



Lead Insight

Community Priorities and Collective Action

Issue 1 | September 2026

Evidence and learning from the launch of the Lead to Change Network across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Listening | Connecting | Influencing Change



Participants at the Lead to Change founding meeting, September 2026.

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www.afroinno.org/lead-to-change

Purpose of this Lead Insight

This first Lead Insight presents the early evidence that led to the creation of the Lead to Change Network and the priorities identified by organisations at its founding meeting. It provides a shared starting point for the Network's Change Labs, future evidence gathering and engagement with public bodies, funders and other decision makers.

Members raised housing, immigration, welfare, legal representation, wellbeing and resource allocation. Taken together, these themes suggest a need to examine how barriers overlap. This issue proposes stronger coordination and community participation as priorities for further investigation and action.

Headline findings

Finding	What the early evidence indicates
Access to advice remains uneven	Members raised immigration, welfare and lack of legal representation. The scale and causes of these difficulties require further investigation.
Housing is connected to wider insecurity	Housing problems were raised alongside welfare, immigration and wellbeing concerns, showing the need for joined-up pathways rather than isolated interventions.
Isolation and anxiety require community responses	Members identified isolation, anxiety and wellbeing as priorities. Change Labs can explore their effects on help-seeking and participation.
Community capacity is under pressure	Organisations identified concerns about resource allocation, access to representation and the support available for sustained community development.
Collective evidence can strengthen influence	Members supported an approach that gathers experience across organisations and converts it into evidence for practical collaboration, advocacy and service improvement.

Main conclusion Lead to Change should provide a practical route from community experience to shared insight, evidence, collective advocacy and influence.

How this insight was developed

Lead to Change was established in direct response to evidence gathered by Afro Innovation Group. In June 2026, AIG consulted 32 community leaders across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The consultation identified clear demand for a dedicated platform through which migrant-led and other community organisations could connect, identify shared challenges and strengthen their collective influence.

The Network's founding meeting took place on 3 September 2026 at the Afro Innovation Group Community Centre. Twenty participants from different organisations attended. Participants discussed the pressures affecting the communities they serve, considered how organisations could work together and agreed the initial arrangements required to sustain the Network.

Evidence included in this issue

Source	Participation	Contribution
June 2026 consultation	32 community leaders	Demand for a dedicated collaborative network and stronger community influence
Founding meeting on 3 September 2026	20 participants	Shared challenges, collective priorities and early working arrangements
AIG strategic and business planning	2026 to 2029 delivery framework	Commitments for network growth, evidence publication, partnership development and policy engagement

How to read the findings

This issue reports qualitative evidence from an early stage in the Network's development. The themes show what participating leaders and organisations considered important; they should not be interpreted as population estimates for the whole of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Future Lead Insight publications will broaden the evidence through Change Lab activity, member contributions, community engagement and relevant organisational data.

Community priorities identified

Participants identified a connected set of issues affecting individuals, families and the organisations supporting them. The following themes organise those contributions without separating problems that frequently overlap in people's lives.

PRIORITY 1

Immigration, welfare and legal support

Participants raised immigration and welfare difficulties alongside a lack of accessible legal representation. These concerns point to the importance of trusted advice, effective referral routes and earlier support before problems escalate.

PRIORITY 2

Housing and basic security

Housing was identified as a major priority. A proposed focus for further inquiry is how housing insecurity interacts with income, immigration status, welfare access and wellbeing.

PRIORITY 3

Wellbeing, isolation and anxiety

Isolation, anxiety and broader wellbeing concerns were identified. Community organisations often provide the first trusted point of contact, but sustained responses require links with health, advice and social support services.

PRIORITY 4**Community development and fairer resources**

Members discussed community development and the allocation of resources. Their contributions reflected concern about whether frontline organisations have sufficient access to funding, information, partnerships and opportunities to shape local priorities.

PRIORITY 5**Community cohesion, culture and participation**

Community cohesion, culture, engagement, education and innovation were identified as areas for collective work. These themes concern how communities connect, preserve identity, build understanding and participate in civic and organisational life.

What the priorities mean for collective action**Challenges are interconnected**

The issues raised do not sit within neat service boundaries. A housing problem may be intensified by welfare delays, immigration uncertainty, poor mental health or lack of legal advice. Effective responses depend on organisations recognising these links and coordinating support around people's circumstances.

Trusted organisations hold important knowledge

Community organisations see recurring barriers through their daily work. When this knowledge remains within individual organisations, patterns may be missed by commissioners and decision makers. Lead to Change can combine experience from multiple organisations, test whether problems are shared and present stronger evidence for change.

Capacity shapes whose voice is heard

The concern about resource allocation is also a concern about participation. Organisations with limited staffing and unrestricted funding may struggle to attend strategic forums, gather evidence or respond to consultations, even when they hold relevant community knowledge. Inclusive engagement therefore requires realistic support for participation.

Evidence must lead to practical improvement

The Network's purpose extends beyond information sharing. Evidence should be used to improve referral pathways, develop joint initiatives, inform service design and strengthen collective advocacy. Lead Insight will document what members are learning, where systems are not working and which responses appear promising.

Evidence pathway Community experience → shared insight → tested evidence → collective action → influence

How Lead to Change supports our strategy

AIG's Strategic Plan 2026–2031 places Community Leadership, Partnerships and Influence at the centre of its second strategic priority. Lead to Change provides a way for organisations to identify shared concerns and shape responses together. Lead Insight makes the resulting evidence and learning available to members and decision makers.

Our shared direction

AIG's vision is a society where refugees, migrants and disadvantaged communities are empowered, included and able to thrive, contribute and shape the decisions that affect their lives. The Network supports this vision by creating opportunities for communities to speak, participate and influence for themselves.

Empowering People and Communities

Community experience helps identify barriers to support and opportunities for better services. Learning from the Network can inform practical improvements in advice, housing, wellbeing and participation.

Community Leadership, Partnerships and Influence

Change Labs bring organisations together around shared issues. Lead Insight can support dialogue with public bodies, funders and researchers, while members contribute to service design and collective advocacy.

Building a Sustainable Organisation

Evidence, learning and accountable partnerships help AIG plan responsibly. The Network's development should be matched by realistic staffing, resources and support for member participation.

What progress should mean

Membership ambitions are 60 organisations by 2027, 90 by 2028 and 120 or more by 2029. Alongside growth, we propose tracking member participation, evidence contributions, partner responses and documented changes to services or decisions. The Business Plan commits to at least one community insight report annually.

Proposed Change Labs

Change Labs will provide the working mechanism through which members examine priority issues, contribute evidence and develop responses. Based on the founding discussion, the following initial structure is proposed for consideration by Network members. The themes can be refined as participation and evidence develop.

Change Lab	Initial scope	Early purpose
Housing and homelessness	Housing access, insecurity, temporary accommodation, tenancy sustainment and links with wider support needs	Map recurring barriers, improve referral relationships and identify practical or policy responses
Immigration, welfare and access to advice	Immigration concerns, welfare access, legal representation, information gaps and trusted referral pathways	Identify unmet advice needs and develop collective evidence for service and policy engagement
Wellbeing and social connection	Isolation, anxiety, mental wellbeing, belonging and access to culturally responsive support	Connect community insight with health partners and strengthen community-based responses
Community capacity, cohesion and participation	Resources, leadership, culture, education, engagement, innovation and community cohesion	Strengthen organisations' capacity to collaborate, participate and influence decisions

A common working approach

- Define the issue and the communities affected.
- Gather evidence from member organisations and community experience.
- Identify patterns, service gaps and examples of effective practice.
- Agree practical actions, partnership opportunities or advocacy priorities.
- Record progress and publish learning through Lead Insight.

From the founding meeting to the next phase

The founding meeting established a practical basis for continued collaboration. Members agreed to maintain communication, meet quarterly and explore a digital platform that can support connection, evidence sharing and joint activity between meetings.

Area	Next action	Intended result
Network communication	Establish and maintain the members' WhatsApp group and circulate meeting information and materials	A connected founding membership
Quarterly meetings	Convene regular forums to review priorities, share learning and agree collective action	Continuity and accountability
Change Labs	Confirm themes, membership and working arrangements for the first Labs	Focused collaboration on shared issues
Evidence development	Create a consistent approach for gathering member and community evidence	Credible collective intelligence
Digital collaboration	Explore a platform for discussion, document sharing and participation between meetings	Wider and more accessible engagement
Membership growth	Continue recruitment across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	Broader representation and stronger evidence

Network growth and accountability

AIG's Three Year Business Plan sets a membership ambition of 60 organisations in Year 1, 90 in Year 2 and more than 120 in Year 3. Growth will be meaningful only if members can participate, contribute evidence and see how shared priorities lead to action. Future Lead Insight issues will therefore report on participation, learning, collaborative activity and influence as well as membership numbers.



Discussion at the founding meeting. Future Change Labs will develop the issues raised into focused inquiries and actions.

Invitation to participate

Lead to Change is open to migrant-led organisations, community groups, faith organisations, social enterprises and voluntary organisations working across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Membership is free. Organisations can contribute by joining meetings, participating in a Change Lab, sharing evidence and helping to develop collective responses.

About Lead Insight

Lead Insight publishes evidence, learning and community intelligence generated through the Lead to Change Network and its Change Labs. It is intended to inform policy, improve practice and support better decisions by organisations, public bodies, commissioners, funders and other partners.

Contact and membership

Lead to Change Network

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www.afroinno.org/lead-to-change

Evidence note Sources: AIG Strategic Plan 2026–2031, sections 3, 4, 8 and 10; AIG Three-Year Business Plan 2026–2029, Objective 2; founding meeting summary, 3 September 2026. Photographs supplied by AIG.