



Commonplace

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Made Local

A practical approach to safer, more cohesive communities

2026

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Executive Summary



Safety is the foundation of cohesion

The LGA's Common Ground: Building Cohesive Communities sets out the leadership ambition for place leaders across England.^[1]

This paper sets out the operating model to make that ambition real.

Across the UK, safety and place have merged. If people do not feel safe, they do not use high streets, parks, transport or shared spaces. When shared spaces empty, belonging weakens. When belonging weakens, trust erodes.^{[2][3]}

Public concern about safety now sits alongside economic decline as a defining local issue with 1 million Anti Social Behaviour incidents recorded in 2025.^[4]

The challenge is not a lack of intent from the Government or Public Services, demonstrated by over 30 years of partnership infrastructure projects through Community Safety Partnerships.^[5] The failure has been working as separate systems, not as one.

The opportunity under devolution is clear: move from siloed partnership to integrated prevention.

Commonplace (powered by Zencity) can act as the enabler, connecting resident voice, perception data and operational policing to deliver Common Ground in practice.

40% of residents cite Anti Social Behaviour as needing the most improvement in their local area^[14]



Confidence Drives Participation



The cohesion equation

Cohesion is not built through statements of intent. It is built through everyday experience.

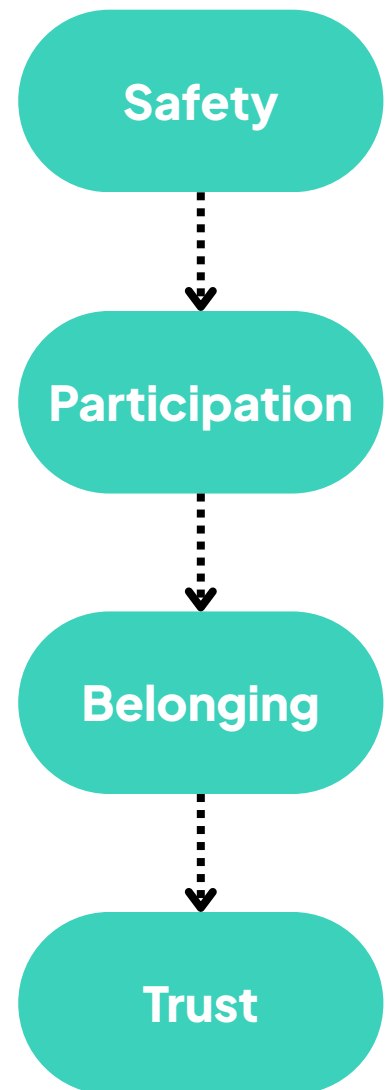
Three conditions reinforce one another:

- Safety
- Connection
- Visible action

When the perception of safety falls, daily patterns shift. People begin to avoid town centres, parks and public transport. As participation declines, everyday encounters between neighbours reduce.

Those routine interactions build familiarity and shared identity. Without them, belonging weakens, and when belonging weakens, trust across a place begins to erode.

Evidence reinforces this link. Among residents proud of their local area, the most common reasons are a strong sense of community (46%), access to green and natural spaces (42%) and feeling safe (42%).^[14]



65% say improving shared spaces is key to creating closer communities^[6]



Divisions Shape Confidence



Perception often forms without contact

The State of Us Report^[6] shows that concerns are not evenly distributed across issues, with migration-related divisions cited most frequently. However, most people report no personal interaction with someone seeking asylum.

Perception is often shaped indirectly rather than through lived contact.

When uncertainty is not addressed, division narratives can grow. Where coordination and follow-through are visible, confidence is more likely to stabilise.

Safety and cohesion are structurally linked.

Top 3 division concerns	1st	2nd	3rd
Between migrants or asylum seekers and people born in the UK	30%	12%	7%
Between different faiths and religions	13%	15%	12%
Between ethnic groups	13%	14%	10%
Between rich and poor	14%	11%	9%
Between party politics or political views	8%	9%	8%
Online (conspiracies/misinformation)	8%	6%	6%
Between older and younger people	6%	6%	7%
By place (towns and cities, urban and rural)	4%	4%	5%
Between people who want independence for Scotland/Wales/NI and those who don't	3%	4%	4%

58% of people have not interacted with someone seeking asylum locally^[6]



Residents Want Practical Action



Shared spaces, visible order, clear communication

Residents consistently prioritise tangible local action over abstract policy debate. On social divides, they emphasise education, fairness and integration: ^[6]

43%

Promote mutual respect in schools

37%

Reform immigration system

37%

Address racial and faith divisions

33%

Address inequality

On connection, they prioritise shared spaces and shared activity:

65%

Improve parks, high streets, libraries

52%

Arts participation

52%

Sport participation

43%

Volunteering

This creates a clear operating logic:

Invest in shared space > Reduce visible disorder > Communicate consistently

To deliver this, police forces, local authorities and placemakers must be able to measure confidence and respond visibly as one system.



Partnership Alone Is Not Enough



Structure without integration fails

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 established Community Safety Partnerships as statutory frameworks for cooperation.^[5] These structures remain in place.

Yet inspectorate reviews repeatedly identify structural weaknesses:^[7]

- Budgets remain siloed
- Data systems do not align
- Performance metrics differ across agencies
- Communication to the public is inconsistent
- Leadership cycles disrupt continuity

Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit illustrates how policing can work alongside health, education and social services to address the underlying drivers of violence through a coordinated prevention approach. ^[8]

Cumbria's Local Focus Hubs reported 90% positive outcomes in reducing repeat ASB. ^[9]

But where success is not visible, fear persists. The failure has not been partnership intent – it has been fragmented execution.

Crime reduction ≠ Confidence recovery



The Confidence Gap



Perception is a performance metric

Police measure recorded incidents. Communities measure how safe they feel.

These two measures do not always move together. A reduction in crime does not automatically produce an increase in confidence. When that divergence widens, cohesion risk increases.

Even where crime falls, safety confidence can remain low if:

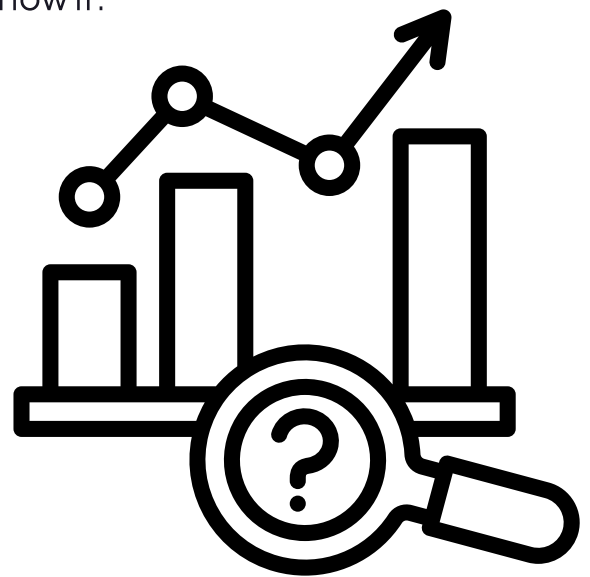
- Environmental decline signals disorder
- Visible presence is limited
- Incidents are amplified online
- Residents feel uninformed

Inspectorate reviews consistently emphasise visible follow-through as essential to restoring trust. ^[7]

Confidence improves not just when incidents fall, but when residents see action and communication.

The implication is clear: leaders cannot rely on crime data alone to understand cohesion risk.

To manage cohesion effectively, perception must be measured alongside operational reality.



Seeing Cohesion Risk Clearly



From confidence gap to cohesion risk

To manage cohesion risk, three types of information must be viewed together.

Recorded Incidents

Police data on crime, ASB and enforcement activity.

Environmental Signals

Lighting, cleanliness, vacancy, public space condition, visible disorder.

Community Sentiment

Perception of safety, trust in services, fear of crime, sense of belonging.

When these layers are viewed together, leaders can see not just where incidents occur, but where confidence is deteriorating or stabilising.

Turn fragmented signals into actionable cohesion intelligence



Enforcement Within the System



PSPOs as a proportionate response

Evidence through consultation

With the establishment of how cohesion risk is identified, the next question is how leaders respond when risk is visible.

Clear public rationale

Local authorities need tools that are both lawful and legitimate. Public Spaces Protection Orders sit at the legal bridge between councils and police.^[10] They allow defined behaviours to be restricted within specific areas and enable enforcement through fixed penalties.

Enforcement & support

Used well, PSPOs can provide visible reassurance. Used poorly, they risk eroding trust and displacing problems.^[11]

Reviews with perception data

Under an integrated prevention model, PSPOs must move from blunt exclusion to accountable intervention.

Transparent reporting

They should be deployed not as reactive punishment, but as structured, evidence-based responses to measurable cohesion risk.



Prevention By Design



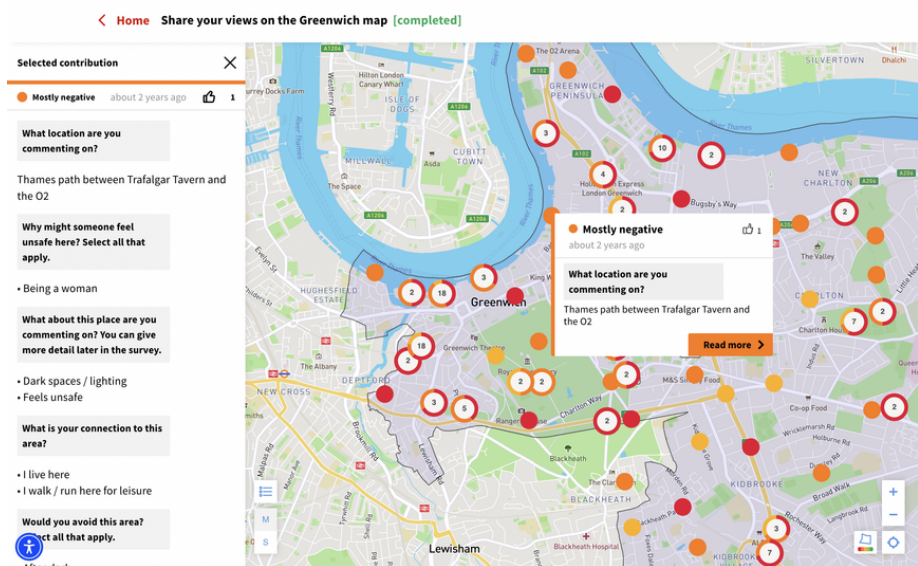
Placemaking as community safety

When cohesion risk is identified, leaders have two response levers: enforcement and prevention. PSPOs respond to behaviour. Placemaking reshapes the conditions that allow behaviour to emerge.

Residents rank improving shared spaces as the most important action for building closer communities.^[11] Neglected space signals disorder. Active, well lit and maintained space increases informal guardianship.

Research suggests safety improvements often generate diffusion of benefits rather than simple displacement,^[12] meaning confidence can strengthen beyond the intervention site.

Greenwich Women's Safety Mapping illustrates this design-led approach, identifying avoidance patterns and environmental vulnerabilities in public space.^[13]



Placemaking and policing must operate as a unified prevention strategy



The Integrated Prevention Cycle



Listen → Survey → Engage → Act → Report → Repeat

The sections of this paper describe the problem and the tools. An Integrated Prevention Cycle enabled by Commonplace connects them into one repeatable operating system.

1. LISTEN – Detect tension early

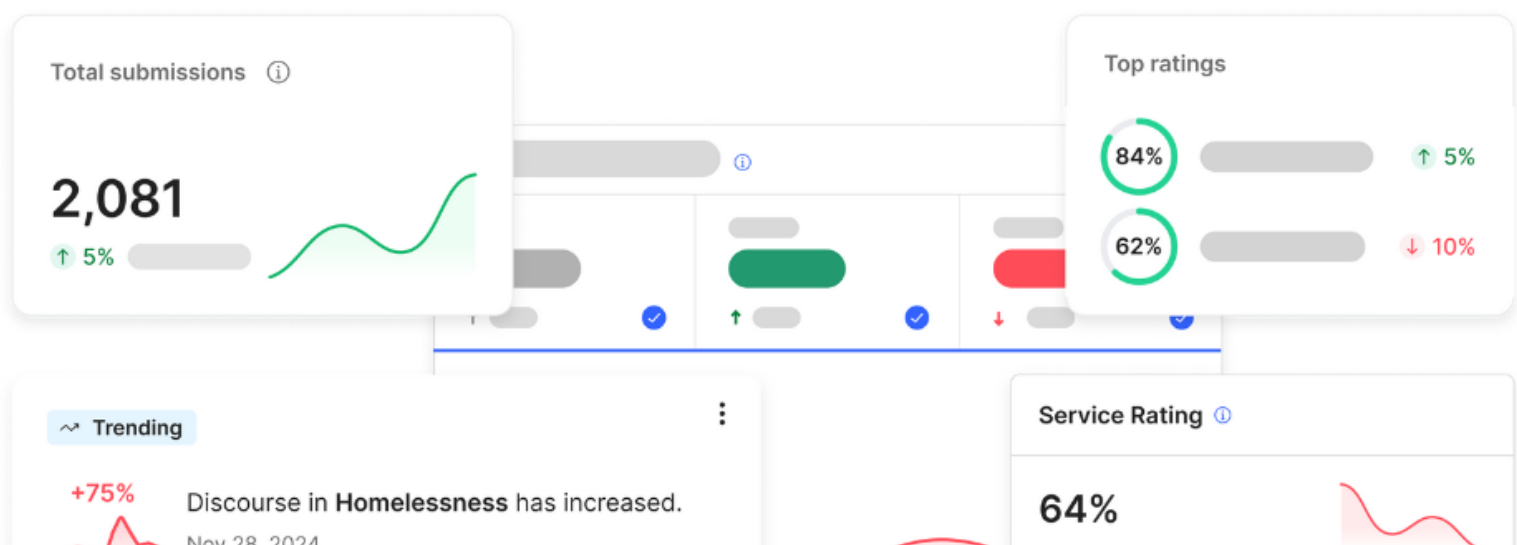
Capture structured, geolocated resident voice in real time. Identify emerging safety concerns, rising anxiety, misinformation and local flashpoints before they escalate.

2. SURVEY – Quantify confidence and belonging

Measure safety confidence, belonging and trust in local services at representative scale. Reveal where perception diverges and track change over time.

3. ENGAGE – Create legitimacy and mandate

Structured consultation on enforcement tools, placemaking interventions and safety strategy. Ensure that action is publicly grounded, visible and accountable.



References



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Making safety visible and cohesion real

Arrange a demo with our Engagement Specialists



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