

Leicester's Voice in Research

Leicester's Voice in Research, part of Collaboratory's Local Voices in Research initiative seeks to understand some of the complex challenges that are important to our local communities and how research from our local universities should be shaped to address these. Through Leicester's Voice in Research events, we aim to:

- Work with residents, local civic and community professionals, and community leaders from across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland who have knowledge and experience of our diverse local communities.
- Collaborate with participants in our workshops to develop an informed understanding of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's community priorities.
- Use these mutually agreed priorities to direct the development of up to 13 new research projects that will be funded and delivered by Collaboratory, starting in April 2027.



What did our communities say?

Over the course of the workshop, 191 **specific responses** were put forward by participants which describe the nature of priority communities, the challenges they face, and the connections arising amongst these. The responses were then analysed using an approach called "thematic analysis" to identify broader common themes and to describe specific, actionable priority areas. This makes it possible to see the bigger picture in hundreds of very different but interconnected responses. This report highlights **7 themes and 38 specific topics for action**.



Figure 1. 2026-27 Leicestershire and Rutland Research Priority themes word cloud

This word cloud gives a graphical overview of the main themes arising from discussions in our Leicester's Voice in Research workshop. The larger the word, the more common the theme was amongst the 191 priorities.

Overview of priorities

Priority Theme	Specific Topics for Action
1. Inclusive communities	1. Social isolation, loneliness, and related impacts on health and life prospects. 2. Left behind communities and hidden need communities overlooked by formal support and services. 3. Communities experiencing exclusion from areas of day-to-day society, i.e., women 50+, elderly people, migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker communities. 4. Participation in community and social life, and lack of social activity opportunities. 5. Addressing barriers to integration and cohesion between and within communities. 6. Empowering migrant communities to become more involved in local society, combatting their own isolation. 7. The role of identity and belonging; cultural, community, and place. 8. Shared spaces and community hubs in community development, empowerment, and cohesion.
2. Inclusive economy, services, and support systems	1. Barriers to navigating Universal Credit and formal support systems, and consequences. 2. Inaccessibility of local services due to cost, tight eligibility, or timing and availability. 3. Service fragmentation and potential for coordination and collaboration across the civic and community sector. 4. Community-based, post-intervention support. 5. Holistic and better support for those most in need - low-income households, intergenerational poverty, and multiple disadvantaged communities. 6. Financial hardship and adapting to the cost of living crisis. 7. Access to and availability of high quality, stable employment opportunities. 8. Need for culturally sensitive approaches to service delivery. 9. Gendered economic inactivity and influence of cultural expectations.
3. Health determinants and wellbeing	1. Mental health challenges as both a cause and consequence of reduced wellbeing and living standards. 2. Low self-esteem and confidence in community of multiple disadvantages and lack of personal empowerment. 3. Challenges within and between healthcare organisations impacting service delivery, waiting lists, etc. 4. Holistic and preventative approaches to healthcare. 5. Women as primary caregivers and impacts on their health, social and economic activity.
4. Young people, education and achieving potential	1. Low levels of secondary school attainment for young people. 2. Young people's disengagement from formal education pathways. 3. Responding to the needs of young people not in education, employment or training. 4. More inclusive and flexible training and development offerings to address regional skills gaps. 5. Responsive and inclusive educational pathways for those that don't/can't engage in "one size fits all" education.
5. Trust, misinformation, and communication	1. Distrust in formal institutions and infrastructure. 2. Misinformation about public services; vaccination hesitancy, university credit, etc. 3. Poor and challenging communication between services and communities. 4. Need for culturally appropriate outreach approaches. 5. Local impacts of social media influence on trust and misinformation
6. Transport and digital exclusion	1. Digital exclusion and access to essential services i.e., healthcare, parking, council services, etc. 2. Accessible and inclusive digital skills literacy 3. Isolation and other barriers resulting from limited digital connectivity 4. Transport challenges - disability access, affordability, lack of connectivity, digital exclusion.

Table 1. Summary of priority themes and specific topics for action.

This table shows a summary of the main themes and sub themes to come out of all 245 individual responses submitted by participants. Themes are ordered from most common to least common. For examples, themes numbered 1 were more commonly mentioned in submissions than themes number 6.

Reflecting on these priorities

The responses from workshop participants highlight a complex and interconnected set of challenges which affect diverse populations across our city and county region. While some themes occur more frequently, such as mental health, long-term health and general wellbeing, there was no suggestion by participants that these were more important than other issues, but rather there was a clear acknowledgement that such issues are often the side effects of other challenges, such as unstable employment, financial hardship, social isolation, experiences of discrimination, etc.

When exploring the causes and effects of different types of challenge, participants often reflected on the role played by the structural barriers that exist to accessing, navigating, and benefiting from formal support pathways and essential services. Similarly, many of the priorities communities who are impacted by the challenges that our participants identified were often facing systemic under-recognition and lack of awareness and understanding. Overall, the responses underscore the need for more inclusive, joined-up, and preventative approaches to service design and delivery.

Priorities yet to be addressed

For our final project cohort (due to start in April 2027), Collaboratory is particularly interested in seeing collaborative, co-created PhD and Research Placement project proposals which seek to address priorities that have emerged multiple times across different iterations of Local Voices in Research workshops. These repeat priorities which have not yet been addressed through a Collaboratory research project are detailed below. They are provided in no particular order of preference of need.

Issues affecting young men and boys

- Those struggling with their confidence, sense of purpose, and role within their communities and wider society.
- Working class boys experiencing poorer education outcomes and the impacts on their life beyond school.
- Combatting negative influences from social media on young people, particularly young men and boys.
- How can young men and boys be supported to address their wellbeing in a society where they feel increasingly excluded from each other and communities?

Education, training, and employment

- Addressing the education and training needs of young people for whom more “one size fits all” approach to education doesn’t work.
- More inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to teaching and pastoral support in schools.
- More responsive and appropriate support for young people as they transition from education into employment

Needs of older age communities.

- Addressing social isolation (and consequences of) experienced by older people, particularly those who might live alone or have limited mobility beyond home.
- Rapid digitalisation of everyday life and the excluding of older age people from everyday services and systems.

Community cohesion

- Loss of communal spaces and places (from community hubs to youth centres) and the related impacts on crime/discrimination, hate crime, and overall community cohesion.
- Better support for social integration - for ex-offenders, migrant communities, ex-homeless, those recovering from addiction, etc.