

Local Trust

Effectiveness of Big Local learning support

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Our eight headline findings and recommendations

Big Local learning support broadly meets the needs of local residents

Headline

Recommendation

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| 1. Courses and learning events are broadly popular and meeting the needs of Big Local residents | - Local Trust to continue to support training courses and learning events as a key part of the Big Local programme. |
| 2. Opportunities for networking and relationship-building are particularly valued | - Retain a mixture of different types of courses and learning events from more formalised skills-training through to opportunities to network and build relationships. |

Learning support needs to adapt and change to meet future needs

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| 3. Learning support needs to develop to meet the developing needs of Big Local areas | - Continue to develop the range of learning support to include skills that are needed for the development of more established (and often more complex) Big Local partnerships. |
| 4. Digital approaches could be used to complement face-to-face courses | - Local Trust to consider how digital approaches could complement face-to-face courses – particularly how Big Local residents can be sign-posted to relevant online content. |

More Big Local areas need to be encouraged to take part in training courses

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| 5. Just over a third of Big Local areas are currently benefitting from training courses | - Local Trust to continue awareness of training courses through both 2016 Spring Events and the Big Local reps network to broaden the range of Big Local areas benefitting. |
| 6. The distance and time taken to get to training courses is a major barrier | - Local Trust to continue to consider ways of minimising the time and travel requirements to attend training courses. |

Monitoring, evaluation & feedback systems can be improved

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| 7. The quality and consistency of attendance information could be improved | - Local Trust to develop a simple template for collecting attendance information to be used by all course and learning event organisers. |
| 8. Promote greater long-term impact from learning support | - Develop more systematic ways of getting feedback from course delegates on the impact of their learning; support ways for course attendees to share learning with their partnership / residents. |

Executive summary

1. Context and analysis

Key Messages

- Local Trust has a broad range of learning support in place from more informal networking events through to skills-based training
- Spring events have the highest level of attendance (over 600 people in 2014 and 2015 combined), with 112 out of 150 Big Local areas having attended at least one
- Training courses began in March 2015 and currently have lower levels of attendance with 56 out of 150 Big Local areas attending a course in 2015
- A small comparative sample showed attendees of training courses travelled larger distances compared to other types of courses and learning events

This research aims to look at the benefit to Big Local residents of attending Big Local courses or learning events. Learning and sharing knowledge has always been a key part of Local Trust's approach to the Big Local programme. There are now a range of activities that take place:

Learning and networking events

- Spring learning and networking events that have been organised each year by Local Trust and the National Association for Neighbourhood Management since 2012 (the Big Lottery Fund organised spring events in 2011)
- A range of other learning and networking activities organised by the National Association of Neighbourhood Management (NANM)
- Learning events organised by Big Local reps

Training courses

- Training courses available from three providers (Directory of Social Change [DSC], Talk Action and Northern College) to all Big Local residents
- Bespoke training courses for individual (or groups of) Big Local areas

The spring events have the highest level of attendance, with over 600 Big Local residents taking part in one of the 15 events in 2014 and 2015. In addition, the large majority of Big Local areas have attended at least one of these events. Training courses began in March 2015. Currently, both the numbers of individuals and the range of Big Local areas who have attended a training course are lower than spring events. Specifically, 54 (36%) of the 150 Big Local areas had at least one attendee at a training course in 2015.

The attendance data available for training courses is very detailed. The training course data shows that a small group of 15 Big Local areas account for over half the attendance at these courses. There are also a small number of 'serial attendees' who have been to two or more courses.

One of the key differentiating factors is that attendees travel much further to attend training courses than they do for spring events or other types of learning events. The analysis of a small sample of attendees shows that attendees to training courses typically travelled over 100 miles to attend, whereas the average for other types of courses and events was 30-40 miles.

2. Participants' views

Key Messages

- Survey responses were very positive about training courses and learning events, with an average satisfaction score of 4.15 on a scale of 1-5
- Training courses scored the highest amongst survey responses
- In telephone interviews with a sample of respondents, the opportunity to network and build relationships was commonly stated as the biggest benefit
- Big Local reps play an important role in informing residents of courses and learning opportunities
- Distance to courses and learning events was stated as a major barrier to attendance

We sent a survey to over 600 Big Local residents and received 121 responses. The survey was supported with a telephone survey of a sample of the respondents. Survey responses were very positive – particularly in terms of satisfaction with the course:

Executive summary figure 1: Average scores for three of the main survey questions (1= very negative, 5 = very positive)

	Survey question	Overall	Spring events	Training courses	Other
1.	How satisfied were you with the course or learning event overall?	4.15	4.18	4.74	3.77
2.	Has the course or learning event helped you in your work on Big Local?	3.61	3.60	4.65	3.19
3.	Has the course or learning event helped you learn new skills?	3.42	3.24	4.74	3.00

In the survey responses, training courses scored the highest across all three of these main questions, followed by spring events and then other types of events. This could reflect the fact that

training courses have greater skills focus and thus leading to higher ratings particularly on question 3 in the table above.

In the follow-up telephone interviews, there was a common theme that the opportunity to network and build relationships with other Big Local areas was one of the greatest strengths of the courses and learning events.

Big Local reps play an important part, along with the Local Trust newsletter and website, in informing people of training courses and learning events available. For many, having an effective rep was a crucial factor in staying abreast of available courses and learning events.

In telephone interviews, a common concern was that courses and learning events were too far away and that the travel time required to attend was unreasonable or impractical. Related to this was a desire to have more locally-organised events

3. Learning and training providers' views

Key Messages

- Skills to function effectively as a group and to deal with the increasing complexity of Big Local areas were highlighted as major learning needs
- All providers felt that there should be continuing opportunities for more informal, self-led learning and networking
- Training providers feel there are benefits to having courses in non-local locations, which is a different view from many of the other respondents and interviewees
- There are currently relatively few systematic approaches to follow up on attendees after courses have finished.

As part of the research, we carried out a range of group and individual discussions with the three training providers, NANM, Local Trust and three Big Local reps.

In terms of learning needs of Big Local areas, themes commonly highlighted by providers included:

- The skills to function effectively as a group and develop their confidence
- The skills to deal with the increasing complexity of Big Local partnerships as they develop and oversee more projects
- Continuing opportunities for more informal, self-led learning and networking

Interviewees noted that there is a willingness and enthusiasm to learn, and this is an ethos that Local Trust has helped to foster amongst Big Local areas. Training providers stressed the benefits of

having a different, non-local setting for courses – to allow people to be in a different environment and away from the pressures of their local work.

In terms of impact, all providers typically used feedback sheets at the end of a course, but there were fewer systematic approaches to follow up on attendees after the event. One provider does phone a sample of three delegates three months after the course has finished. Another suggested developing a simple template to give to attendees to report back to their partnership.

4. Findings from our deep dive visits

Key Messages

- Networking and learning from other Big Local areas was felt to be a major benefit
- Big Local partnership members are aware that their broader local communities also have learning needs, which often aren't the focus of courses and learning events
- The areas felt that their learning needs are evolving as their Big Local partnerships mature
- Distance to attend courses was again highlighted as a barrier
- There is a challenge around sharing learning amongst the wider partnership after events have taken place
- There is a common view that courses and learning events have been effective and beneficial

As part of our research, we identified six Big Local areas from across the country that had each been involved in a good range of learning activities. We then arranged a visit between February and March to each of the six areas to meet key partnership members, the Big Local rep and the LTO. The six areas selected are shown in the table below:

Executive Summary figure 2 – Selection of deep dive case studies and their course & learning event attendance in 2014-15

Big Local Area Name	Wave	Town / Location	Region	Training course	Training course unique attendees	Rep organised events	Bespoke training courses	Attended 2014 Spring events?	Attended 2015 Spring events?
Conniburrow	2	Milton Keynes	SE	2	2	1		Y	Y
Gateshead Big Local	1	Gateshead	NE	1	1	3		Y	Y
Grange Estate	3	Barnet	London	3	3	1		Y	Y
Latch Ford	2	Warrington	NW	9	3			Y	Y
Stoke North	1	Stoke-on-Trent	WM	5	5	5			Y
Thurnscoe	1	Barnsley	YH			9	14		Y

A common theme from the discussions was that networking and learning from other Big Local areas was one of the key benefits of courses and learning events.

Partnership members are aware that as well as their learning needs and requirements, members of the broader community in the Big Local area have learning needs too – financial skills and money management were frequently mentioned.

They also felt that their needs were evolving as Big Local developed, with issues such as how to commission projects or about different types of legally constituted bodies becoming more relevant.

A common motif was difficulties around access to geographically distant training courses. Despite the fact that travel and expenses are paid for, the practicalities of travelling and taking time off work were often noted.

The impact of learning support was more frequently ‘felt’ rather than measured – that is to say that although Big Local partnerships felt they had a clear sense of the impact of learning support, they didn’t have systems in place to measure the level of impact achieved. There is also a challenge around sharing learning amongst the wider partnership after events have taken place. Often there isn’t sufficient time at partnership meetings to share learning.

In summary, though, all six deep dive areas were very positive about the range and appropriateness of the courses and learning events available.