

A photograph of a forest stream with mossy rocks and trees. The stream flows over a series of large, moss-covered rocks. The surrounding forest is dense with green foliage and trees. The water is clear and reflects the surrounding greenery.

Meeting

Mapping

Moving

Ballymena Recovering

*“It was a terrible night
watching on TikTok
our pupils’ houses
being set alight.”*



*“I refuse to let 2025
define us. I believe in
healing, recovery, growth,
opportunity - it’s a
new chapter.”*

*...and what could
this recovery
look like?*

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This report represents something important: the words of people who chose to sit in the same room and speak their truths about what happened in Ballymena in June 2025.

The public disorder that erupted in Ballymena and other areas of Mid and East Antrim Borough in June 2025 was not a surprise to everyone - many in the community had seen warning signs building for years.

But no warning would have been enough to prevent the fear, trauma and upheaval that followed, or the profound sense of loss felt by so many – those who fled, those who stayed, and those who tried to hold things together when the town was at its most fragile.

The Meet, Map, Move sessions at Corrymeela imagined and hosted by Radius Housing Association and facilitated by the Rural Community Network brought together community members, statutory agencies, and frontline workers to do three things: meet honestly, map the situation clearly, and begin to move toward recovery together.

It took courage to name difficult things.

This report seeks to reflect that courage by setting out what was heard, what it means, and what could happen next.

It has been collated by Involve, the public participation charity, with contributions from all those who participated in the sessions.

It is offered not as a definitive account, but as a contribution to the slow rebuilding and recovery process that has been quietly taking place over this last year.

The images of water, rivers and landscapes throughout this report speak to the River Braid that flows through Ballymena, connecting people and land, flowing then into Lough Neagh which is itself on a journey of recovery.



Context

There was significant civil unrest in Ballymena and other areas in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in June 2025.

This was triggered by an alleged serious sexual assault in Ballymena of a teenage girl.

On Monday 9 June, two teenage boys appeared at Coleraine Magistrates Court charged with the assault.

The boys, appearing via video link from a juvenile detention centre in Bangor, Co. Down, addressed the court through a Romanian interpreter. They denied the charges.

The family of the girl led a peaceful vigil on the evening of 9 June 2025 in Ballymena.

Throughout the course of the evening, the situation changed and properties in the Clonavon Terrace area were attacked – an area with a high concentration of Roma people.

This led to a number of days and nights of attacks against the Roma community and other minoritised groups.

In a report published by the Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ, 2025) it notes:

“The family of the alleged victim said that they were “mortified” by the ensuing violence and asked for the PSNI Chief Constable to make a plea for it to end. The chairman of the Police Federation stated that the PSNI “prevented a pogrom with consequences too painful to contemplate” during its attempts “to quell hate-filled violence” in Ballymena when houses containing Roma families were systematically attacked.”

Harryville Primary School saw its roll drop from 235 pupils on the Monday of the riots to 120 on the Tuesday.

Forty-one pupils never returned.

*“Clonavon was like
a war scene.”*



The Inter Ethnic Forum community consultation, which conducted in-depth interviews with adults from Bulgarian Roma, Romanian Roma, Filipino, Indian, Pakistani and Romanian communities, provides vital testimony about the lives that were disrupted.

Before June 2025, respondents described feeling settled in Ballymena, with established routines around work, school and social connections.

This was not a community on the margins - it was a community that had built lives.

This picture matters.

The events of June 2025 did not disrupt a precarious or transient population - they destroyed the settled lives of people who had made Ballymena their home.

“We felt comfortable and at home here.”

“Our children were very happy and felt well supported in their school.”

“The fear on the faces of the family I took from their house on Wednesday night. Two adults, four kids.”

The events did not emerge from nowhere.

Residents and community workers had been raising concerns about housing conditions, demographic change, social pressures and the absence of effective statutory responses for years.

When an alleged sexual assault sparked a protest, outside agitators and social media combined to turn a community's pain into something much more destructive.

Ballymena now faces the challenge and the opportunity of recovery: not simply returning to what existed before, but building something better - a town where all residents feel safe, heard and valued.

“Life was normal. We had no issues.”

“We had steady jobs and we had friends nearby.”



Writing this Report

Radius Housing Association convened a half-day session and then a residential at Corrymeela, in January and then April 2026 as part of Northern Ireland Housing Executive's 'Housing for All' Shared Housing Programme .

These sessions brought together a wide range of participants including:

- Community leaders and residents from South Ballymena and the wider Ballymena area
- Representatives of minoritised communities
- Frontline workers and voluntary sector organisations
- Statutory agencies including the NI Housing Executive (NIHE), Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, the Police Service of NI (PSNI), Northern Health & Social Care Trust (NHSCT) and local schools

The Rural Community Network facilitated these sessions with the residential in April including contributions from the Carson Project, Harryville PS, the Inter Ethnic Forum, Bytes Project, For Your Freedom and Ours, Act Now and Involve.

The sessions were designed to explore contributing factors, system failures, who felt unheard, what has helped since the riots, and strengths the community can build on.

At the residential participants also completed a Wall of Intentionality, recording individual commitments to change.

Notes from flip charts, plenary discussions and breakout groups were captured and form the basis of this report.

The quotes in the report are from participants who attended the sessions.

A youth survey was completed by 18 young people working with the Bytes Project.

Their views are presented as a distinct thread throughout the report, recognising that young people were witnesses, participants and victims in the events, and that their perspective is essential to any credible recovery process.

The findings from the community consultation carried out by the Inter Ethnic Forum are also integrated throughout this report and presented in full where relevant.

In addition, the contributions from representatives from South Ballymena including the Carson Project and Harryville PS speak to the lived experiences of demographic change.

The process was designed to be honest and safe.

Many participants noted that it took courage to name difficult things:

- the racism that was visible in the riots;
- the genuine grievances of long-term residents that had been dismissed;
- the failures of statutory agencies to act on early warnings;
- and the ongoing trauma of those who were displaced.

This report aims to honour that honesty.

It has been written with the participants offering feedback, commentary and content.

It also sits within an ecosystem of other important reports relating to these issues including “Beyond the Spark II - Crisis and Continuity” by Dr Colm Walsh, “Ballymena South, From Community Voice to Action” by the Ballymena South Community Forum and the report published by the Committee for the Administration of Justice “Inciting a Pogrom? Social Media and the Racist Disorder in Ballymena and beyond during summer 2025.”

Finally, we want to acknowledge that a significant missing voice from the residents and therefore this report are the voices of Roma and other minoritised families and children who have left Ballymena and others who are still living with the trauma.

The Inter Ethnic Forum consultation makes the scale of this absence concrete.

Of the respondents surveyed following the riots:

- 24% remained in Ballymena
- 44% relocated to another part of Northern Ireland
- 26% returned to their home country
- 6% moved to another country entirely

Of those who left, 90% indicated they do not plan to return to Ballymena.

This is the demographic reality that any recovery process must confront: that some of the communities most harmed are largely no longer present in the town.

“Why would we come back to somewhere that we are not welcome. All we wanted was to work and provide a good life for our families.”

“On many days, it felt like locals were outnumbered ten to one; we felt like strangers in our own streets.”



What people said *contributing factors*

Workshop participants were asked what factors contributed to the situation in Ballymena.

Five interconnected themes emerged.

1. Housing Conditions and Private Landlord Failures

The condition of private rented housing in Harryville and Clonavon was identified as a central, long-standing grievance.

Participants described:

- A high proportion of properties owned by absentee landlords with little accountability
- Overcrowding, with multiple families in single terrace houses
- Visible environmental decline – rubbish, rats, poorly maintained yards and alleyways
- Landlords profiting from a system that offered little enforcement or inspection
- The Housing Executive facing continuing pressure to house people but with limited powers to regulate private landlords

“The streets can’t just be for landlords.”

One resident described remortgaging his own home to buy the house next door, simply to protect his family from the conditions a bad landlord might create.

That individual act of self-protection speaks to a systemic failure: residents should not need to buy properties to secure their own basic living environment.

“Migrants coming with hope in their heart to make a better life.”

*“The economy needs workers and we got families.
Firms have been let off the hook in relation to
supporting their new workers to integrate.”*

2. Demographic Change and Support

The Harryville and Clonavon areas have experienced significant demographic change over the last number of years, with a rapid increase in the number of migrant workers and their families - particularly Roma communities.

According to the 2021 census, a significant number of Northern Ireland's 1,500-strong Roma population – 740 people, or almost half – lived in the town and nearby areas.

Workshop participants, including long-term residents of all backgrounds, identified that this change happened without an experience of adequate infrastructure, sufficient integration support or community preparation.

Whilst there has been support from the Council and the Policing Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) there is now important learning about how that funding is spent.

The Roma population in particular was described as arriving in conditions of significant vulnerability – many unable to read or write, speaking little English, and separated from broader support networks.

As one of Europe's largest ethnic minorities Roma people have historically faced difficulties such as limited access to quality education, integrating into the labour market, leading to further poverty and social exclusion, lack of quality healthcare, significant discrimination and poor living conditions.

Many employers have brought workers to the area but have taken little responsibility for their integration or welfare.

This was described as a failure of employer responsibility as much as a failure of statutory planning.

3. Social Media and Disinformation

The speed and ferocity of the disorder was significantly accelerated by social media, particularly TikTok.

Disinformation about specific incidents spread rapidly.

Accounts from outside Northern Ireland - including England and the Republic of Ireland – amplified narratives that inflamed tensions.

Participants noted that many of those who physically attended the riots were not from Ballymena at all.

The report published by the Committee for the Administration of Justice on the role of social media in the violence provides further evidence.

(‘Inciting a Pogrom?’ Social Media and the Racist Disorder in Ballymena and beyond during summer 2025 - Oct 2025)

“It was a terrible night watching on TikTok our pupils’ houses being set alight. I had never used TikTok before then – it’s not good when it’s your main source of news.”

4. Absence of Political Leadership

A recurring and strongly expressed theme was the failure of political leadership before, during and immediately after the riots.

Participants noted that aside from a noted few, very few elected representatives arrived during the crisis.

The civic and political leadership that should have been visible was largely absent.

Community members described feeling that their concerns had been dismissed or ignored for years by those in positions of authority, and that this contributed directly to the conditions in which disorder became possible.

“No elected representatives turned up. The only ‘civic leaders’ who came were the Presbyterian Ministers.”

5. Poverty, Deprivation and Unmet Need

Underlying much of the frustration that found expression in the violence was a broader experience of poverty, social deprivation and unmet need.

Participants shared that communities in South Ballymena had experienced long-term lack of investment and an experience of their concerns not being taken seriously.

The riots did not create this grievance; they were an expression of it.

“Not enough listening to the genuine concerns raised by the community.”

“People do stupid things when their backs are against the wall.”



What people said system gaps & failures

There were a range of specific failures in the systems and structures that should have responded earlier and more effectively.

System Failures Identified by Participants

- Enhancement of a community informed emergency planning system working alongside the PSNI, Council, Youth Service and other agencies to respond to civil disorder
- The Education Authority (EA) failed to provide guidance or support to Harryville PS during the crisis, leaving the school to make impossible decisions alone
- HMO licensing and building control mechanisms existed but there seemed to have been a mismatch between the powers the Council have and what the community expects.
- Families and residents had been sharing concerns with services for years; there was no mechanism to act on this community intelligence
- Young people's voices were largely absent from conversations about community tension
- Schools were left without adequate support during and after the crisis; trauma responses took months to begin
- No tension monitoring mechanism was in place to detect and respond to escalating community stress

The Inter Ethnic Forum consultation provides direct testimony about what system failure felt like from inside it.

Respondents described the terror of that night and the chaos that followed, with no clear pathway to safety and support arriving late or not at all for many families.

“Don’t know where they can go but they need out by 6.00 pm.”

The Education Authority’s response was described in stark terms: Harryville PS was told repeatedly that families needed to leave the building by 6 pm, but given no alternative.

The school ultimately paid for hotel accommodation from its own budget.

This is a damning indictment of institutional unpreparedness.

More broadly, participants noted a fundamental gap between decision-makers and frontline workers.

Accountability structures felt remote.

Systems that should join the dots, housing, education, health, employment, community safety, operated in silos that left nobody responsible for the whole picture.

“My school staff over those 2 weeks were dealing with things they should never have had to deal with.”

“We had to evacuate our property late at night, people stood and watched as we were taken from the building with our children crying out of fear but no one said a thing. It was horrible.”



“It was total chaos. Families trying to get their deposits back from landlords, trying to give their keys back, trying to get enough money to leave.”

What people said who felt unheard & unsupported

One of the most consistent themes across the sessions was the experience of feeling unheard.

This was not simply an emotional observation – it had direct consequences for what happened in June 2025.

Established Residents and Community Workers

- Long-term residents who raised concerns about housing conditions and were ignored
- Young people, who felt unsafe and whose views were not sought before the crisis erupted
- Frontline workers and community staff who passed warnings through systems that did not act
- Community leaders who had been raising issues for years and received no meaningful response. For example, large street gatherings, street fighting and intimidation

Minority Ethnic Communities

- Minority ethnic communities, particularly Roma families, whose experiences of targeting and intimidation preceded the riots
- Latvian, Polish, Bulgarian and Filipino residents who found themselves caught between communities
- Migrant women, who faced particular vulnerability and whose voices were largely absent
- The 'non-white faces' in a community whose diversity had not been met with adequate support

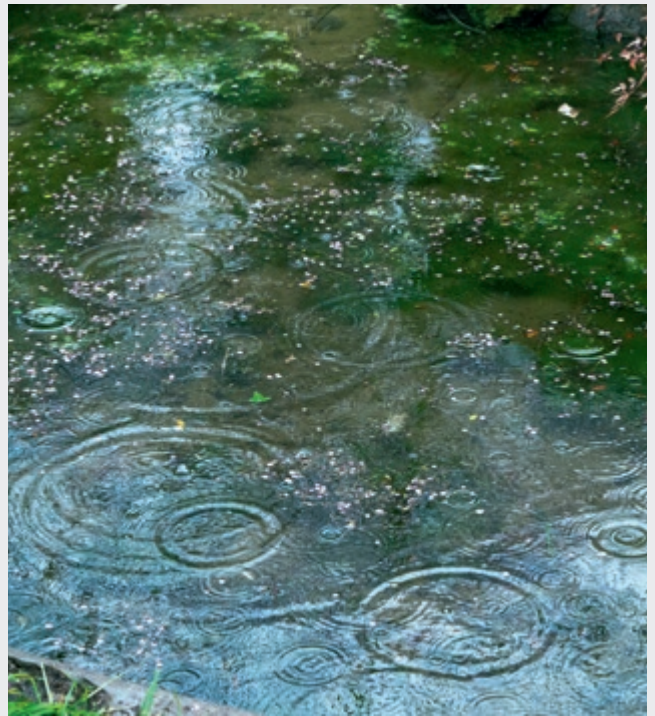
A particularly powerful note from the flip charts stated:

"Minority Communities – are their voices in the room?"

This question should continue to challenge the composition and processes of any recovery group.

Recovery cannot be planned for communities; it must be planned with them.

*"We saw it coming, we felt it
- community intelligence
needs heard."*



The lived experience account from Harryville residents shared at the residential described a community that had tried to integrate and support new arrivals – through churches, community groups and local projects – but that had been overwhelmed by the scale and pace of demographic change.

Residents who raised concerns felt their concerns were dismissed, and that dismissal created a vacuum that more destructive voices eventually filled.

*"Residents felt
abandoned."*

"Shortly after the riots, it almost appeared to have given permission for individuals to be openly racist to anyone who looked different. I felt unsafe going outdoors and experienced intimidation and racist comments."

What **young** people said

Eighteen young people working with the Bytes Project completed a survey about the riots and their aftermath.

Their voices are important, consistent and often more perceptive than adult commentary acknowledges.

What Young People Said Caused the Riots

- Tensions between groups in the community
- People feeling unheard
- Social media spreading misinformation
- A perceived failure of justice in relation to the alleged assault
- Influence from outside the Ballymena area

Young people were clear that what happened was wrong including for those who had genuine concerns.

“It made me feel scared in my own town.”

“It was unfair for some immigrants who didn’t do anything. Unfair for people to have to leave their home.”

The Inter Ethnic Forum consultation adds the perspective of children from minoritised families.

Many of these children are no longer in the town.

Respondents described keeping children home from school out of fear of attack, children still experiencing fear and nightmares months later, and parents actively teaching their children to be more careful about who they speak to - a loss of the ordinary trust and openness that childhood requires.

“We didn’t want to send our children to school, we kept them at home out of fear they would be attacked.”

“Our children want to go back to their school but we feel there is no future for us in NI.”

These children’s recovery needs are specific and acute.

They are processing not only the trauma of June 2025 but the additional trauma of displacement, lost friendships, lost schools and the loss of the only home many of them had ever known.

What Helped Young People

- Youth clubs and youth activities – cited by the majority of respondents as the single most helpful thing. This is corroborated by the Beyond the Spark report
- Talking to adults they trusted: parents, youth leaders, and some teachers
- Seeing friends and maintaining social connections
- Community support and organisations

Notably, several young people identified that schools did not want to talk about what had happened, while youth clubs provided the space to process it.

“I got my point across being able to talk in youth club. School didn’t allow me to talk.”

“The riots affected my friends. I had to take items belonging to my friends home to keep while they moved out of their house for safety. It made me really worried.”

This gap between formal education and youth work settings in creating safe processing spaces deserves attention.

What Young People Want for the Future

- Safe spaces to meet friends, including youth clubs and community spaces
- More activities and opportunities for young people
- People getting along better across different groups
- Better mental health and wellbeing support
- People being proud of their town
- Feeling safer in the community

“I would like for everyone to get on.”

“Was unfair that Ballymena people got all the blame when it wasn’t just us.”

Young people’s aspirations are straightforward and achievable.

They want safety, connection, opportunity and a town they can be proud of.

Any recovery process that does not centre young people’s voices and needs will be incomplete.

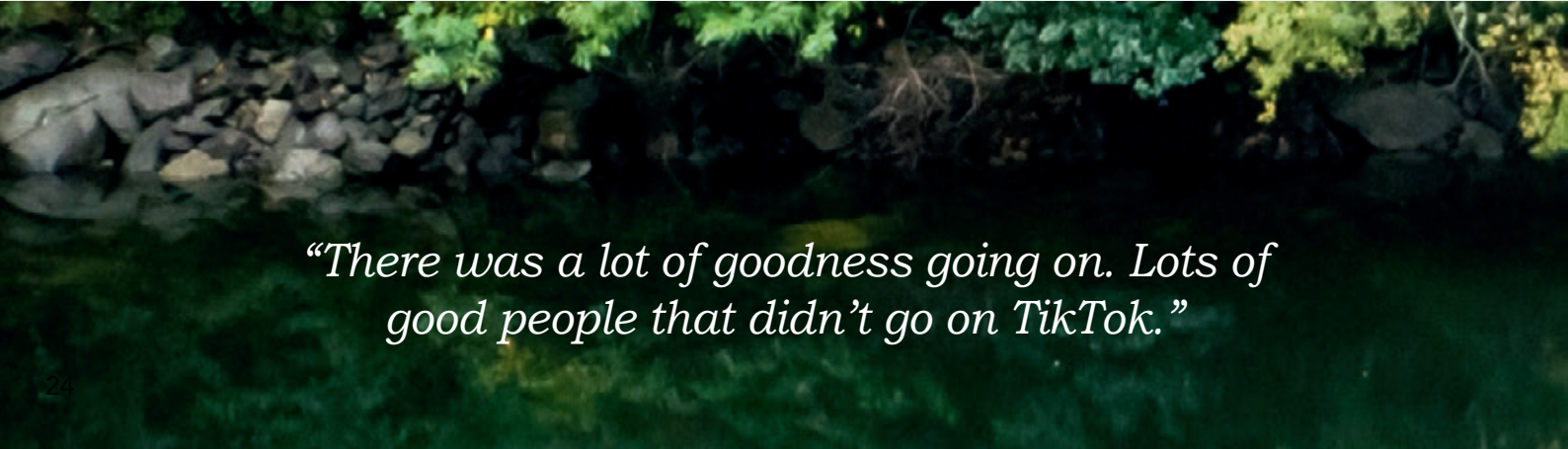


What people said has helped

Despite the severity of what happened, participants identified important, often quiet, threads of recovery since June 2025 and actions that have been helpful.

Actions That Made a Difference

- Neighbours helping protect, board up windows and inviting into their homes
- Environmental improvements in Clonavon: street cleaning, bin emptying and environmental health activity
- Arrest and prosecution of those involved in disorder: participants noted that visible consequences mattered
- Groups such as the Harryville and Clonavon Recovery and Regeneration Group and the Inter Ethnic Forum providing support and services
- Trauma counselling made available at Harryville Primary School
- The important leadership role of the PSNI
- NHSCT Public Health Nursing and social workers safeguarding children and vulnerable families in partnership with the local community
- Council resources released for property repairs
- Agencies identifying and supporting families in need
- The business community promoting positive messages about Ballymena
- Restorative conversations between perpetrators and victims



“There was a lot of goodness going on. Lots of good people that didn’t go on TikTok.”

The Inter Ethnic Forum consultation provides specific data on which organisations minority ethnic families turned to during and after the riots.

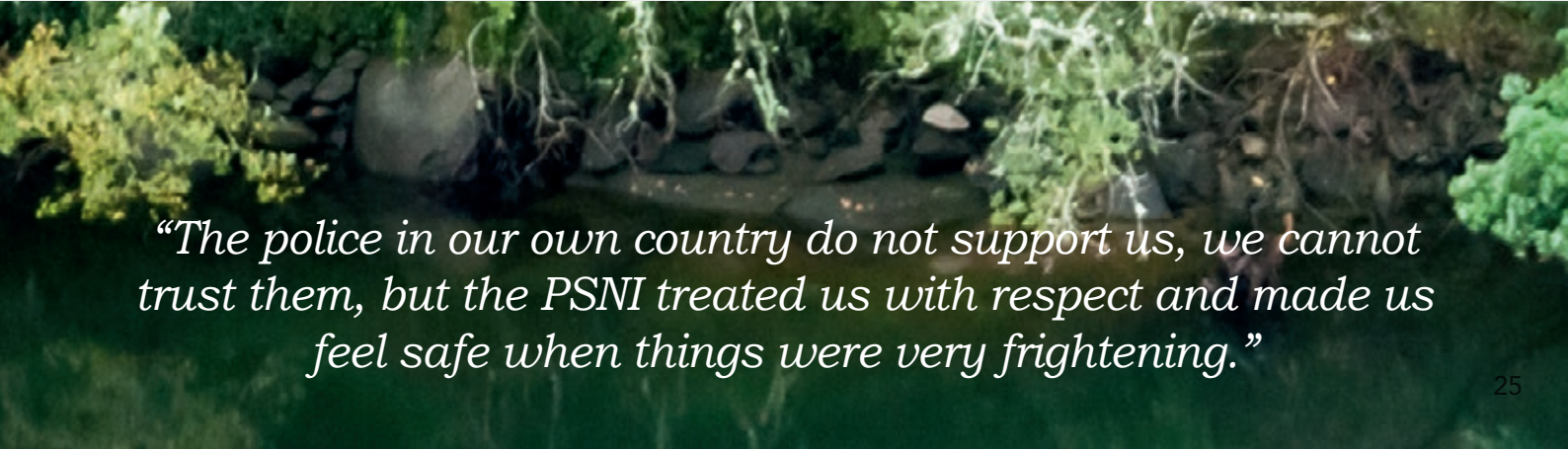
These figures illuminate both what worked and the gaps that remain.

- 90% received support from the Inter Ethnic Forum
- 80% received support from PSNI
- 40% received support from NI Fire and Rescue Service
- 35% received support from NI Housing Executive
- 25% received support from other organisations including Red Cross, local churches and schools, Victim Support NI, and local friends and neighbours

The PSNI received notably positive feedback, including from respondents who noted that their experience of police in their home countries had given them reason to distrust authorities - making the PSNI's response all the more significant.

The NHSCT Emergency Response Team and Social Work staff also played an integral role alongside the Council and the NIHE in ensuring the safety and protection of those adversely affected by the community tensions.

For example, the NHSCT Children and Young People's Service coordinated a multidisciplinary and multi-agency response to facilitate information sharing and develop a coordinated plan to provide advice, guidance, and safety planning for the local community and ethnic minority families.



“The police in our own country do not support us, we cannot trust them, but the PSNI treated us with respect and made us feel safe when things were very frightening.”

Relationships That Held

- Existing long-term relationships between community leaders, communities, landlords and business community
- School voices being heard and supported within communities
- Partnership working between NHSCT Public Health Nursing and Harryville PS
- New groups being established bringing different communities together such as 4womenandgirls group
- Working relationships with statutory bodies: Housing Executive, PSNI, NHSCT, Council, Churches
- New offers of help from outside the immediate area

Communication That Helped

Participants highlighted the importance of honest communication in their own words:

- People being prepared to talk about issues rather than avoid them
- Knowing how and who to reach out to
- Open and honest conversations without fear of blame or labelling
- Racism now being spoken about openly, opening the door for difficult conversations
- Improved multi-agency communication on what was needed to keep people safe
- Online monitoring to take down harmful posts
- People knowing how algorithms work and disrupting them

“Someone acknowledging my hurt.”

“Being able to have a conversation with no judgement.”

“Racism now being spoken about – this has opened the door for difficult conversations.”

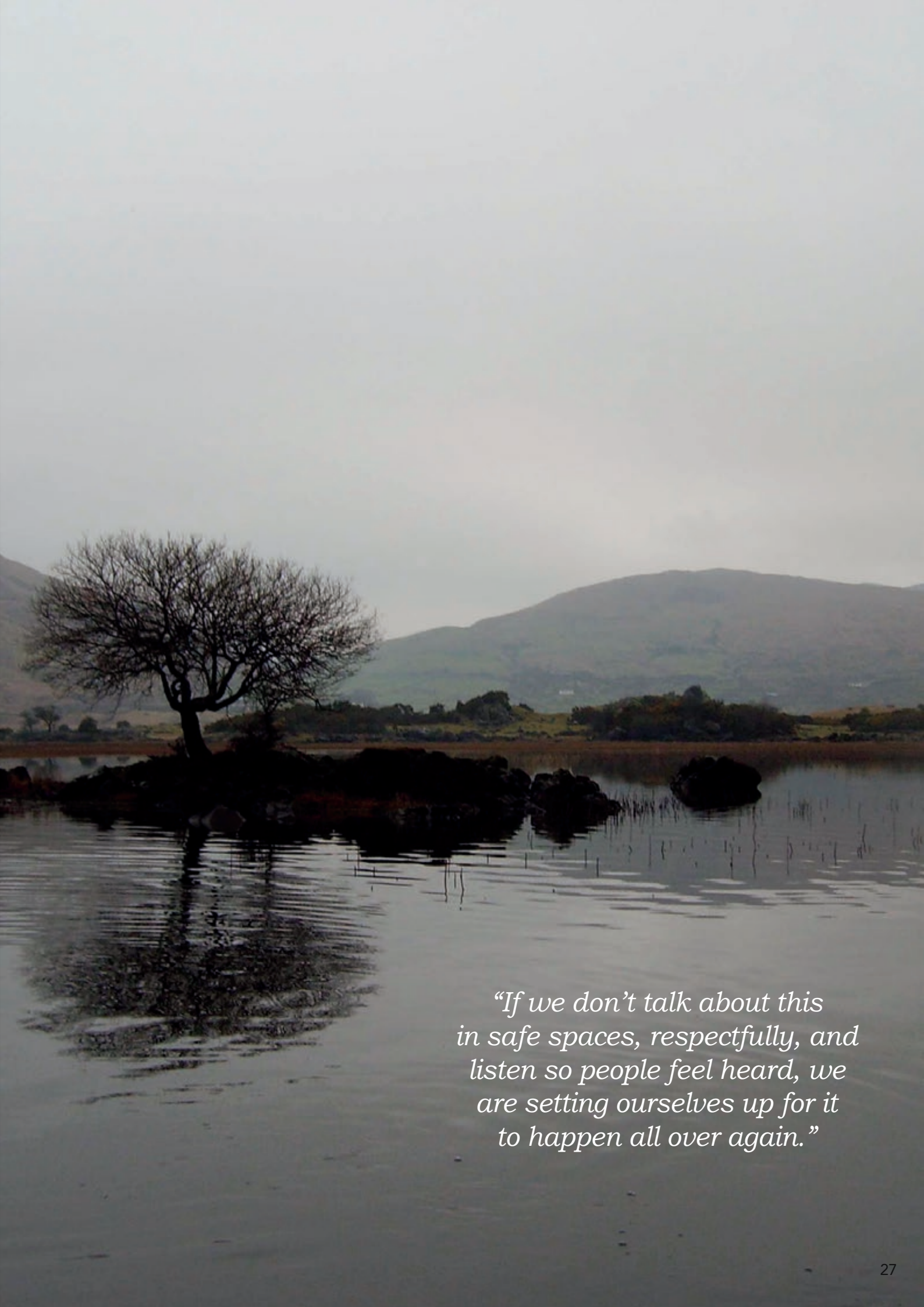
“The unsaid is now being said.”

“Open and honest conversations without fear of blame or labelling.”

“Frustration that it takes an awful event to bring out the best.”

A theme that ran through these observations was the value of ‘human connection’ – the basic act of one person acknowledging another’s hurt.

Participants noted that the worst events sometimes bring out the best in people, and that this quality is something the community can consciously nurture.



*“If we don’t talk about this
in safe spaces, respectfully, and
listen so people feel heard, we
are setting ourselves up for it
to happen all over again.”*

What people said strengths to build on

Participants identified significant existing strengths across Ballymena that provide a platform for recovery.

People and Networks

- Existing networks of community groups with knowledge, skills and experience
- Access to diverse, creative experience across communities
- A desire to create change and move forward
- Goodwill, resilience, respect and kindness visible in communities during the crisis
- Invested local business people committed to the town

Safe Spaces and Institutions

- Schools and colleges with experienced, committed staff
- Community venues that can serve as gathering places
- Existing Housing for All Programme and Neighbourhood Renewal frameworks
- Experience and knowledge of creating safe spaces for young people

The Recovery and Regeneration Infrastructure

- The Housing for All Advisory Group provides a multi-agency platform
- Partnership models exist between statutory, community and voluntary sectors
- Social media can be used constructively for myth-busting and positive messaging

“Say what needs to be said. Have the difficult conversations.”

Wall of Intentionality

“Tolerance and understanding being reciprocal.”

Wall of Intentionality

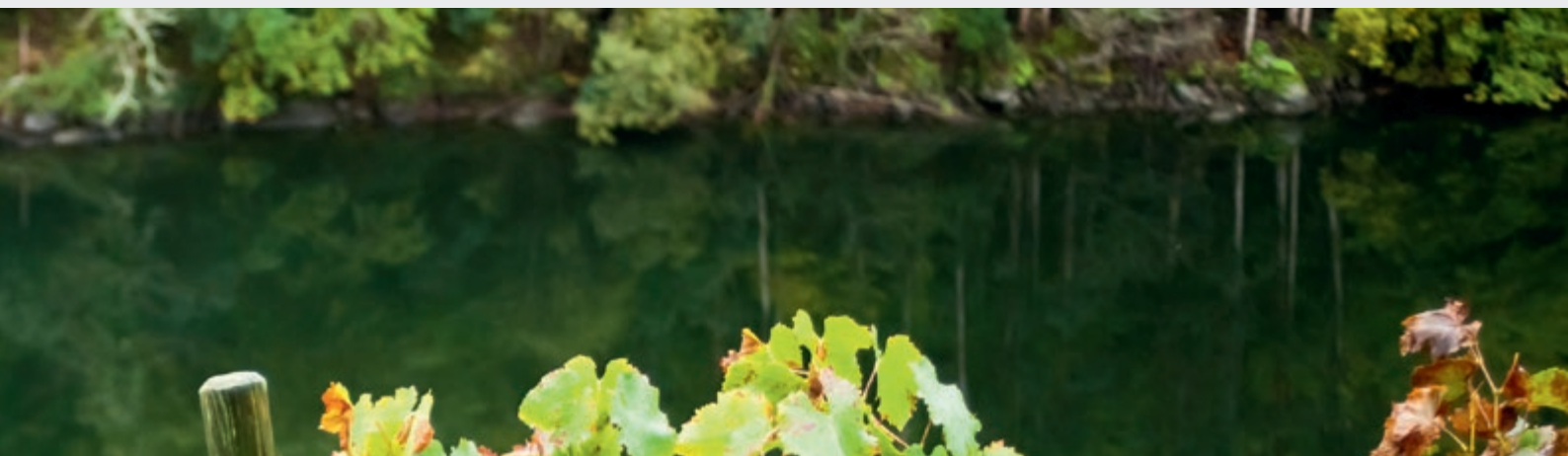
“Education, jobs, hope.”

Wall of Intentionality

“Hearing everyone’s voice.”

Wall of Intentionality

Participants suggested that an overarching frame for building on these strengths is ‘Bring People Together to Celebrate Ballymena’ using events like the town’s 400th Anniversary, to create opportunities for shared, inclusive celebrations.



Key Themes emerging

Unheard Voices

A pattern runs through the evidence: concerns were raised and not heard.

- Long-term residents raised housing and environmental concerns - dismissed
- Minority communities experienced escalating hostility – not adequately responded to
- Young people felt unsafe and angry - limited structured space to process this
- Community workers passed intelligence upward - no action

When people feel consistently unheard by legitimate structures, they find other outlets.

Recovery must create and sustain genuine listening mechanisms.

“We saw it coming, we felt it”

“If we don’t talk about this in safe spaces, respectfully, and listen so people feel heard, we are setting ourselves up for it to happen all over again.”

Accountability Must Be Real

Recovery requires that those responsible for failures, at every level, are held accountable and that systems change as a result.

This includes landlords who allowed properties to deteriorate; employers who brought workers into communities without supporting their integration; statutory agencies that had enforcement tools and did not use them; and political leaders who were absent when their communities needed them most.

Accountability without blame; change without defensiveness.

“We had to uproot our lives, leaving behind our jobs, taking our children from their school and friends and find somewhere to start again.”

Joined-Up Responsibility

No single agency or community body caused what happened, and no single body can fix it.

The evidence points repeatedly to the gap between good intentions in individual agencies and the absence of joined-up, whole-system responsibility.

Recovery requires a designated coordination function with real authority to join the dots across housing, education, community safety, health and employer engagement.

“Accumulation of small decisions over years that aren’t connected up. Who joins the dots?”

“In one house all that remained was a bible and a pencil case.”

Trauma Is Still Present

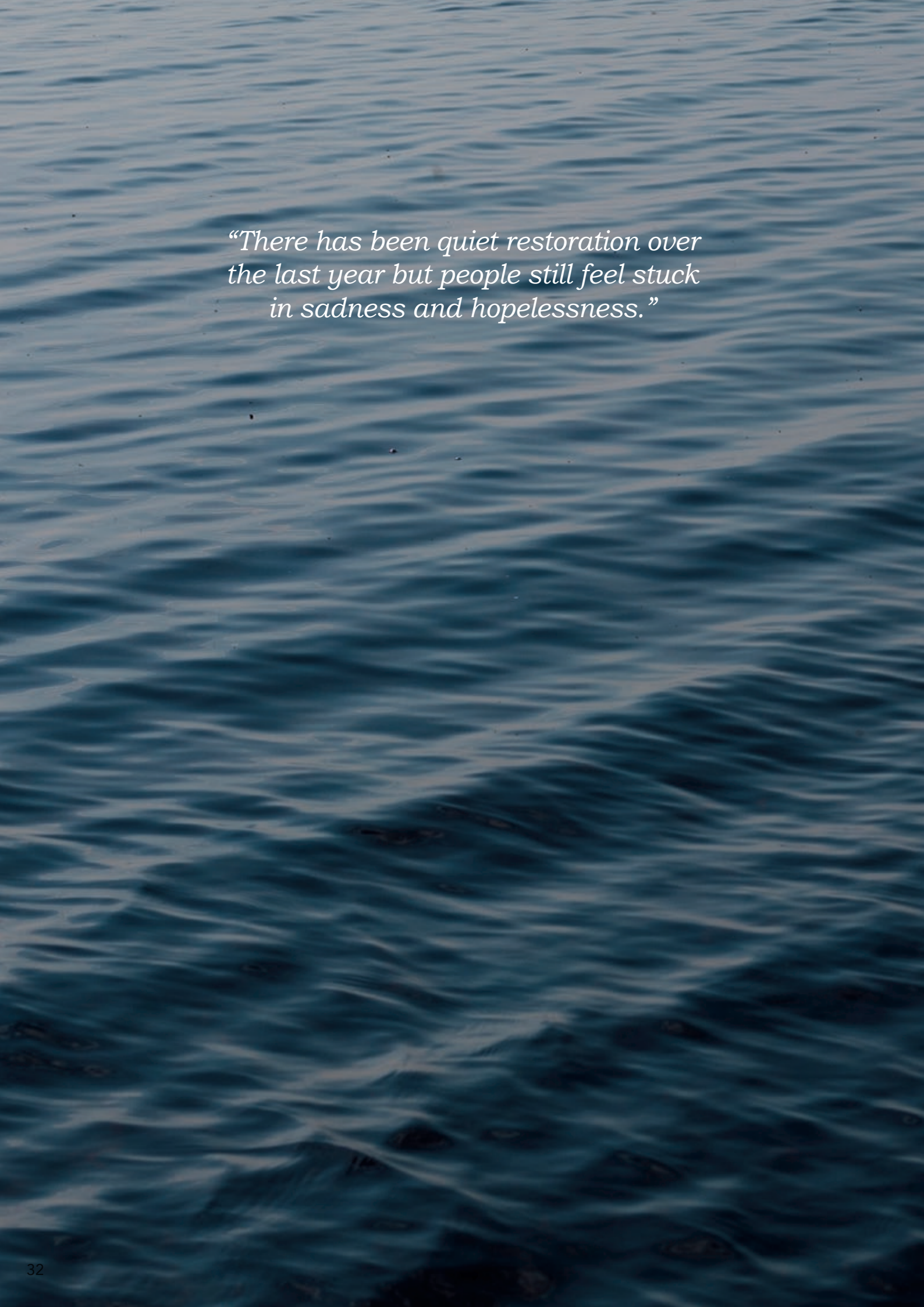
The events of June 2025 caused real trauma: to families who fled, to children who watched their friends disappear, to teachers who tried to hold everything together while watching the chaos on their phones, to community workers who made impossible decisions with significant personal risk, to staff in public bodies trying to deliver services.

That trauma is not resolved by time alone.

It requires active, sustained support.

Any recovery plan that does not explicitly address trauma, in individuals, families and the community itself, will be building on unstable ground.

“We never heard from 23 children ever again. 41 pupils in total never came back. Their belongings left in the classroom and not knowing what to do with them. Their names scribbled on the coat racks - do we let other children use them?”



*“There has been quiet restoration over
the last year but people still feel stuck
in sadness and hopelessness.”*

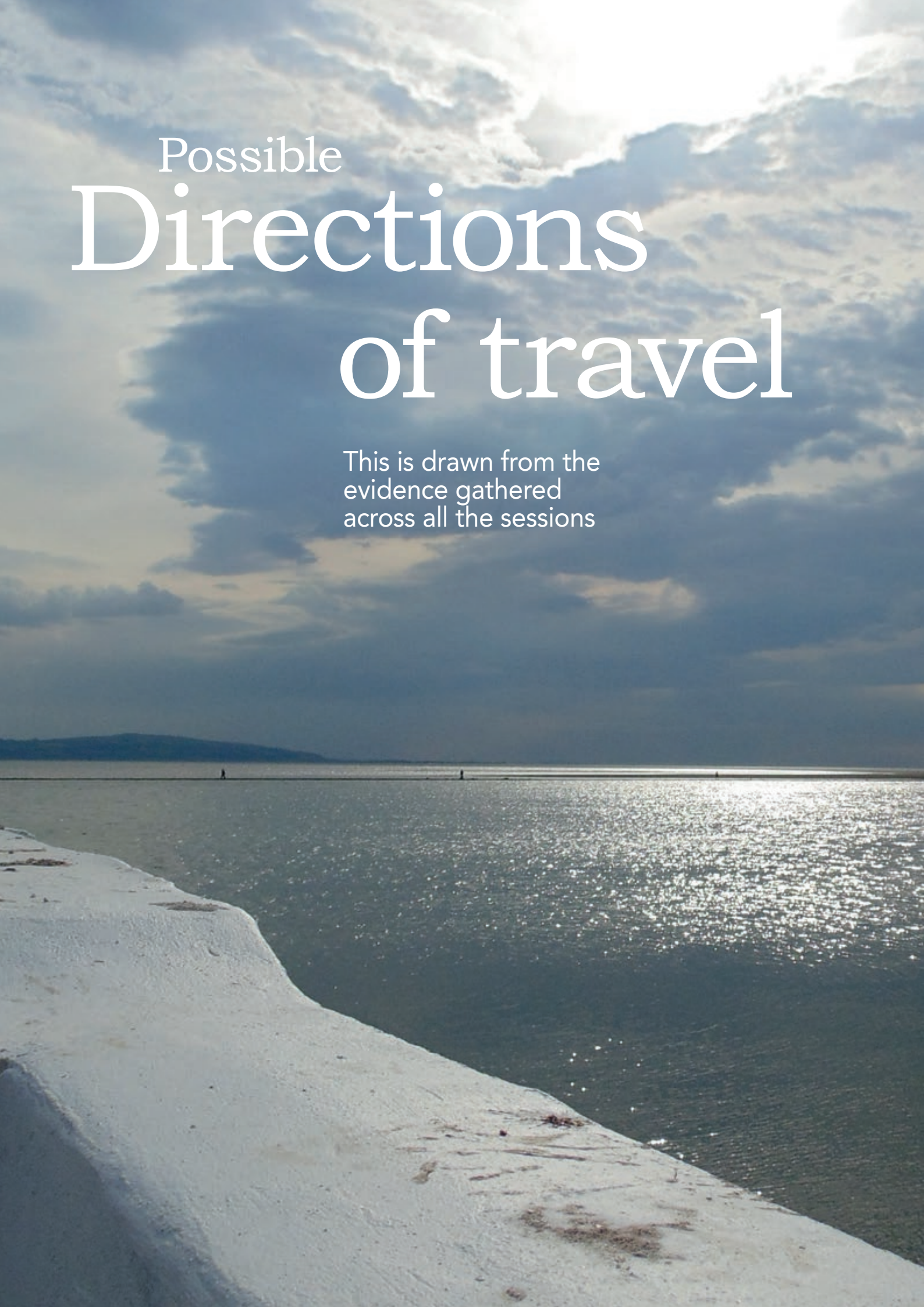
Recovery Is a Long Game

That quiet restoration is real and should be acknowledged.

Recovery from community trauma of this scale takes years, not months.

It requires sustained investment, consistent presence and the willingness to stay in difficult conversations long after the immediate crisis has passed.

Lucy Easthope, a disaster and emergency planning expert, speaks to recovery as a “faltering zigzag” marked by initial surges of heroism and social cohesion, followed by disillusionment, fatigue, and uneven reconstruction.



Possible Directions of travel

This is drawn from the
evidence gathered
across all the sessions

1. Develop a Shared Coordination and Recovery Function

The most urgent structural need is a designated coordination role led by the Council with responsibility for joining the dots across agencies and community bodies.

This should not be another advisory group, but a functioning coordination mechanism with a named individual responsible for driving action, monitoring progress and maintaining relationships across statutory and community sectors.

2. Implement Effective Tension Monitoring

A credible, community-rooted tension monitoring system should be established across the Borough.

This should draw on community intelligence - the 'quiet signals' that practitioners described - and connect to an agreed response pathway.

It must explicitly track escalating hostility against minoritised communities.

3. Reform Private Rental Sector Accountability

The Housing Executive, Council Building Control and the HMO licensing regime should be used actively and visibly to enforce standards in the private rental sector.

A landlord forum should be reinstated, with attendance expected rather than optional.

4. Develop a Comprehensive Communications Strategy

A coordinated communications approach should be developed covering: consistent positive messaging about Ballymena; myth-busting capacity; tackling disinformation on social media; protocols for who says what and when during periods of tension; and proactive engagement with media to ensure community voices are heard alongside official responses.

"Information resilience" is built on networks, not news-feeds.

This requires valuing and investing in networks of real-world messengers who can reach people without relying on the public communications crutch of social media.

5. Invest in Inter-Cultural Competence Across Systems

Inter-cultural competence training should be embedded across statutory agencies, schools, youth services and community organisations.

This includes understanding the specific circumstances of different minority and majority communities - their varying needs, cultures and starting points.

Courses should be built into agency induction programmes and staff development.

The focus should be on building genuine understanding.

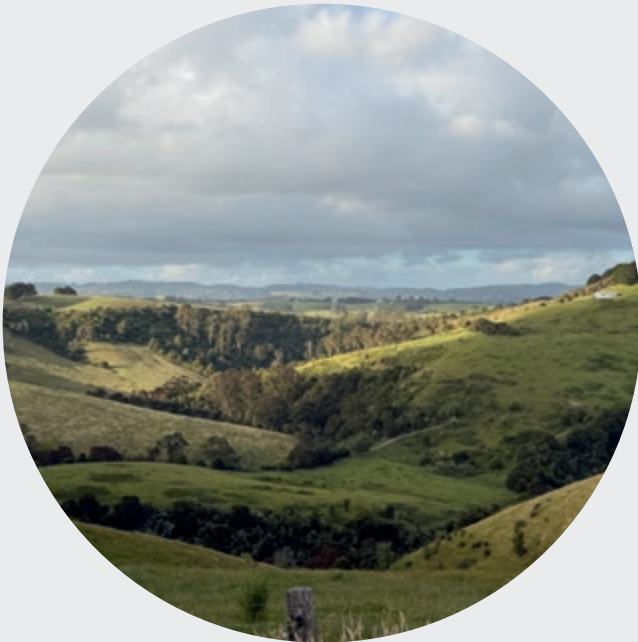
6. Centre and Resource Youth Voice

Young people's voices must be a structural feature of the recovery process, not a consultation add-on.

The youth survey demonstrates that young people have clear views and real needs.

Youth clubs and youth work settings should be resourced to continue providing safe processing spaces.

Schools should be supported to develop their own capacity to hold difficult conversations about community tension, identity and belonging in age-appropriate ways.



7. Ensure Minoritised Voices are Heard

Recovery processes must ensure that the people most directly affected - minoritised people from all backgrounds - have genuine representation and voice in planning and decision-making.

8. Enhancement of Community Informed Emergency & Resilience Planning

Greater community involvement and participation in civil contingency and emergency planning for community disorder should be developed.

This includes supporting early community preparation, stronger communications during the response stage and long term recovery in a public disorder emergency.

9. Commit to Sustained Engagement

Recovery will not happen in a single programme cycle.

There should be commitment to a minimum five year recovery framework, with regular review points, transparent reporting on progress, and a clear mechanism for community accountability.

This includes ensuring Councillors and elected representatives are regularly briefed and actively engaged with the recovery plan.

10. Require employer accountability for integration

Employers who recruit migrant workers into Ballymena and the wider Borough must be held to a clear standard of responsibility for the welfare and integration of those workers and their families.

The evidence from the sessions was unambiguous: firms have brought workers into the area and many have taken little or no responsibility for what happens to them once they arrive.

A formal Employer Charter should be developed through Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, in partnership with the Housing Executive and relevant statutory agencies and community bodies, setting out minimum expectations for employers in relation to housing quality, language support, access to services and community orientation for new arrivals.

11. Recognise and resource the role of faith communities and civil society

The evidence from Ballymena, and from similar situations in Oldham, Bradford and the 2024 UK disorders, points consistently to the same truth: when formal statutory structures fail or are absent, it is faith communities, community organisations and informal networks of relationship that hold people together.

This reality needs to be formally recognised in the recovery architecture - not as a token gesture, but as a structural commitment.

Faith communities and civil society organisations, should be included as named partners in the coordination and recovery function proposed in Recommendation 1, with dedicated resourcing to support their continued role.



12. Require visible, accountable democratic leadership

One of the sharpest and most repeated findings from the Corrymeela sessions was the failure of the majority of elected representatives - before, during and after the events of June 2025.

The courage of the handful of elected representatives that have stepped up was also noted.

Concerns raised for years, including demographic change and sustained investment in community infrastructure have felt unanswered.

During the crisis itself, political leaders felt largely absent.

The communities most harmed had the least access to political representation and the fewest channels through which their concerns could reach those with power to act.

Recovery must address this directly.

Elected representatives at every level - councillors, MLAs and MPs - should be required to participate actively in the recovery framework, with regular structured engagement with community members across all backgrounds.

Attendance and actions should be transparently reported.

More broadly, the democratic deficit identified by participants, the sense that formal channels for raising concerns produce no response, until frustration finds a destructive outlet, must be addressed through the creation of genuine, responsive mechanisms for community voice and participation.

This could include citizens' assemblies and juries, participatory budgeting, deliberative engagement in planning.

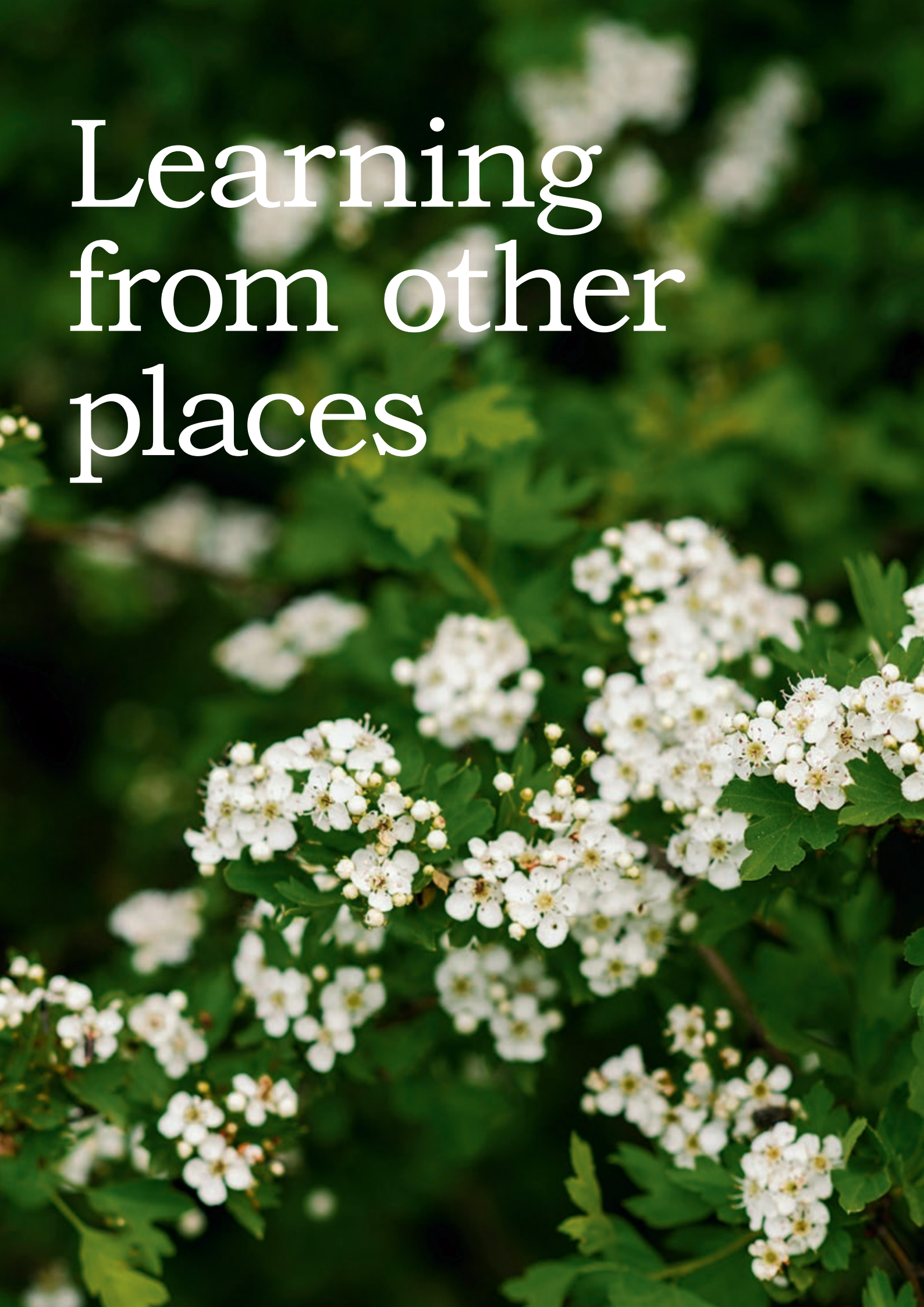
A common factor across these examples and many other similar processes is that diverse residents are given real power to make real decisions through receiving clear information and having the space to deliberate and discuss.

*A Ballymena where everyone
- of every background, culture
and identity - feels safe,
heard and valued.*



*A town that refuses
to let June 2025 define it,
and chooses instead
to be defined by
what it builds next.*

*Communities that have
the difficult conversations,
support one another
through change, and
celebrate what they share.*



Learning
from other
places

Ballymena is not the first town in the United Kingdom to have experienced serious public disorder rooted in inter-community tension, rapid demographic change and the failure of political and civic leadership to respond to building pressures.

Looking at what has happened elsewhere - and what has and has not worked in the aftermath – offers useful lessons.

The 2001 Riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford

The riots that swept through a series of Northern English towns in the summer of 2001, Oldham in May, Burnley in June, Bradford in July, bear some similarities to what happened in Ballymena in June 2025.

In each case, disorder erupted in communities that had experienced long-term economic decline and felt ignored by the political mainstream.

In each case, a specific incident acted as a flash point for much deeper and longer-accumulated grievances.

In each case, outside agitators and far-right organising played a role alongside genuinely local tensions.

And in each case, the damage to the social fabric proved harder and longer to repair than the physical damage to buildings and property.

The inquiries that followed the 2001 riots - the Cattle Report at national level, and local inquiries in each town - identified a consistent set of contributing factors: poverty and long-term unemployment affecting both established and incoming communities; discrimination and harassment that had been minimised or dismissed by authorities; a failure of political leadership to engage honestly with community tensions; and a pattern of communities living parallel lives with limited meaningful contact across cultural or racial lines.

A recurring lesson from the post-2001 inquiries was that the communities which made the most progress in recovery were those that moved beyond treating the riots as an isolated event and instead addressed the underlying conditions that made them possible.

Towns that invested in genuine cross-community relationship building, created honest mechanisms for communities to raise grievances, and tackled structural issues around housing and employment fared better over the long term than those that sought simply to restore order and move on.

One important note from this history: twenty years after the 2001 riots, many of the same towns experienced renewed disorder in the summer of 2024.

The conditions that generate community tension - poverty, inequality, demographic change without adequate support, and the failure of political systems to make people feel heard - do not resolve themselves.

Recovery requires sustained, deliberate effort across multiple generations.

The UK Summer 2024 Riots

The wave of disorder that swept across England and parts of Northern Ireland in the summer of 2024 - sparked by the Southport stabbings and accelerated by deliberate misinformation about the identity of the attacker - provides the most directly relevant recent context for understanding what happened in Ballymena in June 2025.

The pattern was closely similar: a serious incident, a community in shock, misinformation spreading rapidly through social media, far-right networks exploiting the moment, and disorder visiting harm on communities that had done nothing wrong.

In the aftermath of the 2024 riots, the UK government committed £15 million through a Community Recovery Fund to areas affected by the disorder, including significant investment in Southport.

Research conducted in the months following identified several consistent lessons about what effective recovery requires.

Key Lessons from 2024 UK Riot Aftermath

- Tackling social inequalities must be part of any wider strategy on cohesion; surface level community relations work without addressing structural deprivation does not hold
- Community infrastructure needs sustained investment, not emergency funding that disappears once the immediate crisis passes
- Social media platforms need agreed crisis protocols and must be held to them; this requires political pressure and coordinated action, not just local goodwill
- Political leaders must engage substantively with community concerns before disorder, not arrive after it; the credibility gap created by absence during a crisis is hard to repair
- Recovery must be proactive, not reactive: the lesson from 2001 and 2024 alike is that waiting for the next incident before acting ensures the next incident will come
- The voices of those most affected, particularly racialised and minoritised communities, must be centred in recovery planning, not treated as a consultation afterthought

The Role of Faith Communities and Civil Society

One consistent finding across both the 2001 and 2024 contexts was the crucial role played by faith communities, schools and community and voluntary groups in the immediate aftermath of disorder, and in the longer work of recovery.

In 2001, it was community leaders and faith organisations who intervened in the streets during the riots themselves, at significant personal risk.

In 2024, churches and mosques opened their doors as community spaces and places of sanctuary.

Research from the Theos think tank found that local churches in particular had a significant role in holding space for what they called 'deep listening': the work of genuinely hearing community grievances and addressing the sense of disenfranchisement that lies beneath surface tensions. (*Disunited Kingdom? Local churches and the riots of summer 2024*)

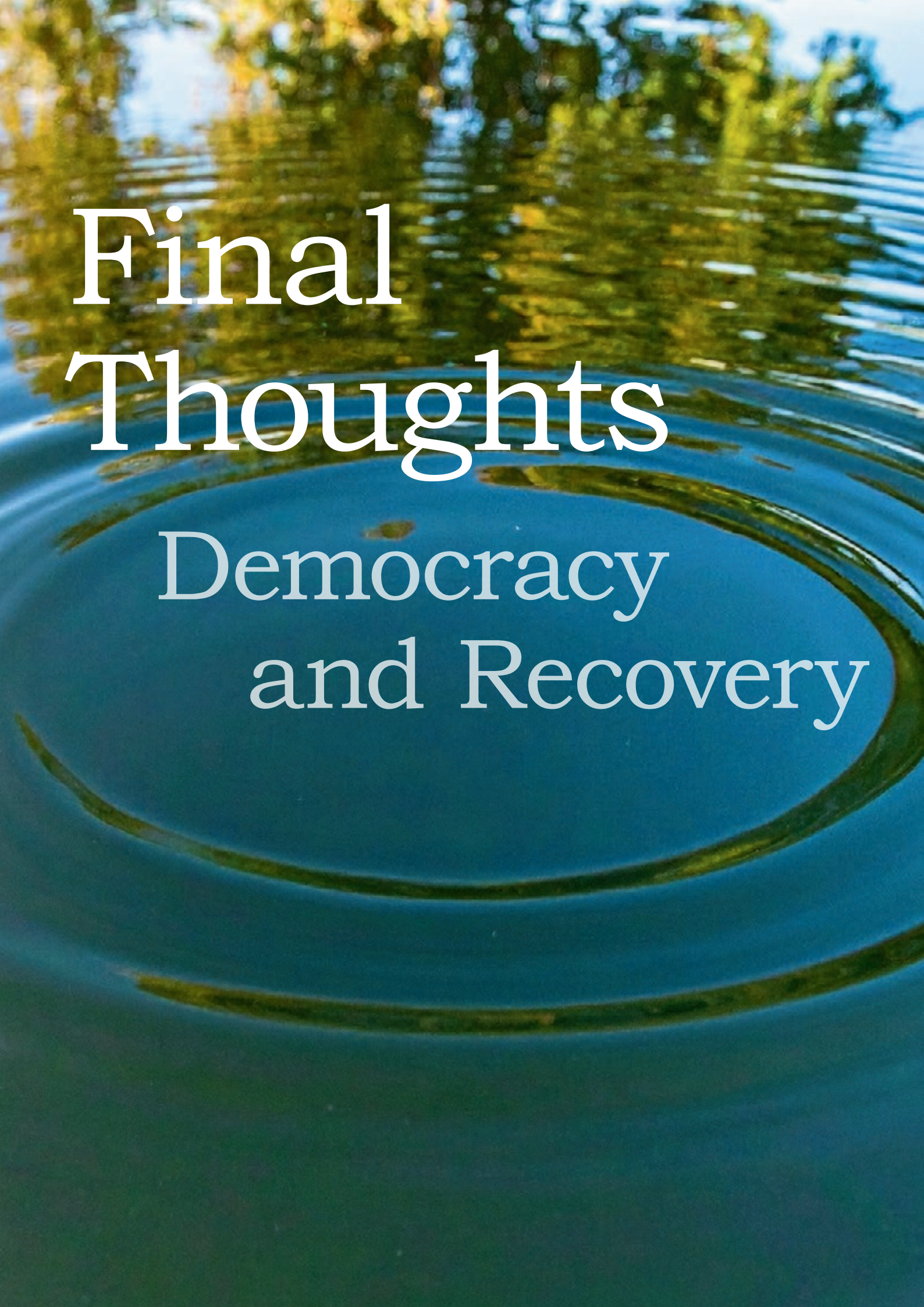
It points to an important truth: when formal statutory leadership fails or is absent, it is often informal, relationship-based civil society structures that hold communities together.

Recovery planning that centres statutory agencies and programmes while undervaluing informal community structures misunderstands where much of the actual work of healing happens.

What the Research Tells Us About What Works

From the evidence within UK and international contexts, several factors consistently distinguish communities that recover well from those that remain stuck in cycles of tension and disorder.

- **Early, honest acknowledgement of what happened and why;** communities that are met with defensiveness or minimisation from authorities heal more slowly than those where institutions take responsibility clearly
- **Long-term investment, not short-term crisis response;** recovery timelines are measured in years and decades, not months. Funding that disappears when media attention moves on leaves communities worse off than before
- **Active cross-community contact and relationship-building;** not tokenistic events, but sustained, structured programmes that create genuine human connection across cultural and racial lines
- **Youth-centred approaches** - young people who experienced the disorder carry it with them; recovery that does not actively invest in young people's wellbeing and belonging stores up problems
- **Community ownership of recovery** - programmes designed for communities, rather than with them, consistently underperform. Local knowledge and lived experience are not optional extras but the foundation of effective recovery
- **Addressing the underlying conditions** - disorder that erupts from poverty, inequality and the failure of housing, employment and public services cannot be recovered from by working on community relations alone; the structural conditions that generated tension must be confronted



Final Thoughts Democracy and Recovery

One of the most consistent and powerful threads running through the Corrymeela residential was "the failure of democracy."

Democracy is not just a system for counting votes.

It is a set of relationships and institutions through which people feel that their voice matters, that the concerns they raise will be taken seriously, and that those who make decisions affecting their lives are accountable to them.

When those relationships break down - when people raise genuine concerns and are ignored, year after year, until the frustration finds a destructive outlet - democracy has failed.

The evidence from the sessions points to several distinct but interconnected democratic failures in the years before June 2025.

Long-term residents of Harryville and Clonavon raised concerns about housing conditions, environmental decline, and the absence of statutory support for rapidly changing communities.

Those concerns were not adequately heard or acted upon.

The gap between decision-makers and the communities they were supposed to serve was wide and persistent.

This is not simply a customer service failure; it is a failure of democratic representation.

When communities find that the formal channels for raising concerns produce no response, their trust in democratic institutions erodes.

That erosion is both a symptom and a cause of the conditions that led to June 2025.

Minoritised communities experienced a parallel but distinct democratic failure.

Their experiences of hostility, intimidation and deteriorating living conditions also went inadequately heard.

The warning signs of escalating tension - which community workers, frontline staff and community intelligence sources were picking up - did not travel effectively through democratic and statutory structures to produce a meaningful response.

Those structures failed their most vulnerable residents.

Recovery from a failure of democracy requires more than good programmes and partnership meetings.

It requires a genuine reckoning with why people did not feel heard, and a structural commitment to changing that.

This means making accountability real and visible.

It means creating genuine mechanisms - not consultations that disappear into reports, but responsive, transparent processes - through which citizens have the chance to participate and deliberate on the issues facing their communities.

It means being honest about what has failed and who is responsible, without the defensiveness that so often protects institutions at the expense of the people they serve.

It also means confronting the specific democratic deficit experienced by minority communities.

If the people most affected by housing conditions and community tension are not in the rooms where decisions are made; if the structures designed to give communities a voice are captured by those already most comfortable with formal processes, then the democratic failure has not been addressed, merely dressed differently.

One of Lucy Easthope's most important observations is that community recovery does not reach an end point.

Government services and funded programmes may withdraw - and in the current resource environment, they typically do, faster than communities are ready for - but the community lives with the event as both memory and future reference point.

The experience of June 2025 will shape how Ballymena responds to tension and challenge for many years to come.

This is a call for realism and for long-term commitment.

Recovery is not a project with a completion date.

It is an ongoing process of tending relationships, institutions and shared identity.

The communities that Easthope has worked with which fare best are those that come to understand this, and that build structures of ongoing support and connection that outlast any single programme or funding cycle.

For Ballymena, this means that the ongoing recovery work must not be understood as temporary crisis responses.

It is, potentially, the foundations of something permanent: a way of being in relationship with one another across the differences of background, culture and experience that the town now holds.





Acknowledgements

This report would not exist without the courage and generosity of everyone who attended the Meet, Map, Move residentials at Corrymeela.

People shared painful experiences, and named difficult truths.

That matters.

Particular thanks are due to groups and people in the Ballymena area.

This includes those who completed the survey carried out by the Inter Ethnic Forum, the young people who completed the Bytes youth survey and community representatives from South Ballymena including the Carson Project and Harryville Primary School – their clarity and honesty is a reminder of what recovery is ultimately for.

Thank you also to Corrymeela for providing a space where difficult conversations could happen with care.

Comments and responses are welcomed on this report.

It is intended to be a living document that grows with the recovery process it describes.

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