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International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

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Rethink, refresh and redo - recovering our neighbourhoods



As part of a wider government push towards place-based regeneration the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) launched their first-phase findings last month. With the announcement of programmes like Pride in Place, the Neighbourhood Health Services, and Best Start in Life, the government has made

clear its ambition to develop placed-based, targeted interventions. ICON, established in November 2024, has been investigating place-based deprivation across England to inform this government strategy.

In a report for Number 10, No Short Cuts, ICON calls for a long-term investment in the country's most deprived neighbourhoods, in addition to the £5 billion secured through Pride in Place funding. The report argues that without immediate action, place-based inequality will continue to deepen, undermining national renewal.

Led by Baroness Armstrong, ICON Chair and former Minister for Social Exclusion, the Commission has spent a year visiting places across England identified as 'Mission Critical' by its Hyper-Local Need Index (HLNI). The HLNI tracks neighbourhood performance against the government's five missions for national renewal: Health, Crime, Growth, Opportunity, and Energy.

ICON's analysis finds that the number of Mission Critical Neighbourhoods is unsustainably high, identifying 613 such areas, alongside a further 5,566 Mission Priority Neighbourhoods also experiencing significant disadvantage. Areas with the highest levels of need are concentrated in the North of England, as well as post-industrial regions, and coastal towns. ICON concludes that achieving national renewal will not be possible without targeted support for these places.

The report highlights that the challenges facing deprived areas are interconnected, reinforcing one another across health, employment, safety, and opportunity. As such, ICON calls for a holistic approach to intervention, including cross-government collaboration, joined-up public services, and stronger community leadership – ending the siloed approaches taken since the end of programmes such as the New Deal for Communities in the early 2000s.

Drawing from extensive consultations with residents and community groups, the Commission's findings demonstrate the need for investment and power to be placed in the hands of local people who best understand their own communities. No Short Cuts, which has been informed by MPs, local government, and academics, calls for £50bn to be delivered over the next 20 years to close the gap between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest of the country.

The commission sets out economic, social, political, and moral arguments for action, making the case that the welfare cost of inaction will be higher in years to come than a clear investment now; with current welfare spending in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods more than double (£5,372) the national average (£2,128), and an estimated lost economic output of £4.5bn per annum.

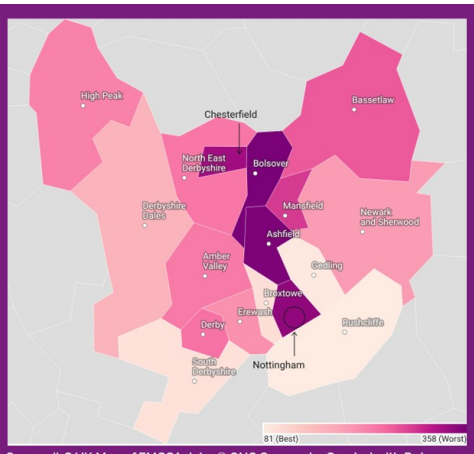
ICON seeks an investment in social infrastructure, which it views as fundamental for building the social capital that enables places to improve their own outcomes through support networks, lifestyle changes, skills development and public safety.

We are delighted to share that ICON Chair, Baroness Hilary Armstrong, who played a central role during the implementation of Sure Start and New Deal for Communities, will bring this experience to ILC's Future of Ageing Conference on Thursday 5 March 2026. The Baroness will join the panel 'Acting now: creating communities where everyone thrives', alongside other sector experts, to discuss how policymakers, workplaces, and public institutions can better support ageing populations amid stretched resources and widening inequality. You can find out more about the conference here and get your tickets via the button below.

We're also pleased to welcome Molly Townsend as ILC's new Research and Policy Officer. Molly previously worked as a member of ICON, building policy recommendations and communicating the commission's findings. She brings considerable experience in public affairs, policy and research to the team. You can find out more about Molly and other members of the ILC team here.

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East Midlands - what are the chances of living well in the region?



Source: ILC UK Map of EMCCA data: © ONS Geography Created with Datawrapper

'I'm ready to fight for the improvements that will make the East Midlands a fairer, greener, better-connected region. Some things will take time, but others can change quickly if we focus our efforts in the right places.

Claire Ward, Mayor of the East Midlands Combined County Authority, November 2025

Academic research on the identity of the East Midlands suggests that, for decades, the region has not featured strongly in the mental maps of those living outside it. Neither confidently "north" nor "south" – and lacking the high-profile narratives associated with larger metropolitan areas – Nottingham and its neighbouring authorities are often under-represented in national debate. Since the days of the miners' strike, this relative invisibility has arguably allowed deep inequalities within the region to persist.

Spatial inequalities in health, wealth and opportunity exist not just nationally but within regions, towns and even neighbouring districts. The East Midlands is a striking example. ILC's UK Better Lives Index shows how sharply outcomes can differ across short distances, shaping people's lives from childhood through to older age. Our analysis underlines why place must sit at the heart of growth, health and ageing policy – particularly in regions that too often fall between the cracks of national attention. For example, Bolsover in Derbyshire and East Lindsey in Lincolnshire are ranked at 358th and 359th places at the bottom of the Index, while Harborough, in relatively nearby Leicestershire is ranked near the top, at 28th.

Even just focusing in on the places that make up the East Midlands Combined County Authority, life expectancy at birth ranges from over 83 years in Rushcliffe to under 79 years in Nottingham. Life expectancy at 65 varies by more than three years, from just over 18 years in Nottingham and Ashfield to more than 21 years in Rushcliffe. These gaps are not inevitable – they reflect long-standing differences in income, employment, housing and health.

Child poverty tells a similar story. Fewer than one in ten children grow up in poverty in Rushcliffe, compared with nearly four in ten in Nottingham. In Derby, Bolsover and

Mansfield, child poverty rates exceed 25%, shaping life chances in ways that often carry through into adulthood and older age.

Economic opportunity also varies sharply. Gross disposable household income ranges from over £25,000 in Rushcliffe to just over £15,000 in Nottingham. Economic activity rates are high in places such as Broxtowe, where nearly three-quarters of people aged 16 and over are economically active, but fall to barely half in Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire.

Average house prices are just under eight times average earnings across the region compared with 8.9 times across England – but range from 6.7 to 11.2 times locally. Lower house prices in some areas might signal affordability. However, they often reflect weaker labour markets and limited opportunity rather than prosperity. Without sustained investment in skills, good work and infrastructure, these places risk being further marginalised.

Later-life outcomes are where inequalities become most stark. Economic inactivity among 50–64-year-olds exceeds 50% in Ashfield, compared with just 13% in Gedling. Avoidable mortality rates are more than twice as high in Nottingham as in Rushcliffe, pointing to the cumulative impact of disadvantage across the life course.

These differences matter not only for individuals, but for local economies and public services. The creation of mayoralties in regions like the East Midlands offers a timely opportunity to change both outcomes and perceptions. With clearer leadership and a stronger voice, the region can better articulate its strengths, confront entrenched inequalities and make the case for targeted investment.

That is why we are delighted that the Mayor of the East Midlands Combined County Authority, Claire Ward, will be speaking at our Future of Ageing conference on Thursday 5 March. Strong mayoral leadership can help ensure the East Midlands is no longer overlooked in national conversations but recognised as a region with both significant challenges and untapped potential.

The UK Better Lives Index is made possible by charitable support and grants from Edwards Lifesciences, Hallmark Foundation and Pfizer.

UK BETTER LIVES INDEX

Our impact - what happens next depends on what happens now

What happens in 2026 and beyond?





For nearly three decades, ILC has worked at the frontier of research, policy and practice, bringing together new insight, cross-sector partnerships and engagement to shape how societies respond to longevity and ageing. This week we held a party to thank many of the wonderful people who make this work possible.

At the event, David Sinclair, our Chief Executive, highlighted some of the things we had achieved in 2025 – an extraordinary year for our small team. We hosted more than 50 events across 11 countries, bringing together nearly 3,000 people face to face – from Canal Street in Manchester to the fringes of the G7, G20 and the UN. Our work reached millions more through media, podcasts and digital engagement, with coverage of the UK Better Lives Index alone spanning over 80 national and regional outlets.

The UK Better Lives Index exposed stark inequalities in how people are able to live, work and age across the country. Our Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index ranked 153 countries on how well they are adapting to longer lives, helping to shift the global conversation from lifespan to health span, work span and wellbeing. Alongside this, we published 16 reports tackling issues from age-friendly economies to HIV and ageing, and gave oral evidence to Select Committees in both Houses of Parliament.

But obviously ageing is happening now, not tomorrow. So as we look ahead to 2026 and beyond, our trustees and team have sharpened how we describe our purpose through five clear strategic missions. These are not slogans or a branding exercise. They are a practical way of staying focused on the change we want to see in a complex and fast-moving world.

Our missions start from a simple premise: longer lives should be better lives. That means seeing longevity as an opportunity, not a problem to manage. It means making prevention pay – for individuals, public services and the economy. It means championing fairness across generations, recognising that intergenerational tension helps no one and sustainable public services matter to all of us. It means breaking down silos between government, business and civil society so ageing and longevity are embedded across strategies, not bolted on. And it means thinking global while acting local, connecting international insight with place-based action.

These missions will guide how we prioritise our research, who we partner with and how we judge success. Over the coming months, we will be clearer about how we measure progress against them – not just in outputs, but in real-world influence and change. Just as importantly, we want these to be tested and strengthened. We invite policymakers, practitioners, funders and partners to challenge us, work with us and help ensure they remain relevant in a shifting political, social and economic landscape.

If you want to be part of that conversation, please get in touch. And do join us at Future of Ageing on Thursday 5 March – another chance to meet face to face and explore how, together, we can turn ambition into action in 2026.

READ MORE

The Friday three newsletter, edited by Emily Evans, is usually sent out fortnightly.

To keep up-to-date with ILC events throughout the year, please continue to check our website on a regular basis. If you are interested in learning more about our Partners Programme, please click here.

Our work is reliant on the generosity of our supporters, please donate to ILC here.

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