Local Trust
trusting local people

Power in our hands:

An inquiry into place-based funding in the Big Local programme

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About this report

This paper is part of a series addressing three lines of inquiry which test the hypothesis of the Big Local programme. Together they explore place-based funding, resident-led decision making and action, and positive and lasting change.

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Cover photo: Young people in MyClubmoor Big Local, near Liverpool, run drumming workshops for young children to encourage their skills and creativity.
Photo credit: Emily Lovell

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Introduction

Big Local is one of the most radical and exciting grant programmes ever launched by a major lottery funder. Between 2010 and 2012, the National Lottery Community Fund identified 150 areas that had historically missed out on Lottery and other funding. Each of those areas was allocated £1m of Big Local funding to be spent over 10 to 15 years. This could be spent in any way they chose, provided residents organised themselves locally to plan and manage that funding, involving the wider community in the decision making process.

The programme was designed to not only fund community projects of choice, but to build capacity, and create lasting change. To understand the extent to which the programme has achieved these aims, Local Trust developed an ambitious Research and Evaluation Action Plan (Local Trust, 2019h) which outlines a hypothesis about what the Big Local programme will achieve.

The **hypothesis of the Big Local programme** is:

> *Long term funding and support to build capacity gives residents in hyper-local areas agency to take decisions and to act to create positive and lasting change.*

Due to the nature of the Big Local programme, especially working with 150 communities and for a such a long period of time, defining one research project that will test every aspect of our hypothesis would be impossible. Instead, we have identified **three lines of inquiry** which are inter-related but focus on testing different parts of the hypothesis. They explore: place-based funding, resident-led decision making and action, and positive and lasting change.

The three-part *Power in our hands* series brings together research conducted over the period of the action plan, along with other relevant research, to understand our current learning as it relates to the lines of inquiry. We do not assume that Local Trust has fully answered the questions of each line of inquiry, rather, we seek to understand what our current learning is across the programme in order to share with Big Local areas, funders and policymakers. This series also identifies future research and learning which could be included in Local Trust's next research and evaluation action plan.

This paper explores the **place-based funding** inquiry and seeks to answer the following questions:

- How is place-based funding best delivered?
- Is place-based funding a suitable way of building community capacity?

Photographer: Rob Coombe

Residents from Whitleigh Big Local sitting in 'Winnie' - a community van that tours the neighbourhood, offering residents the chance to have a cup of tea and a chat.

Methodology

Members of the research team identified research from the 2018-2020 period that appeared to answer a particular line of inquiry. We then reviewed all such research and summarised the different findings and emerging response under each inquiry. We held a workshop in February 2020 to present what we had initially found to the wider research team and were given suggestions for further data and reports to review. The workshop also identified emerging gaps which were used to shape questions in our next action plan. The team overseeing the review went on to review the remaining sources and produce three summary papers for each line of inquiry.

How is place-based funding best delivered?

Place-based funding has a number of meanings and is interpreted differently by different funders. Big Local is a place-based programme, however the focus on developing community skills and capacity is unique. The resident-led approach influences the appropriate size of the area and the amount of resources and support required.

The place-based funding context

Big Local sits within a wider group of place-based funds. Some of these funders work only in one place and may or may not be resident led. Internationally, and within the UK, there have been attempts to define place-based funding. A 2018 literature review by Local Trust included the following definition:

> **A place-based funder has an intimate tie to a particular place that you can find on a map, and is focusing their work in that place with the people who live there and the organizations and institutions that are highly invested in that place. A place-base funder uses a wide-angle, multi-faceted lens in work that is about community resilience and vitality."**
>
> (Foster Richardson, 2009)

This and other definitions explored in the review seem to reflect that place-based funding is holistic and works towards long-term change; goes beyond just giving money to a place; and works collaboratively with local community organisations, or 'anchors'.

However, the definition of place-based funding can be broad and there is no firm consensus on some of these ideas. In the Big Local model, there is less need for a community anchor to act as intermediary between the community and the funder, because the Big Local partnership that oversees local provision of funding and takes decisions locally is led by residents who live within the boundary.[1]

The rest of this paper will explore how Local Trust and the Big Local fund have delivered place-based funding, and what this tells us about the best ways to do this, with reference to other place-based funds or area-based initiatives where they provide comparisons or context for decisions. It first covers the initial stage of targeting a place-based fund, and then considers

[1] Big Local partnerships are a group of at least eight people, the majority of whom must be residents, who guide the overall direction of Big Local in the Big Local area.

Local Trust's role in supporting Big Local areas to deliver their programme and what this might indicate about how to do place-based funding.

How to identify and draw the boundaries of a place

James et al (2014) outlines the criteria that the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) – previously Big Lottery Fund (BLF) – used to choose the 150 Big Local areas. These included: that areas must have experienced a level of disadvantage and been previously overlooked for funding; and should represent a range of areas across England, as well as distinctive variations in types of area, so that coastal areas, ex-mining towns, inner-city estates and rural areas were included.

A report on left-behind areas (OCSI, 2019) outlines an alternative way to target funds, focusing on connectivity. The areas the report defines as left-behind lack "places to meet (whether community centres, pubs or village halls)"; lack "an engaged and active community"; and lack connectedness "to the wider economy—physical and digital". (OCSI, 2019: 2). If the left-behind research criteria were used to target areas for investment or funding, it would be an opportunity to explore how effective they would be compared with the original BLF criteria.

Deciding which places to fund is a complex process, and so is the consideration of size and scale. Too large an area makes it challenging to bring the community together. But there are disadvantages to a hyperlocal approach, too. It is harder for small areas to influence decision-makers (McCabe et al, 2020) and to link into the local economy (University of Cambridge, 2019). A review of English area-based regeneration initiatives (ibid) suggested that an area population of around 10,000 appeared to be a 'success factor'; however, what is optimal may depend on which aims are prioritised.

Area boundaries drawn by funders or cartographers do not necessarily reflect how people interact with their locality. Dallimore et al (2019: 6) notes the importance of boundaries that reflect people's social groupings: "*We observed how, when physical boundaries are coterminous with existing social groupings, smoother programme*

Photographer: Alex Alevroyiannis

Anna and Sarah taking part in the Whitley Bay Lockdown Carnival in May 2020.

development resulted….Where boundaries encompassed a number of disparate sub-groups, the lack of shared experience, sense of place and history of working together made things more difficult." Realistically, it is hard to imagine that a place-based funder that could achieve this complete synchronicity in all areas. Additionally, residents do have agency to negotiate the boundaries imposed on them, as Reynolds (2018: 8) explores in a paper on Big Local, stating that boundaries are *"continuously 'in process' through the dynamics of the initiative."* Around 20 Big Local areas have successfully requested changes to their boundary, expanding its size (narrowing the boundary is not permitted).[2]

Supporting areas and residents effectively

Supporting areas to deliver their Big Local plan is a major part of Local Trust's role as a funder, which has been described as nurturing a "culture of learning"—creating spaces for dialogue and learning to take place without being squeezed by daily pressures (Local Trust and IVAR, 2013: 5). Research and evaluation of this work demonstrate the kind of support needed in a place-based, resident-led programme.

Our Bigger Story, the longitudinal evaluation of the programme, describes the support approach: *"The support element, intended to be flexible and responsive, has been delivered through the Big Local reps, training and networking events, and advice and expertise from programme partners."* (McCabe et al, 2020: 26). There is no fixed programme of support, as it is constantly evolving with the programme, but consistent themes are coming through in the research.

It should be noted that Local Trust's support to areas had to change rapidly in response to COVID-19. Previously, there had been a high emphasis on physical networking opportunities, both regionally and nationally, and on area-based support. Social-distancing measures meant that Local Trust had to shift very quickly to providing virtual events and training instead, such as a weekly drop-in for partnership members to share experiences and ideas on Zoom. Local Trust has also been supporting Big Local areas to connect digitally: for example, providing each Big Local area with one premium Zoom account and training on how to use it. This support has not yet been formally evaluated but take-up is very high, as shown below.

Minimal regulations, priorities decided at a local level

The programme allows areas to create and achieve a vision for their communities over 10-15 years. While this is not exactly a component of support, it is important to reinforce that the Big Local programme puts minimal regulations on areas and directs them to decide their priorities. Areas are not held to annual spend targets or deliverables (James et al, 2014).

This allows members of the Big Local partnership to work at their own pace, allowing for variations in how long it takes areas to form a partnership, design a plan and implement it. Where things go wrong, there is time for the partnership to rebuild itself and resume delivery (McCabe et al, 2020). The resident-led paper in this series shows the time needed for residents to develop their group identity and confidence to make decisions.

2 Number of successful requests according to a member of Local Trust's funding team (estimated).

This underlines the need for funders of place-based initiatives to be flexible and patient. How reps interact with and support areas varies considerably across the programme, and the overall rep role has itself changed as areas' needs change.[3] Furthermore, there is a need for targeted support for areas that are stalling or having trouble making decisions (discussed more below).

Area-based support for all areas

All areas have a rep who acts as the link between the area and Local Trust. Area-based reps are a major part of the support provided to all areas. The role of reps has changed over time, as well as in response to what the area needs (McCabe et al, 2020). Each rep generally works with three to four areas. A 2018 review of the reps' role explained its broad components:

> **Providing 'support, advice and appropriate challenge' to the partnership and ensuring that they operate in line with Local Trust guidance; supporting the partnership in creating, submitting, and reviewing their Big Local plans; providing a link between the area, Local Trust and partners."**
>
> (Local Trust, 2018a: 3)

The 2018 review noted how the reps' role is changing over time—for example, the increasing importance of support with legacy planning when looking ahead to the programme ending. While we do not know how Big Local would have developed without reps, we do know that the support they provide is highly rated by partnerships in Big Local areas, with 86-89 per cent of members in the 2016 partnership survey rating the current reps "very helpful/helpful" across a range of questions relating to support, and only 6-8 per cent rating them "not very helpful/not at all helpful".[4] (Local Trust, 2018a: 1)

Another form of support at area level is that of Big Local workers.[5] Most (145 out of 150) areas have a paid worker working full or part-time on Big Local (from the Area Assessment Tool v3: Local Trust, 2019a). This has developed organically—it is not a form of support provided by Local Trust, the funder, but has been funded locally when partnerships identified the need. Local Trust's research (2019b) on areas that don't spend in line with their plan suggests that the lack of a worker is a barrier to progress.

Some literature suggests that place-based funders should have an intimate knowledge of their area (Foster-Richardson, 2009). Big Local differs from this and puts residents in charge of developing and using knowledge of their area, for example, through building a community profile. Local Trust provides residents with support and tools to do this, such as Local Insight, which is an online tool to access public and official data about any Big Local area. Some research on support within the Big Local programme has reinforced the importance of local knowledge, with areas perceiving support partner organisations as not from 'their place' and being

3 Reps act as a critical friend, to provide information, advice, guidance and constructive challenge. They are also representatives of Local Trust and act as the organisation's "eyes, ears and voice".

4 The partnership member survey is a biennial survey carried out by Local Trust; it is the main tool for Local Trust to understand the opinions and experiences of all 150 partnerships.

5 Big Local is volunteer- and resident-led, but partnerships can choose to fund a local worker to help deliver their Big Local plans. Most of the 150 Big Local areas use some of their Big Local funding for part or full-time workers, who may be formally employed by the LTO.

frustrated with their lack of awareness of the local context. This research reinforced the importance of face-to-face contact and visits where possible (Local Trust, 2018b) to develop this understanding. It will be interesting to see what lessons are learnt from the first phase of the Community Leadership Academy, which will be delivered virtually because of COVID-19.

Support across and between areas

Evaluation of the 'Learning and Networking with Big Local' function at Local Trust shows the value of networking and peer support to Big Local areas. A review of learning clusters, which brought Big Local areas together around specific themes, found that 84 per cent of participants said the most useful aspect was the chance to share ideas and network with other areas on a theme (Local Trust, 2019d). Big Local Connects, the annual event for all Big Local areas, is also highly rated and well attended (98 per cent of attendees rated the 2019 Connects positively, up from 88 per cent in 2018 (Local Trust, 2019c)). These results show the value of networking for developing connections, sharing challenges and frustrations and having open conversations. And while support during COVID-19 has not yet been evaluated, take-up and engagement with virtual events run by Local Trust appear high (131 out of 150 areas had engaged in COVID-19 support as of May 2020).

Local Trust also takes the role of introducing areas to new ideas and experiences, to provide useful challenges and inspiration. For example, in 2018, a new set of support partners was introduced, in part, aiming to "support areas in accessing new knowledge and networks" and to "build areas' confidence in working with a wider range of partners" (Local Trust, 2018b: 2). The evaluation (Local Trust, 2018b) found that these new partners did bring fresh perspectives to areas, but that sometimes only one or two people from a partnership were engaged in the work and it wasn't clear how much knowledge and learning was transmitted across the local area. This is also a challenge for other forms of support.

The learning cluster review found that, for introductions to new ideas to be effective, external speakers need to be able to integrate Big Local work into their bigger picture so as to be of most benefit to participants who may be coming from a position of far less knowledge. There will be more buy-in if participants can shape content to what is relevant to them (Local Trust, 2019d).

Tailored support for specific areas?

Local Trust has also offered specific, specialist support to partnerships based on their context; and has also started developing a more sophisticated understanding of area types. The latter project (called the 'typologies research') is in the early stages of being used to target support, and further research could explore whether this would be effective.

Conflict resolution has always been a part of Local Trust's role. While serious situations might be addressed by the central team, low-level conflict resolution falls within the role of the rep (Local Trust, 2018a). However, some partnerships experience significant barriers without necessarily being in conflict. Some deviate strongly from their planned expenditure (Local Trust, 2019b); or are at risk of not spending out before the end of the programme (Local Trust, 2019e). These areas may not come to the attention of the central funder very quickly: while they may not be experiencing difficulties (it is normal, for example, for projects to take a different course than anticipated) sometimes they are (Local Trust, 2019b). And there is a possibility of targeting these areas with more tailored support when they are identified through financial and other data. This also underlines the importance of flexibility, and of enough time to address and resolve these issues.

As well as understanding the partnership's context, there is also an opportunity to provide learning and networking support based on the area type. The typologies work identified five different types of area: industrial heartlands, rural fringe, peripheral estates, diverse inner-city diversity and economically active inner-city (Local Trust, 2019f). Research elsewhere suggests that area type may influence the success of area-based initiatives (Batty et al, 2010)—pointing to the value of support that is more targeted. However, within Big Local, any support based on these types would need to be mindful of the fact that residents are responsible for developing their own priorities, which may not map onto the typology characteristics.

What we've learned

Place-based funding encompasses many different approaches and Big Local is a specific kind of place-based fund: one that is run by a foundation; is resident-led; and funds a hugely varied range of areas. The lessons emerging from research on and evaluation of how Big Local place-based funding is best delivered may be most applicable to funders who take a similar approach.

The Big Local fund offers substantial support and training to residents to deliver the programme in their areas. Big Local partnerships have total decision-making power over where the funding goes and at what pace. This substantial power is accompanied by flexible, patient support that allows residents enough time to become confident enough to use this decision-making power. Evidence from this programme shows that support needs change over time and variation across areas, and the flexibility to respond to changing support needs as they emerge. It is also interesting to note, from the example of workers, that some support needs may not be predicted or directed by funders and that this can be accommodated in a programme with flexibility about how funds are spent.

The review has also shown the importance of area-based support and the high value given to networking opportunities between areas. COVID-19 will affect this type of support and we don't yet fully know how Local Trust's support, and the areas themselves, will adapt in an environment where most conversations take place virtually. An evaluation of Local Trust's support during this era would be insightful.

Further research could also explore whether and how different approaches to place-based funding lead to different results: for example, the possible value of targeting areas for funding based on their lack of connections/connectivity. However an area may be targeted, we do know from Big Local that residents can and do shape the boundaries of the initiatives themselves, as the markers imposed by funders do not always reflect how people live their lives.

Is place-based funding a suitable way of building community capacity?

While previous place-based approaches have sought to improve community capacity, results have been mixed. This section looks at how the Big Local programme develops community capacity through physical spaces, personal and social capital, and the local economy.

Inherited context

Previous area-based approaches have been criticised for failing to build community capacity:

> **[There is a] belief that previous programmes have often failed because they have given residents insufficient control and placed too many requirements on the investments that have been made...."**
>
> (Local Trust and IVAR, 2013)

Area-based initiatives in the 1990s and 2000s left residents at the margins, as authorities remained risk-averse and maintained close monitoring of activity:

> **...Coming from the centre, as they do, they enshrine pre-existing cultures of programme design and decision-making, rather than taking the risk that communities, given time and resources, may do things differently."**
>
> (Marilyn Taylor, quoted in Local Trust, 2018c)

The legacy of these programmes had mixed effects on the early years of Big Local, with evidence that they led to a form of learnt cynicism among some residents, even while positive lessons were applied in the design of Big Local (see resident-led paper). The rest of this paper will consider what evidence there is that the Big Local programme has built community capacity in the areas that it funds, and will outline what factors seem to be important in ensuring place-based funds build community capacity, with reference to other area-based initiatives where appropriate.

Evidence for Big Local developing community capacity

The Big Local fund has led to partnerships developing community capacity in different ways. As noted in the first section of this paper and below, Big Local areas came from a starting point of low capacity, with a lack of funding historically and a lack of voluntary sector infrastructure (discussed more below). Yet because the criteria used to identify Big Local areas were so broad, the areas lack capacity in different ways and their responses to the Big Local programme are different. Broadly, Big Local can be seen to develop capacity in three different ways: through physical spaces; through developing personal and social capital; and, although this is more challenging, through the local economy. This echoes research on other place-based programmes, which have demonstrated "increased neighbourhood capacity in the form of stronger leadership, networks or organisations, and/or improved connections between the neighbourhood and external entities in the public, private and non-profit sectors," but have had difficulty stimulating economic development (see the paper in this series on positive and lasting change).

Physical spaces

The Area Assessment Tool v3[6] (2019a) shows that some Big Local areas are developing various ways to add to the capacity of their place and that this is often through physical buildings or places. 35 per cent have plans to set up a legacy organisation and 13 per cent are purchasing a building with Big Local money.

So far, 19 areas have used funds towards developing a community hub. Research commissioned by Local Trust and Power to Change (Trup et al, 2019) on community hubs shows they tend to benefit a hyperlocal area, providing holistic support to meet a place's needs. This often includes the provision of a community hall or other meeting space, health and wellbeing activities, offices and workspaces for local groups, and arts and cultural activities. Hubs have the potential to help build social capital and trust in fragmented communities, and to develop more integrated, locally tailored services. As they often provide low-cost office space, and services such as sport facilities, a café/bar and classes, they could also stimulate "local economic and social activity, helping to generate wealth in a place and keeping it there" (Trup et al, 2019: 12). Providing office space could also help develop links between employers and a community. Further research could explore the success of hubs in meeting long-term aims such as building social capital and generating local wealth.

Photographer: Andy Aitchison

Big Local residents in Welsh House Farm, in Birmingham, gardening together on the estate.

[6] The Area Assessment Tool (AAT) is a programme-wide, data-collection system drawing on multiple sources.

Personal and social capital

Changes to the physical environment are important: improvements can improve people's perceptions of their area as a place to live (Halliday et al, 2020—forthcoming) and are a high priority for Big Local areas (see the paper in this series on positive and lasting change).

But it is also easier to see evidence of physical change rather than change among people. The resident-led paper in this series explores in more depth how Big Local develops residents' ability to make decisions collectively about what is best for their area, through identifying and responding to local needs. In 2018, 87 per cent of partnership members agreed or strongly agreed that, *"We are confident that we can identify what is needed to make our area feel like an even better place to live."* This echoes the evidence from other place-based programmes which has found that they increase capacity in the form of stronger leadership, as noted above. However, this skills development will be concentrated among the partnership members and volunteers who are actively involved in Big Local.

More broadly, improving social relationships between residents is a common aim of areas' Big Local plans, with a focus on improving connections and a sense of community. Activities such as festivals, community spaces as described above, and shared campaigns are common (Communities in Control, 2018). Tracking the effect this has on longer-term community capacity is more difficult—both to measure and to confidently attribute to Big Local activity.

The distinct category of resident workers shows how Big Local can develop personal capacity—a big impact on a small number of people. A survey of Big Local workers (Local Trust, 2019g) showed that 27 per cent of workers employed on the Big Local programme are also residents in the area that they work in. These resident workers are less likely to have previous experience in a similar role, and less likely to have a degree than non-resident workers. They are more likely to have been involved in Big Local before becoming a worker, compared to non-resident workers. The report also notes that resident workers appear to be in more junior roles than non-resident workers, perhaps reflecting their lack of experience in similar roles.

The fact that most workers, and more senior workers, come from outside of the Big Local area may demonstrate the initial lack of capacity within places. However, the programme has also offered employment opportunities to residents and, in doing so, is likely to have strengthened personal capacity and, potentially, community capacity too.

Community capacity and the local economy

As noted above, community hubs have the potential to strengthen the local economy by keeping money circulating locally. In addition, Big Local areas often use small grants and loans to develop the capacity of individuals and groups, funding ongoing activities. Larger grants are often used to deliver specific services, such as welfare benefits, money advice and community transport; or to develop amenities, such as a community shop (McCabe et al, 2020). We don't yet know what long-term changes this grant activity will make to an area or its overall community, but it has the potential to strengthen social capital, address financial instability and strengthen the local economy through keeping money circulating locally. Again, new research could explore the medium and long-term achievements of these grants, and what kind of legacy they will leave after the Big Local programme has ended.

Success factors in building capacity: the importance of time

Time seems to be an important factor for place-based programmes to develop community capacity. Previous area-based initiatives have been characterised as too short, not allowing for the time needed for a single project to be designed, delivered and evaluated. As a result of this, New Labour's New Deal for Communities adopted a 10-year timescale, which was associated with positive outcomes (University of Cambridge, 2019). Big Local areas have 10-15 years to spend their money.

Initially in Big Local, time was needed to build confidence and to compensate for the historic challenges and lack of investment. An evaluation of the early years of Big Local (James et al, 2014:112) stated that areas selected:

> **"...[Had] not previously been funded (or previous funding had not made a significant difference for the community); [had] a lack of local capacity – for instance little tradition of active citizenship or community engagement [and] a level of apathy or cynicism [...] and either a lack of resources and facilities or under-used local resources and facilities."**

As a result, sufficient time was needed for the community to become engaged; for residents to develop confidence in their decision-making capability; and for residual cynicism to be addressed and resolved. Dallimore et al (2019: 8) noted the need for "an enhanced and time-consuming role in the process of building the confidence of local residents." Because of the lack of facilities and infrastructure, some also needed time to identify a suitable Locally Trusted Organisation (James et al, 2014).[7]

There are benefits from the flexibility of a long-term programme beyond the initial stages of confidence-building and engagement. Throughout the programme, Big Local areas have experienced hiccups and obstacles in delivery. Between 2016-2018, over half of areas (76) deviated from planned spending to the extent of having payments cancelled or delayed for more than four months, or having multiple payments delayed, or paying back more than a quarter of the money paid (Local Trust, 2019b). It is normal for major projects to experience delays, and the timescale of the Big Local programme allows areas to address obstacles and challenges and resume delivery.

The type of support areas benefit from is covered more in Section 1 of this paper, but it is worth noting specifically about building capacity that previous programmes have identified the need for a development year zero (University of Cambridge, 2019). In response to this, Big Local areas had Getting Started funding, Pathway funding and Creating Plan money that was aimed at building capacity and building partnerships within areas (James et al, 2014).

Interviews with external stakeholders of Big Local (McCabe et al, 2019) reflect the perspective that experienced activists or volunteers can help people "hit the ground running". Yet there can be an over-reliance on this, especially in areas that are already lacking in capacity, with people deferring to those with a more professional background to "get things done" which

[7] Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOS) are the organisations chosen by Big Local partnerships to administer and account for the distribution of their funding.

can exclude others in the community (McCabe et al, 2018a; McCabe et al, 2018b). There is value in people starting from scratch and developing through the experience themselves.

Still, the starting point, or context, of areas needs to be considered as a factor in how much we can reasonably expect community capacity to develop. The New Deal for Communities evaluation saw lower rates of change in areas that were described as "stable, homogenous, peripheral, White estates on the edges of non-core cities." These areas faced more barriers to change because of fewer local job opportunities, poor public services, limited mobility and "prevailing 'cultures' less welcoming of change" (DCLG, 2010: 38). And research on areas that tend to spend at a slower rate than the Big Local average has shown that decision-making capacity remains a particular barrier for them. It may be that a more targeted approach to different types of areas would, therefore, be appropriate, with specific support and guidance based on area context that still supports a resident-led approach.

What we've learned

Historically, area-based initiatives have not been delivered in a way that allows community capacity to flourish. These have been government initiatives, with specific aims, that are more constrained than an independent funder, who can afford to be more embracing of the risk involved in giving up power to the community. Research on Big Local suggests that place-based funding has the potential to develop community capacity, and shows what factors appear to be important. There is evidence it has developed capacity in the areas it funds. The most visible examples of this are things like community hubs, which have the potential to develop the social capital and economic strength of an area if they are successful. More research could explore whether activity in Big Local areas achieves social and economic aims that strengthen community capacity.

There is strong evidence, through Big Local and other area-based initiatives, that place-based funding is more likely to build community capacity if enough time is invested in developing people's confidence and optimism to take advantage of that opportunity. Particularly at the beginning, there is a need for specific support to help areas get started, but throughout the programme obstacles are common and areas experience unanticipated challenges, so having the time to make mistakes, encounter obstacles and recover would seem to be a key success factor. Therefore, delivering a place-based programme is likely to be expensive because of the staff time and specialist support over a long timescale.

Finally, while place-based funding can improve community capacity if done carefully, it is limited in what it can change. It is a challenge for hyperlocal funds to substantially link into the local economy, for example. There are regional, national and global factors which place-based funding cannot substantially influence in many cases. The starting point of an area also needs to be considered when deciding what success would look like in building community capacity.

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About Local Trust

Local Trust was established in 2012 to deliver Big Local, a unique programme that puts residents across the country in control of decisions about their own lives and neighbourhoods. Funded by a £200m endowment from the Big Lottery Fund - the largest ever single commitment of lottery funds – Big Local provides in excess of £1m of long-term funding over 10-15 years to each of 150 local communities, many of which face major social and economic challenges but have missed out on statutory and lottery funding in the past.

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