

social capital in the North East

how do we measure up?

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North East Social Capital Forum

About Northern Rock Foundation

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About the North East Social Capital Forum

The North East Social Capital Forum was established in 2006 to:

- raise awareness of social capital as a practical tool for social and economic regeneration;
- identify good practice in building social capital in the North East;
- find ways of measuring and monitoring social capital;
- provide training and dissemination about social capital;
- link into other work on social capital in the UK.

The Forum was set up as a two-year project run by the Community Foundation and Regeneration Exchange, with funding from the regional development agency, One NorthEast.

More information

www.communityfoundation.org.uk/specialprojects/social_capital

About the author and ippr north

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ippr north produces far-reaching policy ideas, stimulating solutions that work nationally as well as locally. These are shaped from our research, which spans the northern economic agenda, public services, devolution, food policy and rural issues, as well as a strong democratic engagement strand which involves a wide range of audiences in political debates.

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A full data analysis is available as an appendix to this report from www.nr-foundation.org.uk/publications_research.html or by contacting ippr north on 0191 211 2645.

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Foreword

Measurement of social capital in the United Kingdom is still in its infancy. When compared to the analysis that is possible in the United States, there is much more to be done in improving our understanding of how social capital varies at a local level.

This report is an impressive first attempt to break down national statistics to a regional level. It tests some commonly held hypotheses about the friendliness of people in the North East and the strength of our communities, and makes some interesting comparisons between the North East and our friends in the South.

It is particularly helpful in informing the ongoing debates amongst members of the North East Social Capital Forum about how the concept of social capital can help build stronger communities and promote both social and economic regeneration. The report will be valuable to local authorities and other planning bodies as we embark on “place surveys” and get to grips with the ways that different neighbourhoods and communities work, even within a single local authority area. It would be good to standardise the way we collect data which would make further comparisons about social capital in individual communities easier in future.

If reading this report whets your appetite to find out more about social capital and engage in the debate in the North East, do contact George Hepburn at the Community Foundation, who co-ordinates North East Social Capital Forum, and who would be keen to hear from you.



Andrew Kerr
Chair, North East Social Capital Forum
Chief Executive, North Tyneside Council

Executive summary

This research was initiated by the North East Social Capital Forum and commissioned by Northern Rock Foundation in order to provide, for the first time, a robust analysis of levels of social capital in the North East region. The research was conducted by ippr north.

Social capital and regional development: why the interest in the North East?

Social capital essentially refers to people's personal relationships and networks, and is considered the 'social glue' that makes society work. There are three main types of social capital: bonding (strong relationships of care, for example within a family), bridging (looser networks, often with people from different backgrounds, for example acquaintances) and linking (connections with people in positions of power). Research has shown that bonding social capital, while good for personal support, can have negative implications, fostering exclusivity or encouraging negative behaviours through social pressure.

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is seen as a more straightforwardly good thing, and research suggests it could contribute to meeting some of the region's priorities. It is positively associated with shorter spells in unemployment, which could assist with the regional economic strategy's (RES's) objective of economic inclusion. Another priority for the North East, and a theme that runs throughout the RES, is raising people's aspirations, and research suggests that contact with people from different backgrounds, through more extensive and diverse networks, can raise expectations and aspirations.

Furthermore, regional development policy is increasingly about shaping a place and 'selling' an area. Being able to market the North East as a distinctive place with a vibrant and welcoming culture, where there are strong and cohesive communities and people know their neighbours, may have an important contribution to make. For this to be meaningful, it is helpful to get behind these stereotypes and assess the type and level of social capital in the North East region. This research takes the first steps in doing this. There are three common hypotheses we seek to test:

1. the North East is a place of particularly strong communities;
2. the North East is exceptional in terms of being a sociable place;
3. the region has a culture of informal volunteering and social support, so using formal volunteering as a measure of social capital and active communities disadvantages the region.

Fertile ground? The policy context at national and local level

Social capital has featured on the national policy agenda in recent years, although national thinking has shifted a little, with concepts of active citizenship, empowerment and social cohesion coming to the fore. Social capital is intimately intertwined with these aspirations.

As part of the new local area agreements (LAAs), local authorities can choose to include 'stronger communities' as part of their agreement, and they have the option of devising their own additional targets. Alongside this development, the new local authority *Place Survey* will include a number of questions relevant to social capital, and it is expected that individual local authorities will be able to add questions to the survey to collect data on issues of interest. Should they choose to, local authorities can make enhancing social capital central to their activities.

Data and methodology

Social surveys can be used to measure respondents' social networks, participation in organisations and social activities. But care has to be taken with interpreting the data as social capital is not always a good thing, and direction of causality is difficult to establish. These limitations make context vital to understanding social capital, and the ideal would be to supplement quantitative data with qualitative research.

This paper provides a regional analysis of social capital, drawing on the General Household Survey (GHS) 2004/05. This was the first, and so far only, major social survey to carry the Office of National Statistics' set of

questions specifically designed to measure social capital (known as the harmonised question set – HQS), giving robust and comparable data.

The HQS does not currently include questions on bridging social capital, so to supplement the analysis we include data on bridging social capital from the Citizenship Survey 2005. Both the GHS and Citizenship Survey have a large enough regional sample to make generalisations about the wider North East population, but once broken down into different groups – such as age group – we can be less confident of generalisations. Neither survey provides geographical data below the level of the standard region. Furthermore, as the two surveys draw on different samples, despite being from a similar period, they are not directly comparable. While the data are not ideal, analysis of it will provide a broad brush picture of social capital in the region, enabling us to draw some conclusions and highlight areas for further research.

Conclusions

The primary conclusion is that the North East has similar levels of social capital to the rest of the country. In terms of people's views of their local area and their level of trust in neighbours, Parliament, local authorities and people in general, the North East is similar to the British average and most other regions and nations. And while a low proportion of respondents thought they could influence decisions in their local area, either alone (22 per cent), or when working with others (46 per cent), this was not significantly different to the British average or most other regions.

The region that emerges as most exceptional from our analysis is London, where people are more negative about their neighbourhood, have lower levels of trust and are the least likely to speak to their neighbours. This may suggest more fractured neighbourhoods in London, a finding that should give pause for thought about the type of regional development model that the North East wants to follow, and highlight the need for the goal of economic growth to be complemented by social goals, such as enhancing social capital.

The North East also emerges from this analysis as exceptional in some respects, and to return to our three hypotheses:

1 Strong communities: Sixty two per cent of North Easterners report meeting with relatives at least once a week, significantly more than the national average (49 per cent) and each of the Southern English regions. North Easterners are also significantly more likely to speak to their neighbours at least once a week (80 per cent) compared to a national average of 74 per cent, and a London region average of 63 per cent.

These family and neighbourly contacts provide evidence of 'strong communities', and strong social support networks. But they could also signify exclusive and inward looking communities, and a low level of geographic mobility. The challenge for policy makers is to preserve the positive aspects of strong communities while increasing the opportunities open to people.

2 A sociable place: North Easterners are more likely to enjoy a social relationship with their neighbours and family members, but are no more likely to meet up with friends than the British average and most other regions. Levels of social cohesion and bridging social capital may also indicate how outward looking and 'friendly' the North East is – although we appreciate this is an imperfect measure. The region is at the national average for thinking people from different backgrounds get along well in their local area (69 per cent), suggesting average levels of social cohesion. The data from the Citizenship Survey on bridging social capital tells a less positive story. People in the North East are significantly less likely to have friends from different ethnic backgrounds (32 per cent) than the England and Wales average (50 per cent) and London (78 per cent). This could suggest the region is less open and friendly, but the very small proportion of people from different ethnic groups living in the region (less than five per cent in 2001) seems a far more likely explanation. There is also less mixing of income groups in the North East, with significantly fewer people report having friends from different income groups compared to the London region. This could again suggest less openness, although the wider income distribution in London may make meeting people with different incomes more likely. Together these findings might suggest weaker bridging social capital in the region.

3 A culture of informal volunteering: the proportion of people volunteering both formally (28 per cent) and informally (47 per cent) in the North East is largely the same as other regions. While this analysis does not uphold the theory that there is a different, more informal, culture of volunteering in the North East, the scale of informal unpaid help suggests a significant contribution in terms of helping society function, yet government targets are focused only on formal volunteering.

Overall, the analysis reveals an interesting generational divide within the North East, finding respondents in the 16–44 years age group (the youngest age group in the survey) were substantially less likely than their older peers to speak to their neighbours regularly or to meet up with family members frequently. They were also less likely to be satisfied with their area, or trust their neighbours. This would warrant further investigation into whether people’s views change as they get older, or if it is evidence of a generational change in attitudes and views in the North East. With regard to 16–44 year olds having less contact with their neighbours and family, it may be that the North East is becoming more like the rest of the country.

The analysis enables us to make a number of recommendations in relation to what regional institutions and local authorities in the North East can do if they wish to harness social capital as part of their policy agenda, and regarding data quality.

Recommendations

1. Next steps for local and regional institutions

- **Local authorities could make enhancing social capital a central plank of their local area agreement** through a combination of the ‘stronger communities’ targets and additional, locally set targets that relate to social capital using questions from the HQS as the basis for measurement.
- **Institutions wanting to enhance social capital must be clear about how it interacts with goals such as well-being, quality of life and social cohesion.** While there is much overlap between these concepts there are also differences, and there is a need for greater conceptual clarity.
- **The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), One NorthEast and local authorities should work with their partners to understand the potential tension between ‘strong communities’ – or bonding social capital – and economic development.**
- **Local authorities wanting to enhance social capital should opt to add key social capital questions to the new *Place Survey*, in order to improve social capital data at a smaller geographic scale. Those doing so should coordinate their additional questions to ensure the same questions are asked, aiding comparisons and helping to identify policy outcomes and good practice. The Association of North East Councils could play this coordinating role.**
- **One NorthEast should be more precise about what types of social capital it wants to encourage through its regional economic strategy.**
- **The Social Capital Forum and other interested partners should regard the move to a single integrated regional strategy as an opportunity to embed social capital in regional strategies** as the single strategy will cover economic, social and environmental objectives.
- **Local authorities should work with the DCLG to include informal unpaid help as a measure of active citizenship** as a greater proportion of people already engage in this type of activity, which also offers a valuable support mechanism in the community.

2. Data and data quality

- **More data should be produced at the sub-regional level** to provide a more fine-grained picture of the region, and where challenges and opportunities lie.
- **Make data from the new *Place Survey* publicly available** to enable researchers to analyse data on social capital (and other issues), maximising the value of what will be a rich and significant new source of data.
- **Local organisations (whether local authorities, their partners or a combination of the two) could re-run the whole module of social capital questions** at a local authority level to provide a full data set that is comparable to the regional and national data across all the indicators of social capital. If multiple local authorities wanted to do this economies of scale could be gained by coordinating commissioning the field work. **The Association of North East Councils could play this role.**
- **Regional institutions or local authorities and their partners should commission qualitative research to follow up questions that cannot be answered by quantitative research**, such as why the views and attitudes of younger generations in the North East differ to those of the older age groups.
- **The Office of National Statistics (ONS) should continue to improve the measures for bridging social capital** as this will enable regional institutions (such as One NorthEast) and local authorities to better understand the relationship between bridging social capital and regional priorities such as economic inclusion and raising aspirations.
- **ONS and the DCLG should resolve the relationship between the set of social capital questions (the Harmonised Question Set – HQS) and the Citizenship Survey.** The process of drawing up the HQS was considered good practice, but despite aspirations to integrate the HQS with the Citizenship Survey 2007 it has not happened. Greater clarity over the reason for this is required, particularly as questions from the Citizenship Survey are being used to measure progress on building cohesive, empowered and active communities.

1 Introduction

Social capital is a concept that essentially refers to people's personal relationships and networks, and it is often considered to be the 'social glue' that makes communities work (North East Social Capital Forum, 2007). Both within the UK and further afield there has been considerable and growing interest in exploring the links between social capital and a range of policy outcomes, including social inclusion and economic development. This relationship is of particular interest in the North East region of England, one that faces some significant economic and social challenges.

In order to investigate what contribution social capital might be able to make and by what means, in 2006 the regional development agency, One NorthEast, invited the Community Foundation and Regeneration Exchange to set up the North East Social Capital Forum¹. The remit of the group is to raise awareness of how social capital can be used as a tool for social and economic regeneration, to identify and share good practice and to find ways of measuring and monitoring social capital. This research on measuring social capital was initiated by the Forum and commissioned by Northern Rock Foundation as part of its contribution to the Forum's work. The research was conducted by ippr north.

Part of this interest in measurement stems from an ippr north conference held in 2006 to explore the relationship between social capital, regional development and social exclusion. At the conference David Halpern, then a senior advisor to the Prime Minister, gave a presentation that included a brief assessment of social capital in the North East based on the Citizenship Survey 2005 (Halpern, 2006). His analysis showed the region to be ranked bottom on numerous measures of social capital compared to Wales and the other regions of England. These findings caused some shock, and inspired further interest in measuring social capital, as they undermined some widely held beliefs about the sort of place the North East is.

¹ For details see www.communityfoundation.org.uk/specialprojects/social_capital.php

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Measurement is also important if social capital is going to make a contribution to the evidence base upon which policies in the region are formulated, as this requires good quality and comparable information. Measuring social capital will not only enable us to understand the region better, but also to understand the impacts of different policy decisions on different types of social capital, and vice versa. For example, it is often said that the North East is a place of ‘strong communities’ and a sociable place, which could indicate strong social capital in the region. Such traits may present an opportunity for regional development as a distinctive quality of life offer plays an increasingly significant role in regional development. But without measurement it is difficult to give an informed response to whether this picture is truly reflective of the region, and whether it is truer of some areas or groups than others.

Measurement could also contribute to a more rounded view of progressive policy outcomes. For example, growing the economy is understandably a high priority for the North East as the region faces some significant economic challenges. But if in pursuing economic growth the policies and programmes implemented in the region damages people’s social support networks and undermine their capacity for collective action, then we may have reason to object on progressive grounds. Again, such policy impacts on social capital can only really be assessed through measurement.

There is currently a lack of rigorous and comparable data available on measures of social capital. This undermines our understanding of the nature of social capital in the North East, and constitutes a barrier to incorporating social capital considerations into policy-making. This report seeks to begin to address this gap in the evidence base by offering, for the first time, a regional analysis of social capital. The analysis is based on the 2004/05 General Household Survey, which contained an entire module on social capital. The module was designed by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to enhance our knowledge and understanding of social capital across Great Britain, but little analysis of the data has been conducted to date. The analysis in this report will help to increase our understanding of social capital in the North East region, to test some of the assumptions that are often made about what sort of place the region is, and to suggest areas for further exploration.

Before turning in detail to questions of measurement, the next chapter gives a short overview of what social capital is, and why academics and policy makers – especially in the North East – are interested in it as a concept, as well as briefly exploring the current policy context. The third chapter will discuss some of the challenges involved in measuring social capital, before chapter four turns in more detail to the data in the General Household Survey 2004/05. Chapter five offers a summary of the analysis of the levels of social capital in the North East and how the region compares to other parts of Great Britain. Chapter six gives the conclusions and some recommendations. A full data analysis is available to download as an appendix to this report from www.nr-foundation.org.uk/publications_research or by contacting ippr north on 0191 211 2645.

2 Social capital and regional development: why the interest in the North East?

There is only value in spending scarce time and money on measuring social capital if there is good reason to believe it has an important contribution to make to social and economic outcomes. But studying social capital is made difficult by its lack of a widely agreed definition. Social capital is no single 'thing'. Rather it is about human relationships and the impact they have on an individual's quality of life and their life outcomes. Social capital is also a community asset, as it describes the social interactions that create trust and mutuality, enabling people to work together collectively. It is the 'social glue' that holds a society together. But while there is a general consensus that social capital is about relationships, the role of networks and the norms that guide behaviour (ONS 2001), a more precise and widely agreed definition remains elusive. The UK Government has adopted the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD's) definition of social capital:

“Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups.” (Harper and Kelly 2003)

This definition emphasises not only what social capital is but the role that it plays in society. There are three main types of social capital that are referred to in the literature, and each plays a slightly different role. They are described in Box 1.

One of the reasons that social capital has demanded so much interest is the numerous academic studies associating high levels of social capital with positive social and economic outcomes (for a good overview see Halpern 2005). In short, as Michael Woolcock (2001) summarised, people with more social capital are more likely to be “housed, healthy, hired and happy”. However, social capital is not an unambiguously good thing, and strong bonding social capital in particular can be problematic. Bonding social capital does have positive attributes, such as offering strong support networks for members of a group or community. Positive associations have been made, for example, between good mental and physical health and bonding social capital (Stafford and Marmot 2005). But strong bonds can be exclusive, fostering an 'us and them' mentality, and making it difficult for newcomers or those that do not have the characteristics of the dominant group

BOX 1 The main types of social capital

1. **Bonding social capital:** refers to strong bonds of care and close connections, for example within families, close friendship groups or communities. Bonding social capital is good for 'getting by' in life.
2. **Bridging social capital:** is characterised by looser networks of contacts or acquaintances, for example through work or friends of friends. Bridging social capital is more outward looking, bringing people into contact with others from different backgrounds, and can be an important source of information. Bridging social capital is good for 'getting ahead' in life.
3. **Linking social capital:** refers to relationships between those that are not on an equal footing and connections with people in positions of power, for example the relationship between a constituent and an MP. It is good for accessing support from formal organisations.

(be that race, religion, class etc) (Cantle 2005). Strong bonding social capital can also reinforce negative or anti-social behaviours – such as street gangs – and it can also act to perpetuate privilege – for example through the 'old boys' network' – and entrench disadvantage.

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is generally seen as a more straightforwardly good thing, as unlike bonding social capital it is outward looking. More extensive networks offer a greater range of opportunities and information as well as potentially contributing to community cohesion. It may also contribute to meeting important regional priorities. For example, there is evidence that bridging social capital can contribute to the welfare to work agenda, with studies finding that individuals whose more extensive social networks include people in employment are likely to leave unemployment more quickly. This is partly due to the large proportion of job applicants hearing of vacancies through 'word of mouth' (Hannan 1999). Significantly, Granovetter (1973) found that 'weak ties' – distant associates and acquaintances, or what we might call bridging social capital – are of most benefit to the labour market, giving access to more information about opportunities. This suggests that with regard to economic inclusion – an important issue for the North East, and an objective of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) (ONE 2006) – bridging social capital is particularly important. The RES does briefly mention building social

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capital as playing a part in economic inclusion, although it is vague about the precise role that different types of social capital might be able to play.

A theme that runs through the RES is raising the aspirations of people in the region, particularly young people and those that are out of work (ONE 2006). Again, bridging social capital could have an important role to play in meeting this objective, as research has shown that social networks which include people with high aspirations can encourage and inspire children and raise educational expectations and aspirations (Halpern 2005). More extensive networks bring people from different backgrounds together, exposing individuals to a wider range of information and different ways of doing things. This could have an important impact in terms of inspiring people, opening new experiences to them and raising their expectations, making activities that might otherwise seem out of reach appear more possible.

A further important contribution that social capital could make to regional development is through introducing a different set of issues for policy makers to consider. Rather than seeking to replicate the experience of London and the Greater South East, which in many ways provides an imperfect model of regional development (Johnson *et al* 2007), the incorporation of concepts such as social capital and quality of life may have an important role to play in continuing to develop a distinctive 'North East' path to sustainable regional development. The policy climate for doing this is increasingly favourable at national, regional and local level, particularly given the move to a single regional strategy that will seek to balance social, economic and environmental objectives. Furthermore, as regional development increasingly becomes about shaping a place and 'selling' an area as a good place to live, work and do business (ONE 2006), being able to market the region as a distinctive place with a vibrant and welcoming culture, where there are strong and cohesive communities and people know their neighbours, may have an important contribution to make in this respect. The region's '*Passionate People Passionate Places*'² campaign has already started down this road. However, to make this meaningful, it is helpful to get behind these stereotypes and assess the type and level of social capital in the North East region. Measuring social capital and interpreting the evidence base is an important part of that process, and the purpose of this report is to make such a contribution. In the analysis of the data in chapter 5 we test the theory that the region is a sociable place with strong communities.

2 www.northeastengland.co.uk

Fertile ground: the policy context at national and local level

There has been considerable interest in social capital at the national level, particularly in the early part of this century. Under Tony Blair's premiership, the Performance and Innovation Unit did some work to consider the policy implications of social capital (Aldridge *et al* 2002). However, in recent years, concepts like active communities, empowerment and social cohesion have superseded social capital as key concepts. The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review³ set a Public Service Agreement (PSA)⁴ to 'Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities' (HMT 2007). This high-level target – one of just 30 – is shared across central government departments.

While social capital itself does not feature in the headline of this PSA target, it is intricately intertwined with the aspiration, and the document accompanying the target refers to bridging social capital as one of the ingredients required in order to meet the target (HMT 2007). As the *Commission on Integration and Cohesion* (2007) recently concluded, cohesion requires 'meaningful interaction' between people. By this they mean contact between people from different backgrounds that goes beyond surface pleasantries and politeness. In other words, bridging social capital. There is also a close relationship between active communities or volunteering and social capital, as volunteering is an important indicator of people's social participation. The government's 'active communities' agenda has focused on levels of *formal* volunteering – in other words through a group, club or organisation – a focus that is replicated in the PSA target. There is, however, an argument that such a focus disadvantages the Northern regions, including the North East, as these regions have a culture of *informal* volunteering – for example babysitting for a friend or helping a neighbour with their shopping (Williams 2003). This is a theory that we will explore when we analyse the data in chapter 5.

PSAs have proven an effective means of focusing the minds of government departments and public sector bodies on particular policy outcomes, so to have one focused on empowered, active and cohesive communities indicates real political will to pursue this agenda. The government has set out six indicators for measuring success in meeting this target, as outlined in Box 2. Nearly all of these indicators are also measures of social capital, again highlighting the close interconnections between social capital, active communities, empowerment and cohesion.

³ The Comprehensive Spending Review process sets central government departmental budgets and high-level priorities for the following three years.

⁴ Public Service Agreements were introduced in 1998 in order to monitor and measure the performance of government departments against specified objectives.

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BOX 2 PSA target 21: 'Building more cohesive, empowered and active communities'

The PSA sets out six indicators for success:

Indicator 1: The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

Indicator 2: The percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds.

Indicator 3: The percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood.

Indicator 4: The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.

Indicator 5: A thriving third sector.

Indicator 6: The percentage of people who participate in culture or sport.

The majority of these indicators will be assessed through social surveys, particularly the Citizenship Survey, using 2007/08 as a baseline. Indicator 5 will be assessed through a combination of the proportion of people formally volunteering at least once a month (based on social surveys), and the number of full-time-equivalent staff employed in the voluntary and community sector (based on the Labour Force Survey). The document emphasises the local nature of these measures, especially indicators 1, 3 and 4, and states the Government's intention to 'encourage' local authorities to include these measures as part of their local area agreement (LAA).

Source: HMT (2007)

Social capital – again through the lens of social cohesion and active communities – is also increasingly coming to the fore of the local authority policy agenda. As the *Commission on Integration and Cohesion* and the PSA target make clear, local authorities have a key role to play in enhancing social cohesion, community engagement and community relations. This is not a new activity for local government – some of the best local authorities have always worked in this area, although perhaps not with the labels of 'social capital' and 'social cohesion' that we now employ – but there is a

growing emphasis on this as a key role for local authorities as part of their 'place shaping' agenda (Lyons 2007, CLG 2006). Local authorities have a number of tools at their disposal to encourage 'meaningful interaction' in this way, for example through their mainstream activities such as leisure and cultural services, as well as specific projects and initiatives aimed at bringing different communities together. They also have a key role in encouraging active communities through their democratic and consultative processes.

The new performance management regime for local authorities offers an opportunity for them to make enhancing social capital a priority for their activities, should they choose to. The latest stage of the gradual loosening of central control over local authority activity has seen the publication of 198 indicators for local government performance, from which local authorities can select up to 35 to form the basis of their local area agreement (LAA). The indicator set includes a section on 'stronger communities', where seven of the 14 indicators relate to measuring social capital (CLG 2007a). Furthermore, local authorities have the option of devising their own targets in addition to those they select from the national indicator set.

In tandem to this process, a new *Place Survey* is being devised to replace the *Best Value User Satisfaction Survey* conducted by local authorities⁵. The survey will include a number of questions relevant to social capital, as it will provide the performance management data for LAA targets to improve citizen perceptions (this will apply particularly to the 'stronger communities' targets among others). As with the PSA target, the questions used to measure performance will be taken from the Citizenship Survey (CLG 2007b). It is also likely that individual local authorities will have the opportunity to add their own questions to the place survey, enabling authorities to collect data on issues of interest that are outside the national indicator set.⁶ This too offers an opportunity for local authorities to improve their evidence base in order to make enhancing social capital central to their activities should they choose to. However, the current proposal is for the survey to be postal which is likely to have negative implications for gathering data from the hardest to reach in society.

⁵ The *Best Value User Satisfaction Survey* is conducted by local authorities to monitor what people think of their local area and council services. It forms part of the local authority performance management system. From autumn 2008 it will be replaced by the new *Place Survey* which will also explore people's perceptions of their area in order to inform LAAs and the new Comprehensive Area Assessments which will replace the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities. At the time of writing, a consultation on the details of the *Place Survey* was underway.

⁶ Although this depends on the outcome of a consultation underway at the time of writing.

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These policy developments, both nationally and locally, create fertile ground for incorporating social capital into the region's policy-making agenda. The region's strategies already touch on social capital in a number of ways, whether through the focus on vibrant, friendly, 'passionate' communities as part of its quality of life offer, the prioritisation of raising people's aspirations, or local authorities' interest in well-being and cohesion. But maximising the policy potential of social capital requires much greater understanding of social capital, including how much and what types of social capital the region has. This report seeks to take some steps to fill this gap in the region's evidence base.

3 About measuring social capital

The multifaceted and imprecisely defined nature of social capital makes measurement a challenge. In one sense social relationships are woven into the very fabric of our lives, but in another they are quite intangible – it is difficult to assess the ‘quality’ and categorise ‘types’ of relationship as different relationships come to the fore at different times and for different purposes. If we were to simply ask people to assess their levels of social capital, the chances are they would have no idea of what we meant.

But while difficult, measurement is possible. Social surveys have developed ways of gaining an understanding of levels and types of social capital, most often through asking questions about proxy measures for social capital. Some academics believe that the best single question proxy for social capital is the general level of trust in strangers (Halpern 2005). However, this tells us nothing about different types of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking – so is of fairly limited use.

To get a more detailed view, most surveys use a bundle of measures rather than a single measure of social capital, including questions about respondents’ social networks and their participation in organisations and social activities. Robert Putnam – social capital’s most famous proponent – has developed a composite index which gives a single ‘score’ for social capital based on an average for standardised scores on 14 different measures of formal and informal participation and trust (Putnam 2000b). However, his approach has been criticised by some for mixing together quite different aspects of social capital (Aldridge *et al* 2002). Perhaps the more common approach to measuring social capital, and that used by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in Britain, is to use a range of different indicators grouped together by theme to provide a picture of different types of social capital. This creates a more complex picture to interpret, but it is arguably a more accurate and useful one for detailed policy work.

However, even this approach is fraught with difficulties. For example, a key conundrum is whether social capital is an individual or community attribute. For Putnam, social capital has demonstrable externalities beyond the value to the individual, making it a community attribute (Putnam 2000a).

3

But this leads to the problem of whether community level social capital is simply the sum of social capital held by individuals in a particular place or group (ONS 2001).

Furthermore, care has to be taken with interpreting data on social capital and causality for a number of reasons. First, research has found a strong correlation between socio-economic status and levels of social capital. Those with higher educational attainment, higher income and in professional and managerial roles tend to have more extensive networks, and are generally more trusting (Stafford and Marmot 2005). Conversely, the most disadvantaged in society are more likely to have lower levels of social capital. This leads to an important question about the direction of causality – are you better off because you have high levels social capital, or do you have higher levels of social capital because you're better off? Second, it is difficult to separate out individual and contextual factors. For example, whether the low level of trust exhibited by a particular respondent is the result of their personal characteristics, such as their gender or socio-economic status; or the result of context, such as the physical and social environment they find themselves in.

Finally, as discussed above, social capital is not always a good thing, and there are 'bad' forms of social capital. This adds to the difficulties of interpreting social survey data, as more social capital is not necessarily better. This perhaps nods towards the drawback of using large-scale social surveys, as understanding context is essential to understanding social capital (Boeck and Flemming 2005; Franke 2005). A further criticism that might be levelled is that large-scale social surveys only provide a snapshot of what is happening, whereas relationships change over time, making a life course approach more relevant. Both of these criticisms can be levelled at the survey we analyse below, and cause some to reject large-scale quantitative methods – such as social surveys – for researching social capital. However, this is not a view we share.

Despite its limitations, a snapshot is a good start in order to get a feel for the issues and where there are differences that might merit further investigation. Furthermore, large-scale representative surveys give a standard approach to gathering data enabling us to compare levels of social capital among different groups and in different geographical areas. It also means correlations can be found and statistical tests carried out to give an assessment of whether such correlations are generalisable to the wider population. In the longer term, a longitudinal panel survey – where the survey returns to the same respondents at regular intervals – would help to overcome the shortcomings of a snapshot survey by following the same individuals throughout their life course, though the collection of the data would prove costly.

However, it is important to note that this defence of quantitative methods is not to undervalue the contribution of qualitative work, as we would argue that the ideal would be to combine both quantitative and qualitative techniques. For example, complementing social surveys with case studies, action research, and incorporating open ended questions into surveys could all help to provide context and understanding to survey findings. It can also help to open up new avenues for exploring causal links, and explore aspects of social capital that do not lend themselves to quantitative study, such as understanding norms of behaviour and their impacts (Franke 2005).

With these caveats about the shortcomings of social surveys and the challenges of interpreting data on social capital in mind, the next two chapters turn to the General Household Survey of 2004–05 and our regional analysis of social capital.

4 Measuring social capital: the General Household Survey 2004/05

The General Household Survey (GHS) 2004/05 was the first and, so far, only major social survey to carry a set of questions specifically designed to measure social capital. But to date very little analysis of the data has been conducted, and, to our knowledge, none at the regional level. Before providing a regional analysis of social capital in chapter 5, this chapter gives some important background to the data.

Given the level of interest in social capital, in 2001 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) began to work towards more robust, comparable, quantitative data through the development of a set of survey questions designed to measure social capital, known as the harmonised question set (HQS). The questions were designed in such a way that they could be inserted individually into other questionnaires or used together to form a complete module of questions about social capital. The process was considered at the time to be good practice for ensuring consistency of high quality questions across different surveys on a cross-cutting issue. The expectation was that questions from the HQS would be integrated into other relevant surveys such as the 2007 Citizenship Survey. However, this has not been the case in practice. The HQS was also designed to be relatively quick and easy to administer, to enable the survey to be carried out at a local level by institutions or organisations seeking to supplement the national data at a more refined geographic level.

The set of questions take the approach of seeking to measure a bundle of indicators relevant to social capital, including social networks, support structures, community participation, civic and political involvement, trust in people and institutions and norms of reciprocity. To make it more manageable, and aid interpretation, ONS developed a framework which identified five dimensions to social capital that the questions seek to measure. The framework is set out in Box 3. For more detail on the process of developing the question set, see Harper and Kelly (2003).

BOX 3 ONS framework for social capital measurement

1. **Social participation:** is defined as involvement in, and volunteering for, organised groups. These questions focus on the number of groups belonged to, frequency and intensity of involvement, volunteering and religious activity.
2. **Civic participation:** is defined as involvement in local and national affairs, and perceived ability to influence events, contact with public and political figures, involvement with local action groups and voting.
3. **Social networks and support:** is defined as contact with, and support from, family and friends. Questions focus on the frequency with which people see or speak to their relatives and friends, number of close friends and relatives living nearby, exchange of help and perceived control and satisfaction with life.
4. **Reciprocity and trust:** is defined level of trust in 'others like you' and 'others not like you', confidence in institutions, and perception of shared values.
5. **Views of the local area:** measures views of the physical environment, facilities in the area and whether respondents enjoy living in the area. This criterion is included as an aid for analysis and is not considered part of social capital.

Source Harper and Kelly (2003)

Once developed and tested, the set of questions was used in full for the first time in the GHS 2004/05. This is a major, rigorously collected social survey, and importantly, for our purposes, the sample used is not only large enough to enable generalisations to be made about social capital in Great Britain (there is a sample of 8,700 respondents), but, with a sample of 396 respondents in the North East region, the regional sample is also large enough to make some generalisations about the wider North East population with 95 per cent confidence (for a more detailed analysis of the representativeness of the respondents see the appendix). However, the sample size is such that once broken down into different groups – such as age, or socio-economic classification – we can be less confident of whether this is generalisable to the wider group of people sharing those characteristics in the region.

4

Furthermore, the survey provides no geographical data below the level of the standard region, meaning it is not possible to make comparisons between different parts of the region. To the best of our knowledge, the questions have not been used by any local institutions or organisations to measure social capital at a more local level in the North East to complement the national data. This is despite the question set being explicitly designed with this purpose in mind.

One drawback to the GHS 2004/05 is a lack of questions to measure bridging social capital. Such questions were developed, but were rejected as part of the testing process. The questions that were rejected sought to measure bridging social capital by asking respondents about friends from different educational or ethnic backgrounds, but the feedback was that the questions were considered either distasteful or irrelevant by respondents (Harper and Kelly 2003). As a result, the set of questions does not currently include any on bridging social capital, and these questions were not included in the GHS 2004/05. However, the ONS does have ambitions to develop bridging social capital questions, which will be an important addition to the social capital set.

Despite the exclusion of bridging social capital from the GHS, another social survey, the Citizenship Survey, includes questions about whether people have friends with different incomes and friends from different ethnic backgrounds (or at least these questions were included in the 2005 survey). Given we think that bridging social capital is particularly important for regional development, we analyse the responses to the bridging social capital questions in the 2005 Citizenship Survey at the end of chapter 5. As with the GHS, the Citizenship Survey is a major social survey with a national sample of 8,900 and a regional sample of 486, meaning it is also generalisable at the regional level. However, it is important to note that while the two surveys are from a similar period, they draw on different samples, and are therefore not directly comparable. But in the absence of questions about bridging social capital in the GHS, the data from the citizenship survey at least gives us an indication of levels of bridging social capital.

Clearly the data available are not ideal, and do not allow us to measure all of what we would like to, but nevertheless there remain under-utilised sources of information about social capital. This paper, and in particular the analysis in the next section, aims to take a step towards improving the evidence base on levels of social capital across the nations and regions of Great Britain, through an analysis of the social capital module of the GHS 2004/05. While caution will have to be taken with generalising the findings of this research when referring to the breakdowns by age and socio-economic classification, it will for the first time unveil a reasonably robust indication of levels of social capital and how they might vary. This will provide a benchmark of how the North East compares to other nations and regions of the UK on recognised measures of social capital, and an indication of where there might be interesting difference to explore further. It will also offer the opportunity to test the robustness of some assumptions that are often made about the North East region.

5 Social capital in the North East

This chapter provides the analysis of the General Household Survey 2004/05 social capital data. This analysis not only enables us to build a more robust picture of social capital in the North East of England, it also enables us to test some of the assertions that are often made about the region. Three are of particular interest here. The first is that the North East is a place of particularly strong communities. Second is that the North East is exceptional in terms of being a sociable place. And third, that using formal volunteering as a measure of social capital and active communities disadvantages the region as it does not fit with the culture of the North East, where people are more likely (through their strong communities) to engage in informal social support. We will return to these statements about the North East in the conclusions and recommendations.

This chapter will offer an analysis of the data at the regional level to draw out where the North East is exceptional, as well as examples of where responses in the North East are in line with other regions and the national average. This is necessarily a selective process, but the full results of the data analysis can be found in the appendix, which is available to download from www.nr-foundation.org.uk/publications_research.html or by contacting ippr north on 0191 211 2645. In this analysis we present the evidence in keeping with the ONS social capital framework drawing out interesting findings under the five themes of: views about the neighbourhood; civic participation; levels of trust; social networks and support; and social participation. Box 4 provides a note on how to interpret the charts and tables.

BOX 4 Note on interpretation of the charts and tables

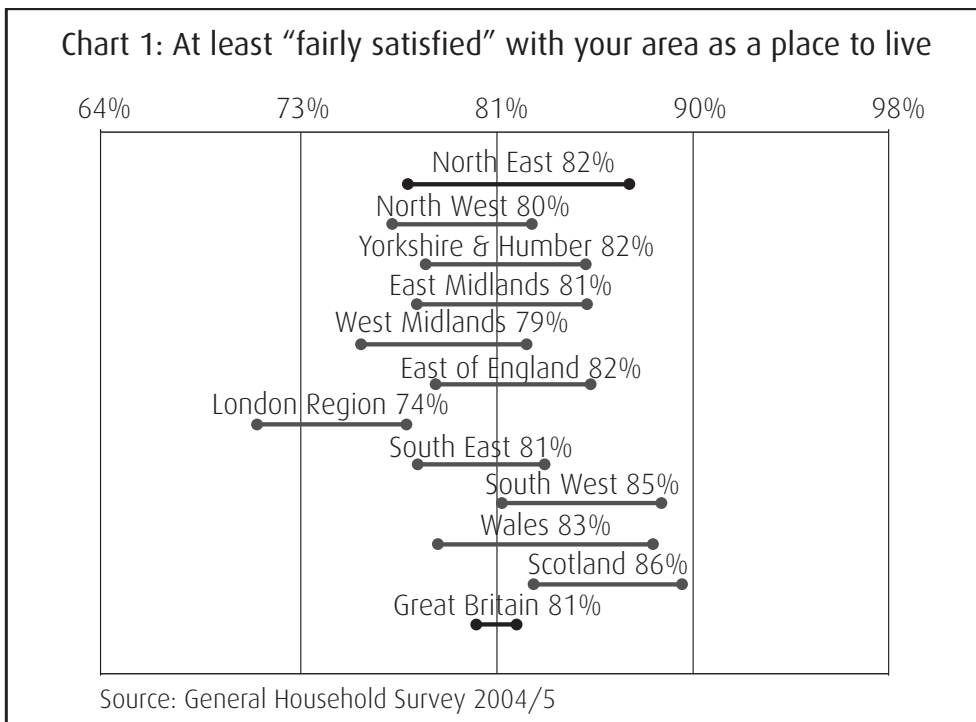
The comparisons between the North East and the other nations and regions of Britain are presented in a bar-chart format. The figures quoted on the chart for each nation/region give the response from respondents in that area. The “bar” illustrates the 95 per cent confidence interval for the responses given, relative to the geographic sample size, meaning that we can be 95 per cent confident that the true response comes within the range of the bar. It is important to stress the need to consider the range covered by the bar in the charts and not just the figure for the average response, as the latter could give a misleading picture. If the “bars” for two areas are overlapping then statistically there is no difference between the responses from the two geographies. Alternatively, if the “bars” for the two geographies are **not** overlapping then statistically there **is** a difference in response between the two geographies.

In the text, and in tables in the appendix, we give detail of the North East responses disaggregated by age (using four age groups) and occupation (using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification⁷ (NS-SEC)). Not all respondents were classified by occupation, so where the occupation statistics are presented they represent the proportion of respondents with that known occupation. It is important to note that the data is less robust when broken down in this way. The figures for age and occupational groups should only therefore be treated as indicative.

⁷ National Statistics Socio-economic Classification
www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/article.asp?ID=1663&Pos=6&ColRank=2&Rank=224

5 Views about the neighbourhood

Chart 1 illustrates that the majority of respondents in all regions of Great Britain are “fairly satisfied” with their local areas as a place to live. In the North East this figure was 82 per cent, which is similar to that of all the regions in Great Britain. The region that stands out is the London region, where the level of satisfaction reported was significantly lower than several other regions as well as the national average.



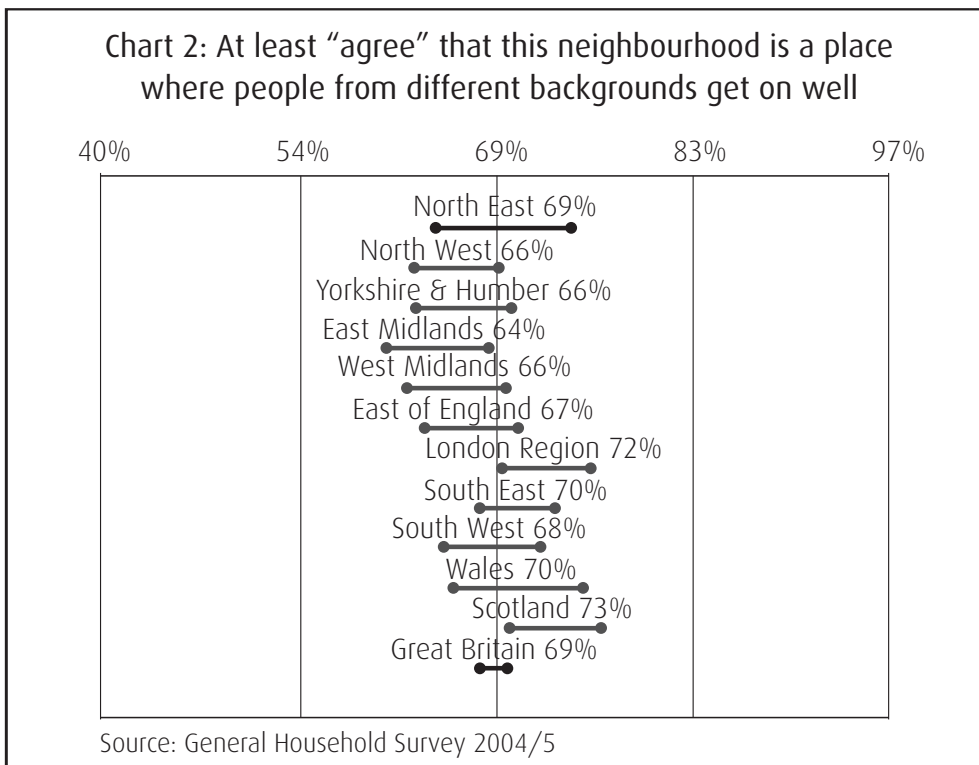
Within the North East, satisfaction with the local area as a place to live is higher among older age groups and higher occupational groups (for more detail see Section 2 of the appendix).

One-third of respondents from the North East stated that they lived in a neighbourhood where “people helped each other” (Table 1). This proportion of individuals in the North East is similar to all regions in Great Britain, except the London region where the proportion was substantially lower.

TABLE 1: People in this neighbourhood....	Help each other
North East	34%
North West	29%
Yorkshire & The Humber	31%
East Midlands	31%
West Midlands	31%
East of England	32%
London Region	23%
South East	30%
South West	32%
Wales	35%
Scotland	35%
Great Britain	31%

Within the North East, older people were more likely to think people in their area help each other, and less likely to think theirs is an area where people “go their own way” (see Section 2 of the appendix for more detail).

The proportion of respondents from the North East who perceive that their neighbourhoods are “a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together” was 69 per cent (Chart 2), not significantly different from the national rate or from other regions in Great Britain.

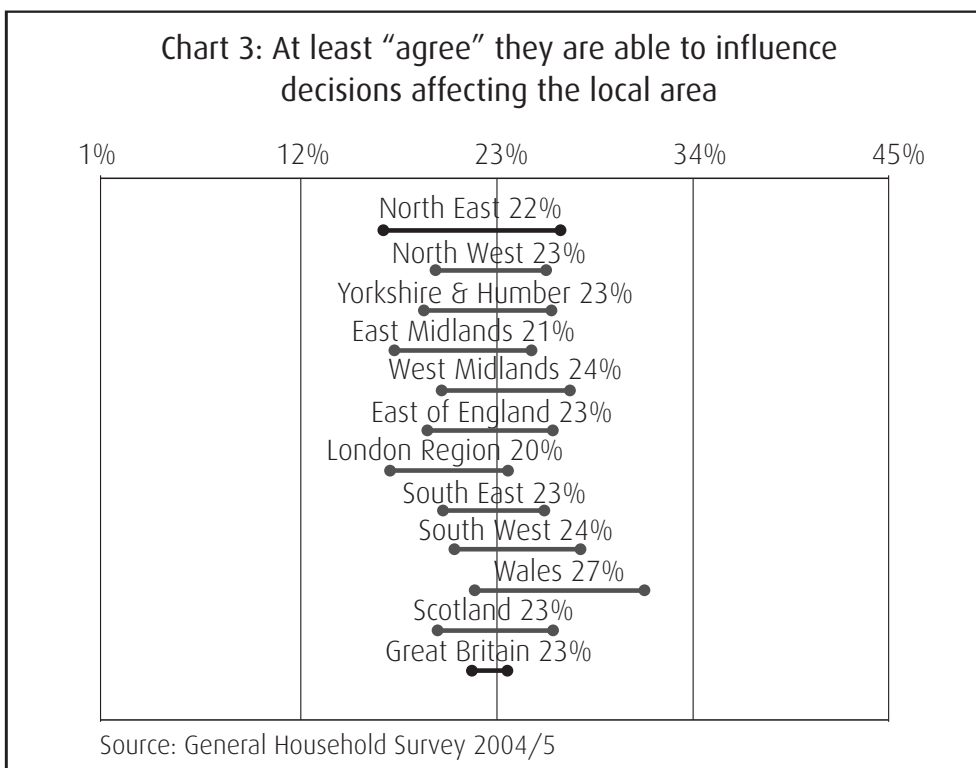


This perception of neighbourhood integration increases with the age of respondents in the region, with the highest level amongst the over 75s age group. (More detail contained in Section 2 of the appendix.)

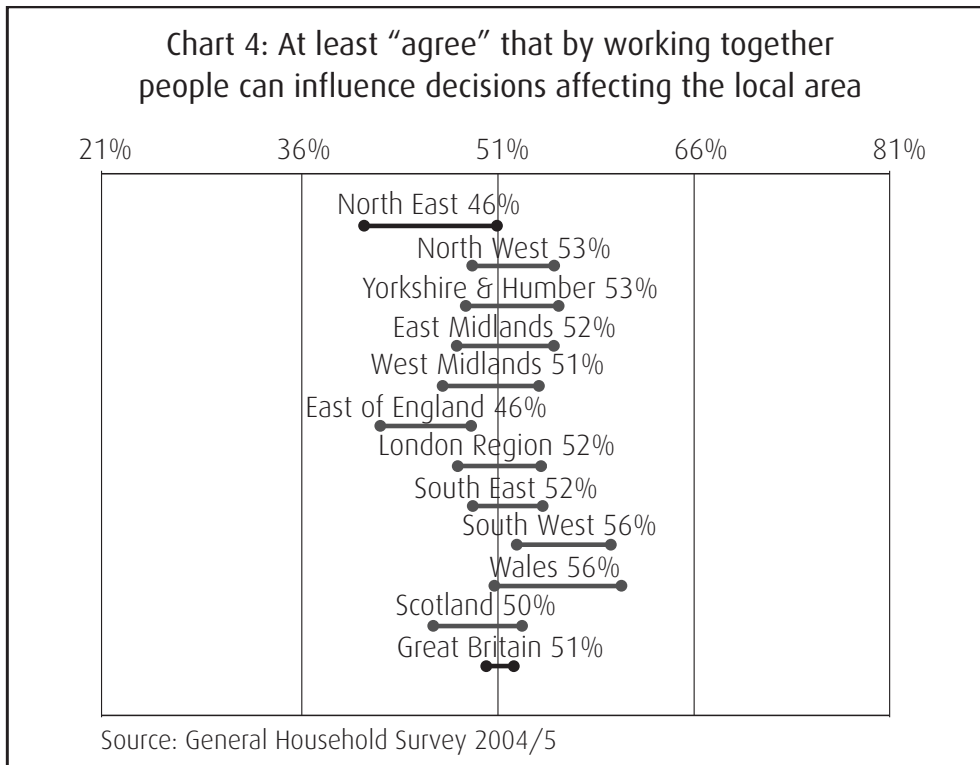
From these responses, the North East is much like the rest of Britain in terms of how people view their local area. The region that stands out is the London region, where people are less likely to be satisfied with their area or think of their neighbours as helpful. Within the North East, views of the neighbourhood are more positive among the older age groups, however it is not possible to conclude from this survey how generalisable this finding is, and if generalisable, whether it indicates a generational change, or whether people become more satisfied as they get older.

5 Civic participation

A mere 22 per cent of respondents from the North East agreed that they felt able to influence decisions affecting their local areas, which was no different from all other regions in Great Britain (Chart 3). Also, those individuals in the North East that felt most able to influence local decisions belonged to the 65–74 year age group, with 30 per cent reporting this perception, while agreement amongst the other age groups was around 20 per cent of the samples (Table A16 of the appendix).



However, as Chart 4 illustrates, the proportion of respondents across the regions of Great Britain that felt able to influence decisions more than doubles when “people work together”. In the North East, 46 per cent of respondents felt able to influence decisions by working with others compared to a national average of 51 per cent. However, the difference is not statistically significant from any other region apart from the South West, where the perception of influence was 56 per cent. The members of the higher occupational classes



in the North East also felt more empowered than the other groups, with between 53 and 59 per cent agreeing that they are able to influence decisions whilst working with other people compared to around 45 per cent of those in lower occupational classes (Table A17 of the appendix).

From these responses, it seems that the North East is much like the rest of the country in terms of the proportion of people that feel they can influence local decisions either individually or collectively. The finding that the higher occupational classes feel more able to influence decisions by working with other people is consistent with other research on civic participation (Keaney and Rogers 2006).

5 Levels of trust

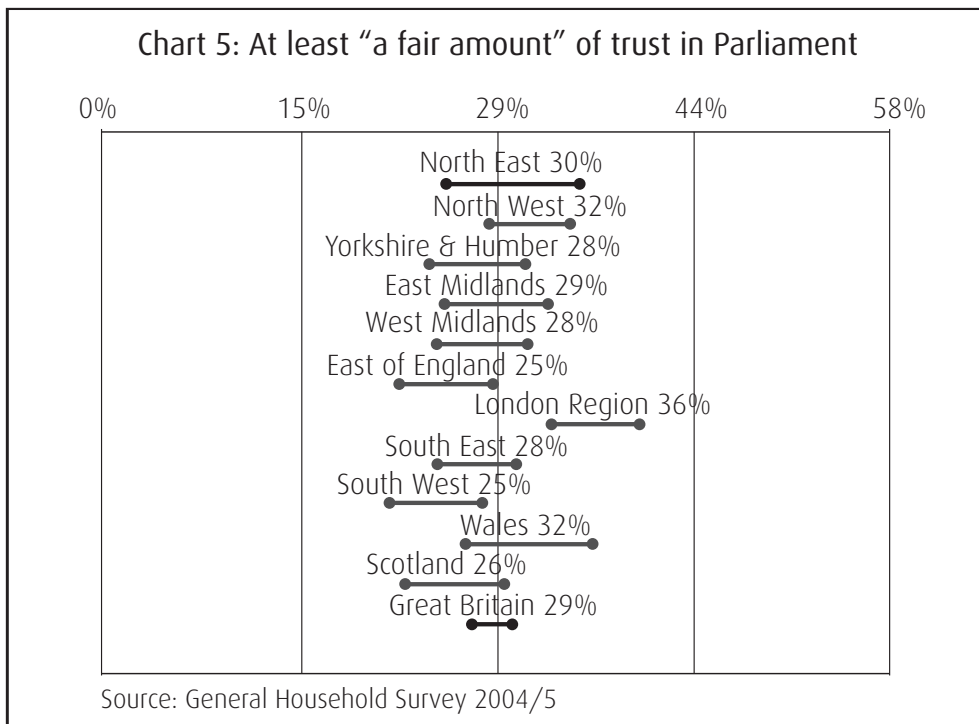
Forty-seven per cent of the respondents from the North East stated that “most people in the neighbourhood can be trusted” (Table 2). The proportion in the North East is similar to those in most regions in Great Britain, other than in the London region, where a mere 28 per cent stated that “most people could be trusted”.

Analysis of the age distribution of respondents (Table A10 of the appendix) identified that only one-third of respondents from the North East in the 16–44 years age group stated that they felt they could “trust most people in their neighbourhood”. The level of trust increases with age as a greater proportion in the older age groups stated that they could trust “most people in the neighbourhood”. The proportion amongst the over 75s age group with this perception (68 per cent) was twice the proportion amongst the youngest age group.

When asked broadly whether people could be trusted (Table A20 of the appendix), levels of trust fall, with around 29 per cent of respondents in the region agreeing that “most people could be trusted”, while nearly twice the proportion of individuals (56 per cent) stated that one “can’t be too careful in dealing with people”. These responses from the North East were similar to the national response and that of all the other regions in Great Britain, although in the East of England fewer respondents (45 per cent) stated that one “can’t be too careful in dealing with people” than in the North East and the other northern and midland regions.

Chart 5 illustrates the proportion of respondents who stated that they have “a fair amount” of trust in Parliament. In the North East, 30 per cent of respondents trust Parliament, which is not significantly different from any other regions in Great Britain. However, there were some differences within

	Most can be trusted
North East	47%
North West	47%
Yorkshire & The Humber	45%
East Midlands	49%
West Midlands	48%
East of England	50%
London Region	28%
South East	53%
South West	58%
Wales	52%
Scotland	57%
Great Britain	48%



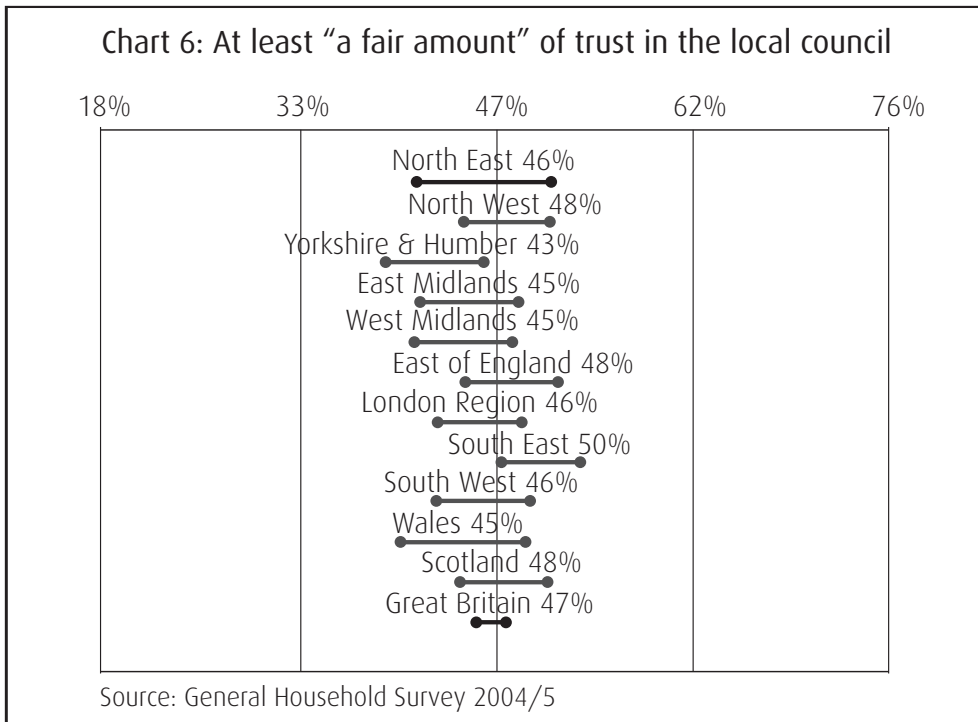
Britain, with significantly more respondents from the London region expressing levels of trust in the Westminster Parliament than a number of other regions in Great Britain.

The younger generations in the North East tend to trust Parliament less than the older age groups, with only 26 per cent of the 16–44 years age group expressing this view, whilst 37 per cent amongst the over 75s age group share this view. The highest levels of trust in Parliament are among those in managerial and professional occupations at 40 per cent, compared to 27 per cent of those in semi-routine and routine occupations, and 25 per cent in the small enterprise sector (Table A24 of the appendix).

Chart 6 illustrates that again trust is higher locally, with 47 per cent of respondents nationally stating they had trust in their local councils. In the North East the proportion was 46 per cent, which is not significantly different from any of the regions in Great Britain.

Respondents from the over 75s age group are the most trusting of their local councils in the region, with nearly two-thirds of respondents expressing trust in their local authority, whilst only 45 per cent of respondents from the younger age groups expressed this view (Table A25 of the appendix).

5



Respondents from the managerial and professional and small enterprise occupations had the highest level of trust in the local councils with 55 per cent of individuals with this view. This fell to 45 per cent among semi-routine and routine occupations (Table A25 of the appendix).

Based on this survey, in terms of levels of trust either in their neighbours, generally in other people or in Parliament and local councils, respondents in the North East are much like the rest of the UK. Again it is the London region that stands out as the exceptional region, for respondents’ low level of trust in their neighbours and high level of trust in Parliament. Within the North East, levels of trust in Parliament, local authorities and neighbours are lower among the younger age groups and higher among older people. Again, it is not possible to conclude from this survey how generalisable this finding is, and if generalisable, whether it indicates a generational change, or whether people become more trusting as they get older.

Social networks and support

Chart 7 illustrates that the region with the largest proportion of respondents that regularly see their relatives was the North East of England, where 62 per cent meet up with relatives at least once a week. The proportion for the North East is significantly greater than the national rate at 49 per cent and is significantly greater than all the southern regions of England i.e. East of England, London region, South East and South West.

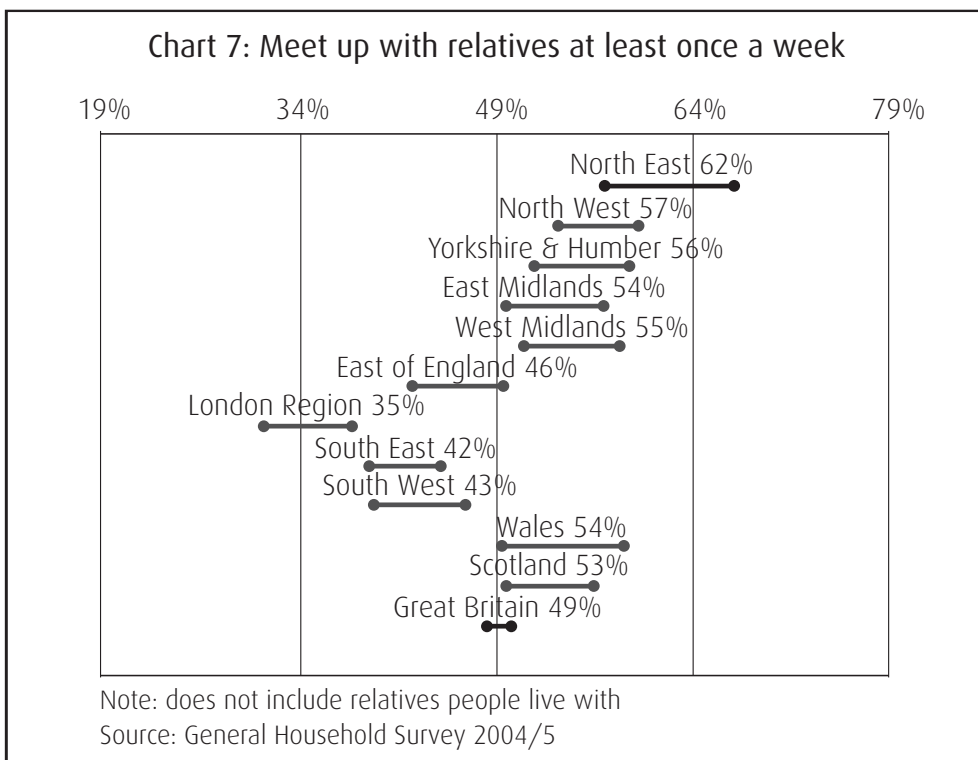
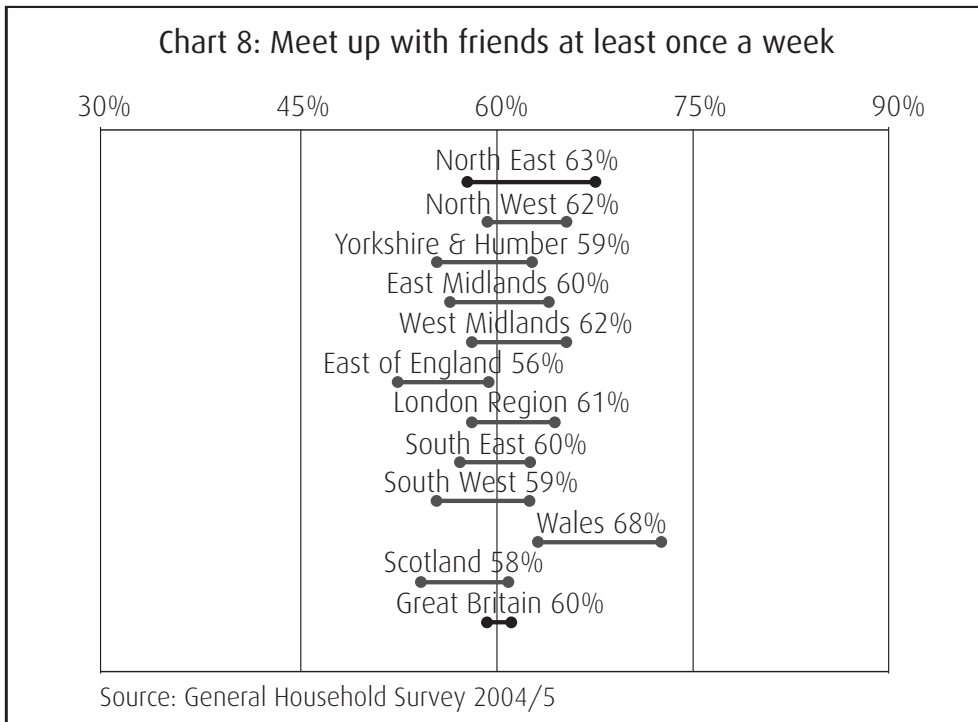


Chart 7 also clearly illustrates that a north-south divide exists in the frequency of meeting up with relatives, with all the regions (and nations) of Great Britain not in the south of England having significantly higher levels of face-to-face interaction than those in the south of England.

The survey findings also suggest that over two-thirds of the over 44 year olds in the North East meet up with relatives on a weekly basis, whereas only one-half of the under 44 years do – similar to national rate (Table A28 of the appendix).

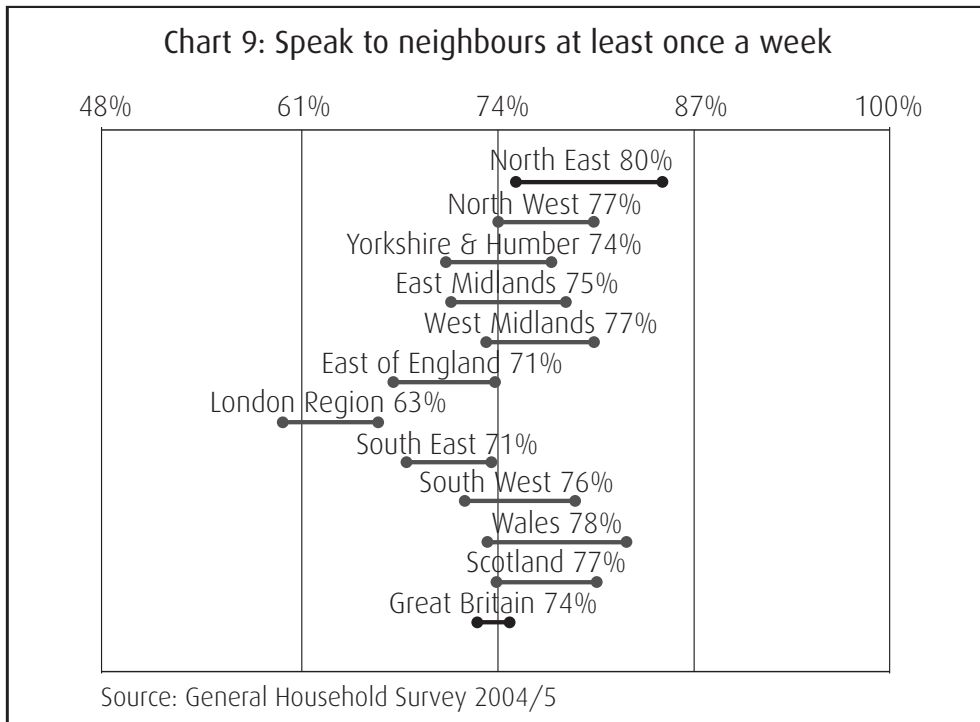
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This greater likelihood to meet up with relatives does not extend to friends, as illustrated in Chart 8. Sixty-three per cent of respondents from the North East stated that they meet up with friends at least once a week, which is not statistically different to the proportion of respondents in any of the regions of Great Britain. However, the population in Wales are significantly more sociable with friends than those in the East of England and in Scotland.

The survey findings also suggest that the 65–74 years age group in the North East are the most sociable with friends, with 70 per cent of this group meeting up with friends at least once a week. Around two-thirds of respondents in each of the occupational classes stated that they meet up with friends at least once a week (Table A31 of the appendix).

However, if we look at the proportion of people that speak to their neighbours at least once a week the North East stands out. As Chart 9 illustrates, 80 per cent of respondents in the North East report such regular contact.



This is the largest proportion in all regions of Great Britain and is significantly greater than the national rate and in the regions of East of England, London region and the South East. The proportion in the London region is significantly lower than all other regions in Great Britain.

Additional analysis of the survey also identified that nearly all respondents (95 per cent) from the North East in the 65–74 years age group reported that they spoke to their neighbours at least once a week. The age group with the least contact with neighbours was the 16–44 year olds, where 75 per cent were in contact at least weekly. Around 90 per cent of respondents with intermediate, lower supervisory and semi-routine and routine occupations had the same degree of contact with their neighbours, compared to 75 per cent in managerial and professional occupations (Table A32 of the appendix).

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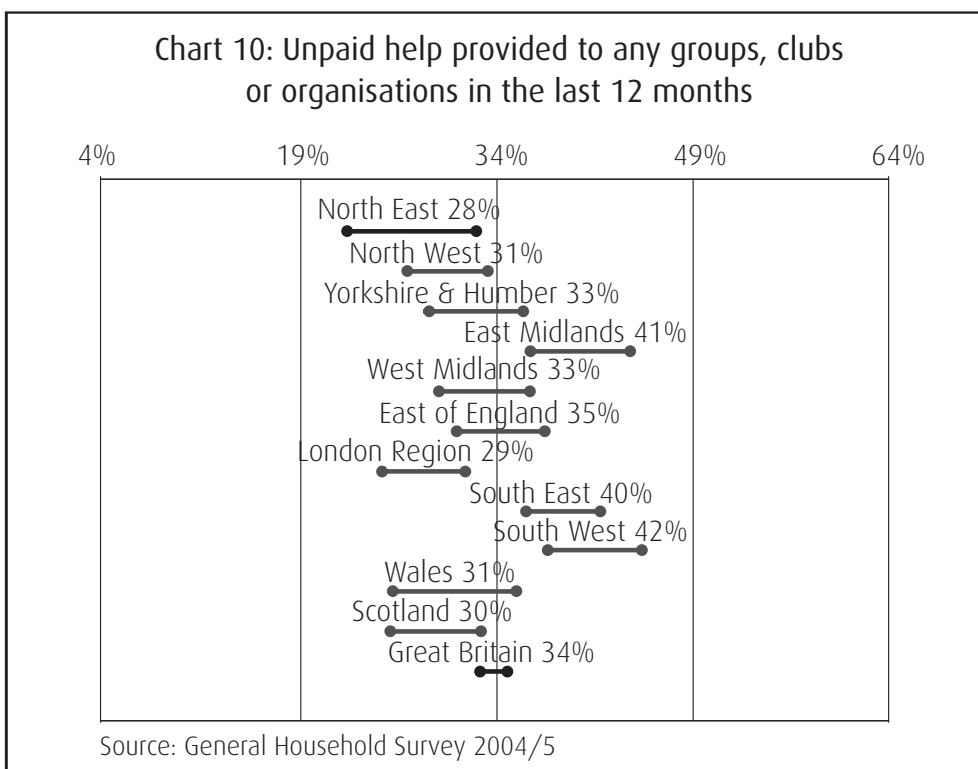
TABLE 3: People who would be asked to help if ill	Proportion North East respondents	Proportion GB respondents
Partner	52%	55%
Other household member	18%	19%
Relative	76%	68%
Friend	51%	54%
Neighbour	45%	38%
Work colleague	13%	12%
Voluntary organisation	4%	4%
Other	4%	3%

The survey findings also identified that 94 per cent of respondents from the North East reported that they would have someone to ask for assistance if ill in bed, which was no different to the national average or other regions. When asked who that would be, more respondents from the North East stated that they would ask relatives and neighbours for assistance than the national average (Table 3).

This survey strongly suggests that the North East is distinct from other parts of Britain in terms of the frequency with which people meet up with relatives, and how often they speak to their neighbours; they are also more likely to turn to neighbours and relatives if they need help. However, within the North East there is variation, with the analysis indicating younger age groups are less likely to meet with relatives or speak to neighbours than older respondents. There was also indication of an occupational divide in terms of regular contact with neighbours, with respondents from higher occupations less likely to report speaking to their neighbours than those from lower occupations.

Social participation

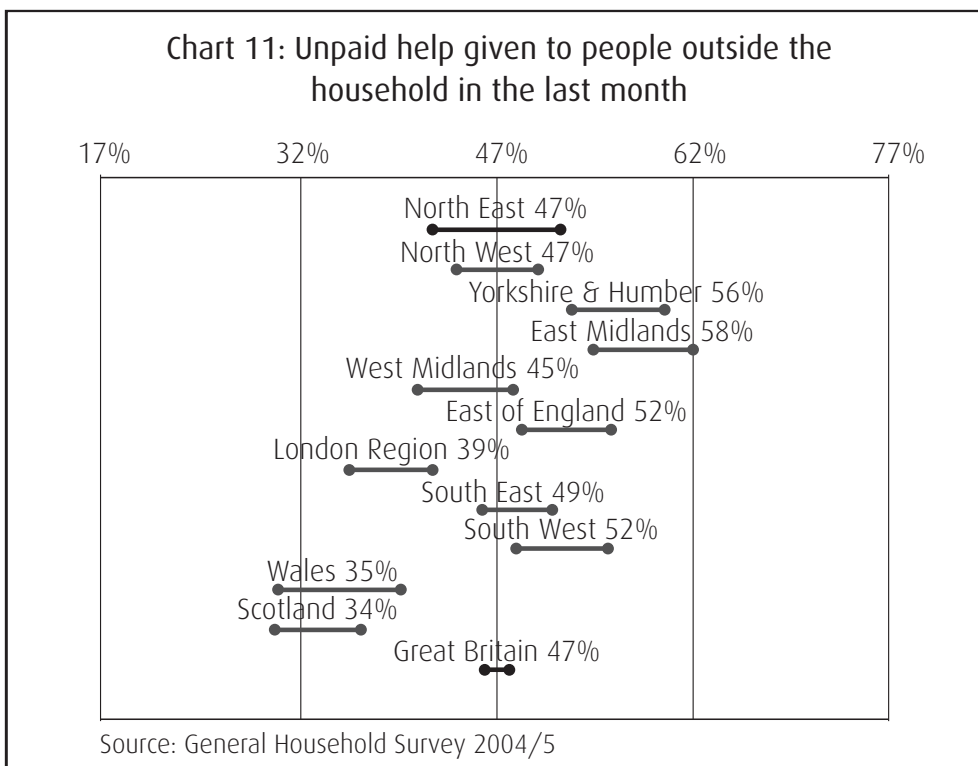
In the last 12 months, 28 per cent of respondents from the North East have formally been involved with voluntary activities, providing unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations. As illustrated in Chart 10, the proportion in the North East is statistically significantly lower than the national rate, as well as lower than the proportions formally volunteering in the regions of the East Midlands, South East and South West.



The survey findings identified that the most popular activities undertaken by those respondents who provide unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations are raising or handling money, organising an event or providing other practical help such as at school or a religious group. The types of groups in which the respondents from the North East participated in are no different from the national rate (Table A44 of the appendix).

5

The survey also found that respondents from the North East are most likely to provide unpaid help if they are under 65 years of age, with around one-third of individuals in each age group providing assistance, while this proportion falls to 15 per cent amongst the over 75s. The occupational groups from the North East who are most likely to provide unpaid help are the intermediate and managerial and professional groups, with approximately half of respondents providing this assistance compared to 16 per cent of those in semi-routine and routine occupations (Table A43 of the appendix).



As a measure of informal social participation, Chart 11 shows the proportion of respondents who stated that they had provided unpaid help to people outside their household in the last month, such as childcare and running errands. The proportion of respondents giving help in this manner was greater in every region than the proportion formally volunteering, a point that is

particularly striking considering the formal volunteering question asked about a 12-month period, while the informal assistance question asks only about the past month. In the North East, 47 per cent gave unpaid help to someone outside their home in the previous month, which was no different to the proportion nationally. It was, however, significantly greater than the proportions of individuals in the London region, Wales and Scotland.

The most popular unpaid activities provided by respondents in the North East to people outside their households were domestic work, transport and errands and emotional support, with around 25 per cent of respondents providing this type of help (Table A46 of the appendix).

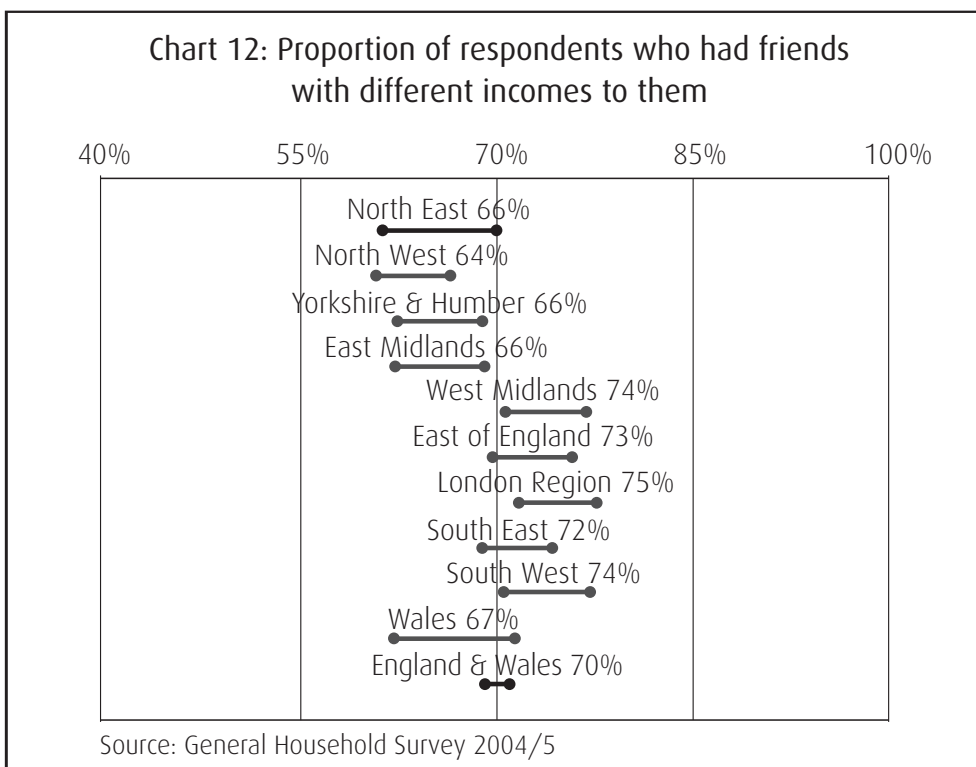
The survey identified that the proportion of individuals in the North East that provided domestic help is greater than the national rate and exceeds the proportions for the London region and Scotland.

Respondents from the managerial and professional occupations have the highest response rate across the occupational classes in providing unpaid help to people outside their households across all types of help. Over one-third of respondents from this group provide unpaid domestic work, transport and errands and emotional support, while nearly 25 per cent provide child care support. Those respondents with lower supervisory occupations and those who are unemployed are less likely to informally volunteer than other occupations, although nearly 20 per cent of respondents in these occupations provide unpaid domestic help to people outside their household (Table A47 of the appendix).

The survey suggests that the North East is much like the rest of the country, with similar proportions of people engaging in both formal and informal voluntary activities. However, within the North East there appears to be a divide between occupational groups, with those in managerial and professional occupations more likely to engage in both formal and informal volunteering.

5 Bridging social capital

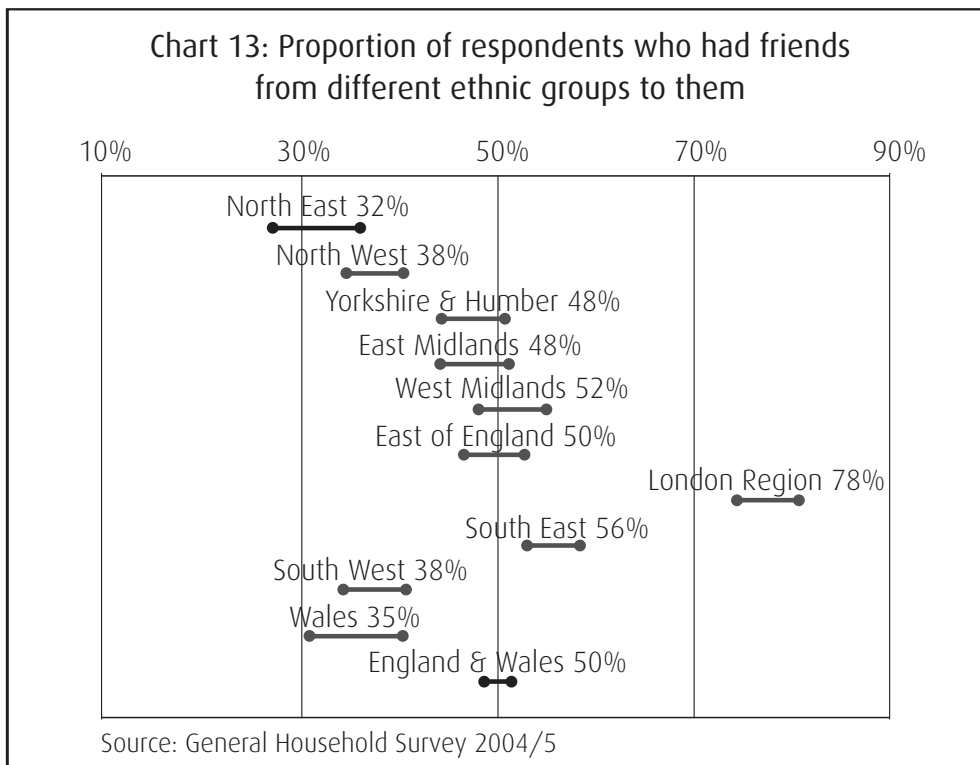
As previously stated, the General Household Survey omitted questions to measure bridging social capital. However, data on this issue is available from the Citizenship Survey 2005 commissioned by the Home Office (although responsibility now lies with the Department for Communities and Local Government), which provides an insight into the behaviours of residents in England and Wales. In 2005, this survey asked two questions designed to measure social capital and social cohesion⁸, both of which we analyse below. As previously, the regional sample is large enough to make generalisations about the wider regional population at the whole region level only. Also, while the data was collected at a similar time it is not directly comparable to the GHS data as the groups of respondents are different.



In terms of bridging occupational classes, measured through different income bands, Chart 12 illustrates that two-thirds of those respondents from the North East stated that they had friends with different incomes

⁸ The 2007 Citizenship survey has substantially more questions on mixing, but the full data set had not been released at the time of writing.

than themselves, which was no different from the England and Wales proportion, although significantly fewer when compared to the London region. In fact, significantly fewer respondents from across the north of England and the East Midlands had friends with different incomes than in the London region. A partial explanation for this disparity could be London’s wider distribution of incomes (ONS 2004), as a wider distribution may make meeting people from different incomes more likely.



In terms of bridging cultural divides, 32 per cent of respondents from the North East stated that they had friends from different ethnic backgrounds (Chart 13), which was similar to the proportions in the North West, South West and in Wales. However, this statistic for the North East was significantly lower than the England and Wales rate and the remaining six regions. In the London region, 78 per cent reported having friends from different ethnic groups, more than twice the rate in the North East.

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A cautious approach is required when drawing conclusions from the latter chart in relation to bridging ethnic groups. In particular, it is important to note that in 2001 over 95 per cent of the population of the North East stated their ethnic grouping was white British (ONS 2003), reducing the opportunities for mixing.

While some caution needs to be taken with the interpretation of these findings, this survey would seem to suggest that there is a lower level of bridging social capital in the North East compared to other regions.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

There is resonance between social capital – especially bridging social capital – and the North East’s strategic objectives of economic inclusion and raising aspirations, especially among young people and those that are out of work. Similarly at the local level, there is a high degree of crossover between agendas to improve well-being through social and economic inclusion, and cohesive, empowered and active communities. As the ‘place shaping’ agenda develops and regional development becomes as much about quality of place and quality of life as it is about physical development (not that the two are mutually exclusive), social capital could have an important role to play in the debate about what sort of place the North East is, and the aspirations for future development.

This report helps to further our understanding of social capital in the North East, and contributes to the region’s evidence base by providing for the first time a regional analysis of social capital based on robust and comparable survey data. Furthermore, as the analysis presented here has regard for the sample size, and therefore the degree of confidence with which we can draw firm conclusions, it is more reliable than a simple face value comparison of the average response given in each region. This analysis points to some areas where the North East stands out compared to other regions, and also suggests some differences in social capital by age group and occupation within the region, although these latter differences must be treated with caution due to possible sampling variation.

The primary conclusion from the analysis is that in most ways the North East is similar to the rest of the country in terms of social capital. Perhaps we should not be surprised by this as all parts of Britain are subject to similar pressures and social trends. In fact, the region that emerges as most exceptional from this analysis is the London region, which has markedly more negative responses with regard to views of the neighbourhood, lower levels of trust and where people are the least likely to speak to their neighbours. This may suggest more fractured neighbourhoods in London and less bonding social capital – at least on a local geographic basis – a finding that should give pause for thought about the type of regional development model that the North East should follow, as while the London region is vibrant

and economically successful, it is also polarised and has significant social problems. This highlights the need for the goal of economic growth to be complemented by social goals, such as enhancing social capital.

The North East also emerges from this analysis as exceptional in some respects, and this enables us to offer tentative conclusions about some of the assumptions that are frequently made about the region, namely that it has strong communities, is a friendly sociable place, and that it has a culture of informal volunteering.

First, the main area where the North East does appear to be exceptional is with regard to social contact with family and neighbours, which would seem to support the view that the North East is a region of 'strong communities'. The significantly greater likelihood of meeting up with relatives and speaking to neighbours on a regular basis is likely to provide a strong social network that can be mobilised in times of need. Indeed, people in the North East were more likely to say they could call on relatives or neighbours in time of need than other parts of the country. However, while this is a positive sign with regard to social support, the interpretation of this finding is difficult as strongly bonded communities can have negative characteristics as they can be exclusive and inward looking, making it difficult for 'outsiders' to integrate and restricting avenues for the flow of information and opportunities. Such high levels of interaction with family and neighbours could also signify a lower level of geographic mobility among the North East population, with people less likely to move away and therefore more likely to know and socialise with their neighbours and live near to their families. In some cases, it may be that people's neighbours are their family members.

This poses something of a conundrum for policy makers. On the one hand, increased mobility can enable people to take up economic opportunities, maximise their labour market success and expose them to new experiences, but it can be damaging to social networks and lead to a fracturing of communities. On the other hand, strong communities offer networks of social support for people, but can be exclusive and inward looking. Both have positive and negative aspects, and are somewhat in tension with each other. The challenge for policy makers is to preserve the positive aspects of strong communities while increasing the opportunities open to people.

Second, with regard to whether the North East is a friendly and sociable place, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the data. While people in the region are more likely speak to their neighbours and meet up with family members, in terms of meeting up with friends to socialise, the region is much like the rest of the country. Another way of looking at this issue is to consider levels of cohesiveness and bridging social capital, which may indicate how outward looking, open and 'friendly' the North East is, although we appreciate this is an imperfect measure. The region's respondents are at the national average for thinking that people from different backgrounds get along well in their local area, suggesting the North East has average levels of social cohesion. However, the data on bridging social capital suggests a less positive story, although one with more than one interpretation. In terms of bridging across cultural divides, the Citizenship Survey 2005 reveals that people in the North East are far less likely to have friends from different ethnic backgrounds. This could suggest the region is less open and friendly than other places, but the very small proportion of people from different ethnic groups living in the region reduces opportunities for mixing, and makes such a conclusion on the basis of this evidence alone unwise. With regard to bridging across income divides, significantly fewer people in the region reported having friends from different income groups compared to the London region. This could again suggest that people in the region are less open to people from different backgrounds; however, it could also be the case that the wider income distribution in the London region makes meeting people with different incomes more likely. Of course these two possible explanations are not mutually exclusive. Together these findings might suggest weaker bridging social capital in the region, which may present a problem given the positive link between bridging social capital and regional priorities such as economic inclusion and raising aspirations.

Third, with regard to formal volunteering compared to informally giving unpaid help, our analysis found the proportion of people volunteering both formally and informally in the North East is largely the same as other regions. Although there was some variation, with the proportion formally volunteering over the last 12 months significantly greater in the East Midlands, South East and South West compared to the North East, and the proportion informally volunteering in the last month in the North East significantly greater than in the London region, Scotland and Wales. Also, the proportion informally volunteering in each region was greater than the proportion formally

volunteering, especially once the different time horizons over which the questions were asked are considered. While this analysis does not uphold the theory that there is a different, more informal, culture of volunteering in the North East (or the North more broadly), the scale of informal unpaid help suggests its importance in terms of helping society function, yet government targets are focused only on formal volunteering.

The analysis also indicates an interesting generational divide within the region, finding respondents in the 16–44 years age group (the youngest age group in the survey) were less likely than their older peers to speak to their neighbours regularly or to meet up with family members frequently. They were also less likely to be satisfied with their area, or trust their neighbours. This poses an interesting issue that would warrant further investigation, as given the sample size we cannot be confident that the findings from the age disaggregation in our analysis are accurate and not the result of sampling variation. But if these findings are correct, we believe there are two possible explanations: first that people's attitudes and views in the North East change as they get older, or second, that the younger generation of North Easterners simply have different attitudes and views. With regard to 16–44 year olds having less contact with their neighbours, and seeing family less often, it may be the case that the North East is becoming more mobile and thus more like the rest of the country. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

The analysis enables us to make a number of recommendations in two specific areas. The first relates to what regional institutions and local authorities in the North East can do if they wish to harness social capital as part of their policy agenda. The second area relates to data and data quality, as while this analysis has revealed some interesting conclusions, this initial investigation perhaps raises more questions than it answers. There are also some recommendations in relation to the quality of data and consistency.

Recommendations

1. Next steps for local and regional institutions

- **Local authorities could make social capital a central plank of their local area agreement.** Local authorities already have the option of incorporating the ‘stronger communities’ targets into their LAAs, however this commitment to building social capital could be enhanced by choosing additional locally set targets that relate to social capital using questions from the harmonised question set as the basis for measurement.
- **Institutions wanting to enhance social capital must be clear about how it interacts with goals such as well-being, quality of life and social cohesion.** While there is much overlap between these concepts there are also differences, and there is a need for greater conceptual clarity. In particular, the **Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), One NorthEast and local authorities should work with their partners to understand better the potential for tension between ‘strong communities’ and economic development, and strong communities and social cohesion.** These are all policy aims at national, regional and local level, but there needs to be much clearer understanding of the relationship between strong communities, and the more outward looking aspirations of economic development and social cohesion.
- **Local authorities wanting to enhance social capital should opt to add key social capital questions to the new *Place Survey*,** in order to improve social capital data at a smaller geographic scale. The *Place Survey* will include questions from the Citizenship Survey in order to monitor progress towards the ‘empowered, active and cohesive communities’ PSA target. Local authorities that are interested in social capital’s role in their economic inclusion, stronger communities and social cohesion remit should opt to include additional questions on bridging social capital, informal volunteering and people’s relationships with their neighbours.
- **Local authorities that opt to do this within the region should coordinate their additional questions to ensure the same questions are asked.** This would provide the participating authorities with much richer data, as responses could be compared to their differing social, economic and demographic profiles. This would help to develop a clearer

picture of the relationship between social capital and other key factors such as occupational class, age, deprivation and rurality. This would also create a common baseline against which change can be measured, which will help authorities to identify policy outcomes and good practice. **The Association of North East Councils could play this coordinating role.**

■ **One NorthEast should be more precise about what types of social capital it wishes to encourage through its regional economic strategy.**

The regional economic strategy mentions building social capital as part of its economic inclusion theme, but greater clarity is needed about what type of social capital and among which groups. Given the twin priorities of tackling worklessness and raising aspirations, we would recommend a focus on activities to enhance bridging social capital.

■ **The Social Capital Forum and other interested partners should regard the move to an integrated regional strategy as an opportunity to embed social capital in regional strategies.**

The new strategy will bring together the economic development strategy with the regional housing and planning strategies. This will broaden the remit of One NorthEast beyond economic objectives to incorporate social and environmental issues too.

■ **Local authorities should work with the DCLG to include informal unpaid help as a measure of active citizenship**

as a greater proportion of people already engage in this type of activity which also offers a valuable support mechanism in the community. Informal volunteering of this sort should be considered an asset.

2. Data and data quality

■ **Carry out more research at the sub-regional level**

to complement the regional data. This analysis of the regional level helps to improve the evidence and reveal some possible trends and areas for further research. But data at a more refined geographical level, and with a sample size that enables us to more confidently interpret the data for different age groups and occupations, would provide a more useful picture of the region, and where challenges and opportunities lie.

- **Make data from the new *Place Survey* publicly available** to enable researchers to analyse data on social capital (and other issues), maximising the value of what will be a significant new source of data.
- **Local organisations (whether local authorities, their partners or a combination of the two) could re-run the whole module of social capital questions** at a local authority level, with a random sample that is representative of the wider population. This would provide a full data set that is comparable to the regional and national data across all the indicators of social capital. If multiple local authorities wanted to do this economies of scale could be gained by coordinating commissioning the field work. **The Association of North East Councils could play this role.**
- **Regional institutions or local authorities and their partners should commission qualitative research to follow up questions that cannot be answered by quantitative research**, such as why people interact more with their neighbours in the North East, whether attitudes are changing with younger generations, and understanding the positive and negative attributes of the strong communities indicated by this analysis.
- **The Office of National Statistics (ONS) should continue to improve the measures for bridging social capital** to enable more confident analysis of this important variable. Improved evidence will enable One NorthEast and local authorities to better assess the relationship between bridging social capital, economic inclusion and raising aspirations, and how important bridging social capital might be for meeting these strategic priorities for the region.
- **ONS and the DCLG should resolve the relationship between the set of social capital questions (the Harmonised Question Set – HQS) and the Citizenship Survey.** Questions from the Citizenship Survey are being used as the basis for measuring progress towards the cohesive, empowered and active communities target, and the LAA targets for stronger communities. Despite aspirations to integrate the HQS with the Citizenship Survey 2007 this has not happened and greater clarity over the reason for this is required given the process of drawing up the HQS was a rigorous and open one, and can be considered good practice.

Data sources

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