



NEIGHBOURHOODS OF CARE

Sheffield 23 April 2026

We recently gathered at the Energy Hub in Sheffield to talk about the idea of Neighbourhoods of Care. Together, we explored a simple but radical question:

How neighbourhoods can become places where people are seen, welcomed, valued, and able to contribute as citizens.



We reflected on

- the ways people already support one another every day
- what already makes our neighbourhoods strong
- what might be possible if communities were given more trust and power to shape care locally.

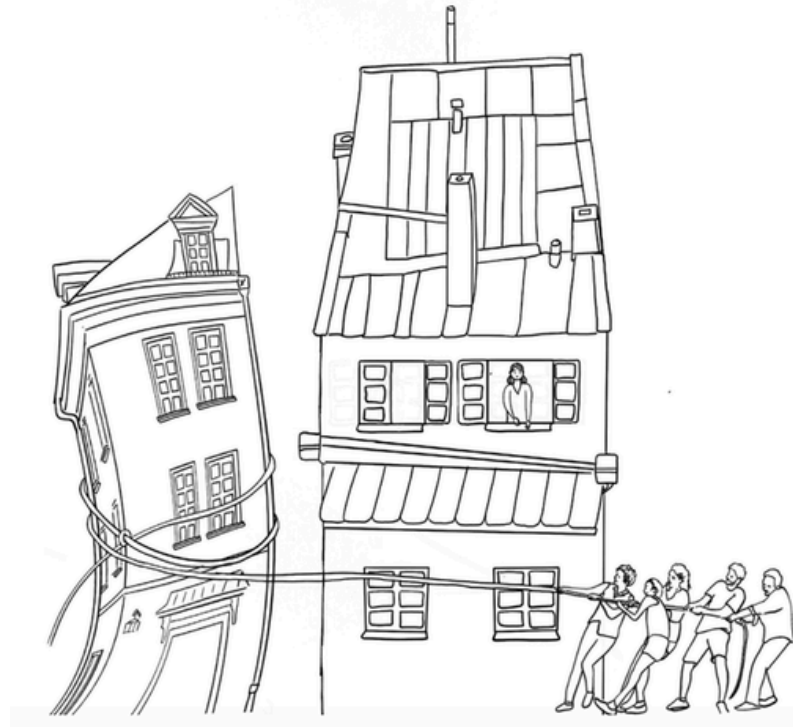
The session was led by Simon Duffy from Citizen Network, with a powerful contribution from Glyn Butcher from People Focused Group, supported by Emma Verity and delicious samosas from Ammi's Kitchen.

WHY

You may have noticed the word 'neighbourhood' popping up more and more in public and policy conversations. From national government initiatives like *Pride in Place* and *Neighbourhood Health*, to local NHS planning and the devolution bill, neighbourhoods are back on the agenda. But why?

The answer lies in scale. A city of nearly 600,000 people is too large for meaningful democracy or care. Neighbourhoods offer something different, **a human scale where people can notice when someone is struggling, organise together, share resources, and create roles that matter.**

NEIGHBOURHOODS?



We are also living through a moment of significant social, economic and environmental pressure. It is becoming clearer that large systems alone cannot solve complex social problems. There is a growing recognition, even within the NHS and local government, that the market model which has shaped public services for decades is not delivering what communities need.



**NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE THE TOP SOIL IN WHICH
CITIZENSHIP CAN FLOURISH**



In Sheffield, this renewed focus is already beginning to shape conversations around health and local infrastructure, including a newly agreed vision for Neighbourhood Health, a framework radical enough to include a fundamental priority to move resources into neighbourhoods, [read it here](#).

PER NEIGHBOURHOOD:

Social value: Carers **10mn**
Citizen Capacity: **26mm**

Over **£28mn** Public Spending:
Social Care: **3.4mn** NHS **14mn**
Education: **10mn** Work **0.2mn**

2GPs, 8 Community Nurses, 10 Social
Workers

1 Primary School

**147 Neighbourhoods, 21 per LAC,
about 5 per ward**

100+
Playgrounds

342
Green Spaces

81
Allotments

13 City Parks, 20 Districts Parks, 50 Local Parks.

600,000 CITIZENS

230,000 Homes

7,000 Streets

4.5mn trees and 7 hills (some say 8)

3,400 VCS
Organisations

249 Friends of
Groups

78 GP Practices

58 Breweries

29 Libraries

7 Family Hubs

2 NHS hospitals

200+ Football
Teams

100+ Places of
Worship

40+ Galleries

2 Universities

69 Music Venues

1,800 Pubs

9 Museums

THE SCALE OF SHEFFIELD

Sheffield is a city rich in community organisations, volunteers and residents who quietly look out for one another. That capacity is already here, in every one of our **147** neighbourhoods. There is real room to better coordinate, resource and trust it so that local people can take more of a role in how care is shaped where they live.

Citizenship and Neighbourhoods:

Citizen Network was founded on a simple but radical idea: **everyone is a citizen**. Not because of paperwork or status, but because everyone is equal, everyone is wonderfully different, and everyone belongs.

Rather than thinking about citizenship as a legal status, we explored it as something much more fundamental: **participation, belonging and mutual responsibility**.

These are not abstract ideals. They are the civic responsibilities that already exist within many neighbourhoods which are unrecognised and unsupported by formal systems.

Protecting what is held in common

Building community

Looking out for one another

Welcoming others

Taking care of each other

Making decisions together

Caring for the natural world

Neighbourhoods are where citizenship becomes real the scale at which people can actually feel their contribution. A city of 600,000 can be a source of pride, but it is too large for people to really feel the difference.

Citizenship is not only an identity. It's an untapped resource.

Research by Simon Duffy looked at Barnsley to understand the true scale of what citizens already contribute.

Potential citizen capacity in Barnsley was worth around

£1.3 Billion

Unpaid care alone was worth over

£0.4 Billion

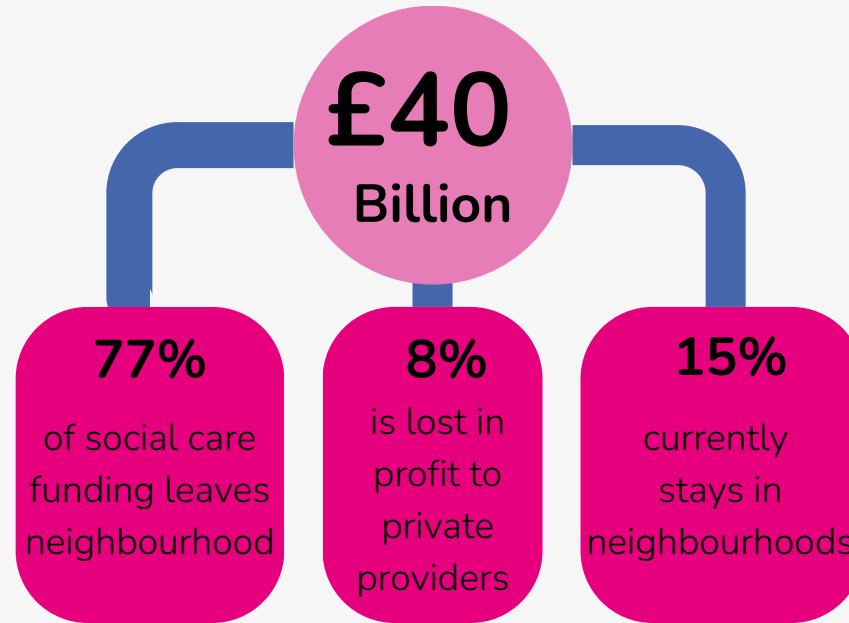
more than the entire NHS spending in the area.

Citizen capacity is enormous, it already exists in every neighbourhood, and it goes almost entirely unrecognised by the systems meant to support people.

HOW CARE IS ORGANISED

Care is one of the most fundamentally human things imaginable. And yet, in public services, it has become an industry shaped by procurement systems, competitive tendering and large provider organisations that are distant from the communities they serve.




Social Care in England costs:



This money leaves through residential care, day centres, home care services and foster care, organised at too large a scale or placing people far from their communities and families.

The current care system extracts resources from neighbourhoods rather than investing in them.

THE HUMAN COST

-  Home care workers are frequently paid only for direct contact time, not for travel between people.
-  Most money is spent on residential care, despite evidence of poorer outcome
-  The number of people in institutional settings has barely changed because as soon as someone is moved out, someone else is moved in.

COMPETITIVE TENDERING


The dominant model for commissioning care is like throwing a hand grenade into a garden every three years and starting again. Organisations that were once rooted in their communities grow into national providers. A better approach would look more like gardening:


Asking what is working, what needs changing, how to improve the soil, and how to strengthen resilience over time.





IF SYSTEMS WORKED DIFFERENTLY


What would happen if the care system were **organised positively around neighbourhoods**.

 Social care money treated as neighbourhood money, personalised where needed, flexible where possible

Neighbourhood-based care teams that share knowledge and solve problems together 

 Community organisations and peer groups trusted and resourced rather than tendered away

Professionals in and connected to neighbourhood life 

 Systems that see citizen capacity as an asset

We want to take these ideas further!
Testing and developing them with real people in real Sheffield neighbourhoods.



WHAT IS ALREADY WORKING WELL

We asked what was already brilliant in their neighbourhoods,

Shared Spaces

Libraries, community hubs, local cafes, parks, green spaces, farms and allotments

Groups

Book clubs, coffee mornings, walking groups, social gardens, community events



Sharing Skills and Resources

Tool sharing, WhatsApp groups, sewing and knitting groups, local trade networks, skill sharing

The Everyday Stuff

Neighbours putting bins back. Cutting the grass for someone who can't. Borrowing milk. Checking in on someone who lives alone. Picking up litter



What Next?



There was real energy and enthusiasm in the room for continuing this work. We gathered the names of many people who are interested in taking these ideas forward. Some possible next steps include:

- Testing ideas locally through small neighbourhood experiments
- Continuing to build and connect neighbourhood networks across the city
- Connecting groups and organisations who share these values
- Sharing learning and stories from what is already working
- Continuing conversations about what Neighbourhoods of Care could look like in Sheffield.

Making change happen locally means starting with the people who already know their neighbourhood best. The expertise and the energy are already there on the ground. Our job is to listen and connect.

If you are interested in getting involved as an individual or a community organisation we would love to hear from you! Get in touch: hello@citizen-network.org

