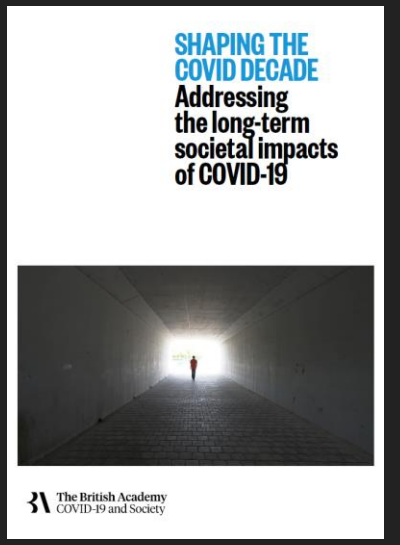
The British Academy's review of the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19

Dominic Abrams

https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/covid-decade/



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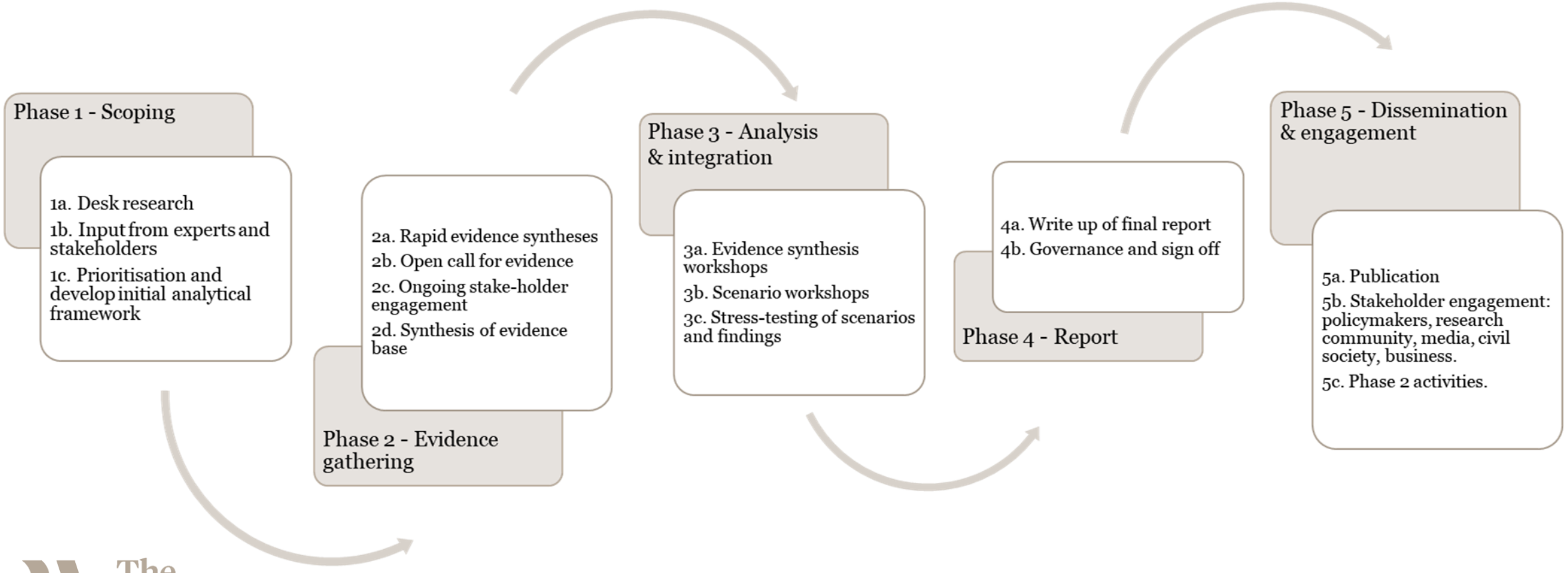
Centre for Social Policy

June 16th 2021

Project question and plan

Government Office for Science invited us to assess long-term societal implications and impacts of COVID-19



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Overview of the Evidence Framework

3 areas of policy focus

- Health and wellbeing,
- Community, culture & belonging
- Knowledge, employment & skills

…5 cross cutting themes

- Governance
- Trust
- Cohesion
- Inequalities
- Sustainability

…considering elements of…

—**place** (local, regional, national, international),

—**scale** (individual, community, society)

—**time** (historical and future).

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Our evidence hub can be found at https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/covid-decade/evidence/

Impact grids – a core analytical tool

	Key societal impact
Present situation	What the evidence tells us about the present situation of the societal effects of COVID-19
Direction setting	Emerging 'direction setting' major challenges and opportunities identified from the available evidence on the present situation
End of decade without intervention	Where the UK could end up in 2030 if we allow the emerging challenges and opportunities to set the direct of travel for society What else are we missing?

Phase 3
Evidence synthesis: Testing the impact grids

— Headline evidence of the *current* societal effects of Covid-19.
— Emerging challenges and opportunities arising from these effects.

—3 days of workshops with 40 stakeholders, follow-up meetings with research teams, other advisors and workshop participants to review, augment and validate initial tranche of evidence across our themes in the 3 key areas (Health, Skills, Communities).

— Further synthesis of impacts

Phase 3
Evidence synthesis: Scenario testing workshops

Substantial uncertainty about how the Covid crisis will evolve.

Strategy: Use impact grids as the basis of our starting point for scenarios of a range of longer term societal impacts and policy directions

Broad scenarios to capture potential unfolding of events

Flexible framework to examine which impacts might deepen, resolve, change, and what the policy options would then be over the next decade.

Scenario 1 - an assumed ‘baseline’

Successful mitigation of the virus threat; ability to focus on long-term economic and social recovery as opposed to constant focus on the health threats.

All groups in society are at low health risk from the virus; free movement and social interactions resume.

Economic recovery is strong and early; government support schemes can end; unemployment falls; there are, though, inevitably high levels of government debt.

The NHS and other public services can resume general, non-crisis operations quickly.

Decision-making is **less constrained** with respect of trade-offs against mitigating the virus, with a range of policy options available to government bodies, businesses, and civil society organisations.

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Scenario 2 – managed risk

Persistent, but managed Covid threat; pressure to retain some preventative public health measures.

Health risks to some vulnerable groups remain but are lower ; many freedoms are restored but some less-intrusive measures remain; people stay vigilant at certain times in certain settings.

The NHS can manage ongoing, perhaps seasonal Covid prevention and treatment and able to restore all other operations; other public services can operate effectively but with some resource still required to mitigate Covid risk.

There remains additional pressure on the economy and public finances to manage Covid, slowing the recovery; some businesses and sectors may require additional support to adapt to changing markets; unemployment for certain groups remains higher.

Decision-making is **difficult**, with the need to balance policy options for recovery against managing Covid. Most policies are complicated by needing to account for Covid risk.

Scenario 3 – waves of disruption

A prolonged economic and social crisis where significant disruption is felt for some time, even if the immediate health threat in the UK declines.

Everyone's daily lives remain affected by the ongoing repercussions of the global crisis. Foreign travel and other freedoms may be impeded by an asymmetrical response to mitigating the health crisis in other countries.

The economy remains stagnant or contracts further; there is severe disruption to businesses in certain sectors; public debt increases further, and public spending cannot effectively support an economic recovery and prevent high unemployment.

Public services, including education, remain under pressure and cannot function effectively for some time.

Decision-making is **limited** to responding to the ongoing crisis, with little time or resource to consider long-term policy options. Businesses and other organisations will be focused on survival rather than long-term recovery.

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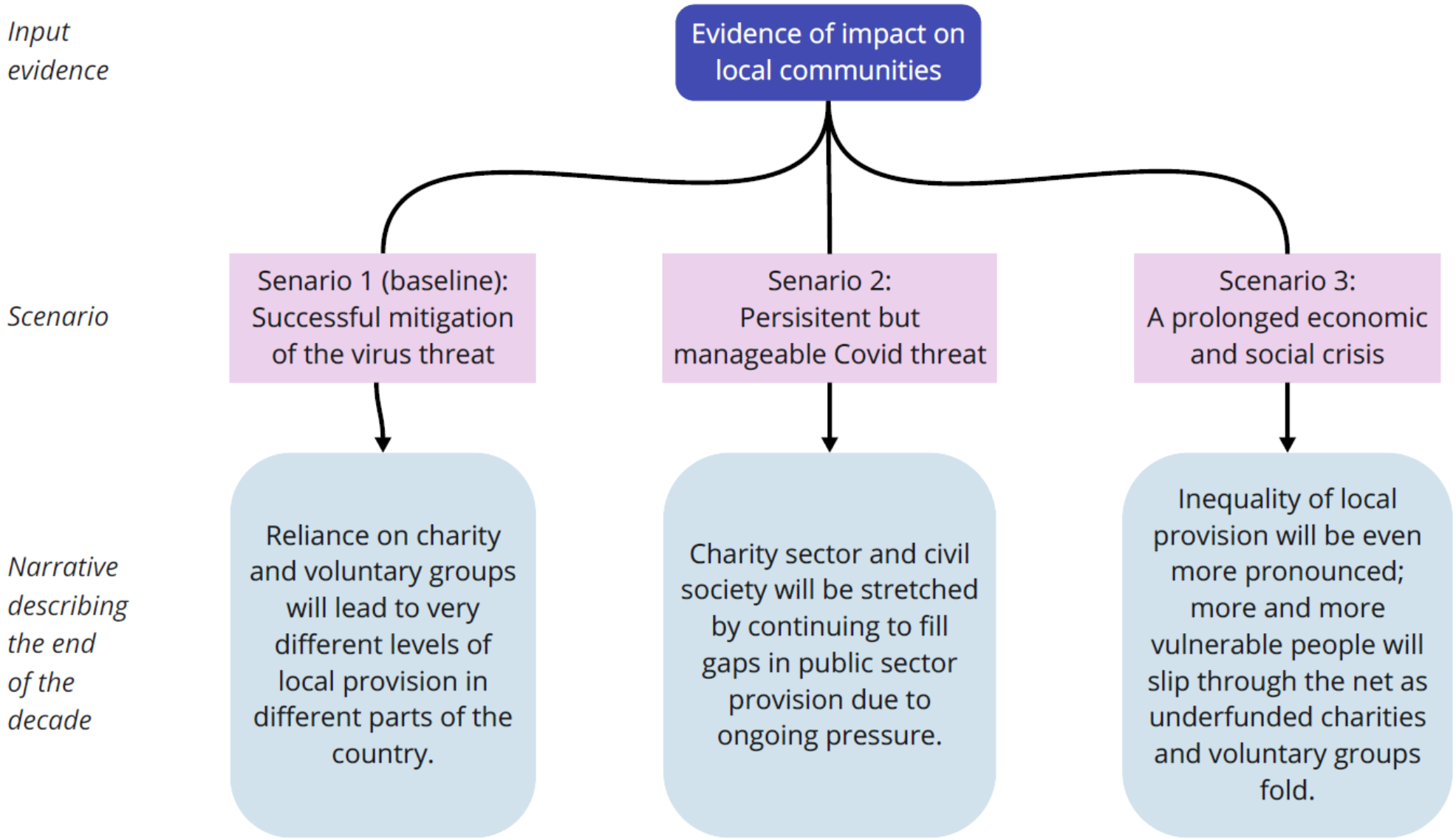
Example – reliance on charity sector



https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/

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The area of health and wellbeing included themes of:

- Health inequalities
- Mental health impacts
- Social care
- Pandemic duration and long COVID
- Information and communication
- Data gathering and new health technologies
- Environmental conditions

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Examples

—COVID cases per 100,000 were persistently higher amongst those in the worst position in terms of indices of multiple deprivation.

—Although medical vulnerability and death were higher amongst older people, this very much depended also on other factors, so that that within geographical areas places with comfortably off older people had much lower rates of hospitalisation than those with a more deprived but younger population.

—Large demographic effects on whether people would be willing to wear masks, suggesting that this is not simply a response to the biological threat, nor simply a matter of individual preference, but perhaps a response to the social norms and other factors prevailing in particular contexts or for particular groups.

—Computer models also suggested that containment might be better managed through focus on communities rather than just bubbles or attempting to limit contact by category of person.

The area of knowledge, employment and skills included themes of:

- Experience of education and skills building
- Further and higher education
- Economic instability
- Effects on employment
- Income inequality

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Two Key Trends

Trend 1) Rising unemployment particularly for young + less educated

— Furlough/SEISS+ UC increases have protected many so far, but different options for working from home

— Job loss + lack of apprenticeships demand + reduced overall training

Trend 2) Lack of face-to-face school teaching

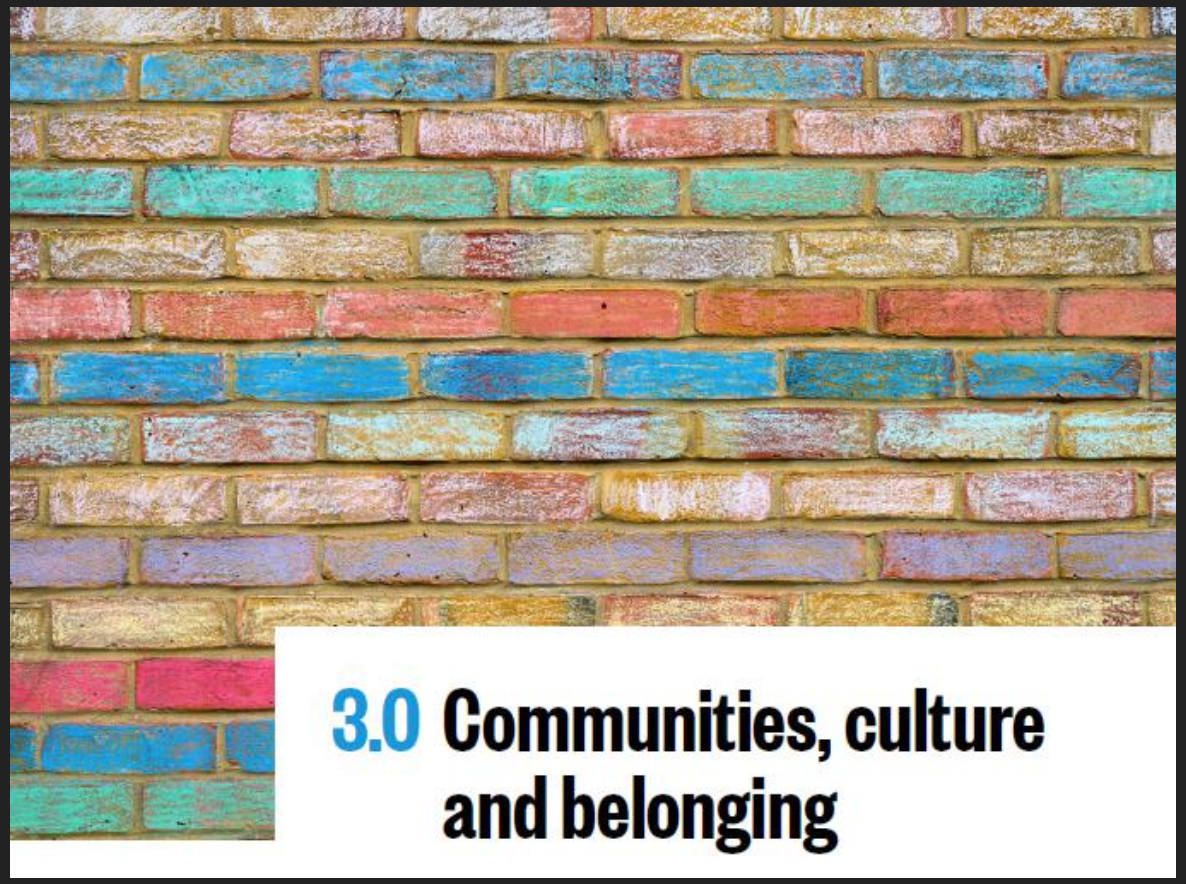
— All children have missed out but worst for children from poorer families

Consequently, 3 types of inequalities particularly likely to increase

— Income inequalities between richer and poorer households

— Socio-economic inequalities in education + skills

— Inter-generational inequalities between older and younger people



The area of communities, culture and belonging includes themes of:

- Community level responses, volunteering and mutual aid
- Cohesion and solidarity
- Patterns of trust
- Place and cities
- Race, ethnicity, immigration and prejudice
- Arts, culture and sport

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Features of Cohesion within and Across Communities

Key elements

- Cultural memory and tradition
- Social economy
- Meanings and mechanisms of social responsibility
- Identity and belonging
- Care for the future

A state

- strengths, capacity, contentment

A **dynamic process** involving responses to

- internal resources and interdependencies
- external stressors and opportunities in a changing environment

Evidence of Impacts through Communities

Community level responses

- Volunteering and positive social engagement, especially through local intermediaries

The role of place

- Place as the locus of actions to address tensions and achieve change
- Transformations and reuse of high streets, residential and work spaces
- Transport and sustainability

Prejudice, discrimination and conflict

- Not only ethnic/religious integration
- Intergenerational social contract
- Scapegoating
- Localism, regionalism and nationalism

The cultural, arts, sports infrastructure

- Key part of community life and vehicles for
- Economic activity
- Social connection, purpose, understanding and influence

Trust and Cohesion

Trust is an essential basis for democratic governance to work and, with cohesion, are essential to sustain cooperative endeavour for shared objectives.

- What levels exist?
- Where does it reside?
- What levels do we need?
- What affects levels of trust and cohesion?

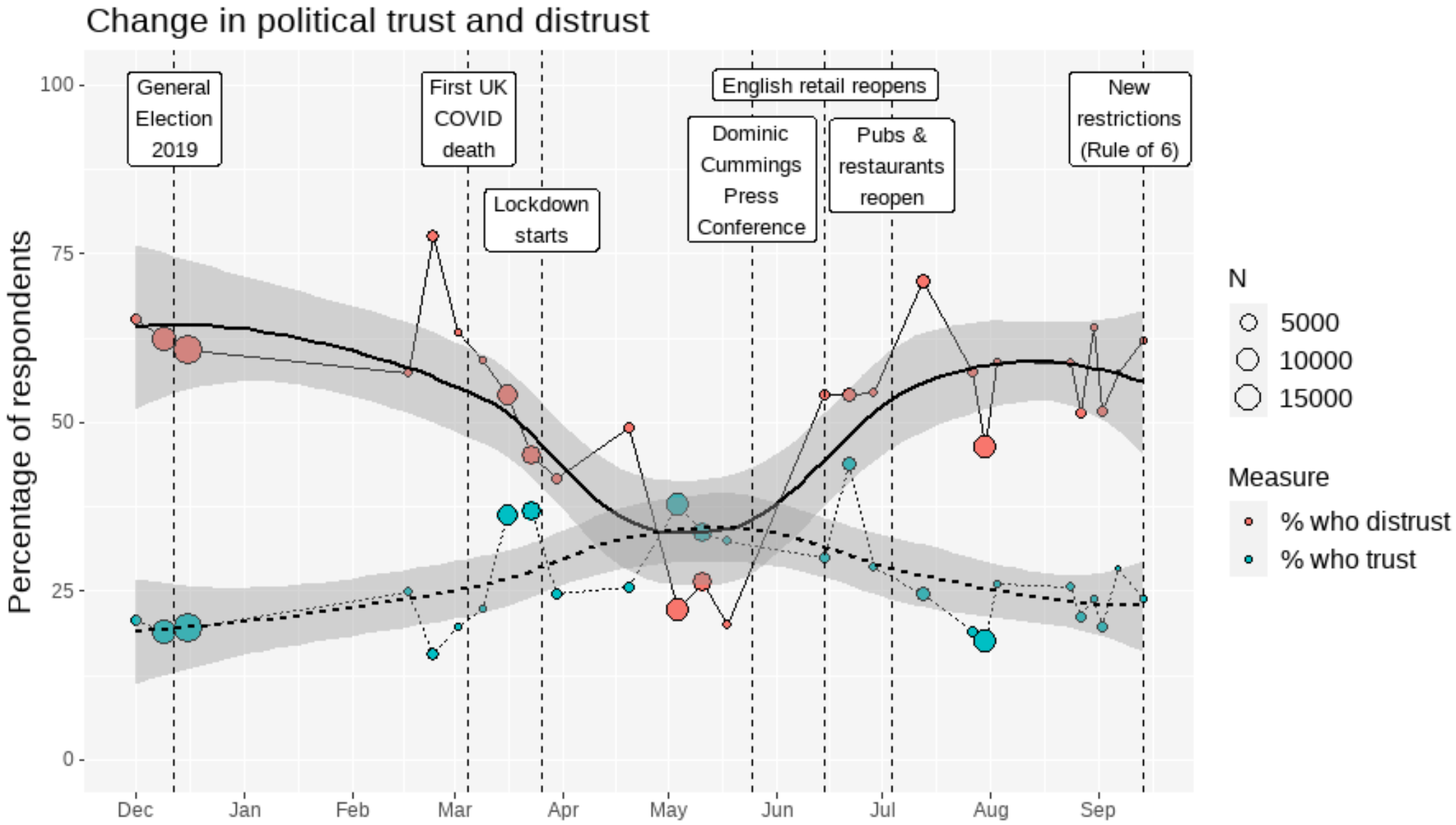
Method

National level survey evidence at weekly intervals across 2020

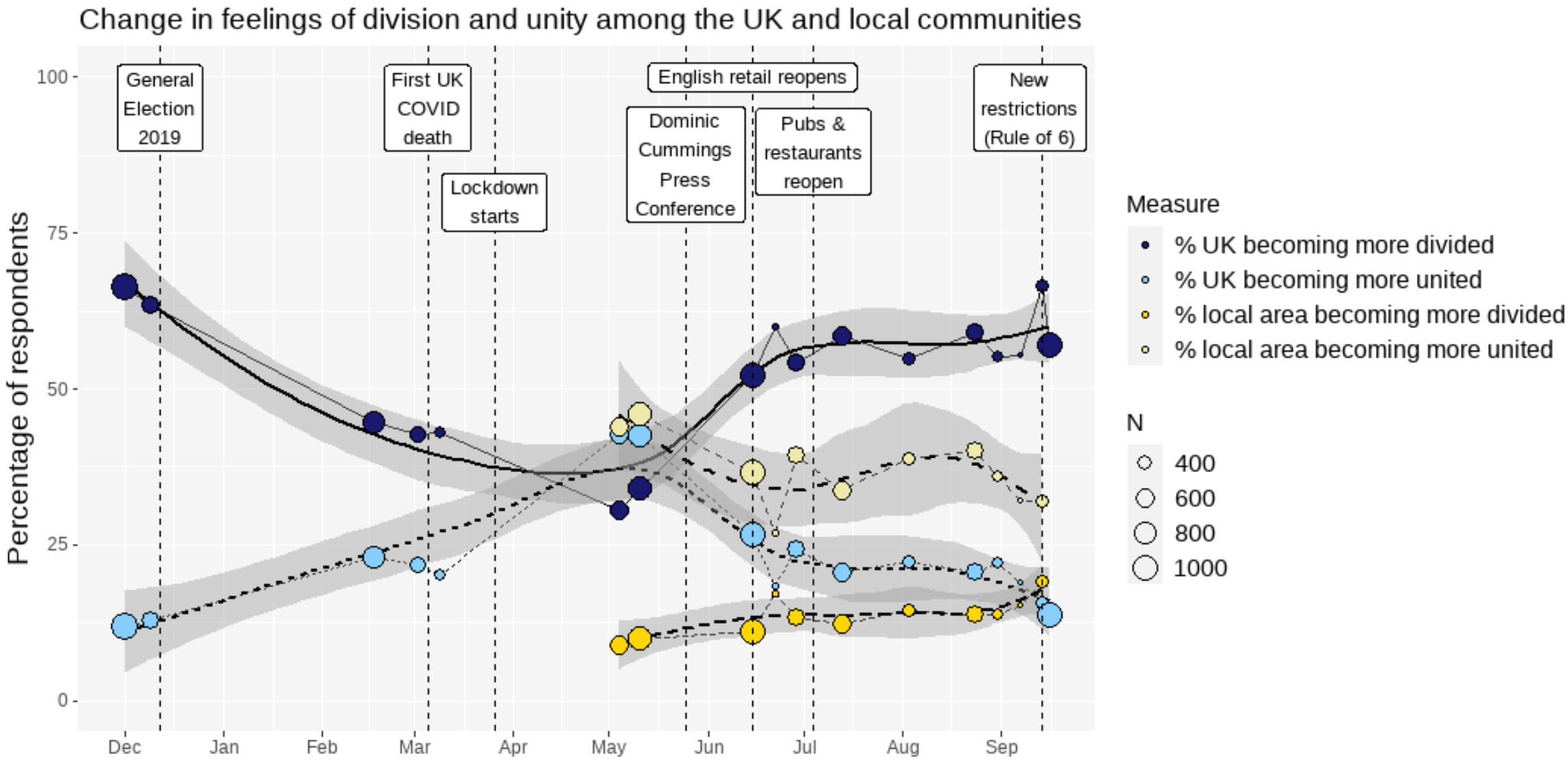
Common metric to integrate different sources

Examined trust/distrust in government, national and local division/unity

Trust and Cohesion



Trust and Cohesion



9 significant areas of long term impact

5.0 Conclusion: nine areas of long-term societal impact

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1. Increased importance of local communities
2. Low and unstable levels of trust
3. Widening geographic inequalities
4. Exacerbated structural inequalities
5. Worsened health outcomes and growing health inequalities
6. Greater awareness of the importance of mental health
7. Pressure on revenue streams
8. Rising unemployment and changing labour markets
9. Renewed awareness of education and skills

Understanding and Shaping the COVID Decade

https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/shaping-the-covid-decade-addressing-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/

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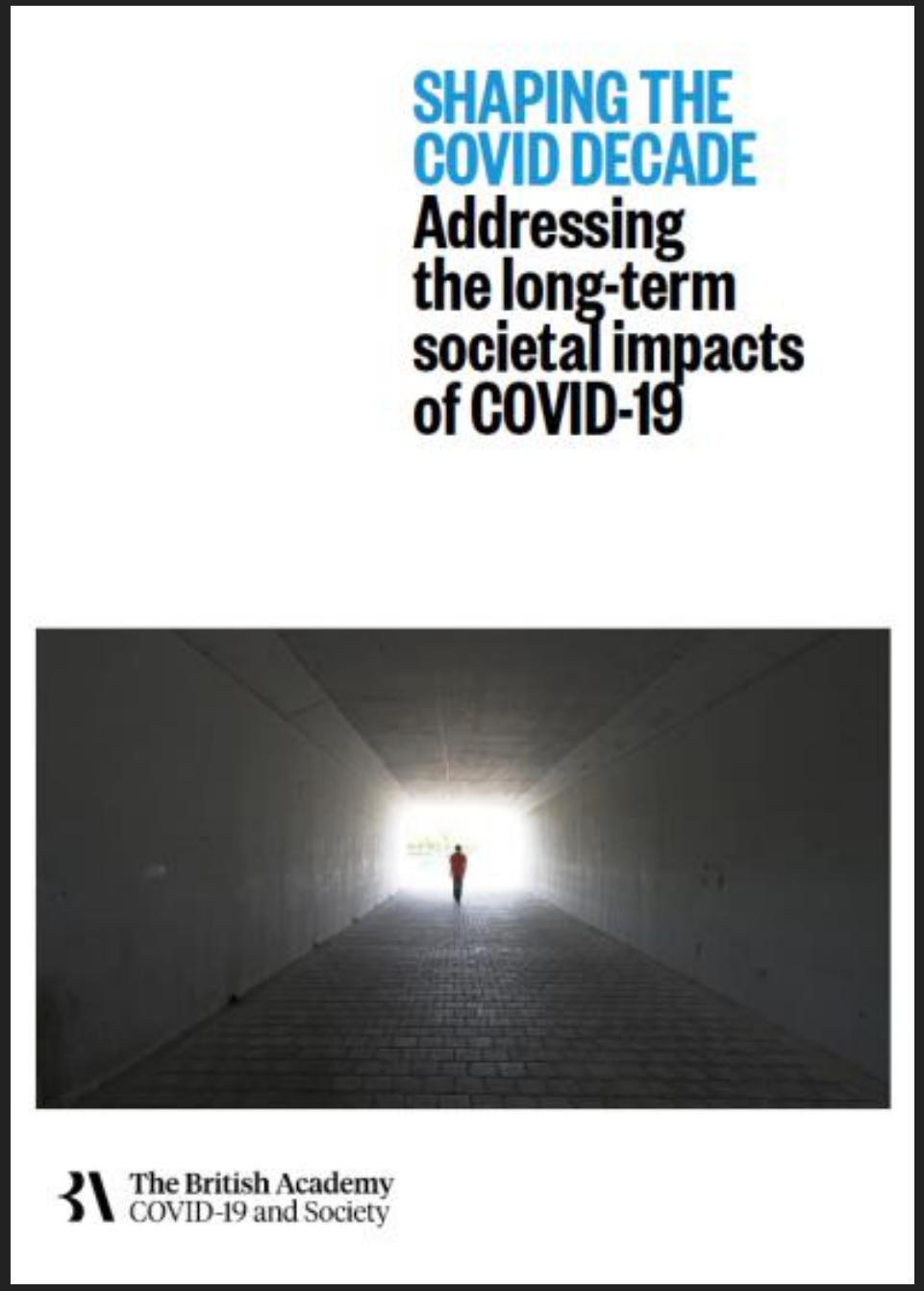
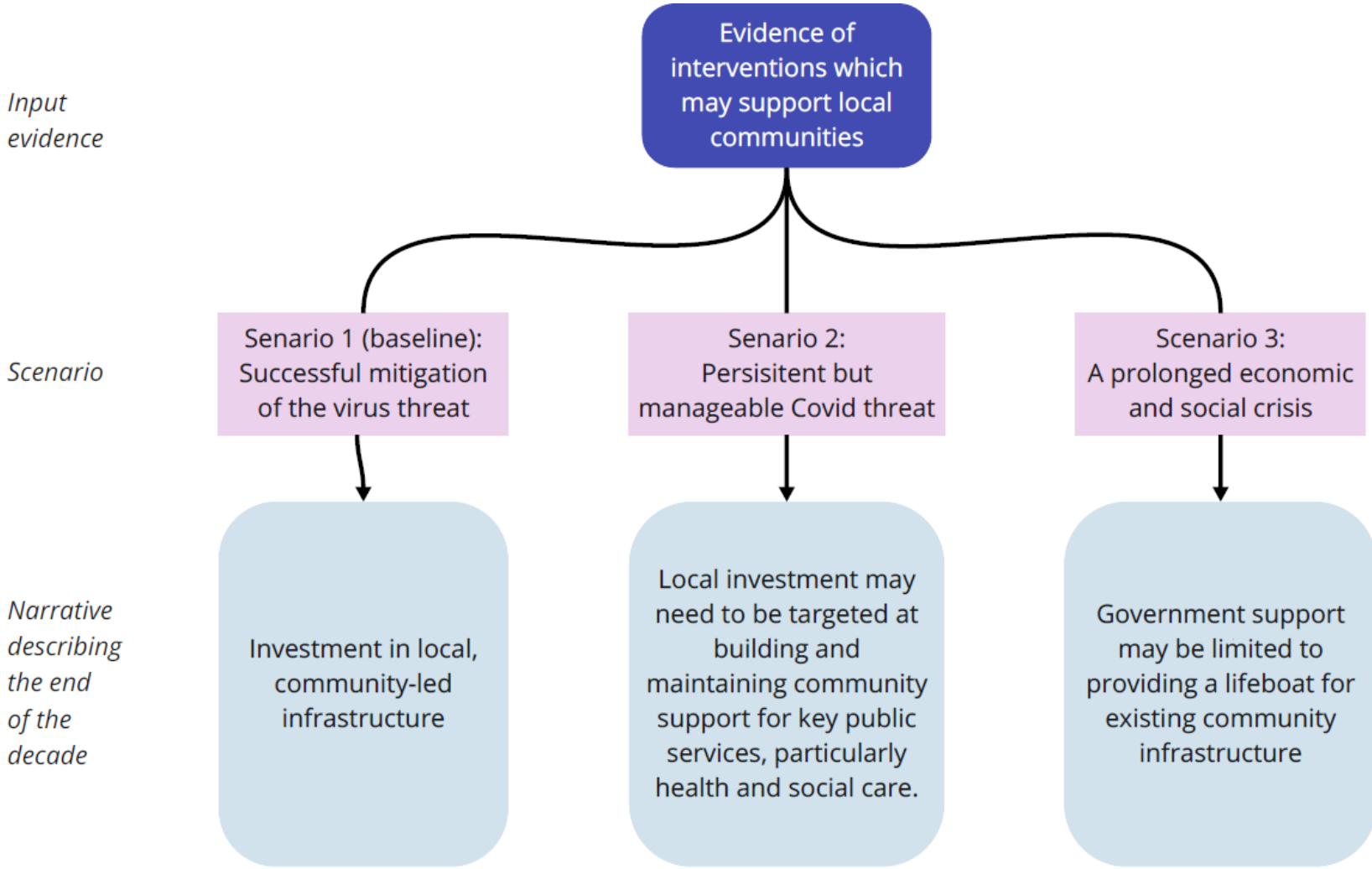


Using the impact grid: evidence of interventions



7 strategic policy goals

3.0 Policy goals and opportunities

1. Build multi-level governance structures

2. Improve the way we develop, share and communicate knowledge, data and information

3. Prioritise investment in digital infrastructure as a critical public service

4. Reimagine urban spaces to support sustainable business, commerce and lifestyles

5. Create a more agile, responsive education and training system

6. Strengthen and expand community-led social infrastructure

7. Use social purpose to help drive a solid strategy for recovery across the economy and society

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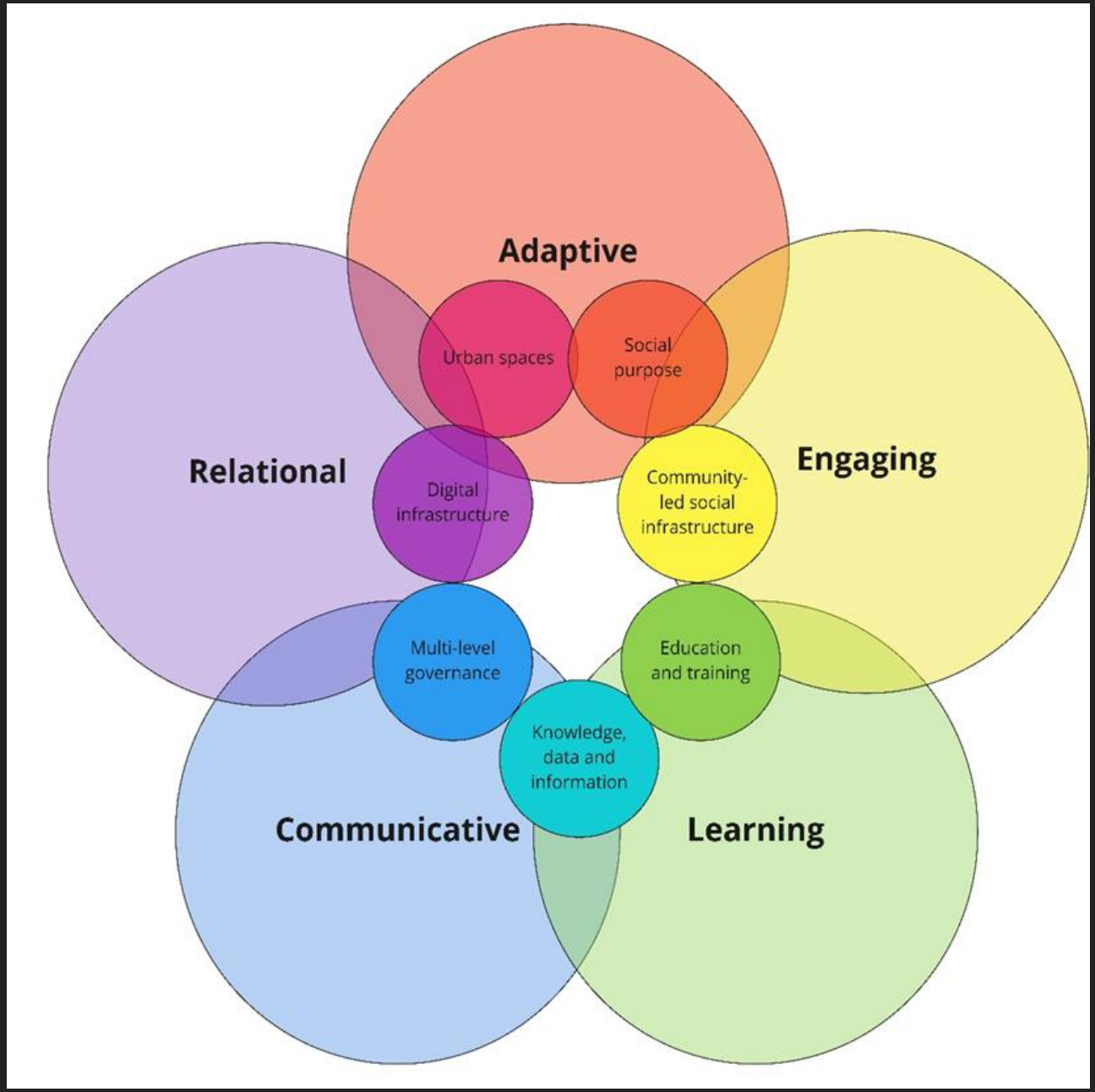
5 CLEAR principles



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Phase 5
Policy Engagement

— SAGE groups
—Cabinet Permanent Secretaries
— Chief Scientific Advisors
— Cabinet Office COVID Task Force
—National CORE studies
—Senior Civil Servants training
—Media engagement etc!

Concluding points

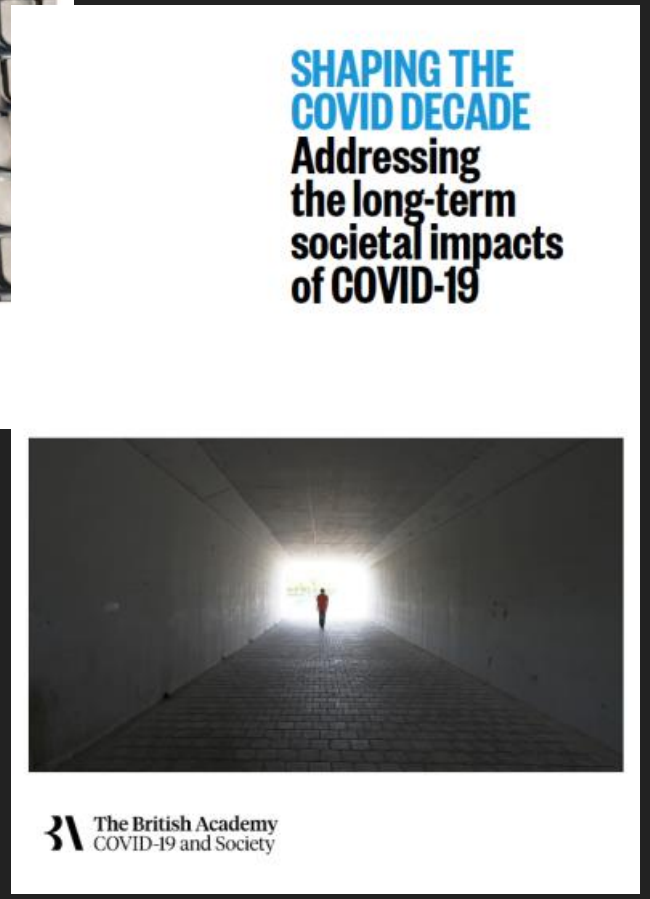
— Policy must be developed to address the interconnections and interdependencies among the impacts, and with sufficient sensitivity to time, scale and context. Addressing each impact in a piecemeal way will always fail to deliver as much as it could.

— Many effects of COVID-19 are themselves an acceleration of existing trends – increasing inequalities, strains on our governance systems, pressures on communities.

— This isn’t surprising; history shows that pandemics are just as much social and economic crises as they are medical and health ones.

— History also indicates that times of upheaval, with sufficient vision, there are opportunities to reshape society.

Understanding and Shaping the COVID Decade



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