



LG2040 Futures Landscape

Landscape report and workshop
notes

07 July 2026

Caroline Star, Iman Bashir,
Paul Graham Raven , Andrew Curry



School of
International
Futures

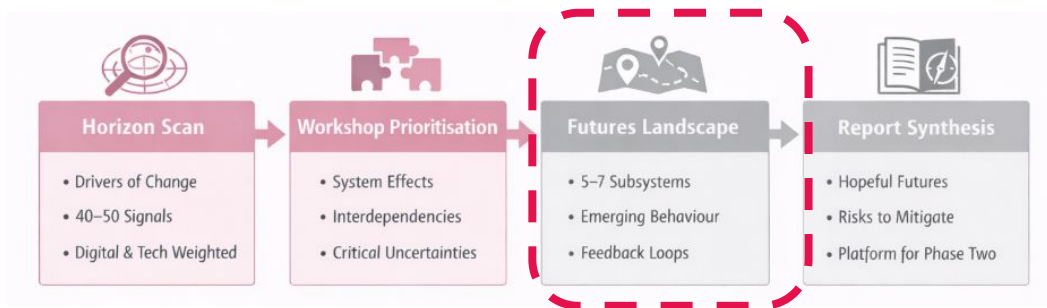
What forces might shape local government in 2040?

This project sits within the LG Horizons programme; an LGA programme supporting councils to think, plan and act with the future in mind.

It is the **first phase of the LG2040 initiative**, set up to explore what local government could look like in fifteen years. Thinking about the future can help councils to make the decisions needed today to lead boldly into 2040.

This first stage looks broadly at the **forces that might shape local government in 2040**. Later phases will map out preferred futures and how councils can adapt and innovate to achieve these.

Having analysed trends and discussed themes we are now at the point of **telling stories about this future landscape**—and we need your help to make them as useful as possible.



How to read this document

This document contains **narrative descriptions of five interlaced and interdependent themes**, which *in combination* describe a **'landscape' for the possible futures of English local government out to 2040**.

They **represent the capture of participant discussions** during a series of workshops, in which participants added detail (including evidence of how they might already be manifesting in specific settings), discussed the role of technological factors, and examined how challenges might manifest differently in different places.

These conversations were rich and showed that the themes generate good conversations; to capture all the detail would take a far longer document than this one. But **the landscape that the themes describe is speculative, rather than predictive**. So it is important to avoid an overdetermined description, in order to leave room for interpretation and imagination in the next stage of the process.

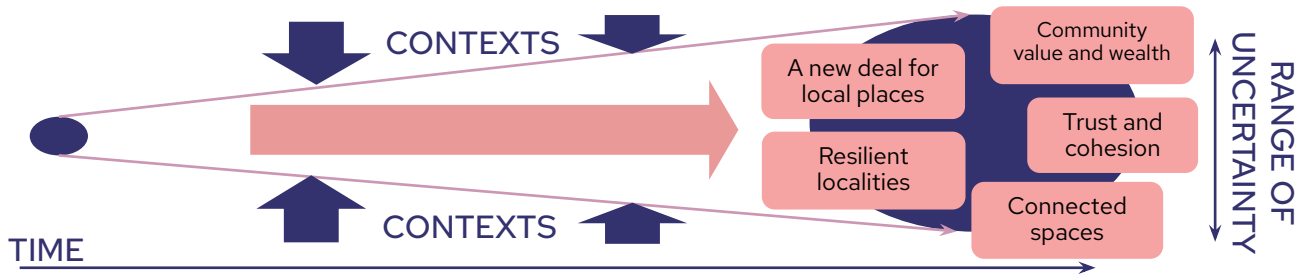
This landscape will be used in a final set of workshops with LGA, partners and stakeholders to develop a set of **hopeful futures narratives**. These will highlight opportunities for councils to help people lead more prosperous, secure, and healthier lives.



A. Futures context

The themes of change construct a 'future landscape'

- The notion of *themes of change* derives from the work of Kurt Lewin, who argued that we should understand social activity as operating in a set of social 'fields'.
- In a foresight context, we therefore aim to identify the most significant fields for a system or a sector. It is, obviously, a simplification, but the process is designed to enable greater focus on critical issues. All models are wrong, as George Box said, but some are useful.
- This approach also draws on the idea of the 'cone of uncertainty', shown below. This is a well-known futures tool that allows you to imagine the limits of the future and the range of possibilities. [1]
- The cone shows that the range of uncertainty increases over time, although the speed and type of change is influenced by slow-moving 'contextual drivers'. The themes, through their interactions, constitute a future landscape.



*Note that **the landscape is not a scenario; nor are the themes**. Themes may also conflict with and even contradict each other.

A note on the futures thinking behind this work

Futurists say that we tend to think of futures in three ways:

- **Probable futures:** what happens if current trends continue.
- **Possible futures:** the range of futures beyond the probable if there is disruptive change in some element of the futures landscape.
- **Preferred futures:** the future(s) that we desire and seek to influence, to the extent that we can.

Good futures work exists in a tension: it needs to be both honest about the existing dynamics of change, and it needs to create agency for change. Because of this, the analysis of the themes focuses both on areas of risk and on places where there are opportunities to create positive change and better outcomes.

“You can't control the future, but you can influence it, by what you choose to do—and what you choose *not* to do.”

Wendy Schultz

Futures metaphors

Probable futures: *'Head'*

Possible futures: *'Heart'*

Preferred futures: *'Hands'*

The themes emerged through an inductive process

The process of developing themes is inductive. Our futures analysis evolved through multiple stages:

- Initially, a long-list of drivers was developed, based on a thorough scan of the overall environment in the context of the project question: What are the forces shaping local government in 2040?
- This was then shortened through a review process involving both SOIF and the LGA project team, and this shorter list (of 45 drivers) was shared in two Drivers Prioritisation workshops, in which around 40 people participated.
- This workshop process invited people both to identify drivers likely to have a significant impact on the future outcomes of local government, and also to explain why they held that view.
- The workshop also identified some missing drivers and areas where the emphasis of the drivers should be framed differently, which were added to the overall list.
- The narratives of change identified in the two prioritisation workshops (which had a high level of overlap) were then used by the SOIF team to identify a set of 'themes' which, taken together, should describe the overall future landscape of English local government.
- Further analysis by SOIF identified their relevant system properties of the themes as a way to understand points of potential change to be explored in the next stages of the project.

List of Themes

1. **A new deal for local places**

Increasing demand for statutory services will continue to drive financial pressures across local areas, unless there is a new underlying settlement

- **Community value and wealth**

Current economic conditions will continue to weigh heavily on some local areas, unless new approaches build and retain local value

2. **Resilient localities**

Climate and resource pressures will continue to put strain on the systems that keep places working, unless resilience is embedded locally

3. **Trust and cohesion**

Shifts in media and public discourse will continue to reshape trust in institutions and wider cohesion, unless there is an adaptive response

4. **Connected spaces**

An ongoing decline of civic spaces will continue to affect belonging and support, unless social infrastructure is restored and strengthened.



Contextual drivers

Some of the drivers identify external challenges for local government

Contextual drivers

There are a number of significant contextual drivers that will shape the overall environment in which local authorities operate. In the futures literature, these are sometimes described as “those events that have already occurred... but whose consequences have not yet unfolded.”

There are also connections between these. **Ageing population**, together with **Living longer, fewer children**, both influence the extent of social care and our ability to finance it.

Climate volatility will lead to both flooding events and to heat events, while **geopolitical volatility** will create supply chain shocks. Both are likely to cause **food and energy shocks**.

These problems must be dealt with, but cannot be addressed at their source. Rather, they express within and through the thematic systems. As such, the themes can be evaluated in part on the extent to which they enable or prevent a response to these contextual drivers.

Note: each theme is built from a broader list of relevant drivers that are listed later in the pack

- Ageing population
- Living longer, fewer children
- Climate volatility
- Geopolitical volatility
- Food and energy shocks



Themes of change

There are **five** themes of change:

- A new deal for local places
- Community value and wealth
- Resilient localities
- Trust and cohesion
- Connected spaces



1. A new deal for local places

Increasing demand for statutory services provision leads to recurring financial crises, unless the deal changes.

1. A new deal for local places

Narrative

This is about resetting the local deal, between councils, government, partners and residents. It explores what communities need to thrive, what roles councils can play, how money flows into and between places, and how responsibility and risk are shared.

Councils are currently spending more on crisis and statutory services (e.g. adult social care) but have varying capacities to raise money, and less freedom over how it is used. This gets in the way of prevention, weakens local choice, and distances decisions from residents' lives. Expectations become unclear and trust is harder to sustain.

There is momentum for a new relationship about place that is clearer, fairer, and more local. This means rethinking who does what, how services are funded, how power and resources are shared, and being more explicit about trade-offs between different priorities.

Relevant drivers

- Ageing population
- Living longer/ fewer children
- Demand/ funding mismatch
- Platform (tech) monopolies
- Entrenched (finance) private monopolies

vs

- Shifts in finance
- AI as service delivery support
- Regulatory experimentation
- Expansion of care economies

Possible positive and negative dynamics

Positive dynamic

The positive loop rests on a new settlement between government and local authorities that redefines their purpose and role, gives them more autonomy, allows them to work with residents and intervene before issues become crises, and moves decision-making closer to people affected. Such a deal to strengthen social value would require close consultation with residents, and positive pressure from community groups and partners.

This could reduce delivery costs through preventative measures, and other “whole picture” policy approaches. More experimentation results in new ways of delivering regulatory outcomes, allowing different councils to learn from each other. Machine learning techniques applied to combined datasets support targeted intervention and prevention.

Negative dynamic

The negative loop is driven by ‘more of the same’: statutory services become ever more urgent, expensive, and regulated, leading government to manage closely and intervene more. Councils are increasingly seen as bundles of service provision by government and partners, which is in tension with resident expectations. The patchwork nature of devolution presents obstacles to innovative delivery, and to reaching a new settlement.

The increasing cost of statutory services forces cuts to other local budgets, and residents feel they are paying more for less. As local outcomes decline, so does public trust in politics and engagement in local issues. This in turn reduces willingness to serve as councillors or take on the responsibilities of senior officers.

Additional factors in play

Technological factors

- An “overarching technological framework” across councils could level out disparities and reduce costs overall
- Machine learning (applied to data shared across and between LAs, and with partners) could improve targeting of prevention and intervention alike
- Putting this into action could build confidence and foster a more innovative culture in councils
- Large Language Models could be used for public engagement around the role of councils
- The “digital divide” may present obstacles to residents engaging with new delivery systems, and to council staff running them
- Technologies could be misused to overwhelm LAs with complaints and requests
- Big Tech monopolies may mean LAs are “shaped by markets, rather than shaping them”

Geographical variance

- Expression of this theme is extremely context-dependent
- Existing regulations combine with ongoing devolution to produce significant structural differences in the capacity of LAs to adapt and innovate in delivery
- There is also significant variance in the capacity for LAs to raise funds, in the availability of strong partners, in digital capabilities, and in appetite for risk
- Whether a council can successfully change its relationship with the public is highly dependent on levels of trust among residents (see theme 4)

Evidence and examples

“Statutory requirements have not kept up with changing expectations and needs; the system has baked in *things*, but not *purpose*.”

- A recent LGIU case study examines Japan's successful devolution of both fundraising and responsibility to local authorities (<https://lgiu.org/a-systematic-analysis-of-local-government-finance-in-japan/>)
- Changes are starting to happen on some specific regulations and roles - with mixed results:
 - National government has started to reset responsibilities between business and councils by extending producer accountability for packaging: producers now have to pay for what is collected by councils within their statutory duty.
 - Building Control and Rental Reform Act is changing council duties, but is perceived to not provide the flexibility required for success
- ‘A new deal for local places’ can be relational as much as regulatory: Thurrock council used a face-to-face approach (e.g. town halls and meetings) to reset its relationship with residents and move past frustration and anger



2. Community value and wealth

Current economic conditions will continue to weigh heavily on some local areas, unless new approaches build and retain local value.

2. Community value and wealth

Narrative

This story seems to have economics at its base, but it's actually the other way around. The key questions are where value is created, and where it ends up.

At present, value leaks out. Long-standing imbalances leave some areas locked into economic and employment models that extract rather than generate local value. This results in increasing unemployment and insecurity, as well as negative effects on health (both mental and physical). As the tax base dwindles, councils are left as the safety net of last resort, with increasing numbers slipping through the mesh.

The placeshaping role of councils can make a difference. Decisions and influence on procurement, planning, housing, regeneration, and skills can help keep value circulating in the area. This supports local business, improves quality of life, and makes places more resilient. They cannot control economic outcomes, but they can influence them considerably.

Relevant drivers

- Widening disparities between and within council areas
 - (Rural areas left behind)
 - (Marginalisation of coastal towns)
- Rising household poverty
- Deepening labour precarity
- Growing numbers of NEETS
- Mental health crisis
- Skills and learning mismatch
- Squeezed HE sector
- Universal Basic Services
- Housing provision reimagined

Possible positive and negative dynamics

Positive dynamic

In partnership with regional actors, councils move to rebalance differences through procurement, investment and housing policies that support local businesses, create jobs and provide training opportunities. Brokering relationships with partner organisations to foster growth becomes an ever more important addition to the service delivery role.

Councils strengthen their influence over housing supply and markets, as well as building new stock and reacquiring and retrofitting older stock where the opportunity exists. This drives down rents, improves quality of life and provides more local employment opportunities.

These dynamics combine to rebuild and recirculate regional wealth, and to rebuild local confidence and pride in place.

Negative dynamic

Left unaddressed, widening divides between and within council footprints increase exposure to insecure and low-quality employment.

This leads to a downward spiral of insecurity and scarcity of employment, exacerbated by claims of inadequate skills. A sense of futile struggle and diminishing prospects compounds the growing crisis in mental health, as well as physical wellbeing.

Meanwhile, rents continue to increase on scarce, substandard housing stock, pushing greater numbers into either in-work poverty or total dependence on council support and services. This further entrenches the disparity problem, which becomes a vicious circle.

Other factors in play

Technological factors

- There are justified concern about influence of AI on entry-level roles, but new technologies (and the net-zero transition) may drive new jobs
- New technologies may also be impactful on service access, integration, and efficiency of delivery (e.g. digital ID)—but it's important to avoid the trap of assuming “tech will fix it”, and/or lock-in to certain modes of delivery
- The technological challenge is not a shortage of data, but rather making better use of the data already existing within and between councils; partnering (with e.g. academia) may present new opportunities for innovative approaches
- Building trust with residents with regard to new technologies will be crucial

Geographical variance

- Deprivation varies between council boundaries, but also within them
- Capability to generate income is more influential on possibilities than service delivery costs
- High-growth “hot-house” areas are better able to drive economic contributions through partnerships
- Important for councils to identify “legacy players” who take a long view to their impact on the area
- Infrastructure levy is powerful, but can't be applied evenly due to disparity in land and property values
- Similar variations apply regarding which levers councils have access to with regard to the housing market, which can reinforce or mitigate inequalities
- Strategic and/or combined authorities may be advantaged by Mayoral abilities to attract investment, but political differences and differing responsibilities may make decision-making harder

Evidence and examples

“In more deprived areas, people leave the workforce earlier because they acquire health conditions earlier, and also acquire caring responsibilities for other adults in the family. That’s an issue and also a barrier for work.”

“We’re going to move into a world which focuses on specialists. But how do you grow your skills and knowledge to become a specialist if you can’t get an entry-level role?”

- Housebuilding is important, but can lead to further displacements of social infrastructure and other community assets (see theme 5), and increased burden on physical infrastructure
- It is necessary to build narratives for growth with residents as well as partners, helping existing communities to understand the benefits in advance (e.g. by emphasising the presence of affordable housing in new developments, possibilities for new jobs)
- The Golden Valley development plan is an example of a council stepping in to shape development through the purchase of the land—but this is a high-risk strategy, out of reach for some areas
- The “tech corridor” joining Cambridge and Norwich represents the possibilities of councils working in collaboration for growth and development
- Lincolnshire council has invested in renewable energy generation, and collaborated with universities to develop skills in the area



3. Resilient localities

Climate and resource pressures will continue to put strain on the systems that keep places working, unless resilience is embedded locally.

3. Resilient localities

Narrative

Resilience is becoming a local operating issue as climate volatility, food and energy shocks, heatwaves, water stress and ageing infrastructure affect daily life with increasing frequency and impact. These pressures are shaped by forces beyond local control, but their effects are felt locally through disrupted access, higher costs and greater pressure on services.

For councils, the question is how far local systems can absorb pressure before it becomes crisis—and the distribution of responsibility is not always clear. This means looking beyond emergency response and strengthening the day to day systems that keep places functioning: working with partners to improve preparedness and adaptability, and moving from transactional to relational engagement with communities as partners.

Relevant drivers

- Climate volatility
- Food and energy shocks
- Old infrastructure, new challenges
- Bioregions and local food sovereignty
- Resilience as a national and local security issue
- Cost of renewables continues to fall
- Planetary boundaries are shaping legal and policy decision-making

Possible positive and negative dynamics

Positive dynamic

When extreme weather and failing infrastructure collide, it raises living costs for households and increases demand on local services. The first response comes from residents and local groups, protecting basic survival pathways through e.g. food support, flood response and community support. This builds visible local capacity where disruption is already being felt.

As local capacity becomes more important, councils work with interconnected initiatives that are holding parts of the system together, scaling community action through council assets, local procurement, infrastructure teams and emergency planning. This creates stronger cooperation across catchments, grids and food networks and makes this vital role more visible. More pressure can be absorbed locally before it reaches crisis point, reducing disruption to households, services and local infrastructure.

Negative dynamic

Climate and resource pressures expose local dependence on industries shaped by global markets, climate risk and ageing assets. Price volatility and supply disruption worsen pressure on essential local provision. Councils are left managing consequences beyond their direct control, with time and budgets pulled into emergency support, repair and continuity planning. The voluntary sector, already under strain, cannot cope with every challenge.

This leaves persistent weak points across grids, drainage, supply chains and local access, locking local government into repeated disruption management. The negative loop is reinforced as each shock leaves less capacity for long-term work with energy providers, water companies, food partners and infrastructure bodies.

Other factors in play

Technological factors

- As in other themes, new technologies are promising for both service delivery and data analysis at scale
- Real-time sensors could provide early warning of water shortages, flooding, air quality events etc
- However, residents may be concerned about privacy and surveillance
- Likewise the “digital divide” problem means that some councils (and some residents) will be better able to adapt than others
- The pandemic provided a foretaste of the possibilities of online disinformation during crises

Geographical variance

- The staged rollout of Local Government Reorganisation is proving disruptive to council operations, with the system likely to remain unstable through to the late 2030s
- Organisational instability creates tensions between service delivery challenges and long-term planning
- Resilience needs vary hugely between councils due to variation in climate impacts and resource pressures, which in turn necessitates localised responses
- Variance in social capital and community capacity also affects the ability of residents to contribute
- Transport and connectivity challenges look very different in rural and urban areas
- Identifying anchor institutions and partners will surface opportunities specific to an area

Evidence and examples

“How do we release time from the transactional stuff that has to happen to put more time into the relational side of working with people? Technology could help or hinder in this space, we need to be deliberate about how we use it.”

- North Yorks and Buckinghamshire are examples of slow reintegration post-Local Government Reorganisation
- Communities are vital sources of local knowledge, and can function as early warning systems for resilience challenges, but this requires relational engagement and support from councils
 - e.g. COVID community clusters demonstrated rapid and flexible support, LAs working with charities and volunteers and residents
 - e.g. NHS community champions provide a good model for health and wellbeing support
 - e.g. Wigan Deal as model for community engagement programmes
 - e.g. Fix My Street app as model for reporting issues
- There are clear advantages in preventative measures over reactive "sticky-plaster spending" (e.g. Cambridge has invested £5M in community water resilience and asset-based community development)
- Sensor networks (as in Smart Cities Initiative) are being used for environmental monitoring and early warning



4. Trust and cohesion

Shifts in media and public discourse will continue to reshape trust in institutions and wider cohesion, unless there is an adaptive response.

4. Trust and cohesion

Narrative

It is tempting to see new media as a dominant cause in this system, but they have merely made a long-standing problem more visible. The steady decline of trust is also connected to the waning influence of older media, in which the barriers to participation were arranged differently. This new plurality—with more voices heard, alongside more persistent forms of exclusion—is not, in itself, a bad thing. But it presents a challenge to councils that they cannot address at root.

The decline could continue if councils carry on as before, and/or rely on anonymous and automated systems of communication and decision-making. The alternative is challenging but potentially rewarding: building credibility through openness, accountability and participatory policy-making, and delivering good outcomes by working across political differences.

Relevant drivers

- Geopolitical volatility
- Institutional trust eroding
- Reconfiguration of the mediasphere
- Automated AI-based decision making
- Increasing political diversity
- Political mobilisation around open data
- Political and economic radicalism

Possible positive and negative dynamics

Positive dynamic

Councils respond to the decline of trust with a new model for credibility: communication that is transparent and accountable, rooted in human connection and openness, and supported by a well thought-out strategy for how automation and technological can support this approach.

The integration of participatory methods into policy-making (e.g. enrolling community groups and using shared spaces) allows councils to pick up some of the political energy in the population, boosting engagement and a sense of community ownership in decisions and outcomes.

Action and messaging are brought into closer alignment, and voter faith in representation is refreshed. Increased turnout accelerates plurality, and councils model the possibilities of effective consensus governance.

Negative dynamic

Councils retreat into established patterns of top-down, one-voice messaging that are increasingly at odds with the media landscape, avoiding sensitive topics in hope of not provoking critics. Turn-key automated systems are used in communications and decision-making.

This retreat serves to further distance councils from residents, and encourages further mobilisation against a “faceless system”, egged on by those who profit from disruption. This includes further weaponisation of FOI requests and other strategies aimed at jamming the machinery, while other voices remain marginalised.

The pervasive sense of division results in more politically plural councils, often with deliberative systems designed for an earlier time, which can leave vital decisions unaddressed and poorly communicated.

Other factors in play

Technological factors

- Focus on making better use of existing tech, while maintaining human connection and social values in services and comms
- Expectations around the purpose/utility of media may shift considerably in the next 15 years
- Such expectations already vary by generation, as do technological and media literacies
- Role for e.g. Large Language Models in standardising user experience and public narrative, particularly in larger councils
- (Perhaps also for content moderation, which is exhausting for council staff)
- Analysis of shared data could improve delivery and reduce costs
- New tools and technologies offer solutions, but can easily bring new problems too
- Online hostility and abuse dissuade vulnerable groups from participation

Geographical variance

- Challenges are universal, though larger councils will have more funds, tools and skills to tackle them
- But it's in some ways easier for smaller councils to maintain a coherent narrative and "brand"
- It's harder to access in-person services in many rural and coastal councils, meaning residents are forced to use online services
- The biggest variance is arguably *within* councils: trust is more fragile around services (e.g. care, child services) with a more emotional dimension
- It was also noted that the political composition of a council plays a role in shaping narratives and discursive tone
- The old leader/cabinet system looks increasingly unsuited to the more plural outcomes of recent elections, while decision-making in unitary bodies can appear remote and slow to residents

Evidence and examples

[With regard to community engagement and outreach:] “It feels like we're going full circle back twenty years, only without the funding.”

“We get quite sentimental about trust... we should be seeing it as an asset and a strategy.”

- Pandemic forced comms innovations (e.g. WhatsApp groups) which proved their value
- Cheltenham Borough using a comms platform with integrated demographic analysis in order to balance reach and discussion of development plans
- Bristol experimented with “geofencing” online discussion around certain topics (limiting to residents living within specific geographic boundaries), which provided a more representative sense of what residents actually thought, but also resulted in negative headlines regarding surveillance.
- Bristol Youth Council as an example of a strong, well-structured and effective youth engagement programme with formally elected representatives, dedicated representation from marginalised groups and a seat at the decision-making table.
- Hackney developing a project of civic-democratic education in public libraries, inspired by a similar project in Berlin (DE)
- Cheltenham Borough worked to counter negative public narratives around homelessness by emphasising the human stories behind the issue



5. Connected spaces

An ongoing decline of civic spaces will continue to affect belonging and support, unless social infrastructure is restored and strengthened.

5. Connected spaces

Narrative

Social cohesion tends to require a sense of place, and place is formed from social infrastructure: the networks of human connection that are anchored in shared spaces. In many areas, this has been weakened by long-term funding pressures on councils, changes to high streets, and the loss of shared social spaces and heritage. Where these connections decline, community cohesion can suffer.

Being present on the ground matters. Councils play a key role in supporting social infrastructure through planning, community partnerships, and use of local assets. Strong social infrastructure can prevent poor mental health and crime, build social capital, and reduce pressure on wider public services over time—but it is not a statutory duty for councils, which makes it hard to prioritise.

Relevant drivers

- Growing prevalence and recognition of cognitive diversity and mental illness
- Increasing youth unemployment
- The shape of the digital divide is changing
- Civic space and social amenities in decline
- Sustained loss of social infrastructure amplifying social isolation
- Contraction of higher education sector
- Growing expectations around “the right to the city” and good civic space
- Criminal justice system under strain from overload and reduced funding

Possible positive and negative dynamics

Positive dynamic

Declining social infrastructure weakens points of contact between residents, local organisations and councils, making need harder to see before it reaches formal services.

This raises the value of visible local presence in places people already use and trust, which become spaces for listening, claims and local organising. Public participation moves into everyday civic life.

Over time, this creates new habits of local problem-solving through clubs, youth provision, public meetings and community use of spaces such as parks, libraries and online groups. These habits support local stewardship, belonging and civic confidence. Social infrastructure starts to rebuild, because people are using shared civic spaces to make local life work.

Negative dynamic

Declining social infrastructure closes everyday routes into learning, work and public life for people of all generations, and particularly vulnerable groups who rely on informal spaces. Schools, colleges and stretched services are left dealing with issues once buffered by e.g. youth provision, local associations, trusted adults; older people become isolated by the disappearance of community spaces.

Withdrawal becomes easier to miss. Young people spend more time in private online spaces where status, grievance and risk are harder to see, and vulnerability increases; unable or unwilling to access what shared spaces remain, older and more vulnerable adults become lonely, and dependent upon diminishing services. By that point, the local places that might have offered support and contact are weaker, under-used or simply gone, lacking the emotional connection and sense of ownership vital to community cohesion.

Other factors in play

Technological factors

- Data can be used to better understand how space is used differently by different groups (e.g. gendered differences in use of park space)
- However, challenges in sharing and using data can limit cross-agency collaboration, and resident concerns are growing re: surveillance by technology
- Smart lighting and other such technologies can make public spaces safer and more welcoming
- There are genuine benefits to online socialisation and communities, alongside the more talked-about downsides
- Online communities can be bridged back into public life through events arranged around shared interests in physical space

Geographical variance

- These challenges were seen to be fairly universal between councils, but it was noted that social infrastructure is not a statutory responsibility for LAs, even though they recognise its importance
- As such, there's significant variance around the resources available to address the issues
- The construction of new towns presents particular challenges around integration into existing webs of social infrastructure
- Heritage and local identity interact in challenging ways with the design and management of community spaces
- E.g. legacy is important, but buildings can be adapted and used for modern social needs
- Communities should be given agency to shape and even run their own spaces
- Problems of stigma, physical accessibility and digital exclusion affect vulnerable groups' use of social infrastructure

Evidence and examples

- Libraries still holding out as a frontline space for social connection and support in many councils
- Faith communities are emerging as drivers of social infrastructure, as they have routes to alternative forms of funding and financial support
- Grimsby Youth Zone: modernisation of C19th heritage granary buildings for youth space
- Cambridge council focussing on social and environmental aspects of community wealth building, not just economic
- Buckinghamshire getting influencers to film in parks and libraries to reach younger residents
- Harborough district using a coffee bus in village squares to reach out to residents
- The Park Run phenomenon: how to support and enable self-convened social infrastructure?
- Some vulnerable residents less willing to use spaces “badged” as council-provided, or framed around stigmatising problems (e.g. “loneliness”)
- Physical social infrastructure presents a liability and maintenance burden for councils, as well as for the communities which might want to take them on for themselves
- There is potential for councils to act as trustees of community-managed spaces, removing fund-raising and maintenance burdens from voluntary orgs

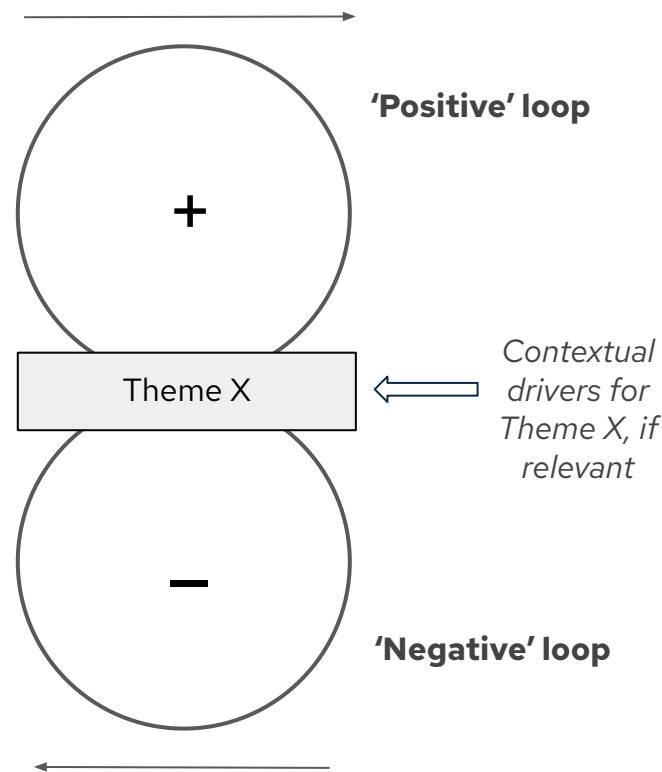


Annex 1

Causal loops for each theme – the basis
for possible positive and negative
dynamics

How to read the causal loop diagrams

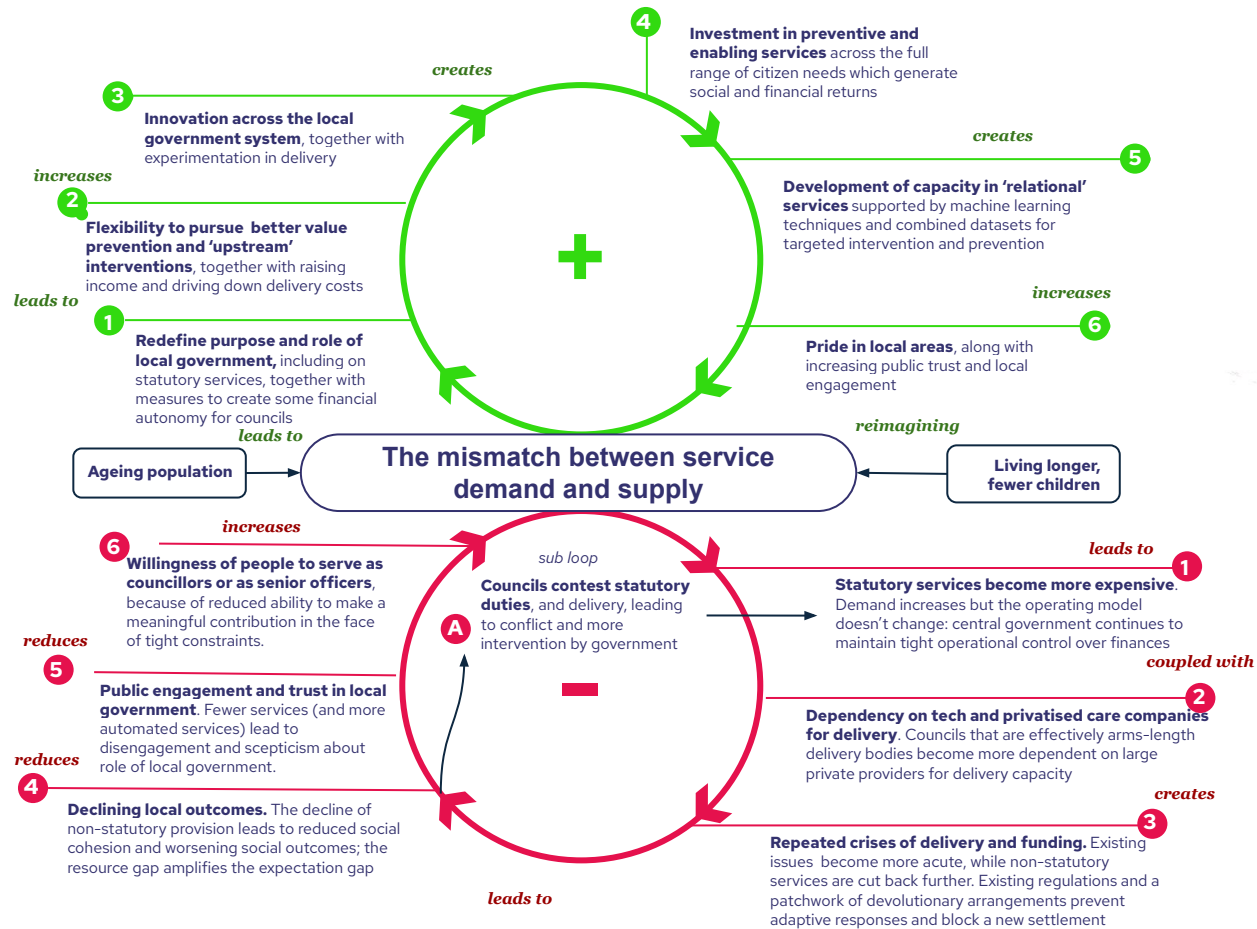
- The possible positive and negative outcomes in the slides above come from more detailed analysis of systems set out in this annex
- It includes a set of causal loops (see right) that describes the underlying systems for each theme. These include an upper loop that describes patterns of change that have the potential to create positive change, and a lower loop that describes a set of adverse outcomes for the system.
- The two loops represent “possible futures”; there is no assessment, deliberately, of likelihood or probability.
- The critical issues to the left of the loops formed the basis for stories about possible positive and negative outcomes. These are deliberately different and not mirror images of each other to explore a wider range of issues and opportunities



1. A new deal for local places

Critical issues

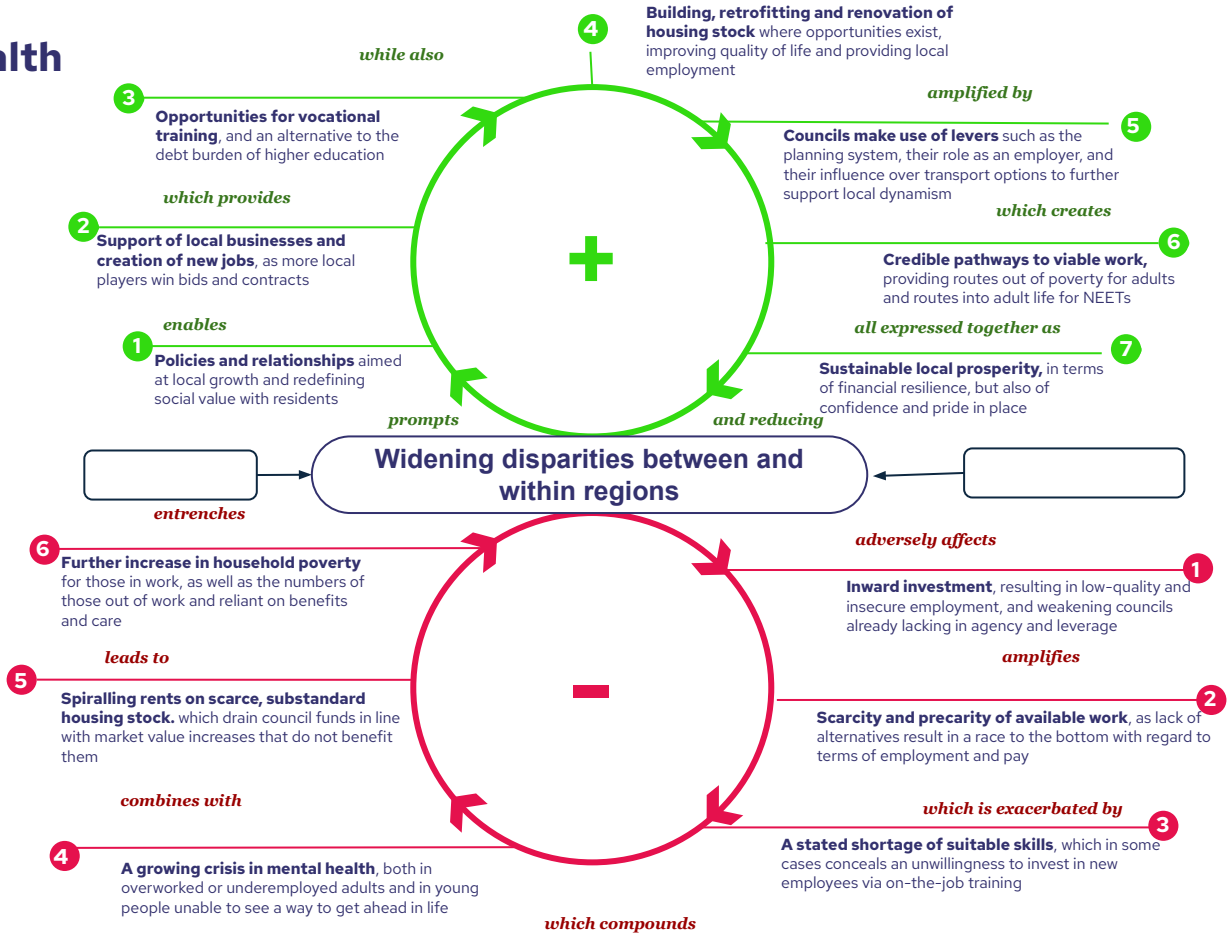
- The extent to which central government is willing to reconfigure roles, relationships and flows
- The potential to enable some local fundraising powers
- The capacity for innovation within local government
- The extent to which councils are able to create an 'ecology' of innovation, in which new ideas are tested in different places and are then learned from elsewhere



2. Community value and wealth

Critical issues

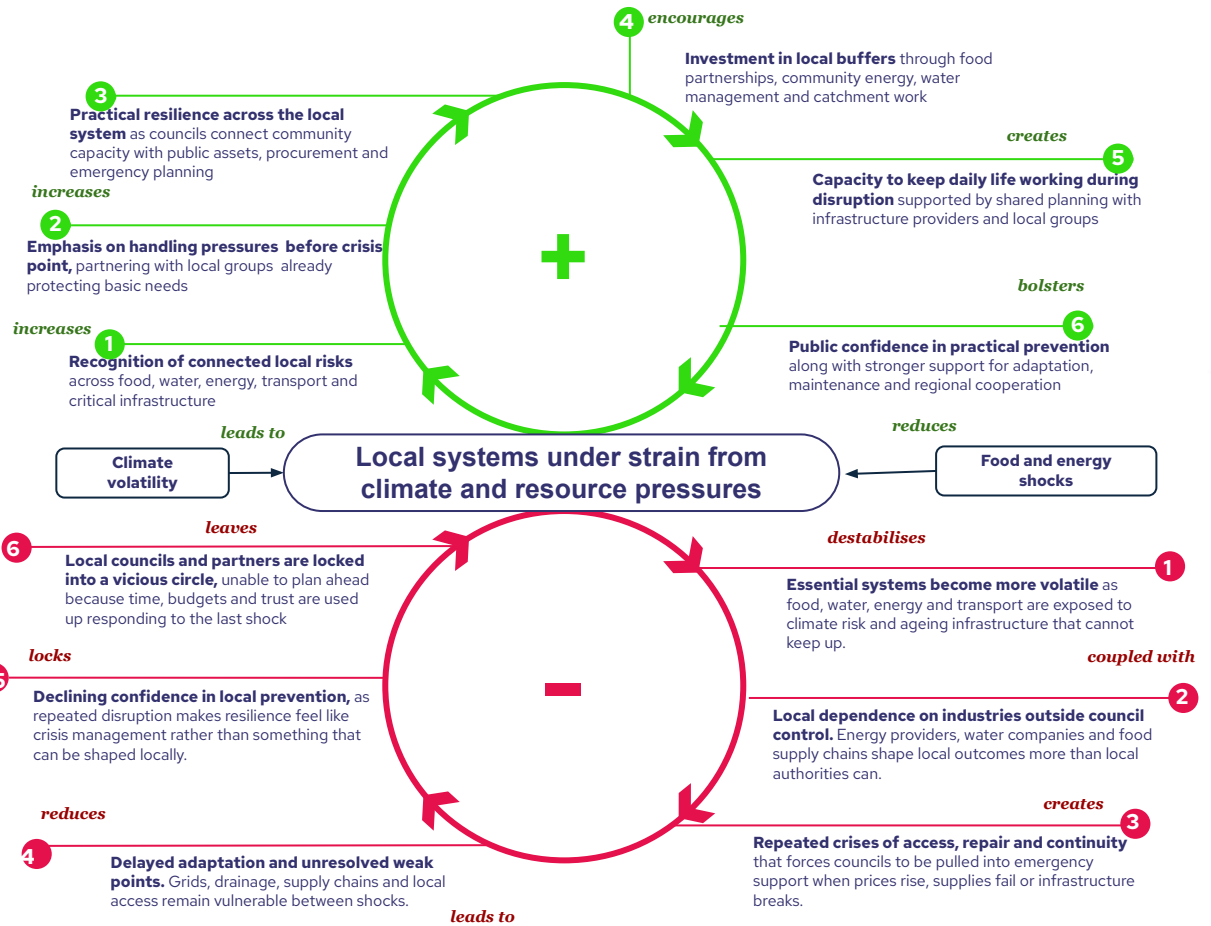
- The potential for making use of procurement, planning and investment to shape local flows and circuits of value
- The influence of extractive business models on local economies
- The role of housing and housing provision in community wealth and health
- The potential impact of changes in national welfare policies
- The linkage between education, employment and opportunity



3. Resilient localities

Critical issues

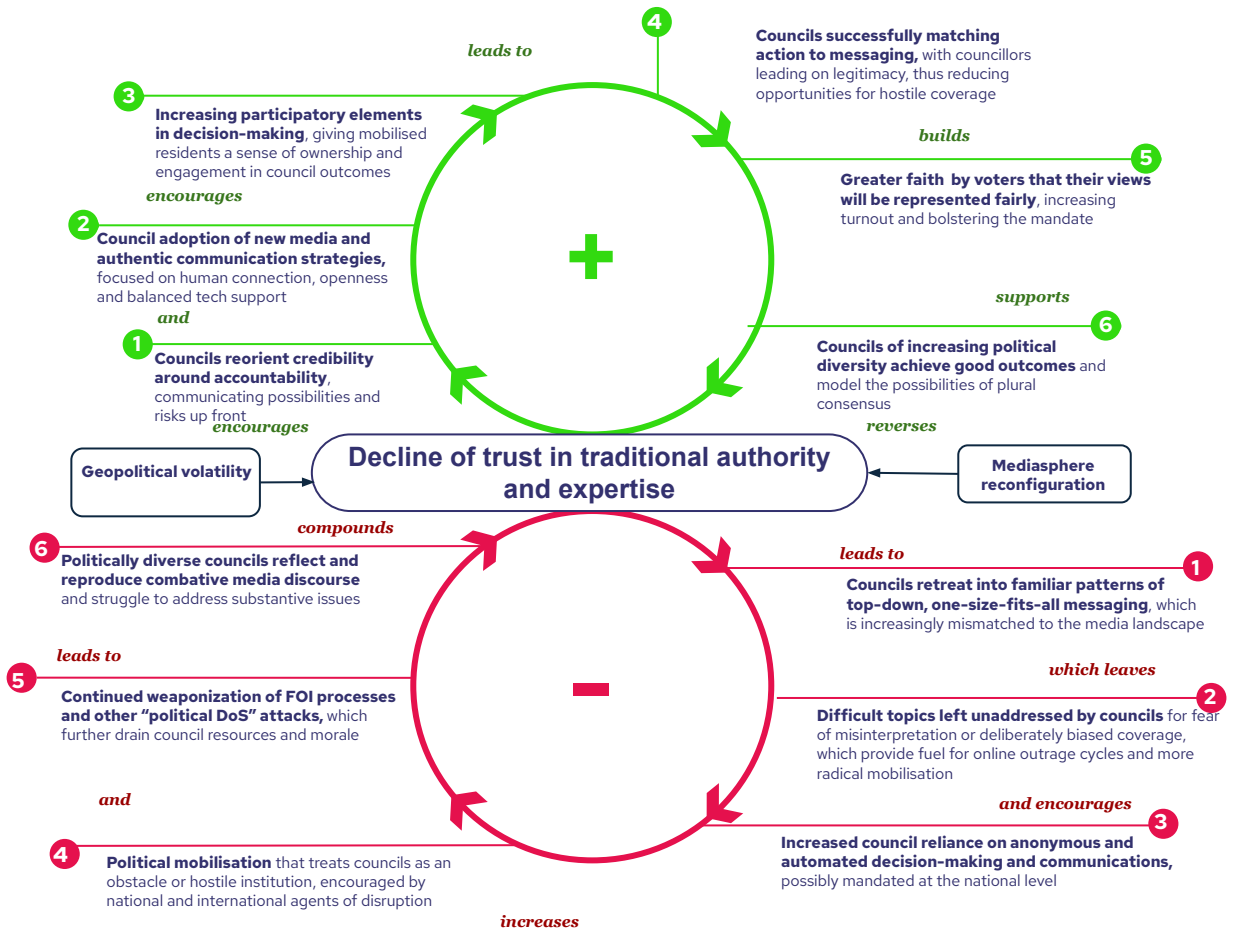
- The extent to which climate volatility and resource pressures disrupt basic systems that keep places working (including water, food, energy and transport)
- The potential for local authorities to build local absorption capacity in collaboration with communities before these disruptions reach critical point
- The extent to which councils can coordinate across systems that they do not fully control
- The extent to which resilience planning addresses uneven exposure across households and places, especially where infrastructure is weaker or local buffers are already thin



4. Trust and cohesion

Critical issues

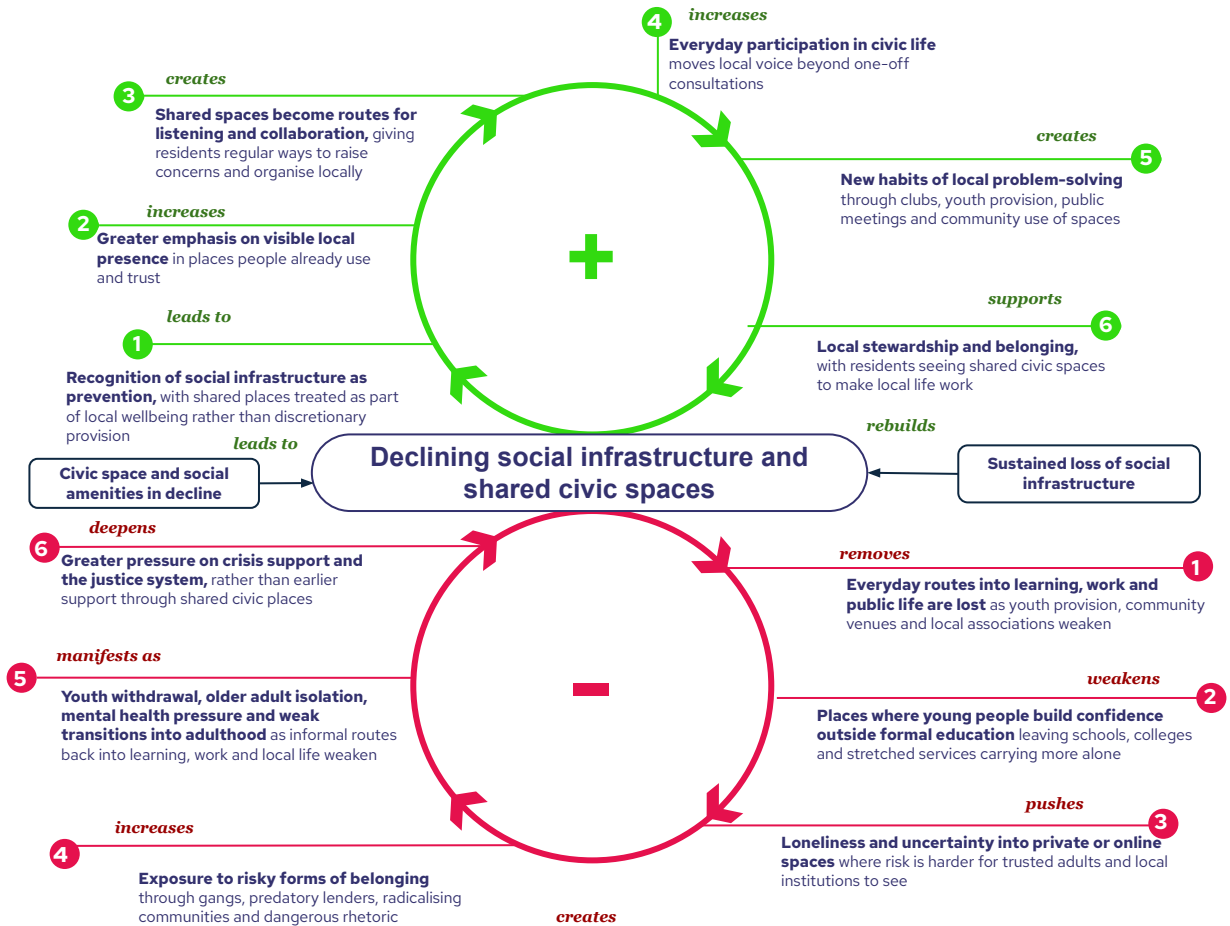
- The challenges and opportunities of implementing a more authentic and accountable model for council communications with residents
- A media landscape which encourages and in some cases remunerates outrage, hostility and extreme position-taking
- Openness and transparency as both popular demand and a potential threat surface
- Growing political pluralism in a system accustomed to and built for a two-party dynamic



5. Connected spaces

Critical issues

- The extent to which the decline of shared civic spaces weakens belonging and social identity
- The related potential to rebuild social infrastructure as a prevention mechanism to this social crisis
- The pressures placed on already stressed systems such as schools and the justice system as youth provision and community venues continue to weaken
- The extent to which councils can support local presence in places that people use and trust, while acknowledging the financial strain that local government is already facing





School of
International
Futures

NOT FOR FURTHER DISTRIBUTION IN THIS VERSION