Developing a Civic Cohesion Framework: Integrating Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and the Civic Intelligence Framework in a Sociotechnical Context

Gill Hagan-Green[1,†], Barbara Spooner[1,†], Stephen Brookes[1,†], Stuart Younger-Cooper[1,†], and Iain Caldwell[2,†]

¹ Digital Safety CIC, Chester-le-Street, County Durham
² Let's Connect, Hartlepool, UK

Abstract

Community cohesion is increasingly mediated by the interplay of digital and physical environments. Traditional urban disorder narratives, have long shaped regeneration and policing policy but are limited in their attention to community assets, digital relationships, and participatory governance. This paper reviews problem-oriented policing (POP) approaches and contrasts that with two complementary, strengths-oriented approaches: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and the Civic Intelligence Framework. Drawing on sociotechnical systems thinking, we propose an integrative Civic Cohesion Framework that maps development pathways across personal–community and digital–physical dimensions. The framework supports practice design for educational, wellbeing, and policy initiatives and is relevant to organisations working with both digital and physical-world communities. Implementation guidance and governance considerations steeped in the extensive, cumulative experience of the writing team, offer an applied lens for North-East England. The paper concludes with a research and evaluation agenda to strengthen evidence for hybrid civic interventions that build trust, agency, and inclusive participation.

Keywords

Community cohesion; Asset-Based Community Development; Civic Intelligence; Sociotechnical systems; Digital inclusion; Participatory governance; Broken Windows Theory; professional background.

1   Introduction

Debates about how best to strengthen community cohesion frequently oscillate between deficit-framed problem solving (crime, disorder, deprivation) and strengths-based mobilisation of community capacity. The rise of digital technologies, data infrastructures, and platform-mediated interaction complicates this debate: communities now form, organise, learn,

and advocate across hybrid online–offline terrains. Policy responses rooted solely in environmental order, and problem-oriented policing (POP) in such theories as Broken Windows [53] and Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS)[48], offer only partial explanatory power in such contexts. By contrast, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) [25] foregrounds the skills and talents of community members and associational life, while Schuler's [45] Civic Intelligence concept highlights the collective capacity of groups to think, learn, and act together, often through sociotechnical means. Enid Mumford's socio-technical design principles emphasised participation, ethical values, and the integration of social and technical systems [31]. Her ETHICS methodology aligns with the Civic Cohesion Framework by embedding community voices and safeguarding well-being in hybrid civic systems. Steve Alter's Work System Theory highlights how people, technologies, and processes interact to produce outcomes [2]. Applied to civic cohesion, it stresses adaptability, governance clarity, and stakeholder alignment. Together, Mumford and Alter provide a robust socio-technical foundation for the Civic Cohesion Framework, reinforcing participatory design and systemic integration as essential for inclusive, resilient civic development.

This paper reviews these literatures and proposes a synthesis oriented toward practice: a Civic Cohesion Framework for designing programmes, policies, and learning environments, such as those advanced by Digital Safety CIC, that intentionally align digital safety, community leadership, and participatory policy development. We begin by defining community cohesion and situating it in relation to social capital [36][11], collective efficacy [43], and place attachment. We then critique problem-oriented policing (POP) approaches with Broken Windows Theory [53] and its critique that questions empirical robustness [17] [42] and offers the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) as an advancement.

We then review the ABCD model and the Civic Intelligence Framework, drawing out points of complementarity. Building on sociotechnical systems [50] we integrate these into a four-quadrant model (digital-physical × personal-community) and outline pathways by which interventions in one quadrant can propagate benefits across the system. This writing team has extensive experience in policing and community engagement, with careers that reflect a deep understanding of public safety, youth intervention, and multi-agency collaboration. This experience informs the position on social dynamics shaping resilient and safer communities. Implementation considerations, including governance, data ethics, community participation, and evaluation follow. The paper concludes with implications for digital

inclusion strategies and community regeneration in the North-East of England and beyond.

2   Defining Community Cohesion

Community cohesion has been conceptualised in policy and academic discourse as the degree to which people from diverse backgrounds sustain positive relationships, mutual trust, shared values, and opportunities for civic and economic participation [10] [1]. Cohesive communities are marked by low inter-group tension, dense interpersonal networks, and confidence in local institutions [10] [1]. The concept overlaps with, but is distinct from, social capital. Putnam's [36] notions of bonding and bridging social capital highlight how networks can mobilise resources for collective benefit, while Coleman [11] emphasised the functional value of social relations in enabling coordinated action.

Collective efficacy, developed in neighbourhood studies by Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls [43] adds an important behavioural dimension: the shared belief that a community can act together to achieve desired outcomes (for example, to maintain public order or support youth). Collective efficacy depends on mutual trust and willingness to intervene. Community cohesion can therefore be thought of as a multi-layered construct linking relational quality (trust, belonging), normative alignment (shared expectations), and action capability (collective efficacy).

In contemporary contexts, digital environments extend the geography of cohesion. Online platforms enable identity expression, mutual aid, and deliberation across spatial boundaries [28] yet they also fragment publics and amplify polarisation. Publics may be fragmented via filter bubbles, echo chambers, and micro-identity silos that undermine shared civic life [49], [33], [18]. Such as the positionality of 'Northernness'   - the debate of what constitutes the north of England and where 'Geordies' are the 'real' Northeast. Does this mindset diminish the opportunities of the collective identity and willingness to work across divides? X, Facebook and Reddit are classic echo chambers, the first through algorithms, and the latter through human moderation. People self-selecting online worlds that echo their views, or if they don't then they end engagement by getting ejected by either the system or human moderators. A further example, follows the notion that "Diversity Networks' are built around BAME identities, rather than common goals such as community cohesion. The ongoing echo chamber of Brexit and Remain,

fuels Reform, civil unrest and recent marches. Agent-based modelling reveals how ideological clustering and elite messaging exacerbate affective polarization [52]. Moreover, identity micro-formations online can chip away at societal norms, risking broader disintegration [24]. Addressing these risks requires robust digital literacy, critical engagement, and hybrid civic modalities. For instance, youth digital resilience is enhanced when online learning taps into offline networks and supports [19]. Similarly, school-based interventions that link digital safety with well-being illustrate how digital–physical fluency builds trust and participatory capacities [13]. Consequently, understanding community cohesion now demands a dual-lens that considers how online and in-person networks interact, how digital safety and literacy mediate these interactions and how institutions can scaffold participation through multi-channel governance mechanisms. Where agencies such as the National Cyber Security Centre offer guidance and support around threats to the security of organisational systems. But where softer issues such as social cohesion are left to chance. These concerns motivate the integrative framework advanced later in this paper.

3 Problem-based-Policing

Problem-oriented policing (POP) marked a major departure from traditional, incident-driven models of policing. Goldstein [9] argued that police should focus less on reacting to individual crimes and more on addressing the recurring problems that generate them. To achieve this, he developed the SARA model—Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment [9]—which provides a structured framework for identifying community issues, analysing underlying causes, designing tailored interventions, and evaluating their impact. Crucially, POP emphasises collaboration between police, residents, and local agencies, recognising that enduring public safety cannot be delivered by enforcement alone. Instead, it seeks preventive, evidence-based solutions that reduce harm while fostering trust, legitimacy, and accountability [9].

Broken Windows Theory (BWT), developed by Wilson and Kelling [53], preceded POP and offered a powerful metaphor: that visible signs of disorder—such as vandalism, graffiti, or broken windows—signal neglect, weakened informal social control, and invited escalation into more serious crime. This thesis resonated with urban policymakers in the 1980s and 1990s, encouraging strategies that prioritised environmental maintenance, order enforcement, and rapid response to incivilities [48] [22]. However, empirical research has challenged its explanatory power. Longitudinal studies show

that disorder and crime are often both symptoms of structural disadvantage rather than linked in a simple causal chain [42]. Critics, most notably Harcourt [17], contend that BWT-inspired policing can disproportionately target marginalised communities, undermining trust while achieving limited long-term crime reduction. Furthermore, BWT has often been conflated with "zero tolerance" policing, a punitive strategy that George Kelling himself later disavowed, emphasising instead that community legitimacy and discretion were central to his original thesis [22].

Problem-oriented policing provided a more constructive way of operationalising the insights of BWT. Rather than assuming that disorder inevitably leads to crime, POP examined the situational and social conditions underpinning disorder and developed targeted interventions to address them. This enabled police to respond flexibly to local definitions of disorder, recognising that what constitutes "incivility" may vary across cultural and social contexts. By embedding preventive strategies within a framework of analysis and assessment, POP avoids the pitfalls of blanket enforcement while reinforcing collective efficacy and legitimacy [9].

The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) demonstrates how the symbolic emphasis on disorder of BWT can be advanced through the structured, collaborative methodology of POP. Skogan [48] documented how CAPS reduced fear of crime, improved satisfaction with policing, and fostered collective efficacy, particularly in neighbourhoods where adversarial dynamics had previously dominated. Although uneven in its impact, CAPS remains a benchmark for demonstrating that sustainable safety is achieved not through zero tolerance but through relational legitimacy, shared problem-solving, and community accountability.

In sum, while BWT highlighted the symbolic and psychological effects of disorder, its enduring value is best realised when situated within problem-based frameworks such as POP and CAPS. These approaches not only embed disorder reduction within evidence-based and participatory practices but also align naturally with broader theories of community empowerment. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and the Civic Intelligence Framework similarly emphasise local capacity, relational trust, and collaborative governance as drivers of sustainable cohesion. Taken together, they suggest that the future of public safety lies not in punitive enforcement but in building civic capacity and co-producing resilient, inclusive communities.

4   Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) emerged from field research documenting how low-income neighbourhoods sustained rich associational networks and problem-solving capacities that were routinely overlooked by service providers [25] ABCD inverts the deficit lens by beginning with community strengths: the skills of residents, the power of local associations, the resources of institutions, the physical and environmental assets present in place, and the connections that link these elements. Development occurs when assets are identified, linked, and mobilised toward shared goals.

ABCD's operating assumptions are that:
1. everyone has gifts
2. relationships build a community
3. citizens at the centre are more powerful than clients at the edge
4. institutions should support, not replace, local problem solving
5. sustainable development grows from inside out.

These principles align closely with evidence that locally driven initiatives produce stronger legitimacy and long-term commitment than externally imposed programmes [30][16] and, in particular, with Problem Oriented Policing (POP) [9].

ABCD contributes to cohesion by strengthening the relational fabric (bonding social capital) while creating bridges across groups through shared initiatives (bridging capital). The identification of community connectors, individuals who span networks and mobilise participation is central [16]. Importantly, ABCD does not deny structural inequality; rather, it seeks to equip communities with the relational and organisational capacity to advocate for change, ideally in partnership with responsive institutions.

5   The Civic Intelligence Framework

The Civic Intelligence concept, advanced by Schuler [45][46], refers to the collective ability of groups, communities, organisations, networks, or societies to address shared problems effectively and equitably. Civic intelligence is not confined to formal expertise; it emerges from dialogue, deliberation, learning, creativity, and collaborative action across diverse stakeholders. Schuler situates civic intelligence within information and communication systems, emphasising patterns that enhance a society's capacity to know itself and to act in the public interest.

Cormac Russell, a key advocate and practitioner of ABCD, has played a central role in articulating how communities can build from their own strengths rather than external deficits. In Rekindling Democracy [40] Russell

highlights the dangers of professional overreach in community life, warning against approaches that displace citizen-led initiatives. His focus on the power of associational life and the central role of community connectors reinforces the foundational ABCD principles, particularly the notion that strong communities emerge when people are seen for their capacities rather than their needs.

However, critics argue that Russell's framing can sometimes veer toward idealism. MacLeod and Emejulu [29] caution that the ABCD model as promoted by Russell may be co-opted in neoliberal governance to justify the withdrawal of statutory support, shifting responsibility for public welfare to under-resourced communities. This critique is particularly relevant when structural inequalities: poverty, racism, or digital exclusion are insufficiently addressed. In this sense, ABCD may risk masking systemic barriers under a language of empowerment.

Russell also gives relatively limited attention to the digital realm. As this paper argues, the increasing importance of digital infrastructures in community life necessitates an expansion of the ABCD model. The Civic Intelligence Framework complements Russell's contributions by emphasising the sociotechnical systems that underpin civic engagement and public problem-solving. While Russell foregrounds the importance of relationship-building and local knowledge, Civic Intelligence integrates these with broader questions of infrastructure, governance, and participatory data ethics.

Together, these perspectives can enrich each other. A digitally expanded ABCD approach, grounded in Russell's insights but extended through Civic Intelligence, offers a pathway towards more inclusive, equitable and resilient community development.

Subsequent civic technology and participatory design research extends these ideas, exploring how digital platforms, open data, and networked communication can amplify civic voice and collaborative governance [15][28][47]. Civic intelligence thus has a sociotechnical character: it depends on human skills and relationships and on the infrastructures, technical, organisational, and legal that mediate communication and decision-making.

The Civic Cohesion Framework used in this paper operationalises Schuler's concept across two axes: digital–physical and personal–community. The resulting four quadrants; Digital Safety Development (personal/digital), Online Community Support (community/digital), Civic Leadership Programme (personal/physical), and Local Policy Development (community/physical) provide a heuristic for mapping interventions and identifying gaps. Movement across quadrants captures developmental trajectories from individual skills to collective governance.

6   Comparative Analysis

Table 1 (conceptual) contrasts the logics of POP, ABCD, and the Civic Intelligence Framework. Where POP foregrounds disorder control through external enforcement, ABCD emphasises asset mobilisation through resident leadership [39][41], and Civic Intelligence emphasises collective sense-making and adaptive coordination across sociotechnical systems [45]. We consider elements of the theories to see where technologies can offer practical guidance in support of civic cohesion. Where mobilised assets build relationships and those relationships build collective efficacy. Collective efficacy shapes local environments and institutions improve environments to further   strengthen   assets.

Digital infrastructures can accelerate or undermine these loops depending on access, design, and governance. Equity implications also diverge. ABCD intentionally redistributes agency by positioning residents as co-producers. Civic Intelligence insists that governance platforms, data practices, and participatory processes be transparent and inclusive, thereby countering exclusionary tendencies in both digital and institutional domains.

Dimension	Problem Oriented Policing (POP)	Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)	Civic Intelligence Framework (CIF)
Primary Logic	Building Safer Communities through prevention and engagement and control of disorder through external enforcement when crime reaches the masses	Mobilise resident strengths and local associations	Enhance collective problem-solving through sociotechnical systems
View of Residents	Engaged subjects of regulation	Active agents and co-creators of change	Collaborative problem-solvers and civic designers
Role of Institutions	Enforcers of order and guardians of environment	Enablers and supporters of community initiatives	Platforms for participation and coordination
Mechanism of Change	Environmental cues informal control and reduced crime	Community connection leads to collective efficacy and to local action	Deliberation and network learning develops civic capacity
Orientation	Proactive / Co-active policing	Strengths-based, proactive	Systems-based, adaptive and participatory
Primary Tools	Police visibility, environmental design, enforcement	Asset mapping, micro-grants, associational networks	Digital tools, civic technologies, co-design methods
Equity Lens	Risk of reinforcing power asymmetries through uneven enforcement	Rebalances agency to residents, but may obscure structural gaps	Focus on inclusive design and access to civic infrastructures

Table 1: Comparative analysis of Theory

Table 2 Below extended the comparative analysis to reflect our Civic cohesion Framework incorporates learning from the theories in table 1

Dimension	Problem Oriented Policing (POP)	Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)	Civic Intelligence Framework (CIF)	Civic Cohesion Framework (CCF)
Primary Logic	Building Safer Communities through prevention and engagement and control of disorder through external enforcement when crime reaches the masses	Mobilise resident strengths and local associations	Enhance collective problem-solving through sociotechnical systems	**Integrate order, assets, and intelligence to build trust, safety, and shared governance across hybrid environments**
View of Residents	Engaged subjects of regulation	Active agents and co-creators of change	Collaborative problem-solvers and civic designers	**Capable digital citizens and local leaders empowered through asset use, trust, and inclusion**
Role of Institutions	Enforcers of order and guardians of environment	Enablers and supporters of community initiatives	Platforms for participation and coordination	**Partners in co-governance, safeguarding, and hybrid civic development**
Mechanism of Change	Environmental cues informal control and reduced crime	Community connection leads to collective efficacy and to local action	Deliberation and network learning develops civic capacity	**Feedback loops across digital-physical and personal-community domains grow civic agency and cohesion**
Orientation	Proactive / Co-active policing	Strengths-based, proactive	Systems-based, adaptive and participatory	**Integrative and recursive across quadrants; blends prevention, empowerment, and platform design**
Primary Tools	Police visibility, environmental design, enforcement	Asset mapping, micro-grants, associational networks	Digital tools, civic technologies, co-design methods	**Digital safety, community platforms, leadership pipelines, participatory policymaking**
Equity Lens	Risk of reinforcing power asymmetries through uneven enforcement	Rebalances agency to residents, but may obscure structural gaps	Focus on inclusive design and access to civic infrastructures	**Combines redistributive intent (ABCD) with inclusive infrastructures (CIF) and safeguards against punitive overreach**

Table 2: Extended Comparative Analysis to Civic Cohesion Framework

7 The Civic Cohesion Framework (Integration)

Building on the four-quadrant Civic Intelligence diagram, we propose an expanded Civic Cohesion Framework (CCF) that integrates ABCD principles and lessons from the critique of Broken Windows. The CCF conceptualises community cohesion as an emergent property of interlinked developmental processes operating across digital/physical and personal/community planes. Embracing and integrating with such commissioners as Public Health, Crime Commissioners, Community Cohesion from LA, VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisations, e.g. VONNE. Each quadrant is elaborated below with indicative goals, mechanisms, and example interventions and presented in table 3.
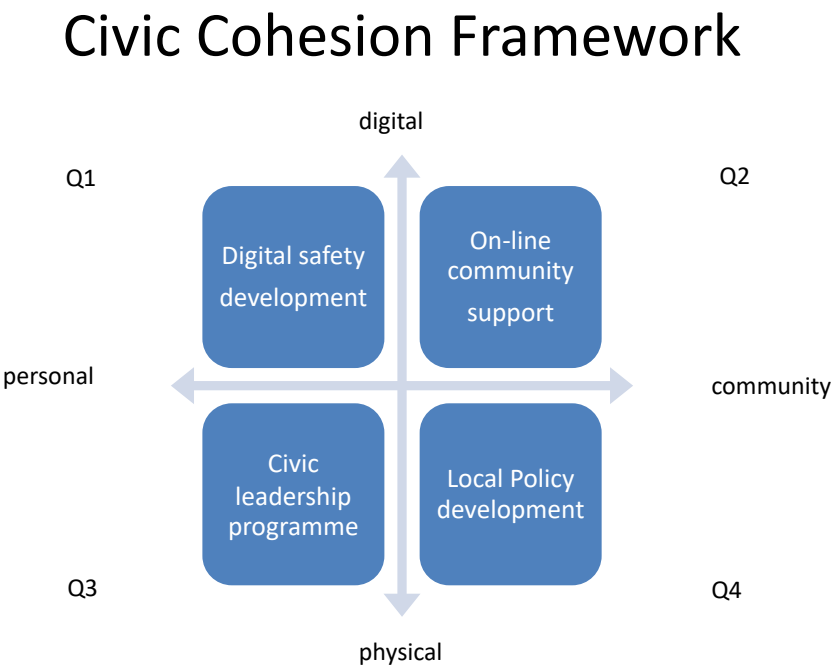
Civic Cohesion Framework

digital

Q1

Digital safety development

On-line community support

Q2

personal — community

Civic leadership programme

Local Policy development

Q3

physical

Q4

Figure 1: Civic Cohesion Framework

7.1 Q1: Digital Safety Development (Personal / Digital)

Goal: Equip individuals especially children, young people, and digitally excluded adults with the skills, confidence, and critical awareness needed to navigate online environments safely and constructively. Core competencies include privacy management, digital hygiene, identity protection, recognising grooming or fraud, evaluating information quality, and understanding digital citizenship norms [27][21]. Digital citizenship refers to the responsible, ethical, and informed use of digital technologies [38]. It includes digital literacy, privacy awareness, respectful communication, and understanding of digital rights and responsibilities. A strong digital citizen not only avoids harm but actively contributes to safer, more inclusive digital environments. These behaviours build individual agency and strengthen collective digital cultures.

ABCD Link: Digital skills are assets. Mapping who in the community has technical know-how, language skills, or peer credibility can seed locally led digital safety clubs or 'buddy' schemes. Youth mentors can become community connectors, e.g. in digital safety programmes described as Gaming Guardians who bridge generational divides, converting individual competence into relational capital.

7.2 Online Community Support (Community / Digital)

Goal: Build inclusive digital commons where residents connect, exchange resources, coordinate mutual aid, and debate local priorities. This includes moderated community forums, neighbourhood messaging platforms, digital noticeboards, and co-production spaces linked to local services [37][28].

ABCD Link: Existing associations; faith groups, youth clubs, disability networks, can federate online, extending reach and reinforcing weak ties across neighbourhood boundaries. Platform governance rules should reflect community values and safeguarding standards to avoid replicating harms [3].

7.3 Civic Leadership Programme (Personal / Physical)

Goal: Develop individual civic agency through in-person learning, mentoring, volunteering, and experiential governance activities [32]. Training topics may include facilitation, conflict transformation, data literacy, and inclusive decision-making.

ABCD Link: Identify and support emerging community connectors; provide micro-grants for resident-led projects; pair leadership development with asset mapping so that participants immediately apply learning to local challenges.

7.4 Local Policy Development (Community / Physical)

Goal: Translate community voice into policy through participatory budgeting, citizens' juries, co-design with councils, and iterative feedback loops [15][47] Physical assemblies, neighbourhood forums, and school-based civic labs anchor deliberation in place.

ABCD Link: Use mapped assets and online deliberation data to inform agenda-setting; ensure marginalised groups are represented; feed outcomes back into digital spaces to maintain transparency and learning, key elements of civic intelligence.

The link between theory and practice is made explicit in the following table 3

7.5 Inter-Quadrant Dynamics and Feedback

Interventions rarely remain confined to one quadrant. Gains in personal digital literacy (7.1) can increase participation in online community platforms (7.2). Stronger digital networks can surface new leaders who enrol in in-person civic leadership programmes (7.3). Graduates from leadership pathways can convene inclusive policy processes (7.4) whose decisions allocate resources for expanded digital inclusion (closing the loop back to 7.1). Tracking these feedback cycles is central to evaluating cohesion impacts.

Dimension	Civic Cohesion Framework (CCF)	Example from policing practice	Example from Health and Wellbeing	Quadrant reference
Primary Logic	Integrate order, assets, and intelligence to build trust, safety, and shared governance across hybrid environments	The creation of resident associations with regular meetings attended by key stakeholders, including residents, community leaders, councillors and police. With the use of anonymous online chat, residents could highlight neighbourhood concerns without fear of reprisals.	Mobilisation Mobilise shared environments, community assets, and health intelligence to co-create wellbeing and foster trust and cohesion across local systems. Health literacy e-portals improves self understanding.	Q1, Q2
View of Residents	Capable digital citizens and local leaders empowered through asset use, trust, and inclusion	The implementation of Community speed-watch which involved local residents in speed awareness and enforcement. Police and PCSOs would accompany residents to deploy technical equipment in areas of concern, raised in community meetings, to deter and enforce speeding issues	Community-led co-design: Agents of personal and collective wellbeing, empowered through health education, social connection, and environmental stewardship.	Q3, Q4
Role of Institutions	Partners in co-governance, safeguarding, and hybrid civic development	By coordinating communication between residents and enforcement agencies, the police would follow up and deal with non-compliance of warning letters. Invariably this would lead to identification of other offences to be dealt with by police, for example untaxed or uninsured vehicles leading to impounding and removal of the vehicle from the public arena.	Co-creators of wellbeing: Enablers of proactive care, civic prevention, and inclusive health equity. The Department of Health, local government, and local clinics coordinate to provide mobile health checks, vaccination access, and wellness workshops in parks and churches, mosques. Local faith leaders co-host events, encouraging trust in health messaging. A local university provides	Q2, Q4

Dimension	Civic Cohesion Framework (CCF)	Example from policing practice	Example from Health and Wellbeing	Quadrant reference
			monitoring and learning support	
Mechanism of Change	Feedback loops across digital-physical and personal-community domains grow civic agency and cohesion	Social media use to update the community on how their participation has led to reduction in crime with examples of results. Where agreeable, contributors names published enhancing community standing and pride in the area	Coordinated health empowerment: Blended community-led action and institutional trust-building drives long-term health behaviour change, i.e. community feedback dashboard.	Q2, Q3
Orientation	Integrative and recursive across quadrants; blends prevention, empowerment, and platform design	By proactive participation of all involved results can be achieved, recorded and improved upon.	Dashboards + redesign + events – Supporting integrated care, preventative plans and inclusive access, connecting health with place, purpose, and participation.	Q2, Q4
Primary Tools	Digital safety, community platforms, leadership pipelines, participatory policymaking	Using advanced ANPR and speed detection technologies, integrated with community participation, whether anonymous or not, and enforcement.	Cultural & gender-sensitive design: Community dashboards, health education kiosks, mobile wellbeing units, intergenerational design labs.	Q2, Q4
Equity Lens	Combines redistributive intent (ABCD) with inclusive infrastructures (CIF) and safeguards against punitive overreach	By implementing a heirarchical structure, and therefore limiting power of enforcement to appropriate agencies, whilst allowing valued input from all stakeholders.	Health kiosks, Ambassadors, Dashboards: Ensuring marginalised voices shape health services.	Q3, Q4

8. Implementation Considerations

Professional experience in policing provides a valuable foundation for informing academic practice, offering real-world insight into criminal justice, community engagement, and ethical decision-making. Drawing on experiential learning theory [23], our professional background in Digital Safety CIC bridges theory and practice, ensuring our interventions are grounded in experience and informed by academia. First-hand knowledge of law enforcement operations supports the application of case-based learning and critical reflection [44], enabling the informed examination of complex, real-life scenarios [26]. Our team bring decades of senior management experience from physical and digital law enforcement to inform our reflection on theory and suggestions for practice.

8.1 Governance and Partnership Architecture

Hybrid civic initiatives span schools, local authorities, community organisations, libraries, health providers, and technology partners. Clear governance agreements, covering roles, data sharing, safeguarding, and decision rights, are essential. Partnership agreements can embed ABCD principles (resident leadership, subsidiarity) while aligning with statutory duties. Multi-stakeholder steering groups benefit from trained community co-chairs to avoid tokenism.

8.2 Data Protection, Ethics, and Trust

Digital components raise compliance and ethical questions under UK GDPR, including lawful basis for processing, transparency, data minimisation, and child safeguards. Cases where educational data flows to commercial or defence contractors, such as controversies involving university traffic monitoring, underscore the need for clear consent, purpose limitation, and community oversight. Trust is a precondition for civic intelligence; opaque surveillance undermines cohesion.

8.3 Inclusion, Accessibility, and Equity

Digital divides persist along socio-economic, rural, disability, and language lines [51]. Programmes must budget for devices, connectivity, assistive technologies, translation, and culturally responsive facilitation. ABCD's asset

lens helps identify under-recognised capacities in marginalised groups; Civic Intelligence reminds us to encode those capacities in platform design and governance rules.

8.4 Safeguarding in Hybrid Spaces

Work with children and vulnerable adults requires integrated safeguarding protocols across digital and physical settings. Moderation standards, reporting pathways, and escalation to statutory services must be aligned. Training community moderators and youth digital ambassadors can distribute vigilance without securitising community life.

8.5 Evaluation and Learning Systems

Evaluating cohesion impacts demands mixed methods. Quantitative indicators may include participation rates, network density metrics, digital skill assessments, and local governance outputs (e.g., policies adopted through participatory processes). Qualitative data, stories of change, reflective journals, deliberative transcripts, capture shifts in trust, agency, and cross-group understanding. Developmental evaluation approaches [34] are well suited to adaptive, co-produced civic initiatives.

9. Application: North-East England \ Digital Safety CIC

Digital Safety CIC works across North-East England to promote digital wellbeing, online safeguarding, and inclusion for vulnerable and underserved populations. The region faces compounded challenges: rural broadband gaps, pockets of deprivation, youth disengagement from formal education (including NEET groups), and variable digital confidence amongst older residents. These conditions make it an ideal setting to operationalise the Civic Cohesion Framework.

A phased initiative is planned, beginning with asset mapping and digital safety workshops (Quadrant 7.1) delivered through community hubs and gaming-based learning environments. Concurrently, moderated regional online communities could link youth, parents, and practitioners (7.2). Participants demonstrating interest could enter a structured Civic Leadership Programme co-delivered with local authorities and education partners (7.3).

Outputs to be; youth digital charters, community data dashboards, or proposals for safer public wifi, would feed local policy consultations (7.4). Throughout, evaluation would track participation diversity, trust measures, and policy uptake.

The North East of England experiences persistent and multifaceted deprivation, characterised by elevated levels of poor mental health, digital exclusion, and socioeconomic inequality [20]. In this context, integrating holistic wellbeing initiatives, particularly those targeting mental health, emotional resilience, and social inclusion, within digital civic engagement strategies is essential. Collaborations with organisations like Let's Connect, alongside regional councils and local service networks, can deliver tailored, wraparound interventions that respond to complex, place-based needs. This aligns with the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), which advocate for mobilising inter-institutional and local strengths to empower communities from within [30]. By embedding digital citizenship pathways in such frameworks, policies can more effectively address structural barriers, foster inclusion, and build community capacity for sustained civic participation.

10. Limitations and Research Agenda

The Civic Cohesion Framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation. Key research priorities include: (1) testing causal pathways linking digital safety gains to offline civic participation; (2) assessing whether asset-mapping interventions measurably increase bridging social capital across demographic lines; (3) evaluating governance models for community-owned digital platforms; and (4) understanding cost structures and scalability in resource-constrained settings.

Methodologically, longitudinal, comparative designs across multiple communities are needed. Social network analysis can illuminate changes in relational structure; participatory action research can surface lived experience; and quasi-experimental designs can compare ABCD-infused civic programmes with conventional service-delivery models. Attention to intersectionality class, race/ethnicity, disability, age is essential to avoid reproducing inequalities within asset narratives.

11. Conclusion

The Civic Cohesion Framework (CCF) emerges from this study as both a synthesis and an advancement of earlier theories on community order, civic capacity, and sociotechnical design. While Broken Windows Theory [53] was influential in highlighting the symbolic significance of environmental neglect, its enforcement-centred applications often eroded trust and overlooked resident capacity [17]. The evolution towards Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) [9] and the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) [48] provided a more participatory, problem-focused orientation, recognising that sustainable safety cannot be secured through enforcement alone but must be co-produced with communities. Building on this shift, the CCF positions civic cohesion as an emergent property of assets, relationships, and collective intelligence, operating across digital and physical, personal and community domains.

By integrating the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) [25] and the Civic Intelligence Framework [45, 46], the CCF offers a generative model for inclusive civic practice. It emphasises the mobilisation of community assets, the cultivation of local leadership, and the embedding of digital and physical infrastructures that enable collaborative governance. Importantly, its socio-technical grounding drawing on Mumford's ETHICS methodology [31] and Alter's Work System Theory [2] ensures that design processes are participatory, ethically robust, and aligned with human values. This positions the framework not merely as a critique of deficit-based approaches, but as a roadmap for building adaptive, equitable, and future-ready civic systems.

The CCF also introduces a dynamic understanding of inter-quadrant relationships. Gains in digital literacy feed into online civic participation; online networks reveal new leaders who can transition into physical civic leadership programmes; these leaders, in turn, channel collective voice into local policy-making. Such feedback loops illustrate how interventions can propagate across domains, producing systemic and sustainable forms of cohesion.

In conclusion, the Civic Cohesion Framework provides a practical and theoretically coherent guide for organisations, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to strengthen trust, resilience, and civic participation. It

translates fragmented insights from criminology, community development, and sociotechnical theory into an actionable model that can be adapted, tested, and refined in diverse contexts. As such, it represents a durable contribution to scholarship and practice, offering both a foundation for future research and an applied agenda for equitable civic regeneration.

Declaration on Generative AI

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used GPT4 for grammar and spell checking and for paragraph reworking from original content. After using the tools the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content

References

[1] Ager, A. and Strang, A., 2008. Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. Journal of Refugee Studies, 21(2), pp.166–191.

[2] Alter, S. (2013). Work system theory: Overview of core concepts, extensions, and challenges for the future. Journal of the Association for Information Systems, 14(2), 72–121.

[3] Boyd, d. and Marwick, A.E., 2011. Social privacy in networked publics: Teens' attitudes, practices, and strategies. A Decade in Internet Time: Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society, Oxford Internet Institute.

[4] Braga A. A., Schnell, C., B. C., & Welsh. (2024). Disorder policing to reduce crime: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis Criminology, Public Policy, 23, 745–775.

[5] Bratton, W. J., Mallon, R., Orr, J. (1997). Zero tolerance: policing a free society. Institute of Economic Affairs, Health and Welfare Unit.

[6] Brookes, S. (1996). Debate on 'Zero Tolerance' –v- 'Problem Oriented Policing'. Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales National Conference, Bristol, England.

[7] Brookes, S. (2004). Identifying the Conditions that Help or Hinder the Development of Community Based Policing Nottingham Trent University, PhD Thesis. Nottingham.

[8] Brookes, S. (2006). Community Policing in Context. Crime Prevention and Community Safety: an international journal, Spring, 2006. Cunneen, C. (1999). Zero Tolerance Policing

[9] Bullock, K., Tilley, N. (2009). Born to Fail? Policing, Reform and Neighbourhood Problem Solving. The Police Journal, 82(2), 117-133. (Original work published 2009)

[10] Cantle, T., 2001. *Community cohesion: A report of the independent review team*. London: Home Office.

[11] Coleman, J.S., 1988. Social capital in the creation of human capital. American Journal of Sociology, 94, pp. S95–S120.

[12] College of Policing (2022). Zero Tolerance Policing. College of Policing. Retrieved 5 August from, updated in February 2025.

[13] Cowling, M., Sim, k. N., Orlando, J., Hamra, J., (2024). Untangling digital safety, literacy and wellbeing in school Activities for 10–13-year-old Students. Education and Information Technologies, 30(1):941-958

[14] Cunneen, C. (1999). Zero Tolerance Policing: Implications for Indigenous People. Indigenous. Law Bulletin, 4(19:7 [online]).

[15] Fung, A., 2006. Varieties of participation in complex governance. Public Administration Review, 66, pp.66–75.

[16] Gilchrist, A., 2009. The well-connected community: A networking approach to community development. Bristol: Policy Press.

[17] Harcourt, B.E., 2001. Illusion of order: The false promise of broken windows policing. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[18] Hartmann, D., Wang, S.M., Pohlmann, L. et al. A systematic review of echo chamber research: comparative analysis of conceptualizations, operationalizations, and varying outcomes. J Comput Soc Sc 8, 52 (2025).

[19] Hassoun, A., et al (2025). Beyond Digital Literacy: Building Youth Digital Resilience Through Existing "Information Sensibility" Practices, Social Sciences, 14(4), pp.230.

[20] House of Commons Library. (2023). NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training.

[21] Jones, L.M. and Mitchell, K.J., 2016. Defining and measuring youth digital citizenship. *New Media & Society*, 18(9), pp.2063–2079.

[22] Kelling, G.L. and Coles, C.M., 1996. Fixing broken windows: Restoring order and reducing crime in our communities. New York: Free Press.

[23] Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Prentice Hall.

[24] Kossowska, M., Klodowski, A., Siewierska-Chmaj, A., et. al., (2023), internet-based micro-identities as a driver of societal disintegration, Humanities and Social Societies Communications, 10, 955(2023).

[25] Kretzmann, J.P. and McKnight, J.L., 1993. Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets. Evanston, IL: ACTA Publications.

[26] Lave, J., Wenger, E. (1991). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge University Press

[27] Livingstone, S., Helsper, E. J., (2007), Gradations in digital inclusion: children, young people and the digital divide, New Media & Society, August 2007, 9(4):671-696 DOI:

[28] Loader, B.D. and Mercea, D., 2011. Networking democracy? Social media innovations and participatory politics. Information, Communication & Society, 14(6), pp.757–769.

[29] MacLeod, M.A. and Emejulu, A., 2014. Neoliberalism with a community face? A critical analysis of asset-based community development in Scotland. Journal of Community Practice, 22(4), pp.430–450.

[30] Mathie, A. and Cunningham, G., 2003. From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. Development in Practice, 13(5), pp.474–486.

[31] Mumford, E. (2006). The story of socio-technical design: Reflections on its successes, failures and potential. Information Systems Journal, 16(4), 317–342.

[32] Nabatchi, T. and Leighninger, M., 2015. Public participation for 21st century democracy. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[33] Otenio, P., (2023), The impact of Social-Media on Political Polarisation, Journal of Communication, vol. 4, Issue No 1, pp56-68, 2023

[34] Patton, M.Q., 2011. Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use. New York: Guilford Press.

[35] Pollard, C. (1997). Zero Tolerance: Short-term fix, Long-term liability'. In W. J. Bratton, R. Mallon, & J. Orr (Eds.), Zero tolerance: policing a free society. Institute of Economic Affairs, Health and Welfare Unit.

[36] Putnam, R.D., 2000. Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[37] Rheingold, H., 2000. The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[38] Ribble, M. (2012). Digital citizenship in schools: Nine elements all students should know (3rd ed.). ISTE.

[39] Russell, C., 2010. Asset-based community development (ABCD): Looking back to look forward. Dublin: Community Action Network.

[40] Russell, C., 2020. Rekindling democracy: A professional's guide to working in citizen space. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

[41] Russell, C. and Jordan, C., 2007. Asset-Based Community Development: Looking Back to Look Forward: Asset-Based Approaches to Community Building. Dublin: Community Technical Aid.

[42] Sampson, R.J. and Raudenbush, S.W., 1999. Systematic social observation of public spaces: A new look at disorder in urban neighborhoods. American Journal of Sociology, 105(3), pp.603–651.

[43] Sampson, R.J., Raudenbush, S.W. and Earls, F., 1997. Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. Science, 277(5328), pp.918–924.

[44] Schön, D. A. (1983). The Reflective Practitioner. Basic Books.

[45] Schuler, D., 2001. Cultivating society's civic intelligence: Patterns for a new 'world brain'. Information, Communication & Society, 4(2), pp.157–181.

[46] Schuler, D., 2014. Liberating voices: A pattern language for communication revolution. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[47] Smith, G., 2009. Democratic innovations: Designing institutions for citizen participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[48] Skogan, W.G., 1990. Disorder and decline: Crime and the spiral of decay in American neighborhoods. New York: Free Press.

[49] Terren, L., Borge, R., Echo chambers on Social-Media: A systematic review of the literature, Review of Communication Research, 2021, vol. 9, ISSN: 22554165

[50] Trist, E., 1981. The evolution of socio-technical systems: A conceptual framework and an action research program. Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Labour.

[51] van Dijk, J.A.G.M., 2020. The digital divide. Cambridge: Polity.

[52] Vedam, V., Mukerjee, S., and Bhattacharya, P. (2025). What contributes to affective polarization in Networked Online Environments? Evidence from An Agent-based Model.

[53] Wilson, J.Q. and Kelling, G.L., 1982. Broken windows. Atlantic Monthly, March, pp.29–38.