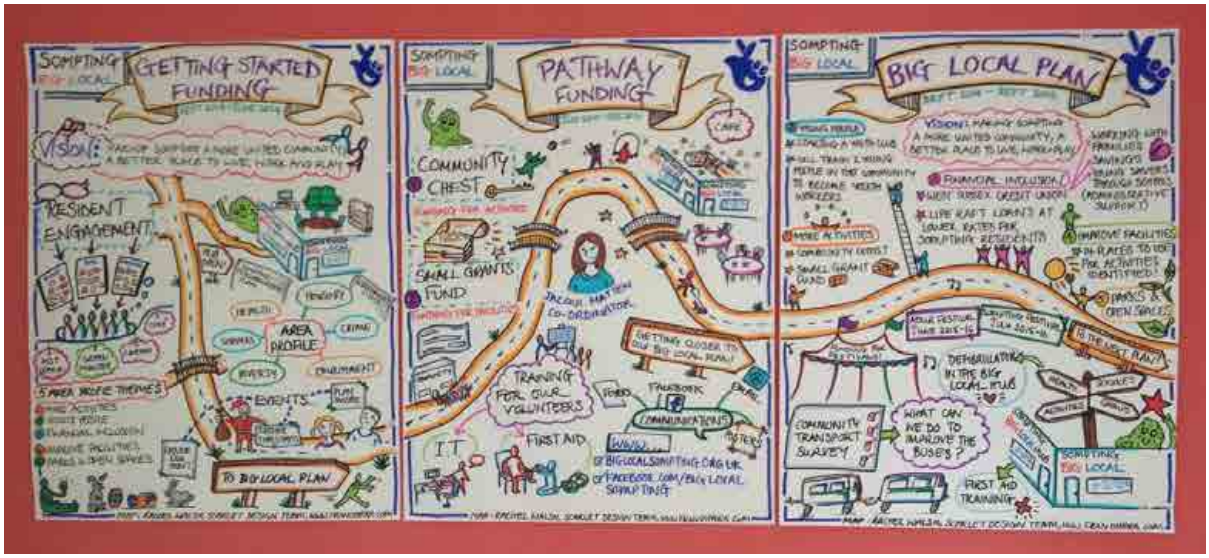
Big Local: the early years



The journey of one Big Local area: courtesy of Sompting Big Local and Scarlet Design Team

Evaluation report

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Championing volunteering and civil society

Institute for Volunteering Research

OPM Office for Public Management

www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk

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Foreword and acknowledgements

Foreword

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and the Office for Public Management (OPM) are delighted to have conducted an evaluation of the early years of Big Local.

As evaluators and organisations we share Local Trust's belief in the potential of voluntary action and community development to change lives and communities for the better. We also share Local Trust's interest in learning from the Big Local programme about how best communities can be supported to identify and achieve their own goals.

Our remit as evaluators was to address questions about what has been achieved, what has changed so far in Big Local areas, what has influenced areas' journeys, and what has been the value of the support areas have been given.

In the course of our research we met some fantastic people in Big Local areas and were inspired by their journeys. There is a richness and diversity to Big Local stories that is hard to capture in a report like ours. A growing living library of Big Local videos and photographs, films, songs and murals, brings to life what is happening in these areas far more powerfully than words on a page can. We recently came across the latest 'Big Local song', a choir of all ages coming together from across a Big Local area: their chosen song opened with the lyric, "it's not about the money, money, money". That sums up a large part of the story we tell in this report - each area has at least £1million, but Big Local is about much more than a pot of money. Though ours is only an early years evaluation, already the money is providing a catalyst for some amazing stories of what people can do when they work together and care passionately about making their communities even better places to live.

We hope our findings will help Local Trust and its stakeholders in their future work, and that this report will do justice to the stories people shared with us.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those who have helped us produce this report, including:

- Members of Big Local steering groups and partnerships who took part in our survey and review activities, workshops and case studies
- Big Local reps who piloted and promoted our activities and responded to our survey
- Local Trust team and national partners, and colleagues in other research teams at the Community Development Foundation, the Institute for Voluntary Action Research and the School for Public Health Research
- Members of our Advisory Group.

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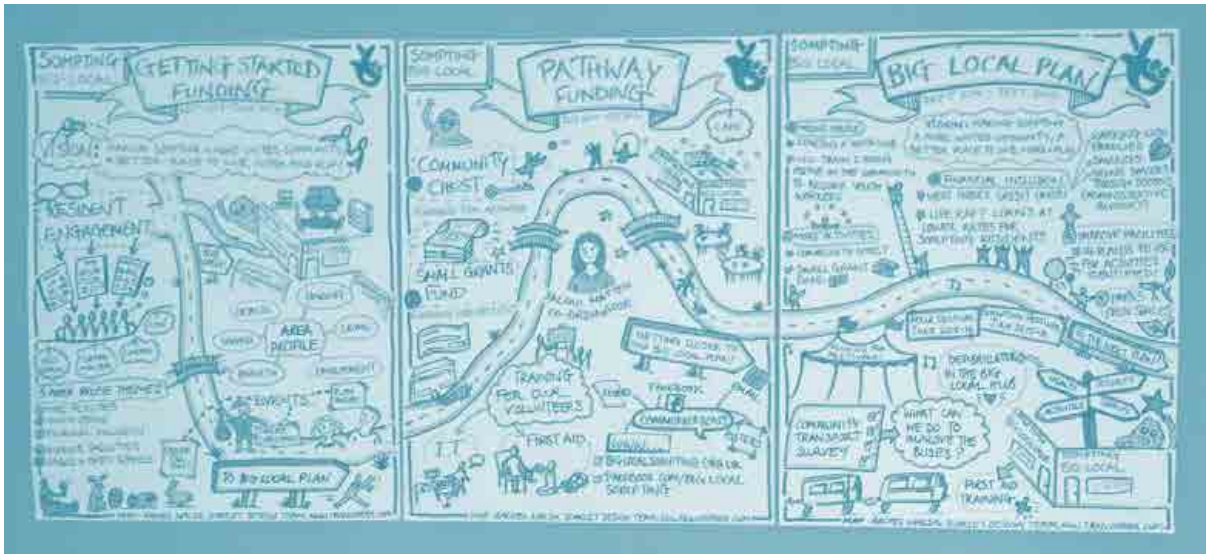
1

Introduction



About Big Local and our early years evaluation

Section 1.1

What is Big Local and what is it trying to achieve? Who is involved and how?

"…(an) investment … to help people in these areas achieve lasting, meaningful change, for their children and generations to come … "
(Big Lottery Fund)

What is Big Local?

Big Local is a national programme offering funding and support for residents in 150 areas across England to make a lasting and positive difference to their communities. Each area has an investment of £1million and at least ten years to use it once they have developed their own local plan. At the heart of what makes Big Local different is the principle that **residents make the decisions** about how the money is used. Minimal requirements are put on how they use it or organise themselves, and support is offered to help them make the changes they feel will make their area an even better place to live.

The programme is funded by Big Lottery Fund and is the Fund's largest ever investment in a community-led regeneration programme. Its long-term **15-year timeframe** is significant. Writing in 2011, Nat Sloane, Big Lottery Fund's England chair**,** explained: "This kind of investment … goes way beyond annual budgetary cycles of local authorities or the parliamentary terms of well-intentioned governments … to help people in these areas achieve lasting, meaningful change, for their children and generations to come."[1]

Another distinctive feature of Big Local is its emphasis on achieving lasting change through **building social capital**. The nature of the changes made in areas will be locally defined, but the shared aspiration across all areas is that the funding and support will build skills, confidence and connections between people and groups, and increase levels of resident choice and control in the longer term. Big Lottery Fund highlighted this aspiration clearly at the programme's launch in 2010, along with its commitment to creating a programme **focused on communities' assets, not deficits**. Local Trust, the organisation that manages the programme on behalf of Big Lottery Fund, reiterated its commitment to these aspirations when it took over: "it is about bringing together all the local talents, ambitions, skills and energy from individuals, groups and organisations who want to make their area an even better place to live … giving them the power, confidence and ability to build a community capable not only of spending cash but securing more in the future."[2]

Local Trust, an incorporated charity, was set up in 2012 to manage Big Local.[3] In the programme's early years Local Trust has worked with seven delivery partners – Renaisi; the National Association of Neighbourhood Management; UnLtd – the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs; Small Change; Capacity Global (now known as Living Space Project); the Institute for Voluntary Action Research; and the Community Development Foundation; with investment management support from CCLA.[4]

Big Local has four core outcomes. At the start of the programme Big Lottery Fund expected that areas would focus on achieving outcomes three and four, while partners would, "support their aspirations and in doing so, work towards the first two outcomes".[5]

1. Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them
2. People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future[6]
3. The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises
4. People will feel that their area is an even better place to live

About Big Local areas

A phased approach was taken to identifying and agreeing the 150 Big Local areas with three waves of 50 areas being brought on stream in July 2010, February 2012 and December 2012. The 150 areas were selected by Big Lottery Fund using a set of criteria that considered:

- **level of disadvantage** – this varied but included high levels of poverty or unemployment; crime/fear of crime; tension between communities; poor qualification levels; ill health; feelings of isolation; badly-kept public space; poor access to services/ facilities; young people with little to do; and older people afraid or unable to go out.[7]
- **previously overlooked for funding and investment** – at the launch of the programme the areas were described as "forgotten communities" with community spirit and potential hampered by people feeling disenfranchised, lacking confidence or skills, mistrustful of statutory bodies and/or having low morale, "so that even where money has been previously targeted to help, it hasn't made the difference hoped."[8]
- **population levels –** Big Local areas were to be small areas where efforts could be targeted at a very local, community level. The final 150 areas have a population size that ranges from 1,577 to 17,300, with a median average of 6,800. The majority (90) have between 3,000 and 8,000 residents.[9]
- **an initial level of local support** – there needed to be a level of local support and 'buy in' from the local statutory and voluntary sector not just to receiving the money but to the programme principles. This was established through exploratory meetings and discussions between Big Lottery Fund and local stakeholders between 2009 and 2011.
- **location and 'type' of area** – as well as wanting a spread of areas across and within regions, there was an interest in ensuring that areas might have some distinctive variations so that different factors might be considered when understanding what works, where, and in what circumstances. Areas therefore cover all English regions and range from rural villages to former coalmining towns, and from inner city estates to poorly-served suburban communities and coastal resorts. Some 89% (134) can be broadly classed as urban and 11% (16) as rural towns or villages.

Establishing the programme 2010-12

Following a tendering process through 2010-11, in July 2011 Big Lottery Fund appointed the Community Development Foundation and a consortium of partners to start to deliver the Big Local programme and to establish a new organisation called Local Trust which would be the corporate trustee of the Big Local Trust (the programme fund, worth around £215 million at the point at which Local Trust took over). Local Trust was established in November 2011, and took on management of the programme from the Community Development Foundation in March 2012. The Big Local Trust was established between the Big Lottery Fund and Local Trust in February 2012.

Figure 1: Early years timeline

July 10-June 11	July 11-March 12		April 12-March 13	April 13–March 14
	Jul–Nov 11	Nov 11-Mar 12		
Big Lottery Fund announces and manages Big Local whilst tendering for a consortium to develop it long-term. First 50 areas announced in July 2010.	Consortium appointed to establish and deliver the programme and to create Local Trust.	Local Trust and Big Local Trust established and handover takes place. Second 50 Big Local areas announced in February 2012.	Local Trust's first year of managing Big Local. Third group of 50 areas announced in December 2012.	Local Trust's second year. The first year that all 150 areas accessed funding for their activities.

During the "transitioning" period of July 2011-March 2012 the Community Development Foundation and then Local Trust and their consortium partners were involved in: taking over support of the first 50 areas from Big Lottery Fund staff; developing the programme infrastructure and support systems, a learning programme, communications and a website; addressing all the legal and technical matters linked to developing Local Trust as a legally incorporated organisation; and planning ahead to meet the needs of the next 100 areas.

There was much to develop during this period at the same time as keeping pace with the needs of a cohort of 50 areas already starting on their Big Local journeys. The challenge of this period was neatly summed up in a review of programme learning conducted in 2013 which likened parts of the evolution of Big Local to a scene in a Wallace and Gromit film ('The Wrong Trousers') where the characters were laying down the track even as their train was moving along it![10] Understanding a little about this early period is helpful in part to put in context the experience of areas from the first Big Local 'wave'. These areas were announced in July 2010, able to draw down £10,000 of funding from the Big Lottery Fund to get them started in December, and then received support from three different programme teams (Big Lottery Fund, the Community Development Foundation and then Local Trust) in their first two years. Though this was a demanding time, the shape of programme support for areas was quickly established, with partner responsibilities broadly as follows (though partners cross over and contribute to different elements of the programme at different times).

Figure 2: Partner contributions to the programme*

Core support	Strategic learning	Thematic support
• Local Trust [programme management]	• Institute for Voluntary Action Research	• Living Space Project [environment and equalities]
• Renaisi [network of Big Local reps]	• Community Development Foundation	• Small Change [social investment]
• NANM [learning and networking]		• UnLtd [social enterprise]

** Note: see also Appendix 1: Big Local delivery partners profile*

Expectations of national delivery partners

Objectives

There are five core programme objectives linked to the provision of support to areas.

1. To make Big Local funding available and accessible to Big Local areas including distributing, administering and monitoring funds
2. To provide a menu of support to enable areas to set up and manage Big Local including local support through Big Local reps; programme guidance and resources; and access to national programme staff for advice/troubleshooting
3. To provide support and resources to enable areas to build locally-driven social investment and enterprise
4. To provide opportunities for networking, learning and peer support across areas
5. To provide opportunities for people in Big Local areas to develop their skills and knowledge including through training and in-depth pilot projects

Achievement of these 'programme support' objectives is the responsibility of Local Trust and their delivery partners who engage directly with areas. (Local Trust has a set of other objectives linked to strategic learning, policy influencing, programme management, communications and governance, and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research and Community Development Foundation's objectives fall within the sphere of strategic learning rather than programme support, by which we mean direct support for areas.)

Principles and values

The Big Local approach is based on the evaluative evidence base about programme efficacy in community development and community-led regeneration, which increasingly links effectiveness and impact with flexible, long-term and locally determined programmes, and identifies a number of contributory factors to the failure of some past programmes. These factors include - not giving sufficient control to the community; having too many requirements of programme participants/beneficiaries; and/or being risk averse or unable to accommodate uncertainty and accept that not everything will work.[11] This evidence helped shape some key Big Local values, including:

Support should be light touch and enabling	The pace should be set locally
Starting point should be assets, not deficits	There should be a willingness to take risks

Expectations of Big Local areas

Objectives

In the programme's early years, areas are supported to focus on the following objectives.

1. To build the foundations for Big Local and get things started – to spread the word and start a conversation; to get people and organisations involved; to establish a local steering group; to identify people's hopes for the future and to create a profile of their Big Local area
2. To form an inclusive and accountable local partnership* to guide the direction of Big Local and ensure that a range of residents are involved
3. To create a Big Local plan that moves the area from varied visions to a shared long-term vision and plan for using the £1million investment in the local area[12]
4. To deliver the agreed Big Local plan – working together to address the identified local needs and priorities, but with flexibility to respond to changes and opportunities
5. To collect evidence of progress and impact and to review the Big Local Plan and partnership annually to enable learning and adapting as necessary

These objectives are not expressed by the programme as objectives in this way, but as seven steps on a Big Local "pathway". We have combined the first two pathway steps (getting people involved and developing a vision), and the last two (collecting evidence and conducting reviews) for ease of analysis of data for our study but have taken care not to lose the sense of the core expectations of areas. There is considerable freedom for areas to move differently and at their own pace through the pathway, but all are expected to address these core objectives.

Principles and values

The programme allows flexibility on how outcomes can be achieved, but there are core values intended to underpin how all areas work. These were initially laid out in the statement of wishes from the Big Lottery Fund in their Trust Deed13, and have since been translated into guidance for areas (though areas are encouraged to agree their own values when they formalise their partnership and develop their plans). Local Trust expects all areas will try to manage and deliver their Big Local in a way that is: **resident led, inclusive and accountable**; and that they will seek to **maximise the long-term benefits** that can be achieved from the investment – including by being open to different ways of resourcing and delivering activities.

note – an initial steering group over time establishes a partnership that Local Trust then endorses as the group of local residents, groups and organisations leading on making Big Local happen in an area. In our report we use "steering group / partnership" to refer to the group leading work in an area except (a) where we know which it is, or (b) describing our fieldwork activities where we use "partnership members survey" or "partnership review activity" for ease, though activities were open to both partnerships and steering groups.

Section 1.2

What questions have we asked in our evaluation and how have we tried to answer them? Who took part and how?

"we want you to tell us how it is … warts and all … we want you to challenge us wherever you think we need to be challenged." (Local Trust chief executive)

Our task and key questions

Our evaluation partnership was commissioned by Local Trust to conduct an independent evaluation of Big Local between May and November 2014. Our team brought together researchers from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and the Office for Public Management (OPM). We had four main goals and, following initial scoping workshops and interviews with Local Trust and delivery partners, we prioritised ten key questions.

❶ To describe and assess the programme's progress

1. What support has been delivered nationally and to whom, and how do areas feel about the support they receive?
2. What has been achieved locally and how do areas feel about their progress?
3. What issues and challenges have affected progress to date?
4. How far is Big Local developing as a genuinely resident-led programme?

❷ To identify outcomes being achieved in Big Local areas

5. To what extent are the programme's core outcomes being achieved? What changes can we identify in confidence and connections, knowledge and skills?
6. To what extent are communities making a difference to the needs they have prioritised – what is changing in Big Local areas?

❸ To assess the value and impact of Big Local's approach

7. How effective has the programme's approach been - what part has the programme's support played in local progress?
8. What has been the particular value of the programme's resident-led and light touch principles?

❹ To identify learning that could inform future support

9. What have Local Trust and its national partners learnt about the support needs of areas, the challenges of offering support, and how needs are best met?
10. Are there ways the programme's support could be improved? What other kinds of support might be needed?

Our activities

We designed a multi-method evaluation combining analysis and synthesis of some of the wealth of programme data and secondary research already undertaken by and/or on behalf of the programme's various partners, and an ambitious fieldwork programme involving surveys, interviews, observation visits and participatory workshops in areas.

Our choice of methods was shaped by considerations including: a desire to reflect Big Local's values (adopting a 'light touch' and empowering approach for local participants); to make the best possible use of available data as a way to respect the time and prior work of stakeholders and fellow researchers; to add value - so our priorities were shaped in part by gaps identified by previous research (ie, an exploration of outcomes and hearing from residents directly how they feel about Big Local and their Big Local journeys[14]); and to deliver activities that would be useful and engaging for those taking part as well as providing valuable information for us in relation to our evaluation questions.

Our evaluation began in April of this year with a month of scoping, desk research and introductory workshops. During this period we refined our evaluation questions with Local Trust and other Big Local stakeholders. We agreed an ambitious fieldwork programme for June to September. This contained seven different data collection activities.

Workstream 1 – Desk research

- A desktop review of available data which involved analysing and synthesising data from more than 50 sources

Workstream 2 – Fieldwork to engage with Big Local areas directly

- A survey of steering group/partnership members
- A group review and reporting activity for steering groups/partnerships
- Workshops with a small sample of areas (ten) who had developed their Big Local plans
- Case studies based on interviews and fieldwork visits

Workstream 3 – Fieldwork to engage with other programme stakeholders

- An online survey of Big Local reps
- Two workshop activities to gather the perspectives of Big Local delivery partners.

In total across our different methods we engaged with almost 400 stakeholders from 90 Big Local areas as well as a sample of Big Local reps who between them were currently working alongside 86 areas. We provide more information about our fieldwork activities and engagement in Figure 3 below. (Full details of our methodology, sample and data analysis processes are included as Appendix 2 and full standalone reports are available from Local Trust for both our surveys.)

Figure 3: Fieldwork activities

Activity	Description	People	Areas
Survey	• Questionnaire for steering group/partnership members • Distribution online and on paper • Focused on outcomes, satisfaction with support and resident-control • Open to all steering groups/partnerships	236	66
Group Review	• A ten-point poster template/group exercise • Distribution by post for self-evaluation use • Focused on learning and outcomes • Open to all steering groups/partnerships	175	35
Workshop	• A 2-3 hour facilitated evaluation workshop • Discussion, review tool for self-assessment of progress and outcomes • Focused on outcomes planning and assessment • Targeted at areas with plans in place	63	10
Case studies	• Development of ten case studies based on interviews and fieldwork /observation visits • Focused on learning and outcomes • Purposive sampling - thematically driven	27	10
Reps survey	• An online survey using SNAP software • High proportion of open questions • Focused on exploring programme concepts and values as well as learning and outcomes • Open to all reps to take part (optional)	37	86

The scope of this report

This report covers the period to end of June 2014. Where changes took place during our fieldwork (between June and September), we have referenced these. We have not re-explored the initial set-up period when Big Lottery Fund and then the Community Development Foundation managed Big Local, though some areas reflected on their experience of that time, but it has not been the focus of our study. Our focus has been very much on areas and the systems and support put in place to enable them to deliver at the local level. We have not looked at delivery against wider programme objectives around strategic learning and policy influencing, nor have we attempted to evaluate individual programme partners or individual areas. (Note – we have produced additional evaluation outputs including reports of both our surveys, a set of case studies and a paper for Local Trust on longer-term programme evaluation options.)

2

Findings

Source: poster of Big Local Spring event 2014

About delivering a national programme of support

Section 2.1

Delivering support: What support has been made available to Big Local areas? Has the delivery of support been in line with the programme objectives?

"An exciting opportunity to do something different, it does feel very different …" (Big Local delivery partner)

What's different about the Big Local approach?

Before we describe what support has been delivered as part of the national Big Local programme, we lay out in a little more detail some of the rationale behind the Big Local approach; and the ethos behind the way support is offered to areas.

Local Trust and its partners work collaboratively to deliver on the core programme objectives and to help areas build capacity and set and achieve their own goals for making their areas even better places to live. A number of core elements of the programme's operation make it different to more usual grants programmes. First, the funding has already been allocated to the 150 areas so the relationship between Local Trust and the areas, and the local organisations who hold the funding for the areas, is slightly different than one where organisations or individuals would apply for funding and then when awarded it, commence a funder/grantee relationship. Local Trust is more akin to the custodian of the areas' investment – which puts the relationship on a different footing.

Where many programmes would involve a set menu of support options, Local Trust aims to offer a menu of support options with as much flexibility as possible and as responsive to areas' needs as possible. The support has been variously described as "bottom up, not top down", "on tap not on top", and most commonly, "light touch and enabling". Essentially this means an approach that is:

- **light touch and flexible** (having minimal requirements, deadlines, rules or regulations. This also includes the idea of a ceiling on the amount of face-to-face support time available so as to avoid dependency on a Big Local rep allocated to guide the area through parts of its journey)
- **bottom up not top down** (led by what residents and communities identify)
- **asset-based** (seeks to appreciate, value and maximise areas' assets)
- **willing to take risks** (open to trying new things, taking risks and learning).

The key assumption behind this different way of working is that it will contribute to different (enhanced) results in the longer-term. That is, these principles will help Local Trust:

- ensure the programme is truly resident-led (by avoiding dependency and taking an enabling instead of directive approach)
- increase local capacity and achieve other core outcomes (by adopting an enabling approach)
- enable more innovation, risk taking and learning (by offering freedoms and flexibilities and opportunities for peer learning and support and adopting the attitude that learning matters as much as "getting things right")
- increase the likelihood of any change being lasting and sustainable as areas take the time they need and make their own decisions about how to tackle identified needs.[15]

Understanding these principles and ***how*** Big Local delivers support provides important context for the description that now follows of ***what*** has been delivered.

Making funds available and accessible to areas

The programme has made funding available for Big Local areas through a number of grants linked to the seven-step Big Local pathway. Three of these are additional to the £1million funding that is allocated to areas.

The first available pot of funding is a 'Getting Started' grant of £20,000. Known as 'Getting People Involved' funding for wave 1 areas[16], this money is intended to enable areas to do the groundwork, engagement and visioning involved in the first three pathway steps. The second is a £2,000 grant for creating a Big Local Plan (step 4 on the pathway). Recognising that it can take some time for areas to finalise their plans, in 2012 Local Trust introduced a further option enabling areas to draw up to £18,000 from their £1million to maintain momentum while they develop their plan ('Pathway' funding).

Once a plan is endorsed areas can access their £1million, known as their Big Local Plan funding. This funding is released over time in phases linked to annual monitoring and reporting processes. The £1million comes with an additional 5% of total annual spend to cover partnership running costs and grant administration in local areas. This additional sum is paid to local organisations trusted and selected by residents to support their local steering group or Big Local partnership.[17] Areas can also apply for a "Marketplace" grant of up to £2,250 a year once their plan is agreed. The marketplace grant is for training or support which may not have been anticipated or budgeted for. Additional funding is held nationally to support residents to take part in programme activities such as learning events.

When talking about allocations or awards of funding within Big Local, there is an important difference to the way grant funding programmes would usually operate. Unlike many funder/grantee relationships, in Big Local the role of Local Trust is not to approve funding - Big Local areas' funding (that is, the £1million) has already been awarded - but to make the funding accessible to the areas. The systems put in place are therefore not to approve applications for funding but to enable areas to draw down their funding as needed – hence Local Trust use the term 'endorsement' when talking about proposals, partnerships or plans, because it is an endorsement not approval process that takes place in regards to making funding available.

FINDING 1: MONEY MADE AVAILABLE TO LOCAL AREAS TO DATE

More than £9million has been allocated as grants directly to Big Local areas, through Local Trust, with all 150 areas accessing at least one of the programme's various funding pots. Just over half of the areas (77) have started to use some of their £1million, and so far these areas have earmarked or spent some £6.8million between them.

Between February 2012 and June 2014, funding had been allocated to local areas as follows:

- 100 areas had accessed Getting Started funding to the value of £1.9million*
- 64 areas had accessed Pathway funding to the value of £0.9million
- 68 areas had accessed Creating Plan money to the value of £0.1million
- 47 areas had accessed Big Local Plan funding to the value of £5.8million
- 2 areas had accessed Marketplace grants to the value of £3,540.

* Note – in fact all 150 areas have accessed Getting Started funding since the start of Big Local if we consider also the time prior to Local Trust taking over programme delivery.

FINDING 2: THE PROPORTION OF THE BUDGET SPENT ON AREAS

The funding going directly to local areas represents more than 90% of the programme's overall annual spend. While around 91% supports local areas directly, the remaining 9% is spent on programme management and learning.

As Figure 4 illustrates, by far the largest proportion of programme funding is allocated to the funding 'streams' above and goes to local areas. This will remain the case as the programme develops as the anticipated annual budget for the next four years is profiled to remain at around 91% to local areas, 7% for support costs and 2% for strategic learning activities.[18]

Figure 4: funding Big Local areas	**2012-13**	**2013-14**
Grants directly to areas	£3.7m	£7.4m
Area delivery costs	£1.7m	£2.0m
Programme development and learning	£0.4m	£0.4m
Support costs	£0.3m	£0.2m
Total	**£6.4m**	**£10.7m**

[Source: Local Trust annual accounts]

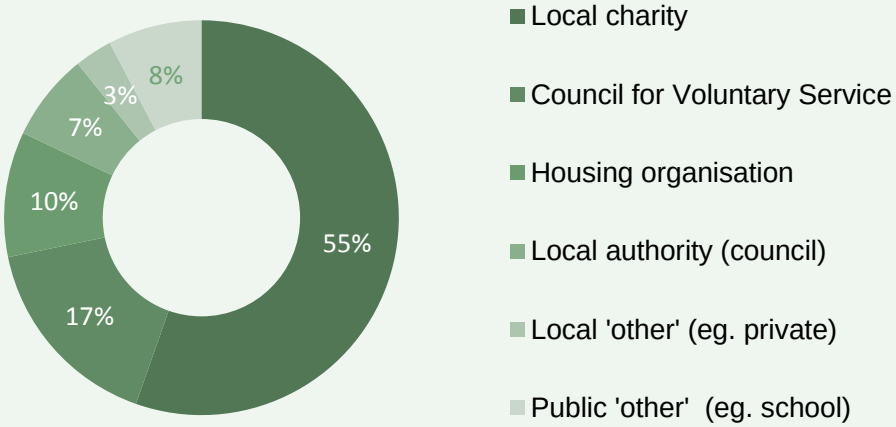
FINDING 3: HOW MONEY IS MANAGED LOCALLY

To reduce the burden of financial management on residents, Local Trust has put in place a grant monitoring and reporting system whereby a locally trusted organisation nominated by residents, administers their funding. Local Trust currently manages this funding relationship with more than 150 organisations, mostly local charities.

Local Trust has put in place an online system for local reporting on activities and expenditure. It has sought to ensure residents remain in control of their funding, but without the burden of financial management, by requiring reporting not from residents but from locally trusted organisations.[19] These are organisations residents choose to take responsibility for the financial management of their Big Local money. Local Trust enters into an agreement with locally trusted organisations and they then take responsibility for making the funds available as needed in the Big Local area. Decisions about how funding is spent locally are still made by a resident-led Big Local steering group/partnership and not by the locally trusted organisation.

Locally trusted organisations are supported through a pot of money made available in addition to the £1million areas can access. The 5% contribution to grant and partnership support goes to locally trusted organisations although many areas ask (and fund) their locally trusted organisations to do more than just administer their funding. Big Local steering groups/partnerships say they select their locally trusted organisation based on several criteria as well as relevant financial management experience, including track record, connections, level of trust, location and independence.[20] Local Trust offers advice on choosing a locally trusted organisation for areas that want it and can stand in as a locally trusted organisation if no suitable organisation can be found locally. It currently does this for four areas. As Figure 5 shows, in 2013 the majority of locally trusted organisations administering funds locally (72%) were local charities or Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS).

Figure 5: Locally trusted organisations



[Source: Institute for Voluntary Action Research, 2014 - based on 144 locally trusted organisations in 2013]

Supporting areas to manage their Big Local

The main source of support made available to areas is the allocation of a Big Local representative (Big Local rep).

FINDING 4: SUPPORT OFFERED IN AREAS – BIG LOCAL REPS

Renaisi and Local Trust have recruited, inducted and trained more than 80 Big Local reps, who offer around 15 days of support to areas as they get started, and around a day a month once they have submitted their plan. The support from reps is primarily focused on residents who are getting involved and on the resident-led steering group/partnership as it develops, though it can also involve working alongside a wide range of other local stakeholders.

Renaisi and Local Trust have between them recruited, trained and now manage and support a pool of reps who can work with anything from one to four areas at any one time, though this has on occasion gone up to five areas. They are a core source of support for areas, the face of Local Trust and the 'custodian of Big Local values' in areas. They are subcontracted to Local Trust and managed by Renaisi. Their role is most akin to an enabler or facilitator – it is described as, "to help areas achieve their vision for their Big Local area through support, advice and appropriate challenge." As well as supporting residents and steering groups/partnerships in Big Local areas, they also provide an important feedback loop for the programme. They report back to Renaisi and Local Trust on area progress and other issues on a quarterly basis using an online reporting system.

Each area receives around 15 days rep support to help them get started and to take them through the steps up to creating their Big Local Plan, additional days to support them while they develop their plan, and then once their plan is approved and they start delivering activities using their £1million, rep support drops to between 5-15 days a year. Their assignments are, however, based on the achievement of certain outcomes rather than identifying a set number of days. Current reps report that once the Plan is in place their support tends to average at about a day a month. In the first instance areas are allocated a rep, but they can choose to change their rep once their partnership and/or plan is endorsed. However, a change of rep might also happen before those points for a range of reasons, including if the rep is moving on.

The expectation is that reps would offer around 15 days support during the first part of an area's journey. The recommended ceiling of 15 days is put in place in part to avoid areas becoming dependent on the rep, or misconstruing the nature of their role. Some reps acknowledge that they have felt it necessary to deliver more than 15 days. In our reps survey we asked an open question about local expectations of their role, and in response 17 (about half the sample) mentioned that in some areas they felt that they needed to give more time than originally intended. This was confirmed in feedback from some local chairs in monitoring reports submitted at the end of their first tranche of funding.[21] It is clear that some flexibility has been needed in the delivery of the role as areas have got started.

FINDING 5: WHAT SHAPES THE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY REPS

How reps work with areas, and the amount and type of support they offer, is shaped by a number of factors, including local circumstances and preferences; the stage of the area's journey along the Big Local pathway; how smoothly areas are progressing and the extent to which they are facing challenges; and the relationship between the rep and the chair or other steering group/partnership members. Flexibility has been needed in the delivery of the role.

Reps manage their time very flexibly and we found differences in the kind and level of contact they have with areas. It proved difficult to see patterns in the amount of support offered at different stages of area journeys as the current monitoring profiles reps' days in terms of the average number of days given to areas in a particular wave (waves 1, 2 or 3). The following factors seemed significant determinants of how much support a rep offers:

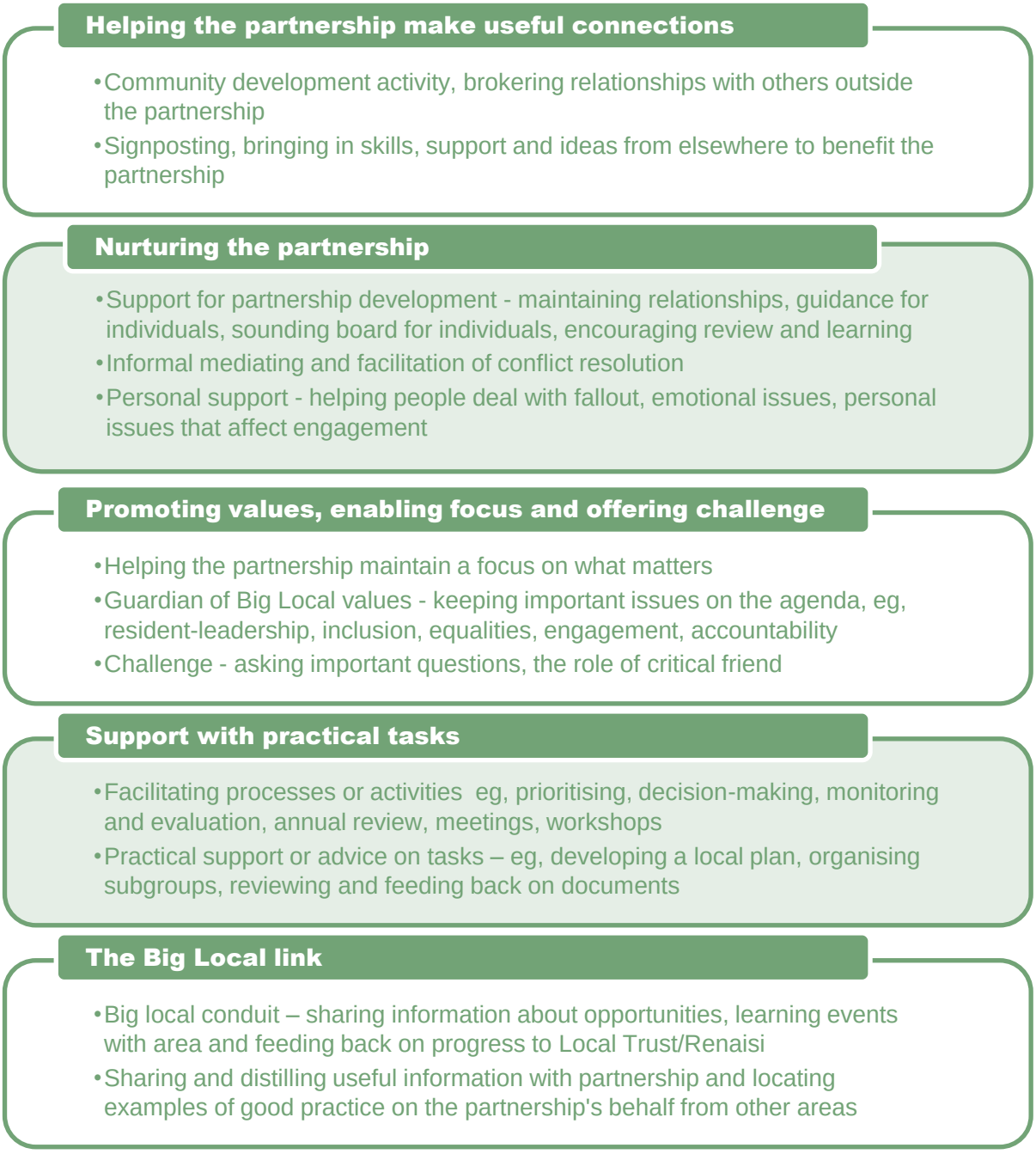
- **what an area is doing**: Reps report being more actively involved at times when areas are submitting proposals for endorsement, developing their plan, organising significant events, or trying something new where they may need extra advice or reassurance.
- **how smoothly things are running**: A rep often plays a key role in offering more hands-on support if an area hits a problem and needs to find a resolution.
- **the preferences and expectations of areas**: Areas have different ways they want to work and different expectations of reps. It is clear that reps also bring their own skills, preferences and working styles to the role and this too is a factor in how rep support plays out in the local area.
- **the relationship between the rep and those involved locally**: In some areas a clear rapport and closeness develops between the rep and members of the local steering group / partnership over time which can draw the rep into offering 'softer' and less practical but equally important emotional support (eg, encouragement, reassurance, or advice aimed at supporting an individual or group to reflect on their behaviour or communication style and its impact on others). These kinds of interventions happen as relationships of trust are built.

FINDING 6: THE TYPES OF SUPPORT OFFERED BY REPS

Between them reps bring significant relevant knowledge and expertise to the programme for the benefit of local areas. Demands on reps can vary considerably and areas can sometimes have expectations that are not within the scope of the role, or reps themselves may take on tasks that fall outside the usual parameters of the role. Areas can benefit from the flexibility reps bring to the role as well as their expertise, though this same flexibility can lead to a lack of consistency that can be problematic when reps move on and are replaced. Renaisi and Local Trust have put in place a number of processes to better ensure consistency as the programme has developed.

The rep's role is varied and requires a wide range of knowledge and skills including in facilitation, community development, project management, coaching, problem-solving and mediation. Though tasks can vary considerably our analysis suggests that they perform five broad functions:

Figure 6: Common functions of the rep's role



For the most part reps report that local steering groups and partnerships understand the rep's role once explained to them, but it is clear from reps' reporting and from our own online survey of reps (n=37) that occasionally areas will have unrealistic expectations. For instance, while 34 of the reps taking part in our survey felt local groups understand the rep's role, only 28 felt that areas' expectations had mostly been realistic. There are occasions when areas will look to the rep to provide more than is strictly within the role, but

we were also made aware of times when reps themselves will offer more because they feel something different or additional is needed by way of support. Some reps offer more flexibility than others in relation to the role (eg, as regards giving extra time or taking on different tasks). Though largely a positive aspect of the support offered, this flexibility can lead to handover-related issues or areas comparing reps and not being sure they are getting what they want or need when they see things being done differently in other areas or by previous reps they have worked with.

Renaisi and Local Trust have put in place a number of processes to try and establish more consistency across the pool of reps, as well as to provide more general support and networking between reps, including an e-newsletter, networking days (twice a year), an online 'basecamp' site, and a reps self-assessment framework.

FINDING 7: THE ROLE OF LOCALLY TRUSTED ORGANISATIONS

More than 150 locally trusted organisations are now working closely with Big Local steering groups and partnerships. These organisations often have a wider role than grant administration and support for the local group or partnership, for instance they may employ Big Local workers or deliver activities or projects in the community under the Big Local umbrella.

Over and above support from reps, the other source of support available to all areas locally is through the locally trusted organisation. Locally trusted organisations, although a part of the Big Local model and funded using Big Local funds, differ from other elements of the support package. They are chosen locally and the relationship is managed locally but they are also often part of the local delivery structure and an active delivery partner - for instance, they might employ a worker or deliver on specific projects within the area's plan.

The area has choice and flexibility about the relationship with their locally trusted organisation. If they are not happy they can change their locally trusted organisation and indeed this has happened in a number of areas, either through mutual consent where the needs of an area have changed or the working relationship between the steering group/partnership and the organisation has not been working out.

Locally trusted organisations often have a place on local partnerships but they do not generally have a vote within the decision-making. Many are organisations that were involved from the beginning, for instance the council or the local Council for Voluntary Service which might have been consulted right from the early days when Big Lottery Fund was exploring which areas to support through the programme. However, areas often review what kind(s) of locally trusted organisation they need once they have a delivery plan in place and this may affect the profile of locally trusted organisations as the programme develops.

Locally trusted organisations have the potential to be highly influential on how things develop locally. There have been instances where they have been found to have a different understanding of what Big Local is about to that of reps or residents, or different

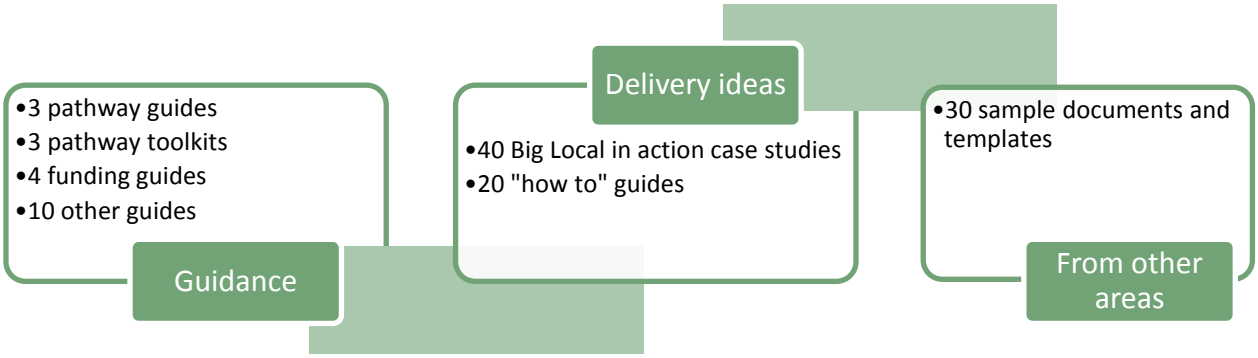
views about what resident-leadership should look like or how to ensure that it happens. In part because they recognised the locally trusted organisation's role as such a key part of the local jigsaw, and in part to ensure clear and consistent messaging about Big Local in areas, Local Trust introduced a locally trusted organisation newsletter in 2014 to strengthen and make more consistent the flow of information from 'the centre' to areas.

FINDING 8: PROVIDING WRITTEN GUIDANCE AND TOOLS

The programme has produced written information for local areas that is intended to be guiding rather than prescriptive; providing a framework of options and ideas rather than a rulebook. The guidance is strongly but not exclusively linked to the seven Big Local pathway steps. This includes over 50 practical guides, toolkits and "how to" resources made available online on a resources page viewed by around 8,000 visitors.

Local Trust and its partners have produced a range of resources (eg, guides, blogs, case studies, sample documents and templates) mainly made available to local steering groups and partnerships either online or via their reps, to help them to become familiar with programme requirements, the pathway, programme values and other core information (by core we mean not themed or topic-based but focused on developing and delivering Big Local in areas, so not including case studies and resources on environment, social investment etc. which we consider separately elsewhere).

Figure 7: Resources produced for areas



The tone of the guidance is practical but not directive, giving options, ideas and examples rather than sets of rules and requirements. Emphasis has been put on bringing guidance to life with practical examples drawn from areas and then shared back with other areas (for instance, the "Start the Conversation" Toolkit contains practical examples and 50 ideas of things to try based on what the first 50 Big Local areas had done to engage local people). Written information has had regard for accessibility issues – with all resources relatively short, kept simple in language and tone and written in plain English, and care has gone into how they look so that they are generally visually appealing and have a strong Big Local identity. The offer is made to provide information in other formats and/or community languages if requested.

Reps, Big Local steering group and partnership members, locally trusted organisations and locally employed workers are primary audiences for these materials but we do not know much about who is using them and how, as there has been no routine monitoring or tracking beyond a count of the number of times some materials have been downloaded.

FINDING 9: HOW THE NATIONAL TEAM ENGAGES WITH AREAS

People in Big Local areas can and do contact the national Local Trust team directly for advice or guidance and the team is also in regular contact with areas to stay abreast of their news and to help them share their learning and their stories. More contact takes place when proposals or plans are submitted for endorsement and if a problem or complaint is brought to the team. With a small team and 150 areas around the country, there is a limit to the direct contact possible and much use is made of online and social media mechanisms to engage and keep people informed.

Though the rep is the main link between Local Trust and areas, anyone involved in Big Local in an area can directly contact Local Trust or one of their partners for advice or guidance on issues relevant to the set-up and management of Big Local, or if they have a problem locally and want to raise a concern either about how things are going or about the support they receive. Areas are also strongly encouraged to get in touch for more 'positive' reasons, for instance if they have stories to tell or ideas to share.

Aside from the more traditional grant management role one would expect from any national programme team, there is a strong emphasis within Local Trust on the contact with local areas being more than a monitoring or management relationship. We identified at least the following activities that engage the team with areas over and above the grant management and monitoring function:

- **keeping areas informed** of opportunities, events, resources (eg, via website, twitter, and a quarterly e-newsletter that reaches more than 3,000 individuals) [22]
- **negotiating or brokering additional support** for areas (eg, in 2014 an offer from BT linked to employee volunteering was promoted to areas)
- **supporting learning and networking** across areas and from outside the programme including an active role in and presence at the Spring networking events organised by the NANM.
- **raising the profile of areas' achievements** (eg, case studies, twitter, Facebook)
- **visiting and supporting area events** as time allows
- **troubleshooting** and working with Renaisi to resolve local complaints.[23]

Much of the team's contact and communication with areas is online (eg, via blogs, twitter and Facebook). There has been a growth in engagement with the programme using social media over time, but possibly only to an extent that would be expected given the growth of the programme (the phased approach with areas coming on in three waves).

Enabling social enterprise and social investment

The key activities linked to enabling locally-led social enterprise and social investment are delivered by UnLtd and Small Change.

Support from UnLtd

UnLtd run a programme called Star People as a part of their Big Local 'offer'. Star people are "individuals with ideas that can improve their area, both big and small, that they are willing to lead" who are then provided with a tailored package of funding and support to help their ideas become a reality.[24] Individuals funded through the programme receive one of three types of grants tiered to suit their goals and their experience: **Try it** (up to £500); **Do it** (up to £5000); and **Build it** (up to £15,000).

Figure 8: Star People Award Structure

Try it	Do it	Build it
• Up to £500 • To test an idea • To develop confidence and entrepreneurial skills	• Up to £5,000 • For exceptional people to start their journeys, building entrepreneurial skills and capacity	• Up to £15,000 • For existing ventures ambitious to grow but not necessarily to national scale

The work of UnLtd is closely tied in to Big Local's asset-based principle in that it is based on the belief that, "people hold the key to the regeneration and vitality of places and local areas – something that cannot be imported or imposed".[25]

FINDING 10: SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE – STAR PEOPLE

The Star People programme, developed to operate alongside other Big Local activities, has supported individuals with enterprising ideas in 110 Big Local areas between 2011 and March 2014. In 34 areas it has worked closely with Star Partners – local organisations who support the Star People programme and other social enterprise initiatives. Since 2011, 532 Star People awards have been made with a total value of more than £1.8 million. In some areas the project has engaged closely with people involved in their Big Local but in some there has been little engagement with the Big Local partnership or others closely involved in Big Local.

Since the programme was launched, more than 532 Star People awards have been made directly by UnLtd or via Star partners. Star Partners have strong links to the Big Local area and are selected to support local delivery by UnLtd on criteria including a demonstrable level of trust from their local community members. Star Partners include entrepreneurs, local businesses and community organisations and can be found in 34 areas. They provide outreach and support and make recommendations about awards to UnLtd.

Figure 9: Star People Awards 2011-2014

	Try it	Do It	Build It	Total
Awards made directly by UnLtd	140	252	25	417
Awards made by Star Partners	58	56	1	115
Total awards made	**198**	**308**	**26**	**532*[26]**
Total value of awards made	**£98,817**	**£1,316,391**	**£390,000**	**£1,833,219**

[source, UnLtd, 2014]

Though numbers have since increased (with more awards made between April and September 2014, taking the total to over 550 awards in 112 areas), we know that at March 2014 there were:

- 40 areas in which there have been no awards at all
- 76 where there have been 1-5 awards made
- 22 where there have been between 6-10 awards.

By the spring of 2014 around half of Big Local areas had at least one **Try it** award holder; almost two-thirds (98) had **Do It** award holders; and 18 had **Build It** award holders. In some of these areas UnLtd worked alongside the Big Local steering group or partnership, or has been in contact with them about award holders in their area, in others this has not been the case. Local Trust and UnLtd have not seen it as essential for UnLtd to work through Big Local partnerships and UnLtd has reported that not doing so has sometimes enabled them to engage more widely and to reach those who might not engage with a programme like Big Local.

Some areas have been easier to work with than others for a range of reasons, and trying to engage with so many areas for the first three years of the programme made considerable demands on UnLtd's capacity (particularly where they encountered areas with less awareness, interest or enthusiasm for taking forward social enterprise activity or with less networks or capacity to support engagement with interested individuals). During our evaluation Local Trust agreed with UnLtd that following a review UnLtd would change its way of working to work more closely with Big Local partnerships and to target resources more intensively in fewer areas. UnLtd therefore announced that it would advertise for and then select up to 15 areas in which to work in more depth from the summer of 2014.

Support from Small Change

Small Change provides information, support and guidance aimed at building knowledge of social investment and local economics in Big Local areas to help residents make more informed choices about the potential contribution of social investment and social enterprise to their Big Local goals.

FINDING 11: SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL INVESTMENT – SMALL CHANGE

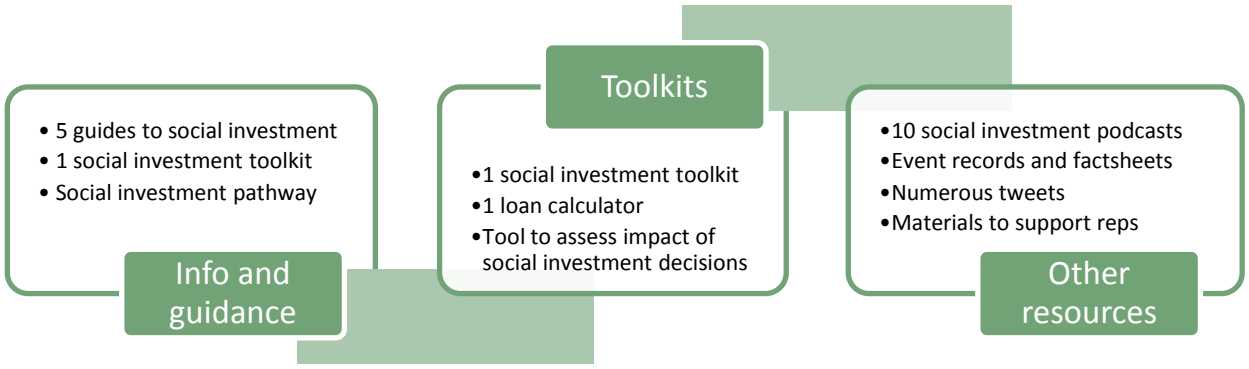
Small Change has made available more than 25 resources of different types to make social investment more accessible for local areas and help them think how they could include it in their plans and/or address financial exclusion and financial capability issues in their area. They have created a pathway for understanding areas' social investment journeys, and recruited and trained 14 Social Investment reps. With the extra capacity offered by having a team of dedicated reps, the project has engaged with 139 Big Local areas, delivered more than 15 events on different social investment topics and wider issues of local economics, and has developed a range of materials to support areas' learning.

The work of Small Change has fallen into three phases:

Providing general information to build awareness and understanding

In 2011-12, the work was mainly about producing user-friendly resources because areas were assessed as 'not quite ready' for more. Though reportedly there were signs that areas were concerned about growing their money the issue was that they did not know where to start and found the topic unfamiliar or daunting. There was not a great awareness at that time of how social investment could contribute to Big Local goals.[27]

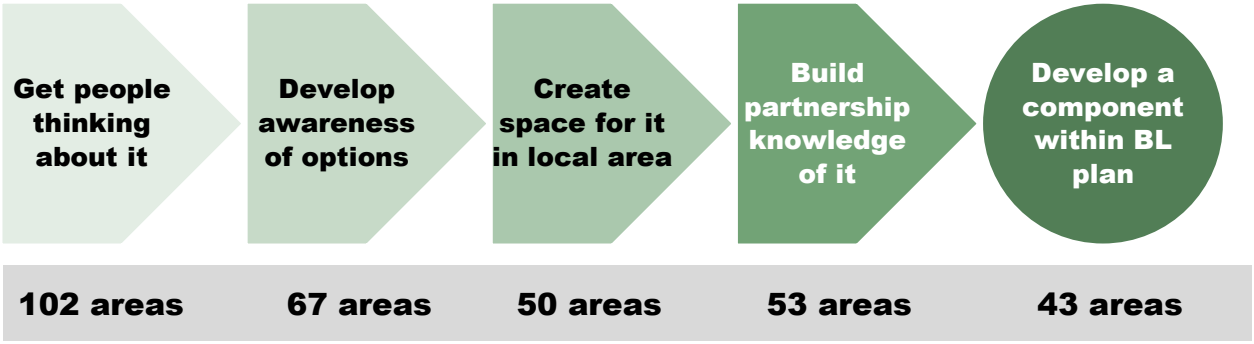
Figure 10: Local economics and social investment resources



More hands-on work brokering links, signposting and advising areas

In 2012-13, the work was more hands-on including facilitating engagement with credit unions and Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs). The work involved some intermediating between areas and CDFIs and credit unions to increase access to credit in Big Local areas and developing CDFI and credit union reporting requirements. Small Change also put in place a social investment pathway for the programme, a way to understand steps that an area might usefully go through to put social investment on the agenda locally, and a framework for offering support. This is shown in Figure 11.

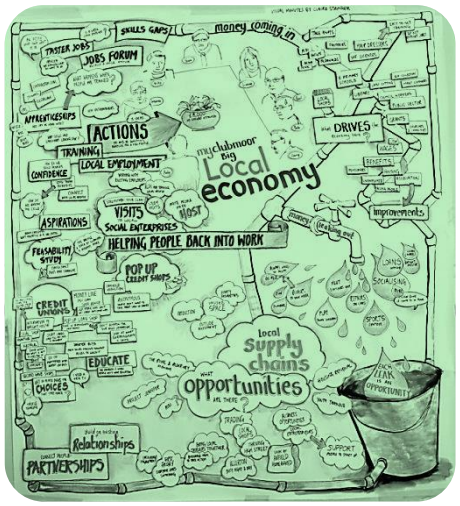
Figure 11: Social investment pathway for Big Local areas



- **Developing a network of social investment reps to disseminate information and engage more areas on economic issues**

In 2013-14, Small Change's development work and support continued to address similar issues with areas and also involved completing a due diligence exercise with a Credit Union (thereby making it possible for a Big Local area to engage with the Credit Union and support it to give out loans under certain circumstances). In addition a new stream of work also got underway with Local Trust and Renaisi to train 14 Big Local reps to become Social Investment reps to support areas to work their way along the Social Investment pathway. These reps have delivered support and advice and 13 of the 14 have also delivered learning events aimed at raising awareness and supporting areas to develop ideas for their plan. Since this team came on board, the amount of information available to areas has increased and there is better intelligence about what areas' support needs are in relation to social investment. Small Change and the reps between them have engaged with 139 areas who have now been assessed (by the reps) as being at the stages of the pathway shown in Figure 11 above.

Aside from social investment support, Small Change and Social Investment reps have also offered support, advice and workshops on wider 'social economy' topics including:



- predatory lending
- financial capability
- financial literacy
- making money stick
- unemployment
- local enterprise
- community asset building
- community energy
- working with credit unions
- access to credit
- fuel poverty.

[Source: Local economy workshop with Clubmoor Big Local, 2014[

Enabling networking, learning and peer support

The National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM) leads on the programme's work to enable networking, learning and peer support via learning events and other learning-focused activities. Over and above the NANM's work, learning opportunities are also created by reps, Local Trust and other partners, though often working in partnership with the NANM.

FINDING 12: NETWORKING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Since 2011 the NANM and national partners have organised 88 learning events around the country in more than 30 different locations. These events have focused on promoting networking, learning and peer support between areas and workshops have often been co-delivered with people from Big Local areas, particularly at Big Local Spring events. We do not know how many individuals have attended in total, but we know that more than 2,000 places have been taken at these events by residents and workers from 145 Big Local areas. The events have all been free and the programme has sought to make them accessible, including by varying the locations and offering to meet the costs of travel, accommodation, childcare or carer expenses for those attending.

In the period July 2011 to June 2014, 88 learning and networking events have been held. The events have been held all around the country and across the regions and have attracted more than 2,000 attendances (ie, at least 2,031 places have been taken). We don't know how many individuals this represents but we do know that 145 Big Local areas have sent residents or workers to these events. Our analysis of those attending between 2011-14 shows that five areas have attended no events at all, half (75 areas) have been represented at between six and 20 events, and three areas at more than 41 events. Support to enable people to attend has included the offer to meet costs of travel, accommodation, or childcare/carer expenses for those interested in attending, and all events have been free.

Figure 12: Attendance at learning events

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	Total
Networking/learning events	10	25	17	-	**52**
Event attendances	154	576	305	-	**1035**
Spring events	*	12	15	9	**36**
Spring event attendances		355	322	319	**996**

* note – in 2011 there was not a spring programme as it now exists but a series of regional summer events. These attracted attendees from 49 of the first 50 areas.

Apart from the first year and transitional period of the programme when there were both launch events and regional handover events, we found otherwise under the general heading of networking and learning events there were actually five 'types' of event: spring events; themed events; visits and buddying; action learning sets; and bespoke events.

Spring events are a highlight of the Big Local calendar and they engage all programme partners and a majority of Big Local areas with anything up to 12 days of networking and events located around the country. These are workshop-based events with a focus on networking and participation, and they provide the main opportunity in the year for those involved in Big Local areas to come together and meet others; find out what is happening in the programme; hear from relevant speakers from within and outside of the programme; showcase their own work; and network and learn together about Big Local and about a range of topics relevant to their activities. To date there has been a strong emphasis on topics linked to the Big Local pathway at these events (eg, plan production, reviewing progress, getting people involved), and on topics that areas were finding challenging or expressing an interest in learning more (eg, engaging more young people or putting social investment on the agenda).

To date the range of topics covered at learning events (including spring events) includes:

- **pathway-related** - getting and keeping people involved, plan-sharing, partnerships
- **buddying/learning sets** – supporting areas to hold buddying visits, chair's role
- **communications** – social media, websites, local media
- **evaluation** – proving it
- **equalities and inclusion** - diversity
- **spaces, places** – environment, housing, open spaces, growing
- **the economy** – sticky money, money matters, unemployment, credit,
- **community assets** – buildings and trusts including study visits

Two other types of peer support and networking activities have also been offered:

Rep-led or area-led networking. These have been local and sub-regional events and workshops facilitated by reps, who can apply to Renaisi / Local Trust for funding to support networking activity across areas. In 2013-14, for instance, 31 such events were initiated and delivered by reps, benefiting more 500 residents.[28] These focused on a wide range of issues from community shops and cafes to participatory budgeting and gave opportunities for sub-regional networking on current topics and concerns for areas.

Virtual networking. Local Trust and partners have produced blogs, YouTube clips, including on a dedicated Big Local YouTube channel, and case studies that have been made available online to further promote peer-to-peer conversations and learning across the programme. Local Trust and partners also stay in touch with areas and encourage areas to stay in touch with each other via Facebook and twitter.

Over the past year, areas have been described as moving "from 'getting started' to 'getting things done'"[29] and as a result there has been discussion about the need to offer learning activities that have more emphasis on skills development. In response to changing needs in areas, Local Trust created specifications to draw commissioned training providers into the mix of support available for areas. In addition Local Trust has developed the "Big Local marketplace" (an online resource of training suppliers and consultants) as a way to support areas to identify and meet their own learning needs. So far little is known about areas' use of the marketplace and only two areas have drawn down marketplace grants to support local learning and development.

Offering more in-depth learning opportunities

FINDING 13: PILOT PROJECTS

Two pilot projects have been offered, focused on the environment and the economy. These have involved two of the national delivery partners offering more in-depth, tailored support in a small number of areas as a way to trial whether this approach would be an effective way to build knowledge and skills. They also provided an opportunity to help areas turn early ideas into realistic plans. Thirteen areas engaged with these pilots and received support and/or training and guidance tailored to their needs. Nine areas engaged with an "environment, space and place" pilot, and four with a "local economy" pilot.

Two pilot projects were launched in 2013 and areas were able to apply to take part. The pilots were intended as a way of offering more in-depth support to help areas develop skills, knowledge and confidence in topics where a need was recognised, but also as a way to help areas develop ideas into deliverable plans. The focus of these pilots was "environment, space and place" and "the local economy". Living Space Project (formerly Capacity Global) ran the former (to June 2014), and UnLtd ran the latter (to September 2014). Both were oversubscribed.

Environment, Space and Place pilot

This project had a target to engage with nine areas on issues relating to the built and natural environment. The offer included advice and information, workshops, and support to generate and firm up ideas for tackling issues around the built and natural environment for inclusion within Big Local plans. Though some support was given (for instance, workshops, providing advice on technical matters such as asset transfer and gifted land, and brokering introductions to other useful contacts or providers) the pilot did not evolve as originally intended and changed over time. Using the time more flexibly than originally intended allowed Living Space Project (formerly Capacity Global) to offer support to a further eight areas via a dedicated helpline.

The Local Economy pilot

UnLtd offered four areas (South Bermondsey, Clubmoor, Boston and Dover Big Local areas) more intensive support through this pilot to help them build local knowledge and to help them "come up with strong ideas around the local economy and enterprise to include … in your Big Local plan and make them happen". There were very different plans in each area, but broadly the work has involved: facilitating opportunities to visit other areas doing similar work and with a similar economy; helping areas understand the local economy and identify opportunities; testing work and ideas; and drawing in other partners.[30]

Final reports on both these pilots were being completed at the time of our evaluation.

Section 2.2

Reflecting on the programme's support: has the support been delivered in line with Big Local's core values, and in particular its "light touch" approach? How have areas engaged with the support that's been offered, and what do they think of it?

"It isn't like any other projects I've been involved with. That's mostly a good thing though. I like the approach … it doesn't make things easy but it does feel like we're really in control …"

(Big Local partnership member)

Delivering support with a 'light touch' approach

FINDING 14: COMMITMENT TO A LIGHT TOUCH APPROACH

There is a strong commitment from the national partners to offering 'light touch' support; enabling rather than directive, and light in terms of the level and type of demands placed on local residents. The programme has put in place systems, processes and a way of working that strongly reflect its light touch ethos. It is a major part of what people feel is different about Big Local but it is also an aspect that both those delivering support, and those receiving it, find challenging at times.

As well as exploring *what* support has been delivered to areas we wanted to assess *how* it has been delivered – particularly if it has been, as intended, 'light touch'. There is a strong commitment on paper to offering 'light touch' support; support that is *enabling* rather than directive; *flexible* rather than rigid; and *non-bureaucratic* – light in terms of the level and type of demands it makes of local areas. This is in part about empowerment and choice for local areas - to ensure that local activities are driven locally and not restricted or shaped by systems or support put in place nationally, and in part in recognition that this is largely a programme driven by people in local areas giving their time unpaid, and as such there is a desire to respect people's input by ensuring that additional demands on their time over and above what they deliver locally should be minimal.

We identified differing ideas of what light touch means in practice and when we asked Big Local reps in our survey to describe what was light touch about the programme's support, this elicited a wide range of responses. However, they most frequently mentioned:

- a clear and limited role for reps
- areas having the freedom to make their own decisions/choose their own approach
- having minimal rules and regulations and reporting requirements
- ensuring areas are free of time pressure
- little or no interference from 'the centre' (no interference rather than no contact).

This tallies with what emerged during our discussions and workshops with Local Trust and national partners and helped us identify a number of core elements that seem to have been considered when developing the programme's 'light touch' approach.

- **rules and regulations** - the minimal nature of these, lack of deadlines, etc
- **support and guidance** - the type and nature of support, and how it is delivered
- **systems and processes** - keeping these simple and minimal
- **culture and attitudes** - learning matters and accepting that not everything will work.

We considered each of these aspects when trying to assess how far the programme has delivered in line with its light touch ethos.

Rules and requirements

- **Flexible and imposing few requirements**. There is considerable flexibility as regards what areas can do and how they do it and with regards to governance and management arrangements (provided areas follow some basic principles around good practice, legality, probity and accountability). This flexibility is reflected in the provision of guidance and frameworks rather than rulebooks and fixed templates. The pathway, for instance, is emphasised not as a set of instructions but as a guide. There is also flexibility as regards to funding, which means that when funding is released to areas there is the flexibility for movement across budgets so that funds can be drawn down and used as the area needs and in the timescale that makes sense for them, and this can be changed through phone and email contact (without additional paperwork).
- **Flexible processes for endorsing plans, partnerships and proposals.** When a Big Local plan is submitted, the assessment process is light touch. It always includes a visit so that areas can put a face to the name and get to know the person who is looking at their plan. If changes are felt necessary to the plan after its initial submission, Local Trust staff write-up the changes and details in the notes so that areas don't have to submit more paperwork. In addition endorsement can be phased so that areas can move forward with some elements of a plan while still refining others.
- **A locally-set pace** is a key principle and in keeping with this there is only one programme deadline set for local areas (that is, for submission of a plan, with the deadline put in place in order for areas to have ten years to deliver on it).

> *"a helpful absence of fixed outcomes, targets, deadlines, timescales, etc." (Big Local rep)*

> *"I think the light touch approach has been very clearly defined and understood from day one … areas have been given genuine freedom in how they develop, how they structure themselves and the ideas they pursue. To put it another way, so far Big Local seems to be the opposite of 'one size fits all'." (Big Local rep)*

Guidance and support

- **Minimal interference from the centre**. Local Trust sees itself as setting the overall tone and approach for Big Local and being there for reassurance and if things go wrong but otherwise at a bit of a distance – operating with a degree of trust, and only getting involved, and then still with a light touch, if needed.
- **The amount of support**. Reps have a fixed outcome-based assignment, which does not set a number of days or hours the rep has to work with the area to achieve the outcomes. This helps ensure areas do not become too dependent on their input.
- **The enabling, capacity-building approach of the reps**. The brief given to reps embodies the light touch approach. It focuses reps on enabling and challenge,

and is clear about their not directing or leading residents in any given direction and nor is it about being the worker for an area. The flexibility of reps adds to the light touch element as they respond to what is needed locally within the broad remit of the role. Where it works well reps offer support that enables areas to define and work towards their own goals and find their own solutions to local needs and to any issues and challenges that arise during the course of their journey.

"We're there to be supportive but not to direct decision-making … areas are encouraged to make their own judgements." (Big Local rep)

"It (being light touch) is clear in the limited role and hours available for us to support and advise people in the local area" (Big Local rep)

"I've started calling it the 'just enough' programme. Just enough money to get started, just enough support from the reps and Local Trust/Renaisi." (Big Local rep)

Systems and processes

- **Reporting requirements** are light and all forms include questions about learning as well as performance. There is a sense that if an area doesn't achieve something they need not worry overly that this will lead to sanctions. Issues where Local Trust or reps are more likely to get involved would be where there is a sense an area is not working in line with Big Local values rather than where it is not achieving the goals that they have set themselves.

- **Having reporting done by locally trusted organisations and by reps and not by residents.** The systems are kept relatively non-bureaucratic and as few and as simple as possible with paperwork produced in plain English.

"lack of paperwork and monitoring – it's good that local partnerships/ residents do not have to complete reams of reports/returns. The feedback comes through the rep." (Big Local rep)

Culture and attitudes

- **Wanting areas to succeed.** The Local Trust team work in a way that emphasises checking in with areas rather than checking up on them, aiming to be approachable and supportive, in line with the programme's enabling ethos.

- **Messaging is strong across partners that learning matters** and that areas can take risks, can make mistakes, and it's OK if something doesn't work.

"More flexible and forgiving" (Big Local rep)

"You do feel like we're all learning and there's a genuine interest in what's not working as well as what is and that comes across. There is a light touch that's about there not being anything punitive like you might see with other programmes." (Big Local rep)

Local Trust and partners feel strongly that what they are trying to do with Big Local is different. In our workshops with Local Trust staff and national partners it was clear that much thought has gone into how to adopt an enabling approach and make it work with the available budget. Reps, who between them have considerable experience of different community and neighbourhood programmes, feel strongly that the programme is trying to be light touch and though describing this as a challenge to deliver on the ground, nonetheless see this as one of the programme's strengths.

> *"other programmes may talk about being resident led but the criteria work against this, eg, timescales, too directive, etc. Also they are normally run by risk averse … officers who don't ultimately have enough trust in people to let them get on with things in the way that Big Local has … (with) reps who must operate in a light touch way". (Big Local rep)*

FINDING 15: THE CHALLENGES OF THE LIGHT TOUCH APPROACH

The 'light touch' approach of the programme, though broadly welcomed by areas, brings with it a number of challenges. These include some lack of understanding of the approach and why it is being adopted; a desire for more than light touch support and guidance in some areas; and a need to balance a light touch with robust processes for monitoring, accountability and risk management. There is also a particular set of challenges for reps as those on the 'frontline' of engaging with local areas in a light touch way. These challenges raise important questions about the light touch approach, including: are there times when 'light touch' may not be enough, or when it could seem counter-productive or not in an area's best interests to remain light touch?

Though a light touch approach underpins the programme's delivery of support and its systems both on paper and in practice, we found that implementing light touch support brought with it a number of challenges.

Lack of understanding of the light touch approach

The light touch approach of the programme is not universally well understood across areas. This is particularly the case in areas where there may be some tensions about how much support people feel they need or feel should be available – there can be a mismatch between what areas want and what is actually offered by the programme. Local Trust is clear that, for instance, reps should not be seen as local support workers, but as guides to the programme and the face of the funder at the local level, but areas do not always see it this way and some feel their rep should act more as a local development worker might. Likewise Local Trust is clear that there should not be too much by way of templates or fixed forms and systems put in place by them and given to areas, but areas sometimes feel this is what they want or expect as a result of being part of a national programme.

Different views have been expressed about this issue, with some suggesting areas may want a worker or more direction because that is what they are used to, but others suggesting this is not about expectations from prior experience but rather a result of a lack of similar prior experience – for instance not having been a part of a programme or received funding or grants before, and therefore feeling the need for more support or more direction to help them deal with something fundamentally unfamiliar and outside of their experience. Both explanations will have a grain of truth for different areas. Whatever the cause, this lack of shared understanding or expectations can contribute to challenges where there is a mismatch between what is wanted and what is offered.

> *"Sometimes this new model is fighting what people are used to." (Local Trust staff member)*

A delicate balancing act – light touch and risk management

Though seeking to be light touch in their support and systems, a key challenge for Local Trust is how to be light touch and yet have sufficient safeguards in place to reduce the risk of misuse of funds or other inappropriate activities in areas. The use of locally trusted organisations and the endorsement process prior to funding; the introduction of an annual review and reporting process linked to the release of funds from the £1million; the role of the rep as the custodian of values and as a vital feedback loop sharing information on local progress or concerns with Local Trust or Renaisi - all these reflect Local Trust's desire to put reporting and accountability systems in place so as to minimise risk but without overly burdening residents. In our reps survey one respondent reflected on this:

> *"All areas complain about the bureaucracy surrounding the drawdown of funds - despite the rhetoric of trying to make this as easy as possible, the reality is that managing public money within an England-wide organisation does not allow for the easy access that areas expect. Areas are very vocal about the frustrations this engenders." (Big Local rep)*

A set of challenges for Big Local reps – light touch on the frontline

We identified a number of challenges inherent in the 'light touch' approach for reps as the individuals trying to deliver light touch support on the ground. This feedback fell within a number of themes which can be posed as statements or questions, not all of which we could address within this evaluation but which we share here as part of our attempt to shed light on what light touch means and how it is working in practice.

- **Are there times and situations when light touch isn't enough?** It seems to reps and some local steering groups/partnerships at least that there are times and situations where more than light touch support is needed. The examples would be at the start-up stage, at times of conflict, and after conflict is resolved. They make a case for flexibility rather than light touch at all times.

"… this is possible in some areas. However (in) many areas there are a lot of challenges and reps are experienced … and will provide … … not 'light touch' but what is needed at that time in a community." (Big Local rep)

"Levels of support required at different stages of the Pathway are very different, particularly around the stress "pinchpoints" of milestones, eg endorsement of the area's Big Local Plan. … ensuring that statutory agencies do not dominate … often require "direction" at crucial points, therefore "light touch" can fluctuate." (Big Local rep)

"There is a massive underestimate about what's achievable taking a light touch approach in the most disadvantaged areas. One of the reasons why Big Local was awarded was a lack of community organisation leading to a lack of access to Lottery funding. It is unfeasible to think light touch can work without extensive initial support to get the ball rolling." (Big Local rep)

- **Is light touch easier or perhaps only really possible if an area has enough local capacity (eg, if the area has funded a worker)?** Many Big Local areas were selected precisely because they do not have that local capacity. Not funding a local worker can sometimes leave areas placing the expectations they might more appropriately have of a local worker on their rep. Some reps wonder if the programme started with a light touch approach too early in areas' development?

"As reps we are supposed to be light touch, there as a guide and an enabler. In reality in some areas there are times when you have to be more than that. … It is much easier for a rep to be light touch if the area has used some of its money, especially at the Getting Started stage, to (fund) a worker, if they haven't the rep often finds themselves holding the group together during difficult times." (Big Local rep)

- **Are there times when a light touch approach is counter-productive or actually not in an area's best interests?** For instance, if it ends up placing more burden on residents, if it ends up avoiding dependence on a rep only to replace that with dependency on a small group of residents, or if it means missing a chance to intervene early and prevent a problem escalating?

"Unless the group is quite able, a 'light touch' approach by reps can create a gap in support. The result can be: a) the rep provides cover for a while until the group finds its feet; b) a paid worker or contractor fills the gap; c) the group flounders … the temptation is to push groups down path (b), which may not be the best solution for maintaining community ownership and increasing skills." (Big Local rep)

"I am concerned about the burden this is placing on some residents - is this fair? Will it result in burn-out? Is it creating dependency on a few residents?" (Big Local rep)

- **Can a light touch approach sometimes jeopardise trust between the rep and the local area – making the rep look uncaring or disengaged?** This can be problematic if building a positive relationship is a part of what makes the arrangement work.

  "You can have people think you're not interested or don't care if you stick rigidly to the notion of a light touch approach. There has to be some common sense and judgement calls left to reps." (Big Local rep)

  "Being light touch sometimes appears as being 'distant'. We are trying to give residents space to explore and experiment but sometimes this is perceived as sitting back whilst they make mistakes and then getting involved when it goes wrong!" (Big Local rep)

- **As areas access their £1million funding, will monitoring the spend of this public money (and potentially managing higher levels of risk) lead to a lessening of light touch?** That is, will Local Trust need to be, or is it in danger of becoming, less light touch as areas start to deliver?

  "It started as light touch and does try hard to maintain that. The questions in the plan review in particular are really challenging, which isn't bad but it is hard for residents to complete." (Big Local rep)

  "I worry that the tone has started to shift recently. It's the new forms but also the way in which things have been introduced. I think it is something for Local Trust to be wary of." (Big Local rep)

- **Is light touch a cause of inefficiency, wasting time/resources? Does some of the light touch approach lead to inefficiency and duplication of effort?** For instance, local areas and reps creating templates and policies from scratch and/or areas finding a blank page daunting rather than exciting.

  "Areas are scared by blank sheets of paper and look for direction which can be hard to resist. Some guidelines or a stronger framework might be helpful." (Big Local rep)

  "We reps spend a lot of (unpaid) time reinventing some basic wheels like policies, contracting, job descriptions etc...." (Big Local rep)

Perspectives on the support offered

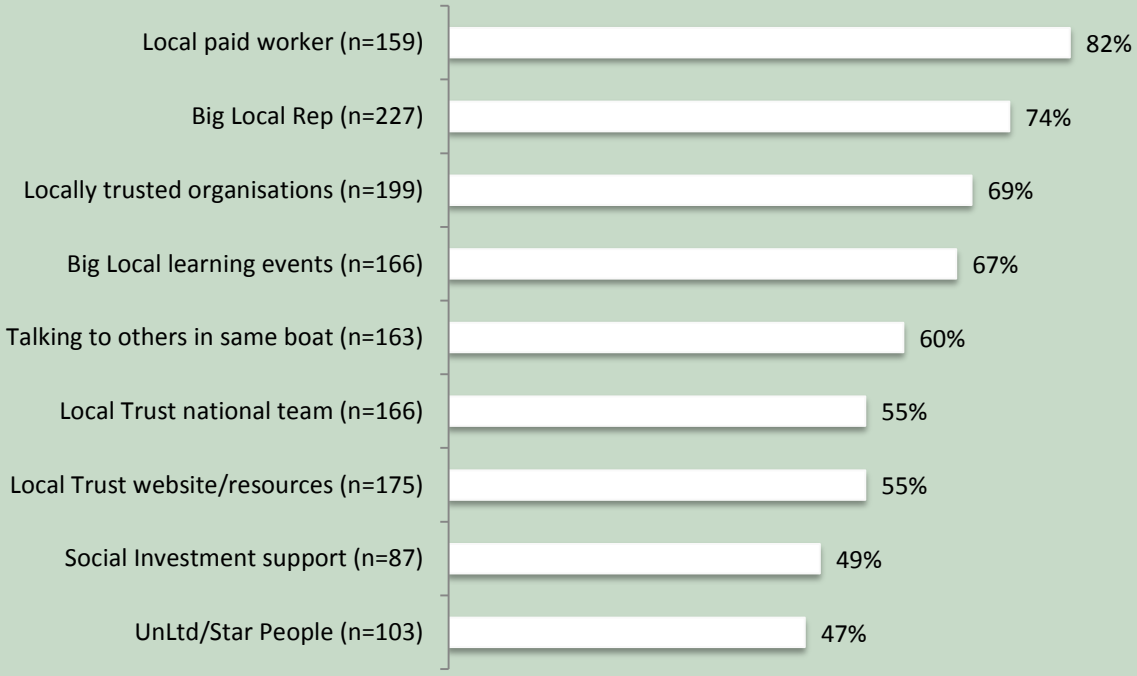
We explored engagement and satisfaction with specific elements of the programme's support using a variety of sources and from two different perspectives (partnership members and reps).

FINDING 16: THE SUPPORT AREAS FIND MOST HELPFUL

Areas are broadly happy with the support they have received from the programme with most aspects of the support made available rated as either helpful or very helpful by a majority of those who took part in our research. Perhaps unsurprisingly, areas rate the support delivered at the local level more highly than other sources.

We asked steering group/partnership members to rate how helpful they had found the support they had received. As Figure 13 shows, areas find most helpful the support that is put in place locally, with local paid workers rated as the most helpful.

Figure 13: Most helpful sources of support (rating as helpful or very helpful)



In our reps survey we asked reps what they felt areas have found most helpful, this time just rating support made available by national partners. The results were similar in terms of what was deemed most helpful, with the only difference being that Reps rated support and advice from Local Trust as slightly more helpful to areas than learning events. Though the assessment made by reps is on behalf of areas they have worked with, the strong correlation between their assessment of what really helps and areas' own assessment does strengthen the evidence about what areas find most helpful.

Our analysis of end of grant reporting (Getting People Involved and Getting Started monitoring reports) revealed the same pattern as our survey – that is, a high satisfaction level with the programme's support overall, but some mixed feelings and/or niggles about the amount of support available (wanting more), and mixed feelings but overall less satisfaction with the programme's paperwork and reporting requirements. We explore this further below.

FINDING 17: SATISFACTION WITH THE NATIONAL OFFER OF SUPPORT

A key aspect of the national offer of support that areas appreciate is the fact that the support offered is flexible and allows them to progress and deliver things in their own way and in their own time. However, though appreciating the lack of interference from 'the centre' some areas would like more direct contact with Local Trust. Those who have had more people-contact so far feed back positively about this, but regarding paperwork, online resources or reporting systems the feedback is more mixed.

The overall satisfaction ratings with programme support are relatively high. Across our sample and in the reporting we studied, we found higher ratings for people than for paperwork or systems, and the flexibilities and freedoms of the programme were particularly appreciated.

- **74% of survey respondents said they felt happy with the support given**
  Of the remainder, 17% (39) said they were unsure/couldn't say, and 9% (22) said they were not happy (n=231).[31]
- **84% agreed they had been given freedom to do things in their own way and in their own time**
  Of the remainder, 7% (17) said they were unsure/couldn't say, and 8% (19) disagreed (n=213).

Direct (in person) support from team members

Areas like the fact that the Local Trust team does not interfere in what happens locally, and just over half of our survey respondents (55%) said they found the support offered by Local Trust either helpful or very helpful. Of the remaining respondents, 39% (64) rated the support as quite or a little helpful, and only 6% (10) felt it was not helpful at all (n=166). Those we engaged directly in workshops were more commonly positive, but we actually found the numbers of those who had been in direct contact relatively low – areas were more likely to have had contact through their rep than directly. When we asked reps to rate how helpful they felt areas had found support, they rated support from the Local Trust national team most highly. It was the only element of support not rated by any single rep as unhelpful. The support from Local Trust and Renaisi in tackling problems in local areas was particularly well regarded.

> *"Support from Local Trust and Renaisi has also been good especially when times were difficult several months ago." (Big Local partnership member)*

"Local Trust has been incredibly supportive … and has recognised that for Big Local to be successful, each area needs time to develop, the chance to try things and sometimes get things wrong." (Big Local partnership chair)

"they have found the individuals (at Local Trust) receptive and helpful but sometimes the flexibility and apparently relaxed nature of the programme leaves some residents still feeling a bit uncertain." (Big Local rep)

When we asked partnership members in an open question what would help them progress in the year ahead, the top response (though from just 39/190 respondents) was more support and guidance from Local Trust (eg, more support with planning, more support with communications, and more practical support to make contact with other areas).

Guidance, resources and website

Around two-thirds (66%) of steering group/partnership members in our survey said they felt the programme's guidance has been simple and clear (n=229) and only just over half (55%) rated the programme's resources and website as helpful or very helpful. We found mixed feelings about the programme's written guidance and resources when talking to areas in person, and reps likewise gave this aspect of support a mixed rating. (Only 18/37 reps agreed with the statement "the programme's communication has been clear and easy for areas to understand".) Some areas suggested they would like to see more or clearer guidance, more templates, policies or procedures that they could adapt for local use.[32]

"the information provided through the bulletins, website and local events are very good." (Big Local partnership member)

"the group have found your guidance very difficult to understand. ... (our rep) did a sterling job in translating it." (Big Local partnership member)

"There could have been more help and advice available … including the provision of document templates … ." (Big Local partnership chair)

Systems, structures and reporting

About a third of partnership members in our survey who felt able to comment on paperwork and reporting said there was too much of it and only around half of reps (18/37) felt "the programme's systems and processes are easy to follow".[33] The issues raised were that there had been some lack of clarity and/or inconsistency in messages about what is required of areas, particularly in relation to reporting and releasing funds. It is not clear what the source of this problem is – whether it is to do with actual changes in requirements; requirements not being conveyed clearly to areas by reps or locally trusted organisations; or areas not always understanding things when explained. We are left to report it here just as a concern raised by areas but which we cannot reliably explain.[34]

"Would like a more flexible approach to the process of requesting more funds" (Big Local partnership member)

"there has also been confusion on what we need to do to draw down the money. … There is some contradiction in the process from the steering group's point of view." (Big Local partnership member)

"processes put in place to release funding at different stages of the pathway are confusing and difficult to navigate." (Big Local partnership member)

FINDING 18: SATISFACTION WITH BIG LOCAL REPS

Areas report high levels of satisfaction with support offered by reps. When specific about what they appreciate about reps areas generally talk about their expertise, knowledge and skills but also about the *way* reps offer support, so, for instance, their flexibility, supportiveness and having the sense that the rep is 'on their side'. One criticism has been about the way the arrangement is set up, with a few areas raising the view that time allocated for support during the Getting Started phase was insufficient.

In our survey 74% of respondents (n=227) rated support from a rep as either very helpful or helpful, with only 3% (6 individuals) rating their rep as not at all helpful. The aspects of reps' support most commonly mentioned in relation to high satisfaction levels were: expertise; trust; a source of ideas; flexibility; and feeling supported.

> *"Our rep has been absolutely amazing, there at every turn but not interfering. I can't think of anything else she could have done." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Our Big Local Rep … has been fantastic. She has always been available to support us and we feel privileged to have worked with her." (Big Local partnership member)*

Our findings mirror those of the Community Development Foundation's earlier research (2013) on how areas perceive reps, where they found a key factor in high satisfaction with reps was less about their expertise but often more about how they relate to people.[35]

We became aware from our analysis of reps' quarterly reporting and some survey feedback (though from a small number of respondents), that there were areas where the relationship has not worked out so well and/or where satisfaction levels are not so high. The issues we identified in our survey responses were where areas felt their rep was taking over (eg, "actively imposing" views) or having conversations locally but not involving residents, or where members of the steering group/partnership did not like the rep's style or approach (eg, finding a rep "patronising" to residents, or feeling that someone "had failed to harness residents' professional skills"). In some cases, however, dissatisfaction was linked to feeling that more time should have been made available.

> *"The amount of time officially allocated to reps to support Partnership Boards does not seem to be adequate, and we've been fortunate that both our reps have given very generously of their time over and above that allocation." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Our Big Local rep … has been great and always willing to help when he could, however the contact time and hours allocated for supporting us has been insufficient causing delays and extra pressure for our volunteers and worker …" (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 19: SATISFACTION WITH SOCIAL ECONOMY SUPPORT

Local areas' views on social investment and social enterprise support are more mixed and overall this is not rated as highly as other forms of support. Where an explanation for this was given, issues were raised about accessibility and communications. Some areas, however, also struggle to see the relationship between some of this work and their own goals – particularly in the case of UnLtd's Star People programme which has been seen as operating separately in some areas to the dissatisfaction of partnerships who would have liked to know more about entrepreneurs in their area. With Local Trust both delivery partners have already reviewed how they work in part to address issues of capacity and accessibility and now work differently as a result.

Research into programme learning conducted by the Community Development Foundation identified early on that social investment and social enterprise were less likely to be on local areas' agendas, certainly in waves 1 and 2 areas. Reasons for this included partnerships having low levels of previous experience of the issues or little understanding of the economic development aspects of Big Local, and residents being less likely to identify economics, money, business or credit as issues unless prompted to discuss them.[36] An awareness of this led to changes in the way this work was approached. For UnLtd the inclusion of pilots to trial the value of a more intensive approach with a smaller number of areas, for Small Change the development of the social investment pathway, taking a stepped approach with areas, and developing a team of Social Investment reps.

Feedback from areas about the work so far has been mixed. There are areas that have established positive working relationships with UnLtd who have growing numbers of Star People in their area, and where things are working well and feedback is good. There are other areas, however, where UnLtd has been seen as operating separately from Big Local partnerships and sometimes not in good communication with the partnerships, so that those involved are unable to see the connection with what they are trying to achieve. Some reps echo these concerns that there is a lack of clarity about the 'fit' of this work in local areas, and voice some concerns about the accessibility of UnLtd's support. (This feedback is based on the period before UnLtd reviewed its approach and decided to focus on fewer areas more intensively).[37]

> *"UnLtd are hard to contact." (Big Local rep)*

> *"Star People has mixed reviews on the ground, because while praised when grants have enabled local entrepreneurs, there have been crossed wires and mixed messages in some local areas." (Big Local rep)*

No specific reasons were given for the mixed review of support received by the 'team' now working on social investment and wider social economy issues (that is, Small Change and Social Investment reps). It does not match feedback from other sources, including from reps and from those attending events organised by the team, which is generally positive.

> *"Support from Small Change and my social investment rep has been great." (Big Local rep)*

FINDING 20: SATISFACTION WITH NETWORKING EVENTS

Areas positively rate the programme's networking and learning events. Only five areas have not engaged with events at all. Reps report four main reasons for non-attendance – capacity; topics not timely/relevant; location; or a lack of interest in activities outside of the locality. Those who do engage find them helpful for learning, reassurance, mutual support and ideas, and enjoy the way they are structured and delivered as well as the opportunity to meet up with other Big Local areas.

The NANM's own analysis of satisfaction immediately after events shows that residents and members of partnerships enjoy the events and find them very useful. Two-thirds of our survey respondents (67%) said they found the events either helpful or very helpful, with 26% (44) suggesting they were quite or a little helpful, and only 7% (11) saying they were not helpful at all (n=166). Reps fed back that they also felt the events have been useful for areas they have worked with, though with the added point made that sometimes it could be hard to persuade some areas to engage.

> *"I've had excellent feedback from the network and learning events and this continues to get stronger every year." (Big Local rep)*
>
> *"The events have been particularly helpful for two of my areas, the third, a rural area, finds it difficult to access some of these." (Big Local rep)*
>
> *"Residents have found the training provided by the Trust useful, and they have been inspired by the sessions on social investment and open spaces, and encouraged by the opportunities arranged for them to meet other Big Local areas." (Big Local worker)*

Reps report that there are four main reasons for areas not engaging with learning activities offered through the programme:

- **capacity** (little time to engage or other pressures);
- **non-relevance of topic** (no fit with needs at that time);
- **geography** (distance to travel to events); or
- **a lack of interest** - some (few) areas remain slightly inward-looking and may not always see a benefit in getting involved in activities outside their area.

We found lower satisfaction from partnership members was usually linked to practical matters (eg, location, being unable to get a place, too late notice), and higher satisfaction linked to either an aspect of the way the events are delivered, or the content, but chiefly to the opportunity to meet others in similar situations and/or to be exposed to new ideas.

> *"We are encouraged to attend training and meetings at other Big Local areas but actually getting it sorted out to go is not only time consuming but disheartening when you don't hear if you have the funding to go until it is too late to go. There should be a clear, quick way to apply for funding and have it agreed or declined in a short space of time so that arrangements can be made." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 21: ENGAGEMENT WITH IN-DEPTH WORK AND PILOTS

Both organisations delivering pilot projects (UnLtd and Living Space Project) report that areas have responded positively to the support made available through pilot projects, and that gains have been achieved in the Big Local areas involved. However, both pilots were affected by lack of capacity on behalf of some of the areas that signed up. This required some flexibility in delivery and may have been linked to other pressures, most notably areas feeling the need to prioritise making progress along the Big Local pathway and therefore having less capacity to engage than originally anticipated.

Both organisations involved in delivering pilots report being affected by a lack of capacity on behalf of some of the areas that signed up. Though partners have reported that all participating areas have benefited, we did not have scope to explore their satisfaction with the support delivered. Based on the evidence that was available to us we identified four challenges for areas' engagement in pilot projects:

- **conflicting priorities** - pathway milestones may need to take priority
- **developing Big Local plans** take more energy than some anticipate – it was specifically working on plans that affected a number of areas' capacity to engage, areas felt under pressure and this affected their participation
- **unrealistic ideas of what might be achievable** – we identified that perhaps some areas may not have been realistic in their ideas and understanding of what could be achieved with the time available
- **lack of time to engage** – even without pathway milestones and plans, areas did not always find it easy to provide people on the ground to engage with pilot activities.

When final reports are completed on these pilots it is anticipated they will contain useful learning for the programme about the circumstances under which a more in-depth approach from national partners may or may not be helpful. However, some learning has already been identified, most notably about timing, with Living Space Project and Local Trust both reporting valuable learning about the importance of offering support at the right time – when an area finds it relevant to what they are doing at that time and has the capacity to engage with it.

> *"It was too early for some areas. This was crucial learning for Local Trust for the model of support we provide … eg, the helpline was set up to support areas with practical advice because that was the type of support areas could make most use of at the time." (Local Trust staff member)*

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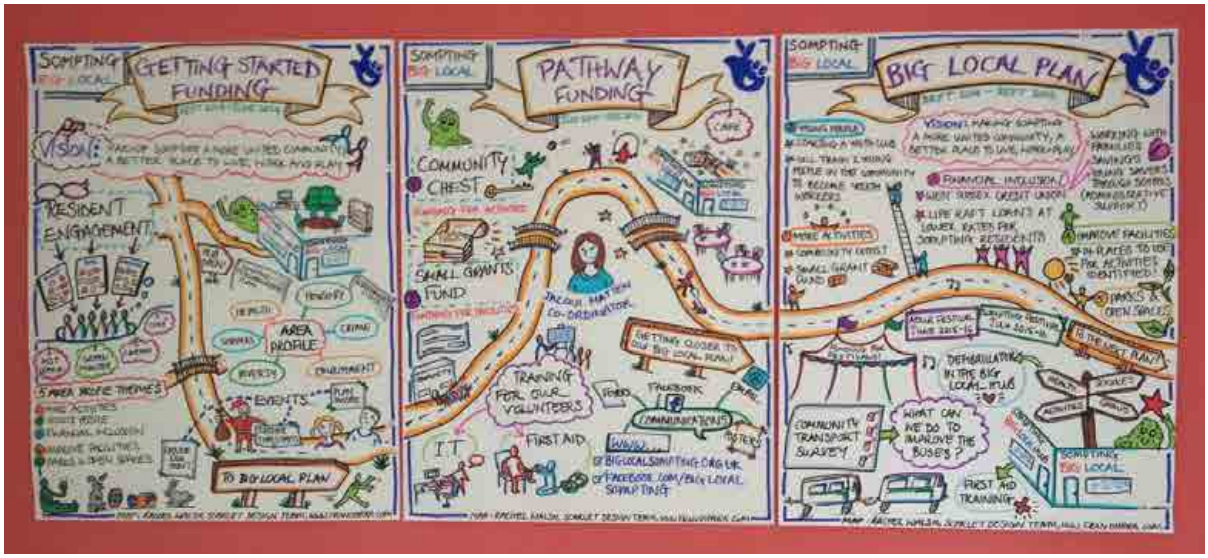
Findings



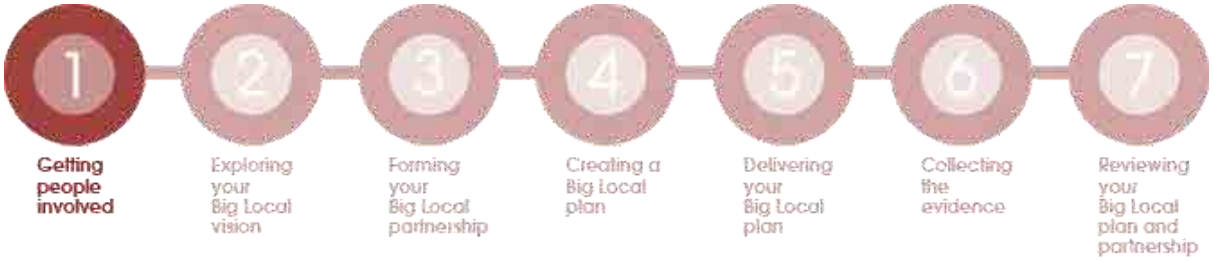
About local progress and how people feel about it

Section 3.1

Local progress: How far have areas progressed in their Big Local journeys? What have they achieved?

"In our area, because of what has gone before, there's a huge administrative task just to find out what's already provided … bringing people and groups together …. to meet the needs of residents as opposed to passively taking what other organisations and their funders want to offer … Not very exciting … doesn't make interesting publicity … but it is essential. "
(Big Local partnership chair)

Getting started with Big Local



Once an area was announced the very early stages involved raising awareness about Big Local, what it is and what it isn't, and bringing together residents and organisations interested in finding out more and hopefully getting involved. The very first steps were commonly supported by Big Local reps, local organisations (usually the local council, local councillors, and any prominent voluntary groups or local infrastructure organisations and active resident groups), and community activists and individuals already involved in community life. These key individuals supported residents to come together, form interim steering groups, develop proposals to draw down their start-up money (their Getting People Involved/Getting Started funding) and identify their locally trusted organisation.

FINDING 22: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR BIG LOCAL

Areas have moved at very different speeds through this early stage of their journey, with suggested activities (consultation, engagement, visioning, producing a profile) often overlapping rather than being seen as separate steps. By March 2014 the last 'Getting Started' proposal was approved by Local Trust. By June 2014, around two-thirds had delivered on their proposals and moved to the next step of the pathway.[38]

By March 2014 all 150 areas had submitted proposals to enable them to draw down a part of their start-up grants. The guidance to the Getting Started element of the pathway suggests areas should: make sure everyone knows about Big Local; reach out to people and give them opportunities to contribute their views; mobilise assets; identify a person to co-ordinate things; and think about having some 'quick wins' to help make Big Local real to people; and consider how they might develop a resident-led partnership to co-ordinate the activities of their Big Local in the longer-term.

Analysis of areas' proposals for this early stage of their journey shows that priorities for the Getting Started element were employing a worker, running community engagement events, and promoting Big Local. Funding was primarily earmarked for workers, events, and promotion and marketing, with between half and two thirds of budgets assigned for these elements. As Figure 14 shows, 69 areas chose to employ workers, 51 chose to run small grants schemes, and at least 45 made sure to include a budget for learning and development for their group.

Figure 14: Planned areas of spend within Getting Started proposals

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Workers	19 areas	24 areas	26 areas
Grant schemes	14 areas	14 areas	23 areas
Training/development	-	30 areas	15 areas

Source: CDF (various)[39]

Figure 15: Proportion of spend on different elements

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Workers	34%	25%	30%
Events/meetings	25%	16%	9%
Promotion/marketing	10%	12%	15%
Resident consultation	-	-	10%
Training/development	7%	8%	7%
Small grants	6%	5%	10%
Equipment	3%	4%	11%
Other	15%	30%	8%

Source: Getting Started in Wave 3 Big Local areas, CDF

Areas have all moved at a different speed to achieve the milestones within this start-up phase, with activities overlapping – for instance, at the same time as exploring people's visions for the future they might have also been researching a local profile or setting up a small grants scheme and activities in the community. Small grant schemes were often introduced as a way to let people know quickly that something was happening and to give Big Local an identity in the area.

By June 2014 around two-thirds of areas had completed their Getting Started phase, or rather, at least two-thirds had (we know that more have completed this phase, but only two-thirds have completed the final monitoring report for their Getting Started grant).

FINDING 23: TAKING TIME TO GET STARTED

The first areas to complete their Getting Started phase have commonly taken longer to achieve what they put in their proposal than they originally anticipated, sometimes a lot longer. Big Local steering groups or partnerships have mixed views about the extent to which this feels like a problem for them.

Most areas felt they would need between six to nine months for this phase of the work, some up to a year, but it has more typically taken at least a year and for some areas significantly longer. An analysis of completed monitoring reports from 83 areas that have completed their Getting Started phase revealed that about a quarter of these thought things had taken longer than planned.

In some areas even the very first steps of getting together and agreeing a small group to take forward the work and being clear what was required took a long time. This was particularly the case in areas where there was no obvious partnership or network of organisations to support the engagement process. Reflecting on interim steering groups and partnerships in the relatively early days of the programme when only the first 100 areas were 'live', reps reported that 79% of the emerging groups were entirely new (not building on a previously existing local group).[40] Some reps have also reflected that in a desire to let residents take the reins from the start, they may have been almost too 'hands off', leaving progress a little slower than it might have otherwise been.

> *"There was learning from phase 1 and 2 that reps had stood off too much at the start." (Big Local rep)*

In most areas, however, it was the task of getting people to understand what Big Local is, getting them involved, and agreeing visions that took longer.

> *"It took us an age just to be able to get the message out there of what Big Local is, and what it isn't. People just didn't get it and half our time was spend dispelling myths and rumours and getting some clear messages out there. To be fair it took a time even for those of us there from the start to really get it." (Big Local partnership member)*

In their Getting People Involved and Getting Started monitoring reports, areas share mixed views on the length of time taken for this phase of their journey – with some feeling it has been problematic, but others more positive and believing that it was worth taking longer as this has given them more solid foundations for moving forward.

> *"Our initial time limit of 6 months was ambitious and it has taken us nearly 18 months to complete the project, but taking time has helped put strong building blocks into place." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 24: HOW AREAS HAVE TRIED TO ENGAGE LOCAL RESIDENTS

Areas have invested a significant amount of time and effort in raising awareness, finding out what people want and trying to get residents involved. Some areas have shown a high level of not only commitment but also creativity in the ways they have tried to reach different sections of their community.

The most common ways that areas planned to inform residents about Big Local were marketing, using websites and setting up a social media presence. More traditional engagement methods included holding community meetings, conducting surveys, leafleting, creating newsletters and using local media. Just over two-thirds of areas funded workers during or towards the end of their Getting Started phase, and the majority of those workers (60%) had a community development remit[41] and were involved in outreach and engagement activities during this early period. However, to more actively engage people rather than just inform them, a wide range of traditional and non-traditional methods were used and many areas have demonstrated real creativity in trying to reach out to all parts of the community, including:

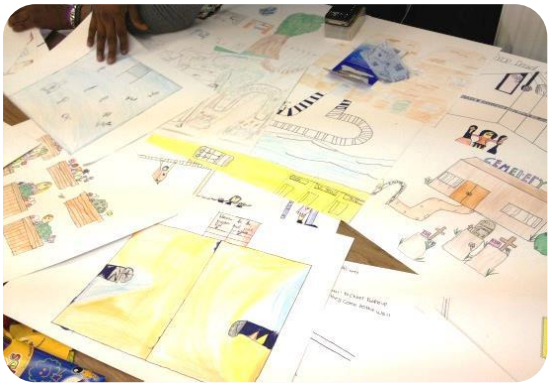
- **Establishing a physical presence** – establishing a physical space, hub, office space or venue that could be identified as being a 'Big Local' place – including working with schools, libraries or other familiar spaces where possible, and/or having a worker to give Big Local a human face and someone more easy to contact.
- **Establishing a visual and virtual presence** - holding stalls at events, creating large banners to cover buildings, creating graffiti walls, running logo competitions and establishing websites, online forums, Facebook pages or twitter accounts so as to enable not just a presence but interaction and conversation.
- **Working through other 'connected' organisations and individuals** with routes to engaging harder to reach parts of the community – eg, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, refugee community organisations, older people's support groups, youth outreach projects, schools, churches and faith groups and disability groups.
- **Hooking people in on the back of other activities** – using activities as a hook – described by one resident we met as the "come along, and oh, while you're here, tell us what you think" approach, using anything from markets, car boot sales, bike rides, and fun runs to talent contests and a wide range of youth activities.
- **Social and community events** - holding parties and community events and piggy backing consultation events off these, tapping into how people might bond over shared food – offering Big Lunches, 1940s style fish and chip suppers, even a café consultation in a café marquee in which waiters became interviewers.
- **Ideas-finders** – events or funding to get people to come forward with their ideas and help to make them happen, eg, using talent nights, X-factor style competitions, dragons den sessions, workshops, small grants schemes or linking in with UnLtd's Star People scheme.

- **Creative and participatory activities** – around engagement and visioning, including using tools like 'planning for real' and 'appreciative enquiry' as well as art, sketchbooks, poetry, film and video, a videopod to record views into, hanging a washing line for people to peg up their ideas in a local market.
- **Training local people for some peer-to-peer engagement** - training local people as community researchers, street champions, 'walkie talkies' (people paid to spread the word and/or research local people's views).
- **Going mobile** and/or locating activities where people might be instead of expecting people to come to Big Local – a cab-cam project interviewing people in a black taxi, a big bus tour around the area to meet people in their own space, engaging hairdressers, engaging girls through outreach in nail bars, local businesses helping with surveys or putting up poster to raise awareness and consult people on their views.
- **Activities for children and young people** – a wishmas tree for primary school children to pin their wishes up and share their hopes for the future; a postcards from the future exercise to get young people to express their aspirations, and sporting and arts activities to engage young people and find out their priorities and their preferences for how they would want to be engaged in Big Local as it progresses.

Finding methods that work for different areas and for different groups

Planning for real - modelling future options
Leigh Neighbours Big Local

Young people's postcards to the future
Chell Heath Big Local



A washing line of hopes and ideas
St James' Big Local

Fish and chips supper 1940s style
East Coseley Big Local

FINDING 25: HOW MANY RESIDENTS HAVE BEEN ENGAGED

The first 83 areas to complete their Getting Started activities report that they have reached out to some 94,000 residents between them. Areas have counted people in different ways so the totals should be treated with some caution. Taken at face value the total of people engaged ranges considerably from area to area – for some this represents a reach of less than 5% of the local population, for others more than 50%. The number of these who have then gone on to become actively involved in driving Big Local forward in the area is closer to 2,900. A majority of areas report that they have between 15-30 people actively involved as they complete their Getting Started phase.

Though figures have generally been approximated within reporting (and different areas will have counted differently), the first 83 areas to complete the Getting Started phase of their journey report that they engaged around 94,000 individuals in total. Not all of these individuals got involved in Big Local conversations and many will just be people reached and informed about Big Local via one-off mailings, household surveys, newsletters or large-scale events. Within this we found that:

- 36 areas report they engaged 10% of their population or less
- 19 areas report they engaged between 11-20% of their population
- 14 areas report they engaged with 21-30% of their population
- 4 areas report they engaged with 31-40%
- 4 areas report they engaged with 41-50%
- 10 areas report they engaged with more than half their local population.

We found such variation in the way that areas appeared to be defining "numbers involved" or "numbers actively involved" that we present these numbers here without drawing any inferences about areas' relative success in engaging their community. Areas were asked how many of those engaged remained actively involved in driving Big Local forward (which was defined as, 'having attended more than one Big Local meeting or event'). The total across all areas was 2,900 but the majority of areas report having between 15-30 people actively engaged as they move on to the next part of their journey. This comment below gives a fairly typical example of how an area might define those actively involved as its core group or partnership plus a small number of active volunteers or group of 'friends':

> *"We'd say that the people 'actively' involved in driving Big Local forwards locally are the Partnership Board – the 25 people who meet on a monthly basis. There are probably another 50 – 75 people who we'd consider to be 'friends'…people who we'll turn to for support with an initiative, for help or advice." (Getting People Involved report, wave 1 area)*

Clearly only a small proportion of those initially consulted or engaged go on to become more actively involved. The minimum any area reported as actively involved was eight people (three areas), the maximum was 270.

FINDING 26: JOINING FORCES WITH LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Areas have spent time during their Getting Started phase making links to other organisations. Not all could do this in great numbers as some areas simply don't have many organisations to connect with, but it is clear that most have used this time to try and build working relationships with other groups and organisations in their area who can help them reach out into the community and/or help make Big Local happen in other ways.

There is a clear expectation that partnerships will link up with other organisations and individuals who can help make Big Local happen.[42] Getting Started reports ask local groups to list networks they have created or joined. Though we do not know much about the quality or depth of some of the connections listed, the first 83 areas to report on this listed more than 1,000 local organisations between them as having been involved in discussions, consultation, research, helping deliver activities or potentially becoming longer-term partners.

The range of organisations that groups connected with shows an incredible diversity and it is clear that areas have thought very broadly about who they might work with. Organisations have included allotment societies, regional rail services, the police, credit unions, tenants' groups, foodbanks, universities, mosques and prisons. The private sector is the least well represented in the list, with local businesses most commonly reported as the hardest to engage. The diversity of organisations reflects areas' efforts to reach out to all parts of the community and to understand what assets and services might already be in place that they could build on.

> *"Collaboration is at the heart of the partnership and every one of our processes. The key driver is the old saying about if you want to go quickly, go alone: but if you want to go far you should go together. We believe the investment we have made in collaborative working and involving everyone will pay us dividends in the long run." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 27: DELIVERING WHAT WAS PROPOSED

A majority of areas on completion of their Getting Started phase report that they have either delivered as expected or delivered more than expected. Wanting to make Big Local 'real', and keen to demonstrate that Big Local wasn't just a 'talking shop', has led to some significant delivery of activities even before Big Local plans have been approved (and the £1million released). Areas have commonly reported achieving their goals with less spent than anticipated thanks in part to the efforts of volunteers, partnership working and in-kind contributions.

A majority of areas reported on completion of their Getting Started phase that they had achieved what they set out to do or achieved more than they hoped. Others felt they had made a good start with their work but saw some of the planned tasks as ongoing. The most commonly reported outputs from this early stage of activity include the following:

Behind the scenes

- **development of a core group of committed people -** time put into developing this group and gearing up to becoming a partnership
- **communications mechanisms** – things in place for ongoing engagement and communications, including community forums, newsletters, websites, Facebook pages and twitter accounts
- **partnerships and promises** - relationships with other organisations built and plans for joint work and initiatives
- **a sense of direction** – from work on visions and action planning.

Out in the community

- **establishing a presence in the community** – the establishment of offices, hubs, drop-in space
- **grant schemes running** - systems in place to manage them, and people delivering on activities in the community
- **activities in the community that are about place** - a lot of activities focused on improving the physical space and delivering 'visible' projects (eg, improving bits of neglected land, planting activities litter picks) engaging people at the same time as addressing concerns raised during consultation
- **activities in the community that are about people** - for instance, events, groups, classes, regular functions.

The reports suggest that while some areas achieved activities that might be called quick wins, others developed quite substantial projects during this early phase. Some experienced tensions as a result and found it difficult to balance the demand to be delivering immediately with the need to develop capacity and take a longer term view. This is a theme we will return to later in this report.

FINDING 28: VOLUNTEERS HELPING BIG LOCAL GET STARTED

Big Local areas have relied heavily on the input of local residents giving their time voluntarily during the initial set-up phase. Many thousands of hours of residents' time have been put into making things happen within and outside of steering groups and partnerships. This has significantly added to the value of the investment in local areas even though it is rarely costed in the way that other 'in-kind' contributions might be.

Activities as part of Getting Started have been delivered by a range of organisations and groups, some funded through the grant, and some not, but many have been delivered by residents giving their time voluntarily. The sorts of roles volunteers most commonly fulfilled include:

- involvement in the steering group or partnership
- help with leaflet drops, newsletter distribution
- research and consultation
- helping administer small grants schemes – eg, sitting on panels
- helping out at hubs and offices - from DIY to tea-making
- help at events, including consultation events
- designing leaflets and other materials, webpages, social media and film production
- engaging with young people – this includes young volunteers.

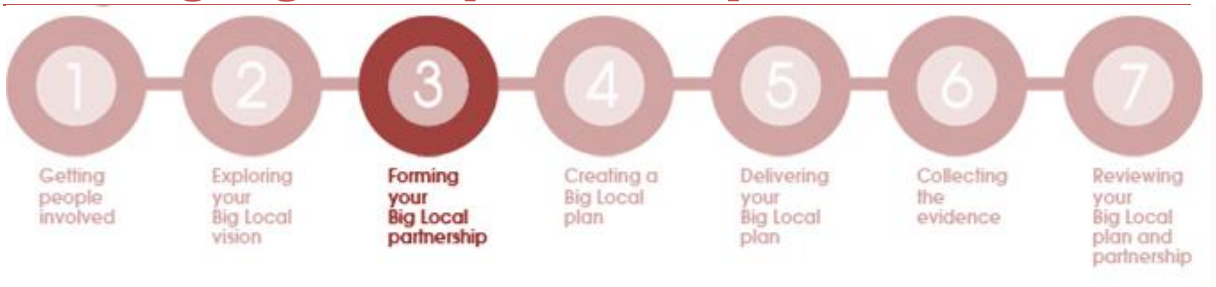
Volunteers' contribution does not seem often to have been calculated or costed, though we found two areas that had tried to do this.

"Back when it started there were times when I was doing five hours a week easily. It got too much, but there was a lot going on and it was 'read this' and 'have a look at that' and 'can you come to this' and then just helping out and it was all adding up." (Big Local partnership member)

"3,000 volunteer hours - this was calculated between July 2012 to July 2014. These hours only cover meetings and events that we have records of. This does not cover the enormous amount of time members have spent at home or doing research visits etc. I would estimate that that figure can easily be doubled." (Big Local worker)

"In a recent study by Orbit Housing they have estimated that from April 2013 to April 2014 residents in Newington have volunteered the equivalent of £38,000 in their contribution to Newington Big Local." (Big Local rep)

Forming Big Local partnerships



The third step on the Pathway is to establish or formalise a resident-led Big Local partnership that has responsibility for guiding the overall direction of Big Local in the area, including creating a plan for the £1million and overseeing its delivery once endorsed. The partnership's role also includes ensuring that local people continue to be involved in overseeing and determining how things are done, and reviewing annually both progress made and the partnership itself. Programme guidance specifies that membership must comprise at least 51% residents and must be endorsed by Local Trust.

FINDING 29: AREAS SETTING UP BIG LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

By June 2014, 81 areas had established a Big Local partnership. The average membership of Big Local partnerships is 15, of which 11 are residents. Though 75% of partnership members are residents, 94% of decision-makers (those with voting rights) are residents.

Almost all wave 1 areas and half of wave 2 areas have formally endorsed partnerships in place, thereby meeting one of the important requirements for the release of their £1million. Of the 81 areas with partnerships endorsed or in assessment at June 2014, we know that:

- 44 are wave one areas (41 endorsed, 3 being assessed)
- 25 are wave two areas (23 endorsed, 2 being assessed)
- 12 are wave three areas (8 endorsed, with 4 more being assessed).

Among other things the assessment process checks that a partnership has a resident majority and that it has considered how it will give residents an opportunity to have their say in the future. Most partnerships are choosing to have more than a 51% resident majority. The average is currently 75% resident membership and some areas are 100% resident-led.[43]. Based on our fieldwork visits to Big Local areas it seems a significant proportion of those involved at the very start move from being in the earlier interim steering group to the partnership and remain involved. In our workshops (involving ten partnerships and 78 partnership members), we found a majority of participants had been involved for between two to four years and in most groups there was at least one individual who had been around since the very first meetings. Other members of partnerships are representatives of organisations, including locally trusted organisations, local authorities and local councillors. These are either involved through an advisory panel or as a minority on the partnership, most usually without voting rights.

FINDING 30: WHAT PARTNERSHIPS LOOK LIKE

The models adopted by partnerships vary, but the most common is of a core group with subgroups. Though models vary, we found a degree of conventionality in terms of how Big Local partnerships operate, and less evidence of creativity in governance than in the initial stages of engagement/consultation. However, some areas *are* trying to develop different models, to work less formally, and to add layers of engagement outside of a more conventional 'core' in order to engage more residents in decision-making.

Areas were given guidance which contained ideas for models they might consider: (a) a partnership with a supporting/advisory group; (b) a large open partnership with a smaller steering group that makes decisions; or (c) a hub and spoke where the hub is a core group of residents with a less formal network of partners outside. To date around two-thirds have chosen to a core group and subgroup model.[44] Feedback from reps and others involved in the programme points to partnerships often operating in a highly conventional and formal fashion, along the lines of traditional committee-type structures. This perhaps reflects the involvement of a core group used to working in this way from previous volunteering experience at committee level and their ongoing influence on how the partnership operates. There may also simply be a lack of ideas about how to organise differently and try other options when areas know that a partnership is a requirement and have not seen alternative decision-making models in action. Whatever the reason, it is a cause of concern to reps and to some partnership members themselves, that if operating too formally it may be they who are 'hard to reach' and not the people they want to engage.

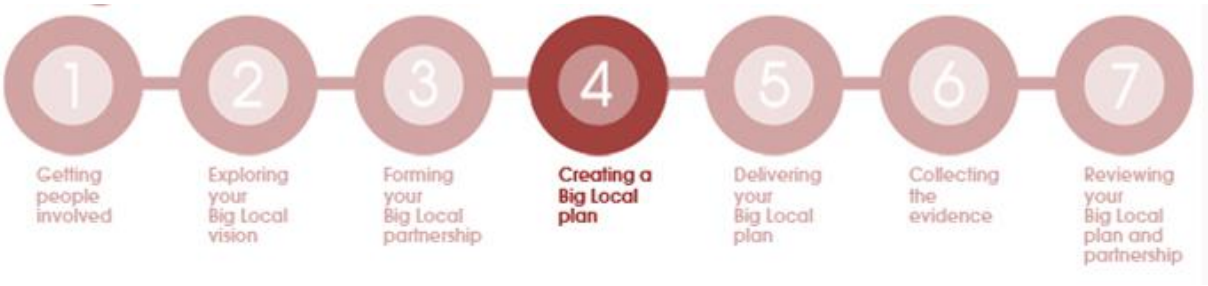
Big Local guidance specifies that partnerships should try to consider ways to be "open, transparent and focused on connecting with people in the area in different ways" and we did find evidence of partnerships trying to address this requirement – for instance:

- **making meetings more accessible**: some have tried to make meetings less formal and/or more accessible (eg, alternating venues, meeting in pubs or more social spaces, allocating a budget for refreshments, varying the place and times of meetings, being less formal in the language or tone of meetings, reducing the workload by paying a local resident to take minutes, calling the group something less formal such as 'the Big Local Bunch').

- **thinking outside of meetings:** others have put in place different mechanisms to widen out possibilities for people to be consulted and/or to take part in decision-making in an ongoing way outside of more formal meetings (eg, having a youth forum or ambassador group that meets and sets its own ground rules for decision-making, participatory budgeting events, using action groups or task groups).

  "There is a clear divide between the 'traditional meeting attenders (usual suspects who are very good at talking) and 'new blood' who are very keen to do and make things happen but require a more informal approach than meetings. We hope the new sub-group structure and a change to how and when meetings take place, along with additional support… from the locally trusted organisation will alleviate these issues …" (Big Local rep)

Creating a Big Local plan



FINDING 31: AREAS THAT HAVE PLANS IN PLACE

Half of all local partnerships have developed their Big Local Plan. Partnerships, and those supporting them, commonly report that creating a plan has been a time-consuming and intense process, requiring a lot of commitment from partnership members and sometimes proving challenging as local people's ideas are prioritised and taken forward, or not taken forward, in local plans. It is not uncommon for areas to take a year or more to complete their Big Local plan and a handful of wave 1 areas (eight), though announced in 2010 still have not produced their plans.

Producing a Big Local plan for the area is a crucial milestone, not least because once endorsed, the area can start to spend its £1million. When we started our evaluation in May 2014, 50 plans had been endorsed. By October 2014, that number had risen to 75.[45]

We found that areas with plans in place have taken up to a year or more to develop their plan. In our fieldwork, this period was most commonly described as very demanding, a lot of work, and sometimes nerve-wracking as the plan came closer to completion. Several groups told us they felt a weight of responsibility in producing the plan and felt nervous as they awaited Local Trust's response and endorsement.

> *"It was huge really … a lot of work, it's your ambitions for ten years. You want to get it right. The other thing was that most of us had never done anything like that before so it was quite daunting. " (Big Local partnership member)*

A few wave 1 areas (eight) have not yet produced their plans. It appears that the time being taken to achieve this milestone is more a reflection of some challenging local circumstances than simply taking time to get things right, though this is also important in those areas. We consider more generally the question of area journeys and challenges later (chapter 5) but common reasons for a significant slowing in pace when trying to develop an agreed plan are: conflict between residents or between residents and organisations; lack of capacity including the loss of key individuals who may formerly have steered activity; and/or stalling on agreeing priorities and moving from many visions to a shared vision.

FINDING 32: THE PROCESS OF CREATING A PLAN

Areas are choosing different ways to produce their plan with some employing plan writers, some allocating the task to one or two individuals in the partnership to lead on, some using small interest groups to produce plans under key themes, and a small number choosing more participatory routes. A common challenge experienced in this pathway stage has been to continue delivering activities in the community whilst focusing on the longer-term view needed to produce the plan.

Areas have approached creating their plan differently but for many it has been experienced as a major and time-consuming task. Because it has taken most areas longer than anticipated some areas (just over 60 so far) have chosen to draw down a "pathway" grant (ie, an advance from their £1million) to keep momentum going while they take the time needed to get their plan right. Some have brought in a consultant or plan writer to help with the last stage of capturing what residents have agreed.

> *"when we brought in (plan writer) – that really helped speed things up." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"We each took a bit of the plan to take responsibility for so our subgroups now were originally brought together for the plan work because it was the things people were most interested in. so they worked together on their bit so it was a real team effort." (Big Local partnership member)*

Other areas have adopted interesting approaches, for instance a rep from a Wave 2 area describes below a co-production approach based on a Participatory Budgeting model. This has meant taking a longer time, but this has not been seen as problematic because of the value in the process and because at the same time as working on its plan this particular area was managing to keep activities going in the here and now.

Local stories: Working together to create a local plan

Wave 2 area, a former coalmining village, Yorkshire & Humber Region

In this wave 2 Big Local, it was decided to use a participatory / co-production approach to creating the Big Local Plan. The rep for the area reports that this has been very effective in terms of involving the wider community in the process but, as importantly, involving the members of the partnership ensuring that the plan has local ownership and endorsement. While this has taken significant time and effort this is preferable to the approach of simply having one or two people compile and draft the plan. The approach:

- publicises what has happened to all the views and opinions people gave
- genuinely involves local people in decision making and the plan content
- recruits new interest and participation of local people
- evidences who has taken part in the process
- provides a database of local people for follow up work, communication and contact for the delivery stage.

"The enthusiasm and maturity of the partnership continues to grow (as) we are simultaneously travelling on two parallel tracks: one delivering engaging, practical and fun activities in the community, while the other is putting together the Big Local plan." (Big Local rep)[46]

FINDING 33: WHAT BIG LOCAL PLANS CONTAIN

The most common priorities in Big Local plans are connected to building a sense of community between people; improving the lived environment; building a stronger economy that people are better able to contribute to; and creating opportunities and developing skills (particularly for the unemployed and for young people). The plans outline the funding of projects or activities through grants or commissioning, and many also have a strong emphasis on local people helping deliver through volunteering, self-help and/or social enterprise. Whilst this is more often defined as a mechanism for delivery than a priority or aim, it is nonetheless an important feature, not least as it makes clear that partnerships are not just seeing themselves as local distributors of funding.

The priorities that people have identified in their plans broadly fall into the categories listed below according to the frequency with which they appear (though noting that often priorities fall within more than one category):

- community
- local space/environment/open spaces
- economy/skills
- children and young people
- health, wellbeing and happiness
- community safety
- older people.

The themes of **people, place and connections** emerge most strongly as priorities in local areas. Plans identify as most important - how places look and how assets are used (place), the people in them (more active, connected, skilled, with raised ambitions and aspirations), and how people are connected (community cohesion, opportunities to come together, more caring and community spirit). The economy and people's economic wellbeing also feature highly, slightly more so in later than earlier plans.

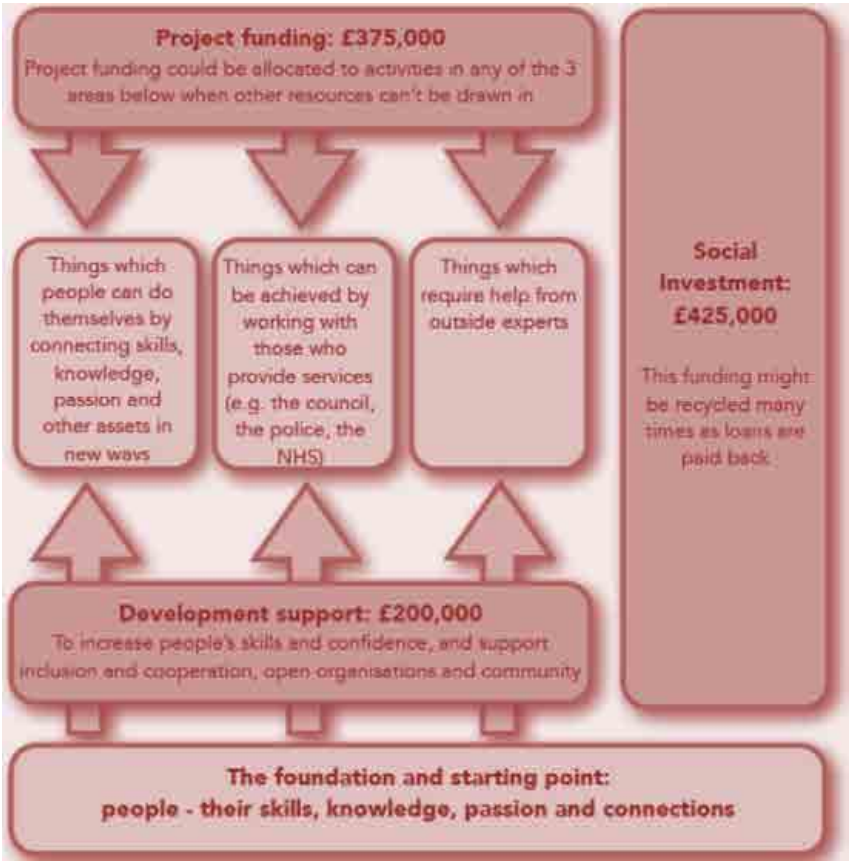
In one Big Local plan the area defines its vision in terms of types of resilience and suggests it aims to build three types of resilience: community, economic and personal.[47] Our own analysis suggested that the majority of areas' plans have priorities that fall within one of these three broad areas and that this offers a helpful framework within which to understand the emerging priorities and goals in Big Local areas. However, this does not quite capture the strong element around place and pride of place, and how people feel about their area that we identified, nor an element of caring and nurturing that we also identified as a feature linked to work on connectedness, that seeks to address issues of inclusion and support for those who might be most isolated, vulnerable or disadvantaged in any community (most commonly identified as older people).

Figure 16: A possible framework for understanding local outcomes

Community resilience	Economic resilience	Personal resilience
• A strong cohesive, active, connected community • A high quality physical environment • A community that is safe • Enabling and responsive public services	• Strong local economy • Local people in work • Residents in financial control	• Children and young people get the best out of life • People realise their potential • People are healthy and have a positive sense of wellbeing

[Source: Rastrick Big Local plan]

Plans outline areas' intention to fund projects or activities through grants or commissioning, but many also have a strong emphasis on local people helping deliver through volunteering, self-help and/or social enterprise. Whilst this is more often defined as a mechanism for delivery than a priority or aim, it is nonetheless an important feature, not least as it makes clear that partnerships are not just seeing themselves as distributors of funding at the local level. The mix of approaches that areas might consider, and the place of "things which people can do themselves" within plans are neatly captured in this model from East Coseley Big Local's plan. The chair of East Coseley prefaces the plan with the words: "90% of what needs doing we can do ourselves."



[Source: East Coseley Big Local plan]

FINDING 34: WHAT PLANS DO NOT CONTAIN

Big Local partnerships have understood the importance of the "additionality principle" and this is reflected in Big Local plans. Funds have not been earmarked for work that would be replacing a statutory service, and care has been taken to ensure that activities do not duplicate what is already being offered or could be offered better by another local provider. Plans commonly identify 'helping people make better use of existing services/facilities' as a goal, rather than setting up something new.

Since the programme was launched there have been significant reductions in public sector funding, in voluntary and community sector infrastructure, in youth and community services and in health and adult social care. In an earlier study of Big Local the Community Development Foundation found partnerships were encountering the challenge of improving their areas "while ensuring they are not simply plugging gaps in services resulting from recent cuts."[48] We did find some evidence of this as an issue on local agendas.

> *"One (challenge) has been residents asking for changes that local councils should address as part of their duties." (Big Local partnership member)*

Despite this sometimes being a pressure or an issue, our analysis of plans did not pick up any evidence of work that could be seen as replacing a statutory service. There may, however, be activities within plans that were formerly delivered by, or funded by local authorities or other funders, that are no longer, and which Big Local areas have considered taking forward in their plans. For instance, proposals to do work with parents, children and young people or under-5s may well reflect reduced funding in these areas as a result of cuts and/or pressure on available charitable funding and some areas talked in terms of 're-establishing' something, for instance youth provision. However, we were unable to identify how much of the work included in Big Local plans was new to the area.

We did find evidence in all our engagement with partnerships of people thinking about the additionality principle – where they had considered if what was being identified as a need was either a statutory responsibility or could be done by someone else or in some other way rather than committing funding to it. This was particularly apparent when considering work on community safety, crime, antisocial behaviour, housing, rubbish/ littering, public health/health promotion - issues that commonly came up in residents' list of things they wanted to address in their area. In such instances, areas have partnered with the relevant statutory body, and/or shared information on the issues raised with the relevant body. Partnerships talked about residents asking for things that were already there, but the residents concerned simply did not know about them (or didn't find them accessible) and this led to inclusion in plans of signposting, getting people better information, and work to make existing services and opportunities more accessible rather than creating new things.

> *"we found people were asking us for things that were already there." (Big Local steering group member) "the stuff that was the council's responsibility we passed their way very early on and we were clear on that." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 35: HOW AREAS PLAN TO USE THEIR £1MILLION

Areas are using a range of different mechanisms for spending or investing their £1million. These include pooling resources with partners; exploring social investment; commissioning projects or services; running community chest/small grants schemes or match-funding pots and participatory budgeting; or self-delivery of projects and initiatives.

Areas are using a range of different mechanisms to spend, allocate or invest their £1million. Figure 17 gives a helpful overview of the core mechanisms being used.

Figure 17: Spending and investment mechanisms

Designing and developing new Big Local projects: Big Local and associated partners will design and develop new projects.

Big Local self-delivery: Big Local volunteers and staff will take a hands-on approach and develop, run, and manage projects of their own.

Community chest/small grants and/or match funding pots: To enable local organisations to deliver and develop the emerging themes Big Local has identified.

Commissioning: Big Local defines projects and then invites organisations to put in tenders to deliver them.

Social investment: Organisations and individuals are able to benefit from direct investment from Big Local: eg, start-up loans, match-funding, etc. This could also include Big Local investing in property.

Partnership/collaborative working: Enabling organisations to work collaboratively across the public, private and voluntary sector.

[Source: Gateshead Big Local plan]

Where some areas are adopting or exploring a mixture of these approaches, some are expressing preferences for just one or two. Some have prioritised self-delivery and working with partners on small projects in the short-term while considering mechanisms that seem more challenging or require more expertise for longer-term exploration (eg, commissioning or social investment). Partnership working and small grants schemes are common in most areas and a majority of those with plans in place are running small grants schemes or community chests, with around 10% of predicted expenditure across areas earmarked for grants schemes.[49] Social investment is the least common approach though interest in this is reported to be growing.

There has been some interest in participatory budgeting as a way of distributing funding that actively involves larger groups of residents, outside of the partnership, in decision-making. For instance, in Rastrick Big Local, the majority of their funding is being allocated through a participatory budgeting route called Voice Your Choice while several other areas are trialling this way of working on a smaller scale using open, public events to make decisions about the allocation of pots of money.

FINDING 36: HOW FAR PLANS REFLECT RESIDENTS' PRIORITIES

Local partnerships feel strongly that they have developed plans that reflect residents' priorities. 94% of steering group/partnership members in our survey said they felt confident their plans reflect residents' ideas about what is most needed to improve their area.

Possibly as a result of the length of time taken to get to the point of producing a plan, and the sheer amount and variety of consultation many areas complete during their Getting Started phase, most partnerships feel very confident that their plans are based on what residents say is most needed. In our survey of partnership members, 94% of respondents (n=234) said they felt confident their plans reflect what residents say is most needed in their area. Only nine individuals from four areas said they didn't feel this.

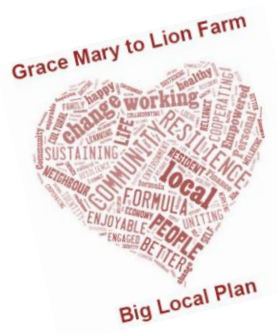
> *"I feel confident we have understood what's needed …. Local people told us what they wanted in it, local people wrote it, and it will be local people who deliver what's in it." (Big local partnership member)*

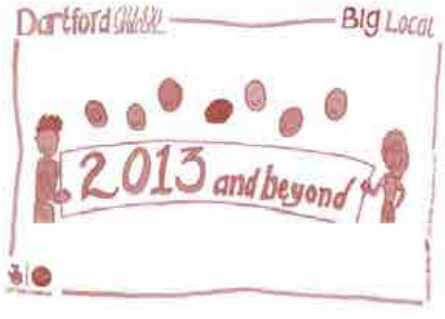
FINDING 37: THE VALUE OF BIG LOCAL PLANS

Some Big Local plans clearly reflect the programme's values of keeping things simple and accessible. They are visually interesting and written in plain English, some have been summarised and put on websites or even filmed. Some partnerships feel an understandable sense of pride in their plan and feel it has helped give them focus and a sense of direction. It marked a really tangible achievement and is now helping them in their local decision-making.

Some areas have really sought to produce a plan that residents can identify and engage with, and so have created summary versions or made their plan visually appealing and kept the language accessible and plain English. Partnerships we visited told us they were proud of their plans and saw them as marking a real milestone. Some shared how their plan was helping them in their decision-making by giving them a clear basis on which to say yes or no to requests for funding depending on whether activities contribute to addressing one of their agreed priorities.

> *"The plan reflects how well we have done at identifying and planning to meet needs. It's been incredibly helpful at giving us a solid base for our decisions." (Big Local partnership member)*





Implementing plans, delivering on priorities

FINDING 38: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER PLANS ARE ENDORSED

For most areas the completion of their Big Local plan marks a turning point, not exactly a line between 'planning' and 'delivery' because so much activity has generally been started during the planning process but certainly a point at which areas commonly pause and, if necessary, make some changes – eg, changing their locally trusted organisation or their rep - before addressing the priorities in the plan.

Areas we visited commonly mentioned the magnitude of the task of completing their plan, particularly if they had followed this up with launch activities and a publicity drive. For some areas things then slowed for a little while as they took a breath and, if necessary made changes in the group or other local arrangements such as engaging a new locally trusted organisation or a rep or funding a worker. This finding confirms an earlier suggestion made by Renaisi that reps sometimes find themselves having to manage "the hiatus that can occur on completion of a plan, before implementation kicks in."[50]

In their first year of plan delivery, areas either chose a high level priority to focus more of their energies on or, more usually, planned a range of activities that might contribute to several of their high level priorities. Analysing what areas planned to deliver in their first year is not straightforward as some first year delivery plans describe priorities as specific deliverables (eg, to deliver a summer festival), where others describe priorities more broadly as goals without specific activities attached (eg, to develop community spirit/pride). To an extent this divergence reflects the amount of flexibility given to areas in terms of the scope and scale of their plans. However, we identified broadly that the focus of much of year 1 activity fell into one of four categories:

- **projects to address high level priorities** – eg, taking forward or funding relevant projects linked to the environment, economy, employment/skills, or work with young or older people
- **managing grant schemes** – funding small groups to do more or develop something new in line with the area's overall priorities
- **ongoing engagement and hub development** - events, marketing, communications and engagement, newsletters and development of local hubs.
- **undertaking development work** – for instance forming new partnerships, recruitment (to the partnership or of a worker), partnership learning/development activity, attracting additional income, scoping/research.

FINDING 39: COMPARING AREAS' PROGRESS WITH THEIR PLANS

Though reports on areas' first year of delivery show that much has been achieved, it is common for things not to have worked out as originally planned. Progress has often been slower than anticipated and one common theme is that the first year has involved some degree of re-assessment and revision as things have not worked out as planned or external circumstances have forced a rethink.

All twenty of the areas we engaged with that were around a year into delivering their plans had some headlines and good news to share and reported making good progress with some if not most of the priorities they originally identified. Achievements include developing new partnerships, bringing in additional funding, launching and/or running small grants schemes, running community events, opening or expanding hubs, exploring different investment or funding options, and funding new projects. However, most areas have not delivered exactly according to plan in their first year, with the main reasons being:

- **more time needed and/or project creep** – areas commonly reported delivery being affected by lack of time or capacity to get as much done as anticipated, delays in getting started with projects or things just taking longer than intended – often for reasons outside of the partnership's control. In addition some areas reported that projects had simply expanded; they had either become bigger or the partnership had realised they were more complicated than first anticipated. This might be finding that new ways of working needed more thinking through (eg, working on loans), or finding a need to buy in specialist skills or address legal issues (eg, housing).
- **problems with partners** – either not being able to get partners on board which led to plans being scaled back, or delays to do with specific issues such as the transfer of a lease or some other decision or technical matter holding up progress, slowing things down. Hold-ups related to local authority decisions and/or processes were one of the more commonly mentioned factors behind delays.
- **opportunities to do something different** – some areas did not deliver as planned because an opportunity arose to do something different.

> *"Nothing has changed but it is taking us longer than anticipated to get to the point where we can deliver our objectives." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"(Partner) not on board so ideas scaled back for some of the project ideas. Difficult to generate involvement and to get active involvement of council … the work changed but because the group responded to an opportunity - ie, opportunity to manage local library." (Big Local partnership member)*

Previous Big Local research has suggested that planned activities may not be delivered as expected because "some areas were coming up with too definite a plan too early".[51] We found the issue was not with the rigidity of plans but more usually about practical and external issues affecting progress, or simply the trials and tribulations of working in partnership with others.

Section 3.2

Reflections on progress: How resident-led is Big Local in practice? How do areas feel about their progress so far? How do residents feel about their involvement?

"If there was such a thing as a slow roller-coaster?" (Big Local partnership member)

How resident-led is Big Local in practice?

FINDING 40: LEVELS OF RESIDENT LEADERSHIP IN PARTNERSHIPS

Where it is working well, Big Local is perceived as strongly resident-led, not just on paper, but in practice. A majority of both the partnership members and reps we surveyed felt their areas were genuinely resident-led, where activities are based on what residents feel is needed, and where decision-making within Big Local is owned and led by residents.

Big Local's guidance on partnerships and the resident-led principle states, "The partnership should keep residents at the centre of decision making and Big Local activities. Residents must be meaningfully involved and their views and hopes should guide the choices of the partnership. Residents should influence the direction and implementation of the Big Local plan and contribute their knowledge, skills and interests to it." This makes it clear that resident-led does not just refer to having residents as the majority on any partnership, though on this account the programme is undeniably resident-led with residents 75% of partnership members and 94% of those with voting rights. However, data from our fieldwork and desk research confirmed that Big Local is not just resident-led on paper, but is also being experienced as resident-led and feels resident-led to many of those involved in local partnerships.

A majority of those taking part in our survey responded positively (on an agree/disagree scale) to a set of statements about how far Big Local is resident-led.

- 94% of respondents said their plans are based on resident views
- 90% felt residents' views are equally valued within decision-making in partnerships
- 86% felt residents have the final say on what is done with their £1million
- 84% felt residents are leading their Big Local.

[* note. 'n' varied across these statements and was between 231 to 234]

"the residents are in charge. In the past, I have heard one councillor after another telling me what they think the area needed - it was off-putting. Big Local is different because the people are in charge." (Big Local steering group member)

"Residents clearly in the driving seat, making their own decisions and the freedom to do what they know is needed." (Big Local partnership member)

Our survey reached both residents and non-resident members of partnerships. We separately analysed responses to these questions to see whether or not there was any significant difference in response. We found that residents were precisely as likely to say that Big Local was resident-led as non-residents.[52] When we explored the issue with reps, the sample with whom we engaged also felt strongly that the programme is indeed resident-led. These findings confirm the findings of an earlier survey across a larger sample of Big Local areas.[53]

FINDING 41: WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF RESIDENTS LEADING

There are residents in some areas who feel that their Big Local is not (or not yet) resident-led. They attribute this to interference or control from other parties (most notably local authorities, local councillors or locally trusted organisations) or to factions of residents with power who are excluding other residents from having a genuine influence on decision-making. Reps also feel these are two of the biggest barriers to resident leadership, though they also cite residents' own lack of confidence and time pressures as important issues affecting genuine resident control.

In our partnership members survey 11% of respondents (26 out of 231) said they felt their Big Local was ***not*** resident-led. When we looked at those who felt this, we found the 26 respondents came from 20 different areas. We also found that in all bar one instance, theirs was not the majority view of respondents in that area. In the one exceptional instance, the respondent replying negatively was the only respondent from that particular area.

Although a minority voice in our survey the feedback of those who chose to elaborate on their responses is nonetheless useful and provides us with useful insights into the kinds of barriers to resident leadership experienced in some areas. Analysis of their feedback showed that where there was any negative or mixed feeling about residents being in control, it was either the result of: (a) not having enough residents involved, or them not yet being confident enough within a group; (b) a feeling that the local council or locally trusted organisation was really in control; or (c) a feeling that only *some* residents were in control – with decisions seeming to be in the hands of a small minority of residents in the group.

> *"Residents have little if any influence over what happens … apart from one exception the ones that are residents rarely attend meetings, take on tasks or get involved with activities" (Big Local worker)*
>
> *"I do not feel that this project has been resident led. Everything seems to have to involve the LTO [locally trusted organisation], they have had more contact with the Local Trust than the rep or the partnership. This project is moving at the LTO's pace." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"It does not seem as though it is about the community and future engagement, just about a few members of the partnership and what they want." (Big Local partnership member).*

These same issues feature strongly in discussions about resident control in reps quarterly reporting – ie, that genuine resident control is hampered in partnerships most commonly by either other parties dominating decision-making, or the control sitting with a minority within a group. In our survey we asked reps an open question about what they felt the barriers were to enabling resident-led activity within the areas they supported. We then thematically analysed their responses. Their responses reinforced the same issues, but also included the lack of confidence of residents and disagreements between residents, so the four things reps most frequently mentioned were:

- interference/lack of support from others (especially local councils) (n=15)
- issues between residents as individuals or between groups of residents (n=10)
- the length of time things take when resident-led which could contribute to others stepping in and the interference mentioned above (n=10)
- lack of confidence/self-belief in some residents (n=14).

We outline below some of the ways in which reps have seen these issues play out so as to hinder resident leadership in local areas.

- **interference/lack of support from other parties** (generally local authorities, local councillors or locally trusted organisations) not sharing the same view of what resident control means, undermining it either because of a lack of faith in it as a way of working; impatience with the process and pace of decision-making; an unwillingness to give up a sense of control from having been in control at the very beginning before residents were becoming better organised; or undermining it without really realising that they were by behaviour that didn't encourage or support resident leadership.

  "actively hostile" "partner agencies not understanding what community leadership means in practice – ie, not holding back and letting things evolve" (Big Local rep)

  "they (eg, locally trusted organisations) have clear ideas about how Big Local should develop but this can be a barrier to residents developing in confidence and taking the power and control themselves" (Big Local rep)

- **factions of residents or individual residents** falling out, or not sharing power with others – here it is either a conflict or a lack of power sharing between residents.

  "community infighting" "community politics" "a history of feuding" (Big Local reps)

- **lack of confidence/self-belief among residents** where residents don't feel certain they can manage things, or don't believe Big Local really is theirs to manage.

  "little or no experience of leading anything so it takes a while to build their confidence" (Big Local rep)

  "Residents' lack of belief in themselves initially – not recognising the power of collective working." (Big Local rep)

- **not enough time or capacity** where reps are clear that the time commitment asked of residents can be a major barrier to resident leadership. Questions about who, what kinds of people, might have the time to give to leading a programme like Big Local are really important when thinking about which residents get involved and can stay involved over time.

  "It is hard to overstate the commitment that a group of people have to make to fulfil the obligations of a Big Local programme." (Big Local rep)

FINDING 42: WHAT HELPS RESIDENTS TAKE THE LEAD

Reps and partnership members alike see a number of factors as enabling resident leadership within Big Local. The most important factor that both agree on is the programme's model and ethos and how it has been set up with such an emphasis on resident leadership. Residents also believe there are steps they have taken to get residents involved that have made a difference, while reps see their own role in enabling resident leadership as key.

Between local partnerships and reps there was common ground about what most enables resident leadership, though reps were more likely to mention their own role as they see the promotion of resident leadership as a core part of it. Across both surveys the following four issues emerged as enablers (in both cases generated from open questions):

- **The Big Local model, ethos, funding and messages** – eg, the 51% rule and emphasis on this in all materials from Local Trust, having the funding there without the need to apply for it, and having it there for a long period of time so that decisions can be made that allow residents to be involved. 32 out of the 37 reps we surveyed agreed with the statement: "The programme has been set up in a way that enables residents to take the lead in their area." They most commonly mentioned the 51% rule or the length of funding as core to ensuring resident leadership.

  "The residents first ethos - 51% of people on the partnership have to be residents – it's simple but unarguably correct and demands respect from local stakeholders." (Big Local rep)

  "51% rule sets a structural foundation for sustaining control". (Big Local rep)

- **Reps as champions of the resident-led principle** -eg, reinforcing and promoting this message. Of all the Big Local values of which reps are guardians, this is possibly the most important as they see their role as often being about helping people understand what resident-led really means or could mean. This also involves support to check imbalances of power and to encourage inclusive practices.

  "the rep support and the way in which they bring people together even when there is no tangible output in the immediate future" (Big Local rep)

  "reps enforcing the resident-led principle … enablers!" (Big Local rep)

- **Actions partnerships have taken locally**. In our partnership review activity participants named a number of things they felt they had done that had enabled resident control. These included, communications and consultation, deciding to fund a local worker, increasing the proportion of residents to non-residents, having residents lead subgroups or take the chair's role, educating others involved and/or encouraging them to move to the sidelines of decision-making.

"We committed to having 70% local residents on the partnership instead of a simple majority" (Big Local partnership member)

"By engaging with as many residents as we can, linking with local community groups and holding meetings which are less formal and more approachable. Constant publicity through events, posters and leaflets …." (Big Local partnership member)

- **Support from agencies locally who "get it", sidelining those who don't** - where other agencies support the principle or if they do not are sidelined to allow residents to take charge.

"We have made a good start, but we're not there yet. We have spent a lot of time simplifying how we operate. There was something approaching a power struggle between councillors, council officers, traditional resident representatives and new residents. … We're at the point now where we've a fully integrated partnership where young people represent about a third of those involved, lots of active "ordinary" residents and a couple from traditional resident associations. … officers from statutory agencies and the councillors … (we) only invite them for specific things. This way the partnership is absolutely resident led" (Big Local partnership member)

FINDING 43: ACCOUNTABILITY TO RESIDENTS IN BIG LOCAL AREAS

Some partnerships identify ensuring accountability to the wider community as something they would like to improve, though we found some examples of creativity in thinking about how to feed back and get feedback in return. Some are worrying about what to report when things are moving slowly or things are happening that the community is less interested in. Some also feel a tension in the programme ethos that states it is ok to take risks and important to accept that not everything may work, but to local residents things not working may not be such an easy message to deliver or to hear.

The guidance for partnerships makes it clear that they need to be accountable, open and transparent and that they should have methods in place "to regularly inform the range of people and organisations in (their) area what Big Local is doing and also ask for feedback to make sure the area's views are reflected".[54]

From those responding to our survey, 83% feel they are keeping residents well informed about what is happening within their area, and they report using meetings, community forums, websites, posting up minutes online, and Facebook pages as ways to keep people up to date and to be accountable. Some areas are being creative in their approach to accountability. For instance, Westwood and Ravensthorpe Big Local has a visual designed to let people know what progress the area is making with programme milestones; Ramsey Big Local has a Facebook timeline for reporting and uses eye-catching poster reporting

instead of formal wordy reports to share updates with local residents; Allenton Big Local uses a 'listen-action-change' story-telling approach to post up on their website stories about how their £1million is being used and what's changing as a result.

Some partnership members identified tensions in reporting where things are slow, of little interest to other residents, or reflect things not working. Some fear pressure to win over cynics and show results could take precedence over genuine accountability.

> *"I like the fact that we can try things and if it doesn't go well you're encouraged to be honest about that, but I'm not sure that's the same as putting it in your newsletter." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 44: INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN BIG LOCAL

Big Local areas have undertaken wide-ranging consultation of different parts of their community, and in part slow development in early phases reflects a strong commitment to being inclusive and hearing from those who may not usually be heard. Big Local plans likewise often reflect the diversity of different viewpoints and needs of different sections of the community, and again the time taken to develop these in part reflects a desire to 'get it right'. However, inclusion and diversity in partnerships and in decision-making processes once Big Local areas are delivering on their plans is not as clearcut and these issues are a cause of concern in significant numbers of partnerships.

In trying to reach an understanding of how far Big Local is resident-led, it is also important to consider not just *if* residents are in control, but *which* residents are in control. Local Trust's core principles include that Big Local should be inclusive and that areas should consider inclusion "of different types of people, communities or groups that reflect the diversity of individuals in (an) area" and should seek to maximise "long term, inclusive benefit (for) all sections in line with priorities decided by the community".[55]

This principle underpins guidance for areas throughout the pathway to consider inclusion: in their consultation, engagement and visioning (not just views but *whose views*?); in their partnership and their decision-making (not just control but *whose control*?); and in their delivery of their plan (*whose benefit*?).

Whose views, whose control and whose benefit?

For the purposes of our evaluation and our interest in questions about resident involvement and resident control, we identified these three questions as a helpful start point to considering how inclusive resident involvement and control have been in practice. However, because this is an early years evaluation, our interest has been in the first two of these questions. (It felt too early to meaningfully explore who services and activities are benefiting, and questions about local beneficiaries were not a part of our evaluation brief.)

Whose views?

We found good evidence of wide-ranging consultation within local areas, and of areas being proactive to reach out to groups who are less likely to be heard in traditional consultations or neighbourhood programmes. Areas reporting on how they had used their Getting Started funding specifically addressed a question about steps they had taken to involve those who are harder to reach: *"How did you involve residents from a wide range of backgrounds, even the most difficult to reach in your area?"* Their responses to this question demonstrate a commitment and creativity, and some real inroads into groups not traditionally involved, though many areas acknowledge this had proved challenging and they had achieved varying degrees of success.[56]

'Harder to reach' groups in local communities were most commonly defined locally as people from Black and Minority Ethnic and refugee communities, young people, older people, the disabled, carers or those with complex needs who are unable to leave their house. Definitions varied and in some, but less commonly, this also included people from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, businesses, working men, and people with mental health conditions or issues with substance misuse or addiction.

The most common approach adopted to ensure inclusive consultation was to work through other partners, community leaders, faith groups or local businesses, but other methods were tried and some areas were very proactive even when it proved challenging.

> *"We tried to get the message out to particular groups through community leaders …. faith groups, the Diversity Network ... a local Lithuanian café ... We know we still have some work to do to keep trying to reach all members of our community …" (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"We have struggled to actively engage residents from the ethnic backgrounds so the residents on the steering group who speak other languages have been speaking to their communities and converted our consultation survey to Urdu, Turkish etc." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Doing activity at different times (important as we have a large number of shift workers). Use of students who come from a wide range of backgrounds." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Once the surveys were analysed it was clear there was a lack of response from people from minority ethnic backgrounds and younger people in certain parts of the area. This has been addressed by commissioning two areas of research to target residents who were not well represented in the*

initial consultation phase." (Big Local partnership member)

Whose control?

The issue of inclusion within decision-making poses questions about:

(a) **who is at the table** (who is in partnerships and to what extent do they reflect the diversity of the community and/or have mechanisms in place to be in dialogue with and accountable to the community?)

(b) **who is in control once at the table** (are some partnerships in danger of being dominated by a small handful of residents, making it difficult for those who are less likely to have done this kind of thing before to really get involved in a meaningful way?)

Both of these questions are exercising partnerships and the reps who work alongside them. In our reps survey 30 respondents (out of 37, in an open question about challenges) stated that getting people involved in a way that reflected the demographics of the area was difficult. Some explained that getting a group of local residents on the steering group or partnership who could be said to be broadly reflective of the diversity of their area had not occurred and they specifically mentioned three groups - those not involved before, young people and people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, as under-represented or as groups that areas most struggle to engage. In our workshops where this came up we identified that partnerships were aware of the issues, committed to keeping them on the agenda and saw the issue of inclusion as something to keep working at:

"What we don't want to do is start talking about "us in here" doing things for "them out there". If we do that we're failing." (Big Local chair)

"The thing that worries me a bit is that I suspect part of why we got the money was because of the issues in (named estate), but that's precisely the area where no-one's getting involved. People are just not interested so do we carry on or do we do things "for" them which isn't how it was meant to be." (Big Local partnership member)

We specifically asked reps whether they felt areas were making progress in involving residents that other locally-based initiatives might have struggled to engage (eg, those not traditionally involved in voluntary and/or community action). The majority of those who answered this question (23 out of 33) said they had seen some success in the areas they had supported. However, they indicated that many partnerships were dominated at the start by those who most commonly get involved in community activity, and that widening participation from this start point was proving to be a difficult process. Where areas were starting to make progress with this it was sometimes causing tensions. They shared that because a lot of partnership members are people who have been involved before in local groups/committees, some of these are acting a little as gatekeepers making it difficult for others to get involved and not always responding well to new people getting involved.

"We are starting with the usual suspects but trying to widen this out is not easy." (Big Local rep)

"in terms of getting the silent majority of people who never engage with things in their area, we've done very well." (Big Local partnership member)

"I think people are getting involved in Big Local who haven't traditionally been involved in things before but this takes time and often the 'activists' act as gatekeepers. (Big Local rep)

"There are noticeable cracks emerging … the people who have till now been the community leaders feeling challenged by others who are now emerging. …There is a risk of people falling out with one another, and the 'arriviste'/new community activists deciding that their efforts aren't appreciated/wanted and stopping their involvement" (Big Local rep)

Local stories: Reaching beyond the usual suspects

Here a Big Local rep tells a story in his own words about how in one of the areas he supports, Big Local is reaching beyond those who might more traditionally get involved in their community.

"A local man turned up … [at one of the area's Big Local events]. He was quite negative about the whole initiative, openly standing up in the meeting saying that "no one's going to get involved and get things happening". The chair looked at him and gave him an ultimatum; "You might be right....but you're here, aren't you? If there's no one else going to do it, then it's up to you!" A few months later, the same man raised the point that a big problem was a lack of quality and up-to-date information about community events and activities. The chair suggested that he lead the "Better Information" working group. He agreed to this, and soon was coming up with ideas. The next meeting he came up with the concept of putting local information on TV monitors in the local shops and pubs. Some thought this may be too much work but after initial persuasion … , the man approached various shops and pubs, and received a positive response. Indeed, two local pubs said that he could use a TV screen in their facility to promote Big Local straight away, without any charge. This was just in time for the Big Local Summer Events. He liaised with the locally trusted organisation's rep (whose team does all the graphic design for this Big Local) and got a presentation placed on a USB memory stick, which he inserted into the TVs. This went down really well locally. He has gone on to negotiate arrangements with the butchers and the post office, and TV monitors and their installation will be in place within the month – funded by Big Local.

"This same man is now a key person on the Big Local Steering Group, attended a recent Big Local Learning Event …, and has become much more enthused, energised and confident about Big Local. He's started to inspire other people to get involved, and from potentially being one of Big Local's early critics, he has become Big Local's biggest advocate, championing our cause."

How areas feel about their progress

Alongside considering progress with achieving pathway milestones, because areas can progress at their own pace, and set their own goals and milestones, an important measure of progress is how areas themselves assess how well they are doing. In our surveying and our achievement reporting we asked areas to identify how they felt about their progress generally, and specifically what they felt they had made most progress with over the past 12 months. These questions were open questions asked without reference to plans or pre-set goals or targets.

FINDING 45: HOW RESIDENTS FEEL ABOUT THEIR PROGRESS

Some Big Local partnerships acknowledge they find it hard to make time to step back and reflect and review how they are doing. Those who took part in our evaluation (just under half of all Big Local partnerships) report feeling generally happy with their progress. However, they commonly feel their progress is slow, sometimes too slow, and they worry that others outside the partnership do not know or appreciate what has been achieved.

Areas taking part in our different evaluation activities (our survey, group review activity and workshops), reported that they felt broadly positive about their progress over the last year. 77% of partnership members in our survey felt they had made good progress in achieving what they set out to do in the last year (n=232). However, many told us they felt their progress was slow, and they worried that others either did not know about or did not appreciate the progress made.

Though 83% (n=219) reported that their group was doing well at keeping people informed about Big Local, just over half (58%) felt others in the area were not really aware of the progress being made, and that there was some pressure locally to start getting results more quickly (52%). This would suggest perhaps though steering groups/partnerships feel they are improving at letting people know what Big Local is and what it is about, conveying their progress is more challenging – particularly where things are slow or changes feel largely 'behind the scenes'. In some areas those involved feel a lot has been achieved, but feel it is 'behind the scenes' in the sense that the main progress has been made with less visible and exciting but necessary tasks such as developing the partnership, putting systems in place for assessing grants, recruiting a worker and building the confidence and capacity of those involved.

> *"a huge administrative task just to find out what's already provided … bringing people and groups together .... Not very exciting … doesn't make interesting publicity … but essential." (Big Local partnership chair)*

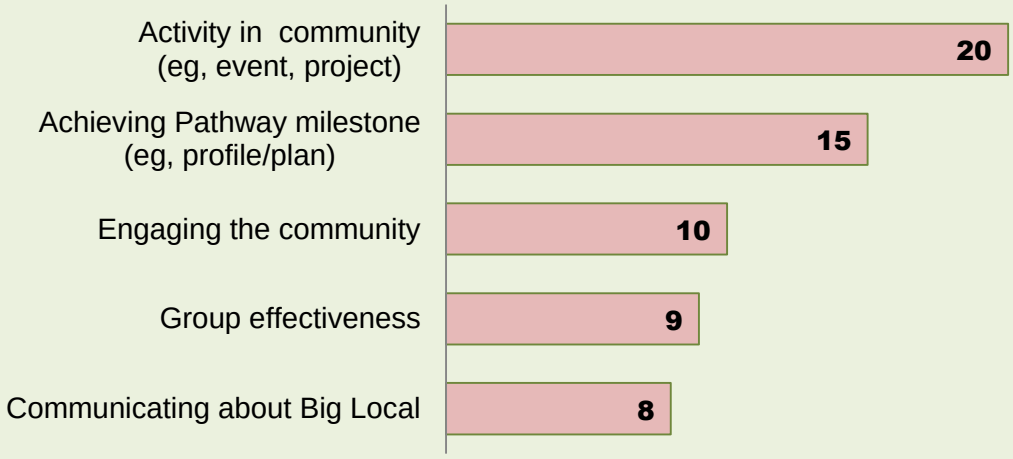
The issue of perceived slow pace recurs not just in feedback from residents to us, but also in reporting to Local Trust where one of the most common messages about progress is that things are slow and/or that things are taking longer than expected. We explore the reasons for this further in our chapter on challenges (see section 5).

FINDING 46: THE ACHIEVEMENTS RESIDENTS FEEL PROUD OF

Residents report feeling most proud when they see things happening in the community and how people respond to that, but also that they feel proud about the work that has taken place behind the scenes that fewer people see (eg, achieving pathway milestones, working effectively as a group or better understanding how Big Local works).

The 35 areas who completed our partnership review activity said their proudest achievements were as outlined here in figure 18 (note: areas could select more than one achievement hence the total is more than 35).

Figure 18: Proudest achievements (n=35 areas)



"Developing projects such as giving grants, summer playscheme, etc which is giving the community what they asked for" (Big Local steering group member)

"Sieving through the priorities and actions from the community engagement work and producing a concise Big Local plan and a year 1 plan and budget" (Big Local partnership member)

"Our Partnership Group is now much stronger and very committed to achieving the outcomes." (Big Local partnership member)

Even though residents report ups and downs in their steering groups/partnerships, they commonly report feeling that they are growing as a partnership and a majority of those involved in our survey and partnership review activity felt they had made good progress in working effectively together, as a group. For instance, in our survey:

- 85% of respondents said they have shared understanding of how to achieve their aims
- 91% said they could say what they think and challenge each other in meetings
- 80% felt their group was able to deal constructively with disagreement or conflict.

[note – 'n' varied between 230 and 232]*

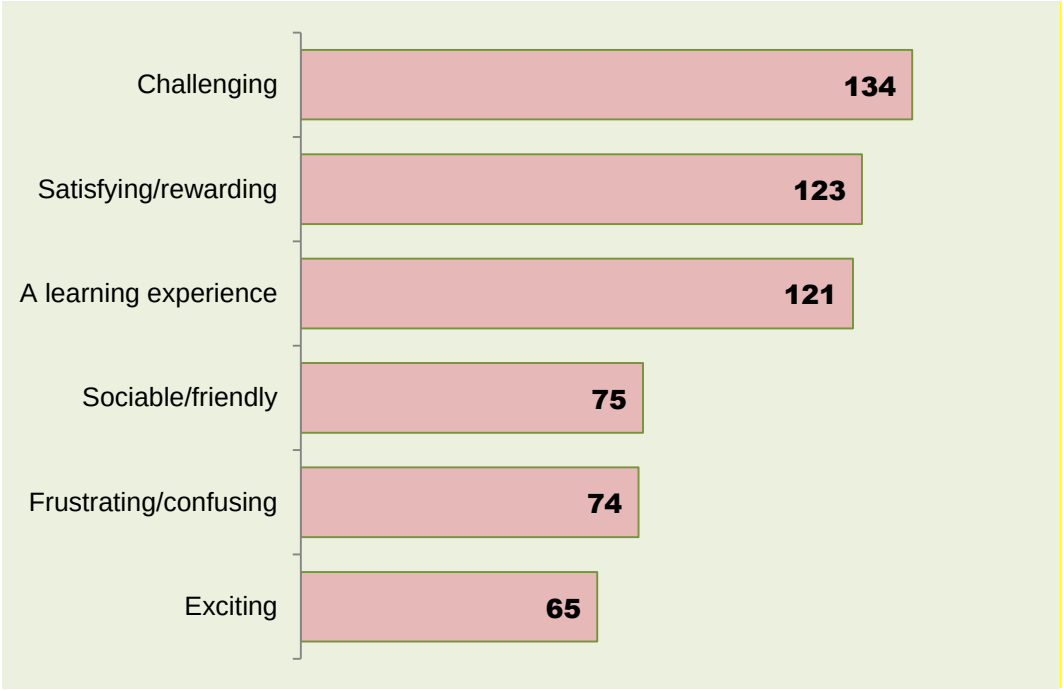
How residents feel about being involved

FINDING 47: WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A RESIDENT SHAPING BIG LOCAL

Residents' experiences of being involved with Big Local are inevitably very mixed. For some it has been a challenging and exciting journey, for almost all a learning experience, but for a few it has been frustrating and has not been entirely enjoyable so far. One strong message emerging from residents' experiences is that being involved in Big Local makes a big demand of people's time and commitment, bigger than many anticipated. It remains to be seen whether this is something particular to the early years or whether this will continue to be the case, as this may have important implications for the retention of residents at partnership level in the longer-term.

We asked survey respondents to choose from a list of 12 descriptive words or phrases the top three which best described their experience of being involved in Big Local. Figure 19 shows respondents' most popular choices. The reality is that many have a very mixed experience of being involved in Big Local and there have been good times and difficult times. The top three were: **challenging** (57% of respondents chose this); **satisfying / rewarding** (52%); and **a learning experience** (51%).

Figure 19: What has being involved in Big Local been like for you? (n=236)



"It is all different things. Frustrating that people don't want to get too involved and exciting as we have seen what it can do so really want to make it work and see some wonderful outcomes." (Big Local Steering group member)

Overall more respondents chose positives than negatives to sum up their experience. Just over half described the experience as satisfying/rewarding and/or as a learning experience; a third (32%) said they have found being involved a sociable or friendly experience; and just over a quarter (28%) said it has been exciting. But, to temper this, just under a third (31%) have also found it frustrating and confusing, and we know that to describe an experience as challenging - the most popular descriptor chosen (by 57% of respondents) - can be taken either way, that is, as either positive or negative.

Although the choice of positive expressions outweighed the choice of negatives, we cannot overlook the fact that for some, being involved in Big Local has been not just challenging, but sometimes frustrating, confusing and, on occasion, stressful. Whilst a small proportion of residents mention positive outcomes for their wellbeing and enjoyment as a result of getting involved, one or two have reported negative impacts on their general wellbeing and/or a level of stress or anxiety (with the latter, though rare, linked to worries associated with being involved, doing too much, or stress linked to periods of fallings out or disputes between those involved).

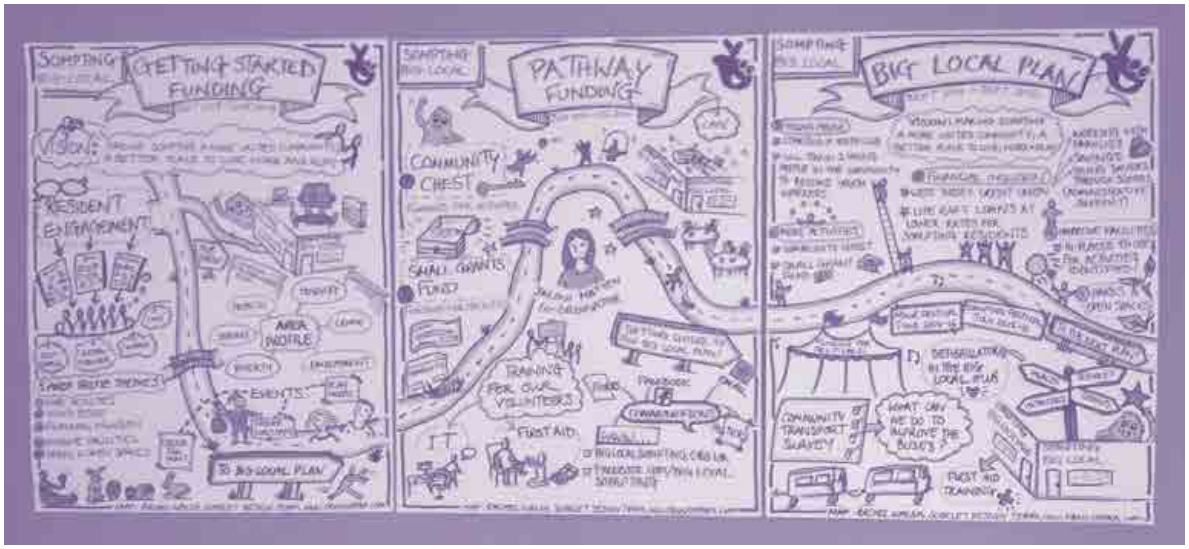
> *"This has been really important to me and has helped me through a difficult period in my life." (Big Local steering group member)*
>
> *"The level of voluntary commitment is extraordinary - a chair recently passed out at a meeting with local stakeholders through exhaustion" (Big Local rep)*
>
> *" … our home life has been taken over by a lot of paperwork/ meetings etc. … His health is beginning to suffer but he won't walk away." (Big Local partnership member)*

We do not know how many individuals have dropped out of steering groups or partnerships along the way, nor why they have done so, but we know from local reporting that this is happening. It would be helpful to understand more about when and why this happens, and indeed when and why people stay involved. This would help us better understand how the processes and the engagement could be improved so that the balance remains as it appears to be now – that is, tipped in the favour of enjoyment over challenges for those giving their time to make Big Local happen.

> *"I have found this very rewarding but at the same time stressful and frustrating. When organising events I worry how they will turn out and if people will turn up and at times hard work getting people to attend events. People are still very sceptical of what we are hoping to achieve yet it is their ideas we are working on." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"There have been times when you just feel like well, what's the point, there was months when it was one thing after another and we didn't feel like we were getting anywhere, but then we had a Christmas event and it kind of turned around." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"I feel like we are now all friends. I love my Big Local." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"The best thing I've been involved with in all my years of working with the community." (Big Local partnership member)*

4

Findings



What changes are taking place in Big Local areas?

Section 4.1

Building local capacity to make a difference: Are residents gaining in skills and confidence to help them make a difference? Are people and organisations connecting up better? Are communities voicing their needs, identifying solutions and playing an active part in making them happen?

"Big Local is making all the difference in the world. I feel different about the (area) – I feel more supported, feel more part of the community, I feel as though there are so many new learning areas ahead, I should be sitting in a rocking chair but I have too much to do, it's exciting!" (Big Local resident and partnership member)

Building individual and community capacity

We explored what kinds of changes were being achieved in areas, with particular but not sole focus on Big Local's four outcomes. In this section of our report we focus on the first two of these.

1 Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them	2 People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future

One issue raised during the course of our evaluation was some lack of clarity or consensus about who these outcomes would affect as the terms "people", "communities" and "the community" are interchangeably used. However, as ours is an early years evaluation we were clear from the outset that our focus would be on the core groups of residents most actively involved in making Big Local happen in their area, even though we understand that over time it will be important for Local Trust to measure the extent to which capacity is being built outside of these core groups.

In the course of our research, and through analysis of the programme's Theory of Change[57], a number of outcomes of interest were identified as highlighted below. This outline does not map connecting lines between these changes as we understand them to be connected to residents'/community capacity in complex, non-linear ways.

Figure 20: Changes linked to capacity

Connections - being and feeling more connected

FINDING 48: PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER, BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Many of those most actively involved in making Big Local happen in their area feel that getting involved has increased their networks and their connections to others. They have met new people and come together in new ways, and many report knowing more about the people and organisations in their area than they did when they first got involved.

A majority of the partnership members who took part in our survey reported that their involvement with Big Local has increased their connections with others. 89% (n=231) said they had got to know more people in their area as a result of getting involved. When this was discussed during our evaluation workshops people talked about meeting new people largely through the process of setting up steering groups and partnerships, but also through attending events, running surveys, community research and consultation activities, and through volunteering in local hubs set up as the base for Big Local activities. People also commonly raised how this involved meeting people they wouldn't normally have met, from different parts of the community, different ages, or different 'status' (for instance, working alongside councillors). They also highlighted that they have come to know more about local organisations, services and businesses in the area than they had previously. For some their involvement had positively influenced how connected they feel to others and to their area:

> *"I do sometimes slightly despair because it's so hard to get people involved but we've brought together a great group of people here and that gives me hope in what we can achieve." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"The basic difference is that … the Big Local work feels like working for one's own family, home and community. Thus the decisions tend to be familial and communitarian." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"I'm a long-time resident ... one of my highlights was walking around with a group of young people and telling them about the history of the place. There were so many things they didn't know. They enjoyed it and I did too." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"The miracle for me was that all those people [on the partnership board] were beavering away and were all isolated – our paths had not crossed, as the meetings progressed friendships grow – you become interested and see opportunities to work together … today my whole working life is intertwined with the academy, the local church, the (named housing provider)… and the council." (Big Local partnership member)*

A majority of the partnership members who took part in our survey also reported that their involvement with Big Local had made them feel more positive about where they live, and that they were contributing to building a stronger sense of community around them.

- 68% of partnership members said they feel more positive about where they live
- 78% feel they are building a stronger sense of community.[58]

Sharing and increasing knowledge and skills

FINDING 49: BIG LOCAL AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The experience of joining a partnership and helping make Big Local happen has had its ups and downs for many if not most of those involved, but above all it has been a learning experience. 72% of those who took part in our partnership survey said they had learnt new things since getting involved and Big Local reps identified learning new things as the second most significant outcome they have observed in the groups they work alongside. Common areas of learning and building skills include: getting better at working with others, knowing more about processes and how Big Local works and increasing knowledge about new 'topics' linked to Big Local plans.

72% of steering group/partnership members we surveyed (n=228) reported that they had learnt new things and/or developed new skills as a result of being involved in Big Local. In our evaluation workshops, we found residents with significant prior experience of volunteering or neighbourhood initiatives were just as likely to be able to identify that they had learnt new things as those who were new to it. This was ascribed to the fact that even for those who had taken part in community initiatives before, for the most part Big Local feels different to them, and this has led to some interesting learning for people.

> *"I really enjoy being part of our Big Local. I work with some amazing people …, many of whom are community volunteers and give a lot of their free time to the community in a very quiet way. … Sometimes I feel out of my depth, and do find myself 'winging' it, but I always seem to come through in the end. I'm just an ordinary person, with no particular training in any community related field, and although I want to help the community I don't know that I necessarily have the skills I need to be able to do it - these are building with time. That all sounds negative, but I still only see being involved with Big Local as a positive learning experience!"*
>
> *"I have been involved in community and other projects for 50+ years. Big Local is the biggest but most rewarding challenge to date I have been involved in." (Big Local partnership member)*

Apart from learning more about their area and the people around them, residents are most likely to identify that they have learnt and/or improved their skills in working with others or in working through Big Local processes. Some also describe learning about new ways of doing things or about new topics linked to elements of their plans. Many are doing things that are new to them and are being challenged by the experience. This sense of learning and challenge contributes to some sticking with Big Local even when it gets difficult or seems slow.

"The fact that no one is paid to be there makes it harder, and has made me think about leaving the group as to not deal with the difficult people. But then I think it'll be a learning experience. This project is unique, and can be exciting to be a part of." (Big Local partnership member)

Residents reflecting on their learning most commonly mentioned the following areas where they had developed knowledge or skills:

- personal, social or communication skills (eg, getting along with others, working in teams, speaking in front of others)
- knowledge or skills linked to Big Local processes (eg, how things work under Big Local, running meetings, recruitment processes, writing a local plan)
- new subjects linked to elements of their local plans (eg, social enterprise, social investment, managing community assets).

Across partnership members, learning and improving abilities in working with others and teamwork were mentioned more than other types of learning.

"I never thought I would have stood up and talked about it in front of a large group of people like that but I did it and it went fine. You do end up doing things you didn't think you could do." (Big Local partnership member)

"What's different about Big Local is … learning from experiences shared, exploring new geographical areas and learning about issues and challenges, applying new skills/experience." (Big Local partnership member)

FINDING 50: WHAT IS HELPING RESIDENTS LEARN AND GROW

More partnership members report they are learning from those on the journey with them in their area than from any other source. 83% of our survey respondents felt this was the main source of their learning, and 85% also said that being involved in Big Local had enabled them to put their existing knowledge and skills to good use. This speaks positively to Big Local's asset-based approach – making use of knowledge and skills already in the community as well as developing them. After this, the other important sources of residents' learning are reps, Big Local workers, or doing things they have not done before. Just over half say they have also learnt from people involved in Big Local in other areas.

When asked what had most contributed to their learning (from a pre-defined list of options) residents (n=236) attributed their learning as follows:

- I've learnt new things from people involved in Big Local in our area (83%)
- I've learnt new things from our rep/paid worker (71%)
- I've learnt by doing new things (66%)
- I've learnt from people in other Big Local areas (58%).

Local stories: Pathways to learning

George Hill, chair of Kingswood and Hazel Leys Big Local partnership had been involved in his local Neighbourhood Association and other community activities for some years before getting involved in Big Local. Since getting involved two years ago he has made the most of the learning opportunities on offer through the programme. Importantly, however, George reports that much of his learning, and his enjoyment, has actually come from working with the other members of the group, the discussions and the debates they have had, and all the learning that comes from the ups and downs of a group's journey and its difficult moments too. He also feels that he has learnt a lot from the area's Big Local rep, particularly seeing how he supported the area through more challenging times

The many connections George has made as a result of his involvement in and outside the local area have also supported his learning, and attending the programme's national learning events has been particularly helpful. These have given him the opportunity "to share challenges but also positive experiences" and have exposed him to new ideas that he has then been able to take back and share with others locally.

> *"I've learned so much … about me, about others, about the organisations that run the show, the pressures they're under."*

In another Big Local area, Lynne Stewart was a busy stay-at-home mum who, unlike George, had not previously been active in her community before getting involved with Big Local. Lynne got involved as a volunteer with Sale West Big Local because of her interest in doing something for teenagers – her own children are in their teens and she felt strongly about there being so little in the area for them to do. Like George, Lynne reports learning a lot from her involvement, and she is similarly enthusiastic about the opportunities Big Local offers for learning and personal growth as well as for making a difference. Since getting involved in the Sale West Big Local steering group Lynne has had opportunities to visit other areas and projects, including a programme run by the Eden Project called The Big Lunch Extra. This was a four day residential camp in Cornwall aimed at helping individuals who want to start or develop a community initiative. Lynne came back from the camp brimming with ideas, enthusiasm and practical tools to share with her fellow steering group members about what she had learnt and experienced and has been able to pass on valuable information as situations and opportunities have arisen.

> "*All these things I picked up from the Eden project have been invaluable. When people have an idea I can give them the tools and confidence to start things off."*

Lynne reports being part of the Big Local steering group has helped her grow in confidence and self-belief as well as improving her skills in getting along with others. The whole experience has been so positive she is now hoping to seek paid work in the community as a result and is now an elected member of the Sale West Board and one of the deputy Chairpersons.

> *"I have learnt so many skills by being part of the Big Local and it has made me even more determined to gain employment within my own community, so that I know I'm making a difference."*

George and Lynne are both committed to sharing their learning with others and excited to do so, both sharing with us examples of this, encouraging others to get involved and recommending activities and ideas to them.

People learning from their local peers

- Steering group/partnership members talked positively about the way they had learnt so much from others in their group. There was a strong sense of appreciation within groups of how they were benefiting individually and as groups from the mix of skills and knowledge around the table, and though people frequently talked about learning curves, they talked almost as often about what they had learnt from what each other had already brought to the table.

  "We're skilling up so we can do things for ourselves. This is community development. We are not that reliant on our rep." (Big Local partnership member)

  "the group I'm supporting are all developing along together." (Big Local rep)

Learning from reps/paid workers

- Reps and locally funded Big Local workers are also an important source of learning. reps in particular are reported to have helped residents improve their knowledge and skills in working together, in meeting Big Local requirements, in running their meetings better, and in processes such as recruitment, running a grant scheme or consulting/conducting community research. The transfer of knowledge or skills from paid workers varies depending on whether the worker was brought in to address a lack of capacity, or to bring skills or knowledge lacking in the group. In the case of the latter, groups were more likely to see this as a learning opportunity. One or two respondents felt actually not having a worker, though it made life more difficult, meant it was more likely that more would be learnt by residents.

Learning by doing

- About two-thirds of survey respondents said they were learning in part by doing new things. This was something that came up frequently in our workshops where groups often felt they had just had to get on and do things without always feeling confident about them and that this was a key part of how they were increasing their knowledge and skills. They talked about learning by doing and quite often about learning from mistakes. Reps too felt learning by doing was one of the most significant ways in which residents were developing their skills.

  "I see them learning through doing and recognising that they are becoming 'experts by experience'." (Big Local partnership member)

  "I never thought I could write a plan. We've learnt a lot. We've learnt about recruiting staff, interviewing, all sorts." (Big Local partnership member)

  "Despite my rather negative answers … I do get excited about the possibilities and there are parts of the programme I enjoy; and I am learning from the experience. Some of our problems could be solved by buying in more help but ultimately that might not achieve the aim of getting more people in our Big Local area with the skills and knowledge to achieve the Big Local outcomes." (Big Local partnership member)

Learning from networking events and pilot projects

- There is unfortunately very little data available on the learning of those participating in pilot projects, or participants in events put on by reps or programme partners. Information on learning is not routinely collected beyond basic data sometimes collected in event feedback forms, which means it is hard to assess learning outcomes from these activities so far. Occasionally reps will reflect in their quarterly reporting on residents' experience of learning events, and when they do, they point to the potential for them to bring about positive outcomes, particularly where they tap into a need that is relevant and/or timely – that is, where the drive and impetus comes from the resident.

  "in February I accompanied one of the residents to a Big Local training day on Community Energy in London. This was a great success and the resident is now actively pursuing a community energy idea for his area." (Big Local partnership member)

Learning from people in other Big Local areas

- Resident learning from those involved in other Big Local areas takes place at national events, sub-regional or thematic events, or is self-directed as areas seek out and visit or make contact with other areas. Though only around half our survey respondents mentioned this, it was one of the aspects of learning they praised most highly. Interestingly, talking to reps about the value they find in their own networking with other reps, it may well be that people are learning more from other areas than they realise, albeit sometimes indirectly via their rep.

  "The most helpful thing we have done is to visit Bermondsey Big Local who were inspiring and informative and really helped us." (Big Local partnership member)

FINDING 51: LEARNING ACROSS BIG LOCAL AREAS

Feedback from areas and from reps suggests learning from peers, where areas can engage with it, is an incredibly useful part of the programme, whether organised nationally, by reps on a thematic/regional basis, or by areas themselves. Areas most commonly learn from each other about Big Local processes, about dealing with challenges that areas share in common, or about new delivery or engagement ideas. Despite some concerns that learning activity often invests in individuals and does not get shared or have wider benefit, some of the areas' feedback suggests that this learning is in fact being shared and applied, particularly if the learning is well timed.

We know from feedback forms completed after networking events that those who have met or been in contact with other Big Local areas have found it extremely helpful to network and share learning and ideas with others in the same situation as them. Feedback after the NANM's learning events and other networking or learning events

organised by partners highlights that talking to other Big Local areas is often rated the best or most useful part of any learning event, and this was confirmed during our fieldwork. Opportunities to learn from other areas are increasingly being facilitated by reps on a sub-regional or thematic basis with around 15 rep-led networking and learning events taking place each year. These opportunities are also being initiated by residents themselves who sometimes arrange visits to areas they feel they could learn from on the back of having met them at a national learning event. Based on reps' feedback, alongside what residents themselves told us during our fieldwork, we found that residents were increasing their knowledge and skills via peer learning in three main areas:

Learning about Big Local processes

"People have increased their knowledge of Big Local and in some areas have learned from other Big Local areas, but mainly about how to manage the Big Local process." (Big Local partnership member)

"The chair attended the spring event at Kings Cross. She came back inspired, particularly by the presentation from White City. That and the networking event we held at Elthorne emphasised the need to consider a locally trusted organisation for the next stage with a different approach!" (Big Local rep)

"Residents who attended the event in Peterborough were especially positive about gaining a wider picture, understanding about building the plan and insight into working with credit unions." (Big Local rep)

Learning about how to tackle shared challenges

"The residents who attended the spring event were really impressed with the work to support the young people and engagement of the schools from Kirk Hallam. They are already in touch and looking to set up a visit to share their knowledge and approach." (Big Local rep)

"The group visited Bermondsey Big Local which they found really inspiring and have implemented some of the ideas …. These are to have outings and events in which each estate has a certain amount of people take part so that it breaks down barriers and integrates people." (Big Local rep)

"Being inspired by (their) approach to local communications led to developing … a range of approaches to extend the community conversation and increase resident awareness." (Big Local rep)

Picking up new ideas

"After talking to Clubmoor, the group intend to do a dog show as a means of raising awareness in the community." (Big Local rep)

"Three members of the Partnership attended one of the London spring events and brought information back to the group as a result. The chair was particularly impressed by the workshop around the prevention of loan shark activity and, as a result, (the area) is sponsoring a session at a local community centre for the general public." (Big Local rep)

Local stories: The value of networking

Big Local is a unique programme and partnerships report finding it incredibly useful to see how other areas have approached Big Local. Lack of time is often a barrier to direct networking between areas but increasingly steering groups and partnerships are seeking out opportunities to visit areas with whom they feel they might have something in common.

Members of Revoe Big Local group have enjoyed two learning visits – to Inner East Preston and to Clubmoor. Their visit to Preston, who were at a similar stage with similar challenges, provided reassurance. They realised they had achieved a great deal. They then decided they would like to visit an area that had progressed further along the pathway. Their rep then put out a request on the reps online basecamp site and the rep for Clubmoor replied. .By chance, an event was coming up to share the Clubmoor Big Local 'story so far' and this proved ideal for sharing ideas and experiences. After the visit a resident who went reflected:

> *"We learnt a lot …. I felt they were reaching out more to the community and we were reserved with that … we were collecting all the information, but it's made me want to get out in the community and start speaking one-to-one with the people who can't get out of the house, who can't communicate."*

The rep for Revoe Big Local also felt the visit helpful for the partnership: *"It gave them a comparison, a benchmark, to move towards."*

Two other Big Local areas, North West Ipswich and South Bermondsey, were both in the first wave of areas. They had similarly positive gains from networking directly with each other and, because they are early starters, they have also hosted visits from a number of other areas and benefited from these. When networking together the two areas identified some valuable learning. For instance, for North West Ipswich residents, the key learning was about the role of the paid local support worker. As their rep reports:

> *"That was like a big lightbulb going on ... They realised … how much the support worker was doing compared to what was happening in North West Ipswich. That caused such a change in their approach to Big Local from that point on … it was amazing how they changed."*

Gannow, like other areas, worried that even though they were working hard, they were "behind" in progressing along the Big Local pathway. For them a visit to Pendle at a similar stage was reassuring. They also visited other community-based projects that had triumphed in the face of adversity. This was a valuable learning experience and these visits led Gannow's residents to shift their focus more on to commissioning than direct delivery.

> *"I think this thing about the scale, a million pounds, it's such a large amount of money you can't fathom it until someone says 'we do this for £300,000'."*

As the reps involved conclude, these visits serve many purposes:

> *'It gives you something to compare to, (and) ideas, it can boost your confidence as you recognise some of the things you're good at that perhaps other areas aren't so good at" "… you see you have good things to offer."*

Growing in confidence and self-belief

FINDING 52: INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND SELF-BELIEF

Residents involved in Big Local report increases in confidence and self-belief which are strongly, though not entirely, linked to their development of new knowledge and skills. As well as growing more confident about their ability to undertake certain tasks linked to delivering Big Local, some report a more general increase in self-belief on an individual and group basis. 88% of partnership members in our survey said they feel confident about their ability to help make Big Local happen.

Residents report that they are growing in confidence that they can help make Big Local happen, and reps confirm this. We used our review exercise to ask groups to be more specific about where they felt their confidence had most grown. There was a strong correlation between what reps reported and what individual partnership members and whole groups reported. They jointly identify the following main areas where residents' confidence has grown:

working better as a group/team – more confident as a partnership

> *"Our partnership group is now much stronger and very committed to achieving the outcomes." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"We are better at organising our Partnership Board meetings and working as a team." (Big Local partnership member)*

engaging residents and communicating about Big Local

> *"Talking to the public and speaking up with our ideas and thoughts" "Going out and meeting people, putting your view and listening to theirs." (Big Local partnership members)*

understanding local needs and making decisions based on these

> *"We are more confident in our decision making and that those decisions are based on research undertaken and knowing the needs of the area." (Big Local partnership member)*

dealing with authority figures

> *"I think we've got much more assertive. We speak out a bit more now." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"I didn't think I'd be sitting here with councillors and people like that but now I would get up and say what I want to and I wouldn't be worried as before. I have done that." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"confidence of a group of residents to meet with and develop relationships with decision makers at LA and other agencies". (Big Local rep)*

FINDING 53: WHAT IS HELPING RESIDENTS BECOME MORE CONFIDENT

Residents (and those working alongside them) attribute their growth in confidence to getting things done, achieving milestones or seeing results; encouragement and support from within their partnership and outside it; comparing their progress favourably with others; and overcoming challenges.

We were able to identify four key factors that emerged as most contributing to increases in confidence:

Getting things done/seeing tangible results. To a large extent it does seem as though, as with learning, much confidence is coming from just doing things and getting results. Residents we spoke to commonly reported a growth in confidence as a result of completing a particular task or achieving a milestone, particularly if this was slightly outside their comfort zone in the first instance. They gave examples of successfully organising an event or supporting a recruitment process.

> *"We organised the market and the first time we thought no-one would come, but they did. Each time that happens you worry like anything and then it turns out ok, you realise you can do it and you just get more confident each time." (Big Local partnership member).*

Encouragement and support. Residents attribute much of their growth in confidence to the support of their rep and/or their locally trusted organisation. Residents' feedback suggests that the part of the rep's role that consists of encouragement, feedback, reminding people of their achievements is very valuable, both for individuals and for groups - promoting review and reflection helps by enabling groups to look back at how far they have come and value what they have achieved.

> *"Getting that support, someone who's there for you, that's been important for being in the chair's role. It could be a bit of a lonely road otherwise." (Big Local partnership member)*

Contact with other areas. People who had visited other areas almost always talked about how this had helped reassure them and boost their confidence. We found only one reference in a report from a rep of where this had not worked well for a group and had in fact dented their confidence. Interestingly when exploring this with groups in our evaluation workshops we found that this works in different ways, broadly via reassurance, benchmarking or learning. That is, for some their confidence was boosted by a visit to another area because they could be reassured about their progress – "ah, someone else is finding that difficult too, it isn't just us" (reassurance); for others confidence was boosted by finding something they felt they were doing better than another area (benchmarking); on other occasions it was about learning and coming back with ideas which made them feel more confident in dealing with a particular issue or challenge (learning).

Overcoming challenges and weathering storms (the kind of "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" effect!) In discussions with groups during our evaluation workshops we picked up a sense that for some groups their increased confidence comes from having worked their way through challenges, from surviving difficult times or situations.

Identifying and acting on local needs

FINDING 54: ABILITY TO IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND LOCAL NEEDS

Residents who have been involved in Big Local feel strongly that the experience has increased their ability to identify and articulate local needs. More than 90% of the partnership members felt confident they had based their plans on what residents had identified as most needed. Importantly many also report that their improved understanding of needs is also accompanied by a better understanding of local assets. A small number recognise that there are groups or parts of the community whose needs they know less about, or weren't able to assess as well, and this is an issue they feel should remain on their agenda. Groups generally report more confidence in identifying local needs than in taking action to address them.

In our partnership survey some of the questions where we found the strongest positive response were in relation to residents' better understanding local needs. For instance:

- 94% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "our activities are based on residents' ideas of how to improve our area" (n=234)
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "we have made the right decisions about what is needed in our area" (n= 231). Of the remainder, 14% (32) were unsure, and just 7% (17) disagreed with the statement.

These findings confirm what we found in our analysis of Getting Started reports and in our evaluation workshops. Steering groups and partnerships feel strongly that the process of research, consultation and engagement undertaken to get things started in their area has left them with a rich source of information on local needs from the perspective of people locally. The level of detail and evidence in profiles and plans is one of the strongest tangible indicators that areas have (or have developed) the ability to identify local needs. We did come across areas where the process of producing profiles and plans had perhaps not involved residents as actively as they might, so it was helpful to have so many confirm that (perhaps despite being in an area where people had not been fully involved) they still felt they had improved their understanding and/or abilities in this area.

We also came across a small number of areas where people acknowledged that though they had improved their understanding of needs, there were some groups or parts of the community that they had reached or understood less well. This was tied in with issues of engagement and inclusion that we have touched on elsewhere, but there was some sense that there is still work left to do and that understanding needs is not a one-off task but something that needs to be ongoing.

> *"I feel we should have done more to find out the views of the elderly in the area. When I look back, I feel that our group has obsessively tried to get kids and young people involved, but did very little to involve the elderly ..." (Big Local partnership member)*

Conducting research and mapping to produce their area profiles has also left many partnership members feeling more confident about their understanding of what assets there are in the local area that they can draw on.

> *"Doing the work for the business directory we found small businesses that we never knew existed. It was an eye-opener." (Big Local partnership member)*

In our engagement with groups when we asked them to assess how well they could identify and address local needs, each time they asked us to separate out the two parts of this programme outcome, that is, to consider *identifying need* and *acting on it* separately. In each group we found more confidence in assessing needs than in taking action to address them.

FINDING 55: ABILITY TO TAKE ACTION ON PRIORITISED NEEDS

Once needs are identified partnerships can find it challenging to work with residents to prioritise between them, and may take a longer time than anticipated exploring ways to address them. Despite reporting more confidence about decision-making generally, groups can still find bigger decisions difficult and can lack confidence about which direction to take. This hesitancy about committing to an approach or taking action can be about not knowing what would be the best approach to tackle an issue, or sometimes about feeling the burden of responsibility for getting things right. Though some have built their confidence and abilities by funding small projects and running small grants schemes, the step up to making major decisions about direction and larger projects can seem a large one. However, both partnership members and reps report a growing confidence and ability to take action over time and expect to see this continue. Subgroups are proving helpful in some areas as a way to really help areas take action as outlined in their plans.

When considering how we might assess whether or not areas are demonstrating increased ability to address what is needed, we considered this would entail assessing how far areas are:

- able to prioritise between identified needs;
- aware of the options they could consider to address identified priorities, and those who can help them deliver on their priorities;
- confident to make decisions about what to do, fund or commission;
- able to make a clear link between activities undertaken and the prioritised needs.

It emerged that prioritising between all the needs uncovered has proved difficult in some areas, though much learning has come out of the process. Then, with priorities in place sometimes groups have not felt confident about which way to go in addressing them. This has sometimes led to exploratory visits to other areas for ideas, or just more engagement outside of an area.

The ultimate decision-making about which needs to prioritise and how to address them has in some areas been perhaps more difficult than anticipated despite groups reporting useful learning from running small grants schemes and funding small projects. It is often at the point of making larger decisions that conflict arises, and tensions emerge in steering groups and partnerships which can add to difficulties agreeing and taking action.

A key part of feeling able to take action on prioritised needs is having an awareness of the options available, and understanding who (which individuals or organisations) in a local area or further afield could help local groups get things done. In our survey we specifically asked about awareness of who could help deliver on priorities. 84% of respondents (n=227) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they have "a good understanding of who to link up with to help us get things done in our area".

In our survey some respondents alluded to a lack of confidence in relation to taking action and making decisions. When we specifically asked about confidence in making decisions about how money is spent, 77% (n= 231) agreed with the statement "we feel confident in making decisions about how we spend the money". Of the remainder 15% (34) disagreed with the statement, and 8% (18) felt unsure.

> *"We are more confident in our decision making and that those decisions are based on research undertaken and knowing the needs of the area." (Big Local partnership)*
>
> *"We are new to this and we are a team of volunteers. I struggle to feel that we are moving at times as we feel a little scared of the sum of money that we have been put as custodians of. We need to get moving or year one's money will end up not being spent." (Big Local partnership member)*

Reps in their own monitoring regularly raise issues linked to decision-making, including a lack of confidence, but also a tendency to play safe and be risk averse, and the need to manage issues of potential conflict of interest.

> *" … (key issues include) … "how to make BIG decisions". The partnership is contemplating a couple of projects (based on taking on local assets) that will fundamentally change the focus of their plan. This is proving to be a very difficult process to navigate both in terms of trying to get the partnership to appreciate the scale of what they are considering while also maintaining progress." (Big Local rep)*

Overall most areas *are* progressing plans and taking action on prioritised needs, and working through subgroups and commissioning providers is helping move things forward. However understanding that partnerships are not always finding this easy is important when trying to assess whether or not they are taking action and becoming better able to take action over time. At this time the picture seems mixed.

> *"Having subgroups has meant people are clear about responsibilities and committed to making something happen and it's with an issue they're interested in or they feel some ownership of so that's working well. We need more people in these as otherwise it's just us same people again, but it has meant we can move things forward more effectively than we were doing before." (Big Local partnership member)*

Getting more people actively involved

FINDING 56: GETTING MORE RESIDENTS INVOLVED OVER TIME

An important outcome all areas are aiming to achieve is to see more people locally actively involved with Big Local over time. Though this varies across areas and some are pleased with their progress, many feel they are not yet achieving this outcome as well as they had hoped. Overall partnerships feel they are doing well in raising awareness of what Big Local is about, but they are finding it harder to turn that awareness into active involvement. Where more involvement is happening, it is often linked to having a visible hub to act as a catalyst for activity, or linked to people seeing quick wins and successes and wanting to be part of the story.

We asked an open question in our survey about what was changing in areas. Of the 182 responses only three respondents felt that getting more residents involved was a change they were bringing about in their area. We specifically looked at this question in our evaluation workshops, asking areas to rate their progress in getting more people involved and it was the topic where they rated themselves as achieving the least. Not being able to get more people involved was generally considered a worry, with the potential to impede an area's ability to act on needs. Some partnerships were also concerned that over time, if they weren't able to draw more people in, they would develop into a group that does things to or for the community instead of with them.

Figure 21: Changes in the local area (engagement)

Where areas are starting to get more people involved they often attribute this to having established a space as a focal point for activities or a small grants scheme, or just to people seeing results and hearing good news stories and wanting to get involved.

> *"Slowly people are becoming aware that there is a 'community' project under way that could improve their area." (Big Local partnership member)*

Maximising or increasing resources

FINDING 57: MAXIMISING OR INCREASING RESOURCES

Many Big Local partnerships have started to consider ways to make their £1million go further, including by attracting in-kind or match funding, fundraising for grants, or exploring social investment options. While some areas have done well at generating in-kind or match funding, and a handful exceptionally well, for the most part the sums involved are relatively small. This is to be expected given the early stage most areas are at. There are, however, some signs that areas are starting to increase their ambitions for maximising their money - building fundraising into workers' roles; starting to build social investment options into plans; and considering large-scale initiatives like consortia bidding and investment in property.

From the outset some Big Local areas have thought about how they might make their money go further, with Getting Started proposals suggesting that 63 areas anticipated achieving a match or in-kind income of more than £420,000, or, an average of about £3,400 to £4,500 per area.[59] Looking at the first 83 reports submitted as areas complete their Getting Started activities, we found that two-thirds of these areas (55) reported some in-kind or financial contribution. The total value of this was reported to be £284,400 but one area alone was responsible for £116,000 of this, so average amounts per area were in reality relatively small. In-kind contributions are more common than financial contributions across Big Local areas. For instance 78% of this reported £284,400 is actually in-kind.

The sources of financial contributions and match funding during Getting Started have included primarily local authorities (eg, match funding lease for a hub), locally trusted organisations (eg, match funding worker costs), and to a lesser extent local businesses (generally fewer and smaller donations). In-kind contributions have commonly been of free venue space, materials (including printing) and time of staff within both local authorities and locally trusted organisations. Two areas have brought in significant amounts of match funding (one £500k from varied sources, one a match for their £1m with most coming from just one funder). Two other areas have brought in significant in-kind contributions with one donated a piece of land for a play area and another close to securing a donation of a building and land worth £350k. However, these remain the exception to the rule.

Overall it seems areas remain more comfortable with more traditional grant fundraising and seeking in-kind contributions than with social investment. However, there are some signs that perhaps areas are becoming more ambitious as they move into their planning and delivery phase. For instance, some are writing fundraising into job descriptions of new workers so that they can better fulfil ambitions to make the money go further; some are reportedly exploring consortia bidding for EU structural funds; 43 partnerships are reported to be developing social investment components for their Big Local plans; and some are looking at buildings and community assets (39 areas) and work with credit unions (58 areas) to look at different ways of financing and investing resources.

Section 4.2

Addressing local needs: What kinds of differences are being made in areas – what, if anything, is changing? Are residents making a difference to the needs they've prioritised?

Making a difference to prioritised needs

In this section of our report we focus on the third and fourth Big Local outcomes:

3 The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises	4 People will feel that their area is an even better place to live

Though for the most part these outcomes have been considered as relating to the needs prioritised within Big Local plans, in our survey we gave all areas the opportunity to reflect on whether or not things were changing in their area yet – that is, all areas irrespective of whether or not they had plans in place.

In part as a result of posing this question to areas still in the early stages of their journey (areas without a plan in place), our survey and our fieldwork visits suggested that areas often felt it was a little too early to talk about making a difference to prioritised needs, though many could talk about some kind of change taking place in their area. However, we also found that a lot of areas when asked to describe the changes that had taken place, actually talked about the activities they had organised rather than any differences those activities may have made.

FINDING 58: THE FEELING THAT IT IS STILL 'EARLY DAYS'

Much activity has taken place, however a lot of it has been "behind the scenes" (eg, researching, planning, building a partnership) and geared at building engagement and involvement rather than at addressing priority needs. Unsurprisingly therefore many areas, particularly those without a Big Local Plan, feel it is too early to be able to identify changes in their local area. Where areas can identify changes in their local area these are most commonly that there is more going on for the community to take part in, and/or people coming together more.

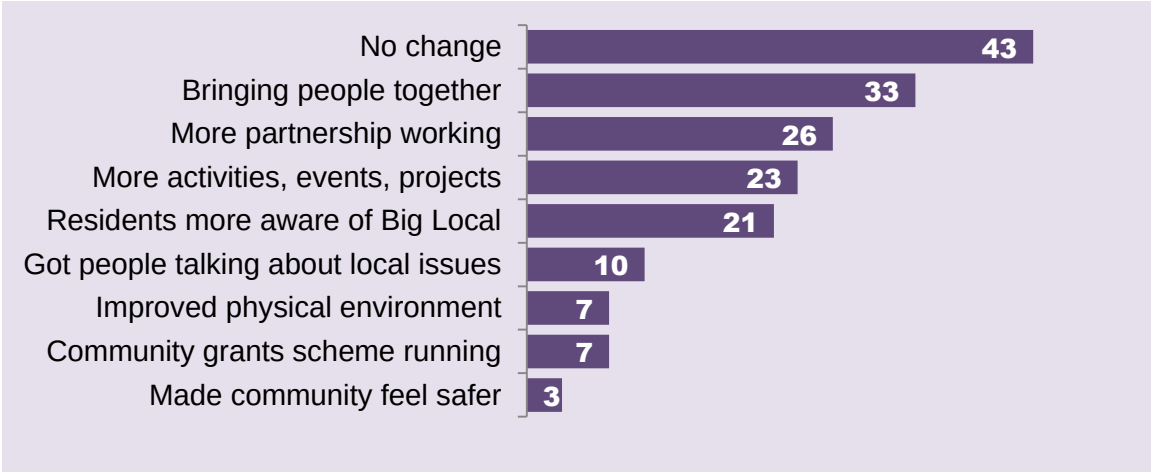
Our survey asked respondents the open question, 'has anything changed in your area already?'. 182 respondents gave an answer and around a quarter of these (43) didn't feel that they could yet see significant changes in their area. The 43 respondents who felt they couldn't yet see a change came from 33 Big Local areas. Where they offered an explanation for their response, this group of respondents most commonly felt that this was due to it still being early days. Some also added that they were optimistic they would start to see some positive impacts in their area soon as residents were beginning to feel more engaged with Big Local. This was reflected in responses to a follow-up question about changes areas hoped to see in the year ahead. The most commonly suggested were: more resident involvement; bringing the community together; improving community facilities; more awareness of or faith in Big Local; and more opportunities or activities for young people.

> *"Some completed activities and projects to show that it (Big Local) is more than a talking shop" (Big Local partnership member)*

Where respondents were able to identify changes in their area, they most commonly identified bringing people together as a key change they had seen in their area or having

more going on in the area (eg, more activities, events or projects getting started). Other changes tended to be the 'behind the scenes changes' of building awareness of Big Local or working better with others. We outline below in figure 22 the main changes identified by respondents. In total 163 respondents were able to identify at least one change (including some who said it was too early to say).

Figure 22: Changes in the local area



FINDING 59: COMING TOGETHER – BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The change that partnerships and their reps most commonly report is an increase in people coming together, that Big Local is starting to bring the community together more. They identify links being made between people, across groups and across communities within the Big Local area. Reps identified stronger connections between people as the biggest thing that is changing in the areas they support, and 78% of our survey respondents felt they were building a stronger sense of community.

Respondents said that Big Local had started to bring the community together. People talked about beginning to see more cohesion between different groups, and new networks being built within the community. A few specifically spoke in terms of an increase in "community spirit", stating that residents were getting to know more people in their community or gaining new friends, or simply that Big Local had got people sitting together and talking about what needed to change in the community. In our review exercise likewise this coming together of the community was the most commonly reported outcome. In areas that started out with a challenging geographical situation (eg, two or three estates or several villages to work across) this outcome felt particularly significant.

> *"It is early days yet but it is bringing people of all types and ages together".(Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"The two communities are in more regular dialogue over a range of issues … with lines of communication and trust developing well ...." (Big Local partnership member)*
>
> *"Drawing the community together … , creating links and connecting people" (Big Local partnership member)*

In one of our workshops a group came up with a phrase to describe what was happening, "we're creating an infrastructure of people". Where other initiatives had built services or put activities in place, they considered their focus to be about building links between people. They saw this starting with their partnership and beginning to spiral out from there. To an extent the kind of activities being funded in many areas reflect the priority that has been given in plans to community cohesion or developing community spirit. For instance, most areas deliver or support community events aimed at bringing the whole community together, at least six areas have community choirs, many have communal growing or gardening projects, and significant numbers are looking at establishing community hubs.

Local stories: Big Local as a catalyst for creating connections

Collyhurst Big Local is made up of several estates and is geographically divided by a busy A-road. On the different estates residents are described as living *"fragmented lives"* with few people identifying with Collyhurst as a whole. The community feels overlooked and let down as previous initiatives have fallen through or failed to deliver on their promises, leaving people distrustful of organisations and new initiatives.

In this context, strengthening connections in Collyhurst was identified as a priority theme for early Big Local work under the title of "Connecting Collyhurst". The residents involved in making Big Local happen have put time and energy into activities that will connect people up in different ways. Since getting started they have tried to reach out to residents not previously actively involved and focus on what people have in common (and staying focused on this). In terms of engaging organisations, they have looked for inspiration both inside and outside the area, drawing in a range of organisations who share the emerging goals and interests of residents. Through Big Local, organisations have built strong relationships and have an openness to working together.

> *"The miracle for me was that all those people were beavering away and were all isolated – our paths had not crossed, as the meetings progressed friendships grow – you see opportunities to work together."*

This has resulted in a number of outcomes already. There are more opportunities to try new things and to remove some of the barriers that prevent people enjoying what is already there in the area**.** For example, Big Local is paying the community centre to organise weekly trips to the Factory Zone for children based at the local primary schools. Another important result has been the amount of new activity that is resident-led. For instance, pupils from Manchester Communications Academy have been supported to set up a football league for the young people of Collyhurst. As well as picking up new skills and experience the young people involved will learn to work together so that barriers between different areas in Collyhurst are broken down. Overall, there is a growing sense of optimism about what can be achieved in Collyhurst. By working with organisations, residents have been able to break down some of those barriers between people and organisations based on a history of feeling let down. Residents talk about feeling on the cusp of change as activities in the plan are taking shape. Through the new partnerships and friendships that have been formed people feel that they can achieve more.

> *"I feel personally in about 5 to 7 years, it will be a better place where we all feel better, more connected, and more positive, more proud of the area, we just needed something to give us a start."*

FINDING 60: CREATING A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

Many Big Local areas have created a space for community activity, an office space, shop space or meeting place for people to come together. However, these hubs function not just as spaces from which activities are delivered but are being used to draw people in with ideas for activities they can deliver themselves in the hub or elsewhere. They are frequently described by areas that are developing them as catalysts for community activity and may be particularly important in those areas where there is very little alternative provision.

There are at least 20 Big Local areas who have set up, or are in the process of setting up, community hubs. There is considerable interest across areas in how to do this, and in the value of this to Big Local areas where other community meeting places do not exist. Despite challenges in the management and co-ordination of hubs, those who have set up a space, even if only a drop-in or 'pop-up' hub, see them as key to the achievement of a number of outcomes in their plan, including making Big Local more visible and engaging more people, helping people connect with others, offering practical services, and offering volunteering opportunities. Areas are being creative in identifying opportunities and making the most of them, setting up Hubs in old libraries, shops, former police stations, as well as setting up pop up hubs, mobile hubs, and hubs in portacabins. They report a range of positive outcomes from this activity.

> *"The community hub is becoming the centre piece of our aspiration and a model of how to draw in additional capacity through volunteers, donations and partners." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"The Community Hub has served to galvanise the Steering Group and has provided tangible evidence of Big Local's presence on the estate." (Big Local rep)*

> *"it has been a source of inspiration, bringing people together … before this there just wasn't a space to do that." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"The community hub has continued to be a successful focus for Big Local, acting as a drop-in for people to come and find out more, a place for meetings and a base for a number of advice sessions and community activities." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 61: ORGANISATIONS COMING TOGETHER

Some areas are reporting that they are contributing to better joining up between local organisations. They report more joint work and feel Big Local has been the catalyst for some of this. For some working in partnership with others is proving difficult as local organisations face their own problems in times of austerity and cuts. However, some good partnership work is emerging in areas that have prioritised joint work as key to their success.

Across all our fieldwork activities, respondents mentioned more or stronger partnership working as a positive outcome achieved by their Big Local. For instance 26 respondents to our partnerships survey specifically mentioned more partnership working as a positive outcome in their area, and this was also raised in around a third of the groups completing our review activity and also in our evaluation workshops.

There are some areas whose joint working has been affected by cuts and changes in partner organisations and this has at times caused some difficulties with delivery. However, overall a strong commitment to working in partnership with others seems to exist in many areas and partnership members talk positively about new links and connections being formed, and about Big Local acting as a catalyst to bring together organisations who may not have worked together before. In addition, some reps report that Big Local subgroups are becoming the focus for co-ordinating all activity relevant to a particular theme in the local area. This suggests that in some areas at least the links with partners forged during the Getting Started phase are coming to fruition.

> *"There has been an increased sharing of resources and knowledge across the community." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"As chair of one of the four local community centres, Big Local has enabled us to meet together, learn from each other and obtain additional resources to help us to develop." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"… the Partnership with the Prison is growing, with free use of their new training rooms offered whenever needed." (Big Local rep)*

> *"the connection and trust built between us and St. Oswald's Church has meant that we've delivered a joint project to transform the land next to the Church Hall, into a landscaped area for local residents to enjoy. This has come about without any constitution, working group, partnership arrangements - just us and the Church saying "we trust each other" - and it's worked! We raised £60k, the Church will maintain it and local residents will benefit from it. This wouldn't have happened without the impact of working together through Big Local … Brilliant." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 62: INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

One of the most common changes that areas report is that they are contributing to a sense that there is more going on in their area and that they have created more opportunities for people. This is thanks to projects started under small grants schemes and support for existing groups to do more, as well as to the efforts of local volunteers who are helping deliver activities, supporting events, and running hubs.

When asked to describe changes in their local area, 25 survey respondents mentioned an increase in community events, projects and activities and these featured heavily in the reporting of groups completing our review activity. Most were not specific about any benefits or outcomes resulting from these opportunities, but we were able to identify a few reported changes.

More opportunities for people to run and/or take part in activities

Small projects delivered through grants schemes are widely seen as important contributors to creating more opportunities for local people. In response to a question in group review exercises about the difference Big Local has made over the past year, small grants were mentioned by 14 areas (out of 35).

> *"Developing projects such as giving grants, summer playscheme, etc which is giving the community what they asked for." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"The funding given to (the Sports Club) has made a real difference and given our local football teams the opportunity to progress. It was really the first opportunity for our residents to see and start to believe that significant change is now possible." (Big Local partnership member).*

More opportunities for people to develop their skills

Areas reported running courses and offering volunteering and training opportunities through their work with local partners and/or funded projects. These include examples which show a clear link to local priorities: For instance, one area is going to offer a seven week radio production course aimed at the community in which participants will be learning all aspects of radio production and making a one hour radio programme promoting the neighbourhood in a positive light; another is employing four residents as researchers in a local community transport feasibility study in partnership with a local university; whilst a third is working with a local care company to train and employ Big Local residents so people can care for elderly neighbours in the area.[60]

Local stories: A little goes a long way

Grant schemes are common in Big Local and can help to kickstart delivery. Two stories from Ramsey Million Big Local demonstrate how their small grants scheme offers more than a one-off payment of funds. Ramsey Million's worker and steering group see the value in doing more than simply awarding money and so as well as awarding funds they signpost people to sources of support and put grant recipients in touch with others where they think that might be helpful so that they can get the best possible outcomes from the money they distribute.

Like many Big Local areas one of the priorities in Ramsey Million's plan is to improve opportunities for young people. Jo White is a mum of two ad was frustrated that there was nowhere for her children to hang out with their friends apart from on the streets. After seeing some comments made by Jo on a social media site about starting up a youth club, Ramsey Million made contact. This resulted in them awarding her a grant to set up her youth club, AS Youthy, for 5-11 year olds. With the funding, Jo and 11 other volunteers trained in level 1 youth work; gained insurance to set up the youth club; and stocked a tuck shop to help finance the youth club in the long term and buy materials for the initial activities she put on. Ramsey Million also put her in contact with the Royal British Legion that helped find a venue, and some youth workers that helped organise the training for Jo and her volunteers. Now 30 children are attending and Jo also has some young people aged 14-16 involved as volunteers. They help out, gain useful experience and have something valuable to put on their CV.

Stephen Buddle is the chairman of Ramsey's cricket club. He wanted to develop the club's youth section, but to get more young people involved the club needed to improve and expand their coaching abilities by training more volunteers. They were awarded a Big Local grant to pay for coaching, which is usually too expensive for many young people to access. Ten young people have now trained on coaching courses with the English Cricket Board as a result of the grant, and have then gone on to train and coach other young people on a voluntary basis.

Jo and Stephen have both seen a range of positive outcomes from the grants they received. Young people have positive and meaningful opportunities to engage in, some have gained in skills and qualifications, and even parents have reported positively on getting some time to themselves as their children have been positively occupied. Over and above these both Jo and Stephen have personally gained a lot from the experience. For Jo as well as valuable training she reports she has learnt she can be a leader and knows now that when she puts her mind to it she can do anything.

> *"This has given me something I can feel satisfied with, knowing that I am doing this for all the other kids and mums. I feel better in myself and like I can do anything."*

For Stephen the benefits have been more about meeting other people and expanding his networks for the benefit of the cricket club and the young people they work with.

> *"Working with Ramsey Million has led to having contact with people we wouldn't normally have come across and opened up new channels of communication that wouldn't have been there otherwise."*

FINDING 63: INCREASING LEVELS OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The work of UnLtd through Star People has contributed to an increase in entrepreneurial activity across 112 Big Local areas. Those receiving awards report significant gains in skills, confidence and raised self-belief. There is also some evidence of wider impact. For instance, as a result of establishing their enterprises, award holders have created local volunteering and training opportunities; brought additional resources into the area; and directly supported beneficiaries – including young people, lone parents and older people in some of the most deprived parts of Big Local communities. Award-winners' projects have supported an average of 60 beneficiaries during the life of the Award.

The most recent reporting from UnLtd suggests that half of those funded through the Star People programme come from the most deprived parts of their Big Local areas. Award holders have been supported to set up social enterprises covering topics as wide-ranging as the environment, community projects, catering, social care, youth projects, IT services, cycle maintenance, bootcamps, family support and healthy eating. The majority of projects fall under the general category of community (65%).

There has been a strong focus on benefiting vulnerable or disadvantaged people within the awards given, with 46% of award-holders' projects supporting children and young people, 15% supporting older people, and 10% working with lone parents. UnLtd report that the projects set up by Star People support a median average of 60 beneficiaries each during the course of their Award. UnLtd further argue that Star People bring the benefit to areas of acting as a positive role model for others around them. Unfortunately an exploration of this was beyond the scope of our research.

For the individuals receiving awards a range of positive outcomes have been achieved, including increased confidence, feeling better able to create social change, and improved skills. The recent evaluation of Star People suggested a number of areas of wider impact within Big Local areas. These include:

- over 62% of award holders' ventures work with volunteers, creating a median average of two voluntary opportunities per project
- almost half (47%) the projects offer training opportunities for the community too, providing a median average of one place per project.[61]

Levels of social enterprise are not purely reliant on the work of UnLtd in Big Local areas. Over and above the work done on the Star People project, there has been other development of entrepreneurial activity led by steering groups or partnerships. For instance, though this has not been routinely recorded we did find that some areas have begun to develop local markets and, in one area, a worker's co-op has been established.

FINDING 64: IMPROVING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Many Big Local areas are able to demonstrate improvements in their local environment. This includes wastelands that have been cleared and sometimes turned into community gardens; an increase in growing and planting activities in local green space; local natural sites such as canals, walkways or woodland being better nurtured; littering in public areas reduced; lighting improved to make areas look better and feel safer; play areas brought back to life; and disused or unsightly buildings becoming the site of eye-catching graffiti walls. It has been suggested that these kinds of changes are so predominant among reported outcomes because they offer such a tangible sign of things changing in an area, because they lend themselves to visible community effort, and because they can be less political and more easily agreed upon as a focus for activity. As well as the actual physical improvement, areas argue such changes can also over time contribute to other important outcomes, including feelings of community pride and community safety.

Changes to the local physical environment feature heavily in Big Local plans and the kinds of changes we describe above are very commonly reported as early wins during Getting Started periods as well as once plans are being implemented. Considering why these outcomes matter so much and feature so much in Big Local plans and reporting, the following reflections were shared with us:

- they offer the most tangible sign that something is going on, that something's changing in an area
- they act as their own publicity for Big Local more effectively than leaflets or posters
- they can generate teamwork and community effort as people join in
- they represent activities that can benefit all sections of the community and so can be generally agreed upon as a good thing and not too contentious. They are 'apolitical', particularly if all benefit
- environmental improvement outcomes can potentially support the achievement of other outcomes, including gains in health and wellbeing as people are making better use of outside space; community safety; community pride; community cohesion; skills development and volunteering. This makes them one of the most "win win" outcomes areas seek to achieve.

"You can really get things moving by focusing on place, it has the advantage of not usually being political so you can just get stuck in." (Big Local partnership member)

"We have completed our first project which was developing a play area. This has instantly changed this area and is now being used daily by community members." (Big Local partnership member)

FINDING 65: A STRONGER VOICE FOR RESIDENTS

Being involved in Big Local is helping many residents feel they have more control over what happens in their area. Some areas report that Big Local is giving residents a place or forum in which they are being taken more seriously; that their views are being taken into account and sought out more often by others, including others in authority, than was previously the case. This is not happening uniformly across areas and was only mentioned by a small number, but if there is a sense that the credibility of partnerships as a kind of influential residents' voice in areas is growing, this would be interesting to monitor over time.

In our workshops partnership members told us they felt that others outside the partnership were starting to recognise them as a bit of a voice to be heard in the local area and in our partnership members' survey 85% of respondents (n=231) agreed with the statement that Big Local is giving residents more control over what happens in their area.

> *"With financial backing the residents now have a voice that is being listened to by the local council." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"We now get told about things that are going on, like the development of the former air base – we have good ongoing dialogue with the council and Big Local is now regularly asked as a stakeholder to respond to consultations." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"The Clinical Commissioning Group is now taking us seriously as having something to say on people's health in the area which has been great. You do feel like we're starting to be respected a bit as having something to say." (Big Local partnership member)*

Though residents may be better heard through their Big Local steering group/partnership, on the question of wider influence, we would agree broadly with the conclusion of the Institute for Voluntary Action Research's recent research for Big Local, that, "at this stage there is no clear evidence of residents generally having greater influence".[62] However, the authors also concluded, some clearly see this as a future goal and believe Big Local can help them have more of a voice in future.

A recent Local Trust report captured several examples of how residents are starting to influence, or try to influence, wider decisions in areas:[63]

- Big Warsop has ambitions to seek to engage with statutory services and ensure the parish gets its fair share of statutory services. As part of this, the chair has written a paper opposing the closure of the local fire station, using publically available evidence to support their case.
- People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House (PEACH) working with local traders and in negotiation with councillors has drawn up a "shopkeeper's charter" which would impose conditions safeguarding the local economy from developers.
- a number of residents from across the Luton Arches (Chatham) Big Local area are campaigning against a licence application for a new supermarket on their high street.

FINDING 66: A BIT OF A BUZZ?

For most Big Local areas it feels far too early to talk about areas feeling like even better places to live, but those most actively involved in making Big Local happen report that they feel there are glimmers and small signs that something is starting to feel different. This was reported as a very intangible thing and variously as: a feeling, a "buzz", an excitement, a change of mood in parts of the community, or a sense of hope and optimism. These are the kinds of changes that will remain among the most difficult things to measure but as Big Local areas were in part given money because they were seen as areas where people's aspirations and hopes were not high, where people did not feel optimistic or enthusiastic about their own community, if these changes are starting to happen it will be important to try and capture them.

In our evaluation workshops and in survey responses when asked what kinds of changes were happening, some respondents reported feeling that attitudes were changing, and that there were early signs of a change in how people feel about their area. Some reps too pointed to this kind of intangible change. Though only a small number of respondents mentioned this, we capture below some of their comments. Few explained what they felt was making the change but where they did it tended to be connected to people seeing things happen, and a few mentioned the power of seeing this happen when led by other people, the idea, perhaps that there is something more powerful or immediate about seeing an initiative being led by people like yourself than something delivered by an organisation or the council or some other organisation. It begs the question about an idea that UnLtd have raised in connection with their work, that is, that when others see individuals not unlike themselves get up and do something different, take the initiative, these individuals act as role models to help others feel maybe they could do the same. We cannot say if that is what is happening but this would be good to explore in more detail given the importance of "feeling an area is an even better to live" as one of the programme's core outcomes.

> *"New projects run by and for local people are making others realise that something is actually happening. The enterprise-focused people are definitely starting to make changes and also change themselves." (Big Local rep)*

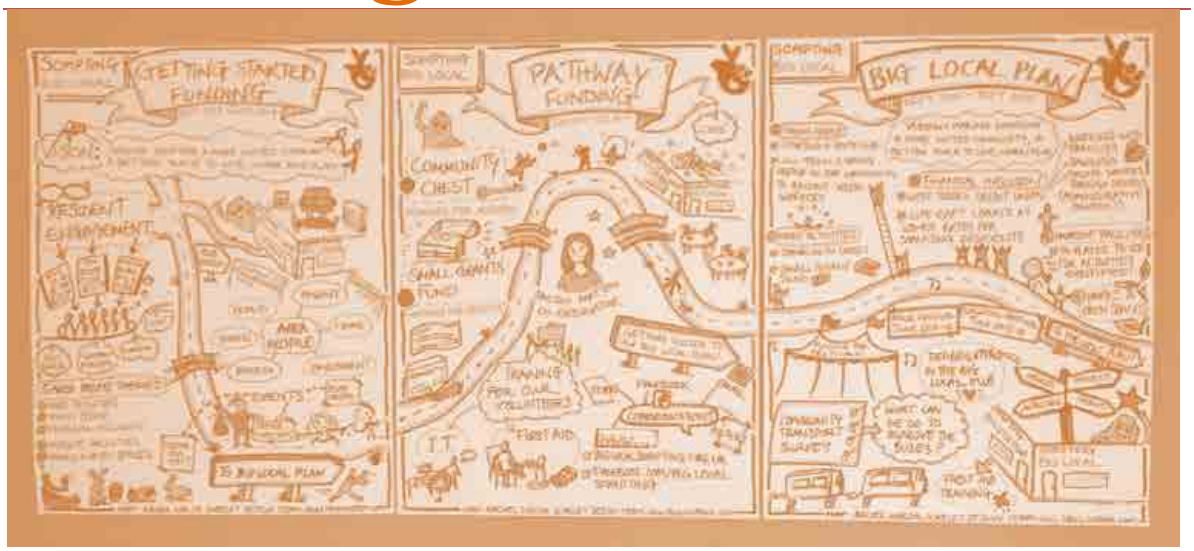
> *"people are far more 'upbeat' about the possibilities for our area … they have stopped asking for money, (and) starting to take personal initiative." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"I have worked in the (region) for the last 15 years and as a development worker have never come across a funder that has given so much control to a community. Although slow, a small amount of money to pump prime new initiatives has and will make a tremendous difference to attitudes and aspirations. There is a buzz already." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"people are coming in with ideas and suggestions - it feels like we're igniting people's imagination." (Big Local partnership member).*

5

Findings



Local journeys – the factors that affect areas' progress.

Section 5.1

Challenges: What are the factors that have most affected areas' progress? What have areas found most challenging?

"It's been incredibly challenging, but then we have to remember that if it was going to be easy, if there could have been a quick fix, then we wouldn't have got the money in the first place." (Big Local partnership chair)

The importance of where the journey starts

Before we discuss in detail how different factors have affected Big Local journeys, we remind ourselves first of the local context for areas' endeavours.

When we talked to those involved in Big Local areas about their progress, and about the things that they found challenging, we quickly saw a strong correlation between the challenges they talked to us about and the reason why they had been chosen as Big Local areas. The areas selected generally have in common that they had not previously been funded (or previous funding had not made a significant difference for the community); a lack of local capacity – for instance little tradition of active citizenship or community engagement; a level of apathy or cynicism –which could stem from being under-resourced and feeling like a 'neglected' community, or having received resources but feeling they were not well used in the past; and either a lack of resources and facilities or under-used local resources and facilities. Furthermore, we knew that few if any of those involved would have had any experience of bringing people together to manage a programme of the size and scale of Big Local. As we were reminded on more than one occasion during our fieldwork, "Big Local is a big ask" in the selected communities, and as one rep pointed out to us in conversation, having a few Scout groups, a tenant's group or a social club in your area is a very different thing from consulting, co-ordinating, and planning a long-term programme worth a million pounds for the benefit for the whole community.

This being the context and starting point for Big Local areas it was therefore not surprising that these same issues have surfaced as challenges as people have come together to try and bring about change. It was beyond the scope of our evaluation to revisit area profiles or explore in depth the nature of the precise baseline or starting point for individual area journeys even for a small sample of areas. We therefore cannot match types of challenges to areas' starting points to consider, for instance, how challenges might differ dependent on the assets or experience an area had to build on, the state of the local infrastructure of voluntary organisations, levels of prior volunteering and community activity, the number of pre-existing resident-led groups such as tenants groups or self-help associations. It is also important to recognise that Big Local areas were also identified as having potential and assets to be recognised and developed.

In the early years of Big Local many of the challenges we have identified are strongly linked to how difficult it can be for a community to recognise, value and make use of its assets (and in particular the people who can get involved and make a difference) when historically those assets (by which we mean both people and places) have not been recognised or feel undervalued or overlooked.

Defining 'good progress' in local journeys

When we started our evaluation we hoped to be able to assess whether there was anything different about areas that reported positively about their progress or appeared to be moving through the pathway more smoothly or experiencing fewer difficulties. We hoped this would help us identify lessons about what works, about what helps as well as what hinders. As it turned out, that proved challenging for a number of reasons not least the fact that there are contested ideas about what constitutes "good progress" for a Big Local area.

For instance, we might consider:

- **Areas moving faster?** If we looked at areas moving faster along the pathway, there is a danger that we could be looking at areas moving quickly but not progressing well with important elements of the programme (eg, are areas moving more quickly less inclusive, or could they have planned too quickly?)
- **Areas delivering more?** If we consider areas who are doing more or spending more, there is a question about whether they are delivering the right things and whether they may be investing in doing more now and not thinking far enough ahead about the next ten years and beyond. What if spending more now doesn't necessarily mean spending wisely if we consider the long term?
- **Areas achieving goals?** This too is problematic – we found a lot of areas have devised plans or put in place timetables that are over-optimistic or over-ambitious, so when they do not achieve goals this is a measure more of the inaccuracy of their planning rather than any failure of effort on their part.
- **Areas having smoother journeys?** Should we try and identify areas experiencing less bumps or hiccups along the way? In fact this felt the most appropriate path to take, but interestingly some of the areas who have had the roughest journeys have learnt the most and have argued that it is in solving problems that their partnerships become stronger and appreciate their worth, and this may in the long run prove important for longer-term success. (There is a strong element of "weathering storms and coming out stronger" in the Big Local stories that were shared with us.)

Given these issues with the notion of good progress, we opted not to try and separately identify and study areas that are currently making "better" progress than others, or those moving faster, or those delivering more. We have instead relied primarily on how areas themselves define their progress and the things that they feel have most enabled them to overcome challenges or make good progress irrespective of whether or not they currently feel they are doing well.

Things that have been challenging

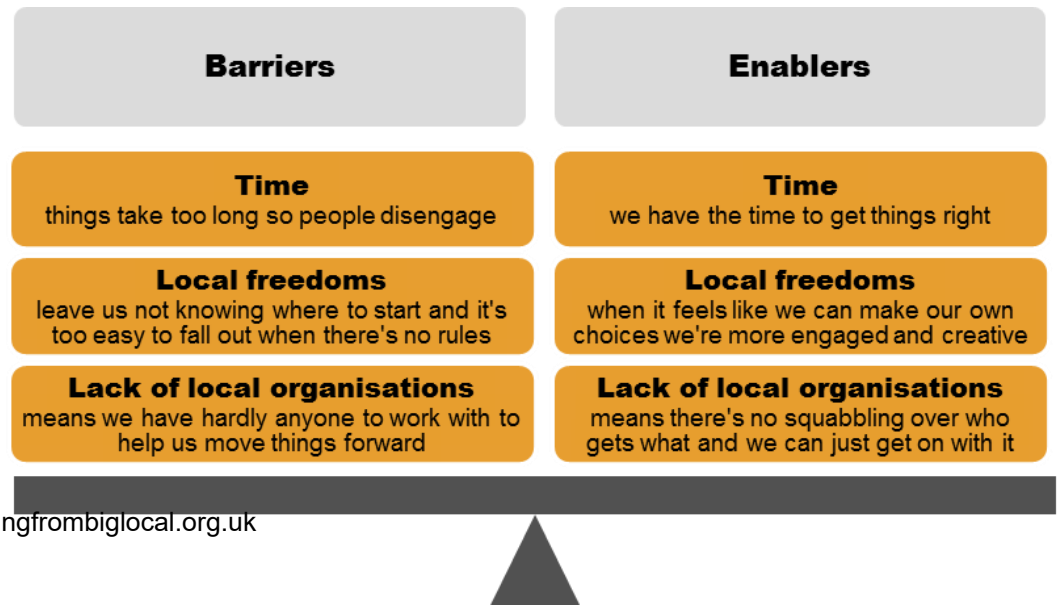
In the course of our research we identified eight broad 'themes' that captured the main challenges areas have faced - some of which we have already surfaced elsewhere in this report. We highlight below both the themes and the most frequently mentioned specific challenges of which the 'top five' were (1) getting people involved; (2) understanding and conveying what Big Local is; (3) capacity; (4) working together and with organisations, (5) pace. Challenges were predominantly related to local context but there were some programme elements that areas have also found challenging.

LOCAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES: Things about the local area, local issues or local actions that have been challenging	
Capacity	● getting people involved and sustaining involvement over time ● finding residents with the time, confidence or skills needed
People	● the influence of personalities, conflict, and personal issues ● working together, relationships and teamwork, and functioning of the local steering group or partnership.
Power	● tensions linked to ownership, power between organisations or parts of a community, challenges of working with different groups ● working with others, issues of power and practicalities of joint work
Community	● the impact of geography, history or local services/facilities/resources ● community identity - the challenge of working within new or different community boundaries
Pace	● the impact on morale or momentum when moving slowly ● when things feel slow it's harder to keep people engaged, to have stories to tell now as well as later,
OTHER CHALLENGES: Things about the way the programme was set up or delivered that have also proved challenging	
Set-up	● the impact of the early set up for wave 1 areas before the supporting infrastructure was fully in place and/or as things changed ● boundaries unreflective of more natural or perceived 'communities'
Concept	● understanding what Big Local is or could be ● conveying to others what Big Local is or could be
Uncertainty	● having 'a blank piece of paper' and a lack of directive or clear guidance – leading to uncertainty and hesitance

Defining challenges

Just as we found interesting complications when defining good progress within the Big Local programme, so too we found some complications in defining and understanding challenges. Our analysis was complicated by:

- **The 'knock-on' effect**. There are often complex interplays going on between factors – it is rarely the case that one issue is neatly categorised or stands alone - for instance, an area might have power issues and it is these that negatively affect relationships with people or capacity (as people drop out at times of conflict); or a geographical issue about Big Local boundaries becomes an issue of power and control as people from different areas or interest groups vie to ensure that the interests of their area/group are represented within Big Local discussions.
- **The 'it depends when you ask' effect**. Some challenges arise, are dealt with, but then resurface and in some areas there may be a kind of cyclical nature to challenges – meaning that *when* you ask can really affect an area's assessment of what is most challenging it. For instance, one area we visited was making excellent progress and the partnership appeared very high functioning and positive, but they shared that had we visited a few months earlier, our assessment would have been very different as they had had a crisis in their partnership so serious that it had required intervention and support from Local Trust.
- **The 'two sides to every story' effect**. Some factors will be defined as a challenge by one area, and simultaneously as an enabler in another, or may even be differently defined within an area. So, for instance, some areas feel the freedom to make decisions locally is a challenge because they would like more guidance or direction and feel slightly unsure what to do without it, whereas others perceive this freedom as a positive thing that enables local control and creativity. Likewise the length of time resident-led processes take to establish and work well has been defined by some areas as an enabler because it allows meaningful engagement and inclusion, but in others this is defined as a challenge or barrier because the length of time taken to move things forward contributes to low morale or lack of momentum.



Challenges that have affected progress

FINDING 67: THE CHALLENGE OF GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED

The most common and most concerning challenge areas have faced so far is getting people actively involved, and sustaining participation over time. This is involvement in governance and decision-making, but also more generally in taking forward plans for activities that require support or input from local people. Many Big Local steering groups and partnerships are concerned about being over-reliant on a small number of people and are keen to get more people involved in different ways but they are finding this difficult.

In our partnership members survey we asked people in an open question to share in their own words the biggest challenges they had faced so far, with respondents able to list up to three separate challenges. The most common response was some aspect of getting residents involved. Almost half of respondents mentioned this as one of the main challenges (49%, 101 out of 211 respondents).[64] Though commonly identified as an area where people were putting a lot of their time and energy, and some identifying it as an area where they were making good progress, nonetheless in separate questions about resident involvement we found:

- only 44% of partnership members in our survey (102 out of 234) felt they were doing well at getting more residents involved as Big Local progressed; and
- 83% (191 out of 231) felt they were over-reliant on a small group and wanted more people to be involved.

Most of those identifying involvement as a challenge were not explicit about what they meant by 'involvement', and respondents referred as commonly to recruiting members of steering groups/partnerships as to recruiting volunteers, with some also mentioning that retention of volunteers and partnership members could be problematic - raising the issue that resignations have sometimes led to a subsequent over-reliance on a small group of people. In our evaluation workshops most of those we visited (eight out of ten) said they would like to see more people getting involved. Our findings here echo those found in the Community Development Foundation's 2013 study which identified a lack of involvement from the wider community and over-reliance on smaller groups as key problems facing Big Local areas.[65]

> *"I think that we are working on issues that local residents care about, but getting active and continuing engagement is challenging." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Getting residents to realise that they are part of the solution, getting them involved." (Big Local resident and paid worker)*

The area's story below shows just how hard some partnerships have worked to get people involved, and how difficult it has been to get results. It also touches on why they feel people don't want to get involved. In this area they believe people feel someone else should be doing things for them rather than them doing things for themselves.

Local stories: The challenge of getting people involved

We have done the following things to get people involved:

- Family Fun Days (families)
- Big Brew event (older people)
- Leafleted the whole area three times
- Established Facebook, twitter and website presence
- Held visual minuting sessions with representatives from the six local school councils.
- Given postcards to all the school children in the area asking them for their opinions with 11 dropboxes
- Run street caged soccer sessions to help us engage with young people who are harder to reach
- Paid for advertising in bus shelters and on Public Information Pillars in shopping area
- Held memory sessions with some of the older people in the community working in partnership with the Feelgood Factory
- Attended many sessions and activities that partner organisations have held to speak - we like to do this face to face involvement as there are issues in the area with adults not being able to read or write
- Set up a partners group consisting of representatives from all agencies with a vested interest in the Big Local area.

On reflection, people in the area no matter what background they are from, still feel like the Council or Government or other agencies should be "Doing" or "Providing", and are quite reluctant to get involved. This is something that we are struggling with and we are constantly thinking of new ways to try to engage with all members of the community.

[Source: Getting Started Monitoring Report]

Those who took part in our research gave a number of reasons to explain why they feel people are not getting involved. These include:

- **No (or limited) culture of self-help or volunteering** - a lack of interest in self-help, a feeling that the state or others should be providing support and services
- **Cynicism** – people don't believe that they, or Big Local, will be any different to other initiatives
- **Apathy** – people are simply uninterested in getting involved in community initiatives
- **Lack of clarity about what getting involved in Big Local actually means** – people are not signing up because they aren't always clear what they would be signing up to – what does getting involved in Big Local actually mean and how much commitment is being asked for?

FINDING 68: FINDING PEOPLE WITH TIME OR SKILLS TO GIVE

Getting involved in Big Local, at least in the work of core groups (steering groups, partnerships or other connected subgroups), is making significant demands on people's time and expertise. Some areas are finding it challenging to find people with the time, skills or confidence to get involved, and sometimes it is a lack of time, skills or confidence that stops people staying involved over time.

The third most frequently mentioned challenge in our partnership survey was capacity. 45 out of 211 respondents mentioned some aspect of capacity – ie, either lack of time, skills or confidence.

Lack of time. One issue that both partnership members and reps mentioned was that many of the people involved are people who already do a lot in their community, who are already active volunteers or involved in running groups, committees or activities locally. This reflects the most recent research evidence on participation in the UK.[66] For Big Local what it means is that there are cases where even if people really want to get involved, they can struggle to fit in support for Big Local on top of everything else they do, particularly as the Big Local ask can turn into a "big ask" in the early days of trying to get things started.[67]

> *"Steering group members are busy people with limited time available and we have been slow to realise that we should probably employ someone to speed up the work". (Big Local steering group member)*

Lack of confidence. In our reps survey this was given more weight than within our partnership survey. For reps this featured as the second key challenge areas have faced (after getting people involved). 14 reps out of the 37 in our sample mentioned feeling that a lack of confidence has affected whether people get involved and feel they have something to offer, how able they are to participate and contribute to the work that is taking place, and whether they stay involved (as some leave if they feel they are getting out of their depth or start feeling unsure what they can offer.)

> *"Capacity and confidence of residents can be an issue as the people involved feel they don't initially have any right to make decisions on behalf of other residents. They often don't progress much between meetings as they want to get approval from everyone involved. This makes progress very slow as every small decision is made at full steering group meetings." (Big Local rep)*

Lack of skills. Less frequently mentioned but a part of overall concerns about capacity, was a mismatch between the skills needed to enable Big Local to be resident-led and the skills held within the resident population. In our partnership members' survey several respondents brought up this issue, pointing to skills gaps in areas such as managing commissioning, grants management, communications, budgeting, etc. Reps brought up similar issues but also voiced concerns about a lack of leadership skills acting as a barrier in some of the areas they have worked with.

FINDING 69: PERSONALITIES AND PERSONAL ISSUES

One of the biggest challenges areas have faced so far is in dealing with the impact of what we could broadly call "people problems". A considerable amount of time in Big Local areas has been taken up dealing with personality clashes, people's own personal challenges, fallings out within groups, and sniping, negativity or unpleasantness aimed at partnerships from people outside of the group. Personal and personality issues have had a disproportionately large effect on some areas' progress. This is in part understandable given the programme is based on a model that puts people and how they work together (the effective working of a relatively small group of people) at its core but also as there may be little local history of people coming together to work in a team in this way.

In residents' top five challenges they raised the difficulties of working together. 19% (41 out of 211 respondents) mentioned some aspect of working together and reps likewise felt this issue of people and how they work together had featured heavily as a challenging aspect of Big Local in some areas. Reps' quarterly monitoring encourages them to report on challenges and successes and in each quarter a significant proportion of the challenges reported will be about people issues and the dynamics within the partnership. The types of issues affecting progress have been:

Personality issues – larger than life personalities or types of people who dominate, behave inappropriately or even bully others. In a relatively small group, one difficult or challenging individual can have a significant and disproportionate impact. In a small number of groups negativity of individuals has also been raised as a challenging issue that affects both progress and morale. As groups become more diverse there can also be clashes of culture and values with the potential for dividing lines to appear along lines of age, class, race or culture, or between so called 'old guard' (those with a long tradition of community participation) and 'new activists' (those new to community participation). There are partnerships where some of the struggles relate not to personalities but to how to value and work with difference.

> *"It is quite fragile at the beginning and one awkward person can make the whole partnership seem to be at risk." (Big Local rep)*

> *"We need a process for dealing with difficult residents who make life hard for the rest of the committee. I guess you'll always have negative Nancies in these kinds of projects, but they make life so much harder when you want to make a positive impact on your community." (Big Local partnership member)*

People's personal problems affecting their engagement or behavior – there have been instances of people with unstable behaviour or mental health conditions negatively impacting on partnerships and their ability to maintain momentum, but there have also

been some sad stories of how groups have been affected by members having to leave because of family responsibilities, experiencing serious health problems or even dying. As groups have bonded but stayed for the most part small, the impact of ill health or bereavement has been understandably significant. Some reps have made a connection between these issues and a perceived fragility of some steering groups/partnerships and perhaps the Big Local model - where a group is so small that changes that affect one person can affect a whole group and significantly impact on progress.

> *"I took over after (she) passed on. It was difficult. I wasn't sure if I could do it, and of course we all knew her and they loved her here. It was very sad." (Big Local partnership member)*

People's personal politics – in a small number of steering groups/partnerships there have been issues reported of how to deal with differences of political opinion, particularly in areas where there is involvement of individuals with extreme political views or views that would run contrary to some of Big Local's core values on diversity and inclusion.

> *"There are concerns about this member's motivations as he's known to be affiliated to the (named) party and this is causing problems as there's quite a difficult undercurrent around those issues here at the moment. It is causing some tension and a lack of trust at meetings." (Big Local rep)*

Tensions between people over roles, power or decisions – some partnerships have found progress slowed because of fallings out over roles (eg, are some people doing more of the work than others, who should be delivering on what tasks), and other issues such as suspicions over individuals' motivations, and worries about vested interests and conflicts of interest. This has also on occasion led to people leaving their local group.

> *"Some of the key resident activists have had to leave partnerships because of the potential for conflicts of interest." (Big Local rep)*

> *"Their remains a group of residents, who were initially involved in Big Local but opted out a couple of years ago, who continue to snipe from the sidelines and undermine everything the Partnership tries to deliver." (Big Local rep)*

The practicalities of teamwork – it is clear that some partnerships have struggled with how to work as a team. Survey respondents across both our surveys mentioned inexperience of working in a team or group and issues about communication and working well as a team. While some partnerships have obviously moved into a 'norming' and even

'performing' stage as a group, others are still very definitely 'storming' and this is affecting progress. This is not always helped by a subgroup structure which, if not managed well, leads to a sense of people going off on tangents and things suddenly feeling harder to co-ordinate rather than easier. (There may be mixed views on the efficacy of using subgroups that we could not really explore in this evaluation. Certainly some have found that while it may resolve some problems, it can also bring its own challenges.)

FINDING 70: RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Some steering groups/partnerships have struggled to develop a working relationship with local organisations that works well for them and supports them in achieving their aspirations. There have been power struggles, issues of vested interests (where local organisations have been perceived as getting involved because they want to gain financially), and tensions with local councils and locally trusted organisations. These have usually been about power and control but sometimes capacity issues and working with different values and cultures have also played a part in making joint working a challenge.

In our partnership members survey 49 respondents mentioned working relationships with local organisations as a key challenge. The majority of these respondents referred directly to tensions and difficulties working with their local council.

Challenges in working with local authorities. In a separate question in the survey, only half of respondents rated support from their local authority as helpful.[68] Some explained that this was because the local authority had wanted to dominate decision-making and/or to direct money towards addressing its own priorities. Others simply suggested their Council was unhelpful, would not co-operate or would cause delays in taking projects forward, but without explaining why things had been this way.

> *"The council say we're just a bunch of housewives!" (Big Local partnership chair)*

Challenges in working with other organisations. Though locally trusted organisations in our survey were highly rated as helpful, some areas have had difficulties in their relationship with their locally trusted organisation. For instance, managing issues of vested interest or conflict of interest; being unable to find a willing or appropriate body to be a locally trusted organisation; finding a locally trusted organisation too controlling or interfering; or clashing over what Big Local is and how things should be done. A few respondents reiterated similar issues with other organisations, particularly large national groups or dominant local organisations active in their area. One issue has been a difficulty in finding the right 'match' - people or organisations to help deliver on specific tasks.

> *"I feel our locally trusted organisation is calling the shots and this needs addressing." (Big Local partnership member)*

Partnerships' own hesitancy about working with other organisations. Difficulties in collaboration sometimes came from steering groups/partnerships themselves – some, though only perhaps a small number, fear that working with and seeking guidance from other organisations and professionals could lead to a loss of control, and have therefore been more insular and not felt confident to reach out and work jointly with others.

> *"I still feel the partnership is too insular. There is a reluctance sometimes to engage with others which is not helping." (Big Local rep)*

FINDING 71: THE EFFECT OF GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Many Big Local areas are not 'natural' communities in the sense that they are localities that straddle several estates, wards or even villages. The boundaries established by the Big Lottery Fund have not always had regard for either natural geographical features that demarcate an area (eg, rivers), or manmade features that serve the same purpose (eg, ward or estate boundaries, railway lines or major arterial roads). This has made engagement, certainly in the early stages, more difficult for some areas. On top of this some areas have a particular challenge posed by the nature of their local population – for instance, they may have a high proportion of vulnerable or transient residents.

Almost a third of areas have queried the boundaries of their Big Local area and requested boundary changes, leading to some changes (eg, increases in the size of their area) and it is possible that some who feel their boundaries are problematic have not approached Local Trust about it.[69] Around half the areas we engaged most actively with (for case study interviews and workshops) mentioned some aspect of their boundaries not being as the community would usually perceive it. It is not uncommon for Big Local areas to have boundaries that are not aligned with wards, other natural boundaries, or how communities have historically defined themselves. We see efforts to create a sense of community in some of the names that have been 'made up' to define a Big Local area that was not previously a natural community - for instance Bountagu (Bounces Mountagu in London) and Greenmoor (Scholemoor and Lidget Green in Bradford), and in the names that emphasise a coming together of different and previously unconnected communities – for instance, Growing Together (a Big Local area that covers five estates in Northampton East).

Some of the problems caused by this, particularly in the very early stages, include:

- **An additional element over which conflict could emerge** - the boundary added an extra layer of potential conflict as people argued about what parts should be 'in' and what parts should be 'out'.
- **Practical challenges for identity and engagement** – these were first how to create a sense of identity and then community where there either was not such an identity, or there were several as the boundaries over-rode patches where there already was a sense of neighbourhood or community identity. It also brought physical challenges of how to physically get people together and find neutral space for them to meet.[70].
- **Complicating stakeholder networks** – the boundary issues also brought a challenge of giving some areas more complicated negotiations to make with partners. Some have had to deal with more partners and on more layers than if a more usual or natural community had been defined - eg, working with multiple parish councils.

- **Some areas lost out on opportunities** - for instance, there are a few occasions where a boundary meant a part of an estate or part of a road outside the boundary was excluded but at the same time so too was an important building or green space that would have made more sense as an asset to be included in the Big Local area.

  "The area is ridiculous really. It has made it really hard for us. There's a massive road right down the middle and traditionally there hasn't been a coming together or a need to come together either side of that, so how do you work around that." (Big Local worker)

  "The main challenge has been geography – the area is split between distinct parts of the city that are not linked in any way." (Big Local partnership member)

Though not as commonly mentioned, some areas reported issues with the nature of their population – notably either diversity and cultural barriers; transience, or high proportions of vulnerable residents. These two stories capture some of these challenges.

Local stories: Working in areas where no community identity exists

Example 1

"We are still trying valiantly to get as many local people involved in the action as we would like and the Partnership formed (we were one of the phase 3 areas). The area is not one with a history of a community in it for some 40 or 50 years but one of numerous disparate communities who keep themselves to themselves and there is a very high turnover of population. There is a high influx of incoming people and a high rate of moving-on but we are still trying very hard to get a good core of the community on board."

[source: Big Local rep quarterly reporting]

Example 2

"The neighbourhoods in which Big Local is operating are characterised by a high level of population movement. That a significant percentage of the local population are transient significantly reduces the total number of local people who would even potentially be interested in, or be capable of being involved in, the Big Local. Insecure housing and uncertain (un)employment, together with the accompanying stresses and inconvenience of frequent changes in address, makes it unlikely that such residents will have time to volunteer. Furthermore, if these folk have no plans to remain in an area, they will also have no emotional or personal commitment to that area, further decreasing the likelihood of engagement in voluntary action. Moreover, some of the most stable pockets within the local area are in fact elderly and therefore too infirm to consider involvement, and the Black and Minority Ethnic community, with some of whom there are specific barriers to interaction such as the linguistic barrier and discomfort around gender mixing."

[source: Big Local plan]

FINDING 72: THE NATURE OF LOCAL SERVICE PROVISION

Given one of the defining characteristics of Big Local areas could be a lack of local services and facilities, it is not surprising that for some areas this features in their list of challenges. Not having an infrastructure of service providers has led to a slower start for some areas; it has made reaching out to people significantly more work than in those areas with good provider networks; and has made it difficult for some to identify a suitable locally trusted organisation. The flipside of this is that in some areas with lots of active organisations, this has not always been an advantage as it has opened the door to potential conflict as these vie for funds or control.

Not having a network of active voluntary and/or statutory sector service providers has slowed the progress of some Big Local areas, with a few not able to find anyone suitable to take on the role of locally trusted organisation, and others having limited choice of partners to work with because there is so little provision in their area.

> *"Some members of the working group want faster progress - can't see the point in talking … The large council estate in (area) is not well represented. … Very hard to find ways in to the estate as no community infrastructure." (Big Local partnership member)*

The reverse situation has also caused problems in other areas – that is, where there are a lot of active organisations in the area but they do not work together, or are competing for funding and therefore see Big Local as a potential funding opportunity.

> *"At first we had so many people coming to meetings … it was partly the money, people thought they would benefit from it. But when the penny dropped and people realised that wasn't how it was going to work, they gradually started to drift away!" (Big Local partnership member)*

A few partnership members told us that restructurings and cuts in local services were having some impact – with relationships built with partner organisations only then to be affected by cuts or people moving on.

> *"Some of what has slowed us down in this first year is changes in the Council … everything was agreed and then the person we were working with lost his job in a reshuffle and we're back to the beginning again." (Big Local partnership chair)*

FINDING 73: CONVEYING CLEARLY WHAT BIG LOCAL IS (AND ISN'T)

For residents one of the most challenging aspects of Big Local has been conveying to others what it is and what it isn't. In the beginning it was difficult to get to grips with exactly what Big Local is or could be in areas, and a lot of effort went into dispelling myths (eg, it's just a funding pot, it's the council's money, it's like all the rest – it won't work or we won't benefit). For some initial publicity and/or media coverage emphasising the £1million was seen as counterproductive, as was the lack of a template or guide to help people visualise what a successful Big Local programme might look like locally.

This was the second most mentioned challenge from the perspective of partnership members in our survey. 61% of respondents (83 out of 211) specifically mentioned issues about how difficult it had been to understand and then convey a clear message about Big Local. Some mentioned that due to mistrust within communities around previous programmes and community development initiatives, often based on previous negative experiences, there was a need to not only get people to understand what Big Local was, but also to convince them that Big Local was 'different'. This proved challenging when those giving out the messages weren't exactly sure themselves what Big Local might end up looking like in their area.

> *"(Some of the community) … find it difficult to differentiate between an organisation to whom they go for funding and the idea of forming a partnership which handles the whole running of a multicultural all-inclusive … (programme) which is fully integrated with the community as a whole and involves much more commitment." (Big Local partnership member)*

The fanfare of the £1million announcements and local coverage of this was something a number of areas identified with hindsight as potentially unhelpful and counterproductive. Some report feeling they have had to spend the last year or so undoing damage caused by people focusing on the £1million and not on other aspects of the programme, though others did feel at least it acted as a catalyst to bring people to the table.

> *"One thing that has not been helpful … is the emphasis from the word "go" on the £1million. This immediately brings pressure to start spending the money before we have a real sense of what it is the community needs or how best to meet those needs. What is not publicised is the important point that areas don't start getting the funding until they have produced a plan that evidences the community's involvement in deciding what it is that it wants." (Big Local partnership member)*

For some areas this issue of ensuring people are clear what Big Local is, is ongoing. Some are still conceptually struggling to describe what Big Local is and their struggles raise important questions not just locally but for the programme as a whole, and not just about communications and messages but about the identity of Big Local. For instance, in a given area is Big Local a resident-led partnership? Is it the area? Is it a local programme? Is it a grants panel? Is it or could it become an organisation of some kind?

FINDING 74: THE PACE OF PROGRESS IN BIG LOCAL AREAS

Areas report mixed views on the pace of their progress. The length of time things can take, and the perceived slow pace with which things move locally, has been identified as a challenge by partnership members and reps alike. This slow progress – though a local perception and not an assessment or judgement shared with areas from the programme at a national level - has nonetheless contributed to low morale and some drop-out as people feel things are taking too long. Not all feel taking a long time is problematic and some feel it simply means they have more likelihood of 'getting things right'.

The pace of Big Local and how long things take was commonly mentioned by areas and by reps – it was mentioned in response to survey questions about challenges, and when we asked people to reflect on what, if anything, felt different about Big Local when compared to other community programmes.[71]

> *"this is different because it is resident led … things take a bit longer to get done but it shows the residents some of the realities local authorities and councillors (face) making difficult decisions." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"I was one of the first residents to get (involved) … I feel the progress to date has been slow and at times it has been difficult to move forward for the benefit of the community." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"It's inordinately slow and burdened by its determination to use third parties (locally trusted organisations) to actually spend and deliver." (Big Local rep)*

The responses showed that there are two main ways that the pace acts as a challenge: creating negative perceptions in the community, and contributing to low morale and demotivation within partnerships.

> *"people feel we are taking too long to get things moving … All they know is we have a million to spend and they want to know what's taking so long!" (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"This is a great opportunity for the area, the timeframe just feels too long (would like things yesterday!)." (Big Local partnership member)*

Those who felt their pace was slow variously attributed this to: being the downside of a resident-led, volunteer-led approach; working with partners causing delays; or lack of a fixed template/guidance to steer action, leading to hesitance or confused decision-making.

> *"The biggest hindrance is the speed that Officers work which is frustrating for local residents." (Big Local rep)*

Not all comments about the pace of Big Local were negative (this was one of our clearest "two sides to every story" challenges) – though many have found it problematic, some have seen it as a positive thing – ie, due to the slow process there is more genuine resident control and, hopefully, as a result, better outcomes in the long term.

> *"It's a sometimes slow process but I feel we are taking our time so we get as much as possible correct." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 75: THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME'S EARLY SET-UP

For some areas, though more usually those in the first wave, the way the programme was set up in the early stages caused them some problems and was identified in their list of challenges. Some early Big Local areas felt the infrastructure of support was still being put in place while they were already up and running meaning that some processes or other details were unclear or that things were changing. Others, not just wave 1 areas, have also suggested that more generally the programme's lack of more directive guidance and/or a lack of clarity in the existing guidance has hindered their progress by leading to confusion, hesitance, and/or flawed decision-making.

Wave 1 areas who talked directly to us about the experience of being involved from the beginning talked about how the transition period between the Big Lottery Fund managing the programme and Local Trust taking over was a challenging time as it sometimes seemed that the infrastructure of support was not quite in place early enough to meet some of their information or support needs, communications were not always clear, and this led to some confusion in local areas. Though very much a historical issue, those areas nonetheless felt it had contributed to some delays and difficulties in their very early days.

> *"As a round 1 area, it feels at times Local Trust is playing catch up with us and holds us back." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"We are a wave 1 area and for the first year or so we did not know what we were doing/meant to do and this caused problems in the community." (Big Local partnership member)*

In our survey, those who mentioned a lack of guidance more recently as a challenge stated that Local Trust had provided them with too few guidelines to follow and/or that the lack of direct contact with 'the centre' had led to them making unnecessary mistakes and not clearly understanding what was expected, though some also mentioned changing guidance – something we were not able to evidence.

> *"We don't know the rules until we break them." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"(A main challenges is) jumping through hurdle after hurdle. It seems we have done everything then surprise, surprise, up pops another." (Big Local partnership member)*

Not being able to identify any ways in which ground rules or guidance had in fact changed, it proved difficult for us to unpick whether the problems referred to stemmed from any actual changing of national Big Local rules or regulations or the introduction of new ones; from incorrect messaging about requirements from either reps or locally trusted organisations; or from areas not always understanding what is required despite guidance.

When challenges collide and journeys stall

There have been some Big Local areas where the scale of local challenges has led to a kind of stalling or implosion. From our analysis of reporting, there does not seem to be a particular type of area, or a single issue or factor that causes this. It seems to be a combination of two or more of the types of challenges we have outlined above – though tensions between people have been one of the most damaging and likely to cause problems. Real crises have generally been where one or more of the challenges we have described have been working in tandem – so difficult people combined with lack of confidence; conflict with a lack of support from local authority or partner organisations; people falling out but then also falling out with the rep or locally trusted organisation who might otherwise have been a source of support over other aspects of conflict. Causes of conflict can be historical or (as an analysis of formal complaints from areas so far shows), can be linked to local process/decisions[72]. The example below shows how local issues can combine to cause progress to grind to a halt until problems can be resolved.

Local stories: When challenges combine and progress stalls

In this Big Local area a crisis point was reached following a period when a number of challenges were building up and despite support from the rep, they proved too deeply entrenched to be resolved so that a crisis could be averted. This example shows how a range of different challenges, and not just one, combined.

Just in the last quarter we have been dealing with:

- **Poor relationships** between group members leading to very difficult and unproductive meetings
- The challenge of **addressing racism from residents** which had emerged during the consultation
- Difficulty of **getting residents actively involved** putting **pressure on a small group** of people
- The impact of **history** - continuing to have a huge impact on the area and leading to tensions
- Extremely **difficult personalities** leading to “a lot of 'gossiping' that goes on in the community and a situation where "I won't get involved if he/she is involved" that is proving quite difficult to overcome.

By the following quarter relationships had further deteriorated, a tension had re-emerged between the steering group and the locally employed worker, a very difficult meeting took place, after which things felt so bad that a member of the group felt forced to resign from what was already a small group, leading to a real crisis and a slowing of pace for this area for some months to follow.

Section 5.2

Enablers: What are the factors that have most enabled areas to progress, and to develop their own solutions to the needs identified locally?

"Big Local is by far the best neighbourhood development programme I've worked on. Flexibility around timescales and budgeting is brilliant! We deliver on resident empowerment where other programmes just talk about it." (Big Local Rep)

Things that have enabled areas to progress

In the course of our research we identified eight broad 'themes' that captured the main enablers of Big Local journeys. We highlight below both the themes and the most frequently mentioned specific enablers of which the 'top five' (in order) were: (1) playing to individual strengths and working as a team; (2) funding paid workers and/or working well with locally trusted organisations; (3) being seen to be delivering – quick wins and communications; (4) support made available through the programme – especially reps; and (5) learning and new ideas from other areas. The factors are a combination of actions that areas have taken and elements of the programme's support or general approach.[73]

LOCAL ENABLERS OF PROGRESS: Local issues or decisions that areas say have helped them progress	
Teamwork	● the people who come together and how they work as a team, and investing in the team ● effective leadership - but also sharing responsibility
Partners	● building relationships with other groups/organisations and not trying to do it alone ● a positive relationship with the locally trusted organisation and funding paid workers
Visibility	● quick / visible wins, ongoing communications to share successes and making Big Local tangible ● clear messaging about what's different about Big Local
Patience	● patience – accepting that the journey will take time and will not be smooth ● persistence, perseverance and self-belief
Positivity	● building on assets – seeing what's there, and focusing on the future not the past ● enjoyment and fun
OTHER ENABLERS: The elements of the Big Local programme that areas cite as enablers	
Flexibility	● time – the length of time available - being able to start, stop, slow, get things right ● the lack of deadlines – lack of any feeling of pressure
Support	● support from Big Local reps ● support from Local Trust and its national partners
New ideas	● exposure to new contacts, insights and ideas ● support to think about how to use new ideas and learning from elsewhere

FINDING 76: TEAMWORK, LEADERSHIP AND SHARING THE LOAD

The characteristics of partnerships that local residents most believe contribute to an area making good progress are: an ability to draw out and nurture people's skills and talents and to work well together as a team; strong leadership that helps a group stay focused on shared goals but avoiding dependence on one or two driving individuals; recognising it's OK to take time out to invest in members of the group or group as whole (eg, training).

Playing to individual strengths and working well as a team. The strongest recommendation that areas made after reflecting on their learning over the past year was that the key to success lies in the people involved and how they work together. This strongly supports the Community Development Foundation's earlier suggestion that "progress is helped by the residents – their skills, networks, commitment, effort and characters are key to areas progressing."[74]

> *"This year, the main lesson we've learnt from something that hasn't gone so well is ...be more tolerant with each other and value each others' opinions." (Big Local partnership)*

> *"What's most helped … is the way we've been able to click and work together as a group .. " (Big Local partnership)*

Strong leadership and the importance of having an effective chair but avoiding dependence on one or two driving individuals. These were also commonly raised as factors that help areas make good progress. Reps were particularly aware of the value of not overly depending on one or two strong individuals having seen how a group could struggle if they then moved on. (We did not explore this issue further as it was not possible within our remit but we note that the Community Development Foundation's current study is looking at roles and relationships and the emergence of models where leadership in partnerships is shared. This could add important insights into how areas are making their partnerships work.)

> *"There is a team spirit amongst steering group members. This is vital to achieve the goals set." (Big Local steering group member)*

Not feeling guilty about spending some time or resources on the development of the partnership and the people on it. Those areas who had invested in team building, away days or other development or learning activities felt they had reaped benefits and would recommend other partnerships do the same.

> *"Our initial training as a group was incredibly helpful. It helped practically but also helped the group bond and this has helped in the way we work together now." (Big Local worker)*

FINDING 77: THE LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT SEEM TO HELP

Though Big Local areas can choose who they work with and what their working relationships with others look like, developing positive relationships with locally trusted organisations and other local organisations can make a real difference in terms of opportunities to learn, to do more, and to sustain what is being done. A willingness to work with others but also to ask for and accept support both feel important in ensuring good progress. Investing in a paid worker where this adds capacity and/or provides opportunities for residents to learn and increase their knowledge or skills is generally seen as a really beneficial investment by those areas who have made it.

Building good relationships with locally trusted organisations – relationships that are empowering and not overpowering. When reflecting on what they had learnt over the past year, steering groups/partnerships felt that the relationship with the locally trusted organisation is key – it should be strong enough to add value but not so strong that they take over, and their values also matter - they should "really get it, the ethos of Big Local".

Funding a paid worker – particularly if this can ensure added capacity and/or a learning opportunity for residents. Those areas who have funded paid workers strongly feel that this has been a vital factor in moving their Big Local forward. The second most commonly cited factor in enabling good progress (after the contribution of the people in the local steering group / partnership) was funding a paid worker and/or the support of the locally trusted organisation. Despite worries from some quarters about the potential for workers to take over, or for partnerships to become dependent on workers (and likewise on locally trusted organisations), if appropriately managed certainly at this relatively early stage of Big Local journeys, having a paid worker has made a big difference.

> *"The thing that most helped us this year was employing an effective co-ordinator to provide continuity and momentum in between partnership meetings." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Paying a Steering Group member to step up to being a Community Worker is having a major impact with the new capacity she brings (paying someone to do a job increases reliability and dependability - it moves away from constantly asking volunteers for favours, and increases productivity massively)." (Big Local partnership member)*

Developing a good relationship with the local authority and other local organisations. Steering groups/partnerships had mixed views on the usefulness of the relationship with their local authority and it was cited as both a key challenge or barrier to progress but almost as often as an enabler. Having a relationship that is close but not too close, where the local authority, and other local partners, pull together and have shared goals, works well. Groups who have their local authority at a slight arms-length, eg, in an

advisory group or represented on relevant subgroups, report finding this a helpful way to avoid council dominance of the agenda and/or decision-making.

> *"When we first started we thought it would be council led, how wrong, our council has supported us and already has done things which has made the lives of people so much better" (Big Local partnership member)*

Local stories: The value of partnership working

Establishing partnerships with statutory, voluntary and private local organisations is key to success in Big Local. Newington, near Ramsgate is a really positive example of residents bringing a range of partners into the picture and thinking creatively about how to work together. A huge amount of what Newington has achieved has relied on working with others. The group look to engage with a wide range of partners, both formal and informal, in order to achieve their vision of 'health, wealth and happiness' for the community.

Initially community events were aimed at residents only. With residents engaged, prospective locally trusted organisations were then interviewed. A local GP 'blew them all away' as a result of his engaging presentation about getting people healthy in which he effectively 'demystified' the commissioning process. The GP became a locally trusted organisation, with health and wellbeing a key part of the Big Local plan. Yet despite his core role as a locally trusted organisation, the residents still retain control.

The partnership also found more informal relationships to be a productive way to take their work forwards. For example, one of the Big Local projects is about reviving a woodland area, Newington Copse, so it could be used by the public again. The area had been fenced off and had become overgrown and neglected. As part of Big Local, residents have been working on the land to clear it and return it to community use. So far over 500 hours of volunteer time have been invested. The regeneration and restoration of the copse has been led by one resident. By working in partnership with organisations such as Mears, Thanet District Council, Travis Perkins and Skill force, he has levered in a huge amount of support and resource. The community has been widely appreciative of the project so far, and a recent application to list the copse as an 'Asset of Community Value' under the Localism Act has been successful.

> *'The feedback we've had from the local community has been really good. The school kids, the teenagers, they all seem to enjoy it…We want to get the schools more involved, it is educational'*

Personal connections between residents on the steering group and organisations helped facilitate the latter's participation in Big Local and draw in resource. Local organisations, in all sectors, were willing to contribute in some way. Even minor donations of materials were put to good use. They were successful in balancing the message that this is a genuinely resident-led initiative with the residents making and leading the decision-making process, alongside working collaboratively with key partner organisations that could help achieve the outcomes of Big Local.

FINDING 78: BEING VISIBLE AND SHARING SUCCESSES

Areas that are building greater involvement and feel they are progressing well commonly attribute this to having some very visible early wins (tangible projects that benefit large numbers of people and/or that have high visibility in the local community), and/or to communicating any smaller wins as widely as possible. Communications that also emphasise how Big Local is different also help areas to overcome apathy or cynicism of the "seen it all before, it won't work" variety, that can otherwise act as a real barrier to local engagement and progress. Seeing this communication as an ongoing effort, rather than a periodic once-a-year job, is also identified as helpful.

Be seen to be delivering and doing things differently

Areas report that being seen to be delivering, and quite quickly – addressing the issues people have raised, making Big Local tangible, has been key to making progress. Developing some quick wins was a strategy recommended by Local Trust in their Getting Started guidance and as a strategy it has proved very successful. Partnerships feel strongly that quick wins and wide ranging and ongoing communications have been real enablers of progress – helping them raise their profile, be taken seriously, get more people engaged, as well as motivating members of the steering group / partnership and others involved as they see their own efficacy in being able to make things happen. In messaging about Big Local emphasising in some way what is different about Big Local can also help – for instance, the fact that residents decide what is done, that the money isn't just a grant scheme but there are different ways to get involved, etc.

> *"Success breeds success and that's how it works." (Big Local partnership member)*

Good communication and consultation that is ongoing

Partnerships have a range of solutions related to communicating well and in an ongoing way that they believe have contributed to their success. These include using a variety of methods, keeping up a constant flow of information, and being careful about the language used (eg, using plain English and avoiding 'us and them' language from the start) and giving thought to being accessible to different groups and parts of the community. Making sure that communications and the flow of information is regular was also cited as important.

> *"…try every avenue of communication you can afford, get it going and keep it going!" (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 79: ATTITUDES THAT CAN HELP

Some of the strongest messages emerging from those who have been involved in Big Local so far are about attitudes and values that have proved helpful over time. The most common were patience, persistence and perseverance; accepting that the journey will not always be smooth and some things will go wrong; having faith and self-belief; being focused on building on what you have and on the future; and try and make involvement enjoyable and even fun!

Being patient but persistent, and persevering. In their learning tips for other areas (drawn from our partnership group review activity), steering groups/ partnerships advised that one of the most helpful things to do would be to accept that things can take a long time, to be patient, but also to be persistent and to persevere if knocked back or if a delay occurs. Accepting that the journey won't be smooth and mistakes will be made, that journeys won't be linear and ever upwards, and that is OK.

> *"We're focused on our vision … our passion for this area, our perseverance … just recognising that we're in this for the long haul … ." (Big Local partnership chair)*

> *"Big Local is a rollercoaster. You take big steps forward but every now and then steps back too. That's normal and all part of the learning. Areas shouldn't expect a smooth ride all the way through. Also remember you have 10 years so don't rush!" (Big Local partnership member)*

Focusing on assets and on the future. Focusing on assets and recognising and building on what already exists gives an important headstart to Big Local activity. This includes tapping into things people care about or are already good at, building on existing relationships and partnerships, and involving those who are already active and respected in the community (though not only relying on them). Areas that have a poor history of community initiatives but have the ability to let that go and focus on the future, suggest this helps them progress better.

> *"You just can't be looking backwards. We had a few doing that a lot in the beginning and it just caused problems. Big Local is a chance to set that aside and think about the future. That's the only way it will work." (Big Local partnership member)*

Having faith and believing that you can do it. The idea that believing in yourself is an important part of success came from both reps and partnerships. And building in enjoyment. Another top tip from areas was to build in enjoyment, fun and celebration. This tip emerged from reporting but also from workshops where it was clear that creating a group that could laugh and enjoy the process even whilst taking their responsibility seriously, was an important factor in having a partnership that worked effectively, kept people involved and got things done.

> *"'Perseverance - don't give up. Team to have fun, eat together and spend time together" (Big Local partnership)*

FINDING 80: FLEXIBILITY AS AN ENABLER

Areas are highly positive about the flexibility the programme offers for them to define their own goals and deliver what they feel is needed for their area, and also recognise the flexibility of having a long time frame to deliver in, no fixed deadlines (beyond agreeing a plan), and a high degree of choice in what they want to achieve and how they go about it.

We specifically asked reps and areas questions aimed at understanding the extent to which the programme is enabling and what it enables. Reps were asked to say whether they thought the Big Local programme was being delivered in line with its core principles by stating whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements. Between 35 and 37 reps responded to each statement.

- 35 (97%) agreed that Big Local enables areas to progress at their own pace
- 32 (86%) agreed that Big Local enables residents to take the lead in their areas
- 30 (81%) agreed that Big Local supports areas to feel safe to take risks and try new things.

Using open questions in both our surveys we explored the broader question about what makes Big Local different.[75] There were a few negative responses, most notably the slow pace that we have already considered in our chapter on challenges facing areas or the lack of guidance and direction, which we have likewise considered elsewhere, but overall responses showed that Big Local is seen as different in a good, positive way, and that after its resident led nature, it is the programme's flexibility that is most appreciated as a positive difference when compared to other programmes (that and the longer timescales to deliver which are also a part of flexibility).

> *"Big Local is by far the best neighbourhood development programme I've worked on. Flexibility around timescales and budgeting is brilliant! We deliver on resident empowerment where other programmes just talk about it." (Big Local Rep)*

> *"Residents' views do matter. The longevity of the project. It's about people not "stuff"." (Big Local partnership member)*

FINDING 81: ACCESS TO SUPPORT AND SPECIALISTS

Of all the support offered at a national level, it is support from the Big Local rep that is felt to be the most important enabler of progress, though access to other specialists and to the Local Trust team and other partners is also generally seen as helpful, particularly when areas hit difficulties. The aspects of rep support that areas most commonly mention in relation to their enabling function are: direct support and advice; sharing skills/knowledge; signposting and putting people in contact with others.

Areas' feedback on the contribution of the rep in enabling them to make progress covers the range of ways that reps offer support. Respondents mentioned the rep's role in: enabling residents to take charge, to be in control at steering group/partnership level; guiding people through the pathway process; signposting them to other sources of information or guidance and putting them in contact with others who may be able to offer advice or information; sharing their own knowledge, expertise or skills – particularly at managing meetings and dealing with conflict; and offering support and encouragement..

> *"The support of the Big Local representative was vital to guide and support us through the process and fundamental to setting a firm foundation." (Big Local partnership member)*

> *"Our Big Local rep: her praise, encouragement, feedback and advice have been really helpful and prevented any feelings of isolation." (Big Local partnership member)*

Other partners were mentioned as supportive and having helped an area with a part of their journey, most notably Renaisi and Local Trust where the enabling role was either about enabling an area to pass through a pathway milestone or to deal with a problem that needed extra help.

Local stories: The rep role in signposting and enabling access to support

Hill Top and Caldwell Big Local is typical of many Big Local areas in that it is perceived by some as *"a place where people just don't come forward to get involved in things"*. The area has worked hard to address this and get people involved, including holding a *Hill Top's Got Talent* evening in June 2013. At this event the Big Local rep spoke. He had just previously attended a Big Local spring event where UnLtd shared some stories about the kinds of enterprises they were supporting. The rep shared some of these at the talent night as a way of bringing Big Local to life for residents. By coincidence a resident who attended the talent night had previously been thinking about the number of parents on low incomes in the area struggling to meet the costs of school uniforms. She had considered recycling old school uniforms by selling them on second-hand at affordable prices, but had not got further than thinking this was a good idea. At the talent event the rep chatted to her, mentioned the story he had heard from UnLtd about someone who had set up an enterprise doing just that, and put her in touch with the team. Just a few months later, with financial support and advice from UnLtd, she established her enterprise at the local school for the benefit of parents on low income.

FINDING 82: EXPOSURE TO NEW IDEAS & SUPPORT TO TRY THEM

The programme has helped people be exposed to new ideas and to try new things in a number of ways including through its learning events, reps signposting and setting up visits and workshops to other Big Local areas and further afield; through the Big Local website and communications, newsletter, etc.; and through partners offering specialist support (eg, Small change and UnLtd). Areas state generally that exposure to new ideas has either helped them address

In our reps survey 25 out of 37 said that they felt Big Local was enabling people to try new things. Reps, networking/learning events and visits to other areas were the things most mentioned by steering group/partnership members in connection with exposure to new ideas.

Those areas that have been able to engage with learning activities outside their area report significant gains from this, and feel this has contributed to learning, increased confidence, and new ways of working. Where the programme has supported people to go on training or to attend conferences such as, for instance, workshops at the Eden Centre, this has inspired some and directly led to changes in behaviour and new activities in local areas.

Though this kind of activity and exposure to new ideas is leading to individuals and/or areas to try things that may be new to them, it is not particularly leading to innovation. As one rep pointed out:

> *"we're growing capacity to manage conflict. I hope also in the future we can grow more capacity for innovation." (Big Local rep)*

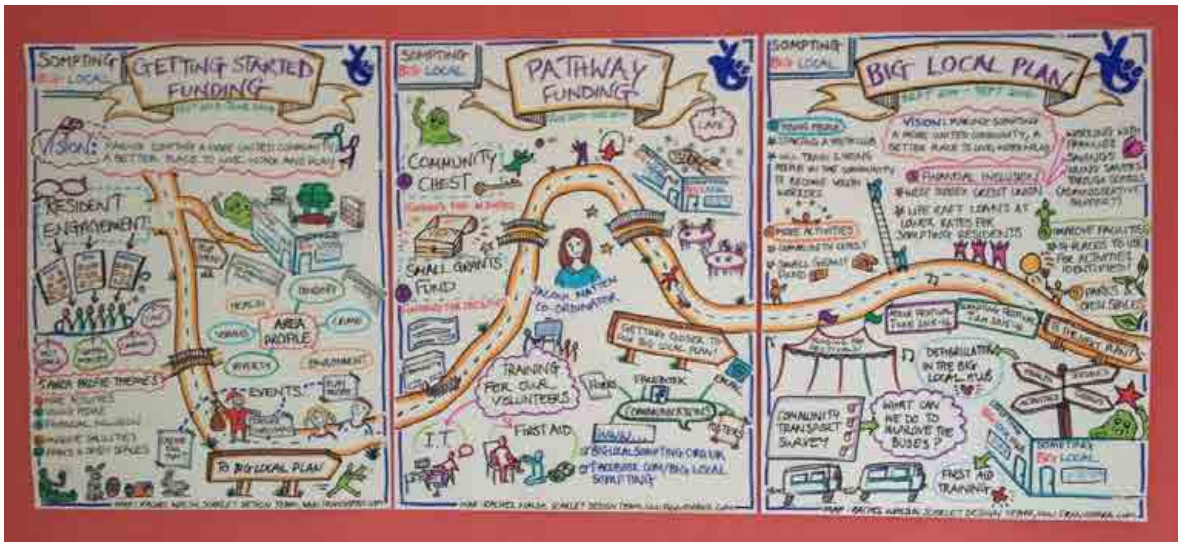
However, some groups do feel they are trying new things even if they wouldn't fall under the umbrella of innovation, it has been about learning about new things, trying new things, or trying to do things differently.

Some mentioned the flexibility we talked about above as an important enabler in connection with taking risks and trying new things, that is, the flexibility that allows areas to try and fail.

> *"I do feel it is really empowering for the community that Local Trust is open to them trying new ideas/initiatives and making mistakes or ventures, failing as long as they learn from them and move forward. Brilliant move!" (Big Local partnership member)*

6

Conclusion



Reflecting on what has been learnt and what may lie ahead

SECTION 6.1

Summing up: Reflections on what has been achieved, and what has been learnt during Big Local's early years.

Reflecting on what we have learnt

We had four main objectives for this evaluation:

- **Progress:** To describe and assess the progress made so far considering national delivery of support for Big Local areas; local progress and the challenges and enablers of progress in Big Local areas; and the extent to which Big Local could be described as a resident-led programme.
- **Outcomes:** To identify and offer explanations for any changes occurring for those involved, and for the wider communities in which Big Local is based, and in particular to consider if intended programme outcomes are occurring.
- **Approach:** To assess the value and impact of the Big Local approach – how far the programme is delivering in line with its core values and principles, and with what effect on local progress.
- **Learning:** To identify any important learning from the experience of Big Local's early years that could usefully inform how areas are supported in the future.

We have addressed the first three of our evaluation objectives in the preceding sections of this report. Here to address our fourth objective we reflect on our key findings, on some of the things we have learnt, and on some of the things we think it would be good to learn more about.

After sharing our learning and reflections, we sum up our overall assessment of the programme's progress so far, before closing our report with some perspectives on the future, describing some of the concerns and aspirations shared with us during our research by those most actively involved in making Big Local happen in their area.

Reflecting on support for Big Local areas

1. Creating accessible opportunities

What we have learnt

- The support made available to areas during the early years of the programme has been impressive in its amount and scope and largely deemed relevant and helpful.
- The majority of people involved in Big Local areas give their time on a voluntary, unpaid basis and have limited time to engage with support of different types and this has been well considered. Overall engagement has been good, but affected by capacity and by people feeling the need to prioritise tasks linked to pathway milestones. Some areas have struggled to engage with the support on offer.
- Local Trust inevitably depends heavily on online communications and working through intermediaries to promote access to the resources and opportunities it offers to people involved in areas.
- Areas report benefits from networking with peers in different ways. However, it seems possible that to date, it has been as much about reassurance and normalising of experience as about learning.

Reflections

- As Local Trust considers new ways to address emerging support needs it will be helpful to continue to maintain a variety of ways for people to engage with support.
- Working through intermediaries and relying on online communications may be having an effect on messages about support and on take-up that we are not aware of. (It is not clear that all steering groups/partnerships are equally well-informed about opportunities or events, and messages about the support available may be 'translated' differently by intermediaries before reaching steering groups/partnerships.)
- Areas can worry about whether or not they are 'doing ok' and are sometimes looking to other areas to compare or to reassure themselves. Though reps offer some reassurance and encouragement, there may be a need for more reassurance and/or feedback on progress in the Big Local 'support system'.

2. Offering local support through a national network

What we have learnt

- The model of working through a network of Big Local reps is highly effective and overall a much valued aspect of the support offered. Key functions are support, acting as a conduit to new ideas and learning, ensuring that Big Local is truly resident led in areas and, importantly, reassuring and encouraging areas.
- Reps network between each other and are positive about the support, ideas and cross-fertilisation that goes on via events and a Basecamp site. Areas benefit as reps network and knowledge, experiences and ideas are more widely spread.

Reflections

- There is more to understand about how the rep role works and its potential and some reps feel their learning could be better used for the benefit of the programme.

3. Keeping things simple

What we have learnt

- There is a clear added value in a collaborative approach that brings together national delivery partners with shared values and commitment but different expertise and strengths. However, it is not always clear to areas how different parts of the offer fit together and how engaging with some activities might help them achieve their goals.
- Areas report a lack of clarity in relation to paperwork and reporting systems with mixed views as to whether this is light touch and simple. It is possible that this issue is specific to the number of processes and different funding 'pots' made available as pre-£1m grants, which will therefore be less of an issue going forward, but the same message emerges about the need to keep things as simple as possible.

Reflections

- There may be a value in revisiting messaging to areas to ensure that information is as simple and clear as possible about the offer of support and how different programme elements fit together and contribute to common national (and local) goals, particularly as new providers become part of the picture.
- Systems for reporting may also merit a revisit to explore what areas are experiencing difficulties with and if streamlining or simplifying is needed or if it's a guidance issue.

4. Offering light touch support

What we have learnt

- National delivery partners have delivered in line with the programme's core values and Local Trust is doing things differently, with light touch support at its heart.
- A light touch approach is not always the easiest, the most popular, nor the most efficient way to offer support (eg, if things take more time when areas are engaged with in a non-directive way, or if sometimes wheels are reinvented as areas create templates and guidelines for local operation where none are available nationally). There are also mixed views as to its appropriateness for the kinds of areas being supported and the level of need they might have for more directive or hands on support even if just for short periods of time.
- Despite differences of opinion about light touch support, the flexibility as regards requirements is a key enabling factor of progress and of the resident-led approach where residents are not overly dependent on the programme's support.

Reflections

- There is a clear demand from areas for more support and guidance from Local Trust and aspects of light touch support are not always in line with what areas want or feel they need. It would be good to unpick if this demand comes from, for instance, areas who have opted not to fund a paid worker, or areas without a supportive locally trusted organisation. Is there a clear understanding in areas of why the programme operates as it does, or does this part of the story need to be retold?
- Has a lack of dependency on reps been replaced in some areas by a dependency on locally trusted organisations or paid local workers?

Reflecting on local progress

5. Area journeys so far

What we have learnt

- Much of what areas have achieved to date is “behind the scenes” and a key achievement has been drawing people together and beginning to operate effectively as a steering group / partnership. They report investing in this work has been a key enabler of subsequent good progress.
- The amount done and the difficulty in doing it may not have been appreciated. People were not joining an existing group, had ambitious goals, and had to manage some challenging local contexts with light touch support and direction. That more than half the areas now have plans in place represents significant progress when considering area starting points.
- Despite progress many areas report feeling they are moving slowly, even too slowly. One way to deal with this has been to invest in small tangible, often highly visible projects. Areas have many stories to tell and some quite significant gains under their belts. It has been in part because of investing in ‘doing things now’ that planning for the longer-term has taken some areas longer than anticipated. In some areas that balancing act between ‘delivering now’ and ‘planning ahead’ has been challenging.
- There is a degree of conventionality in how some areas are organising themselves and some feel low levels of innovation in the kinds of activities planned. Concern to use money wisely may be militating against trying new things and taking risks for some.

Reflections

- The achievement of a milestone along the Big Local pathway (eg, a plan or a vision) is a considerable achievement not just because of the tremendous amount of hard work people in areas have often put in to achieve it but because it often marks a significant ‘distance travelled’ given the starting point of many areas.
- Does a lack of innovation matter if what people are doing helps them achieve their outcomes?

6. Resident involvement and control

What we have learnt

- Getting people involved has been reported as the biggest challenge of the early years of Big Local. Areas have been creative in how they have tried to engage with mixed success leaving many steering groups and partnerships reliant on small numbers and worrying about not being sufficiently reflective of their community. For residents in that position, Big Local can seem like a big ask.
- The programme is and feels strongly resident-led in areas. Not every area feels this way and some steering groups/partnerships are struggling and/or the status quo is fragile, but there is a real sense that this is a strongly resident-led programme even if areas' level of resident leadership fluctuates.
- Inclusion of more diverse groups and/or those not usually involved in voluntary and community activity is still proving problematic. Some groups have struggled to find new people, others have had tensions when trying to include new members into an existing group.

Reflections

- There may be an assumption that groups that have started out with "the usual suspects" will be able to widen to become more inclusive over time, but experience so far suggests that this may not happen naturally, and as some support may be needed to build the confidence of people to join groups, there may be support needed to enable 'gatekeepers' to welcome new people, to challenge those who may need to step back to allow others in.

7. Making the most of local assets

What we have learnt

- Though being cautious with their money and potentially risk averse, at the same time wanting to make the money go further has driven some areas to be more creative (for instance, pushing them to think of ways to make the best of what is available eg, bringing disused buildings back to life, looking at ways to re-purpose or expand the use of an existing community resource or space rather than creating something new).
- In the same vein areas are negotiating useful in-kind contributions to help make their money go further and this is more common than social investment as an option.
- As well as using community assets and drawing on partners' resources, Big Local areas are also making good use of people's existing skills and talents, seeing local people as valuable assets. Star People also contributes to this work.

Reflections

- It would be good to value and consider measuring the ways in which Big Local is operating as an asset-based programme – what does that mean in practice? Which assets are being better valued and developed could be as important a question as how much financial resource is being brought into the area?

Reflecting on outcomes and influencers

8. Changes for those most involved

What we have learnt

- Many of those most actively involved in Big Local have grown in confidence, gained in knowledge and understanding, and learnt new skills from being part of Big Local in their area.
- Despite sometimes stormy journeys, the sample of steering groups and partnerships we engaged with reported becoming stronger more effective groups, feeling better able to identify and act on what was most needed in their area.
- Residents report that they are learning as much from each other as they are from learning events or other sources outside their area. This is as true of those with prior experience of neighbourhood initiatives and those without.

Reflections

- Focusing evaluation efforts on questions about *increases* in capacity, in knowledge in skills or in confidence, may mean that Big Local fails to capture the extent to which skills are being recognised and shared as well as developed. Some also are not learning new skills but reacquainting themselves with skills they haven't used for some time. It might be helpful to ask slightly different questions about capacity in order to capture results that are about sharing 'assets' as well as increasing them.

9. Changes in the wider community

What we have learnt

- Most areas we engaged with, though saying it felt too early to talk about changes in their community, still described important early changes as they saw them. These changes were chiefly linked to three themes we had identified in plans:
  * people - coming together, with more opportunities to learn, enjoy and socialise
  * place – new spaces for community activity; improved physical environment
  * connections – people feeling more connected; organisations working together.
- A small number mentioned feeling that residents were starting to have a little more influence locally, and some felt they could identify "a bit of a buzz", an intangible change in how people were feeling – variously described as optimism, hope, a sense of possibility, a sense that the community isn't any longer a "forgotten" one.

Reflections

- Big Local areas are at the stage of wanting to know better how to capture their important 'intangible' outcomes. Supporting areas to find a way to capture these changes would be beneficial. For our purposes though not as robustly evidenced as we would like, the changes described (and in some cases evidenced) give cause for optimism about the potential of Big Local longer-term to change the way people feel about where they live.

10. Influencers

What we have learnt

- The things that have most challenged areas and slowed their progress have been local issues, and, unsurprisingly perhaps, strongly related to the very reasons areas were selected in the first place – eg, lack of capacity, lack of infrastructure. Getting started there were some decisions made at a national level that also did not help, including drawing boundary maps that did not resonate with the community, and some lack of momentum during the changeover of programme management in 2011-12.
- Issues of people and power have perhaps had the most impact on steering groups and partnerships – personal issues, personality clashes, power struggles, factions between groups, difficulties getting people involved or keeping them involved, and organisations not supportive of the resident-led ethos or otherwise unhelpful.
- These challenges have been addressed by a combination of factors – including strong leadership; shared responsibility and teamwork within groups; support from the Big Local rep, worker and/or locally trusted organisation; positive attitudes and an acceptance that the journey won't be smooth or linear; supportive local organisations who empower not overpower; and, importantly, the flexibility and lack of pressure from Local Trust that says an area can take its time and it is OK to stumble or to get things wrong and try again.
- Looking outside the area and getting ideas from others has also been cited as helpful and areas would like to do more of this, though lack of capacity acts as a barrier.

Reflections

- Groups commonly told us that they had dealt with challenging times, weathered storms and learnt much as a result - but we were unable to look at what had helped them come through and what they had learnt and how. We have only been able to look across areas in a light touch way to consider factors that influence local journeys. A more in-depth study within areas to look at how they overcome challenges, the processes, and the part played by different 'players' in helping them move forward could add valuable insights into what works in supporting Big Local areas to deal with their challenges and learn from them.
- Areas would like to know more about how other areas are doing, areas that they may have things in common with. It is currently not easy to be in touch in the way that some would like. Could it be made easier for areas to look each other up and make contact?

Conclusion – is the Big Local approach working?

The 'Big Question' behind our Big Local evaluation, the one underpinning all the different questions we asked, has really been: "Is the Big Local approach working?" We started this report by describing the Big Local approach to bringing about lasting change in areas as being about building the capacity of individuals and communities to identify and act on the things that they feel would make their area an even better place to live. We described how the approach has been built on evidence that suggests the most effective way to ensure genuine resident leadership and lasting, sustainable change, is: making a long-term commitment; offering non-directive, flexible and light touch support; and enabling areas to try new things and to benefit from peer support and learning. Building on these elements as core principles was expected to make it easier for people in Big Local areas to get involved, and to make it possible for communities to shape their own local programmes.

Is the programme delivering differently? We have certainly seen that Big Local is being delivered differently and in line with the values and principles identified as key to success. Programme objectives have been met and areas have been offered resources, support and opportunities for participation and learning in a flexible, light touch and enabling way. So, is this working as anticipated?

Are people becoming more active; coming together to make a difference? Since the programme started, 150 communities (most with little or no tradition of resident-organising at a community-wide level, and none with experience of managing a community initiative on this scale) have seen core groups of active residents and local organisations come together and consult widely so as to develop shared visions of more positive futures for their community. Residents in these groups have put in many thousands of hours of their own time to work with their communities to prioritise what is most needed; to develop accountable resident-led partnerships; and to produce ambitious plans to tackle identified local priorities. Though doing the best they can, some are struggling to recruit and/or retain sufficient numbers of people to share the workload and to ensure they are working with and not for their community; or struggling to be more inclusive – to engage with more than the 'usual suspects' (those traditionally taking part in community action or voicing their views about what is needed in an area). Much of the success of the programme will depend on the effectiveness and sustainability of these local groups (Big Local steering groups and partnerships) and how inclusive and accountable they can be over time. Though much has been achieved, some are still relatively 'fragile'.

Is the capacity of those most actively involved in Big Local increasing? For those most actively involved we found strong evidence that many are growing in confidence, increasing their knowledge and their skills – particularly in working with others and in some of the practicalities of making Big Local happen. Most of the reported learning and growth in confidence has come from doing - from the experience of taking part; from each other (fellow members of core groups); from Big Local reps and paid local workers; and, to a lesser extent from people involved in Big Local in other areas.

Is progress being made in addressing local issues? Much has been delivered in areas both behind the scenes (consulting, setting up websites, newsletters, forums,

developing plans and putting in place grant-giving and commissioning processes, etc) and in the community (with a diverse array of new projects established, more opportunities on offer, events, community activities, local enterprises, services and facilities). Despite this, many of those involved feel their progress is slow and this can be problematic for morale, motivation and perceptions of the programme in the community. We also know that progress is variable and though some feel that Big Local is working for them, there are some areas where it may not feel as though it is working yet. Indeed, Local Trust may yet find that there are some areas where it will not work – where the challenges are too great, the local capacity too little, or where a different approach is needed.

Are changes being seen in Big local areas? In many areas Big Local has acted as a catalyst for joining people up around shared interests or concerns or a desire to do good in their community; it has led to increased connections; people and organisations working together better; and numerous tangible changes including improved local environments; the establishment of hubs for activities and/or new services/groups. Areas are also starting to report more intangible changes – people 'getting on better' or feeling that things are changing, or a sense of optimism. In some previously 'forgotten' and overlooked communities it is clear that Big Local is helping create a sense of possibility. As things start to happen and to change, those involved report a growing sense of confidence and self-belief that they will make a real difference over time, as people realise the money is theirs and they can do good things with it.

Are foundations being built for more lasting, meaningful change? Thanks in part to the way the programme has been delivered and the type of support offered, but also in large part to the passion, perseverance and hard work of numerous residents and workers in Big Local areas, firm foundations have been established for the future delivery of Big Local. There are, however, concerns about the sustainability of these foundations, not just because of the fragility of some groups, but also because not all are yet convinced that areas have focused on the "right" issues (with some questioning whether they are focused on symptoms not cures, or have focused on short-term issues or quick fixes that may not create lasting change). However, these questions, if they matter, come later. For now, what is clear is that those involved feel strongly they have focused on the issues that really matter most to local people. It may just be that focusing on these locally-defined priorities, may be more likely to bring about the ultimate goal of areas being perceived as even better places to live, rather than focusing on what others (eg, local councils or other organisations) may say matters. In the long-run, just ***the process*** of defining what is needed and coming together to address what is needed (and/or seeing what is needed being addressed), may fundamentally matter perhaps as much as ***what*** is actually prioritised and acted on.

We can conclude that overall there has been a significant level of achievement both nationally and locally during the programme's early years and that the programme's approach does appear to be achieving its intended goals, certainly for most Big Local areas. Considering areas' start points, the distance travelled has been considerable. Whether what is being built will last or lead to lasting change is too big a question for an early years evaluation but in closing we can share some of the factors that may need to be considered to ensure that it does; that foundations become stronger and less fragile where this is an issue; and that lasting and meaningful change might be achieved.

SECTION 6.2

Looking ahead: supporting Big Local areas to achieve lasting, meaningful change.

“It's genuine. Its goals are clear and community led. It's ambitious and brave.” (Big Local rep)

Supporting lasting change – the challenges

The focus of our evaluation has been Big Local's early years, but with more than half the Big Local areas already delivering or about to deliver on agreed plans, it was clear our evaluation was timed at a point of transition and a timely moment in the development of the programme to pause and look not just at what has been achieved so far but at what lies ahead.

In the course of our research we identified many good news stories and considerable grounds for optimism about the future. We also, however, identified a number of challenges and questions for areas (and those who support them) as they move forward.

Figure 23: Future challenges

Choices	**1. What to deliver for lasting change** **2. How to deliver and who should deliver**
Ownership	**3. How to ensure genuine ownership** **4. How to remain accountable in the long term**
Capacity	**5. How to avoid burnout and fallout and enable spreading out** **6. How to strengthen and/or share leadership**
Delivery	**7. How to develop a less fragile 'core'** **8. How to do delivery well and be unafraid to try new things**
Support	**9. How to ensure good local support – councils and others** **10. How to make the most of the national support offer**
Impact	**11. How to define what matters most and who changes are for** **12. How to measure and communicate success**

Supporting lasting change – some key questions

We know that some of these challenges are already on the agenda, and that Local Trust and its national partners are well aware of them - thanks in part to the programme's strong focus on strategic learning (including the work of the Institute for Voluntary Action Research and the Community Development Foundation). Highlighting them here, however, allows us to draw together some key questions that we believe might usefully contribute to discussions within the programme about what is known, what is uncertain and what may benefit from either revisiting or clarifying as Big Local moves forward nationally as a programme, and in the 150 Big Local areas.[76]

Choices

- Are areas choosing "the right" things or are the right things by definition the things areas choose? Will it matter if areas choose to spend or invest their £1million in ways that do not make a lasting change – or if long-term goals within plans such as "improved quality of life for older people" or "better life chances for young people" are not meaningfully impacted by the activities a Big Local partnership chooses to invest in? Or, is the process as important as or more important than any local thematic outcomes?

- What place will "challenge" have in the commitment to "support, encourage and challenge" areas if local decisions seem unlikely to lead partnerships towards achieving their long-term priorities and the programme outcomes?

- Partnerships have worked hard to specify the things that are in their plans. How can plans take into account changing needs and priorities? How can areas be flexible without being blown off course? How fixed are plans and how will they be used longer-term (locally and/or by Local Trust)? How will they be updated and (re)endorsed by Local Trust when the plans timed for two or three years reach their end date? And, to what extent will success be measured in relation to achieving outputs and outcomes in plans?

- Should partnerships be seeing themselves as responsible for making decisions (though accountable to the community) or as responsible for *delivering* Big Local – is 'self-delivery' via expanded volunteering and self-help realistic?

Ownership

- How can partnerships ensure that residents within their community have not just set an agenda at the beginning of the process, but are engaging in an ongoing way and feeling a sense of ownership of what is being planned and delivered throughout the lifespan of Big Local?

- How will partnerships maintain accountability to residents, to the wider community – which needs to be more than keeping people informed?

- How much of the difficulty with engagement lies in how steering groups and partnerships are trying to engage and the 'ask' that is being made, and how much is it linked to broader issues in the local community (eg, cynicism)?

- Some parts of the community may be considered "hard to reach", but how can steering groups and partnerships avoid Big Local becoming too formal, too exclusive and hard to reach itself?

Capacity

- How can partnerships keep momentum going longer-term? How are risks of fall out and burnout minimised? Are there more innovative and creative models for running partnerships and decision-making processes differently to allow more people to take part or to sustain long-term involvement?

- How are gains in skills, knowledge and capacity spread out further afield than the partnership? How are new people brought on board and how can partnerships manage the process of refreshing and renewing membership and engagement over time? Is there learning emerging that can be shared across areas of how partnerships nurture and include new members?

- Do partnerships have the skills they need as plans put people into the position of managing more complex work (eg, commissioning processes, budgeting)? How confident do partnerships feel about managing relationships with locally trusted organisations and workers? Are those leading partnerships in need of more support and skills development?

Delivery

- What will happen if delivery or implementation of plans is poor? For instance, if providers are funded but do not deliver as anticipated, or outputs are achieved but they do not achieve the intended outcomes?

- Will a sense of responsibility for the funding (and pressure to be seen to be delivering tangible and/or quick wins) increase the likelihood of partnerships becoming risk averse, and reduce focus on lasting change?

- Should Local Trust be concerned at low levels of innovation? What is innovation within the context of Big Local? If innovation is important, how can it be better encouraged and enabled?

- If cuts in statutory and voluntary sector services deepen, will this affect either the sustainability of the areas' activities and/or their impact; or the desire of local organisations to exert more influence over decisions about Big Local funds; or will partnerships be tempted to use money to fill gaps as valued services close or are reduced? And does this matter; will this be monitored or managed?

Support

- Areas have sometimes struggled to access support offered by national providers. Are there other sub-regional, local or virtual ways to offer areas specialist support?
- Could taking a more themed approach to networking help, now that plans make clearer what areas might have in common – that is, could areas tackling similar issues be more connected where it is helpful?
- Local support is key. If local authorities, locally trusted organisations and other local providers lose interest as they may see little gain for them in pressured times, or if for other reasons links to their Big Local partnership do not work out, what could this mean for capacity to deliver, for impact and/or for sustainability in an area?
- Some steering groups and partnerships are not yet engaging much outside of their area or with different programme activities. Can we find out more about why that is? How could they be supported to engage better? What benefits might they gain from doing that?

Impact

- What do we mean by lasting change and how is it best achieved? Who will ultimately benefit from Big Local in each area and how? Will benefit/impact be "inclusive and sustainable"?
- How will partnerships know if they have been successful? What will success look like and how can progress and success best be measured and communicated over time; both nationally and locally?
- How will Local Trust hear from wider beneficiaries than steering groups and partnerships over time so that different perspectives on impact are drawn together?
- Engagement with areas has strongly suggested that steering groups and partnerships care a lot about process (about how they work and about values) as well as impact – and may identify strongly with the idea that measuring success would include other factors – that is, not just what is done and what results have been achieved but how it has been achieved. Can this be taken into account when considering how progress and impact are assessed?

Supporting lasting change - grounds for optimism

Much of the focus of our report has been on challenges, on what has affected areas' Big Local journeys. It was a part of our remit to put journeys in context and try to develop a fuller understanding of what has affected progress so far. However, our focus on challenges is also due to the fact areas told us that the Big Local journey is not an easy one. It can be joyful and exciting, it can be thought-provoking and challenging, but it is rarely if ever described as easy. That being the case the level of achievement, the numbers who have been involved right from the start, and the commitment and hours of effort put in by people in areas to make Big Local happen is all the more remarkable.

Though it is relatively early days and much work has been 'behind the scenes' (building foundations for future delivery), nonetheless we found compelling evidence of learning, new connections being made, organisations working better together, a sense of opportunity and hope that maybe something really will change in communities as a result of Big Local.

Our research recognises the challenges but we hope it also gives grounds for optimism that many positive changes can and will take place in Big Local areas. We cannot argue that such changes will be lasting and sustainable yet, but certainly some people will benefit and already have from the process of making it happen, and many more will benefit from the actual changes made over the next decade as plans become a reality in each Big Local area.

Many of those most actively involved certainly already *believe* that Big Local will help them achieve lasting change. 88% of the steering group/partnership members we surveyed said they felt confident their group would achieve its goals in the longer term,[77] with many strongly connecting this to a belief that the change would be lasting. Local stakeholders credit their confidence variously to the fact that – Big Local is taking its time; it is more focused on what is needed; it is being led by residents so there is more investment in sustaining it; and a sense of ownership is developing that will increase levels of engagement and bring a level of respect for the things being done. As one respondent pointed out:

> *"In those cases (previous programmes) targeted work was carried out to achieve more of a quick fix. Big Local is more drawn out, a greater commitment and a much slower process. With a greater end result too."*
> *(Big Local partnership member)*

Our own grounds for optimism, over and above people's own growing sense of confidence and self-belief in areas, comes from seeing evidence of:

- **local visions.** Areas have embraced the notion that Big Local is about more than £1million and are focused on working together and making the best of what they have to bring about change.

- **new connections.** Big Local is already acting as a catalyst to bring together people and organisations, many of whom have not worked together before, and is enabling them to work better together.
- **changes in places.** Very tangible changes can already be seen in so many Big Local areas as places change and more people get involved.
- **changes in people.** The number who can point to things they are doing now that they didn't know they could do; who are growing in confidence, learning new things, sharing what they know and making a difference to others.
- **the commitment of Local Trust, national partners, and Big Local reps.** The clear commitment to and enthusiasm for the programme and its values, and for learning and improving for the benefit of local communities.

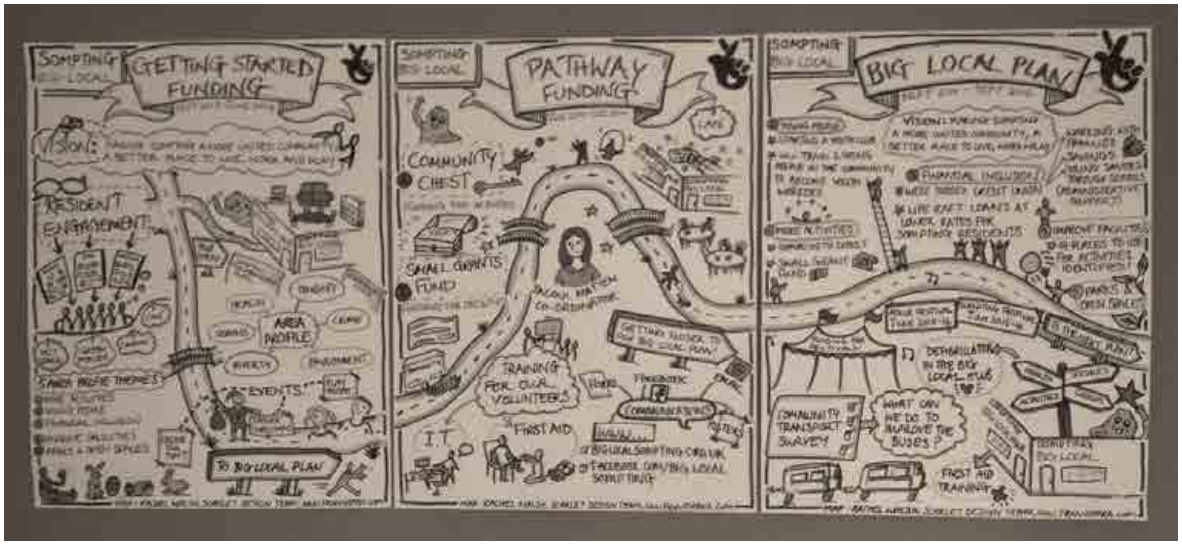
Areas told us above all else that being involved in Big Local is a steep learning curve. Local Trust and its national delivery partners also regularly reflect on the programme as a learning experience. We in our turn as evaluators have learnt much during this project from the many stakeholders we engaged with, and from seeking to understand the ways in which Big Local is different, and how that difference could ultimately contribute to different kinds of changes in Big Local areas.

We hope that our findings do justice to the many achievements and the learning that has taken place across the programme so far. We recognise some of the questions and issues we have raised in this final section are far from easy to resolve, but we hope our report will prove informative and helpful to Local Trust, its partners, reps and those involved in Big Local areas in their thinking and their planning for the future of the programme, and to any future evaluators of the programme in the longer-term.

December 2014

7

Appendices



Appendices, references and end notes

Appendix 1 – Big Local delivery partner roles

Renaisi specialises in the delivery of neighbourhood services, community-led regeneration and employment and economic growth programmes. Their role has included:

- recruiting, supporting and managing the network of Big Local representatives or 'reps'
- producing and maintaining the boundary maps for Big Local areas
- supporting Local Trust to address concerns and complaints arising in areas.

National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM) is responsible for helping Big Local areas learn and share knowledge. They have delivered programmes of workshops and learning events.

- learning events and a spring workshop programme
- resources and blogs to follow up on and further share learning from events
- working with other delivery partners and reps to respond to emerging learning needs.

Community Development Foundation (CDF) – CDF's research team are part of the Big Local learning team. They aim to support Local Trust in:

- ensuring that learning from Big Local areas is identified and shared to assist Local Trust in developing and the areas in achieving their local vision
- coordinating data collected across the delivery partners
- supporting analysis of progress and outcomes from Big Local.

Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) is part of the Big Local learning team and has focused on:

- developing Big Local's theory of change, indicators, outcomes and key learning questions and themes
- analysing data to produce thematic reports (as necessary)
- developing the annual learning report and facilitating strategic learning.

The Living Space project (previously known as Capacity Global) was a delivery partner until the summer of 2014. It has:

- offered support and advice on the built and natural environment
- offered support and advice on cohesion, equalities and inclusion
- provided case studies and other materials to support areas to address these issues and delivered a pilot project to explore the value of in-depth work on space and place.

Small Change works on social finance, social enterprise, social impact and financial exclusion. The organisation has provided advice and guidance for reps and the areas on social investment and wider social economy issues, including:

- producing resources and organising events and workshops
- developing a social investment pathway and training up and co-ordinating the work of a team of social investment reps
- practical support and advice for areas and the programme on social economy issues.

UnLtd is the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs and it delivers the UnLtd Star People programme in Big Local areas. Up until the summer of 2014 their role included:

- providing three levels of Star People funding Award – Try It, Do It and Build It
- offering development support to entrepreneurial individuals living in Big Local areas
- identifying and working with Star Partners to find and encourage residents in Big Local areas to try community entrepreneurial projects.

CCLA provides specialist investment management for charities, faith organisations, and local authorities. They are managing the Big Local investment for Local Trust and the Big Local areas.

Appendix 2 – methodology and sample

Activity 1: Desk research

Evaluation and learning reports from programme delivery partners

Community Development Foundation (CDF):

- Getting People Involved (round 2) planned activities and early learning report (2013)
- Getting Started in wave 2 Big Local areas (2013)
- Getting Started in wave 3 Big Local areas (2012)
- Getting Started funding in wave 3 areas - presentation
- Influences on the development of Big Local Areas (2014)
- Early Learning from Big Local 2011-12 (2012)
- About Big Local workers (2014) - presentation

Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR):

- Big Local 2012-13 Annual Learning Report (2013)
- Big Local 2013-14 Annual Learning Report (2014)
- Big Local: What's new and different? (2013)

Renaisi:

- Evolving the new awards: an evaluation of UnLtd's awards products (2014)

Programme and partners' reporting

Local Trust reports and plans:

- Local Trust Board reports (quarterly) including Local Trust managers' reports (delivery reports) as submitted to the Local Trust Board (2011-2014)
- Local Trust annual accounts (2012-13, 2013-14)
- Local Trust strategy (2014-17)
- Big Local Trust deed (2012)
- Data provided by Local Trust team on outputs (eg, website statistics, grant awards)
- Financial data from the Big Local Community (online reporting system/database)

Delivery partners' work programmes and progress reports including:

- Living Space Project report to Local Trust (March 2014)
- Making a success of space and place projects (tips document, Living Space, 2013)
- Small Change 2013-14 update reports (various)
- NANM learning event reports and discussion papers (various)
- Star People: how enterprising ideas are transforming Big Local areas (UnLtd, 2013)
- Star People awards data from UnLtd (2011-14)
- Shining Stars: unleashing the energy of community entrepreneurs (2014)
- Renaisi's quarterly synthesis reports on reps' activities (2012-14)
- Big Local reps quarterly monitoring reports (raw data, various)
- Reports on rep and resident networking events (various)
- NANM's reports/analysis of event take-up/event attendance data

Local area plans and reports

- A sample of Getting Started/Getting People Involved monitoring reports (n=83)
- A sample of annual reviews from areas reflecting one year post-plan delivery (n=10)
- A sample of endorsed Big Local plans (n=50)

Other programme materials

- Local Trust case studies highlighting learning/innovation (various)
- National partner meeting papers/mins (2013-14)
- Structure charts, guides, case studies, etc.

Activity 2 – Survey of steering group/partnership members

Purpose: The purpose of our survey was to explore: the experience of those most involved in making Big Local happen in areas, and outcomes for them personally; perspectives on progress made so far; outcomes – any changes taking place in the area; resident control – how far residents feel they are in control and leading their Big Local; and local perspectives on the programme's support.

Target respondents: Our target respondents were the members of Big Local steering groups and partnerships in the 150 Big Local areas. We hoped to achieve a sample of 100 areas and that, reflecting the resident-led ethos of these groups, at least 51% of respondents would be local residents.

Instrument: We designed a colourful paper-based questionnaire with ten questions – most were based on statements with agree/disagree scale response options, though we also included open questions. We decided that the survey would need to be on paper and online because we knew that only using an online version would limit responses for this particular target group. The survey was created online using SNAP software. Questions were tested with our advisory group and the Local Trust staff team, before being piloted with reps (3) and members of partnerships (4). Following revisions based on the feedback received during the pilot we distributed the survey questionnaire.

Delivery: The survey was open for responses for a 12-week period from 19 June to 26 September 2014. The link to the online SNAP version as well as downloadable versions of the questionnaire (in a word form and a printable PDF) were sent to local chairs or other named contacts and reps. All 150 areas received an online version, 80 received a paper version via a postal mailout of what we called an "evaluation pack" (containing other materials as below). We gave areas the choice and only 80 responded to request paper versions of our materials. All materials were sent with pre-paid envelopes to enable return without cost.

Response: The survey was completed by 236 steering group/partnership members. 146 chose to complete a hardcopy of the questionnaire and return it to us in the post, and 90 completed it online. 76% had been involved for more than 12 months. We had hoped for a higher response rate. We did three 'chase' activities, follow-up emails and calls, and targeted work through reps to increase take-up. Reps' support helped increase take-up at each point. However, we experienced the following challenges:

- We did not have contact details for all steering group/partnership chairs or named contacts and were therefore sometimes reliant on reps or locally trusted organisations to share information with steering groups or partnerships.
- When information did reach areas we were then reliant on individuals (chairs or named contacts) to distribute to their fellow partnership members.
- We were targeting a group of people involved on a voluntary basis, also at a time when many were on summer holidays and/or local groups were having a summer break.

Sample profile: Of the 236 respondents, 200 (85% of respondents) were either on a steering or partnership group, a subgroup or committee and/or a local resident. The remainder were workers or those on advisory groups or similar bodies linked to but outside of a core group. 140 (59%) respondents identified themselves as a resident in their Big Local area.The respondents came from 65 known areas (five did not state the area they came from). 43 areas were 'pre-plan', 21 had plans in place or in assessment. The average number of respondents per area was four and the maximum number of respondents from one area was eleven.

Data and analysis: We used SNAP's reporting functions and excel to analyse quantitative data, and conducted thematic analysis of responses to open questions.

Activity 3 – Group (ten-point) review activity

Purpose: The purpose of this group activity for steering groups or partnerships was to enable the group to pause and review their progress over the past 12 months using a set of ten prompt / review questions. We advised groups this would probably take an hour of their time. The ten questions focused on learning, progress, challenges, what had been done to enable residents to lead Big Local in the area, and outcomes.
Target respondents: We hoped that at least 50 (one-third) of partnerships would take part though we knew this was an ambitious target given it required groups to take time out of planned meetings or to set up a separate meeting.
Instrument: We designed a ten-question colourful poster template with five pairs of questions aimed at exploring our topics of interest. We also put together a guidance note on different ways to conduct the review activity. We tested the questions and guidance notes with our advisory group and the Local Trust staff team and also checked the process, guidance, timing and questions with a team in one of our own organisations, before piloting with two partnerships. The questions were all open and used a "finish off this statement format" – for instance, "the achievement we're most proud of this year is …", "the thing that has most helped us progress this year is … "
Delivery: Following revisions based on the feedback received during the pilot we distributed the template in an evaluation pack with the questionnaire for individuals (as at activity 2 above). 80 areas received hard copies, and all 150 received information online. As with the survey for individual group members, groups were given a 12-week period from mid-June to the end of September to complete the activity and return their review points. Groups were given different response options to make the return as easy as possible, including completion in a simple online template or sending in posters complete with post-it notes or hand-written notes in a freepost envelope – whichever seemed easiest at the local level.
Response: Completed reports were returned by 35 steering groups/ partnerships. This was less than we had hoped but we had to reassess our expectations when realising how many groups were busy with submission of their plans or focused on achieving other pathway milestones, and how many were affected by holiday of members or a gap in meetings for the summer holidays.
Sample profile: The sample was very well 'balanced' across regions and types of area and of the 35 areas responding, 12 were from wave 1, 12 from wave 2 and 11 from wave 3.
Data and analysis: The data was input online either locally or by a member of the research team where paper copies were submitted, then themes identified and data coded. All qualitative data generated from the completed report templates was included within a thematic analysis.

Activity 4 – Case studies

Purpose: We planned a set of case studies to explore aspects of the programme in more detail. These were intended as thematic case studies, not in-depth, mainly intended to bring emerging themes to life. We identified a list of themes as below.

Themes:

- Tapping into local talent – the programme's asset-based approach
- Connecting up to make a difference
- Doing things differently – the unique local flavour of Big Local areas' activity
- Building residents' capacity
- The development of resident-led partnerships
- Residents delivering through small grants
- Working with others within an area – joint working with other partners
- Working with other across areas – learning and peer support.

Process and sampling: We identified key themes and purposively sampled with these in mind. We then looked at the location and type of area to ensure that even though adopting a purposive approach we had focused our efforts in a way that was broadly reflective of the location and type of areas within the Big Local programme. The challenge with this element of the work apart from getting responses and engagement from areas during the holiday period was that we were asked not to study some areas that we had identified as of interest because of the potential overlap with other research studies happening at the same time and/or topics/areas in a shortlist for case studies about to be developed by Local Trust. This removed several topics and areas that were originally of interest to us, including social entrepreneurs and their contribution to wider impact in an area, and the development of community assets and community hubs.

Instrument: Each researcher developed their own interview schedule and plan for the case studies they were leading on, which varied depending on the focus of the case study. Some transcribed their interviews and some worked up their case study from notes. Each case study required at least a small amount of desk research and in one instance a fieldwork visit also took place to meet and talk to key stakeholders.

Sample profile: In total our case studies involved 27 interviews conducted mostly over the telephone between July and September 2014. Of the interviews, 16 were with residents and the remainder with reps (8), Big Local workers (1), or staff from locally trusted organisations (2). These individuals came from 12 different areas.

Data and analysis: Data from interviews and desk research was combined to draw out the key themes and messages and a case study of about two pages in length produced. (These case studies have been abridged for use within this main report.)

Activity 5 – Evaluation workshops

Purpose: The purpose of these workshops was only in part related to data collection for our evaluation. We wanted to look at progress in areas but at the same time explore how areas feel and describe their progress; what matters to them when describing progress and outcomes; and how they plan to achieve outcomes. The workshops were linked to other work we were undertaking on mapping intended outcomes in Big Local areas (via a desktop review and analysis of plans).
Target participants: We offered the opportunity to host a workshop to all 50 areas with plans in place. We had a target to deliver ten workshops but scope to deliver up to 12 so that we could include a pilot session. In the end thirteen areas booked, but three dropped out, leaving exactly ten which meant we did not have to make decisions about final inclusion in our sample based on issues we had identified (including geography, wave, type of area and engagement with other elements of the programme and/or other research projects).
Process: The workshops, called 'Measure what Matters' workshops, were delivered by two members of the research team, and structured over 2-3 hours (we had to be flexible to work around availability and preferences in areas). Our focus in each was revisiting the plan; clarifying outcomes and checking the logic of planned activities intended to achieve outcomes (creating a theory of change or area story map); identifying success measures; and then reviewing progress made so far in achieving local and core programme goals using a feedback tool with a five point scale.
Delivery: In most areas the story map was useful and engaging and time was limited which meant we finalised a story map and assessed progress quite quickly, but we did not have time to explore future measurement of success in any great detail with areas.
Sample profile: Of the ten areas two were from wave 2, and 8 were from wave 1. 63 individuals attended across the ten areas (this was partnership members, representatives of locally trusted organisations and reps but the majority, 55, were partnership members).
Data and analysis: Each area received a write-up / short report of the workshop for their own purposes plus a story map linking their activities to their intended outcomes, and data from the review exercise component of the workshops was analysed alongside data from ten end of year reviews where a similar review exercise rating progress with achieving core outcomes had been recorded.

Activity 6 – An online survey of reps

Purpose: The purpose of this survey was to explore reps' perspectives on area progress, challenges, enablers and outcomes but also to look at delivery of the programme, programme values and key themes including particularly the issue of how far areas were developing as resident-led programmes, and the issue of light touch support. We had originally planned to do focus groups with reps but were advised that this would not be possible given pressures on reps' time and a potential clash with one of the two national reps meetings taking place during our fieldwork. On the advice of Local Trust we therefore changed our plan to a survey.
Target respondents: The survey was open to all reps and we hoped that at least 50 of the 70 currently employed in the pool would take part.
Instrument: We used an online questionnaire designed in SNAP, and combined closed questions with open questions so that we could hear in reps' own words their perspective on our core questions. Our original areas of interest remained the same, and as we had originally planned focus groups, this was reflected in a bias towards open questions which made the survey long and more time-consuming to complete. However we tested the questions with our advisory group and the Local Trust staff team, before piloted with reps (3). Following revisions based on the feedback received during the pilot we distributed the online link to the survey via a reps newsletter sent by Renaisi, and via direct email and in the reps' basecamp.
Delivery: The survey was open for responses for a 5-week period in September- October 2014. Reminders were sent after 2.5 weeks and then again near the close of the survey when we extended the deadline by a few days to see if we could increase the response rate. (We had been advised that we were likely to get a lower than usual response as some reps were taking holidays over the summer.)
Response and sample profile: The survey was completed by 37 reps, around half of those currently employed. Between them they were currently working in 86 areas, and had previously worked in a further 30. We had originally intended to do some follow-up interviewing with reps but as the survey closed late, and as responses to open questions were so complete, and detailed in the majority of cases, there was little follow-up needed. We used time instead to analyse the qualitative data generated from survey – considerably more than we would have noted from two focus groups.
Data and analysis: We used SNAP's own analysis and reporting functions and excel to analyse quantitative data, and conducted thematic analysis of responses to open questions.

Activity 7 – Engagement with national delivery partners

*Note – we originally planned to interview delivery partners but as they had recently been interviewed for the programme's Annual Learning Review by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (and using a schedule that would have been almost identical to ours) we instead opted for some light touch group reflective activities. In addition we were given access by IVAR to write-ups of all the partner interviews (following appropriate consents) so that we could analyse this data. We only conducted one short telephone interview with a partner with whom we had not been able to engage in workshops / reflective activities.

End notes

[1]Press release. Big Lottery Fund, December 2012. Available at: biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/press-releases/england/101212_bl_eng_forgotten-communities

[2] Local Trust Trustees' report , End of Year Accounts 2012-13 p9

[3] For the 15-year period to March 2027 - the fund of £220million should be spent by March 2027

[4] CCLA manage the investment fund from which funding is drawn

[5] Big Local Trust Deed, February 2012

[6] note, the original statement of outcomes in the Big Local Trust Deed described this outcome as "increased skills, confidence and social capital", making the social capital rationale explicit, but this was later dropped for ease of communication about the programme's outcomes. Big Local Trust Deed, February 2012

[7] Big Local Trust Deed, February 2012

[8] Press release. Big Lottery Fund, December 2012. Available at: biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/press-releases/england/101212_bl_eng_forgotten-communities

[9] According to postcode data supplied by the School of Public Health Research, we found the smallest Big Local area (by population) is Ewanrigg with a population of 1577, the largest is Little Hulton, with a population of 17,300. The median is 6,800 and 90 areas have between 3,000 and 8,000 people

[10] Institute for Voluntary Action Research, Big Local Annual Learning Review 2012-13. Final report, January 2014

[11] The programme is based on evidence that suggests "approaches that work better are flexible, long term and locally determined, which support local people and committed agencies to make a difference over long term" for more on this see Institute for Voluntary Action Research, *Big Local: what's new and different* (2013) p4

[12] When the Plan is endorsed, the area can start to draw down their £1million. There is flexibility in terms of timescales but all plans must be submitted by March 2016 in order for areas to have 10 years to deliver their plan

[13] Making Big Local Happen, Guidance from Local Trust (2013) and Big Local Trust Deed, February 2012

[14] There is, "definitely a gap (in our knowledge) in how residents feel." Institute for Voluntary Action Research, Big Local Annual Learning Review 2012-13. Final report, January 2014

15 When we asked reps in their own words what they felt would be the results of working differently, of the Big Local approach, the three top responses confirmed this though they also added the notion that enabling residents to really take control would also help ensure that what is offered will be more truly what's needed: they mentioned that participation/ resident engagement will be more meaningful; as a result activities will be better focused on what is really needed; and change will be more sustainable

[16] Wave 1 areas received a Getting People Involved grant of £30k not £20k. This was renamed as Getting Started funding for areas in waves 2 and 3

[17] This 5% is for locally trusted organisations (see elsewhere in this report – Finding 3 - for more details of how this process works)

[18] Local Trust presentation delivered at Spring Events 2014

[19] Locally trusted organisations were known as lead organisations but this name was changed when the Community Development Foundation and consortium partners took over to better reflect the fact that it is residents who lead the programme in local areas

[20] Community Development Foundation, Getting People Involved Round 2 report – reasons for choosing locally trusted organisation (2013)

[21] We analysed a sample of 83 "Getting People Involved" and "Getting Started" monitoring reports

[22] Data from August 2013 (Local Trust) recorded 3,041 newsletters with a 25% open rate (e-newsletter tracking)

[23] Data from Renaisi and Local Trust suggests there have been 36 complaints to date from 24 areas (data at June 2014 from Local Trust report to Trustee Board)

[24] Institute for Voluntary Action Research, Annual Learning Review, 2012-13 (2014) p23

[25]UnLtd 'Shining Stars' report (2014) p4

[26] * Note – this 566 is awards not individuals as one individual may receive more than one award

[27] Information from NANM in reporting on events (2011-12)

[28] Reported by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research in the Annual Learning Review 2013-14, p31

[29] NANM reporting, November 2013

[30] From interview with UnLtd undertaken by Institute for Voluntary Action Research for Annual Learning Review 2013-14 (2014)

[31] That is, answered 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement "overall we have received the kind of support we wanted"

[32] This issue was also identified in Community Development Foundation's 2013 study, Influences on the development of Big Local areas (2014), though as here, the number of areas raising this as an issue was small

[33] 31% of survey respondents felt there was too much paperwork and reporting (n=167). In fact this question was phrased as a negative statement. Respondents were asked to rate how far they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "there is too much paperwork/reporting". 31% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with 69% disagreeing. 18 (49%) of reps agreed that "the programme: has systems and processes which are easy for areas to follow"

[34] This finding (of some confusion) has previously been explained by the Community Development Foundation in their "Influences" study (CDF, 2014, p9): "Some residents have misinterpreted some of the messages such as how much of the funding can be used for grants and loans. Local Trust may wish to review what they communicate to residents in different ways to check residents' understanding and to ensure their interpretation is in line with Big Local's aims."

[35] Community Development Foundation "Influences" study - in their 2013 survey with 'n' varying from 76-97 respondents in areas rated sources of support and rated the most helpful as the rep. The reasons given for the high rating for reps included: using plain English, showing belief in people, listening, and ensuring everyone gets a chance to have their ideas heard and respected

[36] Community Development Foundation, Early Learning from Big Local 2011-12 (2012), p27

[37] Reported by Institute for Voluntary Action Research in the Annual Learning Review 2013-14 (2014) p31

[38] Note - there were 83 completed reports on Getting People Involved/Getting Started funding on the system in June 2014, but we know from Local Trust that more areas than this may have completed the work but not yet completed their reports

[39] Getting Started in Wave 3 Big Local Areas(Community Development Foundation), and Getting People Involved (round 2) planned activities and early learning – summary report (Community Development Foundation). Both presentations produced from data analysed in 2013

[40] Analysis of data from reps quarterly monitoring survey, September 2012

[41] Based on Community Development Foundation summary, Workers in Big Local Areas (May 2014)

[42] Local Trust's guidance on partnerships says: "The partnership should make links with many different individuals, groups, and organisations in your area. This could include voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, councillors and MPs, public and private organisations and businesses operating in or near your area to identify opportunities and build links where funding, expertise, joint working and/or support can be provided to the benefit of the local area. **The partnership should also make a particular effort to develop networks with groups and communities whose ideas and thoughts may not be reflected in the partnership at that point in time."** (emphasis ours)

[43] Reported by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research in the Annual Learning Review 2013-14 (2014) p41

[44] This is based on an analysis of the first 50 partnerships, reported by IVAR in the Annual Learning Review 2013-14 (2014), p41

[45]Local Trust announced in October 2014 that half had been endorsed –www.localtrust.org.uk

[46] Drawn from reps reporting quarter 1, 2014-15 as shared in Renaisi's report to Local Trust (June 2014)

[47] Rastrick Big Local plan (2013)

[48] Community Development Foundation, Early Learning Report 2011-12 (2012) reported on p10

[49] This is 10% based on analysis of 60 of the first Big Local plans

[50] Drawn from a Renaisi summary of reps' reporting (report to Local Trust, June 2014)

[51] Community Development Foundation, Early Learning Report 2011-12 (2012) p11

[52] In fact we ran an analysis across all questions and responses to look for any difference in response between resident and non-resident respondents. We found no statistically significant difference in response

[53]The Big Local areas survey undertaken by the Community Development Foundation in 2013 (coverage of individuals from 144 areas) found 77% of respondents saying their area felt resident led (p19) and 86% felt residents have the final say in decision-making (p37). As reported in the Influences on the development of Big Local areas final research report (2014)

[54] Making Big Local Happen, Local Trust

[55] Pathway guidance, Local Trust

[56] Looking at a sample of reports from 83 areas

[57] Programme Theory of Change made available by Local Trust

[58] 68% agreed with the statement “I feel more positive about where I live”. Of the remainder, 15% (32) said they did not know/felt unsure about this, and 17% (38) did not agree with the statement. 78% agreed with the statement, “I feel we are building a stronger sense of community”. Of the remainder, 9% said they did not know/felt unsure about this, and 13% (31) disagreed.

[59] Community Development Foundation Early Learning Report (2012) p18

[60] Local Trust

[61] Renaisi Evolving the new awards: an evaluation of UnLtd’s Awards Products (2014)

[62] Institute for Voluntary Action Research, Annual Learning Review 2013-14 (2014)

[63] Local Trust management report to Board of Trustees (June 2014)

[64] Coded data, mentioned on 101 occasions out of a set of 211 responses. (211 respondents gave between 1 and 3 challenges)

[65] Community Development Foundation, Influences report (2014) p49

[66] NCVO, IVR and Involve, Pathways to Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?, 2011

[67] Again here our finding echoes Community Development Foundation’s report on Big Local influences – they found the same in their sample of 15 areas, that is, that lack of time was a key challenge. Community Development Foundation, “Influences” report (2014), p41

[68] That is, they rated it on a scale as either helpful or very helpful

[69] Community Development Foundation, “Influences report”, 2014, p36 (Finding that some areas felt their boundaries were problematic but they did not approach Local Trust about this)

[70] Again this echoes the Community Development Foundation “Influences” report findings, 2014, p23. They found that respondents in a Big Local area with more than one distinct locality (eg, multiple villages) within their boundary felt this had influenced their ability to get started as they had to deal with relations across the communities, difficulties with physically getting people together and dealing with multiple parish councils

[71] This echoes findings about perceived slowness (from a resident perspective) as identified in the Community Development Foundation’s “Influences” report (2014) p67

[72] Some of these instances have been dealt with through the complaints procedure. Between them Local Trust and Renaisi have dealt with 32 complaints over the past 3 years, from 24 areas. Local Trust’s own analysis of this is that complaints from areas are often linked to decisions. The main issue has been local process – though it may have presented as being about something else at first (after exploration often the real issue is not the same as the presenting issue). By local process this could mean things like a complaint about the membership or structure of a partnership, the contents of the plan, someone taking issue with a particular decision that is made locally, and/or an issue related to the selection of a locally trusted organisation. (Local Trust Delivery Report to Trustees, December 2013)

[73] These enabling factors came in large part from the areas we visited for workshops (10) and the 35 areas who completed our group review activities but also from our analysis of reps’ reporting

[74] Community Development Foundation, “Influences” report (2014) p38

[75] The specific open question was “if you have been involved in other community projects or schemes in the past, can you tell us if being involved in Big Local feels different?”

[76] These challenges emerged from workshops, reps survey, comments in our partnership members’ survey and conversations with national delivery partners

[77] n=233. Of the remainder, 7% said they were unsure and 5% disagreed with the statement.

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