



CTRL Shift Power Shifting Projects

The story of how we are shifting power to people in different communities across the UK, and a guide to starting similar projects in your community

A central graphic of a white outline map of the United Kingdom is surrounded by several images and text boxes. In the top left, a poster for "1 POTTERIES POUND" features a large purple number "1" and the text "A CURRENCY THAT VALUES YOU AND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR COMMUNITY..". In the top right, a map of Sheffield is shown with text: "The 147 neighbourhoods of Sheffield were defined by local citizens over several months. We will be exploring how to improve and use this map to support citizenship action in the future. Published: 17th May 2024." Below the map, there are four photographs: a group of people sitting in a circle in a room; a group of people sitting on the floor in a room; a group of people sitting at a table eating; and a person holding a sign that says "DEBT SUPPORT NOT BAILIFFS". To the right of the bottom photo is a collection of protest signs and puppets, including one that says "END CHILD POVERTY" and another that says "AFFORDABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT".

Acknowledgements

Funders

We are very grateful to our funders for enabling this important work to happen. The National Lottery Community Fund provided funding via the Transition Together project for all the prototype projects and the community of practice. Additional project funding was provided by:

Lankelly Chase, The Equality Trust, NHS Sheffield, Power to Change, Locality, People's Health Trust, Esmee Fairbairn and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



Project leaders and Case study co-authors

Nathaniel Whitestone & Carolina De Oliveira (Sociocratic Neighbourhood Circles) and A Fairer Society, Kate Macdonald (Timebank Hull & East Riding), Mike Riddell, Dave Proudlove, Annette Francis (The Stoke Model), Alex Phillips (UnLtd), Danny Flynn (YMCA North Staffordshire), Vanessa Boon (The Joyful Disruptor), Simon Duffy (Citizen Network) & Tom French (Data for Action) and Charlotte Hollins (Fordhall Community Land Initiative), Mieke Snijder (Institute of Development Studies), Micheal Thomas (Transition Network), Tim The Strasser (Transition Network).

Published by Transition Together UK, March 2025

This edition first published in 2025 and released by Transition Together under the Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED license. You are free to share and adapt these materials, with conditions of attribution and share alike. Find out more: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Summary

Aims and methods

CTRL Shift is a network of organizations focused on building community power through local leadership and participatory governance, enabling the people to have a say in decisions and policies affecting their lives. Their vision is to empower communities to take control of their futures.

Since 2022, CTRL Shift has distributed £35,000 in funding to support partnership projects across the UK, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund via the Transition Together project. These projects were chosen based on their local leadership, power-shifting potential, and innovative approaches.

Each project aimed to shift power and strengthen communities, in different ways:

- **NeighbourUp Bristol** aimed to connect neighbors and empower them through microgrants, coaching, and new organising models (sociocracy).
- **CTRL Shift Hull** aimed to break down barriers between organizations using workshops exploring body, emotions and mind, and creative visioning to encourage deep collaboration and insights.
- **The Potteries Pound** developed a new community currency, with tokens given to community volunteers and used in local businesses.
- **Fair Chance Derby** aimed to give a voice to those experiencing poverty, using learning and crafts to create relationships between people and the council, and influence local policies.
- **Neighbourhood Mapping Sheffield** aimed to create a citizen led map of Sheffield's neighborhoods to empower communities and support local authority decision-making.
- **Market Drayton Community Covenant** tried out a power-sharing model between councils and communities to shape local services.

In addition, there was a **Community of Practice** setup. This was a peer-learning and support space for the leaders of these projects. Through monthly virtual meetings, structured discussions, and project spotlights, it enabled participants to share experiences, build relationships, and gain practical insights.

Key Learnings, Outcomes and Guidance

The **NeighbourUp Bristol** project strengthened neighborhood connections through direct outreach and providing £100 microgrants. Such support fostered trust between neighbours. It delivered Sociocracy training (to make fair decisions together) which was valuable, and requires long-term commitment to be embedded. They learned that engaging the local community should come before funder involvement, and financial sustainability needs a mixed income from more than just grants.

The **CTRL Shift Hull** project broke down barriers through emotional and experiential workshops, which built trust and deepened relationships outside professional roles. People learned about unequal power in the system, sparked new projects and long-term collaborations, including the Town Anywhere Hull project. Safe spaces for vulnerability led to stronger connections.

The Potteries Pound project in Stoke on Trent developed a local currency (trading of tokens). Through widespread engagement, they have involved the community in the visioning and design of the currency, and secured business partnerships including football clubs. Launching a currency requires substantial resources and widespread buy-in, and they are launching a campaign to get it into circulation.

Fair Chance Derby empowered people experiencing poverty to influence local policy through crafts, which highlighted real stories of money struggles, which gained media attention. Also, workshops built their knowledge of how to engage with the Derby City Council, and built relationships between the people and council staff. Creativity and

storytelling worked well to inspire change. The council have made changes and said they will involve people facing hardship in policy making in future.

Neighbourhood Mapping Sheffield created the city's first citizen-led map, engaging 800+ residents. They encouraged civic participation and local identity-building. Transparency and community ownership of the process increased trust. Finding funding to keep going longer-term and engaging underrepresented communities, remained challenges.

Market Drayton Community Covenant piloted power-sharing between the council and local communities. The local community was given the power to design a Community and Family hub, for joined-up public services. Success required trust, structured collaboration, and clear roles. The model is now informing national policy discussions on the 2025 Devolution Bill.

The **Community of Practice (COP)** offered a space for project leaders to share experience, learning and to support each other. Monthly meetings built trust through discussions and project highlights, providing useful insights. However, busy lives and different routines led to inconsistent attendance and the differing focus of each project made it hard to find common interests. Some participants wanted more collaboration and practical actions to build on shared learning.

We have also provided **step by step guidance** to starting each of these projects and the COP in your community. Across all projects, trust-building, collaboration, clear goals, and visibility were key to success.

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Summary	2
Big Words Explained	6
Introduction to CTRL Shift's Power shifting projects	9
Project case studies and guidance for starting one in your community	14
Case study 1: NeighbourUp Bristol	15
Case study 2: CTRL Shift Hull - Exploring Collaborative Solutions in Community Development	24
Case study 3: The Potteries Pound - A Community-Driven Local Currency, Stoke on Trent	26
Case study 4: Fair Chance Derby - creative people power on poverty	36
Case study 5: Neighbourhood Mapping in Sheffield	46
Case study 6: Market Drayton Community Covenant Pilot	55
Case Study 7: Our community of practice	65
Conclusion: learnings and guidance	71

Big Words Explained

Accountability: being responsible for your actions and decisions, and being willing to explain them to others. It's about owning up to what you do and facing the consequences.

Anchor institutions: Large, stable organizations such as universities or hospitals that play a significant role in local economic and social development.

Bureaucracy/Bureaucratic: A system of administration with strict rules and hierarchical structure.

Bursary: A financial grant given to individuals to support participation in activities.

Capitalism: An economic system based on private ownership and profit-driven markets.

Civic Infrastructure: The structures, networks, and systems that support community participation and governance, such as polling stations and community centres.

Community covenant: A formal agreement between local authorities and community groups to share decision-making power.

Community of practice (COP): A group of people who share a common interest and learn from each other through regular conversations.

Constitution: the rule book for the country's government

Co-production: A collaborative approach where service users and providers work together to design and deliver services.

Craftivism: A form of activism that combines crafting (such as sewing or art) with social or political action to push for change.

Devolution: The transfer of decision-making power from central to local government or communities.

Embodied Work: connecting to what we are feeling in our body, mind and emotions, in order to explore topics more deeply.

Equity: Fairness in access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making, particularly for marginalized or disadvantaged groups.

Grassroots governance: A bottom-up approach to decision-making where local people take control of policies affecting their communities.

Inclusive governance: A decision-making process that ensures the participation of diverse groups, including marginalized communities.

Microgrant: A small amount of funding given to individuals or community groups to support local projects.

Mutual Aid Groups: Community-led initiatives where people voluntarily support each other, often in response to crisis, such as people helping to share food and collecting medicines for each other during the Covid pandemic.

Neighbourhood democracy: A system where decision-making power is given to local communities rather than centralized or national authorities.

Neighbourhood Parliaments: A grassroots governance model from India where small, local groups make collective decisions on community matters.

Participatory local government: A governance model where local residents actively engage in decision-making processes.

Participative Budgeting: A democratic process where citizens help decide public budget allocations.

Patriarchy: A social system where men hold primary power and authority.

Prototype: A prototype is an early model or sample of something used to test and improve a design.

Philanthropic funders: Organizations or individuals that donate money to social causes without expecting financial return.

Sociocracy: A way of organising in teams and organizations so that more work is done, faster and everyone's voice is included.

Socio-Economic Duty: A legal obligation (in some UK regions) requiring public bodies to consider the impact of their policies on people in poverty.

Siloed Working: When organizations or departments work separately, without collaboration or shared knowledge.

Solidarity: Unity and mutual support within a group or community.

Statutory Body: A government organization with legal responsibilities to provide public services.

Sustainability: Meeting present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs.

Systemic Change: Long-term, structural shifts in how institutions, policies, and social systems operate.

Theory of change: A structured framework used to plan, evaluate, and understand how an initiative leads to desired social outcomes.

Transactional flow (community currency model): how currency or money flows in an economy, from the issuer (e.g. a bank) to those who spend and accept the money, such as a customer and a shopkeeper.

Introduction to CTRL Shift's Power shifting projects

CTRL Shift is a network of organisations which aim to build community power through community led organizations and participatory local government. Our vision is to bring about a world where communities are defining and in control of their future. You can find out more about our activities on <https://ctrlshift.org.uk/>

Since 2022, we have provided just over £35,000 to support CTRLshift partnership projects across the UK which aim to shift power in an innovative way. The funding for this came from the National Lottery Community Fund via the Transition Together project. We also held a space for the project leaders to learn from each other as peers, called our co-learning **Community of Practice**. Read more about this in the next section.

We chose projects which:

- Were led by the local community, connecting with and amplifying what is already happening locally;
- Cover a specific community of place, for example a local authority area, city or town;
- Bring organisations together into networks of change;
- Were led by those who are aware of the local system they operate in, including the power structures (such as the local council or big business) and how to create change within that system;
- Had high power shifting potential, for instance because of the importance of the power structures engaged, or the number of organisations involved;
- Were trying out an innovative approach to shifting power, such as new ideas, forms of collaboration, participants, etc;
- Promoted equity and inclusion in their communities when building community power.

The map below shows the project names, location, start year and lead organisation.

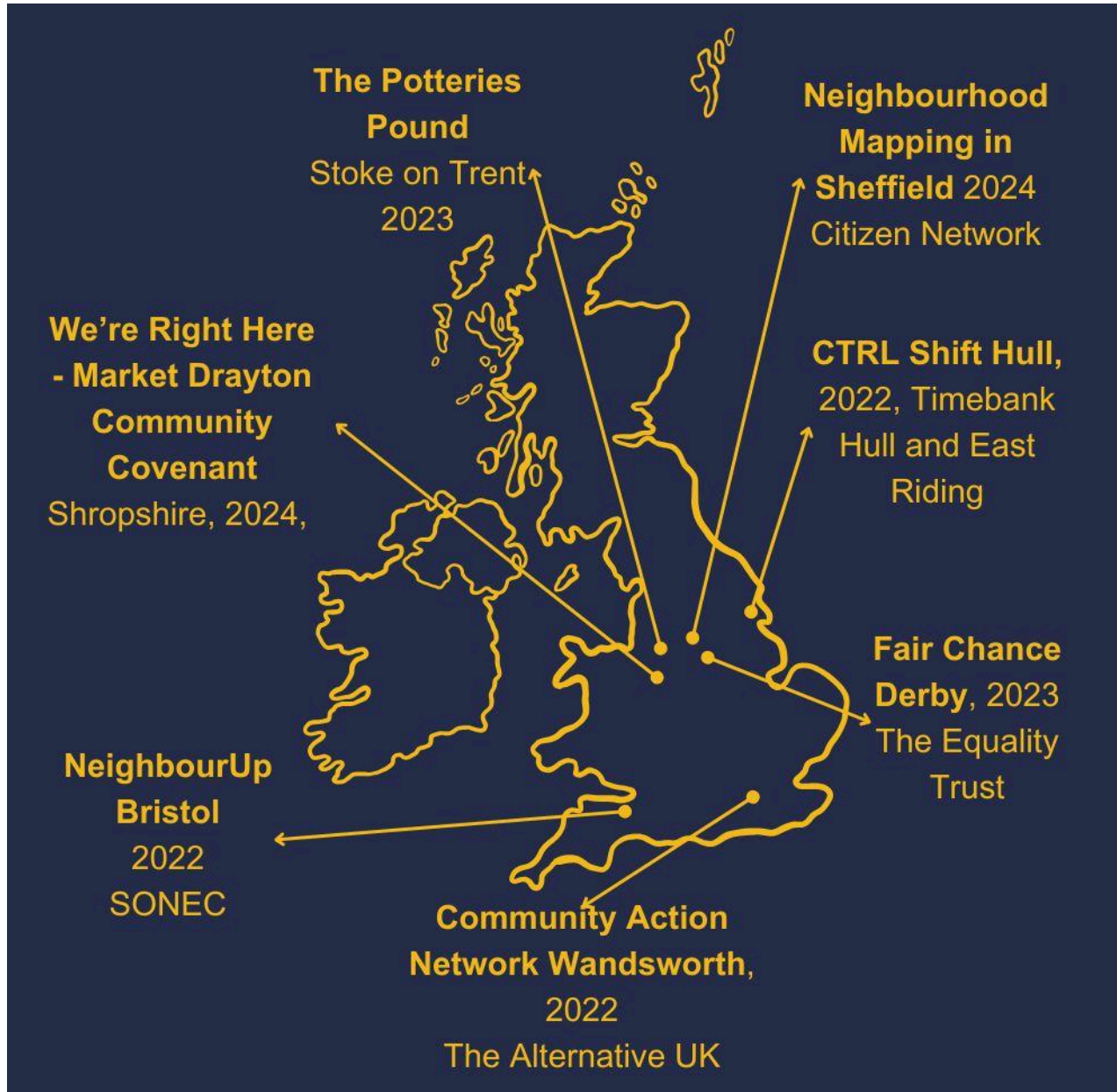


Image: Map of the power shifting projects

These projects were acting in different ways to shift power:

- **NeighbourUp Bristol** aimed to help people in Bristol connect with their neighbours to build a stronger community and work together to solve shared problems. The goal was for people to claim the power to improve their own lives. Initially they tried to network with

professionals and funders, and then moved onto directly helping residents. They provided residents and local groups with advice, training and resource. They distributed 10 microgrants to neighbours and helped a further 22 groups, and are advising others who want to replicate the project.

- **The CTRLshift Hull** aimed to break down barriers between community organizations in Hull to develop collaborative solutions for complex issues like poverty and climate change. Workshops created space for deep, heart centred personal connection and sharing ideas to imagine how local services could be better. These quickly built trust between participants, and years later many now work alongside each other. It enabled shared understanding of complex issues, and sparked new projects such as Town Anywhere. Facilitators around the country are now being trained in the Town Anywhere method, initiated in Hull.
- The **Community Action Network Wandsworth** aimed to bring together diverse members of the local community, so they could collaborate on community led projects. They wished to use a tool called [Po.lis](#) (a software for gathering and understanding what large groups of people think in their own words). However, due to a variety of reasons the project was abandoned. We captured the valuable learnings from this project and they fed into the Community of Practice conversations, helping those projects to avoid the issues that the Wandsworth project encountered.
- In Stoke on Trent, **The Potteries Pound** is a community currency that began as an experiment in upcycling plastic waste into token “pounds”. The pounds will be earned by volunteers who lead with kindness and contribute to their community. They are used in participating local businesses such as football clubs. A broad cross section of the local community has come together to name, design and support the project. A campaign has been launched to raise funds to get the currency to be used more widely.
- The **Fair Chance Derby** project aimed to give people with lived experiences of poverty or money stress more of a say in how things are done in Derby City Council. It supported them to put questions to

local decision makers. It also used crafts, real life stories and joint learning to encourage the Council to work with people facing poverty to design better services. Participants feel empowered to have their voice heard by the council and changes have been made. The council has made a commitment to listen more to the community, and participating groups are now working more closely with each other.

- The **Neighbourhood Mapping project in Sheffield** was created to help people come together, make decisions and take action. The project responded to the fact that in Sheffield, just as in many other communities, it is hard to get your voice heard by local politicians at the neighbourhood level. It used digital technology, social media and community workshops to create a citizen-led map of Sheffield's neighbourhoods. This work has led to more understanding of the importance of neighbourhoods and further work to enable citizens to use the neighbourhood maps to stimulate action and problem-solving. It may also enable community led approaches to service delivery, such as healthcare.
- The **Market Drayton** project aimed to devolve power to local communities through the creation of a **community covenant**. This is a power sharing agreement between the local authority and a range of local community partners. The first devolved power was to guide the development of the Market Drayton Community and Family Hub. The covenant has been created with 25+ representatives and decided how they want to work together going forwards. The learning from this pilot will feed into a national campaign for community power as part of the We're Right Here campaign. The government's 2025 Devolution Bill could give more rights and resources to communities, and outcomes of this pilot will be fed into Bill proposals.

How the CTRL Shift Prototype Projects Shifted Power

Together, the CTRL Shift prototypes show that **shifting power is not only possible—it's already happening**. By combining experimentation, creativity, and community-rooted leadership, these projects have planted seeds of transformation that are beginning to take root and spread. They

offer concrete guidance and inspiration for anyone looking to grow local power and community-led change in their own place.

Over the course of the CTRL Shift prototype programme, each initiative contributed in meaningful ways across the dimensions of **deepening**, **widening**, and **lengthening** impact (based on [Tim Strasser's PhD thesis](#)).

Deepening: Transforming Systems, Relationships and Culture

The projects created significant changes at the **systemic, institutional, and relational levels**. In Market Drayton, a pioneering Community Covenant gave residents a formal role in shaping local services, feeding into national policy discussions on the 2025 Devolution Bill. In Derby, creative forms of storytelling and craftivism empowered people experiencing poverty to influence local policy and develop stronger ties with council decision-makers. In Hull, deep emotional workshops built trust and shifted how organisations collaborate, while in Sheffield, participatory mapping gave residents a greater voice in city planning, influencing institutions like the NHS. Across the projects, **new models of governance, policy influence, and community-council collaboration** emerged, showing what's possible when communities lead.

Widening: Growing Participation, Partnerships, and Public Awareness

All six projects widened access to participation by reaching out to **diverse communities, local organisations, and sectors**. Fair Chance Derby brought excluded voices into local politics, gaining media attention and sparking cultural change. Potteries Pound involved a broad cross-section of residents and businesses in creating a local currency. Neighbourhood Mapping Sheffield engaged over 800 people in shaping their city, and CTRLshift Hull inspired national replication of the Town Anywhere approach. These projects did not act in isolation—they created partnerships, inspired others, and increased public visibility of community-led alternatives. The effects are still rippling outward through **replication, campaigns, and networks**.

Lengthening: Building Capacity, Relationships, and Future Momentum

The prototype projects also laid the **foundations for lasting change**. In several places, the relationships built between communities and councils are continuing through formal structures or new commitments. Long-term trust and collaboration—such as in Market Drayton’s covenant or Hull’s extended partnerships—are keeping the momentum alive. Tools and methods developed during the projects, like participatory mapping, sociocracy training, or Town Anywhere, are being shared, adapted and scaled. Even in projects with more modest resources, microgrants, peer learning, and inclusive processes helped **re-energise local groups, unlock capacity, and create opportunities for ongoing growth**.

Observations about impact domains:

- **Community building** was the most common domain, named by nearly every project.
- **Political influence and council engagement** were central to three projects: *Fair Chance Derby, Market Drayton, and Sheffield*.
- Some projects emphasised **economic innovation** (*Potteries Pound*) or **inner/cultural change** (*CTRLshift Hull*).
- There’s a diversity of entry points—social, political, environmental, economic—yet all were concerned with shifting power toward communities.

Key Patterns about impact approaches:

- Projects like **NeighbourUp Bristol** and **Potteries Pound** focused on *accessible community-led action* through microgrants and tangible tools.
- **CTRLshift Hull** and **Fair Chance Derby** prioritised *relational, emotional, and cultural change*, using creative and experiential methods.

- **Market Drayton** and **Sheffield** exemplified *structural and institutional engagement*, co-creating new governance models or data infrastructures.
- Many projects combined **bottom-up mobilisation** with **efforts to influence top-down systems**, each in their own way.

What do the symbols in the text mean?

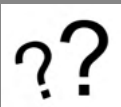
We have used the following symbols in this guide. Here we explain what they mean:



The **story book** symbol is where we tell the story of what happened in the project.



The **tools** symbol is where we explain how you can start a project like this in your local community.



The **question mark** symbol in a grey box is where we explain new and important ideas in more detail.

Words

The **speech text box** contains things people have said about the project.



A **mobile phone** symbol in a grey box is where you can find the contact details of those who were involved in the project.

Project case studies and guidance for starting one in your community

In the following sections we handover to each project to explain in their own words the story of what they did and the impact it had, and how you could try it out in your community. We also include a case study on the Community of Practice, made up of all the project leaders.

The next sections of this guide include these case studies:

- Case study 1: NeighbourUp Bristol
- Case study 2: CTRL Shift Hull: Exploring Collaborative Solutions in Community Development
- Case study 3: The Potteries Pound: A Community-Driven Local Currency, Stoke on Trent
- Case study 4: Fair Chance Derby: creative people power on poverty
- Case study 5: Neighbourhood Mapping in Sheffield
- Case study 6: Market Drayton Community Covenant Pilot
- Case study 7: Our Community of Practice.

The final section of the guide is:

- Conclusion: learnings and guidance

Case study 1: NeighbourUp Bristol

Project leaders: Nathaniel Whitestone and Carolina De Oliveira, from Sociocratic Neighbourhood Circles ([SONEC](#)) and [A Fairer Society](#)

Funded by: CTRLShift and Lankelly Chase

Dates: 2022-2023

Location: Bristol



Summary: NeighbourUp Bristol wanted to help people in Bristol connect with their neighbours to build a stronger community and work together to solve shared problems. The goal was for people to claim the power to improve their own lives. It also aimed to create networks where local residents, professionals, and funders could come together to support community-led projects. This is based on the [neighbourhood organising movement in India](#), and **sociocratic** neighbourhood circles ([SONEC](#)) model.



What is Sociocracy?

Sociocracy is a way of organizing in teams based on the principle that everyone is equal. This includes speaking time for everyone in a circle, making decisions that work for everyone together, and openly electing team roles. **Teams that use sociocracy tend to get**

more done, faster, AND include everyone. Find out more [here](#), and access free and paid Sociocracy learning resources [here](#).



The story of what we did

We embarked on this project in early 2022, with the partnership funding from the National Lottery through the Transition Network (£5,000), and further funding from Lankelly Chase (£30k).

With half the team of four working long distance, and the Bristol based team being new to the community development sector, we spent the first 6 months connecting with the people working in the community. We had trouble connecting with local residents and neighbours through the community organisations we contacted. Also, funders felt we didn't know enough about Bristol yet to offer something valuable, and professionals only wanted to get involved if the funders were there too. What a pickle! By summer, we realized we weren't making progress with funders and professionals, so we decided to focus on helping residents.

We began building relationships with local neighbors by working with community groups and offering free resources through the CTRL Shift alliance, our Bristol contacts, and sharing our knowledge. We focussed our outreach efforts in low income neighbourhoods, by posting leaflets and having conversations. We also engaged with our existing networks and in places where there were already neighbourhood groups. We asked those who were enthusiastic about the work to share it with their connections.

In the autumn, we took our colleague Joseph Rathinam, the global lead trainer for the Neighbourocracy movement, on a tour of the UK & Ireland. During this tour, we met with four groups in Bristol, offering training, coaching, and helpful discussions. (Nine months later, these groups asked for more resources, small grants, and consultancy support for their community projects.)

In December, we added two team members in Bristol to replace those who left. We also started giving out £100 micro-grants to small local groups, especially in low income neighbourhoods where more people facing racism live. This program ran until April 2023 and awarded ten grants. Additionally, 22 other groups received help through referrals (such as sign posting to funding pots or introductions to other people), coaching, and training.





Images: Microgrants bought food for a warm and welcome space in Eastville, and a meal to support Somali elderly in Hillfields

“Thank you for the grant. Our Ayeyyo and Awoowo really appreciated it and enjoyed delicious food. It was Iftar, a good time to get together.”

Kaysaar, Ayeyyo and Awoowo

“Residents from approximately 20 households attended, with around 12 adults actively volunteering and around 15 children free to play together in the street. One of our local Councillors also attended, and was able to speak to residents. Feedback from neighbours and kids has been overwhelmingly positive. Lots of demand to do it again! We also made 3 significantly improved habitats for pollinators.”

Mary, Ridgeway Road



Image: Microgrant supported a street closure and community planting day on Ridgeway Road

In April 2023, we hosted a sociocracy training at [The Haven](#), a land-based project supporting people with mental illness or recovering from addiction.

In May, the new Bristol team raised concerns about not fully understanding our purpose and not feeling in charge. We addressed this by providing training and helping them create a 6-month action plan. We tried to raise funds using the plan, but we were unsuccessful, so we had to stop our activities by the end of 2023. However, we left behind valuable tools and lessons, and we are also advising others who want to create a service like this.



How can you start a project like this in your local community?

Below, we explain:

- A. How to connect with your neighbors and organize your street
 - B. How to create a funded ‘help-desk’ service for local community groups.
- These two steps can be done separately.

Activities should be led by people who are passionate about neighbors helping neighbors and are ready to take action in their own neighborhoods. For more details on NeighbourUP Bristol’s goals and activities, see [here](#).

A. How to connect with your neighbours and organise your own street.

Start by getting to know your neighbours. Say hello, start a conversation, or plan a social gathering such as an afternoon tea or a summer picnic, that everyone on your street is welcome to attend. Take the time to show an interest and really care about people for who they are.



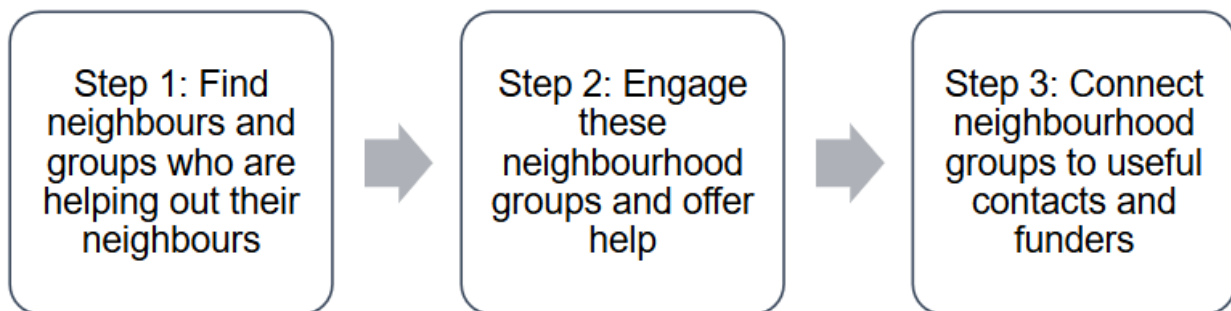
Image: training on children’s parliaments is conducted in a school in Tamil Nadu, India

As you get to know each other, ask about what kind of groups already exist in the community. Are there gardening groups? Neighbourhood watch? Also, listen to what people complain about. Explore what people find challenging and what they’d like to change, for example by asking “if you could change one thing about the neighbourhood, what would it be?” These conversations help to learn about your neighborhood’s strengths and challenges. To take further steps, you

can explore the £1 course on organising SONEC or Neighbourhood Parliaments available at <https://www.sonec.uk/learning-resources>.

We are really inspired by the [neighbourhood parliaments movement in India](#), where neighbours are making great progress in helping each other out. One of the lead trainers of the neighbourhood parliaments movement, [Joseph Rathinam](#) is part of [SONEC](#).

B. How to create a funded ‘help-desk’ service for local community groups.



Step 1: Find neighbours and groups who are helping out their neighbours

Start by finding people who want to connect, or are already connected to, the neighbours on their street. This could be you, or those in your community. During the Covid-19 lockdown, throughout the country neighbours started organising to help each other out, and many of these groups still exist. Check out these [Mutual Aid Groups](#) or have a look at groups on social media e.g. Facebook (tip: search by street name), [Nextdoor](#), etc. Consider other local organizations that are connected to the people on their street e.g. warm and welcome spaces, food-sharing hubs, housing co-ops, community gardens, community centres, land-based community projects.

Step 2: Engage these neighbourhood groups and offer help

Give out [leaflets](#) to everyone on your street, and to local community groups in your neighbourhood. It's important to consider how to include diverse and disadvantaged groups. For example, we spent most of our outreach

effort in neighbourhoods where low income people and those facing racism live. Start conversations and tell them how to access a help-desk service. We also shared our offer with our existing connections. We worked with anyone who was enthusiastic about collaborating. Our help-desk included a 3 step process:

Step 2a: We listened to the needs of the group (see the [Community Connector interview guide](#))

Step 2b: We offered

- Free bitesize training & coaching, including how to build on strengths in your community (see more [here](#)), conflict resolution, facilitation, and website support. We also offered more in-depth training in sociocracy and neighbourhood organising, on a ‘pay what you can’ basis.
- Introductions to other community groups or professionals. We introduced groups to other organizations we knew in Bristol and in the [CTRL Shift](#) network
- A £100 microgrant for projects neighbours wanted to work on together, as long as more than one household on the same street joined in (or supported the idea). We also signposted groups to funding pots we were aware of.

Step 2c: We listened to the feedback from the group, and kept an ongoing relationship with them, asking if more support was required.

Step 3: Connect neighbourhood groups to useful contacts and funders

To build stronger networks for change, we connected neighborhood groups to other community groups and development professionals in Bristol and beyond (such as the [CTRL Shift](#) network).

We also aimed to connect these networks to funders who are keen to support and be led by communities. In order to reach funders, start by doing your research on funders operating in your area, and their priorities.

Local funders that only operate in your area will have less demand than national funders. Look for philanthropic funders (people who donate money to help good causes), community foundations, and local [anchor institutions](#) (these are big organizations with an important role in an area and an interest in helping the community, like universities or the NHS), social enterprises, local businesses, ethical banks, etc.

Invite contacts with an interest or similar aims to discuss how they can support the community. These were the messages we sent to funders, by [email and LinkedIn](#), but also as a listed opportunity on the [Funders Collaborative Hub](#). You can also attend events they will be at. We also tried to recruit ethical local businesses into a programme in which they would sponsor local community groups through a *Healthy Neighbourhoods* fund. Here is a template [interview guide](#) for connecting with and recruiting such businesses.



Get in touch!

[Get in touch](#) with Nate and Carolina

(cdowneyoliveira@gmail.com) who lead this project, if you wish to find out more about how to create this in your area, learn how to organise your street or use sociocracy.

Case study 2: CTRL Shift Hull - Exploring Collaborative Solutions in Community Development

Project leaders: Kate Macdonald (Timebank Hull and East Riding)

Funders: CTRL Shift

Dates: May - December 2023

Location: Hull



Summary: The CTRLshift Hull project is a community-based initiative aimed at fostering collaboration across diverse organisations, groups, and individuals in Hull. It focuses on creating spaces for exploration, deeper connection, and sharing ideas on how local services could better respond to complex social issues such as poverty, food insecurity, and climate change. The project invites stakeholders to move beyond their siloed roles and develop systemic, interconnected solutions that can have a lasting impact on the city.



The story of what we did

In our home town of Hull, many organizations and statutory bodies serving the community are working in isolation, making it difficult to address broader complex challenges effectively, such as poverty, climate change and poor mental health. We understand that solving these complex problems requires an interconnected approach and fostering a deeper sense of shared responsibility.

We in [Timebanking Hull](#) wanted to overcome the barriers leading to the siloed, fragmented nature of many community efforts, and the overwhelm that participants in this work often feel.

To enable cross-organizational collaboration, we wanted to create a space where diverse groups could slow down, collaborate, develop relationships and trust. We thought this would lead to stronger, more integrated actions for positive social change.

The project was designed to challenge conventional approaches to community development. It focussed on relational networks, valuing local wisdom and experience, and systemic change. This aligns with the broader mission of creating more resilient, compassionate, and sustainable communities.



What is systemic change?

When we talk about systems change we generally mean:

- A change that gets to the heart of why the issue (such as poverty or racism) exists in the first place
- A significant and lasting change to how people experience the services (public and private) and systems that are part of their everyday lives
- A change in how things are done, made collectively by the people, organisations and decision-makers who shape a particular issue, which means they won't go back to how they were

Find out more here:

<https://renaisi.com/improving-places/what-is-systems-change/>

To understand how the Hull project aimed to create system change, we can think of the **Two Loops Theory**:

1. **The Old Loop (The way things generally are):**

This is the current way of doing things — often outdated, rigid, and focused on fixing problems one by one. In Hull, this meant organizations worked separately and didn't fully address the root causes of issues.

2. **The Breakthrough Loop (Emergent System):**

This is the new, better way of working — creative, collaborative, and focused on deeper change. It involves people working together, building trust, and tackling problems like poverty and climate change at their core.

In the **CTRLshift Hull project**, people came together in workshops to explore new ideas and relationships. They worked across sectors, shared openly, and imagined better ways to support their city. The project helped **break away from old habits** of working alone and in silos. And, **start new ways of working together**, based on trust, emotion, and shared purpose.

This shift from the old loop to the new one is how real change begins — by building stronger relationships and co-creating better solutions for complex challenges.

The Systemic Constellation Workshop

The project unfolded in a series of workshops that built on each other. We invited different people in our community, some of whom were Timebank members. The organizations represented included the University of Hull, the NHS, different grassroots community organizations, faith groups, poverty action groups, artists and therapists. The first major event was a Systemic Constellations workshop.



What is a systemic constellation workshop?

Systemic Constellations is an approach that uses embodied knowledge (such as how something makes you feel emotionally) to understand how things like families, organizations, or social structures work. These things can be understood as systems. Systems are a set of things working together as parts of a whole.

In the workshop, participants position themselves in different places in the room to create “maps” of the system. The participants represent different parts of the system, such as the inhabitants of a neighbourhood, and the council. The process is akin to role playing or drama. It allows participants to explore key issues, by understanding the root causes of problems. It helps identify what is missing or unknown in a system. Forward movement is often achieved through grieving, accepting truths, and finding one’s role in the system. It also allows them to test possible solutions, and to create positive energy to solve the issues.

Developed by German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger, it combines elements from family therapy, body awareness, trauma therapy, and other practices.

Our workshop involved group exercises to explore three issues in our community: the impact of capitalism and patriarchy, and the impact of removal or privatisation of green spaces.

Different people ‘acted out’ the role of the key players and elements of the issue. For the issue of capitalism, the represented roles were: the community, the council, big corporations. They positioned themselves in the space based on their relationship with each other. They expressed how they felt about each other in their role (emotional work). They then explored how their positions in space and feelings towards each other might change, if new elements were introduced or in response to changes in the positions of others.



Images show participants in the Systemic Constellation Workshop

It was a deeply reflective and emotional process that encouraged individuals to express desires, grief, and hopes for the future. Some participants felt uncomfortable with the embodied nature of the workshop and the vulnerability required to fully engage. However, as the days unfolded, people embraced the process, resulting in deeper insights and stronger bonds between participants. This shared emotional experience enabled trust to be built, and informed the group's next steps.

Doing this work in an embodied way (for example moving around the room and connecting to our emotions), revealed things about the problem we were discussing that would not have been revealed if we just sat around talking about them. By bravely talking about the deeper feelings we were able to support each other with things we don't usually address. This approach also allowed people to recognize their own role in the problem being discussed, and what we could collectively do to solve it.

The Lego Serious Play workshop

In the second workshop we explored our collective vision for the Hull we want, what gets in the way of creating that reality, and how we might shift things. We continued our exploration of using creative ways of exploring these topics. The idea was to break out of our habitual patterns and ways of seeing things, so that new ideas and insights can emerge. We also wanted to give a strong focus to connecting with each other in different ways, on a human to human level, beyond our traditional and professional roles and identities.

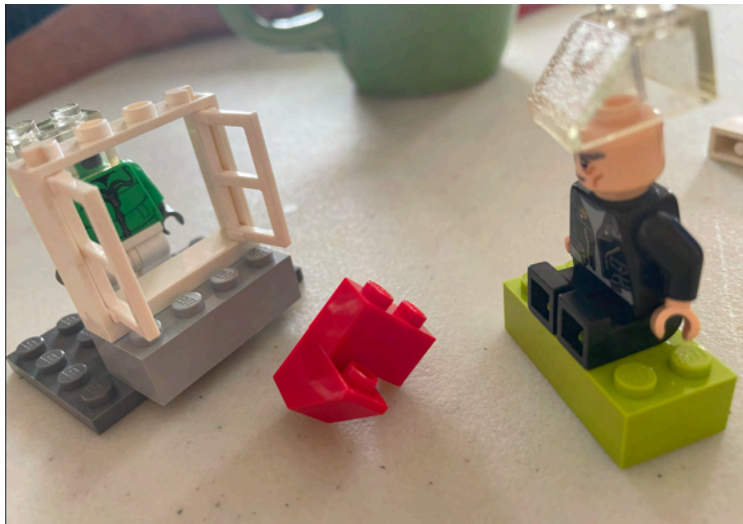
During the workshop we used different tools and exercises including “LEGO Serious Play” as a method for exploring and creating shared visions for the Hull we want, and Systemic Constellations to see how we may be able to shift what blocks us.



What is a Lego Serious Play workshop?

A LEGO Serious Play workshop is a hands-on method for problem-solving and teamwork, where participants build LEGO models to express ideas. This visual approach makes discussions more engaging and helps convey complex concepts effectively.

Guided by a facilitator, participants respond to a question by building a model that represents their thoughts. They then share their creations, ensuring that every voice is heard and different perspectives are explored. This structured process leads to deeper conversations and fresh insights, fostering collaboration, creativity, and innovation.





Images show the Lego made by the workshop participants

OUTCOMES

Vulnerability enabled trust building: One of the key takeaways was the importance of creating spaces where people could be vulnerable and express their emotions. While initially challenging for some, this vulnerability became a source of strength and connection.

Cross-Organizational collaboration was sparked: The workshop encouraged trust, built and deepened relationships between people beyond their professional roles. Further, it shifted power dynamics within the community by honoring diverse knowledge and expertise. Three years on, many of the participants are now working alongside each other as partners, co-leads and collaborators on different projects.

Profound insights from embodied work: The project showed the importance of doing things differently, such as bravely talking about feelings. Participants reported that the embodied nature of the work gave them new clarity about the issues being discussed. This helped shed new light on old problems, and energize participants toward action.

The complexity of problems faced: The challenges in Hull couldn't be solved by separate groups or actions; they needed deep collaboration to understand the connections between different organisations and issues. Through the workshops, we gained a shared understanding of local issues like poverty and climate change. By working together we can make more impact than by working separately.

Sparking further action: Opportunities for working together on different funding initiatives happened, some of which have been successful. Beyond funding, relationships and trust enable routine collaboration and support between us. This is much needed to face current challenges. There is much work in the city now which is impacting on shifting power and enabling greater community voice alongside academic knowledge and policy. This project is part of that jigsaw of impact.

The funding did not allow for some of the embodied initiatives we hoped to do such as [Town Anywhere](#) (a large scale community visioning experience). However, we were able to do this through another project. We did 3 events with different audiences including:

- 230 people of our community gathered in the Hull Minster (large religious building similar to a cathedral),
- regional co-investigators from universities starting a new project,
- local authorities

We also became the first place where we worked alongside Ruth Ben-Tovim to prototype facilitator training. We now have 8 facilitators in Hull meaning we can build on this work. Town Anywhere process was tried out. Trainers will be part of a new collaborative organisation which will provide support to academia and statutory bodies in how to shift power and work alongside each other and communities.



How can you start a project like this in your local community?

Follow these steps to replicate this project in your community.

Community engagement and invitation

Step 1: Bring together an initial group of collaborators to test out the idea and co-design the framing of the invitation. In our case we had representatives from the community, and the university including the Centre for Systems Studies. Introduce them to the workshop approaches we used, explain their use and impact, and see what they think. The methods used should be adapted to fit the cultural context of the community. Some communities may require more time to build trust or a different approach to emotional engagement.

Key ingredients:

- **Diverse Representation is essential.** Ensure that all voices, especially marginalized ones, are represented and actively included in the process.
- **Use systemic thinking:** A willingness to approach problems by taking into consideration different perspectives, recognizing the interconnectedness of issues and the need for cross-sector collaboration.
- **Commitment to Vulnerability:** A community culture that is willing to engage in vulnerability, emotional expression, and non-judgmental inquiry is essential.

Step 2: Identify a diverse group of stakeholders who are committed to exploring systemic issues and working collaboratively

Step 3: Personally reach out to invitees to discuss the intentions of the project. Face to face if possible. When people are busy and tired, it is a big ask to give up a Saturday. The invitation starts with personal vulnerability and appeals about trying something different. This was time consuming and sometimes challenging but the foundation of building trust. Don't assume that everyone will be comfortable with emotional or experiential work—be prepared to offer alternative ways of engaging and do the groundwork to build trust.

Planning and holding the workshops

Step 4: Find a facilitator with experience in embodied work. Strong, experienced facilitators who can manage both the emotional and intellectual complexity of the process are crucial. Find out more here: <https://www.c3labs.org/>

Step 5: Tell participants what to expect. Send them brief information on the methods used, and what to expect to feel and do. This can help participants feel more comfortable with the process.

Step 6: Foster an environment where vulnerability is encouraged, and participants are invited to explore their emotions, beliefs, and connections to systemic issues. Don't rush the process; allow time for deep, embodied work to unfold. Slowing down enables us to speed up later building on foundations of trust and understanding

Key ingredient:

- **Check-In and Check-Out:** Begin and end each workshop with a group check-in where participants are asked about their emotional readiness and reflect on insights gained and how they can be integrated into the session. Both physical and emotional spaces for reflection and processing are key to the success of this kind of work.

After the workshops

Step 7: Encourage Ongoing Collaboration: Create opportunities for ongoing dialogue and collaboration, ensuring that relationships formed during the workshops continue to thrive and translate into action.

Step 8: Follow up with smaller reflective sessions to bring together ideas and keep making progress.



Get in touch

Get in touch with Kate Macdonald who led this project
kate@timebankhullandeastriding.co.uk

Links:

Coming soon: www.participatorycollective.org

Case study 3: The Potteries Pound - A Community-Driven Local Currency, Stoke on Trent

Project leaders: Mike Riddell/Dave Proudlove/Annette Francis - The Stoke Model; Alex Phillips, UnLtd, Danny Flynn, YMCA North Staffordshire

Funders: CTRL Shift

Dates: 1st Jan - 31st December 2024

Location: Stoke on Trent



Summary: The **Potteries Pound** is a groundbreaking initiative rooted in community collaboration, sustainability, and local pride. What began as an experiment in upcycling plastic waste into a currency of trading tokens evolved into a new way of revitalizing local economies. Here, we'll explore how the Potteries Pound was developed, key milestones in its journey, in particular the Hackathon in Burslem where a paper note version of the currency was first introduced, and how this innovative model can be replicated in other communities.



The story of the origins of the Potteries Pound

The idea for the Potteries Pound originated with a desire to create a local currency that would encourage community engagement in volunteering and promote sustainability. Initially called the “Stoke Pound,” the project began with an experimental approach to turning recycled plastic bottle tops into physical currency.

Prototyping with Recycled Plastic



The first step involved collaboration with **Middleport Matters**, a local community group. Members gathered plastic bottle tops from milk and drink cartons, then melted them in a Breville sandwich maker to create sheets of pressed plastic.

The sheets were intended to be laser-cut into coins. However, the thickness of the plastic posed challenges for the laser-cutting process. Although some coins were produced, the team decided to shift to coloured acrylic sheets for easier production



Shaping the Idea with Community Input

- Feedback from the **Youth Offending Team** at Stoke City Council helped refine the project. They proposed renaming the currency to the "Potteries Pound" to be more inclusive of the entire Potteries region, rather than focusing solely on Stoke.
- The tokens gained credibility when local football clubs (FC)—Port Vale FC and Stoke City FC—agreed to accept the Potteries Pound

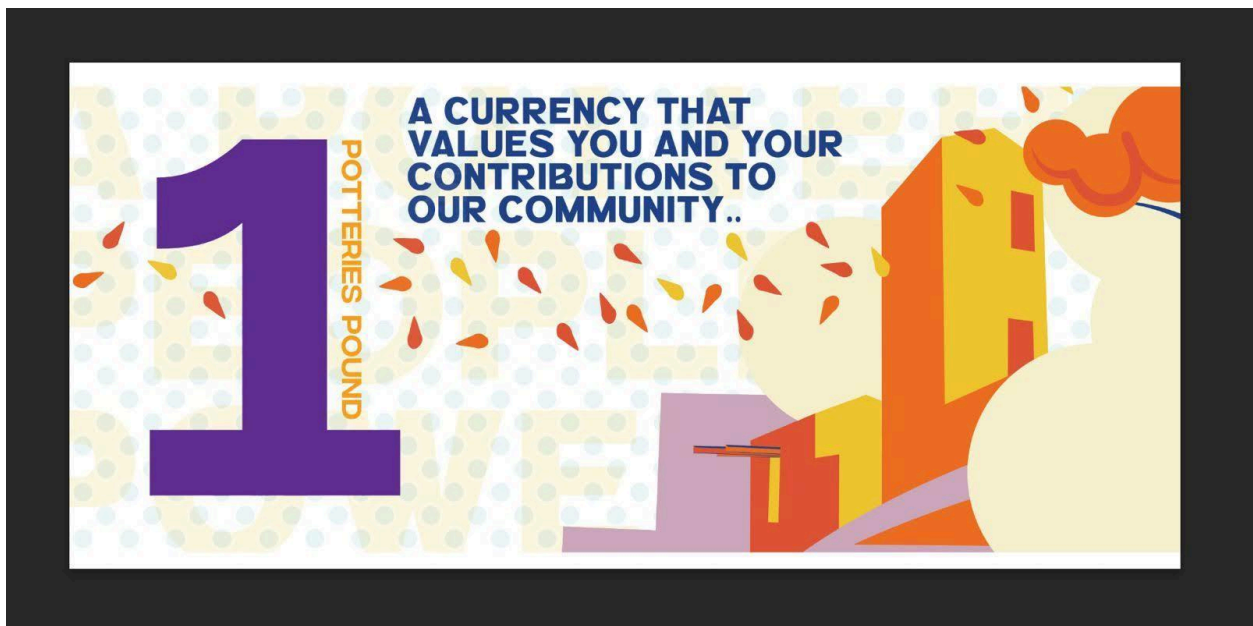
for unsold tickets, lending legitimacy to the concept. They agreed to participate because they wanted to attract more fans.

From Tokens to Banknotes

As the project progressed, the idea of producing notes from **rip-proof paper** was introduced by a professional banknote maker. This opened up new opportunities to involve local artists and storytellers in creating a design that reflected the unique heritage of the Potteries.

Designing the Potteries Pound

- The team identified **Josiah Wedgwood**, the "Father of English Pottery," as a symbol of local pride. A painting of Wedgwood, secured with the permission of its artist, became the foundation of the note's design.
- Collaborating with street artist **Rob Fenton** and other creatives, the final design was unveiled as a striking work of art that had meaning with the community.





Launch Event

The Potteries Pound was officially introduced on **May 1, 2024**, at the **Burslem School of Art**. Over 60 attendees, including community leaders, local artists, and residents, celebrated the launch of the currency, marking a significant step forward for the project.

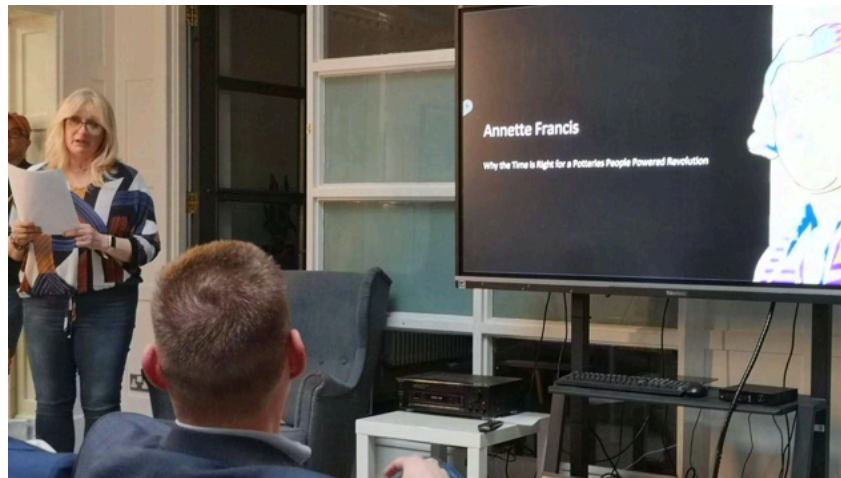
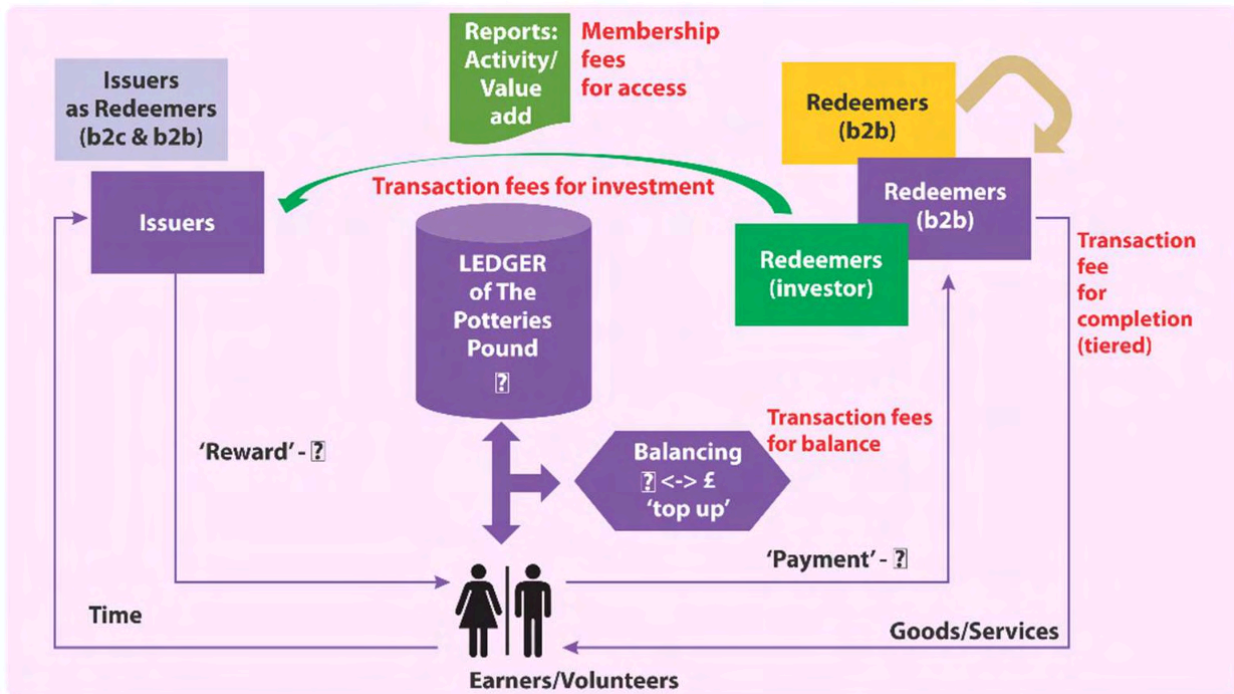


Image: Mayday event where the Potteries Pound was introduced to the local community

How it works - The Model



The model illustrates the flow of operations within the Potteries Pound ecosystem, emphasizing the roles of issuers, redeemers, and the central ledger in creating a robust and dynamic community currency system. These roles are explained below.

Key Components

Issuers and Redeemers:

- Issuers: Organizations that give out Potteries Pounds to volunteers and earners in exchange for their time and labour. In addition, they can use Potteries Pounds with businesses and customers, allowing them to accept payment for surplus goods and services.
- Redeemers: Companies or groups that take Potteries Pounds as payment for products or services that are perishable (such as empty seats at a football match), and which would otherwise go to waste. These organizations might be anything from major corporations to local businesses.

- Redeemers (Investors): Participants in the system who may receive returns on their investments by offering liquidity or other sorts of assistance.

Ledger of the Potteries Pound: the Ledger keeps track of every transaction using Potteries Pounds, including payments, rewards, and balancing actions. This ledger is the central hub of the currency, ensuring accountability, security and transparency.

Earners and Activists: Individuals who volunteer their time and energy in the community will receive Potteries Pounds in return. They are the lifeblood of the system, generating both social and financial value for the neighbourhood.

Transactional Flow:

- Reward: Issuers will give Potteries Pounds for the time and contributions of earners and volunteers
- Payment: Potteries Pounds earned by volunteers or earners will be used to buy surplus products and services from redeemers (e.g. football clubs) in the system.

Transaction Costs: the system will impose varying transaction costs.

- For Completion: Transactions are completed with fees imposed.
- For Balancing: Fees for adding more Potteries Pounds
- For Investment: fees will be used to fund investments, ensuring the continued growth and support of the Potteries Pound system.

Key Outcomes

The Potteries Pound is becoming a symbol of community-driven economic revitalisation even if the currency isn't yet in circulation. Launching a currency requires a lot of resources, such as money, staff, office space. The kind of thing you'd need to launch a new product. We have launched a campaign to raise funds and get support, called The Collective Goal www.thecollectivegoal.com

So far, our key outcomes include:

1. **Strengthened Community Bonds:** Local collaboration was at the heart of every phase, fostering a sense of ownership and pride.
2. **Sustainability Awareness:** The project spotlighted creative ways to repurpose materials, even though the final product shifted from plastic tokens to paper notes.
3. **Economic Potential:** Partnerships with organisations like football clubs demonstrated how local currencies can be part of existing economies.

"The Potteries Pound has the potential to make the Potteries whole again! True prosperity is not measured by coin alone, but by the strength of the community that earns and spends it. Let the Potteries Pound be a currency not just of trade, but of trust—keeping our industry thriving and our people empowered."

Dave Proudlove, Potteries Pound team member.



How to Replicate the Potteries Pound in Your Community

Replicating the Potteries Pound model is both possible and rewarding but you need a big team and quite a lot of financial support and the support of local businesses too. You also need staying power and determination to see it through. Here's a step-by-step guide to help:

1. Identify Your Vision and Goals

- Define what you want your local currency to achieve. Is it to encourage local spending, foster community pride, or promote sustainability?
- Collaborate with stakeholders such as local councils, community groups, and businesses on shared goals.

2. Engage Your Community

- Gather a team of passionate individuals who care deeply about your community. Host sessions or community meetings to build momentum and share ideas.
- Identify a unifying symbol or figure that has meaning with your community's heritage, culture, or values.

3. Develop the Currency

- Decide on the format of your currency: plastic tokens, paper notes, or digital forms.
- Partner with artists, graphic designers, and printers to create a visually compelling design that embodies your community's identity.

4. Secure Partnerships

- Reach out to local businesses, cultural institutions, and organisations to encourage them to accept the currency. Offer incentives such as publicity or loyalty benefits to early adopters.
- Build credibility by tying the currency to trusted institutions (e.g., sports clubs, local government). These organisations want to attract more customers but don't have marketing budgets so explaining that they can participate in a free marketing scheme where the media attention they get is earned and not bought, helps to persuade them to participate.

5. Launch with Impact

- Plan a high-profile launch event to introduce the currency to the community. Include live demonstrations, storytelling, and opportunities for attendees to use the currency immediately.
- Use social media, press releases, and local influencers to generate buzz.

6. Create a Feedback Loop

Monitor the currency's usage and gather input from businesses and residents. Use this feedback to refine the program and address challenges.

Lessons Learned from the Potteries Pound

- **Flexibility is Key:** The original plan for plastic tokens evolved into paper notes, showing the importance of adapting to challenges.
- **Community Input Drives Success:** Listening to feedback—such as renaming the currency—helped build trust and inclusivity.
- **Partnerships Matter:** Securing support from local businesses and organizations legitimized the project and ensured its sustainability.

Conclusion

The Potteries Pound demonstrates the power of community-driven initiatives in fostering local pride, sustainability, and economic revitalisation. By following this guide and learning from the Potteries Pound's journey, other communities can create their own local currencies, tailored to their unique identities and needs.

Whether it's a token, a note, or a digital currency, the key is engaging people who care deeply about their hometown and working together to celebrate its heritage and potential. With collaboration, creativity, and persistence, your community can write its own comeback story.



Get in touch!

If you have questions or would like to discuss this case study, contact **Mike Riddell** mikeriddell62@gmail.com

Case study 4: Fair Chance Derby - creative people power on poverty

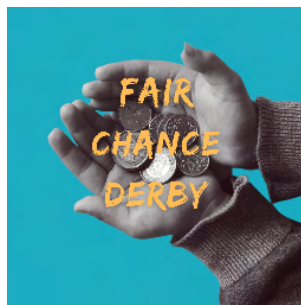
Project facilitator: Vanessa Boon, The Joyful Disruptor, Fair Chance Derby in association with the Equality Trust

Funded by: Equality Trust and CTRLshift

Supported by: Rita Kappia's Empowerment Dolls and film-maker Hardy Saleh

Dates: 2022 - 2025

Location: Derby



EQUALITY  TRUST

Summary: This project built upon local people's successful campaign to get Derby City Council to sign up to the Socio-Economic Duty, which means thinking about how all policies and procedures affect people living in financial hardship. The project aimed to give people with lived experiences of poverty or financial struggles more of a say in how things are done. It provided support to help people put questions to local Councillors, ensuring their stories were heard by those who make decisions about public services. The project used empowerment and creative methods, including crafts, storytelling and joint learning sessions, to encourage the Council to listen and work with people facing poverty to design better services. Participants were also paid for their time, helping to shift and share power to make real change.



How the story started

Once upon a time in Derby, local groups and individuals concerned about poverty came together to talk about the unfair gap between rich and poor people in the city. They talked about children in poverty, parents struggling to buy food and pay bills, people who could not afford to put the heating on and people with no place to call home. The conversations involved local groups such as the Derby People's Assembly, charities, trade unions, community centres and people concerned about the rising cost of living, with increasing debt and financial stress. Together, they campaigned for the Council to use the Socio-Economic Duty, a law to check that public policies support people in poverty and avoid making things worse. Activities included pop-up stalls, petitions, and public events, which appeared in the local newspaper and led to the Council voting in favour of the idea in 2022. This moment was celebrated. However, progress was slow and the people wanted to make sure that this promise was not broken, but put into action for a fairer Derby.



What is the Socio-Economic Duty?

This is a piece of law in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010. It means that national governments and local councils need to consider how their policies and decisions affect people living in poverty and financial stress. It prompts them to change things that would make things worse for the poorest people. It recommends taking positive steps to reduce socio-economic disadvantages, such as low income, homelessness and debt, to create a fairer society.

This Duty has been active in Scotland since 2018 and in Wales since 2021, but England has not yet given it a start date. Charities are

campaigning to urge the UK government to apply the Duty everywhere and quickly, to help address the struggles of rising poverty.

Learn more about the Socio-Economic Duty from the [Equality Trust](#). The Fair Chance Derby campaign persuaded their local Council to voluntarily apply the Duty, as some other councils in England have also done to help their local communities. Campaigners achieved this by running a [petition](#) signed by local people, [public demonstrations](#), writing to the [local newspaper](#) and [urging the Council to pass a vote](#) agreeing to the Duty.



What happened next

Even with this success, and some steps by the Council to think about poverty when writing their policies, many people still struggled with Council decisions. During 2023-2024, campaigners looked for ways to make more progress. CTRLShift funding enabled local people facing hardship to take part in workshops and activities, with pay or vouchers for their time and travel expenses. The project informed these participants about their right to ask questions at Council meetings, and supported them in sharing their experiences to influence policymakers at the Council



Image: Diverse members of the community in the Council House Chamber to put their public questions to Councillors, wearing diversity symbols



Getting creative

The campaigners used craftivism, a mix of crafts and activism, which aims to make change happen. They worked with a local artist to help people make two dolls each to look like themselves. One doll was an empowerment doll with a special message to feel more confident and positive. This was because stereotypes in the media and mean comments by some politicians had made people blame themselves and feel like failures. This was unfair as government policies, low wages or benefit cuts were the cause of their problems. The second doll was a protest doll with a sign to send a message to the Council about what needs to change.



Image: Community artist Rita Kappia with examples of protest dolls with messages on mini banners



People wrote messages about issues such as Council Tax bailiffs (debt collectors) being sent to demand money when people got behind with their bills and mouldy social housing with mice.

Banners also challenged cuts to vital services such as specialist schools and transport for disabled children. The doll-making materials

included a variety of skin tones, hair types, cultural dress and disabilities. This celebrated the diversity of Derby and brought people together from different backgrounds, united by the struggles of unequal wealth. People enjoyed making the dolls and took them on a mini protest outside the Council. Many people passing by stopped to find out more and liked the idea. The [local newspaper came to write a story](#) about the small but mighty changemakers. The campaigners even made a film in the style of a news report, with a doll as the newsreader, to share on social media. [Watch the films here.](#)



Image: snapshot from the [film](#) showing the dolls protesting while a newsreader doll reports the story

The creative approach helped people to express their struggles in a new way, [getting more public support than the usual protests](#). Both members of the Council and the public said it was emotional to see the signs about people's struggles and it had inspired them to want to make a difference.

“Inspirational and hopeful.. Dolls created a lot of dialogue, some powerful stories and overlapping areas of lived experience of structural injustice ... Really great to focus on what change we want, how that might be possible at the local council level - empowering to think it just might be possible to make a difference”

Simran*

“After a long time feeling low with caring, grief and mental health this is something that has finally made me feel hope again”

Helen*

“Why didn’t anyone tell me all this [Socio-Economic Duty and asking public questions to the Council] before?! We should teach everyone about this!”

Denzel*¹



Sharing power by learning together

Learning events were organised to bring Council managers and community groups (and the dolls!) together. People with lived experience of money struggles bravely shared their stories. They described how Council decisions had made their situation worse; for example, by sending bailiffs to struggling households and grant money to help care leavers (moving from foster homes to social housing as a young adult) being used up to carpet bare floors and spent without the young person’s involvement. Everyone discussed ideas to make things better. As a result, there has been some progress on suggestions to change how things are done. As well as

¹ *Names have been changed to respect people’s privacy.

sparking some changes to policies, the project has had an impact on local people who live with financial stress:

- participants are now more aware of ways to take part in local democracy such as putting questions to Council meetings
- participants feel more empowered to tell their stories and make suggestions on what needs to be changed
- separate local community groups are working together more closely to tackle poverty and to use creative ways to highlight the issues
- joint learning sessions enabled the Council staff and people living at the sharp end of austerity cuts to learn about the Socio-Economic Duty and ideas to tackle poverty together. This has broken down barriers between the Council and the community, creating new connections with on-going discussions and opportunities to work together on solutions
- the Council has expressed an aim to increase the involvement of people with experience of hardship in designing policies and services

Towards our happy ever after

This story isn't yet 'everybody lived happily ever after' but Council managers are now learning directly from the people who live the tough realities of poverty and financial struggle. There are more chapters and challenges ahead, but the people and the Council are now working more closely together for a Fair Chance Derby.

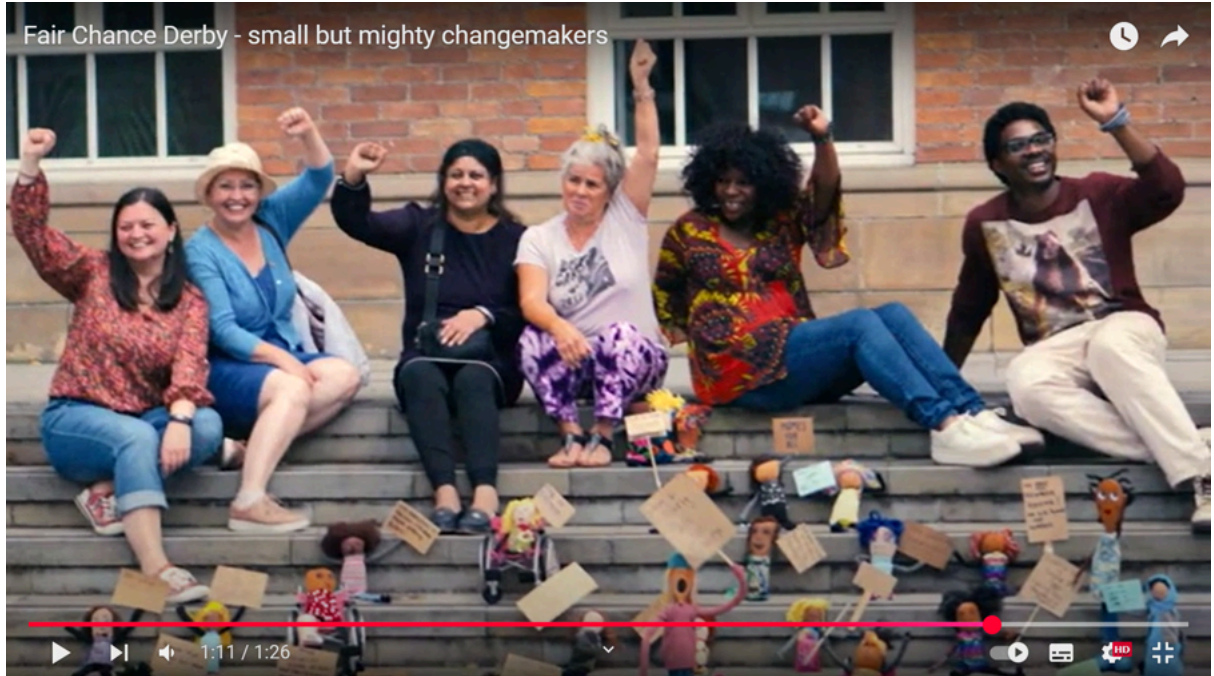


Image: snapshot from the [film](#) showing some campaigners with the protest dolls outside the Council House



How to Start a Similar Project in Your Local Community

This project aimed to inspire and influence the local Council to listen and act upon the feedback from people living with financial struggles.



1. Connect with local groups

Work with community organisations that share your goals, as many voices make more impact. Your local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) or Volunteer Centre will have a list of local charities and community groups. You can look online for local branches of organisations like trade unions, environmental groups, the Indian Workers Association, and Disabled People Against Cuts. Contact your local women’s centre, Youth Council, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans) Centre, disability rights group, parents and carers forum, Multi-Faith Network and cultural community centres to build a campaign to include all voices. This helped the Fair

Chance Derby campaign to gain more signatures for the petition to get the Council to back the Socio-Economic Duty and to involve more people in submitting questions to the Council and in craftivism.

2. Listen to those who live it

Focus on the voices of those most impacted by the issue, ways to bring their experiences to influence policymakers and encourage designing services together. Remember the motto “nothing about us, without us”.



Find inspiration from [Community Reporting](#), the [Human Library](#) and [Co-Production](#).

3. Get informed and share the know-how

Learn how your local Council handles public questions, petitions, and consultations to get feedback from the public. Use these channels to get people’s voices heard.

4. Get creative

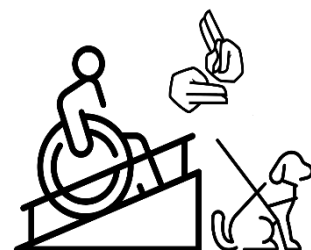
A crafty, fun or unusual approach is great for getting people’s attention and makes it easier to get in the news. Sewing, poetry, rap, painting banners and other types of craftivism give people another way to express themselves that can be more comfortable and therapeutic (healthy) than formal meetings or noisy protests which do not suit everyone. This helps to reach wider than the regular protestors.



Find inspiration from the [Craftivist Collective](#) here.

5. Be inclusive

Find out what everyone needs to take part. Choose accessible venues, involve a diverse team of speakers or facilitators, and link up with equality and diversity groups. Put some money aside in your budget, from grants or fundraising, for accessibility



so you can book a BSL (British Sign Language) Interpreter or provide information in different languages or styles.

6. Celebrate little wins

Share your progress through photos, films, stories and celebrations to keep everyone motivated to keep going and to inspire others.



Get in touch!

Contact Vanessa, The Joyful Disruptor, about this project and how you can use the Socio-Economic Duty to push for change via [The Equality Trust website](#) or on [LinkedIn](#) or visit the [Fair Chance Derby facebook page](#)

Case study 5: Neighbourhood Mapping in Sheffield

Project leaders: Simon Duffy of Citizen Network and Tom French of Data for Action

Funders: CTRL Shift and NHS Sheffield

Dates: June 2023 - ongoing

Location: Sheffield



Summary

The Neighbourhood Mapping project was created to help citizens (any member of your community) come together, make decisions and take action. The project was a response to the fact that in the City of Sheffield, just as in many other communities, there is no democratic infrastructure (such as organisations that support decision making on policy at the neighbourhood scale) at the neighbourhood level. The project used digital technology, social media and community workshops to create a people-led map of Sheffield's neighbourhoods. This work has led to a growing willingness to acknowledge the importance of neighbourhoods and further work to enable residents to use the neighbourhood maps to stimulate action and problem-solving.



The story of what we did

[Citizen Network](#) is a global community dedicated to the idea that everyone matters and that to make this real we need to activate everyone's sense of

citizenship. People need to feel they belong and can make a difference. One critical part of our citizenship is our immediate local community—our neighbourhoods.

The Neighbourhood Mapping project started in Sheffield, which is a large city of about 600,000 people and many diverse neighbourhoods. Despite the rich diversity of Sheffield there was no official map of the neighbourhoods of Sheffield, nor any recognition of the importance of neighbourhoods to citizenship, democracy or to great transitions we need to make as a society.

England is an extremely centralised country. Most public resources are controlled by central government. By international standards local government has limited power, a very weak status in the UK's constitution (the rule book for the government), and is very large. This makes it very hard for [local government](#) to be accountable to local people and it makes it very difficult for people to come together, make decisions and act. The size and distance of local government from local people undermines legitimacy and effectiveness.

Local democracy in England

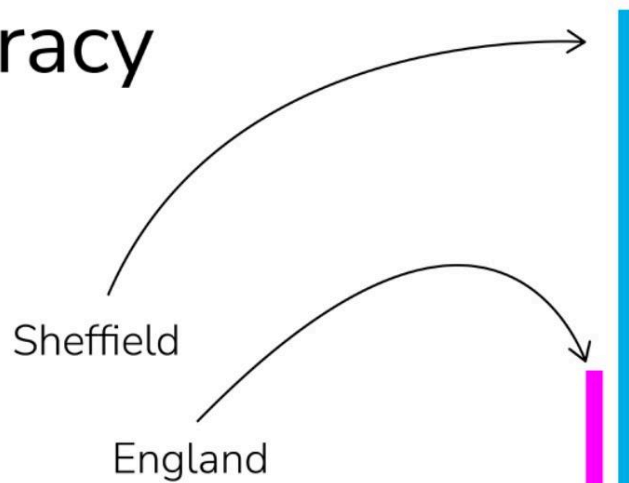


FIGURE 4.1. AVERAGE MUNICIPAL SIZE ACROSS EUROPE (NUMBER OF INHABITANTS)

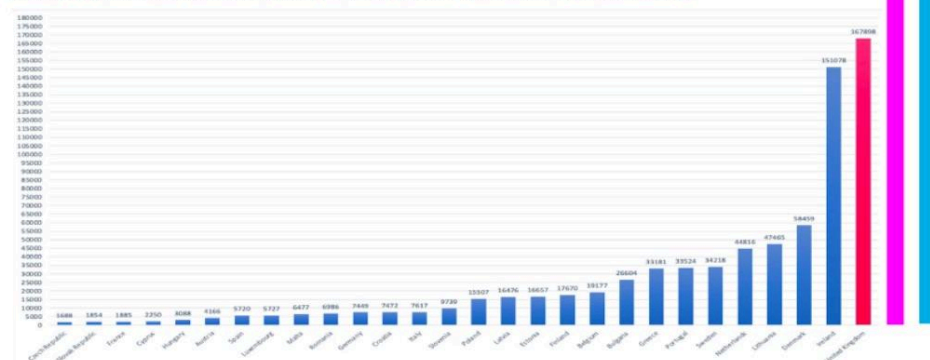


Image: graph of the number of people served by municipal governments across Europe.

In the graph, Sheffield has the largest number of people served by the municipal government (566,000 people), followed by the average in England (368,000 people) as second largest.

Local government is stretched over far too many people. It cannot be properly connected to local people and the opportunities for direct participation by citizens are very limited. Also, Whitehall controls over 85% of public spending and local government has limited powers. This means

local people have negligible influence over local services, planning or the local economy. ²

In Sheffield this problem was exacerbated by the fact that there has been no way of acknowledging the reality of local neighbourhoods. For while most people can identify the neighbourhood that they live in there has been no official map of Sheffield's neighbourhoods nor any rules or structures to help local people bring neighbourhoods to life as part of the city's democratic system. In 2016 local activists in Sheffield described this problem and asked whether [Sheffield was truly a democracy](#).

During the COVID pandemic many neighbourhoods did discover that [citizens could take action without asking for permission](#). At this time Citizen Network also formed the [Neighbourhood Democracy Movement](#) to bring together people who believed that we needed genuine democracy at the truly local level. It believes that we need a new model for democracy and civil society, one that recognised the value of the neighbourhood as the topsoil of community life. The image below explains this.

² Source: Barnett N. Giocannini A & Griggs (2021), Local Government in England: 40 years of Decline. London: Unlock Democracy. Additional data for England is based on the 153 local authorities providing social care and the current population of Sheffield.



Image explaining how neighbourhood care is the ‘topsoil’ of community life

After the pandemic Citizen Network began to look for opportunities to advance the case for the value of neighbourhoods. It seemed like a priority to build a map and list the neighbourhoods of Sheffield. We discovered that there is a very interesting technology for making maps called [Maptionnaire](#) - a Finnish based company. Usually its software was used to help public bodies consult with local citizens about their communities and it is also used to support participative budgeting. However it struck us that the technology could also support a citizen-based approach where local people could help define the neighbourhoods of Sheffield. So Citizen Network used some charitable funding from Lankelly Chase to purchase the licence to use this technology.

We also took information from a local blogger who had [listed the neighbourhoods of Sheffield](#) by cycling around the city and asking people and fellow cyclists where they were from. This gave us an initial list of 142 neighbourhoods. We also introduced this list into another survey which was carried out as part of work to identify [Sheffield's City Goals](#). This also led to the identification of a few more neighbourhoods and the public consultations about the city goals added legitimacy to the idea that neighbourhoods are very important to the people in the city.

The leadership of NHS Sheffield are also very committed to supporting community-led approaches to tackling health inequalities. So we suggested that a map of the neighbourhoods of Sheffield would help them to work better with local people, to identify problems, but more importantly to help people get more active in making change happen in their local community. So NHS Sheffield provided some funding so we could use the expertise of [Data for Action](#), a small local organisation that focuses on using data for social good.

Together we developed a survey tool which asked people some questions and showed them a map of Sheffield which they could draw shapes to represent their sense of local community. The basic questions we asked included:

- What do you think of the list of the current neighbourhoods - would you add any more?
- What do you think of an unpublished council map of neighbourhoods that was shared with us?
- How would you draw and name your neighbourhood?

- What are some of the important things about your neighbourhood?

We used social media to share the survey and we also got some coverage in the local newspapers. We also made the methodology and data open so people could see what we were doing at every stage. As we noted that some areas were less well represented than others we reached out to leaders and social media groups in those areas to increase engagement. Data for Action also ran some workshops with people in different neighbourhoods and we hosted a session to explore the meaning of data which was open to everyone in the city. About 800 people completed the survey and 500 people have volunteered to act as future Citizen Mappers. Taking all of this data together we settled on 147 neighbourhoods which we published on a public map. We are currently still encouraging people to comment on this and we may make tweaks to the map in the future. You can read about this in more detail on the [Data for Action website](#) and there is a summary of the process and the outcomes on the Citizen Network website. We published [the final map](#) on a different technology - called Felt - which allows people to easily comment and add information.



For Citizen Network and Data for Action this process is far from complete and we are continuing to work on this. In addition to the resources from CTRL Shift we have been given some additional resources from a project

managed by [Dark Matter Labs](#) and [Opus](#)—supported by multiple foundations that are exploring how we can help citizens, civil society and public bodies to support flourishing neighbourhoods.

Future work will focus on:

- Identifying points of civic leadership in every neighbourhood
- Mapping groups and organisations providing care and support
- Spot buildings that are open for meetings and community action
- Learning where people are already working towards the City's goals

We will also be working closely with local community groups to ensure that both the surveys and the outputs can be as useful as possible. We are also in discussions with the other three local authorities in South Yorkshire to build a map of neighbourhoods for the whole region. Ideally we would like the boundaries (or an amended version) to be adopted by statutory bodies like the council, however in the meantime we will use this framework in all our local work.

Maps are only tools. But we have seen significant benefits from publishing this map. Statutory bodies and political leaders, if at first nervous, have become increasingly supportive. Many local citizens are excited and are beginning to imagine what kind of actions they can now take at the local level. The map offers a different way of seeing the city. It helps to humanise things and as we now go on to create detailed neighbourhood maps we are hopeful that we will find more people willing to take action and get involved.



How can you start a project like this in your local community?

1. Define your goal

It is important to know why you are doing this work. Mapping is not enough. For us this work is part of a larger project to bring life and leadership into every neighbourhood so that we can make vital changes we need to make and ensure everyone has a valued role in their community. The goal shapes the questions you ask and the conversations you need to have.

2. Get the right technical leadership

This is a digital process and this means that it does require some support from someone with the necessary skills to build surveys using geographical data and to find ways to process and publish that data. Ask around. There will be people in your community with great skills. Some may need paying and so you may have to find funding.

3. Keep everything as open as possible

People need to trust you and your project. It helps to do as much as possible in the open and digital technology does make this possible. You can use social media and more conventional media to share information and you can tell people about the assumptions you are making.

4. Be respectful

Maps and information are powerful and creating new maps is also disruptive. It can challenge people's way of thinking and existing norms. It is very important to communicate your intentions in a respectful spirit. We talked about it like a form of journalism, such as a community newspaper. In other words, we positioned ourselves as offering an independent, citizen perspective; but one that was designed to improve, not attack, the existing system or other efforts.

5. Be human

There is a power in digital data, but it is also limited. It is important to have meetings, workshops and conversations. The data will only be trusted if people know who is behind the data.

6. Plan for sustainability from day one

Data projects always run the risk of becoming quickly out of date or buried under the weight of competing stories and priorities. You need to think about any work like this as ongoing work and you need to build the alliances you need so that data is kept up to date and relevant.

7. Cooperate with other people working with data

Neighbourhood mapping is new and powerful. If you begin you will probably find many people who are willing to work with you both to share data or to ask new questions to neighbourhoods. Look for partners and build solidarity.

Conclusion

Citizen Network and Data for Action are happy to work with you, to share our learning and data. This approach could be extended regionally, nationally or even globally. To make the changes we all need to make we need to focus on citizen and community-led change. Data and neighbourhoods are central to making this happen.

Useful Links:

Citizen Network: <https://citizen-network.org/>

Data for Action: <https://dataforaction.org.uk/>

Maptionnaire: <https://www.maptionnaire.com/>

Felt: <https://felt.com/>



Get in touch!

If you have questions or would like to discuss this case study, contact Simon Duffy simon.duffy@citizen-network.org and Tom French, [Data for Action](#)

Case study 6: Market Drayton Community Covenant Pilot

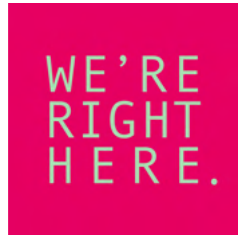
Project leader: Charlotte Hollins, Fordhall Community Land Initiative

Funded by: Power to Change and CTRLshift

Supported by: Power to Change, Locality, People's Health Trust, Esmee Fairbairn, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, New Local, The Young Foundation, Renaisi and the Local Trust

Dates: 2024-2025

Location: Market Drayton, Shropshire



The Campaign for
Community Power



Summary: We piloted the creation of a community covenant. This is a power sharing agreement between the local authority and a range of partners, including parish/town councils, and community 'anchor' organisations in and around Market Drayton. Our first devolved power was to guide the development of the Market Drayton Community and Family Hub. This pilot will also feed into a national campaign for community power as part of the We're Right Here campaign ([Home - We're Right Here](#)). In 2025, we have a significant opportunity to win tangible power over local spaces, services, and spending. The government will pass a Devolution Bill, which will see the biggest transfer of power out of Westminster in a generation. Beyond empowering Mayors and local councils, we want to see the Devolution Bill give new rights and resources to communities and our pilot project is testing out something we will be proposing to the government within the We're Right Here campaign.



What is the national campaign for community power?

We're calling for new rights that would change where power lies in this country. At the end of 2024, we celebrated our first campaign win. The government confirmed that Community Right to Buy, giving local people a first right of refusal when community assets come up for sale, would feature in the Devolution Bill. This means that communities would have the chance to raise funds and take over running local public buildings such as libraries and community centres.

Now, we're calling for two more rights that would lead to stronger communities: A Right to Shape Public Services and Community Covenants, both supported by a Community Power Commissioner.

1. **A Community Right to Shape Public Services**

Encouraging greater collaboration between communities and public institutions when designing, commissioning and delivering local services.

2. **Introduce Community Covenants** that create formal neighbourhood-level power-sharing arrangements between councils and local organisations. They enable local groups to **play an active and formal role in shaping their areas**, ensuring decisions reflect local needs and harness communities' strengths. Community Covenants will **make local democracy more inclusive and effective**.

This work compliments the Labour party's mission of devolving government and the new English Devolution Bill and the Communities Strategy.



What is a community covenant?

Community covenants are independent flexible neighbourhood-level arrangements bringing local people, community organisations and local authorities together to **share power and make decisions together**.

Covenants are formed between local authorities and a range of partners, including parish/town councils, Neighbourhood Forums and community ‘anchor’ organisations or groups.

Each partner of a community covenant is expected to fulfil five tests of local accountability:

1. Earn and maintain the **trust** of the whole community
2. **Support** everyone within their place to participate in community decisions and activities in an inclusive and equitable manner
3. Practise ‘**dynamic local accountability**’ and community leadership based not just on consultations and voting but on ongoing community participation, relationships and local action and co-production.
4. **Work proactively** to identify and address shared issues and local concerns
5. Make decisions so as to promote the **interests of local people**, rather than institutions alone

Participants in covenants must be empowered to make decisions through democratic processes that reflect their organisation and the community they represent. They can then be empowered to deliver and drive projects through the partnerships and creativity that exist within neighbourhoods for the greater benefit of people and place.



The story of what we did

We wanted to create a Community Covenant in Market Drayton to devolve power down to community level. Through discussions with Shropshire Council, we were handed the ability to guide the development of The Market Drayton Community and Family Hub working in collaboration with our town council and local authority to make the decisions together.



What is a Community and Family Hub?

The hubs offer joined-up service delivery across health (NHS), care, council services and the voluntary and community sector. The hubs will be there to offer face-to-face assistance, supporting people to help themselves through the digital and other community offers available. They are closer to peoples' homes in local communities. All in all, helping our community to be more resilient, happier and healthier. These hubs are a key part of Shropshire Council's transformation programme and also part of the Shropshire Integrated Place Partnership's Neighbourhood approach.

It took a lot of meetings over a number of months with Shropshire Council and Town and Parish Councils to get them on-board and to agree a service that could be shaped by the Community Covenant.

Then we had to bring in the local community and gather volunteers which took a lot of outreach, meetings and discussions. All that work resulted in a group of 25+ representatives from across Market Drayton becoming partners of our new covenant - a group of people who are accountable to our local community and all passionate about co-creating better services within our town.

Some of the motivations from group members are:

- To harness local passion and experience to ensure Market Drayton is a place where people can thrive and have opportunities.
- A desire to provide services for early intervention and prevention that makes people's lives better in the long-run – services that build resilience rather than reacting to crisis.
- From Shropshire Council - A desire to work with the community closely and engage them differently to base the initiative on their needs.

Concerns in setting up a Community Covenant included:

- Whether all organisations would be able to put aside personal/organisational interests for the good of all.
- What happens if the different bureaucratic systems in organisations don't align and slow things down.
- How will this work be genuinely inclusive.
- The uncertainty around Shropshire council financial situation.

We held a meeting with Shropshire Council to better understand the process of a Community Covenant and the aims of a Community and Family Hub (our focus for the pilot) within Market Drayton.

We understood that the covenant would be a decision-making voice for our community, enabling our needs to be defined by exploring with the community:

- What should a hub in Market Drayton offer – what is its scope?
- Where will the main base for the hub be?
- How often will it be open/accessible?
- Who will run it, and how will this fit with Shropshire Councils existing services?





Images: The second meeting of the Market Drayton and Rural Parishes Community Covenant as we discussed and created our cultural charter.

Whilst our work is ongoing, at the end of this CTRLShift funded pilot we had created the Market Drayton and Rural Parishes Community Covenant, got approval from Shropshire Council to devolve the decisions on a new Community and Family Hub. Together we have:

- Discussed the key decisions that have been devolved from Shropshire County Council to the community.
- Agreed the culture of how we will work together, including our decision-making process and how we will ensure our decisions are reflective of the wider community of Market Drayton.
- Spent some time understanding and reflecting on what being ‘rooted in the community’ means to us, and how we will ensure the community covenant always remains rooted in community.
- Agreed the timeframe for decisions to be made and the democratic process we will follow.

What happens after we have decided how and where the Market Drayton Community Hub will run?

Some of that will depend on what our decisions are. It is not the responsibility of the Community Covenant to deliver any of the services, but it is our responsibility to ensure the proposals and decisions made are 'achievable, impactful and appropriate' for Market Drayton and its wider community.

The Market Drayton Community Covenant will hopefully live-on to make more decisions in collaboration with Shropshire Council regarding other services in our community.

Knowledge gained through this pilot, will be used as a case study by Power to Change and the We're Right Here Campaign. In turn, this is being fed into papers with Civil Servants and Cabinet Ministers at Westminster as part of the new English Devolution Bill ([English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/english-devolution-white-paper)) and the government's forthcoming Community Strategy.



How can you start a project like this in your local community?

Follow these steps:

1. **Start discussions with your local authority.** Speak to someone senior with a partnership working responsibility and explain the benefits that power sharing with the community can bring – such as additional resources, engagement and support, higher quality of service delivery, cost savings, a happier and more resilient community. Ensure these aims align with the Council's strategic objectives.
2. **Build excitement within the community,** including town and parish councils. Explain the same benefits of true collaborative working. Allow concerns to be shared, talk through them and allow the local authorities space to respond. Use these open conversations to build trust and understanding between your community and local authority until everyone understands that you are working together for the collective good.
3. **Have a public meeting.** Invite a supportive representative from your local authority, town/parish council together with other local organisations that are rooted within your community to a public

meeting. Seat members in a circle to remove any hierarchy and share the vision of a community covenant. In this space, the Council (local authority) is one of the partners in equal right to others

4. **Ensure everyone invited into the group is accountable** in some way to a sector of the community, following the five tests of accountability above. Allow the group to decide if you have the right people in the space or if anyone is missing. This will probably involve a discussion exploring community accountability more with the group to come to a shared understanding of what it should look like in your local context. Accountability could be through formal AGMs and surveys for example, or be as simple as regular two-way conversations.
5. **Discuss ways that you can ensure your decisions are reflective of the whole community.** Identify where wider consultation might be necessary to understand community needs/ambitions.
6. **Create a memorandum of understanding or group charter (an agreement) for your new covenant group** – these are the cultural values that the group and all individuals within it commit to working to throughout the partnership
7. **Celebrate each success** widely within the community to build wider support and engagement
8. **Have a strong facilitator** in place, who has no agenda, but who can support and steer the group through participatory decision-making processes.
9. **Reflect and review** with the facilitator after each meeting to ensure continual learning
10. **Give space for different methods of sharing views**, some may be happy to voice them, others may prefer to write them down.
11. **Keep checking in with the group** to ensure everyone is on the journey with you
12. **Don't rush** things in a bid to get an answer. What is important is not getting to the answer, but making sure the answer/decisions are the right ones for your community

13. **Continually reflect** how you are making decisions together? Does this feel collaborative? Don't be afraid to make mistakes, as long as you learn from them
14. **Keep reminding the local authority that the decisions are to be made collaboratively**, this is not a consultation process, it is power sharing - which means making decisions together.
15. **Be empathic** towards the restrictions of a local authority, this may be within capacity or financial resources – at the end of the day council officers are still people within our community trying to do their best and we have to find a way to work together.



Get in touch!

For more questions, please contact Charlotte Hollins direct 01630 638696 charlotte.hollins@fordhallfarm.com

Organisations who have registered an interest in the covenant:

- Fordhall Community Land Initiative
- Shropshire County Council
- Market Drayton Town Council
- Moreton Say Parish Council
- Market Drayton Library
- Men in Sheds Market Drayton branch
- Debt Centre manager - Market Drayton Christians Against Poverty"
- Market Drayton Patient Participation Group
- Market Drayton Foodbank
- The Zone / 4 All Foundation
- Market Drayton community Enterprise
- Market Drayton St. Mary's Church
- Shropshire Youth Association
- Market Drayton Community Amateur Sports Club
- Freedom Church Market Drayton
- Ukrainian Hub
- Market Drayton Museum / Civic Society

Other Supporters

- Helen Morgan, MP
- Mark Barrow, Executive Director of Place, Shropshire Council
- Penny Bason, Head of Joint Partnerships, Shropshire Council
- Shropshire VCSE

Case Study 7: Our community of practice

Project leaders: Nathaniel Whitestone, Kate Macdonal, Mieke Snijder and Carolina De Oliveira

Funded by: CTRLShift

Dates: 2022-2025

Location: Across the UK

Summary: our community of practice was a monthly meeting with the leaders of the power shifting projects to share experiences, knowledge and skills learn from each other as peers and offer support to each other. to learn



The story of our community of practice

Our community of practice (COP) started in 2022 as a monthly meeting between the initial three people leading the power shifting projects. We shared how our projects were going, learnt from each other and helped each other with any problems we were facing. As we got to know each other as people (not as our organisational role), the trust between us grew, and we became good friends.

By the summer of 2023, two new prototype projects had been selected and joined our COP. We also decided to invite others working on locally-led community projects which aim to shift power (in the UK or abroad) to join. See our invitation [here](#).

At our first meeting as an extended group, we thought about how we wanted the COP to support change in our communities, what success would look like for us, and what we wanted to learn. We worked with Mieke Snijder ([Institute of Development Studies](#)) who designed this theory of change diagram for our COP.

Activities	Outputs	Short term outcomes	Medium term outcomes	Longer term outcomes	Impact
------------	---------	---------------------	----------------------	----------------------	--------



Image: The theory of change for our Community of Practice (Mieke Snijder)

In summary, we wanted to hold a space which was a supportive sounding board and coaching circle. Where people show up as their whole selves, being real and human. And a place where we can share and learn about real issues that are relevant to our work. This would allow us to build relationships with each other, and share knowledge with each other.

Our monthly virtual meetings were 2 hours long. Attendance averaged about 8 people per session. We held about 30 sessions over the course of three years.



Image: Project leaders gather at the Fearless Cities Sheffield summit in November 2024. From the left: Jez Hall, Charlotte Hollins, Vanessa Boon, Carolina de Oliveira, Kate Macdonald and Mike Riddell.

How did the community of practice help?

We held a feedback session in July 2024 where we asked members of the COP what they got out of it, what felt valuable and what could be improved.

Participants found the COP useful for:

- Connecting, building relationships and networking. It feels like a community, a place of comfort for what can be very challenging work.
- They liked the positive, human values.
- They found that the rounds worked well to exchange and spark new ideas, and the spotlights to go deeper on a topic.
- They found the peer challenge, coaching and support very useful for their own work.

However, the number of people attending the sessions varied from 4 to 12 at any given point, and in recent months numbers were dwindling. This pointed to it not being valuable enough for people to come. Because of this, it was hard to build relationships. When we asked why, it seemed there were several reasons. People's priorities had changed, they needed financial support to attend as their time was very limited, people were interested in other things and others felt there should be more emphasis on acting together rather than just learning or building relationships.

These reasons all pointed towards ways that the COP could be improved to meet these needs. Such as:

- Expanding the number of people invited
- Narrowing the focus of the learning topics, and developing an action learning approach.
- Enable sharing skills and useful resources
- Create time to plan how we can act together, not only learn together.
- Considering how we can be more diverse and inclusive, for instance by providing bursaries for participants, planning meetings at times when more people can come, using plain language and easy digital tools.



How can you start a community of practice in your community?

Schedule a meeting and invite people with common interests along. We had a welcome process, where we explained to new joiners the aim and

activities of the COP, and shared our group's '[code of conduct](#)' which explains how we want to run the group in a positive way. (We've had feedback that the language needs to be made simpler, to be more inclusive!).

We always begin the session by "checking-in". The facilitator invites people to share honestly how they are doing, and others to listen with genuine interest. Following that, we experimented with two different practices.

1) The Rounds

The facilitator helps the group have a useful meeting by ensuring that the conversation is kept to what is relevant within the time available, and that everyone is heard by taking turns to speak one after the other in a "round".

In the first round, the facilitator invites everyone to answer: *what's alive for you right now in your work?* The others are instructed to listen carefully for connections with their work and support they could offer. They took down notes on a [Padlet](#) online board. (Padlet is easy and free to use, allowing us to keep all our notes in one place that everyone can access).

In the second round, everyone answers - *what are your reactions to what you've heard - have you identified any connections with your work? Do you have any offers or requests for help?* This was usually followed by a general discussion.

We found this to be a very useful way of quickly getting a picture of how each other is doing, allowing us to identify the connections between our work and offering practical help to each other.

2) The project spotlights

At these meetings, we invite one project leader to present (be in the spotlight) for 20 minutes on their project, followed by answering questions from the audience. You can watch the video recordings of these sessions [here](#). After that, the facilitator invites a round of reactions to the project

spotlight that was shared - *did you identify connections between the spotlight and your own work? Did it spark any thoughts?*

We found this a good way of getting an in-depth view about the spotlighted project, which is particularly useful for those wishing to work or working in a similar way.

Conclusion: learnings and guidance

Over the course of three years, seven CTRL Shift prototype projects have been trying to shift power toward communities across the UK in different ways. The co-learning community of practice enabled them to learn from and help each other along the way. They have had varying degrees of success, and this guide shares the learnings of the projects and guidance so you can try something similar in your community.

NeighbourUp Bristol sought to connect neighbors and empower them through new organising models, coaching and microgrants. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- They strengthened neighbourhood connections, through direct outreach and distributing £100 microgrants to fund neighbourhood initiatives. If you are trying to connect to neighbours on a street, engage with them directly rather than going through local organizations. Small-scale, tangible support (such as microgrants and bite size training) quickly builds trust and participation between people.
- They facilitated training and knowledge-sharing on sociocracy. To be effective, this kind of training needs to be an on-going commitment.
- They started out trying to engage funders and professionals directly which was a mistake. Focus on the grassroots and impacts first.
- Funding sustainability remains a key challenge for grassroots initiatives. Don't rely only on grants. Find other types of income such as fundraising, asking local businesses to sponsor the project, or think about what skills or services you can sell.

CTRL Shift Hull aimed to break down barriers between organizations and enable more effective collaborative solutions, through embodied emotional workshops (Systemic Constellations) and creative visioning (LEGO Serious Play) workshops. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- The emotional and experiential approach was initially uncomfortable for some but proved valuable. Relationships were deepened outside of professional roles, and trust was fostered. Vulnerability builds trust—creating safe spaces for emotional expression leads to stronger relationships.
- Participants also gained insights into systemic issues such as hidden power dynamics and complex local challenges. They shifted perspectives. Participatory and embodied methods can reveal deeper insights than traditional discussions.
- New thinking and long-term partnerships were inspired beyond the project, such as the Town Anywhere Hull project.

The **Potteries Pound** aims to introduce a community currency to encourage kindness, community contribution and to boost the local economy. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- Developed a community-driven local currency prototype, built on strong engagement and local pride. They are now working on pooling more resources to put the currency into wider use.
- Their community was involved in visioning, naming, and artistic design of the currency. Credibility, community branding and engagement help attract participants.
- Launching a currency requires substantial financial and logistical resources, and widespread community buy-in, from both the voluntary and business sectors. They built partnerships with football clubs and businesses to accept the currency.
- Adapted from plastic tokens to paper banknotes for easier implementation. Adaptability is crucial—projects must evolve based on real-world challenges.

Fair Chance Derby sought to give a voice to those experiencing poverty, by creating learning and relationship building spaces, and craftivism (protest dolls, banners) to influence Derby City Council policy. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- They empowered people with lived experience of poverty to influence policy, to have the courage and know-how to speak to their Council.

- They used craftivism (protest dolls, banners) to boost the self-esteem of participants and creatively highlight socio-economic issues, which gained media attention and made the local council more receptive. Creativity and storytelling are powerful tools for advocacy.
- They strengthened relationships between the people living with financial struggles and policymakers, and between the collaborating community organisations. The council have said they will involve them in their decisions going forward.
- Encouraged the Derby City Council to take seriously their requirement to consider the poorest in society when making policy. This requirement is called the Socio-Economic Duty, and all councils in England will have this duty when the government announces a date! Scotland and Wales have already started the duty
- Keeping momentum beyond a campaign requires continuous resources and involvement to make sure promises are put into action.

Neighbourhood Mapping project in **Sheffield** aimed to create a citizen led map of Sheffield's neighborhoods to empower communities and support local authority decision-making. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- Created Sheffield's first people-led neighborhood map, by engaging 800+ residents in defining their neighborhoods. While digital tools enhance accessibility, in-person engagement remains vital. They encouraged civic participation and local identity-building. However, engaging underrepresented communities was challenging.
- Community ownership and transparency were keys to success. Making data public increases transparency, trust and engagement.
- Mapping is a starting point—long-term use requires integration into decision-making. NHS Sheffield may use the map for community health planning.
- Finding money and resources to keep the mapping work going is a challenge.

Market Drayton Community Covenant piloted a power-sharing model between council and communities to shape local services. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- Established a power-sharing agreement between residents, councils, and local organizations, called a community covenant. The covenant had control over how to design a new Community and Family Hub of integrated public services.
- Engaging the council and getting their buy-in is crucial for success, and provides legitimacy.
- The covenant successfully brought together 25+ community representatives to co-design local services, who have now developed their collaborative decision-making model.
- Challenges included bureaucratic hurdles, balancing interests of all parties, and ensuring inclusivity. Power-sharing can strengthen communities, but requires trust and structured processes to succeed, such as clear roles for each party.
- The model is now being shared nationally as an example of community-led governance. It is feeding into national policy discussions on the 2025 Devolution Bill, as part of the We're Right Here campaign.

Finally, the **Community of Practice** was a peer-learning and support space for the project leaders. Monthly virtual meetings were held with a mix of mutual aid conversations and project spotlights. Key learnings and outcomes include:

- Built a network of trusting relationships between project leaders. Strong human connections make power-shifting work more effective.
- The rounds method worked well for mutual aid, emotional support and networking, whereas project spotlights helped people learn in-depth from each other's work. Leaders got new ideas and refined their work through peer feedback. Some new collaborations were sparked.
- Projects cover a wide range of sectors, actors and topics. This made it hard for the topic of discussion to be relevant for all participants. Some participants wanted more action-based collaboration, rather than just learning. Further, participation levels varied, making relationship-building difficult at times.

We have also provided you with step by step guidance on how to start each of these projects in your community. Here are some of the common points between them all:

- **Community engagement comes first.** Every project starts with building relationships and trust.
- **Collaboration is essential.** Whether with residents or institutions, cooperation drives success. You should consider how to be equitable, diverse and inclusive in your engagement plans.
- **Clear goals are necessary.** Every project needed a well-defined purpose before starting.
- **Visibility matters.** Sharing progress through events, media, and storytelling keeps people motivated and involved.