they put flowers and plants in, and flowerbeds outside your house. They only did three streets, then the kids ripped them all out. They just totally wrecked it.*

*They put new post boxes on the estate. It was a waste of time. The postmen couldn't get their keys in the lock because the kids superglued them. First they superglued them, then they set them on fire.*

This degree of vandalism was not unusual on the estates. The workshop participants outlined a number of other cases where the council had provided facilities which first got heavily vandalised, then withdrawn or locked up:

*We had a wonderful adventure playground, but it got wrecked and not repaired, so they closed it.*

These problems tend to be attributed to a trouble-making minority, sometimes the residents of one particular 'bad street' on the estate, or a small number of notorious estate families. There was a feeling that everyone knows the perpetrators, but that there is little that they or the authorities can do to deal with them.

### Crime and drugs

There was concern, particularly among older residents, that 'order' had in a sense broken down, and that the authorities were unable, or unwilling, to do anything about it. The ineffectiveness of the council and police in dealing with antisocial behaviour, the

widespread availability of hard drugs and the loss of control associated with drug addiction, added to this concern. One middle-aged woman described a frightening encounter with a 'crackhead':

*He had a knife and he said he used it the other night. He said 'it would be a pity if I used it on you'. Well, I whacked him one. But he got away with it.*

In Coalton, the council is working closely with the police to tackle the drug problem on estates. As part of its SRB strategy, extra funding has been given to the police service to provide high visibility policing in the area that includes the estate. Initially, the police were fearful that they would meet resistance from residents in an area regarded as 'difficult to police'. In fact, residents welcomed the extra police presence and the drop in crime that went with it. Their complaint was not that there were too many police, but that there was not enough action:

*They know who the drug dealers are. We've all reported it often enough. Why don't they do something about it?*

*My grandson had his motorbike stolen, and a BMX stolen, and a friend had her brand new bike stolen by the same person. He's in the paper every week about drugs. We told the police. They told us 'prove it'.*

Crime and drugs were similarly linked in the other two workshops. In Barminster, heroin and crack cocaine were both said to be available on the estate, along with a range of other drugs. The main concern was the *quantity* of drugs available, which meant they were cheap to obtain, and also that police raids were not

effective in stemming the supply:

*Drugs are so easy to come by on the estate. They're not pushed any more. They're cheap. It's a matter of supply and demand.*

*Ninety per cent of the crime on this estate is caused by drugs. They're thieving to feed the habit.*

In their responses, workshop participants at Thames Green differentiated between hard and soft drugs. Cannabis and the 'recreational drugs' were considered acceptable; crack cocaine and heroin were not, partly because of the effect on users, including addiction and loss of control, but also because of the effect that those desperate to feed a habit had on others:

*There is nothing else for the kids to do but hang around on the street corner. If they burn weed, you are lucky. The other groups burn crack, so at least it is the lesser of the two evils. That's how you have to look at it.*

*Let me tell you something. Myself and a few friends, we do mother-minding. When mothers get paid at the end of the month, we go and sit in their flat until they have paid all their bills because they have got teenage sons who are addicted to heroin and they've got knives at their own mothers' throats for their wages.*

### Family support

The workshops identified a serious lack of support for children and parents under stress, whether this is caused by poverty, joblessness, or exclusion from the normal living standards and level of participation in society that most people take for granted. Vulnerable families on

the study estates are exposed to conditions where high rates of crime prevail, drugs are readily available, and aspirations and expectations are low; conditions in which even families with much better resources would find it difficult to survive and thrive:

*The only government aid that we have got round here is social workers and probation officers for our kids. (Mother, Thames Green)*

Participants in all three workshops identified the need for programmes of support to parents in order to ensure that children have a constructive home environment and improved life chances. Some identified a need for more family drop-in centres with crèche facilities. Others felt that formal parenting classes would be helpful, although they recognised that some people would feel there was a stigma attached to having to 'learn' about how to be a good parent.

### Estate communities

Yet, despite the existence of major social problems, most people seemed broadly content to live where they did, and many, though not all, saw their estate as a friendly place. When they expressed any personal anxieties, they tended to worry more about their children's futures than their own:

*The majority of people are decent. Decent people, decent neighbours.*

All three communities were described by some residents as 'friendly and close knit', but by others as 'cliquey' or excluding. The difference in perception appeared to depend on whether the respondent was included in or out of the main community.

To explore patterns of exclusion and inclusion within the communities, participants in each workshop were asked how long they had lived on the estate, how well they knew their neighbours and how many other estate residents they knew. Similar questions had been asked in earlier 'excluded' discussion groups. From these two sources, an outline could be traced of different patterns of social relations on the three estates. In Coalton, the ex-mining community, every participant in the workshop knew all the other participants, not just by sight, but where they lived and something of their life histories. Of the three communities, Coalton was by far the most 'traditional' and close knit.

Barminster was also close knit, but the social networks that were described appeared to depend on age, length of residence, and the activity levels and interests of individuals. Barminster had a core of long-established residents who had lived on the estate all their lives, or from the time the estate was built. The older ones knew well the cohort they grew up with, or who lived on the estate when they moved there, and also their immediate neighbours, but few of the more recent arrivals. At the other end of the age range, young people who grew up on the estate reckoned they knew everybody who lived there at least by sight. But the range of acquaintances of more recent arrivals on the estate was much more limited and depended on their length of residence and the extent to which they participated in local social organisations (like the churches, tenants' association or community centre).

Thames Green too had a core of long-standing residents but here the main divisions were between black and white residents who often used completely different services and

facilities, and between those in and out of work. Those in work spent less time on the estate and knew fewer people than their counterparts who were jobless. Indeed, on all the estates, jobless people (vulnerable to social exclusion) seemed as well connected as those in work to others in their own communities. It was newcomers, particularly those in work, who often found it hard to 'fit in' to the estate and its community:

*If a family moves on to the estate it might take a bit of time for the parents to adjust, but the children usually adapt quite well. There are a lot of children on the estate and they just make friends and go here, there and everywhere. For parents, it can be quite hard.*

Participants' views about the friendliness of others on their estate appeared to depend on how well they themselves 'fitted in':

*You know the streets, everyone will wave as you go past, it's home isn't it? (Man, pensioner, Barminster)*

*I've lived here for five years and I really only know four or five houses over the road and two either side of me. (Man, 'newcomer', Barminster)*

*It's lonely here, you don't know anybody. (Black woman, Thames Green)*

While residents had different views about the current strength of their communities, most in all three areas agreed that community spirit has declined over recent years. People are now less friendly and less trusting than they used to be, and good neighbours are harder to find.

*When we first moved in, there were good neighbours, but it has gone downhill gradually, not suddenly.*

*The community spirit's gone. You wouldn't believe how hard it is now to find a good neighbour.*

When participants in each of the workshops were asked to draw up lists of the good and bad things about where they lived, social relations within their community featured on both sides of the balance sheet. In each area, people valued the 'good people', 'nice people' or 'decent people' who lived there, while they were also concerned about the antisocial behaviour of others, especially 'out of control' children and young people, and those driven to antisocial actions by drugs (crack cocaine). This feeling of a community in the balance was summed up by a young mother in Barminster who explained:

*I grew up here, I've lived here all my life. I like the estate. But if it gets any worse than it is, I'll have to move out.*

There are mixed views about the future prospects of these estates. Many residents feel that their estates will continue to deteriorate and some are fatalistic about this. At Thames Green, the only estate of the three not to have won 'special funding' (through SRB), the physical condition of the estate is a live issue because residents feel let down by the state of disrepair and lack of improvements. But others are more optimistic about their estate's prospects and feel that things could be improved if local people got more involved in estate life. Indeed, one marked difference between the workshops and the 'excluded' focus groups was that workshop participants were very much more positive in attitude and willing to get involved in self-help, mutual aid and community activities. These ranged from

marching bands and sports clubs through to informal child-care arrangements, mothers' groups and individuals helping others with their entitlement to benefits or services.

### Movers and returners

The sense of residents actively assessing the trade-off between the pros and cons of living in their community was underlined in the Coalton workshop where several of the participants had moved out of the area because of its economic and social decline, but then had moved back again. The main motive for moving away was to improve employment opportunities, but in each case the reason for returning was the wish to rejoin a community of which they felt a part.

*If you want to get a decent job, you've got to move away. But you lose all this, knowing everybody. I moved to Hull but I knew nobody, and then I moved back. In Coalton, I can sit in a pub, no matter which one, and there is someone I know. You know what's going on.*

Another man had got a job in London but could not afford the London rents or house prices. He decided he was happier living on benefit in Coalton in a comfortable home with people he knew than scraping by in London, surrounded by strangers. A third had moved to the south coast with her husband but found people unfriendly. So they moved back to be with people they knew:

*You see, when you live somewhere like Coalton, you learn a lot about the people in your street. If you see people, they say hello to you and they're friendly to you, whereas if you've moved away, you don't get that, do you?*

These returners underline an important message from the workshops that, despite the decline of these areas, they are 'home' to many people who still feel strong ties to their local communities and this is reason enough for them to continue to want to live there.

At Thames Green, too, there was evidence that there would be two-way traffic if people were more free to move. On the one hand, two-thirds of workshop participants said they would leave the estate if they had a choice; on the other, there was much talk of sons and daughters of existing residents who would jump at the chance of moving to the estate if they were able:

*There are people crying to get back on the estate because they know the people here and like the estate. But they can't get an offer.*

Even the would-be leavers said they would think differently about wanting to move if the estate's physical and social problems were tackled.

### Conclusion: estates in the balance

In its National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the Social Exclusion Unit describes a linear process by which declining neighbourhoods progress to become unpopular areas where nobody with choice wants to live. A number of the stages in this process would be familiar to residents of Coalton, Barminster and Thames Green. Yet, the three community workshops revealed another side of these communities which suggests that the process of neighbourhood decline is not necessarily the one-way street described by the Social Exclusion Unit and others, but is something more dynamic

that depends on the cumulative personal decisions of many households about the advantages and disadvantages of living where they do.

All are communities that have traditionally had a strong sense of communal solidarity, some of which remains to this day. In earlier times, this community of place was reinforced by communities of work. Now these work ties have gone but many of the social relationships still remain. More than anywhere else, the estates and their communities are still 'home' to a large proportion of those who live there. And, like many other communities with strong ties, those living on the estates are slow to warm to outsiders. Newcomers in Barminster, black people in Thames Green and those moving from a 'bad street' to another part of the estate in Coalton, all described these same communities as 'cliquey', 'unfriendly' or even hostile. How the communities are seen depends on whether they are viewed from the inside or the outside: but the common factor is that both viewpoints are describing communities of some strength. While social exclusion has eaten into communal solidarity on the three estates, they all remain places where people choose to live.

The views expressed in the community workshops suggest that in all three areas there are balancing factors: those which attract people to a neighbourhood or provide a reason for them to stay (pull factors); and others which drive people out or make the area unattractive to inward migration (push factors). Social exclusion – poverty and the social problems that go with it – is a push factor in each area. In Coalton, an additional push factor is the wider economic decline of the area. But each estate also has pull factors outlined in the workshops

as ‘the good things about living here’, chief among which (for those who feel part of it) is the strength of the local community. There is evidence that people weigh the balance between these factors in deciding whether to leave, stay in, or indeed return to, areas which were once good places to live but are now in decline. Inertia, lack of better alternatives and staying with ‘the devil you know’ are reasons for staying put. Lack of safety and security, poor education and declining life chances for children, poor job prospects and a declining environment, are all reasons to move away:

*Trouble is, when you move away, what is there to say it's any better? You might just go into an area where it's even worse than the one you've left.*

Some participants suggested that one more adverse event – like being burgled, or a member of the family being robbed or attacked – could change the balance between going and staying for an individual or household:

*I like the estate, but if it gets any worse than it is, I'll have to move out. (Mother, Barminster)*

*You have to make a decision whether you want to live in a stressful situation all the time or whether you would, perhaps, prefer to move on. I have two children and it is getting to the stage where I have had enough. I really have had enough. (Mother, Thames Green)*

One image that came strongly from all three workshops was of ordinary, decent people on these estates trying to live normal daily lives amidst a background of growing disorder, and complex and severe social problems.

# 16 Community workshops' perspectives on tackling social exclusion

## Accessing services

In every workshop, participants felt that their access to services, both public and private, had deteriorated in recent years. Their perception was that service providers had withdrawn public services as a means of achieving cuts in service budgets required as a consequence of 'capping' public expenditure. Private sector provision had also declined with the closure of shops and withdrawal of financial services. As services diminished or disappeared, residents felt increasingly abandoned by the service providers. There was a sense that the local authorities in particular were too big and too remote to understand the needs and priorities of residents. Participants spoke of the closure of local housing and social services offices, a diminished police presence, and the closure of youth and community services. It was apparent that the connections between these communities and wider society had been weakening for a long time.

*This has been happening for years, gradually downtrodden people are getting even more downtrodden.*

Asked to list local facilities and amenities open to them, participants in Barminster and Thames Green came up with what seemed on the face of it to be a reasonably good range, although Coalton appeared less well served with both fewer local amenities and poorer access to the nearest urban centre. The problem appeared to be that facilities that had once been good now suffered from poor repair or upkeep,

and the activities on offer often lacked imagination and were not suited to the current needs of the local community, and so were not widely used. Youth services in particular were criticised for failing to appeal to young people. There was also thought to be a low awareness of the facilities that were available:

*A lot of people don't know where this community centre is. There are no signs or anything.*

The withdrawal or reduction in the level of services was not the only problem. Local authorities and other agencies were also criticised for failing to integrate and co-ordinate their services. In some cases, the lack of integration of services appears to have got worse, rather than better, as a result of SRB funding with:

- a variety of organisations overlapping and duplicating effort
- a multiplicity of small-scale local initiatives with no real co-ordination or shared learning
- individuals having multiple relationships with different services and agencies, with no single service able to see or act on behalf of 'the whole family'.

The consequence is that agencies are frequently unable to deliver the most appropriate solution for individuals or families, which takes all their needs into account. As a result, people feel let down by service providers and disappointed at the service they get.

### Information

Lack of information was another problem. The complexity of the welfare system and the difficulty that people had in finding their way round it was a barrier. Participants said they had a problem in getting a grip on how councils and other public service providers worked. Again, the consequence was that individuals rarely made the most of the services available. In particular, participants had problems with:

- who to go to for advice about their circumstances
- which department or agency deals with which problem
- understanding their rights and entitlements.

*They don't tell you what you're entitled to, you have to find it out for yourself.*

### Youth services

On all three estates, youth services were identified as a key priority by both front-line providers and residents. Underlying this priority is a recognition that many of the estate's problems are related to truancy, gangs of youths 'hanging around,' youth crime, drug use and dealing. Residents believed that problems set in once children reached the age of 12, and they said that this threshold was getting lower all the time:

*It used to be 14 and 15 year olds, now you get 12 and 13 year olds doing drugs, they're getting younger all the time.*

The critical age group for action was seen as seven to 12 year olds, who might be prevented

from falling into the same cycle of exclusion and disadvantage if there were more social and developmental activities available to them. All three workshops stressed that the key to providing attractive and valuable services for young people of all ages is to involve them, in a practical way, in the design and development of new services, so that they feel some ownership of them. Specific ideas included:

- youth centres, run by a dedicated youth worker but designed and built with the participation of local young people
- new or improved sports facilities
- organised trips away for local children (participants in the Barminster workshop spoke highly of camping trips organised by local youth workers).

In addition, residents proposed a range of activities designed to be attractive to older children while also developing skills they could exploit for work:

- motorbike tracks and maintenance workshops
- computer courses.

### Engagement

There was little sense from the workshops that, at present, residents are consulted or involved in decision making, although participants were in no doubt that they would welcome more opportunities for involvement. They feel that decisions are imposed from 'on high' by managers with little understanding or experience of their circumstances. This creates an impression that local agencies are not

interested in providing services that meet residents' real needs and are not genuinely committed to their concerns:

*They're just going ahead and doing what they want, they're not asking our opinions. (Man, Coalton)*

*If I thought the council cared about me and other people as tenants, and cared about my welfare and my living conditions, then I would feel differently. (Woman, Thames Green)*

In addition, the local authorities were not effectively communicating with residents to explain their priorities and the reasons for their decisions. Participants felt that:

- the council had 'its own agenda' that it would follow regardless of residents' views
- they were told too little, too late about the council's plans
- the information they receive does not contain anything useful, interesting or honest about the council's plans
- consultation is often not genuine because the council has already made up its mind.

The consequence is that residents feel neither that they have an opportunity to have a say in decisions about their estate, nor that there is any attempt to justify decisions that have been taken. As a result, local authorities become associated with the arbitrary and irrational exercise of power on estates, rather than being seen as agencies on the residents' side.

### A breakdown of trust

Perhaps most importantly, there is a powerful lack of trust and empathy between residents and service providers. Many participants gave anecdotes of poor treatment or a perceived lack of interest from the council, police, health services and other local agencies; these were seen as ineffective, disinterested, uncoordinated, out of touch and in no sense 'on our side':

*If the council ran itself efficiently and acknowledged when they made mistakes, and used those mistakes as a lesson, then I don't think that people would feel so disillusioned.*

*You're not treated as the customer with the council. You're treated like a nuisance, like you're after something that you're not entitled to.*

There is a belief that the council is not interested in residents' needs and does not understand their circumstances. This can start with an inadequate council response to a specific problem (poor quality repair work, errors in processing rent payments, delay in getting housing benefit or council tax benefit, a lack of sensitivity to individuals' circumstances, and so on). But poor experiences of the council as a landlord, and friends' and families' similar experiences, quickly generate a broader lack of faith in the authority and its services as a whole, and a perception that the council does not listen to, or care about, estate residents:

*They don't know what it is like to live here. If they did they would do something about it.*

Residents' lack of access to services, the failure to engage local communities and the breakdown of trust reinforce one another and

contribute to a vicious circle of disaffection and ineffective services. Figure 1 graphically displays the relationships among these different issues.

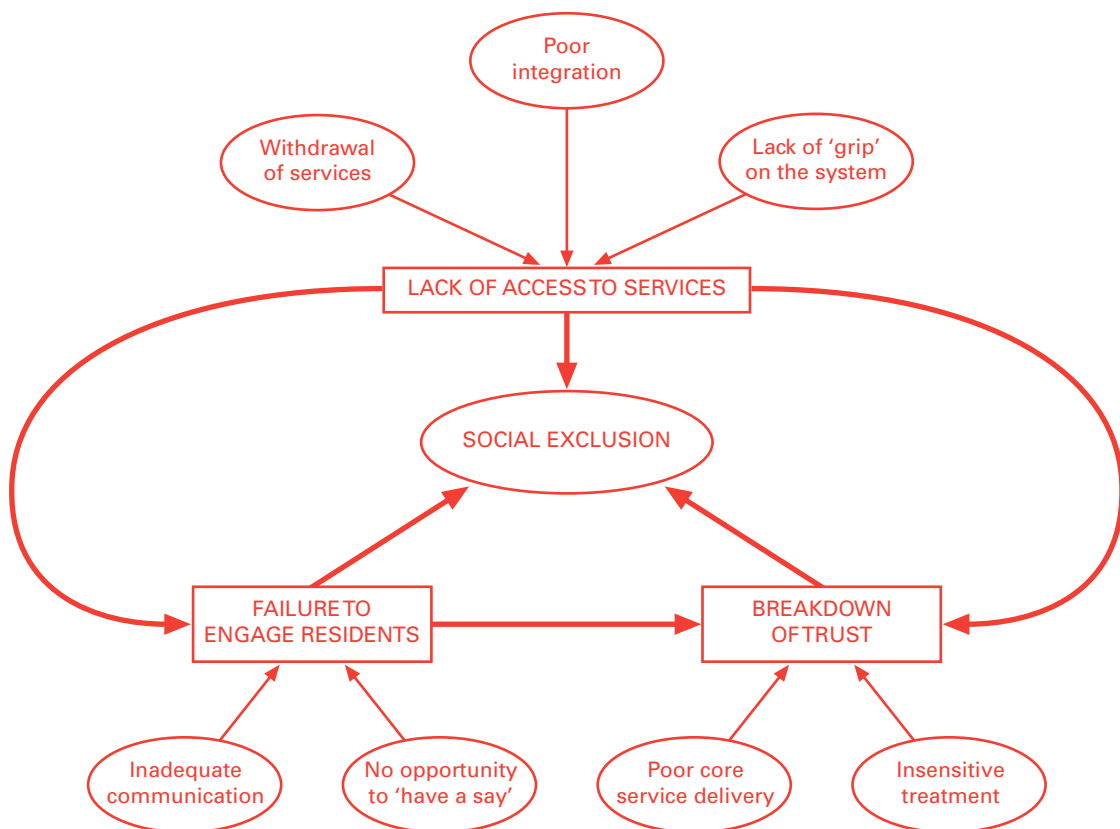
**Local champions**

In the public services, however, there are examples of individuals working in specific roles who have overcome these problems. They were described as being ‘one of us’ or ‘on our side,’ and were seen as understanding residents’ circumstances in a way that ‘the council’ did

not, even when they were local authority employees. They included:

- a head teacher who goes out on to the estate to round up truants, but also allows children to use the school playground after hours to play football
- a community police officer who is trusted because he is ‘straight’ and speaks up for young people from the estate
- several youth workers who have won the trust of young people and are felt to be ‘on their side’

**Figure 1 How poor public services contribute to social exclusion**



- some councillors who are felt to be close to the people they represent.

The difference between these individuals and other staff appears to lie in their independence of spirit, a more 'human' approach and their willingness and ability to spend time helping to sort out problems. They are better at empathising with residents, more prepared to listen to them and less likely to come across as simply the representative of their employer's rules and regulations:

*He [community police officer] speaks for himself, and if he thinks you're getting a raw deal from the police he'll back you all the way.*

### Conclusion

Despite the efforts of 'local champions' like those mentioned above, the overwhelming

impression left by the community workshops is that public service delivery to these estates has declined in volume and quality at a time when needs have increased as a result of the higher numbers of disadvantaged households living there. What is more, there is no sign from this study that this process has yet begun to change. At the time the fieldwork for this research was concluding, councils in all three areas were seeking fresh service cuts in order to achieve budget reductions. While the modernising agenda has begun to change the organisational model at the town halls, the socially isolated communities on the estates in this study have not yet begun to feel the benefit of any improvement in their access to services, or opportunities to have a say about decisions that may affect their homes and lives.

# 17 Different perspectives

This chapter concludes the reporting on the qualitative research in Part 3 by summarising the views, attitudes and aspirations of participants in the whole estate community workshops, and comparing and contrasting them with those of the groups vulnerable to social exclusion reported in Part 2. It then goes on to bring together some of the ideas about tackling social exclusion discussed with front-line service providers and in the community workshops. Finally, it considers how certain key themes from these discussions might be taken forward in new ways of improving access and service delivery on estates.

## Perspectives on social exclusion compared

One of the research objectives was to compare and contrast the views, attitudes and aspirations of groups vulnerable to social exclusion with those of the wider communities on their estates. This section summarises the salient points from Parts 2 and 3 to form the basis for that comparison.

The *groups vulnerable to exclusion* were much less likely to be concerned about the things that outsiders thought were wrong with their estate and would be 'bad things about living there'. In particular, they did not:

- see their estates as others saw them
- recognise estate disrepair and lack of improvement as a problem
- regard a high rate of joblessness as a problem
- see themselves as 'socially excluded'
- think that residents dependent on income support were 'poor'.

They were generally content with where they lived. Their main concerns were with everyday life and their main problems centred on social relationships with others who lived nearby – family, friends and neighbours.

The responses of participants in these groups were marked by a lack of confidence, self-esteem and optimism, and a profound apathy. They seemed to share a sense that they were powerless to change things and had little confidence that things could be changed. Generally, their aspirations and expectations were low.

Although these feelings and attitudes were present in the community workshops, they were held by a minority of participants. The tenor of the workshops was much more positive, hopeful and creative. There was a greater willingness to get involved, but also much greater criticism of the public authorities for not tackling estate issues. The majority of *workshop participants* were more likely to:

- be critical about estate disrepair and lack of improvement
- be concerned about the appearance of their estate
- worry about the level of crime, vandalism and antisocial behaviour
- be concerned about the widespread availability of hard drugs
- feel that 'order' had broken down to a degree
- be critical of public authorities, who they thought were 'ineffective, disinterested, unco-ordinated, out of touch and not on their side'

- feel embarrassed about the public reputation of their estate.

Workshop participants had a much more optimistic attitude than the respondents in the 'excluded' groups. They had higher aspirations and were more interested in getting on – some called it 'bettering themselves'. They were less content with where they lived and thought that a lot could be done to change things for the better, but that nobody was doing it. Lastly, they felt 'neglected' by the public authorities; some said they felt 'abandoned' by them.

Their main problems were concerns about their children's life chances, including:

- their education
- their prospects of getting a job
- preventing them getting sucked into crime, drugs, or teenage pregnancy through peer pressure.

In both the workshops and the earlier 'excluded groups', respondents identified an *estate culture* and pressure to conform to it. This included:

- a toleration of crime, drugs and antisocial behaviour
- a culture of low attainment
- low aspirations and expectations
- estate norms that were different from mainstream society
- strong pressure from peers to conform to estate norms.

It is notable that the estate culture reflects the attitudes and norms of groups vulnerable to social exclusion more than those of the wider

community. One way of explaining these findings is that the estate culture, though perpetuated only by a minority, is the dominant culture in the common areas, where children and young people congregate. Low-grade criminal activity, antisocial and intimidating behaviour, and drug dealing were reported to be commonplace in these areas, whatever the values of the majority of residents. A further, related, point is that activity in the common parts of an estate is dominated by the residents who spend most time there – who do not regularly leave it to go to work, and cannot afford leisure activities or shopping elsewhere. The insularity of these residents – their lack of 'connectedness' to people and places off the estate – is one of the defining features of social exclusion.

### New ways of working at a neighbourhood level

The final task of the community workshops was to investigate new institutional forms that might improve individuals' access to services at a neighbourhood level. While estate residents and front-line service providers saw lack of resources as the main barrier to improving access to public sector services, the workshops and discussion groups also identified other barriers which could be broken down by new ways of working. This section pulls together from these sources a set of requirements that new local service delivery mechanisms should meet, and goes on to describe three specific options for improving access that were discussed in two of the workshops, and the way that participants responded to them.

Analysis of the responses from this programme of research suggests that new

methods of service delivery, or channels of access to services, are required to tackle the problems associated with poverty and social exclusion on troubled housing estates. The research so far indicates that the following features would be required:

- a local presence
- better access to information about services
- points of advice and advocacy for residents that are not tied to one particular service
- better co-ordination and integration of services, both within agencies and between agencies
- the capacity to guide residents through dealings with a wide variety of services and agencies (the 'intermediary' function)
- continuity of personnel to enable the development of trust
- improved 'customer care' and flexibility (availability outside working hours, drop-in resources, prompt response to queries)
- a greater emphasis on consultation and listening
- feedback mechanisms that allow residents to give their views
- better formal communications between agencies and residents.

### What are the options?

Options for a new model for improved local service delivery that incorporates the above

features were discussed at two of the community workshops (at Coalton and Thames Green). Workshop participants recognised that, while the inability of existing services to address residents' needs was partly to do with their physical withdrawal from estates, it also stemmed from the failure of integration and co-ordination of services, both within local authorities and between local authorities and other agencies. The divisions between the responsibilities of different council departments make it difficult for needs that span them to be properly recognised and met. Co-ordinated working between council departments and outside agencies can be even more difficult.

For example, a key priority area – how to deal with disaffected youth on estates – is likely to involve housing, education, social services, community services, leisure, the police, probation service and the employment service, as well as a number of voluntary agencies. Each of these services has only a partial responsibility for the problem; no service has a complete overview and, while the new Youth Justice teams now have an oversight of the criminal law aspect, nobody has a formal responsibility for overall co-ordination. Crucially, no one 'owns the problem'; therefore no one is responsible for sorting it out.

Where staff in these services make the necessary linkages in relation to a particular client or issue, the connection is more likely to be made on the basis of personal contact rather than established organisational networks. If this complex division of responsibilities is hard for front-line service providers to understand, it is completely baffling to most estate residents. They have no guide to finding their way into and around the system and are often sent from

one department or agency to another to sort out their problem, or meet their needs. It is clear that ‘joined-up problems need joined-up solutions’ at two different levels: first, at the provider level to integrate and co-ordinate services; second, at the consumer level to improve access to the system and make full use of its provisions. How should this best be done?

The workshops considered these two different approaches – top-down and bottom-up – to joining up access to services at a neighbourhood level. The bottom-up approach looks at the provision of services from a *consumer* point of view. The consumer issues identified earlier in this report include lack of information, understanding rights and entitlements, knowing which department or agency deals with which problem, and who to go to for advice and help. The top-down approach uses *management structures* to co-ordinate and integrate the disparate services and agencies. And a third, different yet, approach was also considered: the option of empowering tenants and residents to better help themselves by supplying their own services through a tenant management organisation (TMO), or something similar, with devolved powers and budgets.

### The options considered

These options for improved channels of access to services were first considered in the community workshop at Coalton, after which they were further refined and developed as three alternative models. These were then presented and discussed in the final workshop at Thames Green. Participants were asked for their views on the merits and demerits of a:

- top-down model for service integration and co-ordination, characterised by a council-appointed neighbourhood manager, with delegated authority to co-ordinate local services
- bottom-up model, characterised by the provision of semi-official advocates or advisors, who ‘know the system’ and can advise and assist residents, but with no authority to deliver service improvements
- local management hybrid, along the lines of a tenant management organisation, with some powers and budget devolved from the council to a democratically controlled community organisation.

The following responses were obtained. Participants were enthusiastic about the *bottom-up* model because it addressed directly their problems about lack of information, who to go to, and rights and entitlements. It also addressed more fundamental problems about lack of engagement and trust. Residents liked the idea of having someone ‘on their side’ who knew their way round the system and was sympathetic to their needs and concerns. However, the person or persons would need to have a status sufficient to ensure that service providers would give them the co-operation and information they would need to do the job. And, if they had an advocacy role, the position would need to have enough ‘clout’ to ensure that the advocate was listened to.

But residents saw problems with this model. If the advisor or advocate were a council employee, they would have divided loyalties. If, on the other hand, they were part of a voluntary agency, they would have no real influence with

the council. The consensus view was that, while a local information and advice point would be a step forward and meet some real needs, there was concern that the advisors would have no real authority or budget to make things happen locally:

*They'd be good listeners, but that would be it.*

Views differed on the *top-down* model. While there was ready recognition of the advantages of integration and co-ordination, the workshop identified a number of barriers and a lack of belief that the council could, or would, overcome them. First, it could be uneconomic to reorganise services to locate them at an estate level; and to do so would certainly run counter to the 'economy of scale' argument that has driven service reorganisation in recent years. Second, different services had different boundaries, which did not neatly coincide with those of the estate. Third, there was the issue of whether the person in charge would co-ordinate or manage services – would they have influence or real power? Fourth, it could be crucial which service employed the person in charge, and what kind of arrangements were made to give them authority or influence over other services. Finally, would a public sector employee be able to reconcile the needs of the estate with the requirements of their employer?

*They'd always have to follow the paymaster.*

Of the three approaches, residents felt that a *hybrid organisation* along the lines of a tenant management organisation, with a combination of real power and local control, had the most potential. But, while participants thought this was better than the other two approaches, they had reservations about it. The main caveats were:

- some foresaw potential problems with tenant board members not acting impartially, particularly when there were competing claims on resources
- TMOs' powers have typically been limited to council services, with little direct input into services provided by other agencies, which may be equally important
- residents were keen that any local service organisation should provide jobs for local people and suitable training opportunities for residents to gain the skills required
- democratic control and local representation do not necessarily solve communication problems: therefore a need for effective engagement and communication between the TMO and residents could still remain.

But, while most participants were keen to have their say and wanted to be listened to, what they said they really wanted was high quality services delivered competently and without undue delay by others paid to do it, rather than having to control the management of services themselves. They wanted to gain a better grip on the things that affected their own lives, but preferred not to be involved in controlling things that affected the lives of their neighbours and other residents:

*We want changes, so that we can go to the housing office and say, this is what we want and see it happening. We don't want to go there and have to wait weeks or months or years before something happens.*

## Conclusion

The development of new ways of improving access to public services at a local level was one objective of this research, and its findings have thrown up some relevant issues. The first of these is the importance of the social housing estate as an agent of social exclusion. There is a good argument that social exclusion is in part a product of the way poor and disadvantaged households have been gathered together through the residualisation of the social housing sector. The second is the importance of public services on estates that may otherwise be becoming socially isolated. Large social housing estates are not going to become better places to live without the active intervention of the public services, especially the local authority; because incomes are so low, there is limited scope for the market or the private sector to develop a role here. The third relevant finding is the degree to which the majority of residents do not share the views and attitudes of the 'excluded', although these often dominate the 'estate culture' and certainly affect the reputation of particular estates. A fourth is the need for better integration and co-ordination of services, both within public agencies and between them. And a fifth is the need for better information and ways of accessing the services that are available. A gloss on this would be the provision of a 'trusted intermediary', someone who knows the system and could guide residents through it and where necessary 'be on their side'.

The last of the community workshops was held in November 1999, five months before the Social Exclusion Unit published its proposals for the National Strategy for Neighbourhood

Renewal. These research findings suggest that the Social Exclusion Unit is on the right track in its focus on neighbourhood management as a mechanism for tackling social exclusion. A *neighbourhood manager* could be someone with overall charge of all the public services in a neighbourhood; someone to go to when things go wrong; someone who 'owns' the whole problem, not just part of it. *Neighbourhood wardens* would help restore a sense of 'order' where it has broken down. *Super caretakers* could take charge of the common areas, where crime, drugs and antisocial acts are now tolerated. All of these would add a local presence, face-to-face interaction and human contact, things the workshop participants said they wanted.

However, the workshops identified a number of pertinent questions which need to be addressed if neighbourhood management is to be effective: for example, how big is a 'neighbourhood? Is an estate too small to act as an economic base for services? What is to be done about the lack of co-terminosity between services? In which service is the neighbourhood manager to be placed; and how will he or she be accountable to residents? These questions will be familiar to many local authorities that in the 1980s and 1990s considered and tried out the decentralisation of their housing and other services. None of them has clear-cut answers, and it needs to be recognised that there will be both advantages and disadvantages in whichever management structure is introduced. And last, but by no means least, neighbourhood management will only work properly if it is properly resourced.



# **Part 4**

## **Overview and Conclusions**



# 18 Excluded communities, isolated neighbourhoods

Parts 2 and 3 of this report presented and analysed the findings of research on three social housing estates into the views and attitudes of, first, residents vulnerable to social exclusion; and second, other estate residents and front line public sector service providers. This final part draws out the main themes of the research findings, and sets out its conclusions. This chapter addresses the following questions.

- What light does the research shed on social exclusion?
- Is work the key to combating social exclusion?
- Will new ways of working be enough to prevent social exclusion on social housing estates?
- Why are public services so critical on large social housing estates?

## What light does the research shed on social exclusion?

An important objective of this research was to give a voice to those vulnerable to social exclusion, so questions of definition were central from the outset. Who are 'the excluded'? The first chapter of the report outlined various attempts to define social exclusion. There is some consensus that the salient features that apply to individuals are lack of income (poverty) and lack of connectedness to wider society. Income and employment might therefore be two effective filters, or screens, through which 'the excluded' might be identified.

For the purposes of this research, it was decided that long-term detachment from the labour market was likely to meet both criteria, and this was chosen to be the main filter for the Phase 1 focus groups. Pensioners were also included at this stage of the research, for a particular reason. At that time, the Minister for Welfare Reform, Frank Field, was making the case that those dependent on state pensions were socially excluded. Such pensioners are likely to be poor and are clearly disconnected from the labour market, so appeared consistent with the filters adopted for Phase 1.

### Lack of work

How well did these filters identify residents vulnerable to social exclusion? Long-term *lack of work* proved a good indicator of a distinctly different pattern of feelings, attitudes and aspirations among the 'excluded' groups. Participants in the non-pensioner 'excluded' groups gave an account of an estate culture that tolerated crime and anti-social behaviour, violence and aggression, drink and drugs. Further, the responses of participants were marked by:

- a lack of confidence
- a lack of self-esteem
- low aspirations and expectations
- a lack of belief that things can improve
- profound apathy.

But not everyone who was jobless shared these characteristics. Some were more optimistic, positive, hopeful and had clearer and higher aspirations. On probing, these individuals mostly turned out to be part of a

family where one or more parents were in full-time work, or had been until recently; or who had spent most of their lives living elsewhere than the estate. The key difference seemed to be that these respondents had as a resource a framework of norms and values much closer to those of mainstream society. So, long-term lack of contact with the labour market proved a good indicator, but poor predictor (in individual cases), of social exclusion.

The older people recruited for the pensioner groups in all three areas were markedly different from those in the other 'excluded' groups. In fact, they very quickly demonstrated that they were not excluded in any meaningful way apart from having a limited amount of money. They were confident, optimistic and generally better connected than those in other groups, and they demonstrated clearly that lack of money and lack of work did not inevitably produce social exclusion. Other things, like lifetime habits and values, could persist even when work ceased and money was short.

### Connectedness

What does the research say about the issue of *connectedness*? It seems a concept closer to the notion of social exclusion than being out of work or having little money. It recognises that people can be connected to society in different ways; not just through work, but also through membership of clubs, societies and organisations, belonging to faith communities, doing voluntary work and so on. Generally, the responses indicated a link between a pattern of regular work and interest in, and awareness of, what goes on in the wider world.

But, again, there were exceptions. Pensioners appeared better connected than others in the

'excluded' groups, possibly because they continued with the habits, and held to the values, acquired in earlier years. They read more newspapers, used libraries, and were more likely to follow news and current affairs on radio and TV, as a result of which they were better informed. They also got about more than other people without jobs, using public transport travel concessions, and they made more of public facilities like parks and community centres, all of which offered opportunities for social interaction with others outside the estates. Being cut off from the labour market did not appear to impede the connectedness of pensioners.

Another notable exception was found with the long-term jobless among the black community at Thames Green. Lack of acceptance by the white community on the estate led them to socialise elsewhere, as a result of which they had more friends, and made more use of facilities, away from the estate in the rest of London. In this research, the better connected groups were pensioners, those in full-time work and ethnic minorities. The least well connected residents tended to be white younger people who grew up on the estate and who, as adults, had little or no contact with the labour market.

### Estate culture

This finding confirmed other indications from the research of the importance of the *estate culture* in social exclusion. The three study estates were identified as problematic neighbourhoods by the local authorities in whose areas they are located, and residents were aware of the perception of outsiders that their estate was unpopular. However, the research shows that each estate was far from

homogeneous: in the community workshops, both long-term jobless and those in regular work were represented, and clear differences in attitudes, aspirations and feelings emerged between different groups. The majority – those in work, pensioners, and the long-term unemployed with parents who worked – held views and attitudes close to those of mainstream society. But, despite their own views, their perception of the estate as a whole was that its culture was different from the mainstream, and that there was an acceptance of behaviour which would not be tolerated elsewhere.

This finding of an estate culture that is at variance with the majority views of estate residents is important because it gets close to the centre of the debate about social exclusion and socially isolated communities. In this study, groups vulnerable to social exclusion are a minority, albeit a substantial one, among the populations on each estate and yet they appear to shape the culture that dominates each estate and influences particularly its children and young people. It is this culture that colours the views of outsiders when they think of the estate; that leads front-line workers to say that families allocated a home there are being 'set up to fail'; and causes some parents to try to prevent their children from playing in estate common areas. Because the majority hold different views, they resent the reputation that the estate has gained, and the resultant stigma attached to living there. This resentment was heard in the workshops in complaints that shopkeepers, service providers and even prospective employers treated everyone from their estate badly:

*They think we are all the same.*

### No clear dividing line

The final general finding is that, despite the distancing of most of the workshop participants from the behaviour and values of a minority, there was *no clear dividing line* between the two. The minority vulnerable to social exclusion were undoubtedly part of the community, and their behaviour, values and attitudes were at one end of a spectrum rather than of a different kind or nature. Further, they seemed reasonably well integrated with locally based friends and social networks. While the link between long-term detachment from the labour market and social exclusion is clearly strong, the evidence of this research suggests that the connection is not a simple one. The boundaries of poverty, joblessness and social exclusion may overlap but are by no means congruent. The Phase 1 discussion groups demonstrated that not everyone who was jobless or poor held values and attitudes substantially different from mainstream society. And holding a job and having an adequate income did not necessarily mean estrangement from estate culture.

### Is work the key to combating social exclusion?

Despite this lack of congruence, this research nevertheless supports the existence of strong links between long-term detachment from the labour market and the problems associated with social exclusion. Beyond the obvious connection between lack of an earned income and poverty, there is evidence of other associations between having a job and feelings of confidence and self-esteem, higher aspirations and expectations, and sharing the norms and values of wider society. Getting and holding a job tackles the

issues of both income and connectedness, the essential elements of social exclusion. Is work, therefore, the key to tackling social exclusion on estates?

This question is, of course, the battleground in the United States between the arguments of Charles Murray and William Julius Wilson, rehearsed in Chapter 2. Both men accept that there are behavioural differences between 'excluded' groups and the mainstream. Both acknowledge the strong association between lack of work and exclusion. What they disagree about is which is the cause, and which the effect. Put simply, do people not have jobs because they have the behaviour and values of the socially excluded (Murray), or do they behave in this fashion and have these attitudes as a result of being without jobs (Wilson)?

This research illustrates the complexity of the issues involved in this debate. In Coalton, a community that previously had a high rate of employment and low social exclusion changed to one with low employment and a high incidence of crime, drugs, vandalism and family breakdown in the years after the mines closed. On the face of it, a lack of jobs caused people's behaviour to change for the worse (as argued by Wilson). However, this change is the result of a process that has taken place over time. When the pits closed, their labour force fragmented. People responded differently to the situation, according to their age, health, skills and ease of mobility. Some left the area to find work; some retired early; some who had suffered as a result of injury or exposure to coal dust registered themselves as long-term sick or disabled; and some registered as unemployed while others withdrew from the labour market without signing on. Both the size and the composition of

the Coalton workforce have therefore changed. Many younger, fitter, more mobile workers have gone; and some of those who stayed have grown out of the habit of work after a decade of joblessness.

In the context of Coalton, and many similar old industrial areas in the North, the growth of social exclusion could be explained in at least two ways. One is that the lack of work has corrupted a previously industrious workforce causing social ills like crime and drugs to proliferate. The other is that the population has changed: those vulnerable to social exclusion were there all the time but just became more visible when others left the area to find work elsewhere. There is some evidence in this research to support both accounts; but in either case, the outcome is clear. A decade with a diminished supply of work has left those without jobs in Coalton in worse shape than when the pits closed. A new industry starting ten years ago would have found a workforce looking for work and prepared to retrain. The same employer now would find a depleted workforce, including many who are seriously demoralised and not work ready.

There is little doubt that the trigger for the growth of social exclusion at Coalton was unemployment and the sudden collapse of the local economy as a result of pit closures. The impact was felt not just by individuals, but also by the whole community. Because the local economy was dependent on a single industry, the loss of that industry fragmented estate communities as some residents moved away in search of work. The physical effect on neighbourhoods was stark: the depopulation of estates caused large numbers of empty properties, which were then subject to

vandalism and sometimes arson. The deterioration of the physical environment led others to move out of fear. It is clear that a large-scale loss of jobs can cause not just the social exclusion of individuals, but also the social isolation of whole neighbourhoods. At a community and neighbourhood level, the link between loss of work and social exclusion is both clear and strong.

So, would the availability of local well paying jobs now solve the problem of social exclusion in Coalton? The answer is not on its own and not quickly: although the cause of neighbourhood decline there was the loss of work, the social problems that resulted are now so deeply entrenched that it will require more than the re-emergence of jobs to solve them. This suggests that one limb of the government's approach to tackling social exclusion – Welfare to Work – will not, on its own, be enough to deal with social exclusion, although it should help prevent exclusion in the next generation.

A different argument for the efficacy of work in tackling social exclusion is that it socialises young people, particularly young men, by placing them in a workplace environment alongside others of their parents' generation, thereby exposing them to the values and norms of the wider community. The generation now growing up on the estate in Coalton would be more likely to make a smooth transition from school to adulthood if their future prospect was a working career, rather than unemployment. If the government's New Deal can capture school leavers before they get used to not working, and place them in work or worthwhile training, it could begin to turn the tide on social exclusion. In the longer term, however, their future will depend on access to an adequate supply of jobs

that not only connect them better to wider society, but also pay enough to support a family.

### **Will new ways of working be enough to prevent social exclusion?**

One line of thinking from central government is that working in new ways, with different public services interacting or 'joining up' at a local level, is likely to increase the efficiency of services and thereby obtain 'more for less' from public investment. But, in the earlier discussion about the government's new agenda for modernising local government, the question was asked: 'will new ways of working be enough?' Within this research, some light may be shed on the answer by reviewing the route which the three study areas took to their present condition, and by considering how far new ways of working would have helped to prevent social exclusion. Since each of the study areas was chosen to typify a different combination of area economic and social characteristics common in post-industrial Britain, the findings from these three areas are likely to have wider relevance.

Part 1 of this report showed how through the 1980s and 1990s populations became more polarised along the lines of tenure, and how this has led to spatial segregation, with households vulnerable to social exclusion increasingly concentrated on social housing estates. Parts 2 and 3 showed the consequences of this in the three study areas, and found that the problems in each – joblessness, higher crime, drugs, low achievement – are similar. However, the process by which disadvantage has become concentrated has differed in different places. The main two routes to social exclusion could be

characterised respectively as the sudden collapse of the local economy and the residualisation of social housing fuelled by a needs-led allocation policy. The study estates at Coalton and Thames Green respectively demonstrate these processes.

### Local economic collapse

*Local economic collapse*, the story of Coalton, could be replicated in many other parts of post-industrial Britain, where an old traditional industry that was once a main employer has now gone. In Coalton's case that industry was coal, in other areas it might be steel, shipbuilding, manufacturing or a port. A town or city that loses a major industry that was the reason for its existence inevitably faces a period of readjustment while it copes with employment losses. This may also mean reducing the size of the housing stock to match population losses. In Coalton's case, this meant demolishing a nearby estate of 200 houses that was virtually abandoned. More clusters of houses and parts of estates may also have to go as the town shrinks to a size compatible with its new economic base. Coalton is a community in transition, as are many others in post-industrial towns, especially in the North. The problem of the abandonment of neighbourhoods and cumulative decline in these areas will require mightier remedies than those designed to tackle social exclusion on housing estates. Until these areas have settled, demolition and downsizing are likely to be the predominant pre-occupation of their local authorities.

### A needs-led allocation policy

A *needs-led allocation policy* driving residualisation is the explanation for social

exclusion at Thames Green where the social composition of the estate is almost entirely determined by the allocation policies of the local authority. Lettings to the estate are made in a local housing market that is very different from Coalton or Barminster where only the neediest, three-quarters of whom do not have a full-time job, gain access to council housing. This process makes it likely that the numbers of jobless people on estates like the one at Thames Green will continue to increase. Some may soon find a job in London's buoyant labour market but others remain jobless for a long time. Given the findings of this research and elsewhere of the close links between long-term joblessness and vulnerability to social exclusion, council allocation policies can be seen to contribute directly to social exclusion on housing estates by constantly topping up estate populations with more people who are jobless and vulnerable.

### Local spatial polarisation

To these might be added a third process – clearer to identify in a small town or city such as Barminster than a larger metropolitan conurbation – of *local spatial polarisation* which results from the exercise of housing choice. It reinforces the outcome of a needs-led allocation policy operated by the local authority in a housing market very different from London. Here, income differentials are smaller in relation to property prices and there is only a narrow gap between those able to buy a small terraced house and others in low-paid jobs who rent a similar home from the council or a private landlord. The study estate in Barminster is one of a small number at the bottom of the city's housing market and is an area where blue-collar workers traditionally live. It is owned by the

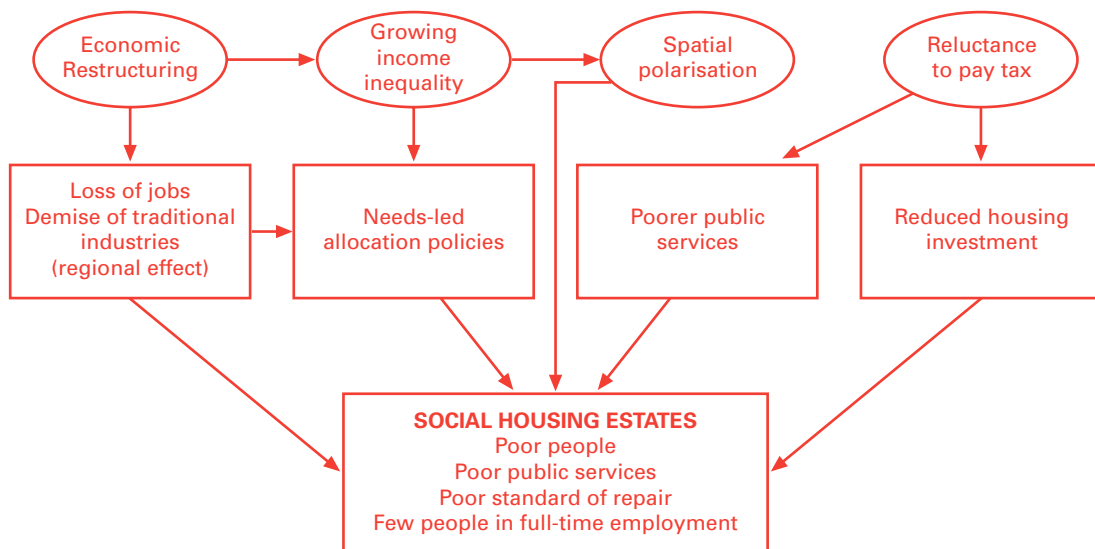
local authority but there are also similar areas of privately owned low-income housing elsewhere in the city. Any loss of local blue-collar jobs is likely to have a disproportionate effect in these areas and, over time, such estates or neighbourhoods accumulate jobless people because they have the least choice of moving elsewhere. But those with jobs and higher incomes living on a troubled estate have a greater choice whether to go, or stay, because they have alternative housing options within their reach. So here, too, a process that increases the local level of social exclusion is at work, with working households on moderate incomes leaving the estate, to be replaced by others who are more disadvantaged.

As the routes to social exclusion have been different (Figure 2 maps them), it is likely therefore that the strategies that will be needed to prevent and tackle social exclusion in each situation might also be different. However, the inescapable conclusion from this evaluation is

that the forces which have driven these study estates to their present condition – economic restructuring, income inequality, spatial polarisation and residualisation – are much too large and powerful to be countered by ‘more joined-up working’ at the level of an individual estate. What then is the point of working in new ways?

The answer is that, while neighbourhood management and joined-up working may not be able to counter these larger forces, they have a vital role in transforming an estate into an acceptable neighbourhood in which to live and bring up a family. The key point is that the public services do not have to do this on their own. The evidence of the workshops is that the majority of households on these estates are anxious to see services improve, and need to feel supported if they are to stay. The future of these communities is in the balance: local public services have a key role in determining whether they continue to decline, or begin to revive.

Figure 2 Routes to excluded communities



### Why are public services so critical on large social housing estates?

Social housing estates account for around half the areas of multiple deprivation in England, and it is likely that they accommodate a substantial part of the problem of social exclusion. Some large council estates are as big as small towns, with a population of 10,000 or more people, and a great many more are big enough to make up neighbourhoods in their own right; but they all are different from other areas of multiple deprivation in one important respect. They are areas in which almost all the land and most of the homes are in the ownership of a single body, which also happens to control or manage access to most of the area's services. This virtual monopoly gives a council (or, in some cases, a housing association) the major share of responsibility for the area's condition and also, almost exclusively, the power to change things for the better. Unlike other areas of poor housing, a single agency on social housing estates has the ability to affect the lives of people who live there directly, for good or ill, through the quality of the services it provides, the state and appearance of the physical environment, and the way it engages with residents. For these reasons, there is a strong argument that large social housing estates are a special case that requires different treatment.

Large council estates, in particular, are almost unique because nowhere else – apart from some prisons and defence establishments – does an arm of the state have such tight control on a local area. It owns the land, makes all the decisions about what goes on it, looks after the buildings and common areas, provides all its amenities, regulates services for the young and

old, runs the schools and tends its green spaces. One study of an area that was made up of a number of large council estates, the *South Canning Town and Custom House Study*, describes the relationship between local residents and their council landlord in this way:

*The council has a unique concentration of power over residents' lives. The council has determined the physical development of the area; it controls where 90% of residents live and when they may move; it is responsible for the physical upkeep of their homes and for the condition of the whole environment in which they live. It decides what choice of shops they may use; where they may park their cars; and what community facilities they may enjoy. The scale of council ownership is such that the effect of its activities and policies is uniquely far reaching. This concentration of power is almost feudal. (Boughton and Hebden, 1984)*

This 'almost feudal' relationship is not understood by senior council officers and members, but is keenly felt by residents, including those who took part in the community workshops in this research. Those participants perceived a very one-sided power relationship in which they were essentially supplicants and the council officers were gatekeepers who controlled access to the services and resources they needed.

Now, a situation has arisen on many council estates, not envisaged at the time they were built, of increasingly needy estate populations, which are substantially dependent on services controlled by the council and other public providers. Because of the near monopolistic nature of this provision, there is little that estate residents can do to improve their quality of life except complain, petition and campaign. When

that fails, they are left with the option of moving, but here, too, there is little room for choice because the council controls most of the options available to low-income estate households. Although nobody set out to create a relationship of this dependency between councils and residents living on their estates, the reality is that it now exists and needs to be recognised when decisions are made about estate services.

Poor areas need constant attention if further decline is to be prevented. In areas of mixed tenure and mixed land use, some of that attention may come from a variety of independent interests – from shopkeepers and small businesses to home-owners – who have both a financial stake in the good reputation of their neighbourhood and also the power to decide the contribution they can make to ensuring its needs are met. When a single agency owns virtually a whole area, if that agency does not provide the attention, care and support the area needs, it is unlikely that anyone else will, and the area is vulnerable to decline.

On large council estates, the concentration of ownership and power in the hands of public authorities makes residents critically dependent on public service providers. If core services are withdrawn from council estates, there are usually no alternative suppliers: residents must go without, or travel a greater distance to re-establish access. Where services have been

progressively withdrawn from an estate over a long period, residents may feel abandoned by government at all levels, as did participants in the community workshops in this research. The response of estate residents in Coalton, Barmminster and Thames Green suggests that lack of access to services, and their poor quality, is a significant contributory factor to social exclusion on housing estates.

Nonetheless, areas can still be poor, but need not be socially isolated. The positive side of the power that local authorities have to affect the lives of estate residents is that they are in a very strong position to change things for the better if adequate resources are available. For this reason, large council estates are different from other areas and require different public service arrangements – levels of resources higher than elsewhere; new structures to ensure the co-ordination and integration of services; and better access to information. All these are necessary to ensure that services get through to those who need them, alongside new forms of engagement to overcome problems of distrust. In its National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the Social Exclusion Unit is right to focus on neighbourhood management to make public services work at a local level, but this will need to be adequately resourced. And, because these estates are likely to remain poor places for the foreseeable future, they will need continuing long-term support to prevent further deterioration.

# 19 Vision, resources, management

This last chapter sets the findings of this research in the context, outlined in Part 1, of recent social change and changing social policy. It considers the structural factors that have contributed to the growth of social exclusion on troubled housing estates and concludes that long-term solutions will mean addressing some difficult fundamental issues, as well as needing commitment, resources and time. However, much can be done in the meantime to make such estates better places to live through neighbourhood management and better ways of working.

This report began with a review of the debate about social exclusion in the UK that is taking place against a background of changing social policy. The New Labour government elected in 1997 set in motion a series of linked reviews, which are concerned respectively with the renewal of the welfare state; tackling social exclusion; modernising local government; and targeting its own spending in the most effective way. In the light of this research, what conclusions can be drawn about the way in which social exclusion might be tackled and the long-term future of social housing estates?

## The road to social exclusion

The evidence from this research is that social exclusion, often addressed on the level of individual households, has a strong estate and neighbourhood dimension. It can be argued that estate culture, and the effect of widespread joblessness on estates, are both agents of social exclusion, and that collecting together poor and disadvantaged households through the process of residualisation has contributed to its growth. It is not obvious, however, why social housing

estates more than other areas should contain such a high proportion of people who are jobless. The answer is rooted in the 1980s and the way that governments of that time responded to the social and economic upheaval caused by the onset of market globalisation.

Beveridge's welfare state was based on the assumption of full employment. Indeed, one of his premises was that government would make 'full use of powers of the state to maintain employment and to reduce unemployment'. Both Conservative and Labour governments stuck to this view for 30 years and made substantial progress in reducing poverty and income inequality. But, when market globalisation caused British industry to restructure and shed labour in the 1980s, the pressure of rising unemployment became too great and the government abandoned attempts to intervene to maintain full employment. Unemployment rose to almost four million, causing a rise in poverty and a widening of the gap between rich and poor. By the 1990s, the strain on public services had become evident. The welfare state had absorbed much of the impact of sudden widespread economic and social change, but at a cost. The effects of living with a high level of unemployment were plain to see in the social security budget. The effects of social housing accommodating many of the unemployed who were among the casualties of industrial reorganisation took longer to appear.

## Council housing under strain

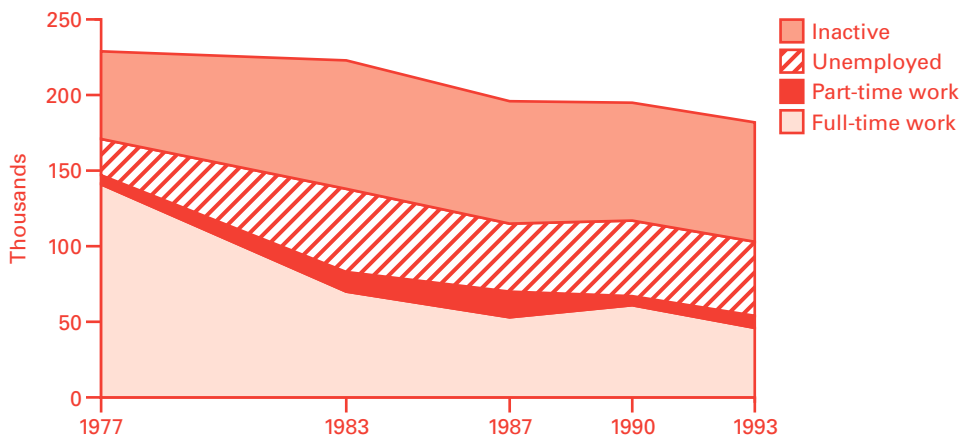
Council housing was designed to accommodate a population in work and it served a largely working population well enough for much of the last century. However, especially over the

last two decades, housing estates have accommodated an increasing proportion of people who are unemployed or economically inactive and they have become poorer places. Figures 3 and 4 show the way in which the number of jobless residents of council housing increased over this time. Figure 3 shows the dramatic change in the employment status of new tenants moving into council housing – from 62 per cent of new tenants who had full-time jobs in 1977, to only 26 per cent with full-time jobs in 1993. The way this influx of new tenants without jobs, together with falling blue-collar employment levels and the effect of the right to buy, has changed the overall population in council housing is captured in Figure 4. The proportion of households living in council housing that have at least one earner fell from 70 per cent in 1978 to only 34 per cent in 1993. The proportion of households with two or more earners dropped even more steeply, from 40 per cent in 1978 to only 14 per cent in 1993.

As this research has shown, estates function differently when only a minority of residents have jobs. Work takes people out of the confines of home and gives them an opportunity to interact socially with others in their workplace, status through their job and the money they need to enable them to participate more fully in society. The loss of work changes not just the pattern of life for individuals, but also the way they use their home and locality. Their life becomes estate-centred in a way that it was not before; local social relations matter more; the discipline and structure that work brings to the day are missing.

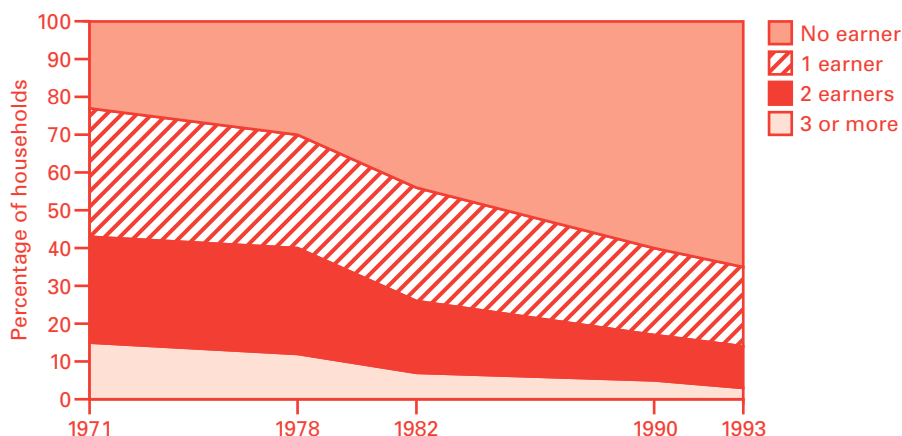
The changes that occur when work disappears are even more acutely felt in traditional industrial areas like Coalton where council estates were built to accommodate workers in specific industries such as coal, steel, manufacturing or shipbuilding. Sometimes, these estates were located close to the industries they served, in isolated places with few

Figure 3 Employment status of new council tenants



Source: ONS, Housing in England 1993/94

Figure 4 Households with earners in council housing



Source: ONS, Housing in England 1993/94

amenities. These estates may have been good places to live when residents had jobs and money, but, without either, isolation and lack of amenities soon become a problem. When those industries shut their plants, pits and yards in the 1980s and 1990s, the *raison d'être* for the estates went too. Leaving semi-abandoned neighbourhoods behind them, many people without jobs left these areas in search of work elsewhere. Changing patterns of work, and how governments have responded to them, have therefore had a profound impact on social housing. Although the national rate of unemployment by the year 2000 had dropped back to just over one million, the lowest for two decades, the legacy of economic and industrial restructuring still remains in local concentrations of joblessness on social housing estates and in the old industrial areas.

### Rebuilding the welfare state in poor areas

To a substantial degree, what we now call social exclusion is the result of the failure of

overstretched public services over the past two decades to maintain the vision of Beveridge and adapt it to a fast changing economy. Tight control of resources by the last government played a large part in denying effective services to poor areas. In many districts, services have been incrementally withdrawn from estates and poor neighbourhoods in order to achieve budget cuts. Even where services have been maintained, the increase in need consequent on growing joblessness and poverty has outstripped public services' capacity to provide. The outcome is that residents of poor areas have found it increasingly hard to access the public services they need; and very often the quality of those services is poor.

One way of looking at the strategies the government has chosen to tackle social exclusion is that, by remedying public service failures in poor neighbourhoods, they are selectively rebuilding the social protection system erected by Beveridge in the areas where it has suffered most damage. The problems of poor areas targeted in the National Strategy for

Neighbourhood Renewal – poor health, low educational attainment, high unemployment, poverty and poor housing – are Beveridge’s ‘giants’ under other names. The only unwelcome newcomer to the list is crime. There is a good case, rehearsed in this report, that the concentration of these problems in poor areas makes it harder to live in them and is a potent force in perpetuating social exclusion. Most of the present problems of poor areas, then, are not new problems but are among the very problems that the welfare state was created to tackle. The difference between the time of Beveridge and now is that, to a much greater degree, these problems are concentrated in specific localities.

The government’s solutions, too, are, similar to those of Beveridge’s time, based on decently paid work for those who are able, backed by effective welfare state support. The government’s wider two-part strategy for tackling social exclusion employs a modern form of these remedies. Welfare to Work aims to increase the number of people with jobs, while also delivering more money to low-income households; both of these were fundamental aims of the original welfare state. So, too, is financially assisting the support of children, which the Chancellor has done through substantial increases to child benefit. The other part of the wider strategy, neighbourhood renewal, will begin to address the need to rebuild public services in the most deprived areas. This selective approach can be justified objectively by the evidence of greater concentrations of disadvantage in those areas, but it is also a cheaper and more achievable strategy than renewing the welfare state across the board.

The incoming government in 1997 inherited not only an underfunded and deteriorating

public sector, but also increased demands on the welfare system caused by an ageing population and the impact of rapid economic and social change. It did so in a climate of unwillingness on the part of the electorate to pay higher taxes to fully fund the level of public service it aspired to. The British government was not alone in having to deal with this conundrum; most Western governments faced something similar in the late 1990s. Lacking the money to restore public services across the board, the British government chose instead to concentrate on the pinch points in education, health and poor neighbourhoods where smaller sums of money could make the most difference. Channelling funds through area-based initiatives – like SRB, Health and Education Zones and New Deal for Communities – rather than mainstream programmes is one way of doing this because it sends resources directly to the communities and neighbourhoods that need them most.

The new approaches to tackling social exclusion, in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and through Welfare to Work, are very welcome and will go a long way towards tilting the balance in estate communities towards stability. But the government strategy might not be enough to rid social housing of the consequences of concentrated social disadvantage.

### Four crucial issues

This report has identified a number of significant shapers of social exclusion on housing estates. They include growing income inequality, spatial polarisation, poor quality public services, the collapse of local economies, the absence of work and pervasive estate

cultures. Dealing with these issues is complex and will involve difficult choices. Most have resource implications. All need to be tackled and none of them are easy. The following four crucial issues are key to tackling social exclusion and may be central to the long-term future of social housing.

- 1 *Poor public services*: estate populations are now needier but have poorer public services. There is a strong argument for making the ideals of Beveridge work at a local level on large council estates. Whether this is done by increased resources or through new ways of working, improved public services have a crucial role to play in reintegrating socially isolated estates with the wider community.
- 2 *Residualisation* raises the most difficult choices. Social exclusion on council estates will be difficult to tackle if most new tenants are jobless. And, if these estates remain poor, they will need constant attention and require high levels of resourcing. However, if council housing does not give priority to the neediest, where else are they to live? There are no easy answers, but this question will not go away.
- 3 *Lack of housing investment* is one of the reasons why people are leaving social housing. The government is already pledged to tackle the colossal backlog of repairs, but estates also need updating and improvement and some will need to be replaced. People feel they are judged by the quality of their housing

environment. The morale of estate residents is boosted considerably by estate modernisation.

- 4 *The job–skills gap*: there is a mismatch between the skills required to access jobs that are becoming available in the new knowledge-based industries and the manual skills possessed by men (in particular) who are jobless in old industrial areas. Although unemployment nationally has returned to 1970s' levels, the legacy of industrial restructuring has left pockets of joblessness that are blighting these areas. Long-term jobs are required to replace those lost from the old traditional industries which previously provided reasonable and stable incomes for manual workers with few academic qualifications. The New Deal and Working Families Tax Credit offer a bridge to the labour market, but there is no long-term guarantee of a level of income sufficient to support a family. Without replacement jobs, it is hard to see how many old traditional industrial areas can retain their existing population.

Fifty years ago the way to tackle the problem of concentrated disadvantage in social housing would have been to build more homes in areas of high demand in order to reduce concentration by increasing supply. But, now, no tax-conscious government aware of the reputation of a residualised social housing sector is likely to be keen to use taxpayers' money to build more of the same. The dilemma is this: if the supply of social housing continues to diminish, social exclusion is likely to get worse because disadvantage will become even

more concentrated; but, while social housing is strongly linked to social exclusion, there is likely to be little political support for increasing the supply. It is a catch-22 situation.

In areas of low demand, where employment losses are severe, downsizing council estates and areas of private housing may be inevitable. Selective demolition is preferable to sustaining high levels of voids and vandalism in areas where significant population losses follow the loss of a major employer. Experience elsewhere, notably following the closure of pits in the Durham villages and in South Wales, suggests that not everyone will be happy with grassing over these old industrial neighbourhoods. A significant proportion of the population will choose to remain even after the bulk of the labour force has gone. Shrinking the housing stock to suit a reduced population will not be easy, but better arrangements for compensation and relocation would help.

### Vision, resources, management

While the large questions of supply and demand continue to present difficult choices for both local and central government, there is much that can be done to make disadvantaged social housing estates a better place to live. One finding of this research is that there is a critical role for the public services to play on estates, in providing services at such a level that they attract and retain residents whose confidence in their neighbourhood is 'in the balance'. The engagement and mobilisation of estate populations would be a great step towards changing estate cultures that reinforce disadvantage and attract stigma. Negative estate cultures tolerate crime and drugs, and

inhibit learning and personal development. Building social capital on estates would be a means through which the attitudes and values of the majority could become the dominant estate culture.

Three ingredients are needed to reconstruct public services on social housing estates: vision, resources and management. Each of these is important and all are needed to restore stability. This chapter has already reviewed the *vision* – Beveridge's vision – of decent employment for those who are able, public support for difficult times and how the government strategies for dealing with social exclusion are looking to rebuild social protection on the worst estates.

The argument about whether more *resources* are needed to improve services, or just better *management*, is an old one. New ways of working offer the same tantalising promise of efficiency gain that made 'more for less' so attractive to politicians in the 1980s and 1990s. After more than a decade of ever increasing efficiency, the gain is still hard to discern. In this argument about means, there is a danger of losing sight of policy objectives. A front-line worker interviewed for this research commented on service level reductions but recognised that:

*... the world has changed in the last 20 years. If we had the resources, we probably wouldn't put them back in exactly the same way.*

Interviewed later, a senior manager in the same authority argued that the problem was less a lack of resources and more a question of how they are used: priority choice and management were, he claimed, what determine service outcomes. Meanwhile, at estate level, residents were complaining that services were

inadequate and service quality was poor. Whatever the reason, the reality is that resources are not getting through in the form of services for those who need them.

What matters is the outcome, which on housing estates seems to be worsening. 'Outcome' rather than 'input' (resources) or efficiency (management) is the place to focus the search for service improvement. Improved services to estates must be seen as the key issue, regardless of how they are delivered. Earlier in this report, it was argued that large council estates should be treated as a special case, partly because of the concentration of need that exists there, but also because local authorities hold such a concentration of power over the things that affect the estates and their residents. Rarely do examples of such extreme need and the power to alleviate it sit so closely together. Changing the focus of service delivery from town hall to estate, and of performance measurement from efficiency to outcome, would help frame an alternative approach to improving estate conditions.

The concept of neighbourhood management could offer such an approach. The critical thing is that resources are allocated, and management systems devised, in such a way as to ensure the adequacy and effectiveness of services at the point of delivery. The approach should be to start by defining the desired outcome and then work back to establish the best way of achieving it. One example of where this has already been done is at Broadwater Farm, in the London Borough of Haringey, where a once severely troubled estate has been normalised by estate improvements and a highly visible presence on the ground of public sector services. This was done in part by physically locating front-line

public service providers on the estate. These include a Neighbourhood Officer and seven housing managers, eight caretakers and ten repairs staff. A police station has been relocated to the estate and concierges provided to control access to flatted blocks. There is also a council-run community centre on the estate. In all, there are 59 full-time equivalent public sector staff working on an estate of 1,063 dwellings.

The outcome is an estate that is clean, well managed and has a crime rate lower than other areas of its kind. One evaluation of service delivery concluded that 'comparing like with like, the service on Broadwater Farm is considerably more cost effective than the delivery of more centrally run housing services to other estates in Haringey' (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, 1999b). This remarkable level of staffing, it is claimed, has been achieved largely by shifting personnel from central offices to the estate. If this was replicated elsewhere in the borough, the result would be that services would have a much smaller central staff, but many more staff available to work in teams providing intensive services to estates.

The Broadwater Farm approach is an illustration of how, by focusing on estates and outcomes, the level and quality of services available locally may be increased by organisational means, as well as through increasing overall resources. However, even though examples such as this are promising, it has not yet been demonstrated that authority-wide neighbourhood management can be achieved for the same cost as centralised services. This report argues that improved services to estates must be seen as the key issue, regardless of the means of delivery.

## Communities in the balance

In the 50 years since Beveridge, a great deal has changed and there are fundamental questions to be asked about welfare. Does a much more affluent population mean that benefits no longer need to be 'universal'? Or would social cohesion be damaged unless higher income tax payers continue to get something back for their money? A balance needs to be struck between economic efficiency and popular support in deciding what to include in, or out, of the welfare system. One area where the balance is critical is in deciding what support government should give to helping people meet their housing needs. Housing was never a universal benefit, like health or education, but, for most of the post-war period, households in all tenures have received assistance from the public purse in meeting their housing costs, whether through tax relief, means-tested assistance, or the subsidised provision of public housing.

For half a century, council housing promised to be a solution to the slums, the Victorian 'rookeries' and the 'criminal areas' of Charles Booth. Then the solution turned into a new problem. System building in the 1960s and 1970s raised doubts about mass housing solutions that made it easy for central government in the 1980s to stop councils building any more. For the past two decades, a diminishing social housing sector has accommodated an increasing number of the poorest and most disadvantaged until, now, councils and housing associations together manage most of the homes in more than half of the most disadvantaged enumeration districts in Britain. The poor areas have returned, this time managed largely by public authorities. One

conclusion might be that social housing doesn't work.

A different picture emerges when seen from the inside. Throughout the last two decades of economic change, social housing has acted as a Beveridgean 'safety net' for people in acute housing need. For many people, social housing is still the best, and for some their only, hope of a decent home at an affordable price. Although it has never been a universal benefit, social housing still provides homes for more than one in five of the population and it is estimated that half of the people now alive in Britain have lived in social housing at some time in their lives.

But the experience of living on a large estate is different now from what it was. Two decades of under-investment have accumulated a backlog of repair work estimated at £19 billion. Absorbing increasing numbers of people without jobs has made estates poorer places, more dependent on public services while councils, forced to cut budgets, continue to withdraw those services and close their neighbourhood offices. Estate populations feel that they have been badly treated by all levels of government. Many residents have lost faith that things ever will, or even can, get better. From their perspective, the communities living in social housing have had problems inflicted on them from outside – loss of jobs, long-term lack of investment, failure of public services. If social housing is now not working, they say it is because it has been 'abandoned' by public authorities.

Since 1997, new central government policies and projects offer the promise of better things to come. The acknowledgement by the Department of the Environment, Transport and

the Regions (DETR) of the size of the repairs backlog and the government's pledge to tackle it is good news; as is the radical programme for area renewal drawn up by the Social Exclusion Unit; and the raft of area-based initiatives designed to get money speedily to the areas where it is most needed. Yet the findings of this research are still worrying – that there is no perception at estate level that services are improving and, worse still, because of the lack of trust that exists there, no real belief that life on troubled estates will be transformed.

All the time, households are taking individual decisions about whether to leave or stay in declining neighbourhoods. For some people, with no earned income, the question is academic because their options are limited and largely controlled by their landlord; so they stay. But others with higher incomes have more choice. They weigh in the balance their prospects, and those of their household; their safety and security; the condition of their surroundings; and the life chances of their children. Should they go or stay? Those with choice who move are likely to be those who are most concerned about their local environment, the quality of local schools, and levels of drug abuse and crime. If they move, it is likely that they will be replaced by a poorer and more vulnerable household, giving the spiral of decline one more twist. The cumulative effect of many individual decisions can have a devastating effect on communities and

neighbourhoods. This has been seen already most acutely in many old industrial areas in the North. Estate communities on many large social housing estates are now communities in the balance.

This research has shown the reality of social exclusion on social housing estates: the failing public services; the damage to the life chances of children growing up there, whether they recognise it or not; the problems faced by residents living within an 'estate culture' which the majority do not support. But the conclusions drawn from this research are not all pessimistic. Now, a government seems determined to get the measure of the problem, and to start working towards solutions. This research has found that they will not have to undertake that work on their own. There is a significant proportion of residents who may be prepared to work with service providers to change things for the better, if they can share in the vision and can see the resources being put in. And, if they are persuaded that there is a real determination to reverse the decline, some of those who would have chosen to leave will stay, helping to tilt the balance towards stability and community renewal. But it is going to take time, considerable resources and a strong commitment to change if troubled housing estates are to be turned round, and made good and safe places where people of all ages will want to live, stay and make their long-term home.

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# Appendix: Methodology

## Background and objectives

This report contains the findings of a programme of qualitative research undertaken by David Page on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). Discussion groups were recruited and moderated by Oakes, McKee and Opinion Leader Research (OLR). Community workshops were facilitated by OLR.

In 1998, the JRF commissioned a programme of qualitative research to investigate the values, attitudes and behaviour of residents of three of Britain's 'troubled' council housing estates, in locations for which the pseudonyms of Thames Green, Coalton and Barminster have been used in this report.

The broad research objectives were to:

- explore the nature of social exclusion and identify its causes
- gauge front-line providers' perceptions of social exclusion and their views of possible solutions for 'worst estate' residents
- compare and contrast the views, attitudes and aspirations of groups vulnerable to social exclusion with those of the wider estate communities
- explore the nature of the relationships between individuals and service providers
- identify practical solutions to the problems facing social housing estate residents
- investigate new institutional forms that might improve individuals' access to services.

## Research design

The research took place in three stages:

### Phase 1: focus groups with socially excluded estate residents in three areas

- Twelve extended discussion groups, four recruited from each of three estates in January to March 1998:
  - two mixed-gender groups, one of parents 25–45 years and one of older people aged 55 and over, in each of the three areas
  - in Thames Green, one group of teenage mothers and one of young men aged 18–20 years – single, no children
  - in Coalton, one group of young women aged 16–20, and one of young men aged 21–24 years, all single, no children
  - in Barminster, one group of young women aged 21–24, and one of young men aged 16–17 years, all single, no children
  - all participants unemployed or economically inactive, had not worked in previous six months and were not currently involved in any formal learning or training programmes.
- Four additional group discussions with black African and African Caribbean residents on Thames Green estate in August 1999:
  - two mixed-gender groups, one with 31–45 year olds and one with over-45s
  - two groups, one with men and one with women, aged 18–30

- all participants unemployed or economically inactive, had not worked in previous six months and were not currently involved in any formal learning or training programmes.
- One group discussion with ‘achievers’ at Thames Green in August 1999:
  - those who have escaped social exclusion, whether through work, learning, or participation in community initiatives
  - including a mix of black and white residents, men and women, and different ages.

### Phase 2: frontline providers

- Group discussions with front-line providers in Thames Green, Coalton and Barminster, conducted in September and October 1999:
  - each group included six to eight local community providers, including youth and community workers, social workers, housing officers, employment service officers, health workers, teachers and police officers.

### Phase 3: community Workshops

- Three day-long community workshops with local residents, one in each estate, in November 1999.
- Each workshop included 12–14 participants, recruited to include a cross-section of local residents:
  - including a mix of long-term unemployed and people with work, different generations, and both long-term and short-term residents
  - and, in Thames Green, a mix of white, black and ethnic minority residents.

