Index Insights

Neighbourhood Safety

Resident Voice Index™ initiative

The Resident Voice Index™ is a long-term project that gathers anonymised survey responses from people living in social housing in the UK. These short surveys are designed to provide policy makers and housing providers with information they can use to improve neighbourhoods and communities.

Neighbourhoods & Communities survey

In this five-minute survey that 3,875 self-selected UK social housing residents completed, we explored the availability and importance of local facilities and amenities within neighbourhoods along with perceptions of community belonging, caring and safety. The questions were designed to deliver insights into how neighbourhoods could be adapted to improve these perceptions.

Cornerstones: Independence, Transparency, Brevity, Anonymity

We are not paid by anyone to perform these surveys and the results are published for free in a transparent fashion for anyone who may benefit from using them.

The surveys are kept unintrusive and short by focusing on the chosen topics only and we guarantee results will not be traceable back to individual respondents.

Safety

Across the Resident Voice Index™ initiative, for residents and housing providers alike, safety has emerged as a key issue to be addressed – this relates to safety in the home, safety of the home (building safety) and neighbourhood safety. The project began by exploring neighbourhood safety, asking whether residents believed that their neighbourhoods were safe and what could change to make them feel safer.

Overall, 39.5% of respondents felt that they live in a safe neighbourhood, 60% were unable to say that they live in a safe neighbourhood, and 34% felt unsafe in their neighbourhood. Perceptions of safety increased with age, with people under 35 feeling significantly less safe than those over 55.

When asked for suggestions around how to improve safety in their neighbourhoods, respondents named tangible interventions that multiple actors, from policy makers to housing providers, could focus their efforts on.

The most popular were increases in community policing, addressing problems related to the misuse and dealing of drugs, improving how neighbourhoods and developments are lit, and reliable CCTV operating in neighbourhoods.

Other popular suggestions included providing activities for young people, making sure greenery is well groomed to deter antisocial behaviour, addressing speeding in areas, making careful placements of residents in communities, and giving extra support to those who need it.

It's also worth noting that in suggestions around what could change to make neighbourhoods feel safer, 1 in 10 could not suggest any potential improvements to their neighbourhood to increase safety.

Illustrated Insights

3,875

Self-selected UK social housing residents responded to questions on their neighbourhoods and communities

We explored the importance of:

Local Facilities and Amenities
Community Belonging
Caring and Safety

39.5%

feel they live in a safe neighbourhood

34%

feel that their neighbourhood isn't safe

Those that feel like they belong to their neighbourhood are over **3 times more likely to feel safe** than those who feel like they don't belong

Respondents under 35 feel significantly less safe than those over 55

Applying the insights

Unsafe neighbourhoods have been linked to poor health outcomes. While addressing these societal issues can be difficult and complex, the positive outcomes could have far-reaching effects on personal and societal wellbeing. Learning that the majority of residents could not say that they definitely live in a safe neighbourhood reveals that work must be undertaken to improve these perceptions.

This research sought to investigate the complex relationships between residents' perceptions of belonging to and caring about neighbourhood involvement, as well as feelings of neighbourhood safety.

There was a high response rate for questions that asked about neighbourhood safety, indicating that the topic resonated with respondents. In particular, the wealth of free-text suggestions for what could make a neighbourhood feel safer shows that even for the 39.5% of people that reported feeling safe in their neighbourhoods, work could be undertaken to make those neighbourhoods safer.

When answers were cross analysed, the Neighbourhoods & Communities report found that the respondents who felt a sense of belonging were over 3 times more likely to report feeling safe (64%) than those who did not (13%). The results showed similar statistics when assessing belonging data through the lens of those who felt safe.

For decision makers these results suggest that a sense of community correlates with a feeling of safety in a positive and marked way, as respondents look to one another as a source of assurance and social connection. As such, interventions that actively try to improve feelings of safety may have a knock-on effect on a sense of belonging.

Last word

There is currently momentum in the UK to address the effects of crime on communities. The Home Office's 'Beating Crime Plan' acknowledges the role that neighbourhood safety has in supporting communities to thrive socially, culturally and economically. The practical suggestions brought forth by respondents illustrate that across stakeholders, there is comprehensive understanding of the problem and how to address it; now is the time for action.

"None of us can fulfil our potential if we live in fear"

Boris Johnson, Beating Crime Plan, July 2021

What else matters to residents?

Increased Policing | Tackling Drugs
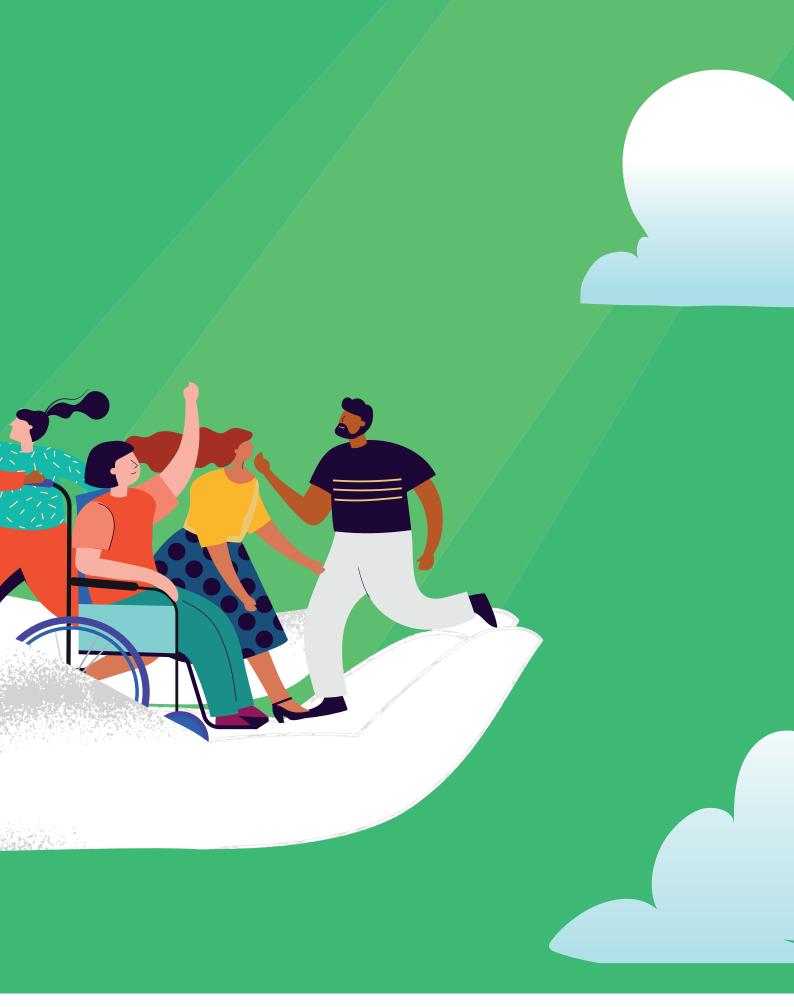Better Lighting | Improved CCTV

60%

of respondents could not say that they live in a safe neighbourhood

A sense of community belonging is connected to feelings of safety

Actions aimed at improving feelings of safety could have a knock-on effect on residents' sense of belonging