

# Annex A: The role of communities and connections in social welfare legal advice: Methodology

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<b>1. Aims and objectives.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Approach.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Process for choosing case-study areas.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Work package one (WP1): Literature and data review.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. Work package two (WP2): Sector professional workshops and other sector engagement.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Work package three (WP3): Focus groups and interviews.....</b>	<b>8</b>
6.1 Choosing the hyperlocal locations.....	8
6.2 Data collection tool – semi-structured interviews.....	8
6.2.1 Developing the questions.....	8
6.2.2 Engaging with communities and piloting.....	12
6.2.3 Recruiting interviewees.....	12
6.2.4 Ensuring consistency in the administration of interviews.....	13
<b>7. Work package four: Data analysis and triangulation.....</b>	<b>14</b>
7.1 Social networks data.....	14
7.2 Social networks visualisation.....	14
7.3 Quantitative non-social networks data from Network Canvas.....	15
7.4 Qualitative interview data.....	15
7.5 Triangulation.....	16
<b>8. Ethics and data protection.....</b>	<b>16</b>
I. Workshop questions/discussion points.....	17
II. Interview Questions Full Text.....	19
<b>Tables One and Two: Interviewee characteristics.....</b>	<b>30</b>

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### **1. Aims and objectives**

Our research compared access to Social Welfare Law (SWL) advice services, and advice-seeking behaviours, across four case-studies: the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale; the Isle of Anglesey; South Hams; and the London Borough of Hackney. In these areas we selected hyperlocal fieldwork locations: Deeplish in Rochdale; the village of Bryngwran on the Isle of Anglesey; Dartmouth in South Hams; and the Hackney Wick, King's Park and Victoria wards in Hackney.

**Our key aims were to:**

- Investigate relationships between access to SWL advice, and connectedness, equality, and wellbeing of case-study communities;
- Investigate how community attitudes, attributes, and affiliations affect SWL advice-seeking behaviour, and provision of local informal/formal organisations, models, and channels of advice delivery;
- Explore these relationships and their effects, including contexts of occurrence, making recommendations for policy and service design improving access to justice for diverse communities.

**Our central research question was:**

**RQ1.** How is access to timely and appropriate SWL advice related to the connectedness, (in)equality, and wellbeing of communities?

This was addressed through themes of sub-questioning:

**RQ2.** Which formal/informal local organisations offer SWL advice services in case-study communities, through which modes of delivery, what challenges do organisations face and what is offered to the community by non-local services?

**RQ3.** How do people within case-study communities seek to resolve SWL problems, including navigating organisations and channels? What are people's attitudes to advice-seeking, what barriers do they face, and how can SWL advice providers lessen them?

**RQ4.** Are there differences between the perceptions of SWL advice practitioners and community members as to what services are provided?

**RQ5.** How do social networks of those receiving advice compare with those who need advice but are not finding the help they need? Are individuals supplementing relationships with formal advice providers with informal providers? How do structures of informal networks compare to those of formal advice seeking? How do advice seeking networks compare across our cases?

## **2. Approach**

This comparative case-study, “investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context...when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin 2018; 14).

The case-studies are not intended to represent samples of populations for statistical generalisation. The nature of our research approach, i.e. qualitative case studies, aims to capture and understand rich real-world insights and unique experiences of people and their stories, in their own words, rather than providing statistical generalisations of a population. Qualitative studies focus on understanding context, meaning, and depth, rather than generalisability, and help provide representative perspectives, experiences and contexts. We have inductively articulated, expanded and, to a lesser extent, generalised, theories (analytic generalisations) about the relationship between SWL advice, community characteristics, attributes and affiliations, and connectedness, (in)equality, and individual and social wellbeing. The distinguishing characteristics of the cases have been used as a springboard for reflections about contrasting findings, appreciating the heterogeneity of communities whilst recognising broader national issues and their impact on the locality (Bryman 2021; 60-61 and Yin 2018). Further information about the case-study areas can be found in Chapter 3 of the main body of the report.

The contexts of the case-studies are primarily the geo-political boundaries of local authority areas (Anglesey (with some matters considered on a devolved national Welsh basis), Rochdale Borough, London Borough of Hackney, and South Hams District (with some matters considered on a West Devon basis)). The reason for choosing geographical areas relates in part to local authority control over much of the commissioning and funding of advice services, and other matters of social welfare and community wellbeing policy that impact on experiences of social welfare legal (SWL) problems. Other considerations for choosing local authority areas relate to these being clear units for data collection around demographic characteristics, and providing clearer boundaries in terms of the applicability and scope of the research than other means of identifying cases. The scope of the research had to be appropriately limited in some clear way due to the limitations of time and funding.

Whilst SWL advice-seeking and advice-giving are a commonplace occurrence in each case-study location, the geo-social characteristics of the locations themselves significantly differ. The approach we applied also resembles an instrumental case-study, gaining insight into practises of SWL advice-seeking and providing within these specific locations (May 2011; 228).

## **3. Process for choosing case-study areas**

The key consideration in selecting the case-study areas was that there should be significant diversity across the case-study areas, reflecting considerations such as geographical location, population density, ethnicity, language, receipt of benefits and employment situation. The other main criterion was that the research team needed to have some form of existing connection with a local community or communities within the area, through which trusted relationships could be formed/continued in the very short research period.

Forming trusted and genuine relationships with communities is essential to conducting authentic and accurate research, and for genuine co-production. There was insufficient time within the research period to develop completely new but sufficiently meaningful relationships. Thus, research team members already had some form of trusted connection with each community, developed, for example, through past research, engagement with the advice sector, or the engagement of community embedded researchers. Effective data collection methods, such as interviewing, emphasise and require trust and rapport-building early in the data collection process in order to create and develop engagement and cooperation (Gabbert et al 2020) and enhance the quality of information, especially on sensitive topic areas (Prior 2018).

Pen pictures were created for each proposed case-study area, providing extensive data about the geo-social-political characteristics of the area and about advice services provision, as well as several measures relating to wellbeing and community strength. The pen pictures were shared with our Advisory Group ('AG'), and discussed extensively at an AG meeting, before a final decision on case-study area selection was made unanimously.

#### **4. Work package one (WP1): Literature and data review**

WP1 involved an extensive review of literature on SWL advice networks, service delivery models and channels, including primary materials (policy, legislation, guidance, regulation, and quality frameworks), as well as secondary materials (academic literature, reports, commentaries) and grey literature (reports by non-governmental organisations, charities, sector-representative bodies). We applied existing knowledge to identify sources, alongside recommendations from our AG and other stakeholders, expanded through online searches, and research participant recommendations throughout the project.

WP1 also included a review of literature, and analysis of data sources, relating to community connectedness, equality, and individual and social wellbeing in the context of access to justice. Including outputs of the British Academy Cohesive Societies programme and Nuffield Foundation research aimed at advancing social well-being, especially in relation to justice. We drew on the resources of the Understanding Communities Network. This was expanded by searching databases and journals, use of grey literature, and literature from equality, human rights, and wellbeing monitoring organisations. We also examined several quantitative data sources, including from the Office for National Statistics; Equality & Human Rights Commission; Ministry of Justice and other UK Government departments; Welsh Government; SAIL databank (anonymised person-based data for Welsh population for research to improve health, wellbeing and services); and Onward's "Social Fabric" and "Thriving Places" indexes. This work enabled us to a) articulate a clear framework of structures and indicators for analysing connectedness, (in)equality, individual and social well-being in the context of access to justice within case-study communities; b) evaluate community characteristics, assets, and attributes against this framework; and c) help to develop field-work tools (themes and fields of questioning).

WP1 also included a review of literature and secondary data on how people seek to address 'justiciable' problems (Pathways to Justice research) and research into legal capabilities (characteristics a person needs to deal effectively with law-related issues). Literature and

data sources were accessed from the Ministry of Justice, Legal Services Board (LSB), Law Centres Network, and Legal Aid Practitioners Group (e.g., LSB 2019; Pereira et al 2015; Pleasance et al 2013; Genn 1999) to determine what granular data existed for our case-study communities. This enabled us to better consider past research on how people seek advice to resolve problems, and informed the development of field-work tools relating to advice-seeking behaviours.

In WP1 we also conducted systematic searches of several directories and networks to enable identification of formal and informal SWL advice services, and other organisations offering help with SWL problems, in the case-study areas. This included a search of the Charity Register (<https://www.gov.uk/find-charity-information>) using filters of location, and of “how the charity helps” (provides services, provides advocacy/advice/information, and other charitable activities). Students on placements also assisted with this search. Other directories included the Welsh Government “Dewis” platform, Law Society data, and data from Advice UK and the Advice Services Alliance.

A literature review briefing was developed for the AG, presenting the key themes in the contemporary state of the art literature, and these themes were also discussed at a full AG meeting.

## **5. Work package two (WP2): Sector professional workshops and other sector engagement**

We held several workshops in the case-study areas with SWL advice and Community Voluntary and Social Enterprise (CVSE) sector professionals. Participants were identified through existing connections, advice networks, and through research in WP1. The largest workshop, of 28 participants, was in Rochdale, with attendance at other workshops ranging from 6 to 20 participants. We held two workshops in most case-study areas to ensure that those who could not attend initial workshops were able to take part, and to use initial workshops to identify other potential participants. For those who could not take part in workshops, we also held smaller meetings either in-person or online. The full list of organisations participating by case-study area can be found at Annex D to the main report.

Workshops generally began with a short presentation about the research, then splitting into smaller groups of participants from different organisations to discuss some key questions, which were largely the same for all workshops across the case-study areas, with some additional more locally relevant questions where appropriate. The questions are listed below as “I. Workshop questions/discussion points”. Each small group had at least one notetaker, and each group discussed the themes of their answers with the rest of the participants in plenary. Briefing notes were drafted as an outcome of each workshop and shared with participants who were invited to check and correct any misinterpretations to ensure accuracy, and to add any further comments or data about the experiences of their organisations/services. Workshop data was analysed using a framework approach to thematic analysis, using open coding to capture emergent properties and constructing an index of central themes and sub-themes that were represented with cases and variables (Bryman 2021; 538-541; and Ritchie et al 2003; 219). Where it was felt that the perspectives



of any key organisations/services or individuals were missing from the data, these were sought through additional meetings and discussions.

## **6. Work package three (WP3): Focus groups and interviews**

### **6.1 Choosing the hyperlocal locations**

Within each case-study area we selected a hyperlocal location (village, council ward, or other geographically determined location) in which to conduct detailed primary data collection. Several factors determined the choice, including the demographic characteristics of the area and the spread of different characteristics across the four case-study areas, as well as factors identifying the community locally, or sections of that community, as marginalised for certain reasons, whether relating to ethnicity, language, multiple deprivation and/or rural remoteness. We selected communities that were likely to have experienced SWL problems, and that were likely to have experienced different types of such problems. Our choice was also heavily guided by the local knowledge of the advice and CVSE sector professionals who participated in WP2, in terms of understanding community attributes and affiliations, the potential value to policy and practice of gaining a better understanding of communities in certain hyperlocal areas, and the best means to connect with certain communities. Capacity and willingness of the communities to engage with the research were also considered, including whether certain marginalised and/or ethnic communities may feel over-researched. The familiarity of our team members with certain communities was also a factor. These characteristics and potential hyperlocal areas were discussed at length both with our AG and with advice and CVSE sector professionals in each case-study area, before a final selection was made. Our choice was also guided by funder feedback about diversity across the case-studies during the review of our full proposal.

### **6.2 Data collection tool – semi-structured interviews**

The main data collection tool used with individuals was semi-structured one-to-one in-person interviews.

#### **6.2.1 Developing the questions**

Developing the appropriate questioning and approach was one of the most resource intensive aspects of our research, involving extensive background research on best practice in the field, including our review of existing studies (WP1), as well as several iterations and extensive testing with our AG, other research professionals, and communities. The initial themes of questioning, guided by our research questions, were also built on and developed in the light of the findings of WP1 and WP2. The full set of questions is novel in that it brings together some aspects of so-called ‘paths to justice’ research with social network mapping questions and a section of semi-structured qualitative questioning that was recorded and transcribed. As this is a novel combination for one interview, each aspect of the tool and approach to administering it was vigorously tested over many months of development. This included early piloting of our interview questions to enable us to refine them to ensure the interviews captured relevant information effectively.

Paths to justice studies that partially inspired our work are extensive, from Hazel Genn’s pioneering study in the late 1990s (Genn 1999) to the August 2022 Public Understanding of



Law Survey (PULS) developed by Nigel Balmer and colleagues at the Victoria Law Foundation. The initial Paths to Justice Survey explored the behaviour of the public in dealing with potential legal disputes and problems, as well as the behaviour of potential plaintiffs or potential defendants. It identified the strategies adopted by those involved in potentially justiciable events to resolve or conclude the matter, use of courts and ADR, and the factors that propel litigants towards the legal system. It identified structural factors, such as costs and procedures, or lack of knowledge, which prevent access to the legal system where it is desired, and further assessed the effect of this lack of access to the formal legal system for individuals.

There have since been many studies and uses of the data collected. Pleasence et al (2004) used the Legal Services Research Centre's Periodic Survey of Justiciable Problems to assess the overall incidence and overlap of problem types, and conducted hierarchical cluster analysis based on each respondent's experiences of categories used to identify clusters, as well as establishing the social and demographic predictors of each cluster. The researchers were able to identify each type of problem's likelihood of overlapping with further problems, highlighting the policy implications of the findings, in particular concerning the need for developing 'joined-up' solutions to multiple 'joined-up' problems.

Smith et al (2013) researched how clients present with clustered problems and the success of legal advisers in detecting multiple problems, including the barriers and facilitators that might be relevant.

The research of Sandefur ("Bridging the Gap" 2015) and others, such as Pleasence et al (2011), provides further information on pathways to justice, demonstrating that it is not always lack of access to lawyers or costs that dissuades people from seeking legal advice, but rather that people see their situations as bad luck and not something to be challenged, or describe their situations as private and not something with which they would wish to involve someone from outside their family, or crucially, from outside their community, or they did not recognise their problems as legal in the first place.

There have also been meta-analyses of the surveys themselves. For example, Pleasence et al (2013) for the Nuffield Foundation explores methodological issues, assesses the impact of, and provides guidance and resources for the future development of surveys of justiciable problems. The researchers note that, since the mid-1990s, at least 26 large-scale national surveys of the public's experience of justiciable problems had been conducted in at least 15 separate jurisdictions, reflecting widespread legal aid reform activity. The number is now likely to be even higher. Pleasence et al note that across these various surveys, modest differences in question formulation yielded significantly different results, showing that the risks involved in comparative analysis are notable and that technical details and data should be transparent and accessible.

More recent studies have expanded beyond the incidence of 'justiciable problems' and the steps people do (or don't) take to resolve them into conceptions of 'legal capability' and 'legal confidence', for example, the England and Wales Legal Services Board has conducted an Individual Legal Needs Survey, assessing participants against three standardised measures of legal capability using OECD Guidance.

The most recent PULS study (August 2022) is an innovative hybrid, combining approaches from the tradition of legal needs survey research with new thinking on the conceptualisation and measurement of legal capability (Balmer et al 2022). The PULS supports ‘bottom-up’ approaches to access to justice, a growing movement worldwide, which puts people’s needs and capabilities at the centre of justice sector policy, design, regulation and reform. Our work is part of this movement towards a more ‘bottom up’ and, in our case specifically, ‘community based’ understanding of potential legal or justiciable problems.

We met together in-person as a full team to start drafting the questions, based on WP1 and WP2 and our research questions, as well as best practice in social network mapping surveys and paths to justice surveys. The initial draft of the questions then went through several detailed iterations, before being uploaded into Network Canvas. We trialled the questions on tablets (as they would be administered in the field) with our full AG at an in-person full day meeting. Each question was discussed in detail, including wording, flow and presentation on the tablet. Having taken extensive feedback from the AG, we developed further drafts of the full questions and sent text versions of these to the AG for additional review and feedback.

Our extensive, detailed and iterative development of our interview questions led to a final set which offered an innovative mix of social network mapping questions and other closed and open questions. Closed questions allowed us to capture comparable responses (e.g., participant backgrounds and demographics), whilst open questions allowed us to capture deeper insights into participant experiences, captured in their own words, which allowed participants to express themselves freely, offering rich qualitative data.

The final iteration of the interviews involved three key areas of questioning:

- Questions about the person, their circumstances and wellbeing;
- Questions designed to map out their social networks of close connections within the community, as well as their awareness of organisations/services helping people in the community; and
- Questions about the kinds of SWL and other problems people had experienced and who they had turned to for help or advice.

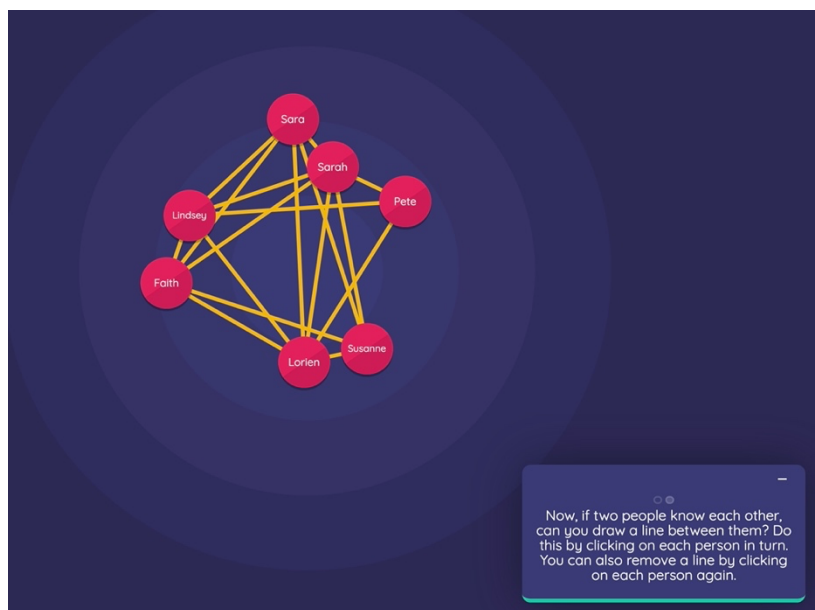
We asked our interviewees whether they had experienced any problems relating to common SWL issues in the last two years. Specifically, we asked whether they had experienced any problems relating to the following: benefits, money, housing, employment, health, immigration, and discrimination. We were also interested to find out what other problems people identified as affecting them within their local communities, and therefore gave them the option to mention other problems experienced specifically within the community. Where interviewees had experienced at least one problem (usually SWL problems but also including some other problems) we asked them to choose one recent problem (or series of what they perceived to be connected problems) and to tell us more about their experiences in relation to this/these. These conversations were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in-person by an interviewer using a tablet holding a bespoke questionnaire designed on Network Canvas, a free and open-source software for surveying personal networks. The screenshots from Network Canvas below show part of the process for mapping social networks, explaining how interviewees can add people to their social networks, including choosing where to locate them, and how they can draw lines between people to show that the interviewee believes that certain people know each other. We asked interviewees to place people on their social network maps based on how close they are to the interviewee, and how close they are to each other (we did not define 'close' and allowed interviewees to interpret this). We have collected co-ordinates data that will allow further research about, e.g., how dense social networks are based on how closely people are placed together, whether people are more likely to share SWL problems with people perceived as closer to them, etc., but this is not analysed in the current report.



Interviewees add people to their networks and place them based on closeness to themselves and to each other. Names are used for ease of reference for the interviewee, but data is immediately anonymised at the end of the interview.

Interviewees draw lines between people who know each other, showing the connectedness of their social network. More lines indicate a more connected social network.



The full set of interview questions are at II. below

### **6.2.2 Engaging with communities and piloting**

Once we had an agreed draft of the questions, we then engaged with communities to further develop the tool, focusing both on the question wording and on the look and feel of the questions on the tablet in Network Canvas. We engaged with smaller focus groups of three to five community members in each hyperlocal case-study area, and adjusted the questions accordingly based on feedback. We then tested the revised version of the questions on the tablet with other community members.

### **6.2.3 Recruiting interviewees**

To create or further develop existing trusted relationships with hyperlocal communities, team members visited each community several times before approaching participants to recruit them for interviews. We attended events such as afternoon teas, warm hubs, choir practice, craft and cooking sessions, and chair exercise, meeting and engaging with community members and becoming familiar faces at the community centres and other locations where we would eventually seek to recruit participants. Immersing ourselves into the field this way helped develop trust and rapport with the community and participants, and also enabled us to capture and understand the context and culture of each case-study area, which helped inform our analysis and interpretation of the interview data. Each hyperlocal case-study had a particular initial base for interviews (Deeplish Community Centre; the Iorwerth Arms in Bryngwran; Dartmouth Community Café; and Frampton Park Church in Hackney)

Interview participants were recruited initially during events taking place at the above locations, and each location had a private and secure space, where interviewee and interviewer could speak freely in comfort. Where convenient for participants, interviews were conducted on the day of initially meeting, for others, interviews were arranged for a later date. Some interviews were conducted in people's homes and workplaces, at the request of the interviewee and with appropriate risk assessment for the interviewers. It was important to interview participants wherever they felt most comfortable to talk about their experiences.

We adopted a 'snowball' or word of mouth approach to participant recruitment initially, including by giving participants flyers with information about the project to pass on to others they knew locally. Snowballing is a widely used method in qualitative research, especially when studying hard to reach populations or when addressing sensitive topic areas. Snowballing allows researchers to reach individuals who might otherwise be difficult to identify and locate, especially those living in small or rural communities, or with social stigmas or unique characteristics. In most areas we attended a broad range of events and activities to access a cross-section of the population, of different ages and genders, employed and unemployed, etc. We left flyers with contact details in key community spaces, and engaged with local GP practices, schools and some key employers. People identified as key community connectors in our research findings were also of great

assistance in reaching interviewees who might not otherwise have participated, people who might be considered ‘hard to reach’.

Our approach was slightly different in Deeplish. We identified early on that many people in the hyperlocal area do not speak English as a first language and either would not be able to participate in any interview in English or, while able to do so, might not feel fully comfortable discussing SWL problems in English. We were also conscious of the cultural sensitivity locally. Given this, the interviews in Deeplish were conducted by three community researchers who were variously employees or volunteers of Deeplish Community Centre, and had the trust and confidence of the hyperlocal population. Interviews took place primarily at Deeplish Community Centre, with some taking place at nearby Spotland Community Centre. Our interview questions were professionally translated into the main local languages, Punjabi in particular, with community researchers then also contributing to the translation to ensure it reflected the language use of the local community. For Bryngwran on Anglesey, we had both English and Welsh versions of the questions and interviewed in either English or Welsh depending on the interviewee’s preference.

Although our interviewees are not intended to be statistically representative of the hyperlocal communities, we regularly reviewed the demographic profile of those we had interviewed and sought to fill in gaps in perspectives, especially with regard to age, gender, or employment status. We took a slightly different approach in Hackney, where we worked with two hyperlocal populations, one specifically of older people and one of younger people.

Tables One and Two at the end of this Annex show the characteristics of the interviewees in each case-study cohort.

#### **6.2.4 Ensuring consistency in the administration of interviews**

Ensuring consistency of administration of the interview questions was especially important to our research and we produced a detailed Interviewer Guide with notes on every question as well as screen shots from Network Canvas to assist with the technical aspects of administering the questions. We had several meetings as a full research team to focus on matters such as what further clarification to give on certain questions or words in questions should that be sought from interviewees. We focused extensively also on the semi-structured aspects, including prompts and how to respond to expected answers. We then had several training sessions in-person as a team, practising administering the survey to each other using the Interviewer Guide and addressing any concerns arising. We each individually practised administering the questions with friends, family and colleagues, and in our local communities. A group of Bangor University law students were also recruited as a focus group for practising administering and developing the questions.

Part of the interview, where the interviewee tells the ‘story of a problem’, is designed generally to be audio recorded and transcribed. However, in the very few cases where interviewees were not comfortable with audio recording, interviewers took written notes, and an additional Notetaking Guide was produced for the research which included both: 1) Topics on which all interviewers might wish to make notes in addition to administering the

survey on the tablet (e.g., where community interviewees reflected on the nature of the community generally, its strength, connectedness, challenges and so on, or reflected more generally about the development of their social networks): 2) More specific information about possible answers to open questions (e.g., possible barriers to seeking help and advice, what could be done to improve help and advice seeking in the community) and prompts on the kind of information to seek in response to open questions.

In Deeplish we held initial conversations with those who had an interest in becoming community researchers, explaining our project, what the role would involve, etc. We then held two half-day training sessions with community interviewers, going through the Interview Guide and practising administering the questions with each other. In Deeplish we observed one to two interviews administered by each community researcher before they went on to conduct interviews alone. Where these interviews were conducted in Punjabi, either a third person translator was also present, or the community researcher translated the interviewee's answers into English for the research team member who was observing.

Members of the research team also observed each other's initial interviews and met to discuss our experiences. As a team we met every other week throughout the research project and had a team WhatsApp group for sharing interview experiences and any questions/concerns, particularly about consistency of approach.

After completing an initial set of interviewees, approx. 3 in each case-study area, we analysed the data collected in Network Canvas and listened to the audio recorded parts of the interviews, so that we were able to learn from each other to further improve our interviewing techniques.

Whilst we have taken all measures to ensure consistency in interviewing, through a comprehensive Interviewer Guide, extensive training and ongoing monitoring, it is nevertheless the case that we could not have controlled for all factors unique to each interviewer such as personal characteristics, use of language, accents and so on. However, we are satisfied that the consistency is sufficient to have obtained reliable data to effectively compare across each of the case-study areas.

## **7. Work package four: Data analysis and triangulation**

### **7.1 Social networks data**

Social network data was extracted from the edgelist produced by Network Canvas. Measures of density (connectedness), average degree of alters (the ego's network minus the ego itself), and other descriptives like the percentage of each ego network who were friends or family, were all calculated using the R programming language and the SNA package (Butts 2020).

### **7.2 Social networks visualisation**

Social networks visualisations were created by first parsing the raw data collected from Network Canvas to reconstruct the nodes (people and organisations) and edges (connections between people) of each interview. Ego data is attached to each interviewee



so that interviews may be filtered later based on all available properties in the dataset, including the case-study area within which the interview took place.

Once processed, the dataset is loaded into a custom Kumu (<https://kumu.io>) social network template which uses a force directed layout. Force directed layouts place nodes closer together if there are many connections within the network. Nodes within less connected networks tend to be more spaced out. This makes it easier to spot closer and more distant social networks at a glance. We built controls into our Kumu map to filter out community leaders, and to filter the networks by region, gender, age, problem resolution, and internet confidence. More controls could be added to filter any aspect of the data collected with Network Canvas during the interviews.

For publication purposes we created a copy of the dataset with randomised connections between nodes in each interviewee's social network in order to anonymise the dataset as best as possible without losing key narratives in the visualisations. We also created typical networks for each interview area based on the average counts of organisations, people within the networks, and the connectedness of those networks.

### **7.3 Quantitative non-social networks data from Network Canvas**

Quantitative non-social networks data from Network Canvas was extracted to and analysed in Excel, including statistical analysis of the demographic characteristics of the interviewees and their answers to multiple choice and scalar questions. Student research assistants helped by double checking calculations.

### **7.4 Qualitative interview data**

Qualitative data from the interview transcripts, and the small number of notes as an alternative to a transcript, were analysed using an approach to coding that focused primarily on themes that emerged from the data. We used a framework and reflexive approach to thematic analysis, using open coding to capture emergent properties, and constructing an index of central themes and sub-themes that were represented with cases and variables (Bryman 2021; 538-541; and Ritchie et al 2003; 219). We coded an initial sample of transcripts from each case-study area, with these initial transcripts each coded by two researchers. Having two researchers analyse the data aids comparison of analysis and interpretations, reduces bias, helps reach consensus between researchers, and strengthens the validity and reliability of findings. Generally, those coding for each case-study area were either those that had conducted interviews in the location or those who otherwise had the most extensive knowledge of the community and its characteristics. Community researchers in Deeplish did not code interviews, but we drew on their knowledge and understanding of the community when coding themes arising. For Deeplish, interviews were translated into English before coding, and again, for any concerns about translation or the accuracy of how certain matters were represented, we drew on the expertise of community researchers and key community individuals in Deeplish. We continued to check each other's coding on a regular basis, and the PI personally coded all interview transcripts to gain a detailed understanding across all case-study areas for comparison. Again, we had regular meetings during the coding process. All working draft coding documents were stored on our shared drive and accessible to all team members.



These documents were then summarised into briefing papers, initially lengthier with further summarising as the key themes of the research began to emerge.

Notes taken by interviewers alongside the transcripts/specific notes were also analysed and key themes included within triangulation below.

### **7.5 Triangulation**

We prepared detailed briefing papers for each of the case-study areas with quantitative and qualitative thematic data from the interviews and met several times as a research team in-person to present and discuss the data and to draw comparisons and discuss emerging themes.

The full coding of the one-to-one interviews with community members was then also compared against the full coding of the workshops with advice and CVSE sector professionals, with data triangulation points noted to enable exploration of both similarities and differences in the themes arising and the different participants' perspectives on central issues.

A full team meeting was also held in person to present the social network visualisations and to discuss the properties of these alongside the triangulated data from the sector professional workshops and one-to-one interviews with community members.

This Main Public Output has been through several iterations and an extensive peer review process with our AG (including socio-legal studies methods experts, and policy and practice professionals) and other professionals. At all stages the methodology was overseen by the AG and by advice and CVSE sector professionals in case-study areas. It was also contributed to and overseen by people with so-called 'lived experience' in each hyperlocal area.

## **8. Ethics and data protection**

The research was carried out under the authorisation of Bangor University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Committee, and an extensive Data Protection Impact Assessment was carried out and maintained throughout the project.

## I. Workshop questions/discussion points

### Social Welfare Advice and Communities:

#### Agenda:

Welcome and introductions

Short presentation on the research project

Discussion Theme 1 – Advice and support networks (approx. 30 mins)

In this discussion we focus on which formal/informal local organisations you are aware of that offer social welfare advice services to communities in [insert case-study area], through which modes of delivery (face-to-face, online etc), what challenges do these organisations face and what is offered to the community by non-local services? What organisations do you know of that have a role in connecting people to advice services and other support?

Discussion Theme 2 – Your organisation (approx. 30 mins)

During this discussion we explore how your organisation delivers advice services, refers people to advice services and/or supports service users (e.g., in-person, telephone, online)? How does your organisation link with the community (what does that connection 'look' like; how is it created, maintained, eroded)? What challenges does your organisation face in providing services?

Tea Break (15 mins)

Discussion Theme 3 – How do people seek advice (approx. 30 mins)

This discussion explores how you think people in [insert case-study area] mainly seek help with social welfare problems, which organisations would they approach and through what channels (in-person, online etc)? How do you think people's approaches to seeking help differ depending on their characteristics, including where they live, e.g., in town or more rural areas? Do community members perceptions as to what services are provided differ from practitioners' perceptions and why you think that might be?

Note for notetaker & facilitator - characteristics can also include age, ethnicity, disability, language, we're interested in knowing what barriers people might face in seeking advice given their characteristics, and what advice providers could do to lessen those barriers.

Discussion Theme 4 – Next steps and working with communities (approx. 15 mins) (in plenary)

Here, we close the workshop after discussing next steps of our research project.

Notes for notetakers & facilitators: things to cover (in plenary) can include:

1. Are you aware of any other formal/informal organisations who provide of social welfare legal/rights advice services in [insert case-study area] that are not here today, if so, who are they?
2. Do you think they would be interested in participating in a potential second workshop similar to this?
3. How best can we reach out/contact them?
4. How best do you think we could approach citizens who have sought/seek social welfare legal/rights advice?
5. How best do you think we can approach/find/engage with citizens who don't seek advice even though they are likely to need it?

## II. Interview Questions Full Text

### Introduction

This research project is about problems people might face relating to their welfare which includes things like benefits, debt, housing, employment, immigration, public services like health and education and facing discrimination based on their characteristics such as age or ethnicity. The aim is to make it easier for people to access help and advice when they experience problems like these, and to publish reports and other resources that will make a difference to communities.

The aim of our conversation today is to map out how your connections with friends, family, and the community affect what you do to look for advice when you have a problem; how easy it is for you to get help in the community and what that experience is like.

Everything you say will be treated as anonymous and nothing will be written or said in reporting on the results that could identify you. The researchers may use quotes from this interview in reports to help make findings feel more real, but will be very careful to ensure these quotes are completely anonymous and cannot be traced back to you or anyone you know. You can skip any questions you would prefer not to answer.

This conversation will take up to about one hour. I have £20 in vouchers to offer you for taking part. I also have a leaflet to leave with you that explains the project and which has information about some services in your community. This also has contact details for the project, explains more about how your privacy is protected and how you can withdraw from the project if you wish to. Have you got any questions for me?

---

### Q1. Informed Consent

If you are happy to continue.

Based on what's just been explained to you, are you happy to carry on and participate in the research

Yes

No

---

### About you

Can we start by getting to know a bit more about you and your circumstances.

Q2. What was your age at your last birthday?

Q3. In which country were you born?

Drop-down list adapted to most common countries of birth in each case-study area, includes “other, please specify” option and “prefer not to say”.

---

Q3a (if Q3 is other). About you

Please specify where you were born?

Q3b (if Q3 is other). About you

Since you were born abroad. How old were you when you first came to the United Kingdom to live for 6 months or more – even if you have spent time abroad since?

---

Q4. About you

A few more questions

What languages do you mainly speak at home?

Adapted to the main languages spoken in the case-study area with “other, please specify” option and “prefer not to say”.

Q4a (if Q4 is or includes other). Tell us about you?

A few more questions

What other languages do you speak at home?

---

Q5. About you

Using the Internet

Q5a. How confident do you feel using the internet to search for help and advice, where 0 means not at all confident and 10 means very confident?

Q5b. How confident do you feel filling in online application forms, such as applications for benefits or other entitlements, where 0 means not at all confident and 10 means very confident?

---

Q6. About you

A few more questions

For how long have you lived in [insert case-study area]?

- a. Less than a year
- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-4 years
- d. 5-9 years
- e. 10-19 years
- f. 20 or more years
- g. I don't live in [insert case-study area]
- h. Prefer not to say

Q6a & b if Q6 is I don't live in

About you

A few more questions

Q6a. Whereabouts do you live?

Q6b. How long have you lived there?

- a. Less than a year
  - b. 1-2 years
  - c. 3-4 years
  - d. 5-9 years
  - e. 10-19 years
  - f. 20 or more years
- 

Q7. Your community

Help in the community

To what extent do you agree with this statement: People in this community are willing to help each other? Where 0 means completely disagree and 10 means completely agree.

---

Q8. About you

A few more questions

What is your housing situation?

- a. Own it outright
- b. Buying it with help of a mortgage or loan

- c. Rent from public housing or other community or social housing
- d. Rent from a private landlord
- e. Living rent free
- f. Other
- g. Prefer not to say

Q8a if Q8 is other

Please explain your accommodation?

---

Q9. About you

Do you live alone?

Yes

No

---

Q10 if Q9 is No

About you

A few more questions

Q10a. How many people aged 18 or over live in your household?

Q10b. How many people aged under 18 live in your household?

---

Social Network Questions

The next set of questions are about the people and organisations you speak to, this helps you to see what something called your 'social network' looks like. Understanding people's social networks makes it easier to make sure help and advice are given where and when such is most needed. The questions are about who you speak to regularly and who you think helps with problems in your community. Together we will draw a map of what your connections with other people look like. When we publish the research, we won't show any pictures of any person's map (so it won't be possible to identify you or your friends, family etc), but we will show some general maps that have been made based on what the maps of people in your community (and the other communities we are working with) look like.

---

Q11. Who do you speak to (including text, WhatsApp etc) regularly? Includes people you live with.



Q12. Aside from those people who you have just mentioned, are there any other people you speak to when wanting to find out what's going on in your community?

Q13. Aside from those people already mentioned, is there anyone else who helps people with problems in your community?

---

#### About your community

For each person you named, please answer these questions about them. You can also go back and add more people.

For people mentioned in Q11-13.

How do you know this person, check all that apply

- a. Your family member
- b. Your friend
- c. Your acquaintance
- d. Your neighbour
- e. Another person living locally
- f. Your work colleague (current or former)
- g. A person of faith / spirituality
- h. Local councillor
- i. A person that provides you with support or a service
- j. A person you provide with support or a service
- k. Other

If you checked "provides you with support or a service", could you check any that apply?

- a. Your care worker
- b. An advice worker
- c. A local community worker/community navigator
- d. Your Universal Credit work coach
- e. Someone that provides a service to you locally, e.g., postman, shop assistant, librarian, GP

If you checked "other", could you please describe how you know them?

---

Q14. With you at the centre of the circles, can you arrange everyone in order of how close you are to them, and also how close they are to each other?

Q15. Now, if two people know each other, can you draw a line between them? Do this by clicking on each person in turn. You can also remove a line by clicking on each person again.

Q16. Which organisations or services in your community are you aware of that help people with their problems?

---

## Problems

Q17. The next few questions are about the problems people experience. Understanding more about the types of problems people in this community experience helps to better target advice services to particular problems and to the people facing them. Have you yourself experienced any of the following problems within the last two years?

- a. Problem with state benefits, e.g., universal credit, housing benefit, personal independence payments, or pension credit.
- b. Problem with money or debts, e.g., not being able to pay Council Tax or energy bills or being harassed for money you owe.
- c. Problem with your housing situation, e.g., getting repairs done, being asked to leave for no reason, not being able to access social (council) housing fit for your needs, or being at risk of homelessness.
- d. Problem with employment, e.g., being unfairly sacked or made redundant, problems with your pay or work environment.
- e. Problem with citizenship or residency, or other immigration issues.
- f. Problem with access to health and social care services, including physical and mental health, and services for drug and alcohol problems.
- g. Problem being discriminated against based on your characteristics like age, gender or ethnicity.

Q17a. Are there any other problems that you'd like to mention?

---

## Permission for Audio Recording

Q18. Can we now talk about one of the problems you have experienced? Would you be happy if the rest of our conversation is audio recorded, as it would be great if you can explain the problem in your own words, and recording will help me be sure the information collected properly reflects your experience. The recording will be typed-up. Once it has been typed-up, it will be deleted, and the typed-up version will also be deleted within one year after our project has finished (in July 2025). I'd like to reassure you that all the law and rules about your data privacy are being followed, and you can read more information about this on the leaflet.

Based on what I've just told you, are you happy for me to audio record the rest of our conversation today?

Yes  
No

---

Start the recording now using the Dictaphone and begin by stating for the recording: “This interview is Case ID... (state full Case ID)”.

Remember if not audio recording to ensure you take notes in your notebook.

---

Story of a Problem

Q19. A problem you have experienced

Thinking about the kind of problems you have had, could you pick one and explain what that problem was about?

---

Q20. Who, if anyone, in your network did you share this problem with? If no one, why was that?

---

Q21. Are there any other people not already mentioned that you shared this problem with? They don't need to be people living/working locally, or people you speak to regularly.

How do you know this person, check all that apply

- a. Your family member
- b. Your friend
- c. Your acquaintance
- d. Your neighbour
- e. Another person living locally
- f. Your work colleague (current or former)
- g. A person of faith / spirituality
- h. Local councillor
- i. A person that provides you with support or a service
- j. A person you provide with support or a service
- k. Other

If you checked “provides you with support or a service”, could you check any that apply?

- a. Your care worker
- b. An advice worker
- c. A local community worker/community navigator
- d. Your Universal Credit work coach

- e. Someone that provides a service to you locally, e.g., postman, shop assistant, librarian, GP

If you checked “other”, could you please describe how you know them?

Please add the new people to your network

Please add lines between people who know each other

---

Q22. Were any of the people you shared the problem with able to help you, and if so how?

---

Q23. When facing this problem, which organisations or services in this network, if any, did you contact for help or advice?

---

Q24. For each of the organisations/services you contacted for help or advice with this problem can you tell me how you contacted them?

- a. In person/face-to-face
- b. By telephone
- c. By email
- d. Completed an online form
- e. Other

If you selected “other” can you please explain?

---

Q25. Are there any other organisation or services not already mentioned that you contacted about this problem? (e.g., national telephone lines, websites, forums, lawyers)

How did you contact them?

- a. In person/face-to-face
- b. By telephone
- c. By email
- d. Completed an online form
- e. Other

If you selected “other” can you please explain?

---

Q26. For each of the organisations/services contacted, can you tell me what help or advice, if any, you got from them?

---

Q27. Did you face any particular challenges or barriers in getting help or advice with this problem, and if so can you describe these challenges or barriers? (E.g., time, complexity, cost, public transport, location, language barriers)

---

Q28. Has the problem now been resolved?

Yes

No

Other

If you selected “other” can you please explain?

---

Q29. What, if anything, would have made it easier for you to get the help or advice you needed to resolve this problem?

---

#### Final Questions

Thank you very much again for talking to me today. To finish up I have a few more quick questions to confirm that a range of people have participated in the research/ these may be considered sensitive. Your responses will, of course, remain confidential, but you can choose not to answer if you prefer.

Q30. How would you describe your ethnic group? Check all that apply.

Asian or Asian British

- a. Indian
- b. Pakistani
- c. Bangladeshi
- d. Chinese
- e. Any other Asian background

Black, Black British, Caribbean or African

- a. Caribbean
- b. African
- c. Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

- a. White and Black Caribbean
- b. White and Black African
- c. White and Asian
- d. Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background

White

- a. English
- b. Welsh
- c. Scottish
- d. Northern Irish
- e. British
- f. Irish
- g. Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- h. Roma
- i. Any other White background
- j. Prefer not to Say

Q31. How would you describe your gender?

- a. Man or male
- b. Woman or female
- c. Non-binary
- d. Another term
- e. Prefer not to say

Benefits, Employment, Health and Education

More about you

Q32. Do you receive any state benefits because of low or no income? For example, universal credit, housing benefit, employment support allowance or pension credit.

Yes  
No

Q33. Which if the following best describes your circumstances?

- a. Working full-time (37 or more hours per week)
- b. Working part-time
- c. Working occasionally
- d. Not working and in education
- e. Not working and looking for work
- f. Not working due to health or disability
- g. Retired
- h. Not working in formal employment, but looking after the home, children or having other caring responsibilities
- i. Other (please specify)
- j. Prefer not to say

Q34. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- a. No formal educational qualifications

- b. Completed GCSEs (or equivalent)
- c. Completed post-16 education (e.g., A Levels, BTEC)
- d. Completed an undergraduate degree
- e. Completed a postgraduate degree
- f. Prefer not to say

Q35. Do you have any long-term health condition, impairment or disability that restricts you in your everyday activities, and has lasted or is likely to last, for 12 months or more?

Yes

No

Q36. Wellbeing

Next, I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".

- a. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- b. Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- c. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- d. On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Finished

Thank you again for taking part in this research. Here is a leaflet which gives you information about our project and also gives information about some organisations and services in your community that you can turn to for help. It explains how you can contact the research team and more about your data privacy. I have £20 in vouchers to offer you for your reasonable expense of taking part, reasonable amounts like this would not normally impact your tax and benefits, but I cannot give you specific advice on your particular situation. The research team will be coming back to [insert case-study area] to present and discuss the findings of the project and you can also find updates on the project website (web address and contact details are on the leaflet).



## Tables One and Two: Interviewee characteristics

Table 1: Gender, age, ethnicity, language, benefits & health conditions					
	Deeplish	Bryngwran	Dartmouth	Hackney Older	Hackney Younger
Total number of interviewees	52	39	49	42	9
Gender	32 (61%) female / 20 (39%) male	64% female / 36% male	71% female / 27% male	90% female / 10% male	6 (67%) female / 3 (33%) male
Age range	21-85	20-89	19-89	34-95	18-28
Average Age	58	52	47	72	22
Born outside the UK	48 (92%)	1	4 (8%)	37 (88%)	2 (22%)
Ethnicity	46 (90%) Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	21 (54%) White Welsh; 10 (26%) White English; 7 (18%) White British	28 (57%) White English; 13 (27%) White British; 3 (6%) White English & British	27 (64%) Black African; 11 (26%) Black Caribbean; 3 (7%) White: English or British	3 (33%) Black African; 4 (44%) Black Caribbean; 3 (33%) other ethnicities
Speak a language other than English at home	42 (81%)	20 (51%) speak mainly Welsh at home; 5 (13%) speak a mixture of Welsh and English	0	35 (83%)	1
Receiving state benefit due to low or no income	42 (81%)	11 (28%)	34 (69%)	30 (71%)	4 (44%)
Long-term health condition, impairment or disability	42 (81%)	11 (28%)	26 (53%)	26 (62%)	3 (33%)

<b>Table 2: Housing, employment and education</b>					
	Deeplish	Bryngwran	Dartmouth	Hackney Older	Hackney Younger
<b>Housing</b>					
Own home no mortgage	19 (37%)	15 (38%)	4 (8%)	6 (14%)	0
Own home with mortgage	9 (17%)	12 (31%)	2 (4%)	2 (5%)	0
Social renting	11 (21%)	3 (8%)	37 (76%)	71%	7 (78%)
Private renting	10 (19%)	3 (8%)	2 (4%)	1	0
Live alone	9 (17%)	10 (26%)	20 (41%)	27 (64%)	
<b>Employment</b>					
Working full-time	6 (12%)	16 (41%)	6 (12%)	0	3 (33%)
Working part-time	5 (10%)	10 (26%)	8 (16%)	3 (7%)	1
Not working & caring in the home	2 (4%)	1	7 (14%)	1	
Not working due to health	18 (34%)	4 (10%)	17 (35%)	2	1
Retired	18 (34%)	8 (21%)	6 (12%)	35 (83%)	
Not working & looking for work	1	0	1	1	2 (22%)
Not working & in education	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Education</b>					
No formal qualifications	24 (46%)	5 (13%)	8 (17%)	10 (24%)	0
GCSE or equivalent	10 (19%)	9 (23%)	14 (29%)	13 (31%)	1
A level or equivalent	7 (13%)	16 (41%)	16 (33%)	14 (33%)	4 (44%)
Degree level	9 (17%)	9 (24%)	10 (20%)	4 (10%)	4 (44%)