



University of
Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

SCCT
Sutton Coldfield Charitable Trust



Revisiting Social Needs in Sutton Coldfield

Research Summary

2023

OVERVIEW



Commissioned by Sutton Coldfield Charitable Trust (SCCT) a team of researchers conducted a review into the social needs of residents in the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield. The aim of the research was to provide insight into the challenges facing the wellbeing of residents and to generate a list of recommendations to meet identified unmet needs. Ultimately this will feed into the strategic work of SCCT to consider future areas of investment, innovation and inter-agency working. This short research summary provides an overview of the key insights from the research and the recommendations.

Using a mixed methods approach to engage with residents the report draws upon a household survey, 50 resident interviews and 5 focus groups as well as interviews with service providers, local politicians, and Trustees of SCCT. Data collection was conducted over a two-year period and gathered information prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as during the crisis and in the aftermath.

The household survey was sent out to 3000 households across Sutton Coldfield which achieved a 20% response (over 600 responses).

In addition, through service mapping of provision in Sutton Coldfield, a list was produced of 246 community organisations 136 sporting facilities.

The analysis highlights 7 keys factors of wellbeing which are prominent areas of unmet needs across the whole of Sutton Coldfield. Analysis also indicates lower quality of life assessment for older residents (75+), LGBT+ residents and those with low incomes. Further attention should be given to children and young people as well as residents of all ages with learning disabilities, which are referred to within the “emerging issues” section later in this Summary.

This Research Summary outlines six scenarios that reflect the challenges facing Sutton Coldfield in relation to unmet social needs. Related to these scenarios are a series of potential ambitions against which are a series of possible developments.

Both these potential ambitions and possible developments are presented for the consideration of SCCT within its own strategic planning and its collaborative work with other stakeholders. Through its own funding activity and wider partnership, SCCT can draw upon the insights from the analysis to facilitate appropriate responses to unmet need. These ambitions and developments are examples of how to respond to unmet social needs. They are presented for the consideration of SCCT. They are not a blueprint for change but illustrative of the forms of activity or investment that may be pursued over the coming years to address unmet needs of local residents.

7 KEY FACTORS OF WELLBEING



Seven key factors were identified through the household survey as areas for attention to facilitate improvements in residents' wellbeing.

Social capital - Social capital refers to the connections you have with others, be it family, friends, your wider community and even community leaders and authorities. This is the connection between people in the community. Social capital was our most significant factor across all Sutton Coldfield wards. This may be unsurprising during the pandemic and the restrictions on social interaction.

For social capital to come out as the top factor within the analysis, suggests that a sizeable number of residents do not see family or friends on a regular basis. This can impact on a range of issues, from a sense of belonging to mental health and may indicate that residents are socially isolated to an extent. As wider analysis of the data indicates, residents also feel a lack of ability to influence and inform local decision making.

Local Community Satisfaction – Local community satisfaction covers a range of matters that are often visibly present in the day-to-day lives of residents such as parking, litter and local spaces. The factor also measures the ability of residents to influence their local area, linking to the social capital factor, with a mix of frustration and uncertainty about how to be involved in local change.

Generally, residents are happy to be living in Sutton and are satisfied with their local community. Many however recognised issues with traffic and parking and the demise of local shops and amenities.

Within this factor, residents highlighted a need for greater access to information regarding their local communities. However, how this information was accessed varied, with younger residents looking to social media and older residents preferring physical notice boards at central locations.

Standard of Living – This factor captures the quality of people's living conditions (with some housing overlaps) as well as an assessment of cost of living. The analysis illustrates how income primarily determines whether residents can afford certain items. Essentially, lower income groups are lacking items that they need but cannot afford.

Interestingly, the data on the residents' desire to have friends or family around for a meal or drink at least once a month, but are unable to afford this, comes out as one of the highest across all wards: this is one way in which finances can impact upon social capital. It is likely that residents with low incomes are prioritising their expenditure around needs which ensure basic survival but not the wider social interactions which are fundamental to a broader set of social needs.

Mental Wellbeing – Mental wellbeing was also a significant factor in the analysis. Most residents do feel that the things they do in life are completely or fairly worthwhile. However, for those with lower mental health scores analysis shows there is an overlap with some of the lowest levels of satisfaction across the other factors. It is important to reflect on how scores in this factor may reflect a broader

decline in mental wellbeing, especially in the West Midlands, during the pandemic.

In addition, the analysis suggests there are higher levels of anxiety within LGBTQ+ residents, lower income groups, and those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Physical Wellbeing – As expected, there is a gradual decline of physical wellbeing by age. It can also be seen that with increasing age, comes the increase in comorbidity of multiple health conditions. This is broadly spread across Sutton Coldfield.

Any support in relation to physical wellbeing is likely best targeted at the older age groups, especially as this seems to be where the multiple physical health challenges increase. Additionally, looking to improve active lifestyles at an earlier age, to develop health-boosting habits, especially relating to sport, are likely to have longer-term benefits.

Financial Wellbeing - The data gathered for this factor pre-dates many of the current cost of living challenges that are impacting upon the UK. The predominant factor of financial wellbeing is built around the subjective view of residents in how comfortable, or not, their financial circumstances are.

It is primarily at the ward level that we see variation but, it is worth noting, not at significant levels of variation. Therefore, whilst certain wards have lower levels of financial

wellbeing this factor is experienced across all wards in Sutton Coldfield. This indicates the existence of groups of people in poverty within the wider affluence of Sutton Coldfield. Thus, some residents are struggling financially in a context where support may not be as readily visible and accessible compared to more deprived parts of the wider Birmingham region.

Furthermore, it is likely those residents in more affluent areas will have fewer obvious sources of support and so may be in more urgent need of assistance.

Housing - Housing was of particular interest for SCCT as this is an area of work that forms a part of their history through the Almshouses. From the survey analysis housing is the seventh and final significant factor for residents. In particular, this highlighted issues regarding cost of up-keep and repairs to the home.

In terms of residents' satisfaction with their current housing there are no broad patterns amongst residents. The analysis suggests that low-income residents, potentially those living in the older housing stock in Sutton Coldfield are more likely to be affected by issues relating to upkeep and repair.

From the interview data it is possible to indicate concerns regarding homelessness. More broadly there is concern about limited homelessness support and provision across the Town. However, it is likely that the incidence of homelessness in the Town is lower than in other parts of Birmingham.



Other emerging issues

The analysis suggests that whilst concerns about poverty and deprivation focus on certain locations within Sutton Coldfield, pockets of poverty exist across all wards – and it is in affluent wards that there will likely be fewer services and support available.

Residents have generally expressed that Sutton town centre has eroded overtime.

Generally residents are happy with local services but there was concern raised regarding facilities for children and young people being significantly lacking/underinvested. This overlaps with emerging analysis regarding

support for people with learning disabilities, also seen as being underfunded/lacking. People with learning disabilities also seem to live their day-to-day lives in a bubble excluded from wider Sutton residents.

There are general concerns around perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour, largely linked to safety in Sutton Park and car thefts. Several other issues are noticeable within Sutton Coldfield, especially concerns in relation to domestic abuse and the lack of support for residents who experience this within Sutton Coldfield.



Scenarios - Linked to social & wellbeing factors	Potential Ambitions	Possible Developments that SCCT may support
Social Capital and Local Community Satisfaction The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and extended pre-existing social isolation and reduced opportunities for community cohesion.	One: Support the development of more inclusive and accessible sporting and leisure provision within Sutton Coldfield.	1.1 Improved engagement with sport for young people and people with disabilities
		1.2 Requirement that sports grant applications demonstrate inclusivity
	Two: Facilitate collective social interaction through community initiatives that encourage community participation and reduce social isolation and loneliness within Sutton Coldfield.	2.1 Post-COVID development of social activities that reduce loneliness
		2.2 Development of a time banking network
		2.3 Ensure the service and sporting mapping directory is kept up-to-date and available as an information resource for residents
		2.4 Enhancement of residents' voices in their communities
Standard of Living and Financial Wellbeing Many residents are sacrificing social needs to fund the cost of basic needs, whilst having limited (if any) savings to cover "lumpy" expenditures and are generally struggling to manage financially.	Three: Support the development of improved welfare advice, employment guidance and financial literacy	2.5 Development of a network of Community Centres
		3.1 Development of a network of welfare advisors
		3.2 Development of an employment support fund
		3.3 Improvement of financial literacy initiatives and guidance available to residents of Sutton Coldfield.
Mental wellbeing Within the context of the pandemic residents report poor mental health, with links to social capital and financial wellbeing influencing this pattern.	Four: Support the development of initiatives to improve mental health.	3.4 [linked to housing findings] Development of a support fund for home repair – similar to relief of need grants.
		4.1 Development of a network of mental health first aiders
		4.2 Investment in parental support initiatives
Physical wellbeing Residents within Sutton Coldfield experience a deterioration of physical wellbeing as they get older alongside decreasing access to sport and leisure activities.	Five: Support the development of Sutton Coldfield as an "active town"	4.3 Social capital and financial wellbeing initiatives that should also assist in attaining this ambition.
		5.1 Initiatives that enable Sutton Coldfield to become an "Active Town" including active ageing initiatives
		5.2. See possible developments listed above in relation to <i>potential ambition one</i> : Support the development of more inclusive and accessible sporting and leisure provision within Sutton Coldfield.

Housing Residents who lose their home or are seeking to escape domestic abuse have few housing options available to them.	Six: Explore the development of various forms of housing support for varied circumstances, such as recently being made homeless or escaping domestic abuse	6.1 Exploration into the feasibility of providing Almshouses, or a different model of supported housing, to those who have recently become homeless or with other specific requirements.
		6.2 Provision for individuals experiencing or escaping domestic abuse.
		6.3 Development of a support fund, or system of packages, to provide a new home starter kit for people/families who have recently become homeless.
Quality of life measure Certain groups of resident's experience lower overall quality of life in comparison to other residents: specifically geography, sexuality and age.	Seven: Support the development of inclusive approaches to enhance the quality of life for all in Sutton Coldfield	7.1 As part of equality, diversity and inclusion at SCCT, develop connections and reach across a wider range of diverse community groups, and specifically those less represented in the research focus groups: LGBT+ residents and agencies, ethnic minority residents and groups, and residents with physical disabilities
		7.2 Consideration into the viability and suitability of future research targeted at those groups less represented in the research interviews and focus groups within the next five years.
		7.3 Integration of inclusivity monitoring into wider grant application activity.
	Eight: In adopting a whole town approach to implementation of new initiatives and activities consider targeting pilot schemes or initial activity in those areas, and amongst those groups of residents, with lower quality of life scores.	8.1 Ensuring that a whole town approach is adopted to all the above possible developments within strategic planning
		8.2 Using the analysis provided to inform discussion, consider the suitability of adopting a phrased/targeted introduction of certain developments to ensure those residents experiencing more significant barriers to needs satisfaction are early beneficiaries.

AUTHOR

Dr Lee Gregory: Principal Investigator for the project. He was previously a senior lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Birmingham and is now Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham. His research interests include poverty and inequality as well as theoretical and conceptual debates about welfare provision. He is particularly interested in the role of welfare provision in perpetuating and challenging social problems and notions of alterity within welfare debates.

Project Team

Working with Dr Gregory during the project which started in 2019:

Dr Laura Bentley: Research Fellow for the project. She is a research fellow in the Department of Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology. She joined the department in 2019 after submitting her PhD thesis which examined the transitions of working-class women out of higher education.

Dr Richard Summers: Research Fellow for the project. He is also a research fellow in the Department of Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology. He joined the department this year following completion of his PhD in cognitive neuroscience, which involved building a brain-computer interface for older adults and exploring its implementation to support cognitive and physical function.

Professor Simon Pemberton: Project Advisor. He is a professor in Social Policy and Criminology currently researching aspects of social harm caused by states and corporations, as well as social structures, in particular the harms caused by inequality. He has previously worked on the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team would like to thank Sutton Coldfield Charitable Trust for funding the project, but are especially grateful for the support from Ernie Murray (previous Chief Executive), Tina Swani (current Chief Executive), David Cole (Grants Manager) and the members of the Social Needs Review Working Group. Special thanks also to Helen Kimmet, Administration Manager at SCCT, for consistent, high-quality support.

While we also thank the many respondents to the survey, interviews, focus groups and various service providers involved in the project, particular thanks go to Midlands Mencap, especially Ashleigh Jones, The Future Melting Pot and Live at the Lodge for their additional support in securing focus group participants and venues.

In addition, thanks go to Dr Sam Watson, at the Institute of Applied Health Research, University of Birmingham, for his support with access to data and GIS mapping.

The report content does not reflect the views of Sutton Coldfield Charitable Trust but the independent analysis of the research team.