

REPORT PREPARED FOR LOCAL TRUST

A study of community engagement within the Big Local programme

NCVO RESEARCH

SEPTEMBER 2016



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the residents, workers and Reps who helped with this research. This included taking the time to speak to us and looking through the different versions of the case studies and profiles. We are also grateful to the staff at Local Trust for the information they provided and their support in developing the analytical framework and various materials.

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1. Introduction

This project was commissioned by Local Trust and explored various facets of community engagement, looking at similarities and differences between Big Local areas in terms of engaging their communities and teasing out what learning might be shared.

1.1 Background and need for the research

Local Trust highlights how *'Big Local partnerships need mechanisms to continually engage with the wider community'*.¹ This is ultimately because Big Local outcomes are *'about people feeling like their area is an even better place to live'*.² This means that partnerships need to engage with those in the local area, and not just those directly involved in Big Local.

There is no single Big Local definition of community engagement, but from various Big Local guidance documents we know that a Big Local partnership is expected to:

- work in a way that keeps people who live and work in the area at the centre of its decision-making;
- deliver continuous, inclusive and thoughtful involvement of local people;
- reflect the community in its make-up – reflecting the range and diversity of people who live in the area;
- make particular effort to develop networks with groups and communities not reflected in the partnership at any point in time;
- take the lead on a programme that is inclusive in its activities, its decisions and in who benefits from its activities;
- make residents meaningfully involved and consider their viewpoints and ensure that their aspirations inform the choices the partnership makes, including priorities;
- connect with and involve people from across the area – taking steps to avoid becoming an isolated group without meaningful connections to people living and working locally;
- know how the wider community feels about their Big Local achievements.

Local Trust acknowledges that engagement methods may be influenced by the reasons why they are engaging and the nature of the partnerships. The latter is a key point; partnerships are resident-led, with Big Local decision-makers being volunteers.³

1.2 Aim of the research and research questions

The aim of the research was to increase understanding of community engagement in Big Local areas: what drives it; how it is being approached in different contexts; where it is

¹ Research brief.

² Research brief.

³ Research brief.

working well; and what is being learnt about effective engagement that others could learn from. We identified four main areas to focus the research on:

1. What's happening – why and how are areas engaging their community?
2. What's different – how and why does engagement differ?
3. What's working – for whom and in what circumstances?
4. What's being learnt – what's being learnt or tried that could help others?

From this we devised seven research questions:

What's happening?

- 1) What approaches and activities are being tried and adopted by partnerships seeking to engage their wider community – who is being engaged with and how?
- 2) What is shaping areas' decisions about engaging with their wider community - what motivations, drivers and other considerations influence their decisions and approaches chosen?

What's different?

- 3) How does community engagement differ between Big Local areas, and what areas of commonality can we identify?
- 4) How does what's happening in Big Local areas compare to either practice previously tried in their own area (local history and experience) or in other programmes and initiatives with a community or neighbourhood focus?

What's working?

- 5) What's proving to be most effective and how do we know it is effective? What criteria are areas using to identify effective engagement in the Big Local context given that this may vary but is likely to include: considerations of breadth and reach; inclusion and diversity; and quality and depth (meaningful and genuine engagement)?
- 6) Where areas are using methods that appear to be effective, what is it that underlies that effectiveness? What are the key contributory factors?

What's being learnt?

- 7) What can others – both inside the programme and further afield – learn from emerging community engagement practice in Big Local areas?

The methodology is outlined in the appendix, as are definitions of key concepts used in the report. These concepts are: volunteering; community development; and social capital.

1.3 Rationale for choosing focus areas

In total we produced a profile or case study for 13 areas: 12 area profiles, four of which also became case studies, and one area for which we only produced a case study but no profile. Hereafter these will be referred to as our 'focus areas'. They were chosen either because they were using approaches that were widespread in Big Local, they had engagement

practices that resonated with our conceptual framework (see next chapter), they had an interesting take on a commonly used approach, or they were innovative and unusual (see appendix for a list of the focus areas).

2. Understanding engagement in Big Local – developing the engagement wheels

Chapter summary

We developed five engagement wheels to help describe and understand engagement in Big Local:

- Wheel 1 – Purpose: what are the drivers of community engagement in areas?
- Wheel 2 – Context: what are the most relevant features of local context?
- Wheel 3 – Motivations: what motivates people to get involved?
- Wheel 4 – Approaches: what are areas doing?
- Wheel 5 – Effectiveness: what does effective practice look like?

A workshop identified some key factors for the first three wheels:

- Wheel 1: keeping people informed *as a way of legitimising decisions and tapping into a wider set of skills and resources to deliver Big Local.*
- Wheel 2: *the plans and strategic focus of the area and size and nature of the community and the influence, views and skills of the individuals involved – e.g. the Rep or the Chair.*
- Wheel 3: *getting to know others, responding to issues or causes that matter personally, and engaging because of belonging to, or wanting to connect across an interest group – particularly families with children.*

Wheels 4 and 5 were more rudimentary in the workshop, and the key factors were identified by the case study areas (see chapter 5).

2.1 Engagement wheels

To help map out what was happening across areas, and for the purposes of our initial workshop, we considered the way in which community engagement in the Big Local context could be seen as a journey, a vehicle and a destination. That is:

Journey	Areas may primarily see community engagement as a process or journey; a process for working in partnership with local people to achieve a shared vision.
Vehicle	Areas may be thinking of community engagement as a means to an end; seeing it in an instrumental or functional light – as a tool to achieve some other goal (e.g. better decisions, greater impact).
Destination	Areas may be thinking of community engagement as an outcome as well as a process; seeing an engaged community as part of an overall goal, part of their vision for success.

With ideas about journeys and vehicles in mind we structured our mapping around the idea of routes and wheels. Wheels were also used because we know that many of the existing models for understanding engagement and participation use tables, matrices or ladders. These are generally linear representations which can sometimes be criticised for suggesting a potentially unhelpful hierarchy of types or levels of engagement.

The wheels represent both findings and analytical categories that were tested by later fieldwork. These were developed during the scoping phase of the project and different approaches to community engagement were identified. The categories were refined at a workshop in January 2016 with various stakeholders. It is highlighted in relation to each wheel which components were most commonly identified by attendees at the workshop.

The five engagement wheels are:

- Wheel 1 – Purpose: What are the drivers of community engagement in areas?
- Wheel 2 – Context: What are the most relevant features of local context?
- Wheel 3 – Motivations: What motivates people to get involved?
- Wheel 4 – Approaches: What are areas doing?
- Wheel 5 – Effectiveness: What does effective practice look like?

Each wheel contains eight categories or ‘segments’. These are based on analysis of practice in the programme. The first three wheels were developed before the workshop and we have incorporated feedback from the attendees on what were seen as the most common or important element of each wheel. The final two wheels were developed based on feedback from the session. We asked the five case study areas to rank which had been the most effective and important in their area.

They are not mutually exclusive but are likely to overlap or at least be strongly related. We found that areas were likely to be using several approaches, at different times or with different groups, but could favour some over others.

Wheel 1 – Purpose: What are the drivers of community engagement in areas?

The first wheel *Community engagement in Big Local* is mostly about purpose. We identified a number of drivers or reasons areas might seek to engage their wider community. Areas may define it in a number of different ways and see it as having a number of purposes simultaneously or over time.

The two that emerged as perhaps most common in the Big Local data during the workshop were: keeping people informed as a way of *legitimising decisions, protecting against detractors* [3]; and tapping into a *wider set of skills and resources to deliver Big Local* [5 and 6].

Figure 1. – Purpose: What are the drivers of community engagement in areas?



Wheel 2 – Context: What are the most relevant features of local context?

Local context is key to understanding how engagement is defined and practised, and how effective it is, with different factors acting as ‘shapers’, challenges, barriers, or enablers. The key factors that emerged during the workshop as perhaps the most relevant were the plans and strategic focus of the area and size and nature of the community [5 and 7], and the influence, views and skills of the individuals involved – e.g. the Rep or the Chair, or other members of the partnership [6]. Whether or not areas had invested resources and employed a worker who may have responsibility for community engagement was also felt to be important.

Figure 2 – Context: What are the most relevant features of local context?

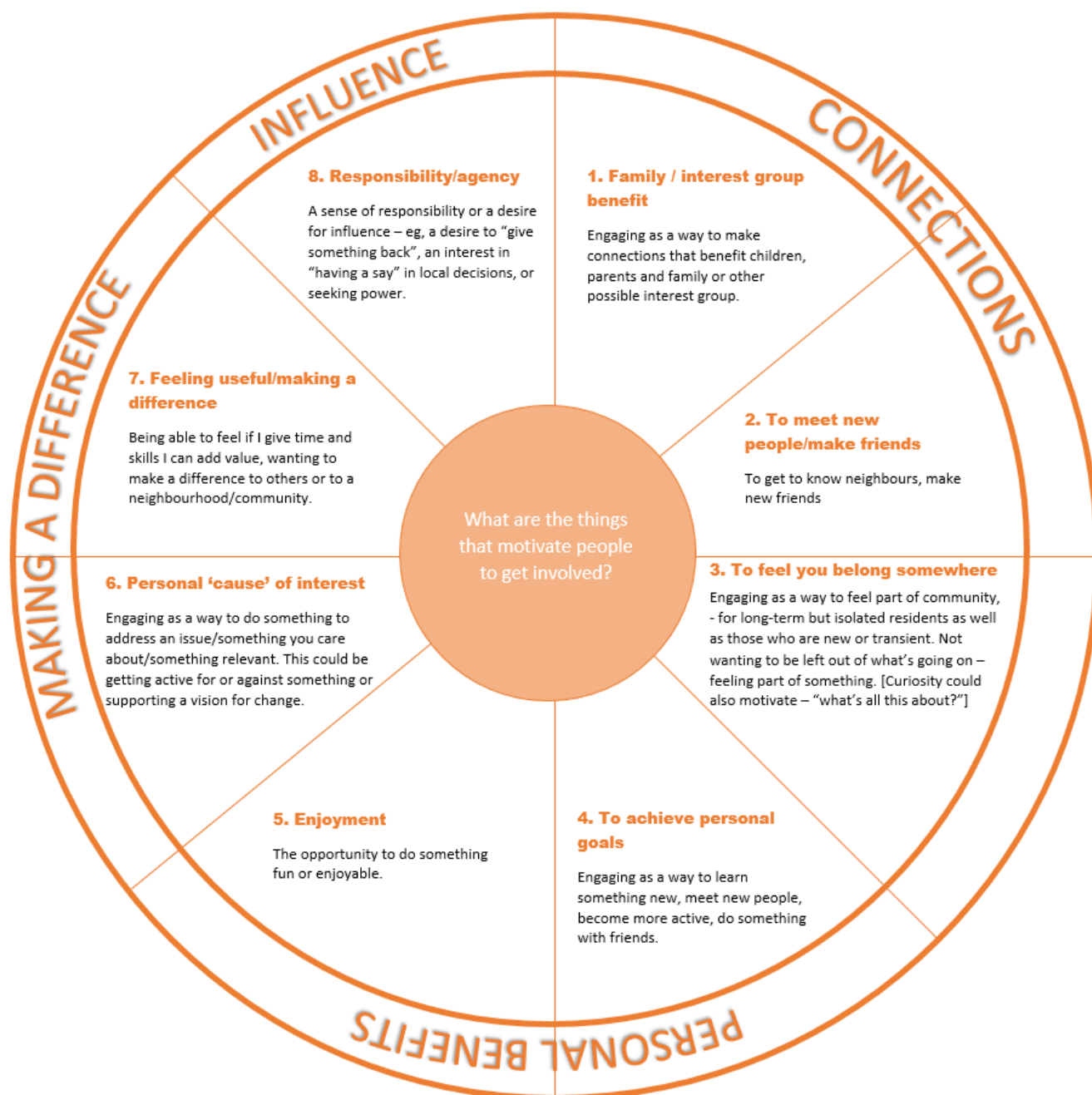


Wheel 3 – Motivations: What motivates people to get involved?

The motivations that seemed to emerge most strongly were: getting to know others [2]; responding to issues or causes that matter personally [6]; and engaging because of belonging to, or wanting to connect across, an interest group – particularly families with children [1].

The reasons we found for why people might engage with Big Local featured in the wheel resonated strongly with those identified in NCVO's *Pathways through Participation* research and our wider knowledge of why people participate (e.g. relationships, helping others, personal benefit, influence).

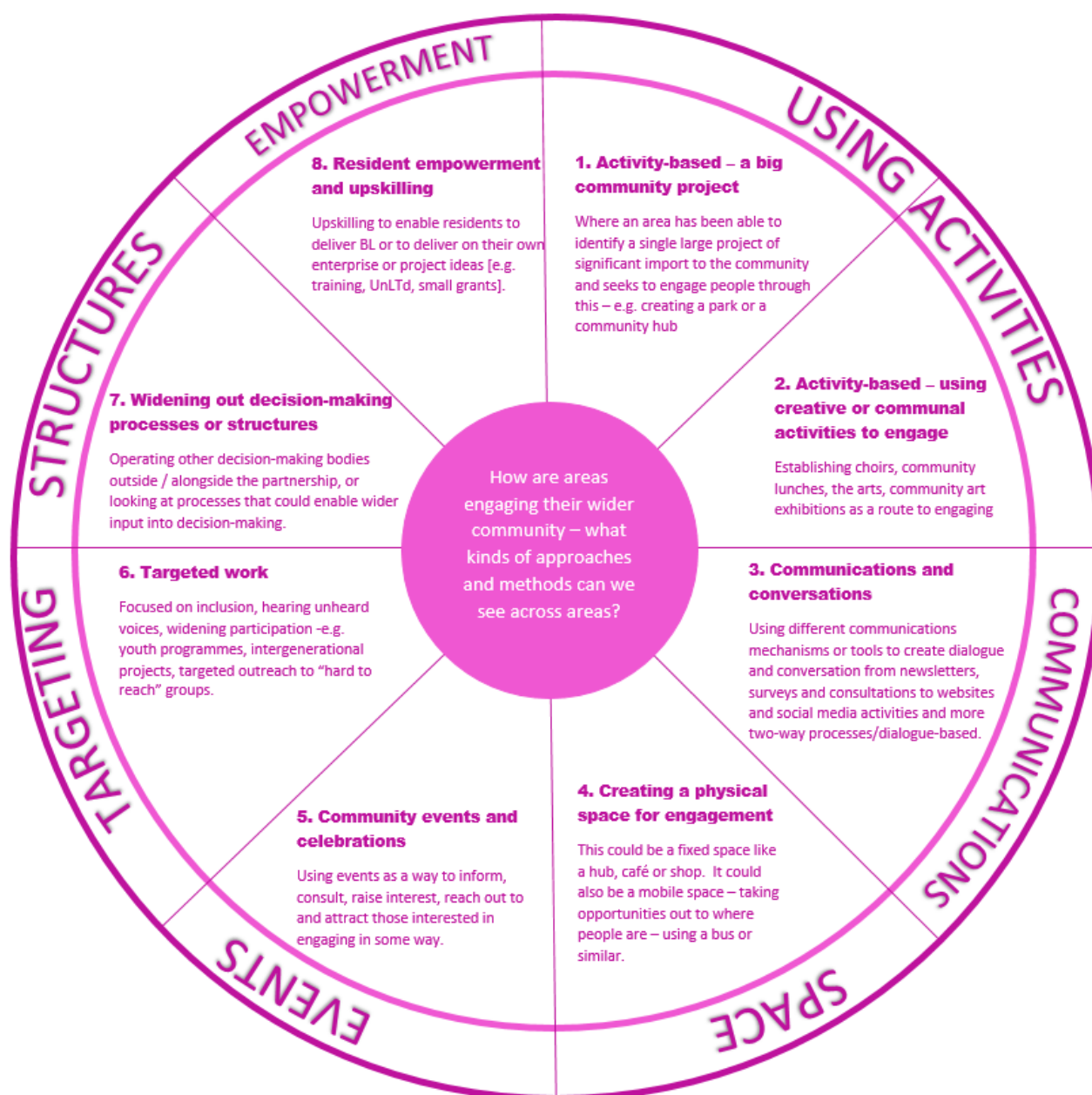
Figure 3 – Motivations: What motivates people to get involved?



Wheel 4 – Approaches: What areas are doing – the kinds of approaches being tried

Areas could be using any combination of these *broad approaches* (rather than specific methods or activities) to engagement. Each of these is explored in more detail in chapter 3 and in chapter 5 we report how the case studies ranked them according to their relative effectiveness.

Figure 4 - Approaches: What are areas doing – the kinds of approaches being tried?



Wheel 5 – Effectiveness: What does effective practice look like?

Workshop participants were asked to identify what they felt was effective practice and asked why they considered this to be the case, from which we summarised the key characteristics in the wheel below. The perceived importance of each of these were ranked by the case study areas and are examined in more detail in chapter 5.

Figure 5 – Effectiveness: What does effective practice look like?



3. What's happening – why and how are areas engaging their community?

Chapter summary

What? Community engagement approaches and activities in Big Local areas

The eight approaches outlined in wheel four are:

- Activity-based – a big community project;
- Activity-based – using creative or communal activities to engage;
- Communications and conversations;
- Creating a space for engagement;
- Engaging through community events and celebrations;
- Targeted work;
- Decision-making structures and fora;
- Resident empowerment and upskilling.

Who? The people engaging in Big Local

We identified three ways in which people can engage in Big Local:

- 1) Directly through a Big Local activity;
- 2) Through a group or activity supported by Big Local;
- 3) In an activity that had no direct link to Big Local, but they are helped by Big Local to do so.

There are different types of volunteer roles available, from governance roles to participation in social activities. A variety of roles was felt to be essential to the effective functioning of areas.

Why? How the areas chose these approaches and their influences

The reasons offered for choosing approaches reflected most of the categories from wheel 1 (purpose) and wheel 2 (context).

The process of choosing which approach or activity to use appeared, to a large degree, to be one of trial and error. We found local areas to be highly pragmatic and focused on what works. In certain cases a systematic approach to community engagement was pursued which could be summarised as:

- Building on established forms of engagement in the community;
- A community development approach;
- Community organising.

3.1) What? Community engagement approaches and activities in Big Local areas

In chapter 2 eight approaches to community engagement were outlined in wheel 4. In this chapter each approach will be outlined in turn, with examples drawn from the 13 focus areas.

3.1.1) Activity-based – a big community project

This is where an area runs a substantial project, including those with large budgets or high visibility, to engage their community. A larger project could make a statement of intent about Big Local and its spending capacity.⁴ In some cases it could be seen as a better use of a large resource, for example, building something big with a significant amount of money instead of spreading it across multiple small projects. Activities we observed included:

- Creation of a community hub;
- Community Asset Transfer activity;
- Renewal or creation of parklands;
- Taking over of allotments.

Practice example: Allotment in Catton Grove

The Catton Grove Big Local Community Allotment⁵ falls under the Big Local Plan's 'healthy community' priority. The area had developed a '*grow it, cook it, eat it*' project to enable local residents to share and develop gardening and cooking skills. They approached Norwich City Council and established some community gardening plots at a local allotments site. As part of this they also created a bank of garden tools for people to borrow to help maintain their own gardens and start growing fruit and vegetables. In the future they will be developing a range of community cooking sessions to enable people to improve their cooking skills and eat healthily on a budget. The



allotment survived thanks to a group of committed volunteers and the support of local partners, and has served as a valuable way of not just engaging those directly involved but also stimulating the interest of others in what's going on, what Big Local is all about, and how they can get involved too. It provided a useful example of how a communal activity linked to the visible improvement of local space can contribute to community engagement and to getting more people involved in what is happening.

Another example of this approach was seen with Barrow Island (not one of our focus areas but profiled elsewhere) who funded a play park. The project cost £200K of which £46K was match-funding. In the published case study, the Big Local worker described the 'buzz' and excitement it had created in the community:

⁴ Taken from the Catton Grove Engagement profile, p. 5.

⁵ Information from the Catton Grove website (no longer available).

‘For months leading up to it schoolchildren would come to the drop-in asking “when’s it going to happen?” It’s probably the best park in the area now, people are just overwhelmed by it.’⁶

Hubs are examples of other large projects, such as the community café in Whitley, which are explored under the approach *creating a space for engagement*. This is an example of the inevitable blurring of lines between some of the approaches and activities; in some cases creating a physical space for engagement could also be a large community project.

3.1.2) Activity-based – using creative or communal activities to engage

More common than larger projects were small-scale activities. These included:

- Establishing social groups, including arts-based groups (e.g. choirs);
- Running local history projects.

This was a way of engaging people primarily through social activities and, more indirectly getting them involved in Big Local. The importance of this type of group social activity for enhancing community engagement is often highlighted in literature examining social capital.⁷

A useful example is the Big Worle Showbiz Choir which was set up and developed by a local resident. It proved to be an effective way to bring people together, with over 100 members joining in the first six months,⁸ and an average attendance of around 60 who meet weekly. The choir also provides other opportunities for people taking part. It is, for instance, looking to *‘train a number of local people in the Big Worle area to provide and operate lighting and sound systems to support the other sections of Big Worle Showbiz. This training will also provide employment opportunities.’⁹*

Sometimes, Big Local’s involvement in such activities could be one step removed. This could include Big Local providing start-up funding and/or a place to meet. For example, in Brookside there have been a number of organisations that Big Local have supported, one of which was Cre-active, which provides arts and crafts activities for young people. The group was borne out of a discussion of young mothers on the Brookside Big Local Facebook group which focused on the fact that there was little for young people to do in the area. Around 45 young people attended the group.

Some of these activities could be overtly about getting people involved in Big Local more widely, acting as a ‘hook’ to get people to participate, or simply as an end in themselves; for example, something for the community to engage in without trying to involve them more deeply in the running of Big Local.

⁶ Quote from the Barrow Island Play Park case study (website no longer available).

⁷ See: Putnam, R. D. with Leonardi, R. & Nanetti, R. Y. 1993 *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* Princeton University Press.

⁸ See Worle profile, p. 2.

⁹ Quote from the Big Worle Big Local website (no longer available.)

3.1.3) Communications and conversations

This approach is about providing information and using communication tools to create dialogue and conversations, including:

- Producing newsletters, advertisements, billboards;
- Developing websites;
- Using social media;
- Running ongoing face-to-face consultation.

This could be one-way communications, for example, newsletters or surveys, or two-way, using social media to have more dialogue-based activities, although online communication can be unidirectional too. With often only a relatively small number of people attending meetings, newsletters and social media were seen to provide a useful way for partnerships to be accountable for what they are doing to a large number of people. A further challenge was that it was hard to establish who may be following the accounts, for example whether they are all residents.

Practice example: Connecting to the community in Kirk Hallam¹⁰

Big Kirk Hallam is seen as a 'bike wheel' model of engagement, something that was put to them by their Rep at their first meeting:

*'[The Rep was] brandishing a bike wheel and suggesting the **rim** of wider community interest, the **spokes** of people taking the strain of the action and the small **hub** connecting these to moving forward.'*¹¹ [emphasis added]

This idea has remained with the partnership since and they have sought to utilise communications accordingly:

*'Ensure (rim) large numbers know of and feel connected to Big Kirk Hallam through newsletters, website, events etc., drawing on the (spokes) strengths, skills and commitment of those leading on the action by building vibrant partnerships and clear agreements on who is doing what and to what purpose and retaining a committed and connected (hub) partnership with the majority of residents retaining the vision and giving direction.'*¹²

In practice this included different activities for children and young people. It was felt that this work had gone particularly well so far which was *'...the most successful of the activities...with the highest attendance'*. Young people appeared to have embraced the activities offered through Big Kirk Hallam; they were seen to be *'...fantastic, they have such enthusiasm'*. It was felt part of the reason for the success was that *'...it has been what the kids wanted'*.

Examples of work with young people included Passport work, where children were required to complete 20 things before leaving school, and The Big Camp Out, where in partnership with the

¹⁰ See Kirk Hallam case study.

¹¹ From the Kirk Hallam Big Local website (no longer available).

¹² From the Kirk Hallam Big Local website (no longer available).

local school, Big Local involved a security firm to help put up tents. The event also included a bonfire, and children were taught how to make safe drinking water and eat bugs.

It is worth noting that engaging with young people had also significantly helped to increase interaction with adults: *'...once we got the kids there the adults came, then you can have more conversations'*.

Practice example: 1000 Conversations in St Peters and the Moors

The term '1000 Conversations' originally came from a resident. Loosely adapted from infrastructure organisation Locality's 'Action to Regenerate',¹³ this activity relies on the Big Local partnership being more visible, going from door-to-door in the area, speaking to people face-to-face (as opposed to more impersonal consultation methods). It was felt that this could build relationships in a way that other methods such as surveying residents could not. By engaging with people, they could also let them know about forthcoming Big Local activities, such as events.

One of the partnership members is a Community Organiser, who works in another area. She is involved in Big Local in her capacity as a local resident, but had utilised her Community Organiser skills in her role on the partnership. When the partnership felt they were not penetrating the community and failing to get the community's views, she provided the tools of this technique to do that.

The group had since constructed a physical network map of people and who they are connected to, with string recording these connections. Ultimately they looked to build *'a more active and connected community'*.

One piece of feedback from the initial 1000 Conversations work was that local people were passionate about having something for children to do during the summer. Activities planned for this summer include the Youth Holiday Project by the Rock, a Community Music Festival supporting local talent with interest in music, and eight weeks of children's play activities in the local parks run by the Cheltenham Trust.

3.1.4) Creating a space for engagement

Some Big Local partnerships have created a hub or physical space for people to meet and engage, including:

- Drop-ins;
- Community cafés;
- Gardens/allotments;
- Mobile engagement, such as pop-ups and markets.

¹³ See: re-generate.org

Such provision could go beyond direct engagement in Big Local activities, with the space used for people engaging with each other and in wider community life.

Practice example: Community café in Whitley

In Whitley Big Local, a community café has been central to their activities¹⁴, which was opened in 2015. In their Big Local plan, the partnership summarised feedback from consultations about what residents wanted from the café:

‘The message from local residents was very clear...We want a vibrant community centre with a cafe serving good quality affordable food, we want things for young people to do; to entertain them, keep them off the streets, and raise their aspirations for what they can achieve, we want easier access to services, we want a cleaner and more pleasant place to live, and we want to lose the stereotype, for people to respect us and for us to be able to take pride in Whitley as our home.’ (Partnership member)

The community café not only provided a venue for groups to meet, but a space which local residents could use, where the food was seen to be appropriately priced. People could interact informally, including those who have not engaged before:

‘It’s about that engagement and who we are engaging. Are we engaging the “usual suspects” in the community or are we starting to engage the people who previously haven’t been engaged? And I seriously believe we are at that turning point now. I noticed it more having been away for a month and come back. The number of people who have been casually using the café and are now asking questions and support with things. Asking to volunteer with things, asking to be involved in things.’ (Partnership member)

Hubs do not necessarily have to be a building. Gardens and allotments (e.g. in Catton Grove and or Warwick Ahead) provide a focus for volunteering and healthy living initiatives. Moreover, hubs were not always permanent and therefore did not necessarily require investment in a building. We observed instances of pop-up initiatives, such as markets (e.g. in Plaistow South and L30 Million), including those which lasted no more than a few hours in established buildings (St Peters and the Moors). These findings are consistent with what emerged from NCVO’s *Pathways through Participation* research, which emphasised the importance of physical spaces for participation. As in Big Local areas, it described a diversity of spaces, including formal spaces, such as community centres, and more informal areas, such as parks, pubs and libraries.

3.1.5) Engaging through community events and celebrations

Big Local areas often ran community events, whether to raise awareness of Big Local or with a clear participatory purpose (voting on priorities in the Big Local plan). In other cases these were simply more generic community events, including:

- Summer fares;
- Celebrations (e.g. cultural / faith calendars);

¹⁴ See Whitley Big Local case study, p. 5.

- Food-based (café consultations, fish and chip suppers, 'Big' lunches);
- Consultative events.

Practice example: Engaging the community in Big Local through events in SO18¹⁵

In SO18, the community engagement elements to the Big Local events have multiple different layers, something that has changed over time. In the beginning these events were about engagement in Big Local during the 'Getting Involved' stage:

*'Our area has very few existing organisations, so getting out on the street and running engaging, fun activities was essential to having conversations with local people about what was important to them. Out of this we have got a number of themes, which have been the backbone of our plan and what we're trying to achieve.'*¹⁶

As time has gone on, the emphasis had shifted so that in addition to having good events in themselves that were well-attended and enjoyed by participants, the events were felt to be a way of drawing people in and getting them involved in Big Local:

'The partnership has been good at using some of the activities put on because they have identified a need, such as a job club and tea and tech [an online teaching group]...They have used those activities to meet an expressed need. But then they work very hard at encouraging and nurturing people that come to that into other potential roles in Big Local.'

This was often referred to as discovering the 'treasure'. It was seen as a stepped approach, with people's engagement being built up, initially having tasters of engagement that are accessible. By treasure they mean people who could contribute to the community; yet often it could be 'buried treasure' because these people do not always come forward. It was rare that people wanted to become more involved in Big Local straight away.

'[We didn't want to scare people] off by saying "come and join our committee" because that doesn't work.' (Worker)

It is also about nurturing people who do get involved, even if they do not commit to a more expansive role straight away. Matching opportunities and people's interests was felt to be an important part of this. The partnership summarised their approach as:

- A conscious effort to discover the 'treasure';
- The need to foster good relationships to learn people's past experience, and to discern their skills, interests and what sparks their energy;
- Continual attention to valuing the person as well as their role.

¹⁵ Locally produced case study, cited with permission.

¹⁶ Locally produced case study, cited with permission.

Events have included youth weeks, the Speak Up SO18 youth forum, Halloween events, Christmas events, a wellbeing event, and spring community days. There have also been clean-up days at local green spaces and nature hunts for local families.¹⁷

3.1.6) Targeted work

Some areas target certain parts of the community, either geographic communities or communities of interests or identities, such as a particular black and minority ethnic group. These activities included:

- Youth clubs and programmes;
- Intergenerational projects;
- Activities targeted at 'hard-to-reach' groups;
- Working through other 'connected' organisations who are engaged with 'hard-to-reach' parts of the community.

There have been instances where the Big Local partnership adapted its structure because of this. In SO18, they have a hub in one part of their area in which engagement is lower, but not in the other. They also have different workers for different parts of the area, so they are able to focus on the different needs of each area and tailor their work specifically. In addition, their events, highlighted in the previous section, can be targeted at a particular demographic, especially if felt to be under-represented in Big Local. For example, they had a 'cream tea' to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday in the new hub, specifically aimed at older people:

'The whole objective of that cream tea is that people will come and have some sort conversation about whether we can run, together with them, some sort of activities with that age group, of which there are a lot in that neighbourhood.' (Worker)

In terms of engaging a particular group, Plaistow South focused on youth activities. The Plaistow Youth Market promotes enterprise among young people and has been so successful that the area is soon to hold its fourth market with a further two planned in 2016. The area had worked with their lead partner on youth engagement, NewVic, to organise events for young entrepreneurs who can access support via workshops and advice in partnership with UnLtd,¹⁸ from whom the area won a year of intensive support after a competitive process. The area had since employed a part-time Youth Enterprise Worker (one of the experienced market stallholders) to head up the development of the Plaistow Youth Market as a social enterprise in its own right.¹⁹

Although not highlighted as a major issue, some partnerships had found engaging certain groups challenging. They had made overtures to the groups, such as visiting their meetings and providing details about Big Local, but had nonetheless frequently found them to be unresponsive. Although there was some interest, so far there has been little active involvement from them.

¹⁷ Information from the SO18 Big Local website (no longer available).

¹⁸ This is through Star People, which supports social entrepreneurs in Big Local.

¹⁹ See Plaistow South Engagement Profile, p. 6.

3.1.7) Decision-making structures and fora

This approach is about widening out formal decision-making alongside – or extending beyond – the partnership. This can be achieved by creating structures or groups where those beyond the partnership can contribute to decision-making. This could also involve more *ad hoc* or one-off events, for example consultative meetings on a particular issue.

Activities included:

- Participatory budgeting;
- Partnership subgroups/open meetings/open forums;
- Forums, often with devolved budgets (e.g. youth forums);
- Open space;
- Citizens' juries.

We found that many Big Local areas had developed some form of participatory budgeting. Indeed, there was some indication that learning from different areas had encouraged areas to try this particular approach.

Practice example: Participatory budgeting in Rastrick

Achieving relatively low levels of engagement with their survey and some of their initial engagement work, the steering group began to look outside the area for ideas about how to increase levels of engagement with their wider community. When members of the Rastrick Big Local partnership heard a presentation about participatory budgeting at a Big Local spring event, they were taken with its potential and how well it seemed to be working elsewhere. Following local discussions, a decision was taken to find out more and the area employed a consultant to advise them on how they could try participatory budgeting in their area, and so 'Voice Your Choice' was developed.

Voice Your Choice is Rastrick Big Local's main mechanism for giving local people a say in the focus of Big Local and what should be funded. Voice Your Choice is conducted annually and involves four steps:

Step 1: Rastrick residents are asked to vote for the issue / concern which they think should be tackled in the following 12 months. They are presented with the themes compiled from the data gathered during the development of the Community Profile and from the initial consultation activities. The first year's priority theme was children and young people.

Step 2: Once the outcome of the vote is known and the top issue is identified, local people, groups and organisations are invited to put forward proposals that will address this issue.

Step 3: Details of the proposals are publicised and residents then vote to determine which of the projects they would like to see funded. People can vote online, at the local school, and through a household form that is posted to them.

Step 4: Funding is then allocated to those proposals that have received the most votes.

The hope was to engage local people in larger numbers than previously and the initial results have been promising. In the most recent vote in March 2016, more than 1,000 people took part in the voting on projects related to the Environment.

In Brookside, the Big Local partnership ran open forums, usually held before the main partnership meeting. This provided a space for individuals and groups to put forward ideas and raise issues. Sometimes they found that no one turned up, while on other occasions large numbers would attend and raise matters of great importance to them. For example, the local Be Active group lost its funding from Sports England. It approached Big Local and various members of the groups made their case in a forum, and as a result Big Local helped to support the group through a transitional stage to the point where it could be sustainable.²⁰

3.1.8) Resident empowerment and upskilling

Residents can be upskilled and trained through Big Local through informal or accredited training. In some cases volunteer opportunities were used as a way to build confidence and strengthen people's CVs. Opportunities included:

²⁰ At time of writing the group was still in the transitional funding stage.

- **Community researchers:** Being a community researcher meant that residents were part of the consultation process. In some cases they received training, in certain instances they were paid;
- **Training:** As well as community research, there was training in community development in some areas;
- **Small grants schemes:** Small grants schemes could enable individuals and groups to pursue ideas and projects;
- **Supporting local enterprise:** Including Star People, which supports social entrepreneurs in Big Local, and social investment initiatives.²¹

The training could be directly about how to take a greater role in Big Local, for example training in community development, or more general training, such as courses in SO18 to help older people use the internet.

By training residents to listen to other residents, areas found that community views could be more comprehensively represented. This had taken the form of community researchers, for example in SO18 and Whitley, where residents received training and support, and in some cases were paid to do so. Such an approach was felt to allow issues to be explored in greater depth, whilst maintaining and promoting the involvement of the community. This could also have a campaigning element. For example, in both areas the community research explored transport issues and this was then used as the basis of successful campaigns to change bus services.

Capacity-building was defined in different ways by the areas, from more formal community development training to building confidence by working in the café when people lacked work experience:

'It doesn't matter whether they succeed at the task or not. But because they feel valued in the space where they are doing the task they are growing in confidence...Capacity building has to take into account that person being themselves in a way rather than a cog in a machine.' (Partnership member)

In Whitley there were various other examples of capacity-building. In addition to hiring a full-time community development worker, six people were trained (City and Guilds award) in community development, and the community hub now provides a number of paid and voluntary roles for local residents.

Residents could also be empowered by being encouraged to come forward to make their ideas a reality, for example through the creation of Community Interest Companies in Brookside. Telford Bikes, a new social enterprise set up by residents and run by volunteers, provided affordable bikes for the community and created voluntary training opportunities for local people in the area. They received funding from UnLtd and use a space provided by the Wrekin Housing Trust, and with a grant from Big Local they purchased a van. This involved

²¹ The Big Local Star People programme developed nearly 300 social leaders across 133 Big Local areas.

tapping in to what residents are personally interested in, which could also be good for the local community and economy.

3.2) Who? The people engaging in Big Local

This section will examine volunteer roles, as opposed to paid roles, in Big Local and the level and intensity of engagement.

3.2.1) Motivations and volunteer roles in Big Local

In wheel 3, various motivations for getting involved in Big Local were outlined. These motivations and examples of activities they engaged in/volunteer roles, are outlined below.

Table 1. Volunteer motivations and roles in Big Local

Theme	Definition	Opportunities in Big Local
Family / interest group benefit	Engaging as a way to make connections that benefit children, parents and family or other possible interest group.	-Volunteer roles in existing groups or new groups, which are supported by Big Local, this might be by a small grant, a place to meet, help to set up, or help to become sustainable. -Attendees at Big Local events.
To meet new people/make friends	To get to know neighbours, make new friends	-Big Local Events. -Groups supported by Big Local. -Spaces provided by Big Local.
To feel you belong somewhere	Engaging as a way to feel part of the community – for long-term but isolated residents as well as those who are new or transient. Not wanting to be left out of what’s going on – feeling part of something. [Curiosity could also motivate – “what’s all this about?”]	-Those who are not already active in the community engage through more informal activities, such as attending a community café.
To achieve personal goals	Engaging as a way to learn something new, meet new people, become more active, to do something with friends.	-Groups (sometimes in the form of courses).
Enjoyment	The opportunity to do something fun or enjoyable.	-Groups. -Events.
Personal ‘cause’ of interest	Engaging as a way to do something to address an issue/something you care about/something relevant. This could be getting active for or against something or supporting a vision for change.	-Groups. -Events. -Forums. -Big Local itself (partnership and more active volunteers).
Feeling useful/making a difference	Being able to feel that I can add value if I give time and skills; wanting to make a difference to others or to a neighbourhood/community.	-Forums. -Big Local itself (partnership and more active volunteer roles). -Campaigns/visible success – linked to delivery.
Responsibility/agency	A sense of responsibility or a desire for influence – e.g. a desire to ‘give something back’, an interest in ‘having a say’ in local decisions, or seeking power.	-Forums. -Big Local itself (partnership and more active volunteer roles).

The potential motivations for people getting involved in Big Local e observed in this research resonate with other available research. The most recent and comprehensive national survey of volunteer motivations in the UK remains *Helping Out*. The most commonly cited reasons for volunteering (respondents could select a variety) were a mixture of altruistic reasons ('wanting to improve things and help people'; 'an important cause') and those closer to self-interest ('meeting people'; 'an activity connected with the needs of friends and family').²²

3.2.2) Engagement and volunteer roles in Big Local

The different types of individuals' community engagement in Big Local areas can be broadly summarised as follows:

- 1) **Someone engages in the community directly through a Big Local activity.** This could involve becoming a member of the partnership, attending events (community fun days, Christmas grottos) or belonging to clubs *directly* run by Big Local (e.g. choirs or allotments).
- 2) **Someone engages in the community through a group or activity supported by Big Local.** Someone engages through a group that is *not directly* run by Big Local (e.g. arts and crafts, fitness groups) but that has been supported by it in some way (e.g. through a grant or the use of a Big Local Hub).
- 3) **Someone engages in the community in an activity that had no direct link to Big Local, but they are helped by Big Local to do so.** This is where contact with Big Local in some way helps someone become more involved in the community. An example of this in Whitley in which a resident regularly attended the hub, a community café, to drink tea but got to know those involved in Big Local as she spent more time there. As she was considering setting up a parent-teacher association she went on to seek advice from those at the hub and was supported in doing so.

As we shall see in the next section, some of the case study areas were preoccupied with the importance of volunteers in the first category. It is not that they did not value people in the other two categories, but in the immediate term they needed volunteers who could actively create, shape and deliver activities to help Big Local to blossom and achieve their plans.

It was felt that some people could be put off by more formal roles and engaged more informally, building their engagement over time because of the unusually long duration of Big Local. The three different types of engagement were seen to potentially have longer-term implications, with people doing things themselves, and ultimately doing so beyond the life of Big Local. This relates to a component of wheel 1 (purpose) relating to social capital, which is to build a more 'engaged' and connected community.

²² Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A. and Davis Smith, J. (2007). *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*. London: National Centre for Social Research and the Institute for Volunteering Research. Online at: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/2547/>. p. 35.

3.2.3) Getting and keeping people engaged in Big Local

A recurring theme of the case study interviews was that of individuals' journeys of participation in Big Local. This could be relatively light-touch, such as attending one event a year but could also concern more regular attendance. Interviewees in case study areas frequently highlighted the importance of the level of activity, something that was often specifically discussed in relation to the need for Big Local areas to have a core of committed volunteers beyond the partnership.

The details varied between interviewees, but the recurring idea was that a greater number of people in the area needed to become more actively involved in Big Local. So while someone attending a Big Local group activity could be considered an instance of community engagement, in order for Big Local to thrive areas require that some of those people go on to help organise these activities, or come up with the ideas in the first place. Although it was uncommon for people to attempt to quantify how many 'active' volunteers they needed, in St Peter and the Moors the chair estimated it was around 20 to 30.

It was also clear that certain people are not attracted to certain types of roles in Big Local, for example, what some referred to as 'committee' type roles, such as belonging to the partnership. In S018 they outlined at a Big Local learning event that certain things could be off putting:

*'...it didn't work to invite someone showing a glimmer of interest to our initial steering committee meetings: they just didn't come back!'*²³

The area found that it could be more effective to find roles suited to individuals, something that resonates with much of the volunteering literature and good practice guidance:

*'Much more successful has been drawing people into practical things that match their interest, their energy, their skills. And the things that are working best are where we're able to respond to an individual's spark or passion and help provide a framework and support and resources to take this forward.'*²⁴

There were also interviewees who talked about involvement in Big Local in terms of progression, for example, with people starting off by attending events and then going onto organise them.

However, it may be that some people never 'progress' beyond more 'simple' or light-touch activities. As noted in chapter 2, we deliberately designed the wheels so there would be no hierarchy, recognising that the different activities are valuable in their own right.

Furthermore, NCVO's *Pathways through Participation* research found that people's involvement in their communities was not always linear²⁵. It did highlight, however, that in

²³ Locally produced case study, cited with permission.

²⁴ Locally produced case study, cited with permission.

²⁵ Brodie, E., Hughes, T., Jochum, V., Miller, S., Ockenden, N. and Warburton, D. (2011) *Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?* Online at: involve.org.uk/resource/pathways-through-participation (main report, p. 67).

certain roles participation ‘snowballed’, this is where ‘*people were involved to some extent already and then they took on a new, more formal governance role on a committee and/or as a trustee, which led to a corresponding increase in workload.*’²⁶ More commonly, the Pathways research found that participation changes over someone’s lifetime, often affected by ‘critical moments’, such as having a baby, becoming ill, or retiring.²⁷ This could have ramifications for Big Local: over the ten years of the programme people’s participation will inevitably change and it would be a risk to assume that all volunteers will be retained and become increasingly involved over time.

3.3) Why? How the areas chose these approaches and their influences

3.3.1 Why the areas chose their approaches and activities

A diverse and diffuse range of reasons were offered for adopting the various engagement approaches. Because of the nature of Big Local, which is led by residents with a range of skills sets, we found that approaches were rarely underpinned by an overarching principle.

Interviewees in the case study areas tended to focus on tangible activities, opposed to the more abstract categories that defined the approaches in wheel 4 identified by attendees at the workshop. We found that each approach could cover a number of activities. For example, the approach about widening out decision-making processes or structures could include participatory budgeting as well forums and citizen juries.

The reasons offered for choosing activities resonated with elements of wheel 1 – purpose and wheel 2 – context.

Reasons for choosing activities related to purpose of Big Local (relating to wheel 1)

Quite often the fact that community engagement was a *programme requirement* of Big Local was mentioned, or rather that it was in the wider spirit of Big Local. As outlined later in chapter 4, this was often seen as an attraction of the programme, something that made it different to other initiatives. Therefore engaging the community is not so much a choice but an innate part of the programme, which was seen as positive.

Areas engaged with the communities to help *inform decisions* [4 – see Rastrick’s participatory budgeting] and *make decisions*, as well as to *seek legitimacy and be accountable* [3], as cited by St Peters and the Moors (1000 Conversations). In fact, the most common reason for trying a particular activity (as opposed to a more generic approach) was that it had been identified as part of the community consultation.

Immediate needs sometimes dictated activities, however. Something that preoccupied many of the case study partnerships at this time was getting more volunteers to help with delivery, both in terms of *relieving the pressure on a small group* [5] and *increasing delivery capacity* [6]. Events were sometimes used to increase the capacity of Big Local partnership, by

²⁶ Brodie *et al*, *Pathways through participation final report*, p. 63.

²⁷ Brodie *et al*, *Pathways through participation final report*, p. 36.

engaging volunteers and reaching out to those who are considering getting involved, or, just as importantly, those who potentially might become more involved in Big Local over time. Even where recruiting additional volunteers was linked to a specific aim or an event, this would not be explicitly mentioned when promoting it. It was about drawing people into an appealing event that they would enjoy in its own right.

Making sure no one was left out [7] meant that certain groups could be targeted. This might be because they were felt to be under-represented in Big Local activities, or it may have emerged during the Getting Started phase, with, for example, a community consultation highlighting a lack of facilities for young people. But for those partnerships that had been established for some time, it could become obvious that, for whatever reason, there was a group or part of the area that was not engaging in Big Local.

Finally, *building a more 'engaged' community* [8] was an end or a goal in itself, in which people saw beyond immediate issues and focused on what would be achieved by the end of Big Local.

Reasons for choosing activities related to context of Big Local (relating to wheel 2)

The nature of the local community and its challenges, such as deprivation, were felt to influence approaches, something that was often related to *previous history of engagement* [1]. These issues were often identified during the consultation phase, where engaging the community was important as a way to inform decisions. As outlined in relation to wheel 1, the areas' needs will come to the fore, for example if there is a dearth of facilities or services that people would wish Big Local to address. The importance of existing infrastructure, participation and deprivation, and its impact on how Big Local engages and how effective it is, should not be underestimated.

Locally-based individuals and organisations could shape community engagement approaches in different ways. *Existing infrastructure, including groups and networks* [2] could provide a foundation for a Big Local partnership or help to communicate about its activities to the community. *Who is involved* [6] and *who is 'the community'* [7] were important aspects to consider, with people contributing their skill sets. These could be summarised as:

- **Building on established forms of engagement in the community:** Where an existing, pre-Big Local resident-led group forms the basis for the Big Local partnership (e.g. Brookside);
- **Community development approach:** Where an experienced community development professional introduces them to community development ideas (e.g. Whitley; SO18; Kirk Hallam);
- **Community organising:** Where areas had a community organiser involved in the partnership, they could influence their approach (e.g. St Peters and the Moors).

There were cases where the approaches were influenced by a community development worker or, more rarely, a community organiser. Most frequently these were Reps or specialised workers (i.e. community development) hired by Big Local. Yet there were instances where residents also had this type of expertise. An example of an area that did more consciously adopt a distinctive approach was in Whitley, where there was a strong

community development influence, with an experienced community development professional on the partnership. They went on to have a full-time community development worker and six residents took a course in community development. One of these residents talked about how, early on, the partnership googled different community engagement approaches, which helped them affirm that community development was the best fit for them. Other types of resident expertise could also influence approaches and activities, for example having an experienced youth worker on the partnership.

Finally, the *availability and use of resources was a factor* [8] in the sense of activities common in Big Local being tried, which were often suggested by the Rep. Some activities were seemingly fundamental to most Big Local areas, such as communications, events and activities. Other more specialised activities had been adapted because of their use in other Big Local areas, such as participatory budgeting and community researchers.

Frequently, it seemed to be a process of trial and error in regards to which approach or activity they used. The fieldwork suggests that local areas are being pragmatic and focusing on what practically works. For example, some areas had experienced poor attendance at events, so had subsequently decided to run fewer events and try other activities.

4. What's different – how and why does engagement differ?

Chapter summary

Similarities and differences between focus Big Local areas

Similarities

- **Having structures that were programme requirements:** including having a Rep in the start-up phase, forming a resident-led partnership, consulting the community in some way and developing a plan.
- **Running 'bread and butter' Big Local community engagement activities:** there were certain activities that were not compulsory in Big Local which the majority of areas ran without a great deal of conscious decision making as to why they chose these.
- **Having a pragmatic approach to community engagement:** the areas tended to have adopted a range of activities, often on a case-by-case basis.
- **Striving to get more people actively engaged in Big Local:** some of the areas struggled to get people to take a more active role. Others had good engagement with volunteers but needed greater numbers in order to progress to the next stage.

Differences

- **Context of the area:** the nature of the area, in terms of existing participation, economic deprivation and local support structures, often affected both how partnerships approached Big Local and their success in engaging the community.
- **How activities were shaped and run:** whilst there was commonality on a superficial level, these could look very different in practice in each area.
- **Less frequently used approaches:** two of the eight were much less common: *a big community project*; and creating *a physical space for engagement approaches*.
- **Whether community engagement was a journey, vehicle or destination:** for many of the areas under study engaging the community, certainly at this stage, had, at least in part, an instrumental purpose – trying to grow the core delivery group.
- **The presence and role of paid workers:** whilst the majority of the areas under study had paid workers of some sort, their roles, hours and prominence varied greatly.

Comparison to other programmes

Interviewees identified three distinctive themes:

- **Length of Big Local:** the long time period allows for longer engagement strategies. This is partly about context – in areas with low levels of engagement, it could be very challenging to enact change in just a few years.
- **Resident-led nature:** the resident-led nature of Big Local, with it being run by residents not organisations, was highlighted by many as an example of how the programme is intrinsically about engaging the community. Rhetoric about resident involvement was not uncommon; it was more embedded in Big Local.
- **Flexibility:** this is interlinked with the length of programme and its resident-led nature. The range of choices open to a Big area as they develop their plan was considerable. Residents can be engaged because they identify the needs of the community, as opposed to an external body.

4.1) Similarities and differences between Big Local areas of this study

Similarities

- **Having structures that were programme requirements:** although not the most prescriptive of programmes (see next section), the structure of Big Local meant that each area was required to: have a Rep and have a partnership with majority residents broadly reflecting the community; consult the community in some way; and develop a plan. Having a resident-led partnership meant the community was at the heart of the process from the beginning. The role of the Rep was also particularly important and they could be very influential. Many seemed to have community development backgrounds and suggested similar activities for residents to consider. As the programme progressed, they were an important conduit for shared learning between areas.
- **Running 'bread and butter' Big Local community engagement activities:** there were certain activities that were not compulsory in Big Local to run but are part of Big Local delivery, which the majority of areas ran without a clear purpose. Other activities were chosen after engaging in learning about other Big Local areas, such as small grant activities.
- **Having a pragmatic approach to community engagement:** the areas have adopted a range of activities, often on a case-by-case basis. There was frequently an element of trial and error to this – if an approach did not do well in engaging people it might be dropped or adapted. An overarching approach to community engagement, in the sense that all the partnership framed what they were doing in terms of a set of principles, was rare. But where it did occur there was an overt community development or community organising ethos.
- **Striving to get more people actively engaged in Big Local:** some of the areas were struggling to get people to take a more active role in Big Local. Others had good engagement from volunteers so far but needed more to move on to the next stage.

Differences

- **Context of the area:** the nature of the area, in terms of existing participation, economic deprivation and local support structures, often affected both how partnerships approached Big Local and their initial and ongoing success in engaging the community. For example, if there was vibrant activity and existing groups, they could build on that. There were other instances where residents had felt let down by previous initiatives and/or by the local authority, something that required trust to be re-built.
- **How activities were shaped and run:** whilst we identified commonality on a superficial level, these could look very different in practice in each area. For example, all of the 13 focus areas had a small grant scheme (which falls under the approach of *resident empowerment*) but only two of these were using participatory budgeting (which fits under approach of *widening out decision making*). So even though all these areas award small grants, residents' involvement in this process, as well as the amount of money on offer, varied greatly.
- **Less frequently used approaches:** of the eight approaches, two were much less common: *a big community project* and *creating a physical space for engagement*

approaches. Only a couple of the focus areas had larger projects. None of these were on the scale of Barrow Island's (not a focus area), which is known for having one of the larger projects in Big Local. In terms of creating a physical space for engagement, five of the focus areas had created or were in the process of creating a space. Another three used other spaces, for drop in sessions, for example.

- **Whether community engagement was a journey, vehicle or destination:** for many of the focus areas engaging the community, certainly at this stage, had, at least in part, an instrumental purpose. It was a 'vehicle' to trying to widen the core group delivering Big Local. Some had improved community engagement as a destination; an aim in itself. Some areas, such as Whitley, described what engagement in the area would look like by the end of the programme.
- **The presence and role of paid workers:** Whilst the majority of the focus areas had paid workers of some sort, their roles, hours and influence varied greatly. Some were community development workers, some had an administrative role, some did both. In certain cases workers were central to much of the Big Local work, involved in delivery or being one of the public 'faces'; in others they were more peripheral, having a back office role.

4.2) Comparison to other programmes

In the case studies, interviewees were asked about their experience of other community engagement programmes. Residents were less likely to name specific schemes than those who were 'professionals', either workers or Reps. The latter cited a variety of regeneration programmes they had worked on, including New Deal for Communities, Single Regeneration Budget and localised council funded estate regeneration (for example SO18 and Telford). Other initiatives cited included the European Social Fund, Our Place, and Community Organisers.

There were three main themes that were identified when interviewees compared Big Local to other community engagement programmes. These were:

- The duration of the programme;
- Its resident-led nature; and
- The flexibility of the programme.

These all impact on how community engagement takes form and will be discussed in turn.

4.2.1) Length of Big Local

Big Local as a national programme will last for 17 years and individual areas have approximately ten or more years to implement their plan, not including the development stage. The length of the programme, in terms of community engagement, allows for longer engagement strategies. This is partly about context – in areas with low levels of engagement, it can be challenging to change this in just a few years.

Many programmes that people had previous experience of usually had a length of no more than three years although there were a few exceptions, such as New Deal for Communities, which was ten years long. One experienced Rep reflected on 30 years' experience of working on such initiatives:

'Almost all of that has been short-term project-based, with a straight linear theme...there's outputs. A lot of them have been tick box stuff. Some of them have not been so bad, like Single Regeneration Budget. But overall none of them have had the length of time given to them that Big Local has, it's got ten years.' (Rep)

The long period can allow for early successes to be built upon. Many interviewees noted that, including the Getting Started period, Big Local in their area had passed the three year point already. In SO18 their Rep reflected that their campaign around bus frequencies succeeded, making sure they were not reduced to being hourly, after around three years of Big Local activity. Whereas in some programmes they would be winding down or reporting by that stage, in Big Local they could build on this success and use it as example of how Big Local could change things. Another interviewee in SO18 also reflected how the period of time lets areas develop:

'We have evolved too, it's through the first years we have worked out what we should 'really' be doing. If it had just been a three year project we'd just have worked out what we should be doing when the money would be finished. I think Big Local is a trail blazer in how funding should be made available to communities like ours.' (Worker)

Big Local was seen by some as being about empowering residents and creating a long-term legacy in the area. The emphasis on empowerment is not unique to Big Local, but long-term span can be more conducive to long lasting impact in this respect. It was felt that if an area is to engage those who have not engaged before (the theme *targeted work*) it needed time. In Whitley a member of the partnership felt that the area had gone from initiative to initiative with a lack of continuity and connections in the past without developing people:

'Whitley's had initiatives loads of times. But when the initiative's finished there's not many people anywhere further on. Then you get into a culture of people waiting for the next initiative to come along and do it for them. And we have to work hard with this longer-term initiative...to make sure that doesn't happen. So hopefully this time we've got long enough to let people see that if any of us [the partnership] go away for a month people will just carry on and do it. And that's already starting to happen in a lot of ways.' (Partnership member)

Two key benefits around the timescale were identified by interviewees. One was the necessity of a long timescale, as change is gradual and can be difficult to achieve. It can be very difficult to achieve substantial shifts in a just few years, especially if areas have little history of engagement to begin with. The second benefit is how having a longer timescale could make people feel about, and engage with, the programme and what they can achieve. Recognition of the 'brand' and familiarity with the core volunteers, through face-to-face contact, was identified as particularly important by these areas, and this can build over time.

4.2.2) Resident-led nature

Big Local is run by groups of people from the community opposed to being delivered through organisations. This makes a difference in terms of how and why engagement happens. It means that residents are at the centre at the programme in terms of its organisation and

driving it forward. Where organisations are involved, for example as a Locally Trusted Organisation, they were still answerable to partnership.

The resident-led nature of Big Local was highlighted by many interviewees as an example of how the programme was intrinsically about engaging the community. Rhetoric about resident involvement was not uncommon in community engagement programmes, but it appears to be more embedded in Big Local:

'Whilst they [other programmes] have a rhetoric of 'it's the community that counts' none of them had being resident-led built into them like Big Local has from the outset.'
(Rep)

Residents frequently felt greater ownership over Big Local because they could genuinely make decisions, as opposed to only superficially influencing them. The parameters of decision making were highlighted in this context: interviewees often had experience of 'choice' in other programmes in terms of choosing from an often narrow range of predetermined options. This was an important difference with Big Local, as this resident highlighted:

'But this is the first thing that is not "Let's consult with you – you can pick between geraniums and gerberas". This is not like that. This is "we are going to spend one hundred thousand pounds on transport, help us decide how to do that". So this is a bit different. It's meaty...It is "what do you want us to do?"' (Partnership member)

This sense of ownership had often led to greater engagement on the interviewee's part.

In another area an interviewee also made this point emphasising that residents decide on priorities and outcomes, unlike other programmes where topic areas were already fixed. Those interviewed saw that Big Local areas were given autonomy to decide what is right for them:

'...this is community engagement by the people and for the people.' (Rep)

A more general observation was that Big Local, compared to previous initiatives, particularly regeneration programmes, is more focused on people:

'Big Local is investing in the community rather than the buildings and the physical structures.' (Worker)

4.2.3) Flexibility

A third difference of Big Local compared to other programmes was the perceived flexibility of the programme, which is interlinked with the length of the programme and its resident-led nature. The range of choices open to a Big Area as they develop their plan was considerable. Residents could be engaged because they identified the needs of the community, as opposed to an external body. One interviewee, with experience of regeneration initiatives and other programmes, such as Our Place and Community Organisers, spoke about the importance of this aspect:

'The flexibility of Big Local, with the commitment to it being really locally led and responsive, is also a very significant difference. We really feel we are being given the freedom to work out what will make the best use of the Big Local money in our area, and have the support to work with this.' (Worker)

However, it is important to note that it is not just the aims that are set by the residents, it is the approaches, something that resonated with those we spoke with. As highlighted in the previous chapter, this had provided flexibility to try a range of projects:

'Big Local has given us the time to trial and test things, learn things as we go along. That flexibility has been really, really helpful. It allows us to learn from our mistakes or from some of the challenges that arise.' (Worker)

This was part of the learning journey all areas go on. A trial and error approach in choosing activities, as highlighted in the previous chapter, means that areas found what was best suited to their area and the residents.

5. What's working – for whom and in what circumstances?

Chapter summary

Reflections on effective ways to engage communities

The case study interviewees were asked to reflect on what helped to effectively engage the community, summarised in the following three themes:

- **Capitalising on the timeframe of Big Local:** the areas under study often used different approaches at different points over the life-time (so far) of Big Local in the area. There were instances where different activities were seen to be more effective at engaging people in the short-term, while others were part of a longer, more gradual process of engagement. In the short-term, quick wins and tangible results were a way of demonstrating that Big Local could effect change.
- **Having multiple and varied entry points into Big Local:** there were a variety of entry points for individuals into Big Local, or as one interviewee described them, 'trigger points'. This may include attending an event, having an activity funded or helping to run an event, activity or hub. The following groups were also identified: partnership members; additional volunteers; direct beneficiaries; and the wider community.
- **Having both breadth and depth of engagement:** *breadth of engagement*, where as many different groups of people engaged as possible, often seemed more important in the Getting Started phase of Big Local. This was sometimes framed as a way of giving the steering group a 'mandate'. Examples of this scale of activity in the delivery stage were voting exercises in participatory budgeting. *Depth of engagement* referred not just to the numbers engaged, but also to the nature of that interaction. Trust could be built up through face-to-face interaction, by conversing with residents in a variety of settings – such as events, in residents' homes and in the streets – as opposed to more impersonal large scale interaction or consultation. Many areas sought to combine breadth and depth.

The effectiveness of the different engagement approaches

The case study areas 'ranked' the different approaches used (wheel 4). They were asked to identify the three most effective approaches, the most frequently cited were:

- Communications and conversations;
- Community events and celebrations;
- Targeted work.

The fifth engagement wheel looks at what helps to facilitate successful engagement. We originally developed eight categories then added a ninth category of using visible and tangible successes so far as evidence of what Big Local can do. Again, the five case study areas were asked to rank these categories. There was a much greater spread in identifying what makes practice effective; areas mostly agreed that having visible results was crucial.

5.1) Reflections on effective ways to engage communities

The case study interviewees were asked to reflect on what helped to effectively engage the community. The following three themes summarise what was identified as important:

- Capitalising on the timeframe of Big Local;
- Having multiple and varied entry points into Big Local;
- Having both breadth and depth of engagement.

Several of these themes cut across the different approaches outlined in the previous two chapters. Each will be discussed in turn in more detail.

5.1.1) Capitalising on the timeframe of Big Local

Echoing the importance of timeframe of Big Local highlighted in the last chapter, the areas under study often employed different approaches at different points over the life-time (so far) of Big Local in the area. This might mean that they used surveys in the beginning, during the consultation phase, but they also used awareness-raising events at later stages. Yet as areas had plans approved and started delivery they were often less likely to pursue these large-scale consultative exercises. More regular activities tended to become more established over time.

There were also instances where different activities were seen to be more effective at engaging people in the short-term, while others were part of a longer, more gradual and sustained process of engagement. In the short-term, quick wins and tangible results were seen to be a way of demonstrating that Big Local could effect change.

Effective longer-term engagement approaches included more informal engagement of people, which develops over time. For example, in Whitley the community café was about developing a financially sustainable resource for the community that provided a space where members could gather informally, as well as for more formal activities. It was believed that capitalising on these informal relations would take time.

In general, building the capacity of residents, in terms of skills and knowledge, and organisations was seen to be a longer-term process. Running a training course will not immediately change someone's life, for example, but can be the start of a process of development. Improving community infrastructure, such as creating community hubs contributed to this process. Interviewees discussed the importance of building trust in the case study areas, which was linked to the longevity of the programme. Seeing that Big Local is run by residents and can achieve things can help to build trust.

5.1.2) Having multiple and varied entry points into Big Local

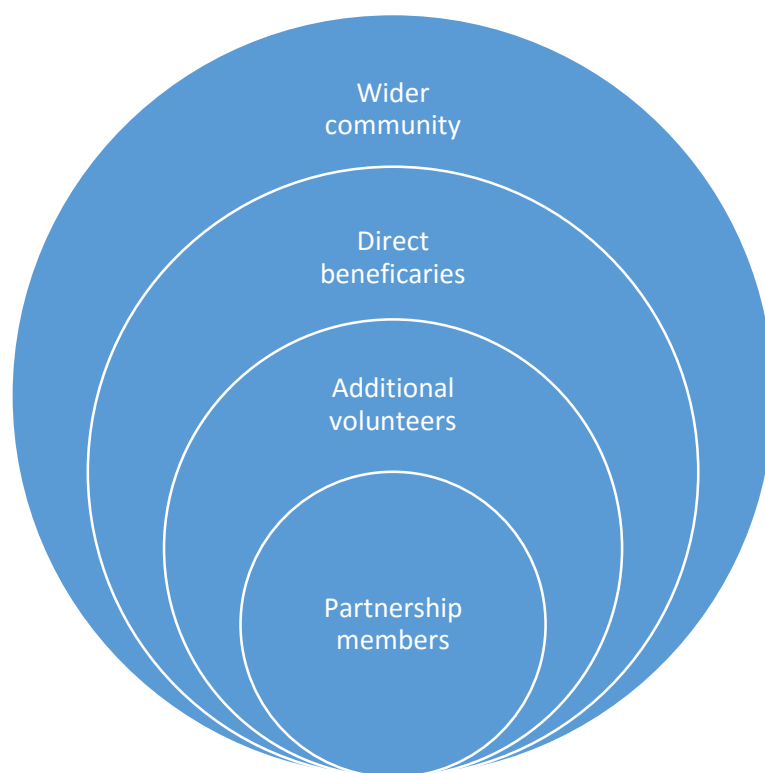
It was clear from all of the focus areas that it was necessary to pursue activities from more than one of the eight approaches to engage the community we identified. As noted earlier, all the areas pursued at least six of these eight broad approaches.

This meant that there were a variety of entry points for individuals into Big Local, or as one interviewee described them, 'trigger points'. This included attending an event, having an activity funded or helping to run an event, activity or hub. This links to the theme about

where in the Big Local process the areas are (explored below), with roles tending to diversify as Big Local progresses. Perhaps early on, the roles were more formal and intensive, what some described as ‘committee roles’, which is necessary to put the plan together. When areas were formally delivering their plan, and activities were up and running, there could be a greater variety of roles, including less intensive, more informal ones. It will be important to see whether the number of roles in Big Local expand in most areas over time.

To varying degrees the case study areas emphasised the importance of how Big Local was structured to make Big Local function and where the community fitted into this. At its simplest it followed the pattern in the figure below:

Figure 6 – Different participants in Big Local



As noted in the chapter on engagement, the category of additional volunteers could often have disproportionate importance attached to it to get delivery going and building momentum. But it was having an awareness of getting this right in order to engage the broader community.

5.1.2) Having both breadth and depth of engagement

Breadth of engagement – for example having as many different groups of people engaged as possible – often seemed more important in the Getting Started phase of Big Local. Having as high a number of responses as possible for initial consultations, for example through surveys, was seen as preferable by areas. This was sometimes framed as a way of giving the steering group a ‘mandate’. The extent to which areas tried to maintain this large-scale engagement

varied. For instance, with participatory budgeting Rastrick, was able to keep a significant number of residents active in decision making, with around 1,000 people still voting in later rounds of the process, maintaining a high level of engagement.

On the other hand, something that came up repeatedly when interviewees were asked about what makes effective engagement was the importance of face-to-face interaction. This might be termed as the *depth* of engagement – so not just the numbers engaged, but the nature of that interaction. By conversing with residents in a variety of settings – such as events, in residents’ homes and in the streets – trust could be built up, as opposed to more impersonal large-scale interaction or consultation. It is important for those involved in Big Local to be visible in the community. Yet establishing recognition of those involved in Big Local takes time.

Many areas sought to combine the two. In the case of St Peters and the Moors, it was felt that surveys were not personal enough, and that face-to-face conversations were necessary in order to understand what residents really wanted. But with the ultimate target of 1,000 of these conversations, this was an example of how depth and breadth can work together.

5.2) The effectiveness of the different engagement approaches

The engagement wheel of how effective approaches were, as originally developed, has been adapted into the table below, along with how the case study areas ‘ranked’ the different approaches. They were asked to identify the three most effective approaches, in order (one to three, with one being the most effective). The results are captured below.

Table 3. How the case study areas ranked the importance of different approaches

Theme	Description	No. of case study areas citing this (out of 5)	Rank (scores allocated 3 if ranked 1 st , 2 for 2 nd , 1 for 3 rd)
Communications and conversations	Using different communications mechanisms or tools to create dialogue and conversation from newsletters, surveys and consultations to websites and social media activities and more two-way processes/dialogue-based.	4	9
Community events and celebrations	Using events as a way to inform, consult, raise interest, reach out to and attract those interested in engaging in some way.	4	8
Targeted work	Focused on inclusion, hearing unheard voices, widening participation – e.g. youth programmes, intergenerational projects, targeted outreach to ‘hard-to-reach’ groups.	3	5
Activity-based – a big community project	Where an area has been able to identify a single large project of significant import to the community and seeks to engage people through this – e.g. creating a park or a community hub	2	3
Creating a physical space for engagement	This could be a fixed space like a hub, café or shop. It could also be a mobile space – taking opportunities out to where people are – using a bus or similar.	1	3
Activity-based – using creative or communal activities to engage	Establishing choirs, community lunches, the arts, community art exhibitions as a route to engaging	1	2
Widening out decision-making processes or structures	Operating other decision-making bodies outside/ alongside the partnership, or looking at processes that could enable wider input into decision-making.	-	-
Resident empowerment and upskilling	Operating other decision-making bodies outside/ alongside the partnership, or looking at processes that could enable wider input into decision-making.	-	-

Areas ranked the following as most effective: *communications and conversations*; *community events and celebrations*; and *targeted work*. All three in some way focus on building social capital. Although only a small sample, it echoes another Local Trust survey about the importance of communications and conversation, particularly face-to-face interaction²⁸. Two

²⁸ Local Trust influences report (2015) quoted in Bussu, S. (2015) *Building social capital: Summary of learning from Big Local*. London: Local Trust (web page no longer available). There was a survey question: ‘what are the best ways to get and keep people involved in Big Local?’. The most cited methods were: speaking to people face to face, events and involving residents in small tasks.

approaches, *widening out decision-making* and *resident empowerment and engagement*, were not selected by any of the five areas.

5.3) What makes an effective approach

The fifth engagement wheel looks at what helps to facilitate successful engagement. We originally developed eight categories then added a ninth category, that of using visible and tangible successes so far, as evidence of what Big Local can do. This additional category emerged from the case study interviews. Again, the five case study areas were asked to rank these categories. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Ranking of what makes practice effective by case-study areas

Theme	Description	No. of case study areas citing this (out of 5)	Rank (scores allocated 3 if ranked 1 st , 2 for 2 nd , 1 for 3 rd)
Visible results (linked to demonstrating impact, accountability and legitimacy)	Where the community have worked together to achieve something and the results are visible to all, for example successfully campaigning to re-route a bus or increasing its frequency, that demonstrates to the community that 'it can be done', that change can be achieved.	4	7
Creative, formal/informal	Informality and creativity pay dividends. Areas doing it well are making it easy, removing barriers, and attempting to avoid bureaucracy.	2	4
Clear, ongoing, open communications	A lack of engagement, or at least not feeling heard or represented is a common complaint. Areas 'getting it right' are generally getting their communications right and using a variety of mechanisms.	2	4
Enjoyable and rewarding	Engagement works where it is enjoyable and rewarding, enabling people to achieve what they want to from it, whether that's for themselves or others.	2	4
Positive culture and resourcing	Engagement works where it is seen as a positive, not just something that 'must be done', that is, where it's seen as a priority and as a legitimate activity for resourcing.	2	3
Variety and flexibility	The engagement enables people to engage with Big Local on their own terms, offering a range of ways for them to get involved, enabling opting-in and out.	1	3
Adaptability	Engagement methods change over time or where things are found not to work – the partnership is able to adjust what it is doing as needed to achieve results/keep people engaged/reach new people.	1	3
Builds on what is there	Builds on what's there already but isn't tied to it if it isn't helpful, uses what works.	1	2
Inclusive of different people over time	Inclusion isn't just about including those who represent the diversity of any community but is also about being welcoming to new people over time.	-	-

There was a much greater spread on the factors that case study areas identified as important in making practice effective, with *visible results* being the most popular. This also came across strongly in interviews. By pointing to tangible projects or successful campaigns it was felt to be easier to get more people on board.

5.4) Amendments to the wheels

Following our fieldwork and learning, we made the following amendments to the wheels:

- **Wheel 2 – Context.**

The wheel originally cited previous history of engagement [1]. We made a minor amendment to this in order to capture the broader issue of areas with lower levels of engagement, volunteering and voluntary action and how this is an ongoing issue for community engagement and Big Local, not just in the beginning. The new wording is:

‘Level of engagement in the area

What has happened, how engagement has been managed or experienced in the local area and the impact/legacy of this. Over time this can include the legacy of initial attempts to engage as part of ‘Getting Started’. Also, the levels of engagement prior to Big Local, especially if low, and the factors behind this, can affect engagement in Big Local over time, not just in the beginning.’

- **Wheel 4 – Approaches.**

A new theme to be added called “Timing”, and within that a new category:

‘Building momentum.

This is about pacing actions over time. In the short term this can be about quick wins, which is often choosing something that is achievable relatively quickly. In the longer term there are some slower burning initiatives, the results of which may not be immediately clear.’

- **Wheel 5 – Effectiveness.**

A new theme has been added which is ‘Tangible’ and within that a new category of visibility. This was the only additional category that was added in time for the case studies to rank, and it proved to be important.

‘Visibility.

This is where the community have worked together to achieve something and the results are visible to all, for example successfully campaigning to re-route a bus or increasing its frequency, that demonstrates to the community that ‘it can be done’, that change can be achieved and that Big Local can help facilitate this.’

6. What's being learnt – what is being learnt or tried that could help others?

Chapter summary

Areas' learning about community engagement

From the beginning

- ***Involving as many people as possible:*** areas felt that there is a need to talk to as many people as possible; the more people who are invested in Big Local, the more successful they will be.

The delivery stage

- ***Adapting engagement approaches if they do not work:*** interviewees felt partnerships should not be afraid to change their strategy if something is not working. With the length of the programme there was plenty of time to change things and improve or to try new ways of engaging.
- ***Listening to the community:*** the importance of listening to the community was emphasised, or as one interviewee put it: '*shut up and listen*'. There could also be conflicts within the partnership over strategy – consensus-building was difficult.
- ***Act as a collective:*** being able to mobilise different people in the community. It is difficult to change things as an individual, but collectively people are able to change things.
- ***Getting people active in delivering Big Local:*** central to the success of Big Local, especially in the early years of delivery, was converting interest in Big Local into people becoming more active.

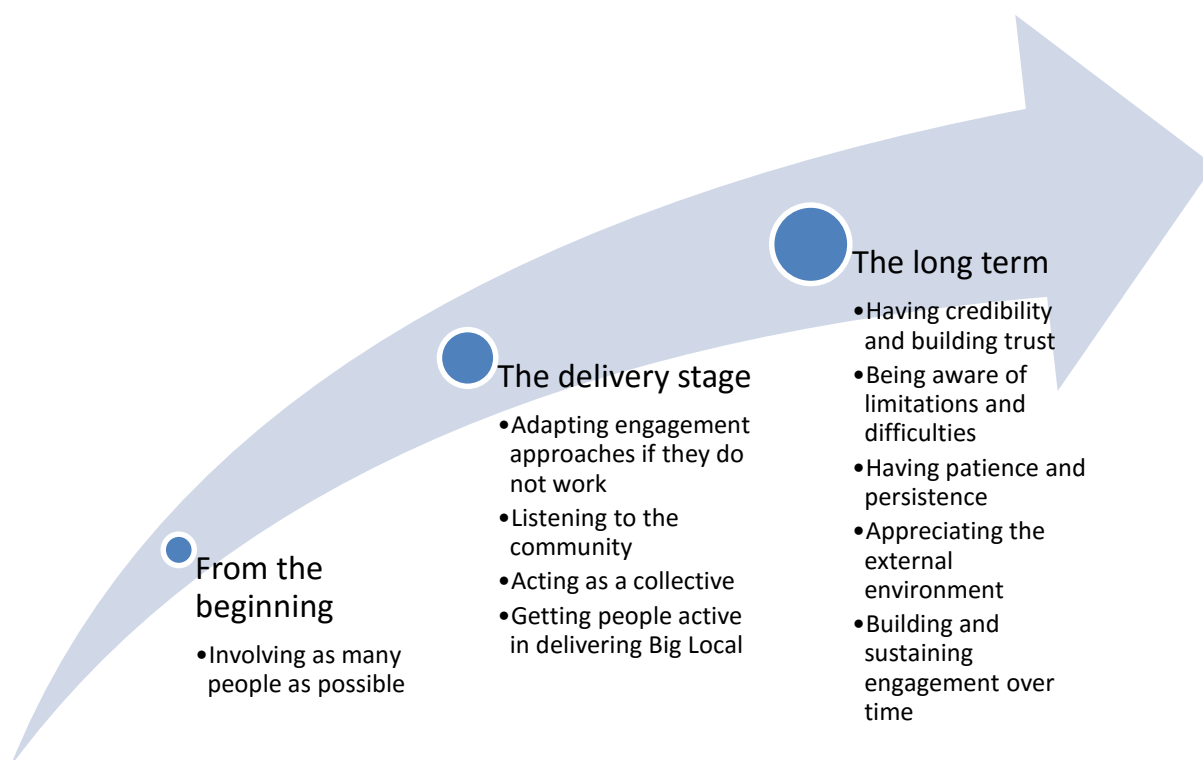
The long-term

- ***Having credibility and building trust:*** feeding back to the community about Big Local activities was seen as important in order to let residents know what was being done and demonstrating that their views and feedback was being acted upon.
- ***Being aware of limitations and difficulties:*** there can be inevitable limitations to volunteer-led activity, especially in terms of the capacity of volunteers. Often many partnership members work full- or part-time which can limit their time available to Big Local.
- ***Having patience and persistence:*** slow progress can sometimes be frustrating for partnership members and patience and persistence is needed. Many areas found it hard to maintain initial interest when it was clear that the million pounds would not be spent straight away.
- ***Appreciating the external environment:*** the capacity of partners should be a key consideration. Both the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector have experienced significant cuts.
- ***Building and sustaining engagement over time:*** engagement takes time. Some partnerships talked about building up visibility and trust with people, even if they were not directly involved in Big Local activities.

6.1) Areas' learning about community engagement

The different learning points are mapped out over the course the programme in the diagram below.

Figure 7 – The pathway of learning in Big Local



The following learning points about engaging their communities were identified by the five case study areas:

6.1.1) From the beginning

Involving as many people as possible

Areas felt that there is a need to talk to as many people as possible. The more people are invested in Big Local, for example, the more people participating and shaping it, the more successful they felt they would be. It was felt that partnerships needed to be proactive in finding people to engage, including leaders and connectors in community, and develop and nurture them. If areas relied just on those who came forward, they could only reach people who have engaged before:

'If you wait for people to come to you, you will only get a certain type of person who engages, you're not reaching the whole community. So in order to get a mandate you need to go out. Ideally I would suggest go out door-knocking.' (Partnership member)

It was felt that when someone was identified who wants to get involved, partnerships should be careful to act on it and do so quickly, because they may not come back.

Reach is key, with some partnerships looking to engage as many people as possible, through a variety of activities. Some sought to cover every avenue in reaching the whole of the community but others were less sanguine about being able to reach all residents. Often Big Local areas are not a natural, pre-existing community and, as noted in relation to *previous history of engagement* and *existing infrastructure* (in Wheel 2: context), some parts of the Big Local area could be harder to engage than others. Therefore different approaches to engage different parts of the area may be needed.

6.1.2) The delivery stage

Adapting engagement approaches if they do not work

Interviewees felt partnerships should not be afraid to change their strategy if something is not working. With the length of the programme there was plenty of time to change things and improve or to try new ways of engaging. This links to the flexibility of Big Local as highlighted in chapter 4. In addition, by taking their time to engage, partnerships could connect with people in a variety of ways, learn from this and then adapt the work or approach accordingly:

‘...you don’t have to do everything in the beginning, you can build up the engagement.’
(Worker)

Another aspect of this relates to *targeted work*, for example, developing different types of activities, recognising and understanding that everyone is different and that diverse activities are needed to respond to this difference to secure successful engagement.

Listening to the community

The importance of listening to the community was emphasised, or as one interviewee put it: *‘shut up and listen’*. There could also be conflicts within the partnership over strategy. But it was also noted that, ultimately, consensus-building was difficult:

‘...it is a lot of hard work. It is not just one person having a vision, but it is having a shared vision. That is the biggest challenge.’ (Partnership member)

Something that came up frequently in the case studies was the view that while it was quicker to impose a vision or an idea, seeking to gain consensus on a shared vision was a longer, more challenging process. This is fundamental to Big Local, but it was not felt to be easy.

Acting as a collective

Being able to mobilise different people in the community was seen to be important. It is often difficult to change things as an individual, but collectively people are able to make progress, with examples from the focus areas including successfully campaigning to improve local services:

‘Having something solid, well consulted, well written, and well supported by your community makes you successful. It then gives statutory authorities, bodies, businesses no choice but to listen to you.’ (Partnership member)

Getting people active in delivering Big Local

Central to the success of Big Local, especially in the early years of delivery, was converting interest in Big Local into people becoming more active:

'I think there's so much good will, so much money, so much interest. We need to capitalise.' (Partnership member)

There was an acknowledgment that people want to be engaged at different levels, and that not everyone wants or is able to be actively engaged, for example, regularly attending events or volunteering. Providing meaningful opportunities²⁹ to reflect the desire to be engaged at different levels can help to create a more appealing Big Local partnership.

There can also be an issue of perception for partnerships who may feel there are only small numbers of people on the partnership and/or doing some of the 'core' work. While in certain areas it could sometimes be felt that little was being achieved; others talked about taking a step back and realising that they have achieved a great deal, which relates to *visible results*. Frequently outcomes or success was simply hard to see when they individuals were 'in the thick of it'. Plan reviews could represent an opportunity for the partnership to take stock and assess their achievements.

Although finding that most engagement tends not to be a linear progression, NCVO's *Pathways through Participation* research developed a model that could also speak to Big Local with regard to how involvement in the 'core' activity, which in Big Local could be membership of the partnership, can lead to involvement in other activities:

*'People have a core, or primary, activity and get involved in others in order to support or complement their core activity. Often heavily engaged in one activity, these participants get involved in other activities when it furthers their interest or the interest of the organisation or group they are part of.'*³⁰

6.1.3) The long term

Having credibility and building trust

Feeding back to the community about Big Local activities was seen to be important in order to let residents know what is being done and demonstrating that their views and feedback is being acted upon. Credibility was key – interviewees felt that it was important to fulfil promises in order to maintain trust. A lack of trust was often a legacy of previous initiatives or dealings with the local authority where the community had felt let down. It was important not to create unrealistic expectations among residents. Sometimes this happened right at the beginning, where residents heard that there was a million pounds to spend, but it took some time for delivery to begin.

²⁹ This is where the motivations of the volunteer are well matched with the opportunity, to ensure that both the volunteer and the partnership get something out of the role in a mutually beneficial relationship.

³⁰ Brodie *et al*, *Pathways through Participation*, p. 52.

Being aware of limitations and difficulties

There can be limitations to any volunteer-led activity, especially in terms of the capacity of volunteers. Often many members of partnerships work full- or part-time which can limit their time available to Big Local:

'If you're asking someone to engage on a voluntary basis make sure you look after them and make sure you support them well.' (Worker)

Having an awareness of the difficulties of engaging volunteers, for example of people volunteering more actively in core roles, was seen as important. Areas found that initial engagement might often be relatively easy, for example just getting people to attend an event but that achieving repeated and deeper contact, the kind which leads to people being more actively involved, was more challenging.

Having patience and persistence

Slow progress could sometimes be frustrating for partnership members and patience and persistence was needed. Many areas found it hard to maintain initial interest when it was clear that the million pounds would not be spent straight away, and that it takes time to develop a plan before moving onto delivery. It was seen to be vital to remember that change takes time in order to limit frustration and disappointment when things might not progress as planned, or levels of engagement were not as high as the initial aspirations. Furthermore, it was felt that there is no quick fix in engaging people and that it will take time:

'...don't get frustrated! Be patient, it will all come together that way, if you are doing what the residents want. Try your best, work hard and don't give up.' (Partnership member)

Areas commonly found that there could be widespread disagreement about different elements of what the partnership said or what Big Local did. As such they noted that areas need to be realistic that opinions will differ.

Appreciating the external environment

The capacity of partners should be a key consideration. Both the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector has experienced significant cuts in recent years, a situation which is likely to continue in the future. In practice this means the capacity of these partners to support Big Local in some areas has been substantially compromised. This can make it *'...hard to offer such a range of activities...our projects need more than our little can give them, they need extra.'*

Priorities for institutions can also change, related to either national or local policy development. This can mean that the priorities of areas may no longer be a mutual fit, so areas should seek to be aware of this at the outset and plan accordingly.

Building and sustaining engagement over time

Engagement with communities takes time. Some partnerships discussed building up visibility and trust with people, even if they are not directly involved in Big Local activities. Others spoke about how one step could lead to another, for example that initial engagement can

lead to further engagement, although this will not always become immediately obvious. Linked to this is the benefit of not simply working with those already active in the community or just finding people with an existing skill set; it is also about wanting to see people develop and 'bloom', so working with those who might need nurturing or support.

7. Conclusion and implications

This report has captured a variety of activities and approaches for engaging the community in Big Local areas. There was commonality in the general types of approaches, but the details of how activities have been run and how effective they have been have differed. At the heart of the story has been the role of the partnership and other core volunteers. These tend to be non-specialised volunteers without ‘professional’ experience of community development. Having a volunteer-led organisation that is not bound by rigid requirements had important consequences, such as a lack of uniformity, which meant that they could try different approaches and activities. Furthermore, when they did attempt similar approaches and activities they could be applied in vastly different ways.

Whilst the research tells us a great deal about community engagement in Big Local, it is very much situated in the context of where many of the Big Local areas are now: having completed the Getting Started phase, and having had a plan approved and moving into delivery. Building sufficient numbers of active volunteers to deliver Big Local and/or devise and run community projects preoccupied many who were grappling with the difficulties of engaging people over a longer period, sowing the seeds but not always seeing results quite yet.

7.1) Concluding reflections

In this conclusion, we identify a number of salient points about what helps to shape and enable community engagement in Big Local, as well as key challenges. These are grouped into the three thematic areas: breadth and depth of participation; the timeframe of Big Local; and pragmatism/the programme’s flexibility.

7.1.1) Recognising the importance of both breadth and depth participation in Big Local

We captured some of the different roles people have in Big Local, and the variety in terms of the different activities they conducted, as well as the amount they were involved. Both breadth and depth of engagement were important.

Importance of reaching as much of the community as possible (breadth of engagement)

Ultimately, Big Local needs to benefit the whole community. In chapter 5 the following different categories were mapped out: partnership members; additional volunteers; direct beneficiaries; and the wider community. The first three categories entail some direct involvement in Big Local.

The importance of having a multitude and diversity of these ‘entry points’ was repeatedly emphasised, although the majority will have lighter-touch engagement with Big Local, such as attending an event or group. To get people involved, the areas needed to provide not only varied, but meaningful, opportunities. These more intensive roles, which can contribute to a feeling of buy-in and ownership, are linked to depth (see below).

Breadth was also about *who* was involved – were all parts of the area participating? Did participants reflect the diversity of area in terms of age and ethnicity? *Targeted work* was highlighted as an important way to engage as many people as possible, from different demographics.

Importance of core members of Big Local (depth of engagement)

In order for Big Local to function, there needs to be a 'core' of volunteers with a deeper level of engagement; this was not limited to the partnership. With many of the areas examined in this study in the early stage of delivery, there was a need for an increased number of volunteers, beyond the partnership itself, something that could affect community engagement in some areas going forward. As Big Local activities expanded, there could be a clearer demarcation between those delivering Big Local and the 'beneficiaries'. That is to say that people in the community could benefit from Big Local activities without having direct contact with the partnership. Although this was not necessarily a problem in itself, at this stage members of the partnership and other core volunteers sometimes appeared to be feeling the strain. There were instances where partnerships were hiring workers at this point where they had not done so before and/or increased the hours of paid workers. This helped to relieve the strain on volunteers. Some of these workers were in a community development/support role, whilst others had more niche functions, such as being employees in a community café or undertaking administration for the partnership.

7.1.2) Ramifications of the Big Local timeframe

The length of Big Local had three major impacts on community engagement.

Different things are needed at different stages

It was striking that as areas moved into delivery, different challenges arose. There was often a need to expand capacity, either through additional volunteers or through paid workers, as noted above. In addition with the consultation period having been completed, the need to consult large numbers of residents often reduced, because the plan had a 'mandate'. There were notable exceptions to this, such as large-scale participatory budgeting, which could often lead to a greater emphasis on the depth of engagement and more face-to-face interaction.

As Big Local progresses, and especially as delivery increases, a clearer demarcation emerges between those that deliver, the direct beneficiaries, and the wider community. For example, beneficiaries were those who attend activities or events, whilst the wider community, for example, might benefit from an improved bus service without having direct contact with Big Local.

Building social capital over time

While the interviewees did not use the term social capital, their discussions about how engagement would build over time very much fitted with the concept, including building trust and networks. Many Big Local areas had low levels of community engagement before Big Local, for example almost no community groups. For these areas the early years of Big Local will be spent building bonding social capital, in the sense of creating activities where residents interact. As part of this, running community events and creating and supporting local groups and activities were vital. This could also have an element of bridging social capital in the sense that it brought people from different groups together. However, building social capital, especially from a low base, does take time and Putnam's work on social capital in both Italy and America suggested that substantial changes in engagement occurs over

decades, not just in a year or two.³¹ This is reflected in volunteering rates in England, which, despite minor fluctuations, have altered relatively little over the last fifteen years.³²

Building bridging and linking social capital is important in terms of targeted work that different networks make links with each other. These may be between different ethnic groups, these may be with organisations, such as universities and businesses. Although there were efforts made to target certain geographic areas and demographic groups, some remained unresponsive to Big Local. However, in a number of Big Local areas there is increased collaboration and networking with local institutions (e.g. councils; universities; health agencies; but also other community groups). It is also important to note that the potential value of bridging and linking social capital can be constrained by limited resources in the community, for example, if an area is more deprived there are less likely to be economically valuable networks than in a more affluent community.

Sustainability

The length of the Big Local programme means that durable networks and groups can potentially be created, as noted above. The length of time also brings challenges: keeping people engaged over time and continuing to attract new people is not easy. Building momentum was important for areas and there may well be a critical mass of activity that leads to recognition and engagement from the wider community. Furthermore, sustainability for some was explicitly about empowering the community so that they would not always be dependent on external initiatives in the future and that the mutual support developed in Big Local would lessen the need for this.

7.1.3) The importance of pragmatism and flexibility

The flexibility of Big Local, in the sense that it is not a highly prescriptive programme in terms of how it is delivered and what the money is spent on, meant there was a great deal of diversity in how the partnerships engaged with the community. The importance of this flexibility in terms of approaches to engagement are explored below.

Fluidity of approaches

As might be expected from a resident-led programme, our Big Local focus areas have not had homogenous approaches to engagement. Indeed, even within most of the areas, there had been fluidity in their approaches, which has changed over time and evidence of pragmatism was observed, with areas changing things and trying something different if things were not working. Even those areas that have drawn more consciously on an existing approach such as community development or community organising, have tended to adapt and develop these approaches over time, as opposed to following them rigidly from the beginning.

Variations in application

There is a learning culture and one of sharing between Big Local areas which was evident in this research. For example, areas had adopted participatory budgeting and community researchers because they heard about it from another area through a Big Local event. What is notable is how differently these can be applied in practice. For example, participatory budgeting can vary greatly by types of voting system and the amount of money on offer; by

³¹ See *Making Democracy Work* and *Bowling Alone*.

³² gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey

the same token a community hub could be the focus of Big Local in the area or be more peripheral. In addition, the context of the area could shape how these approaches were applied. Areas varied in existing community engagement, economic deprivation and local support structures.

7.2) Implications

Particular challenges around volunteer-led organisations

Big Local provides some substantial volunteer opportunities, with one interviewee, a partnership member, describing it as a 'meaty' role. This gives volunteers the autonomy and scope for creativity seen as so important in the work of Rochester³³. However, a potential downside is the absence of formal management practices, or rather aspects of it. While this is not to suggest that areas should blindly adopt the systems and processes evident in much volunteering good practice, there is nonetheless great value in ensuring that volunteers are well-supported, understand their role, and are appropriately matched to roles.

Linked to this is recruiting new volunteers and retaining existing ones. Most of the existing guidance is for organisations where paid staff recruit volunteers into existing roles and as such it would be helpful to develop guidance tailored to need of volunteer-led groups and organisations. Although the 'management' of volunteers by professionals might contradict the Big Local resident-led ethos, support of volunteers in this volunteer-led environment can be lacking. A more formal approach does not have to be too prescriptive. For examples, role descriptions could be written for certain volunteer roles to ensure clarity for all those involved. Without having to enter potentially problematic terminology around 'management' of volunteers, structures can be developed, for example regular catch-up meetings, which ensure volunteers are supported.

Ultimately people need to enjoy participation and conviviality remains important – people need to get on with each other. The prominence of social activities and groups in Big Local is a key ingredient in this. Yet there also needs to be mechanisms that help conflict resolution.

The resource intensiveness of face-to-face interaction

This report echoes other Big Local research about how partnerships tend to prefer face-to-face interaction and find it the most effective way to engage people (see chapter 5). However, this can be incredibly resource intensive in terms of pressures on volunteers' time and capacity. One way of addressing this might be engaging paid workers and/or increasing their hours (see below).

'Beneficiaries' with little direct involvement in Big Local

As Big Local progresses, there will be increasing wider community benefit from Big Local activities, including for those with no direct involvement in Big Local (as outlined in chapter 5). Some of the more active volunteers struggled with the notion that they would be putting a lot of effort in that others would benefit without contributing anything, which might be described as a fear of 'freeloaders'. Although this feeling was not universally shared it tended

³³ Rochester, C. (2013) *Rediscovering Voluntary Action: The beat of a different drum*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

to manifest itself in the expressed need for more volunteers or people with ideas for activities.

Potential of community spaces and hubs

Not all areas had meeting spaces or hubs. Those that did could find them extremely useful in supporting Big Local activities and community life more generally. The importance of physical spaces for engagement was highlighted in NCVO's *Pathways through Participation* research. However, this was not without challenges: a cautionary note for Big Local is that the *Pathways* research also found that community hubs tended to be more effective if they were run by the people who used them and were not dominated by one particular group.³⁴

Role of workers

It would be advantageous to capture more comprehensively the role of paid workers in Big Local. This would include their roles, hours, and at what point they joined the programme. Their relationships with residents/volunteers could also differ, as did whether they are from/based in the area. As part of the programme's learning ethos, this issue was recently discussed informally in the online forum Basecamp. With the strains on volunteers' capacity as the areas enter a more intensive stage, it is important to examine how workers can support them and how their role and influence might develop and increase.

Areas and groups not engaged

Although not identified by all case study areas as a major issue, some partnerships were struggling to engage all parts of the area and all demographic groups. There were instances where certain groups had been unresponsive despite targeted work and the partnerships could sometimes wonder whether there was a point at which they needed to give up. It might be that more assistance could be provided to engage non-responsive groups.

³⁴ Brodie et al, *Pathways through Participation*, p. 46.

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APPENDIX

A1. Methodology

The different phases of research we undertook as part of this work are outlined below:

- **Practice mapping part 1: desk research and workshop planning.** This drew heavily on our [Early Years Evaluation](#) of Big Local, where thematic analyses of engagement had been conducted. This secondary research also included analysing areas' plans and Rep reports³⁵. We also looked at wider relevant literature, including NCVO's *Pathways through Participation* literature review and final report³⁶ to help sense-check Big Local data. As a result, a conceptual framework was developed in the form of five engagement 'wheels'.
- **Practice mapping part 2: participatory workshop on community engagement practice.** In this workshop the wheels were presented and we received feedback from various stakeholders, including Local Trust staff and Big Local Reps, which helped refine the framework. They also made suggestions of Big Local areas with compelling engagement practices, which were then profiled.
- **Practice templates: twelve engagement profiles.** A detailed profile was written on twelve areas about various aspects of their community engagement approaches. These looked at early engagement in the area, their vision for community engagement, and challenges and learning. The draft profiles were then sent to areas for approval and revised as necessary.
- **Practice examples: five case studies.** These looked at the areas' overall engagement approaches and then focused on one particular approach. They built on desk research (four out of five of the areas had been profiled) and interviews with people in the area, usually the Rep, a partnership member and a worker.³⁷

³⁵ These reports are produced every quarter by the Reps and update Local Trust on progress in the area during that period and provide information for contract management purposes.

³⁶ Brodie, E., Cowling, E., Nissen N. with Ellis Paine, A., Jochum, V. and Warburton, D. (2009) *Understanding Participation: A Literature Review*. London: NCVO, IVR and Involve. Available at: involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/docuemnt/Pathways-literature-review-final-version.pdf; Brodie *et al*, *Pathways through Participation*.

³⁷ There were some constraints on the areas we could use as case studies because certain areas of interest were participating in other Big Local research studies.

A2. Key concepts: volunteering, community development and social capital

There are several key concepts/bodies of practice that recur throughout the report and inform our thinking. We define three of the most important below: volunteering; community development; and social capital.

Volunteering

Volunteering is central to Big Local. Whilst there are paid staff both at local and national levels, in Big Local areas the programme is very much led by volunteers, i.e. the residents. It is important to consider this from the outset because it has profound implications for how the programme was designed and is run, and how Big Local partnerships engage the local community.

There is no one uncontested definition of volunteering. However, there are three key characteristics present in the majority of definitions, as volunteering is generally understood as:³⁸

- Unpaid;
- Undertaken through an act of freewill;
- Of benefit to others;

Local Trust highlights the central role of volunteers on their website:

‘Big Local depends on volunteers – people who give their time and energy for the benefit of their area. That may mean helping steer a local project, or joining a partnership, or one of the many other ways in which people can take part according to their own interests, skills and availability.’³⁹

Yet within Big Local, volunteering, especially in the early years, is of a particular type. Partnerships resemble volunteer-led groups. The fact that they are not run by paid staff and do not have formal structures for managing staff and volunteers is important. The resident-led nature of Big Local means that volunteers are in essence what Rochester describes as ‘unmanaged volunteers’:

‘...these volunteers do not slot themselves into pre-defined roles and submit to a process of selection, induction and, often, training, but exercise considerable autonomy over the scope and the content of their volunteering activities.’⁴⁰

³⁸ Ellis Paine, A., Hill, M. and Rochester, C. (2010) ‘A Rose by Any Other Name...Revising the what exactly is volunteering question’. IVR Working Paper 1, London: IVR. Available at: assets.uea.ac.uk/f/185167/x/b902f7eb47/report-a-rose-by-any-other-name.pdf, p. 10.

³⁹ From the Local Trust Programme Guidance about volunteering. (Website no longer available.)

⁴⁰ Rochester, *Rediscovering Voluntary Action*, p. 217.

Rochester goes on to identify different types of voluntary organisations, and perhaps the most relevant he describes are ‘associations’. These have much in common with Big Local partnerships due to the nature of the ‘unmanaged volunteers’ and the partnerships’ frequent lack of paid staff (with the notable exception of the Reps and in some cases paid workers). For those areas with some employees, however, the type of group described by Rochester that is closest to Big Local partnerships containing unmanaged volunteers is what he describes as a ‘micro voluntary agency’:

‘While these bodies employ staff to carry out some of their operational work, they rely...on the voluntary efforts of the members of their governing body and, in some cases, other volunteers to undertake the tasks that the staff are unable to perform.’⁴¹

But in two ways Big Local partnerships do not resemble these or other groups. Firstly, their formation was driven, at least initially, by external forces, i.e. the Big Local programme. Secondly, a budget of £1 million, even over ten or more years, means that they have substantially greater funds than many of these types of organisations. If, for example, a partnership had an annual spend of £100k over a ten year period it would fit the NCVO Almanac definition of a medium-sized voluntary organisation.

Whilst all partnerships are resident-led, there is variation in the extent to which volunteers are involved in the delivery of activities. Local Trust highlights three models of partnership:⁴²

- Partnerships provide overall guidance and recommendations;
- Partnerships do some delivery (such as planning and running community events);
- Partnerships become their own locally trusted organisation.

The majority of the case study areas tended to fit into the second model. This had important implications for community engagement: as Local Trust guidance points out, this model allows for greater volunteering and capacity building opportunities, but there is also the risk that partnership members become overburdened.

Finally, it is also important to understand volunteer journeys and that people’s involvement takes place over a period of time and in relation to a wide variety of external factors; something that we examined in detail in our Pathways through Participation research. Again there is considerable discussion in this report about whether such journeys are linear, with people becoming increasingly involved over time, or more complex.

Community development

Community development centrally underpins the Big Local ethos, as set out in Local Trust’s strategy for 2014-17:

‘We use a community development approach to resident and community led regeneration of areas. We believe that those who make up the community know best

⁴¹ Rochester, *Rediscovering Voluntary Action*.

⁴² Requirements for partnerships were outlined in Big Local programme guidance.

*what's needed and are the most likely to come up with the solutions to make a lasting positive difference to the places where they live, work and socialise.*⁴³

Like volunteering, there is no single definition but it has been summarised as:

*'A set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy. There is a community development profession, defined by national occupational standards and a body of theory and experience going back the best part of a century. There are active citizens who use community development techniques on a voluntary basis, and there are also other professions and agencies which use a community development approach or some aspects of it.'*⁴⁴

More specifically, Big Local uses an asset-based community development approach, which can be defined as:

*'Asset based community development is a specific strategy for sustainable community development which focuses on identifying the strengths and assets in a community and mobilises individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to build on these to take action. It pays particular attention to the assets inherent in social relationships, as evident in formal and informal associations and networks. It tends to define itself as an alternative to what it sees as traditional approaches which it sees as starting from community deficits or needs.'*⁴⁵

In Big Local, community development is particularly evident in the following aspects:

- **The structure of programme:** having residents lead the programme in their area and the community identifying and prioritising what they want to do with money;
- **Presence of community development workers:** there are paid staff, such as Reps and workers, articulating a community development approach. It is not known what percentage of Reps have a community development background, but the majority encountered in this research did;

⁴³ Local Trust (2014) *Local Trust strategy, April 2014 – March 2017* (website no longer available).

⁴⁴ Community Development Foundation (2006) *Community Development Challenge Report*. Wetherby: Communities and Local Government publications, p. 4.

⁴⁵ This definition is from the Asset Based Community Development Institute and can be found at [abcdinstitute.org/docs/what%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment\(1\).pdf/](http://abcdinstitute.org/docs/what%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment(1).pdf/). As referenced in IVAR (2015) *Building on assets: The Local Trust approach*. Available at: <https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/building-on-assets-the-local-trust-approach>

- **Residents consciously using a community development approach:** As described in the definition above, there are 'active citizens' in Big Local employing community development techniques, such as partnership members and other volunteers. Some overtly use community development terminology; others do not.

Social capital

The concept of social capital is an important way to understand what can help make communities work together (or, indeed not work together). There are many different definitions of social capital.⁴⁶ Bourdieu defined it as the resources accessible through a person's networks:

'[Social capital is] the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'.⁴⁷

Coleman⁴⁸ and Ostrom⁴⁹ both used the concept in terms of how social capital can be a form of collective action, with people drawing their collective resources together, even if they are quite limited, for the collective good. This is similar to asset based community development. Tangible contemporary examples would be a group of local people conducting a litter pick or forming a credit union.

Trust is a key part of social capital and vital for building cooperation in communities. For many social capital theorists, it is essential to have a high level of social trust in order to overcome collective action problems.

There are three variants of social capital that are particularly relevant to this research:

- **Bonding social capital:** this describes dense networks of strong ties between people, often in a geographic community. Having strong ties with people can lead to strong mutual support. Bonding social capital underpins communities.⁵⁰
- **Bridging social capital:** this summarises how people connect to people they know less well, often casual acquaintances. These connections can be powerful, as they link to different types of networks.⁵¹ This is vital in diverse communities with multiple networks that differ in terms of faith, ethnicity etc.

⁴⁶ Bussu, *Building social capital*.

⁴⁷ Bourdieu, P. 1986 [1983]. 'The Forms of Capital', in Richardson, J. G. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258. pp. 248-9.

⁴⁸ Coleman, J. S. 1988. 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology* vol 94, pp. S95-S120.

⁴⁹ Ostrom, E. 2000. 'Social capital: a fad or a fundamental concept?', in Dasgupta, P., and Serageldin, I. *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective*. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank, pp. 172-214. pp. 172-3.

⁵⁰ See Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster. p. 22

⁵¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, pp. 22-23.

- **Linking social capital:** this less commonly cited type of social capital refers to ties that link to people and organisations outside of their networks who have power.⁵² These could be organisations and institutions.

Bridging and linking social capital can provide valuable opportunities, for example to individuals in terms of employment opportunities and groups in terms of funding opportunities. For example, the notion of bridging social capital is based on literature examining how people find jobs – weak ties can be key. Yet this does not mean that bonding social capital is without value. On the contrary, communities need this kind of social capital in order to function – it is about neighbours knowing and looking out for each other. But on its own, it is not enough. It is also worth sounding a cautionary note about bridging and linking social capital. The value of these will depend on resources of the networks being accessed. So the potential value of bridging and linking social capital can be far greater in areas of greater economic wealth than those that are deprived.⁵³

⁵² Woolcock, M. 2001. 'The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes', *ISUMA* 2 (1) pp.12-13.

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion about the importance of the resources of the networks someone is connecting to, see: Bottero, W. (2005) *Stratification: Social division and inequality*. Abingdon: Routledge.

A3. List of profile and case study areas

No.	Area	Areas of interest/case study theme
Profiles		
1.	Lawrence Weston	Making it part of something bigger , building on what's there, emphasis on resident voice/say in local change and redevelopment.
2.	Catton Grove	Engagement spaces – community allotment and the community hub.
3.	Brereton	Use of big community events .
4.	Rastrick	Participatory budgeting highly prominent.
5.	Plaistow South	Youth enterprise – there are youth markets.
6.	Worle	A hub and many activities and groups.
7.	Birchfield	Volunteering to involve people who might not otherwise be involved.
8.	St Matthews Estate	Use of social media and communications .
Case studies		
9.	Brookside	THEME: building on what's there /collaboration Tapping into existing provision and partnerships but also tapping into local talent – growth in CICs led by local people.
10.	ST Peters & The Moors	THEME: community organising/1-2-1 engagement 1,000 conversations – trying to engage people more one-to-one, face to face , as a way to build residents capacity to get involved in things in the community.
11.	Kirk Hallam	THEME: communications and conversations Big on listening, learning and accountability and ideas about how success breeds engagement
12.	Whitley	THEME: empowerment /capacity building Invested in training residents to research, manage, lead, deliver etc – a very strong capacity building approach .
13.	SO18 (no profile)	THEME: using activities to engage Using events and activities is a key area of effectiveness for SO18.

A4. Area engagement profiles

Lawrence Weston	p. 2
Catton Grove	p. 8
Brereton	p. 14
Rastrick	p. 19
Plaistow South	p. 25
Worle	p. 30
Birchfield	p. 36
St Matthews Estate	p. 42
Brookside	p. 49
St Peters & The Moors	p. 55
Kirk Hallam	p. 61
Whitley	p. 67

Community Engagement in Lawrence Weston Big Local

Activity Profile – Making it part of something bigger

1. About Lawrence Weston and its community

Lawrence Weston is a housing estate located in north-west Bristol, built in the 1950s. Formerly a primarily council estate, now it has a mix of social and privately owned housing. The area is home to a population of just over 7,100 people.



The population is predominantly white British but had seen increasing diversity in the decade before Big Local, for instance with many Eastern European migrants moving into the area. In decade prior to becoming Big Local, Lawrence Weston had received little in the way of sustained regeneration funding or investment and in the decade prior to become a Big Local area the estate had lost a number of facilities including a further

education college, school and sports facilities, a library and several of its pubs. Things had begun to change on the estate, however, even before Big Local got underway with a recent period of active community development and resident action to 'turn things around' – focusing on neighbourhood planning. In 2011 a resident action group 'Friends of the College Site' started up in response to the closure of local facilities and potential for future developments. Quite quickly a more general neighbourhood planning group emerged with a view to influencing the estate's future development. Lawrence Weston became a Big Local area in wave 3 of the programme, announced in December 2012 and having an official launch on the estate in the spring of 2013. The area's Big Local plan was produced by December 2013 [a three-year plan for 2014-16] and endorsed shortly after this by Local Trust.

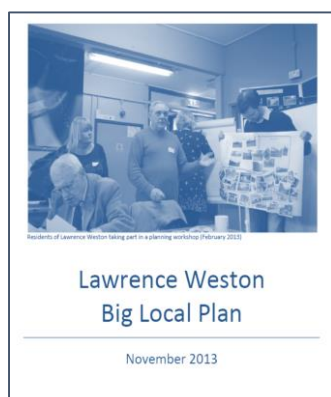
2. Early community engagement efforts

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Developing varied communications mechanisms	Information about Big Local was included in each quarterly issue of the 'On Your Doorstep' newsletter throughout 2013 so that residents could be kept in touch and knew how to get involved if they were interested. In addition, separate leaflet drops promoted big events and membership drives to help recruit new volunteers.
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2. Organising community events	Events included consultation events and fun days with a consultation element organised by the Development Worker and the BLPSG. It also involved attendance at other local events to raise awareness of Big Local and consult residents about priorities and plans. 
3. Partnerships and outreach – working with others to reach out and engage	The Development Worker and BLPSG maintained a high level of engagement with existing services, community groups and forums to get the word out about Big Local and ensure community involvement in the planning process, for example Big Local was discussed by the over 50s forum, a local parents and practitioners group, the youth forum and the residents planning group.
4. Using creative, resident-led research activities	At an early stage though both formal and informal meetings took place, the area tried to use more ‘engaging’ and enjoyable activities to attract a wider range of views and perspectives than might have emerged just from holding meetings. This included a residents’ walkabout which involved people noting down things they saw which they liked, and things they didn’t and then discussing not only how they could improve things that weren’t so good but also why they liked the things identified as good.

Community engagement in agreeing the Big Local plan. A community fun day was used to showcase the Community Plan and the Big Local Plan and people were able to discuss and prioritise different aspects before the Big Local plan was finalised. The final plan focused on the eight priorities from within the Community Plan, identifying actions within each theme:



- Housing and the image of the estate;
- Crime and community safety;
- Traffic and transport;
- Jobs, skills, business and financial exclusion;
- Health, wellbeing and social care;
- Planning, public realm, parks and green spaces;
- Young people, children, families and education;
- Community facilities/activities, art, leisure and sport.

After less than a year the area had engaged directly with more than 350 residents to discuss the Big Local plan and how they could get involved with Big Local (with many more reached through the distribution of leaflets and newsletters). It had established a residents’ steering group with ten

members, who were connected to a wider local partnership that included about 75 people (residents and representatives of local organisations). The area also reported having engaged with around 45 members of the community whom it could call active volunteers (people who had got involved with more than one Big Local meeting or event).⁵⁴

3. Lawrence Weston's engagement approaches

When looking more generally at the area's work to engage the wider community classifying it into three types of engagement seemed helpful to us in understanding how the area has approached and thought about engagement. These are:

- **A means and an end** - Engagement is a process and a goal;
- **Action** - Engaging residents in volunteering/self-help, in delivery as well as decision-making;
- **Voice** - Engagement as a way to build a strong voice for the community about local change.

With its plan in place and endorsed by Local Trust, in 2014 the steering group began work to enable delivery of the commitments in the plan. The Steering Group is using eight different kinds of activity to engage the wider community in Big Local activities as the plan is being delivered:

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership structure – membership open to new people, a youth forum, and subgroups for issue-based engagement	Both the steering group and the partnership are advertised as open to all residents and workers in the area on an ongoing basis and as new workers and residents come into contact with Big Local or the LTO, they are formally invited to join the partnership if they wish to. In addition, the partnership has left the option to create working groups and subgroups to cover cases where they would want particular input or feedback from members of the community on an activity or issue. To engage young people in decision-making, a youth forum has been proposed. Initial ideas for this included that young people might develop their own communications strategy for engaging with other young people, and also that they would be able to allocate funds through a young people's grant pot [see below].
2. Developing communications mechanisms – and building social media and online opportunities for more instant dialogue and feedback	The area reports seeing proactive communications activity as having two key benefits: (a) sending out positive messages about the area to help build a more positive image of Lawrence Weston as a place and as a community; and (b) keeping in touch with residents and encouraging them to get involved. Key mechanisms have included: supporting the continuance of the community newsletter; working with the local university (University of West England) to improve the Ambition Lawrence website (which has a dedicated

⁵⁴ Lawrence Weston *Getting Started* monitoring report [2013]

	Big Local page) and other forms of social media; using community noticeboards; and having a Big Local screen in a local shopfront.
3. Using community events	As during the initial consultation, the area has continued to use events as a way to raise awareness of Big Local, bring people together, and hopefully generate interest in people getting involved in some way. At an early stage events were described as valuable because they enabled the area to engage people who were not otherwise engaged in local groups or with local organisations. These have generally been organised in partnerships that involve residents and local businesses and organisations in their planning and delivery, as well as then seeking to generate more involvement from those who participate. For example, in 2015 a winter themed art exhibition took place. In the same year Big Local helped to re-establish the local carnival, which included a community renewable energy workshop through Big Local. As part of the area's community-led housing initiative a Passivhaus self-build demonstration event was held.
4. Creating engagement spaces	 Quite early on the area identified a value in having a space with which people could identify as a community hub, a place where they could go to find out what was going on and how they could get involved. They have aspirations to take on the lease for a shop to provide a base and office in the belief that having a shopfront premises would <i>“greatly enhance our ability to stay in touch with residents and will also enable them to get involved at times and in ways that suit them. We will provide a screen via a projector in the shop window, which will publicise Big Local and other information for residents.”</i>⁵⁵ The area has also invested in feasibility studies about the possibility of developing a community hub and in 2014 they set up a Catch-Up Café initiative, offering a monthly drop-in point – again intended to improve the residents' engagement with Big Local and other local projects.
5. Neighbourhood/ street-level engagement – street ambassadors	In 2015 the area reported that as part of their commitment to hearing and responding to community feedback on how they are doing, and monitoring the performance of the Big Local plan, they hoped to get resident feedback via a new project recruiting Street Ambassadors. Recruitment is ongoing in 2016.
6. Residents grants panels	Residents grants panels have been set up to engage members of the community in having a direct say in some of what is spent, and to get

⁵⁵ Lawrence Weston Big Local Plan.

	them more involved by coming up with project ideas. The area has created a grant pot for older people managed by older people.
7. Promoting and supporting community action and volunteering	The area plans to develop a volunteering bank to promote volunteering and offer training for volunteers. It has also built links with the local university's student volunteering programme. A number of projects seek to involve residents as volunteers – for instance as community energy champions in a proposed energy project. Within the role of the development worker there are tasks linked not just to the delivery of the plan but also the role has a 'community capacity dimension' (building residents capacity to deliver Big Local). ⁵⁶
8. Using partnerships and connections	To a significant degree the area has seen it as important that engagement takes place that builds on and doesn't duplicate existing community engagement mechanisms, local forums and networks. It uses these, including the Community Network to keep not just residents but also partners and other key stakeholders in touch with Big Local progress and opportunities.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The very recent and ongoing larger programme of work on neighbourhood planning has significantly influenced the shape of Big Local in Lawrence Weston in terms not only of its priorities but also how Big Local's structures and projects have been shaped to enable the wider community to get involved. However, this is still a community that for a long time prior to its community planning activity in 2012 had not seen much by way of resident-led activism or organising.

The area is long and relatively straight, running along a main road. There is a lot of activity in the centre, some in the north, but less so in the south. The significant amount of partnership work on the Community Plan gave Big Local a large number of potential partners to help engagement with different parts of the community. The local authority would appear to be supportive and a part of the picture but quite 'hands-off', with work driven by the residents' steering group and by the local resident-led community organisation.

The residents getting involved from the outset have demonstrated a real commitment to working together with their friends and neighbours to get things done. The Big Local Rep's reports regularly reference the amount of work done by the Steering Group whose members regularly and consistently attend meetings and have done so now for the first three years of the project.

This is an area which had previously had a relatively small number of very active volunteers but a majority less interested in or engaged with community activity or getting involved in community projects. As a result the area has made use of a really wide variety of mechanisms to reach out to people and encourage them to get involved. There is now another local worker, not from area. The employment, training and enterprise initiative is gaining pace, which means a new kind of social media engagement in the area.

The following engagement challenges have been mentioned at different points by some of those involved with Lawrence Weston Big Local. The two clearest challenges are strongly linked and are

⁵⁶ Assessment visit report, December 2013

perhaps the most common we have seen in our profiling of different Big Local areas – that is, **workload** (the amount done by a small core group) and **engaging ‘new’ people over time**.

- **Workload.** The area’s plans are highly ambitious with a lot of activities and a list of projects and ideas that has grown over the first two years of delivery.
- **New people.** A Big Local review process identified as a key issue that while the volunteer residents on the Big Local steering group are highly skilled and effective and have become increasingly so over time in delivering the area’s Big Local plan, there have been some difficulties actively engaging ‘new’ people in the whole Big Local process – though work has already started to address this (e.g. the drop-in café and increased communications activity).

The area has identified a number of learning points about community engagement – about what has worked and what hasn’t in terms of getting and keeping people engaged.⁵⁷

- **Face-to-face engagement and events work best.** *“Posters on community boards and leaflets often get ignored, but door-to-door and in person engagement is great for getting people’s ideas and opinions, and promotions and engagement at big fun events get much more response than asking people to go online in a newsletter article.”*
- **The value of linking in to wider plans and networks and working in partnership.** This is reported to have brought good results in terms of capacity to reach people and create opportunities for engagement.
- **Balancing long-term larger projects and short-term visible wins is important – success can breed greater levels of engagement.** The area has a number of large, strategic projects that it is working on within its wider Community Plan. It has tried to balance larger projects and short-term visible wins.
- **Commitment and perseverance.** Following a more recent progress review in 2015, the Big Local Rep reported that a key learning point had been the vital importance of the way that residents had stayed together and worked together through all the ups and downs of the Big Local journey: *“the benefits of residents sticking together and keeping going through thick and thin, are both moving and inspirational.”*

⁵⁷ Learning drawn from *Getting Started* monitoring report 2013 and Rep monitoring reports, 2014-15

Community Engagement in Catton Grove Big Local

Activity Profile - Engagement spaces

1. About Catton Grove and its community

Catton Grove in the north of Norwich is a residential urban area. The main Catton Grove estate was built in the 1930s by Norwich City Council. It is largely residential with a mixture of housing type but a majority social housing (54%). The area is contained within four main roads and falls within two electoral wards, the Catton Grove ward and Mile Cross wards. The area has reasonable (though costly) transport links and some open and green spaces, including a large park and a public playing field. The area is home to around 5,300 people living in 2,600 households. Much of the community is settled, even including many of the original families of those who arrived on the estate when it was first built. The area is very well served with community facilities including several shopping parades with a high number of independent local businesses as well as larger providers and supermarkets. It has a library, two GP practices, a community centre, four churches and four schools (two on its borders), provision for parents and children through Sure Start centres, several youth projects, and some voluntary sector provision for older people (much delivered through local churches). Catton Grove became a Big Local area in Wave 3 of the programme in December 2012. The area began its journey along the Big Local “pathway” quickly in early 2013, forming a steering group and consulting and seeking to engage local residents and others working in the community on what Big Local should look like in Catton Grove. A formal resident-led partnership was established, and a Big Local plan completed in the spring of 2014, with both endorsed by Local Trust in July 2014 [a three-year plan for 2014-17].

2. Early community engagement

Building a steering group. After initial meetings with the designated Big Local representative (rep) in January 2013 a group of community representatives came together and began to discuss how



to get started. This group became known as the Big Local Bunch – the steering group from the outset tried to make its work and its activities accessible, by adopting an informal ‘title’ and using down-to-earth terminology in talking about its role. The Bunch included local residents and representatives from local community groups, churches and schools plus some local Councillors. The group began to meet regularly, promoting Big Local within the community and encouraging people to feed their ideas and comments into the Big Local Plan.

Engaging the community. The initial consultation process was comprehensive with a range of methods used to engage different parts of the community, with the main methods being:

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Surveying – developing household and business surveys	A household survey was designed by the Bunch and their LTO as a way “to ensure that everyone would have at least one opportunity to share their views and ideas and have a say in how Big Local develops.” ⁵⁸ It was delivered to every household with reply boxes in shops and buildings across the area for people to drop off their completed surveys. To increase the return rate teams of volunteers went out to encourage people to complete the surveys on their doorsteps. An online option was also made available, though few used this. Overall they received 300 responses. In addition to this, after an initial mapping exercise identified over 185 local businesses and employers, a survey was sent to all of these businesses but the response rate was very low.
2. Community Chest grants programme	A small grants programme was set up in 2013 to kickstart activity and encourage small community groups to engage. It was also hoped this would help raise awareness in the community and encourage others to get involved.
3. Neighbourhood/ street-level engagement – a street reps approach	Initially the area hoped to develop a model of street reps as a way of putting in place a network of individuals linked to their area who would then help with engagement at a hyper-local level, and who would be “recognised in the community as the ‘go to’ people on their street to find out about Big Local in Catton Grove”. Though this invitation was put out as an option, there was insufficient interest to make this happen before the development of the Big Local Plan.
4. Outreach and work with partners	 Members of the steering group attended a range of community events in the first year – e.g. school fetes/open days, community play days in the park. They also held an event in partnership with a local youth project to consult young people and offered a number of drop-in sessions at the local community centre and library and a local chapel. Interviews were conducted with representatives of local organisations, local Councillors, Head teachers, GP Practice Managers, Police Officers, the local MP, Neighbourhood Manager, Library Manager, Health Visitors, and leaders of children’s and youth groups, church groups, older people’s groups, community centre, food bank and credit union.

⁵⁸ Catton Big Local Plan, 2014.



Engaging the community with the Big Local Plan.

After six months of intensive consultation a review day was convened where six priorities were identified and, following the Review Day, a focus group was held for each of the priorities. The focus groups included local residents and representatives from local community groups and organisations. They met for three months and each developed a set of recommendations to be considered for the Big Local plan.

The priorities in the final plan were:

1. Building an Active and Vibrant Community;
2. Access to Community Information and Advice;
3. Access to Employment and Training;
4. Building a Healthy Community;
5. Activities and Services for Young People;
6. Activities and Services for Older People.

There was further consultation, including attending community events and meetings – e.g. Christmas Fairs at each of the schools, an Older People's Forum meeting and a Community Safety meeting.

This engagement with the community relied heavily on volunteer input with steering group members and other volunteers putting in many hours to organise events and consult the community. A decision was made in 2013 to recruit a worker to increase levels of engagement and help the area move forward. In the first stages of engagement, the area focused very much on connecting up with people, networking, getting information out to people and trying to be visible online and through events as there was not (at that time) a Big Local community base.

At the end of 18 months, Catton Grove had put in place a partnership with ten people, seven of whom were residents; had produced its first Big Local plan; and had engaged with 900 community members, attracting around 73 volunteers. The area reported that there were around 20 members of the community actively involved in driving Big Local forward at this time.⁵⁹

3. Catton Grove's engagement approaches

Several key ideas seem helpful in understanding the area's approach to engagement. These are: **accountability** (engaging to ensure accountability); **action** (engaging to build more active citizens); and **inclusion** (taking steps to enable inclusive engagement).

⁵⁹ Catton Grove *Getting Started* monitoring report

With its plan in place and endorsed by Local Trust, Catton Grove has built on the engagement activities that worked well during its *getting started* phase to build more ongoing engagement through the delivery of the plan.

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership – encouraging new people to join	The plan suggests that the membership of the Partnership will be refreshed on an annual basis “to enable more members of the community to get involved. This will enable the Partnership to increase in numbers, become more diverse and more representative of the community as a whole.”
2. Engaging people as volunteers	Catton Grove Big Local has a strong focus on volunteering. So, for instance, within each priority outlined in the plan there is some element of volunteering promotion. Within the establishment of a youth forum is the idea of promoting youth volunteering; for the older people’s project some of the work will include recruiting volunteer older people’s champions; for a cooking project volunteer cooking mentors will be sought; for its exercise project, volunteer exercise buddies; and for an allotment project, volunteers to share their gardening skills. The area has also offered volunteer training so that people can feel confident to get engaged, for instance, in its first year offering volunteers training in IT and an accredited course in Community Volunteering.
3. Using visible community projects as a way to engage people	The area has been particularly effective in developing a couple of visible community-based projects that need volunteers - thereby engaging people not just as beneficiaries of a service delivered by an organisation but in a resident-led project which also usefully manages to raise interest in and the profile of Big Local so that others start getting involved. The best example of this is their Big Local Community Allotment.⁶⁰ As the area’s rep reports: “[the] allotment project is starting to help bring new people into Big Local and is something practical and fun.” 
4. Using varied communications strategies	Catton Grove has established a community newsletter, a website and social media to help keep people informed about Big Local and promote community groups and organisations.
5. Organising community events	The partnership has been explicit about using events not just for people to get together and enjoy, but also “as a vehicle to promote and celebrate the work of Big Local, undertake consultation and encourage others to get more involved.”
6. Creating spaces for engagement – from drop-ins	The area has built on drop-ins trialled during the initial community consultation period, and established regular drop-ins “so that people will get to know where they can simply pop along for a chat to find out a

⁶⁰ From the Catton Grove Big Local website (no longer available).

to a community hub	<i>bit more about Big Local in Catton Grove.”</i> These are offered at the local library and at free coffee mornings in the local community centre. Longer-term, however, the area is developing a Community Hub in a disused old police station. This will address an identified need for a central point from which people could access information and advice services, but the partnership also sees this as a potentially invaluable space from which to engage the community in a range of different ways and particularly through volunteering as there will be a range of volunteering opportunities associated with the hub – e.g., meeting and greeting visitors, promoting hub services, becoming trained as community advisors, helping people access the IT facilities.
7. Partnership working - working with others to engage those who are ‘hard to reach’ (e.g., young people)	In 2015 the area set up a youth subgroup to explore how the partnership could better engage with young people. The subgroup decided that it would be good to partner with a youth agency to deliver on youth engagement and so they tendered out a workstream of youth services and youth engagement in 2015 to a specialist provider with whom they now work in partnership.

An activity in focus - more about the community allotment

The Catton Grove Big Local Community Allotment⁶¹ falls under the Big Local Plan’s healthy community priority. The area has developed a ‘grow it, cook it, eat it’ project to enable local residents to share and develop gardening and cooking skills. They approached Norwich City Council and established some community gardening plots at a local allotments site. As part of this they also created a bank of garden tools for people to borrow to help maintain their own gardens and start growing fruit and vegetables and they will be developing a range of community cooking sessions to enable people to improve their cooking skills and eat healthily on a budget. The allotment survives thanks to a group of committed volunteers and the support of local partners, and has served as a valuable way of not just engaging those directly involved but also stimulating the interest of others in what’s going on, what Big Local is all about, and how they can get involved too. It provides a useful example of how a communal activity linked to the visible improvement of local space can contribute to community engagement and to getting more people involved in what’s happening.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

Influences cited by the paid worker include having over 20 years’ experience working as a community worker for this area (and its neighbouring estates). This has taught them what works and what does not. For example, many residents are reluctant to read, and will not engage with, leaflets, newsletters, posters, surveys etc. To get the message across requires visibility and often repeated attempts to engage, people do not come forward willingly and have low levels of aspiration, not believing that they can be part of change happening in their community. Also they are working with very low levels of IT use – even amongst people directly engaged in Big Local only half the Partnership members have an e-mail address. This means that there are not opportunities to engage via social media and websites; they have to be visible and speak to people face to face to get messages across.

⁶¹ From the Catton Grove Big Local website (no longer available).

Another issue concerns the ‘branding’ of Catton Grove Big Local. It takes a long time for the community to build a trusting relationship with the all-inclusive and non-judgmental approach, particularly when there is no particular place to ‘hang our hats’, although the community resource centre ‘The Box’ is now open.

The following engagement challenges and learning points have been mentioned by those involved in Catton Grove:

- **Overcoming cynicism or mistrust.** The area, like many Big Local areas, has experienced difficulty in getting residents actively involved. So, for instance, it has found poor take up of many of its offers to get involved – for instance, the ambassador or street rep roles, joining the Big Local Bunch or taking part in one of the Focus Groups set up to enable a wider group of people to get involved.
- **Difficulties encouraging organisations to work together with the community.** As the area summed up in one of its feedback reports.

“Another lesson learnt is that in this community even £1million is not enough of an incentive to get organisations working together for the benefit of the community. Partners (both delivery and strategic) are easy to interest when they feel that maybe there is funding available to support their priorities, but less easy to keep involved when asked to contribute to the community and work together. From past experience, we knew it wouldn’t be easy to get services / organisations to work together but we have been surprised at how reluctant organisations have been to get actively involved when there is money on the table. We have only limited partner support and need to change this in the future, possibly through a strong driving force that pulls everyone together. However, at the moment we don’t seem to have the people with influence to do this.”

- **The value of face-to-face engagement.** The all-household survey was assessed as successful in large part because of the teams of volunteers who went out knocking on doors to encourage people to complete the survey on the door step.

Community Engagement in Brereton Million

Activity Profile - Big community events

1. About Brereton and its community

Brereton Million covers the residential part of the parish of Brereton and Ravenhill in the West Midlands. It is situated in the north of Cannock Chase (a designated area of outstanding natural beauty) and to the south of the market town of Rugeley. Made up of both urban and rural areas Brereton is a former mining area, with a strong local identity. There are just over 6,500 people living



in around 2,700 households. Brereton contains many different community organisations and clubs, several active churches, a local social club, several primary and secondary schools, and many independent businesses and shops. It has a football club, allotments, and several active associations of residents such as BRACE (Brereton and Ravenhill Association for Community Events). Brereton Million became a Big Local area in wave 2 of the programme,

announced in the autumn of 2012. The area began its journey along the Big Local “pathway” fairly quickly though local consultation and planning then took place over almost two years. The area’s Steering Group became a formally endorsed Big Local Partnership in August 2014, and produced their Big Local plan by December 2014. The plan was officially endorsed by Local Trust in February 2015 [a three-year plan for 2014-16].

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. Work to get the community involved in Big Local was kickstarted in September 2012 with a series of open meetings facilitated by the Big Local rep which resulted in a small group of interested residents signing up to join a steering group to take forward the work. Membership of the group was boosted in May 2013 when new members joined and the group began meeting monthly.

Engaging the community. Once the group started meeting regularly, they came up with a variety of ideas to help them reach out to and engage with the community as widely as possible.

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Developing varied communications mechanisms	In its first year the group set up a website, a Big Local in Brereton Facebook page, developed a logo and publicity materials, and purchased Big Local t-shirts and other ‘branded’ items to help them raise awareness in the local community.
2. Community events	The group organised Big Local consultation and awareness-raising events in different venues throughout the community, e.g. church halls, community centres, pubs, clubs as well as running engagement

	activities at others' events – e.g. a graffiti wall at a church Christmas Fair.
3. Partnership working and piggybacking off other activities	Working with others already in contact with the community was an important part of the area's approach: The steering group and volunteers visited schools, older people's lunch clubs, local churches, the library, and made contact with local businesses and traders, and charities and groups working in the area. They also used opportunities offered by other organisations' events and meetings to 'piggy back' and promote Big Local. The project aimed to engage young people by working with a local young people's group (VOICE) and engaging children in schools as part of mapping/visioning for Brereton.
4. Using visible community projects to engage	The group used quick-win visible projects to help with their engagement. For instance, they received lots of concerns from residents regarding the condition of the local War Memorial. They brought together volunteers to clear the area and plant up the garden and have done it each year since. This engaged the community as volunteers came forward to help out, but also helped them raise awareness of what Big Local was about.
5. Developing volunteer roles through subgroups and champions	The steering group tried to create opportunities for people to get involved in different ways, including establishing subgroups to share the work and to attract volunteers to work on things they care about and suggesting that people could become involved as a Big Local champion if they wanted to be involved but not through meetings or making decisions.
6. Neighbourhood / street-level engagement	Household-level work including door-knocking and surveying was used. The group designed and distributed a household community survey, and distributed leaflets door-to-door, getting volunteers to door knock and talk to residents to encourage responses

Engaging the community with the Big Local

plan. By early 2014 the steering group and their Support Worker had started to draw together residents' views and the results of their mapping and to develop a Big Local plan. One of the key mechanisms the group used to engage the community and make sure the plan reflected community views was a large-scale open community voting event titled - **It's time for you to decide.**⁶² The event was a way for residents to vote on how some of the money would be spent. At the event there were various activities including crafts, fun things for the children to do, stalls from other organisations active in the community, singers and a travelling circus troupe who set up in the park, and a free buffet.

During this time, local residents could vote at a stall explaining all of the proposed ideas on the voting card, where several steering group members were around to discuss the vote with



⁶² Brereton Million Big Local Plan

residents. Overall, there were 256 responses from the residents. Based on this vote, priorities for the first three years were established. The priorities that made it into the final plan were:

- Support community groups;
- Create employment opportunities and help people gain skills;
- Promote health and wellbeing;
- Bring our community closer together;
- Expand the potential of our green spaces;
- Work with partners to generate further opportunities.

This early (pre-plan) engagement with the wider community relied heavily on volunteer input with members of the steering group and other volunteers putting in many hours to organise events and consult the wider community. The group worked closely with a Support Worker recruited to help move things forward and engage the community, and with several partners, including the local Parish Council who later became their Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) and their local CVS (who partnered with the Parish Council and employed the group's Support Worker).

By the end of 2014 the residents had formed a partnership which was formally endorsed by Local Trust in August 2014, and created a Big Local plan that was then endorsed nationally in February 2015. In the process they had engaged 4,000 people, with around 2,000 having been engaged with face-to-face at meetings and events, and 44 members of the community reported to be actively involved in driving Big Local forward and supporting Big Local delivery.

3. Brereton's engagement approaches

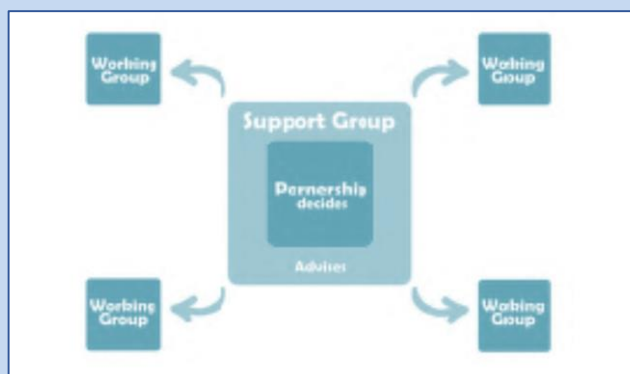
When looking at the area's work to engage the wider community we identified several principles or themes that seemed to underpin the work the area has done on engagement.

- **Accountability** [engaging the community in order to be accountable].
- **Inclusion** [engaging the community to be inclusive of all, and engaging in an inclusive way]

The Brereton Big Local plan identifies four key ways the Partnership intended to engage with their wider community over time as the plan is being delivered:

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership structure – using open meetings and subgroups for issue-based engagement



Following a steering group workshop in the summer of 2014 workshop the group came up with their preferred partnership and decision-making structure. The

structure is one where a core group decides but engages with a wider 'support group' for advice and support, and also has the potential to set

	up working groups to engage others in taking forward work on particular themes or projects. The plan commits the partnership to try to “Meet people from all parts of the community and get them to participate in planning and decision-making” including by holding open meetings for the community to aid openness and transparency and to support wider engagement; having Brereton champions involved; and generally being friendly and having a welcoming atmosphere even if using a formal structure.
2. Using large-scale fun events to engage	Brereton has made excellent use of activities to engage people, offering enjoyable large-scale events and activities that have had great results in terms of turnout and support from volunteers to make them happen. For instance, the partnership contributes to a local carnival but also holds its own events, e.g. attracting residents in very large numbers to a local Winter Wonderland event and an outdoor cinema night (where people had been consulted about preferred options).  
3. Developing communications mechanisms - and building social media and online opportunities for more instant dialogue and feedback	The steering group planning workshop in the summer of 2014 also talked about the importance of trying to inspire people to get involved, and the partnership has worked hard to improve the way it communicates so as to inspire engagement. It has used a variety of communications methods, using social media and YouTube, and has Facebook working well with increased online engagement. The area has also produced an engaging video to bring its work to life.
4. Partnership working	Plans to keep conversation going with partner agencies, councils, emergency services, schools, local businesses, shopkeepers, and a range of service providers are a part of the partnership’s overall plan to make sure it does not become disengaged from the community and doesn’t inadvertently overlook or exclude any particular group (e.g. young people). As the area’s rep reported in 2015 <i>“the group is aware of the need to keep publicising Brereton Million, and specifically to reach out to people that still aren't aware of it.”</i>

4. Challenges and learning

The following engagement challenges have been mentioned by those involved in Brereton Big Local at different points during its journey:

- **Difficulties generating interest and/or active participation in the wider community.** Despite the partnership's best efforts not everything they have tried has worked and the area has had to contend with low levels of interest and participation from residents at times. For instance, a low response to its initial surveying and a lack of participation in some events.
- **The time taken to produce the local plan.** This had a negative impact on maintaining engagement of some of those more actively involved in the beginning with some disengaging when the process of consultation, research and producing a plan took longer than originally anticipated.

In their reporting at different stages the partnership and the Big Local rep have identified the following learning points about engaging the community.

- **Written materials alone are not enough to engage the community – the real impact comes from face-to-face engagement.** For instance, reflecting on their initial consultation the area reported:
"We asked simple questions (what do you like about Brereton? and What would you improve?) making it easier for people to have their say. We made sure the whole community received a consultation leaflet...the follow up ensured a good response and range of ideas. Knocking on doors in certain areas (bungalow areas where the elderly live) as they can't go far and were pleased to still give their opinions."
- **Working with others is crucial.** Employing a dynamic worker was essential to accessing the community as was working in partnership visiting community groups and schools.
- **Events work particularly well to raise profile and awareness and get people interested –** though careful attention needs to be paid to locations, with some working better than others.
- **Developing champions roles can be helpful.** Developing Brereton Champions - a group of volunteer residents holding meetings in pubs to discuss their ideas and projects - proved to be a good informal way of involving some who may not have been interested in getting involved in other ways.

Community Engagement in Rastrick Big Local HD63

Activity Profile - Participatory Budgeting

1. About Rastrick and its community

Rastrick is a town in Calderdale, West Yorkshire. The Rastrick Big Local HD63 [RBL] area is a slightly larger area than that covered by the Rastrick electoral ward. Over three quarters of Rastrick is classified as domestic gardens or greenspace. There are a little over 12,000 people in the Rastrick Big Local area, living in 5,400 households. Working age adults (16-64) make up 63% of the population. 27% of residents are over 65 and 18% are under 16. The population is predominantly white, with less than four per cent of residents coming from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. The area is well served by a range of amenities and facilities. It has its own train station and local bus services that serve the area, a range of shops and supermarkets, a library, several churches, two doctor's surgeries, two secondary schools and several primaries, active community groups, some youth provision, and social clubs for both cricket and bowls. Rastrick became a Big Local area in Wave 2 of the programme, with its award of £1m announced in April 2012. The area began its journey along the Big Local 'pathway' relatively quickly after the announcement was made; establishing a local steering group by July 2012, developing a formal resident-led partnership by March 2013, and then producing a Big Local Plan by March 2014. The area's plan was endorsed by Local Trust in August 2014 [a two-year plan for 2014-16].

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. Following an initial meeting with the Big Local rep in April 2012, a reference group was set up and a website launched the following month. A series of community roadshow events and a household survey followed in June, and by July a steering group of interested residents and other stakeholders had been formed. At an early stage the steering group identified a set of eight guiding principles to steer its work. Whilst some of these were about how they would do things and how Big Local resources might be used, three specifically addressed community engagement. These were:

- Make sure community members can have a say and participate;
- Maximise the opportunities for people to make a contribution;
- Aim for inclusiveness (giving everyone a chance to be involved) and encourage greater interaction between people (particularly from different generations, neighbourhoods, backgrounds).⁶³

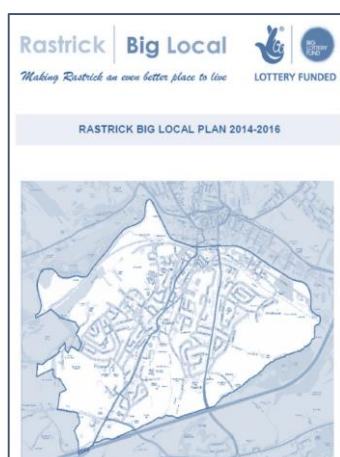
Engaging the community. As part of its *Getting Started* activities, the initial steering group wanted to consult widely in the local area to find out what people wanted. They used various methods to consult and to try and get people involved.

⁶³ Rastrick Big Local Plan

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Surveying – developing household surveys	A questionnaire was designed and distributed by volunteers. Copies were sent to every household and also handed out at four community events. Despite distributing c.5000 questionnaires, only 300 responses were received with the majority of respondents aged under 25. The steering group mapped the respondents to understand better who they had reached and who they had not but overall the group had hoped for a bigger response and remained keen to reach and hear from more people. Following the relatively poor response to the initial survey, engaging with more people was a priority.
2. Varied communications methods	The area developed a website, did leaflet drops, and engaged with the local press to raise awareness of Big Local and the opportunities to get involved. They also created banners and other marketing/publicity materials and a newsletter distributed to more than 500 contacts.
3. Events and meetings	The group organised events open to the whole community and targeted events to reach particular groups (e.g. meetings and activities in schools or with relevant community groups). These varied from meetings, roadshows, and ‘bubble and speak’ sessions to larger scale events – the Big Vocal launch and the BIG event (in August 2013).
4. Outreach and work with partners	Networks and connections were well-used at this time with members of the steering group relying on word-of-mouth, sharing information through their own networks and making the most of opportunities to talk to others about Big Local in different settings and with different people they encountered.
5. Small grants fund	A community projects fund was established in December 2012. In its initial stage this was seen as an important mechanism to help raise awareness and engage more people in Big Local. A worker was employed to support the Partnership and to co-ordinate the fund.

Community engagement around the Big Local plan. A second stage of engagement and consultation took place through 2013-14 as priorities started to emerge more clearly. A second survey took place and several more public meetings and events, helping the Big Local Partnership start drafting its plan.



The final plan contained three broad goals linked to resilience, which it defined as ‘being able to thrive and make the most of opportunities as well as being able to withstand challenges and overcome problems’. These goals were, to build economic resilience, personal resilience, and community resilience where the composite elements of community resilience were described as a strong, cohesive, active and connected community; a high quality physical environment; and a community that is safe.⁶⁴

Specific themes contained within the first plan were around:

- Health and wellbeing;
- Leisure and opportunities to do things with others;

⁶⁴ Rastrick Big Local Plan

- Work, money and job opportunities;
- The environment;
- Community safety;
- Children and young people.

Much of the initial engagement was undertaken by members of the steering group and a small number of volunteers. However, it was recognised that further focussed input was required and an Engagement and Development worker was employed in late 2014. The Board also set up an engagement subgroup to lead on this area of work with a remit to ensure that “RBLP continually engages with Rastrick residents, organisations and businesses.”⁶⁵

3. Rastrick’s engagement approach

Rastrick explicitly states its engagement vision and goals in its Big Local plan, laying out in the plan the thoughts of the steering group on why engagement matters and what they hoped to achieve in relation to community engagement:

*“This is partly about **enabling as many members of the community as possible to contribute to making decisions about what issues are a priority and what money should be spent on**; it is also about encouraging and supporting people to **come together and participate** in the things that Big Local and the Rastrick community offer.”⁶⁶*

From this we understand that the area has considered community engagement to be about:

- Community-based **decision-making** (participation in decision-making);
- Community **benefit** (participation in activities); and
- Community **action** (delivery).

Though the plan says less about engaging people to take part in the delivery of projects (e.g. volunteering to make projects happen) than it says about decision-making and benefiting from activities, delivery is still mentioned, as in the last point here.

With its plan in place and endorsed by Local Trust, Rastrick put in place a number of mechanisms to ensure ongoing engagement with the wider community but the main one was a decision-making mechanism called ‘Voice Your Choice’, based on participatory budgeting.

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Using participatory budgeting to involve people in decision-making

Achieving relatively low levels of engagement with their survey and some of their initial engagement work, the steering group began to look outside the area for ideas about how to increase levels of engagement with their wider community. When members of the RBL Partnership heard a presentation about participatory budgeting (PB) at a Big Local spring event they were taken with its potential and how well it seemed to be working elsewhere. Following local discussions, a decision was taken to find out more and the area employed a consultant to advise

⁶⁵ Rastrick Big Local Partnership Framework [November 2013]

⁶⁶ Big Local Plan

	them on how they could try PB in their area and so ‘Voice Your Choice’ was developed.  Voice Your Choice is Rastrick Big Local’s main mechanism for giving local people a say in the focus of Big Local and what should be funded. This is a two stage process. First residents vote about what theme is to be prioritised then later they vote on which grant awards will be made within that theme. Voice Your Choice is conducted annually [see below]
2. Ongoing communications and occasional events	The communications mechanisms which were established during the initial consultation (the website, a newsletter, publicity materials, etc.) continue to keep people informed about Big Local, with occasional events also helping to raise awareness. The latter are often linked to Voice Your Choice or the small grants scheme, e.g. award nights or celebrations of achievements of funded projects.
3. A small grants pot	A small grants scheme continues alongside Voice Your Choice and acts as a way to encourage the community to come forward with their own ideas for activities that will benefit the community
4. Other	Reporting on a Big Event held in July 2015 the Big Local Rep’s report said that the area was aware it wanted to do more than rely on its funding activities as a way of engaging people in Big Local. She reported that the area was “ <i>testing new approaches to getting more people involved</i> ”. What this meant in practice was being more proactive at the event – engaging with people as they entered the event or came to the plant sale they had organised in order to draw people in, inviting community organisations to have stalls at the event and having a prize draw for those people who could show they had been to all the stalls.

An activity in focus - more about participatory budgeting

Voice Your Choice is conducted annually and involves four steps:

Step 1: Rastrick residents are asked to vote for the issue / concern which they think should be tackled in the following 12 months. They are presented with the themes compiled from the data gathered during the development of the Community Profile and from the initial consultation activities. The first year’s priority theme was children and young people.

Step 2: Once the outcome of the vote is known and the top issue is identified, local people, groups and organisations are invited to put forward proposals that will address this issue.

Step 3: Details of the proposals are publicised and residents then vote to determine which of the projects they would like to see funded. People can vote online, at the local school, and a household form that is posted to them.

Step 4: Funding is then allocated to those proposals that have received the most votes.

The hope was to engage local people in larger numbers than had previously been managed and the initial results have been promising.

In March 2015, 1,370 people took part in the voting on children and young people's projects. This compared with just over 300 people who had responded to a leaflet drop asking for people's views.

In the next round of voting (to choose the Theme for funding in 2016) there was less interest, with only 317 votes cast. The Environment emerged as the 'winner' with 42% of the votes cast.

In March 2016, 1,095 people took part in the voting on projects related to the Environment, so the level of interest has held up well.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The main driver has been the form of participatory budgeting they have adopted in Voice Your Choice (VYC). They heard about this at a Local Trust workshop and subsequently employed a consultant over a 12-month period to set up the structure of VYC and helping implement it in year 1. Whilst the consultant was very clear that what was developed had to be what best suited to Rastrick, they took on board the lessons he has learnt from his work in other areas.

In year 2, they have successfully managed the process themselves and would expect to do so in the future. (So the initial consultancy costs were limited to year 1).

The level of involvement from members of the VYC Work Group has been key to ensuring that they have a model that meets their needs. A lot of thinking has gone into what will work best for their local situation and they continue to develop the process (e.g. moving from just a Household Voting Form to all households (Year 1) to going out to various community meetings with voting boxes to enable people to vote at those meetings (Year 2)). VYC is important because:

- This is the main way for finding out what local people want;
- It is the fairest, most transparent way they have come across of letting all members of the community have a say in how the money is spent;
- It reaches or involves far more people than the roadshow or leafletting efforts;
- It is seen as an approach which needs to be viewed as longer term – building up recognition takes time and an initial issue is that the results of the projects have not been immediate (the 2015 projects, for various reasons, are only now beginning to show results);
- They feel they still have a lot to learn / do about publicising the benefits and positive results that have accrued from this approach;
- VYC has stimulated new thinking / ideas for projects and is helping to bring about a greater level of networking amongst existing groups / organisations.

Other important points:

1. They feel there is a danger with engagement of the ‘tail wagging the dog’: i.e. an engagement activity becomes something they end up doing in order to say they are doing engagement. Instead, they felt they should be looking at their main areas of activity (VYC, Small Grants, providing information for the community) and making sure they build engagement into that.
2. It's easy to forget that meaningful engagement with large numbers takes time to achieve.

The following engagement challenges have been mentioned by those involved in Rastrick Big Local:

- **Defining the community.** Starting with a community that didn't reflect boundaries or other local understanding made it difficult to engage people beyond the Rastrick ward boundary, in the broader Big Local area. This was addressed with a rebrand in 2015 to include the postcode so that people might better identify that Big Local includes them.
- **Workload.** The area's programme of work is ambitious and it takes a considerable time commitment to make things happen. As at 2015-16 various reports suggest much of the work is still falling on a small number of people and that this can cause feelings of overload.
- **Residents' level of trust.** Residents can find it hard to believe they can genuinely influence decisions. As concluded in the area's pathway grant reporting:

"It is very difficult to persuade residents they have a voice in decisions affecting the future of the area."

In their reporting at different stages the partnership and the Big Local Rep have identified participatory budgeting as a successful method of engaging the community and drawing out ideas that might otherwise never have surfaced.

Community Engagement in Plaistow South Big Local

Activity Profile – Youth enterprise, partnerships, trying street level engagement

1. About Plaistow South and its community

Plaistow South is situated in the London Borough of Newham in East London. It covers around three-quarters of the Plaistow South Ward. The quality of the living environment in Plaistow South ranks in the 9% most deprived wards in England.⁶⁷ Housing stock varies considerably in type and quality, but it is known that perhaps as much as 26% of the population lives in accommodation that is too small for them. Plaistow South is comprised of nearly 10,000 people living in around 3,500 households. The population is growing and is scheduled to keep growing quite significantly over the next decade. It is the fourth most ethnically diverse ward in East London with 103 different languages spoken. Eleven per cent of the population are aged over 65, and 25% under 18. Initial community surveys for Big Local suggest that one of the things many residents particularly like and value about the area is that it is so diverse.⁶⁸ The area is well provided for in terms of many amenities and services, including local shops and businesses, schools and a local college, places of worship, a number of GP practices and a local hospital, an active voluntary and community sector, and some youth services including a youth centre. There is not a community centre or community hub within the area, though there are two just outside it.



Plaistow South became a Big Local area in Wave 3 of the programme, with its award of £1m announced in December 2012. The area began its journey along the Big Local 'pathway' relatively quickly after the announcement was made; establishing a local steering group by May 2013, then developing a formal resident-led partnership and producing a Big Local Plan by June 2014. The area's plan was endorsed by Local Trust in August 2014 [a two-year plan for 2014-16].

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. Initial meetings began in February 2013 with a range of local organisations, including the local authority (London Borough of Newham), NewVic College, four local schools, two youth work organisations, the local hospital, and the Anglican Parish. These meetings were led initially by the area's Big Local rep with support from a local voluntary organisation. They were followed by five neighbourhood briefings. During the course of the neighbourhood briefings a number of residents began to join in and help spread the word, for instance helping out on stalls at local events. An open 'Forum' contact list of 140 names was built up across these events and this forum met in May 2013. It was at this meeting that membership of a Steering Group was agreed.

⁶⁷ Plaistow South Big Local Plan

⁶⁸ Plaistow South Big Local Plan

Engaging the community. Once the Steering Group started meeting regularly, they came up with a number of ideas to help them reach out to and engage with the community as widely as possible. They employed a Community Development Co-ordinator and, between volunteers and the Co-ordinator, used a variety of engagement methods.

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Running community events



A series of ‘Post-it’ consultation events were held where local people were invited to discuss and identify what they liked and did not like about the area and their priorities for change – most were open community events, some were targeted at young people. In total some 1,200 post-it notes were collected and analysed and these directly informed the plan.

2. Outreach and partnership working – working with partners and networks

The group made use of the extensive network of organisations in the area already working with the community and attended meetings or events at these organisations, “meeting people where they are rather than expecting them to come to us”,⁶⁹ e.g. making contact with pensioners’ groups, youth clubs, school councils, Asian women’s



groups.

3. Using varied communications mechanisms

A website was set up, marketing materials developed (e.g. t-shirts, banners and posters), and a newsletter produced and around 2,500 copies distributed to schools and local groups. A logo design competition was used to engage young people and students.

4. Engaging with local organisations and businesses – in person and online

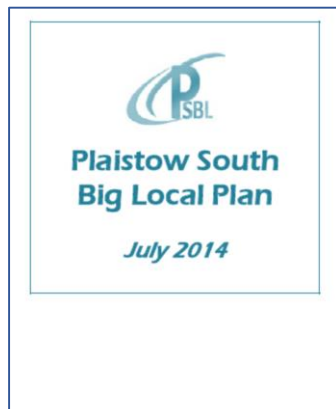
Local businesses were invited to attend a business forum meeting which resulted in a local businessman being co-opted onto the steering group. The area also worked with *Mapping for Change*, and encouraged local organisations and businesses to contribute to a Big Local map of the area aimed at helping people find out what was available locally and where.

⁶⁹ PSBL *Getting Started* monitoring report.

5. Small grants scheme

A small grants scheme was established as a way to engage local groups and their beneficiaries and at the same time to raise awareness of Big Local in the community.

How community engagement informed the Big Local plan.



By early 2014 the steering group and their Development Worker had started to draw together residents' views and the results of their mapping and to develop a Big Local plan. The final plan highlighted six priorities drawn in particular from the post-it consultations but incorporating all the information gained from other consultation activities:⁷⁰

1. Celebrating people and place;
2. Green/run-down spaces;
3. Family and personal financial management;
4. Older people's needs;
5. Working with young people/young adults;
6. Supporting local action.

This early (pre-plan) engagement with the wider community relied heavily on volunteer input, with members of the steering group and other volunteers working alongside the Community Development Worker and putting in many hours to organise events and consult the wider community.

By the summer of 2014 the residents had formed a partnership of 15 members of the community and had created a Big Local plan that was endorsed nationally in August 2014. In the process they had engaged 1,850 people, with 15 reported as actively driving forward Plaistow South Big Local (PSBL), and 30 volunteers engaged and supporting the process.⁷¹

3. PSBL's engagement approaches

When looking at the area's work to engage the wider community three 'themes' seemed helpful to us in understanding how the area has approached and thought about engagement. The area doesn't just talk about engaging people so that they can benefit from activities that will be offered. Its language in relation to engagement talks about:

- **Empowerment** – building people's capacity through engaging with Big Local;
- **Action / active citizenship** – volunteering and social action to make Big Local happen;
- **Voice** – engagement in wider issues affecting the community beyond the 'Big Local' agenda.

The PSBL Big Local plan identifies five ways the Partnership intended to engage with their wider community in a more ongoing way over time. The engagement activities in the plan are based on learning from the initial phase of consultation and some are continuations of work started at that time – including the continued employment of their Community Development Co-ordinator. The engagement approaches and activities include:

⁷⁰ Big Local plan, p. 12.

⁷¹ *Getting Started* report

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Using varied communications strategies and community events	The area has a varied communications strategy – with a website being developed as more of a community portal (linking to other community activities as well as Big Local activities), Facebook and twitter, and three newsletters a year. It also continues to use events as a way to engage people. In the (year 1) plan PSBL talk about building community engagement with people in the community and stakeholders through holding events including a launch event, a Celebrate Plaistow Street Party, and a Christmas party. They also noted the importance of attending other local events, suggesting that “events help build and maintain our presence locally”. ⁷²
2. Using visible community projects as a way to engage people – particularly projects linked to local identity and pride of place.	The area makes excellent use of activities linked to local identity and pride of place to engage people. It has invested in a number of projects that focus on helping people identify with their local area and feel part of a community. For instance, a local oral history project (‘Growing up in Plaistow’); Celebrating people and places – developing local identity through community art – developing a Plaistow Mural. ⁷³
3. Creating spaces for engagement – from drop-ins to a community hub	Having already held drop-ins in community settings where people can find out more and get involved, the area is also looking into the possibility of developing a community hub. There is also a local youth centre (the Mix) which the area has just started to use as a base for some of wider community activities.
4. Small grants	The area uses a small grants fund to tap into and enable local ideas. <i>‘There is a lot happening in the area already. We will look to support this and stimulate new activity through a programme of small grants.’</i> ⁷⁴ A small grants scheme is to support existing activity and stimulate new activity. ⁷⁵ They gave out £10,000 worth of grants in the first 18 months with each award being between £350 and £2,500.
5. Partnership working – working with others to engage those who are ‘hard to reach’ (e.g. young people)	Partnership working underpins most of the initiatives the area has developed or worked on with others. One of the most successful examples of how the area has used a strong partnership approach to help it engage with a target group for the benefit of that group and the wider community is the Plaistow Youth Market. ⁷⁶ This promotes enterprise among young people. It has been so successful that the area is about to hold its fourth market with a further two planned for 2016. The area has worked with their lead partner on youth engagement, NewVic, to organise events for young entrepreneurs who can access support via workshops and advice offered in partnership with UnLtd. (In a competitive process the area won one

⁷² Plan, p. 10.⁷³ Source: Plaistow South Big Local website (no longer available.)⁷⁴ Big Local plan, p. 12.⁷⁵ Plan, p. 12.⁷⁶ Source: Plaistow South Big Local website (no longer available.)

	year of intensive support from UnLtd). The area has now employed a part-time Youth Enterprise Worker (one of the experienced stallholders) to head up developing the PYM as a social enterprise in its own right.
6. Neighbourhood/ street level engagement – Plaistow Streets project	Plaistow Streets is about engaging people at a very local level in taking action to improve the physical and community life of the street. It entails working with local people in specific streets to engage them in cleaning up the areas, improving front gardens, etc. The area aims to work with two streets each year organising local events and finishing with a street celebration. There is a budget of £1,500 available for each street. The initiative is part of the area's wider 'streets and green spaces' work that is intended to support interested groups of local residents to make improvements to their locality. The first green space 'make-over' is planned for June. The area has found that in fact it has not been easy to get residents to take up the offer of help and funds.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The following influences have helped shape PSBL's approach to engaging with the wider community:

- Suggestions from the area's Big Local rep(s) were key in the early days and have remained helpful in shaping what is done and providing ideas.
- Things have also been influenced by the recruitment of a qualified community development worker as the area's Community Development Co-ordinator turned out to be well placed to share options and ideas for the resident group to consider. The worker has significant experience of community development (i.e. early connection with, and deep understanding of, Big Local and the area, as a result of being involved via a local voluntary sector organisation right at the very start of PSBL).
- The steering group (partnership) has an extensive mix of people with either relevant professional backgrounds (e.g. in youth and community work) and/or a real knowledge of and feel for local needs and what inspires people to get engaged.
- Finding good local partner organisations with key committed individuals has also been important.

The following engagement challenges and learning points have been mentioned by those involved in PSBL at different points during its journey:

- **The time it takes.** The area has observed that it is vital to spend time on relationship-building, within the partnership and with partners and residents.
- **The value of partnerships.** Working with others who are linked in to the community has been very important.
- **The value in employing a worker.** This has been an important part of what has enabled meaningful engagement with the wider community. Most of the initial steering group were employed so it was crucial to have a worker to 'join the dots' and 'spin the plates' between meetings.

Community Engagement – Worle Big Local

Activity Profile – A community hub and activities

1. About Big Worle and its community

Worle Big Local is situated on the outskirts of coastal Weston-super-Mare and has a population of



approximately 3,600 people living in around 1,600 households. The Big Local area is actually located on the edge of the village of Worle. It is a largely residential area. However, Worle is generally regarded as part of a commuter belt and prior to Big Local this was seen as having had a negative impact on community vitality.⁷⁷ The

community is a relatively young one, with nearly a third of the population under 25. The majority of the populace are white British with only 6% of the population being from BME communities. The area has some pockets of green space and one large park to the North of the area. Though there are several schools and a large supermarket and other local amenities and shops, the area was initially described locally by some of its residents as, “a dormant area with few existing community organisations.”⁷⁸

Worle became a Big Local area in Wave 2 of the programme, beginning its journey along the Big Local “pathway” with a programme of *Getting Started* activities in 2012, establishing a formal resident-led partnership towards the end of 2013, and having its plan endorsed by Local Trust in 2014 [a three-year plan for 2014-17].

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. The local council facilitated initial meetings and a scoping group was developed that brought together partner organisations with an interest in working with residents to improve the community. These organisations included the local authority, the police, the local CVS (Voluntary Action North Somerset), a local housing provider that later became the area’s Local Trusted Organisation, the Rotary Club, Sainsbury’s, Care and Age UK). This group helped drive the planning for how to raise awareness and get local residents interested and involved in Big Local, holding meetings and conducting early outreach. By early 2013 an initial steering group with a growing number of residents and chaired by VANS was meeting on a monthly basis and by December 2013 this group comprised 32 members, 24 of whom were local residents. Steering group meetings were advertised widely and remained open to all.

Engaging the community. With a small but growing group of residents interested in being part of a steering group, a wide range of activities was undertaken to engage the wider community and get them involved between 2012 and 2014.

⁷⁷ The Big Worle Plan makes reference to a lack of “community vitality”.

⁷⁸ *Getting Started* monitoring return, March 2014 [GS_10009]

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Events – using open public events, some targeted at particular groups and some organised by others	The steering group organised public events and held these in different locations to engage residents in identifying local needs and assets and visioning activities – for instance, at one event people discussed and recorded what they would like the newspaper headlines to say after 10 years of Big Local activity. The events were informal and built in opportunities for creativity and fun. A local arts group organised a whole weekend community engagement arts project based on outdoor theatre for children, young people and families, with participants encouraged to share and record their views about what they liked, what could be better and what they would like their area to look like in the future. Group members and other volunteers also attended local events and activities organised by others, including activities for older people, and for youth as well as wider community events. At these events the Big Local <i>'Plant Your Ideas'</i> stand proved popular with all ages - residents were encouraged to plant their ideas in flower pots so that the area could see them grow within the Big Worle plan.
2. Using varied communications and marketing routes	The area established a Big Worle website and social media sites. All are run and maintained by local residents and provide the opportunity for people to share views, ideas and keep in touch. By the time the Big Local plan was agreed, nearly 500 people had actively engaged with the area's social media sites. Young people were actively involved in helping come up with the 'brand' and logo for Big Worle via partnership work with local schools on a logo competition which received 67 entries.
3. Upskilling residents to take an active part in Big Local	Eight local people were trained as community researchers through a six-week programme delivered by South West Foundation. They conducted research to help inform the plan including interviewing more than 100 community members between them, analysing the responses and presenting these back to the steering group.
4. Using visible, ongoing community projects to engage people.	As an example, the Big Worle Showbiz Choir was set up and developed by a local resident. It has proved to be a great way to bring people together, with over 100 members joining in the first six months. It has now been renamed Worle Community Choir.
5. Partnership work to reach hard to reach. Working with young people who are not traditionally engaged	As well as engaging with schools, the steering group commissioned a local youth work social enterprise to work with young people who were not easily heard through traditional routes. 76 young people actively engaged in establishing ideas, needs and aspirations. The majority of this group had not heard about Big Local previously despite the comprehensive engagement programme.
6. Involving people in decision-making via	In November 2013 the area held an event based on participatory budgeting having decided to go down this route in part as a way to reach people it had not really engaged with up to that point. The area's first <i>'U Spend'</i> event took place at a local community centre,

Participatory Budgeting.

where local organisations and groups presented their ideas to local residents and other groups in a bid to secure up to £500 for their project. On the day 12 projects sought to secure a share of the £3,500 pot of funding and 50 community members got involved in voting and making the decisions. Projects were scored on local benefit, value for money and benefits to the wider community.



The priorities that made it into the area's Big Local plan were:

1. Improve communication between local people
2. Make the area safe and friendlier
3. Develop local skills and training, employment
4. Eliminate health inequality, promote healthy lifestyles
5. Increase activities for children and young people
6. Tackle social isolation
7. Improve open spaces
8. Improve access to community meeting places.

"Most of all we want to bring people together."

The engagement of the wider community drew on the steering group, volunteers and partners. A community development worker was employed as a freelance adviser but the area did not employ a support worker until a later stage when seeking to develop a local community hub (see below). By the end of an 18-month period the partnership was in place and a plan agreed, and in the process the steering group had engaged 2,547 individuals (consulted, informed, engaged) with 53 reported as then going on to become actively involved in driving Big Local forward in the area.

3. Worle's engagement approaches

Worle Big Local has a distinct work stream within its plan for **communication and community engagement**. This is strongly linked to its first plan priority (improving communication between local people). During consultation on the plan, communication and community involvement were not ranked quite as highly as other priorities within the plan, but the steering group felt this may have been largely due to residents feeling that this work was simply essential to underpin the rest of the action plan.⁷⁹ Though there is a distinct programme of work that focuses on communications and engagement, other work streams and areas in the plan also reference the importance of engagement.

When looking at the steering group and then the Partnership's work to engage the wider community the 'themes' that seemed to us helpful in understanding how the area has approached and thought about engagement were:

- **Communication and connections** – engagement as a way to improve links and interaction between people
- **Ownership** – engaging as a way to build ownership of the programme and local projects
- **Action** – engaging people in getting active, in "coming together to tackle issues".⁸⁰

⁷⁹Big Local Plan

⁸⁰Big Local plan

This suggests (though it isn't made explicit) that the area's vision for community engagement might include the idea that Worle would be a community where people are engaged with each other, where they feel ownership of activities for community benefit, and where people are actively engaged in tackling issues that matter in the local area.

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership—encouraging new people to join, including through task groups and focus groups	The partnership has a set of decision-making principles that include being inclusive, participatory, collaborative, cooperative and agreement-seeking. It tries to make meetings informal and enjoyable, whilst still focusing on getting things done as a team.⁸¹ It seeks to engage others in its work through task groups and focus groups. Each of the eight priority areas in the plan have an associated task group. The task groups develop work plans and make recommendations to the partnership for a decision. Notes from task group meetings are published on the Big Worle website. Task groups can also convene focus groups – time-limited informal groups that can help the task group consider a particular activity or issue. Membership of these groups is open to members of the community with a particular interest or knowledge in an issue. However, these action groups have been difficult to sustain so the partnership model has evolved to reflect this (i.e. task groups came out of partnership discussions to enable ideas/projects to be taken forward).
2. Participatory budgeting events for small grants	The area continues to hold an annual U-Spend PB event. In 2016 the event was a Dragons Den event for young people aged 7-19 who could 'win' an award of up to £500 for an idea that would benefit the community. Lessons learnt from this activity showed that this needed to be a more fluid programme that gave young people the confidence to come forward with their ideas and for support to be provided for ideas to become a reality.
3. Maintaining varied communications methods	The area has in place communications that are one-way (keeping people informed – e.g. notice boards in well-visited locations and the quarterly newsletter) and two-ways (encouraging dialogue – e.g. using online and social media communications including Facebook, a blog, open partnership meetings and drop in opportunities at the HUB).
4. Using events to engage	The area continues to make use of community events as a way to engage people and a way to continue to hear from residents and give and receive feedback. It works in partnership with the local primary school to provide the annual summer fair and also to enable the pupils to become involved in developing aspects of the plan as part of their curriculum e.g. nature trail.
5. Continuing to use groups and projects to engage people	As well as its community choir, which is now a standalone initiative, the area has developed groups and clubs that bring people together but also help build connections between people over time (e.g. a gardening club and a coffee morning group) and enable the partnership and

⁸¹ Reflections from Big Local rep's reporting

	volunteers to stay in touch with people's views and ideas in an ongoing way. The development of the Job Club has provided an opportunity to engage with residents who may not normally be reached through traditional activity as well as providing support for those seeking work. Big Worle has supported five people in developing their own social enterprise and they are currently working with Unltd to access funding and business support/mentoring to develop their ideas.
6. Building residents capacity to get involved	Building on the success of its community researcher programme, the area planned to offer media and marketing training for interested residents but has initially employed local people to undertake this on behalf of residents. There is also an offer of support and training for volunteers who would like to help out at the Big Worle Hub.
7. Creating a space for engagement.	 The area has developed a local hub as the partnerships shop front to showcase its activity and office. It opened in December 2014. A range of activities and services have been offered and a core of volunteers have been recruited. The area employed a hub Development Worker, admin worker in 2016 and Job club manager in autumn 2015 but is otherwise heavily reliant on volunteers who run or support activities, including a successful Friday Job Club.
8. Neighbourhood / street-level engagement	The area continues to consider ways to engage people at a more local level, including looking at developing a nature trail, and safe routes. A street champions programme and exploring ideas about Community Organisers (COs) for the area has also been considered as engagement increases across the area.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The partnership has been able to draw on the wealth of community development expertise within the residents, workers and partners involved in Big Worle. This has enabled the partnership to bring a range of creative ideas together that suited local needs and the profile of the area. Some of these, like plant your ideas and checking and changing events, participatory budgeting and community researchers, were methods that had been used in other areas but which were adapted for the area.

The hub provides a focal point for the community and enables the partnership to showcase its activity. It is a key element of the work and has helped to foster local ownership and pride in the Big Local programme but is not the sole focus and does not detract from the ambition for the partnership to reach out within the wider area.

In its reporting at different stages the partnership and the Big Local rep have identified the following challenges and learning points about what's worked and what hasn't worked so well in engaging the community.

- **Challenges in reaching out.** Despite considerable effort, parts of the community remain hard to reach and hard to engage. The area has considered many ways to be inclusive – holding events at different times and in different locations, using hard copies of information for those who are digitally excluded, and running a community researcher programme with five researchers from diverse backgrounds who then reached 114 residents who the area feels might otherwise not have been reached. Despite this, it still recognises some parts of the community are not engaging as well as others. The Partnership has recently (March 2016) commissioned the services of a local PR and Marketing company to work closely with the Partnership, attending meetings to capture all of the events and activities of Big Worle.
- **Challenges in communicating about the £1m.** In the early stages, the message that there was £1million that “is yours to spend” put a lot of pressure on residents, such as from behind-the-scenes lobbyists at a time of ever-decreasing amounts of money. The steering group felt the money issue skewed the development at first. The steering group members (most of whom then joined the Partnership) worked hard to develop clear and consistent messages about the money and how it could be used but did feel that though the allocation of funding got more people engaged than would normally be the case, in the initial period at least, it created some challenges in terms of local understanding of the programme.
- **The value of supportive local partners.** Real commitment and support from local agencies has really helped residents take the lead in Big Worle.
- **Piggybacking on existing events.** This was very useful in addition to setting up Big Local events. “Due to the fact it was a relatively dormant area, there were not many opportunities to piggyback on another event so we had to make the most of every one.”
- **Early and visible spend that residents have a say in (PB) really helped.** The U Spend participatory budgeting events have been key events. They have “really solidified a new level of engagement with community members ... The U Spend event demonstrated the huge potential within our community.”

Community Engagement in Birchfield Big Local

Activity Profile - Volunteering to involve people who might not otherwise be involved

1. About Birchfield and its community

Birchfield is situated in Birmingham, three miles north of the city centre. The Handsworth and Lozells Ward (of which Birchfield is a part) is the fifth most deprived in Birmingham. Geographically Birchfield doesn't have a clear identity. This is largely due to an expressway built in the 1960s which split the area in two, creating a roundabout and systems of underpasses and subways making pedestrian access to the local shopping centre for instance, difficult. The area is primarily residential with a diversity of housing stock. There are some green spaces in the area, but these are often inaccessible, located behind properties/privately owned, or not within walking distance. Around 7,600 people live in the area. The largest ethnic group are Asian/Asian British, those with Pakistani heritage being the largest group (26.5%), Indian heritage second (14.1%) and Bangladeshi heritage third (9.25%). 25.5% of population describe themselves as Black African, Black Caribbean, or Black British. Over 50% of the population are aged under 29, with only 11% over 60, making Birchfield a very young neighbourhood. Unemployment is high at 10.1%. Only 50% of the adults of working age are economically active. Nearly a third of people aged 16 and above have no formal qualifications. Male life expectancy is two years lower than the average for Birmingham (at 74.6 years). Birchfield describes itself as having good community assets. There are a number of community groups, community networks, social enterprises and social housing providers based in, or delivering in Birchfield.

Birchfield became a Big Local area in Wave 2 of the programme, with its award of £1m announced in 2012. A local steering group was established in April 2012. A formal resident-led partnership was set up in 2014, the Big Local Plan was complete by 2014. The area's plan was endorsed by Local Trust in 2014 [a two-year plan for 2014-16].

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group.

In 2012 the Birchfield Neighbourhood Forum formed a steering group, to begin the 'Getting Started' phase of the programme. A series of initial partnership meetings were held; the majority attending were local residents. Twenty people attended one or more of these meetings. During these meetings the terms of reference and code of conduct were discussed and formally agreed.

Engaging the community.

During the initial partnership meetings a range of approaches to engagement were discussed and developed. From the outset the core partnership believed they had an important role to play in building relationships and strengthening **connections** with partners. A key approach of the partnership in engaging the community was to ensure they had the opportunity to **contribute**, through clear publicity, **communicating** an ethos of openness, welcoming new people and recognising the value in the membership changing over time.

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Community events	Two Community Conferences were held, one on 27th April, the other on September 7th 2013. Each conference was in a different location. The first conference focused on exploring priorities for the area through workshop sessions. These priorities had emerged from other early engagement work. 33 people attended. The aim of the second conference was to build on the first event to create a shared vision, to share and help shape the Big Local Plan and thematic actions plans included in it. 19 people attended. A series of pop-up events/road shows were held to talk to the community on the streets and find out more about their priorities for the area. These were held at a variety of locations during April and May 2013.
2. Varied communications mechanisms	The community were encouraged to contribute to the consultation process through a variety of communication mechanisms. Online, through the website or by email or twitter; face to face by attending the pop-up events/road shows and community conferences; through research, by completing the questionnaire; or by phone by text. A newsletter distributed to households in the Big Local area before the April Conference, highlighting the variety of communication mechanisms available.
3. Connecting with local groups	A series of meetings were held with local groups, including faith groups and schools.
4. Consultation and research	A Big Local survey was devised and conducted, to find out what residents like and dislike about their area, what local assets they value, their priorities for improvement and their vision for the area. The survey was available both on-line and on paper. In-depth interviews were carried out with a range of representatives from a variety of organisations in the area, some of whom also being residents. 28 representatives were interviewed.

By September 2015 the partnership had 14 members, 9 of which are local residents. They had created a Big Local plan that was endorsed nationally in 2014. A Community Development Worker was appointed in February 2014. A part time Volunteer Co-ordinator was appointed in September 2014. 250 people came to the launch event. The partnership now meets every 6 weeks, and a summary of meeting is available via their website.

3. Birchfield Big Local's engagement approaches

When looking at the area's work to engage the wider community it is helpful to contextualise this within the vision for the area, communicated through a series of goals. A vision statement was created at the Birchfield Big Local Plan (BBL) meeting in September 2013. This vision focused on three main aspirations⁸²:

- **Contributing** – a community that is empowered, engaged and enabled to address issues to create a prosperous and regenerated area;
- **Celebrating** – a place where citizens are equal, are nurtured and have a collective sense of ownership to make the area somewhere people want to come to and stay;
- **Connecting** – a well-served and connected community, providing new direction to break the poverty cycle and provide a lasting legacy.

The Birchfield Big Local Plan clearly communicates the desire to engage with the wider community over time and in ways which empower them to sustain the work of BBL beyond the life of the programme. One of the key questions for Birchfield Big Local has always been 'What happens in Year 11?'⁸³

The Birchfield Big Local Year 3 Plan identifies the ways the partnership has implemented engagement over time, and what it plans to do in the future. The approaches described incorporate both learning and aspiration in relation to ongoing engagement with their wider community. The priorities for Birchfield Big Local continue to be organised around the four key themes identified at the beginning of the process. This work continues to be supported by the core/infrastructure work as above. The four main themes are:

- 1) Well-Run Birchfield;
- 2) Well-Built Birchfield;
- 3) Well-Served Birchfield;
- 4) Thriving Birchfield.

There are a variety of approaches to continued community engagement around these priorities and their related activities.

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Supporting what works – maintaining and recognising successful engagement	The Community Development Worker and Volunteer Coordinator posts have been extended for a further two years⁸⁴. Volunteering will continue to be supported, primarily through the Volunteer Coordinator, continuing the successful engagement of local people by local people, in the activities and priorities of BBL. Community Events continue to play a key role in engaging with local residents. Events either supported by or organised by
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⁸² Birchfield Big Local Plan & Birchfield Big Local website (no longer available).

⁸³ Birchfield Big Local Plan pg.5

⁸⁴ Birchfield Big Local Year 3 Plan pg.4

	BBL will continue. Special themed events also continue to play a role. The Heritage Trail event will be repeated sometime in 2016, there will also be another Play Day. A series of events will be run in October 2016 for Black History month.
2. Develop existing activities to engage new people – broadening the scope of community engagement	The Birchfield Big Local partnership would like to attract new members, using varied communication channels. In particular, they would like to attract more young people, and members of the Muslim community which “...while well represented amongst volunteers are not well represented on the partnership”⁸⁵. A summary of the partnership meetings is now available online, on the Birchfield Big Local website. An additional office space has been rented downstairs at Grosvenor Road Studios, making it more accessible and allowing the upstairs space to be used by a variety of initiatives. A communications sub group has been created to take forward the work of producing and distributing the quarterly newsletter, delivered to all 2000 households. It is now in a larger A3 format “and is generating an increasing amount of interest and feedback”⁸⁶.
3. Incorporate learning in order to re-launch activities and address priorities	The Job Club, set up in 2015, whilst initially successful, saw numbers subsequently decline. It has now been re-launched as Stepping Forward. In addition to ‘typical’ job club support, there is also support with English, IT and personal and social skills.
4. Scoping the feasibility of new ideas and putting existing ones in to action – to support sustainable resident led engagement	Having a community hub has remained an ambition, as does having an accessible outdoor play space for children. A new steering group of local residents will be established to manage the site and refurbishment of a disused area as a community garden and children’s play area. A feasibility study on Tackling Fuel Poverty will be carried out. The aim will be to provide an integrated approach to tackling fuel poverty. Citysave Credit Union have provided training to volunteers or champions from the Big Local areas (in Birmingham) about: “Credit Unions, the services that they offer and how to access them” ⁸⁷ . Money management and the high interest rates of Pay Day lenders is an issue for some residents.
5. Research – engaging people in	In early 2015 a baseline survey was conducted to understand better how people “think and feel about the local area at the

⁸⁵ Birchfield Big Local – Year 3 Plan pg.2

⁸⁶ Birchfield Big Local – Year 3 Plan pg.4

⁸⁷ Birchfield Big Local – Year 3 Plan pg.8

the evaluation and future direction

start...” The survey will be repeated at intervals to see “...if responses change over the life time of Big Local”.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The following influences have helped shape Birchfield Big Local’s approach to engaging with the wider community:

- **The clear recognition of barriers to implementing a long-term strategic vision**, relevant to Birchfield, both historical and emerging through programme learning. This recognition has demonstrated to the community their needs are understood and that there is genuine desire to overcome barriers through strategic work and feasibility study investment.
- **The desire to tackle long standing issues with long terms aspirations** – for example the ambition to develop a permanent community hub *“to provide a common meeting space and resource for all the residents of Birchfield”⁸⁸*.
- **The understanding that effective communication needs to be appropriate** to different groups within the community to encourage their engagement, and that this requires planning and sufficient and/or dedicated resources.
- **The acknowledgement at the outset that infrastructure support would be** needed to deliver work across the themes and provide some strategic physical legacy and long term community capacity.
- **Building in to the initial plan ideas about how the work in the Birchfield Big Local area could be evaluated coherently across the theme groups**, using appropriate quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Using a combination of established evaluation experts as well training local residents to undertake this work, clearly influenced their approach.
- **Being engaged with and open to learning, from the residents**, about the work of Birchfield Big Local, but also learning linked to their experiences with **other initiatives**.
- **Understanding the barriers to engagement at the outset** – both cultural and time constraints.
- **City University have closed their north campus** at Perry Barr to relocate near the city centre, which is likely to impact negatively on local shops and the privately rented sector.

The following engagement challenges and learning points have been mentioned by those involved in Birchfield Big Local at different points during its journey:

- **The volume of input required from key individuals**. The Community Engagement Officer has given more input than the allocated time frame.
- **Perceptions of previous regeneration initiatives**. Previous regeneration initiatives had not always met community expectations, especially around sustainability and legacy. This often

⁸⁸ Birchfield Big Local Plan - pg.20

led to “*cynicism and disengagement*”⁸⁹. Big Local is seen as an opportunity to do things differently, particularly around capacity building and community empowerment.

- **Funding of delivery partner organisations.** The Nishkam Centre’s funding for outreach work has come to end, this has had an impact on the ability of BBL to provide benefits advice.
- **Creating a sense of place** – “Where is Birchfield?”⁹⁰ is a question that is often asked.

⁸⁹ Birchfield Big Local Plan– pg.5

⁹⁰ Birchfield Big Local Plan pg. 23

Community Engagement in St Matthews Big Local

Activity Profile - Social media and communications

1. About St Matthews and its community

St Matthews is an inner city estate in Leicester in the East Midlands. Located within the Spinney Hills ward, the estate was built in the 1950s and early 1960s. The majority of the housing stock remains in council ownership. The area is quite densely populated and 'compact', with little open and green space. What open space there is on the estate was recognised locally as neither well-maintained, nor well-used by the community. It is the most deprived neighbourhood of Leicester. The area is home to around 4,250 residents living in 2,300 households. Almost half (48%) are aged under 25.

Unemployment is high, many live on low incomes, and educational attainment levels are lower than average among young people. It is the most ethnically diverse community in the city with large numbers of new arrivals from African, Asian, Eastern European and other countries. Compared with many other Big Local areas, St Matthews is relatively well-served in terms of its services and amenities.

St Matthews became a Big Local area in Round 2 of the programme and began its journey along the Big Local 'pathway' in March 2012. A small interim steering group was established in June 2012. The group developed as a resident-led partnership early in 2013 and this partnership (SMBL) began meeting fortnightly later that year. The partnership was formally established in March 2014. The area's first Big Local plan was produced and finalised then by July 2014 [a one-year plan for 2014-15] and following a review, its second was produced in 2015 for a further year [2015-16].

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. The Big Local Rep initiated a series of interest-raising and knowledge-gathering sessions in different places across the estate in the spring and summer of 2012 and during this time a small steering group of representatives of local organisations and some residents came together to take the work forward. This interim steering group began to meet regularly. It involved residents working alongside key agencies, including several local community groups, and in particular an active community project called the Contact Project and the local CVS (Voluntary Action Leicester) who both offered support to the group as residents began to take an increased lead over time in shaping their Big Local. The resident participants saw their role not just as active volunteers but also in part as ambassadors for Big Local, to engage with other residents.⁹¹ Some training was offered in this period to help the group develop and grow into a formal partnership.⁹²

Engaging the community. The activities tried by the steering group to engage the wider community at this time fall under three broad headings:

1. **Communications.** Developing varied communications mechanisms;
2. **Events.** Organising and attending community events;

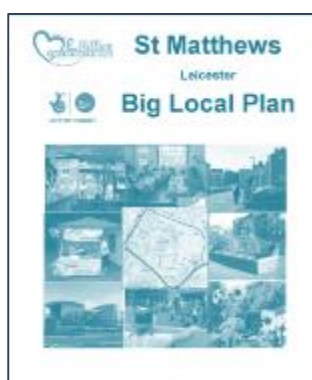
⁹¹ St Matthews Big Local *Getting Started* proposal, 2012.

⁹² *Getting Started* proposal, 2012

3. **Partnerships, networking and outreach.** Working with existing community groups and community leaders to help reach out into the community.

Given the diversity of the estate, particular attention was paid to networking and engaging widely, and using a range of mediums and a variety of places so as to ensure that as many as possible from all parts of the community were aware of, and able to contribute to, Big Local.

Engaging the community with the Big Local Plan. With a set of broad aims in place, the steering group spent the summer of 2013 consulting in order to engage the community in prioritising between the ideas that had emerged. As well as the parks events, other consultation events continued to inform the development of the area's plan with the last taking place in October 2013 when parents and children were targeted outside the local school. With this phase of consultation over, the group drafted their plan, presenting it back to the community at the 2014 Parks Day.



The priorities that made it into the plan were connected to five overall goals. The vision for the area was that St Matthews would become a place:

1. which is cleaner and greener;
2. where everyone is appreciated, valued and respected;
3. where everyone feels safe and secure;
4. where everyone can reach their potential and local businesses flourish;
5. where diversity, talent and creativity are celebrated.

The engagement with the community during the first two years as the Big Local plan was developed relied heavily on volunteer input with members of the steering group and other volunteers putting in many hours to organise events and consult the wider community. After two years of hard work, St Matthews Big Local had put in place a partnership with 17 people, nine of whom were residents; had produced its first Big Local Plan; and had engaged with around 650 community members in the process.⁹³ Along with the 17 members of the community actively involved in driving Big Local forward, the area had at different points engaged around 50 volunteers (people who had supported at least one Big Local meeting, event or activity).⁹⁴

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Developing varied communications mechanisms	Volunteers within the steering group worked on communications: developing a website, Facebook page and Twitter account; using local media as well as social media to get the word out; making a documentary video; leafleting and putting up posters; and developing an email contact list of people who wanted to stay in touch. Given the diversity within the community and the many community languages spoken, the group considered translating their materials but in the end relied instead more heavily on word-of-mouth, making use of resident volunteers who spoke different languages and who engaged
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⁹³ St Matthews Big Local newsletter, 2014

⁹⁴ *Getting Started* monitoring report, 2013.

	face-to-face with people.
2. Using community events	The first event the partnership used to engage with the wider community was the July 2012 Parks Day when a stall was set up and information shared with the community. The next was a whole week of action and consultation activity in February 2013. This, St Matthews Week, was organised by the Big Local steering group working with a range of partners. It was used as a way to raise the profile of Big Local, gather more information from all parts of the community about what people felt was most needed to improve the estate, and generate more interest in getting involved across the community. Each day was broadly themed and targeted different sections of the community. For instance, Monday saw a high profile Big Clean Up; Tuesday was children's day; Wednesday focused on jobs and enterprise with open taster sessions; Thursday was a day for young and old with youth activities on Bushey Park, an advice evening for young entrepreneurs, and a Valentine's Day tea for elders; Friday saw young reporters conduct radio interviews with local residents; and Saturday involved activities for women and girls and a cultural evening hosted at a local school. At each event participants were asked a set of questions about what they liked about the estate; what changes they would make; and if they wanted to be involved in decision-making. At the annual Parks Day in August 2013 people could attend a Big Local stall and vote on priorities for inclusion in the Big Local plan; and again the event was used in 2014 to update on progress and share the plan.
3. Partnerships, networking and outreach	The steering group built on its connections and made the best possible use of the network of local community groups, many set up and run by local residents, active in the area and trusted by their communities. These helped spread the word.

3. St Matthew's engagement approaches

When looking at St Matthew's work to engage the wider community, three 'themes' seem helpful in understanding how the area has approached and thought about engagement:

- **Community accountability** – engaging as a way to be accountable, transparent and responsive;
- **Community action** – engaging as a way to enable community action;
- **Community benefit** – engaging members of the community so that they can benefit from what is developed, by taking part and by connecting with others.

St Matthews has built on the engagement activities that worked well during its *Getting Started* phase to build more ongoing engagement through the delivery of its plan(s).

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership – open meetings and working groups	The partnership has tried to ensure it is open to wider community input through: • Making all partnership meetings open so that anyone in the community can come along; • Enabling new members to be voted onto and off the partnership each year at its AGM; • Making notes of all its meetings available online; • Setting up working groups with scope to draw in others to support their work (e.g., 'environment' and 'community' groups).
2. Developing communications mechanisms - and building social media and online opportunities for more instant dialogue and feedback	The area has built on work started during its <i>Getting Started</i> phase and uses the following ways to maintain a dialogue with the community: • The partnership makes maximum use of its Big Local website and social media (Facebook and Twitter) accounts. The website is regularly updated and there is a strong emphasis on visuals to bring things to life, including photographs, videos and films about the local area and about Big Local [see below for more on this]. • A quarterly newsletter is delivered to every address on the estate. Though newsletters are often seen as a one-way, information-giving, approach, in fact the area has found their newsletter has generated a lot of interest and some dialogue. The Partnership Chair, in a Local Trust case study, suggested, <i>"Our newsletter... generates a lot of local conversations – it has generated the most excitement and the most conversations about Big Local."</i> In addition the area uses mailchimp and texting to keep in touch with people. • Placing posters, including in different languages, on noticeboards around the estate.
3. Organising community events	Events are not a large part of how the area engages the community but the area's first Big Local plan did state that in order to make sure residents are involved in both decisions and actions, <i>"the Partnership will deliver certain events on a yearly basis which will assist in maintaining residents' involvement in and shaping of the Big Local throughout its lifetime."</i> St Matthews uses two events in particular to communicate and to maintain community input: • The annual parks event; • The Big Local AGM which is delivered alongside a community wide evaluation and redress event <i>"where residents can challenge, influence and congratulate the Partnership on their achievements year by year, help to develop new initiatives and highlight new and emerging needs within the community."</i>
4. Running a small grants fund	An important way the area looks to engage the community in Big Local is through its grants programme. The partnership runs (with support from its local CVS) a grants programme linked to its priorities and vision for the area. Alongside awards for organisations (up to £4,000) and larger awards between partnerships of organisations (up to £10,000), grants of up to £500 are available for residents to provide positive activities for local people.

	In the first year this was very successful with over £40,000 of projects benefiting over 3,000 people on the estate. The first round of the fund saw two residents take forward their ideas, one for a football tournament and one for a health cooking challenge with parents. After the football tournament, organised by a local resident, one father described it as <i>"the best thing that's ever happened here."</i> ⁹⁵
5. Periodic surveying	As a way to check that it is focused on the right priorities, that it is up-to-date in its understanding of what the community feels is most needed, and to engage the community in identifying future priorities, the partnership has introduced a survey as part of its annual reviewing process. The first of these was started just after its first AGM to be promoted at the annual parks event and at other opportunities over the summer.

An activity in focus – more about online community engagement

Without a Big Local centre or hub St Matthews has made particularly effective use of its website and social media (Facebook and Twitter) to engage the community online, to keep people informed but in an accessible and interactive way. With nearly half the population under 24, this was a considered decision that took into account the nature of the local community. The examples below show how different engagement 'functions' are supported online.

Informing the community

A clear, simple website, easy to navigate

At an early point the area developed a clear and simple website – it focuses on information-sharing, engagement and accountability. As well as news of what's coming up, copies of the local newsletter, and information about what's already happened, there is a 'meet the partnership' page which shares photos and a few words about Big Local from each member. The area's Big Local rep identified this as particularly effective.

"It is a compact area and having published photos of partnership members there's a lot of face recognition and interaction."

Being accountable to the community

A great example of how the website supports the partnership is its desire to be accountable and transparent is the way the area developed a map of community assets and then took this a step further and created an interactive map to show where funding is being spent and to tell the stories of the difference the funding is making. The website also includes copies of the minutes of every partnership meeting.

Consulting the community

The area maximises opportunities for people to have a say wherever consultation is possible, so, for instance, using online voting technology to give people a say on the film they would most like to see as part of a community cinema project.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

⁹⁵ Referred to in Big Local rep reporting, August 2015.

The area has been influenced by taking into account the nature of the local population. In particular, its engagement work reflects a desire to be inclusive, taking into account the community's diversity, and an understanding of how a younger population might be well engaged online.

Attending Big Local spring events has been helpful. For instance, after attending a spring event in 2014, this helped inform local discussions about the value of having a worker in post to help implement the Big Local plan. [partnership minutes, May 2014]

The discussions within the community have most influenced their delivery. Many of the partnership members have either lived or worked within the community for many years and have many networks which help influence what is needed within the community. They have also undertaken numerous engagement events within the community to check that they are on the right track. Several partnership members have also attended Big Local learning events where they have gained valuable skills which have helped with their delivery. They also feel very fortunate to work within a small geographical area where there are many agencies and individuals who have offered them advice and support in delivery such as, but not limited to, tenant association, housing officers, local councillors, and the local police team.

The following engagement challenges and learning points have been mentioned by those involved in St Matthews Big Local.

Challenge: capacity within the partnership.

A core of members has been involved from the start, and have shown a great commitment to getting things done and improving the estate, but there have been points at which attendance has fluctuated and most members had some limitations on their time (e.g. being in full/part-time employment or having family commitments). A development worker was appointed in part to address this challenge as it was recognised that there would be a value in having someone in post to support ongoing engagement of the community.

Learning:

The value of understanding and respecting how people want to be engaged

For instance, in the beginning the area hoped that offering small grants would enable people of all ages to come forward with ideas but they noticed after a year that older residents were not applying for grant funding.

The area has benefited from making good use of local 'connectors'

As the Big Local Rep reported in one of his update reports, he saw a strength in the area in how the partnership has worked so well with others, and how it has brought together residents with longstanding local community workers, who have a good knowledge and understanding of the estate and care about it.

"The advantage of local people who are plugged into local institutions helps."

Recently they have found it difficult to engage with the business community despite their on-going commitment to support local business in St Matthews by offering free business advice and support, training and business loans.

They have organised a highly successful business forum and brought together numerous agencies and individuals that could benefit business. The second business forum was poorly attended and they continue to find it difficult to engage businesses. The partnership has decided to re-evaluate this part

of delivery and re-consult with business to check how they feel Big Local / St Matthews could support them. Before this consultation gets underway it was decided that they should identify and develop a database of businesses to help with them to engage with them smarter, such as by electronic means. They are looking to work with Leicester Business School, De Montfort University to support them with this piece of work.

Community Engagement in Brookside Big Local

Activity Profile - Tapping into existing provision and partnerships

1. About Brookside and its community

Brookside is one of several large housing estates built in the New Town of Telford in the early 1970s. It is set within an estate ring road, Brookside Avenue, off which stem a number of residential cul-de-sacs. It is not possible to cross the estate from one side to the other by car but there are many footpaths and walkways connecting the estate's different parts. The community is relatively settled with many residents having lived on the estate since it was first built. The population of the Big Local area (homes within the estate ring road) is around 5,200, the majority of whom are white British. Residents from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities comprise around seven per cent of the population. It is a relatively young population with 75% of residents aged under 45. There are few local employment opportunities and unemployment levels on the estate are particularly high (41%). There are some amenities and services located on the estate, including a community centre (Brookside Central) and a small shopping area that consists of a post office/mini-market, hairdressers, fish and chip shop and Housing Association office. There are more amenities in a neighbouring estate and in Telford itself – which is reachable by bus. The local council (Telford and Wrekin) had prioritised Brookside for regeneration and investment by the time Big Local came along so the Brookside shopping area was already undergoing a redevelopment and the local community centre (Brookside Central) was scheduled for a major refurbishment.

Brookside became a Big Local area in Wave 2 of the programme, announced officially in February 2012. After initial groundwork and awareness-raising it established a residents steering group and in 2013 designed a programme of activities to engage and consult the wider community in more depth using Big Local *Getting Started* funding. The local steering group was endorsed as a Big Local partnership in June 2015 and submitted a plan for its £1m just after this [a two-year plan to 2017.]

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. Work to get the community involved in Big Local was kick-started in 2012 with a series of 'drop in' events facilitated by the area's Big Local Rep at the estate's Community Centre, and a presentation to a Public Meeting about the Centre's redevelopment. At this time BIG (Brookside Improvement Group) was heavily involved in the redevelopment of the Centre and in the early days of Big Local the Big Local Group was a sub-group of BIG. The two groups later merged and many of those involved with BIG became members of the Brookside Big Local Steering Group.

Engaging the community. The range of activities undertaken by the steering group to engage the community in the early days of Big Local included:

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Developing varied communications mechanisms	The area's communications and marketing activities included leaflets, social media, branded items like t-shirts and banners, noticeboards around the local area, and making links to local media (print/radio). The rationale laid out in the plan for engaging in these ways was <i>"to develop a local promotion and marketing campaign to increase levels of engagement and instil a sense of pride; by providing more information, increasing confidence, increasing community responsibility"</i> .
2. Organising community events	The area held four awareness-raising / visioning events and revisited ideas generated at earlier (pre-Big Local) events in 2011. The Steering Group together with the BEG (Brookside Events Group) also organised a Brookside Big Local Summer Extravaganza in 2014 and used this as an opportunity to do some face-to-face surveying with local residents. Also that summer residents and delivery partners were invited along to a workshop focused on the eight themes which had emerged from talking to residents. There was an emphasis in events on fun and creativity, with an arts and music festival/beach party and an Easter celebration event and the Brookside Central Community Centre opening event. Later there was a networking event in 2015 timed to coincide with the launch of the area's Facebook page.
3. Outreach and partnership links	Working closely with others to engage the community was really important in Brookside, particularly as so much else was already going on. Steering group volunteers made face-to-face contact with drop-in sessions at the community centre, and outreach planned to engage with groups who were not reached so well in the early stages of the work, including the: African community via the Pentecostal Church; children, young people and parents via schools and the youth club; older residents via the existing clubs in the area (e.g. Bingo); and the unemployed via skills courses held in the community centre.
4. Establishing a small grants fund and supporting local enterprise	The group established a small grants fund which was seen, in part, as a way to engage residents and get them to bring forward their ideas. It also began supporting local residents with enterprising ideas (including by working with UnLtd). So, as well as setting up a small grants scheme, it also supported two larger projects by providing match funding received from other sources with a Big Local contribution. Recipients included Telford Bikes, a social enterprise which recycles old bikes, and to the start-up costs of a community café ('Take 5') in the newly refurbished community centre to help give residents a place to meet and connect socially.
5. Engaging at neighbourhood/ street-level – informal conversations and feedback mechanisms	Members of the steering group engaged individuals on a one-to-one basis via a series of 'walkabouts' of the Big Local area offering the chance for volunteers to chat informally to residents wherever they met them, giving out information about an online survey and feedback opportunities in their area e.g. ideas/comments boxes in community venues. Volunteers also got involved in door-knocking activities to inform and engage people.

Engaging the community with the Big Local plan. By 2014 the steering group had started to draw together residents' views and the results of local mapping and to develop a Big Local plan. In the spring of 2014 they drew up a specification for a plan co-ordinator to help pull things together. In January 2015, the Partnership came together to consider the different priorities and actions / solutions that had already been identified. They laid out all the Theme Priorities and associated Action Cards and then removed things they knew already existed or were being planned by others. They then prioritised the remainder.



The priorities that made it into the final plan were:

- Social enterprise, investment, employment, training and skills;
- Our environment – clean, safe and green;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Community safety;
- Our community – adults; children and families; and youth;
- Engagement and encouraging involvement;
- Brookside Community Centre – capacity and skills development.

This early engagement with the wider community relied heavily on volunteer input with members of the steering group and other volunteers putting in many hours to organise events and consult the wider community. Word-of-mouth and the local knowledge of steering group members helped engage widely across the community. At this stage the group included some people involved in other bodies, e.g. Brookside Cooperative Partnership Board, the parish council. which was seen as helping to ensure Big Local was connected to what else was going on and making the best use of resources. However, capacity was an issue and a decision was made in 2013 to fund a Community Liaison Worker from the local CVS to take on some of the wider engagement.⁹⁶

By the time its plan was submitted the area had engaged more than 1,200 people on the estate, with 12 actively involved in driving Big Local forward (an entirely resident led Big Local Partnership) and 35 volunteers (getting involved with more than one Big Local meeting or event).⁹⁷

3. Brookside's engagement approach

The partnership and the wider community. The partnership considered its connection to other providers in the local community and how it anticipated that residents and those who work in, or deliver services to, the community would be able to engage with the main Big Local decision-making body – via theme groups linked to workstreams. Though good community engagement underpinned all the area's work, it felt it sufficiently important to create a workstream specifically focused on it.

Looking at what the area says about community engagement, three themes seemed helpful to us in understanding the area's approach:

⁹⁶ Local area *Getting Started* monitoring report.

⁹⁷ *Getting Started* monitoring report

- **Community benefit** – engagement to ensure all can participate in and benefit from activities;
- **Community action** – engagement of community members as volunteers;
- **Collaboration** – working closely with others to engage widely.

With its plan in place, Brookside has built on the activities that worked well during its *getting started* phase to build more ongoing engagement through the delivery of its plan. The key types of activity for ensuring engagement over time are:

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership structure – establishing a local forum and a young people’s Big Local	Residents are very much at the helm in this area with a 100% resident partnership and engagement with partners and other organisations through theme groups rather than within the resident-led decision-making group. However, the group wanted to ensure accountability to the wider community in other ways so in July 2015, when the partnership was endorsed, the area introduced a new meetings format so now they alternate between decision-making meetings and community forums. In addition they have sought to open up decision-making by developing a Young People’s Brookside Big Local, working with a local youth worker to develop a young people’s group.
2. Supporting volunteering and enterprise - using grant funding and engaging with businesses and enterprise agencies	The area continues to use grants and support for social enterprise to enable the wider community to get involved in developing and delivering activities for community benefit. So, for instance, small grants are helping residents and community organisations to try out their ideas, e.g. a project using the arts to engage with young people who self-harm. As well as the resident led Take 5 Café and the Telford Bikes – UnLtd have had some involvement in enabling other new enterprises to get off the ground including Cre-Active Group (arts for kids); the Telford Hornets ladies’ rugby; and A Better Tomorrow. Business Champions to support enterprise and volunteering have also been approached.
3. Varied communications mechanisms - developing social media for more instant dialogue and feedback	Brookside’s communications continue to be varied. The area is looking at how to support its newsletter to become sustainable, is further developing its website, posters and set up a Facebook which had engaged with 837 people (members signed up) by March 2016.
4. Continuing to use community events	The area continues to find events useful to be a way to get people involved. For instance, it has held a Halloween disco, a popular live nativity and Christmas fair (in partnership with BEG), and a Big Local Big Bang Firework display (which attracted 800 people).
5. Working collaboratively	Collaborative working in the area is helping the partnership achieve its goals and helping it target different parts of the community. The area’s Big Local Rep reported recently that this collaborative approach is going well and <i>“is resulting in new people being involved”</i> .

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The pre-existing group focused on Brookside Improvement and the volume of other things going on affected how the area engaged with people:

“This Community Plan has been written in the context of an extraordinary pre-existing and evolving foundation of voluntary community groups and social enterprises deeply rooted in our area. We are determined to connect the opportunities that Big Local gives us with these and other initiatives in order to make the greatest possible lasting difference to our future well-being and social regeneration.”

This is a clearly defined estate with clear identity. The opportunity offered by the redevelopment of the community centre to have a focal point for some of the new activities and groups planned has affected how things have developed. Having so much else going on has helped build a collaborative, partnership approach. Having Community Organisers has been really helpful in terms of engagement.

The local authority and other partners have been supportive of the Big Local residents group and see shared regeneration aims. Engagement has been led by volunteers and partners, but fundamentally by residents rather than agencies. The area has learnt that

“Brookside people like to get together and party!”

The following engagement challenges and learning points have been mentioned by those involved in Brookside Big Local at different points during its journey:

- **Engaging new/more people in the work of the partnership, in the inner core group has been challenging.** There have been capacity issues along the way and times when the core group was keen to build up the numbers of those actively engaged with the partnership. This in part led to the recruitment of paid staff (including a paid co-ordinator in January 2016). In addition open meetings are not always very well attended though open to the public and well publicised.
- **Residents in the area lack capacity to engage for a range of reasons.** Residents can lack confidence and self-belief or face a number of other factors that affect their ability to engage. The partnership shows a good understanding of this, and lists barriers such as: feeling of isolation (young families and elderly); lack of confidence / fear of going out; complex issues / needs faced by some individuals that need assistance to resolve; no central hub for adults to physically engage; lack of notice boards / not enough publicity / information. Added to this were comments about a perception that things won't change; a lack of empowerment; no sense of belonging and ownership; lack of confidence to socialise; low motivation and general apathy shown by the majority to get involved in community events; the need to tackle anti-social behaviour before people will get involved; and the use of certain venues is a barrier to engaging some people. At an early stage the steering group recognised that some residents would need support, encouragement, confidence-building and training to be able to really engage as more than beneficiaries of activities put on for them by others.
- **For groups that are harder to reach, working with others is key to engagement.** So, for instance, the partnership has worked with a local church to engage better with BME communities, and with a youth project to engage better with young people.
- **Face-to-face contact and social get-togethers have proved to be two of the most important routes to engaging with the wider community.** The area has suggested family activities and

social events help them with *“connecting with neighbours, finding out how many talented people we have, engaging with them face-to-face, offering support and encouragement to achieve their goals...but communication with the wider community is challenging.”*

Community Engagement in St Peter's & the Moors Big Local

Activity Profile - Community organising/1-2-1 engagement

1. About SPTM and its community

St Peter's and the Moors Big Local area is in Cheltenham, to the west of the town centre. It comprises two estates – St Peter's estate and the Moors estate. The area is chiefly residential with different parts of the estates having their own distinctive characteristics. There is a mix of housing types and tenures but in parts a majority of housing is council owned. There are around 3,200 people living in the area, in close to 1,300 households. The community is a relatively young one, with 37% aged between 18 and 29 and seven per cent student households. Ten per cent of residents are over 65 and a third of the population under 25. The majority of residents are white British, with around 10% of the population from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, with seven per cent being Asian or Asian British. The two estates share a small parade of shops located on the St Peter's side of the carriageway, churches, a number of retail and business units and a large supermarket. There is a primary school, a university campus (University of Gloucestershire), a small park and a sports ground owned by the University. There is a local football team, two youth centres (both connected to/based in local churches), a children's centre and a number of voluntary and community projects that are active in the area. At the time Big Local was announced there had been some recent partnership working across organisations and with the local authority, e.g. through Cheltenham's Positive Participation Partnership Group.

SPTM became a Big Local area in Wave 3 of the programme in December 2012, beginning its journey with a programme of *Getting Started* activities in 2013. By the end of 2014 the area had established a formal resident-led partnership and completed its Big Local Plan for 2015-16 which was endorsed by Local Trust in December 2014.

2. Early community engagement

Building a steering group. An initial stakeholder meeting was held in December 2012 led by the Big Local Rep and representatives of the local authority who had been involved in the initial process with BLF. In the spring of 2013 open meetings and drop-in sessions were held to inform residents and start understanding their views on the area's needs, but also as a way to build a core of resident volunteers to drive the project forward. Following the first residents' forum meeting in June 2013, a core group of six residents came together to form a steering group and began meeting and working with local organisations to set up three community events aimed at getting more involved. The group established three subgroups aimed at moving things on and ensuring residents' views were at the centre of the area's plans: a communications group (to raise awareness and capture residents' views); an events group (to try and get residents involved); and a research group (to map local assets and opportunities).

Engaging the community. Led by the steering group and its subgroups, a range of activities took place to engage the community, with these boosted after a few months by drawing down the area's *Getting Started* grant (in October 2013). Community engagement at this period focused largely on informing, consulting, and encouraging residents to get involved and the group used six main approaches to achieve their goals.

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Developing varied communications mechanisms	Volunteers built a website, set up a twitter account, designed leaflets and delivered these door-to-door. Local school pupils were involved in a competition to design a Big Local logo and, following this, more printed materials were produced, including a 'Community Chat' newsletter.
2. Organising community events	The group organised five community events which really helped raise awareness and get people interested, including family picnics and social events.
3. Creating and supporting volunteering opportunities	Various volunteering opportunities were developed over and above steering group membership. For instance, the group advertised for interested residents to come together and start up an events group which would be supported so that they could develop their skills through running events for the community. ⁹⁸
4. Creating a space for engagement	At an early stage residents pointed to the lack of a local community centre or other space for activities. As part of its consultation with residents the group trialled a café drop-in at a local youth centre (The Rock) with young people being involved in the running of the café. Over 150 people used the café and it proved to be a really successful way of engaging residents face-to-face in discussions about Big Local.
5. Establishing a small grants fund	The group established a small grants fund for community-led projects (£300 - £500 per grant) to enable local residents to develop and deliver small projects to improve the area. They hoped this would also help them recruit area ambassadors.
6. Engaging at neighbourhood/ street-level	The idea was developed to establish a bridge between the steering group and individual residents by identifying and supporting area ambassadors or street champions who would take the lead for their street(s) and act as a conduit between the steering group and individual residents.

Engaging the community with the Big Local Plan. By spring 2014 the area's vision was emerging and the steering group was starting to draw together residents' views along with the results of a local mapping exercise so as to develop their Big Local Plan. The group was ambitious in its community engagement goals, keen to ensure it had consulted with the widest possible constituency of residents, institutions and businesses in the development of the plan, and at one point set themselves an ambitious goal that the plan would incorporate the views of at least 60% of local residents, institutions and businesses. A plan writer was employed to draw everything together and in June 2014 with four priorities agreed, a picnic in the park and BBQ and a drop-in consultation at a local youth centre were used as opportunities to consult about specific activities that might sit under each priority. The priorities were:

1. Enabling residents to be supportive neighbours;
2. Helping residents to make ends meet;
3. Making the area safer and cleaner; and
4. Developing more things to do and places to go in our community.

⁹⁸ November 2014 Community Chat newsletter.

Activities to engage the community were delivered by volunteers though at first with much support from the local council and housing departments, a local community project (Elms ABCD project) and their Big Local rep. To add capacity in 2014 and increase the level of engagement, the group used some of the *Getting Started* money to employ two sessional workers. Their tasks were to engage and consult with local residents, recruit volunteers, help co-ordinate and run community activities, build up contacts and support the steering group, including with event organising and administering community chest grant funding.

After two years the area had its Big Local Plan in place; had formalised a partnership of 14 members, nine of whom were local residents; and had engaged with more than 1,200 individuals – 14 driving things ahead more actively but some 75 others having also been involved in some way (e.g. volunteering and supporting activities).⁹⁹

3. SPTM's engagement approaches

With its plan in place, the Partnership was particularly concerned to build wider engagement with more residents, seeing this as essential to the success of the plan for a number of reasons. After a year when despite considerable activity, the residents on the partnership remained concerned at the lack of engagement of residents in significant numbers, the SPTM Partnership took a step back and reviewed its approach and started to develop some new ideas. Following this review, SPTM developed a framework for community engagement which captures their goals and lays out how they want to see engagement '*informing and framing all their activities*'¹⁰⁰. The area has sought to think of ways establish an ongoing dialogue – with an emphasis on '**conversations not consultation**'.

Looking at this framework and other descriptions of the area's activities, three themes seem to underpin SPTM's approach:

- **Accountability** – Engagement for accountability;
- **Connections** – Engagement as a way to build relationships between people;
- **Capacity** – Engagement as a way to build residents' and community capacity.

The key types of activity the area has put in place for ensuring engagement over time build on things tried and tested during the process of developing a local plan, but develops some of these further and also introduces new ideas. Building residents' engagement, and their capacity to engage, has been a priority for SPTM and the Partnership has employed a full time worker to co-ordinate volunteers and to work with them to engage residents.

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership structure – establishing a local forum and a youth committee	Since agreeing the structure the area has looked at establishing a youth committee so that younger people in the area can have their voice heard, without having to go to the main meetings. ¹⁰¹ It has also established a monthly residents' forum which operates as an engagement platform a fortnight either side of the monthly partnership meeting. These regular fixtures are augmented by weekly community café drop-in sessions [see below].
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⁹⁹ Getting Started monitoring return, March 2014 [GS_10009]

¹⁰⁰ St Peter's and the Moors Big Local, Our Approach to community Engagement 2015.

¹⁰¹ Nov 2014 newsletter

2. Varied communications mechanisms – building social media/online opportunities for more instant dialogue and feedback	The quarterly newsletter is distributed to 1,200 households and the local school and an e-newsletter is being developed (though building up a list of resident subscribers is a challenge). Facebook is being increasingly used as a means of communications, sharing information quickly and gathering feedback. As well as this, the area has taken consultancy advice on how to raise its profile via a marketing and communications strategy and has offered training for residents in these areas.
3. Creating and supporting volunteering opportunities	The area has sought to proactively support and encourage volunteering. It has for instance tried to offer more things for residents to get involved hoping that this <i>“would in turn inspire more resident-led activities”</i>. It has focused an important part of its work on <i>“community volunteering, internship and community work with the focus on training and skills improvement”</i>, so for instance working with The Rock youth centre to further develop the community café; developing ideas around student internships with the university following a successful volunteering project involving students creating memory maps of the local area; supporting volunteers to produce the newsletter; and developing a gardening project with Mucky Spade Volunteers (where people volunteer in pairs for a couple of hours a month to help tend a neighbour’s front garden). The area is also working with partners to support the development of a new community choir.
4. Creating spaces for engagement	Following the success of the area’s community café with the worker attending weekly drop-ins to engage with residents, the Partnership is looking into the feasibility of developing a building-based community hub.
5. Running a small grants fund	The area’s small grants scheme is continuing.
6. Organising community events – but opening up to more flexible resident-led events programme	In the early stages of Big Local the SPTM steering group and then Partnership organised several successful community events. With their plan in place they have now introduced a ‘flexible events programme’ which encourages residents to set up events themselves – giving people the opportunity to come together in a shared space which could be a green space, a local facility or even a resident’s home. So residents could be financially supported to run a stall at a community event and provide an activity that adds value to what’s already happening, or to host an event in their home for their neighbours with the support of the project co-ordinator and representatives from the partnership.
7. Engaging at neighbourhood/ street-level – “1,000 conversations”	In 2015 the area introduced a Big Local Listening Campaign called ‘1,000 conversations’. This involved door-to-door visits and events over summer of 2015 to increase resident input into ideas and activities. The approach is focused on building engagement with individuals and small groups and involves face-to-face doorstep conversations and follow up support for residents with ideas to make them happen. The idea has been developed from a Community Organiser [CO] approach and is a new development for the area.

An activity in focus – more about “1,000 conversations”

The method is loosely adapted by community organisers from ‘Action to Regenerate’ through the infrastructure organisation, Locality. 1,000 conversations is a guided conversation – it is not a ‘tick-box exercise’ that only provides set opportunities for residents to engage with the Big Local programme. It is a consistent and ordered means of engaging residents at the door, listening to what matters to them most, revisiting those who are happy to participate or keeping in touch and supporting residents with ideas they’d like to follow through to fruition.

- **Planning.** Break area into geographical sections and start in less familiar territory.
- **Devise questionnaire.** Test conversational flow (not necessary to ask all the questions – listen and respond to the interest of a resident). Respond to the energy the resident has around certain issues. Take contact details if appropriate.
- **Reconnect** with the area and revisit those you have not connected with and those you have. Sometimes this step takes time so the next step is important.
- **Be visible.** Walk around the whole area to be seen – people sometimes stop to share information; also good to find out what is going on within the area.
- **Be responsive.** Observe and support residents who have energy and would like to get involved.

All the steps are repeated in different areas within the Big Local Area. The area recognises that this process is, and will be, time-consuming but feels that it is a necessary building block to building up resident participants in Big Local.

4. Influences, Challenges and learning

As identified in the ‘Challenges’ section below, there has been little engagement or community development previously in the area. Those involved have reported time and time over that the process of building engagement will be slow and there is a need to build capacity and self-belief in the community that by getting involved people can make a difference.

The area was not a natural community in that there are several different areas within the two estates and the estates themselves are separated by a main road. People may identify more with their neighbourhood than the two estates as a whole community. There was a lack of a hub, a physical space that could be seen as a community meeting place.

One of the key partners in the early days of the steering group was a community organisation using ABCD approaches and some of the residents first involved attended training offered as part of the ABCD project. ABCD uses the language of connectors which the Partnership also now uses in talking about developing resident capacity (tapping into natural ‘connectors’ as part of recognising and building on such individuals as assets within their community).

The Local Authority, a local housing provider and ALMO have been actively involved in supporting community engagement activities from the start. The housing provider has hosted development workers and been enabling of and supportive of a resident-led, community capacity-building approach.

The Partnership has also been influenced in its thinking about community engagement by who its resident members are and what they bring to the table. For instance, a decision to employ staff was in

part because the resident members of the steering group for much of the journey were all people who were full-time employed. The vice-chair of the partnership is an experienced community organiser, who has shared her approach with the partnership. This has helped in the development of the 1,000 conversations approach. The Vice-Chair has also brought in additional funding from Locality to further facilitate the approach.

The following challenges have been mentioned within the area's (and the local Rep's) reporting. The first two of these are strongly connected and commonplace across the majority of Big Local areas.

- **Getting numbers of residents involved.** This has been a challenge with the area reliant on a relatively small core of people which has caused some anxiety within that group about being sure to be representative, to feel they have a strong enough mandate within the plan, etc.
- **Residents' capacity to engage and to lead engagement.** The area has taken on a lot and this has been led by volunteers without extensive past experience of running community programmes. Support, and in particular from a paid worker, was seen to be essential.
- **Difficulties engaging young people.** To tackle this issue the partnership has worked closely with The Rock – a local youth project – to develop young people's interest in the project. One of the resident members of the partnership is given the responsibility to work along with The Rock.

In their reporting at different stages the Partnership and the Big Local Rep have identified the following learning points about what has helped and/or worked well:

- **The value of employing workers.** This has added to the capacity to engage with local residents and to the skills and expertise residents can draw on and benefit from.
- **The value of having a community chest.** It has proved positive to have a community chest that residents can bid into to run their own projects.
- **The need to have supportive partners keen to work in genuine partnership with residents.** As well as working well with the local authority and key voluntary and community and church groups, the area has made a positive link with the University of Gloucestershire. They are a significant stakeholder in the area, having a campus, a sports facility, plus many students in the area. They are keen to support the Big Local project and opportunities have been developed for students to help the project as part of their studies with other plans for joint work in the offing. The University has appointed one of its directors as a conduit between Big Local and the University to support the partnership.

Community Engagement in Kirk Hallam Big Local

Activity Profile - Listening, learning and accountability

1. About Kirk Hallam and its community

Kirk Hallam is a village in the south-east of Derbyshire comprising four neighbourhoods. It is located just outside of Ilkeston on the A6096, Ladywood Road, which runs through the middle of the area. The housing is mixed in type and tenure with a mixture of ex-council houses, private homes (many Wimpey houses built in the 1950-60s) and social housing. The area is home to around 6,400 residents living in 2,700 households. In the last decade or so it has seen a declining population as nearby big industries have closed and people have moved to find employment, but generally the population is relatively stable and settled. The majority of the population are white British with 97% of residents born in the UK. The area is not large, but large enough for many needs to be met locally. It has health provision (doctors, dentists and chemists), two supermarkets, a post office, a chip shop, newsagents, a church, a community hall, two pubs, two primary and two secondary schools and a local college. A number of charities are active in the local area and volunteers support activities in the community and help ensure that a number of local venues and facilities (including churches and the community hall) are available for the benefit of local people.

Kirk Hallam became a Big Local area in Round 3 of the programme and launched locally in December 2012 as Big Kirk Hallam (BKH). The area began its journey along the Big Local 'pathway' relatively quickly, holding its first community meeting in January 2013, forming a steering group in February and developing a formal resident-led partnership just over a year later in May 2014. The area's Big Local plan was produced shortly after this and endorsed by Local Trust in August 2014 (a two-year plan for 2014-16).

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. Following an open community meeting about the new Big Local for Kirk Hallam in January 2013, and with the active support of the Big Local Rep, a small steering group of residents came together to lead on early work to help get Big Local up and running. By April 2013 this initial steering group was meeting regularly and holding discussions about how to raise awareness of Big Local and engage the wider community in shaping it.

Engaging the community. The activities tried by the steering group to engage the wider community at this time fall under five broad headings – representing approaches intended to support what the area quickly began to call its 'community conversation'. They were tried out from December to April, and then developed further using Big Local *Getting Started* funding.

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

1. Developing varied communications mechanisms	Communications. A small group of volunteers worked on communications: developing a website and Facebook page; establishing a newsletter; running a competition to decide on a logo that best represented the area's vision for the future; volunteers distributing leaflets and letters door-to-door and by email as a resident
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	email list was built up; attending local meetings and events and having a stall or giving a talk; and sharing information about Big Local via the press and local radio. The communications plan at this time focused on raising awareness, capturing and sharing the community conversation but also continuing it as well – including using the new website and email to engage and ask questions as well as to share progress.
2. Organising community events – large and small	The group used large community events in different parts of the area “to extend the reach of [their] engagement” relying on advertising and personal connections and networks to offer events that were open and accessible to everyone in the area. They then also used smaller events and focus groups/meetings “to extend the depth of [their] community connection.” ¹⁰² As themes and priorities emerged consultation meetings became more focused with resident steering group members eventually leading themed activity subgroups and reporting back on these to the main group.
3. Establishing a small grants fund	A community chest / small grants scheme was established in May 2013 in part to show something was being done and to make Big Local more ‘tangible’ for local residents. This was also, however, seen as a way to engage the community, to support residents and local groups with ideas to come forward with their ideas and engage with Big Local. A resident panel was set up to make the decisions and ran three rounds of awards in the spring of 2013, winter 2013, and spring 2014. By the time the Big Local plan was completed, the three rounds had seen more than £9,000 allocated to twelve local projects.
4. Partnership links and outreach to existing groups	The steering group with the support of their Rep and later a paid worker, reached out to make contact and build links with potential partners as a way to identify people who could help deliver Big Local activities but also as a way to reach further out into the community. For instance, working with the local Housing Association and community hall lunch club to engage with older residents; with schools to engage with 5-18 year olds; with Sure Start and parent groups to engage with families.
5. Engaging at neighbourhood/ household-level – running a survey	A community survey was also produced and used to engage people. Prior to the development of a questionnaire, simple online/email-able postcards were also used. The questionnaire-based survey received 1,000 responses, though mostly from the local college.

An activity in focus – more about how events were used to engage

Events enabling face-to-face interaction and dialogue with residents were perhaps the main method of engagement at this time. Events of different types were variously used to engage the community in identifying need; to prioritise between needs and make decisions about funding

¹⁰² BKH *Getting Started* proposal [2013]

allocations; to keep people updated with progress and enable them to ask questions about what was going on; and to develop the Big Local plan and then give feedback on it.

A large community event in January 2013 enabled a broad-scale discussion of things about Kirk Hallam and what would make it an even better place to live. Thirty-eight people took part: 26 were residents, 34 wanted to stay in touch, 27 wanted to help take action and 13 were happy to help steer next steps in taking Big Local forward. This was followed between January and March with smaller group discussions to identify issues and potential solutions in more detail.

A second large event in April 2013 enabled residents to consider and comment on emerging themes and to vote on priorities for activity. Sixty-five people took part: 47 were residents and 18 were not residents but worked in the area. Feedback was very positive to the effect that lots had been achieved but also that the event was enjoyable. Importantly this, like other engagement events at this time, was very deliberately designed not to be like a formal community meeting. For instance, this one had an arts activity table where poems were being written and logo designs doodled to aid visioning and the identification of ideas and good things in the community to build on. More unusually the wider community was also consulted at this event about how to allocate resources across each theme using an activity called '*Cutting the Cake*'. Having looked at priorities for action, residents and workers thought about how to allocate the £1m across the four main themes. Each person who took part in cutting the (foam) cake made up to four coloured flags, each representing one of the four priorities and then wrote the number of slices of cake they would apportion to a maximum of eight slices. The allocations were then accepted by the Steering Group as a guide to spend for the first BKH Big Local Plan.

Summer and autumn events allowed for findings to be shared and commented on by wider audiences of residents and workers prior to producing the area profile and plan, and themed focus groups then helped engage the community in developing the plan in more detail. The focus groups for each priority area were intended "*to foster collaborative effort around community identified needs*". They drew together relevant and interested people to explore the issues, look at what was currently happening and what needed to happen next, and identify potential lead organisations for activities identified as priorities.

In February 2014 a large event enabled a further review and consultation with the community on the draft plan. This was combined with a celebration and the award of the third round of small grants.

A further open meeting in May (though this one not so well attended) enabled a final check with residents before completion and submission of the plan.

Engaging the community with the Big Local Plan. Once the plan was written, events over the summer of 2014 focused on sharing plan highlights with the community and encouraging residents to get involved in activities. The priorities that made it into the plan were:

1. Things to do and places to go;
2. Access and the environment;
3. Quality of life for individuals and the wider community;
4. Education and training.

This engagement with the community relied heavily on volunteer input with members of the steering group and other volunteers putting in many hours to organise events and consult the wider community. A decision was made to recruit a paid worker, a Plan Co-ordinator. Whilst engaging with

the community was part of this worker's role, much of the work to raise awareness and reach out was resident- and volunteer-led. They had no hub or centre/office base, so engagement was very much focused on establishing connections through events, activities and online communications.

At the end of 18 months, BKH had put in place a partnership with 10 people, seven of whom were residents; had produced its first Big Local plan; and had engaged with 1,500 community members, at least 600 of these in face-to-face discussions (with others online or via questionnaire). By this time, it had 50 community members actively involved in some way in driving Big Local forward.¹⁰³

3. Big Kirk Hallam's engagement approaches

The partnership and the wider community. There can be a maximum of 20 on the partnership board, with a maximum of 12 residents (with two places for young people aged 12-18).

We can draw out some important goals and principles from what the area says about engagement in its plan and in other places. For instance, though not setting targets for its engagement, at an early stage the steering group discussed levels of engagement it expected to achieve. In some of its early planning, the group anticipated that within its population of about 5,000 it would be good (or realistic at least) to achieve:

- A continuing connection with at least 500 residents;
- The involvement of at least 50 residents and local workers taking action in support of BKH;
- A core – a steering group of about 15 with two-thirds being residents.¹⁰⁴

The area's Rep uses the analogy of a bike wheel to explain this thinking: *"[There is] the outer rim of residents who feel a connection and who link with Big Local; the spokes of residents and workers who take the strain to make things happen in doing stuff. And the small but vital core hub which holds it all together and helps roll forward."* The advantage of having the idea of spokes is that it recognises that people could move up and down the spokes, becoming more involved at some times and less at others.

Themes and ideas about engagement. When looking at BKH's work to engage the wider community, three 'themes' seem helpful in understanding how the area has approached and thought about engagement:

- **Conversation** – engaging in a continuous community dialogue and conversation;
- **Accountability** – engaging as a way to be accountable, transparent and responsive;
- **Action** – engaging as a way to enable community action.

¹⁰³ *Getting Started* monitoring report

¹⁰⁴ *Getting Started* proposal 2013 and subsequent email correspondence with the rep

BKH has built on the engagement activities that worked well during its *getting started* phase to build more ongoing engagement through the delivery of the plan.

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership structure – establishing a local forum and a youth committee	Partnership meetings are open to the public, though it isn't common for members of the public to come along. In order to ensure the partnership does not become exclusive or removed from the community KBH set up a resident forum as a group to which the partnership could be accountable. It is open to all residents in the BKH area and meets at least annually with an AGM intended to enable the wider community to be engaged in reviewing the work that has been done and giving feedback regarding the priorities. The forum gets reports from the partnership board and the forum can review and determine the resident membership of the board. Twenty-five residents have to attend for it to be quorate. Other ways the partnership has tried to ensure it is open to wider community input is through setting up sub-groups or working groups where necessary to get others involved in its work. It has also developed a youth committee.
2. Developing communications mechanisms - and building social media and online opportunities for more instant dialogue and feedback	The area has a lively and engaging approach to communicating with the community and a strategy that has clear goals: • Letting people know what's been agreed in the Plan; • Encouraging people to take part and get involved in Big Local; • Encouraging people to volunteer in other ways across Kirk Hallam. BKH has developed a BKH news hub in partnership with an arts organisations and makes use of a website, Facebook, Twitter, an extensive email distribution list to residents and workers as well as offering updates through a quarterly newsletter. There are regular postings and blogs on the website (at last four times a month), Facebook posts at least twice a month and Tweets at least twice a week from @bigkirkhallam #biglocal to build community interest. In addition, the area has built good contact with the local radio and local press. It produces ten stories of change a year and one publication and presentation in time for the AGM.
3. Organising community events	Events are not a large part of how the area engages but it does use large events to build community interest – organising some (e.g. celebration events) and attending others and having a presence. As there were four large community events through the year (e.g. an Autumn Fair, and a Lakes and Meadows event) BKH has supported and attended these.
4. Running a small grants fund	The area's small grants scheme is continuing and has a high profile with awards ceremonies and change stories posted online and shared in the area's newsletter. The sharing of stories of grantees is used as a way to engage others – the area sees that success has the potential to breed more engagement – each grantee story provides a demonstration of what people and volunteers can do and hopefully inspires others to get involved.

5. Partnership working –to increase engagement of people who might be otherwise hard to engage (e.g. young people)

The area continues to build and grow partnerships with local organisations and to work with them to engage with the community. Its work on youth involvement, working with a youth provider, has proved particularly successful. The focus of its work with young people has not been just providing activities but trying to grow youth leaders and to empower young people to come up with their own ideas and this approach is paying off with a growing core of young people active within Big Local.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

In response to questions about the influences on their approach to engagement, the partnership produced a detailed response, posted in publically on their website.¹⁰⁵ It outlined how the Rep and early experiences of Big Local were important influences.

The following engagement challenges have been mentioned by those involved in BKH:

- **Engaging people in the work of the partnership.** There have been points when the area has reported that it would be keen to build numbers of those engaged within the partnership. It has also sometimes found that its open meetings are not very well attended.
- **Engaging people in numbers.** Some comments from a recent plan review suggest that there may be a concern about a lack of breadth of engagement, for example:
“I think that this vision still works but we are struggling to get this through to the community. We are not getting much response from the resident community and getting them involved as much as we would like.”
- **Engaging older people.** After a year’s delivery on its Big Local plan, one area identified for reflection or improvement has been the engagement of older people.
- **Maintaining links with partners and local providers.** The wider community isn’t just residents but is also local projects and organisations. Although the partnership has good relationships with a wide range of local organisations, it can be a challenge to maintain these links.

In their reporting at different stages the partnership and the Big Local Rep have identified the following learning points about things that have gone well and have helped engagement.

- **Having a community chest,** particularly putting it in place before the plan was in place, helped with community engagement.
- **Varying event types,** between large events and smaller more focused events.
- **Youth involvement** has worked well. Engaging with and supporting a strong youth provider and focus on empowering young people, not just delivering activities to them, is building ownership and involvement with young people starting to more often present their own ideas to the community chest panel and some young people starting to volunteer and undertake youth leader training.

¹⁰⁵ <https://bigkirkhallam.wordpress.com/category/communityconversations/>

Community Engagement in Whitley Big Local

Activity Profile – Capacity building residents

1. About Whitley and its community

Whitley Big Local area is located two miles south of Reading town centre. It is a suburban estate bordered by major local roads. The area is mainly residential with housing mixed in type and tenure, with around 36% being provided by social landlords. Before Big Local there was not a strong sense of place or community identity. Around 9,000 people live in the area. As well as tensions between different parts of Whitley, the Big Local plan notes that population make-up has also posed a challenge to any local sense of community. The area has seen fairly steady population growth over the past few decades, much of it the result of immigration, which has resulted in both a rising population and increasing cultural diversity. Around 30% of the population are from black and minority (BME) communities with about 18% born outside of the UK (mostly Africa and Asia). There is also a small student population with five per cent of residents being students from nearby Reading University. The area has a relatively high unemployment rate and according to the Whitley Big Local Plan, it is seen as “*an area with a bad reputation*” and one that before Big Local suffered from a bad press locally with negative ideas and representations of residents as workshy and the area as one beset by crime. The area includes a large number of voluntary and community groups, local sole-trader businesses and other community assets including statutory services, schools, shops and local businesses. However only few organisations are working across the whole of the Whitley Big Local area for the benefit of the community

Whitley became a Big Local area in Wave 3 of the programme with its funding and Big Local status announced officially in December 2012. It quickly began its journey along the Big Local ‘pathway’ early in 2013, establishing a residents steering group and designing a programme of *Getting Started* activities which started in June 2013. It established a formal resident-led Big Local partnership in 2014 and submitted a plan for its £1m later that year in December 2014 (an eight-year plan to 2022 which it began delivering on straight away though it was not formally endorsed by Local Trust until a little later in 2015).

2. Early community engagement efforts

Building a steering group. Work to get the community involved in Big Local was kick-started in the very early stages by the area’s Big Local Rep who was very actively involved along with some staff from key local organisations in raising awareness of Big Local and the need for residents to get involved. At this very early stage, meetings, local press announcements and leafleting were used to encourage people to get involved. This early activity generated interest from a small group of residents so that alongside awareness-raising and consultation work with a broad focus across the community, a series of more structured meetings could take place involving those most interested in getting actively involved and taking a lead on making Big Local happen. Through March and April 2013 some 21 resident volunteers attended four meetings to plan and promote Big Local. This group began meeting together regularly after this time as the Big Local steering group.

The core steering group of residents quite quickly set themselves up as an independent residents group called Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA). The group included volunteers with links to other organisations in the community, and with a good knowledge of local activities and providers. The group established a constitution and governance arrangements and a small core committee of officers for WCDA with these elected at volunteers’ meetings.

Engaging the community. Between December 2012 and May 2013 Big Local volunteers were attending meetings and talking to groups and organisations including play centres, library, local schools, and using such groups to help spread the word to residents. Residents were uniformly asked three questions – what did they like about Whitley, what did they not like, and what would make Whitley an even better place to live. In the 18 months between when it started meeting and the completion of the area’s plan in December 2014, the residents’ steering group developed a wide-ranging programme of activities focused on raising awareness; bringing together community views; understanding needs and assets; exploring and growing residents’ ideas; and building participation and leadership. The group used five main ‘types’ of activity to engage the community at this time.

Table 1. Early approaches to engagement

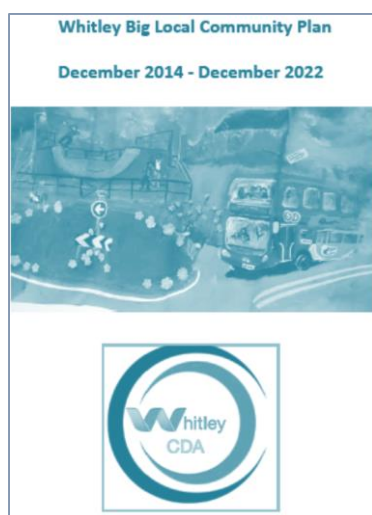
1. Upskilling residents to lead and deliver Big Local	The area invested in resident training very early on with a group of residents trained up in community development. The area also trained up a group of community researchers in partnership with the nearby university ¹⁰⁶ (see below – partnership with the University). Radio and newsletter projects also involved initial resident training.
2. Targeted work and outreach. Engaging with existing groups to ‘go to where people are’	The group worked closely with partners to reach people where they already engaged, for instance working with the local school cluster’s pupil council as a way to consult children from all nine schools in the area, with a housing provider to talk to tenants during their AGM, to church groups and older people’s groups and projects dealing with financially excluded clients.
3. Using visible community projects and activities to engage – often linked to building a sense of place or identity.	A number of community projects were developed as a way to engage residents and raise awareness of Big Local. These tended to be visible, with capacity to engage across the community, and linked to building a sense of place or identity. For instance, a garden maintenance project was supported with a local housing provider [and engaged 102 residents]; and a local museum project brought residents together to record a history of Whitley verbally and using artefacts, photos and other media. Largescale events were similarly used, including a community day, a street party and support for a local carnival.
4. Developing varied communications mechanisms	The area developed posters, leaflets, branded items and used noticeboards and distributed information at events. It also developed a website and social media presence, and established a community radio and a community newspaper, Whitley Way. As the area is bisected by a busy road, the group also came up with the idea of giant bus adverts using posters developed out of a visioning exercise with local school children.
5. Creating spaces for engagement	The area established an office and communications hub, and later worked on setting up a community café as ways to create a space for engagement – somewhere people could come and find out more and get involved.

Engaging the community with the Big Local Plan. Towards the end of 2014 with the plan in draft and then final shape, the steering group was still engaging the community through a

¹⁰⁶ The residents group established WCDA as a CIO in the spring of 2014, which enabled them to directly employ four local residents as researchers.

checking and consultation process using a variety of methods, including formal and informal meetings, creative activities and online methods. For instance:

- **Online:** the area shared small extracts of the plan on social media and requested feedback as well as emailing the entire document to members, volunteers, contact list, and partners for feedback.
- **Over coffee:** feedback forms were put out at the community café, and feedback tables were developed too. A local volunteer took key extracts from the community plan and transferred them to table tops for people to browse as they sat in the cafe. The tables could be written on and had non-permanent marker pens for people to add their own comments.
- **Face-to-face and at events:** the launch event of the community café was a whole day consultation event for the plan where the entire plan and extracts were available, and volunteers asked people's opinions and asked them to fill in questionnaires. The area also used its partnership launch party as an evening consultation event where partners were mailed the document in advance and spent the evening explaining and discussing it and receiving feedback.
- **Ongoing openness to plan feedback:** the plan is still made available for comment and feedback is still encouraged.



Three residents produced the plan, describing it as building on everything they had been told over the previous two years: *"It is essentially a product of drawing together everything we have learnt over the past two years, there is nothing new here that would come as a surprise to the residents, it is their words strung together into a story."*

In the end the priorities that made it into the area's Big Local plan were broadly based on ideas of financial inclusion and capacity building. They were:

1. Employment, education, training & enterprise and finances;
2. Community activities and accessibility;
3. Improved environment;
4. Young people and old.

This engagement with the wider community relied heavily on volunteer input (though with support from partner organisations) but at heart it was about members of the steering group and other volunteers putting in many hours to organise activities and consult the wider community (and writing the plan themselves).

By the time the Big Local Plan was in place at the end of 2014 the area had established a Big Local Partnership with 50 members, including 28 resident members, and had engaged 4,000 individuals with 40 reported as actively involved in driving Big Local forward in the area.

The partnership and the wider community. The resident-led, volunteer-led Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA) was the local steering group, becoming first a CIO and then, in 2016, a registered charity. The idea was that any volunteer can be part of WCDA if they want to but the group recognised that *"some people just want to volunteer and do the hands-on stuff and leave all the admin and organisational work to others"*.

In order to develop a Big Local Partnership 'WCDA' (the residents' steering group) called together individuals and representatives of organisations they thought could give the best input, advice and

guidance to the Whitley Big Local project and set out five main areas of ‘investment’ that they wanted partners to contribute to – the LTO role, capacity building, advising, supporting Big Local projects, and monitoring the work of WCDA. As the model below shows – WCDA retains decision-making responsibilities with the partnership constituted as a wider group of residents, organisations and businesses that brings a connection between the WCDA and the wider community. That connection focuses on transparency and ongoing engagement.

3. Whitley’s engagement approaches

Three key themes seemed helpful to us in understanding how the area has approached and thought about engagement:

- **Capacity** – the area puts a strong emphasis on empowering residents to make a difference – capacity-building for active citizenship;
- **Inclusion** – the area strives to be as inclusive as possible in the way it enables people to get involved;
- **Ownership** – strengthening and validating a resident voice on local issues and building a sense of ownership seem important also.

With its plan in place and endorsed by Local Trust, Whitley has built on the engagement activities that worked well during its *Getting Started* phase to ensure ongoing engagement through the delivery of its plan. The key types of activity for ensuring engagement over time are as outlined below

Table 2. Ensuring ongoing and inclusive engagement

1. Opening up the partnership structure – establishing a large broader community partnership and working groups	The area has put in place a broad community partnership structure: enabling accountability to and dialogue with the wider community. Working groups support engagement and in additions WCDA have open public quarterly meetings to which all are welcome.
2. Developing communications mechanisms – and building social media and online opportunities for more instant dialogue and feedback	The area has a multi-media publicity strategy appropriate to each of the projects and to the overall Big Local programme. They enabled some short-term, quick projects in part to raise awareness and to encourage involvement with a number of important longer term projects. They use social media, their community newspaper, printed documents and open meetings. They see the Whitley Way newspaper as “ <i>our voice for speaking to the local community</i> ”. (Originally this was volunteer-led but later a paid editor for a day a month was sought as the role became increasingly demanding for a volunteer). Plans for a community radio did not develop as successfully as the newspaper so more communication takes place online and via the newspaper than by radio as originally anticipated.
3. Upskilling local people to get involved and using projects to create and	A worker was employed chiefly with an engagement and capacity-building remit. The role was designed to focus on “ <i>widening the participation and engagement of local residents...and partnership organisations in the Big Local project...assisting local residents to identify and meet needs in local projects...providing training and support in</i>

support volunteering	<i>community development....”</i> The project has used community projects to engage people, maximising volunteering opportunities.
4. Creating spaces for engagement	Whitley has developed a community café space in a local community centre where it also has an office base. Launched in January 2015 it is seen as part of the area’s work to establish a central hub to support efforts to engage the community. 
5. Running a small grants fund	The area has set aside a quarter of its £1m for a small grants programme. This was launched in December 2015.

An activity in focus – more about community research

An early partnership established with the University of Reading enabled the development of a community research project in Whitley. Following training in participatory action research (PAR) methods by experts at the university, a group of 12 students and residents undertook a community transport feasibility study. Four residents were involved in this project and were employed directly by the WCDA and students from a local college that does not see many of its young people progress to university were also involved.

The community research team first carried out research on Whitley transport needs. The team surveyed 500 local people on their experience of travelling around town. They also conducted 30 interviews with the public and with voluntary sector organisations and arranged five community focus groups to gain thorough understanding of the issues. The final report – Working better with Whitley: exploring the everyday transport needs and experiences of local communities in South Reading – highlights the biggest barriers to ‘getting around’ identified by residents.

The work was so successful that the research group have been approached to deliver other community research projects, and work to explore financial exclusion is now underway. The project is an example of successful engagement of the community on several levels:

- It is an excellent example of community empowerment as the community set its own research agenda – community transport and financial exclusion were identified as concerns for further research by the community, not by an academic establishment.
- It represents engagement of a core group of residents and young people as volunteers.
- It represents effective resident to resident engagement as resident researchers engage with their fellow residents to discuss important local issues.
- It represents engagement of the university as part of, not outside of, ‘the community’.
- It represents successful engagement with residents’ views and experiences of transport. As the area’s Big Local rep explained *“the research peels away the usual assumptions about transport systems to reveal just how lack of mobility is experienced in working class neighbourhoods”*.

4. Influences, challenges and learning

The partnership found that their ideas came from everywhere and everyone. The biggest challenge they had was about staying focused on the things they promised people they would deliver with them. Every new volunteer, person they meet, or customer in the social club and café influences how they move forward. All of their projects must, however, deliver the Big Local outcomes and meet the community development National Occupational Standards.

It was felt to be important to distinguish between ‘what’ they do and ‘how’ they do it. Whitley Big Local has been different from the very start, they followed a completely different course from other areas. For the ‘what’ everything influences them; every single comment, idea or piece of feedback is listened to and incorporated. Each piece is like another thread being woven into a rug that is the bigger picture. Even if the ideas are not good ones they are still listened to and are useful as they tell us something about people's perceptions, attitudes and possible prejudices, and what makes people engage, they all inform what needs to be done in Whitley.

For the ‘how’ – they felt fortunate to have the input of an independent community development practitioner from the very start. It opened their eyes to things they wouldn't have otherwise been aware of, made them question and challenge the usual way of doing things, and gave them a backbone to hang the ‘what’ onto.

The following points have been mentioned within the area's (and the local Rep's) reporting:

- **Engaging hard to reach groups (and businesses).** The area has actively engaged the community in its work but has not always found this easy and in some of its reporting it mentions that areas for improvement are in *“the need to connect better with the most excluded groups; the need to build effective and sustainable business relationships; and the need to connect with 19-24 year olds.”*
- **Resident capacity – people's own undervaluing of their talents.** The area has recognised that a first step that is challenging is just in getting people, particularly those who are disadvantaged and have perhaps been negatively labelled in the past, to recognise and value their own skills and talents.
- **Maintaining support for a growing base of volunteers.** Though not a major challenge at this time, the area is conscious of the time that it takes not just to recruit but also to maintain and sustain a strong volunteer base.
- **The value of tapping into the strength of women and their networks** – which Whitley Big Local has seen *“form the bedrock of their families and the community”*.
- **The importance of using a variety of methods to engage a variety of people.** Reflecting on some of its early successes in engaging the community, the area reported:
 - *“We involved residents from a wide range of backgrounds, because we ran a wide range of projects. A single project might only have attracted a limited interest but a wider range of projects is more likely to encourage people from different backgrounds.”*
- **Face-to-face engagement is by far the most successful.** *“We have consistently found that Whitley people prefer a less formal approach and will open up more when speaking to a real person than when asked to fill out a form.”*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ All learning drawn from reps' reports, *Getting Started* monitoring report and/or the Big Local Plan.