Why place matters: neighbourhood effects on crime and anti-social behaviour

An evidence and policy review for the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods

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About Crest Advisory

We are crime and justice specialists — equal parts research, strategy and communication. From police forces to public inquiries, from tech companies to devolved authorities, we believe all these organisations (and more) have their own part to play in building a safer, more secure society. As the UK's only consultancy with this focus, we are as much of a blend as the crime and justice sector itself.

About this report

Crime and anti-social behaviour are top priorities for the residents of 'mission critical' neighbourhoods. That is clear from national statistics, public opinion research by the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) with Public First, and from ICON's visits programme, during which the Commission heard countless tales of lives blighted or destroyed by local disorder and crime.

As a result, ICON asked Crest Advisory to explore the effects that neighbourhoods have on crime and anti-social behaviour, and the policy implications of this analysis, through an evidence and policy review.

On that basis, the ideas set out here are the authors' and so should not be ascribed to the Commission as a whole, or to any individual Commissioners or their associated organisations.

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Executive summary

Neighbourhoods — understood here as the small, local areas people identify with in their daily lives which do not necessarily align with official administrative boundaries — play a central role in shaping people's experiences of crime and safety. This is particularly true in relation to anti-social behaviour (ASB) and visible disorder. These issues, while often seen as less serious than violent crime, directly affect people's day-to-day lives by shaping perceptions of safety, trust in institutions, and community cohesion. This paper makes the case for why neighbourhoods must be at the heart of crime policy — both as spaces where crime is experienced and as sites of potential solutions.

The evidence is clear: the social and physical conditions of neighbourhoods are not incidental to crime — they help to generate it and shape how people respond to it. Poor lighting, unmanaged public spaces, and the erosion of social ties can all create the conditions in which ASB and crime thrive. Crucially, these neighbourhood characteristics can also be changed. Interventions that enhance the built environment, foster informal guardianship, and build local trust can have a preventative effect, reducing demand and improving outcomes cost-effectively.

Over the past three decades, policy has increasingly acknowledged this link with initiatives such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, neighbourhood policing and the Safer Streets Fund. These initiatives reflect a wider recognition that local, place-based approaches, built on strong partnerships and trust, are essential. However, the effectiveness of such approaches has often been undermined by fiscal constraints, insufficient targeting of the most affected neighbourhoods and a lack of investment in the social connections that sustain resilient communities.

The government wants to 'take back our streets' as one of its key missions. In its June 2025 Spending Review, the government announced a new national commitment to improving 350 deprived communities, and a £240 million investment in a Growth Mission Fund — signalling a renewed commitment to place-based approaches. It was also announced that police spending power will grow by 1.7% annually, to support the government's mission to make streets safer, complementing a pledge made in April 2025 to 'restore local policing' and a commitment to placing 13,000 neighbourhood police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) into dedicated community roles.

To achieve its ambitions, the government needs to 'think neighbourhoods': focus on areas where harm is greatest, invest in the social foundations of safety and deliver quick, visible improvements. Neighbourhood-focused approaches are not only effective, they are efficient. With limited public finances, place-based approaches offer a strategic route to delivering high-impact, low-cost crime reduction, particularly in relation to ASB and disorder. But achieving the government's mission to 'take back our streets' requires more than additional police officers. It requires investing in both places and people — building social capital and strengthening cohesion — to prioritise key issues and needs at a place-based level.

Summary of key findings

- **Crime is heavily concentrated and persistent in areas of multiple disadvantage.** A small proportion of geographic areas account for a disproportionate share of crime and ASB. These areas often face persistent poverty, underinvestment, and institutional neglect, which foster conditions for crime to take root and persist. Residents in these areas report significantly greater concerns about ASB, illegal drugs and safety, and feel less connected and optimistic about their communities.
- **Disadvantage and instability reinforce each other, weakening community control.** Factors such as residential turnover can interact with disadvantage to undermine social cohesion, weakening informal social control and making communities more vulnerable to ASB and crime.
- **The built environment shapes both risk and resilience.** Urban design influences crime not only by affecting opportunities for offending but also by shaping perceptions of safety, trust and community pride, and enabling more positive use of public space, including through increased natural surveillance and by supporting informal guardianship.
- **Social cohesion and trust can act as protective factors, particularly in areas of disadvantage.** Strong social bonds, shared norms, and a collective willingness to intervene (collective efficacy) can help neighbourhoods resist crime and ASB, even in deprived areas.
- **Crime and ASB matter to communities — they act as wider signals of neighbourhood decline.** Visible signs of disorder and ineffective institutional responses erode trust and community pride, reinforcing a negative cycle of decline and insecurity. Addressing these perceptions is key to rebuilding confidence and reducing crime.

Summary of recommendations

The report calls for a neighbourhood-based approach to tackling crime and ASB, grounded in the evidence that strong community relationships — alongside enforcement — are essential to safer, more resilient places. It proposes five areas for action:

1. **Governance and strategic targeting:** Focus policy and funding on the neighbourhoods most affected by crime and ASB. A new cross-government unit should coordinate investment, align strategies and ensure sustained oversight, supported by local partnerships and devolved funding models.
2. **Social infrastructure and community power:** Invest in the social fabric of communities to build collective efficacy. A Social Fabric Fund should support grassroots initiatives that build trust, strengthen social ties and promote informal guardianship in areas with high harm and limited civic infrastructure.
3. **Neighbourhood policing and enforcement:** Rebuild visible, community-responsive policing. Neighbourhood policing should be rebranded as a specialist discipline, with dedicated training, career pathways, and metrics that reflect trust, engagement and responsiveness — not just enforcement.
4. **Local services and place-based prevention:** Bring services to where harm happens by co-locating youth, mental health and substance misuse support in affected areas. Community input should shape local service delivery and environmental improvements.
5. **Evidence, insight and evaluation:** Develop a national framework for measuring neighbourhood safety, led by the new Police Performance Unit. This should incorporate resident perspectives, go beyond crime stats, and help identify what works at neighbourhood scale.

The report also recommends exploring sustainable funding options — such as levies on developers and high-impact industries — to support long-term, place-based investment in neighbourhood cohesion and safety.

Introduction

Tackling crime is one of the government's five core missions in its Plan for Change. A range of national initiatives has been launched to support this ambition, from the Young Futures Programme (focused on early intervention with young people), to the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee (which aims to rebuild trust through visible, local policing), and Respect Orders (new enforcement powers to restrict the movement of repeat offenders in public spaces).

While violent crime remains a major concern, there is growing recognition that public confidence and quality of life are often shaped by persistent, lower-level issues, such as anti-social behaviour (ASB), visible disorder and environmental neglect. Research and polling commissioned by the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) found that residents in 'mission critical neighbourhoods' — areas identified as being furthest from achieving the government's five missions — consistently identified ASB and lower level crime as priorities. These types of neighbourhood-level harm are highly salient to residents, and can signal decline, erode trust, and foster the perception that neighbourhoods are unsafe or neglected. They also have economic consequences — deterring business investment, and weakening the social fabric that supports growth and opportunity.[1]

Against this backdrop, Crest was commissioned by the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) to explore how neighbourhood-level approaches can be better harnessed to reduce crime, and in particular, to tackle ASB and visible disorder.

ASB is defined as 'conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person'[2] and is understood to encompass a range of criminal and non-criminal behaviours, including noise nuisance, property damage, public disorder and drug-related activities. While this paper attempts to distinguish between ASB and crime more generally, this is not always straightforward: much of the available evidence overlaps significantly and public perception research suggests that individuals often do not draw a clear line, but instead respond to incidents based on whether they undermine their personal or community sense of safety.[3] Despite this, a consistent theme emerges: certain behaviours — whether technically criminal or not — are experienced as persistent and corrosive threats to community cohesion and feelings of trust.

This report draws on a wide body of evidence to explore how neighbourhood conditions shape patterns of ASB and crime more broadly. It explores theories and frameworks to help explain both where and why such issues emerge, the significant impacts they can have on individuals, communities and trust in institutions, and what can be done about it. It is important to note that the report does not aim to provide an exhaustive review of enforcement tools or criminal justice processes, nor to evaluate national crime reduction strategies in their entirety. Rather, it focuses on how locally grounded, preventative and place-based approaches can complement traditional policing tools to reduce demand over the long term. In short, this report aims to show that neighbourhoods are not just sites where crime happens — they are key to solving it.

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[1] Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods. (2025). Interim Report: Think Neighbourhoods
[2] Section 105(4) of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
[3] HMICFRS. (2024). The policing response to antisocial behaviour: PEEL spotlight report.

Why neighbourhoods matter in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour

Too often, debates about crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) overlook the crucial role that place plays. While national crime trends are regularly cited, less attention is given to how harm is distributed — or to the fact that some communities face a vastly different reality than others. This matters, because crime and ASB are not just individual incidents; they are shaped by and embedded within the local environments in which they occur.

A policing-only response to neighbourhood crime and ASB is not a long-term solution. While it may provide short-term relief, relying solely on enforcement is resource-intensive and insufficient to tackle the root causes of local harm. To deliver sustainable reductions in crime and support the government's Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, there must be place-based investment in the physical and social fabric of communities.

To design effective responses, we need to understand where harm concentrates, how it is experienced, and why certain neighbourhoods remain more exposed over time. This section sets out the case for focusing on neighbourhoods in crime policy — not just as backdrops for crime, but as active drivers of safety, trust and resilience.

Crime and anti-social behaviour are not experienced equally

Crime and ASB are highly concentrated. Evidence shows that a disproportionate share of crime and ASB tends to cluster in small geographic areas (sometimes referred to as crime or ASB 'hot spots'), such as street segments, bus stops or an address or group of addresses.

These clusters are often at levels even more concentrated than public perceptions suggest. For example, Home Office analysis has shown that nearly a quarter of all neighbourhood crime was committed in just 5% of local areas.[4] This can also be seen within counties or cities: for example, in Cumbria, 18 areas identified as ASB hot spots accounted for 0.04% of the county but 23% of all ASB,[5] while a single retail park accounted for 9% of all ASB calls in Newcastle-under-Lyme.[6]

A similarly stark concentration is seen in violent crime. Data from 2016 identified that half of all violent crime in England and Wales took place in only 2% of street segments;[7] while in London, nearly 70% of knife-related homicides in 2017-18 took place within 1% of small geographic areas.[8]

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[4] Home Office. (2021). Beating crime plan.
[5] Cumbria PCC. (2025). Commissioner goes on patrol as part of Operation Enhance. 18 March 2025.
[6] College of Policing. (2024). Muti-agency problem solving to reduce anti-social behaviour car cruising.
[7] Park, S. (2019). *Examining the "law of crime concentrations" across multiple jurisdictions* (Doctoral dissertation, George Mason University).
[8] Massey, J., Sherman, L. W., and Coupe, T. (2019). Forecasting knife homicide risk from prior knife assaults in 4835 local areas of London, 2016–2018. *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing*, *3*, 1-20.

Evidence indicates that these patterns persist over time, highlighting the extent to which certain neighbourhoods face ongoing exposure to crime and disorder.[9,10,11,12] For example, a study examining street segments in Seattle between 1989-2002 found that half of the crimes reported over the 14-year period consistently happened within 4.5% of street segments.[13] Similarly, there is evidence that gang territories in London today correspond closely with areas identified as poor in 1900.[14] These conditions not only make such areas more vulnerable to harm but also contribute to a sustained sense of insecurity among residents.

These entrenched patterns of harm are reflected in how people experience and perceive their neighbourhoods, particularly in areas facing the greatest disadvantage. Recent polling by Public First for ICON found that while concerns about the economy or infrastructure were similar across different areas, residents in the highest need neighbourhoods were distinctly more concerned about litter (53%), ASB (49%) and illegal drugs (48%).[15] For example, four times as many people in high-need neighbourhoods called illegal drugs a 'major issue' compared with those in the lowest need neighbourhoods. Findings from ICON's engagement programme further indicated that people living in high-crime areas often feel less safe, less connected to their communities, and less optimistic about the future of their neighbourhoods.[16]

> "I don't think there's a specific, big issue anywhere. I think there's lots of smaller issues that are all contributing… Nobody likes to go out on an evening, no more, because you don't feel safe… And then you've got your local shops closing, and litter. It all has a knock-on effect."
> — ICON focus group participant

[9] Braga, A. A., Turchan, B., Papachristos, A. V., and Hureau, D. M. (2019). Hot spots policing of small geographic areas effects on crime. *Campbell systematic reviews*, *15*(3), e1046.
[10] Weisburd, D., Bushway, S., Lum, C., and Yang, S. M. (2004). Trajectories of crime at places: A longitudinal study of street segments in the city of Seattle. *Criminology*, *42*(2), 283-322.
[11] Braga, A. A., and Weisburd, D. (2010). *Policing problem places: Crime hot spots and effective prevention*. Oxford University Press.
[12] Lee, Y., Eck, J. E., SooHyun, O., and Martinez, N. N. (2017). How concentrated is crime at places? A systematic review from 1970 to 2015. *Crime Science, 6*(1), 6.
[13] Weisburd, D., Bushway, S., Lum, C., and Yang, S. M. (2004). Trajectories of crime at places: A longitudinal study of street segments in the city of Seattle. *Criminology*, *42*(2), 283-322.
[14] Wieshmann, H., Davies, M., Sugg, O., Davis, S., and Ruda, S. (2020). Violence in London: What we know and how to respond. The Behavioural Insights Team.
[15] Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods. (2025). Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges.
[16] Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods. (2025). Think Neighbourhoods: A new approach to fixing the country's biggest policy challenges.

Such findings have been corroborated elsewhere. A 2023 mixed-methods research study in England and Wales found that 18% of respondents in the most deprived areas considered ASB a 'very big problem' compared to 5% in the least deprived.[17] Polling commissioned by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change and Crest Advisory showed that 52% of respondents living in the most deprived areas said they feel a serious impact in their neighbourhood from organised crime — often a driver of lower level criminality — compared to 24% in the most affluent areas.[18]

Crime and anti-social behaviour act as wider signals of neighbourhood decline

Perceptions of crime and ASB can intensify their harm. The concept of 'signal crimes'[19] helps explain this: certain incidents are seen as indicators of broader breakdowns in safety or order. Residents' sense of risk is often shaped less by the actual rate of crime or ASB, and more by what these incidents symbolise — and by how visibly authorities respond. These incidents act as social signals, influencing how safe and cohesive a neighbourhood feels.

Polling and engagement across England and Wales found that people often describe ASB as something that gradually chips away at their sense of safety.[20] Some respondents described avoiding local spaces altogether, which reduced everyday contact between neighbours and deepened feelings of disconnection, making it feel like a place where people no longer looked out for one another. Participants noted that trust between residents had eroded as a result of ASB, giving rise to suspicion and reluctance to spend time in communal areas. This atmosphere of mistrust discouraged involvement in community life. As residents became more resigned to the presence of ASB, some spoke of a broader sense of social indifference or 'moral decline', where people seemed to care less about one another and the state of their neighbourhood.

These experiences are not simply reactions to physical disorder but are shaped by broader social and structural factors. Recent research using survey data from a northern English town found that people are more likely to perceive high levels of disorder when they feel economically insecure, dissatisfied with their area, and let down by local and national authorities.[21] In this way, perceptions of disorder act as a form of social commentary — signalling disconnection, marginalisation and a breakdown in trust in institutions.

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[17] Home Office. (2023). Anti-social behaviour: impacts on individuals and local communities. UK Government.
[18] Davis, S., Bomford, C., Britton, L., and Iosad, A. (2024). A new approach to serious and organised crime in the UK. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.
[19] Innes, M. (2004). Signal crimes and signal disorders: Notes on deviance as communicative action. *The British journal of sociology*, *55*(3), 335-355.
[20] Home Office. (2023). Anti-social behaviour: impacts on individuals and local communities. UK Government.
[21] Bradford, B., Girling, E., Loader, I., & Sparks, R. (2025). 'Seeing disorder' in an English town. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 17488958251342733.

In places with persistent exposure to ASB, these behaviours often come to symbolise deeper patterns of neglect — further undermining confidence in both public spaces and public institutions, and accelerating the fragmentation of community life.

This deterioration is not only felt by residents themselves but can shape how the area is viewed from the outside. Territorial stigmatisation occurs where entire areas become associated with disorder, danger, or decay — discouraging investment, undermining community pride, and limiting opportunities for residents, particularly young people.[22]

In this context, perceptions of ASB are not just a consequence of harm — they are part of the harm. They affect quality of life, depress civic participation and make it harder to build resilient, supportive communities. This underscores that people's sense of place, and the level of disorder they perceive, are not merely responses to visible signs of decline but are bound up in how they understand their lives and position within wider social and political systems. In this way, tackling ASB is not only a question of enforcement but also one of neighbourhood renewal, trust-building and restoring confidence in local environments.

[22] Wacquant, L. (2007). Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality. *Thesis Eleven, 91*(1), 66-77.

Case study: Operation Vulcan — the impact of tackling crime on local regeneration

Operation Vulcan is a Greater Manchester Police (GMP) initiative that aimed to tackle the counterfeit goods trade in two local areas of Manchester: Cheetham Hill and Strangeways. These neighbourhoods were identified as high-harm locations due to their involvement in the counterfeit goods trade, alongside high levels of criminality. At the outset of the operation, there were 206 counterfeit shops in the area, which were linked to the supply of drugs, abuse of immigration status, violence and exploitation. Intelligence suggested that the counterfeit trade in these areas accounted for approximately 50% of the UK's illegal counterfeit goods market, contributing significantly to organised crime[23] and earning the areas a reputation as the 'counterfeit capital of Europe'.[24]

Operation Vulcan brought together the resources of 65 different agencies — including the Intellectual Property Office, Immigration Enforcement, trading standards, local homelessness charities, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, and Manchester City Council — to deliver a coordinated response. The operation used targeted disruption techniques to clear specific premises of criminal activity, maintained a visible presence to hold the area, and then engaged communities in rebuilding efforts.

As a result, all counterfeit shops in Cheetham Hill and Strangeways were shut down and crime rates fell significantly, with the overall crime harm index reducing by 48%.[25,26] This led to improved community relations, which in turn generated better police intelligence and more efficient policing.[27] The operation also boosted local business and investor confidence, as reflected in positive survey responses from local businesses and a £300 million increase in investment in the area.

The success of Operation Vulcan in reducing crime also laid the groundwork for wider economic revitalisation — attracting new businesses, supporting housing improvements, and reinforcing investor interest.

Operation Vulcan illustrates how place-specific enforcement, combined with multi-agency coordination and community engagement, can deliver rapid reductions in crime and ASB while also building local trust and unlocking regeneration.

[23] Greater Manchester Police. (2022). Operation Vulcan.
[24] College of Policing. (2024). Operation Vulcan — reducing counterfeit sales and crime harm.
[25] Greater Manchester Police. (2024). Looking back on two years of Operation Vulcan – the Greater Manchester Police initiative that shut down counterfeit street.
[26] College of Policing. (2024). Operation Vulcan — reducing counterfeit sales and crime harm.
[27] Crest Advisory. (2025). Operation Vulcan interview.

Policy implications

- **Efforts to address neighbourhood safety should focus less on strict legal distinctions between crime and ASB**, and more on behaviours that most visibly erode trust and cohesion in public space.
- **Crime and ASB prevention should be targeted at persistent hot spots**, with interventions designed to break cycles of entrenched disadvantage and social harm.
- **Public confidence is shaped as much by the response to ASB as by the behaviour itself**. Local authorities and partners need to act in visible, consistent ways that demonstrate care and control over shared spaces.

The role of neighbourhoods in shaping crime and anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime are often seen as the result of individual choices — shaped by personal morality, upbringing or opportunity. But in reality, a neighbourhood's risk of higher or lower levels of crime and ASB is influenced by a complex interplay of wider factors. These include levels of deprivation and the availability of local services, the physical condition of public spaces and the strength of social ties. Over time, these structural and environmental conditions shape everyday behaviours — affecting both the opportunities for crime and the likelihood that it will take root or persist.

A wide body of evidence has examined these dynamics through a range of theories and frameworks (see Figure 1). While the terminology varies — from social disorganisation to collective efficacy or neighbourhood instability — the core insight remains consistent: ASB and crime are not evenly distributed because the conditions that give rise to them are not evenly distributed. Crucially, these conditions do not act in isolation. Factors such as weak social cohesion and concentrated disadvantage interact and reinforce each other in ways that help explain why some neighbourhoods face persistent problems while others remain more resilient.

In this section, we set out the key ways in which neighbourhoods interact with crime and ASB.

Crime is entrenched in areas of multiple disadvantage

Concentrations of crime and ASB are not random — they reflect deeper structural inequalities and entrenched local disadvantage. Neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of social deprivation[28] or multiple disadvantages — such as poor housing, limited access to services, and underinvestment in public space — tend to experience significantly higher rates of crime and disorder.[29,30] A wide range of data reinforces this point:

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) consistently finds that crime and ASB rates are disproportionately concentrated in the 20% most deprived areas.[31,32]
- A quarter of those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods live in the 10% of neighbourhoods with the highest crime rates, compared with 3% of people in the least deprived neighbourhoods.[33]
- A Greater Manchester study found that increases in concentrated disadvantage were associated with a 2% rise in nuisance incidents and a 3% rise in violent incidents.[34]
- A British study showed that areas with higher levels of deprivation had significantly higher rates of property and violent crime.[35]
- In a 2024 CSEW survey, 18% of respondents living in the most deprived areas reported a high level of perceived ASB compared to 4% in the least deprived.[36]

This is compounded by the fact that disadvantaged areas often have lower trust in the police and public services, making residents less likely to report crime or intervene in ASB. For example, a study exploring fear of crime and feelings of safety and security in 11 European countries found that residents who think they live in areas with lower crime rates tend to express more positive attitudes towards the police than do those who live in areas where there are higher crime rates.[37]

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[28] College of Policing. (2021). People and places — how resources can be targeted. 1 July 2021.
[29] Jung, J. (2023). Neighbourhood effects on antisocial behaviour among young people in England and Wales: a multilevel analysis (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bristol).
[30] Giulietti, C., and McConnell, B. (2020). Kicking you when you're already down: the multipronged impact of austerity on crime. Centre for Population Change.
[31] Higgins, N., Robb, P. and Britton, A. (2010). Geographic patterns of crime, in: J. Flatley, C. Kershaw, K. Smith, R. Chaplin and D. Moon (Eds.), *Crime in England and Wales 2009/10*, London: Home Office.
[32] Home Office. (2023). Anti-social behaviour: impacts on individuals and local communities. UK Government.
[33] The Health Foundation. (2024). Inequalities in likelihood of living in high-crime neighbourhoods. 11 July 2024.
[34] Lymperopoulou, K., Bannister, J., and Krzemieniewska-Nandwani, K. (2022). Inequality in exposure to crime, social disorganization and collective efficacy: Evidence from greater Manchester, United Kingdom. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *62*(4), 1019-1035.
[35] Tarling, R., and Dennis, R. (2016). Socio-Economic Determinants of Crime Rates: Modelling Local Area Police-Recorded Crime. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, *55*(1-2), 207-225.
[36] Office for National Statistics. (2024). Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables: March 2024 dataset. Table S32.
[37] Reid, I.D., Appleby-Arnold, S., Brockdorff, N., Jakovljev, I., and Zdravković, S. (2020). Developing a model of perceptions of security and insecurity in the context of crime. *Psychiatry, psychology and law, 27*(4), 620-636.

When trust in institutions is low and formal opportunities are scarce, informal structures often emerge — including gangs, street networks and illicit economies — offering alternative sources of income, identity and protection, particularly for young people. Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street* [38] describes how, in contexts of persistent poverty and institutional neglect, a street-based value system can take hold, where respect must be actively earned and defended. In the UK context, Simon Harding's concept of 'street capital'[39] highlights how young people may gain status through proximity to violence, local knowledge, and connections to criminal networks. These informal systems can provide a sense of belonging and agency — but also entrench cycles of violence and further isolate communities from mainstream opportunities. Over time, such dynamics can become embedded, making them difficult to disrupt through enforcement alone.

Social disorganisation can compound disadvantage to further entrench harm

Disadvantage and instability can reinforce each other, weakening community control and creating conditions in which disorder and harm are more likely to flourish. Social disorganisation theory[40] identifies poverty, residential instability and ethnic heterogeneity as factors that can weaken social ties and shared values, thereby undermining informal social control and making it harder for communities to regulate behaviour and prevent crime.

High levels of residential turnover can disrupt social ties and reduce people's attachment to a place. Research using administrative data from England and Wales showed that areas with higher turnover experience significantly higher crime rates, particularly property crime and violence.[41] The findings showed that turnover was linked to increased burglary and theft in gentrifying areas, suggesting that economic shifts can create new opportunities for crime, particularly targeting incoming, wealthier residents. In contrast, in declining areas with high turnover but stagnant or falling property prices, crime drives further churn, as residents leave in response to disorder, creating a cycle of disinvestment. Importantly, neighbourhood disadvantage appears to amplify the impact of residential turnover, making deprived communities more vulnerable to its destabilising effects.[42] This combination of instability and structural disadvantage helps explain why some neighbourhoods struggle to maintain informal control and are more prone to persistent ASB or crime.

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[38] Anderson, E. (1999). Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City. W.W. Norton and Company, New York.
[39] Harding, S.K. (2012) 'The role and significance of street capital in the social field of the violent youth gang in Lambeth'. PhD Thesis. University of Bedfordshire.
[40] Shaw, C. R., and McKay, H. D. (1942). Juvenile delinquency and urban areas.
[41] Braakmann, N. (2023). Residential turnover and crime — Evidence from administrative data for England and Wales. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *63*(6), 1460-1481.
[42] Williams, S. A. (2024). Decomposing neighbourhood (in) stability: The structural determinants of turnover and implications for neighbourhood crime. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *64*(2), 361-380.

Another important influence on cohesion and trust is how ethnically diverse communities interact. Ethnic heterogeneity does not automatically lead to reduced social trust or informal control. In fact, in long-diverse neighbourhoods where people mix regularly, diversity can support rather than undermine cohesion — research in London found that ethnic diversity was associated with higher perceived cohesion once deprivation was accounted for.[43] However, where diversity is coupled with language barriers, limited cross-group interaction, or a lack of shared norms, it can create challenges for community cohesion.[44] Research has found where ethnic groups were segregated within neighbourhoods (meaning limited social or spatial interaction) residents reported lower levels of social cohesion. Broader UK studies also show that perceptions of threat and reductions in trust are more likely to occur in areas with high rates of in-migration, rapid demographic change, or when diversity intersects with socio-economic deprivation.[45] Historical events in the UK, such as the Oldham riots, have shown how entrenched segregation and unaddressed inter-group tensions can escalate into violence.[46] Moreover, the role of racism and discrimination must be acknowledged, both as a structural factor influencing disadvantage and as a potential driver of mistrust and inequality in exposure to crime.[47]

While in the US, disadvantage, high residential turnover or ethnic heterogeneity are closely linked, [48,49] research suggests that in the UK context, it is disadvantage and its interaction with instability and ethnic diversity — rather than these factors per se — which is more consistently associated with weak social ties and higher crime.[50,51,52] In this way, social disorganisation and structural disadvantage are mutually reinforcing: disadvantage magnifies the destabilising effects of turnover or segregation, while disorganisation weakens a community's capacity to respond to harm. Where informal control breaks down, residents may withdraw from public spaces, avoid confronting ASB, or lose confidence in institutions. This can create a vacuum where crime and disorder are more likely to persist unchallenged.

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[43] Sturgis, P., Brunton-Smith, I., Kuha, J., and Jackson, J. (2017). Ethnic diversity, segregation and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods in London. In *Multiculturalism, Social Cohesion and Immigration* (pp. 22-45). Routledge.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Wiertz, D., Bennett, M. R., and Parameshwaran, M. (2014). Ethnic heterogeneity, ethnic and national identity, and social cohesion in England. In *Social Cohesion and Immigration in Europe and North America* (pp. 123-142). Routledge.

[46] Ritchie, D. (2001). Oldham independent review: One Oldham one future. Panel report.

[47] Bowling, B., and Phillips, C. (2002). Racism, crime and justice. Pearson Education.

[48] Bailey, N., and Livingston, M. (2007). Population turnover and area deprivation. Policy Press.

[49] Garner, S. (2011). White working-class neighbourhoods: Common themes and policy suggestions. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[50] Letki, N. (2008). Does diversity erode social cohesion? Social capital and race in British neighbourhoods. *Political studies*, *56*(1), 99-126.

[51] Bécares, L., Stafford, M., Laurence, J., and Nazroo, J. (2011). Composition, concentration and deprivation: exploring their association with social cohesion among different ethnic groups in the UK. *Urban Studies*, *48*(13), 2771-2787.

[52] Sturgis, P., Brunton-Smith, I., Read, S., and Allum, N. (2011). Does ethnic diversity erode trust? Putnam's 'hunkering down'thesis' reconsidered. *British journal of political science*, *41*(1), 57-82.

The built environment shapes both risk and resilience

Neighbourhood design and the built environment play a critical role in shaping local patterns of crime and ASB, influencing both the opportunity for offending and the community's capacity to exercise control. Physical features such as street layout, housing design, public space, and land use can either encourage safety or create conditions in which crime flourishes.

It does this not simply by shaping opportunities for crime, but by amplifying — or undermining — the social and institutional dynamics that help communities maintain order. Features of place can entrench disadvantage and weaken trust, or they can support cohesion and enable communities to take control of their own safety.

In many high-crime areas, the physical environment both reflects and reinforces structural disadvantage. In London, for example, research has found that gang activity tends to cluster around post-war public housing, especially high-rise estates, even when controlling for other socioeconomic characteristics.[53] Other studies have linked higher rates of crime and disorder to neighbourhoods with high concentrations of alcohol vendors, abandoned buildings or poorly maintained non-residential spaces.[54,55]

Theories such as 'routine activity theory'[56] and 'broken windows'[57] offer insight into the interaction between physical cues and social order (see Figure 1). Routine activity theory identifies three elements that must converge for a crime to occur: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. Poorly maintained communal areas, abandoned buildings, and underused public spaces often lack informal surveillance, reducing opportunities for informal guardianship and creating opportunities for crime and disorder. Local amenities (like pubs or transport hubs), can shape this convergence, attracting transient populations and creating crime opportunities where natural surveillance is low or disorder is tolerated.

[53] Disney, R. F., Kirchmaier, T., Machin, S. J., and Villa, C. (2022). Gangs of London: Public Housing, Bombs and Knives.
[54] Raleigh, E., and Galster, G. (2015). Neighborhood disinvestment, abandonment, and crime dynamics. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *37*(4), 367-396.
[55] Wo, J. C. (2016). Community context of crime: A longitudinal examination of the effects of local institutions on neighborhood crime. *Crime and Delinquency*, *62*(10), 1286-1312.
[56] Cohen, L. E., and Felson, M. (2010). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach (1979). In *Classics in environmental criminology* (pp. 203-232). Routledge.
[57] Wilson, J. Q., and Kelling, G. L. (1982). Broken windows.

Neglected spaces may also signal to offenders that an area is not closely monitored or valued, making them more attractive targets. Broken windows theory suggests that visible signs of disorder — like vandalism and litter — can foster a sense of neglect, weaken informal social control and increase serious crime over time. It is worth noting, however, that although influential in the United States, the direct applicability of broken windows theory to UK settings is debated — with UK research placing a greater emphasis on the role of poverty and disadvantage.[58,59,60]

At the same time, the design of places can also shape crime prevention, both directly (by reducing opportunity), and indirectly (by fostering community pride, encouraging interaction and supporting informal guardianship).

Even small changes to the physical environment, such as improved street lighting, can have a meaningful impact on crime and ASB.[61] A 2008 systematic review found that better lighting significantly reduced crime,[62] while a 1999 study conducted in Stoke-on-Trent reported a 26% drop in crime in areas where lighting was upgraded compared with a 12% increase in a nearby control area.[63] Notably, the reductions occurred across both daytime and night-time offences, suggesting that the impact may stem not only from increased surveillance and deterrence but from an increase in informal social control.

CCTV has similarly been shown to reduce crime[64,65] with the largest and most consistent effects demonstrated in car parks — where a review of eight evaluations reported a 37% reduction in crime.[66] An evaluation of the government's Safer Streets Fund found that CCTV contributed to reductions in ASB and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in some areas.[67] In one case, real-time CCTV monitoring enabled the swift identification of a suspect, preventing further acquisitive crime. Residents also noted increased safety and improved perceptions of public space.

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[58] College of Policing. (2021). Zero-tolerance policing.
[59] Weisburd, D., Wooditch, A., Weisburd, S., and Yang, S. M. (2016). Do stop, question, and frisk practices deter crime? Evidence at microunits of space and time. *Criminology & public policy*, *15*(1), 31-56.
[60] Hinkle, J. C. (2013). The relationship between disorder, perceived risk, and collective efficacy: A look into the indirect pathways of the broken windows thesis. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *26*(4), 408-432.
[61] Welsh, B. C., and Farrington, D. P. (2008). Effects of improved street lighting on crime. *Campbell systematic reviews*, *4*(1), 1-51.
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[63] Painter, K., and Farrington, D. P. (1999). Street lighting and crime: Diffusion of benefits in the Stoke-on-Trent project. *Surveillance of public space: CCTV, street lighting and crime prevention, 10*, 77-122.
[64] College of Policing. (2021). Closed-circuit television (CCTV).
[65] Piza, E. L., Welsh, B. C., Farrington, D. P., and Thomas, A. L. (2019). CCTV surveillance for crime prevention: A 40-year systematic review with meta-analysis. *Criminology & public policy*, *18*(1), 135-159.
[66] Piza, E. L., Welsh, B. C., Farrington, D. P., and Thomas, A. L. (2019). CCTV surveillance for crime prevention: A 40-year systematic review with meta-analysis. *Criminology & public policy*, *18*(1), 135-159.
[67] Home Office. (2024) Evaluation of the Safer Streets Fund round 3, year ending March 2022.

The link between third spaces — such as parks, cafés and community centres — and crime is context-dependent. While access to these spaces is often associated with reduced crime,[68,69,70,71] their impact can vary depending on factors including the local crime context and the affluence of the neighbourhood.[72,73] For example, one New York study found that community gardens in low-income areas were four times as likely as gardens in affluent areas to lead to other neighbourhood issues being addressed.[74] The presence of local guardians also plays a critical role, with studies showing that green spaces can lead to a reduction in crime where locals adopt and maintain them, but can become the ideal setting for crime in the absence of local guardianship.[75]

Together, these findings emphasise the role of the built environment in enabling or constraining crime. Importantly, the evidence also makes clear that these measures work not only by increasing the perceived risk of being caught but also by signalling care, visibility and local investment, highlighting the importance of combining physical changes with community involvement and maintenance.[76,77] Environmental design is most effective when it works with — rather than substitutes for — social cohesion.

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[68] Papachristos, A. V., Smith, C. M., Scherer, M. L., and Fugiero, M. A. (2011). More coffee, less crime? The relationship between gentrification and neighborhood crime rates in Chicago, 1991 to 2005. *City and community*, *10*(3), 215-240.

[69] Van Bergeijk, E., Bolt, G., and Van Kempen, R. (2008, April). Social cohesion in deprived neighbourhoods in the Netherlands: The effect of the use of neighbourhood facilities. In *Housing Studies Association Conference, York* (pp. 2-4).

[70] Shepley, M., Sachs, N., Sadatsafavi, H., Fournier, C., and Peditto, K. (2019). The impact of green space on violent crime in urban environments: an evidence synthesis. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *16*(24), 5119.

[71] Ogletree, S. S., Larson, L. R., Powell, R. B., White, D. L., and Brownlee, M. T. (2022). Urban greenspace linked to lower crime risk across 301 major US cities. *Cities*, *131*, 103949.

[72] Wang, R., Cleland, C. L., Weir, R., McManus, S., Martire, A., Grekousis, G., ... and Hunter, R. F. (2024). Rethinking the association between green space and crime using spatial quantile regression modelling: Do vegetation type, crime type, and crime rates matter?. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*, *101*, 128523.

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[75] McCord, E., Houser, K. (2015). Neighborhood parks, evidence of guardianship, and crime in two diverse US cities.

[76] Farrington, D. P., Gill, M., Waples, S. J., and Argomaniz, J. (2007). The effects of closed-circuit television on crime: Meta-analysis of an English national quasi-experimental multi-site evaluation. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *3*, 21-38.

[77] Welsh, B. C., and Farrington, D. P. (2009). Public area CCTV and crime prevention: an updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *Justice quarterly*, *26*(4), 716-745.

Social cohesion and trust can act as protective factors

While deprivation and structural disadvantage are strongly associated with crime and ASB, they do not fully explain patterns of harm. Interestingly, there are areas where key risk factors are prevalent, yet violence remains low or absent — suggesting that other factors may play a protective role.[78]

Here, the role of social cohesion and trust appear to be key. Although the relationship between crime, social cohesion and trust is complex, there is evidence to suggest that where residents feel connected to one another, share common norms and are willing to intervene for the common good, communities are more resilient to crime and ASB. Conversely, when trust erodes and people withdraw from communal life, informal control can weaken — creating conditions in which disorder and harm are more likely to flourish.

Cohesion combined with informal social control (collective efficacy) can prevent crime even under conditions of disadvantage. Informal social control theory[79] is one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the relationship between neighbourhoods and crime. It argues that neighbourhoods do not influence crime directly but rather through their capacity (or lack of capacity) to exercise informal social control over behaviour. When communities are unable or unwilling to exert informal control (for example, by challenging nuisance behaviour or supporting local norms), crime and disorder are more likely to take root.

Closely linked to informal control is the concept of collective efficacy. Collective efficacy theory[80] specifies the mechanism through which communities exert informal social control: the interaction of mutual trust among residents (social cohesion) and a shared willingness to intervene for the common good, particularly in response to ASB.

High collective efficacy has been found to reduce crime even in structurally disadvantaged areas,[81] with evidence from the US, Australia and the UK[82,83] supporting its association with lower crime. Even where poverty, deprivation or underinvestment are present, neighbourhoods with strong social ties seem better able to resist some of the destabilising effects that often accompany these conditions. For example, a study comparing Chicago and Stockholm neighbourhoods found that as collective efficacy increased, violence decreased in both cities, despite Chicago having higher

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[79] Sampson, R. J., and Raudenbush, S. W. (1999). Systematic social observation of public spaces: A new look at disorder in urban neighborhoods. *American journal of sociology, 105*(3), 603-651.

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[81] Hipp, J. R., and Wickes, R. (2017). Violence in urban neighborhoods: A longitudinal study of collective efficacy and violent crime. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *33*, 783-808.

[82] Mazerolle, L., Wickes, R., and McBroom, J. (2010). Community variations in violence: The role of social ties and collective efficacy in comparative context. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *47*(1), 3-30.

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levels of structural risk.[84] In this sense, cohesion and trust are not just by-products of safe communities — they are core components of what makes communities safe in the first place.

In the UK context, this concept is especially relevant for explaining variation in levels of ASB across similar urban areas. Collective efficacy also overlaps with the concept of 'guardianship intensity' — the idea that effective guardianship involves not just the presence of individuals but also their capability and willingness to intervene.[85]

Community infrastructure is often assumed to foster collective efficacy — but the evidence is not conclusive. A Chicago-based study found that neighbourhoods with more voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations had lower crime rates.[86] However, the effects vary: a study conducted in the South Bronx, New York, found that in very deprived areas, educational and employment charities were sometimes linked to increased violent crime, in part because of increased competition for scarce resources and the potential for VCS organisations to attract potential offenders into a local area.[87] It suggested that community engagement, awareness of existing organisations and structured mechanisms for community mobilisation were key to maximising the positive impact of VCS organisations. Another longitudinal study of 10 US cities found that the positive effects of VCS organisations only emerged after several years — suggesting that time and continuity matter.[88]

UK studies have generally found weaker links between community infrastructure and collective efficacy compared to US-based studies. A study which modelled neighbourhood-level crime patterns in Greater Manchester from 2012 to 2016 found no clear association between the number of VCS organisations and crime rates.[89] Community development in the UK tends to rely more on government funding, with a higher baseline of public service provision. In the US on the other hand, such development tends to be more bottom-up and driven by grassroots initiatives. This suggests that while VCS organisations are vital service providers, they may not automatically generate the trust or engagement needed to reduce ASB unless they explicitly aim to build social capital. It also raises important questions about how to design and fund community services in ways that actively support cohesion and trust, rather than assuming they will arise as by-products of provision.

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[84] Sampson, R. J., and Wikström, P. O. (2008). The social order of violence in Chicago and Stockholm neighborhoods: A comparative inquiry. *Order, conflict, and violence*, 97-119.
[85] Reynald, D. M. (2009). Guardianship in action: Developing a new tool for measurement. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, *11*, 1-20.
[86] Sampson, R. J. (2012). *Great American city: Chicago and the enduring neighborhood effect*. Chicago: University of Chicago press.
[87] Slocum, L. A., Rengifo, A. F., Choi, T., and Herrmann, C. R. (2013). The elusive relationship between community organizations and crime: An assessment across disadvantaged areas of the South Bronx. *Criminology*, *51*(1), 167-216.
[88] Wo, J. C., Hipp, J. R., and Boessen, A. (2016). Voluntary organizations and neighborhood crime: A dynamic perspective. *Criminology*, *54*(2), 212-241.
[89] Lymperopoulou, K., Bannister, J., and Krzemieniewska-Nandwani, K. (2022). Inequality in exposure to crime, social disorganization and collective efficacy: Evidence from greater Manchester, United Kingdom. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *62*(4), 1019-1035.

Case study: Big Local funding — reducing crime through community-led investment

The Big Local programme, run by Local Trust and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, provided 150 communities in England with £1 million each, empowering residents to direct local funding over ten years. Its core aim was to enable communities to shape their own futures, rebuild social infrastructure and boost community cohesion.

Areas with Big Local interventions experienced significantly steeper declines in crime and ASB compared to similar neighbourhoods without such investment. Between 2011 and 2021, total crime in Big Local areas fell from 143.4 to 124.3 incidents per 1,000 population (a reduction of 19.1 incidents). In contrast, comparable benchmark areas saw a smaller decline, from 171.9 to 161.4 incidents per 1,000 population (a reduction of 10.5 incidents).[90]

This equates to a 49% greater reduction in crime in Big Local areas compared to benchmark areas.[91] The trend was statistically significant, providing strong evidence that neighbourhood-level interventions can lead to improved community safety outcomes and outperform similar non-intervention areas.

By investing in community hubs, youth programmes and improved public spaces, residents strengthened social bonds and informal guardianship, acting as a buffer against crime . Stronger local networks increased collective efficacy and civic pride — discouraging disorder and signalling community care.

Beyond crime reduction, Big Local initiatives boosted neighbourhood confidence, enhanced cohesion and attracted further funding. Interviewees emphasised that these changes would not have happened without sustained local autonomy and social investment.

The programme demonstrates the long-term value of empowering communities to take the lead in shaping safer, more resilient neighbourhoods.

[90] Local Trust, 3ni, Shared Intelligence, and OCSI. (2025). Everybody needs good neighbourhoods 2: A counterfactual analysis of the impact of resident-led neighbourhood-based initiatives in deprived communities. July 2025.
[91] Mudie, R., Farrar, E., and Signori, C. (2025). Progress and Pressure: Understanding economic and social change in England's neighbourhoods. ICON Research Working Paper. ICON, June 2025.

The definition of what constitutes a neighbourhood is key to understanding the impact of collective efficacy in the UK. In particular, much of the variation in the effects of collective efficacy on violence appears to occur within neighbourhoods rather than between them, suggesting that current geographical units may be too large to capture the nuanced dynamics of local interactions. In particular, self-defined neighbourhoods often do not align with official administrative boundaries, suggesting that people's lived experiences and social interactions are shaped more by perceived and symbolic geographies than by formal spatial units.[92] Additionally, evidence suggests that simply identifying neighbourhood-level characteristics may be insufficient, as individuals react differently to the same local conditions and may follow distinct routines that limit cross-group interactions.[93]

It is also important to note that many of the foundational theories on social disorganisation and collective efficacy were developed based on research in US cities during the 20th century. While these theories have influenced UK research, the direct application of US findings to UK neighbourhoods should be approached with caution due to differences in social structures, governance, and urban forms.

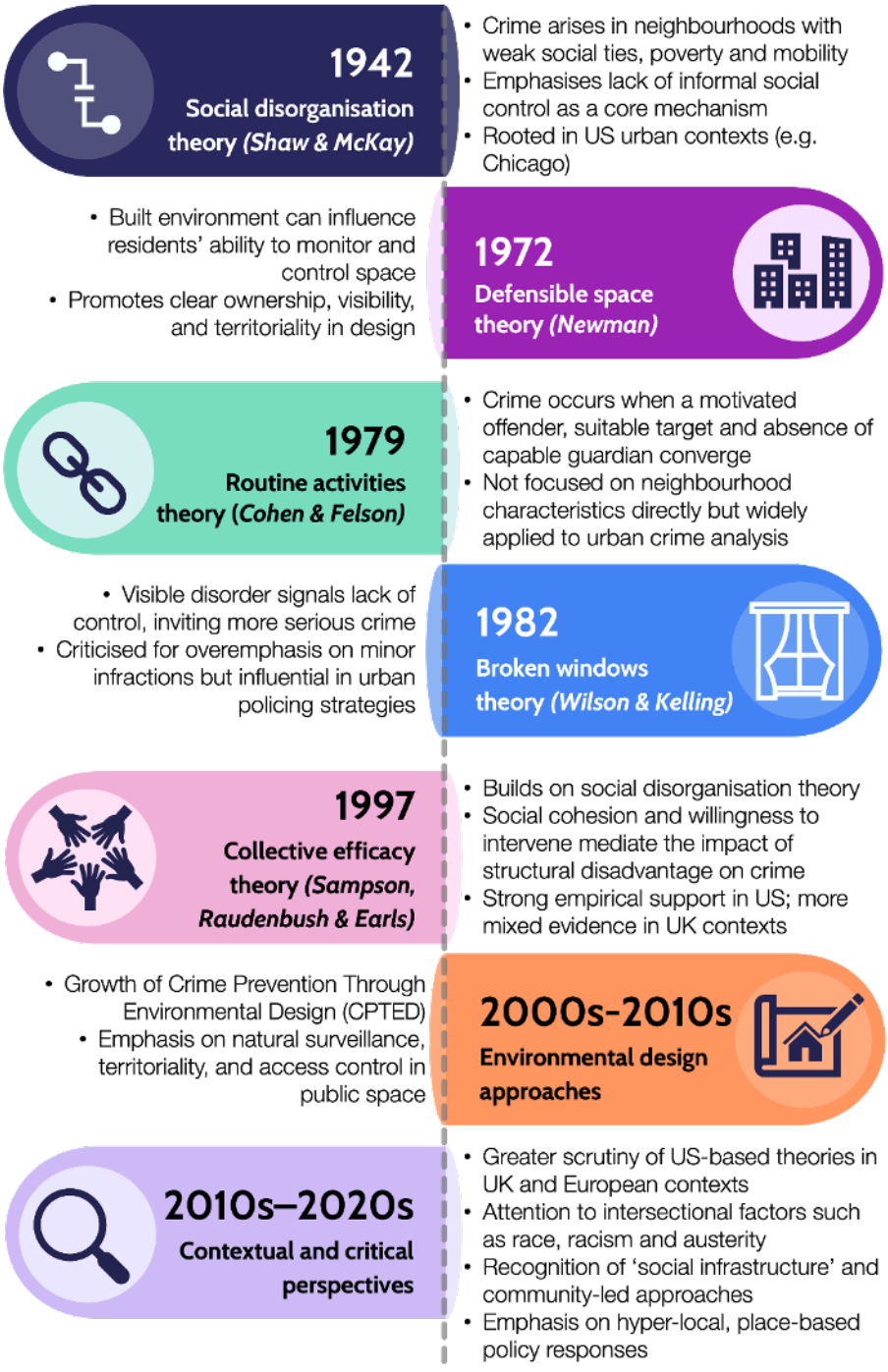
Nevertheless, many of the core principles — such as the role of trust and mutual support in reducing local disorder — remain relevant, particularly for tackling ASB and low-level crime. The evidence suggests that social cohesion and trust can help explain both where crime happens and how communities can resist it. As such, building stronger social bonds must be central to any long-term strategy for tackling ASB and neighbourhood-level harm.

[92] Martin, I., Roberts, C., Lowe, T., and Innes, H. (2020). Neighbourhood as a Policing Delivery Unit. In *Neighbourhood Policing: The Rise and Fall of a Policing Model*. Clarendon Studies in Criminology, Oxford Academic.
[93] Sutherland, A., Brunton-Smith, I., and Jackson, J. (2013). Collective efficacy, deprivation and violence in London. *British Journal of Criminology*, *53*(6), 1050-1074.

Policy implications

- Disadvantage is a key driver of crime and ASB, both on its own and in the way it interacts with other factors. **Efforts to reduce ASB and low-level crime must focus on areas facing entrenched disadvantage**. Interventions should be locally tailored and place-based, addressing the social and economic stressors that drive persistent harm.
- Stable communities are more resilient to disorder and low-level crime. **Reducing ASB requires greater integration between housing and community safety policy.** Interventions that combine tenancy support with neighbourhood engagement can prevent issues before they escalate and support early, proactive resolution.
- **Well-designed public spaces can reduce ASB and crime, particularly where physical improvements are coupled with local stewardship.** Environmental design strategies must be informed by local context and coupled with efforts to increase social ties.
- **Place-based strategies should incorporate targeted efforts to address physical and social disorder** — such as littering, vandalism and public intoxication — not as ends in themselves, but as part of wider efforts to build trust, strengthen community cohesion and support informal guardianship.
- Communities that are cohesive and willing to intervene for the common good are more resilient to crime and ASB. **Policy should prioritise the creation of shared community spaces, promote integration in areas experiencing demographic change, and fund initiatives that facilitate inter-group contact** — particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Figure 1. The evolution of neighbourhood crime theories and approaches



An overview of place-based initiatives to address crime and anti-social behaviour

Over the past three decades, UK policymakers have increasingly recognised the link between crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), and place (see Figure 2). In response, a wide range of initiatives have sought to improve safety and reduce harm by targeting specific areas, focusing on visible enforcement or seeking to address the social, economic and environmental conditions that underpin crime and disorder.

However, despite a long history of place-based initiatives, policy responses have not always maintained consistent focus on ASB or the wider community dynamics that shape trust, cohesion and perceptions of safety.

This section provides an overview of key place-based approaches in the UK, and draws lessons for future efforts to build safer, more resilient communities — particularly in areas of persistent disadvantage.

Successive governments have focused on local visibility and enforcement to build trust and deter crime

A foundational element of place-based crime reduction has been the presence of uniformed officers in communities, aimed at fostering trust and deterring criminal behaviour.

One of the earliest and most significant place-based initiatives was the introduction of neighbourhood policing teams in the early 2000s. These teams aimed to provide a visible and locally embedded police presence, fostering relationships with residents and encouraging community engagement. The rationale was that a consistent, on-the-ground presence would deter crime, improve trust in policing, and facilitate intelligence gathering. Neighbourhood policing also aligned with broader aims to increase public reassurance and reduce fear of crime.

From 2010, the landscape of place-based crime initiatives began to shift under the coalition government. Neighbourhood policing declined significantly between 2010 and 2018, largely due to reductions in police numbers under austerity measures. This erosion of visible local policing drew criticism and was identified as a factor contributing to declining trust and community engagement.

A systematic review of the international research evidence showed that neighbourhood policing overall significantly improves public confidence and trust in the police.[94] A review by the College of Policing[95] similarly found that neighbourhood policing can have a positive impact on public perceptions when three core components are implemented in combination: targeted visible presence (increased foot patrols in hot spot areas), community engagement (a structured programme of engagement with communities), and adopting a problem-solving approach (that typically involves multi-agency partnership working within the area).

In April 2025, the government pledged to 'restore local policing', committing to place 13,000 neighbourhood police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) into dedicated community roles, reflecting a renewed emphasis on place-based crime reduction.

Case study: Hot spots policing — effective, but not enough on its own

Hot spots policing involves directing police resources to areas where crime is most concentrated. The premise is that deploying greater numbers of officers to locations with high levels of crime and disorder — or 'hot spots' — is a more effective and efficient way to reduce crime by acting as a visible deterrent, discouraging offenders from committing crimes and reducing opportunities for offending. Understanding these hot spots requires police to actively listen to residents who live in these areas, as they possess crucial insights into the factors contributing to these patterns.

As one of the most studied and proven approaches in modern policing, there is substantial evidence that hot spots policing has a strong impact on reducing crime.[96] It is particularly effective when implemented through a problem-oriented policing approach (which focuses on addressing the underlying conditions that lead to crime), rather than relying solely on deterrence or increased arrest risk.

The effectiveness of hot spots policing also varies by crime type. It has been shown to be most effective for drug offences, followed by disorder offences, property crime, and violent crime. These crimes carry high social and economic costs for society, making targeted reductions especially valuable.

The evidence behind hot spots policing highlights how visible, targeted enforcement in areas of concentrated harm can reduce crime and build public trust — particularly when underpinned by local insight and problem-solving — but also underscores that policing alone is not sufficient without efforts to address the wider conditions that allow crime to persist.

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[94] Gill, C., Weisburd, D., Telep, C. W., Vitter, Z., and Bennett, T. (2014). Community-oriented policing to reduce crime, disorder and fear and increase satisfaction and legitimacy among citizens: A systematic review. *Journal of experimental criminology, 10*, 399-428.

[95] College of Policing. (2025). Exploring the impact of implementing neighbourhood policing on public perceptions.

[96] College of Policing. (2018). Hot spots policing.

In parallel, successive governments have sought to tackle local-level ASB through a range of enforcement powers. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which were civil orders designed to prevent individuals from engaging in ASB. These orders marked a shift towards empowering local agencies to intervene earlier and more visibly in tackling community-level issues. The coalition government then replaced ASBOs with a new suite of powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. These included Civil Injunctions, Community Protection Notices and Public Space Protection Orders, and were intended to be more flexible and locally tailored tools for responding to persistent problems. Most recently, the Crime and Policing Bill 2025 proposed the introduction of Respect Orders — a new civil order for adults aged 18 and over that enables the courts to ban adult offenders from engaging in specified ASB-related activities, and also include positive requirements with the aim of addressing the root causes of perpetrators' ASB. Breaching a Respect Order will be a criminal offence.

Place-based initiatives have targeted disadvantage through social support and multi-agency action

Recognising that enforcement alone is insufficient, **successive governments have introduced programmes targeting the underlying social and economic issues contributing to crime and ASB**. These programmes were founded on principles of strong partnership governance — bringing together local authorities, police, schools, housing providers and health services — underpinned by shared resourcing and coordinated operational delivery. At their core was the recognition that policing alone would not improve safety or reduce crime and ASB; instead, sustained progress required collaborative, place-based approaches that addressed the root causes of harm.

Arguably the most ambitious of these place-based programmes, targeting deep-rooted deprivation, was the New Deal for Communities (NDC). NDC (1998–2011) focused on 39 of England's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, addressing five interconnected issues: crime, health, education, employment and housing. It took a community-led approach, encouraging residents to shape regeneration efforts in their areas. NDC supported a range of people-related and place-related interventions based on neighbourhood-specific needs and challenges. Efforts to reduce crime included an enhanced police service and neighbourhood warden schemes, and improving physical environment and public spaces.[97] The evaluation found an overall positive impact, with fewer people becoming victims of crime and improvements in how residents viewed lawlessness and neglect in the area.[98]

[97] ICON, Frontier Economics. (2025). The evidence for neighbourhood-focused regeneration.
[98] Communities and Local Government. (2010). The New Deal for Communities Experience: A final assessment. Volume 7.

Another flagship initiative, pursued during Tony Blair's third term, was the 2006 Respect Agenda. This aimed to bring together local actors to address persistent ASB through a combination of enforcement and early intervention, described by Tony Blair as 'putting the law-abiding majority back in charge of their communities'. It included enhanced enforcement tools (such as on the spot fines for minor offences), parenting support initiatives (including a National Parenting Academy to train professionals in supporting parents of children exhibiting challenging behaviour, alongside the expansion of Parenting Orders to enforce parental responsibility), and empowering local communities to hold authorities accountable. This reflected a growing recognition that sustainable improvements required joint working across sectors and sustained engagement with affected communities.

The Troubled Families programme (2012-2021), launched by the coalition government building on the Dundee Family project, marked a continuation of targeted, place-based work. It focused on the most disadvantaged families in specific local areas, offering whole-family support to address overlapping challenges such as crime, poor school attendance and unemployment. This initiative reinforced the idea that crime reduction must be part of a wider set of social and economic interventions at the neighbourhood level. The programme showed some positive outcomes, most notably a reduction in the number of children who ended up being brought into care, a 25% reduction in adult custodial sentences, and 37% reduction in youth custodial sentences.[99]

Case study: Neighbourhood officers reducing anti-social behaviour for council tenants in Sheffield

In 2016, Sheffield City Council introduced Housing+,[100] a proactive housing management approach designed to support tenants and prevent issues such as ASB from escalating. The scheme, which includes dedicated neighbourhood officers for each housing area, offers annual visits and a range of support services, from ASB management to mental health and employment advice. By focusing on early intervention, Housing+ has significantly reduced ASB reports, with incidents falling from 5,000 in 2016/17 to under 3,000 by 2019/20. The proactive engagement of neighbourhood officers — resulting in strengthened local partnerships, — has also improved tenancy sustainability, with fewer tenants terminating their agreements. Housing+ has fostered stronger neighbourhood cohesion by improving access to services and ensuring tenants receive tailored support, contributing to safer and more resilient communities. This case study shows how programmes that address the underlying social and economic drivers of ASB — such as mental health, employment, and housing stability — can play a vital role in reducing harm, strengthening community ties and creating the conditions for long-term safety.

[99] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2019). National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015–2020: Findings.
[100] Local Government Association. (2021). Sheffield Council: neighbourhood officers helping to reduce ASB for council housing tenants.

Crime prevention strategies have increasingly used design and place-making to improve safety

Physical design and urban infrastructure have also increasingly been recognised as tools for reducing crime and enhancing perceptions of safety.

Secured by Design (SBD) was first introduced in 1989 by the Association of Chief Police Officers as a voluntary initiative to reduce crime through better design and security standards in the built environment, strengthening crime prevention through environmental design principles. It began to gain significant traction in the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly after the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which encouraged multi-agency approaches to crime reduction, including through environmental design. Throughout the 2000s, SBD became more systematically embedded in local authority planning practices, supported by the work of Designing Out Crime Officers who advise on development proposals.

During the 2010s, its principles were formalised, firstly through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which instructed local planning authorities to ensure that new developments create safe and accessible environments, and secondly through the introduction of Part Q of the Building Regulations in England, which mandated minimum standards for the security of doors and windows in new homes — many of which are met through SBD-accredited products. Since then, SBD has become a widely adopted benchmark for crime prevention through environmental design, with many local authorities requiring or strongly recommending compliance in residential and public developments. Research has shown that SBD-compliant developments experience lower rates of burglary and ASB.[101]

The Safer Streets Fund, launched in 2020, has similarly targeted crime prevention through physical improvements to the built environment. Projects funded through this scheme have included better street lighting, secure entrances to communal areas, and increased access to community engagement activities. These interventions are designed to reduce crime both by addressing environmental risk factors and by fostering a greater sense of ownership and vigilance among residents.

Launched in 2021, the Levelling Up Fund is a multi-billion pound capital investment programme aimed at reducing regional inequalities by supporting infrastructure, regeneration and cultural projects across the UK. While not specifically designed to reduce crime, it has contributed to crime prevention by funding improvements to the built environment. Several projects have focused on urban regeneration — including the redesign of town centres, high streets, parks and transport hubs, which are often associated with ASB — and have applied principles aligned with crime prevention through environmental design.

[101] Armitage, R., and Tompson, L. (2022). The role of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) in improving household security. In *The Handbook of Security* (pp. 909-930). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Recent policy has embraced prevention and public health models to tackle the root causes of crime

In parallel to enforcement and environmental interventions, there has been a gradual but significant shift towards prevention and cross-sector collaboration in tackling crime and ASB.

The 1990s witnessed the development of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, created through the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. These multi-agency collaborations between police, local authorities and other partners formalised a new model of locally focused crime prevention.

Since the mid-2010s, there has been a growing emphasis on prevention, early intervention and public health approaches to crime. One of the most significant developments was the creation of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) in 2018. Inspired by the Glasgow public health model, VRUs bring together police, health services, schools, local authorities and community organisations to tackle the root causes of serious violence. With a focus on long-term interventions and support for at-risk individuals, VRUs marked a shift away from reactive enforcement towards holistic, preventative approaches. There are now 20 VRUs operating in areas with the highest levels of violent crime.

Although the latest VRU evaluation found no statistically significant effects of VRUs on homicides, sharp object hospital admissions or police-recorded crime outcomes, there were positive indications of change, most notably on ASB, and evaluators noted that impacts on serious violence 'may take longer to materialise'.[102] While focused on violence, VRUs demonstrate the value of cross-sector partnerships in addressing complex harms at the neighbourhood level. Their structure could inform new approaches to tackling persistent ASB, particularly in areas of deep disadvantage.

Building on the VRU model, the government has pledged to introduce 'Prevention Partnerships', aimed at identifying young people at risk of violence and diverting them away from crime. These partnerships are intended to deepen multi-agency collaboration and ensure a more proactive response to youth offending and vulnerability.

[102] Home Office. (2023). Violence Reduction Units 2022 to 2023.

Case study: Project Vita — youth-led prevention of anti-social behaviour in Wallsend

In 2019, North Tyneside Council received £130,000 from Northumbria's VRU to tackle youth-related crime and ASB in Wallsend, an area with high deprivation. Half of the funding was used to create a shared base for police, youth workers and community protection officers in a former council contact centre, improving multi-agency coordination. The other half funded 'Project Vita',[103] a youth engagement initiative offering out-of-hours outreach and creating a youth-led drop-in space. Outreach focused on listening to young people, identifying those at risk, and linking them to early support. The drop-in was used by around 70 young people per night and within four months, ASB had fallen by nearly 48%. Local residents praised the impact, with council officers attributing the success to traditional youth work, community collaboration and early intervention.

This case study underscores the importance of locally rooted, youth-led and trauma-informed approaches to ASB. Where funding enables services to be visible, responsive and sustained, ASB reductions can be both significant and rapid. Scaling such models will require more consistent national support for VRUs and youth services delivered at a local level.

What has been missing: coordination, prioritisation and a focus on co-production and building social ties

Despite the breadth of past initiatives, successive policies have often lacked a coherent national strategy for identifying which neighbourhoods should be prioritised and how to address the multiple and interacting factors that contribute to crime and ASB. While there has been progress in embedding prevention into local policy frameworks, many initiatives have treated neighbourhoods as static rather than dynamic environments shaped by economic shifts, population change and evolving social networks.

Moreover, ASB and low-level crime or disorder have not always been a central focus — despite their disproportionate concentration in certain neighbourhoods and their strong influence on public confidence.

To build on the lessons of previous initiatives, future efforts must move beyond a predominant focus on individuals or enforcement and instead strengthen collective efficacy, trust and social cohesion at the neighbourhood level. Despite growing recognition of place-based harms, policy has rarely addressed the social fabric that underpins community resilience, particularly in areas experiencing persistent ASB and low-level crime. This matters not only because these issues are highly visible and distressing, but because perceptions of disorder — often shaped by visible signs and local responses — can drive fear more powerfully than crime volumes themselves.

[103] Local Government Association. (2021). North Tyneside Council: working with young people to improve their life chances

Evidence — particularly evidence on health outcomes — shows that meaningful community engagement can improve outcomes not just for residents but for public services themselves.[104,105] Co-designed or co-produced services tend to better reflect local priorities, enhance uptake and legitimacy, and strengthen relationships between institutions and the public (even when trust is low and resources are scarce),[106,107] underscoring the potential of community participation to generate more effective and efficient responses to complex, place-based challenges such as crime and ASB.

Yet these lessons have not been systematically embedded. There remains no cross-government mechanism for coordinating neighbourhood policy, aligning departmental investments or maintaining long-term focus on areas experiencing persistent disadvantage. While the June 2025 Spending Review introduced significant funding for neighbourhoods, the broader policy landscape remains fragmented.

[104] Rong, T., Ristevski, E., and Carroll, M. (2023). Exploring community engagement in place-based approaches in areas of poor health and disadvantage: A scoping review. *Health & Place*, *81*, 103026.
[105] Cyril, S., Smith, B. J., Possamai-Inesedy, A., and Renzaho, A. M. (2015). Exploring the role of community engagement in improving the health of disadvantaged populations: a systematic review. *Global health action*, *8*(1), 29842.
[106] Loeffler, E. (2015). Co-production of public services and outcomes. In *Public management and governance* (pp. 319-336). Routledge.
[107] Rodriguez Müller, A. P., Casiano Flores, C., Albrecht, V., Steen, T., and Crompvoets, J. (2021). A scoping review of empirical evidence on (digital) public services co-creation. *Administrative Sciences*, *11*(4), 130.

Case study: Clear, Hold, Build

Clear, Hold, Build is an operational framework that provides a model for combining the resources of the police, public sector organisations, charities and the private sector to to reduce serious and organised crime (SOC) in high-harm locations. It has been implemented in all police forces across England and Wales.

The strategy involves three phases:

1. **Clear**: Targeted enforcement to disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups (OCGs).
2. **Hold**: Maintaining control to prevent other OCGs from filling the void.
3. **Build**: Working with communities to build resilience and prevent the re-emergence of SOC.

Clear, Hold, Build adopts a place-based strategy to support communities that have been persistently impacted by OCGs and aims to bring the tackling of SOC threats into neighbourhood policing. It seeks to rebuild trust between residents, the police and statutory agencies by encouraging collaboration between local people, community groups and partner organisations. The framework emphasises community involvement in shaping the response, ensuring that interventions reflect local priorities and have a lasting impact beyond immediate enforcement.

A Home Office evaluation of Clear, Hold, Build showed that the framework was associated with a 24% reduction in acquisitive crimes (i.e. robbery, residential and commercial burglary, and theft of a vehicle), equivalent to 51 crimes per month across the areas that adopted the framework.[108]

The success of such programmes reinforces the importance of local infrastructure, long-term investment and multi-agency coordination in building safer communities. For ASB and lower-level harms, the same principles apply: targeted interventions that are tailored to local needs, co-produced with residents, and sustained over time are far more likely to succeed than reactive or short-term efforts.

[108] Home Office (2025). Evaluation of Clear, Hold, Build: A local response to serious and organised crime.

Case study: Operation Modulus – co-producing safer communities in Glasgow

Launched in 2013, Operation Modulus was a co-produced intervention aimed at reducing crime and ASB among 15–26-year-olds in deprived Glasgow neighbourhoods.[109] Designed as part of a broader shift towards public service reform in Scotland, the initiative exemplified how co-production can operate across governance levels — from strategic commissioning to front-line delivery.

The programme brought together police, fire services, housing associations, employment services and third-sector organisations. A firefighter was seconded to coordinate local partnerships and support a model of distributed leadership, with an emphasis on collaboration rather than command.

Young people were engaged through door-to-door outreach and invited to articulate their goals — whether that be qualifications, employment experience, or personal development. Services were then shaped responsively around these aspirations, with flexible mentoring and activity programmes. This approach gave participants real agency in shaping their support, moving beyond service delivery to shared design and ownership.

Outcomes included:[110,111]

- **Crime reduction:** significant drops in crime and vandalism across all areas — including an 80% reduction in one area of Glasgow.
- **Personal development:** participants gained qualifications and work experience; in one area, seven young men went on to secure employment with the local housing association.
- **Service transformation:** agencies reported cost savings, improved inter-agency trust, and new collaborative practices that outlasted the programme.

Operation Modulus shows how co-production can drive meaningful change — not only reducing ASB but improving service outcomes and local relationships. It demonstrates the value of co-commissioning and flexible delivery grounded in local knowledge, trust and power-sharing, offering a practical example of how engaging communities meaningfully can generate better outcomes and more sustainable services.

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[109] Cullingworth, J., Brunner, R., and Watson, N. (2024). Not the usual suspects: creating the conditions for and implementing co-production with marginalised young people in Glasgow. *Public Policy and Administration*, *39*(2), 278-297.

[110] Brunner, R., and Watson, N. (2016). Operation Modulus: Putting Christie into Practice in Gorbals. Glasgow: What Works Scotland.

[111] Cullingworth, J., Brunner, R., and Watson, N. (2018). The Operation Modulus approach: further lessons for public service reform. Glasgow: What Works Scotland.

Looking ahead

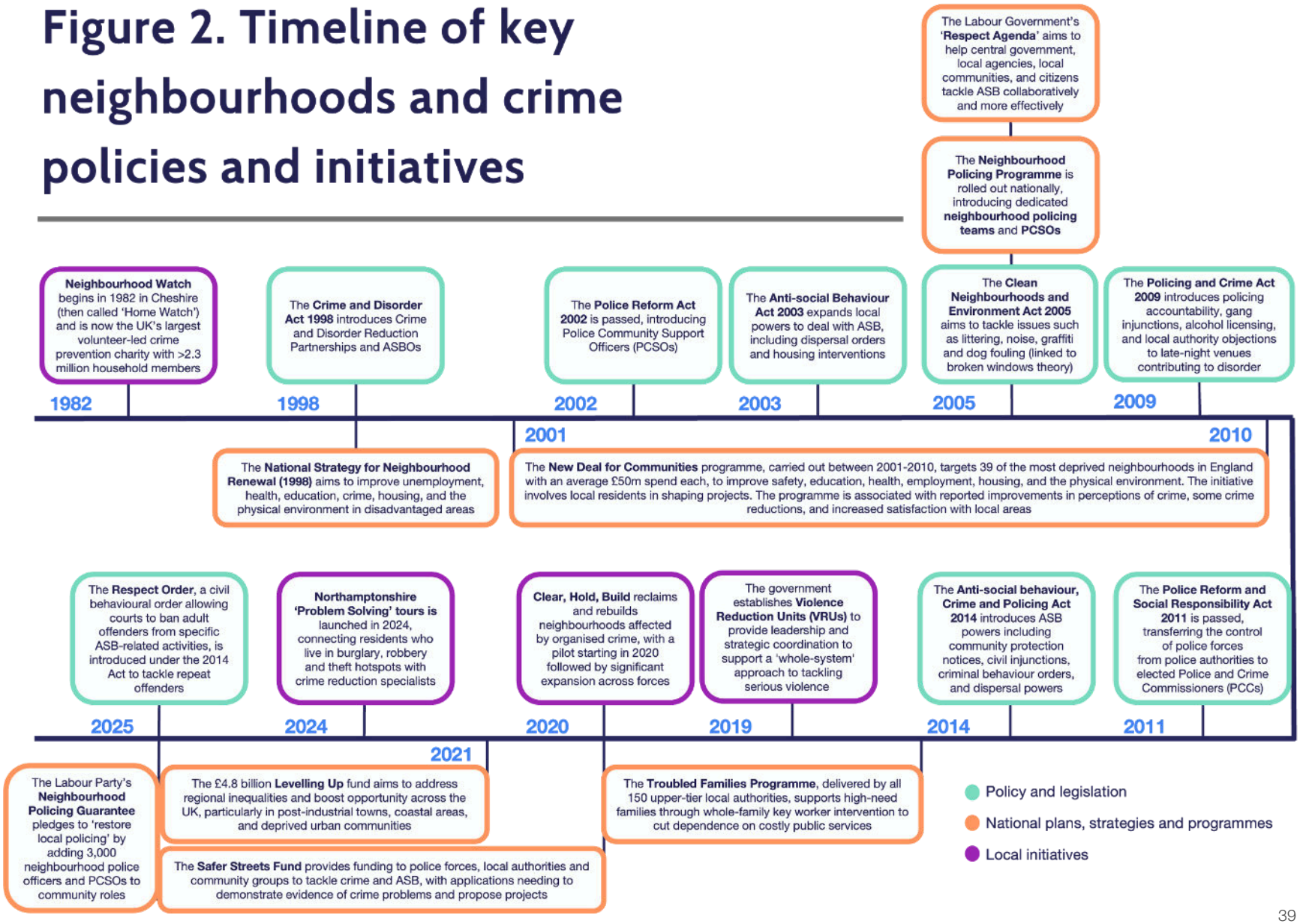
The June 2025 Spending Review marked a significant renewal of a place-based agenda, with several major commitments aimed at improving outcomes in deprived neighbourhoods. These included a national programme to improve 350 of the most disadvantaged communities, a £500 million investment in 'trailblazer neighbourhoods' pilots, and a £240 million Growth Mission Fund to support job creation and economic regeneration at the local level. It was also announced that police spending power will grow by 1.7% annually, to support the government's mission to make streets safer. This renewed focus on crime and ASB, alongside a renewal of neighbourhood approaches, presents a key opportunity to drive forward effective place-based initiatives to address crime and ASB.

Policy implications

- Successive policies have often lacked a coherent national strategy. **A dedicated cross-government unit could help ensure that deprived neighbourhoods are not overlooked** and that local strategies are supported by consistent, coherent national direction.
- Previous initiatives have often lacked a coherent approach for identifying which neighbourhoods should be prioritised and how to address the multiple and interacting factors that contribute to crime. **Future policy should ensure efforts are targeted at areas of greatest harm, and grounded in how residents experience and define their neighbourhoods.**
- Austerity significantly weakened local capacity to deliver visible, preventive approaches to ASB. Although flexible enforcement tools were introduced, their success depends on coordination with social support. **Rebuilding capacity — including frontline engagement, trust-building and co-produced solutions — for local problem-solving is essential to future crime and ASB strategy.**
- **Evidence underscores the value of sustained local presence in reducing ASB and fear of crime.** Future neighbourhood policing and safety strategies must prioritise visible, relational and community-embedded policing, especially in neighbourhoods with persistent low-level disorder. Police should not only be present but visibly engaged, building relationships through dialogue and collaboration, and working alongside residents and partners to foster neighbourhoods that feel — and are — safer and more cohesive.
- **A joined-up, prevention-focused approach, grounded in local knowledge and shared problem-solving, is vital for tackling crime and ASB in the long term.** Enforcement tools such as Respect Orders must be balanced with engagement and support, while regeneration efforts are more effective when integrated with resident-defined and community-led safety priorities.

- Despite growing recognition of place-based harms, policy has rarely addressed the social fabric that underpins community resilience, particularly in areas experiencing persistent ASB and low-level crime. **Future efforts must strengthen collective efficacy, trust and social cohesion.**
- **Addressing perceptions of crime and safety, and the harms they produce, requires long-term, locally grounded investment in trust-building, visibility and community capacity.** Central to this is the need for active listening: understanding the lived experiences of residents, responding to their concerns, and co-producing solutions that reflect local needs and priorities.
- Environmental design — including lighting, maintenance, green and third spaces — can reduce ASB when combined with local stewardship. **Built environment policy should embed community safety outcomes at its core.**

Figure 2. Timeline of key neighbourhoods and crime policies and initiatives



How to build stronger, safer neighbourhoods

The evidence is clear: crime and disorder are shaped not only by neighbourhood disadvantage and environmental decline but also by the strength of community relationships. While poverty, instability and structural disadvantage create the conditions in which crime can thrive, collective efficacy can act as a protective factor — buffering neighbourhoods against both serious and low-level harms.

This is particularly relevant in the context of anti-social behaviour (ASB). ASB often emerges where informal social control has broken down — where anonymity, mistrust or disengagement allow low-level harms to go unchallenged. The visibility of ASB, and its effect on feelings of safety and order, can accelerate local decline if left unchecked. Interventions that strengthen social bonds, support informal guardianship, and promote active stewardship of public spaces are central to turning this tide.

Research consistently shows that people are more likely to intervene (whether to report ASB, challenge minor offences or participate in collective solutions) when they feel a sense of belonging, shared norms and mutual trust. These forms of collective efficacy are not evenly distributed, and they cannot be imposed from outside. They must be nurtured through investment in the social fabric of communities: fostering relationships, creating opportunities for connection and building trust in public institutions, particularly the police and local government.

This evidence points clearly to a policy direction that prioritises local, community-led, place-based approaches to prevention — delivered through effective multi-agency partnerships and neighbourhood hubs that break down siloes in service planning and delivery.

Below, we outline what a neighbourhood-based approach to crime might look like via a set of policy recommendations grouped under five themes: governance and strategic targeting, social infrastructure and community power, neighbourhood policing and enforcement, local services and place-based services prevention, and evidence, insight and evaluation. We also make suggestions on how sustainable funding sources can be ensured to support place-based initiatives. Together, these aim to enable a neighbourhood-based approach to ASB and crime that is targeted and rooted in trust, local knowledge and long-term resilience.

Governance and strategic targeting: focus on the neighbourhoods most affected by crime and ASB

ASB and crime are not evenly distributed — they are concentrated in specific neighbourhoods, often those experiencing long-term deprivation and institutional neglect. A coordinated, targeted strategy is essential to ensure public resources are directed where harm is greatest. This requires not just local delivery but central alignment and oversight.

Key recommendation: ***Establish a dedicated cross-government unit at the centre of government to coordinate neighbourhood policy and delivery***

This unit should be based at the centre of government — ideally in the Cabinet Office, No.10 or HM Treasury — and tasked with aligning the strategies, budgets and interventions of departments whose work affects neighbourhood outcomes (e.g. the Home Office, DLUHC, DHSC, DCMS and DfE). It would be responsible for identifying priority neighbourhoods across the UK, ensuring consistent investment, tracking progress against shared objectives, and surfacing local learning.

Delivery could be supported through local public service partnerships and area-based initiatives, such as the 'trailblazer' pilots, while the unit maintains national oversight of neighbourhood-focused funding. A dedicated ministerial lead or neighbourhood 'champion' could help provide the political leadership needed to establish neighbourhoods as a lasting government priority.

Supporting recommendations

- **Direct key initiatives, such as the Young Futures Programme, at the highest need areas** — for example locating youth hubs in mission critical areas.
- **Adopt mission-led, cross-sector governance models** — drawing on the set-up of Public Services Boards in Wales for example — to align local actors (police, housing, health, education) around shared goals and provide the strategic coordination and accountability needed for local delivery of cross-cutting priorities.
- **Reform the police funding formula** to ensure deprived and high-harm neighbourhoods receive a proportionate share of additional officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and resources.
- **Pilot devolved funding mechanisms**, such as neighbourhood-level participatory budgeting, allowing communities to direct investment into the issues most closely linked to safety and trust.

Social infrastructure and community power: invest in the conditions that build collective efficacy

Collective efficacy can act as a protective factor, particularly in areas of disadvantage. Yet, policy has rarely invested directly in the social infrastructure that supports this. We should invest in the social foundations of safety through community-led approaches: build the local relationships, shared spaces and community power that underpin informal social control by actively involving residents in the planning and implementation of initiatives.

Key recommendation: ***Create a Social Fabric Fund targeted at high-deprivation, high-harm neighbourhoods***

The fund would be administered nationally but delivered locally, supporting projects that build relationships, strengthen trust and promote informal guardianship. This could include peer-led community initiatives, street-level safety interventions or inclusive events that bring diverse groups together. It could also support third spaces (such as cafés, community hubs and youth centres) that act as anchors for social connection and informal surveillance, especially in areas with limited civic infrastructure.

Funding decisions should be made in partnership with local residents and organisations, with clear metrics linked not just to crime reduction but also to perceptions of safety, civic participation and social connection. Local authorities or civil society bodies could act as delivery partners, supporting capacity-building and sustainability.

Supporting recommendations

- **Embed trust-building in neighbourhood policing models** e.g. by ensuring that the new Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee policing framework includes trust building and community engagement as key performance indicators and developing training for officers.
- **Co-produce neighbourhood improvement goals with residents**, focusing on crime reduction, safety and local wellbeing, recognising that what makes a neighbourhood feel safe or resilient will vary by place.
- **Develop digital tools or apps that allow residents to co-report issues**, validate hotspot data, and co-design interventions e.g. a 'FixMyStreet'[112] for ASB.
- **Encourage the use of 'Good Neighbour Agreements'** across all housing providers — local authorities and housing associations — to formalise community expectations and responsibilities. Agreements should be supported by local authorities and aligned with local policing efforts to ensure clarity, accountability and fair application.

[112] https://www.fixmystreet.com/

Neighbourhood policing and enforcement: build local legitimacy and visible presence

Crime and ASB matter to communities — they act as wider signals of neighbourhood decline. A neighbourhood-based approach to crime needs to involve rebuilding visible neighbourhood policing and enforcement, and ensuring that the correct support mechanisms are in place to ensure that the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee — one of the government's flagship policies — is effective.

Key recommendation: ***Rebrand neighbourhood policing as a specialist discipline***

Neighbourhood policing should not be seen as a generalist role or less skilled policing function. Officers in these roles need advanced skills in engagement, conflict resolution and relationship-building, and should be offered dedicated training, accreditation and a defined career pathway.

The Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee performance framework rightly proposes a dedicated career pathway underpinned by additional training and professional standards. However, to truly elevate the status of neighbourhood policing across forces, this should be complemented by specialist recruitment routes and measures to support long-term retention — such as incentives, clear progression opportunities, and protection from routine abstractions. As part of the government's wider police reform agenda, national and local policing KPIs must explicitly reflect the value of neighbourhood policing, with metrics that go beyond enforcement to include visibility, trust, and responsiveness to community needs.

Supporting recommendations

- **Learn from the successes of previous neighbourhood policing models by:**
    - **Ringfencing funding for the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee,** to reduce issues of abstractions and turnover.
    - **Expanding co-location of neighbourhood police officers within multi-agency service hubs in high-need areas**
- **Target additional PCSOs and neighbourhood officers at areas with persistent ASB and low trust**, focusing on consistent visibility, direct engagement and effective relationship building — not just enforcement — ensuring police are responsive to community priorities and concerns.
- **Support the rollout of 'designing out crime' teams**, especially in neighbourhoods where the built environment contributes to persistent disorder or feelings of insecurity.

Local services and place-based prevention: bring help to where harm happens

The built environment shapes both risk and resilience. Urban design influences crime not only by affecting opportunities for offending but also by shaping perceptions of safety, trust, and community pride. Policies should bring services to where harm happens and empower communities to shape licensing, enforcement and environmental improvements.

Key recommendation: ***Co-locate youth, substance misuse and mental health services within high-need neighbourhoods***

These services are often fragmented, hard to access, or located outside the communities most affected by ASB and related harm. Co-locating them in local spaces — for example, community hubs, schools, or housing offices — would improve accessibility, reduce stigma and make early intervention easier.

Service design should be based on local needs and resident input, with integrated delivery teams working alongside neighbourhood policing and local authority partners. Shared referral systems, information sharing agreements and co-working arrangements should be in place.

Supporting recommendations

- **Invest in 'community navigators' in high need areas** — trusted individuals embedded in communities of high need who help residents access services, build social networks, and participate in local governance.
- **Run 'problem-solving tours' with residents, service providers and local leaders** in affected areas, identifying visible triggers for harm and co-designing practical responses.
- **Align investment in local infrastructure with community safety goals**, for example, targeting repairs, lighting improvements and enhancements to the built environment in places with high levels of visible disorder or resident concern.
- **Develop a 'rapid repair' toolkit for visible signs of disorder** such as vandalism, broken lighting or fly-tipping — small-scale, rapid interventions that signal visible care, control and community investment.
- **Strengthen licensing enforcement for venues linked to repeat disorder**, and create clearer pathways for community input in licensing reviews and decisions.

Evidence, insight and evaluation: understand what works at neighbourhood scale

To understand what works at neighbourhood scale and the impact of place-based initiatives, we need to deepen our understanding of local crime and ASB and how to reduce it. Success should be measured not just through crime statistics, but through improvements in trust, perceptions of safety and civic participation — linking safety outcomes to wider social missions.

Key recommendation: **Task the new Police Performance Unit with leading a national evaluation framework for neighbourhood safety**

The Home Secretary has announced the creation of a new Police Performance Unit to track national data on local performance and drive up standards. This new unit could perform a broader role and serve as a key lever for building a more consistent and meaningful understanding of neighbourhood safety — one that reflects not only enforcement outcomes, but the lived experience of communities. This would include developing shared metrics that go beyond enforcement and rates of crime and ASB, such as trust in police, perceptions of safety, confidence in local services, and levels of civic participation.

The framework should draw on data from multiple sources, including police and local authority records, national surveys, and direct community input. It should also support local areas to carry out their own evaluations, helping identify what works and where gaps remain. This should serve to develop a broader understanding of 'what good looks like' when it comes to improving neighbourhood safety in under-served communities.

Supporting recommendations

- Task the new Police Performance Unit with:
    - **Developing a shared understanding of what 'neighbourhood' means across services**, recognising the importance of both geographic scale and social dynamics in shaping cohesion and risk.
    - **Leading the development of a national, standardised platform for street-level crime, ASB and vulnerability mapping** — integrating police data, local authority reports, and community insight.
    - **Evaluating the impact of neighbourhood-based strategies not only on crime rates, but on wider outcomes** such as trust in public institutions, perceptions of safety and civic participation.
    - **Promoting data-sharing between local services** to enable dynamic, joined-up responses to emerging problems.
- **The Home Office should ensure that funding for ASB/crime initiatives is outcomes-based**, rather than activity-based.

Ensure sustainable funding sources to support place-based initiatives

Public services continue to face significant strain following more than a decade of austerity. While there are welcome funding commitments, including around the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee and trailblazer neighbourhoods, the broader fiscal environment remains tight.

To create a sustainable funding stream for the types of community-led safety and cohesion initiatives proposed in this paper, government and local areas should explore the introduction of targeted levies on those who benefit from — or contribute to pressures on — local neighbourhoods. These could include:

- Business Improvement District (BID) levies on local commercial premises.
- Increased Section 106 contributions from property developers.
- Higher licensing fees or a night-time economy levy on licensed venues.
- Levies on short-term letting platforms or large delivery/logistics companies.
- Additional charges on second home ownership in affected areas.

Such measures would help ensure that those with a direct stake in local places contribute fairly to their upkeep and resilience — creating a dedicated, place-based funding stream without increasing general taxation or adding pressure to overstretched public services.