Future Governance Forum

HENRY SMITH FOUNDATION

A BETTER WAY

SIX WAYS TO MOVE THE DIAL ON PREVENTION

A provocation paper from the Social Insights Panel

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About The Future Governance Forum

The Future Governance Forum (FGF) is a progressive, non-partisan think tank focused on transforming the state with the ultimate goal of renewing the nation. We make politically credible recommendations for reforms that can be delivered nationally and locally, build strong networks to test new ideas, and collaborate and use our relationships with public, private and social sector leaders to innovate.

Our current programmes of work explore:

- **Vital Institutions:** How can we reform existing state institutions and establish new ones so they are fit for purpose and built to last?
- **Better Services:** How can we build public services that are faster, more reliable and built around people's needs?
- **Progressive Markets:** How can we rethink markets and unlock investment to renew the economy, and deliver for people and places?
- **Impactful Devolution:** How can we meaningfully and permanently devolve power in one of the most centralised countries in the world?
- **Rethinking Migration:** How might we deliver a more effective asylum system that sustains greater public confidence, while remaining consistent with the principles of international law and progressive values?

By prioritising these questions we are thinking about new progressive models of governance for the long term. Our working model is to convene experts and find ways in which we can bring perspectives from very different organisations together to suggest ways in which the "how" of government could be more effective at every level.

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Executive Summary

Why we established the Social Insights Panel

The complexity and depth of the challenges we face as a nation cannot be addressed by the government alone. Tackling these challenges requires building broad coalitions across and beyond the state, testing and iterating together in pursuit of shared goals. We welcome the UK Labour government's strong intention to bring civil society into the heart of decision-making, with early signs of progress evident in the establishment of the No.10 Partnerships Unit, the Civil Society Covenant and the newly appointed Civil Society Council. Elsewhere in government, the Test, Learn and Grow programme is closing the gap between policy and delivery in local places to improve public services.

But there is a long way to go. All too often, by the time civil society organisations are engaged in partnership with the government, implementation has already begun or is substantially planned. Partnerships are almost entirely limited to departmental policy and delivery, and in many ways civil society mirrors the departmental silos of government. The tone set by this government creates an opportunity for civil society to partner more strategically on complex challenges. It is through practice that the muscle of collaboration is built, which is why we launched the Social Insights Panel (SIP) in partnership with the Henry Smith Foundation and the Better Way Network to bring the collective expertise of civil society insights to bear on cross-cutting, complex, wicked issues.

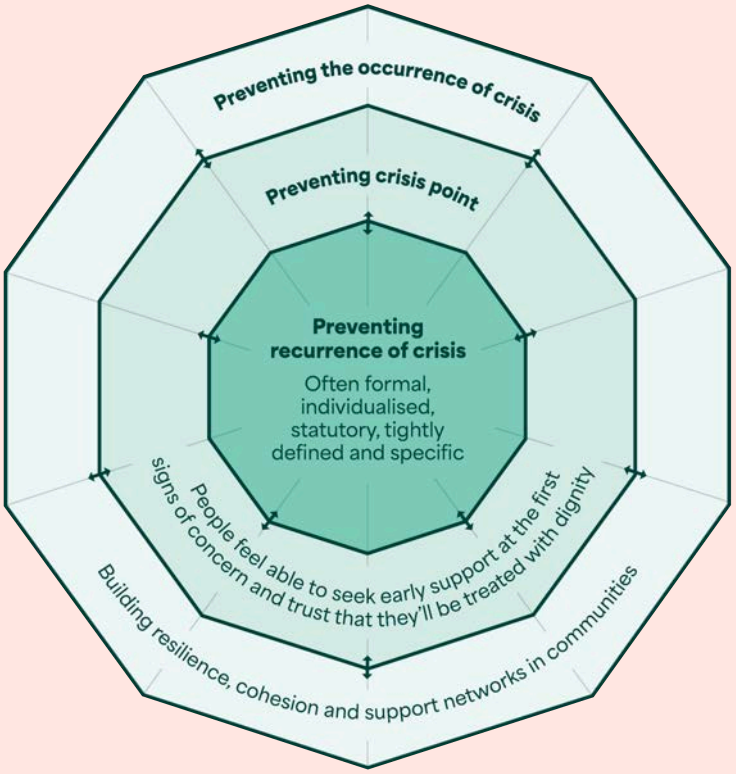
A web of support: our framework for understanding prevention

The government is right to want to adopt a preventative, person-centred and place-based approach. But prevention is a term used broadly and often without precision. We have identified three tiers of prevention, across a dynamic web of support. Each tier is part of a single, interconnected system:

1. **Preventing the conditions for crisis from forming:** Building resilience, cohesion and support networks in communities to help people to thrive, **sitting at the outer edges of the web.**
2. **Preventing people from reaching crisis point:** Creating the conditions where people feel able to seek early support, and trust that they'll be treated with dignity, at the first signs of concern, **sitting in the middle ring of the web.**

3. **Preventing the vicious cycle of recurring crises:** Formal, individualised provision which seeks to prevent the revolving door of crisis. It is often tightly defined and specific, statutory, and sits at the **very centre of the web.**

Preventative work and support systems are most loosely defined and community-rooted at the outer edge of the web, and become more formal and individualised as one moves towards the centre. Too often, in the words of one roundtable participant, "the gate is really far into the system." The intention should be to support most people at this outer edge where possible, to prevent acute and recurring crises arising, while recognising that some people are going to need the more directed support of the second ring and very centre (and indeed, that individuals will not always need support in a linear way - requiring different levels of support and stewardship across the web at different times). However, as things stand it is this vital outer edge of the web that is at greatest risk of disappearing, meaning more people risk falling into otherwise avoidable acute and/or recurring crises, and that ever more pressure is placed on the support services closer to the centre.



Six breakthroughs in mindset

In chapter 3 you'll hear from the many leaders and practitioners who took part in our research. It is their experiences that led us to argue for six breakthroughs in mindset which we think the government should adopt in pursuit of a stronger web of support:

1. **Recognise that relationships are paramount**

A single trusted relationship can achieve more than a checklist ever will, yet we continue to build systems that make relationships nearly impossible to form or sustain. Too often the state treats trust as a by-product of public services, rather than a foundational starting point.

2. **Create meaningful opportunities for belonging**

Loneliness is an indicator of structural failure in our public services, and it is young people who are bearing the brunt. A sense of belonging cannot be achieved through a referral pathway, or even the consolidation of services into a single building. It is achieved through a plurality of entry points into support across the web. But this best practice at the grassroots level goes against the grain of a powerful and in many ways understandable urge from public services to streamline and simplify the system into a 'single front door'.

3. **Focus on people's needs rather than risk to institutions**

All too often risk frameworks protect institutions rather than people. For example, the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence Assessment (DASH) risk tool, which was designed to safeguard women, too often safeguards the system instead. A shift towards a needs-led approach incorporates the breakthroughs outlined earlier, and empowers professionals to use discretion and curiosity, rather than relying solely on compliance, as their guide to providing support.

4. **Hold public and social sector practitioners in far higher esteem**

Frontline workers are asked to execute the impossible task of building meaningful relationships with people to improve their lives within compliance-driven and risk-led frameworks which undermine the trust so critical to those relationships. We should not be surprised by high levels of stress and turnover, which lead to churn of relationships for the people they support. Practitioners must feel they are able to exercise their professional judgement freely within a system that provides the necessary support to build the relationships that are so critical to improving outcomes for people.

5. **Chase innovation in the right places**

Innovation is about identifying what works - which sometimes might be novel or new - but crucially, then sustaining it. So funding should be invested in creating stability within community-based spaces where innovation could grow. Evaluation of services is often too focused on activity and what services do, and where it does look at outcomes it does so on an individual or one-off basis, rather than pushing on to the level of the system, where reducing or removing blockages can lead to genuine transformational change

6. **Overhaul public and social sector commissioning culture and practice**

A structural barrier to each of the five previous breakthroughs, commissioning culture is breaking down the collaboration it should be incentivising, threatening to destroy the very fabric of the web of support we think is so vital to prevention.

If one theme unites all of our breakthroughs, it's that they are a prescription for trust.

Introduction

The Social Insights Panel exists to inject civil society wisdom into the most complex policy challenges the government faces

Successive governments have sought to reset the relationship they have with civil society organisations, from the Civil Society Compact in 1998, the launch of Cameron's Big Society Agenda in 2010, the 2018 Civil Society Strategy, and multiple 'open government action plans' throughout the 2010s. On their election in July 2024, the Labour Government gave their steer on the latest recalibration of that relationship: *Mission-driven government,* a theory and practice for leading with purpose and governing in partnership. Missions can provide a mechanism for a form of government which is humble; working in broad coalitions across and beyond the state in pursuit of shared goals, including a culture of testing and iterating in collaboration with civil society.[1] In July 2025, No.10 and DCMS launched the Civil Society Covenant as their reset to the relationship, and in March 2026 membership of the Civil Society Council was announced. Sir Keir Starmer's No.10 function includes a partnerships unit responsible for engagement with civil society organisations, business and faith communities.

Despite all of this, relationships between the state and civil society remain a far cry from what is needed to deliver significant change on the complex challenges we face as a country. Mission-driven government is a welcome idea, but its potential depends on civil society being meaningfully involved in both scoping and delivering the missions. Missions that feel and sound designed in closed Westminster settings are less likely to translate effectively on the ground.

Recalibrating this relationship requires effort on both sides. For too long, civil society has also organised itself into lobbying silos which mirror the departmental silos of government. The tone set by this government opens up an opportunity for civil society to partner more closely whilst retaining independence and challenge; a creative tension which could be transformational for public services.

[1] Mariana Mazzucato, Sarah Doyle, Nick Kimber, Dan Wainwright and Grace Wyld, 'Mission Critical 01: Statecraft for the 21st century', The Future Governance Forum and UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 30 May 2024; Hamida Ali, Shadi Brazell, James Somerville and Grace Wyld, 'Mission Critical 03: Mission-driven partnerships with civil society organisations', The Future Governance Forum, 30 January 2025.

It is through practice - rather than talk - that the muscle of collaboration is built, so within the same week the Civil Society Covenant was launched, we launched the Social Insights Panel (SIP) in partnership with Henry Smith Foundation and the Better Way Network.[2]

We launched the Social Insights Panel because we identified a gap: there was no forum or channel for the collective expertise of civil society to feed in at the early point when cross-cutting approaches are set. By the time civil society organisations are engaged, either nationally or locally, implementation is either planned or has already begun, and departmental and lobbying silos kick in. As a result, civil society leaders are simply not at the table early enough. Where partnerships do exist, they are almost entirely related to policy detail and delivery, effectively testing whether government decisions will survive contact with reality.

Choosing our scope for Phase 1

The government's public service reform agenda, as set out in the 2025 Spending Review, aims to:

A. Organise services around people's lives;
B. Focus on prevention rather than crisis management;
C. Devolve power to local areas to design services with people.

These are principles which have been widely agreed upon for many years. They require ways of working which civil society leaders understand all too well, and deliver successfully against considerable odds. There is a huge opportunity to learn from the knowledge and experience of people who have been putting these principles into practice for decades.

That's why we decided to focus our first phase of work on providing insights to influence the *Test, Learn, and Grow* programme from the Cabinet Office, launched in the same busy week as the Civil Society Covenant. This is one of the key ways in which the government aims to deliver its public service reform agenda. It is a programme tackling **six complex policy and societal challenges in ten places around the country**, with a focus on closing the gap between policy and practice, and then growing the impact of those learnings by unblocking the systems challenges which get in their way. A culture of rapid testing and learning across both policy and delivery functions is something many of the best in civil society are adept in, and each of the policy challenges the programme has chosen has implications right across social policy and social change. They are cross-cutting themes with multi-agency implications locally and nationally, and change simply can't be achieved without the strategic insight and expertise of civil society.

[2] The Future Governance Forum, 'Announcing the Social Insights Panel: new FGF project led by Polly Neate', 17 July 2025.

This paper marks the end of phase 1, which ran from September 2024 to February 2025 and focused on three strands of the Test, Learn and Grow programme: **ending violence against women and girls, supporting transitions to adulthood, and building integrated and preventative family support.** We focused on these because of their interconnections, the breadth of civil society organisations with expertise to contribute, and the immense human cost of continuing with the status quo - with a correspondingly exciting opportunity for the government to have a revolutionary impact for people and communities.

Our hypothesis was that we would find major common systemic challenges across all three themes, and this proved correct. This final paper therefore focuses on these cross-cutting insights. Our overarching framework is to promote a shift towards prevention, which we understood as having three layers, set out in chapter 1. In chapter 2 we contextualise the three policy challenges we explored. Our aim throughout the process has been to **identify a small number of overarching mindset shifts which, if they happened, could be transformational**. You'll learn about these in chapter 3. We set out to explore how local agencies can more effectively tackle three wicked problems, and in the process we uncovered underlying wicked challenges for the state itself. It's our hope that Phase 2 of the Social Insights Panel will explore *how* to make our proposed breakthroughs a reality.

A further note on scope is required. This paper does not set out why or how civil society organisations should be involved in government decision-making (you'll find that in *Mission Critical 03*, delivered by FGF in partnership with NPC and Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales).[3] We plan to continue this work by demonstrating how civil society is key to the changes we need to see across government decision-making and delivery, whether through the Test, Learn and Grow programme, the Pride in Place initiative or community cohesion. Indeed, we launched the Social Insights Panel at a time when shoring up community resilience and peace in the face of division, polarisation and resentment has become as urgent as public service reform itself. In our discussions on a sense of belonging in particular, we saw how polarised narratives are themselves an obstacle to reaching people in need earlier, and therefore to any shift towards prevention.

Like the government's three principles for public service reform, our six breakthroughs are not new ideas, though we have found that they are more urgent than ever. It can sometimes feel like we've been having the same conversation for years. And yet, the direction of travel moves inexorably in the opposite direction. Where these breakthroughs are successfully put into action, civil society is always a major driver.

[3] Ali, Brazell, Somerville and Wyld, 'Mission Critical 03: Mission-driven partnerships with civil society organisations', 30 January 2025.

Chapter 1: Three levels of prevention

We set out to answer the following core questions:

1. How do we create conditions where misogyny is tackled at source, where women and girls feel safe to speak up, trust they will be believed and have confidence that action will follow?
2. How can we build the conditions for genuinely preventative and non-stigmatising integrated family support services that families can access early, and which they trust?
3. How can we create the conditions for young people to feel supported, empowered and equipped to make a successful transition into adulthood?

Prevention is a term used broadly and often without precision. Whilst we're clear that preventing revictimisation and recurrence of crisis is a form of prevention - not simply a sticking plaster - we also find that prevention is rarely interpreted in practice to mean the prevention of individuals and families from getting anywhere near a crisis point in the first place. Furthermore, the work to share and embed best practice, changing systems so that they support preventative work, receives the least attention, resources and scrutiny.

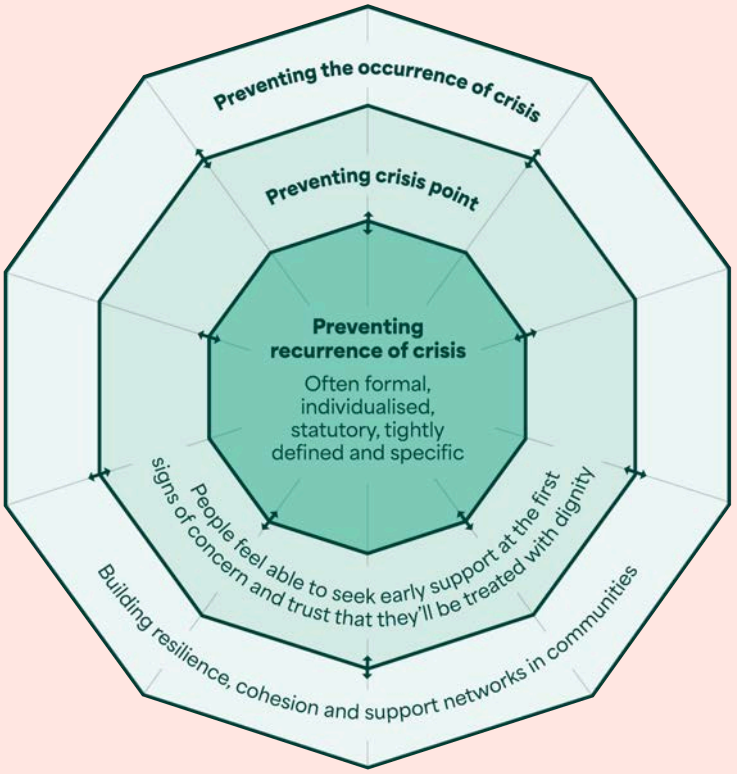
Three levels of prevention	**Example:**		
	Violence Against Women and Girls	**Family Hubs**	**Transitions to adulthood**
1. Preventing the conditions for crisis from forming	Preventing perpetration of abuse through education, reducing misogyny and tackling anger, violence and entitlement amongst boys and in the wider culture that we all take part in.	Creating a web of support around families so they feel included, trusted and supported, and can find the right specialist support easily, when and where they need it.	Listening to young people's aspirations and creating opportunities for them to fulfill them, and surrounding them with stable, trusted relationships which can provide advice and support if needed.

2. Preventing people from reaching crisis point	Preventing crisis points by supporting women and girls to recognise and report abuse and ensuring the right help is in place to respond.	Creating the conditions where families can ask for and find help early, without fear or stigma, and receive joined-up support before problems escalate to child protection or care proceedings.	Creating the conditions where young people can seek help early, build trusted relationships with adults and peers, and avoid reaching breaking points during key transitions.
3. Preventing the vicious cycle of recurring crises	Preventing re-victimisation and crisis recurrence when women come into contact with public services of all kinds, including how the current DASH framework might be improved or replaced.	Preventing families repeatedly cycling through crisis, statutory intervention and child protection, by redesigning support around sustained relationships, not one-off referrals or incident-led responses.	Preventing people from repeatedly falling through the gaps between services and redesign support systems around sustained relationships rather than eligibility or crisis response.

A web of support: A framework for understanding three depths of prevention

Our exploration of prevention across all three policy areas has led us to conceptualise a **web of support.** The web represents three layers of prevention where individuals, families and practitioners are understood to be part of a whole system, acknowledging that the struggles people experience do not fit within professional specialisms or public service silos, and that currently people are excluded in multiple ways from accessing that system until an acute crisis hits:

1. **Preventing the conditions for crisis from forming:** Building resilience, cohesion and support networks in communities to help people to thrive, **sitting at the outer edges of the web.**
2. **Preventing people from reaching crisis point:** Creating the conditions where people feel able to seek early support, and trust that they'll be treated with dignity, at the first signs of concern, **sitting in the middle ring of the web.**
3. **Preventing the vicious cycle of recurring crises:** Formal, individualised provision which seeks to prevent the revolving door of crisis. It is often tightly defined and specific, statutory, and sits at the **very centre of the web.**



Preventative work and support systems are most loosely defined and community-rooted at the outer edge of the web, and become more formal and individualised as one moves towards the centre. Too often, in the words of one roundtable participant, "the gate is really far into the system." The intention should be to support most people at this outer edge where possible, to prevent acute and recurring crises arising, while recognising that some people are going to need the more directed support of the second ring and very centre (and indeed, that individuals will not always need support in a linear way - requiring different levels of support and stewardship across the web at different times). However, as things stand it is this vital outer edge of the web that is at greatest risk of disappearing, meaning more people risk falling into otherwise avoidable acute and/or recurring crises, and that ever more pressure is placed on the support services closer to the centre.

> *"The difference between a pathway and a web is that a web holds families while a pathway necessitates families do the journeying. A pathway implies linearity, but nobody's life is actually like that. We shouldn't use the word 'signposting' because you can signpost someone to the moon, but it doesn't mean they've got a rocket. It's about professionals doing the travel and the work rather than expecting a mum who hasn't slept in two years to navigate a pathway."* (Roundtable participant, family hubs)

Chapter 2: Why this work is urgent

Before we explore the breakthrough mindset shifts which could move the dial on all three, let's contextualise the urgency of the task we face in the three complex societal challenges we focused on: ending violence against women and girls, providing integrated family support for children and their parents, and better supporting young people to transition to a successful adulthood. These challenges are urgent not only in themselves, but because they feed into one another and relate to wider issues we did not explore, such as homelessness, offending, and of course, poverty. Too often, the state, and sometimes civil society, treats the same individuals, households and families as a series of separate problems, rather than recognising how these issues connect and responding more holistically. The following section briefly summarises the scale of the problem in our three starting point areas of focus.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls

In December 2025, the government published volume 1 of their strategy to build a safer society for women and girls.[4] This built on their investment in July 2025 expanding the Drive Project, strengthening monitoring and disruption tactics, and increasing the use of protection orders.[5] This work is urgent because:

- The police receive a domestic abuse call every 30 seconds in England and Wales.[6]
- In the year ending March 2025, 7.8% of people aged 16+ (around 3.8m people) experienced domestic abuse, with the vast majority being women and girls.[7]
- Between 2019 and 2022, reports of sexual assault and rape by under-18s in England and Wales rose by 40%, with an 81% rise in incidents on school property in that period.[8]

[4] Home Office, UK Government, 'Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A Cross-Government Strategy to Build a Safer Society for Women and Girls Volume 1 Strategy', 18 December 2025.
[5] Home Office, UK Government, Jess Phillips MP and The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, 'Landmark Package to Pursue Domestic Abuse Perpetrators', 16 July 2025.
[6] Home Office, UK government, 'Shifting the scales, transforming the criminal justice response to domestic abuse', 15 April 2025.
[7] Office for National Statistics, 'Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025', 24 July 2025.
[8] Michael Savage, '"Toxic" online culture fuelling rise in sexual assaults on children by other children, police warn', The Guardian, 17 February 2024.

- Among women aged 16–25 supported by Refuge, reports of strangulation or suffocation increased by 9% between April 2024 and March 2025, compared with the previous year.[9]
- One-third of 17–21-year-old young women have received unwanted sexual images.[10]
- In the year ending March 2024, domestic abuse-related crimes accounted for 15.8% of all police-recorded offences and one third of violence against the person offences were flagged as domestic abuse-related.[11]
- There is growing evidence of a correlation between teenage boys' consumption of 'manosphere' content with more negative attitudes towards women and girls, and the normalisation of misogyny.[12]

Case study from Becky Rogerson, Social Insights Panellist

Given the declared national emergency in 2025, a review of the current approach is essential. Too many victims are failed, and too many perpetrators allowed to cause harm. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) impacts beyond the direct victims, rippling through families, friends and communities. Prevention is key, at all levels, carefully delivered to give agency to victims and protective others. We must recognise in the delivery of our people' services that everyone sits within a context, they have a history, differing individual resources and cultural norms. Our job is to understand and respond to this diversity and act in a way that enables, not in a way that dictates or demands compliance. We have an extensive toolkit, but it must be activated in a way that delivers outcomes that make a difference.

As an example, protective orders can be a positive tool for victims at risk of harm, but as this case study shows, victim-led enforcement can also increase perpetrator risk.

Sarah sought a protection order following continuous harassment from her ex-partner. Separated for over a year, her ex was turning up at her house and workplace, threatening to harm her and her children if she didn't rekindle the relationship.

Two weeks later, her ex-partner appeared outside her children's school and followed her home, an obvious breach of the order. Sarah hesitated to report to the police, fearing

[9] Refuge.org.uk, 'Refuge reports rise in violent threats and strangulation among young people', 13 August 2025.
[10] Stephen R. Burrell and Nicole Westmarland, 'New paths to prevention: engaging more boys and men in ending violence against women', Firebird Foundation and End Violence Against Women, 14 July 2025.
[11] Office for National Statistics, 'Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2024', 27 November 2024.
[12] Craig Haslop, Jessica Ringrose, Idil Cambazoglu and Betsy Milne, 'Mainstreaming the manosphere's misogyny through affective homosocial currencies: exploring how teen boys navigate the Andrew Tate effect', Sage Journals, 26 February 2024.

retaliation, but this happened twice more and she eventually made a complaint to police. Sarah was assessed as medium risk using the DASH RIC (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment Risk Indicator Checklist), the ex-partner was not assessed.

The case took weeks to progress to court and Sarah became more afraid as the threats increased. At the court hearing, her ex-partner received a fine (first offence and no 'actual' harm). She later said that the order increased the danger to her as her reports escalated the situation without providing any protection.

The harassment continues, she lives behind locked doors and arranges her days around avoiding any situations where she may be confronted by him.

This case illustrates one of the structural problems in the current system. Since breaching a civil order became a criminal offence (Domestic Violence Crime & Victims Act 2004), these orders rely on victims to initiate a breach and engage in what has become severely delayed enforcement, exposing them to danger during long gaps between reporting a breach and any criminal justice response. As the CJS is 'incident based' i.e. only deals with the actual reported breach, it does not consider the history and context of the case and therefore can underestimate the danger.

As a medium risk case, Sarah does not receive any follow up support, and her ex-partner has received no intervention to prevent the escalation of his behaviour.

Integrated family support

The government's 'Best Start in Life' Strategy (also July 2025)[13] commits to a new national network of Best Start Family Hubs, aimed at rebuilding joined up support for young children and their parents in the early years, as part of the government's Opportunity Mission to break the link between a child's background and their future success. Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies finds that access to a Sure Start centre between birth and age 5 significantly improved educational attainment up to GCSE, with much larger benefits for children from the poorest households and many ethnic minority groups.[14] For every £1 spent on Sure Start, there were at least £1.09 of benefits through school outcomes alone, before counting wider health and social care savings. And so, this work too, is urgent:

- Funding for family hubs remains well below historic Sure Start levels and is often short-term, limiting the ability of local areas to plan, iterate and embed. In 2023/24,

[13] Department for Education, UK Government, 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life', 7 July 2025.
[14] Pedro Carneiro, Sarah Cattan and Nick Ridpath, 'Sure Start greatly improved disadvantaged children's GCSE results', Institute for Fiscal Studies, 9 April 2024.

local authorities were spending less than a quarter on children's centres and family hubs compared with the peak of Sure Start.[15]

- In 2023–24 around 68% of children achieved a good level of development by the end of reception (age 4 or 5)[16]; the government's target is for 75% of children to reach those levels by 2028.[17]
- There are deep and persistent disparities in school readiness.[18] Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and children eligible for free school meals (FSM) are consistently far less likely to be 'school ready' than their peers:
    - In 2023–24 around 75% of children with no SEND reached a good level of development, compared with 19.7% of children with SEND.[19]
    - 72% of children not eligible for FSM were school ready, compared with 51.5% of children eligible for FSM, with boys on FSM particularly far behind.[20]
- The number of children in care has continued to rise sharply. In 2023, there were over 83,000 children looked after in England (the highest number on record), representing a 23% increase over the past decade, with rates of newborns entering care rising particularly fast.[21]

Case Study: Capacity CIC at one of our Better Way workshops, by Caroline Slocock, Panel Member

Emma Lord from Capacity CIC at our workshop on integrated family support reflected that "families tell us that most supposedly 'early help' they received was neither early nor helpful. This was a common theme from the families they listened to, and so in response they set up a "family toolbox" providing a wide range of accessible services, some under one roof. This was delivered through an alliance between charities and others, bringing in providers who were more trusted than social workers, who parents often fear will take away their children. Part of the secret of their subsequent success was that these collaborative contracts were based on top level principles, not KPIs and central control. When I hear examples like this, I realise how listening to people, joining forces, building relationships and focusing on principles instead of targets are already building genuine early help and changing lives.

[15] Centre for Young Lives, 'New FOI data reveals funding cuts to family hubs and children's centres could put government's opportunity mission at risk', 8 April 2025.
[16] Department for Education, UK Government, 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life'.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Sophie Metcalf and Nehal Davison, 'School readiness: How can government start closing the opportunity gap in early years education?', Institute for Government, 21 March 2025.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Department for Education, UK Government, 'Children looked after in England including adoptions', 25 April 2024.

Supporting transitions to adulthood

Since August 2024, the government has announced a series of measures to strengthen youth support, rebuild local services and improve young people's transition to adulthood. These include an £88 million "Opportunities for Young People" package to help young people reconnect with their communities through volunteering, music, outdoor activities and local youth projects; a thematic review by the Department for Education on "Preparation for Adulthood" arrangements for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and work by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to develop a National Youth Strategy for 10-25 year olds intended to create a more coherent offer for young people. Once again, this work is urgent:

- Around 800,000 young people aged 16–24 in England are not in education, employment or training (NEET).[22]
- 16–24-year-olds are the loneliest age group in Britain with loneliness closely linked to poor mental health and economic inactivity.[23]
- Care-experienced young people face acute challenges; over 40% are NEET at age 19.[24]
- Young people with special educational needs experience abrupt cliff-edges in support once they turn 18, as entitlement frameworks shift from children's to adult services.[25]
- NHS data show that one in five 17–19-year-olds has a probable mental disorder, yet continuity of care between CAMHS and adult services remains poor.[26]
- Pay and housing insecurity among under-25s has worsened post-pandemic, compounding social detachment.[27]
- Young people repeatedly describe feeling "isolated, unsure how to connect and increasingly turning to online content to fill that gap".[28]

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[22] Office for National Statistics, 'Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: August 2025', 21 August 2025.
[23] Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK Government, 'Tackling loneliness evidence review: main report', 17 March 2023.
[24] Department for Education, UK Government, 'NEET age 16 to 24', 27 November 2025.
[25] Richard Batcheler, Carey Oppenheim and Anvar Sarygulov, 'The challenges to traditional understandings of journeys to adulthood: Rethinking journeys to adulthood', Nuffield Foundation, 30 April 2025.
[26] National Health Service England, 'One in five children and young people had a probable mental disorder in 2023', 21 November 2023.
[27] Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2024', 25 July 2024.
[28] Gamote and Hyman, 'Inside the mind of a 16-year-old: From Andrew Tate to Bonnie Blue to Nigel Farage - what do first time voters think about social media, politics, the state of Britain and their futures?', Demos, 9 November 2025.

- Too many care leavers face a "care cliff" at 18, with support falling away overnight. A third experience periods of homelessness in the first two years of independence, and many describe feeling 'abandoned' just as responsibilities spike.[29]

When so many people are in acute crisis, shifting funding to the outer edges of the web can feel hard to justify. Yet part of the difficulty is that crisis services have already been stretched to breaking point, with thresholds for support rising ever higher. This imbalance is not only due to scarcity. Even where there isn't a shortage of resources, investment and professional attention are often drawn towards crisis. This is particularly visible in the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) tool, which we return to later. And reorganisation fatigue across all layers of government and statutory services reinforces this pattern.

Decades of repeated restructuring in local authority children's services, often following well-publicised tragedies, have unsurprisingly created defensiveness and a siege mentality in many sectors. Meanwhile, women and people of colour continue to be disproportionately affected by decades of systemic underfunding for specialist organisations. This is currently exacerbated by divisive narratives which are making it even harder to invest while making the need to nurture the sense of belonging and cohesion at the outer edges of the web even more urgent.

With resources concentrated at the centre of the web, responding to crises and, at best, preventing further harm, it will take a concerted effort and significant momentum to shift policy, behaviour and funding. Only then can resources flow toward the informal, community-based support at the edges of the web, where people are more likely to seek help earlier and may avoid the need for state intervention altogether.

A brief note on language: Throughout this work we use terminology which is imperfect, but which aligns with government programmes and priorities. As one participant acknowledged: *"Do we really want to use the language of '**transitions** to adulthood' in day to day life? Or 'Trusted adult'? We create a whole infrastructure of professionalism around these things, but I don't talk about my own children 'transitioning' to adulthood, or the 'trusted adults' in their life, so why the children I work with?"* Another said, *"when I hear the word 'transition' it creates fear. It sounds like a cliff edge."*

Others commented on the aspiration for **independence**: *"Is anyone independent? Shouldn't the aim be for interdependence? As an adult I don't think I'm at all independent, but I know who to reach out to when I feel a bit stuck."*

And finally, *"we need to ask what we mean by **belonging** - belonging to what? There is a real cognitive dissonance when asking marginalised people to be 'pro' a society that excludes or harms and in the context of far-right discourse. Is it really safe to belong?"*

[29] Become Charity, 'Support every step of the way: End The Care Cliff report', 13 October 2024.

Chapter 3: Six breakthrough mindsets

It was striking but unsurprising to all of us in the process of this work that the same ideas and challenges recurred across our conversations with experts in ending violence against women and girls, supporting transitions to adulthood, and building integrated and preventative family support. Families nationwide are accessing, or trying to access, support for all three of these difficulties, a reality made especially clear during our time with young people at the Rekindle School in Manchester.

An important realisation for us has been that the touchpoints on the edges of the web of support don't need to be subject or problem-specific. What matters is that they are accessible, trusted and able to nurture a sense of belonging through strong relationships, and are equipped to identify and respond to emerging difficulties in people's lives through their power and influence across the web. Addressing these mindset shifts will therefore require a significant power shift as well as culture change, but in return it will improve people's lives, support communities and build trust anyway - whether or not they are experiencing any of the three issues we've used as a starting point. This is an end in itself - and an important one if prevention is the aspiration.

To really move the dial on these challenges, the government is right to want to adopt a preventative, person-centred and place-based approach. We have identified **six breakthroughs in mindset** which could get them there. Not all six have equal weight and detail in this report, but that is simply reflective of the input we've had in the limited scope of this work, rather than their importance. We welcome input and feedback from readers, with this paper intended as a provocation to stimulate further discussion, in the spirit of sharing our thinking in the open as it evolves.

1. Recognise that relationships are paramount

There is no doubt that the systems we've examined need radical change. Talking about systems change can imply that we need to overhaul deeply rooted, tangled structural blockers to progress. By comparison, investing in relationships can seem surface level. But relational practice can be radical and transformational.

We know that a strong relationship - between a social worker and a new parent, between a mental health practitioner and a teenager struggling under the pressures of modern life, or between a specialist practitioner and a woman experiencing violence and coercion in her relationship, can blow the challenges of their operating environments out of the water and

transform lives.[30] Relationships open up the possibility of deeper forms of prevention; without them, interventions remain stuck at the centre of the web.

The state needs to face the question of how it handles relationships. It has lost sight of the gravity of removing children from their parents, and of whose responsibility it is to protect children from abuse in the family - the perpetrator or the victim.

> *"The state has never really gotten comfortable with what its role is in interpersonal relationships. It's happy to bulldoze through families when it comes to children, but it's always unsure what to do with women."* (Roundtable participant, Violence Against Women and Girls.)

In some parts of public service, a transactional approach is required, not least because it reduces the risk of bias or prejudice. But by delivering services transactionally we lose good bacteria as well as bad, especially when addressing complex needs. By contrast, a relational approach creates a new shared capacity between people and the state to achieve better outcomes. A deeply relational culture would render terms like co-production redundant: 'what we might call co-design becomes planning and what we might call co-production becomes implementation,' not least because there can be a paper thin difference between 'service user' and 'service provider' in a community-run space.[31]

> *"Relational practice will not happen if it is not modelled at every layer of management. It is a disgrace that there is no universal entitlement to reflective supervision across multi-agency partnerships. I think we deify lived experience over learnt experience. Instead we should see it as a tapestry of knowledge drawn from different experiences."* (Roundtable participant, Transitions to Adulthood)

Case Study: The impact of relational work

A pilot by *My Sister's Place* in Middlesbrough, first run in 2013, successfully supported women and children trapped in the most dangerous and "intractable" high-risk domestic abuse cases with perpetrators who had over 500 criminal convictions between them. A study published in 2025 shows that relational, trauma-informed work, focused on survivor engagement and perpetrator disruption, achieved safety for 75% of women who had previously been unable to engage with services. 90% of perpetrators were brought to

[30] This is something the liberated method for public service reform explores. See: Mark Smith, Hannah Hesselgreaves, Ron Charlton and Rob Wilson, 'New development: The 'liberated method' —a transcendent public service innovation in polycrisis', Taylor and Francis, 17 February 2025.
[31] Dan Honig, Mekhala Krishnamurthy and Rahul Karnamadakala Sharma, 'Relational state capacity: conceiving of relationships as a core component of society's ability to achieve collective ends', John Hopkins Stavros Niarchos Foundation SNF Agora Institute, 24 February 2025.

justice, and 47 children were prevented from being taken into care. Cost-benefit analysis indicates an extraordinary potential saving of £110,000 per case across children's social care, police services, and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). Scaled nationally this could deliver savings of £646 million–£2 billion nationally to children's social care, police and MARAC, transforming outcomes for around 17,000 women and 29,000 children.[32]

Preventing an individual or family from reaching crisis point at the earliest signs of difficulty requires spaces where people feel safe. For women and girls to feel safe to seek help at the earliest signs of abuse, or for a new parent to seek support with parenting without fear of child protection intervention, trust must be built in 'everyday', practical ways. Trust means expecting someone to act responsibly not only in moments of risk, such as when you disclose risk or danger, but in the ordinary, expected situations as well. The gold dust of community-based spaces is that they provide space for women to simply come together over a meal, build relationships and talk openly without any pressure to make any disclosures before they feel comfortable.

> *"What we often do is just 'do something else.' We say, come join us for a meal, for soft play, for free vitamins, for a baby bank. I myself wouldn't leave the house thinking, "I'm going to go find this engagement today to improve my child's life chances", so why should any mum? There has to be a really lovely offer."*
> (Participant, Family Hubs)

Community-based spaces are more likely to reflect and respond to the needs of the people they serve and to be trauma-informed in practice. Trust is earned through reciprocity, and these spaces are much more likely to start from a belief in what women tell them. What they need is the power and credibility to then ensure that appropriate and proportionate action will be taken. This cannot be said for all arms of statutory provision; for instance housing officers may assume reports of domestic violence are fabricated to secure housing. The trust deficit is exponentially more severe for minoritised women, whose experiences, in the words of one participant, are considered by statutory services as an 'aberration from the norm'. Relationships built in community, where people can see themselves reflected, allow for patterns like coercive control to be picked up before crisis point, which statutory provision has no mechanism for absorbing and acting upon.

The state and funders must value the broker, and value the space in which trust is built. The trouble is:

[32] Fiona Sheil, Becky Rogerson, and Lesley Storey, 'Intractable High-Risk (MARAC) Cases: A Way Forward', RIVA, November 2025.

> *'A lot of the work looks like you're not doing anything. I would love to see funding for 6 months where it's ok for nothing to happen - it's just space to build those relationships."*

The specialist women's sector in particular has been stretched for years, and if the state wants to see any real shift towards prevention, active investment is required to continue supporting early, relational work of this kind.

Consistency of this support is also critical. Deeply preventative work is ultimately about keeping people away from needing too much state intervention in their lives. One of the strongest predictors of reduced re-entry into crisis for families struggling with parenting is long-term, continuous relationships throughout the challenges and changes of family life. Yet current commissioning frameworks give very little to no permission for this sort of work. Staying with a family throughout pregnancy, early childhood and housing transitions - even if crossing borough boundaries - reduces repeat involvement with statutory services. Strong relationships can be the antidote or prevention to over-interference by the state in people's lives, which resonates with Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's aspiration for the state to "tread more lightly on people's lives." [33]

Similarly, youth and mental health experts emphasise that prevention cannot succeed without creating conditions in which young people feel safe to ask for help early and believe that someone will respond. The young people we spoke to described their relationship with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as *'an employer-interviewee or client relationship, rather than human to human.'* In schools, colleges and youth provision, trust is treated as a by-product of service delivery rather than a deliberate outcome. But trust is also a precursor to engagement. Too often, fear of judgment, bureaucracy, or being labelled "a problem" deters children from seeking support until breaking point. Young people are far more likely to open up to someone they already trust - and to explore their aspirations with them - than to formal services. Yet these relationships are rarely built into system design.[34] Furthermore, eligibility for a service doesn't necessarily mean that service is what's needed. Practitioners told us that CAMHS, for instance, is often not quite the right intervention for the children they work with. Eligibility criteria often aim to simplify things, rather than embrace messy reality.

> *"Effective work builds social and emotional skills over time rather than using one-off educational interventions. Practitioners find that they slip into the conversations about misogyny because the kids have trusted adults. It's the inverse of going into a school and saying, 'guys, your views are bad.' It becomes peer to peer. And it is about relational practice because it's about trust.'* (Roundtable participant - Transitions to Adulthood)

[33] GOV.UK, 'Keir Starmer's First Speech as Prime Minister: 5 July 2024', 5 July 2024.
[34] Children's Commissioner, 'Children's mental health services 2023-2024', 18 May 2025.

Preventative systems also understand that young people's lives play out online as much as they do offline. As one young person noted in one of our roundtables, culture and identity are increasingly passed 'sideways' in global networks of young people, rather than down through family lines. Professionals need the permission and capability to engage with this reality.

Family Hubs present an opportunity to shift from this cycle to a model that places sustained relationships at the centre. Hubs that bring together many services with the aim of creating 'one front door' may miss the point. Does a family hub even need to be constrained to a physical space? Buildings belonging to a public sector agency are often distrusted, seem alienating or threatening, rooted in past or inter-generational trauma of state intervention.

A focus on the physicality of new family hubs is a design product, not an accident. We can see the crumbling hospital ward or library; we can't so readily observe the crumbling trust between people. Relational state capacity is 'generally underinvested in precisely because it is difficult to observe; too often it simply lies dormant.' [35] Why should a family hub be seen as a physical space that people go *to*? Could it be a conceptual space, meeting people where they're at, in mosques, churches, food banks, kids play areas, cafes and online - reaching people where they spend time?

> *"There is a paternalistic tone to missions of giving every child the best start in life because it's all about fixing problems. The narrative must be about connection, play, and support. In rural coastal environments, we must think of the hub as a set of shared principles rather than just a physical collocation of resources. Social media is underutilised too; services should learn from the power of peer influencers to grow engagement. We need to understand that communities for racially minoritised people show up differently and are not just located in a physical place."* (Roundtable participant - Family Hubs)

This need for a more positive tone was reflected in our roundtable on transitions to adulthood. Young people are struggling with high expectations and adultification from a young age. But, when they are having fun:

> *"There is a vilification of adolescence. We need to work much harder to talk about how fabulous being a teenager can be. We see behaviours through a lens of concern and trouble, especially for black teenagers. We should try and smile more when we see kids having fun in the street. Maybe that needs a public campaign."* (Roundtable participant - Transitions to Adulthood)

[35] Honig, Krishnamurthy and Karnamadakala Sharma, 'Relational state capacity: conceiving of relationships as a core component of society's ability to achieve collective ends', 24 February 2025.

We have focused on the subject of relationships at great length, because in many ways this breakthrough is a prerequisite for any of the others. It is a fundamental philosophical shift, without which our other breakthroughs can arguably not even be understood, never mind implemented.

2. Create meaningful opportunities for belonging

People across the country are experiencing profound isolation and loneliness, still under-recognised in public services. A lack of trust in services is itself a significant driver of this isolation. Isolation is often seen as an individual's responsibility, but as a panel we have come to the conclusion that isolation is the result of systemic failures, partly fed by a wider climate of distrust, misinformation and exclusion. Many participants described environments where discrimination, exclusion and far-right narratives limit the possibility of belonging and cut off the relational networks that support healthy transitions. One young person we spoke to asked: "How can I feel I belong where I'm not wanted?"

Loneliness is one of the strongest predictors of crisis, from poor mental health to involvement in crime or exploitation, but older generations' perception of young people's hyper-connection online can obscure the extent of their isolation.[36] While public awareness and state initiatives on loneliness have largely centred on older people, it is a critical and under-recognised problem amongst young people. The government should focus more explicitly on tackling loneliness in their work to transform youth support.

Healthy transitions to adulthood are too often framed as helping the young person have *independence*. Few adult readers of this report will see themselves as purely independent, but rather interdependent on stable networks of care, connection and responsibility. Care-experienced young people, in particular, are pushed towards premature independence without the scaffolding most of us rely on well into adulthood; so the government's youth strategy should prioritise interdependence over independence.

Belonging and identity go hand in hand, and people's ethnicity, class, disability, gender and immigration status shape how safe they feel in institutions and public spaces. This is true for women and girls experiencing violence, new parents struggling to find support, and young people navigating transitions to adulthood. Therefore, a sense of belonging cannot be created through a single pathway. Young people need a web of support with highly diverse entry points, including safe spaces that reflect their identities, culture and lived experience. Yet the ambition to streamline and simplify the system held by many funders and public services pulls in the opposite direction from the best practice happening at grassroots level. The answer is to shift emphasis and instead resource a plurality of

[36] Co-op Foundation, 'Co-op Foundation research finds loneliness is contributing to poor mental wellbeing for millions of young people', September 2021.

options. Currently, the groups most trusted by marginalised young people, women at risk of abuse, and struggling families are almost always the most underfunded. Enabling these community-based organisations to thrive while maintaining independence is essential for any credible prevention strategy. It is also urgent as these are precisely the organisations and groups on the brink of closure.

> *"It was joining an Irish dance group' that eventually got me a job, not an 'intervention'"* - Workshop participant

Why a mindset shift to provide meaningful opportunities for belonging matters to me: Ruth Ibegbuna, Social Insights panellist

Young people consistently tell us they are lonely. They describe mounting pressures on their mental health and a sense that available services are struggling to meet escalating demand. They are coming of age amid economic uncertainty, rising living costs, accelerating climate anxiety, and an intrusive digital environment that intensifies comparison, scrutiny, and social fragmentation. These forces combine to create a uniquely challenging pathway to adulthood.

Youth isolation is not only a personal crisis; it is a structural one. A generation that feels unsupported, unseen, and unwelcome cannot easily develop the confidence, agency, and civic trust required for a positive UK future. In our work, we repeatedly encounter young people expressing a desire not merely for provision, but for presence. They want to feel 'welcomed in' rather than left to navigate uncertainty alone.

Providing digital platforms or physical youth spaces is valuable, but insufficient. What young people consistently value more is sustained thoughtful accompaniment: adults and institutions that sit alongside them, invest real time and resources, and create meaningful intergenerational environments. These are spaces where experience and energy can meet, where the next generation is supported to shape their future rather than being expected to shoulder it alone.

During a recent week-long residential programme, a group of young participants were asked to imagine the future they most wanted to inhabit. Their response was striking in its clarity and consistency. They did not first call for new technologies, qualifications, or employment pathways. Instead, they asked for more "love and care" from UK society as a whole. They spoke of a desire for deeper inclusion, greater visibility, and a cultural shift in which young people feel cherished rather than expected to simply "go it alone" into an uncertain and often frightening future.

In policy discourse, concepts such as love, care, and joy are frequently dismissed as soft or intangible. This language is more commonly associated with community initiatives

than with government strategy. Yet these values speak directly to the relational foundations that enable young people to thrive. When systems operate through a 'care-first' lens, they signal to young people that they are seen, heard, and valued. This, in turn, fosters belonging, strengthens resilience, and builds the trust necessary for long-term civic participation.

Embedding belonging as a core design principle across education, youth services, and local governance would represent a significant shift. It would mean moving beyond transactional engagement towards sustained, relational support; investing in intergenerational spaces that nurture dialogue and shared responsibility; and recognising young people not as future stakeholders alone, but as available and willing current partners in shaping a hopeful and sustainable society.

At its core, the message from UK young people is both simple and profound: they want to belong. Systems that respond to this call, with time, care, and genuine partnership, will be better equipped to support a generation facing unprecedented complexity, and to secure a more cohesive and optimistic future for the UK as a whole.

3. Focus on people's needs rather than risk to institutions

One of the biggest barriers to meaningful prevention is a focus on risk over need. Services seldom allow the time to listen carefully to people's experiences from their own perspective, or trust that individuals may understand their own needs best and willingly listen to what they might be. Worse, the risk that preoccupies services is all too often a risk to themselves as an institution, as opposed to risk to the individual. A focus on the most high-risk cases is in many ways a product of austerity; in a constrained fiscal context, how else do we decide how to deploy resources? And yet a risk-driven lens is failing to protect people.

The domestic violence sector is a prime case study for this broken dynamic. Before 2009, there was no consistent national system for assessing risk in domestic abuse cases. Between 2007–2009, the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence Assessment (DASH) checklist was developed by ACPO and CAADA (now SafeLives) with Home Office support.[37] DASH lies at the heart of a risk-based and managerial approach to identifying and responding to domestic abuse. It is inherently non-preventative, non-relational, and non-person centred, and therefore at odds with the stated aims of the government's public service reform agenda.

[37] SafeLives, 'What is MARAC?' Accessed April 15th, 2026.

DASH inadvertently reinforces victims' and survivors' fears, such as that their children might be taken into care, and may even unwittingly collude with perpetrators who create and exploit the same fears in order to control and coerce their victims. Its binary format, relying on yes/no questions and self-disclosure, misses patterns of coercive control and escalation. Critics argue that a risk-led checklist has entrenched a culture of crisis management, funnelling resources to the highest-risk cases while delaying help for those at earlier stages of abuse.

While DASH intended to standardise referrals, improve information sharing, and create a shared language across agencies, it was meant as just one element of a wider toolkit. Instead, it has become the gateway into the entire system, meaning its strengths and flaws directly shape victims' safety and the allocation of support. It was rolled out nationally, without any formal testing or independent evaluations of its predictive accuracy and without a test and learn mindset. Studies have found that DASH frequently misclassifies high-risk cases, with up to 88% of victims who experienced repeat violence initially scored as standard or medium risk.[38] It misses coercive control and funnels support to only the most visible crises, meaning help arrives only after harm escalates.

> *"There is an unbearable stress in the system around fear of something terrible happening. There's no breathing space for practitioners, which can really distort our therapeutic practices. It means we're not really listening to women, we're just doing repeated MARACs without any real impact. It is so rare to have the opportunity to think beyond the immediate risk - for instance, what the woman really wants is help to get a job, or move to a new home. The real sea change would be for risk to be transferred to the perpetrator and the focus for the woman to be purely on needs."*

A risk-led model crowds out any capacity for the system to listen to stories and experiences beyond that risk lens, or to co-create solutions with the survivor, which are far more likely to create lasting safety. Indeed, victims and survivors aren't even present at the multi-agency conference (MARAC) prompted by the DASH. A professionals-only discussion of a woman's case, exacerbates her feeling (and indeed her reality) of decisions being made about her, without her.

The age-old idea of a deserving victim is so engrained that we're seeing women being asked to sign safety agreements to say they will not 'expose their children to domestic abuse'. As

[38] John Ross, Jaqueline Sebire and Heather Strang, 'Tracking repeat victimisation after domestic abuse cases are heard with and without Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) in an English Magistrate's Court', Springer, February 1st 2022.; Tom Kirchmaier and Ria Ivandic, 'Written evidence submitted by LSE Centre for Economic Performance (VAW0024)', Parliament Committee, May 2021.

Gisele Pelicot so powerfully argued, shame should change sides: "it's not for us to have shame, it's for them."[39]

> *"If you're doing a risk assessment on a woman you're doing a risk assessment on the wrong person. It's perpetrators that need to be assessed and dealt with."* (Roundtable participant, Violence Against Women and Girls).

Similarly, interventions for young people are often built around risk management and eligibility, rather than their personal needs. We found that young people had a sophisticated understanding of how underfunded and broken systems like CAMHS are, and are acutely aware that unless they are in crisis, or are disruptive in school, they won't receive help and will continue to struggle quietly, in isolation. 'Man-made cliff edges' at 18 and 25 mean the abrupt withdrawal of support at the most volatile stages of life, forcing professionals to prioritise thresholds over need. Support is withdrawn at the moment stability is forming, leaving young people to navigate rising expectations and responsibilities with reduced support.

A needs-led approach facilitates continuity, relationships and belonging (as explored in Breakthroughs 1 and 2), and responds to what a young person needs to thrive, not simply whether they meet a statutory threshold. This would mean empowering professionals to use discretion and curiosity, not just compliance, as their guide.

And last but by no means least, families often move in and out of crisis because support is short-term, fragmented and focused on risk and incidents. The system intervenes intensely at moments of crisis but withdraws too quickly for meaningful change to take hold. The result is that families are subject to multiple interventions without anyone building a clear picture of their needs or staying involved long enough to sustain progress. Practitioners describe a pattern in which a crisis stabilises temporarily, only for difficulties to re-emerge once formal involvement ends, because the conditions that produced the original crisis remain unchanged. Even when people have reached the centre of our web of support, where the most intensive support is found, they are not held securely or guided back to the edges of community-based support that could help sustain lasting change.

Why a mindset shift from risk to needs matters to me: Becky Rogerson, Social Insights panellist

Risk currently operates as the organising logic of the system through the DASH risk assessment, MARACs, and commissioning arrangements for specialist services. Introduced with clear aims, their current use is misaligned with what survivors seek when they ask for help, places disproportionate and costly emphasis on procedural

[39] Angelique Chrisafis, 'Gisèle Pelicot tells mass rape trial "it's not for us to have shame - it's for them"', The Guardian, 23 October 2024.

compliance, and limits opportunities for early intervention and sustained engagement, as shown in this case study:

An independent specialist service in the north of England offered an open-door policy to any woman in the community in need of support around domestic or sexual abuse. It had a strong community footprint with a thirty-year history and was well respected for its accessibility and positive outcomes.

One Friday evening as the service was closing a woman walked in asking for support. It was 5.15pm and all the IDVAs/ support staff had just left, leaving only the receptionist and the cleaner in the building to lock up. The receptionist explained that no staff were available, made the victim an appointment for Monday morning and provided safety planning advice and out of hours telephone numbers. Tragically, the woman was killed by her partner over the weekend.

The service, commissioned by the local council, was closed temporarily, pending an investigation and review of policies and procedures. The service reopened some weeks later with enhanced security on all access points, an appointment only policy, and a raft of additional procedures to be followed.

This will ensure that in the case of another homicide, this agency will be in a position to defend its own actions and provide information to any statutory review. It also substantially reduced the number of victims entering the service and increased the number of people attending only the initial appointment. This service took the decision not to respond to the next tender opportunity and has diversified its activity.

4. Hold public and social sector practitioners in far higher esteem

We talked in Breakthrough 1 about relationships being paramount. Strong relationships which change lives are often forged in spite of, not because of, the conditions practitioners face. Therefore, the national-level challenge for this government is to create the conditions in which relationships are able to thrive. Frontline practitioners told us how compliance-driven frameworks leave little space for curiosity or relational work. They are asked to build trust without the reflective supervision, time or emotional support required, contributing to burnout, turnover and instability that people on the receiving end feel acutely. These are all themes we'll come back to.

Mission-driven governments need the humility to acknowledge what they don't know, empowering those with practice-based professional judgement. As the interface between policymaking and delivery, frontline practitioners in public sector agencies - such as

teachers, police officers, social workers - should be seen as part of the policymaking community.[40] While there are some indications the government understands the importance of this,[41] there has been a severe denigration of the value of frontline practitioners across all three of the policy areas we explored. They are often doing their best within constrained conditions, and often in tension with their core professional values such as working to high standards. This leads to cognitive dissonance - a psychological state in which two or more conflicting beliefs are held simultaneously, made manageable with 'cognitive shields', such as making the client blameworthy. These day-to-day decisions help cope within the pressures of the work, and professionals 'effectively become the public policies they carry out'.[42]

> *"One of my frustrations over a 40-year career has been how we've over-professionalised interventions to the point of "producer capture". There is plenty of evidence which seems to suggest as soon as you touch a formal system, the outcome is going to be pretty negative. What can we do to deflect people from formal systems? I trained as a social worker about 40 years ago, and at that time, social work training allowed you to explore ideas from people like Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire about community development, structural inequality, and how you built capacity in communities to address issues. Can we ever get back to that?"* (Chris Wright, Panel member)

When we focus on the hyper-local, specialist and culturally specific groups and organisations at the outer edges of our web, we find practitioners receiving complex and traumatic disclosures with even less access to training, supervision and information-sharing than their counterparts in public services. Without this support, they cannot fully play their part in the web of support, holding people safely or helping them navigate to further support when needed.

Practitioners are being asked to deliver relational, trauma-informed work inside structures that actively prevent it, as explored in Breakthrough 2. They are held in compliance-driven and risk-led frameworks, with high caseloads and limited time, often without the training and supervision this work demands. As a result, the trust they build with people exists despite the system, not because of it. The consequences are predictable: high stress, high turnover and disillusionment - not only among practitioners, but also among the people

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[40] Michael Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, Russell Sage Foundation, 1980.

[41] James S. 'Pat McFadden calls for a start up mindset in government transformation', Government Transformation Magazine, 10 December 2024; Cabinet Office, UK Government and The Rt Hon Darren Jones MP '"Move fast, fix things" – Darren Jones sets out plan to rewire Whitehall and incentivise innovation in the civil service', Cabinet Office, UK Government, 21 January 2026.

[42] Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy.*

they support and the organisations they work for. It is no wonder that frontline staff churn is high and public trust is low.[43]

Policymakers must acknowledge the knock-on effects of culture or policy changes across the whole system:

> *"Once you start talking to schools about healthy relationships, you're going to see an increase in disclosures, with teachers on the phone for hours to the local authority trying to get children's social care on a Friday afternoon, who are completely under-resourced themselves."* (Roundtable participant - Transitions to Adulthood)

What frontline practitioners in public services need, whether they work in the public sector or in civil society organisations, is freedom to exercise professional judgement in a framework that provides continuity, information-sharing, training, support and supervision. Small, independent local groups and organisations need the same, but also greater security: stable funding, access to information held by larger, formal organisations when needed, and the ability to broker contact with them in a way that sustains their own relationships with people who need support.

5. Chase innovation in the right places

Innovation is highly prized, and understandably so; we all want to see the promise of technological innovation, for example, realised for positive change. But there is vital work to create the conditions for meaningful innovation, which, in public service delivery, is often much more organic and collaborative than it is flashy:

> *"Innovation isn't just novelty or 'new' ideas; it's the implementation of ideas in practice. Most funders don't really get that, and there is a sort of hunt for the new. We should support that kind of innovation and de-risk it. And the most impactful thing we can do is be in dialogue to build alliances with other funders."* (Workshop participant, Violence Against Women and Girls.)

These views can feel controversial to express, but they are widely shared amongst practitioners and civil society leaders across issue areas and geographies. Innovation is rarely pursued in established community-rooted organisations. This creates frustration and damages trust among those best placed to deliver change that public services seek. Take new approaches to family support: innovation efforts will fall short if they focus on new 'single front door' spaces, rather than seeking insights and inspiration for innovation in the

[43] Phil Tinline, 'Power Failure: A new theory of power', The Future Governance Forum, 19 January 2026.

spaces families already trust: mosques, churches, food banks, peer networks, where early conversations about people's personal challenges and problems actually happen. And before turning to something new, it is important to invest in understanding whether and how existing approaches are working. Yet most small civil society organisations and groups lack the resources to demonstrate their outcomes and impact. Meaningful investment from the public sector or other funders in the Impact Economy could help change this, if investors are willing to back grassroots work in the long and sometimes complex task of demonstrating impact - even when it has not done so already.

Case Study: Violence against women and girls perpetrated by teenagers is too often a peripheral issue

"Violence against girls was like a side issue in a lot of these boys' lives. It was not the focus for the professionals... They were worried about their experiences of trauma, exploitation, gangs, or carrying knives." (Roundtable participant)

Islington Council took a deep dive into the life experiences of 21 boys, who were collectively responsible for the victimisation of 32 women and girls before they turned 18. They tried to understand what services had missed, and why these boys had been able to cause extensive harm. Their analysis showed that three-quarters had experienced domestic abuse as children, over 30% had undiagnosed neurodivergence, 80% had generalised offending, and every single one of them had significant issues with education.

This, of course, drew attention to the need for early intervention in schools. But perhaps more importantly, it surfaced that violence against girls was too often seen as a side issue in service interaction with teenage perpetrators. The system was designed to focus on gang involvement, violence and drug use, and professionals said they found it hard to talk about relationships and attitudes to women because it felt like an adult topic, out of reach of the child-first focus of many professional services.

In response to this deep dive, Islington's VAWG team began supporting the Youth Justice Service by offering in-depth training on teenage relationship abuse: how to identify it and build skills in practice to discuss and address it; co-location within services; embedding VAWG workforce development practitioners in panels, including Early Intervention & Diversion, high-risk community panel, custody panel, MACE; offering trauma-informed consultations to practitioners to support them on cases; DSM (Islington's MARAC) will now hear high risk cases for under 16s; VAWG workforce development practitioners attend strategy discussions where those under 18 are victims or causing harm in their relationships; and they have created a sub-category at the front door for adolescent domestic abuse.

The pursuit of innovation can push organisations and groups to repackage existing work as something new, at significant cost to time, money and the credibility of funders.

Meanwhile, the kind of innovation that emerges organically within communities and services at the outer edges of the web, where preventing the need for costly intervention is possible, is squashed by the insecure funding and churn of staff:

> *"I lead and line manage a lot of really eminent experts on addressing serious violence but we spend much more time asking: when do our staff's contracts end, where is the next funding coming from, how does it look after 26th March, how many people will we have to put at risk of redundancy before then? And if we could spend that amount of time talking about what is going to actually shift the dial, the whole country would be in a better place. It really feels like a real crisis point, this constant chasing and hustling for funds."*

Meaningful time, or 'breathing space' as many of our participants identified, is needed to embed and refine innovations in response to the feedback of the people they are designed to benefit:

> *"I think we all know that learning is at the coal face, not through business models collecting data that tracks processes. For VAWG, the 64-page quarterly monitoring return I used to send in to the MOJ reported demographic data, referrals, and a deficit list of victim characteristics entitled 'trauma-informed practice'. It bore no reflection of the work actually undertaken or outcomes achieved."* (Becky Rogerson, panellist)

In short, we have heard calls for more intentionality and sophistication when it comes to innovation. The government should invest in building the evidence base for what works where it is weak; for instance, on preventing misogyny and violence amongst teenage boys. Conversely, we know what works in delivering support services for women experiencing violence. The challenge is often that those approaches aren't sufficiently resourced and innovation is required not in *what* to do, but how to scale known solutions to wicked problems and help them 'stick' across a system. Evaluation too rarely focuses on trying to identify system blockages:

> *"When services are being evaluated, it focuses on how the practitioners are doing, and how outcomes are being achieved, but very little attention is paid to what the blockages are and what is difficult for people supporting young people to navigate. My hope for Test, Learn, Grow is that it really focuses on that work. We are seeing where people are getting really worn out and where relational practice becomes difficult; less from the trauma of the people being supported, and more from the system itself."* (Roundtable participant, transitions to adulthood)

Next, we'll move onto exploring the necessary overhaul of commissioning practice against the backdrop of a quote shared by one participant:

> *"There's a powerful quote where she says that poverty is the 'wallpaper of social work practice: too big to tackle, too familiar to notice'. I think austerity has become the wallpaper of policy."* (Roundtable participant, transitions to adulthood)

In reality, it is in commissioning practice itself that innovation is most desperately needed.

Reflections on innovation in social impact settings, Mike Adamson, Social Insights Panellist

Everyone believes we should be more innovative and learn more quickly if we are to build the kind of society and economy that can look after all its citizens. And innovation is all around us in how we engage, how we communicate, how we take photographs, how we book travel, how we generate clean energy, how we deliver tasks requiring the processing or large amounts of information - and more. At times, the rate of spread and adoption of these technologies is overwhelming, with both positive and negative consequences which we then seek to mitigate. But the pace is relentless.

Some of this innovation has been harnessed for social purpose. The spread of impact investing in the green economy; cash programming in international aid and development; new life saving service pathways for stroke patients; new booking systems for refugee drop-in centres are all examples. The attribute that all of these innovations have in common is standardisation of processes that allow scale and replication.

However, many of the great practices described in this report to address violence against women and girls, transitions, or family support, do not lend themselves to standardisation. Perhaps there may be opportunities to standardise to enable data sharing and learning, and they may have common principles, for example, about person centredness, the key role of front-line workers, and so on. But needs, social capital, organisational capacity and institutional arrangements vary across geographies. What works in one place cannot be lifted and shifted somewhere else, especially when they are dependent on collaborations across different public sector and civil society organisations working across social care, health, education, criminal justice and more.

As Chair of St Mungo's, I am proud of the work we are doing with the Greater London Authority to test new ways of working that will aim to move upstream to anticipate when someone is at imminent risk of rough sleeping and prevent it happening. But if it works, the test will be how we enable wider adoption by leaders and front line workers in other places around the country without imposing a service blueprint that will not work.

We need to innovate not only in the services we offer but also the institutional arrangements and expectations that enable a successful pilot or new approach to be sustained and replicated. That requires a different style of leadership and governance focused around humility, curiosity and courage with a willingness to put the purpose first and organisation second. It starts with the cause and a commitment to collaboration, as well as a willingness to re-engineer individual organisational ways of working to serve the greater good.

6. Overhaul public and social sector commissioning culture and practice

Local voluntary and community sector groups have spent decades calling for commissioning behaviours that allow their work to flourish, but the stark reality is that commissioning makes their work more difficult and less effective. The funding crisis in local government in particular has led to a culture of gatekeeping scarce resources in many local authorities, which is not only experienced by individuals who need help, but also by organisations who must tender and compete for funds.

A change in commissioning culture and behaviour is an urgent necessity if civil society is to fulfill its potential as a partner in public service reform. It is a fundamental requirement for all the other recommendations in this paper.

We heard that current processes and practices were undermining rather than promoting effectiveness. A managerial approach - often implemented by procurement specialists rather than specialists in the needs they aim to meet - in which targets are imposed from above reinforces silos rather than joining them up. Both risk aversion and centralisation lead to unnecessary reporting, getting in the way of delivering true value. Costs are managed rather than value, and agreeing principles for how services should be delivered would be more effective than KPIs.

Shortages of public sector funds continue to threaten to destroy the local web of civil society support and innovation, whether those spaces are place-based, identity-based, or virtual. Serious attention to prevention spend means funding the outer edges of our web, and the level of change this requires should not be underestimated. Commissioners must seek to understand the local needs of a community before they commission services. Understanding and resolving complex needs, as opposed to operating risk and eligibility assessments, requires a completely different approach to commissioning, which is currently one of the biggest structural blockers to prevention across all three strands.

Take marginalised young people: they told us that the groups they trust the most have the least secure funding. In family support work and the protection from violence against women and girls, short-term contracts destabilise any potential for relational work. Competitive tendering also undermines the ties between community organisations themselves, making the collaboration and sharing of best practices that are essential for public service reform, and for people to move around the web, far more difficult than they need to be.

Commissioning drives towards simplification and consolidation at the highly specialist, community-based, and hyper-local level, which is the very place where, as we argue throughout this paper, trust can be nurtured and people can feel heard and understood. Highly diverse communities made up of multiple intersecting identities need equally diverse touchpoints for support. Commissioning that forces homogenisation will damage the complex network of grassroots initiatives, which it could instead be encouraging and nurturing. Meanwhile, it creates complexity within public sector organisations themselves, precisely where the consolidation and simplification should be taking place.

Annika King from the Young Women's Trust, for instance, suggested during one of our workshops that commissioning could revolve around principles rather than prescribed targets, such as young people feeling belonging, trust and joy. The government's Test, Learn and Grow programme and the Office for the Impact Economy could explore the potential for new frameworks of measurement along these lines. The very term 'impact economy' leans heavily on the idea that the impact of an intervention can be proven, otherwise it's not effective. The further we go towards the outside edge of the web, the less likely it is that impact has already been demonstrated, or, in some cases, that the 'work' has even been conceived in that way. Of course, anyone investing in solving these huge and complex problems wants to see that their money is buying some success. It's who defines that success, and whether the patience exists to truly 'test and learn', that we should question.

Conclusion: start with trust to strengthen the web of support

It's time to fully accept that we have reached a point where seeking help often seems more dangerous than continuing to live with domestic abuse, isolation, family conflict or parenting difficulties. This is a disastrous state of affairs.

Very few people truly believe that if they face one of the issues we examined - they are in a controlling relationship, they are struggling with bullying or can't cope at school, they feel overwhelmed by being a parent - contacting a public service with statutory duties will be risk-free. And the more marginalised or minoritised we are, the less we are likely to believe that contacting a crisis-level public service will be useful, supportive or even safe.

Early help must mean meeting people where they are, making the most of any touchpoints they already have with support, whether formal or informal, whether public sector or civil society led, and patiently offering touchpoints if they don't exist.

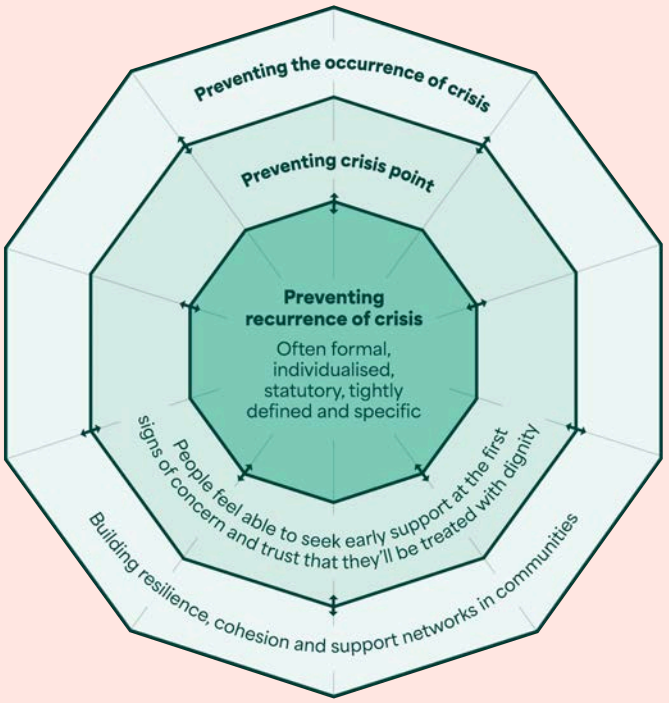
At its simplest, deep prevention at the outer edges of our web means already having someone to turn to when help is first needed: someone trusted, who understands not just the presenting problem, but the wider context, and who knows what to do, who to contact, and how to help us access further support.

In many communities, a web of support already exists. But it is often completely separate from the structures that can mobilise public services. It is an inescapable conclusion from our work that the only way forward is to allow the people, places and organisations that are already trusted to act as gateways to further support when needed. There is a real risk that stronger association with statutory services could undermine people's trust in those community-based initiatives - and we know that trust is gold dust to the process of prevention and support. But we heard that in practice many of these community-based groups and organisations already navigate safeguarding concerns and the limits of confidentiality. Involving them in information-sharing, and deliberately building trust between them and the agencies that sit towards the centre of the web, while respecting their independence and the skill and knowledge of their workers, will not disempower them - it will empower them further.

There is also a risk here that closer information-sharing with local authorities and other public sector agencies could threaten the independence of civil society organisations. But the truth is that risk exists already. Current commissioning practices are far more damaging to the independence of charities than the web approach we are suggesting. Risk-led and

eligibility-driven frameworks remove the professional judgement to decide alongside an individual or family what support they need and why. Community-based groups, who provide anything from a purely social space to a safe space for abuse survivors, and everything in between, need a sustainable footing, ensuring their practitioners don't burn out and trusting their judgement. This would transform their ability to ensure people can navigate inside the web if they need to. And won't it be useful to see exactly how those pathways are used when people start from a position of trust?

What we are proposing is a radical shift in the respect and esteem shown to small, specialist organisations by public services. We propose that these groups should be properly supported and resourced to continue their powerful work, with the breathing space to innovate. They should also be recognised and equipped to provide advocacy, share information, and use their judgement to determine when further support is needed - helping people move inwards through the web if necessary.



By mapping the web, using the knowledge of local people and civil society, public services can place themselves at its centre where they belong, empowering the groups and organisations at the edges of the web and along its pathways to point the way for people who need more intensive support, and, if necessary, navigate the route to support alongside them.

Rather than basing community groups and outreach in public sector premises, our vision is for the public sector to strengthen the local ecosystem of early support. This means improving communication across the system, supporting the wellbeing of practitioners, and providing sufficient resources to demonstrate and build on what works so that pathways to safety already exist before an individual or family becomes vulnerable.

Where the web does *not* yet exist, careful thought must be given to building it in a way that starts by understanding where trust currently lies and meeting the immediate needs of the community, rather than by publicising, relocating, rebranding, or recommissioning the crisis-level response. Organisations providing deep preventative support at the outer edges of the web need to be equipped with a full understanding of how to navigate avenues within the web, and to have privileged access to the decision-making of public sector agencies,

rather than being merely in contact with procurement departments and competitive tendering processes. Public services must also be open to advocacy from community groups and organisations acting on behalf of both individuals and communities.

It's important here to strike a note of caution about the concept of 'communities', which are extremely varied, bringing people together through different experiences and identities, both face-to-face and virtually. They can also exclude as much as they include. As well as building trust, they can be galvanised by distrust of those outside the group. Open communication and a commitment to the overall goal of improving public services for everyone are key to participation in the web of support, and these tests need to be applied to all touchpoints.

Perhaps the biggest change this way of thinking demands of public services is to resist the urge to simplify the ways in which individuals can access support. Instead, public services must accept the complexity of identity and trust, using communication and information sharing rather than structures and physical locations to enable both individuals and organisations to navigate the web.

Our view is that investment in the web will do far more than provide a genuine shift to the prevention of complex and dangerous levels of need for individuals and families - although that is prize enough. It would also build social capital, strengthen bonds between people, increase trust in public service solutions to their problems, and improve understanding of how the systems that affect their lives actually work.

If we are to work together to counter division, disinformation and distrust, as indeed we must, people need to feel that their identities and contributions matter to the wider community. That means recognising and valuing difference as much as shared belonging. A sense of belonging depends on being treated as though you belong.

We are not recommending new structures for public services. We are recommending public services that demonstrably value specialism, difference, true listening, and the trust that it can build.

The change we are proposing is radical, yet our breakthroughs are nothing new. What stops this change from really happening? What is keeping orthodoxy in place? What is the system leadership needed to make these breakthroughs happen? And what are the institutional connections and relationships that create the conditions for it to happen consistently? It might be that radical change has been too scary for even widely accepted ideas to actually happen in practice. If the government is serious about delivering on its principles for public service reform, it will have to incentivise a dramatic shift. How to do that is the question we hope to answer more fully in phase 2 of our work.

About the Social Insights Panel

Introducing the panel

Polly Neate: Chair and convenor of the Social Insights Panel and FGF Policy Associate

Polly is a cross-bench peer in the House of Lords, as well as a strategic adviser to organisations, qualified coach, mentor and high-profile expert commentator on social issues. Until March 2025 she was CEO of the housing and homelessness charity Shelter, and before that she was CEO of Women's Aid and Executive Director of External Relations at Action for Children. She has substantial first-hand experience of leading teams through rapid and transformational change and strategic challenges, both external and internal. Polly is also a former award-winning journalist and communicator who has spoken on platforms as diverse as the Oxford Union and the 250,000-strong first Women's March on London. She is an experienced non-executive director and charity trustee. She was made CBE and Honorary Doctor of Laws (Bristol University) in 2022.

Mike Adamson CBE: Chair of St Mungo's and Former Chief Executive of the British Red Cross

Mike is an experienced CEO, Board member and coach with extensive leadership experience across the not-for-profit, public and private sectors. He is Chair of St Mungo's, a leading homelessness charity, a leadership coach and strategy partner for CEOs and Directors tackling complex social challenges and an Honorary Visiting Professor at Bayes Business School, Centre for Charity Effectiveness. Mike was Chief Executive of the British Red Cross for nine years until November 2023, overseeing responses to major crises including the Grenfell Tower fire, Covid and Ukraine. Mike pioneered cross-sector collaborations on emergencies, refugees and health, co-chaired the Voluntary & Community Sector Emergency Partnership, and served as a trustee of the Disasters Emergency Committee. He

also led a global review of the Ukraine response and was Interim Director of the Global Commission on Modern Slavery & Trafficking. He was awarded a CBE in 2021 for services to the humanitarian sector.

Ruth Ibegbuna: Founder of RECLAIM, The Roots programme and Rekindle School

Ruth, a former teacher turned leading UK social entrepreneur, has spent over a decade empowering communities and young people to drive positive change. She founded The Roots Programme after the 2016 Brexit Referendum, uniting diverse communities and fostering compassion. Ruth is also the Founder and CEO of Rekindle Schools in Manchester and London and soon to be Scotland, empowering young critical thinkers from working-class backgrounds. She launched the national SPARK programme in 2025 to support changemakers outside London and previously founded and led RECLAIM for 11 years, guiding working-class young people in challenging leadership inequalities. A powerful and inspiring speaker, Ruth shares her journey of overcoming challenges with honesty and resilience. In 2019, she established Northern Soul for social justice training. Recognised as a Clore and Ashoka UK Fellow, she was named one of the UK's 500 most influential people by The Sunday Times and a top female changemaker by Virgin. Ruth authored 'On Youth' and received a doctorate in Education from Manchester Metropolitan University in 2017.

Becky Rogerson MBE: Director of RIVA and Former CEO of My Sister's Place and Wearside Women in Need.

Becky is a nationally recognised feminist leader and expert in Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), with over 20 years' experience leading specialist services in the North East of England. She is known for driving systemic change through innovation, research, and multi-agency collaboration. Becky was awarded an MBE in 2011, and an Honorary Doctorate from Durham University in 2025. A Churchill Fellow and former magistrate, she now serves as Director of RIVA, driving systems change, and as a Non-Executive Director for a major housing association.

Anand Shukla: Chief Executive of the Henry Smith Foundation

Anand is Chief Executive of the Henry Smith Foundation where he has led the organisation through a strategic transformation: rebranding to reflect its identity as a modern, independent foundation, launching the "Elevate Your Impact" strategy for 2025–2030. As CEO at Brightside (2015-20), he led the charity to support over 10,000 young people annually through its pioneering digital mentoring programmes, and introduced an evidence-led impact framework helping the organisation to become a leader in mentoring for social mobility. As CEO of the Family and Childcare Trust (2010-15), he guided the merger of Daycare Trust and Family and Parenting Institute, creating a unified voice for childcare policy and family support. He has served as a trustee and board member across the sector, including roles with Social Investment Business, Health Poverty Action, Child in Need India, John Schofield Trust and Richard Thornton Foundation.

Kirsten Westlake: CEO of Two Magpies Fund and co-founder of the Violence Against Women and Girls charity, Let Me Know

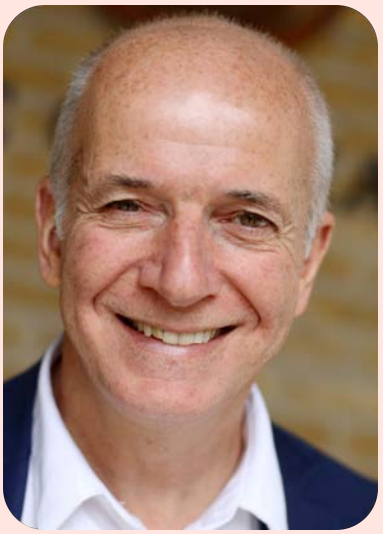
Kirsten is CEO of Two Magpies Fund, a grant-giving organisation that works across the VAWG, child poverty and criminal justice sectors. She is a strong advocate of the power of emerging charities to bring new thinking and fresh approaches to tackling society's biggest problems. She is also co-founder of the charity Let Me Know, which teaches young people about healthy relationships and tackles the root causes of violence against women and girls, and served as Chair there for five years. Prior to this she set up and ran the North London operations of Little Village, the UK's leading baby bank. Kirsten's early career was in business development and marketing, predominantly at the BBC and in consultancy. Kirsten is a magistrate in London and a trustee of Switchback, a charity which supports men to build stable, rewarding lives outside of the criminal justice system.

Caroline Slocock: Co-founder of the Better Way Network, Director of Civil Exchange

Caroline is the founding Director of Civil Exchange, a think tank which aims to help government and civil society work better together and, as a member of the Civil Society Covenant Advisory Group, helped draw up the Government's new Covenant. She is a Co-Founder of A Better Way, a cross-sectoral network of leaders who are improving services, strengthening communities and creating a fairer society, and now chairs its core group. In the past, she was the CEO of the charity Refugee and Migrant Justice and held many senior roles in Government, including in No.10, the Treasury and the Department of Education, and was Chief Executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission. She is an author and regular commentator in the media.

Chris Wright: strategic adviser, mentor and Former Chief Executive of Catch22

Chris trained as a social worker and spent 20 years working in both the criminal justice system and children's social care before moving across to the voluntary sector where he spent the next 17 years. He stepped down as CEO of Catch22 in 2022 having led the organisation for 11 years. He's now pursuing a portfolio of interests as a Non-Executive Director, adviser and mentor. Chris has a strong belief in the need for public services to be more relational, local and responsive to the needs of those they serve and has a particular interest in the role that social businesses can play in the provision of these services.



Our process

For each of our three thematic strands - ending violence against women and girls; supporting transitions to adulthood; and building integrated and preventative family support - we have followed the same collaborative process:

1. Rapid literature review and semi-structured interviews to produce a short provocation paper shared with attendees of both workshops and roundtables (2 and 3 below).
2. An open access workshop hosted by the Better Way Network, which brought together grass roots practitioners with panel members to reflect on what works, all three of which took place between 13th October and 21st November 2025.
3. Private roundtables of the Social Insights Panel, joined by expert guests, all of which took place between 2nd November and 5th December 2025.
4. A second iteration of the provocation paper following stages 2 and 3.
5. Finally, we were lucky to spend a Saturday in December 2025 with young people from the Roots Programme at the Rekindle School in Manchester (both founded by panellist Ruth Ibegbuna) to explore themes related to the work of the Social Insights Panel. Whilst we framed our questions very differently at Rekindle from the framing we used with practitioners, it was striking how much their perspectives resonated with all prior stages of the work.
6. We then looked at cross-cutting systemic issues at a panel roundtable with guests from the Cabinet Office, and with the Better Way Network at the Better Way Annual Gathering.

Consistent with the rest of the process, this paper has been developed iteratively and in partnership, shaped by ongoing engagement, feedback and insight from all panellists. We hope you heard their voice and experience throughout the paper. We are grateful to everyone who has supported the panel to push and evolve its direction in line with a plethora of expertise and insight, including: Aisling Barker, Ciara Bergman, Nick Cook, Arielle Garton, Dez Holmes, Sophie Humphreys, Fozia Irfan, Annika King, Emma Lord, Bethia McNeil, Cate Newnes-Smith, Ghino Parker, Sue Penna, Lauren Seager-Smith, Laura Seebohm, Fiona Sheil, Cathy Ashley, Marike van Harskamp, Lee Webster, Jane Williams.

We are particularly grateful to Anand Shukla and Will Jacks from the Henry Smith Foundation; Caroline Slocock, Will Nicholson and Lucia Lovine from the Better Way Network for convening workshops; and Ruth Ibegbuna, Cara Kennedy and Heidi Heinemann from the Roots Programme and Rekindle School for their collaboration, and both Grace Wyld and Shuab Gamote from FGF for all their work with the panel and in developing the paper.

The Social Insights Panel Partnership

A Better Way is a network of 1,500 grass roots and national leaders committed to improving services, strengthening community and achieving a fairer society. It shares insights and inspiration and works across sectors to make change happen.

The Henry Smith Foundation has a 400-year history of backing work to tackle poverty and creating a more just society. Today it is one of the UK's largest independent funders, funding organisations supporting people through some of life's toughest transitions and points of crisis and pushing for systems that work for everyone.

The Roots Programme was established in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum to bring people in the UK together across social and cultural divides. Creating spaces for open dialogue, shared learning and relationship-building, they enable participants to explore different perspectives, bridge divides and foster mutual understanding.

Rekindle School is a youth-led national education charity and network of supplementary schools operating across Manchester, London and Scotland, working with young people underserved by the mainstream education system. They support young people to build confidence, develop critical thinking skills and engage with the issues affecting their lives and communities, creating pathways for young people to shape their own futures and contribute to wider social change.