



co
op

Community Report: Better Together

Foreword by Rebecca Birkbeck, Director of Community Engagement at the Co-op



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Director of Community
Engagement, Co-op

With more than 3,500 food stores and funeral homes across the country, we know how important community is to the 4.5 million members who own our Co-op, the many customers who shop with us daily, and the thousands of local groups we support.

That's why from time to time, we think it's important to take the nation's community pulse by researching local life and sharing the findings.

This latest report 'Better Together' shows that whilst many people feel helpless to influence global or national issues, they're increasingly turning their attention much closer to home, where they believe they can have a more meaningful say and make a difference.

Our research shows some people are closer to their community today than was previously the case, with about a quarter of people (23%) feeling more connected now than ten years ago.

However, whilst community togetherness is stronger than a decade ago for some, it would be wrong to assume that everything is rosy in the neighbourhood communal garden. Whilst an increasing number of people are more connected locally, almost a third have no pride in the place where they live, and a similar number never get involved in their communities.

So for those of us who believe that community plays a positive role in enhancing our wellbeing, we face the challenge of how to reconnect the 30% who don't. After all, all our previous research in this area tells us that connected communities are stronger communities.

Earlier this year, we launched our 'Stronger Co-op, Stronger Communities' ambition because we know that by sharing our success, we can improve communities for the benefit of everyone.

The Co-op has long been associated with the concept of self-help and it's clear to us that communities need far more than just money. However, the £19m our members have generated by shopping with us will certainly help the 4,000 local groups that are set to benefit from the Local Community Fund this year.

We also have over 200 member pioneers throughout the UK, building relationships between local causes, Co-op members, colleagues and the wider community, bringing people together to do what matters most in their area.

We don't have all the answers, but as this report shows, many of the things needed to build a strong sense of community – like how people feel – are already in place, they just need help and support to grow.

We're committed to helping communities to connect more, and we're excited about the increased social value that this can unlock for everyone.

Key findings of the Community Report: Better Together



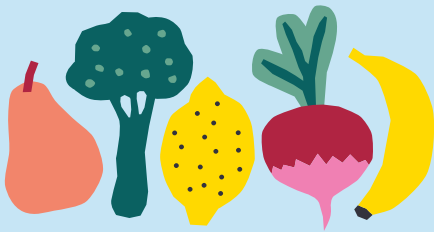
A third of people are disconnected from the place where they live



A quarter feel closer now than at any time in the past 10 years



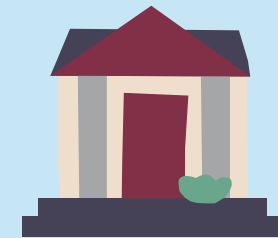
Seven out of ten are prepared to get involved in community activity



Two in five donate food or goods to a local cause



A third joined a campaign to save a neighbourhood resource



The local campaign attracting most support is fighting a library closure

Connected Communities

A contrasting picture of community life in Britain has emerged from new research by the Co-op, which shows that a third of people are disconnected from the place where they live - while almost a quarter feel closer now than at any time in the past 10 years.

One in three (33%) have no pride in their area and a similar number (31%) are not prepared to do anything to improve the wellbeing of their community, but almost twice as many (23%) say they are closer to the place where they live now than the 12% who say they feel less connected than a decade ago.

With society more geographically mobile than ever before, it's not surprising that moving house or area was the biggest reason for feeling less connected, with 18% of people citing this. This was followed by children leaving home (12%) and health issues (11%).

Our work with the British Red Cross on loneliness and isolation has shown the negative impact that a breakdown in connections can have on peoples' lives, and children leaving home and health issues were identified as some of the key triggers for this.



Parklife

Spaces and places to meet are vital to a vibrant community, and this was reflected in the research. When asked which communal spaces were central to their community, 49% of people said parks were amongst the most important.

With evidence to suggest that visiting parks not only helps with health and wellbeing, but can even boost the academic performance of children in urban areas, green spaces are more important than ever for communities.

The popularity of parks was followed by libraries (34%), high streets (29%), playing fields (23%) and village or church halls (21%).

Whilst 15% of respondents felt there were more communal spaces than two years ago, over a quarter (26%) said there were fewer.

Younger people were more positive about the spaces and places, as almost a third (31%) of 18 – 24 year olds thought there are more places to get together compared to two years ago – 16% higher than the average of the other age groups.

The importance of green areas was highlighted in the summer, when the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (NFPGS), said “time was running out” for the UK’s parks. The group announced a ‘Charter for Parks’, and called on Government to make it a legal requirement for all parks and green spaces to be maintained and managed to a good standard.

Dave Morris, Chair of NFPGS, said: “Continuous budget cuts to staffing and maintenance are leaving them vulnerable to neglect and deterioration, or even sell offs.”



It's the taking part that counts

When asked about taking part in a number of community-based activities, over two thirds (70%) said they did not do any. However, if there were more opportunities to take up something new, around half (49%) would.

A quarter (25%) of people would like to attend adult education classes, 22% would like to join a community group, and 18% would like to try online learning.

Recent research from the Department of Education found that adult community learning could help people with depression and anxiety, so the opportunity to take part can have a big impact on people's mental health. This is clearly an area where increased awareness of what is locally available could increase connectivity and engagement.

Since the Co-op's Local Community Fund was launched in September 2016, over £3 million has been shared by 3,000+ schools, colleges and skills development initiatives in the UK. The social value this investment generates far outweighs the level of initial funding, and is a key expansion area for the Co-op moving forwards.

When questioned about taking up sporting activities if they became more widely available, the most popular choice for 26% of respondents was walking and rambling. This was followed by using a gym or doing a yoga class (both 17%), joining a sports club to play games like badminton or squash (14%), and playing a team sport such as football (9%).



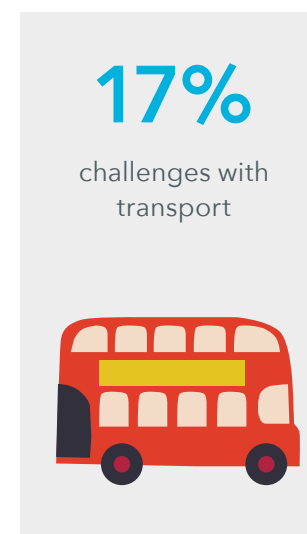
Relationships

Meeting face-to-face with friends and family is often the best way of staying in touch and catching up on the latest news, and just under a quarter (22%) of us meet up with groups of friends at least once a week. In a society that is obsessed with digital devices and virtual meeting places, it is refreshing to know that personal contact is still valued by a lot of people.

However, it looks as though one-to-one meetings are becoming less popular, as well over a third (37%) of people meet up less often than they did five years ago.

More than a third (37%) put this down to living a long way away from friends, 28% to a lack of free time and 20% because of increased work pressures. Challenges with transport (17%) and the cost of getting together (16%) also stopped people from regularly meeting face-to-face.

On-to-one meetings are becoming less popular due to:



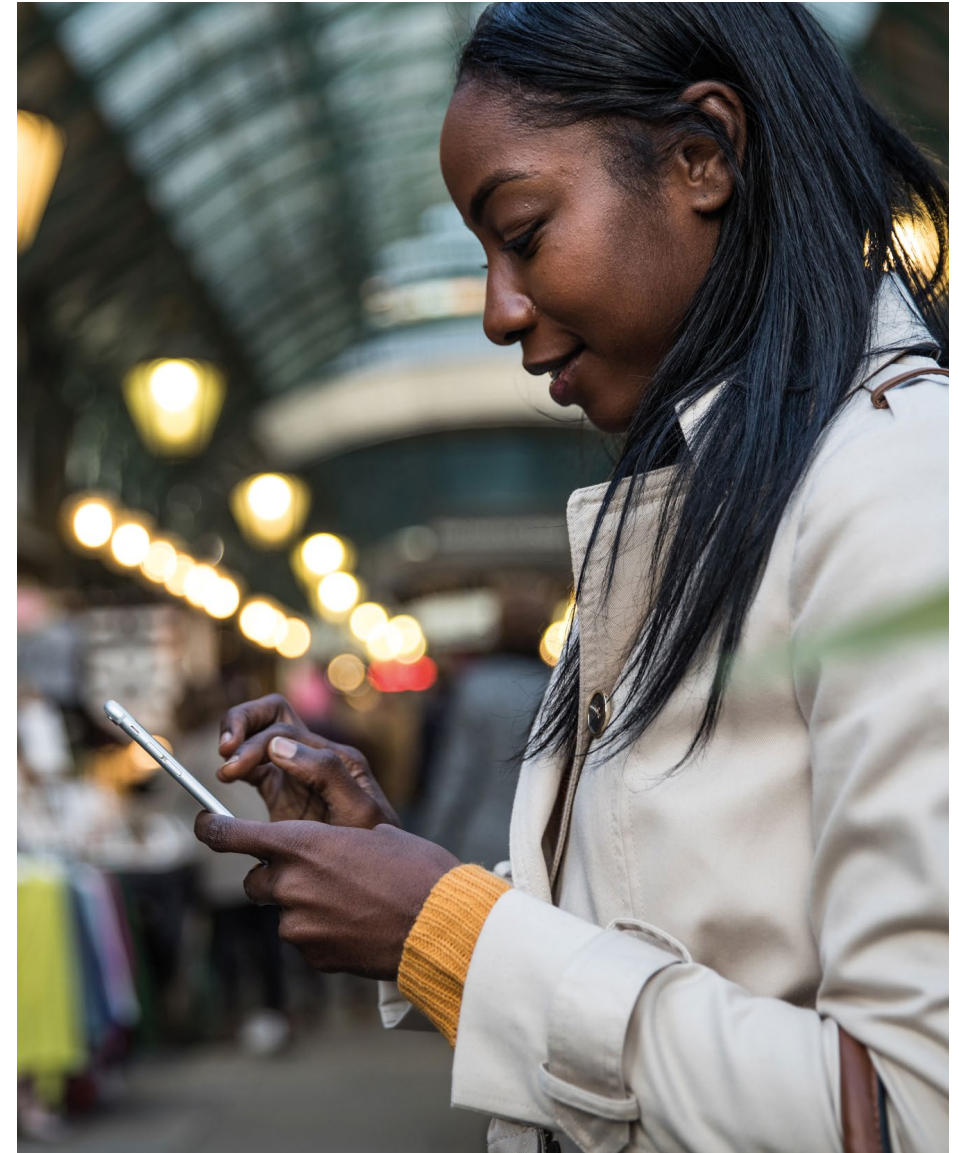
Can I phone a friend?

The most popular way of communicating with friends and family was by phone (used by 29% of people), followed by meeting in person (26%). In a sign that the use of Facebook and Instagram may be on the decline, apps like Whatsapp (used by 21%) were more popular than broader social media sites (17%).

The use of social media really does reflect the age of the user, as less than 10% of people aged 55+ use it to stay in touch, versus just over a quarter (26%) of respondents aged 18 - 25. The opposite is true when asked about keeping in touch by phone, with this method favoured by 40% of people aged 55+, versus 13% of 18 - 25 year olds.

Social media has helped generations of people all over the world to keep in touch, although there are plenty of people who find it intrusive and unnecessary, so it's interesting that nearly twice as many people still prefer the phone.

Men were more likely to meet in person than women (31% v 22%), whilst women were more likely to use an app than men (25% v 17%).



Family events are better together

Group gatherings can be the cornerstones of connecting people, and when asked which events brought people together, family occasions such as weddings, funerals or christenings came top, with 38% of people seeing these as the best way to connect people.

The next most popular were summer fetes and trips to the pub (both 27%). 26% of people said a crisis or disaster brought people together.

In the past 12 months the country has enjoyed a number of high profile events, and 18% of people said that meeting for a big sporting tournament like the World Cup or a Royal Wedding was their best way of getting together. A charity event like a dinner or fundraiser was cited by 17% of people.

When asked which of these had the most lasting and positive effect, family events scored highest with 27%, followed by a holiday (21%), but interestingly, while a crisis or disaster could be considered to be a negative event, 17% claimed it had a positive impact on them and their community.



Everybody needs good neighbours

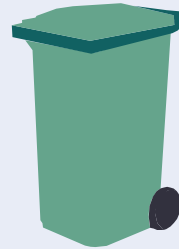
Brits are still a nation of friendly people that are happy to call on those next door, with 70% of people having helped a neighbour in the last 12 months.

Almost two thirds (64%) said they knew at least one of their neighbours well, although 36% said they didn't know anyone on their road at all. On average, people are on good terms with at least two of their neighbours.

These findings are broadly similar to the recent report from Co-op Insurance and Neighbourhood Watch - ['A Neighbourly Nation: Through the keyhole'](#).

37%

have put a neighbour's bins out / away



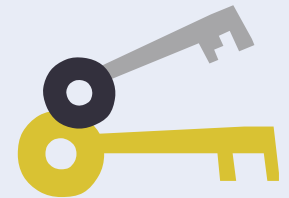
31%

have collected a neighbour's post



23%

have a spare key for a neighbour's house



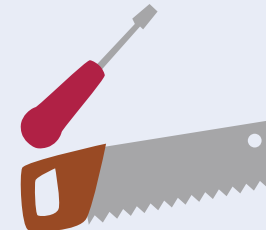
22%

have checked in on someone else's house when they're on holiday



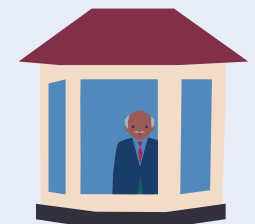
21%

have loaned a tool to a neighbour



17%

have spent time helping elderly neighbours



Getting involved

Over a third (38%) of respondents have volunteered in their community in the last 12 months, with the most popular activities being to support local community groups and picking up litter (14% of respondents).

Echoing concerns that our cities are seeing an increase in rough sleeping, 7% of respondents had helped the homeless in the last 12 months, and 6% had supported a food bank.

Co-op members have supported over 170 projects addressing homelessness through the Local Community Fund since September 2016 when the scheme launched, providing half a million pounds of much needed funding.

It might be surprising to know that the likelihood of doing something positive in a community decreases with age, as 40% of 18 - 24 year olds were active in their local area in the last 12 months compared to just 22% of residents aged 55 or over.

In terms of how often people were active in their community, 14% of people volunteered a few times a year, 10% said they got involved once a week or once a month, and 7% of people helped out every year.

However, the research shows that 62% have done nothing in their community over the last year. This is surprising as previous research by the Co-op shows that 40% of causes that benefited from the Local Community Fund have seen an increase in the number of volunteers compared to five years ago.

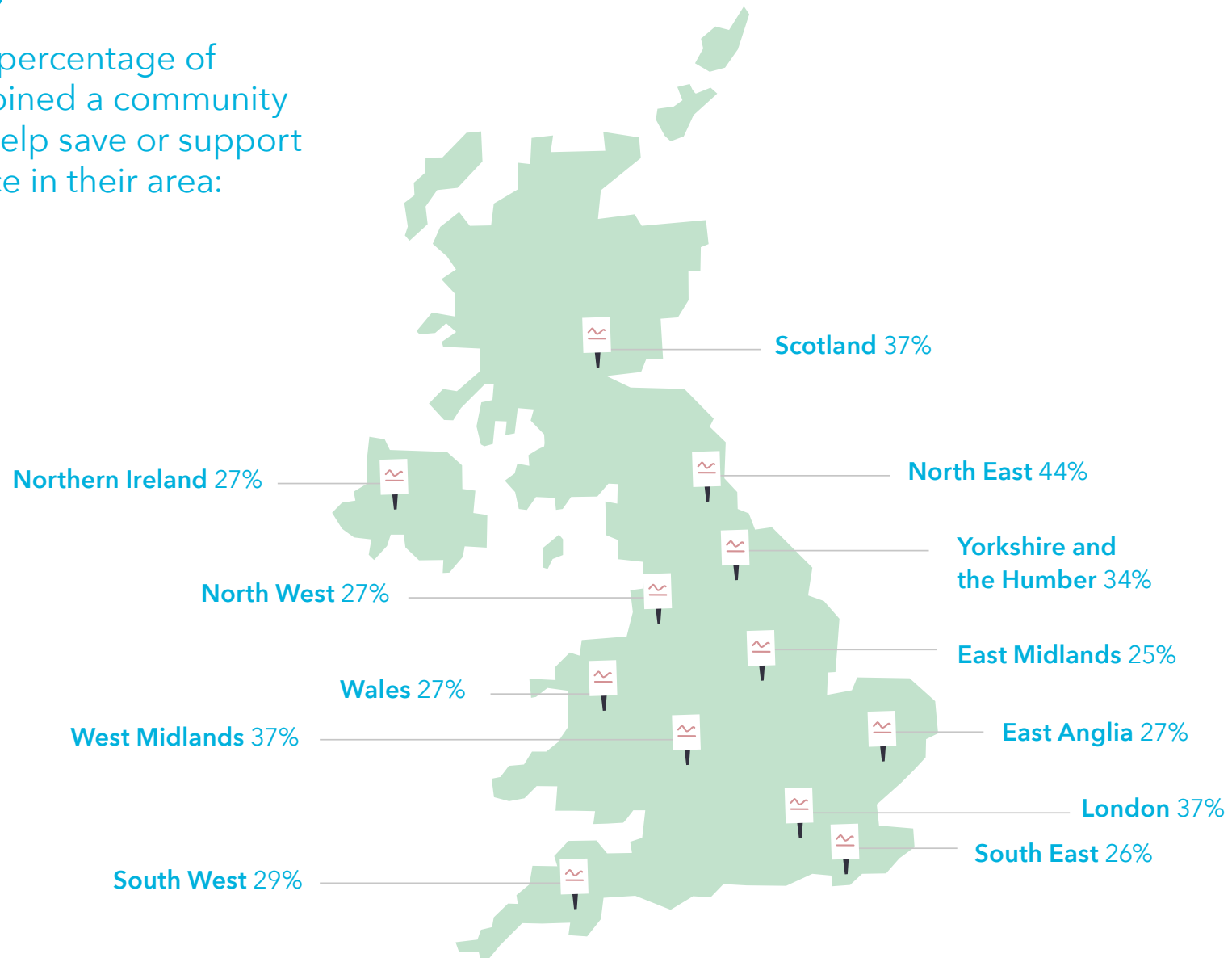
Sometimes this can be because people perceive what they are doing as 'helping out' rather than volunteering.

30% of people have joined a community campaign to help save/support local resources. When asked about the type of campaigns supported:



Community campaigners

The following percentage of people have joined a community campaign to help save or support a local resource in their area:



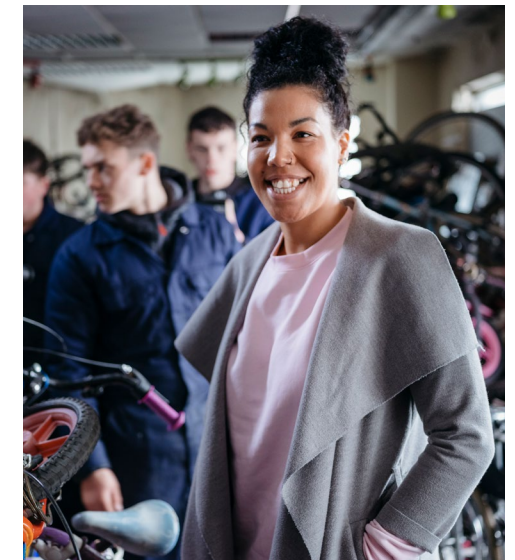
Community support

When asked what they were prepared to do to improve the wellbeing of their community, just under two thirds (69%) were willing to roll their sleeves up and get involved, with donating food and goods the most popular methods of helping out (41%).

23% were happy to care for isolated or vulnerable people, and the same number would encourage friends and family to get involved in their community. Promoting worthwhile causes through social media was popular with 20% of respondents.

67% of people said that they were proud of their community. When asked to list what made them proud, 27% said the people, 21% were pleased by its cleanliness, 18% said schools, and 17% said how people helped each other.

The challenge facing communities - and where businesses like the Co-op can help - is how to reach those who are not proud of where they live, and how to reconnect them in order to unlock even more social value and restore a sense of pride.



Word gets around

Good old fashioned word of mouth is the most popular way of finding out what's happening in communities, with 40% saying it was their favourite way of staying in touch with local events.

The decline of the local newspaper has clearly been exaggerated, with 37% saying it was their preferred way of getting information, versus social media (30%) and online news (24%). Regional media like TV and radio was used by 17% of respondents, and texting or using an app were popular with 11%.

It might not be a surprise that compared with five years ago, more people are using social media (36%) and getting their news online (27%).

The popularity of online news and social media - as well as 24 hour TV news - shows that people expect instant media updates at their fingertips so it's good to see people also taking the time to read regional newspapers, which have for decades been the go-to source of local information.

40%

of people say word of mouth is their favourite way of staying in touch



▼ 27%

read their news online



▲ 36%

use social media



Co-op in the community

With its unique business model, the Co-op, unlike its rivals, is able to focus on the specific needs of its members and customers. Since the launch of the Co-op Local Community Fund in September 2016, over 12,000 community causes have received just under £40 million, which has been used to fund everything from village halls and support groups to education providers and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

This approach is evolving all the time in order to ensure the Co-op better targets the funds generated by members and that the collective efforts of the business, its members and other organisations are concentrated on building stronger communities.

That is why 2019 will see a renewed Co-op community vision, which will provide local leaders and individuals with the insight to instigate the improvements that are needed to make life better for everyone.



Research questioned 2,000 people by One Poll, October 2018.
Nationally representative sample.

About the Co-op

The Co-op is one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives with interests across food, funerals, insurance, legal services and an online electrical store. It has a clear purpose of championing a better way of doing business for you and your communities. Owned by millions of UK consumers, the Co-op operates 2,600 food stores, over 1,000 funeral homes and it provides products to over 5,100 other stores, including those run by independent co-operative societies and through its wholesale business, Nisa Retail Limited. It has more than 63,000 colleagues and an annual revenue of £9.5bn.

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