# Influences on the development of Big Local

# Final Research Report

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# 1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of research conducted by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) on behalf of Local Trust. Our research aims to gain a greater understanding of what influences the progress of Big Local areas across England.

## 1.1 What is Big Local?

Big Local is all about bringing local people together to change their communities for the better. Residents in each of 150 Big Local areas across England are given at least £1million to use over ten years to make their areas even better places to live. In the process of doing this, Big Local aims to fulfil the following outcomes:

- communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them;
- people will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future;
- the community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises; and
- people will feel that their area is an even better place to live.

The Big Local programme is run by Local Trust, working with an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund. More information about the programme can be found in the appendix to this report.

## 1.2 About the research

### 1.2.1 Background

This research follows up on the Big Local journey of 14 areas involved in research conducted by CDF in 2013[1], the main findings of which are summarised in Figure 1.1. Conducted one year on, this report presents research that builds upon these prior findings.

[1] CDF (2014) Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report. Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

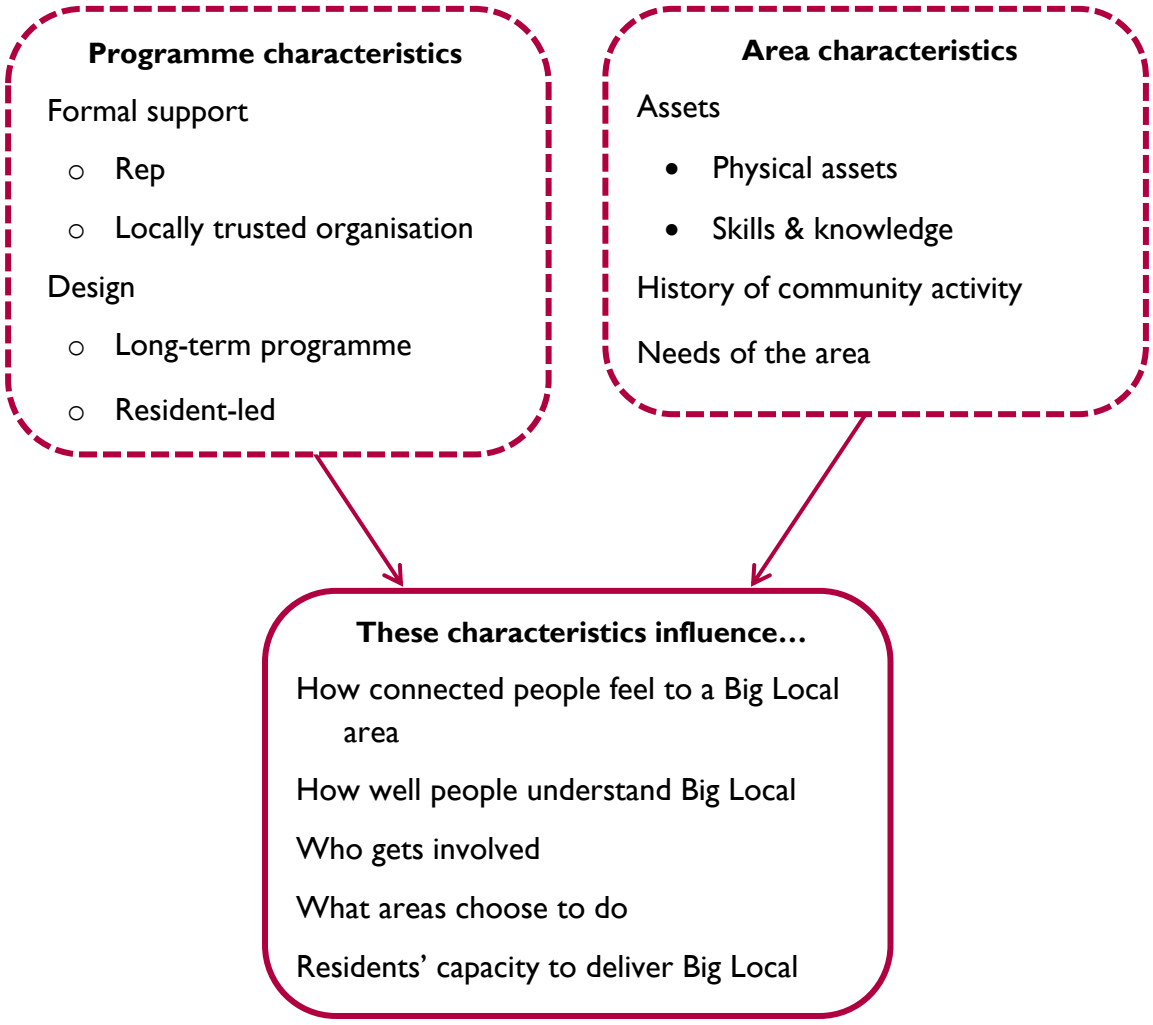



**Figure 1.1 Summary of CDF's research on influences on Big Local conducted in 2013**

### 1.2.2 Research aims

Our research involved visits and interviews to 15 Big Local areas and a survey sent to 150 Big Local areas. The overall purpose was to gain greater understanding of the factors influencing the progress and development of Big Local areas so that Local Trust and its partners can do an even better job of supporting areas to reach their goals. Our research had four aims:

- understand key roles within Big Local areas and how they are evolving;
- identify the main influential factors that support or hinder progress of Big Local areas;
- explore the extent and nature of support received and its influence on Big Local areas; and
- investigate the impact of influences on Big Local areas and any differences across areas.

Further details on the research methods are available in the Appendix.

## 1.3 About this report

This report is based on findings from our interviews in 2014 and survey of key residents in 2015. It builds on findings of research previously conducted by CDF[2] and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) with the Institute for Voluntary Research (IVR) and Office for Public Management (OPM)[3].

The report focuses on what is making Big Local work in some of the areas visited, as well as challenges faced by areas and how some have overcome these, to try to indicate some of the ways in which the Big Local journey can be made easier for those involved.

The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter two explores the **progress in areas** since CDF's visits in 2013;
- Chapter three outlines **structure and decision making** within the Big Local areas visited and evidence of residents leading Big Local;
- Chapter four introduces the concept of **shared leadership and the changing roles** within Big Local;
- Chapter five presents **influences on the development of Big Local**;
- Chapter six details the **learning, networking, training and support** accessed and desired by areas involved in the research;
- Chapter seven discusses what our research finds about Big Local evolving in **the future**; and
- Chapter eight provides some **conclusions** on what the research reveals about Big Local and any impact of these findings on the future development of the programme.

[2] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report. Available at:* https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

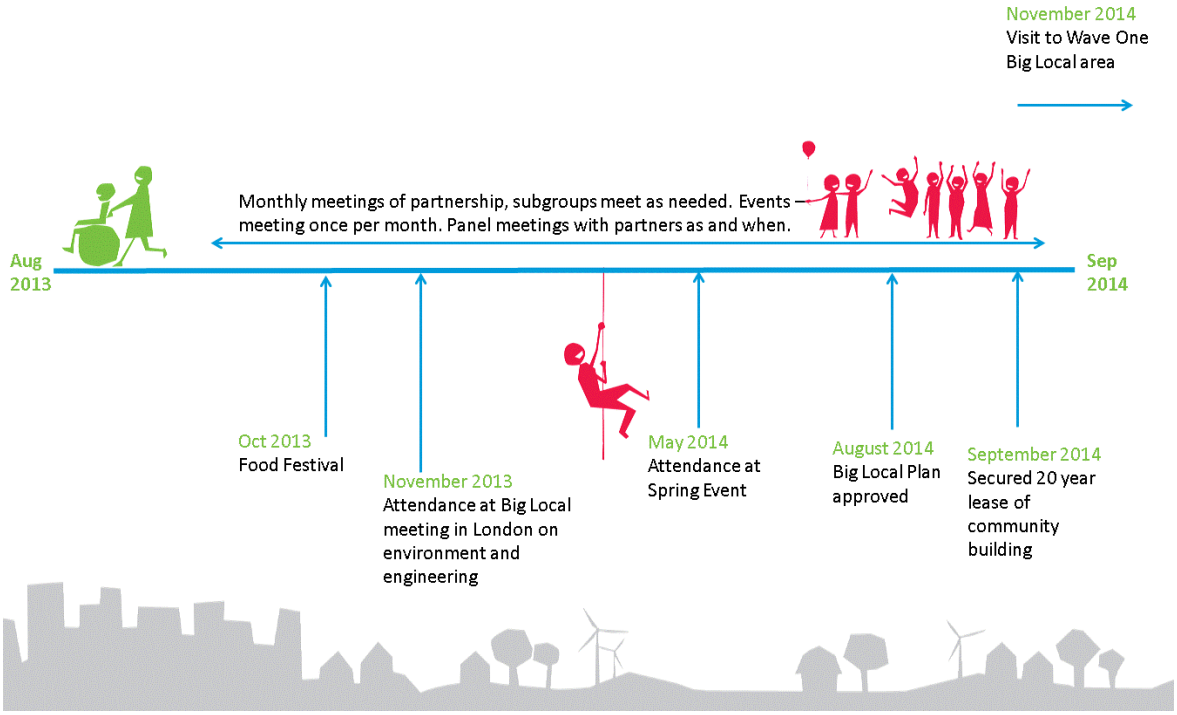
[3] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report. Available at:* https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

# 2 Progress in Big Local areas

This chapter outlines findings on both past and present activities in areas. It goes on to review the extent to which areas feel they have made progress so far through Big Local and the satisfaction of steering groups and partnerships with their perceived progression.

## 2.1 Activities in Big Local areas

In order to explore what areas have been doing since our last visit, we asked residents in focus groups to draw a timeline of key events and milestones. This task was completed by 12 of the areas we visited and an example is given below.




Since CDF's research conducted in 2013,[4] Big Local areas have been working to get more people involved, form a partnership, create a plan and deliver projects to make their area even better. As with the early years evaluation by NCVO, IVR & OPM (p.59)[5], the top three priorities for areas who responded to our survey were bringing the community together, younger people and community facilities.

[4] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

[5] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

Our survey results show community events and research and consultation are the most common activities areas have achieved. As they finalise their plans and start to access more funding, partnerships are beginning to develop contacts and deliver specific projects to meet their plan priorities.

### 2.1.1 Community events

Areas have spread awareness of Big Local in the wider community through various local events, such as barbeques and festivals. These occasions are about the promotion and celebration of Big Local in the area, reflecting NCVO, IVR & OPM's finding that an enabler of Big Local is to "*build in enjoyment, fun and celebration*" (p.135).[6] Events also offer a less formal opportunity to consult the community on their needs.

### 2.1.2 Research and consultation

Research and consultation has also played an important part in the areas' journeys so far. It allows areas to identify the issues that residents feel need to be tackled within the local community.

### 2.1.3 Building relationships with other local groups

Areas are often investing in building relationships with other groups in the local area: "*I was amazed [at] all the different clubs that are on. And a big thing…since the Local Trust started, it's the relationships between these people…they're actually compiling what is available in [the area], which has never ever been [done] before.*" (resident)

The strength that comes from working in these partnerships is highlighted by a local organisation: *"through working with the [Big Local partnership] and the different organisations and people and residents that it's drawn together, [I've] definitely found that strength in partnership."* Residents are building on these networks to help deliver Big Local, promote what is going on in areas already and avoid duplication of activities.

**Big Local's Big Ideas**

- One area boosted involvement in their research by giving those who filled in their questionnaire at a Big Local summer event a voucher for free food at the barbeque.
- Another area asked residents to write their ideas and comments on little post-it notes and place them on a three-dimensional map of the area provided by the locally trusted organisation.
- Making good use of their local resources, one steering group was loaned a 1950's bus from a local bus museum, which they drove around the area spreading the word about Big Local. They attracted a lot of attention and found it was a great way of starting conversations about Big Local.

[6] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

### 2.1.4 Small grants programmes

Residents on the partnership or steering group often grant small pots of money, usually between £250 and £500, for community projects in the local area. These may be described as 'quick wins' to *"get the name of Big Local out there"* and "*just lift the whole area gradually*", being relatively quick and easy to give out, but they also *"make a little bit of money go a long, long way, and they have a significant impact."* (rep).

### 2.1.5 Developing buildings and facilities

Of the areas we visited, three have developed new community hubs with a further three working towards taking over or developing a community building. To make this happen partnerships make decisions to commit a large amount of money to a single project and face a number of new challenges, often relating to planning restrictions and legal issues around leases or insurance, as well as health and safety. Areas increasingly draw on specialist support and advice (see Chapter four), as well as training, to overcome these challenges. A case study of a community building is given in Case Study 3 at section 5.3.7.

## 2.2 How are Big Local areas progressing?

The early years evaluation suggested that Big Local areas are generally happy with their rate of progress, though "*they commonly feel their progress is slow*" (p.76).[7] These findings were also reflected in our survey of Big Local areas, where the most frequent response was that progress is slower than expected (41%, n=87), although a third feel it is progressing as they expected (32%, n=87). Two thirds of respondents are satisfied with their rate of progress, which represents an improvement in comparison to our 2013 survey of Big Local residents when just over half were satisfied. Wave 1 areas are slightly less satisfied with their progress than Wave 2 and 3 areas overall. This is perhaps a result of Wave 1 being launched before Local Trust had been established, as discussed in CDF's report on influences research conducted in 2013.[8]

## 2.3 Conclusion

Since CDF's research conducted in 2013, areas have been working to get more people involved, form a partnership, create a plan and deliver projects to make their area even better. Community events have been popular across areas as a way of promoting Big Local and engaging residents in Big Local and there is evidence that residents' links and networks within their community are growing. Our research shows that perceptions of progress across areas are mixed, but that the majority of steering groups and partnerships are satisfied with the progress they are making.

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[7] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

[8] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

# 3 Structure and decision making of Big Local

This chapter discusses the structure of Big Local partnerships and steering groups, including who is involved in partnerships and the increasing role of subgroups. It then describes decision making within these groups, with a particular focus on what helps this to develop, identifying changes that have occurred to support decision making. It concludes by reviewing the evidence that Big Local is becoming increasingly resident-led in some of the areas involved in the research.

## 3.1 Structure of partnerships and steering groups

The structures adopted by groups often tend to take a traditional committee form with a chair and regular meetings. Steering groups generally have a much looser structure than partnerships, drawing together a range of organisations and residents. A typical partnership structure drawn during a resident focus group is shown in Figure 3.1.

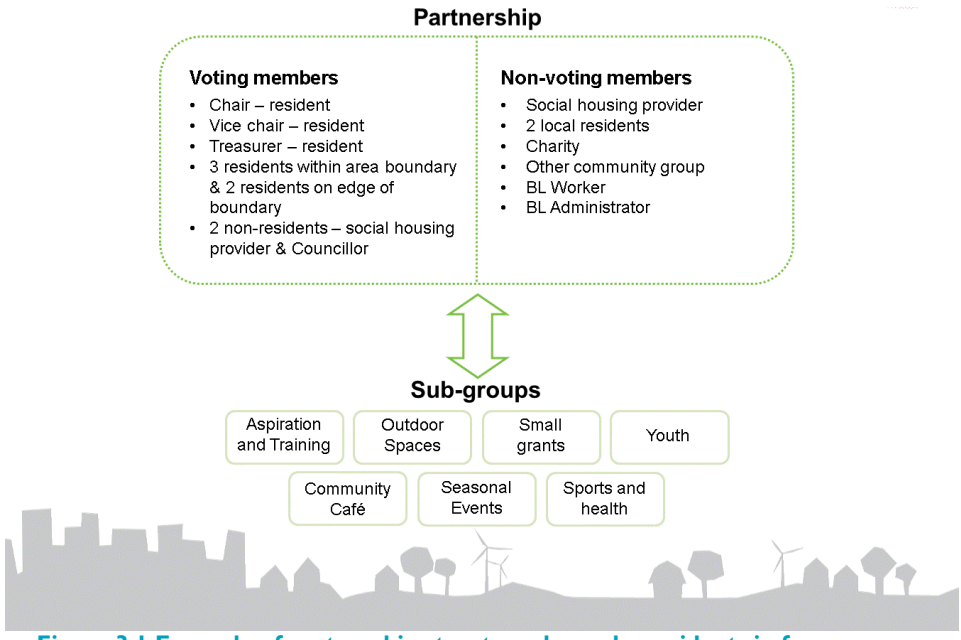


**Figure 3.1 Example of partnership structure drawn by residents in focus group**

Groups are learning how to better structure meetings as they continue along their Big Local journey. Providing structure and more regular attendance helps with making decisions. It means less repetition of discussion and people get to know and trust one another, learning together,

and developing a shared vision. In one area, the worker now meets with any new people who are interested in joining the steering group to "*explain what the group is about: what we do; what we've done in the past; where we're up to; what we're talking about...*" (worker). This ensures meetings don't repeat discussions.

Residents didn't describe becoming a partnership as a key milestone on their timeline, but one worker did describe it as a turning point: *"it's made it realistic…it's made them realise 1) how valued they are, but 2) that they're turning into decision makers…made them realise that they have got a lot of strengths; that I think it's given them a sense of belief that they can actually do it…"*

**Big Local's Big Ideas**

- One Big Local area has a rotating chair for partnership meetings to relieve any pressure on one person holding the position. They have "*found that was a very nice and fair way of running the meetings*".

While there were reported problems with formal structures being off-putting to some residents, there is evidence of residents overcoming this by explaining the purpose of Big Local and the meetings to their neighbours, encouraging them to get involved. Case Study 1 outlines a steering group who feel they work well together and what it is that helps them do so.

### 3.1.1 Subgroups

Our research shows that subgroups are common to both steering groups and partnerships. They form in response to specific issues and activities (such as organising an event, a consultation or communications), but also, once a plan is in place, around the priorities and activities in the plan (such as aspiration and training, crime and safety or housing). Subgroups' meetings are often less formal than partnership meetings, meeting as and when they are needed, and are seen as "*conduits for decisions*" as they feed back to the partnership.

Residents take on championing roles in subgroups and draw on the support of different groups and organisations (who often aren't invited to partnership or steering group meetings) to provide expert advice.

Subgroups are often chaired by residents who are already active in the partnership and are interested in the theme/activity of the subgroup. While the evaluation by NCVO, IVR and OPM[9] found that many of those on subgroups were the same as on partnerships, there is evidence from those we interviewed that they are starting to draw in new residents, particularly in terms of putting on events. It is hoped that this will eventually lead to more involvement in the partnership:

*"[The partnership] is all about governance and it's not the most glamorous and exciting of things, and some people don't want that and that's fine but they might love to go off and run a bonfire party or something like that, in which case, that's where we're looking at getting people into [the subcommittees]…with the hope that if they come in here and they show a bit more interest, 'Well, come up and join us up here,' because sometimes coming up this route of it will be easier."* (resident)

[9] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

## Case Study 1: Steering group structure

The steering group is made up of residents who have connections to community centres, community buildings, churches, schools, local businesses and housing associations. They also draw help and advice from the Council, the police and other services when needed. Along with their contacts and an understanding of the community, residents bring different skills, including funding, financial development and information technology. Residents build on their skills and knowledge through training from Local Trust's partners. For example, one attended training provided by Local Trust's partner, Small Change, and then "*picked up that whole social investment side as a responsibility…and now [the resident has] met with the two local Credit Unions in our area*".

After the initial announcement of Big Local in the area, the steering group had a lot of different people coming to meetings for the first six months, which meant a lot of repetition of discussions. Attendance is now more regular and the same people come to "*practically every meeting, [so] we're not going over things all the time…there's a very clear focus now because as a steering group we've really formed ourselves and become quite a strong group.*"

The residents involved are proud of how the steering group works: *"The thing that's really impressed me over the last year in this group is with the Council involvement, with the different skills people have got…I've just seen things talked about and then done."*

The steering group feels that everyone in their area is 'on board' and want the best for the area; the local Council, housing association, police and fire service are all committed to helping residents with Big Local. This shared focus and commitment means the area is pleased with their progress and excited for all they can achieve in the future.

## 3.2 Decision making

Decision making is consensual and, particularly after a partnership is endorsed by Local Trust, done by voting. Of the areas visited, residents hold a majority vote on partnerships with often only one or, at most, two non-resident organisations also having a vote, most frequently the locally trusted organisation or a key local organisation. Residents in some areas are increasingly seeing themselves as the decision makers and becoming more confident.

A structure for a steering group or partnership, such as terms of reference, helps with decision making "*I've watched them function now and you can see how well aligned they are with each other. I think taking their time to get to this point is what's strengthened them up…They've got the terms of reference sorted and they know what's expected of each other, and they know that they've got safeguards in place. No one person can make some crazy choice without the rest of them.*" (local organisation)

Some of those interviewed feel that residents in Big Local struggle to be the decision makers because they are uncertain of the process and want to ensure that what they are doing is right for the community in terms of allocating the money: "*I personally have struggled with the [small grants] as to whether or not you're making the right decision as a resident. I've found it so hard…I'm*

*always nervous on that one…who to give the money to, is that actually the right decision to make?... Would it be better spent elsewhere?*" (resident)

One of the particular challenges of residents being decision makers is that they know many of the people seeking funding: "*I think they found that decision [on small grants] was difficult because they knew the lady. So… I guess what we're trying to do is take out the fact that they know people out of the equation.*" (worker)

Residents fully debate and consider difficult decisions, which may take more time. Decision making also becomes harder if those on the steering group or partnership who are involved in a number of other community groups or organisations cannot separate these roles. As with CDF's previous research on influences[10], self-policing helps here: "*they try and come with their resident hat on rather than their work hat.*" (resident)

Workers, reps and locally trusted organisations are important to decision making. They use their experience to advise residents, guide discussion and resolve conflicts. The development and adoption of the plan can make decision making easier too, which is discussed further in section 5.1.

## 3.3 Big Local as resident-led

Alongside increased confidence in decision making, there is evidence that Big Local is increasingly led by residents. Most of those interviewed during the course of this research feel that Big Local is resident-led. The exception is a Wave 3 area that is still trying to engage with residents in the area: "*The drive for moving it forward at this stage is not primarily coming from residents, but they are very supportive of it and want to see it happen.*" (worker)

There is also evidence from organisations that residents are getting more confident in taking the lead: *"I think they are growing in confidence for me to get to the point now where…it's more often that I'm saying things just to help people understand stuff…I think their leadership is getting stronger, really.*" (locally trusted organisation)

Figure 3.2 shows the number of areas who responded to our 2015 survey who feel residents have the final say, lead and view Big Local as their project has increased since the 2013 survey.[10] An overwhelming majority (95%, n=82) feel residents have the final say on what will happen in Big Local.

[10] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

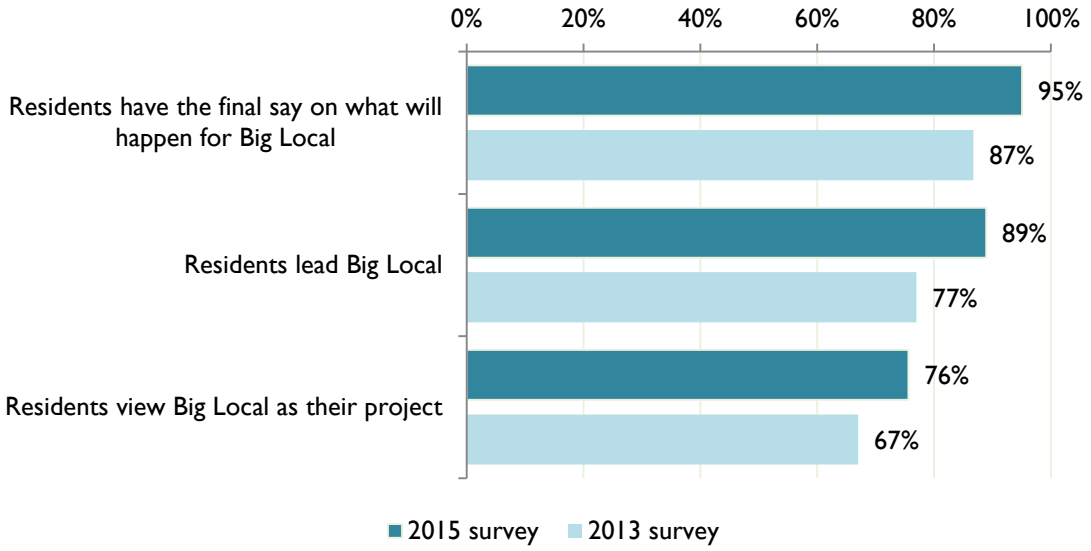


**Figure 3.2 Whether survey respondents agree residents lead Big Local, view it as their project or have the final say in Big Local (n=81/82) with comparison to 2013 survey (n=98-100)**

### 3.3.1 Benefits and challenges to being resident-led

The following benefits and challenges to Big Local emerged during the course of our research:

Benefits include:

- Ownership and control: "*…so many times we've been given something that looks good and then taken away…whereas this way it's our ownership of it I think that's been the key to getting people in.*" (resident)
- Giving residents choice and voice: "*When I come [to Big Local meetings], I can talk. If they do something and I think it should be done different, I will say...*" (resident)
- Accountability: "*it's transparent and our neighbours can ask us, "What are you spending that £1million on?" and we can communicate with them.*" (resident)
- Improved wellbeing and a greater understanding of their area.

Challenges include:

- The capacity of those involved and the lack of involvement from the wider community: "*I think the unfortunate thing is there's so few people that's been prepared to get involved.*" (resident)
- Big Local is described by some residents as a 'big commitment', whilst balancing time for Big Local with other commitments can be a 'strain', 'horrendous' and 'very difficult'.
- Lack of confidence over skills and experience holds residents back "*it's taken us a long time to get where we are. Because, I'll speak for myself, I'm just an amateur…I'll come [to Big Local meetings] and half the time be quiet for a change.*" (resident)

- While resident involvement increases accountability, there is a need to maintain boundaries. One area says residents knock on the chair's door 'day and night' about issues.

These challenges (particularly around capacity) can delay progress but are, to some extent, overcome by:

- Gaining confidence over time. Many areas report that residents are increasingly comfortable leading Big Local because they find their voice, understand the programme better, have a clear vision of what is needed through the plan or achieve something they are proud of. Support from other residents, the rep, the locally trusted organisation and other organisations help this.

- Residents are reflecting on challenges to learn from them and move on, building up resilience: "*I think we've got to be able to take failure and learn from it.*" (resident)

- Hiring a worker to overcome time and capacity issues: *"they've recognised that they need a Development Worker to get this done. They're not going to be able to do it all on their own and, once they've got somebody appointed, that should bring enough capacity in to enable them to deliver what they need to*." (local organisation)

- Being able to say 'no': "*If you're busy enough you tend to find another way of slotting something in or you know how to say to people, 'Look I'm very sorry I can't do that.*'" (resident)

- Being supported by other residents, organisations or a worker and sharing responsibility: this is discussed further in Chapter four.

- Continually involving other residents in Big Local to increase capacity: this is discussed further in Chapter five.

### 3.3.2 Developing skills and confidence

"*Look at what we've done in two years and where we've come and what we've learnt*." (resident)

Regardless of the size and scale of projects that Big Local areas are undertaking in the local community, residents frequently describe the amount that they have learnt as one of the key successes of the Big Local programme so far.

For many residents, involvement in Big Local is giving them increased confidence to speak up about issues that they may previously have left unsaid:

*"If the majority of people are agreeing with something it is very hard to actually voice objections, but I see people doing that now…I also see changes in people individually in that speaking up in working party meetings or getting more actively involved or new people coming along and feeling comfortable about how they can contribute."* (worker)

## Case Study 2: Increased confidence of residents running Big Local

Residents on the steering group initially found it difficult to understand the Big Local programme and lacked confidence when talking in meetings. The initial steering group was lucky to have strong interest from local organisations but some "*were talking across people and interrupting people*" and "*shouting what they…thought the residents wanted*" rather than letting residents say what they wanted. Whilst residents wanted to work with organisations and providers, they didn't feel confident to challenge them: *"we didn't know if we had the power to say, 'Hang on a minute'…*"

The residents employed a worker to help make Big Local happen; when they first hired her "*we took her to one side and said, 'It's just above our heads,' because [of all the acronyms] the TDAs, the DFS…*" The worker came up with a rule that if *"any of [the organisations at meetings] said a word which we didn't understand, we had to make an animal noise in the middle of the meeting. There was more moos, there was more baas, there was more woofs, more meows, whoever was speaking had to explain that word in a different way.*" This helped residents speak up in meetings and keep control of what was talked about. The worker also encourages "*residents to have a particular role*", such as updates on particular areas of the plan. This informal support and training has developed the confidence of residents on the now partnership; they understand more about Big Local and put their point of view forward.

While residents on the partnership are growing in confidence, the wider community often "*don't think they are capable of [getting involved in Big Local]*" but whilst the wider community "*lack maybe the confidence of turning up at meetings and getting involved in those kind of planning side of things…they'll happily come along and do things*".

The partnership has made substantial progress with Big Local, "*getting more a sense that things are just starting to work according to plan*", and this progress has been helped by the support of the worker, greater understanding of Big Local and, most notably, the ability to draw down money following the endorsement of the plan. Residents are in charge and "*know how to call on providers as and when needed, but those providers aren't leading*"

## 3.4 Conclusion

The structure of Big Local is fairly formal in most areas, with specific roles and subgroups assigned. As some areas are becoming more established, a group of residents are emerging as committed to regularly attending steering group or partnership meetings. Decision making is consensual, with voting on issues where there is disagreement. There is evidence that decision making in Big Local is becoming easier as residents understand the needs of their area and gain confidence as decision makers.

Our research shows that Big Local is increasingly led by residents and residents describe the amount they have learnt as one of the key successes of the programme so far. Our research also shows that, in some areas, the skills and confidence of residents leading Big Local are growing and they are truly taking control of the funding to try to deliver change in their area.

# 4 Shared leadership and roles

This chapter introduces the idea of shared leadership as a management structure and how this is relevant to Big Local. It then discusses the key roles to help deliver Big Local, identified during the course of our research. We outline the roles performed by each of the groups involved in Big Local and outline the value of peer and partner support that residents need to perform a range of roles and support their progress.

## 4.1 Shared leadership and roles

### 4.1.1 Shared leadership

Steering groups and partnerships work well together when there is shared leadership from residents and partners. This is gained through clarity on the direction of Big Local, and by supporting and listening to each other. Shared leadership reflects a situation where:

"*multiple team members engage in leadership and is characterised by collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility for outcomes. It has been described as a mutual influence process carried on by members of a team where they lead each other toward the achievement of goals*"

Hoch (2013, p.161)[11]

Under shared leadership there is "*a reduced distinction between leader and follower, because team members may fill either of these roles at any given time*" (Nicolaides *et al.,* 2014, p.924[12]). Shared leadership is found to enhance team and organisational performance and team effectiveness,[11] partly through greater participation of all involved, information sharing, and a "*positive tone among team members*".[12] Taking on shared responsibilities, rather than relying on one person, allows for greater understanding, communication and enthusiasm.

There are three dimensions that develop shared leadership: shared purpose, social support and voice. Carson *et al.*[13] describe these as follows:

- **Shared purpose** – "*team members have a common sense of purpose and agreed-upon goals are more likely to feel motivated, empowered, and committed to their team work*";

[11] Hoch, J. E. (2013) Shared leadership and innovation: the role of vertical leadership and employee integrity, *Journal of Business Psychology*, 28(2) 159-174.
[12] Nicolaides, V. C., LaPort, K.A., Chen, T.R., Tomassetti, A.J., Weis, E.J., Zaccaro, S.J. and Cortina, J.M. (2014) The shared leadership of teams: a meta-analysis of proximal, distal, and moderating relationships, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(2014) 923-942.
[13] Carson, J.B., Tesluk, P.E. and Marrone, J.A. (2007) Shared leadership in teams: an investigation of antecedent conditions and performance, *Academy of Management Journal,* 50(5) 1217-1234. (p.1222)

- **Social support** – "*team members' efforts to provide emotional and psychological strength to one another*"; and

- **Voice** – "*participation and input…the degree to which a team's members have input into how the team carries out its purpose*".

Partnerships and steering groups work well together where there is a shared vision (most often through the plan). This helps all those involved share information and support and encourage each other to deliver their vision, and all feel able to express their opinion on activities. Where residents and their partners take on a shared responsibility for delivering Big Local, sharing tasks and problem solving, their progress becomes easier, even if there is only a small group of people involved: "*all these things are too much pressure for one person…It needs at least two so that they can work together*." (resident).

Where an area relies too much on one person, progress in the area is delayed if the individual's circumstances change or the role becomes too hard. In one area, residents learnt from "*the big gap*" created by the chair leaving by evolving to share responsibility amongst resident volunteers and having a worker "*in the background doing the running around*."

### 4.1.2 Roles

During the course of CDF's research, we asked areas to describe any formal roles on the partnership, as well as roles of any individuals or organisations they are working with. We find that partnerships have formal roles in terms of Big Local (e.g. Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, locally trusted organisation) along with support and advice from reps, workers and local organisations. We also identify key 'team roles' that need to be fulfilled for the partnership/steering group to operate effectively. These roles include:

- **Strategic Thinker** – keeping an eye on the bigger picture and ensuring activities relate to desired outcomes;

- **Do-er** – making things happen;

- **Catalyst** – sparking new ideas and ways of doing things;

- **Connector** – bringing together different people and groups across the area;

- **Advisor** – providing expert advice and support; and

- **Coach** – supporting development and motivating others. This is often someone who is slightly removed.

These roles may be filled by more than one person. One person may also perform more than one role, and may change roles over the course of time or depending on the project: "*We work as a team. Our team consists of thinkers and do-ers, between us we seem to get the right balance. I am not saying that the "thinkers" do nothing and the "do-ers" don't think!*" (survey respondent). The support functions provided by the roles are illustrated in the circular structure shown in Figure 4.1. Partnerships become weaker when they lack certain roles and this can happen when they

lack the 'right people'. The roles residents, reps, locally trusted organisations, workers, local authorities and other groups play in Big Local are explored in more detail in the sections below.

**Figure 4.1 Roles in Big Local identified by CDF**

### 4.1.3 Role of residents

Residents generally act in the roles of Strategic Thinker, Do-er, Catalyst, Connector and Coach. Our survey results (see Figure 4.2) show the roles that residents most commonly cover include coming up with new ideas (Catalyst), getting projects started and getting things done (Do-er), providing leadership (Strategic Thinker), ensuring everyone works effectively together (Connector) and problem solving.

Interviews reflect residents as Catalysts by the number of references to residents' ideas as "fantastic", "great", "fabulous" and "brilliant". The danger, however, is that there are too many ideas and not enough consideration of how to undertake these, which writing a plan helps with: "*The thing that they need to do is they run away with their ideas; they need to take a step back and plan things, I think, properly. The Big Local and this plan stuff is showing them how to do it…"* (worker)

Residents act as Coach to motivate and develop each other: *"We encourage each other, don't we?"* (resident). They also act as champions for certain tasks and priorities or for geographic areas of Big Local.

Residents are becoming more confident as they progress along their Big Local journey, as discussed in section 3.3.2, and are taking on bigger roles as a result: "*… it has taken a long time to get the balance and the dynamic right where residents are actually in those roles and empowered and confident and it has become a truly resident-led process…[a] massive change since last year*." (worker)

The roles and activities of residents on the partnership are changing as Big Local continues: "*the whole partnership and the whole thing is evolving and it is going to be changing, and we need to accept that there are going to be changes, that there will be rise and falls of different parts of it…*" (resident)

**Figure 4.2 Where the answer to 'who in your partnership or wider network, if anyone, covers the following roles?' was 'Local resident(s)' (maximum n=83). A multiple response question: respondents could select more than one answer, so totals do not add up to 100%.**

### 4.1.4 Role of reps

Reps act in the roles of Strategic Thinker, Do-er, Catalyst, Connector, Advisor and Coach. We see from our survey that roles the rep most commonly covers are providing expert advice (Advisor), connecting Big Local to other groups and people (Connector) and giving objective feedback (Coach). This reflects NCVO, IVR & OPM's findings that reps' roles are varied, functioning to help the partnership make useful connections, nurture the partnership, promote values, enable focus and offer challenges, support with tasks and act as the Big Local link (p.18).[14]

As found in CDF's research conducted in 2013,[15] the 'fit' of the rep is important: "*I think you've got to work with a committee that you actually get on with*" (resident). Reps are less likely to be Do-ers than in previous years, likely a reflection of the increasing number of workers (see section 4.1.6). Areas feel reps are very limited in terms of their time and capacity. Where reps are relied upon as Do-ers, these limits delay progress.

As areas move to delivery then reps are also selected as Catalysts and Advisors based on their specialist knowledge: *"[The rep has] been very, very supportive and obviously it's a different kind of support now [the plan is endorsed] and he has different areas of expertise. I know that he's very into return on social investment and renewables and things, so he's bringing new areas of expertise to the group as well…*" (locally trusted organisation). This is reflected in our survey where we find 84% of areas (n=83) rely on their rep to provide expert advice.

[14] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

[15] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

### 4.1.5 Role of locally trusted organisations

Locally trusted organisations act most commonly in the roles of Do-er, Connector, Advisor and Coach. Though the numbers are lower than results for residents or the rep, our survey of active residents in Big Local (see Figure 4.3) shows that locally trusted organisations are mainly looked to for providing expert advice (Advisor), problem-solving and getting things done (Do-er).

Seven areas have adopted a new locally trusted organisation since CDF's visit in 2013. The type of organisations acting in this capacity are, however, broadly the same, with nine community organisations/charities, two housing associations, two private/public sector organisations and one local authority.

**Big Local's Big Ideas**

- One locally trusted organisation encouraged residents into roles on the partnership by setting out what the role of chair would involve and what was required from the person to make it work. They focused on characteristics, not a long list of skills, so as to encourage as many people as possible "*we need somebody with a bit of enthusiasm and willing and able to come to the meetings and that sort of thing*"

Locally trusted organisations see themselves acting as Advisor and Coach, though they recognise they need to be careful not to have undue influence. We find that when locally trusted organisations share the purpose of Big Local and are proactive (such as providing training on financial reporting and agreeing how to present budgets) then this helps progress.

**Figure 4.3 Where the answer to 'who in your partnership or wider network, if anyone, covers the following roles?' was 'Locally Trusted Organisation' (n=83). A multiple response question: respondents could select more than one answer, so totals do not add up to 100%.**

Generally, relationships with locally trusted organisations are good and only two of the fifteen areas report problems. Problems arise when the locally trusted organisation appears to have a different agenda to Big Local: "*they have got their own tasks and objectives that they really want to accomplish, an agenda, so we have got ours. It became really tough…*" (resident). Issues are also caused by the slow release of funds by the locally trusted organisation and areas suffering from a lack of choice in terms of who to have as their locally trusted organisation.

There is evidence that the role of the locally trusted organisation is changing as the programme moves forward: "*At the moment [our role is] to ensure that…the projects that are being funded are reporting properly and we are able to supply the detail that Big Local Trust…the role that we were originally asked to fulfil was to help people do the community engagement...*" (locally trusted organisation).

### 4.1.6 Role of workers

Our research shows workers most commonly perform the roles of Strategic Thinker, Do-er, Connector, Advisor and Coach. Though the response numbers are lower than for residents and rep, our survey results show that workers are most commonly looked to for co-ordinating activity (Strategic Thinker, 48%, n=83), getting things done (46%, n=83) and getting projects started (Do-er, 42%, n=83).

**What job titles do workers have?**

- Development Worker/Community Development Officer (5)
- Big Local Coordinator (3)
- Support/Project Officer (2)
- Motivator (1)

In CDF's research on the influences of Big Local conducted in 2013, five of the 14 areas visited had a worker, with an additional four planning to hire one. This has risen to 10 out of 15 areas having a worker/s at the time of our visit, with three areas intending to get one in the future and two areas stating they would not get one. The latter is because "*there's no need because actually it is a very strong Committee…what are they going to do that you're not already doing? I mean it is a question of actually trusting the local people to get on with it.*" (resident)

Two areas are looking at hiring more than one worker so that they can have specific responsibilities, such as an overall coordinator and a youth worker. Where there is a worker, their tasks are set by residents with, generally, their contract and line management responsibility with the locally trusted organisation.

Workers are all on fixed term contracts and all part time (though one area is looking at getting a full time worker). Many are hired from within the Big Local area (four of the ten areas have a worker who is also a resident), or because they have worked in the area before. In two of the areas visited, the worker is an employee of the locally trusted organisation and their time is given at no cost. Workers help residents but do not replace resident involvement, which is reflected in our survey results showing more reliance on residents than workers for all roles apart from providing expert advice (see Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 for a list of roles).

The worker quite often acts as the Do-er, such as making sure actions from meetings are followed up. The value of having this paid support to capacity is "*huge*" and enables things to

happen because the worker has time to organise events, meetings and activities, but one area felt this meant "*you lose grip of what's going on*." (resident)

The worker also acts as a Connector, bringing new ideas to engage with residents. They provide a different type of support to residents than the locally trusted organisation: "*We're more we've got the facilities, we've got the resources. [The worker has] got the community development skills and the way they involve people*." (locally trusted organisation)

Workers commonly describe themselves as facilitators and enablers, acting in the role of Coach: "*I see my role as a Big Local worker as an enabler... working with the residents and the local partners and anybody who's involved to just, you know, to start some development happening*." (worker)

There is evidence that workers' tasks are changing with the different stages of Big Local. For example, during getting started and getting people involved, one area hired a worker with the job title of Coordinator to promote Big Local in the area and connect people to create a steering group. Their contract has now ended and the next worker will be developing the plan and facilitating increased resident involvement, moving from a Connector to a Coach. The changing nature of the role and the skills needed is also reflected by one area's delay in hiring a worker until they knew what they needed from the role "*because you don't know what shape of person you want until you've got the shape of the Plan*." (resident)

**The Worker as a Strategic Thinker and Coach**

- This worker describes the Strategic Thinker and Coach role they have been providing on the steering group: "*…one of the things that we did after about the first six months, because we were going round in circles…I printed off some documents from work so a ward profile, which breaks down: how many people are unemployed; how many people are on benefits; how many cars have been stolen in the area; how many houses have been burgled; numbers of [antisocial behaviour] cases…[and] I printed off a couple of the Area Committee papers to show what the area committee had been spending their money on, to show roughly how much things cost…and they were like: 'Oh my god, I can't believe a bin costs that much.' … they couldn't believe it… I think it was useful for them to make a sort of transition…to what the actual real issues in the area was*."

### 4.1.7 Role of local authorities

Where Big Local areas have involvement of their Council, they act in the capacity of Connector and Advisor: "*So having your local councillors, whether or not they live in the area, as part of the partnership has been really important because they can get stuff shifted and know who to ask in to give advice*." (worker). As with CDF's research on influences conducted in 2013,[16] residents in some areas report 'sceptical' or mistrusting relations with their local authority and these relationships

[16] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

affect progress. Other areas report good or excellent relationships with their local authorities, whilst some interviewees say that relationships are improving as barriers come down.

The control of funding does mean residents feel they don't have to rely on the Council, which empowers them: "*We can't rely on the government or the council because they will say the budgets won't allow this, whereas [Big Local] has enabled us to say, well we can actually do this because…there is another pot of money...*" (resident)

### 4.1.8 Other people (local organisations, Star People)

Relationships between organisations and the steering group/partnership have not changed since the 2013 survey. There is much evidence from interviews of increased networks and awareness of other community groups in the area as a result of Big Local (as discussed in section 2.1.3). As areas move into delivery, these connections relate to expert advice (the Advisor role) for particular priorities or activities: "*They've got some private business involvement now…bringing a different perspective but, again, one of the things is about jobs and access to jobs, so they can make links with other private sector organisations and businesses within the area and try and help develop those links…*" (local organisation)

This is reflected in our survey results where the biggest role of other organisations or people (not residents, rep, locally trusted organisation or worker) is expert advice (25%, n=83). Progress in areas is delayed when areas cannot access this specialist help, either because organisations are not engaged or residents lack knowledge of who to go to: "*what we need is the expertise to help us make [investment in housing]…I've never done anything that big with housing before, they've never done anything that big, they know it needs doing but it's getting the expertise on board to help them achieve that really so that they don't waste a large chunk of money*." (worker)

Issues in relation to UnLtd and the Star People programme have been explored in CDF's research on influences conducted in 2013[17]**Error! Bookmark not defined.** and NCVO, IVR & OPM's early years evaluation.[18] In the areas we visited, there still appears to be some disconnect between Star People and Big Local. In one area, this is due to a lack of knowledge of the scheme: "*[Another Big Local area] had the Star People and we knew nothing about [that]…We still don't.*" (resident). Of the 15 areas, six areas do not have Star People. Better publicity of Star People through events, reps and locally trusted organisations could increase the number of areas with Star People. Other research by CDF finds that Star People funding is unlocking enterprise in Big Local areas.[19]

The business ideas discussed by Star People in CDF's research in 2013 have not progressed, largely due to personal circumstances changing or a change in the sector beyond the control of the individual. In other areas, Star People do not appear to fully understand what Big Local is about and the partnership/steering group are unsure who has received funding from UnLtd.

[17] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

[18] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

[19] Two pieces of forthcoming research from CDF on Big Local: 1. Areas moving from plans to delivering projects 2. Areas focusing on improving their local economies

Whilst not necessarily for social enterprise, Star People funding is being used for a number of community projects promoting Big Local and improving residents' health and wellbeing, with the potential for greater involvement in Big Local as a result.

### 4.1.9 Role of Local Trust

The requirements of Local Trust in overseeing the core programme remain unclear to some areas. This is discussed further in section 6.2.1.

## 4.2 Conclusion

Progress in Big Local areas is helped by shared leadership for delivering Big Local priorities. For this to happen, there must be a shared purpose from the plan, support from residents and their partners, and all those involved must be listened to and considered. Where there is too much reliance on one individual and leadership is not shared, progress can be hindered. Developing shared leadership is a positive advance for Big Local areas to achieve.

A number of different roles have been identified which help partnerships and steering groups to progress in Big Local. These are:

- **Strategic Thinker** – keeping an eye on the bigger picture and ensuring activities relate to desired outcomes;
- **Do-er** – making things happen;
- **Catalyst** – sparking new ideas and ways of doing things;
- **Connector** – bringing together different people and groups across the area;
- **Advisor** – providing expert advice and support; and
- **Coach** – supporting development and motivating others. This is often someone who is slightly removed.

Where these roles are not being filled, or there are too many people undertaking the same role, then progress is more difficult. Our research shows roles are changing in Big Local areas as they move from getting people involved to developing and delivering plans. This is because different tasks and activities are required for the different stages. While still leading and taking decisions, residents increasingly need the support of the rep, locally trusted organisations and local organisations for expert advice, while workers increase capacity through project management and administration.

There are continued questions around how areas find individuals to fill the roles needed to deliver Big Local, particularly when there are no suitable organisations to work with or there is apathy in the community to getting more closely involved in Big Local, but this model of shared leadership and roles may help areas to identify gaps in their partnership and steering group and find the right people to fill them.

# 5 Influences on the development of Big Local in areas

This chapter considers the factors that are influencing the development of Big Local across areas. It is about understanding what it is that helps and hinders residents' ability to identify and take action upon local issues and, ultimately, their likelihood of positively effecting change within their communities.

Many of our findings show that the challenges facing areas continue to echo those of our Big Local research conducted in 2013[20] and NCVO, IVR & OPM's evaluation 'Big Local: the early years'.[21] These include programme-related factors, the assets already in place in the community and the relationships between residents and partners. The biggest continuing challenge our research identifies relates to the wider community being aware, engaged and involved in Big Local.

This chapter considers the impact that the process of Big Local has and factors which affect Big Local's relationship with the wider community. It concludes by considering what might work to better engage residents in Big Local.

## 5.1 The effect of the Big Local process

While Big Local aims to be a relatively 'light-touch' programme, our research finds that some residents feel that there are *"a lot of hoops to jump through"* (resident). There is a risk that some volunteers are put off by the various processes put in place before areas can access and spend any money. These processes are important to ensure that everything is done correctly, but, where they cause delays and slow progress, there is a risk that local people become suspicious or disillusioned: "*There were a lot of people came along, but then, as they saw that there was going to be a process and it wasn't going to be a process that happened overnight, people started to drop off."* (resident)

Nevertheless, many areas that have spent time developing ideas and getting their plan endorsed by Local Trust recognise the value of doing so: "*It has taken a while to get to this point, but the process itself has been fruitful. We have established many new partnerships and things have begun to happen before the money has been drawn down*." (resident)

[20] CDF (2014) *Influences on the development of Big Local areas: final research report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/influences-on-the-development-of-big-local-areas-2013-14

[21] NCVO, IVR & OPM. (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

While the process of putting together the plan and setting a direction is 'quite intense' for some areas, the plan itself gives areas the chance to re-focus on their goals and time for reflection on their achievements so far. Drafting the plan appears to aid the development of projects for the benefit of the community and relationships with partners to help deliver these. Areas also note the importance of continuing to run events and consultations while writing the plan so that Big Local remains visible.

## 5.2 Getting people involved

As a resident-led programme, Big Local is centred on the participation of local people. Our research finds that there are three levels of participation in Big Local:

- **Awareness and understanding of Big Local in the wider community** – to make the work of the steering group or partnership easier as the community are more likely to approach them with any ideas or issues.

- **Engagement from within the community –** a range of events and activities is needed to engage people and ensures Big Local can be representative of the community and build relationships between neighbours.

- **Involvement in decision making and day-to-day tasks** – as Big Local is resident-led, there needs to be the capacity within the community to run the programme.

These three stages of participation are each separately very important to an area's development, but they also represent an interlinked chain of volunteering, similar to the 'Pathways through Participation' research by NCVO, IVR and Involve.[22] Volunteers first become aware of a local cause that they believe in and over time start to increasingly engage with this cause, attending events and building their relationship with those more involved, before they themselves take up more active involvement in the cause.

### 5.2.1 The challenge of getting people involved

Our research indicates that getting people involved in Big Local is the biggest challenge faced by many areas. Of our survey respondents:

- just 24% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that most people in the wider community understand Big Local (n=81);

- 48% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that most people in the wider community have heard of Big Local (n=80); and

[22] NCVO, IVR and Involve (2011) *Pathways through participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship?* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/pathways-through-participation-volunteering

- as many as 82% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that it has been difficult to get local residents involved with Big Local (n=86).

This is also reflected in interviews: *"Apart from the actual partnership and the people that have directly been helped to date, if I went out and spoke to 20 people just randomly within the community, they'd probably know vaguely something about a lottery and one million pounds but I don't think they'd really know much about it."* (locally trusted organisation)

Big Local areas may face difficulties if they are forced to rely on a small group of residents to run it, as time and capacity becomes an issue. Many volunteers face competing demands on their time, often from their paid employment and family life but also from other community groups that they volunteer with. Our research shows that residents are very keen to involve all members of their community and are working hard to do so, with some results: "*We've asked the teenagers to come to meetings. They're a bit reluctant but they're less reluctant now...*" (resident)

Of those residents interviewed in focus groups who completed a survey, 20% have not been involved in a community group before (n=40). This is higher than those who responded to our survey of areas where 90% (n=87) of respondents have been involved in some form of volunteering in the past. This is likely a reflection of our survey being targeted at chairs who we find have more experience in community activity than other steering group/partnership members who took part in focus groups.

Through our research we find geography of communities, local publicity, politics and personality and areas' histories impact upon areas' ability to increase participation in Big Local from the wider community. These are set out in detail below.

### 5.2.2 The geography of communities

The way in which the boundaries of Big Local are mapped over the physical and imagined geography of communities plays an important role in the wider community's perception of the programme. The boundary of Big Local in an area can create problems as they are not natural communities.

Areas are beginning to overcome this challenge though. Those involved in our research have worked hard to develop an identity, with many areas involving local people in designing a logo for the area. One Big Local area previously felt divided into two separate communities, but now, as a result of Big Local, members from each of the two areas are becoming increasingly supportive of issues affecting each other: *"You can actually see change and the two communities supporting each other and boundaries being broken. It is, for me, the most tangible thing I've seen personally from Big Local."* (locally trusted organisation).

### 5.2.3 Local publicity of Big Local

The wider community's awareness, engagement and involvement with Big Local depend to some extent on the image of the programme that the partnership is able to portray locally. This image can be built up through events, activities (such as football tournaments), online social networking, promotional leaflets or posters and just by talking to people face-to-face. The promotion of Big Local needs to be clear, constant and widespread so that the wider community know Big Local is there and what it is.

Some of the publicity that areas receive, however, is not necessarily under their control; for example, articles in the local media. Building good relationships with those in the local press, while continuing to promote Big Local face-to-face, online and in print, helps ensure the wider community has the right information.

### 5.2.4 Local politics and personality clashes

While areas note that money from Big Local is empowering as they have control, it can also create suspicions and tensions within communities over its spending: *"when it was announced, there was hundreds of people arrived at the beginning because there was money…[but] they do, they have different motivations. They question everything. They always read subtexts where there's no subtexts…I suppose because there's money involved".* (resident)

By being as open and transparent as possible with those in the wider community and constantly talking about Big Local, suspicion may be avoided.

### 5.2.5 Areas' histories

As noted in our previous research conducted in 2013, an area's past often has a great bearing on its future. There continues to be apathy and cynicism from the wider community as a result of the failure of previous funding programmes. Our research shows, however, that in some areas tangible projects and the long-term nature of the programme, as well as continuous publicity from events, are starting to overcome this apathy and cynicism. These will be outlined in more detail in section 5.3.

**Big Local's Big Ideas**

One partnership has built a temporary community building as part of Big Local. Big Local meetings used to be held in flats on the estate as the area lacked community facilities. They now have a central building within the community for meetings, events and activities, including a monthly birthday party for residents whose birthday fall in that month. The hub is a visible symbol of the hard work and achievements of residents: *"[Big Local] is hard work, but it is worth it, because we achieve something out of it, it is this place.*" (resident)

## 5.3 What works for getting people involved?

This section considers some of the ways in which areas have been successful in involving more people in their journey so far.

### 5.3.1 Use different means to engage different people

"*that volunteering [training] the other week …what I took on board is how you actually plug into people's interests…Because it's not the single thread, it's a range, a spectrum…*" (resident)

Our research indicates that there is no single solution to increase the awareness of Big Local; instead, it is a matter of diversity. Some people's main source of information is online, whereas for others print is more important. This is reflected in responses to our survey on what have been the best ways of raising awareness, as shown in Figure 5.1.

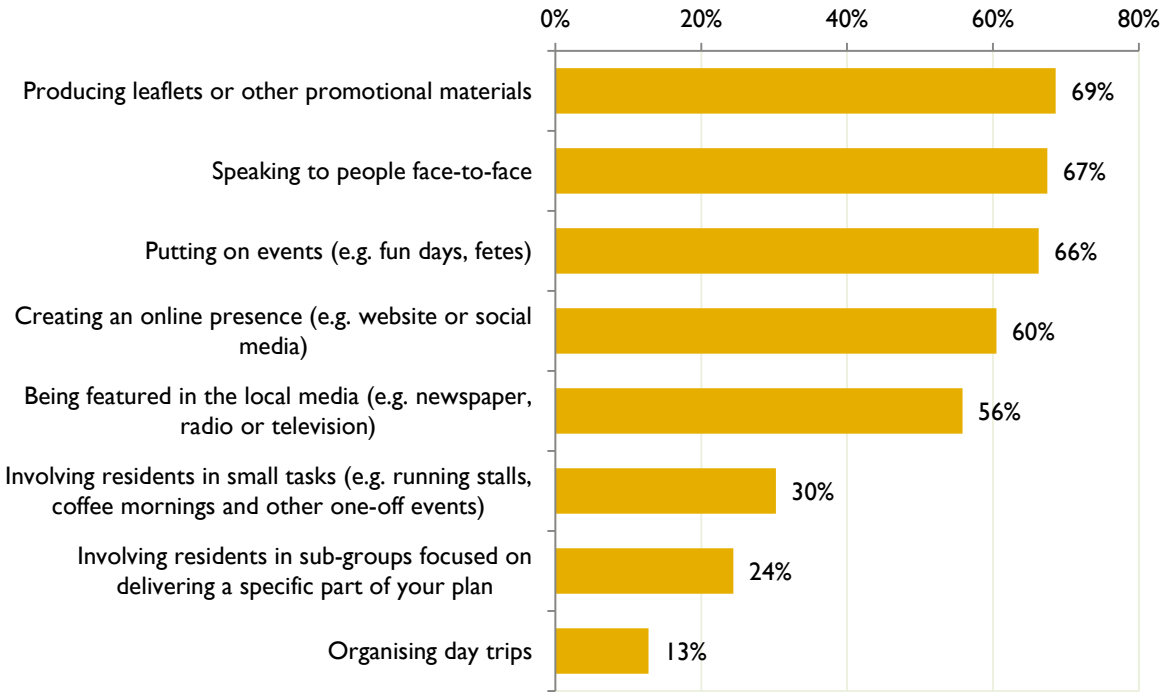


**Figure 5.1 Survey responses showing the best ways of raising awareness of Big Local in the wider community (n=86). A multiple response question: respondents could select more than one answer, so totals do not add up to 100%.**

### 5.3.2 Keep up a constant presence

When people appreciate the long-term ambitions of Big Local they are more likely to engage with it, but unless there is continuing promotion of the programme then they may think that any events or projects are just one-offs. To maintain a constant presence, it may be useful for a partnership to ask their locally trusted organisation and other partners, or their worker if they have one, to promote the programme for them during 'quiet periods', such as plan making.

### 5.3.3 Face-to-face communication works

Speaking to people face-to-face is shown in our research to be one of the best ways of raising awareness (see Figure 5.1), getting people involved and keeping them involved (see Figure 5.2). One area, for example, finds that the simplest way to overcome negative feeling in the community is to invite as many people as they can to meetings and let them ask any questions that they want.

### 5.3.4 Some people prefer to engage with Big Local by doing small tasks

51% of areas that responded to our survey say that asking residents to do small tasks, such as baking cakes for festivals, is a good way of getting them involved in Big Local, as shown in Figure 5.2. This 'micro-volunteering' is becoming increasingly common across the UK, especially with

those that have limited time to give, and offers a powerful way of engaging more residents in community work.[23]

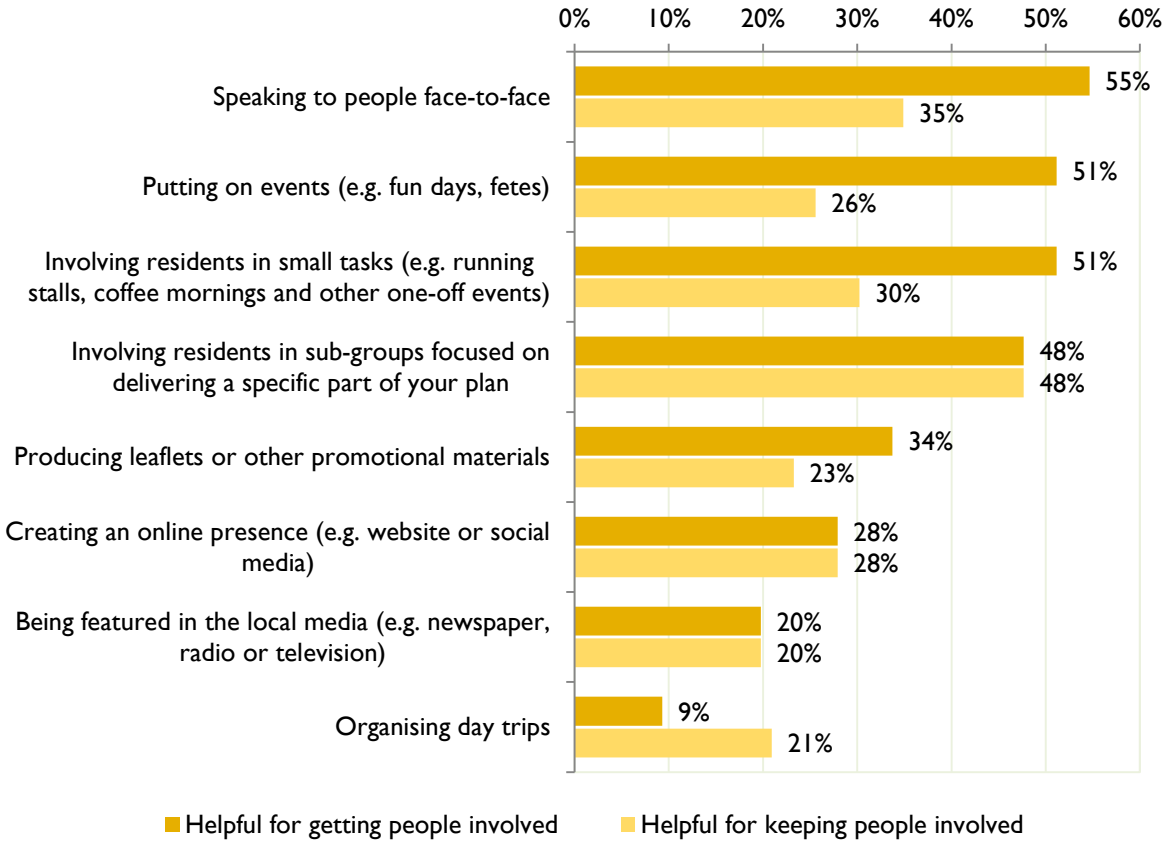


**Figure 5.2 Survey responses of the best ways of getting and keeping people involved in Big Local (n=86). A multiple response question: respondents could select more than one answer, so totals do not add up to 100%.**

### 5.3.5 Community events act as a trigger for involvement

Events often provide an opportunity for local residents to get involved with the programme. Helping out by doing small tasks at these events, such as serving drinks at a coffee morning or putting up tables at a festival, may lead to further involvement.

### 5.3.6 Subgroups help keep people involved

As discussed in section 3.1.1 and shown in Figure 5.2, involving residents in subgroups which specialise on delivering a particular part of an area's plan is a useful way of engaged people in Big Local. When people are passionate about an issue and feel they have something to give then they will step forward.

[23] IVR and NCVO (2013) *The value of giving a little time: understanding the potential of micro-volunteering.*

### 5.3.7 Tangible outcomes boost engagement

*"I think local people who don't get directly involved with things like this want to see something that will benefit them and until something like that happens I don't think people will take it as seriously as it should be taken."* (Star Person)

The approval of a Big Local plan and the increasing move towards project delivery among areas helps them shrug off the image of Big Local as just a 'talking shop', which encourages greater involvement. Large-scale tangible outcomes, such as a community building, are not easy to achieve when there are issues with getting people involved in the first place. A step-by-step process may be necessary, with areas learning from each stage to build on these foundations for bigger outcomes. Case Study 3 outlines how one area has started to draw the community in through the refurbishment of their local community building.

## Case Study 3: Refurbishment of a community building

Residents on the Big Local partnership have worked hard to refurbish a near-derelict pavilion in a recreation ground central to the area. Using £52,000 of Big Local money, they secured a full repair lease from the Council and organised volunteers to paint and decorate the pavilion to bring it back into community use. There was some nervousness about spending such an amount of the Big Local funding during the first year of the plan; the partnership "*are aware that it's not our money*", that it belongs to the community, and are "*trying to get things right and that does take a long time. A lot of debate*".

They felt it was important to refurbish the pavilion as the area lacked a community centre and residents wanted a meeting place. The partnership wanted something physical that would show residents "*where some of the money's gone to…So that they know it's been used for the purposes it was supposed to be used for.*" During the repairs, they left the doors open and invited people in to see what was being done and why to spread the word about Big Local. Local teenagers helped to paint and decorate with their efforts rewarded by fish and chips from the local Councillor.

The partnership thought about the sustainability of the building. They have a "*sound business head*" and secured *"long-term bookings from a dance group, so they were already aware of how much money they're going to get in".* The group are now looking to repair and lease the building opposite the pavilion to make a facility for young people; their experience refurbishing the pavilion has *"built their confidence but it has also built their aspirations".* They hope that it will grow Big Local in the area: "*…once [the pavilion] is up and running and people do start to attend, then we'll get more input [into Big Local]…It will increase the level of interest. It will increase the level of commitment and involvement…"*

### 5.3.8 Keep communications community friendly

Wider resident involvement can be encouraged by keeping it simple. This approach is summed up well by one area's Big Local project worker:

> "*The way that you would usually do things in a business or professional environment don't necessarily work in a community environment…sometimes we just don't even call it a meeting,*

*it's a coffee morning or whatever…Avoiding PowerPoints, avoiding too much paper…making things as 3D and dynamic as possible, so there have been a few times where I've just brought in Lego or whatever to demonstrate stuff and that has been good.*"

### 5.3.9 Areas can take advantage of the long-term nature of Big Local

As discussed in CDF's research conducted in 2013, one of the key benefits many of those interviewed see in the Big Local programme is the long-term approach that it takes to improving the community. This allows areas to tackle issues in the way that they want and in whatever order they wish. The long-term investment, over 10 years, allows communities to go at the pace they want and should help develop capacity within the area:

> "*I do my best to go at the speed of the community that I'm working with rather than rushing through a process that they then don't' feel confident with…the thing that pleases me most about this process is that the Big Local Trust are doing this over a decade, rather than a couple of years funding and then they've gone on to something else. That seems like a really intelligent way to do business with communities.*" (worker)

### 5.3.10 Understand that it is natural for people to drop in and out of volunteering

As outlined in the 'Pathways through participation' research by NCVO, IVR and Involve,[24] people may enter and leave volunteering multiple times throughout their lives for a number of different reasons. In our research, volunteers stop becoming involved due to a change in circumstances (such as a new job or ill health, because they move away or because the process is slow). This doesn't always stop them from returning at a later date: "*I left due to ill health but I'm back and proud to see that we have delivered our plan as we first set out to do. Glad to be back and was welcomed with open arms.*" (survey respondent)

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter reflects upon the factors that influence the development of Big Local in areas across the country. Our research shows that many of the factors affecting areas' success are the same as those identified in previous research, which include programme-related factors, the assets within communities and the relationships between residents and partners. We build on these findings in relation to the Big Local process and areas' relationships with the wider community.

Our findings suggest that some areas feel that the processes involved in the early stages of the programme, when combined with processes required by locally trusted organisations, can act as a barrier to progress. Our research also shows that where residents persist, and their plan is endorsed by Local Trust, they appreciate the time taken to understand the area and develop the plan.

[24] NCVO, IVR and Involve (2011) *Pathways through participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship?* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/pathways-through-participation-volunteering

The key issue that continues to affect areas is their relationship with the wider community and the challenge of getting enough people involved in Big Local. Our research identifies a number of factors that influence an area's ability to successfully do so:

- The geography of communities;
- Local publicity and local media coverage;
- Local politics and personality clashes; and
- Areas' histories.

The following advice may help boost awareness, engagement and involvement in the programme:

- Use different means to engage different people;
- Keep up a constant presence within the local area;
- Face-to-face communication and events are great ways of spreading the word;
- Residents often get involved and stay involved in Big Local through completion of small tasks or involvement in subgroups;
- Activities with tangible outcomes often increase involvement;
- Keep communications as community-friendly as possible;
- Work at a pace which suits your area; and
- Understand that it is natural for people to drop in and out of volunteering.

# 6 Learning, networking, training and support for Big Local

Our research finds the most beneficial part of areas' experience is achieved through shared learning, while their biggest need continues to be around how to involve people. As areas get their plans in place and move to delivery they are moving towards more theme-based learning, which creates another set of needs. This chapter discusses our findings on learning, networking and training before moving on to exploring what support is important to areas in their Big Local journey. It concludes by discussing the future training needs identified.

## 6.1 Training, learning and development

As NCVO, IVR & OPM have detailed, Big Local training encompasses five 'types' of event: spring events; themed events; visits and buddying; action learning sets; and bespoke events (p.26). When areas we visited put together their timeline of what had been happening in Big Local over the last year, six of the 12 completed timelines showed training as one of the key events of the Big Local steering group/partnership.

Some residents are enthusiastic about training ("*I will never turn down training.*") and are keen to invite a wider group of residents, not just those on the partnership or steering group to attend. The 2015 survey results show how residents who responded look primarily to the rep for links to training and development (67%, n=83), followed by the locally trusted organisation (51%) and any worker in place (34%).

### 6.1.1 Local Trust training programme

Training comes from the programme put together by Local Trust and its partners, including Spring Events run by the National Association of Neighbourhood Management (NANM), or social investment training from Small Change. One resident describes Spring Events as 'well organised' and another resident mentions how useful face-to-face learning is. Three areas mention how useful the online information on Local Trust's website is, and the ability to take part in online webinars, but one resident feels that people from their area wouldn't be 'comfortable' taking part in an online webinar. Another area criticises provision of online information because, being from a deprived area, many residents do not have access to computers or the internet.

The main benefit of Spring Events is meeting and talking to other areas and getting ideas; this encourages and inspires residents: "*[The Spring Events] kind of inspires you to keep going because you see the possibilities and then you hope that that will kind of happen here as well.*" (resident)

When the residents in Case Study 3 first looked at taking over the pavilion, they wanted the Council to repair the building and take responsibility for future maintenance. Having talked to Locality about full repair and insurance leases during a Big Local Spring Event then *"[two residents] came back and said, 'We're going to take the full repair lease on. We're going to do it because it makes it easier for the council to get the documentation in place, it's a fairly low risk as long as we're insured."* (locally trusted organisation)

Case Study 1 mentions how theme-based training can encourage residents to take up particular responsibilities, such as social investment. It also provides practical advice and ideas that can lead to connections being built: "*And we got some ideas from [the social enterprise training] which helped us to come up with the ideas to the Credit Union…*" (resident).

### 6.1.2 Learning and development in the areas

As outlined above, reps are the main source of residents' links to training and development. In some areas, they also encourage workers to attend training: *"She's been great. She, again, is always sending things to me and saying 'Oh, get involved in this, get involved in that'…she continues to suggest different things that might be of benefit and things to get along to, training and partnership things"* (worker).

Reps and residents themselves pursue opportunities for areas to visit each other: "*we chose Winterton because Winterton is in exactly the same situation as we are. Winterton has got problems with flooding, Winterton has got problems with the doctors, problems with OAPs, problems with services exactly – they're in an almost identical situation to what we're in…*" (resident).

The rep and worker also provide more informal learning and development during partnership or steering group meetings, such as giving residents certain roles and responsibilities to build their confidence or running mini-sessions to address gaps in knowledge or skills. Workers are also organising training to overcome barriers to participation and increase involvement in Big Local, such as money management and cooking on a budget. One locally trusted organisation notes that identifying training needs is a specific task for a future worker.

Training, learning and development is also provided by locally trusted organisations and local organisations, such as help with budgeting and financial reporting. Another locally trusted organisation has a Service Level Agreement with a Council for Voluntary Services to undertake a training needs assessment of the partnership. The CVS are then *"going to provide all that training for free for the group under our agreement.*" (worker).

### 6.1.3 Barriers to training

We find similar barriers to training as outlined by reps in NCVO, IVR & OPM's evaluation[25], including capacity, topics not timely/relevant, location or a lack of interest in activities outside of the locality. Some of these barriers can be addressed by reps, workers and locally trusted organisations supporting residents to identify training opportunities, whilst the ability to take up a range of topics and types of training, including Spring Events, visits to areas, use of online resources and local, bespoke sessions, may also help. One area has included funding in their plan

[25] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

budget for training because *"until we really now start to get down to what we're going to start providing I guess we don't fully understand what training we might need but we understand that we probably will need that along the way so we've allocated some small amount of the budget towards [it]."* (resident).

## 6.2 Support

The visits to areas reveal that residents look to each other, Local Trust, the rep, any worker and the locally trusted organisation for support.

Our survey finds that reps continue to be the authoritative voice of Big Local, with 96% (n=83) of residents in our 2015 survey looking to the rep for guidance on what they can and can't do with Big Local. There is evidence that the support of the rep is changing and they are used less for project management/administration: 20% of areas in our 2015 survey (n=83) say they look to their rep for support with this compared to 43% in 2013 (n=99).

Where support is provided to residents through the locally trusted organisation, local organisations and any workers, it is to enable them: "*I'm encouraging and supporting people to be independent, you know, so they're not dependent on me.*" (local organisation). As with CDF's influences research conducted in 2013, locally trusted organisations say they are supporting residents to take the reins of Big Local in the future, though they will still be there to provide advice. In this follow-up research, workers are increasingly providing this support, building up and enabling residents to take the lead in Big Local. This is likely a reflection of more areas having a worker.

Most locally trusted organisations interviewed say they get support for Big Local from the rep, while workers say they look to the locally trusted organisation primarily then the rep and then Local Trust: "*I think if I had an issue…my first port of call would always be to speak to the [locally trusted organisation] and speak to [the rep], because, obviously, that's our local relationship, isn't it, you know? And then, beyond that, I would go to the Local Trust.*" (worker) .

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the greatest challenges to Big Local is that of involving people. Survey respondents, often the chair of the steering group/partnership, go to other residents for help with this (61%, n=83). This shows the importance of residents acting as 'champions', not just for particular areas of work, but for Big Local in their area. Figure 6.1 shows that support from other residents is mainly in relation to coming up with new ideas, connections and involving people. Areas are more likely to rely on other residents than the worker when it comes to help with involving people (78% for residents, 45% for the worker where n=83) and coming up with new ideas (61% compared to 40% where n=83).

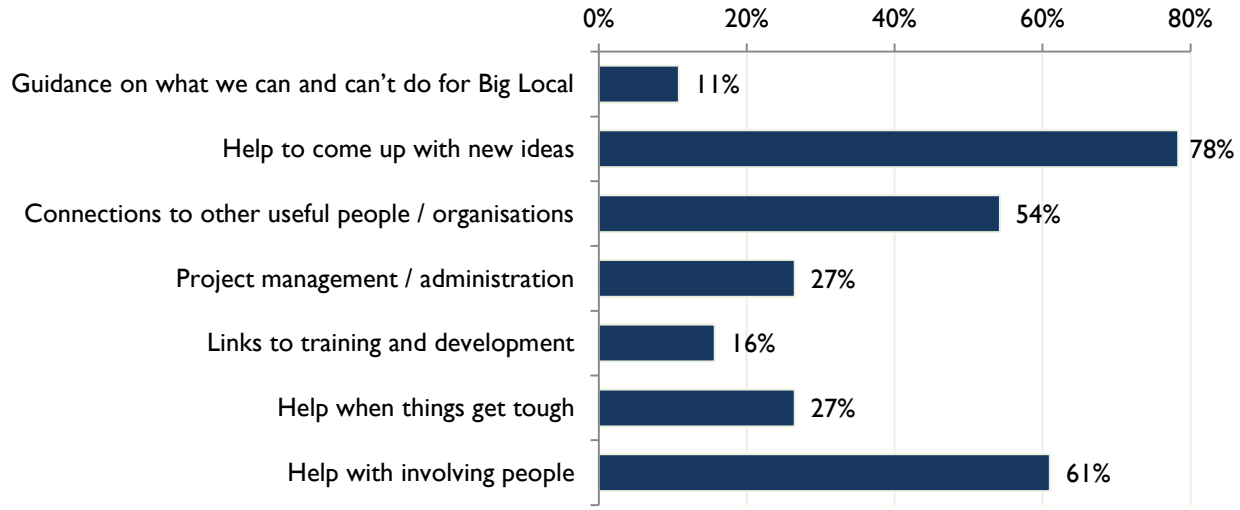


**Figure 6.1 Where survey respondents indicate 'Other residents' provide help and support (n=83). A multiple response question: respondents could select more than one answer, so totals do not add up to 100%.**

### 6.2.1 Local Trust

Interviewees mostly report a good relationship with Local Trust; they are there at the end of the phone when needed and areas appreciate visits from them, as it gives them reassurance they are going in "*the right direction*". The main contact areas have with Local Trust is from endorsing plans and partnerships before releasing funding. There is, however, some confusion about the name of Local Trust by residents. Variously, residents describe Local Trust as the Lottery, Big Local and Big Local Trust. This is partly a result of the way in which the programme was established before Local Trust was set up. Some areas want Local Trust to promote Big Local nationally to aid them in their local promotion: "*No one outside the Big Local project areas knows about the project. A national campaign, not localised, explaining the project and inspiring other funded, and non-funded areas*" (survey respondent).

As NCVO, IVR & OPM found,[26] residents have some issues with the light-touch approach of Local Trust because they are unsure of the freedom presented by the programme: "*I think probably it is being unsure at times of whether we are heading in the right direction…And being unsure, yes we've got a body above us, but it's a body that's telling us we can do whatever we want.*" (resident)

Alongside this is a feeling that there are definite processes that need to be followed and which areas want more guidance with: "*how do you put the Plan together? What's the process? Big Local has a very definite process for everything and you spend ages don't you, trying to find out what is their process and how they like it to happen…*" (resident). A need for more specific guidance is also reflected in our survey, as well as the importance of workers in helping residents understand the process.

[26] NCVO, IVR & OPM (2014) *Big Local: the early years, evaluation report.* Available at: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/big-local-early-years-evaluation

## 6.3 Future training and support

The different stages of Big Local make a difference to future training and the support required. Seven areas had endorsed plans at the time of CDF's visit, with a further three having submitted plans. The areas with a plan are moving into the delivery stage of Big Local and indicate less of a preference for skills-based training and more for practical, theme-based training. Areas desire practical training in *"Health and safety, first aid, managing money, monitoring and evaluation, all the compliance side of things…risk assessing, organising things."* (worker), as well as participatory budgeting, delivering workshops, safeguarding, food handling and running a community hub. Residents also want practical tools; one survey respondent requests "*more fun motivational tools to support and encourage volunteers*."

When compared to CDF's 2013 survey of areas, the results from 2015 show less of a need for help with producing a plan and guidance on Big Local and a greater need for help in involving people and connecting to other Big Local areas and local organisations. This is somewhat dependent on wave, with later Wave 3 areas more likely to require help in producing a plan, connecting to organisations and being clear on what they can and can't do through Big Local.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Training, learning and development is accessed at a national level, through the programme supported by Local Trust and its partners, as well as at a local level, through reps, locally trusted organisations, local organisations and workers. Residents find shared learning from other Big Local areas and practical ideas to aid engagement and delivery the most useful. There are continued barriers to training in the form of time, capacity and the relevance of topics at any particular time, but a flexible approach to training delivery could help address this.

In terms of support, this comes from within the partnership with residents looking to each other for creating connections and generating ideas, workers for project management and locally trusted organisations, reps and local organisations for expert advice and practical information as they move to the delivery stage. Overwhelmingly, reps remain the source of guidance on what areas can and can't do in terms of Big Local. Locally trusted organisations and workers are supported by each other, the rep and Local Trust. There continues to be some confusion about process requirements of Local Trust, which reflects the need for the role of the rep and any workers to guide (but not lead) residents in Big Local.

Future training requirements reflect the biggest issue with areas progressing along their Big Local journey: getting people involved. Areas continue to desire support in terms of practical tools to engage people and the encouragement of sharing lessons with other Big Local areas. As areas move to the delivery phase, there is also an increasing need for theme-based training, such as First Aid, and improving how they work with local organisations.

# 7 Big Local in the future

This chapter considers the future of Big Local across areas and the way in which the programme may evolve over time. As many areas begin to have a plan in place, future activities are focusing on delivering the priorities of this plan. Areas are planning for the sustainability of Big Local and, regardless of whether areas felt they are progressing, remain committed to the opportunity to help improve their area.

## 7.1 What does the future of Big Local look like across areas?

As areas get their plan in place, they are moving away from activities focusing on promotion and engagement towards more themed activities that relate to specific plan priorities. Figure 7.1 outlines future activities those who responded to our survey will be undertaking, underlining the potential need for specialist support to help residents with specific, themed projects.

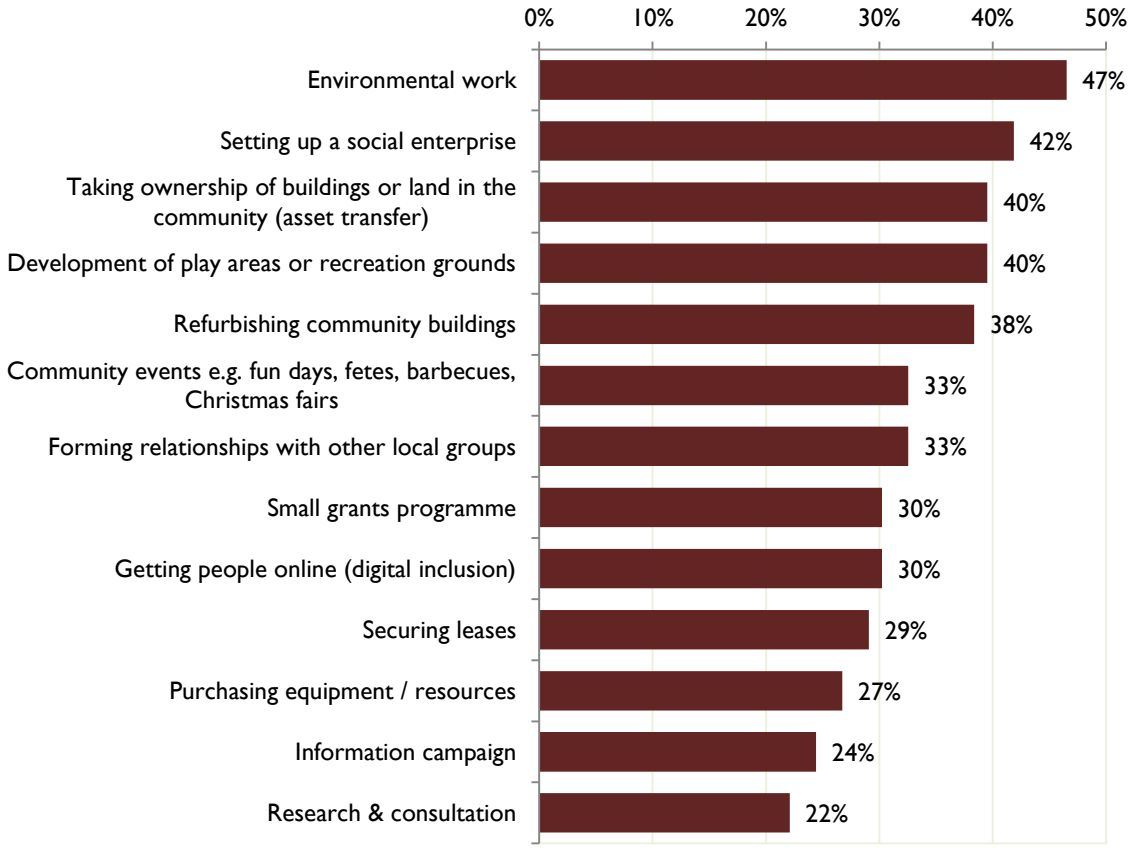


**Figure 7.1 Activities that Big Local areas are planning to do in the future (n=86). A multiple response question: respondents could select more than one answer, so totals do not add up to 100%.**

### 7.1.1 The sustainability of Big Local in areas

Residents are considering the difference that their activities will make in the long-term and are keen to ensure that their work is sustainable and has as much impact as possible, particularly on children as they are the "*young people of the future*":

> "*We've talked quite a lot, haven't we, about making sure what we do is sustainable…we want to look in ten years' time and say 1) how are the 24 year olds that were 14 year olds ten years ago that we've invested in, what are they doing now, and actually what position are the 14 year olds that have come through – are they better off than the 14 year olds ten years ago?...In some ways I'd like the project hopefully to not just be ten years; hopefully we'd get to a point where if it can regenerate itself that it can continue longer*." (resident)

Areas are looking to build a lasting legacy from Big Local to ensure the sustainability of their achievements. This includes hiring residents as workers, with four of the ten areas with workers having hired these from within their community. Some partnerships are looking at social investment; for example, through purchasing housing for renting out to more deprived community members or charging local organisations for the hire of community facilities set-up by their Big Local. Any profits from such activities would be reinvested in Big Local. Match funding also remains important to areas; they see it as key to making the money go further.

### 7.1.2 The commitment of residents to Big Local

Of 52 residents, locally trusted organisations and workers who took part in our research, 51 say that they plan to continue their involvement into the future. Their desire for change is the main driver behind their continued efforts: "*It's [the residents] real deep-seated desire to make a positive difference to this place where they live, because they know it has the potential to be much more than it is, and they would really like to see that positive change*." (worker)

This is also reflected in the results of our survey about what motivates respondents to get involved in Big Local, where 92% (n=87) say it is about helping to improve their area. We find evidence that, whilst progress in Big Local areas is not always smooth, residents and organisations view the programme as an opportunity to change their communities for the better, even where change is not yet occurring.

## 7.2 Conclusion

Big Local areas are planning specific, themed activities in the future as they move towards delivering projects in relation to their Big Local plan. They are also planning for the sustainability of Big Local through considering the long-term impact of what they are funding, employing local residents and looking for social investment. We find in our research that, despite any challenges presented by the programme, by people or by the place, residents have a strong passion and commitment to their areas, which drives them to continue their involvement in Big Local now and in the future.

# 8 Conclusion

This report outlines research conducted by CDF in 2014-2015 on what is influencing the progress of Big Local areas. Our research aims to gain greater understanding of the factors influencing the development of Big Local across the country to help areas make progress. Our learning can inform the development of support provided to them by Local Trust and its partners.

Our research involved visits to and interviews with 15 Big Local areas, alongside a survey sent to 150 Big Local areas. Our research finds evidence that some areas are starting to meet the aims of the Big Local programme, namely:

- Areas have a plan in place that has identified local needs and they are building up partnerships with individuals and organisations to address these;
- Residents are increasingly taking the lead in Big Local and are developing skills and confidence as a result;
- Where progress has been made, particularly through tangible changes like the development of community buildings, residents are starting to feel they are making a difference; and
- Residents report knowing more about their area, are engaging with more of the community and are delivering tangible changes, all of which make their area an even better place to live.

No matter what stage a Big Local area is at, whether they are getting started, preparing a plan or delivering a plan, there are three main challenges which hinder their progress:

- Involving residents in the wider community;
- Accessing support needed; and
- Understanding the Big Local process.

This chapter outlines the main findings in the report before giving key messages for Local Trust and Big Local areas from our research.

## 8.1 Summary of research findings

### 8.1.1 Progress

- Activities in areas are moving away from promotional events and consultation to building contacts and delivering on specific plan priorities, such as the physical environment;

- New networks are being created in communities through Big Local; and

- Areas feel progress is mixed, but more areas who responded to our survey in 2015 feel happy about their progress than those who responded to the 2013 survey.

### 8.1.2 Structure and decision making in Big Local

- The structure of Big Local in areas is generally a committee, with partnerships and steering groups having regular meetings and residents having formal roles within this;

- Subgroups are formed around specific activities or plan priorities. These are generally less formal and draw in new people and expert advice from organisations that are not on the partnership or steering group;

- Residents are becoming more confident in decision making but still need reassurance from the wider community and the advice of others to feel they are doing the right thing for the area;

- Big Local is increasingly resident-led, with 95% agreeing that residents have the final say on what will happen for Big Local;

- While many residents struggle with time and capacity needed for Big Local, they are starting to overcome these, particular when they hire a worker; and

- Many residents are developing new skills and increased confidence as a result of Big Local.

### 8.1.3 Shared leadership and roles

- A helpful structure to deliver Big Local is shared leadership. This describes a management structure where all team members engage in leadership and decision making to deliver projects;

- This is occurring in Big Local and aiding progress when partnerships and steering groups share a vision (most often through the plan), share information and support and encourage each other to deliver the vision, and all involved feel able to express their opinion on activities in relation to this;

- Along with shared leadership, certain roles also help to deliver Big Local. These are Strategic Thinker, Do-er, Catalyst, Connector, Advisor and Coach. These roles can be filled by more than one person and it helps when people are the right 'fit' for a partnership or steering group;

- The roles of those involved in Big Local, the residents, rep, organisations and workers, are changing with the different stages of the programme in the area; and

- The role of reps, locally trusted organisations and other partners in providing expert advice is increasingly important as areas deliver projects in relation to their plan.

### 8.1.4 Influences on the development of Big Local

Factors related to the Big Local programme and the people and place characteristics of areas remain challenges to progress in some areas.

The greatest challenge areas face, no matter what stage of Big Local they are in, is involving the wider community. Areas need to increase awareness, engagement and involvement of the wider community in the programme to develop successfully, but this frequently proves difficult, with 83% of survey respondents agreeing that it is hard to do so. There are a number of factors that influence this, but the following advice may help some areas overcome these challenges:

- Use different means to engage different people;

- Keep up a constant presence within the local area;

- Face-to-face communication and events are great ways of spreading the word;

- Residents often get involved and stay involved in Big Local through completion of small tasks or involvement in subgroups;

- Activities with tangible outcomes often increase involvement;

- Keep communications as community-friendly as possible;

- Work at a pace which suits your area; and

- Understand that it is natural for people to drop in and out of volunteering.

### 8.1.5 Training and support

Shared learning from other Big Local areas and practical tips and toolkits are what areas like the most from training. This provides ideas and encouragement for residents to continue to lead Big Local. As areas move to delivering their plan, they increasingly look for theme-based, rather than skills-based, training.

Support for residents comes from other residents, reps, locally trusted organisations and workers. There is also increasing support from other Big Local areas.

### 8.1.6 Big Local in the future

As they move to the future, residents leading Big Local are:

- Moving to more themed activities to meet the priorities of their plan;
- Looking to build a sustainable legacy from the programme; and

Residents remain very committed to Big Local, even though it can be a challenge to deliver. They see it as an opportunity and are passionate about improving their area.

## 8.2 Messages for Local Trust

- There is evidence that areas are becoming increasingly clear about what Big Local is, are becoming increasingly confident in leading Big Local and that these residents are more than just the 'usual suspects'.
- Areas are maintaining the principles of Big Local through majority voting on partnerships and ensuring the sustainability of the funding through building a legacy.
- Support is still required, however, in terms of understanding and promoting the programme and being clear on monitoring requirements.
- Areas want to feel they are not alone in their journey; shared learning and promotion of Big Local as a national programme may help with this.

## 8.3 Messages for areas

- Big Local can be a challenging process for many residents involved and while the journey is not always smooth, areas that persist find it rewarding and are starting to see change.
- Understanding the process, having the confidence in taking the lead, choosing the right people to work with and connecting to others in the community to support delivery all makes a difference to the development of Big Local.
- Having control does not mean having all the answers; support is needed from other residents, reps, locally trusted organisations, workers, local organisations, other Big Local areas and Local Trust to help deliver Big Local.

- Everyone on the partnership has a role to play in Big Local and responsibility should be shared.

- Some areas find that hiring a worker gives them extra capacity and helps them understand the process of Big Local better.

- Continuous publicity of Big Local through conversations, websites, leaflets, newsletters, events and activities helps to increase the number of residents who are aware of Big Local, who are engaged and who volunteer to help.

- Areas are continuously learning and building on the foundations of activity in the area with a continual process of planning and action and celebrations of achievements.

## 8.4 Conclusion

Residents are giving their time and energy and working extremely hard to deliver Big Local across the country. Though the Big Local journey may be challenging, particularly in terms of getting people involved, there is evidence of increasing awareness, engagement and involvement from the wider community. Residents are identifying the needs of their community and taking action in response to them through the support of those around them. This support includes other residents, the rep, the locally trusted organisation, local organisations and, quite often, a worker. Residents are growing in skills and confidence to increasingly take the lead in Big Local and remain very committed to it. This is because of their continued passion to make a difference to their area and make it an even better place for all who live there.

# Appendix

## About the programme

Big Local seeks to create a lasting positive change in the 150 areas involved in the programme through achieving the four Big Local outcomes outlined in section 1.1. Residents make all decisions on the focus and direction of Big Local in their area through developing and delivering a plan, with the help of a locally trusted organisation to hold their funds. Residents choose this locally trusted organisation, typically a local charity, council for voluntary service, local authority or housing association, but in the absence of an organisation that is trusted locally, some areas choose Local Trust to fulfil this role.

People in the area create a group to guide the overall direction of Big Local in their area and to ensure a diverse range of residents and local organisations are actively involved. This is called the Big Local partnership, though in some areas it is the Board or Committee. The majority of members (at least 51%) have to be residents and membership should be reviewed annually and is expected to change over time.

It takes time to establish this partnership and, in the meantime, there is generally a group of residents and others to get Big Local started. This group has different names in different Big Local areas and in this report it is referred to as a steering group.

Residents decide when to submit their vision and plan and spend funds for their area depending on their needs, as long as all money is spent by February 2026. Alongside their locally trusted organisation, partnerships work with a range of organisations to deliver their plan. Each Big Local area is also assigned a contact (rep) to support them and, once they have an endorsed partnership, they can choose to select their rep from the pool of reps quality assured by Renaisi.

Big Local is more than just a grant-giving programme. It also includes support to develop social investment and social entrepreneurship within these communities through Small Change and UnLtd, as well as a pool of social investment reps.

The steering group/partnership consults with residents in the area and conducts research to understand what the key issues are in the community that need addressing. These are then developed as priorities to address in a Big Local plan, which outlines activities and a budget for these activities to address identified priorities. Local Trust review and endorse this plan before releasing Big Local money to the locally trusted organisation for residents to spend in accordance with the plan. The locally trusted organisation is then responsible for reporting back on this expenditure to Local Trust.

The 150 Big Local areas were selected by the Big Lottery Fund because they had historically received below average amounts of funding from Big Lottery Fund, which could reflect a lack of capacity in the areas to apply for funding. The 150 areas were announced in three groups of 50 areas in:

- July 2010 (Wave 1)

- February 2012 (Wave 2)
- December 2012 (Wave 3)

Local Trust oversees the programme and manages the funds, supporting residents to make a lasting positive difference to their communities.

## Research methods

The 14 areas that took part in the 2013 research were all re-visited. An additional visit was made to an area that was selected for participation in the 2013 research, but did not take part in interviews. In the prior research, this sample was selected in June 2013 based on:

- **Launch date** – five areas from Wave 1, launched in July 2010; five areas from Wave 2, launched in February 2012; and five areas from Wave 3 launched in December 2012.
- **Region and geography** – to represent the spread of areas across the regions and the nature of the area (eight urban, five rural and two coastal).
- **Big Local rep** – areas selected were supported by 15 different reps. Reps in four areas had changed since CDF's previous research, with two areas now having the same rep.

Figure A.1 shows the areas involved in our research.

**Figure A.1 Location of sampled Big Local areas (Map data © Google 2015)**

The CDF research team spent a day in each of the 15 areas between August 2014 and January 2015. The detail of who we interviewed is different in each area, depending on how Big Local is working in the area, but it typically comprised the following:

**Interactive focus groups with residents involved in Big Local:**

- This was with between one and ten resident(s) actively involved in Big Local, either involved through the steering group/partnership or helping to deliver activities or events.
- 49 residents were interviewed as part of a focus group and a further two by telephone as they were not available on the day of the visit.
- We asked residents to complete a survey as part of the focus group. Of the 40 residents who did so, five were residents not on the steering group/partnership with the remaining 35 all attending or having a role within the steering group or partnership in the Big Local area.
- A rep was also interviewed as part of a focus group in one area.

**Interviews with a representative of the locally trusted organisation:**

- A total of 13 locally trusted organisations were interviewed as part of this research, with five of these the same as spoken to in 2013.
- This included eight community organisations/charities, two housing associations, two private/public sector organisations and one local authority.
- One locally trusted organisation could not be contacted and another area was without a locally trusted organisation at the time of our research.

**Interviews with a Big Local worker where there was one:**

- Out of the 15 areas, 10 had a worker, all of whom were interviewed as part of this research.

**Interviews with organisations working with Big Local areas:**

- These were defined as an organisation or person who was not a resident but who helped to support Big Local in the area, through activities or projects.
- Six organisations were interviewed during the course of our research, including a local authority, youth worker, a Big Local plan writer and an environmental charity.
- Three areas did not identify any such organisation.

**Interviews with a Star Person where there was one:**

- Of the nine areas with Star People at the time of our research, four such people were interviewed.

Where one or more of these participants were unavailable on the day of the visit then interviews were conducted by telephone.

Focus groups used visual prompts, drawing the structure of the partnership and a timeline of activity since CDF's last visit. All interviews followed a topic guide with some tailored questions depending on whether the interviewee was a resident, locally trusted organisation etc. The questions included:

- Roles within the steering group or partnership;
- Relationship with the rep, locally trusted organisation, worker and other key organisations or individuals;

- Perceptions on the resident-led nature of Big Local;
- Types of support and training accessed;
- Activities and events over the last year;
- Decision making; and
- How they see Big Local evolving in the future.

Following completion of the visits, a survey of all 150 areas taking part in the programme was conducted in February 2015 to explore some of the issues that had been raised in more detail. The survey was targeted at key residents, such as the chair of partnerships, and included questions on:

- How and why they got involved in Big Local and their history of community activity;
- Priorities and activities in the area;
- The best way of engaging people;
- Roles and support for the steering group and partnership; and
- Thoughts on progress and what would make the Big Local journey easier.

A total of 88 areas responded to this survey (a response rate of 59%), though the numbers answering each question within the survey varied. Responses were broadly evenly split by launch date with 36% from Wave 1, 30% from Wave 2 and 34% from Wave 3.

**Rebekah Ryder**

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