

# GM Live Well Stories of Impact and Change from the Live Well Accelerator Programme

*“The GM Live Well movement is powerful because accountability is built into its structure. As Shapers ... the community accountability group across GM ...we work alongside community reporters to ensure lived experience directly influences priorities, accelerator site design and resource allocation. This has increased transparency, strengthened trust and shifted decision-making closer to communities. Moving from consultation to shared stewardship is not just cultural change ... it improves relevance, responsiveness and long-term impact.” - Folashade – GM Shapers*

*“Collectively I believe we have genuinely shifted the way we work with communities – moving from doing things for people to working with and alongside them and doing what was needed – handing power to the communities. We are helping to create inclusive, empowered communities that are shaping their own futures. This movement feels strong, powerful and impactful. Together we are bringing about real change and uniting communities across Greater Manchester.” - Nadia - GM Shapers*

This report captures powerful stories of impact and change from across the GM Live Well Accelerator Programme.

Many of the images woven throughout the report were captured by residents and community members as part of our participatory photography project, responding to the simple prompt: *What has changed?*

## Live Well Stories of Impact - At a Glance

Over the past two years, a £1m investment from The National Lottery Community Fund created protected space to test, learn and grow the conditions for community-led prevention across five Accelerator localities – Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford and Tameside – while simultaneously building a regional, community-led Live Well movement for change.

Throughout this time, the programme has been grounded in a clear and compelling proposition: that Live Well must be both *community-led* and *system-enabled*.

- Led by local people who shape priorities and take action on the issues and things they care about, building collective power.
- And enabled by systems that grow new forms of leadership, decision-making, funding and accountability that actively support, not constrain, brilliant community-led practice.

Across Greater Manchester, cross-sector teams spanning local authorities, the NHS, VCFSE organisations, community leaders, funders and regional partners have worked tirelessly and passionately to embed this approach.

What follows are the stories of what has been happening as a result.

To capture the change underway, we convened participatory **Ripple Effect Mapping** workshops across all five Accelerator sites and with the GM Live Well team, surfacing and mapping both intended and unintended ripples across governance, funding, collaboration and neighbourhood life.

Alongside this, we led a **“Take One, Pass It On” photography project** in each locality, inviting people to respond to a simple question: *What has changed?* Some of those images are woven throughout this report, offering a visual glimpse into the relationships, pride and momentum that were built through this work.

Over the following pages, you can read in detail about the impressive and compelling impact achieved — and the ways of working or practice that made it possible.

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Each of these stories shows how Greater Manchester is beginning to grow enabling systems that centre community action, power and wealth.

They describe funding being spent differently — with priorities shaped by communities and prevention embedded into criteria. They show governance mechanisms redesigned to centre lived experience in decision-making. They highlight community groups collaborating in new ways to provide more holistic, trusted everyday support.

Through Ripple Effect Mapping and the photography project, we also paid close attention to how these shifts in funding, governance and collaboration may be translating into the outcomes we ultimately want to see: improved health, reduced loneliness, stronger pathways to employment and reduced pressure on services.

While these outcomes take time to measure at population level, we have collectively surfaced powerful stories that offer early insight into change that might otherwise go unnoticed: people growing in confidence, gaining new skills and employment pathways, building bridges across communities, strengthening pride in place and finding renewed hope in their neighbourhoods.

**This has helped us build a picture of how community-led and system-enabled practice is beginning to make a difference across Greater Manchester — by strengthening:**

- **Civic participation**  
By growing people’s capacity, agency and confidence for ongoing democratic involvement. For example in Oldham, where participatory grant-making was met with extraordinary demand, with over 1,200 votes cast to allocate £75,000 of neighbourhood funding. Residents helped shape the criteria and process, and saw their decisions translate into visible local projects, reinforcing belief in their ability to contribute and influence.
- **Communities’ health and wellbeing**  
By investing in relationships and trusted, community-led spaces that enable early support, belonging and stability. For example, Peel Park Pavilion in Little Hulton, Salford, which provides a consistent neighbourhood hub for advice, volunteering and everyday connection — supporting residents to move from isolation and crisis towards stability, purpose and participation.

- **Skills, capabilities and employment**

By trusting people with meaningful responsibility and recognising lived experience as expertise. When people are involved in governance, research and decision-making, confidence and leadership pathways often follow. For example, in Rochdale, members of the Anti-Poverty Foundation Group have not only shaped borough-wide strategy and influenced anti-poverty priorities, but were able to strengthen their own leadership and employment trajectories.

- **Community cohesion**

By bringing people together to co-design and decide collectively, building relationships across organisations and communities that might otherwise remain disconnected. For example, in Salford, community research brought together residents from diverse backgrounds — speaking more than five languages and connecting across different faith and cultural communities — to lead nearly 700 conversations in Little Hulton. In doing so, it not only shaped local priorities, but strengthened bridges across communities and deepened relationships that continue beyond the project itself.

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Each story of impact and change includes powerful learning about the ways of working, the practice that made this work possible.

**In addition, Live Well Accelerator teams have co-created 10 recommendations for leaders at the heart of Live Well implementation.**

This report aims to do three things:

- **Celebrate the impact** made possible by the communities, practitioners and leaders who have worked together to grow community-led and system-enabled practice across Greater Manchester.
- **Provide practical learning** for those continuing to embed GM Live Well — capturing the approaches, conditions and practice ingredients that have enabled these stories of impact to emerge.
- **Strengthen collective belief** that community-led prevention — rooted in trust, strong relationships, shared power and neighbourhood strength — is not only achievable, but impactful.

## 2. How GM Live Well has grown in scale and influence

Live Well is Greater Manchester's commitment to ensuring that great, everyday support is available in every neighbourhood. As a key mayoral manifesto commitment from Andy Burnham, GM Live Well reimagines health, social and employment support from the ground up – led by communities and enabled by a better connected, and supportive system of public services, focused on reducing inequalities. It builds on Greater Manchester's history of public service reform, with a continued focus on people, place and prevention.

At its core, Live Well is about shifting how support is organised and experienced. It seeks to move away from fragmented, reactive systems towards approaches that are rooted in neighbourhoods, shaped with communities, and focused on preventing problems from escalating. This means strengthening local connections, widening access to trusted spaces and support, and enabling

people to have greater control over the things that affect their lives. The ambition is for everyone across Greater Manchester to have the support, connections and resources they need to live well.

Greater Manchester is a place of significant growth and opportunity, but those benefits are often unevenly felt. Across the city region, many communities continue to experience deep and persistent inequalities in health, income and life chances. Poverty, isolation and insecurity are part of everyday life for many people, shaped by long-term economic pressures, structural inequalities and discrimination, and uneven investment. Alongside this, communities are navigating increasing social and cultural divisions, often intensified by wider national and global pressures, rapid change and uncertainty. These conditions can weaken trust, strain relationships and make it harder for people to feel connected to one another and to the places they live.

Responding to challenges of this scale cannot be achieved by any one organisation or sector acting alone. Live Well depends on collective action across communities, the VCFSE sector, local authorities, the NHS and regional partners. It requires new ways of working together – across neighbourhood, borough and city-region levels – with shared leadership and learning, and a greater willingness to shift power and resources closer to communities. Live Well seeks to create the conditions for this to happen, supporting the relationships and practices that make community-led prevention possible.

Since its early development in 2021, Live Well has grown significantly in scale and profile. Over the past year in particular, it has become a central part of Greater Manchester's approach to prevention and reform, including its role as the UK's first Prevention Demonstrator. In 2025/26, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and NHS Greater Manchester committed £10 million of joint investment to grow Live Well across all ten boroughs, with funding built into plans for subsequent years. Through Greater Manchester's Integrated Settlement, the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme – worth £10 million a year – is also aligned with the Live Well model, alongside multiple other investments including the Live Well Communities Fund, which devolves funding and decision-making locally.

Alongside this, The National Lottery Community Fund has committed £16.5 million over four years to invest in local social infrastructure, supporting VCFSE organisations to grow and sustain the physical spaces, networks and relationships that underpin community-led health and wellbeing.

The past few years have been formative, focused on building a shared understanding, testing new approaches and learning what helps and hinders progress. Live Well is now entering a different phase. Across Greater Manchester, localities and partners are beginning to put new ways of working into practice, changing how decisions are made and how resources flow at neighbourhood level. The work is moving from exploration to delivery, and from early learning into action.

Generous and long-standing support from The National Lottery Community Fund has been central to enabling this shift. Through the Live Well Accelerator Programme, this comparatively small but flexible investment created the space to test new ways of working, strengthen relationships across sectors, and build practical learning about what helps community-led prevention to take hold.

As this phase of funding comes to an end, and Live Well moves into wider implementation —there is an opportunity to pause and reflect. This report brings together stories of impact and change from across the Accelerator programme, capturing what has begun to shift in practice,

relationships and decision-making, and using that learning to inform how Live Well continues to develop across Greater Manchester.

### **3. The role of the Live Well Accelerator Programme**

Shifting towards community-led prevention requires time, trust and space to work differently with communities, to test new approaches, and to learn what helps change take root across neighbourhoods. The National Lottery-funded Live Well Accelerator Programme made this possible through flexible funding, creating the conditions for experimentation at a key moment for Live Well.

The £1 million 2-year programme supported the GM Live Well team at Greater Manchester Combined Authority and a wide range of partners — spanning localities, NHS Greater Manchester, VCSE organisations and communities — to explore how community-led approaches could be strengthened, and what needed to change in the wider system to support them. It demonstrated the value of funding that prioritises learning, relationships and adaptation, and helped build the confidence, shared understanding and momentum that have since shaped Live Well's development across Greater Manchester.

#### **What the programme set out to do**

The Accelerator Programme was designed to test a simple but demanding proposition: that improving health and wellbeing outcomes through prevention requires both strong community-led approaches and a system that actively enables these.

Its Theory of Change recognises two interdependent conditions.

1. First, that community-led approaches — where local people shape priorities, take action and build collective power — are essential to creating the conditions for health and wellbeing.
2. Second, that these approaches can only flourish where the surrounding system is willing to change: where leadership, decision-making, funding and accountability support, rather than constrain, community-led ways of working.

**The focus of the programme was on understanding the conditions that help community-led prevention take root and last.**

Over time, the idea of *community-led* and *system-enabled* practice has become a defining way of describing the Live Well approach more broadly — shaping practice, influencing decisions, and providing a shared language that unites partners across sectors around a common purpose.

#### **The Live Well Accelerator Sites**

Five sites across Greater Manchester were supported through the Accelerator Programme, in Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford and Tameside. Each site worked in a different context, with distinct histories, partnerships and challenges, to co-design and prototype its own approach to growing *community-led* and *system-enabled* Live Well approaches, grounded in local relationships, assets and priorities.

Sites tested what it looks like to work differently with communities and to create more enabling local systems. This included experimenting with emerging forms of leadership that cut across organisational and sector boundaries; developing new ways of collaborating between the VCFSE sector, local authorities and the NHS; and piloting approaches to funding where communities had a stronger role in shaping decisions. New forms of governance began to emerge, centering lived experience in local decision-making and challenging established assumptions about where expertise and authority sit. Taken together, these local experiments helped surface actionable insights about what enables, and what limits, community-led prevention at neighbourhood level.

## **A regional movement-building approach**

Alongside neighbourhood and locality-level experimentation, the Accelerator Programme has taken a deliberate regional movement-building approach. This meant connecting learning from the five Accelerator Sites with wider practice, evidence and lived experience from across the city-region, recognising that brilliant community-led work was already happening in multiple places across the region. The Live Well movement created spaces where this work could be seen, valued and connected, helping to shift the narrative from isolated examples to collective momentum.

A series of regional learning events brought together over 1500 people from community organisations, politicians, local infrastructure bodies, statutory partners, system leaders and residents, as equal contributors to a shared endeavour. These collaborative events surfaced and shared powerful examples of community-led prevention and their impact on people's lives, which in turn have inspired and challenged local leaders to reconfigure their systems to be more connected, preventative and community-led. Learning has travelled via workshops, locally rooted reflection sessions, newsletters, podcasts, webinars and written outputs – allowing ideas to circulate, connections to deepen, and confidence to grow across borough boundaries.

The Live Well movement has helped embed a shared language of *community-led* and *system-enabled* practice across Greater Manchester. It has strengthened alignment between sectors, increased the visibility and influence of lived experience in shaping strategy, and grown a collective belief that Live Well represents a hopeful, practical vision for the future.

## **What this report focuses on**

Over the past two years, a series of [learning reports](#) have captured key milestones, insights and learning from the Accelerator Programme, including the thinking behind new forms of organising and the emergence of Live Well Alliances as cross-sector spaces for collaboration, accountability and shared action – as articulated in the [Live Well Alliance Blueprint](#), a practical guide for partnering with communities to lead Live Well together.

As the Accelerator Programme draws to a close, this report focuses on what has shifted and changed. It brings together stories of impact from across the programme, centring the voices, experiences and practice of those at the forefront of this work; and it explores what happens when systems make space to work differently with communities.

Over the following pages, we'll set out:

- Our approach.

- Stories of Impact and Change from the Live Well Movement, and Accelerator Sites across Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside.
- What is starting to change for Greater Manchester communities.
- Recommendations for leaders at the centre of Live Well implementation.

## 4. Stories of Impact and Change

### The approach

Demonstrating progress and impact in community-led prevention is challenging. Improved health, reduced loneliness, increased employment and reduced pressure on services take time to materialise, and even longer to be visible in population-level data, however. Strategic decisions affecting people's health and wellbeing today cannot wait for such outcomes to become apparent and measurable. Local leaders need to understand, in real time, whether the system changes necessary to bring about these outcomes are taking root.

This means paying close attention to early indicators and step changes: changes in relationships and trust, increased confidence and capability within communities, new patterns of collaboration, and different flows of power and resources. These are not peripheral signals but important conditions that make longer-term outcomes possible. Measurement needs to capture these foundational changes, while remaining grounded in what matters to communities rather than reducing progress to narrow or overly simplistic metrics.

This is especially relevant for the Live Well Accelerator Programme. Much of its work has focused on growing and embedding *community-led* and *system-enabled* practice — shifting how decisions are made, who holds influence, and how systems respond to community priorities. These structural and cultural shifts matter in their own right, and they shape the trajectory of future outcomes by altering how power, resources and decisions flow across the system.

To capture change in a way that fits this work, we used Ripple Effect Mapping (REM). REM is a participatory method that brings stakeholders together to map what's changed over time — including intended and unintended impacts — and to make visible the “ripples” that spread through communities, partnerships and systems. REM produces a shared visual map, grounded in lived experience and practice, that helps connect activity to emerging outcomes.

We held REM workshops across all sites and with GM Live Well movement builders (the GM Shapers), and supported Accelerator sites to develop their own stories of impact and change based on the existing evidence.

Alongside this, we coordinated a one-day ‘Take One, Pass It On’ photography project in each Accelerator locality. Each site was provided with two disposable cameras and invited to respond to the prompt: *What has changed?* The cameras were passed from person to person — between community members, volunteers, partners and system leaders — creating a visual chain of reflection.

The project was supported by three photographers/facilitators, who followed the journey of the cameras — capturing the “behind the scenes” moments of people taking their photographs, and

supporting the cameras to reach individuals and spaces that might otherwise have been overlooked.

The resulting images do not attempt to prove impact, but to make visible the textures of change: new relationships, reclaimed spaces, growing confidence, sense of pride, collective action. Some of the results of this work are woven throughout this report.

## **For everyone and by everyone: GM Live Well as a regional movement for change**

At the start of the Accelerator programme, in late autumn 2023, there had already been political momentum around Live Well. The ambition — that everyone across Greater Manchester should be able to access great everyday support that enables them to Live Well — had been a consistent manifesto commitment of Mayor Andy Burnham. Live Well was positioned as central to Greater Manchester’s response to tackling health and wellbeing inequalities. What was not yet clear was the form it would take.

The GM Live Well movement-building approach began with a deep recognition: if prevention was to become a reality, then the shift of power to communities had to be truly genuine. An ethos of “doing with” communities needed to be anchored across every level of public sector decision-making, with a laser focus on growing community action, power and wealth.

Without this, Live Well risked becoming yet another public service transformation programme — ambitious in intention, but without the culture change required to deliver lasting and transformational change for communities.

There were already pockets of brilliant community-led practice across the region. For example groups like [GM System Changers](#) and [Elephants Trail](#) had been working on alternative decision-making and funding models that put communities in the lead. The Mayor’s vision was explicit as well:

“Put communities back in control so that they can create and keep wealth and recirculate it in communities.” - Mayor Andy Burnham at the Live Well Launch

What was missing was a shared language and clear pathways to describe what a system shift towards community-led prevention could really look like — and how it could be achieved at city-region scale.

This required building new alliances across sectors and with communities. It meant working intentionally and differently with the VCFSE sector, challenging the narrative of public services as sole “fixers” and instead creating space for collective learning, inspiration and influence. And perhaps most importantly, it meant cultivating collective hope — a belief that this scale of change was not only necessary, but possible.

At a GM level, the Live Well team took on this challenge, and it marked the beginning of the GM Live Well movement.

## What we've achieved

Over the past three years, the GM Live Well movement has grown in numbers, influence and confidence — becoming a visible and increasingly unstoppable force for community-led change, recognised beyond the region and across the UK.

Most importantly, Live Well values are visible across the system with significant culture shifts felt across the region — in localities, between public services and the VCFSE sector, and within communities themselves.

### A growing movement that unites Greater Manchester

The strength, diversity and reach of the movements are present in its numbers, the influence it has had and the passion, determination and willingness of its members.

Regional Live Well events brought together a wider range of community organisations, CEOs and Directors from all ten boroughs, politicians including Mayor Andy Burnham and Secretary of State Alison McGovern, VCFSE infrastructure organisations, NHS leaders, funders such as the National Lottery Community Fund and Lankelly Chase, Local Trust, the We Are Right Here campaign, local activists and residents.

The following events reflect the journey of growing the Live Well movement, highlighting the energy, diversity and shared commitment co-designed with communities.

Under the banners of **Community Wealth**, **Community Power** and **Community Action**, approximately **1,500 people** participated across four events, centred on:

- **Live Well Launch (100 participants)**  
Which saw Andy Burnham and the Chair of the National Lottery Community Fund share a panel with community leaders - a symbolism that mattered deeply, as it demonstrated publicly that communities were co-authors of reform instead of beneficiaries.
- **Community Wealth (150 participants)**  
Which included an unplanned, spontaneous interview between Live Well Shaper Folashade Alonge and Andy Burnham, where he reaffirmed his manifesto commitment to Live Well and reflected on how the Live Well movement had already influenced his political priorities.
- **Community Power (500 participants)**  
Including a rich, community-led agenda with more than 15 breakout rooms, a keynote speech from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and a powerful performance from the SAWN community choir that got even the most senior public sector leaders on their feet to dance - a true Live Well moment.
- **Community Action (600 participants)**  
Which took over the beautiful Gorton Monastery via 14 community-led breakout sessions and 29 interactive stalls exploring what Live Well Spaces, Offers and Centres should look and feel like — this directly influenced the Live Well Hallmarks now guiding implementation across Greater Manchester.

Each of these events has succeeded in bringing people closer together, celebrating diversity and

truly co-designing what a Live Well future might look like.

As one participant put it:

*“At a time when we are feeling increasingly powerless, today’s event was so uplifting - to see, hear and feel the energy for doing things differently, to centre citizen voices and practise being in community.”*

Andy Burnham spoke about moving “from a politics that breaks bonds and creates division” towards a future that is cohesive and collective.

*“To get there, we need to mobilise everyone into a strong, united force — and that’s what the Live Well movement is all about.”*

In 2025 we launched ‘Shaping How We Live Well Together: A [‘GM Participation Playbook’](#) — catapulting community participation to the centre of Live Well decision-making.

- 200 community and system leaders attended the launch event
- 500 printed copies were distributed
- 236 digital copies were downloaded
- The playbook is being used locally, nationally and internationally — including within the Cabinet Office, UN partners, Home Office and Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs - leading to interview requests from the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP)
- The Playbook travelled to the most senior democratic meeting in Greater Manchester. Each local authority leader received a copy with many now using, for example Manchester City Council are exploring the playbook in an adult social care context.

Movement-building did not only happen on large stages. It also grew through smaller, relational spaces, in rooms, online and between peers.

The **Live Well Community of Practice** brought together Accelerator site teams in a trusted space for reflection, challenge and shared learning. It became a living demonstration of culture change, where cross-sector colleagues could speak honestly about barriers, test ideas and support one another to lead differently in their localities.

**Live Well Learning Events** in September 2025 and February 2026 each brought together **more than 100 practitioners and leaders**. These sessions intentionally connected Accelerator learning with emerging practice across all ten localities — strengthening relationships, sparking new collaborations and ensuring that insights travelled beyond individual boroughs.

Alongside this, more than **ten themed webinars** engaged approximately **750 participants**. These sessions explored what Live Well means in practice across employment support, housing, natural environment, primary care, SEND and regeneration — helping different parts of the system understand their role in a preventative, community-led Live Well model.

In partnership with the We’re Right Here Campaign, Local Trust and Chatty bus, the **‘BIG GM Live Well Bus Tour’** took **115 senior leaders** — including the Mayor, group CEO GMCA, TfGM and

GMFRS, Caroline Simpson and partners from across all ten localities — into neighbourhoods to see Live Well in practice. On a Bee Network bus, leaders visited community-led and owned spaces across the region, meeting communities who showcased food projects, advice hubs, bike workshops, creative arts spaces and digital exhibitions of citizen voice, and importantly, shared testimony about the difference these spaces of hope and connection make.

The Bus Tour directly shaped the £10m GMCA & NHS Live Well Implementation Fund, grounding investment decisions in what communities had already built and valued. It strengthened the case for long-term, flexible funding and reinforced Greater Manchester's reputation as a national pioneer of community-led system change.

The **National Lottery Community Fund Board** visit in June 2025 brought 80 senior leaders into CommUNITY Little Hulton. All five Accelerator Sites presented their work, the Elephants Trail brought lived experience reporting into the room, the GM Shapers reflected on the strength of the Live Well movement and 10GM positioned social infrastructure as foundational to Live Well across Greater Manchester. The visit aligned GM's approach with the Lottery's national strategy and strengthened confidence in future investment.

The **GM Live Well Podcast** launched with **100 contributors** across eight episodes, reaching over **1,500 streams to date** — including government departments, think tanks and international partners.

The **Live Well newsletter** now reaches **2,500 subscribers**.

There's an insatiable appetite to co-shape, co-create and be an active part of the movement.

The upcoming **GM Live Well Festival received over 270 submissions** for sessions, workshops and exhibitions — far exceeding expectations.

As Folashade, one member of the GM Shapers reflected:

*“Everyone is asking how to be involved.”*

Movement-building is clearly happening beyond the core team — Live Well has become a movement for everyone and by everyone.

### **Embedding a deep commitment to ‘community-led’ across the system**

The scale and confidence of the GM Live Well movement has translated into far-reaching structural change. What began as a call to shift power towards communities is increasingly starting to take shape in strategy, funding and formal governance across Greater Manchester.

### **Live Well is now recognised as a core priority within the Greater Manchester Strategy 2025.**

The language of community-led and system-enabled practice — first developed through the Accelerator programme — is formally embedded within regional policy. Participation is no longer treated as an add-on; it is recognised as a strategic, system-wide priority and integral to Greater Manchester's reform architecture.

This shift has also been recognised nationally. The Mayor's manifesto commitment — to make Greater Manchester the UK test bed for “an entirely different way of providing social support and social security in the 21st century” — has become a reality.

In July, the Live Well movement was featured as a case study in the NHS 10 Year Plan and **Greater Manchester Combined Authority was named as the first Prevention Demonstrator**. The Prevention Demonstrator will take a community-led preventative approach to public services — strengthening the key foundations of people’s lives, from housing and employment to education and wellbeing. Crucially, it explicitly builds on the Live Well model and the role of community-led organisations, bringing together health, employment support, debt advice in partnership with the VCFSE sector. What has been developed in Greater Manchester is now being positioned as a blueprint for national reform.

### **Structural change is also visible in where money flows.**

The **£10m GMCA & NHS Live Well Implementation Fund earmarked 50% of funding to flow directly to the VCFSE sector**. This represents not a marginal redistribution, but a deliberate and meaningful shift of investment towards neighbourhood-rooted organisations.

The **Live Well Communities Fund** has now moved into year two, **embedding participatory budgeting as a normalised funding approach**. Decision-making power continues to sit closer to communities, reinforcing the principle that those most affected should shape investment priorities.

In addition, the **National Lottery Community Fund has committed £16.5m** through a strategic partnership with Greater Manchester, focused on **sustaining the community-led spaces**, hubs and networks that are essential to making Live Well real.

### **A noticeable culture shift across all system levels**

Beyond strategy and funding, perhaps the most significant shift has been cultural.

Across Greater Manchester, leaders are working differently. Senior officers, VCFSE and community leaders are collaborating across organisational and sector boundaries — often beyond formal role descriptions. They are increasingly meeting one another less as representatives of institutions and more as people working towards a shared mission.

Central to this shift has been a deepened cross-sector partnership between 10GM (representing the VCFSE sector), Greater Manchester Combined Authority and NHS GM. Increasingly, these partners operate as one team, guiding, shaping and championing Live Well together.

The Live Well identity has come to represent something larger than any single organisation: a shared endeavour shaped not by structures alone, but by human relationships. It requires leaders to show up not only in role, but in values, and to lead with humility, curiosity and trust.

This alignment has been visible to external partners too. During the National Lottery Community Fund visit, Chair Dame Julia Cleverdon reflected that she could not distinguish who was from councils, the NHS, voluntary sector leadership or community organisations:

*“If you cut people down to their core, they would bleed the same vision, values, and Live Well mission — and that’s very rare.”*

Whilst there is still work to do, for many this cultural shift feels tangible.

*“People didn’t believe this would be different,” one VCFSE leader reflected. “But it is. It feels real. It’s centred around trust. We feel included, heard, and seen.”*

In addition to this, the Live Well Accelerator programme has given people permission to challenge existing systems, to do things differently and to redistribute power. This culture of experimentation has been vital in creating change.

It can be traced back to an early act of trust: a no-strings-attached investment from Lankelly Chase that created protected space for participatory grant-making through GM System Changers. It signalled belief in communities' ability to make decisions about their own futures, and it required new behaviours from officers, from funders and from community groups. It shifted grant-making from control to trust, and demonstrated that when communities are trusted with power, they use it responsibly and creatively.

The Combined Authority's decision to match fund this work marked a turning point. What began as a radical experiment became an embedded approach. Participatory budgeting was no longer peripheral but began to influence how the system organised itself.

Over time, this permission spread. Live Well has enabled early examples of community-led change to move from exception to expectation. Participation is no longer framed as innovative, but it is increasingly understood as foundational, by working alongside the GM Shapers community accountability group.

At the Participation Playbook launch, many named this shift explicitly. One participant said:

*"This was the permission I've been looking for."*

The #PressPlay pledges that followed were not about programmes or projects. They were commitments about behaviour and power:

- *"Recognise my power and always share it."*
- *"Use my voice at a strategic level to share grassroots ideas."*
- *"Push councils to be braver."*
- *"Bring tenant voice into the Good Landlord Charter."*

These pledges signalled a collective willingness to redistribute influence.

Group CEO, GMCA, TfGM and GMFRS Caroline Simpson committed publicly to take the Playbook into every senior meeting — positioning participation as *"the single most important conversation in everything we are doing in GM Live Well."* - and embedding participation into the bloodstream of Live Well decision-making.

### **Community power embedded at the heart of the system**

As the Live Well movement has grown in confidence and influence, so too has the role of community power within the system itself.

Community leaders have moved from being consultees to co-designers, and increasingly, to accountability partners within Live Well's governance and reform architecture.

From the earliest days, the GM Live Well Shapers — a facilitated, paid co-design group made up of grassroots community leaders and people with lived experience — played an important role in shaping the movement. They co-led regional events, challenged system assumptions and brought lived experience into strategic conversations.

Over time, their role deepened, as a simple but powerful question began to surface in reform discussions:

*“If there are groups already doing this work in communities, why wouldn’t we want them at the centre?”*

GM Shapers are now recognised as a community accountability partner within Live Well. They are invited into reform meetings and governance discussions, not to endorse pre-formed decisions, but to co-shape them. Their presence has helped reframe conversations about inequality and prevention around lived experience and practical community insight.

Their work has also evolved into community-led research. Through the Live Well Communities Fund, GM Shapers developed into GM Researchers, gathering evidence from neighbourhoods, exploring what impact looks like locally and informing how success is understood. In doing so, they have expanded the region’s understanding of evidence itself, valuing community trust and agency alongside traditional system metrics.

Alongside this, building from the Alliance Blueprint, the GM Live Well Alliance is taking shape as a shared and transformative governance space with collective responsibility for Live Well’s direction.

Inspired by the Participation Playbook, a Live Well Assembly is being convened to co-design how the Alliance itself should operate. Through an open invitation to the wider Live Well movement — with places allocated through sortition — residents, practitioners and leaders will come together to shape recommendations for governance and accountability.

Representation from the Approved Provider Collaborative, Local Infrastructure Organisations and the GM Equality Alliance now also sit within Live Well governance structures. This reflects a growing recognition that community power is essential to reform.

Whilst the journey is ongoing, community power within Greater Manchester is increasingly becoming embedded — in funding decisions, in accountability mechanisms and in strategic direction. It is less dependent on individual champions and more visible within formal structures.

## **Our HOW - key ingredients of our practice**

### **Always starting with people**

The Live Well movement-building approach is grounded in a simple but disciplined principle: start with communities, every time.

This principle can be traced back to early partnerships between the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and GM-based VCFSE organisations such as Elephants Trail, who led community reporting across the region. Their work centred on a foundational question: *“What does it mean to Live Well to you?”*

This early question established a precedent: community knowledge would do more than information delivery, it will shape direction.

Since then, starting with people has remained a constant. It has shaped the co-design of Greater Manchester’s approach to growing Live Well Spaces, Offers and Centres, it is informing the

development of the GM Live Well Alliance governance model through a Citizen Assembly, and it underpins the participatory design of the Live Well Fund.

Importantly, this principle does not only show up at moments of strategy. It lives in the everyday decisions that determine whether power genuinely shifts:

- Who is in the room — and who is not?
- Who sets the agenda?
- Who is resourced for their time and expertise?
- Whose knowledge counts as evidence?

Representation, open invitation and co-design are not treated as improvements to existing processes, they are becoming the default way of working.

This requires consistency and intentionality, particularly from statutory partners, and a willingness to move beyond consultation towards shared decision-making. There can be no meaningful system transformation if communities are not the starting point.

### **From engagement to movement building**

Live Well consciously chose movement-building over engagement.

Engagement asks for views. Networking connects actors. Movement-building shares ownership.

It does so by redistributing responsibility, and inviting people not simply to contribute, but to co-create and carry the work forward. This has been vital to Live Well's momentum. It has created the snowball effect now visible across the region, where people are actively stepping forward to shape what comes next, for example by reaching more than 250 submissions to be part of the Live Well festival.

Movement-building has enabled people to leave their lanyards at the door and meet each other as humans — across sectors and across levels of seniority. It is what made it possible for the most senior leaders in the city-region to board a Bee Network bus together and visit community spaces — not to inspect but to experience and learn from community-led health and wellbeing in practice.

Over time, this is shifting the centre of gravity from *governing* to *shared decision-making*, and from *traditional partnership structures* to *flexible Live Well alliances* rooted in trust and collective purpose and resources — as articulated in the [Live Well Alliance Blueprint](#).

### **Weaving Networks of Trust and Equity**

Traditional partnerships often centre institutions. Live Well starts with communities — especially those whose voices and leadership are too often excluded.

It does so by working alongside partners and community leaders who bring deep experience of social justice and anti-oppressive practice. These relationships go beyond the usual organisational networks, recognising the knowledge, trust and leadership already rooted in neighbourhoods.

Inclusive practice is built into how the Live Well accelerator has worked — from the 'open' design of events to participatory approaches such as sortition, to communities shaping the

decision-making structures, with equity and inclusion at the heart. The aim is not simply representation, but shared power.

This approach recognises a simple truth: many communities — particularly those facing structural discrimination such as racism — have long-standing reasons not to trust public services and institutions. Building trust with communities furthest from services has therefore been central to Live Well's development.

Live Well has prioritised these communities, building from the work already happening and recognising, respecting and valuing the leadership within them. By supporting rooted and diverse community leadership, trust grows through relationships and networks.

In this way, Live Well is quite literally weaving trust — growing equitable, diverse and powerful networks of trusted relationships that allow the movement to spread, deepen and endure.

### **A shared language that can be recognised across sectors**

The Live Well movement has been anchored by a shared articulation: Live Well is both community-led and system-enabled.

This simple phrase has been fundamental to the direction of Live Well.

It does two important things at once.

Firstly, it signals that power must shift — that communities lead in shaping priorities, action and direction. And it makes clear that the role of the system is not to retreat, but to actively enable through funding, leadership, shared governance and collective accountability.

Secondly, in doing so, it avoids unhelpful binaries. Prevention is not something delivered by institutions to communities, nor something communities are expected to carry alone. It is a relational, cross-sector mission that requires both conditions to be present and aligned.

Having this shared language has helped unite people across sectors. It has provided clarity about roles and expectations, and has been a consistent reference point for learning and implementation. Over time, “community-led and system-enabled” has moved from being programme terminology to becoming a defining description of the Live Well approach, shaping how localities design their work, how partners reflect on progress, and how reform is understood across Greater Manchester.

It has created a common ground from which different stakeholders, statutory leaders, VCFSE organisations, funders and residents, can see their place in making Live Well happen.

### **A movement that brings joy and hope**

The Live Well movement building approach has been intentionally hopeful.

Events have been creative, sometimes playful, occasionally unconventional — with bouncy castles, Afro and Bollyfit performances and walking tours as activities alongside keynote speeches from ministers and chief executives. Last year, the Live Well team launched a podcast without prior experience, and this year they are building one of the largest community-led festival series the Greater Manchester region has ever seen.

This approach is not accidental. Working in this way requires letting go of perfection. It requires replacing the fear of getting it wrong with the belief that something meaningful can be built together. Most importantly however, it signals that pushing boundaries, dreaming big and aiming high are not naïve aspirations — they are practical strategies for cultural change.

In a context where many public service professionals often feel constrained by risk and compliance, Live Well has created permission to experiment, to collaborate in new and exciting ways and to imagine bold alternatives.

When people see this kind of change modelled in public — hope becomes credible.

### **Making system leaders experience accountability differently**

Live Well events have changed how accountability is experienced.

Traditionally, accountability has often sat within closed governance spaces, including boards, committees and senior leadership meetings. The Live Well movement has deliberately widened that frame.

Live Well events and public conversations have created spaces where system leaders share a stage with community partners, for example at the Live Well Launch Event where VCFSE leaders interviewed the Mayor and Chair of the National Lottery Community Fund, or at the Community Power Event where young people hosted a panel that included government ministers. At numerous Live Well events people have seen chief executives address rooms filled with residents and frontline practitioners.

These public moments have shifted the terms of accountability. Leaders are no longer predominately accountable to institutional peers or performance frameworks. They are accountable in the open, alongside the communities most affected by their decisions.

Working in this way introduces a different kind of responsibility — one grounded in relationships rather than hierarchies. It can be uncomfortable or feel exposing, but it also has the potential to strengthen decision-making by creating opportunities for leaders to connect to the ways in which policies touch upon peoples' lives.

Accountability becomes both shared and more human — and by default more harder to distance from.

### **Creating shared spaces to solve challenges collectively**

System change requires intentional, protected learning spaces.

The Live Well Accelerator Community of Practice was a clear example of this type of reflective space, and it became a central engine of the Live Well movement. Via light-touch facilitation, this cross-sector, peer-led space for learning, challenge and problem-solving, enabled teams to name barriers, surface tensions and test assumptions. In doing so, lessons were able to travel from neighbourhood practice into locality strategy, and from locality insight into regional reform conversations.

Alongside this, structured learning spaces between the core Live Well team and the Live Well Learning partner, Innovation Unit, created the conditions for honest reflection on power, pace and priorities. This was key to ensure that institutional pressures would not push the work back

towards short-term outputs and familiar behaviours.

Learning spaces allowed partners to hold steady, to resist drift, to revisit Live Well principles and to remain anchored in community priorities.

### **Building on what's strong and growing it**

The Live Well movement has consistently started from what is already strong in communities and chosen to grow that.

Across Greater Manchester, community groups, grassroots leaders, peer networks and community hubs had been doing essential preventative work for decades. The movement sought to recognise, resource and connect this practice.

This has meant being intentional about centring community leadership by paying people for their time, investing in existing spaces and championing brilliant community-led work and its impact. At every Live Well event, the team shines a light on work that historically has gone unrecognised or under-valued. Breakout sessions are community-led, stalls are hosted by neighbourhood organisations, and lived experience shapes the agenda.

The message is consistent: prevention is already happening. The role of the system is to notice it, back it and remove barriers to its growth.

Seeing the impact of this work so publicly and repeatedly has also been significant for statutory partners. It has challenged traditional assumptions about where expertise sits and who holds solutions. Over time, this visibility has helped create a shift — from seeing public services as primary fixers of social problems to understanding their role as partners within a wider ecosystem of community-led prevention.

## **From crisis to prevention: Re-building trust between communities and public services in Rochdale**

In Rochdale, the Live Well Accelerator work began with a clear recognition that cycles of poverty, poor health and exclusion are deeply interconnected, and that the way decisions are made often reinforces those cycles rather than breaking them.

Residents and communities experience overlapping forms of poverty — emotional, cultural and economic — which affect different groups in different ways. Yet decisions about how poverty is addressed have tended to sit with those in positional power, often far from the communities most affected. There have been few established routes for communities to shape priorities or hold leaders to account, and limited space for lived experience to influence decision-making in meaningful ways.

At the same time, short-term funding pressures and political cycles have meant that responses have often focused on managing immediate need, rather than tackling root causes. This has contributed to a system that is largely crisis-led, with limited trust between communities and public services, and little opportunity for prevention to take hold.

The Live Well Accelerator created space to test a different approach. In Rochdale, this meant asking: how might power and decision-making around anti-poverty work be shared differently, so

that communities are working alongside those with positional power – through trust as a core part of a shift towards prevention?

## What we've achieved

In Rochdale, the shift from crisis response towards prevention is becoming visible in who is involved in decision-making, when they are involved, and what is prioritised as a result.

### Embedded community-led decision-making

A key change has been the formation of the Anti-Poverty Network, with strategic leadership from the **Anti-Poverty Foundation Group (APFG)** - a diverse group of community leaders who are paid for their time and headspace to shape and lead the work.

The APFG **now sits within formal governance arrangements and helps shape borough-wide priorities on poverty and prevention**, rather than responding to decisions after they have been taken.

The shift in power described earlier has begun to reshape how resources are framed, allocated and delivered across Rochdale.

### Resources shifted towards prevention

Funding decisions are increasingly oriented towards prevention rather than crisis response.

The Anti-Poverty Foundation Group (APFG) played a direct role in designing the Live Well Community Fund as a preventative fund, rooted in the strategic priorities they had identified, including addressing underlying drivers of poverty rather than responding only to its visible consequences. Smaller, more accessible grants have enabled community organisations to intervene earlier, offering person-centred support before problems escalate. Prevention is no longer an aspiration attached to strategy documents; it is actively being built into funding criteria and delivery models.

The shift is particularly visible in the evolution of the **Household Support Fund**. Through the work of the Accelerator, partners **expanded the fund fivefold and successfully advocated for a dedicated prevention strand** embedded alongside crisis provision. What began as a smaller test of concept grew to represent around half of the total funding allocation the following year. This marked a material change in how Rochdale conceives of financial support – as an opportunity to break cycles of recurring hardship.

Investments now include:

- Debt advice embedded within Rochdale Foodbank, delivered through an innovative volunteer-led model that integrates preventative financial guidance alongside crisis food provision.
- A new partnership between the Hospice and Citizens Advice Bureau, ensuring that people at the end of life can access high-quality financial advice within trusted settings, reducing stress and uncertainty at a critical time.
- Multi-lingual advice available across the borough in places that residents already know and trust, increasing accessibility and early engagement.

Taken together, these developments signal a clear and practical shift from crisis management towards prevention — with resources increasingly shaped by lived experience and designed to address root causes rather than symptoms.

### **Greater trust between communities and public services**

There are also clear signs that **trust between communities and public services is being strengthened.**

A significant marker of this shift is the evolution of the local authority's Anti-Poverty Strategic Board into the **Anti-Poverty System Group**. This change explicitly recognised that strategic oversight of the borough's anti-poverty strategy now sits with the Anti-Poverty Network, with the wider system acting as an enabler rather than sole decision-maker. A **community leader now co-chairs the group alongside the local authority** — signalling a material redistribution of leadership and accountability.

In practice, this has meant lived experience shaping formal strategy. Members of the Anti-Poverty Foundation Group (APFG) have spoken directly at the Integrated Care Partnership Committee, sharing first-hand accounts of poverty and holding system leaders to account. Their contributions are reflected in the borough strategy, with poverty named as a core priority across health and care for the first time.

The impact has extended beyond the borough. Evidence and testimony generated through **Rochdale's anti-poverty work contributed to the national case against the two-child benefit cap, later referenced by Paul Waugh MP in Parliament when the government announced the policy would be lifted in November 2025.**

System partners describe a cultural shift alongside these structural changes. As one public health specialist from Rochdale Borough Council reflected:

*"It wasn't us and them. It was us together."*

Alongside this, there are **early signs that trust between communities and public services is beginning to be strengthened.** Community leaders are choosing to be part — and stay part of — senior system spaces, including speaking openly about lived experience at the Integrated Care Partnership Committee and taking on formal governance roles. These are not low-risk actions, which signal growing confidence that participation will be meaningful.

Community leaders describe a growing sense of confidence, legitimacy and agency. As one APFG member put it:

*"I wouldn't have felt comfortable in spaces like this before, but now I absolutely know that I belong here — and that the people of this community belong in these spaces too."*  
— Jo Barker-Marsh, Anti-Poverty Foundation Group

Taken together, these examples point to early but meaningful impact: prevention is being prioritised earlier, resources are being shaped by lived experience, and trust is being built through shared leadership and governance. Communities are beginning to experience themselves not as recipients of crisis support, but as active partners in shaping Rochdale's response to poverty, health and wellbeing.

## **Our HOW - key ingredients of our practice**

### **A commitment to root causes**

From the outset, the work was grounded in a shared commitment: if prevention is to be meaningful, it needs to address root causes, not only manage symptoms.

Prevention was not framed as a future aspiration or solely as a way of reducing costs. It was treated as a discipline applied throughout the work. **This meant asking different questions — not simply “how do we respond to this need?” but “what conditions are driving this crisis, and how might we begin to change them?”**

An explicitly intersectional approach was central. Bringing together people with lived experience of poverty, racism, migration, disability and caring responsibilities surfaced a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how poverty operates. Hearing these stories alongside one another revealed shared drivers — debt, insecurity, lack of control, isolation — cutting across different communities.

This helped shift the group from fragmented responses towards shared priorities. Prevention became collective work, grounded in a common understanding of what needed to change.

### **Building trust by doing work that mattered**

Trust was not built through consultation exercises or strategy documents. It grew through shared decisions — and through seeing those decisions have consequences.

Community leadership was treated as essential from the beginning. Community leaders were paid for their time, supported to participate on their own terms, and given genuine influence over decisions. This was not symbolic inclusion; it altered who shaped priorities and how.

Importantly, the work did not wait to be perfect. There was a willingness to take risks, to try new governance arrangements, and to learn in the open. Trust grew because people could see decisions changing — funding being redesigned, boards being reshaped, language shifting.

Trust developed because people could see that participation led to change.

### **Investing in people — inside and outside the system**

Progress depended on investing in people's confidence, capability and resilience.

Within the Anti-Poverty Foundation Group, members were supported over time to develop skills in governance, advocacy, negotiation and collective decision-making. This wasn't a one-off training intervention — it was sustained capability-building through participation.

At the same time, work was done with system leaders. Reflective spaces were created where senior officers could explore what it means to share power and sit with uncertainty. Psychological safety mattered. Leaders needed space to be uncomfortable — and to grow through that discomfort.

The groups deliberately moved at the pace of trust, resisting the pressure to deliver quick outputs or meet arbitrary targets. Time was invested in facilitation, reflection and learning across

communities, VCFSE organisations and statutory partners. These spaces allowed tensions to surface, assumptions to be challenged, and relationships to deepen.

This relational infrastructure held the work steady through complexity and change.

### **Growing power collectively**

Perhaps the most important shift was reframing power itself.

This was not about public sector partners losing power. It was about recognising that power can be strengthened when it is shared.

Public sector partners slowed decision-making, accepted uncertainty and shared control — particularly over funding and governance. Formal structures were reshaped to support shared leadership, including co-chairing arrangements and upstream community involvement in funding design.

As power became more distributed, it became more effective. Community leaders gained legitimacy and influence. System leaders gained insight and trust. Prevention could be built into decisions because those most affected were part of shaping them.

Working differently was not an add-on to the programme. It was the programme.

## **How everyday support grows communities' sense of pride in place in Little Hulton, Salford**

In Salford, the Live Well Accelerator work focused on Little Hulton, a neighbourhood facing entrenched inequalities, often described through indicators of deprivation and poor health outcomes. Over time, these narratives have shaped how the area is being perceived and treated — and how Little Hulton is experienced by those who live there.

Simultaneously, there is a history of strong community activity in Little Hulton. Local organisations, informal groups and faith communities have consistently been providing advice, connection and practical help against a backdrop of low investment and economic inequality. Restricted, short-term funding cycles have meant that support has often been fragmented, residents did not always know what was available or who they could turn to for trusted advice and support. Whilst organisations were working hard they often did so in parallel, competing for funding pots, and everyday prevention work was not consistently visible within wider system planning.

The cost of this fragmentation has been cumulative: duplicated effort, missed opportunities for early support, and a neighbourhood often seen — and seeing itself — through a deficit lens.

The Live Well Accelerator Team, made up of Salford CVS and Community Little Hulton sought to address this - not to create something new, but to connect and strengthen what already existed — and to test whether doing so could change both experience and perception of communities' sense of pride of living in Little Hulton.

## What we've achieved

Over two years, significant shifts have taken place in Little Hulton. The neighbourhood is growing into a clear centre of gravity for everyday support, with demonstrable increases in social capital, connections and networks. This is beginning to change how Little Hulton sees itself, and how it is seen by others.

As the Chair of CommUNITY Little Hulton reflected, the Live Well Accelerator has helped in “*putting Little Hulton on the map*” — through visible leadership, collaboration and sustained activity rooted in the neighbourhood.

### Community space as the anchor

The opening and development of **Peel Park Pavilion**, led by CommUNITY Little Hulton, has provided both a physical and relational anchor for the area. The Accelerator work was instrumental in ensuring that this new community space was actively integrated into the life of the neighbourhood — with organisations aligning activity around it, coordinating events and using it as a consistent point of connection.

In December 2025, the Pavilion was recognised as a flagship **Live Well Centre**, demonstrating the impact of Little Hulton’s social infrastructure on communities’ sense of belonging. The centre has been brought to life through advice sessions, training courses, food provision and informal support running side by side. Residents know where to go, and the space is consistently active and visible.

Events such as the *Spirit of CommUNITY Little Hulton* festival drew in more than 100 people, and at CommUNITY Little Hulton’s AGM meeting there were queues forming outside. That visibility and energy signal people’s appetite for togetherness locally, and challenge long-standing deficit narratives about the area. As one participant put it

*‘This space makes me proud to be from Little Hulton. What we have here is special.’*

### Connected everyday support - by Little Hulton for Little Hulton

A key development has been the co-creation of the **Little Hulton Trusted Voices network**, hosted at the Pavilion. The network brings together community organisations, entrepreneurs, activists, local volunteers and wider individuals who are already active in Little Hulton and who are keen to play a role in supporting residents to identify the right support.

The network meets regularly to build a clearer understanding of one another’s work, to explore emerging community needs and strengths collectively rather than in isolation. This has led to previously dispersed activity becoming more connected, for example through new collaborations across CICs who are now actively working together, sharing information and co-leading funding applications.

The Accelerator team has developed an asset map to support this process by making Little Hulton’s resources more visible — both to residents and to those working locally. In doing so, it has shifted the narrative to one of existing assets and strengths, surfacing the depth of local activity that was previously under-recognised.

### Increased community-led decision-making

There are clear signs that power and agency have shifted to local communities and residents.

From the outset, the team recognised that strengthening pride in place required understanding residents' perceptions of Little Hulton.

Local people were recruited as community researchers who spoke to nearly **700 residents** through door-knocking and outreach. Their insights about hopes for the neighbourhood continue to shape the direction of CommUNITY Little Hulton's work.

The Live Well Fund created a further opportunity for participation. Through a participatory funding process, **644 residents** took part in allocating local resources. For some, this marked their first experience of local decision-making. As one resident put it,

*"This is the first time I ever voted in my life."*

In Little Hulton, this kind of participation created tangible impacts. Residents are not only casting a vote; they are seeing funding decisions translate into activity in spaces they use and recognise, as well as projects they supported taking shape across the neighbourhood. That visibility strengthened confidence and reinforced a sense that the neighbourhood's direction is collectively shaped.

## **Our HOW - key ingredients of our practice**

### **Communities leading the change**

A consistent compass throughout the work was the principle that Little Hulton should shape Little Hulton. Community leadership was a consistent starting point for direction-setting.

This required a deep understanding not only of local challenges, but of how residents experience and speak about their neighbourhood. Local people were therefore recruited and paid as community researchers. They knocked on doors, spoke in community spaces, facilitated groups and mapped local assets. These conversations generated insight into what works for residents, what does not, and into the local anchors people already trust.

### **Embracing creativity and flexibility**

Making community leadership meaningful required flexibility in practice.

While the programme held clear aims, it allowed openness in how those aims were achieved. This created space to respond to opportunity, adapt to local insight and evolve the approach over time.

Participatory voting for the Live Well Fund, for example, was not part of the original design. Introducing it significantly broadened engagement, bringing in new organisations, new residents and even first-time voters. The willingness to adjust course reflected a commitment to inclusion and local ownership over adherence to any fixed plan.

Creativity and flexibility therefore acted as enabling conditions. They allowed the work to stay responsive to what community research was surfacing, and ensured that leadership remained genuinely local rather than becoming procedural.

### **Strengthening the role of hyper-local organisations**

The work also took a deliberate approach to strengthening hyper-local leadership, recognising that neighbourhood pride and prevention depend on credible local anchors.

The partnership between **Salford CVS and CommUNITY Little Hulton** reflected this principle. CommUNITY Little Hulton led on the ground — rooted in relationships, daily activity and the stewardship of Peel Park Pavilion. Salford CVS focused on creating enabling conditions within the wider system — aligning funding and strategic support to back what was emerging locally.

This division required trust, flexibility and genuine power-sharing. It involved clarity about complementary roles: one partner working directly with residents and neighbourhood networks; the other influencing the system to sustain that work.

Strengthening the hyper-local anchor enabled CommUNITY Little Hulton to grow its role in the neighbourhood, support emerging CICs and entrepreneurs, and create opportunities for volunteers and residents wanting to contribute in ways that larger, less place-based organisations would have struggled to do.

### **Investing in local people — and trusting them with real roles**

Employment and leadership opportunities for local people were central to the work's impact.

Community researchers were recognised within the area, and this familiarity shaped the depth of engagement. Residents were more willing to speak honestly about their experiences when approached by someone who understood the local context.

Within Peel Park Pavilion, kitchen staff, course leaders and volunteers are local residents. Their presence reinforces that the space belongs to the community, with leadership being visible and relatable.

### **Bringing people together in visible ways**

Moments of collective gathering played an important role in reinforcing momentum and shared identity.

Events, workshops and festivals at Peel Park Pavilion created opportunities for organisations and residents to see the network in action. The *Spirit of CommUNITY Little Hulton* festival brought together more than 30 organisations in one space, making the scale of neighbourhood activity visible.

These gatherings did more than showcase provision. They allowed people to experience their neighbourhood as active and connected. Pride in place grows through shared experience - when community-led activity is seen, collaboration is tangible and collective effort can be felt.

## **Devolve & involve: Shifting towards preventative ways of working across Oldham's neighbourhoods**

In Oldham, the Live Well Accelerator began with a practical challenge: **if prevention is to take root at neighbourhood level, decisions about local investment must be shaped much closer to the communities they affect.**

Health and wellbeing outcomes in Oldham remain among the poorest in Greater Manchester, with

neighbourhoods such as East District facing entrenched inequalities linked to income, housing, employment and access to opportunity. Yet the mechanisms that determine how resources are prioritised and distributed have traditionally operated within formal institutional processes. While residents have contributed views through engagement and consultations, there have been limited opportunities to influence how funding frameworks are designed or how preventative priorities are defined in practice.

At the same time, sustained financial constraint and rising demand have placed pressure on public services to focus on short-term stability and crisis management. Place-based prevention was widely recognised as important, but difficult to embed in ways that genuinely redistributed influence.

The Live Well Accelerator in Oldham co-designed a neighbourhood investment model that puts residents at the heart of decision-making with the aim to develop and prototype a preventative funding approach that could inform practice across the borough.

## **What we've achieved**

Two years in, the Live Well Accelerator work in East District, Oldham has **moved participatory, neighbourhood-led practice from experiment to embedded practice.**

What began as a co-designed prototype for involving residents in decisions about local investment has become a credible and increasingly normalised approach to neighbourhood working.

Through sustained engagement and testing, Oldham has demonstrated that preventative funding and decision-making can be shaped with residents in ways that are practical, scalable and aligned with borough priorities.

### **A tried and tested approach to participatory grant-making at neighbourhood level**

In East District, the model for neighbourhood investment was built with residents, step by step, through a deliberate co-design process that took place over several months.

Through a Design Jam and a structured prototyping phase, residents, community groups and district partners worked together closely to shape both the priorities for investment and the mechanics of decision-making. Rather than consulting on pre-set criteria, residents helped define what preventative funding should support in East District as well as how the process itself should operate. This included shaping accessible application formats, agreeing evaluation criteria and designing a blended voting system that combined public pitching, online voting and in-person ballot boxes.

Because this groundwork was co-owned by residents and tested collaboratively, the resulting neighbourhood investment process carried legitimacy rooted in local insight.

A total of £75,000 was allocated across 58 microgrants and 21 larger grants, with 62 applications submitted and more than 1,200 votes cast.

What now exists in Oldham is a locally co-authored model for neighbourhood investment that reflects communities' language, priorities and practical realities.

This approach is now beginning to scale. The methodology developed in East District has informed borough-wide thinking and is being built into the evolving One Oldham Fund framework. Oldham is also working in partnership with The National Lottery Community Fund on a £300,000 “You Decide” participatory grant-making initiative across Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside — directly building on the model tested through this work.

Participatory neighbourhood grant making is no longer being treated as a pilot. It is increasingly understood as part of how Oldham allocates resources.

### **Increased civic participation through deeper engagement**

A defining achievement of the work in East Oldham has been the breadth and diversity of participation it generated.

The team worked deliberately to reach residents who are often least represented in formal engagement processes, through trusted local networks, community venues and face-to-face conversations. Engagement was designed to be accessible and rooted in everyday neighbourhood life.

This approach brought together a genuinely mixed cross-section of East District, including residents who had not previously participated in local decision-making.

The scale of involvement reflects that effort:

- 1,226 online votes were cast.
- 79 votes were submitted via library ballot boxes.
- Queues were forming outside the “Power to the People” event and more than 80 people took part in listening to organisations pitch directly to the neighbourhood and voted on the night.

The engagement methods developed through the Accelerator are now informing how Oldham works with residents more widely. Learning from East District has influenced the Pride in Place engagement strategy in Chadderton, where approaches to reaching residents who are less connected to formal structures have drawn directly on the Accelerator model.

Similarly, the engagement tools developed through the Accelerator — particularly the strength-based Live Well question postcards — are now informing borough-wide initiatives. In East District, these postcards were key to reaching a wider group of residents, shaping investment priorities through their responses and encouraging participation in the Design Jam. The postcards have since been used to support engagement for the Community Regeneration Partnership capital grants, helping to surface residents’ insights and guide funding priorities.

The Live Well Oldham Accelerator has provided practical tools and confidence that participatory neighbourhood engagement can be robust, scalable and applicable across different funding streams.

### **A visible culture shift towards collaborative, preventative practice**

One of the most significant shifts has been in how partners now approach decision-making together. The East District process required public sector officers, VCFSE partners and residents to share responsibility over decisions that would traditionally sit within institutional control. In

doing so, it created space to slow down elements of decision-making, open up criteria and processes to collective exploration, and trust that co-design would strengthen legitimacy rather than weaken accountability.

Over time, this has influenced day-to-day practice. Staff across sectors have grown in confidence around participatory grant-making as a robust and credible way of allocating public funds. Residents have taken on visible and meaningful roles in shaping and approving investment decisions, and VCFSE partners have acted as connectors and stewards of the process, helping to hold shared responsibility between communities and the council.

Participatory methods are no longer seen as isolated experiments in Oldham, but as practical and effective tools with learning from the Accelerator work now shaping Oldham's wider Live Well Implementation Plan, informing funding frameworks and neighbourhood-led practice across the borough.

## **Our HOW - key ingredients of our practice**

### **Embedding co-production as a system-wide Live Well principle**

A defining feature of the Live Well Oldham Accelerator was for co-production to be recognised and embedded as a core Live Well principle, shaping how partners worked together across the system. Action Together and colleagues in the council worked in close collaboration to hold this commitment in practice, particularly at moments when institutional pressures could easily have narrowed the space for shared decision-making.

This meant being intentional about how decisions were being made. When timelines tightened or grant deadlines approached, partners made conscious choices to protect resident involvement rather than defaulting to internal processes. It required a shared willingness to reflect on whether proposals genuinely reflected community priorities, and to ensure that residents remained involved upstream.

Over time, this collective discipline built confidence across partners. Co-production became less about a stage in the process and more about a way of working, shaping how neighbourhood investment was discussed, designed and governed.

### **Genuine community leadership**

From the outset, the work sought to shift the conversation about health and wellbeing in East Oldham. Rather than starting from deficits or service gaps, engagement began with a strengths-based question: what helps people here stay healthy, connected and hopeful, and what should Live Well mean in this neighbourhood?

Community leadership was designed into the process from the beginning. Residents were not invited to respond to a pre-set model; they were asked to help shape the approach itself. This required deliberate attention to power: creating space in agendas, adjusting timelines, and ensuring that influence was distributed across the design, prototyping and decision-making stages. Grassroots leaders and community members were remunerated for their time and expertise, recognising that lived experience is critical knowledge and that meaningful participation requires practical support.

“Power to the People” events and wider engagement activity were led in large part by residents

and community leaders themselves. Their networks and credibility enabled participation to reach far beyond those typically engaged in statutory consultations. Attention to inclusivity was deliberate: language support, culturally appropriate food, child-friendly spaces, flexible formats and thoughtful design choices ensured the process felt accessible and welcoming.

As a result, what residents identified as important — connection, trusted spaces, cultural relevance and early support — directly shaped the priorities and mechanics of neighbourhood investment. Prevention was not defined in abstract terms; it was articulated locally, and translated into a tailored funding framework, reflecting communities' priorities as well as system ambition.

### **Spaces for shared reflection and learning**

A core ingredient of the Oldham approach was the intentional creation of space for reflection, iteration and shared learning.

Co-design unfolded in stages, with structured opportunities to test, adjust and strengthen the approach over time. When elements of the engagement process did not resonate as intended, partners revisited and reshaped them in dialogue with residents and district colleagues. This willingness to return to first principles, instead of pressing ahead to meet deadlines, reinforced the robustness of the process.

Structured facilitation methods were central to this. The Design Jam methodology provided a disciplined yet creative framework through which residents, voluntary sector partners and officers could work as peers. Prototyping allowed ideas to be explored in practice before being formalised, building confidence and legitimacy in the emerging model.

Allowing time for this iterative development required the team to hold steady when institutional pressures mounted. By protecting reflective space and collective problem-solving, partners ensured that the model evolved in response to what mattered most to communities.

### **Codifying the process through written materials**

A further strength of the Oldham approach has been its commitment to capturing and sharing learning. The tools, facilitation methods and structured processes developed through the Design Jams and participatory funding work have been documented and translated into practical materials.

This has ensured that the approach does not rely on individual champions or informal memory. Instead, it provides a clear and transferable framework that can be adapted across districts and funding streams. By codifying the process, Oldham has created the conditions for neighbourhood-led decision-making to move from a time-limited prototype to an embedded and scalable practice within the borough.

## **Connecting people, skills and purpose: Shifting towards Asset Based Community Development in Bolton**

The Live Well Bolton approach is grounded in learning from the Covid19 pandemic, which demonstrated that some of the most effective local responses had been built on local community connections and strengths — neighbours supporting neighbours, voluntary groups stepping up and informal networks filling the gaps that statutory systems could not.

However, as the immediate crisis receded, there was a risk of slipping back into more traditional service-led and target-driven ways of working. Public services were facing mounting pressures and system leaders were juggling both demand and financial constraints.

There was no consistent, borough-wide language and strategy for building on the lessons from the pandemic, nor was there a shared understanding across sectors of what it would take to sustain a genuinely strengths-based, community-led approach to health and wellbeing in day-to-day practice.

The Bolton Live Well Accelerator created space to address this: The question was not only how to shift responses towards prevention — but how to grow an entirely different culture across the system by embedding Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a shared way of working.

## **What we've achieved**

Over two years, Bolton has moved from small pockets of strengths-based activity to a more coherent, cross-sector commitment to Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) — with visible influence on commissioning, procurement, neighbourhood funding and day-to-day practice.

### **Asset-Based Community Development embedded as shared system practice**

Through collaborative training, sustained partnership working and a cross-sector Community of Practice, ABCD has become a shared organising principle across Public Health, VCFSE infrastructure and neighbourhood partners.

This shift is now visible in commissioning and procurement decisions. For example, the award of a major wellbeing leisure contract to a Bolton-based provider reflected a deliberate decision to retain investment, employment and expertise within the local economy. Rather than defaulting to a national provider, partners recognised that locally rooted organisations strengthen preventative impact because they are embedded in the social fabric of neighbourhoods.

The same principles are influencing healthcare practice. The development of Making Every Contact Count (MECC) with Bolton NHS Foundation Trust links clinical staff more directly to community support, strengthening prevention pathways beyond the hospital setting. An NIHR evaluation underpins the programme, supporting its integration into everyday hospital procedures and reinforcing the credibility of relational, preventative approaches.

Learning from the Accelerator has also reshaped Public Health's wellbeing procurement process to better reflect Live Well principles, now explicitly asking local people, "*How would you like to be supported to keep well?*" — signalling that lived experience is shaping formal system processes.

Across the system, there is growing confidence in relational, preventative approaches, even where these do not generate immediate or easily quantifiable outputs, and ABCD is increasingly understood as foundational to long-term prevention.

Rather than starting with deficits or service gaps and applying a "doing to" mindset, partners are building from what already exists: residents' skills, lived experience, informal community networks and locally rooted organisations.

### **Community voice shaping neighbourhood investment**

Embedding ABCD also created the conditions for a tangible test-bed: The Live Well team worked together to prototype a shared decision-making pilot over neighbourhood funding in Bolton Central South.

Through the Live Well Community Fund, local people and organisations shaped both investment priorities and the funding process itself. Community conversations identified what preventative support should focus on locally, and residents co-designed an accessible process combining simple applications, public pitching and community voting – both in person and online.

This resulted in:

- £75,000 distributed
- 58 microgrants and 21 larger grants awarded
- 62 applications received
- More than 1,200 community votes cast

The process engaged 47 VCSE organisations, including groups not previously connected to Bolton CVS, widening the network of voices shaping prevention locally.

Residents could see tangible outcomes from their participation, reinforcing confidence that their voice had influence. Smaller and emerging groups accessed resource that would otherwise have remained out of reach, while building confidence, visibility and practical capability.

Independent evaluation highlighted that the relational impact was as significant as the financial investment. Participants reported making new connections, understanding the local VCFSE landscape more clearly, and feeling part of something bigger. Many described feeling “seen” and validated for the first time. For several groups, the opportunity to participate and collaborate outweighed the value of the grant itself.

Initial scepticism about whether such a diverse group could reach shared decisions shifted over time. As one participant reflected after the process: *“To get this many people in a room, create a shared purpose, and get everyone to agree on a final decision was really great to see.”*

The process also strengthened community cohesion. Participants became more aware of one another’s work and more respectful of different perspectives. New collaborations and referrals emerged, and some groups who had never previously engaged with statutory services became connected to wider networks.

For public and voluntary sector partners, this marked a practical redistribution of power. Public health officers, Bolton CVS staff and residents worked alongside one another to steward decisions that would previously have sat within institutional processes. This was an example of ABCD put into practice: trusting local insight, backing community assets, and shifting from managing risk to investing in community-led solutions.

Importantly, the pilot did more than distribute funding – it demonstrated a credible alternative model for preventative investment. It showed that community-led decision-making can be transparent, accountable and strategically aligned. The principles tested through this approach – transparency, shared stewardship, relational decision-making and asset-based criteria – are now influencing wider funding and commissioning processes across Bolton, embedding a new expectation that community voice is integral to how investment decisions are made.

## **Our HOW - key ingredients of our practice**

### **Committing to ABCD as a core system value**

Bolton began with a clear system-level commitment: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) would become the shared discipline underpinning prevention strategies and collaborative practice across partners. This commitment was crucial in ensuring that asset-based practice became embedded in how decisions were made across the system.

Bolton invested in deliberate cross-sector training, bringing together Public Health, neighbourhood teams, VCSE partners and community leaders in shared learning spaces to develop a common language and shared expectations.

In doing so, ABCD became a practical lens for framing prevention, shaping commissioning conversations, designing funding approaches and guiding day-to-day interactions with communities.

### **Growing relational practice across the system**

Shifting culture required intentional spaces for honest dialogue about power and risk, and trust-building across organisational boundaries.

The ABCD Community of Practice was central to this — a space where cross-sector partners could slow down, reflect, and explore their default ways of working and the barriers that get in the way of moving towards more intentional, community-led practice. These spaces were held safely, with structured facilitation that strengthened confidence to work relationally in day-to-day roles.

### **Putting communities in the lead of decision-making**

The Live Well Community Fund presented an opportunity to put ABCD principles into practice by placing communities in the lead of decision-making.

Doing this genuinely and authentically required intentional design choices. Residents' involvement was not limited to a selection process; they were invited to redesign the mechanics of funding. Cross-sector partners began by collaboratively analysing existing data to identify a neighbourhood for testing, before engaging in far-reaching community conversations to better understand what "Live Well" meant in the selected Bolton Central South.

Communities co-developed funding criteria, proposed project ideas and formed new collaborations to address identified needs. The team treated lived experience and community leadership as vital expertise, which meant providing vouchers for resident participation, access budgets to reduce barriers, and payment for VCSE partners' time. These choices shifted who could take part and whose voice shaped outcomes.

Meetings unfolded with emergent planning in mind, creating time and space for participants to engage in genuine deliberation rather than being presented with fixed proposals. Putting ABCD into practice required tolerance of ambiguity, particularly from statutory partners accustomed to linear planning. Holding that uncertainty built legitimacy and ownership in the final model.

### **Shifting the system's role from doer to enabler**

Perhaps the most significant ingredient was a reframing of the system's role as a whole.

Public Health and council colleagues began to see their responsibility not as holding decision-making centrally, but as creating the conditions for community leadership, stewarding accountability alongside residents, and protecting relational practice within institutional constraints.

This shift is beginning to alter commissioning conversations, procurement processes and funding expectations beyond the Live Well Community Fund — a demonstration of ABCD in practice.

## **Growing a cross-sector approach to community-led prevention in Tameside**

Tameside's voluntary and community organisations across were making significant contributions to strengthen mental wellbeing, reduce isolation and support residents facing economic hardship and inequality, often doing so on a shoe-string budget.

However, this work was not always consistently visible or connected to borough-wide prevention strategy. Like many places, Tameside was navigating financial pressures and shifting priorities, and opportunities to align community-led practice with borough-wide strategy were limited. The borough lacked a shared language and frameworks for articulating what community-led prevention looked like in practice, or for demonstrating how it contributed to wider health and inequality ambitions. As a result, activity and strategy were not always as joined-up as they could be.

The Live Well Accelerator created space to strengthen commitment and coherence — bringing community leadership and system leadership into closer dialogue by co-designing shared principles, and embedding a clearer understanding of prevention into governance, commissioning and funding decisions.

### **What we've achieved**

Through the Live Well Community Leadership Group, community leaders and public health colleagues co-produced seven community-led wellbeing principles, drawing on insights from more than 100 VCFSE leaders and volunteers. The principles articulate what prevention looks like in practice in Tameside: support that is relational rather than transactional; rooted in dignity and trust; shaped by local leadership; and focused on strengthening connection and belonging before crisis takes hold.

These principles now underpin Tameside's approach to community-led prevention. They have been:

- Adopted across the system as a shared reference point
- Embedded into the Live Well Community Navigation Commission
- Used to shape the Tameside Communities Fund
- Incorporated into the borough's Live Well implementation plans

This represents more than alignment in language. It marks a shift from community-led work being adjacent to strategy, to actively shaping it.

As Director of Public Health James Mallion reflected:

*“We don’t always know what’s best for communities... working side by side, listening to and being guided by our communities is really the only way we can make sure we offer preventative support in the right place at the right time.”*

### **Prevention embedded in funding decisions**

The launch of the Tameside Communities Fund represents a tangible structural change.

This was the first fund of its kind in Tameside, introduced after two years of disinvestment across the VCFSE sector. At a time when community organisations were facing significant pressure, the fund provided much-needed resources to sustain and grow community-led activity.

To date:

- £206,920 has been distributed to 31 organisations and groups delivering community-led prevention across the borough.

Crucially, the fund is overseen by a community-led panel grounded in the wellbeing principles. This means decisions about prevention funding are informed directly by lived experience and sector insight.

The Communities Fund has:

- Improved the resilience of the VCFSE sector by stabilising organisations and enabling new and emerging social economy organisations to develop
- Attracted external investment into the strategic investment fund, generating financial value for Tameside
- Secured commitment from within the system to contribute further funds and continue investing in community-led prevention into 2026/27

Prevention is now being designed into investment decisions — and backed by sustained system commitment.

### **Governance and leadership are aligned**

The Accelerator supported the development of:

- A Live Well Community Leadership Group
- A Live Well System Leadership Group
- A co-produced Theory of Change for implementation
- A prototype neighbourhood approach in St Peter’s ward, Ashton

These structures bring community and system leadership into ongoing dialogue with collaboration starting to become deeply embedded.

### **Our HOW - key ingredients of our practice**

#### **Making community-led prevention visible through storytelling**

A core ingredient of the work was recognising that prevention was already taking place across Tameside.

Community organisations were strengthening mental wellbeing, reducing isolation, supporting young people and sustaining neighbourhood networks. Creating opportunities for this work to be seen and understood became central.

Storytelling provided a practical way to do this – particularly where formal impact data was limited or organisations had lacked capacity to evidence outcomes. Through shared workshops, reflective sessions and short films, lived experience and community-led practice were brought directly into dialogue with public health and system leaders.

This allowed community-led prevention to become more tangible, highlighting the vital role of community organisations as contributors to shaping Tameside’s wider approach to wellbeing.

### **Convening across boundaries by co-creating shared principles**

A second key ingredient was bringing together people who did not routinely sit in the same room – VCFSE leaders rooted in neighbourhood practice, public health colleagues, commissioners and wider partners. The Live Well Community Leadership Group became a space where these perspectives could meet on more equal footing.

Through engagement with more than 100 leaders and volunteers at a voluntary sector summit and wider conversations, the group co-designed seven community-led wellbeing principles. These emerged through discussion, challenge and reflection – grounded in lived experience and tested against what prevention looks like in practice.

The process built trust and collective ownership. The principles created a shared language, making visible the values underpinning community-led prevention in Tameside – dignity, connection, relational support and local leadership. This helped align system ambition with local realities and built an important bridge between public, health and VCFSE sectors.

The Live Well principles were embedded into the Community Navigation Commission, the Tameside Communities Fund and Live Well implementation planning. They now inform commissioning decisions and funding criteria, providing continuity as the Live Well moves into implementation.

### **Building influence across the system**

As shared principles and stories took shape, attention turned to ensuring they travelled beyond the core group.

The team invested in building relationships with senior leaders across the council and public health. The Live Well principles, alongside short films and case studies, became practical tools for bringing community insight into governance meetings and strategic forums. They shifted conversations from abstract strategy to grounded examples of what prevention looks like in neighbourhoods.

Building on this momentum, a new Live Well System Leadership Group was co-created, bringing together Action Together and senior council decision-makers. Meeting monthly, this group provides a structured bridge between community learning and system implementation.

## 5. What's starting to change for Greater Manchester communities

There is increasing evidence that investing in community power has a vital impact on people's health and wellbeing. National work, including that of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, has highlighted the relationship between investment in neighbourhood-level capacity – community spaces, trusted local organisations and lived experience-led decision-making – and stronger social cohesion and long-term wellbeing outcomes.

This connects directly to the Government's Pride in Place ambitions: pride emerges where communities have the power to shape the places they live. Enabling residents to influence decisions, steward local assets and build collective solutions strengthens belonging, trust and neighbourhood resilience over time.

The stories of impact and change in this report show how Greater Manchester is beginning to put these principles into practice. Working across sectors and with communities, partners have started to create enabling system conditions that centre community action, power and wealth – marking an important shift towards prevention across the region.

We have seen funding being spent differently, with priorities shaped by communities and clear consequences for what that money supports – often moving investment upstream towards preventative, relational activity. We have seen governance mechanisms redesigned to centre lived experience in decision-making, as well as community groups collaborating in new ways to provide more holistic, trusted everyday support.

What is much harder to measure and understand is how these shifts in funding, governance and collaboration translate into the outcomes we ultimately want to see: improved health, reduced loneliness, increased employment and reduced pressure on services. Many of the Accelerator sites have only recently distributed funding or brought projects to a close. As noted earlier, prevention takes time to show up in impact data, and pathways to change are rarely linear.

Through Ripple Effect Mapping and the photography project, we have therefore paid close attention to early indicators of health and wellbeing – often brought to life through unintended or secondary impacts of the work. These approaches have helped surface stories that might otherwise go unnoticed: stories of people growing their confidence, gaining new skills and creating employment pathways, building bridges across communities or finding new hope and a positive outlook on life.

Our analysis has been framed by the [Live Well Accelerator's UK evidence for community power](#), which the team created in 2025 and which draws on national research, led by organisations including Kings Fund, Local Trust, Public Health England, Power to Change and many others.

This has helped us draw a dotted line between community-led and system-enabled practice and four interconnected areas of impact:

- Civic participation
- Communities' health and wellbeing
- Skills, capabilities and employment
- Community cohesion

## Civic participation

The Live Well Accelerator work has created important ripples that point to an increase in communities' civic participation by growing people's capacity, agency and confidence for ongoing democratic involvement. Civic participation is foundational to Live Well. It is through strengthened participation that trust between communities, the VCFSE sector and public services can grow, enabling the kind of shared responsibility and collaboration that Live Well implementation depends upon.

A clear example is the trajectory of Rochdale's Anti-Poverty Foundation Group (APFG) members – leaders with lived experience of inequalities who are now continuing to shape borough strategies, influence how resources are framed and allocated, and step into regional and national policy conversations. The APFG has clearly grown into a platform for civic leadership.

Jo Barker-Marsh, for example, has contributed to national policy discussions alongside the New Economics Foundation and was invited to No.10 Downing Street to meet Prime Minister Keir Starmer in recognition of her work. Locally, she is in discussion with Rochdale Council about establishing a Youth Forum – extending democratic voice to young people and embedding participation more deeply in the borough's future.

Aly Darwin's involvement in the APFG has translated into leadership within Macmillan's work, connecting advice services and health and opening dialogue with senior leaders.

Community-led and system-enabled practice has contributed to growing community leadership with residents now present, and heard, in senior governance spaces. They are co-chairing system groups, contributing to Integrated Care Partnership discussions and influencing funding priorities - a material shift towards shared civic responsibility.

Across all the Accelerator Sites, creating opportunities for people to co-shape their neighbourhoods has been met with extraordinary demand. In Salford, 644 residents participated in allocating Live Well funding. In Oldham, more than 1,200 online votes were cast alongside in-person ballots to determine neighbourhood investment. In Bolton, 47 VCSE organisations and local residents engaged in shaping and deciding the Live Well Community Fund.

For many, this was their first experience of deciding how money should be spent in their neighbourhood. As one resident in Salford stated:

*“This is the first time I ever voted in my life.”*

In East District, Oldham, participants described increased confidence and a stronger sense of connection to others as a result of the process. One Resident Steering Group member reflected that she had previously volunteered locally but had never been involved in funding decisions; the experience helped her feel more connected and more able to contribute.

What mattered was not simply being asked for views, but seeing those views shape real decisions. Residents could trace a clear line from workshop conversations to funding criteria, and from voting events to projects delivered in familiar community spaces. As one Oldham participant put it:

*“We actually felt recognised and valued. And it was fun..”*

Across these examples, there is a consistent pattern. Civic participation grows when communities:

1. **Are invested in to lead** — building capability and confidence to embed lived experience within formal governance
2. **Get to shape decisions that matter** — co-designing priorities and criteria, not simply responding to pre-set proposals
3. **See visible consequences** — where decisions translate into funded activity and tangible change in their neighbourhoods

## Communities’ health and wellbeing

Improvements in communities’ health and wellbeing are perhaps the most complex and long-term impacts to track. Yet throughout the Accelerator sites there are powerful stories that demonstrate what becomes possible when systems shift to support the social connections and infrastructure that make a visible difference for people’s mental and physical wellbeing.

Getting active in local communities builds social networks and relationships that can often have transformational effects on people. Peer support, volunteering and participation in community-led groups in trusted local spaces can improve and sustain individual health and wellbeing outcomes in ways that statutory services alone often cannot.

In Salford, Sarah’s story illustrates this clearly.

After a period of class A drug use, Sarah began volunteering at Peel Park Pavilion, supported by CommUNITY Little Hulton. What started as informal help in the kitchen gradually became something more structured. Over time, she took on responsibility for running the kitchen — coordinating activity, welcoming residents and becoming a consistent presence in the space.

The Pavilion offered more than a volunteering opportunity. It provided routine, connection and trust. Sarah has spoken about the importance of being relied upon — of knowing others are expecting her and that her contribution matters. That sense of responsibility, alongside peer relationships and visible appreciation from the community, has been central to her wellbeing.

Today, Sarah is recognised as a key part of the Pavilion. Her presence helps shape the welcoming atmosphere residents describe as central to the space. Her journey demonstrates how community-led infrastructure can create environments where people rebuild confidence, take on leadership and contribute meaningfully to their neighbourhood.

Across other Accelerator sites, funding and governance decisions are beginning to create the conditions for similar stories to emerge.

In Tameside’s St Peter’s ward, investment has supported EJV Aspire CIC — a values-led, non-profit alternative provision where young people shape at least 50% of decisions. The programme focuses on confidence, resilience and bravery among young girls, strengthening pathways into education, employment and adulthood.

Similarly, funding has strengthened the Carmel Christian Centre’s community café as a safe and welcoming space for vulnerable residents, including people in recovery and those experiencing

long-term unemployment. Led by individuals with lived experience, the café provides connection, dignity and routes back into volunteering and work.

Investing in community-led initiatives, spaces, hubs and organisations is key to improving health and wellbeing locally. Stories like Sarah's tell us that it grows when people:

1. **Experience belonging and trust** — through consistent, welcoming spaces where relationships are built and sustained.
2. **Take on meaningful roles and responsibility** — shifting from recipients of support to contributors and leaders
3. **See their contribution recognised and valued** — reinforcing confidence, purpose and identity

## Skills, capabilities and employment

Increasing the knowledge, skills and economic agency of communities is central to the Live Well ambition. Ensuring that every resident has the resources and connections to Live Well depends on access to secure, meaningful work and opportunities for leadership and enterprise.

The Live Well Accelerator's focus on community power, action and wealth has created a multitude of ripple effects across skills development, confidence and employment pathways.

In Oldham, the co-designed participatory funding process built both practical skills and self-belief. Residents serving on assessment panels and steering groups gained experience in facilitation, reviewing applications, weighing priorities and making collective decisions. Microgrants enabled individuals and groups to test ideas with modest but meaningful resources.

One applicant described how securing a small grant reignited her daughter's sense of purpose at a time when she felt uncertain about her future. Together, they planned and delivered a local activity — turning an idea into action in their own neighbourhood. What began as a microgrant became an opportunity to build confidence, initiative and leadership across generations.

In Rochdale, co-leading the Anti-Poverty Foundation Group has translated into tangible leadership and economic progression. Lilly Bell established her own organisation with the support of fellow members and has since progressed into national leadership in penal reform for female prisoners. Nasrine Akhtar has embedded payment for lived experience into funding bids — valuing her time and expertise, shifting expectations about fair participation and strengthening her own economic sustainability. Daisy Silva has initiated savings groups and introduced a 'VIP' pay-it-forward card at her community café, creating dignified access to food while strengthening local networks of mutual support.

In Salford, residents' participation in the Accelerator work has translated into concrete employment pathways:

Marc, one of the community researchers, had been under-employed before joining the project. Initially recruited to support local engagement, he became a trusted presence in the research process — facilitating discussions, gathering insights and feeding findings back into the programme. Through this visible responsibility, he developed facilitation, communication and analytical skills. As a result of his involvement, he secured two part-time roles, including with a local partner organisation drawing on his research experience.

This trajectory was not accidental. It was the result of being trusted with responsibility and recognised as capable within his own neighbourhood.

Across the Accelerator sites, a clear pattern is emerging. Skills, capability and economic agency grow when:

- **Local talent is recognised and invested in** — building confidence by valuing lived experience and existing strengths.
- **People are trusted with responsibility and visible leadership roles** — stretching competence and creating pathways into employment and enterprise.
- **Resources are accessible and flexible** — enabling individuals and groups to test ideas and turn initiative into sustained action.

## Community Cohesion

Increased community cohesion is both a key ambition for Live Well and a condition for its long-term success. Stronger relationships across neighbours, communities and organisations reduce isolation, stigma and conflict, and create the social fabric on which health, democratic participation and prevention depend.

Across the Accelerator sites, the process of community-led design via events, marketplaces, community research activity and participatory budgeting have created structured opportunities for people to encounter one another differently — not as service users and providers, or competitors for scarce funding, but as collaborators in shaping their own neighbourhoods.

Physical community infrastructure has played a critical role in making this possible. Spaces such as Peel Park Pavilion in Salford provide consistent, welcoming environments where relationships can form and deepen over time. These spaces are relational anchors within neighbourhoods — places where trust is built through repeated interaction.

In Oldham's East District, the participatory funding process acted as an important connector within the local social infrastructure. Design Jams and voting events brought together residents, voluntary groups and council officers in shared decision-making spaces. Two organisations that met at a Power to the People marketplace discovered a shared interest in men's wellbeing and began exploring collaboration. A resident who attended a funding drop-in session at a library connected with Lees EcoHub and started volunteering the following day. The process strengthened ties across and between residents and community anchors.

In Salford, the adopted Community Researcher model played a role in strengthening cohesion locally. The Community Researchers were not drawn from a single network or demographic, but reflected the diversity of Little Hulton and surrounding neighbourhoods. Together they spoke more than five languages and brought connections across different faith and cultural communities — including the local Buddhist temple, Muslim communities and long-standing white British residents.

This breadth of lived experience mattered, and meant that engagement reached into communities that might not ordinarily participate in formal consultations. It also created bridges across communities that do not always encounter one another in shared civic spaces. Through working side by side, designing questions, hosting conversations and feeding insights back into decision-making — researchers built relationships across difference, modelling the kind of cross-community collaboration that strengthens neighbourhood cohesion.

Mary, who runs a local CIC, described previously operating in a funding environment shaped by short-term cycles and competition. Through involvement in the Salford Trusted Voices network and activity at the Pavilion, she has begun collaborating more closely with other CICs: contributing to joint funding applications, sharing intelligence and participating in cross-organisational initiatives, including work supporting young people not in education, employment or training.

As organisations share space, relationships and opportunity, the culture is beginning to shift from scarcity-driven competition towards mutual support and alignment.

These examples point to a wider pattern emerging across Greater Manchester. Community cohesion grows when:

- **Hyper-local spaces and events bring people together across demographic and organisational boundaries** – creating joyful, repeated opportunities to connect.
- **Participatory processes give people from a range of backgrounds a meaningful role in shaping their neighbourhoods** – building networks of trust and cooperation through shared responsibility.
- **Local organisations are supported to collaborate rather than compete** – strengthening the relational infrastructure that underpins long-term prevention.

## 6. Recommendations for leaders at the centre of Live Well implementation

These recommendations have been co-produced by Live Well teams across Accelerator Sites and the GM Live Well team.

### 1. Recognise relationships as the key to Live Well

Across every Live Well Accelerator site, the most powerful shifts have come from relationships. Relationships between neighbours, between grassroots organisations, between communities and public services. These are not soft outcomes, they are the civic infrastructure that makes community-led prevention possible.

If Live Well is to spread, it must be designed around what we now know works: trust, connections and shared decision-making. That means intentionally recognising, resourcing and protecting relational practice across neighbourhoods and institutions alike. Relationship-building cannot remain an invisible layer of the work, squeezed around targets and transactions - It is the work.

Reorienting the system around relationships is not a retreat from rigour, but a move towards greater effectiveness. By shifting away from rigid, bureaucratic processes that fragment people's lives and towards human, flexible and locally responsive ways of working, we are able to unlock better outcomes for communities, improve staff wellbeing and satisfaction, and contribute to more sustainable public services. Prevention grows where relationships are strong.

### 2. Embed new, bold and participatory budgets and funding mechanisms

Across the Accelerator sites, we have seen clearly what flexible, unrestricted funding can unlock for community-led health and wellbeing, particularly in places like Little Hulton. When funding is accessible, relational and rooted in trust, communities are able to support earlier, collaborate more deeply and grow their own preventative capacity.

We have also seen the wider democratic impact of place-based prevention budgets shaped directly by communities. Designing and stewarding participatory funding mechanisms has strengthened civic participation, built cohesion and shifted collaboration from competition to shared purpose.

Live Well now has a clear opportunity to scale these approaches. Participatory, community-led investment should not sit at the edges of the system, but instead be embedded as mainstream practice.

If community-led prevention is to become real across Greater Manchester, money must flow differently: longer-term, more flexible, and with communities actively deciding what it supports.

### **3. Move at a speed that allows for genuine community involvement**

Genuine collaboration across sectors and with communities takes time. Trust-building requires patience, commitment and space. Across the Accelerator sites, the strongest shifts happened where partners allowed relationships and shared understanding to develop, rather than forcing pace to meet institutional timelines.

If Live Well is to be truly transformational, we must allow the pace to be shaped by those participating, not solely by system pressures. This means holding our nerve when urgency mounts, resisting the drift back to closed decision-making, and protecting time for meaningful co-design.

### **4. Start with equity and intentionally grow alliances**

Live Well has shown that community-led prevention is strongest when it begins with those communities who have historically been least well served by public services, and who often have the greatest reason not to trust them, including communities experiencing structural discrimination such as racism.

Across the Accelerator, growing alliances beyond traditional institutional partnerships — alongside community organising campaigns, social justice groups, grassroots networks and rooted community leaders — has helped Live Well reach deeper into communities and better understand the structural inequalities shaping people's lives.

If Live Well is to feel meaningfully different for residents, it must not only transform public services but also confront the structural inequalities and systems of oppression shaping health, wellbeing and opportunity. This requires sustained investment in trust-building and relationships, working alongside trusted grassroots leaders and organisations and recognising the knowledge and legitimacy they hold. Equity must be embedded across the Live Well system — from governance and decision-making to funding, service design and impact measurement. Only by doing so can Live Well avoid reproducing the inequalities it seeks to change and instead build a preventative system rooted in trust, justice and community power.

### **5. Remunerate people and organisations for their time**

Participatory processes that fail to resource people for their time reinforce existing inequalities.

If community-led practice is central to Live Well, then participation budgets must become standard practice across Greater Manchester.

Payment and practical support widen who can participate in decision-making spaces and signal that lived experience is valued as expertise.

## **6. Work with communities to co-create new metrics for understanding success**

Measuring the impact of community-led prevention is not without its challenges. Some of the most important changes can take years to be reflected in traditional performance data.

Live Well will be strongest when communities are involved in defining what success looks like. This includes developing community-led outcome frameworks and identifying early indicators that reflect the step changes already underway.

It also requires innovative approaches such as community-led research, storytelling and participatory evaluation to sit alongside quantitative data, ensuring that both evidence and experience shape our growing understanding of Live Well impact.

## **7. Fund time for team reflection and learning**

Dedicated, resourced time for reflection and learning is essential if Live Well is to embed new ways of working.

Teams need space to strengthen skills in co-design, facilitation and participatory decision-making, and to develop confidence in new forms of leadership, governance and accountability.

Equally important is learning as a region. Cross-locality spaces — such as Communities of Practice — enable Greater Manchester to connect approaches, share insight and build a coherent but locally rooted model of Live Well implementation.

## **8. Embed a strengths-based and asset-based approach**

Live Well has demonstrated the power of shifting from deficit-based narratives to recognising the assets already present in communities, including networks, skills, spaces and leadership.

Embedding a strengths-based approach means consistently starting with what is strong and building outward. It means ensuring that every conversation with communities counts, and that engagement leads to increased opportunity, participation and influence.

## **9. Embed genuine grassroots community leadership**

There is mounting evidence that hyper-local organisations and grassroots leaders reach communities in ways the formal system cannot. Their credibility, relationships and daily presence position them at the heart of preventative practice.

Live Well implementation must intentionally shift influence and responsibility towards these organisations, recognise them as equal partners by placing them in the lead of delivery, funding

and decision-making.

## **10. Give staff permissions to work in participatory ways**

Live Well depends on staff feeling able and supported to work relationally and across organisational boundaries. Many of the shifts described in this report were made possible by individuals who chose to work differently, often beyond narrow role definitions.

Leaders must actively create a culture that recognises and rewards this practice. Job descriptions, performance frameworks and management behaviours should enable staff to build genuine relationships with communities and cross-sector partners and embed participatory ways of working, instead of constraining them.

Embedding Live Well means embedding new behaviours across the system: sharing power, building trust and working alongside communities as partners in prevention.

*“What we’ve seen through this Accelerator is what becomes possible when we start to make good on the promise of community power. Not just in words, but in budgets, in policy and in practice. And in the way we understand and share impact too – this report is its own story of impact and change! It shows that community power isn’t a nice-to-have, it’s essential, and it sits at the heart of Live Well. We’ve started something incredible together. And the power of movements is that every one of us has a role in where it goes next.” - Tabz O’Brien, GM Live Well Team*

*“The Live Well Accelerator has shown that we can work differently – centring communities, shifting power and trusting each other to do things in new ways. The stories of impact we’ve seen will shape the next phase of Live Well, helping us grow community-led, system-enabled ways of working across Greater Manchester. It’s not for us to manage community capacity. It’s for us to stand aside, support it and believe in it. That means choosing humanity over bureaucracy, and being accountable not just upwards through systems, but outwards to the communities we serve.” - Alison Mckenzie – Folan, CEO Wigan Council & GM Live Well CEO Portfolio Lead*

Our thanks go to our strategic partners at the National Lottery Community Fund for their trust, support and shared commitment throughout what has been a truly transformative programme for Greater Manchester. Above all, we thank the communities across Greater Manchester who have shaped this Accelerator and who continue to lead and grow the GM Live Well movement. This work exists because of you - its future will continue to be shaped by you.

#GMLiveWell