

# Political activities and Big Local areas

This guidance updates our approach to what we mean by “political activity” and explains what this means for Big Local areas going forward, providing a fuller explanation of what we mean in our grant terms and conditions.

The guidance is split into three sections:

1. Our grant terms and conditions
2. Party politics and Big Local
3. Influencing and campaigning

## Our grant terms and conditions

When we put in place a funding agreement with an LTO we ask them to sign terms and conditions. In the prohibited purposes section it states: “Grants must not be used for any purpose which is prohibited by Big Local funding, including... political activities.”

The primary purpose behind the grant conditions in relation to political activities is to ensure that:

- Big Local areas do not get drawn into matters of party political controversy at a local level, or become associated with the political positions of local political parties
- Big Local funds are not spent on activities that might be interpreted as politically focused campaigning

We recognise that one of the big benefits of Big Local is its ability to provide local residents with a voice and the skills and confidence to influence decisions made in their area, and we have no wish to unnecessarily constrain this as a result of this guidance.

## Party politics and Big Local

### Involvement of local councillors in Big Local partnerships

In some Big Local areas, local councillors sit on – and in some cases chair - Big Local partnerships. Where councillors are members of Big Locals, partnerships should seek to ensure:

- that councillors are not seen to exercise undue influence and control in relation to decision-making. Big Local is intended to support residents develop confidence and control in their areas, which is in addition to the value brought to communities by local councillors

- that there is clarity between the councillor's role on the Big Local partnership as a member (and potentially resident), and their responsibilities as a councillor. This is particularly important when considering external communications, so that there is no suggestion that Big Local funding and the partnership more generally is supporting or promoting the interests of that councillor. This may be a particularly sensitive issue in the run up to local elections.

## Involvement with local political parties

Big Local partnerships bring together local people with an interest in and commitment to their area, and there is often an overlap between partnership members and those interested and involved in local political parties. This is not a problem, provided that Big Local partnerships are careful to manage it in a way that does not expose themselves to the risk of being associated with a particular political party or agenda. This means partnerships should:

- not endorse or oppose the initiatives or manifestos of one political party above another
- try to ensure that their partnership is not dominated by one particular political group at the expense of others
- actively seek to bring new people and voices onto their partnership where there is a concern that it is seen as over-dominated by one particular interest group or voice
- review membership of the partnership to ensure that it broadly reflects the area see [Partnership guidance here.](#)

## Party politics and Big Local funding

Individual members of Big Local partnerships are able to engage in party political activity, however Big Local funds cannot support that activity. In the same way LTOs acting outside of Big Local can do whatever they want, within the constraints placed on them by charity law (where applicable) and their own trustees. However they cannot make use of Big Local funds to support party political activity as that breaches the terms and conditions of funding and they have a

particular responsibility to ensure spend is appropriate.

Organisations that have been funded by Big Local to deliver services and activities are in the same position as LTOs – what they do outside of the confines of Big Local is not a matter for Local Trust or Big Local, but that any Big Local funds they receive should not be used to fund political activity and Big Local partnerships should not provide funding for that purpose.

We would not expect any Big Local funding to be provided to national or local political parties in any circumstances.

## Influencing and campaigning

Through Big Local we are eager to promote democratic participation and recognise that some Big Local partnerships may become involved in the range of community-based campaigning work. For example ensuring that community voices are heard when decisions are made around preserving an asset for community use or maintaining local authority funding for a vitally important local bus service. Other Big Local areas may find themselves

involved in projects which require them to convince local partners, including the local authority, to make decisions that support the delivery of their ambitions – for example deciding to transfer an asset to the Big Local partnership or an associated organisation.

We would expect most Big Local partnerships to take forward activity seeking to influence local decision making to some extent, where it forms part of a partnership plan and contributes towards a shared vision for the area. In particular where it relates to working with local people to:

- establish a shared vision for their area, and the changes that need to be made to achieve it
- work with local partners, including their local authority, to promote their vision for their area, influence decision making and build partnerships to help achieve it
- build the confidence of local people to articulate their views and organise themselves in ways to ensure those views are heard

However, in doing so, Big Local areas should take care to ensure that their activity does not put them in danger of breaching the terms and conditions. This may not necessarily occur because of the subject matter of a particular issue, but rather the manner in which it is pursued, and caution should be applied to ensure activity doesn't become part of any political controversy. This means campaigning activity shouldn't become the predominant activity of the partnership or organisation for an extended period of time.

We have considered defining this further and giving examples but the problem with this is that they inevitably confuse matters further and detract from the flexibility that we are encouraging and is at the heart of our approach and guidance. Instead we acknowledge that each area and case is different and each case must be considered in light of its individual facts and circumstances.

## Further information

If you have any queries about this guidance please contact Local Trust (020 3588 0565; [info@localtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@localtrust.org.uk)).

We do review and update our guidance from time to time and if you have any suggestions please let us know.

### Local Trust

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The endowment for the Big Local programme is held by the Big Local Trust and overseen by Local Trust. The Big Local Trust was established by the National Lottery Community Fund with a National Lottery grant of £196,873,499.

**If you need this document in other formats or a community language please get in touch with Local Trust and we will help you.**

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