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Rebalancing the Power

Five principles for a successful
relationship between councils
and communities

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Local Trust

Rebalancing the Power: Five principles for a successful relationship between councils and communities was researched and written by NLGN and published by Local Trust in September 2018. Local Trust is registered in England and Wales, charity number 1147511, company number 7833396.
www.localtrust.org.uk

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Cover photo, page 5, page 7: James O Jenkins.
Pages 10,13,17,19,27,29, 31, 33: Andrew Aitchison.
Page 35: Benjamin Nwaneampeh



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the organisations and individuals that have generously given their time and insights to this research by taking part in our interviews and research workshop.

In particular, I am grateful to all those from Hateley Cross Big Local, Lawrence Weston Big Local, Withernsea Big Local, Prospect Estate Big Local, Arches Local Big Local (Chatham Medway), Big Local Wembley Central, Birchfield Big Local, Brookside Big Local, Canvey Big Local, Grassland Hasmoor Big Local, Growing Together Big Local, Ramsey Million Big Local, Sale West Big Local, Welsh House Farm Big Local; as well as councillors and officers from Rushmoor Borough Council, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Bristol City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Bath & North East Somerset Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, City of Wolverhampton Council, Gloucester City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, London Borough of Bexley, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Ramsay Town Council, Royal Borough of Greenwich, Trafford Council, Scarborough Borough Council, Sheffield City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, West Sussex County Council, and Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council who took part in the interviews and research workshop.

I would like to thank Matt Leach, Jessica Wenban-Smith and Andy Curtis at Local Trust for their input and support throughout.

My colleagues at NLGN have contributed in numerous ways throughout the production of this report. Special thanks to Jessica Studdert for her patience, guidance and support in editing and refining the content of this report. The research workshop would not have been possible without the perseverance and expert support of Vanessa Schneider. I am very grateful to Zoe Abel and Erica Belcher for their excellent note taking support during the telephone interviews. Thanks also to Adam Lent, Claire Porter, Molly Jarritt, Sanmeet Kaur, Melissa Macdonald, Sarah Lawson, Trinley Walker and Jane Swindley who have all contributed in their different capacities throughout the research.

Finally, I am grateful to Local Trust for the funding that made this project possible in the first place. Any errors or omissions are solely mine.

Pawda Tjoo

New Local Government Network

Foreword: Shana Roberts, Brookside Big Local

At the start of 2018, I was elected to be Chair of the Big Local group for Brookside in Telford. It was an honour to be chosen by the partnership but it had taken time to build trust and demonstrate to members that my motives were all genuine. I was, after all, 'one of them', a councillor.

When I first joined Big Local, it was obvious to me that the council lacked understanding about the purpose of Big Local and the residents lacked clarity regarding the responsibilities of either group. This caused much confusion and uncertainty, with many residents unsure of who to approach to get their pot holes fixed, or whether to get on and fix them themselves.

I've since discovered that some Big Local partnerships have been reluctant to allow councillors to join them, or even have a rule to exclude them. In Brookside, I was aware of a degree of wariness about my motives, and concern that I would use Big Local to push my own political agendas. However, I was clear from the beginning that I was a resident first and foremost. I walk the same streets, I see the same problems, and I share the same concerns.

I also saw the potential for positive change in my community and how Big Local would allow me to help drive that change. I joined the Parish Council not because of any personal political aspirations, but because I finally realised that I was a member of my community and, in turn, accountable for it.

Within Big Local I found a group of like-minded and passionate people, who were committed to the same goal. Big Local is an amazing opportunity to create robust foundations which can be sustained and maintained by

local councils and residents supporting each other. This is the essence of a successful and sustainable partnership - understanding the benefits of long-term strategic goals and their lasting impact on a community.

Balancing power comes by acknowledging that we are all on the same side and we want the same things. It is our responsibility to ensure that no one voice speaks for everyone and no one person sets the agenda.

Big Local is not there to fill gaps in local budgets. Big Local is not a forum for political point scoring. Big Local is about empowering people within the community, to make the right decisions and assess what their community needs based upon their own experiences and the experiences of those around them.

I am not a councillor. I am not a Chair. I am a resident that understands that I, like many others, have the ability to implement great change in my neighbourhood by getting involved and making a difference.

This is the true ethos of Big Local - bringing community minded people together and providing them with the opportunity to invest in their home and create a legacy for future generations. Big Local is the promise of a better tomorrow.

Cllr. Shana Roberts
Chair of Brookside Big Local

Foreword: Adam Lent, NLGN

The New Local Government Network is lucky enough to work with the most innovative councils in the country. Those councils are recognising that the route to the transformation they seek comes down to a radically redrawn relationship with their communities.

Councils face three big imperatives: to do more with less money; to respond to ever-growing demands from citizens for influence; and to shift towards a preventative model of public services. All three push a council towards seeking a more collaborative relationship with their residents. A relationship that is about a shared sense of ambition for a place rather than a transactional contract between taxpayer and public servant.

What this new relationship means in practice, however, is still very much in development. For some, it is about opening up a new type of conversation between public sector and communities. For others, it is about an approach to service delivery built around social networks and 'strengths-based approaches'. At NLGN, we are constantly exploring these valuable responses but we also think there is a need to explore the power relationship between public sector bodies and their communities and understand how that collaborative mind-set can be catalysed by tipping the balance of power in the community's favour.

This is why Big Local may be the most important social initiative currently operating in the UK. It has so much to teach us about how handing over real financial power can create entirely different outcomes for communities that the public sector has struggled for many years to help.

Big Local looks to us like the future of public services. For that reason, I am delighted that NLGN has been able to work on this research to better understand how the community commissioning model piloted by Big Local can be made to work as effectively as possible.

Adam Lent

Director, New Local Government Network

Introduction

The role of the council and councillor is changing. In the context of reducing budgets, growing demand pressures and shifting public expectations, the traditional role of the local authority as service deliverer has diminishing impact. As many services are pared back, demographic changes mean people need different types of support, and there is increasing recognition that communities may have to take the lead in solving their own problems. There is a growing sense that the role of the local authority is shifting towards that of an *action enabler*.

This means that instead of always directly delivering services, councils increasingly need to take on a facilitating role and foster a wider ecosystem of support and activity. This requires a very different relationship with communities – the traditional paternalistic approach of councils deciding what services an area needs, with councillors leading from the front, will now need to shift towards a mode of operating which listens, supports and enables.

In parallel to this, there has been a rising interest amongst independent funders in place-based approaches which emphasise the role of the community.¹ As many discretionary services have come under pressure or have been withdrawn entirely, the contribution of independent funding in communities has taken on a new significance. Communities working on their own, sometimes supported by independent resource, have an increasingly important role to play. But the readjustment underway has blurred lines

of responsibility – councils need to cede control if communities themselves are to take on more. For each, there is a need to understand what that recalibration means in practice, and how to get the best out of this new landscape of service provision and community-based activity.

Big Local areas are at the sharp end of these changes. Covering 150 neighbourhoods across England, each area receives £1.1 million from the Big Lottery Fund directly to the community to support projects of their choice over a period of 10-15 years. They are therefore uniquely placed as areas in which that changing relationship between councils and communities is catalysed. The model of Big Local provides a space in which council officers, councillors and different members of the community have an opportunity to take on different roles. Communities themselves are encouraged to take the driving seat to work together and decide how to make a lasting impact to their area. This new balance of power

¹ Gilbert, A., 2017. *Building Bridges*, p. 9.

and responsibility has expressed itself in different ways in different communities. But where it works best, it provides a model that may have more general value as the role and purpose of local government continues to be reinvented.

This report reflects on the behaviours and actions that are at the core of making new relationships work. Some areas have found ways to overcome challenges and create positive new ways of working, and in other areas those relationships are less developed. The experience of Big Local areas provides insights that can be applied more broadly to all parts of the country, where the new enabling role for councils, working with, rather than for communities, needs to be embedded.

Councils will need to work more effectively in managing more complex relationships with the community, operating within a diverse ecosystem. Council officers may need to focus on behaving in a less internally-focussed and rigid way, shifting to behaving more creatively and collaboratively beyond the organisation itself.² Councillors will need to understand their emergent role as an advocator and orchestrator, bringing groups together.³

With this in mind, the research for this report set out to identify the key challenges in the relationship between the council and community through the lens of Big Local. The research used two core methods: in-depth interviews with a range of Big Local representatives, residents, councillors and officers; and a workshop drawing together the same range of participants.⁴

This research identifies five components of a successful working relationship, incorporating insights from partners across the council and the community – both in terms of what has worked well and what has worked less well:



- 1 Recognise what each partner is trying to achieve**
- 2 Take active steps to build trust**
- 3 Maintain ongoing dialogue and honest communication**
- 4 Be flexible and adaptable**
- 5 Develop shared ownership and accountability**

The report covers each in turn, addressing why they are important and identifying practical action points for partners. Taken together, they chart out a new route towards rebalancing the power between councils and communities. To help the council and community recalibrate their relationship in practice, we conclude by distilling five key principles for effective partnerships which all parties should have in mind at the start of a relationship as they establish how they will work together in the future.

² Lent, A. and Studdert, J., 2018. *Culture Shock: Creating a Changemaking Culture in Local Government*, p. 18.

³ Mangan, C., et al., 2016. *The 21st Century Councillor*, p. 8.

⁴ More details on the research methodology can be found in Annex 1.

About Big Local

Big Local is a programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by Local Trust. It grants at least £1.1m investment over a period of at least 10 years to each of 150 communities which have, typically, been previously overlooked for Lottery and other funding. The programme provides an opportunity for local communities to work with a range of partners both locally and nationally, to improve their community as they choose, ranging from training and careers advice to creating new community amenities for young people and the elderly.

The programme was set up to support communities that have experienced the decline of local industry, high levels of employment and are in need for specific support in terms of activities and new facilities. Areas were selected in 2010-12 in partnership between the Big Lottery Fund and relevant local authorities. The £1.1m Lottery investment for each Big Local area is intended to kickstart the process of rebuilding the local community, building local leadership and civic capacity and helping the community to secure more funding in the future.

Big Local aims to enable people to make their communities better places to live by helping them to develop skills and confidence; firstly, to identify key priorities for their area; secondly, to devise a plan for action; and thirdly, to implement this plan for the benefit of their local community. Big Local brings local residents, organisations and groups together to contribute their local expertise, talents, ambitions and skills to create a lasting positive impact on their

area and community. Through Big Local, residents have increased control over the decision-making process in their area with very minimal requirements on how they spend the funds and how they organise themselves.

Each Big Local area forms a resident-led 'partnership' to guide the overall direction of Big Local in their area. The partnership is responsible for creating a Big Local plan, in consultation with the wider community, and ensuring the plan is delivered and the money is spent appropriately. The partnership, led by a chair, is usually made up of at least eight people including residents, local councillor(s) and others that are involved in Big Local in the area.

How Big Local works with the local authority

The success of Big Local is aided by a good relationship between the different parties involved. In addition to working

closely with Local Trust and a Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO), who helps administer projects in the Big Local Area, the community also have regular interactions with their local council, from elected members to council officers.

The working dynamic between the council and community varies significantly between Big Local areas. In some areas, Big Local partnerships collaborate with the council on multiple levels through their interactions with elected members, senior management and council officers. If Big Local areas are in local authorities with continued investment in community development workers, individuals are often quite involved and supportive. Elsewhere, where this provision has been withdrawn, regular officer-level contact can be sporadic or non-existent. Equally, in some places, residents made early decisions to

keep elected members at arm's length, such as excluding them from the Big Local partnership. This has sometimes been one of the ways in which communities have asserted themselves as 'resident-led', and set out to forge a new relationship with their council.

However, in setting up community projects, Big Local partnerships often require support from the local council (e.g. in obtaining planning permission, or negotiating asset transfers), so a good relationship with senior management and council officers is often identified as very important. Elected councillors are often directly involved in Big Local partnerships, either as a non-resident representing the local authority in the Big Local area, or in their capacity as a resident on the steering group with some voting power.



Five

components to a successful relationship between councils and communities


Achieving a successful relationship between councils and communities requires all involved to be reflective of their behaviours and seek to develop empathy towards each other. 'Mutual respect', 'honesty', 'transparency', 'flexibility', and 'one of equals' are just some of the terms that have been mentioned during the course of the research as fundamental to an ideal working relationship between councils and communities.

The research revealed five key components to a successful relationship between councils and communities based on analysis of the interviews and feedback from the workshop. Each section will highlight the existing challenges, and suggest actions for developing these components in the future.

1 Recognise what each partner is trying to achieve

The ability to recognise and respect the value of both the community and the council is critical to the most successful working relationships. There may be a natural asymmetry in the activity and roles, and multiple actors within each, but it is important to foster mutual recognition.

Experience of different Big Local areas demonstrates that right from the start, it is important to show respect and listen to other partners, or there is a risk that early damage can be done which takes a long time to repair. In one area, a council had demonstrated an interest in the funding available through Big Local, but had their own ideas about how to spend it, which caused upset:

 **Lack of trust, listening and respect of the steering group [by the local authority] particularly in relation to a specific project [were issues] ... residents felt they had been ignored and not respected especially when the local authority are wanting money to support another project. This caused a huge amount of aggravation which was unnecessary. A more respectful and listening approach could have been achieved. It caused huge upset with many steering group members, and distrust of the local authority."**

(Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) representative)

In another area, the Big Local partners themselves did not see the value in engaging with the council partners, which created early discord:

 **When the first Big Local Rep came into the area ... all were invited to the local community school. It was very well attended but the meeting did not go so well. The residents and partners were in the room and the decision was made by the Big Local Rep at that time that she just needed to speak to the residents and not the partners. The partners were not very happy, and they left. This incident seems to have alienated the partners. It was not done very well, and it will take a while to build those bridges again."**

(Community engagement officer)



Brookside
Big
Local

BROOKSIDE COMMUNITY FRIDGE
OPEN: 9:00AM - 4:30PM

HELP YOURSELF
TO WHAT'S ON THE SHELF

FREE FOOD
All food is free to take. It is yours to take as much as you need. No need to pay anything.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
We are a community fridge. We are not a charity. We are not a food bank. We are a community fridge. We are not a food bank. We are a community fridge.

WHAT TO DO
1. Take the food you need.
2. Take the food you need.
3. Take the food you need.

PLEASE BE CONSIDERATE
PLEASE BE CONSIDERATE
PLEASE BE CONSIDERATE
PLEASE BE CONSIDERATE

PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK
PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK
PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK
PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK

HOW TO DONATE
TO THE COMMUNITY FRIDGE

DONATE YOUR SURPLUS FOOD
DONATE YOUR SURPLUS FOOD
DONATE YOUR SURPLUS FOOD
DONATE YOUR SURPLUS FOOD

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WHAT TO DO
WHAT TO DO
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WHAT TO DO

PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK
PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK
PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK
PLEASE FILL IN THE VISITORS BOOK

The Wrekin
Housing Trust
More than a home

Recognising the value each brings to the relationship also involves empathy towards each other's positions and perceived shortcomings. On the part of the council, there can be an attitude that the residents lack sufficient expertise:

“ I see the theory that projects should be resident-led but actually in reality it does not work this way. Our successful projects like skills care and money advice have been provided by external agencies.”

(Council officer)

“ It's important to get the knowledge base, and this is not really possible [by simply relying on resident volunteers], without paid staff in post.”

(Community engagement officer)

In practice, 95 per cent of Big Local areas employ their own professional staff to support them and they often commission independent expert advice or bring in external assistance.

There have also been indications that the newly empowered residents are seen as a threat to the traditional controlling role of councillors and councils, rather than a valuable local asset, resource and capacity for the area:


“ Residents are powerful when they have the money, but this is often not recognised. Instead, this is taken personally by [the council] as they try to tell us what to do and bully us....The council needs to understand that the resident volunteers are taking their time to help.”

(Project worker)

“ [The council] don't like that they can't control Big Local because it's run by the community. They can't get their head around not controlling a spending priority ... they get frustrated. There is tension between the local authority and Big Local as they can't control the project.”

(Big Local representative)

Some Big Local areas are also demonstrating that the residents can bring expertise to bear, which may be less reliant on professional capability per se, but more so about understanding the innate nature of their community. When councils recognise this, they can understand how the community can contribute to their own understanding of where the council can add value:

 **Local people don't necessarily have the professional expertise, but they have the knowledge of the problem. Councils shouldn't rely so much on data, statistics, reports and ideas devised in conference rooms... instead, they should listen to what residents are saying and use their knowledge and expertise of what's needed in the area."**

(Big Local representative)

 **The fact that it is resident-led caused misunderstanding but is possibly now its main strength. We have a small population of about 6,000 but it goes up to 8,000 -12,000 in the Summer, which skews the focus on the Summer and tourism. But Big Local has a different and all-year-round focus. The council thinks we should fund more events for the Summer, but we focus on all-year-round community issues and employment. Residents have the final say, which is good."**

(Project worker)


In some cases, councils are demonstrating a strong predilection for traditional, more paternalistic ways of working, which frustrates the community who want to take on a more proactive role:

 **The biggest issue is the personalities behind what's going on. The Deputy Director [in the Council] was very hard-nosed and very pushy, her subordinate was not particularly helpful either. But one year later there was an internal reorganisation in the Council and they appointed someone else to replace her. This was a massive and positive change because the personalities were very different, the new DD was very supportive and very good at mentoring people."**

(Former chair of a Big Local Partnership)

As this example demonstrates, the residual paternalism and hierarchical attitude isn't necessarily a structural issue – it can be down largely to the behaviour of the individuals and the culture of the council involved.

On the part of Big Local residents, there can be a view that council involvement is a "nice to have" but that due to council's budget pressures and internal priorities, there shouldn't be much expected of them:

 **To continue to build a relationship with councils is important but not essential to making Big Local work. And councils have a lot of problems of their own, so it is unrealistic to expect councils to take a big part."**

(Big Local representative)

In areas where the activity was more advanced, there was an indication of a more nuanced understanding of the council's position. Firstly, an understanding that the council itself comprises a diverse range of actors with sometimes competing priorities, appetites and opportunities:

W One of the things I've supported the partnership to do is build positive partnerships with local authorities - at different levels and with different teams. I try to say, 'you need to work with local authorities ... things won't be achieved without relationships with the local authority.' They need to challenge the local authority at times but through a positive relationship. But some residents still have a traditional approach to relationships with the council officers."

(Big Local representative)

Secondly, the key to successful working with the council seems to rely on residents recognising the range of different actors within the council and harnessing what is necessary to get results:

W Projects around greenspaces and waste removal were able to happen a lot quicker because the local authority was able to point to the right people, this happened a lot quicker than if the community had done it alone."

(Big Local representative)



Recognise what each partner is trying to achieve

Drawing together the lessons from Big Local areas' experiences, it is important that both partners develop empathy and recognition for what each brings to the table. For councils, this involves developing an understanding that the particular expertise of communities can complement rather than detract from, their own perspective; this expertise is based on intricate understanding of how life is lived in the area, and very often deep passion for the future of the place. Demonstrating awareness of the commitment given by participants of Big Local is important – they are volunteers and contribute a significant amount of time which should not be taken for granted.

For Big Local partners and the wider community, it is important to recognise the different layers within the council, although this can be extremely complex to people outside the organisation. Here, the role of the councillor is crucial – as a liaison between the town hall and the community. Many Big Local areas have found it important to supplement their capacity with external support, particularly on projects that require specialist knowledge, such as career and financial advice. This is particularly important in areas lacking charitable organisations and a culture of volunteering.

In order to develop mutual recognition of what both the council and the community bring to the relationship, a series of actions have been identified based on insights from successful Big Local relationships.

Actions for councils

- Both elected members and officers should take active steps to develop awareness of the priorities and needs of the local residents through listening and engagement. Consider how to supplement formal processes with more informal or social routes to get to know residents in their community.
- Focus on developing a positive partnership with the local residents and the Big Local partnership. Think about how perceived weaknesses can be turned into positive attributes – for example detailed understanding of the nuances of the community can supplement professional and technical expertise and help the latter make a better impact.
- Council officers and councillors should be upfront and explicit about the council's responsibilities in specific projects. Work to identify how particular parts of the council can add specific value, which may be at a given point in time rather than ongoing. Understand how "the council" can be perceived by the community, and take active steps to help them access resource and break down barriers.
- Councillors in particular should understand their role as a bridge between the ambitions of the community and the specialist expertise of the council – and play a proactive part in identifying opportunities to link these.

Actions for Big Local partnerships and other resident-led groups

- Realise that a good relationship with the council is necessary to the smooth running of projects, and can help unblock barriers or unleash action to help the development of your project.
- Don't perceive the council as a single unified entity, and recognise the need to build relationships on different levels, and identify allies who can help catalyse action.
- Leaders of Big Local partnerships and other resident-led groups should think about how to supplement existing capacity to make more impact – for example through developing a volunteer strategy to make opportunities more targeted in the community, or bringing on particular expertise to fill identified gaps. This can also help clarify the roles of volunteers and support them in developing their skills further.

KEY PRINCIPLE


1

Be inclusive and treat all parties with respect from the start.


2 Take active steps to build trust

Building trust doesn't happen by accident. To forge genuine and lasting relationships, active steps need to be taken. The experience of Big Local areas reveals that openness, honesty and transparency are all required, and that ultimately building trust is a marathon not a sprint - it can take time to get right, so persistence is key.

Mistrust has developed within council-community relationships in Big Local areas in different ways. In some areas, early lack of trust came about through a failure on the part of the council to understand the value of the Big Local project, and to immediately enter into the partnership with a set view of what it can be, based on their own agenda rather than that of the community:


 **[at the early stages] there was the attitude that Big Local is a hole in the wall."**

(Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) representative)

 **"[The council] needs to understand Big Local, what it's about and its values. It's not an ATM ... They need to understand what Big Local is and see them as a partner not just there as a cash machine and as something they can control."**

(Big Local representative)

Communities have quickly become alienated on occasions when the council has stepped in unilaterally and taken credit for a project that the community feels it has direct ownership of:

 **"The local authority marketing team got wind of it [success of a project] and it got put in local newspaper as a local authority project which took the relationship back a few steps."**

(Big Local representative)

Mistrust can occur for benign reasons – in some cases, the local authority appears to have wanted to commit in principle to a course of action, without being honest with themselves or their community partners that it would be hard to fulfil a promise in practice:

 **... I've seen local authorities not wanting to give a bad impression so go along with something they know they are not able to commit to...."**

(Big Local representative)



This approach has then created problems further down the line with mistrust in the council's ability to deliver. To overcome this, it is important for the council to manage public expectations from the start by being upfront:

“ ...It's important to be out there without raising expectations which will blow up in your face. For instance, sometimes people get too demanding and ask for a swimming pool, cinema, etc. which is just not possible. So one needs to have a consultation in which one outlines clearly from the start what realistic options are.”

(Big Local representative)

“ Be realistic and manage expectation ... there needs to be enough awareness of people's expectations [in order] to manage people.... Roles and responsibilities need to be clear from the start”

(Project worker)

On the part of the community, frustration can occur when there is a lack of consistency on the part of the council in the way it works with them, which undermines how trust develops. These can be down to how councils generally operate across different departments, with varying internal definitions of where the remits begin and end:

“ There were also inconsistencies with responses.... Officers sometimes redirect people to speak to other members of the council repeatedly, so it is a confused interaction with various members of the council, with each member thinking it's another officer's area of responsibility.”

(Big Local representative)

“ The council needs to be respectful and consistent ... it's what has impacted the relationship the most ... When there has been an inconsistency of who is dealing with whom, this provides an opportunity to regress into old ways of working.”

(Big Local representative)

The inconsistencies can also be caused by the specific behaviours of individuals within the council:

I would describe the relationship [between the council and the community] as 'the good, the bad and the ugly' In relation to our relationship with the local authority, I think it depends on who you deal with, what departments and what priorities. Like any partnership, there are always some positives and negatives, we have a mixed experience, dependent on the characters that we deal with."

(LTO representative)

These experiences have knock-on effects on how the community then behaves, which perpetuates mistrust. Residents can repeatedly ask for official confirmation rather than simply relying on a verbal communication. It can appear from the outside of the council as though no-one is prepared to take responsibility for any decisions made, which can be a major barrier to progress. Yet there can be inconsistencies apparent on behalf of the communities too, which can mean progress is slow to get off the ground – or stop-start when it does:

The difficulty is 'how much can we expect from volunteer residents?' They tend to turn up to meetings which is great, but it tends to be that people with the loudest voices tend to be heard but there are those who are very quiet."

(Community engagement officer)

Residents themselves cannot get the plan into order, certain knowledge can come from the residents, but collaboration still needs to be done."

(Community engagement officer)

To forge trust between partners, the council will need to take a proactive role and seek to close the gap between their own agenda and that of the community. There can be tensions here, between the wider representative role of the council of the whole borough, and the specific priorities of a Big Local neighbourhood. But ultimately, building deeper trust will rely on the local authority having a better understanding of the need to shift the dynamics over the longer term. This might involve some upfront investment of time and energy to agree roles and mutual value:

Putting together processes and procedures, whilst time consuming, was very important to get the right structure in place."

(Council officer)

Possibly a memorandum with the local authority would have helped. The council has been supportive but if an MoU was set out at the start then the partnership wouldn't ask for things that it clearly wouldn't get."

(Big Local representative)



Take active steps to build trust

The role of time was cited by many as key to developing and embedding trust, but the progression of time by itself doesn't necessarily result in trust. Councils can still take proactive steps to demonstrate their track record of delivery and secure early wins which build confidence in the

community – crucially, these should be clear “deliverables” rather than over-ambitious promises that are not followed through. It will also be important to ensure ongoing meaningful engagement with the community, which is explored in more detail in the next section.

Actions for councils

- Make sure colleagues across the council are well informed about the purpose of Big Local, for example through using general internal communication channels, or briefing specific teams. This can help remove any preconceived ideas and ensure that agendas align from the outset.
- Councillors in particular must be careful not to over-promise where there is then a risk of under-delivering – make sure to identify deliverables which could be small scale but will serve to develop trust.
- Council officers and senior management should work with community partners to establish a clear timeline and endpoint of projects from the very start to remove ambiguity. A timeline should serve as a point of reference for new council staff and can inform them of the council's existing relationship with a Big Local area.
- Existing council officers and senior management should ensure that a follow up and handover system is in place to facilitate the building of trust and positive working relationship, especially in cases of any changes in staff members.
- Council officers should outline a clear set of liabilities and model of working from the start to speed up the process of working in the long run, e.g. by preventing legal problems or GDPR issues.

Actions for Big Local partnerships and other resident-led groups

- Recognise that as statutory bodies, councils need to go through due diligence, including legal and financial checks, which can sometimes seem beside the point to the project at hand.
- Big Local representatives in particular should work with the council to set a broad timeframe and key milestones for projects where they are collaborating, and seek to put these in place with identified allies within the council if this doesn't happen automatically.
- Big Local Partnership chairs and workers should work to obtain buy-in from the council and other partners by conducting necessary research into specific projects, to support the case for their ongoing development and commitment.
- Big Local Partnership chairs or representatives should establish a long-term relationship with key individuals in council who can advance the aims of Big Local, such as councillors.
- In areas where there is an engaging/proactive parish council or other community organisations, they can be an invaluable ally in terms of getting projects set up, unblocking barriers and liaising with the local authority.

KEY PRINCIPLE 2


Find ways to reflect a changed relationship which clearly set out the roles that different parties play, mutual priorities and areas with some level of flexibility.

3 Maintain ongoing dialogue and honest communication

Ongoing dialogue and communication is key to a healthy relationship between councils and communities. This means engaging the right individuals from both the council and community from the very beginning and maintaining a continuous pattern/ rhythm of communication throughout and until the completion of a project. To be effective in its new role as a facilitator, the council also needs to be 'more honest and trusting'. This means treating the community as an equal partner in any conversation, rather than simply talking about them or at them.⁵


Effective communication can help build trust over time, identified in the previous section as vital – and it is important to establish this from the start. As one Big Local representative reflects on the early days of their relationship:

to personnel and political changes, both of which can frustrate the development of a strong relationship. Mitigating the impact of these relies on clear communication that ensures mutual understanding and to ensure those involved do not feel their hard work has been put in for nothing:

 **At the early stages, having a regular series of meetings with senior local authority officers would have helped. As it was, the communication only occurred when something was going badly. So, if there was regular communication we would also have [been] updated on positive things."**

(Big Local representative)

Clear communication is essential to navigating some of the problematic inconsistencies that can sometimes set things back. Community populations can change, and the council can be subject

 **Relationship building is difficult when the residents are transient... Local authorities are also transient, and we have about five different links at the local authority. The current one has been there for a couple of years which is quite good. It is important to have an understanding of what their roles are and what the limits to their roles are. If there is an election it could be a different kettle of fish. When there is a change of councillor the relationship could be quite different."**

(Big Local representative)

⁵ Needham, C. and Mangan, C., 2013. *The 21st Century Public Servant*, p. 9.

“The council changes, and the steering group changes. None of the original members are on [the] current steering group.”

(Big Local chair)

There are clear potential traps partners can fall into unless clear communication is established. On some occasions the absence of communication has led to entirely avoidable negative fallout, simply because a decision was not conveyed quickly or effectively enough:

“...there have been proposals put forth by Local Authority which caused a lot of tension because of poor communication - this still needs to develop.”

(LTO representative)

On the other hand, some community partners who have avoided early engagement with the council, found that this led to some serious consequences further down the line in terms of their difficulty in understanding the way the council works:

“I wish there had been meetings at beginning to outline timeline and endpoint. I didn't know at the outset the level of council bureaucracy.”

(Big Local representative)

Clear upfront communication and effective information sharing can save time over the long-term and avoid duplicating work or repeating previous failures:

“[My advice is] look at what else other people are doing. Local authorities were doing things around youth work, so they were able to hook up and collaborate. So, don't reinvent the wheel... Here something got set up that wasn't working and Big Local also set up something similar and didn't realise that something was already set up.”

(Big Local representative)

“Research the area thoroughly and consider carefully what its needs are before doing anything on the ground, know what is already happening in the area so that we do not duplicate.”

(Council officer)


“Have a comprehensive approach, resident and partnership need to work with partners in the area. Without clear knowledge, [our Big Local] risks replicating what is already going on.”

(Community engagement officer)

It is certainly the case that ongoing dialogue can be hard to maintain in the face of conflict or an adversarial working relationship. This can be particularly difficult at the start of a project when roles are not clear, and trust has not yet had time to develop:

 **Any Big Local Rep will tell you that a big part of their role is mediation: taking people aside and telling them the consequences of their behaviour (sometimes incl. bullying etc.) ... Mediation and diplomacy occurred particularly in the early days. It is about people and about individual relationships with other people. It's about recognising people's strengths and weaknesses."**

(Big Local representative)

 **Don't be put off at early stage formation because things will be tough. When you have a variety of characters trying to get together with people with different life experiences and agendas, disagreements will come at varying levels. So, it is important not to be put off by that but not to dwell on it either, because nothing will be achieved but stress and aggravation because that will only accumulate."**

(LTO representative)

Where Big Local partnerships have forged successful relationships between the council and the community, this has been based on clear, honest communication. Getting into a routine and habit of ongoing information exchange can help create a sense of shared purpose and endeavour, that partners are working together on the same side:

 **Communication and being upfront has worked well. Recently Big Local put money into a project to do with environmental and economic work and it took a while to get the physical project going so we worked to get something mutually beneficial. I found them very welcoming which makes you want to help. This environment helps to get things done ... They can come to me, and in turn I am privy to information that they think I need, which is very helpful."**

(Council officer)

 **Close cooperation is really important - for both sides to know what is happening and have [a] feedback mechanism, and people are able to report issues to councils, e.g. reporting fly tipping and homelessness, etc."**

(Council officer)

Maintain ongoing dialogue and honest communication

In the context of a recalibration of the roles of the council and the community, clear communication is essential to navigating new ways of working, where the old rules don't apply, but there can be haziness about what is expected instead. Effective communication needn't rely on

everyone knowing everything at the same time, as this can get difficult to manage. By identifying which key individuals need to be kept in close, regular contact and which require less frequent updating, effective ongoing communication can be better managed.

Actions for councils

- Council officers and councillors should conduct regular meetings with the Big Local Partnership to ensure that both failures and successes are discussed and reflected upon in an open and honest way.
- Council officers and senior management should clearly communicate in good time any changes in staff and leadership to ensure an ongoing positive relationship with the Big Local partnership.
- Council officers and councillors in particular should be prepared to communicate disappointing news to the community with empathy and truthfulness.

Actions

Actions for Big Local partnerships and other resident-led groups

- Engage with the council as early as possible and seek buy-in from senior elected members.
- Big Local representatives and chairs should be assertive when dealing with the council, and at the same time be understanding about how negative behaviours, particularly in formal meetings, can undermine effective communication and the development of a positive relationship over time.
- Big Local chairs and representative should take steps to encourage positive engagement from residents back to the council to facilitate constructive ongoing dialogue.

Actions


KEY PRINCIPLE 3

Agree how different parties would like to communicate in the future and build this into the relationship from the start.

4 Be flexible and adaptable

Being flexible and adaptable is key to constructive working between councils and communities. The need for councils to be able to respond with creativity and autonomy to complex and competing demands is increasingly recognised as key to operating successfully in the twenty-first century.⁶ The emerging role of a public servant as 'municipal entrepreneur' has been identified, as one who undertakes a wide range of roles, including story-telling, resource weaving and navigating.⁷ The experience of Big Local areas demonstrates the continuing need for these characteristics to embed, as the relationship between the council and community recalibrates.

One big barrier for communities is the rigidity they can be met with from the council. This can be a result of a residual mode of operating on behalf of the council that expects to prescribe solutions on behalf of the community rather than working mutually with them. This approach manifests itself as an overly procedural, bureaucratic approach which frustrates action in practice:

 **The first year of the project was taken up by bureaucracy of the council. The council had so many requirements of policies etc. so it took that long to get the work of Big Local going... Every workshop needed a risk assessment. The puppeteer didn't know how to fill in the risk assessment form so someone from the council had to help him and the only possible risk they could come up with was emotional distress."**

(Big Local representative)

 **The biggest challenge was working with the council, getting the council staff involved and them understanding what exactly it is that we need from them.... Councils are very rigid, and they have to be to protect the public purse."**

(Former chair of a Big Local Partnership)

⁶ Lent, A. and Studdert, J., 2018. *Culture Shock: Creating a Changemaking Culture in Local Government*, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Needham, C. and Mangan, C., 2013. *The 21st Century Public Servant*, p. 13.



The lack of clarity that is innate to Big Local partnerships, in particular at the start of a project which could go in a number of possible directions, demands a fundamentally different way of working that challenges assumptions councils have traditionally operated upon. The notion of an ongoing partnership rather than a specific programme, is a way of working that operates outside the comfort zone of the traditional hierarchical model of service delivery, which prizes certainty and predictability:

 **The Big Local partnership has a vision of working in partnership, not of solving problems, Big Local isn't even a formal organisation. It tries to find partners. Councils found us very difficult to deal with - [they] threatened to report us to the charity commission."**

(Big Local representative)

 **"It's challenging because of how councils are used to working. Councils work on a confrontational model, not listening to what people are saying, they are looking to get a majority vote. Big Local looks for consensus. Councils can't get their head around that because they're used to a majority, but this alienates a minority group. Big Local project is more focused on building a consensus which councils struggle with."**

(Big Local representative)

Yet the insights from successful Big Local partnerships show that there can be wider benefits to councils adapting their way of working to make space for the community to take on a greater role:

 **When the council takes the Big Local Partnership seriously, understands its values and wants to work with partners towards common objectives, it can be a successful partnership."**

(Big Local representative)

 **I think that a lot of the work Big Local is doing is focused on social inclusion which is something that we would struggle to resource. We focus more on economic and environmental issues. So, they focus on social inclusion, involving the community. The fact that it is led by the community for the community is the advantage because they know what they need and want. Whereas we don't know, we're not based in that town, so we can't offer such extensive support."**

(Council officer)

The nature of Big Local – operating at a more granular neighbourhood level – means that they have the advantage of providing both a link and detailed knowledge to a locality; something councils operating across a wider geography cannot always sustain. This Big Local insight into what works well in an area can be invaluable.

“ I think it’s about the council being able to be transparent and consistent whilst being flexible... what works in one community may not work in another.”

(Councillor)

There could also be occasions in which the community needs to adapt to current circumstances. In some cases, a hangover from previous experiences can cloud the potential for future relations. The ability to move on from previous bad experiences can be important to remove barriers to progress, especially in a context where new council staff may be involved or where a new mindset or culture has recently been adopted within the council:

“ One challenge is history – a lot of the things we talk about have been on the table for many years. A lot of things happen where both sides hold on to what hasn’t been done in the past which can cloud decisions in the present and future. I suggest and encourage this doesn’t happen. I must say that local communities are more guilty of that than local authorities. There is an expectation that local authorities have to mirror the way local communities work.”

(Big Local representative)



Be flexible and adaptable

Looking to the future, a core challenge for councils operating in the new low resource/high demand/high public expectation environment, is that they no longer have the means to simply ramp up service delivery in response to problems in communities. Instead, they have to find a way of operating that exists in a grey area in between the state of doing nothing and doing everything.

In other words, doing some things, and not others; sometimes, and not all of the time. The insights from Big Local partnerships demonstrate that learning to let go is still very much underway, and the need to become more flexible and adaptable in the face of new activity, rather than revert to traditional behaviours and processes, will be key for the future.

Actions for councils

- Council officers and senior management in particular should be prepared to negotiate and compromise on certain key positions the council holds in order to achieve the best outcome for the community.
- Council officers should understand the unique insight that neighbourhood communities can offer, for example intelligence about local conditions which could deepen the impact of wider policy and practice from the council.
- The role of the councillor is key – as representatives of the community they need to be humble in how they approach understanding what communities would like to achieve. As conduits for the community inside the town hall, officers need to ensure this is incorporated as they respond to the community.
- Don't assume you need to enter into a partnership knowing the outcome at the start – be open and start with a blank sheet of paper, which the community can complete alongside you. Be open to goalposts shifting.
- Take steps to remove unnecessary procedures – seek to develop greater organisational awareness of the difference between a legal requirement and a cultural habit.



Actions for Big Local partnerships and other resident-led groups

- Big Local representatives and chairs should be prepared to negotiate and compromise on certain key issues in order to achieve the best outcome for the community.
- Understand that councils are going through a process of transition themselves. Try to find ways to feed back positively on proactive and adaptive behaviours, especially to elected members who are accountable, and who ultimately need to represent your concerns within the council.


KEY PRINCIPLE 4

Seek to develop empathy for each other's position and be prepared to compromise on certain issues to achieve the best outcomes for the whole.

5 Develop shared ownership and accountability

Developing shared ownership and accountability is fundamental to ensuring the smooth running of a project and a good experience for all parties involved. The rebalancing of power between councils and communities will ultimately involve new dynamics for each – with shifting levels of responsibility and control. Research has shown growing awareness of the need to establish genuine co-production, which involves joint ownership between the council and community.⁸ In Big Local areas, these shifts are underway, and some of the insights from projects demonstrate where deeper changes still need to occur.


Forging a shared approach can sometimes be frustrated by people who remain preoccupied with their personal agenda rather than a collective agenda. The experience of Big Local areas appears to suggest that time and persistence to develop a wider community approach can lead to certain individuals falling by the wayside as partnerships embed:

 **People often come along with a personal agenda, not a community agenda, so it generates a tense relationship.... over the years, those that recognised this isn't [just about their own personal agenda] but for the community [as a whole], some decided to stay while others decided to leave the partnership."**

(LTO representative)

 **By November 2014 [the end of the first year], some people left because they realised that the money wasn't there to spend on their own personal projects."**

(Big Local Partnership chair)

 **It followed a similar sequence to organisational cycle (theory). When Big Local was announced there was a local meeting which 100 people attended (this never usually happens with local meetings). A steering group was formed – there were problematic people with single issue minds – storming out of meetings etc. It took about 18 months for that to settle down and after that we ended up with a stable group."**

(Big Local representative)

⁸ Needham, C. and Mangan, C., 2013. *The 21st Century Public Servant*, p. 6.

When it comes to forging shared ownership, the experience of Big Local reveals that both sides can exhibit a lack of commitment and responsiveness which frustrates this joint endeavour. On the one hand, some Big Local residents cite council obfuscation which has delayed the projects being delivered on schedule:

“ Councils are large organisations which can be siloed. There are often issues raised by residents that don't sit with one area of responsibility. Residents get frustrated with lack of speed. Sometimes it feels a bit like turning the Titanic. One example is when residents wanted to know whether a green space could be developed on or not as it was prior ex-industrial land. Six months later they hadn't been given an answer.”

(Big Local representative)

On the other hand, from the perspective of the council, there can be a frustration that although there is a latent appetite to take on more ownership, this doesn't always follow through:

“ There is a mismatch of what people want to see happen and what they are willing to put into the project... [it's a] problem to get people to own the project, no one wants to lead on it.”


(Council officer)

“ The most challenging thing is that the local community is at a very low level of engagement”

(Council officer)




Developing clear accountability is critical to securing a shared sense of ownership and follow-through. The absence of it can create problems:

 **Accountability [is needed] - local residents have seen things not happen and there is no way to keep accountable. If local residents have chased that up it leads to a negative interaction."**

(Big Local representative)

Meanwhile successful partnerships have been based on clearly agreed accountability, with councillor representation but as a minority voice so that the community take on greater ownership:

 **The relationship with councillors and Big Local has been very positive. There are four councillors and they'll have one vote. One of the benefits is that they're all in the same political party which keeps it in same direction and this has been a very positive for the partnership."**

(Big Local representative)

It is clear from the experience of Big Local areas, that although councils do need to shift out of a paternalistic mode, at the same time communities themselves need to shift out of an expectation that the council will do everything:

 **Lack of take up and engagement [are issues] - we recently put together a public meeting, for street cleaning, and park managers gave presentations about the problems like parking and fly-tipping. We advertised it very widely, in shopping centres and every method you can imagine, and after all that only one person came who was not even a partner or a resident. This is frustrating."**

(Council officer)

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Develop shared ownership and accountability

As the role and relationship between councils and communities recalibrates, the preconditions to successful working outlined in the first four sections of this report, need to come together to sustain shared ownership and accountability over the longer term.

With clarity and respect for the value each can bring to the partnership, and concerted attempts to build trust, the early more trying days of a partnership can transition to maturity. The achievement of this will rely on effective, ongoing communication, and an awareness of the need to be flexible and adaptable.

For true shared ownership and accountability to be forged, this will need to be based on both partners working beyond traditional approaches and shifting their expectations of each other. As Big Local projects are mostly nearing their halfway point (year five of a ten-year cycle), there are increasingly “questions about what will happen when Big Local is no longer there”.⁹ Councils will need to think about the lasting impact of projects, and actions they can take to sustain both the immediate impact, and the wider behavioural shift that could occur.

Actions for councils

- Get creative about how to engage with the community – understand that entering the partnership should be on their terms, so find out how and where you can add value.
- Don't feel that you need to step in to lead – if there appears to be lack of commitment on the part of residents, work with allies in the community to generate engagement rather than taking it over.
- For councillors, be wary of trying to seek credit for projects or the perception that they can be easily politicised – make sure you communicate the shared nature of joint endeavours.
- Foster a sense of ownership of a project in the community by making clear where residents are taking charge of key aspects of the project. In some Big Local areas, elected members on the steering committee have deliberately excluded themselves from voting on key decisions in order to give residents the ultimate say.

⁹ Comment by a workshop participant.

Actions for Big Local partnerships and other resident-led groups

- Explore creative ways of engaging the community. This may include different means of advertising an event or opportunity for residents to be involved in community initiatives, through traditional leafleting and posters as well as via social media.
- Big Local chairs and representatives should seek to find ways to retain the grassroots essence of projects. In some Big Local areas, the partnership engages two types of workers: one who is focused on growing the grassroots engagement, and one who is focused on strategic planning and work for Big Local. This combination of roles is crucial in ensuring the grassroots element of the Big Local in the area continues to thrive.
- Big Local workers and volunteers from other resident-led organisations would benefit from working with the council to conduct community surveys where they are commissioned. Community surveys are hugely valuable, and some Big Local workers have said that it would be worth paying residents to knock on doors and conduct surveys in order to gain some valuable local insight.

KEY PRINCIPLE 5

Foster a shared sense of endeavour by agreeing small actions that can be delivered together to build trust, and then scale up successes incrementally.

Conclusion

The backdrop to this research is the changing nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state. This is catalysed by reducing funding and increasing demand, the combination of which create pressures on local services and mean they cannot continue to operate in the way they always have. But there is also a growing expectation of direct control on behalf of people themselves, which they already exercise day-to-day, through for example the wide range of consumer choice, smart technology and social networks both on and offline.

These dynamics has consequences for that sphere between the citizen and the state: the community. It is at this level that the personal and the collective intersect – small enough to be personally known and loved, big enough to have critical mass to take on more shared responsibility. The relationship between those actors at the heart of this shifting dynamic has been the focus of this research. The Big Local approach provides insights into how in practice these relationships need to continue to evolve – between the key players locally including councillors, officers, Big Local representatives and most importantly of all, residents themselves. The insights will be of use to those already seeking or participating in partnerships, but they have wider applicability given the changing context and nature of the relationship between councils and communities.

The changing role of the local authority from being a traditional service deliverer to an action enabler in the future will require

a fundamental shift in the way the council works with the community. The insights from this research indicate the future approach needed. Rebalancing power involves both the council and the community moving away from an expectation of paternalism from the former towards the latter – with councils ceding control and communities stepping up to seize it. To do this, the council will need to learn how to operate in the grey area between doing nothing and doing everything – taking on the role of a facilitator, supporting the community to develop their skills, confidence and expertise. Equally, communities themselves need to discover a more proactive role, becoming more engaged in identifying local priorities and working together to achieve them.

Through the lens of Big Local, this research has identified five key components for a successful relationship between councils and communities in the context of increasing community-led activities and decision-making. First, a constructive

relationship begins with a mutual recognition of each party's objectives and the value each brings to the table, and respect of the unique role and expertise that each offers. Second, with this mutual respect in place, councils and communities need to take active steps to continually build trust, by identifying mutual objectives and values to focus on in the long-term. Third, to achieve that trust, ongoing dialogue and honest communication should be effectively maintained. Fourth, to work effectively and balance different agendas and priorities, it is necessary to be flexible and adaptable, in order to respond to unexpected

circumstances in a creative way. And finally, a successful relationship requires shared ownership and clear accountability between the council and community. This is the ultimate embodiment of a joint partnership, and there is a need for mutual agreement on how it will work in practice.

To embed these components of a successful relationship, five core principles for action can be identified for partners to have regard to from the very start of a relationship. The findings from the research show that if these can be followed, there is a real chance of a long-term positive relationship growing from the beginning:

- 1** Be inclusive and treat all parties with respect from the start.
- 2** Find ways to reflect a changed relationship which clearly set out the roles that different parties play, mutual priorities and areas with some level of flexibility.
- 3** Agree how different parties would like to communicate in the future and build this into the relationship from the start.
- 4** Seek to develop empathy for each other's position and be prepared to compromise on certain issues to achieve the best outcomes for the whole.
- 5** Foster a shared sense of endeavour by agreeing small actions that can be delivered together to build trust, and then scale up successes incrementally.

For a successful re-balancing of power to take place, both the council and community need to honestly reflect on what has worked well and what still needs to be improved in their working relationship. By examining this relationship through the experiences of residents in Big Local areas, this report highlights the need for councils to move away from the role of a manager who delivers and instead take on the roles of a facilitator who enables, and an advocate who seeks to let the community shine and take ownership of their own area. In these new roles, councils are recognising the value of local expertise and seeking to support local residents in developing their skills and knowledge through involvement in Big Local projects. By taking the back seat councils are also helping communities develop greater confidence in planning and setting up their own projects.

This does not mean councils becoming disengaged from the work of Big Local partnerships; rather councils should learn to recognise how much support is needed by the community and when to provide the support to ensure the best outcome for the local area – this needs to ebb and flow over time and as community ownership develops. With a positive relationship and constructive way of communicating, councils and communities may find that their agendas and priorities are not very different after all, and that both parties ultimately aim to achieve the best outcomes for their local community.

ANNEX 1:

Research Methodology

This research involves a series of in-depth interviews designed to capture the nuances of the relationship between the council and community qualitatively. We have selected four Big Local areas to focus on as part of the research. The four Big Local areas were selected to cover a good geographical spread and based on a wide range of experiences. We conducted 20 in-depth interviews with a diverse range of individuals who hold different roles within the council and within the Big Local partnership in these Big Local areas. These interviews provided critical insights into what has worked well and what has continued to be a challenge.

Following the interviews, we conducted a research workshop in early June 2018 to engage a wide range of individuals involved in Big Local in their areas, including those from the council and the community. This event included a presentation of early findings emerging from the interviews, a roundtable and several break-out sessions each exploring in greater detail some of the early findings emerging from the interviews. The workshop operated strictly under Chatham House rules to encourage more open and honest sharing of both successes and failures by participants. Over 30 participants contributed to the workshop discussion and we received input from councillors, council officers, and residents.

Both the in-depth interviews and workshop addressed the following key research questions:

- 1 How have Big Local areas worked with Local Authorities? What different models of partnerships have been explored and which have been the most successful?**
- 2 What challenges have councils and local communities encountered and how have they been overcome?**
- 3 What recommendations would you make to other councils and community organizations looking to set up a project in their area?**
- 4 What does the ideal relationship between communities and councils look like?**

ANNEX 2:

Glossary of Terms

Big Local

Big Local is a unique programme that puts residents across the country in control of decisions about their own lives and neighbourhoods. Funded by a £217m endowment from the Big Lottery Fund - the largest ever single commitment of lottery funds - it provides in excess of £1.1m of long-term funding over 10-15 years to each of 150 local communities, many of which face major social and economic challenges but have missed out from accessing their fair share of statutory and lottery funds in the past.

Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder, established in 2012 to deliver Big Local. For more information, visit www.localtrust.org.uk.

Big Local Area

An area that is endorsed by and has received at least £1 million from the Local Trust is called a Big Local area. The Big Lottery Fund selected 150 Big Local areas across England that had been overlooked for funding in the past, particularly by the Big Lottery Fund. They will receive funding and support over at least a ten-year period to make a lasting positive difference in their communities.

Big Local Partnership

A Big Local Partnership consists of residents, stakeholders, and others that are involved in Big Local in the area. It is a group of at least eight people, who together are responsible for guiding the overall direction of Big Local in each area. A Big Local partnership is responsible for creating a Big Local plan, and for ensuring it is carried out and that money is spent in an appropriate way.

Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO)

An LTO is chosen by each Big Local partnership to receive, administer and account for the distribution of funding on the partnership's behalf.

Financial agreements are agreed in advance: an LTO receives funding based on the budget in the Big Local Area's plan and the payment schedule attached to the funding offer letter. Local Trust also provide LTO's with a contribution towards their administration and partnership support - which is 5% of the total spend. This contribution is in addition to the £1 million funding that a Big Local Area receives.

Locally trusted organisations in Big Local areas are diverse, and include: housing associations, parish councils, local businesses, charities, voluntary groups, community foundations, schools, credit unions and a GP surgery.

The roles of each LTO may differ from area to area. In some instances, the LTO may deliver activities and services on behalf of the Big Local partnership as part of the Big Local plan. They may also employ and manage a worker, or run a small grants scheme. Though Big Local areas usually chose an individual LTO, in some cases they might want to work with more than one.

Big Local Representative

The Big Local representative role is 'light touch' and often involves mediation and facilitation. The role of a rep is to help an area create their shared vision, develop their Big Local Partnership and develop and implement their Big Local plan. The rep acts as a mentor and critical friend to people on the Big Local journey, and actively seeks for opportunities for residents to take the lead. The support provided by the rep mainly involve visits, face-to-face meetings, and email and telephone support. The rep also provides advice and support to the community on the selection of their locally trusted organisation (LTO), on maintaining their Big Local Partnership, and on the annual review of their Big Local plan, among others.

Project Worker

Project workers are employed and funded by Big Local partnerships to support the delivery of Big Local projects. Their role may involve managing Big Local tasks (e.g. as project managers); someone to engage with the community (e.g. development workers); or someone to give specialist advice and guidance (e.g. personal debt or career advisors).

Big Local Partnership Chair

Following the endorsement of a Big Local partnership, the Big Local chair is responsible for signing a Memorandum of Understanding, which sets out and agrees the relationship between the Big Local partnership and Local Trust. The role of a chair is held by volunteers in different Big Local areas, and involves chairing steering group meetings following an agreed agenda and working closely with local partners to achieve the Big Local objectives for their area.

Rebalancing the power: Five principles for a successful relationship between councils and communities

With financial resources likely to be under pressure for the foreseeable future, councils will increasingly need to become a supporter and enabler of communities ready to solve their own problems. Communities themselves may also need to change their expectations and take the opportunity to identify solutions to problems that local government on its own is no longer able to solve.

This research, which was commissioned by Local Trust to investigate the relationship between councils and communities in Big Local areas, found that where local authorities make room for them, communities often have a real appetite to take on more responsibility.

About NLGN

New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is producing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. www.nlgn.org.uk

About Local Trust

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

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