

**Local Trust**  
creating  
lasting  
change

# **Big Local: What's new and different?**

**July 2013**

## Foreword

Since Big Local was announced in 2010, and the subsequent establishment of Local Trust in 2011, we have been interested in developing some work that highlights what is 'new' and 'different' about Big Local. This paper sets out some of the deliberate choices that the Community Development Foundation (CDF) led consortium and then Local Trust and its partners made during the set-up phase that builds on the learning and experiences of area-based, community development models that preceded Big Local. It also outlines other approaches that Big Local draws on to facilitate and support resident-led change in 150 areas across England.

Local Trust is pleased that this paper describes how Big Local has been developed using lessons from the past. This includes our deliberate efforts to make this a long-term investment so that residents in Big Local areas are able to build their skills and confidence at their own pace. Additionally, our aim to give greater control and power to residents has been recognised through highlighting the light-touch face to face support we have in place and the importance of peer-to-peer learning for people in Big Local areas to learn from each other.

This report also outlines some important distinctions about the unique position of Local Trust (as an independent charitable trust, not a government agency), our values and our approach. Our willingness to take and manage risks aims to encourage those in Big Local areas to deliver more innovative activities, while supporting people to build on their assets, expand their potential and embrace opportunities. This may include social investment and community finance activities which create new, albeit riskier opportunities than those offered in previous area-based regeneration and community development programmes.

The challenge ahead is responding to and managing the issues and risks involved in delivering a programme like Big Local. Participation, leadership and volunteering are key parts of Big Local, and Local Trust is considering how we support resident enthusiasm and involvement over time. Similarly, the capacity for Local Trust to use the programme's culture of learning to adapt and accommodate change over 15 years will be a significant test.

Local Trust will use learning from Big Local to develop strategic and incremental improvements to Big Local so Big Local areas can achieve change on their own terms. Our theory of change can be found online, and this paper helps put it in context. Our work with our two research partners, IVAR and CDF and our external relationship with the School for Public Health Research will support us by conducting close investigations on the set-up of Big Local and the appropriateness of the support in place.

Finally, we are looking forward to the discussion and debates this paper will inspire and more importantly, how this dialogue will lead to improvements to our activities and approach so that we are able to better support residents' and their interests in all Big Local areas.

Debbie Ladds  
Chief executive, Local Trust  
May 2013

## Introduction

Big Local aims to enable people to achieve lasting change in the areas where they live. It will do this by giving local residents increased control over a long-term investment, with minimal requirements placed upon how they spend money and organise themselves. This is in the belief that previous programmes have often failed because they have given residents insufficient control and placed too many requirements on the investments that have been made. Big Local's intention is to be 'new and different'.

In November 2012, IVAR was commissioned to carry out a short exercise to support Big Local in this intention. This involved a brief review of documentation about a range of programmes in the UK and further afield in order to:

- Identify important lessons from previous community involvement/regeneration programmes both in the UK and beyond and the way they are being taken forward by Big Local; and
- Highlight the issues Big Local will need to address over the coming years if it is to deliver on its commitment to be 'new and different'.

The programmes that we reviewed and the reports we drew on are listed in Appendix A. Appendix B provides a summary of some of the international examples, which will be less familiar to readers.

Documentation on previous programmes varies in its usefulness and applicability to Big Local. Firstly, learning about what worked and what didn't was often hampered by the emphasis on success stories and the need to paint a positive picture. Secondly, evaluations of outcomes were often not accompanied by a critical review of the processes through which these outcomes were achieved. Thirdly, on our initial trawl, we found few programmes that adopted a comparable model to Big Local. Many previous programmes have focused on partnerships with government, on equipping local communities to engage more effectively with government and on giving communities a say in government or service provider budgets. Few involved the level of investment, the long timescale or the focus on residents taking control that characterises Big Local.

For this reason, we regard this exercise as the first step in a wider process of strategic learning. It will be developed further as part of IVAR's *Foresighting* programme, which will involve a more extensive search of international programmes, for example in the US and the global South, that relate to Big Local's theory of change, both to identify past learning but also how this learning is being put into practice in the present.

The paper is divided into two sections. In the first we review the evidence for the approach that Big Local is already taking in its initial stages. In the second, we identify the issues and questions that need to be borne in mind as Big Local is rolled out.

## **Part One: Evidence for the approach that Big Local is taking**

The need for resident-led change has been widely recognised over recent years. Most of the programmes we reviewed suggest that, when residents are given control over programmes and budgets, they can rise to the challenge. Giving residents control also increases levels of participation generally, as evaluations of participatory budgeting in the UK and abroad have found. It is important to remember that, in the past, commitments to resident-led change have not always lived up to their promise – the New Deal for Communities (NDC) perhaps being the most prominent example. Learning from past programmes identifies a number of factors which are important in giving residents control, many of which Big Local has already taken on board. These are:

- Pace of development
- Starting with assets not deficits
- Willingness to take risks
- Light touch support
- Peer support and opportunities for reflection.

### **Pace of development**

Programmes like Fair Share Trust have demonstrated the value of a long-term commitment. A range of programmes in the UK and abroad have emphasised the need to allow time for processes of capacity building and community engagement as a foundation for effective community control, especially where there is little history of community activity. Most programmes emphasise the way in which capacity and community confidence in taking control builds over time. It also takes time to build trust – across communities and between communities and their partners. Conversely, short-term programmes, despite significant achievements, have been hampered by the need to demonstrate success over a limited period. The much longer-term NDC recognised the need to allow time for a development phase before plans were put in place and funding committed and evaluation of NDC suggested that a development 'year zero' would have been helpful. Having 'getting started' grants and development funding is now also generally recognised as essential if communities are to make the most of the resources on offer.

### **Starting with assets not deficits**

In parallel, many programmes now recognise the importance of mapping and unlocking community assets rather than adopting a deficit model. Neighbourhood Challenge, for example, saw its rationale as 'investment in potential' rather than 'solving problems'. This approach not only builds on the assets already in the community but also provides external validation, which can have a significant impact on local confidence.

### **Willingness to take risks**

Despite its initial commitments to putting communities 'at the heart of change', the NDC was widely criticised for the monitoring requirements that it put in place and the way this stifled resident control. As the national evaluation argued, residents lost faith and interest as initial commitments turned out to have no substance. Take Part, on the other hand, whose government funding was minimal compared to the NDC, report that the fact that it had limited government funding gave it a freer hand and

allowed for greater local control. Several programmes have demonstrated the value of small pots of money with no strings attached (Grassroots Grants, JRF Neighbourhood Programme, The Single Community Programme). The investment that Big Local is making is much greater. Predecessors like Fair Share Trust and Neighbourhood Challenge have underlined the importance of taking risks, being able to accommodate uncertainty and recognising that not everything will work. This will be important for local trusted organisations acting as accountable bodies in Big Local areas as well as for Local Trust itself.

### **Light touch support**

Giving residents control, as Big Local recognises, does not mean leaving them to sink or swim. There will be specific skills and specialist knowledge that communities – or individual community members – need if they are to get the most out of any investment. These may include, for example, planning, asset management, how to set up an enterprise or claim their community rights. The English Participatory Budgeting evaluation emphasises the value of external support both for avoiding pitfalls and also for bringing a 'challenge' to the process to ensure it is rolled out effectively, while the Brazilian experience underlines the need for technical support. Programmes like Neighbourhood Challenge also emphasise the importance, which Big Local has always stressed, of having a choice of tools and approaches.

The value of having someone on the end of a phone, bringing in their own and other specialist expertise and taking an active and continuing interest has been demonstrated by a number of projects – examples include the facilitators in JRF's Neighbourhood Programme, the Neighbourhood Challenge mentors, and New Labour's neighbourhood renewal advisors. A trusted mentor can provide brokerage where there are tensions and different interests to be accommodated. These programmes have also demonstrated how the presence of this external support and the prestige of being part of a national programme can give communities additional leverage with other external actors.

A number of foundations have been experimenting with Funding Plus, not least to ensure that they get the most out of their investment. The emphasis here as elsewhere is on enabling and not doing things **for** the community. A study of these initiatives emphasises the need for strong personal relationships with grantees, a bespoke rather than a prescriptive approach and careful and responsible management of power relationships between funder and grantee.

Programmes like the National Empowerment Partnership, Communities First Wales, Neighbourhood Challenge and Take Part have also emphasised the fact that it is not only community members who need new skills. Panel<sup>1</sup> members from local organisations may also need ongoing support if residents are to be allowed the space and trust to take control.

### **Peer support and opportunities for reflection**

Programmes also emphasised the value of peer support – the opportunity for residents to share experience with people like themselves from other parts of the

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<sup>1</sup> Different programmes adopt their own terms to describe local structures for engaging and assembling residents. We use 'panel' as a general term to describe a wider variety of local structures which could include steering groups, or local committees or partnerships.

country. This provides opportunities for reflection, identified as a crucial element, for example, in Neighbourhood Challenge, the JRF Neighbourhood Programme and Take Part.

## **Part Two: Issues and questions to bear in mind**

Much of the learning outlined above has already been taken on board by Big Local. As Big Local develops and the local areas move from planning to action, it will be important to maintain the commitment that has been made to principles such as a willingness to take risks, promoting continued opportunities for reflection, and continued access to support as new needs and challenges arise. The JRF Neighbourhood Programme, for example, found that even the most experienced groups valued access to support when they needed it. Learning from past programmes also suggests the following principles will become increasingly important if meaningful engagement is to be sustained:

- Focus and managing expectations
- Collaborative outcomes
- Flexibility to accommodate changes over time
- Local leadership and accountability
- A culture of learning.

### **Focus and managing expectations**

The larger scale programmes we reviewed – Fair Share Trust and NDC, for example, emphasised the need for focus in local plans. Even with the large-scale investment that NDC offered, the evaluation found that plans were often too wide-ranging and ambitious and that residents had set themselves up to fail. Sometimes this was because they were trying to tackle issues beyond their control, but often it was because they had set themselves too many outcomes.

Many programmes are set up with a fanfare about the level of investment being made which sets up unrealistic expectations in the community at large and leads to disappointment, even setting up tensions between community leaders and parts of the community who feel they have not benefited.

### **Collaborative outcomes**

Measuring impact, even with an evaluation as sophisticated as that undertaken for the NDC's, is difficult. Neighbourhood Challenge emphasised the need to work with residents to define outcomes that are jointly owned and meaningful if residents are to take control.

### **Flexibility to accommodate changes over time**

That said, much will change over the fifteen years of Big Local. Accurate predictions are hard to make, but changing policies and economic circumstances will affect people in Big Local areas - there are likely to be population changes and changes in local agencies and services. Past programmes emphasise the need to be flexible enough in their plans and their structures to accommodate changes both in the external environment and in the community itself. They have found that local residents have developed their skills over time. Trust is built; new people get

involved. Fair Share Trust found that community panel members became more strategic over time. Conversely, past programmes examined here have found that levels of engagement ebb and flow and that initial enthusiasm may not be maintained. At the same time, key people in other agencies may move on, meaning new relationships have to be built.

Big Local is well equipped to provide the necessary flexibility in planning, so long as this is reflected at local level. It does not, for example, have the annualised budget constraint that has bedevilled government programmes in the past. But building reviews into programme delivery is essential to ensure that the vision continues to resonate over time. And locally trusted organisations will need to reflect Local Trust's flexibility, to embrace its vision and be open to the possibility of failure. As the Neighbourhood Challenge evaluation stresses, it is important to continue to take risks, acknowledging that not all investments will succeed: 'all investments, whether they succeed or not, are worthwhile as they create new connections and develop resilience' (NESTA 2012b, p.22).

Big Local also needs to accommodate cycles of involvement. Recent research on participation (Brodie et al, 2011) suggests that people get involved in different ways, at different points in their life. We still have a lot to learn about how to sustain involvement over the long term. Evaluations of programmes like Fair Share Trust and Communities First Wales stress that giving residents control will involve offering local residents a variety of ways into engagement at different levels over the length of the programme.

### **Local leadership and accountability**

Initiatives like participatory budgeting show how the prospect of having more control over local spend can encourage residents to get more involved in their communities. But, as the previous section suggested, some longer-term past programmes have found that involvement can fall off over the years as initial enthusiasm fades, initial expectations prove unrealistic or the novelty wears off. Past learning suggests that Big Local will have to guard against power sticking with a few community members who act as gatekeepers or who represent only part of the community. Big Local partnerships will also need to guard against burnout and nurture future leaders.

Leadership is often a vexed issue in community programmes, but gibes about 'usual suspects' often miss the point. Research suggests that it is important to have realistic expectations about levels of involvement – Fair Share Trust and Communities First Wales found that relatively few people wanted to commit to a local panel. Neighbourhood Challenge emphasises the importance of distributed leadership. Participatory budgeting evaluations have emphasised the opportunity that engagement in decision making offers to encourage dialogue between different parts of the community, while Take Part stresses the need to make an explicit commitment to finding common cause through a recognition of difference. The point made earlier about having different levels of involvement will be critical – a consistent message from past and current programmes (for example Participatory Budgeting in England and elsewhere) is that local decision making works best when accompanied by other forms of public engagement. Big Local partnerships are already adopting a variety of ways of widening participation and the programmes we have reviewed for this document have developed many different and imaginative approaches to this, which offer an additional resource to draw on.

There are inevitable issues about conflicts of interest in resident-led programmes. The likelihood of having many residents on local panels who have no vested interest in the way funds are distributed is remote. For example, local community activists with interests in local organisations may lead to suspicion regarding their conflicts of interest and it will be important to learn from Big Local how this challenge can best be met.

Evaluations of both Fair Share Trust and participatory budgeting programmes found that transparency and accountability are critical. Past programmes have emphasised the need for effective communication, especially if Big Local is to get through to those who are 'harder to reach'. But they have often found that this can fall by the wayside when leaders and resources are stretched. Effective programmes have found imaginative ways of ensuring accountability (as the Toronto Community Housing example in Appendix B demonstrates) and many programmes are now using new technologies to communicate with the wider community – again there are good ideas to draw on. For example, a Fair Share Trust group built a Facebook group to communicate with their community and publicise their activities more widely. Another Fair Share Trust group developed a website in order to provide information as well as a forum for people to respond. However, it is important to recognise that the most excluded do not always have access to the internet and a number of programmes have found that websites are underused. Some programmes (e.g. the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Neighbourhood Programme) have also found that interactive websites have not fulfilled their potential and are underused by their participants.

### **A culture of learning**

Finally, past programmes emphasise the importance of maintaining a culture of learning over the long term and ensuring that this is not squeezed out by day-to-day pressures. In this section, we have identified a number of issues that community regeneration programmes have been struggling with for years. There is still much to learn, for example, about how engagement can be maintained, spread and grown over the longer-term and how to work effectively with difference. Take Part, Neighbourhood Challenge and international programmes have all emphasised the value of creating safe spaces for continuing dialogue and discussion at local level. Big Local – with its commitment to residents being in control and its long-term perspective – offers an important opportunity to move forward on all of these.

## Summary

Past programmes have emphasised and provided evidence for many lessons which Big Local is taking on board. These include the need to:

- Allow sufficient time for development
- Start from assets not deficits
- Be willing to take risks, recognising that not everything will succeed
- Provide light touch support
- Ensure peer support and opportunities for reflection.

They also identify a number of features that Big Local will need to keep in mind as it moves from planning into action. As well as the above, these include the need to:

- Keep plans focussed and manageable in order to avoid residents in Big Local areas being set up to fail (but without stifling ambition and aspiration!)
- Enable residents to shape outcomes and measures of impact
- Be flexible, recognising that external factors, as well as community capacities and aspiration, will change
- Continually seek to spread engagement, provide a variety of ways in, foster distributed local leadership, and ensure adequate communication and accountability throughout Big Local
- Maintain a culture of learning and dialogue throughout Big Local.

## Appendix A

### Programmes reviewed, with key reports

#### UK-based

##### **Communities First Wales**

AMION Consulting Limited and Old Bell 3 Limited (2011) *The Evaluation of Communities First*, Welsh Government.

##### **Fair Share Trust**

Sally Downs Consulting et al (2009) *The first five years of the Fair Share Trust Programme: An evaluation for the Big Lottery Fund*, Big Lottery Fund. Available at: [biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/stronger-communities/evaluating-fair-share](http://biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/stronger-communities/evaluating-fair-share)

Fair Share Trust (2010) *Learning Document: Community Communications: Fair Share Trust*

##### **Funding Plus**

IVAR (2011) *Beyond money: A study of funding plus in the UK*, London: IVAR

##### **Grassroots Grants**

Pearmain et al (2011) *Grassroots Grants: Final Evaluation Report*, Community Development Foundation

##### **JRF Neighbourhood Programme**

Taylor, M. et al (2007) *Changing Neighbourhoods: Lessons from the JRF Neighbourhood Programmes*, The Policy Press

##### **Neighbourhood Challenge**

Nesta (2012a) *Neighbourhood Challenge: Learning Paper*, Nesta

Nesta (2012b) *Neighbourhood Challenge: Learning from innovative communities*, Nesta

##### **National Empowerment Partnership**

IVAR/University of the West of England (2009) *Evaluation of Year Two of the National Empowerment Partnership: A project report*, Community Development Foundation

##### **New Deal for Communities – (NDC)**

Batty, E. et al (2010) *Involving Local People in Regeneration: Evidence from the New Deal for Communities Programme*, Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at: [extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/Volume%20two%20-%20Involving%20local%20people%20in%20regeneration.pdf](http://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/Volume%20two%20-%20Involving%20local%20people%20in%20regeneration.pdf)

Batty, E. et al (2010) *The New Deal for Communities Experience: A final assessment*, Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at: [extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/A%20final%20assessment%20-%20Executive%20summary.pdf](http://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/A%20final%20assessment%20-%20Executive%20summary.pdf)

Fordham, G. (2010) *The New Deal for Communities National Evaluation: Final Report – Volume*, Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/general/Volume%20one%20-%20Achieving%20a%20neighbourhood%20focus%20for%20regeneration.pdf>

Lawless, P. and Pearson, S. (2012) 'Outcomes from community engagement in urban regeneration: evidence from England's New Deal for Communities' Programme in *Planning Theory and Practice*, 13 (4), pp. 509-527

### **Our Place Scotland**

Presentation at Renaisi Learning Network for Community Based Regeneration in Great Britain Event 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2013

### **Participatory Budgeting in England**

Communities and Local Government (2011) *Communities in the driving seat: a study of Participatory Budgeting in England*, Department for Communities and Local Government

### **Pathways through Participation**

Brodie, E. et al (2011) *Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?* NCVO/IVR/Involve

### **Rural Target Fund**

Yorkshire Rural Community Council, *Evaluation of the Rural Target Fund and Rural Enabling Body*

### **Take Part**

Miller, S. and Hatamian, A. (2011) *Take Part Final Evaluation Report*

### **The Single Community Programme**

Taylor, M. et al (2005) *Making Connections: an evaluation of the Community Participation Programmes*, London: ODPM

Johnston, R. (2010) 'Reviewing the ALAC model', in Mayo, M. and Annette, J. *Taking Part? Active Learning for Active Citizenship, and beyond*, Leicester: NIACE.

## **International**

### **Canada**

Leviten-Reid (2006) *Asset-based, Resident-led Neighbourhood Development*, Action for Neighbourhood Change

**The global South**

Sintomer, Y. et al (2010) *Learning from the South: Participatory Budgeting Worldwide – an Invitation to Global Cooperation*, Capacity Building International: Germany

**Poitou-Charentes, France**

[participedia.net/en/cases/high-school-participatory-budget-poitou-charentes-france](http://participedia.net/en/cases/high-school-participatory-budget-poitou-charentes-france)

**Porto Alegre, Brazil**

World Bank, *Empowerment Case Studies: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil*, World Bank

## Appendix B

### International examples of participatory budgeting

#### **Porto Alegre, Participatory Budgeting in Brazil**

Porto Alegre is said to be where the first full participatory budgeting process was developed in 1989. It began as part of a wider government reform programme to address poverty and standard of living within the city. One third of the city's residents were living in isolated slums at the city outskirts and lacked access to water, sanitation, health care facilities, and schools. Since 1989 residents have taken part annually in participatory budgeting activities to decide how to spend the city budget. The process begins with a series of neighbourhood and citywide meetings, where residents and elected budget delegates identify spending priorities and vote on priorities. Delegates are elected to represent specific neighbourhoods and meet weekly or bi-weekly over a period of months to discuss district needs and decide spending priorities. Guidance from technical specialists is provided during the decision making process and the mayor and local authority staff attend meetings to respond to citizen concerns. Once the resulting district budget is finalised the city council can suggest changes, but only the Mayor may veto the budget. Resident participation in the participatory budgeting activities has grown annually indicating it is a successful method for increasing citizen involvement. A paper from the World Bank concluded that while participatory budgeting cannot overcome wider problems such as unemployment, it can improve living conditions. For example, in Porto Alegre, sewer and water connections increased from 75% of households in 1988 to 98% in 1997.

*World Bank, Empowerment Case Studies: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil.*

#### **Toronto Community Housing, Participatory Budgeting in Canada**

Toronto Community Housing is the largest social housing provider in Canada. It is home to approximately 164,000 low and moderate-income tenants in 58,500 households including seniors, families, singles, refugees, recent immigrants and people with special needs. Since 2001, participatory budgeting events occur annually to fund projects that will improve tenants' quality of life. It is an example of participatory budgeting led by residents without involvement from government authorities. In 2012, through participatory budgeting, residents decided how to spend \$9 million (from the Toronto Community Housing annual budget). Types of projects funded through participatory budgeting have included garden and playground improvements, enhanced security systems, redecoration of common areas, gym renovations and the creation of a computer resource centre. A working group made up of tenant volunteers set up in October 2003 worked with Toronto Community Housing staff to develop the participatory budgeting process. Every year tenants suggest ideas for improving their community and identify the top priorities for their building. Tenants present their ideas at large voting events attended by many residents; they are one of the most popular events Toronto Community Housing hold each year. All of the ideas are presented on display boards that each building creates, and people vote by placing stickers on their preferred projects. Participatory Budgeting has become a sustainable process within Toronto Community Housing to ensure tenants make decisions regarding housing. One of the most successful features is the voting events that offer a forum for transparent decision making and attract a large number of residents.

### **Poitou-Charentes – Secondary School Participatory Budgeting in France**

Poitou-Charentes is a rural region in France with a population of 1,600,000 inhabitants. In 2005, the executive of the Region Poitou-Charentes implemented the first participatory budgeting at a regional level in Europe. These activities include annual participatory budgeting at secondary schools to make decisions for ten percent of the total school budget. Participatory budgeting occurs at all 93 public secondary schools in the Region; and in a five-year period it led to the funding of almost 1,400 projects directly proposed and decided by residents. From the beginning, participatory budgeting has enabled the regional government to measure priorities in secondary schools. Students, teachers, parents and other staff are involved in the process across a range of schools including general, professional, agricultural and special needs schools; this means a wide demographic of the region participates.

The first stage of the process is a meeting attended by pupils, parents, teachers and other staff where a government representative explains the rules of participatory budgeting. Working groups made of 10 to 20 participants are convened for a short period to identify projects aimed to improve daily life at school; these ideas are then presented back to the general assembly. The regional representatives and the head teacher do not attend the working group discussions. In the following weeks regional authorities evaluate the proposals (participatory budgeting activities do not include building or refurbishing buildings, but can fund the purchase of equipment, as well as projects to improve cultural and social life or wellness at school).

The school community is then invited to a second meeting; a summary sheet describing the projects that have been considered and their cost, and explaining why some projects were not been accepted is distributed to all the participants. Following a discussion on the proposed projects, participants vote to rank their preferences. Each participant owns ten ballots and ranking of the priorities is immediately made public. The most widely voted projects are implemented. In regards to motivating involvement, it has been important for people to perceive change is occurring. When people see the achievements of participatory budget activities they are more inclined to take part in the next round of meetings. However, slow progress at the implementation stage, and sometimes the difficulty to identify what has been funded as a result of participatory budgeting has been identified as a weakness within the process.

Available at: [participedia.net/en/cases/high-school-participatory-budget-poitou-charentes-france](http://participedia.net/en/cases/high-school-participatory-budget-poitou-charentes-france)