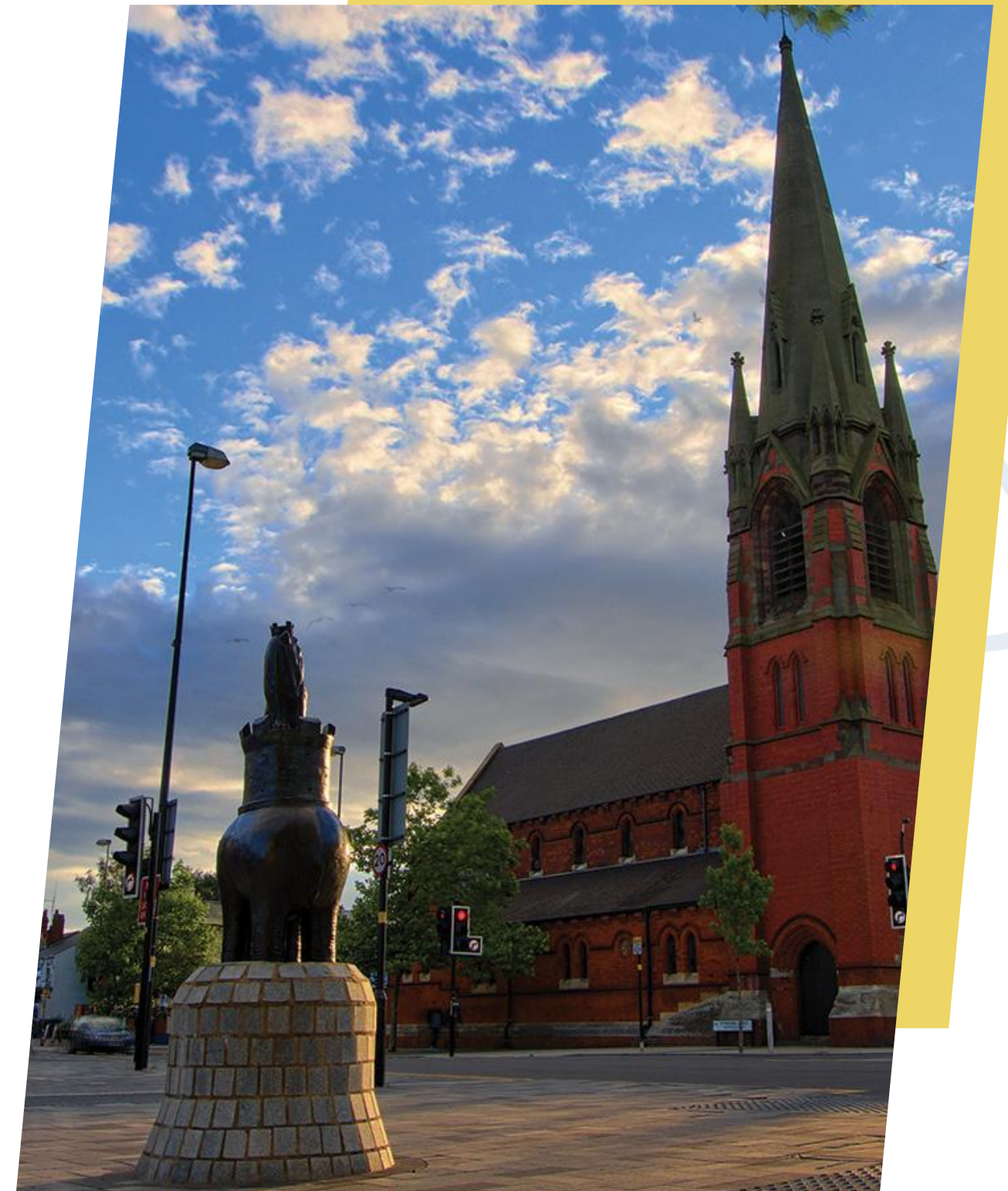


Sandwell Tensions Monitoring Framework (STMF)

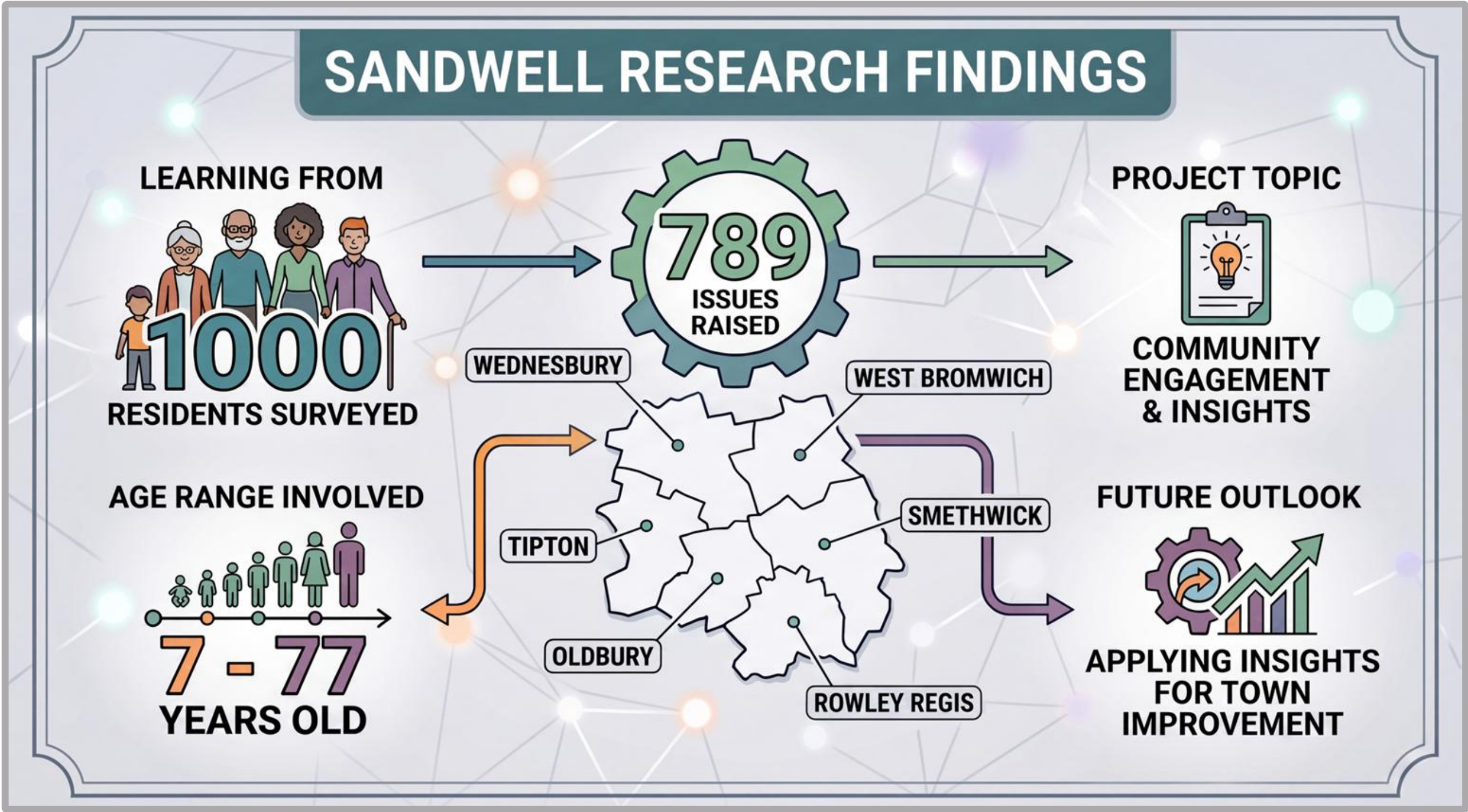
REPORT SNAPSHOT

A ground-level snapshot of community concerns, priorities and voices gathered through deep listening based on direct on-street engagement across all six Sandwell towns - informing local decision-making with resident insight.

Sandwell, February-March 2026



We've been learning from over 1000 Sandwell residents between 7 and 77 years old.



HOW WE WORKED: OUR APPROACH ON THE GROUND

DEPLOYMENT STRATEGY

The areas where our team were deployed between February-March 2026, were chosen based on a mix of sources; information shared by local authorities', intel gathered by our team, and the priority of having an even distribution of research conducted across all of Sandwell.



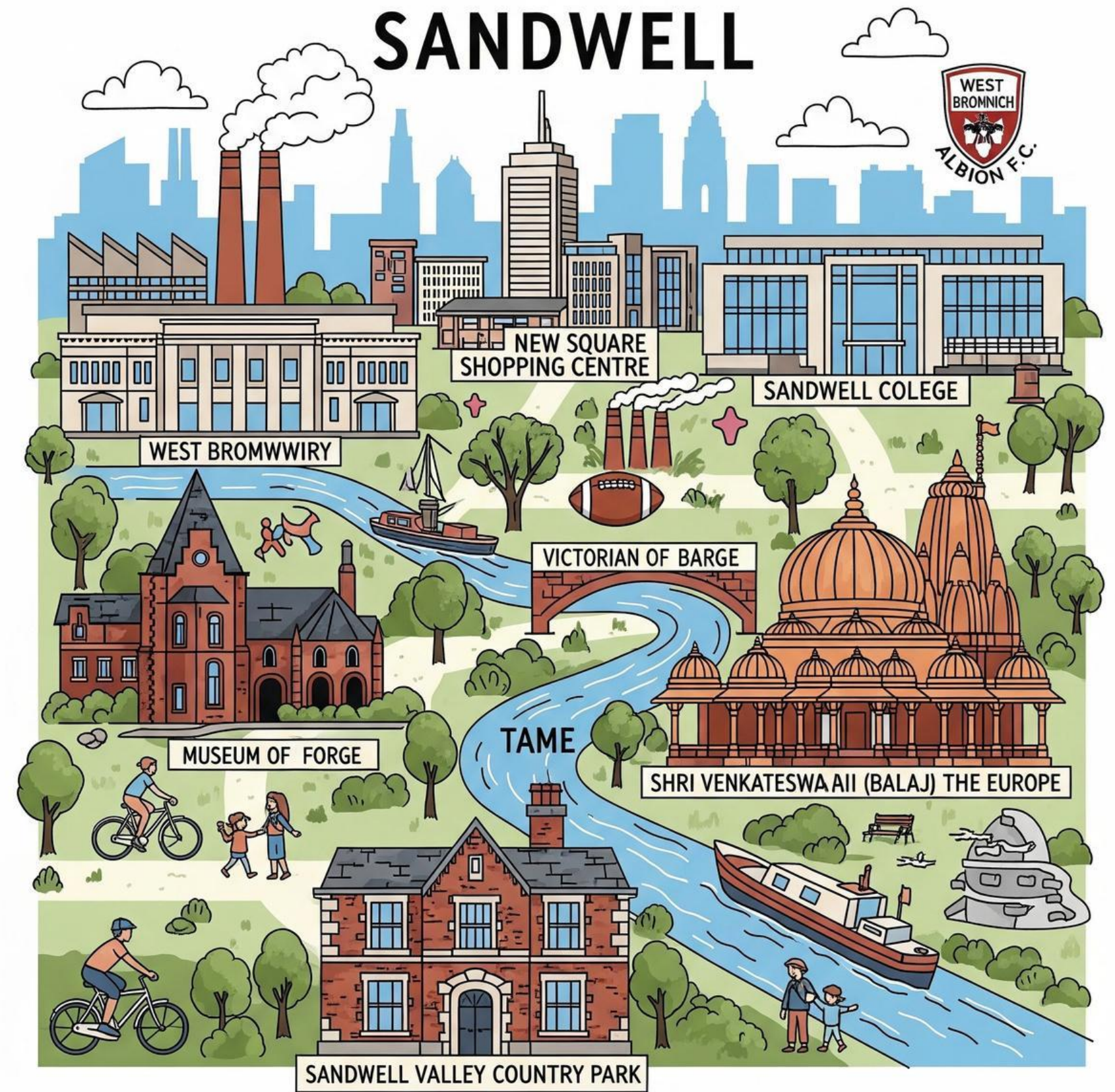
AGILE ENGAGEMENT (ACE) IN PRACTICE

Our approach is based on understanding community tensions through deep in-person agile community engagement (ACE). In this project, tension monitoring means listening to residents and gathering evidence, in real time, about how safe and connected people feel, what concerns are emerging, and what might be increasing pressures between groups, or towards institutions.





OPPORTUNITIES



PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS & HOW TRUST MATTERS

The concept of the social contract is highly relevant to Community Safety. Our data shows that people across Sandwell's towns display a high variance in how different people, groups, and areas experience Sandwell.

Male 46 White Brit, West Bromwich:

"There's a lot of loneliness, so a lot of people are keeping to themselves. However, there's a lot of people not talking but they are watching what is happening and internally frustrated... There's nothing that makes us want to even do more for Sandwell cos it doesn't really look after us... Facilities shut early and things cost too much so you just stay home and drink or smoke". He expressed that he can see why and how people are not following politics either and just not participating in much".

A Frayed Social Contract

When residents say trust in the Police is limited and trust in the Council is conditional, they are describing a frayed social contract.

Residents feel the state is failing to deliver on its end: providing safety, authentic inclusion, material investment, and future opportunities for youth, despite them holding up their end of the bargain.

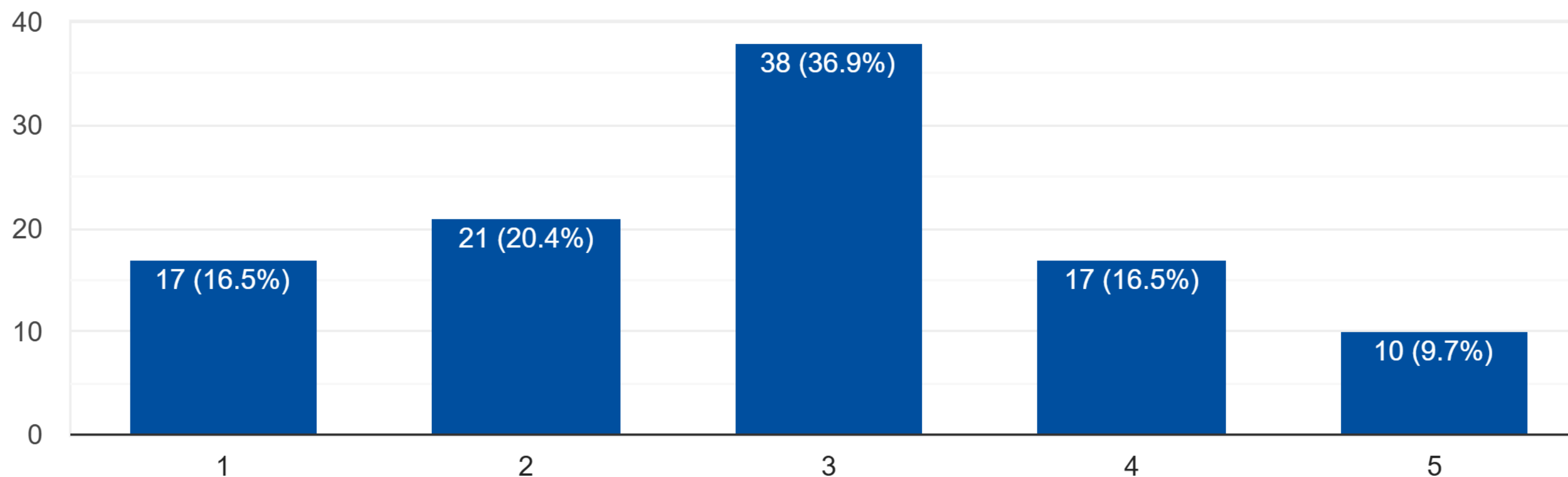
Reshaping the Local Contract

We must move toward a model where power is shared and trust is rebuilt.

- Shared power and decision-making
- Active collaboration between Council and community
- Creating an environment for safety and thriving local populations.

13. How much do you trust local authorities (such as the council, police, schools, community organisations, or churches) to deal with local problems? 1 to 5, with 1 being A lot and 5 being Not at all

103 responses



Bar chart from STMF survey exploring level of trust in authorities.

SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS & HOW TRUST MATTERS

The concept of the social contract is highly relevant to community cohesion and safety. Our data has found several threads fraying Sandwell's social contract.

In our hyper-digitalised global world, we are increasingly seeing how huge external pressures provoke, and often metamorphose, local issues in generating novel community cohesion tensions. As nascent multipolarity exacerbates global tensions. In the United Kingdom we are seeing huge socio-political challenges posed by Britain's structural struggles with economic stagnation, growing wealth inequality, and demographic change.

All this exacerbated by the transformation of a public sphere traditionally built around physical spaces, civil society, mass politics, and broadcast media; shifting towards the predominance of algorithm-driven digital platforms which can fracture, isolate, and inflame discourse, just as much as they can connect.

A Frayed Social Contract

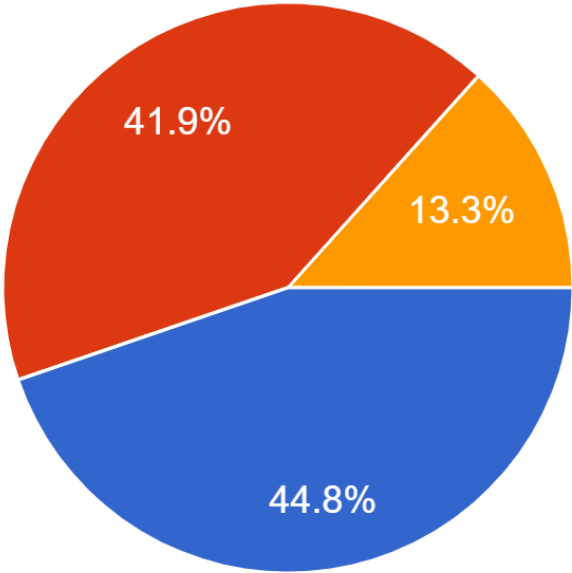
- Perceived withdrawal of State protections – high reporting of absence or ineffectiveness of the police
- Lack of material investment in public infrastructure – with a particular emphasis on the degradation of the high street and criminality within it.
- Lack of support for small business trying to survive
- Political disengagement and disillusionment from established mass politics
- Resource friction and perceived injustices
- Normalisation of violence and social disengagement

Fractures in communities

Alarmingly this variance displays fractures of opinion and aspects of ethnic and cultural segregation across Sandwell's towns. For example, towns like Smethwick and West Bromwich with established histories of migration and multicultural mixing held much stronger positive opinions on community cohesion, in relation to less ethnically diverse towns in Sandwell such as Rowley Regis and Tipton.

5. In the past 12 months, have you personally experienced or witnessed tension, arguments, or conflict between people in your area?

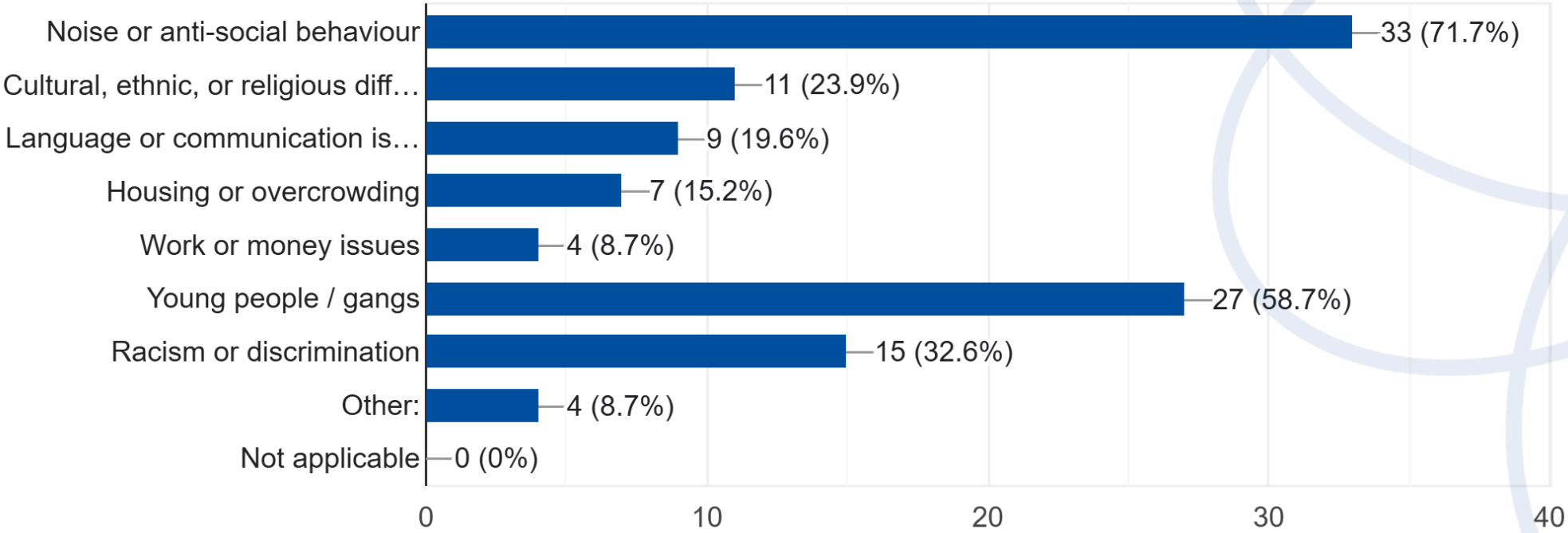
105 responses



- Yes
- No
- Not sure

5.1 If yes what was it mainly about? more answers if they want to

46 responses



Graphs from STMF survey exploring frequency and types of tensions in Sandwell.

Established Tensions

Established tensions in Sandwell are rooted in the visible decay of the public realm and a perceived withdrawal of authority. Across all six towns, antisocial behaviour (ASB), drug misuse, and retail crime are no longer seen as exceptional incidents but as part of the "everyday reality".

- **Substance Misuse and Public Disorder:** In West Bromwich and Smethwick, residents frequently report witnessing open drug use and dealing congregating around transit hubs and supermarkets, creating an atmosphere of intimidation. In Tipton and Wednesbury, this takes the form of street drinking and "rowdy youths" in balaclavas on electric scooters.
- **Environmental Neglect:** Litter and fly-tipping are consistently framed not just as hygiene issues, but as a "visible sign of apathy". Residents in Tipton and Smethwick argue that the "broken window" effect—where unmanaged dumping signals that "nobody's in charge"—directly feeds into a sense of decline and lack of pride.
- **Retail and Transit Violence:** The safety of frontline workers is a critical established tension. Security guards in Oldbury report a "diabolical" mentality amongst offenders, with one guard recounting a "knife held to his throat". National Express drivers in the region describe being "spat at, threatened, sworn at and physically assaulted".

Significant Quotes (Established Tensions):

"Italy had more decorum and togetherness." (Sudanese male, West Bromwich).

"The High street is dying... Rough, run down, poverty, nothing around here for people and for youth." (white-English male, mid 30s, Tipton).

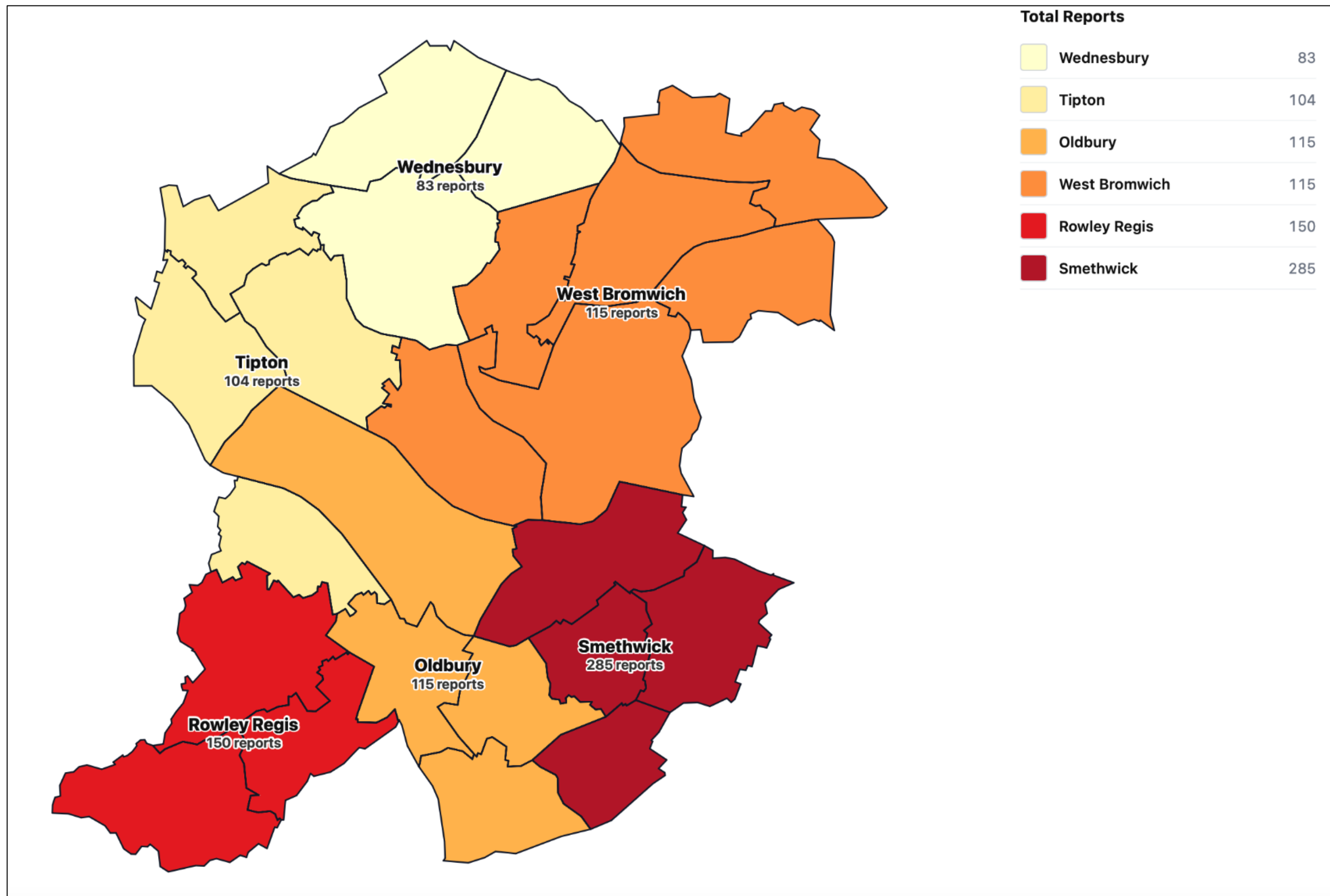
"You feel a bit threatened when you see gangs... bikes and electric scooters going really fast." (white-English female, early 60s, Tipton).

Emerging Tensions

Emerging Tensions: New Frontiers of Conflict

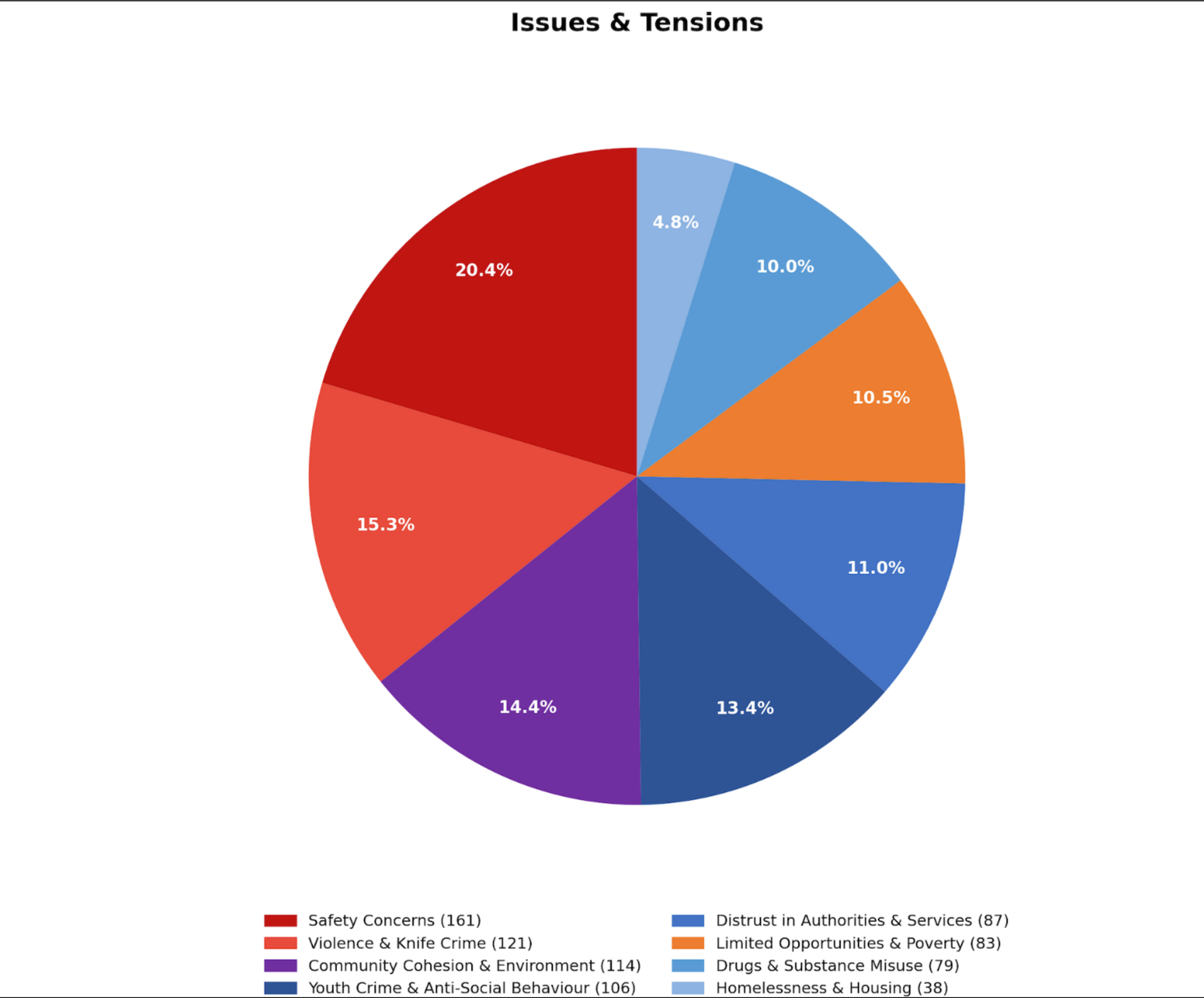
Comparative analysis between February and March data reveals several "emerging" tensions that are escalating in intensity:

- **The "Red vs Blue" Youth Wars:** A highly specific and dangerous tension has emerged among young people, involving violent rivalries between groups often linked to secondary schools. These conflicts are frequently fuelled by social media, leading in worst instances to retaliatory stabbings. One young respondent noted that these conflicts are "bigger than people realise" and are often invisible to parents and teachers.
- **Grooming gang rumours:** There is a rise in reports regarding "grooming gangs," particularly targeting Sikh girls in Smethwick according to an older Sikh Punjabi respondent. Also report of grooming of young white and black English girls in Oldbury made by mid-50s Black-Caribbean woman and vulnerable children in care homes. Residents expressed frustration that these issues are often "hidden under the blanket" and not openly addressed by authorities.
- **Digital Bullying and Social media division:** The role of technology in local tension is increasing in terms of bullying amongst young people, but also in the spread of rumours and divisive narratives through social media channels
- **HMO Proliferation and "Suspicious" Housing:** The rapid increase in HMOs is blamed for attracting "addicts" and "suspicious individuals" to residential streets, leading to increased noise, litter, and a perceived loss of "neighbourhood decorum".
- **Growing Generational Divide:** there are huge reports by under-25s feeling that there is a lack of economic and social opportunities for them in the area. While huge number of over-25s focus, at least in some part of their tensions reports on youth-related ASB, violence, and loitering.



Choropleth map showing number of tensions reported through ACE interviews across Sandwell's 6 towns.

**Charting the
distribution of
tensions from ACE
street-interviews.**



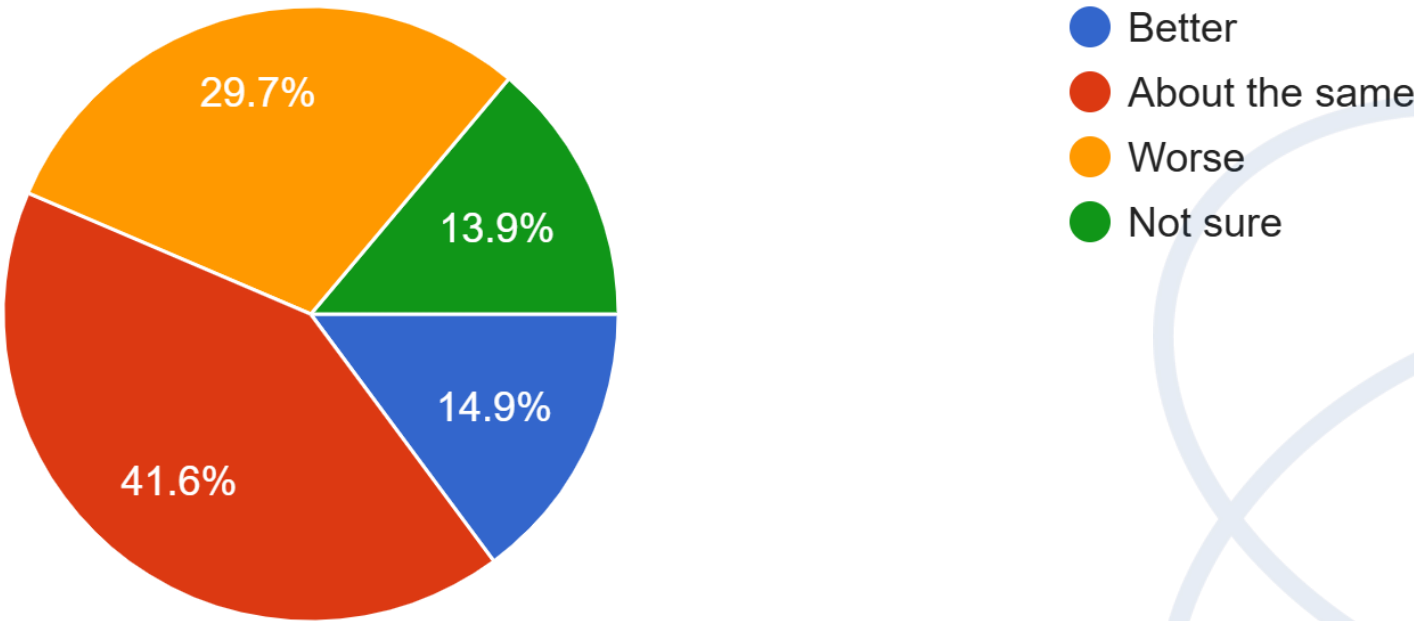
What unifies opinion across the six towns in both survey responses and ACE street-interviews is a sense of indifference which is at times connected to nostalgia about the past in terms of social connections, material investment, and public safety.

71.3 % survey respondents holding negative or indifferent opinions on the condition of their areas is a cause for concern. The survey and street interview data shows a thematic connections across perceptions of indifference related to several issues; community safety, access to services, relationship with authorities, state of public infrastructure.

Street interviews show a pervasive and multifaceted sense of declinism that cuts across all core demographic populations living in Sandwell. Residents frequently describe a transition from a historically "safe" or "vibrant" community to one plagued by:

- Generational disconnect
- Economic and visual decay
- Normalisation of violence
- HMO proliferation
- Youth ASB and knife culture
- Political disillusionment

3. Compared with 5 years ago, do you think your area is:
101 responses

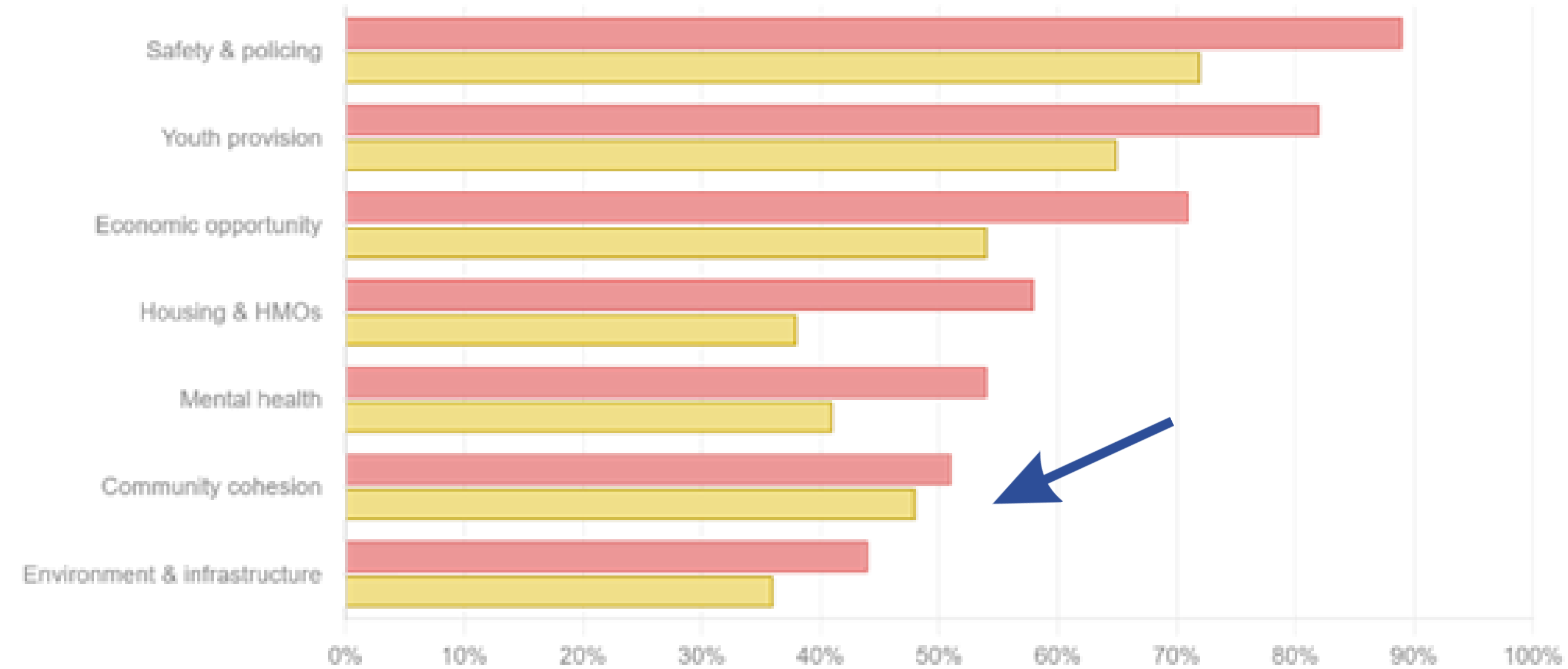


Pie chart from STMF Survey showing respondent's perceptions on the condition of their local area.

In Oldbury, long-term residents feel that the (British-Pakistani 43) "community has changed... people are less caring" and that there are fewer opportunities for different groups to come together. In Rowley Regis, one resident (white-English male 50s) stated simply that "community cohesion has gone"

THEME FREQUENCY — ALL TOWNS COMBINED

■ Tension / concern ■ Solution / positive



Cohesion as Strength and Defence

Cohesion as a Strength and Defence

The sources indicate that when cohesion *does* exist, it can also act as a protective factor, for example, residents who stay within family or ethnic group networks often report feeling safer. However, this "strength" is often defensive.

Similarly young Smethwick residents spoke of following an "unwritten code" for protection against violent crime, involving; "DIY safety", "looking away" at normalized issues, "informing police stigma", and a head down approach "keep yourself to yourself and trouble wont find you" (Male, 27, West Bromwich).

Youth and Social Integration

- Diverse Friendships: Perception of Improvement based on more ethnic and cultural mixing
- Many residents, particularly newer arrivals in Smethwick report positive feelings about Sandwell's diversity, with international students in Smethwick described the area as "welcoming" and stated they "feel at home" (23-year student from Punjab).

Community Cohesion in Sandwell a Disjointed Picture

Smethwick: This town is consistently highlighted as having the strongest community sentiment, largely anchored by religious and cultural civil society institutions. Residents describe the area as "welcoming" and feel "at home" due to a sense of "respect and unity" fostered by religious and cultural hubs. Some international students even feel safer in Smethwick specifically because of the high density of people from their own country.

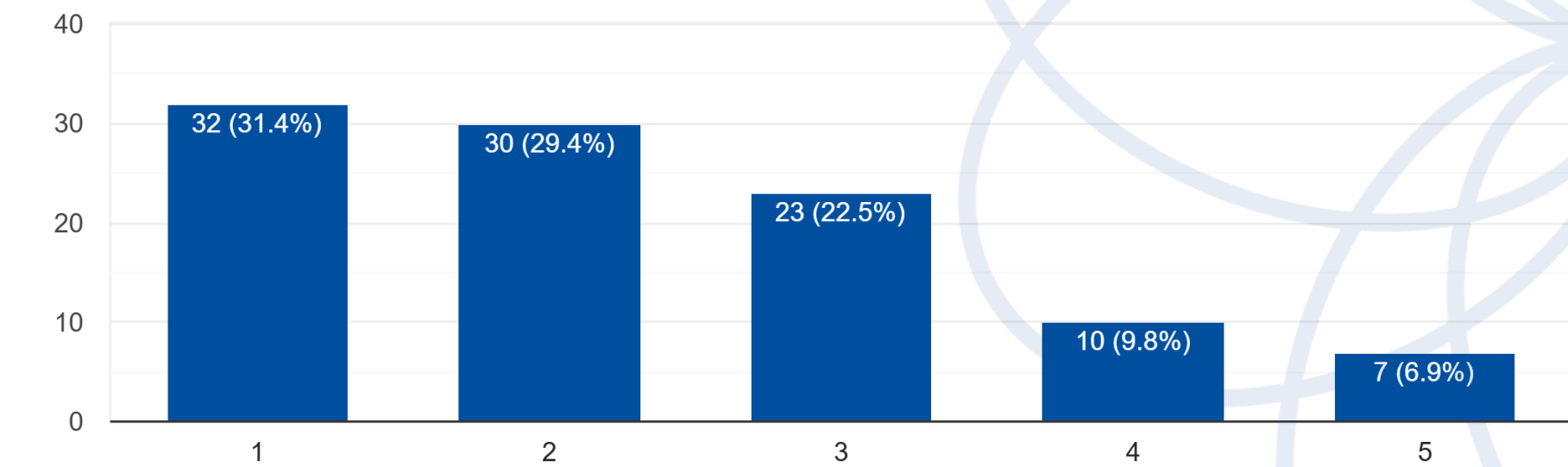
Oldbury: Despite issues with retail crime, Oldbury is characterised by long-term residents as a "nice little community" where "everyone knows each other" (older white-English). Some residents here describe themselves as "lucky" compared to other parts of the borough in terms of feelings around community safety. Positives are also found in recreational spaces like gyms, which are described as places where people of different backgrounds can mix with positivity.

Rowley Regis: This town shows the most significant evidence of a frayed social fabric. One long-term resident explicitly stated that "community cohesion has gone" and that families no longer know one another as they once did. The area is described as predominantly White British, and ethnic minority residents report feeling "highly segregated and racist" or being told "this country belongs to us". Additionally, the "Red vs Blue" school wars indicate deep divisions among the youth and potential flares of violence.

Tipton: Respondents in Tipton frequently lament that the "community spirit is gone". There is a high level of political disengagement, with many residents feeling that neither the local council nor the national government "gives a damn" (older white-English). While the Tipton Sports Academy serves as a rare social hub, much of the data points to isolation and a lack of social opportunity.

Wednesbury: Cohesion here is hampered by environmental neglect and difficulties around integration. Residents report that the town centre feels "dead" and that there are no places for balanced conversations to resolve community frustrations. Language barriers are specifically cited as a major obstacle to inclusive communication and engagement with authorities.

11. Do you feel you belong in your local community? Please rank from 1-5 how you feel on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being Yes, very much and 5 being Not at all
102 responses

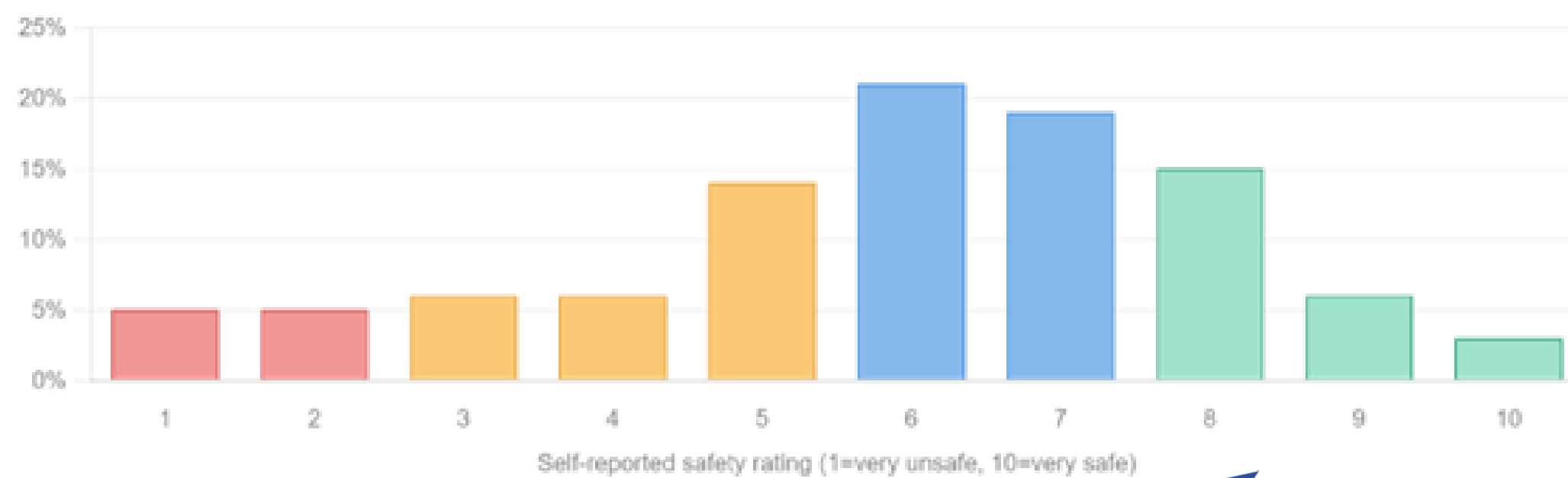


ATTITUDINAL ANALYSIS — TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

■ Low/no trust ■ Conditional trust ■ Trust present



SAFETY RATING DISTRIBUTION (WHERE NUMERIC SCORES GIVEN, N=85)



WORD & PHRASE FREQUENCY — BY TOPIC CLUSTER

SAFETY NOUNS

police (147×)
knife/knives (61×)
drugs/drug use (89×)
CCTV (34×)
gangs (42×)
stabbing (28×)
lighting (41×)

SAFETY VERBS

feel (unsafe) (93×)
patrol/patrolling (38×)
protect (29×)
witness/witnessed (44×)
report (22×)
intimidate (19×)
improve (67×)

YOUTH NOUNS

young people (73×)
youth club/centre (31×)
school (58×)
opportunities (62×)
activities (44×)
knife crime (31×)
mental health (47×)

ECONOMY ADJECTIVES

struggling (38×)
closed/closing (29×)
limited (34×)
affordable (17×)
vibrant (12×)
declining (21×)
dead (14×)

HOUSING NOUNS

HMO (28×)
housing (41×)
accommodation (19×)
damp/mould (8×)
landlord (11×)
council house (14×)
homeless (22×)

COMMUNITY ADJECTIVES

safe (88×)
unsafe/not safe (79×)
diverse/diversity (36×)
welcoming (21×)
friendly (24×)
ignored (16×)
frustrated (31×)



THE STRATEGIC MANDATE: A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

The Hidden Asset

Community safety is the Council's **unrecognised superpower.**

It is not merely a cost centre or a collection of risk metrics; it is the fundamental prerequisite for all civic thriving.

Influence Point: Safety drives economic growth, social cohesion, and resilience.

The Golden Key

Statutory Trust Fragile



CSPs occupy the unique bridge because the community already trusts grassroots networks.



CSP Opportunity Authentic Cohesion

TURNING INSIGHT INTO RADICAL CO-PRODUCTION

The Data of Hope

Language used by our communities regarding youth is not cynical; it is packed with:

Future Optimism: Nouns & adjectives of raw potential.

The Core Ask: “Take us on the journey with you.”

The Action Plan

Agency over "Youth-washing": Move beyond consultation to giving young people genuine agency.

Hyper-local Spaces: Sub-culture-specific environments for authentic connection.



**The blueprint and community backing already exist.
Who will you look at building this with?**

SHAPING REGIONAL INFLUENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY SAFETY

Behavioural Change

Leveraging attitudinal insights for service improvement and more engaging communications.

Encouraging reporting through the specific lenses of youth and community needs.

Culture Adjustment

Utilising co-production with communities to shift certain cultural norms.

Fostering integration and shared experiences to build long-term regional stability.

Attitudinal Insights

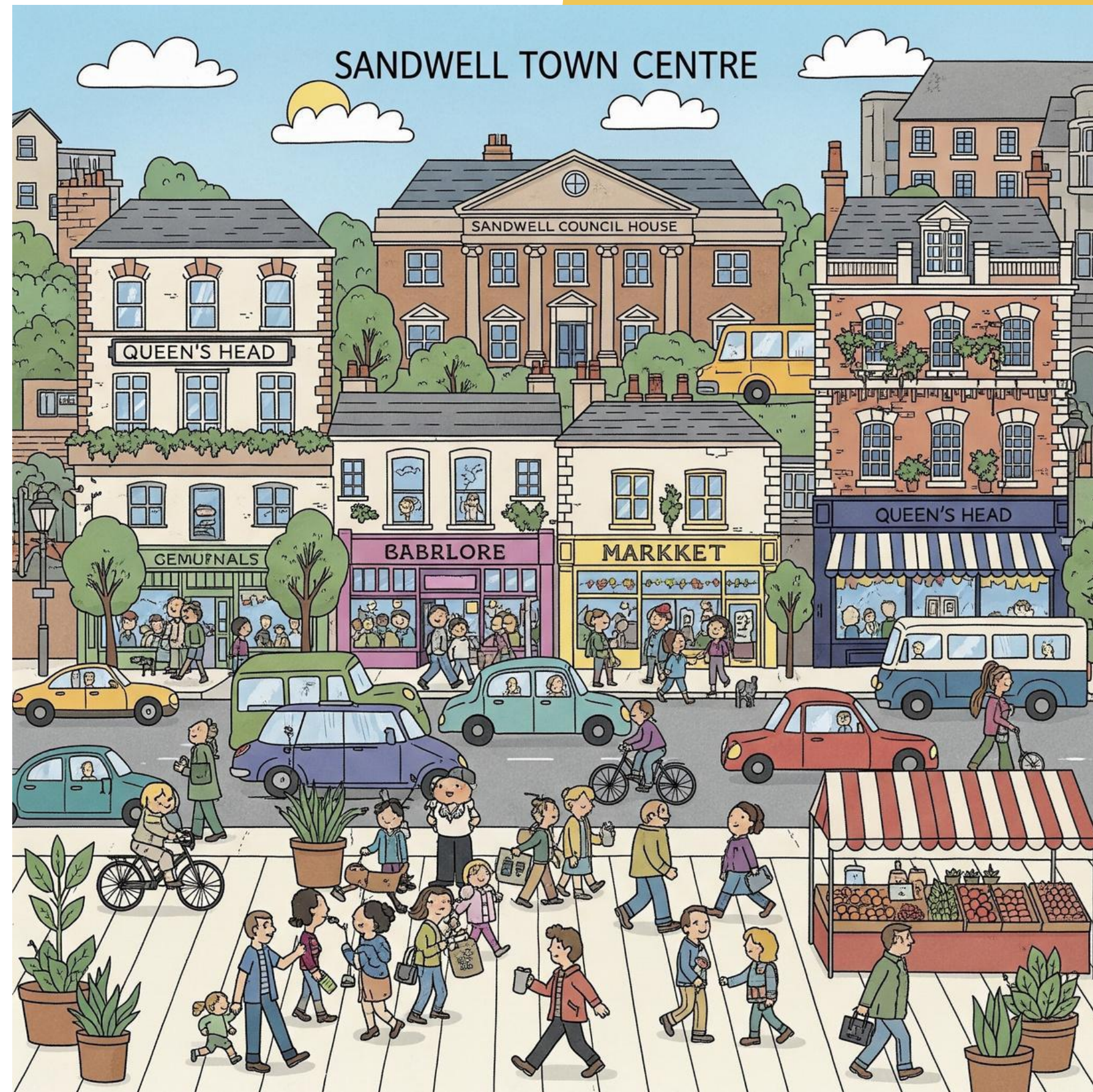
Shaping local regions by understanding the 'why' behind behaviors.

Moving beyond surface observations to influence deep-seated community perspectives.



Empowering local authorities to move from monitoring to active regional influence.

HIDDEN TENSIONS #1



HIGH STREET DISPLACEMENT & ORGANISED CRIME



Rapid Commercial Shift

The proliferation of 24/7 vaping shops is actively pushing out long-established local businesses, fundamentally altering the high street character & relationships. Some of the new starters miss protective factors or local cohesion.

Organised Crime Links

Significant community/business concern regarding the link between vape shops/barbers/desert spots and organised crime syndicates. Moral, social & financial consequences.

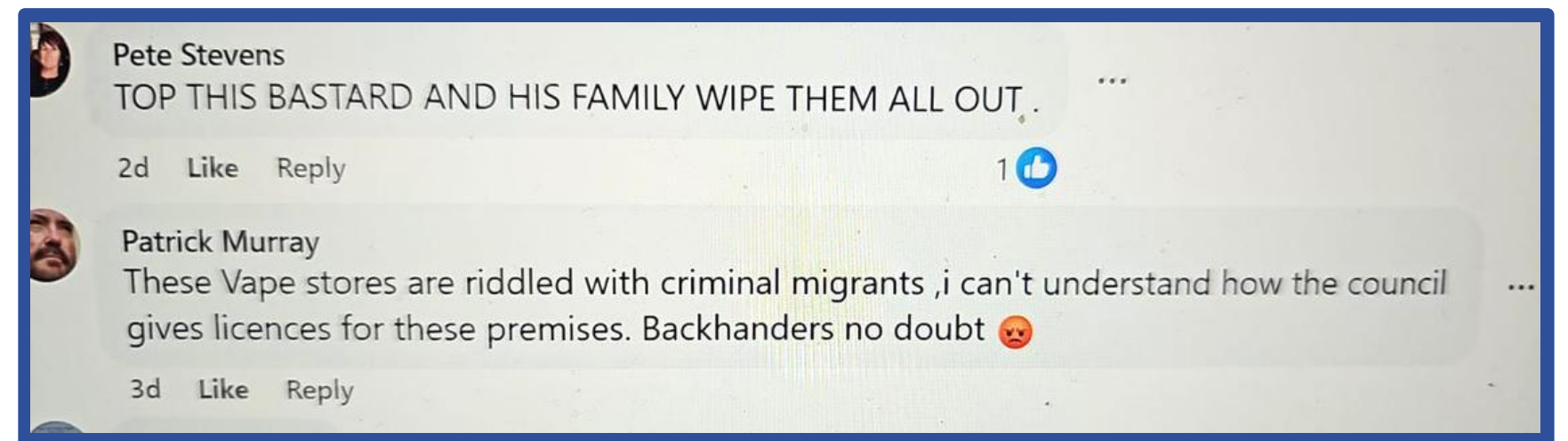
Fiscal Push/Flight

All leading to unfair practices and long term inequalities – opening longer, spilling onto pavements, voiding employment laws. Businesses closing or wanting to leave.

STRUGGLING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Economic Survival at Risk

- ➔ Local businesses are struggling to survive amidst rapid commercial shifts.
- ➔ Increasing pressure from 24/7 vape shops and high street displacement.
- ➔ Many long-standing establishments are now preparing to leave the area altogether.
- ➔ Loss of community character as traditional shops disappear.



UNLOCKING OUR TACTICAL ADVANTAGES

What the data is telling us about Sandwell...

THE GRASSROOTS TRUST DIVIDEND

Institutional vs. Social Trust

Institutional trust remains conditional, yet community response to **local lifestyle and cohesion events**.

Tactical advantage: Anchor safety initiatives within high street revival to naturally crowd out anti-social behaviour through active, healthy footfall.

THE OPTIMISM HOOK

Youth Dialogue Dynamics

Youth conversation in Sandwell is not cynical; it is defined by **future optimism, hope and potential**.

Tactical advantage: Use high street youth events as a strategic hook to re-shape how young people interact with Council colleagues - moving from enforcement to co-design.

COMMUNITY SAFETY INNOVATION?

From top-down campaigns to citizen-driven insights

REDESIGNING ENGAGEMENT

'Celebrating Sandwell' vs. Clinical Safe Spaces

Current, clinical 'Safe Spaces' risk under-usage, low engagement, or stigma. Insight reveals an appetite for lifestyle led connection.

The Tactic: Embed third-party reporting centres inside fun, positive, lifestyle-focused events to help communities safely define what they are seeing.

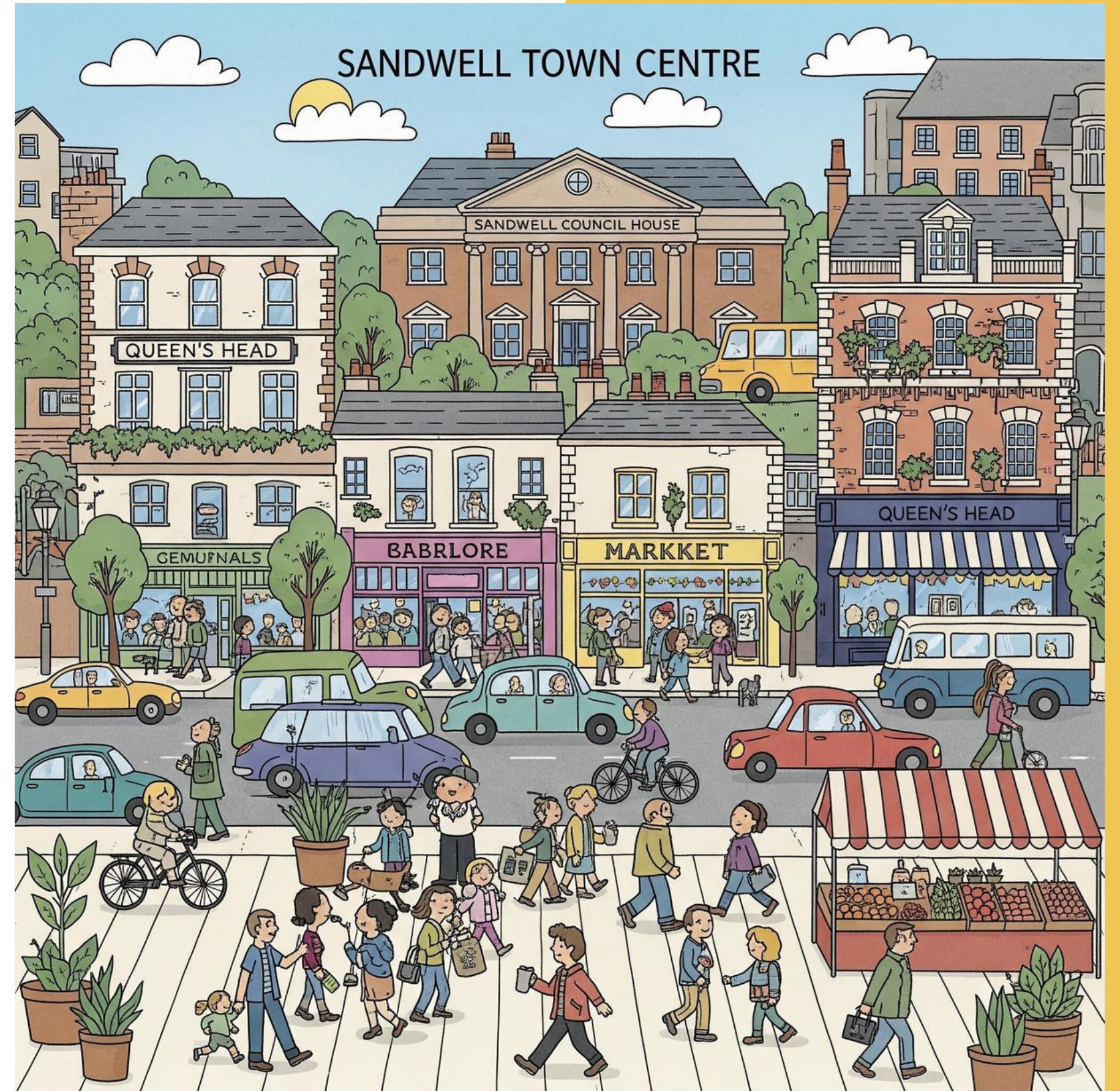
THE GAP ANALYSIS

The Evolution of Safer 6

The reality: It remains Council driven rather than a citizen-driven movement.

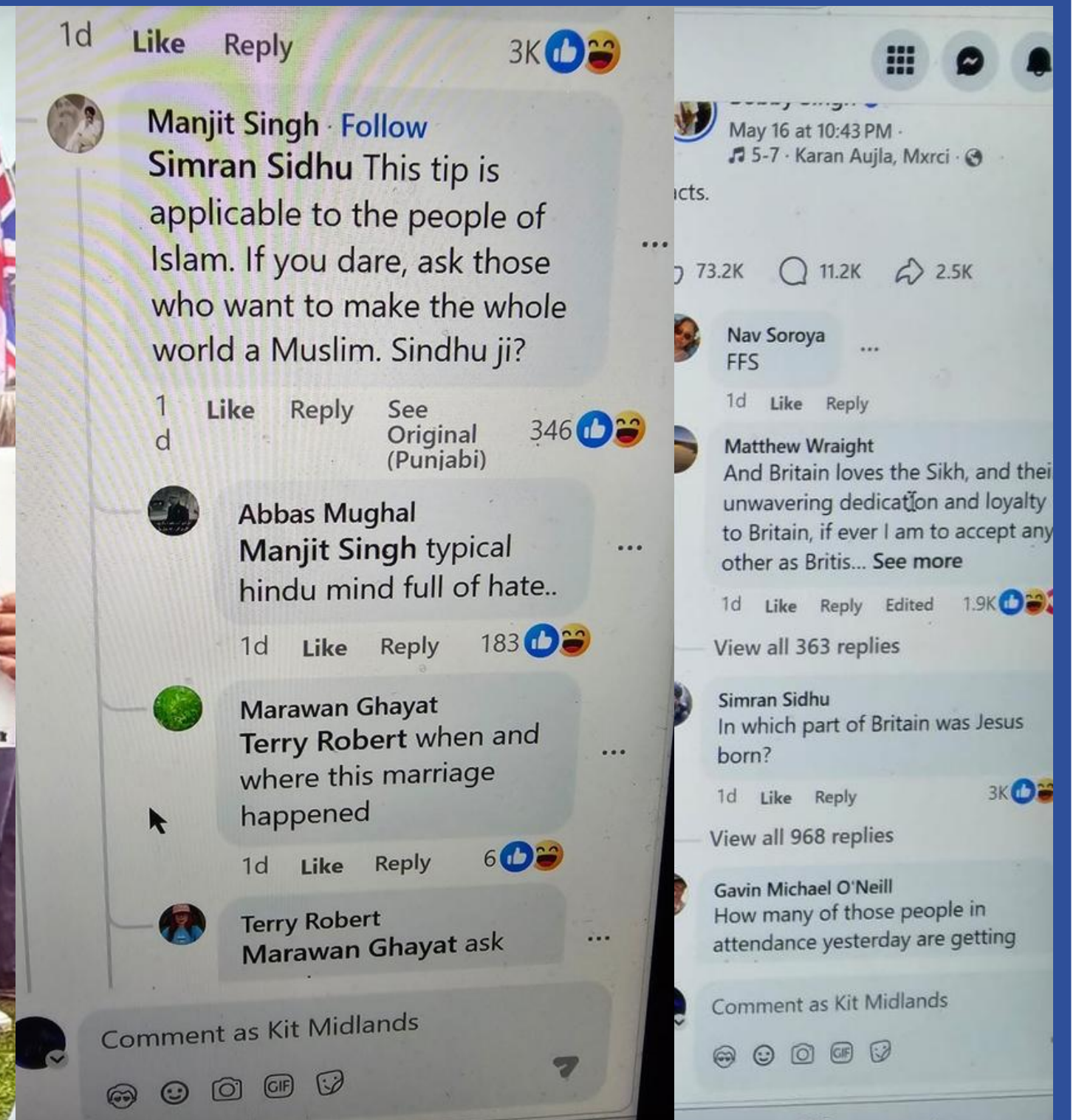
The Missing Link: Misses spontaneous, hyper-local, and sub-culture-specific community intelligence.

HIDDEN TENSIONS #2



INDICATORS OF FAITH RELATED TENSIONS

- CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, SIKHISM



Twana Talib Setallani

Hahahahah 😂 SINGH

No matter how hard you try to impress them, you'll never be one of them in their eyes.

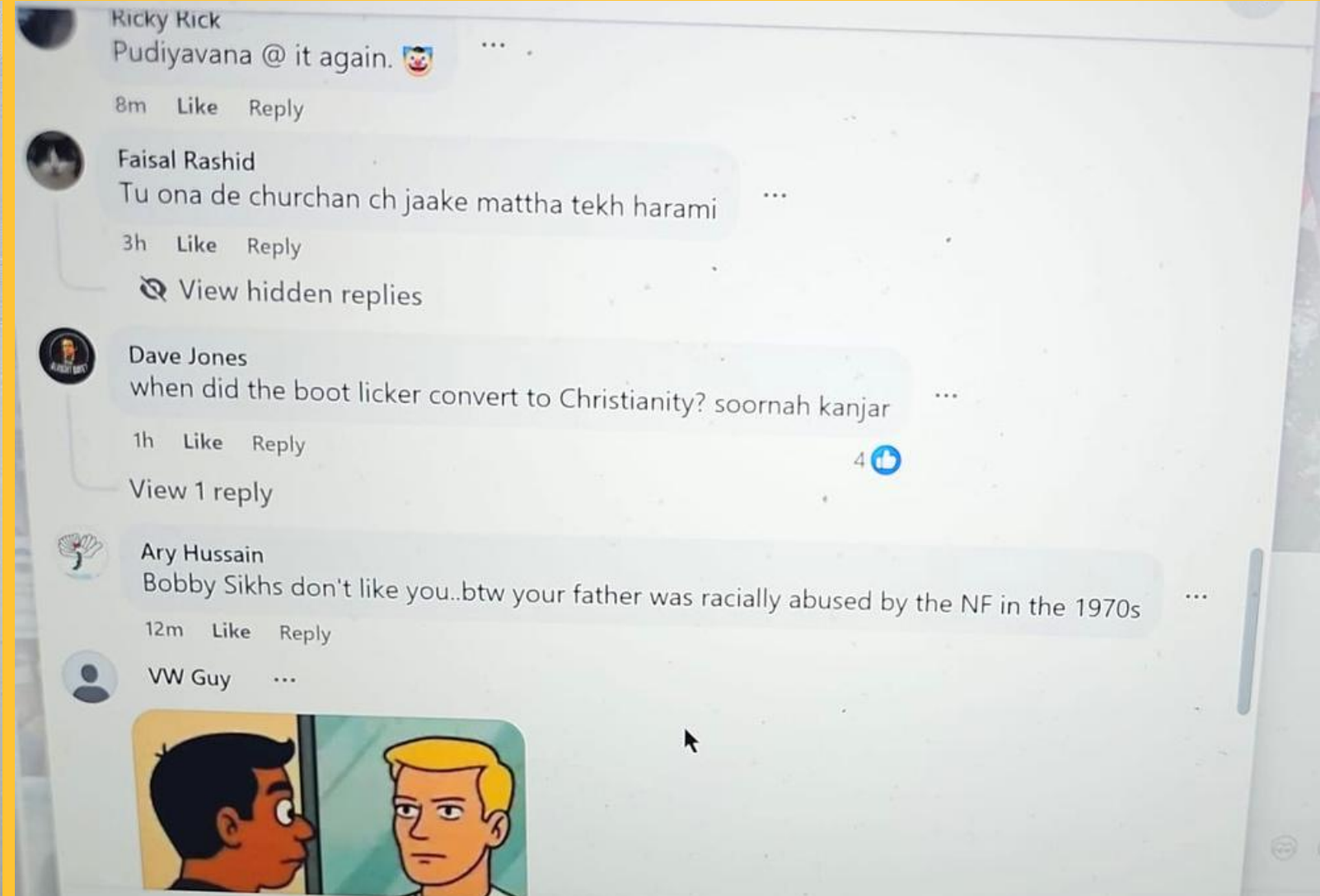
You can stand beside racists, smile in their pictures, and betray your own dignity for their approval, but to people like that, you'll always be "the other." and you'll still be 🧑🏿

SINGH 🏳️🌈 in their eyes. 👽

They will use you as a token today and disrespect you tomorrow. 😊

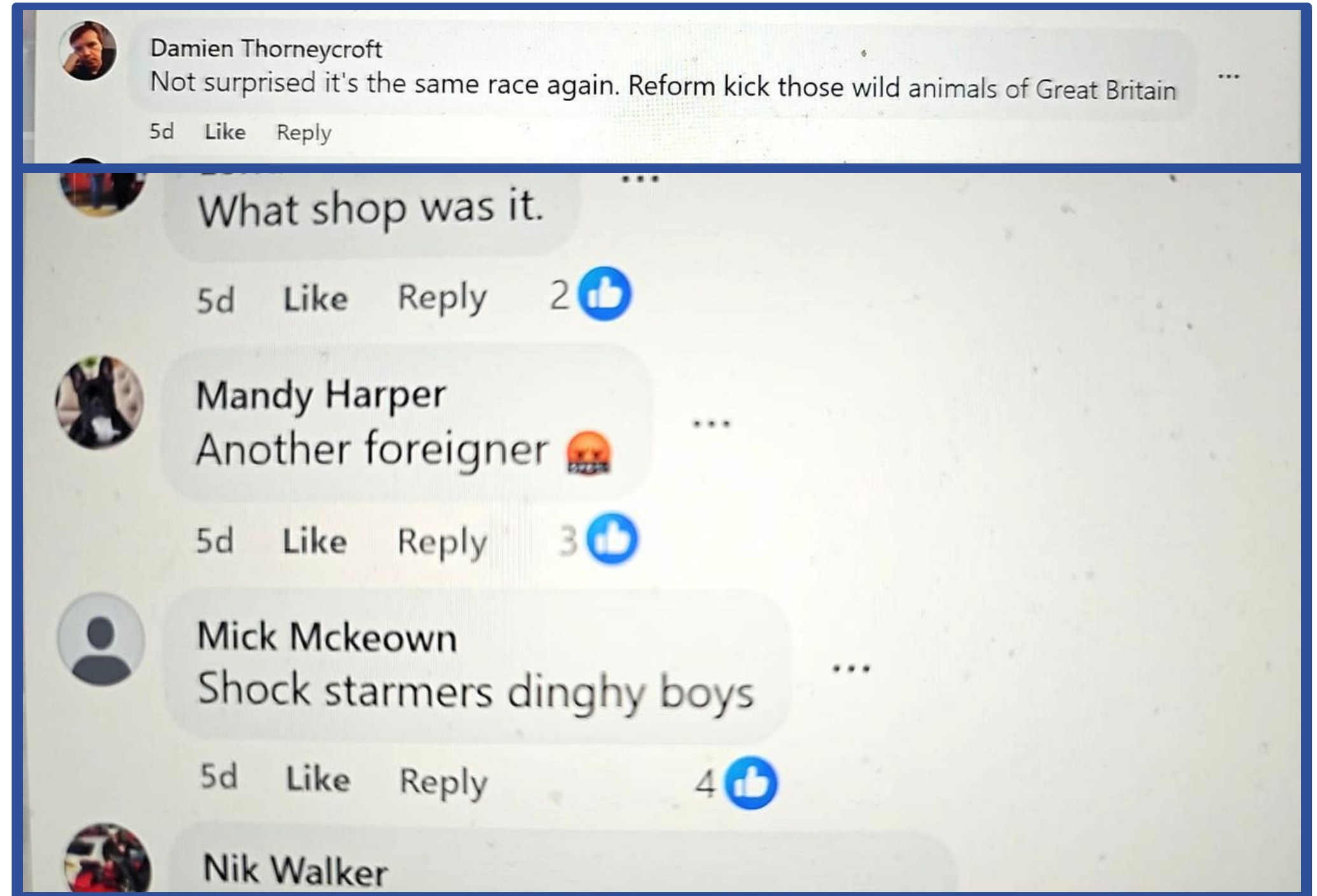
1d Like Reply

163 👍 🗿 😂





RESPONSES TO SANDWELL PAGE SHOWING PERPETRATOR FROM POLICE POST

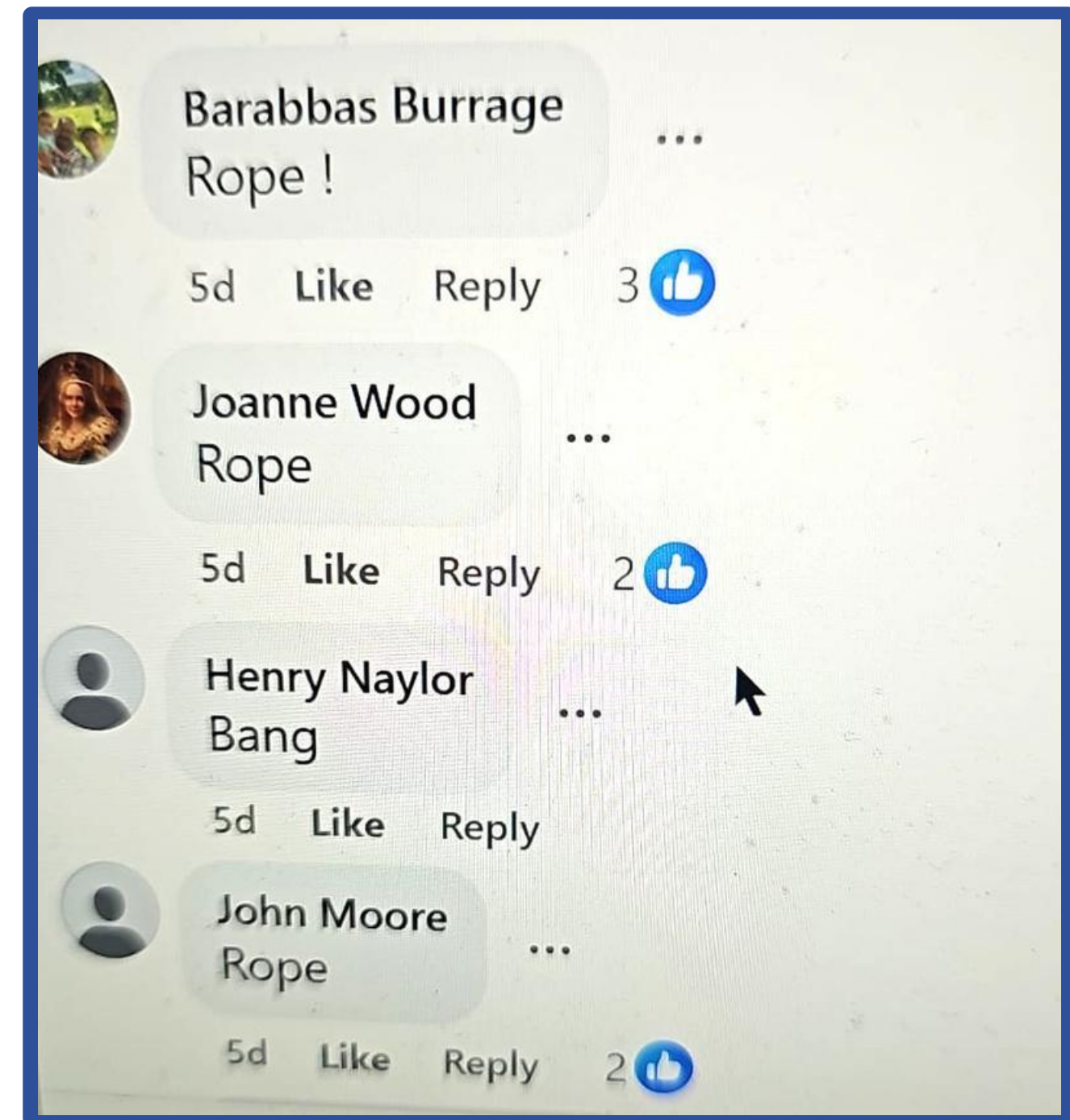


TREND OF LANGUAGE ADJUSTMENTS TO AVOID ALGORITHM BLOCKING OR SANCTIONING PROFILES



Is there appetite for a glossary?

Should professionals be aware of the evolving vocab & emojis?



NAVIGATING INNOVATION

The Third Sector as "Strategic Cover"

Internal systems can often create friction for fast-moving or experimental projects. Use the Third Sector to bypass bureaucratic inertia.



De-risk Innovation:

Route experimental initiatives through trusted partners.

Systemic Tension:

Bypass internal friction points while maintaining statutory oversight.

Agile Delivery:

Accelerate timelines by leveraging external flexibility.



BUILDING SYSTEMATIC COALITIONS

SEND Parent Networks



AMPLIFIERS



The Exceptionally well-connected and motivated to broadcast safety messaging through peer-to-peer reassurance.

Local Businesses



EYES & EARS



High street operators providing immediate spatial intelligence on "Safe Spaces" and local trends.

Youth & Creatives



AUTHENTIC VOICE



Moving beyond tokenism; giving young people agency to design narratives that resonate with peers.



Moving from transactional consultation to continuous community co-production.

REALISING THE POLICY BLUEPRINT

The Unrealised Link

Sandwell's opportunity to connect NHS Neighbourhood Health with Community Safety and Public Health.

Despite this, strategic alignment remains unrealised in several regions, leaving interventions siloed and reactive.

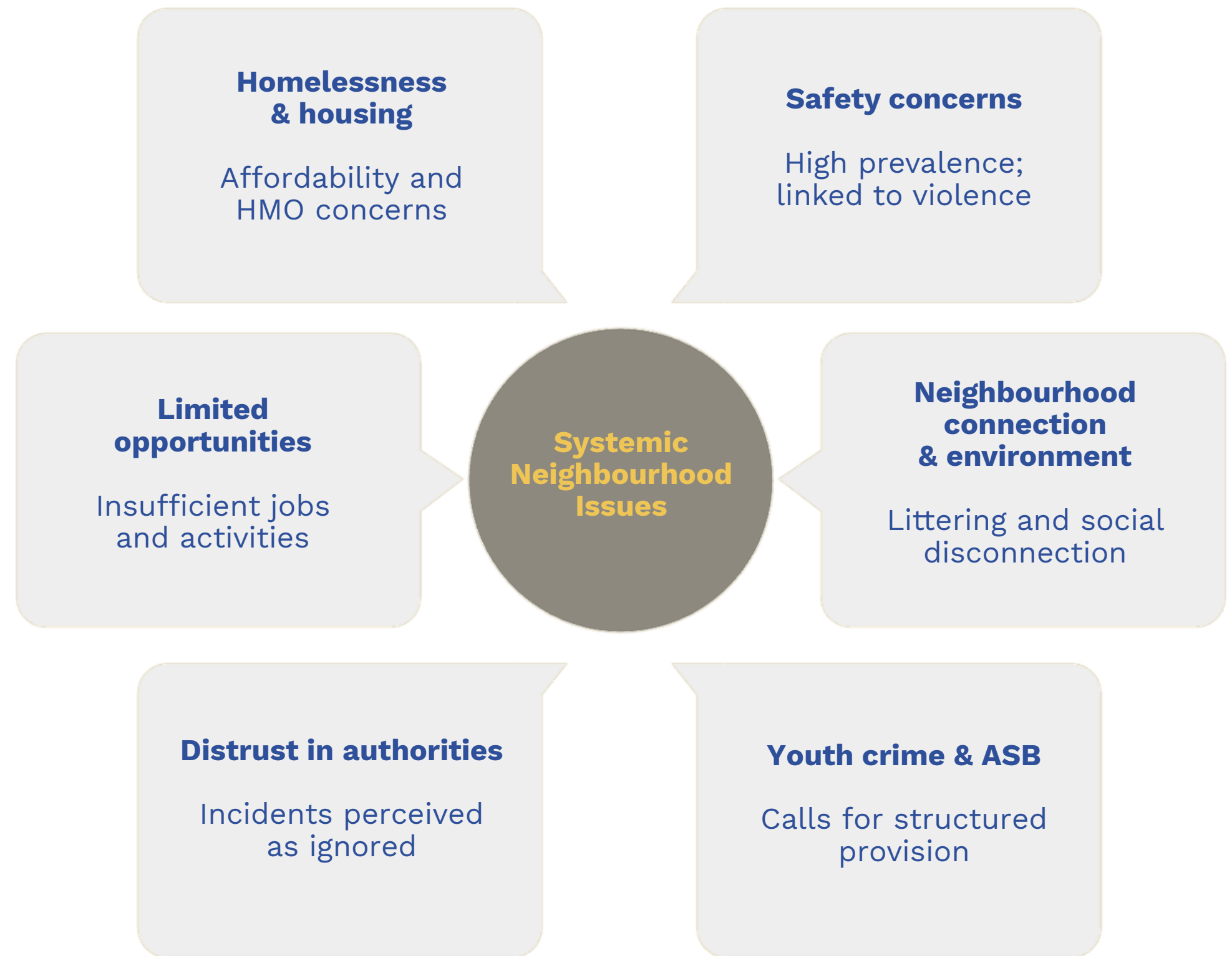
Strategic Action

Break down directorate walls by integrating safety metrics with health frameworks. A safe high street is an active, healthy, and resilient space.

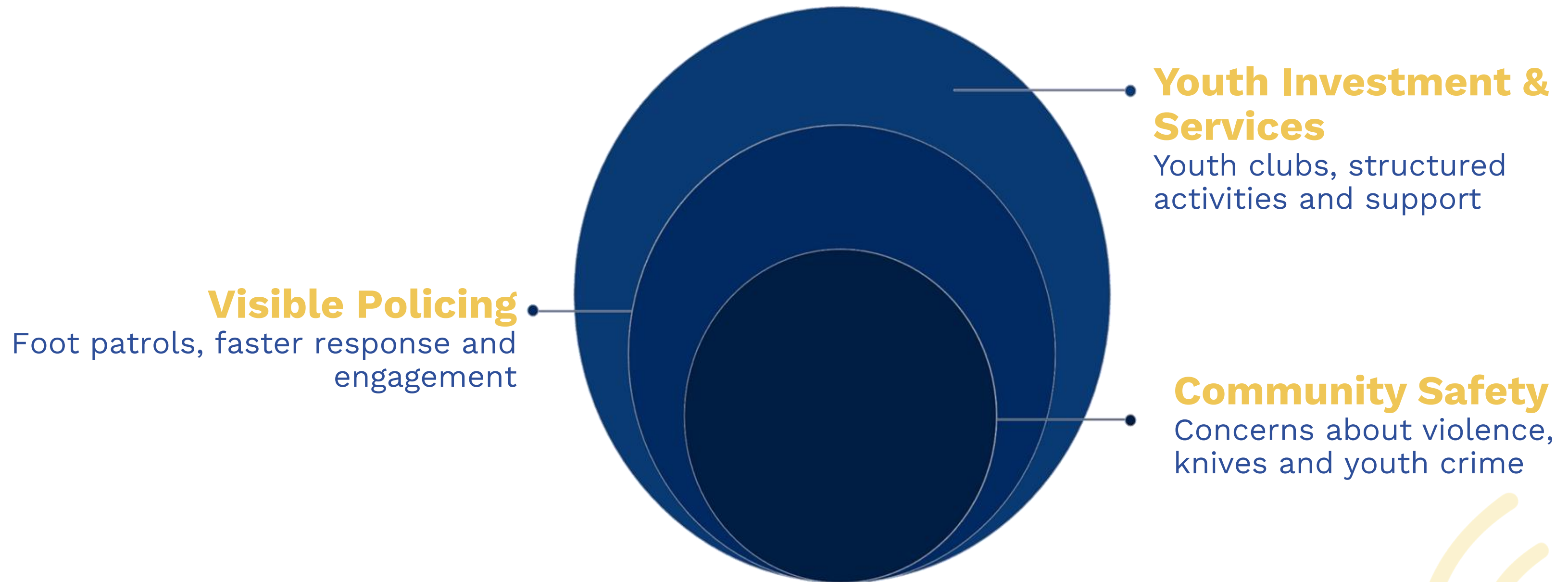


| THE FULL PICTURE...

WHAT ARE
PEOPLE MOST
WORRIED ABOUT -
PERHAPS OBVIOUS
BUT STILL
PERSISTENT



WHAT RESIDENTS ARE CALLING FOR...





THE CLEAR MESSAGE FROM SANDWELL RESIDENTS

Residents want **safety, opportunity, connection and accountability.**

They want to see investment in young people, protection for the vulnerable, stronger community bonds and a council that listens, acts and follows through.

SAFETY | Visible policing, better lighting and protection for vulnerable groups are non-negotiable priorities across every ward.

OPPORTUNITY | Young people and working-age residents need pathways - employment, education, mentoring and safe spaces to thrive.

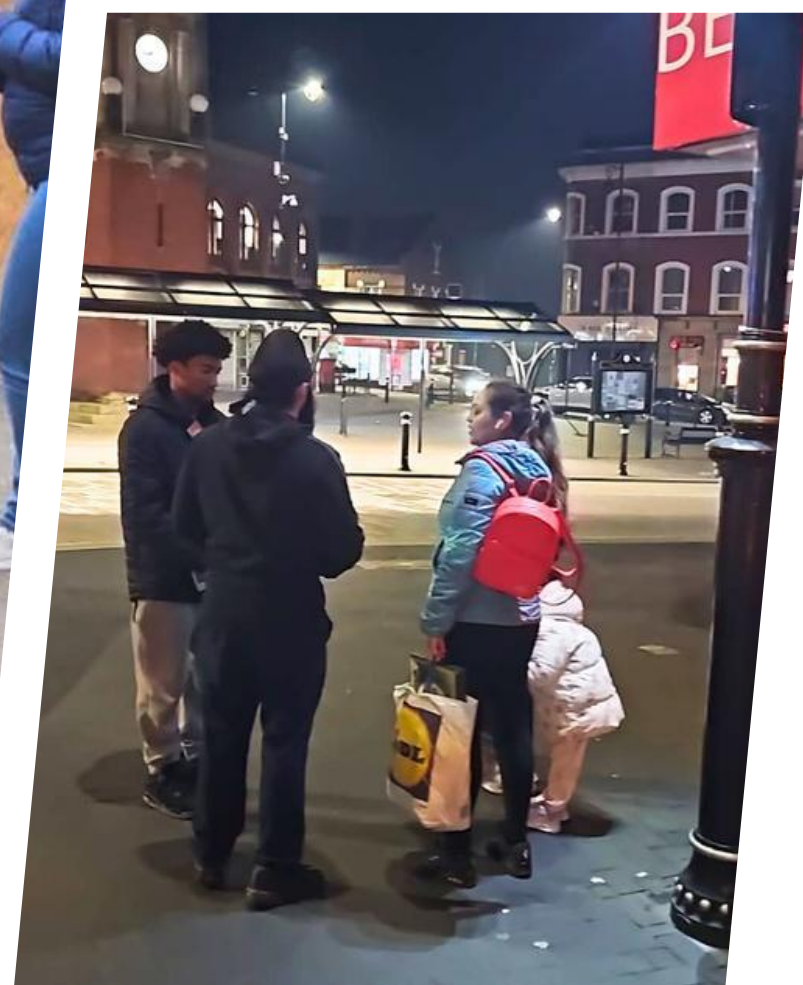
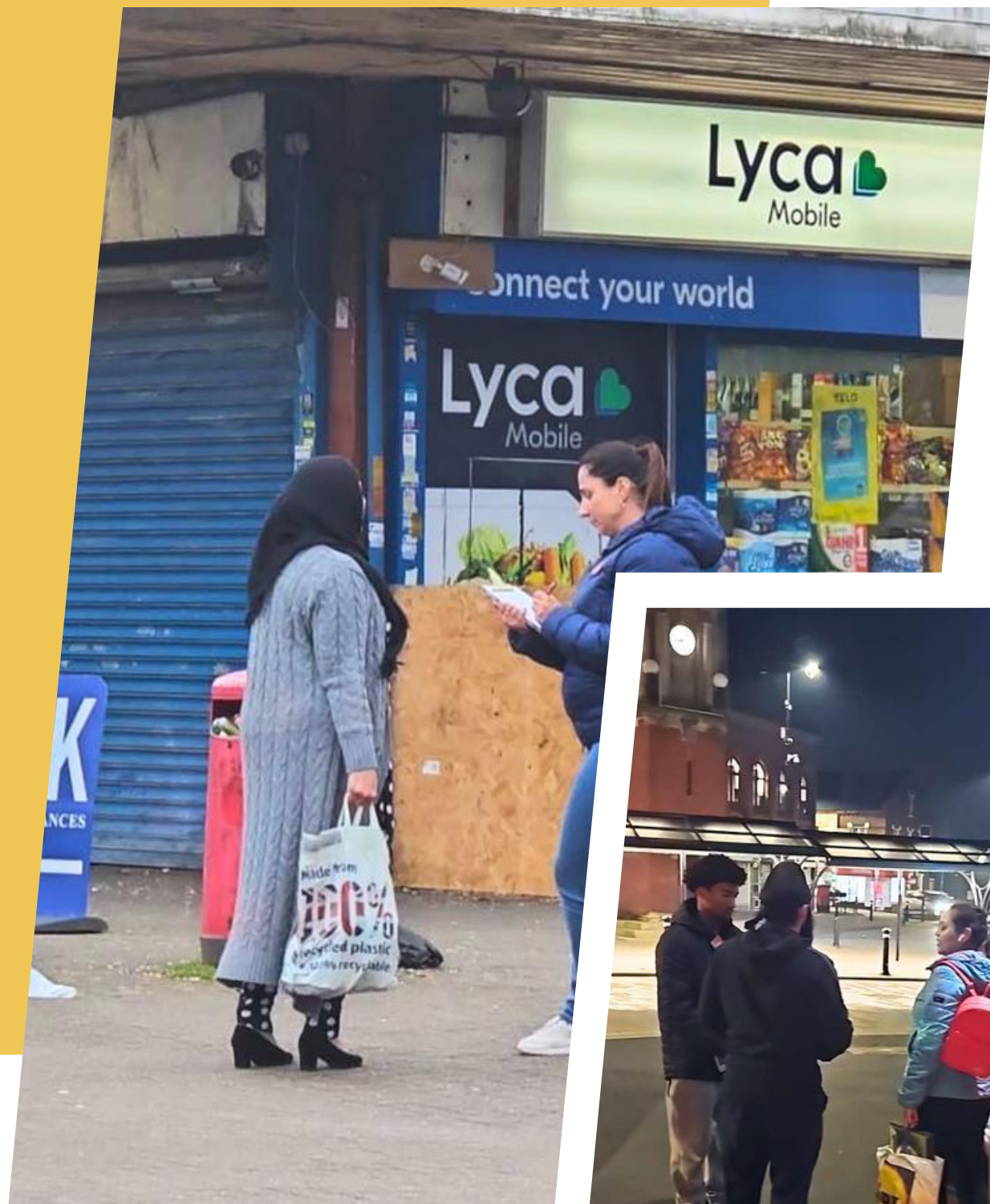
CONNECTION | Communities are asking for the spaces, events and initiatives that bring people together across cultural and social divides.

ACCOUNTABILITY | Residents demand that the council listens, communicates clearly, acts on what it hears and follows through with visible results.



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Project delivered with the support of **Sandwell Council** and funding made available by the **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** (MHCLG) - Common Ground Resilience Funding.



THANK YOU!

For training, advice
or support, contact us:

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