

Submitted by Local Trust, 31 October 2017

Civil Society Futures call for evidence – Towards place based resident-led funding

Introduction

- 1. In response to the Inquiry's call for evidence, we present research and learning from the Big Local programme. The programme embodies the Inquiry's principles of being action-oriented, sustainability-driven and people centred. We argue that its key strengths are that it is placed based, long-term, resident-led and non-prescriptive. The flexibility of the programme has enabled it to adapt to a changing environment. Therefore Big Local offers an empowering model, the key tenets of which could be replicated elsewhere.
- 2. One of the questions the Inquiry asks is What types of civil society organisation will be important over the next decade? We address this question by focusing on our place based programme, which is unique in its scale and longevity. As the Inquiry's recent research report indicated, there is growing interest among funders in place based initiatives. In addition, as already noted, the non-prescriptive nature of the programme means it can adapt to changing political and economic contexts, which has relevance for another question of the Inquiry: How will the different forms of civic network respond to social, political, environmental and technological change?
- 3. Big Local is a 15-year Big Lottery endowment to support community development and civic engagement across 150 neighbourhoods in England. It is administered by Local Trust. Although Big Local is only a third of the way through its planned delivery programme, there are already important lessons about approaches to supporting places and communities, the importance of investing in civic/social infrastructure, and the potential for communities to take responsibility for self-commissioning solutions to the problems they face.
- 4. In this submission we outline the programme; detail some of the barriers encountered and how they were overcome; and look at evidence of the impact of the programme so far. It ends by presenting relevant case studies of Big Local areas.





The Big Local programme

Background to Big Local

- 5. In Big Local each area was each awarded £1 million to spend over a 10-15 year period. Big Local areas, typically neighbourhoods of 1500-4500 homes, were selected by the Big Lottery Fund in 2010-12 on the basis that they had historically 'missed out' on their fair share of Lottery and other funding. Often (but not always) this was because they were communities with relatively low levels of civic engagement and, as a consequence, may have lacked a critical mass of active and engaged citizens and community-based organisations competing for grant funding from Lottery and other sources.
- 6. Communities are expected to set their own priorities and output targets, and to organise themselves in ways that are appropriate to their area. The desired outcomes of the overall programme are therefore broad that:
 - 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.
 - People will feel that their area is an even better place to live.
- 7. Big Local builds on learning from previous regeneration and community development programmes, providing an alternative model for creating engaged communities and active residents. In contrast to short-term, prescriptive programmes, where relatively small numbers of people would have to complete a set range of activities in a short space of time, there is much greater scope for a wider range of residents and communities to get involved over a longer period of time. Its key features are that it is:
 - Placed based: Big Local invests in communities as opposed to projects or organisations.
 This provides a basis for community engagement across a range of activities and over a significant period of time residents have multiple opportunities to get involved and can engage on issues in their areas that are important to them.
 - Resident-led and non-prescriptive: Residents make decisions about how the money is spent. There are very few restrictions on what this might be and there is genuine choice, as opposed to choosing from a set of pre-devised options or themes set in advance by funders. Residents produce plans for three years at a time, enabling them to build on their achievements and adapt to changing contexts.
 - Over a significant period of time: With each area having at least ten years to spend the
 money, there is time for networks to develop, involved residents to grow in confidence
 and skills, mistakes to be made and learnt from, and as well as the opportunity to create
 lasting change. As the Third Sector Research Centre note: '...Big Local is in stark
 contrast with previous neighbourhood change and regeneration programmes in that areas
 are not driven by top down targets, annual spend and externally imposed goals and
 outcomes (see for example New Deal for Communities... and the Single Regeneration
 Budget)'2;
- 8. For a resident's perspective on Big Local in their area, and their own personal journey, see Kathryn's story below.

² McCabe, A., Wilson, M. and Macmillan, R. with Morgans, P. and Edwards, M. (2017) Big Local: Beyond the Early Years – Our Bigger Story: The Longitudinal Multi Media Evaluation of Big Local 2015 – 2016. Online at: http://ourbiggerstory.com/OBS-2015-16-Final-Full-Report.pdf., p. 86.

Positive change for people and place³

Kathryn's story from Big Local in Blackpool

When I first started to volunteer at Big Local Revoelution just over two years ago, I was very timid and shy.

Having social anxiety and bipolar disorder made me very isolated and I wouldn't leave the house or even my bed for weeks at a time. From the first day I set foot in the Revoelution hub, I haven't been away.

The Big Local project is unique in that it has put residents in the 150 areas in control, which in itself has raised issues. For us here in Blackpool, residents have been sceptical, they have never been offered opportunities like this: to voice their opinions, have them heard and then have them acted on positively.

We have had to work tirelessly and consistently to assure people that our partnership is resident led and it is actually those who live, work or volunteer in Revoe and sit on our partnership panel that have voting rights. That could be voting on particular projects, who should deliver them and when they should be delivered or voting on local issues that the partnership thinks need addressing.

After all, we live in a deprived area and witness the deprivation in all forms on a daily basis. Who else would be better equipped to identify the needs of their community other than the residents themselves?

I started by making teas and coffee for drop ins, and from this people around me were able to identify my transferable skills such as my IT skills. So from making refreshments, I then started to work on the newsletter, which then led to me taking minutes, controlling social media and arranging meetings.

Local Trust realise that in deprived communities people may not have all the tools that are needed to run projects like this so provide a lot of free training for residents in the 150 areas. It's this training that has helped me understand the third sector, governance and best practice, how to make meetings successful and present with confidence and clarity.

I now know people within my community that I stop and chat to in passing or say Hi to. I now feel a part of my community and a contributing member to positive change for my family, my children, my friends, neighbours and future generations.

The third sector has lost a lot of funding and organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to access even small pots of funding, so £1 million over ten years is a brilliant foundation to work with. It also means we are looking at new and invigorating ways to work in partnership with other services that fulfil all our objectives, which I think is really exciting.

Big Local means opportunity to improve, improve yourself, your area and the lives of those around you. It means change, changing attitudes and perceptions of your area and those you live amongst. It means freedom, freedom to express your experiences and take risks with new ideas and projects. And it means hope, hope for the future, hope that the changes we make have longevity and positively affect the area, hope that every tomorrow is better than today.

Empowering communities in a changing economic and political context

Big Local's focus on civic engagement

- 9. A big focus of early work by many Big Local areas has been around civic engagement perhaps reflecting the extent to which Big Local areas have a history of lack of engagement and participation before the programme. As of July 2017, 134 out of 150 Big Local areas were currently spending money on explicit community engagement projects. For example, see appendix 27.c for a case study on St Oswald and Netherton.
- 10. More widely, Big Local encourages civic engagement and facilitates co-operation in three main ways:
 - The core emphasis on working with and engaging the community and placing them in the lead in defining priorities in their area and then ensuring delivery.
 - The focus of many areas on using their £1 million as leverage to generate engagement with much broader networks of organisations and institutions, including local government and third sector organisations.
 - The ability to bring local authority and civil society organisations onto Big Local partnerships (whilst retaining a resident majority on decision making bodies).
- 11. Communities can be strengthened if the individuals within them are upskilled as noted in the introduction one of the outcomes of Big Local is increase the skills and confidence of residents. This is particularly pertinent because Big Local areas have lower than the national average for educational attainment. Involvement provides opportunities for boosting cultural and social capital, as we saw in 'Kathryn's Story'.

Providing citizens with the influence and leverage

- 12. Big Local was devised before the major public sector spending cuts. But its non prescriptive nature means that areas have been able to adapt to this changing context. In some areas, a focus of Big Local partnerships has been around establishing or re-establishing links with the wider communities they live in, through bringing in services or addressing issues around transport and access to employment. An example is the Wargrave Big Local in Newton-Le-Willows who have invested significantly in bringing a range of new services, and agencies into a community that has suffered from the loss of their major local employer and has traditionally lacked embedded local activity and capacity.⁵
- 13. In some Big Local areas, the £1 million has helped change the way in which local communities and those working with them relate to shared challenges. Whilst it is a relatively small sum of money when compared to other sources of investment and expenditure in many communities, it has nevertheless changed local dynamics, enabling communities to work on solving issues together on an equal footing, as opposed to focusing on problems helping change local citizens from the position of passive applicants for or recipients of assistance to active negotiators of change. See 27.a in the appendix for a case study of Big Local improving green and open spaces in Grassland Hassmoor. In another Big Local area, the partnership has worked with multiple local agencies and established a key role for itself in the local planning and development process, enabling the development of 40 new community-owned homes, the development of major new local sporting facilities and the

⁴ Unpublished analysis of Big Local plans.

- launch of a community energy company, releasing over £4 million of additional resources into the local community. See 27.b in the appendix for a case study of housing developments in Lawrence Weston.
- 14. Where it works best, Big Local money provides local people with a long term, resourced and relevant voice capable not just of representing views but also directly delivering change that they themselves control, providing a focus and a legitimacy to the civic engagement that underpins it. Research on how Big Local areas are attracting additional resources shows that no respondents felt that the area would have received all the additional resources had there not been a Big Local partnership bringing the community together to lead change in their area. Three quarters of people felt that they would have attracted little or no resources without Big Local.⁶

Barriers and enablers to civic engagement

How residents get involved in Big Local

- 15. Although £1 million spread over 10-15 years does not amount to a huge amount of additional resource when compared to statutory and other funding going into many communities, it is a large enough sum to provide a strong focus for engagement, decision making and participation.
- 16. There are typically different levels of involvement of residents in Big Local both between and within Big Local areas. These range from more intensive participation to more light touch involvement. In most Big Local areas, we have seen an increase in levels of participation and in civil society activity, ranging from volunteering to forming new civil society groups and building partnerships in the public, private and third sectors.

Barriers to active engagement

17. As noted, Big Local operates in areas that often have historically low levels of engagement, which may in itself have led to a lack of access to grant funding in the past – there was no-one locally making the case for investment in their area. As a consequence, there have been stark differences in the speed that areas have come together and developed and delivered their plans. The Big Local programme was designed from the outset to allow areas work at their own pace: where Big Local was able to build on and strengthen existing emergent civic activity and networks, areas were able to move more quickly forward; in other areas time was needed to get started. Moreover, within some Big Local areas, partnerships initially found it challenging to engage all parts of the area and all demographic groups. These are the communities that, in terms of engagement, may require the most investment in building sustainable local relationships and shared ambition, and slow progress should not be judged negatively. But with a 10-15 year time horizon, rather than the much shorter duration of many other community engagement and regeneration programmes, it has been possible to allow areas to overcome those issues and move forward at their own pace.

Overcoming barriers to help facilitate engagement

- 18. A key part of the Big Local ethos is to not focus on the deficits of communities, rather their strengths an 'asset based approach'. As IVAR state: 'Local Trust's approach is perceived as an empowerment rather than deficit model focused on recognising and building on strengths and assets in an area, rather than the needs and negatives.' Helping the residents overcome barriers has included:
 - a. **Learning and networking:** A key component of the programme is to share learning about how barriers have been overcome and how they have succeeded in engaging their local communities. These include learning events,⁸ alongside major regional and national networking events that have been run every spring since 2012. These have promoted networking, learning and peer support between areas, and workshops are often led or co-delivered with people from Big Local areas.⁹ There has also been networking facilitated at a local level, often by the Big Local 'Rep' workers employed by Local Trust at a community level to provide light touch mentoring and support to local areas. Reps also have regular network meetings to share their experiences. In addition, evidence and learning has been presented online and shared through social media.¹⁰
 - b. Support: There are various support mechanisms in addition to the peer support through networking. Having a Rep on the ground (even if only for a few days every month) and broader support from Local Trust has been vital in helping Big Local areas facilitate community engagement. There is also other support projects, such as grants for innovative projects in Big Local areas. Many areas employ a support worker to help them. The roles range from administrative support to community development work.
 - c. Developing sites of participation: One early focus of many Big Local has been on the importance of available space to facilitate community activity and engagement which appears to be a key factor in enabling activity to take place within communities. This can be particularly important in communities where traditional places to meet and interact whether the local pub, church or major local place of employment no longer exist. Where areas have existing spaces, Big Local areas have typically been keen to work with rather than sideline them. A significant number of Big Local areas have invested in either establishing or improving local community hubs: 'They tended to be seen by residents as more accessible and as a way of getting more people involved from the local community.'11
- 19. It is important to recognise that this form of support requires significant resourcing and commitment over the long term, requiring a different order of sustained engagement and investment than many shorter term or project based programmes. Over 15 years, Local Trust will be investing some £65m in providing that support approaching 30% of the value of funds directly disbursed. However, it is not clear that the development of a critical mass of civic engagement and organisation is possible in areas with low levels of existing capacity without accepting this as a necessary (and ongoing) investment requirement.

⁷ IVAR. (2015) Funding for resident control: The Local Trust experience so far. Online at: https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Funding-for-Resident-Control-Local-Trust-2015.pdf p. 4.

⁸ Turner, J. (2016) Effectiveness of Big Local learning support – Executive Summary. Online at:

 $[\]underline{http://localtrust.org.uk/assets/downloads/documents/EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY\%2018\%2016\%20Big\%20Local\%20effectiveness\%20of\%20learning.pdf. \\$

⁹ NCVO, IVR and OPM. (2014) Big Local: The Early Years – Evaluation Report. Online at:

http://localtrust.org.uk/assets/downloads/documents/Final report reduced.pdf p. 26.

¹⁰ See various case studies and resources: http://localtrust.org.uk/library/

¹¹ School for Public Health Research. (2016) Communities in Control Study – What are we learning? Online at:

http://localtrust.org.uk/assets/downloads/documents/Communities%20in%20control%20-%20What%20are%20we%20learning%20final.pdf p. 2.

What's different about Big Local? – Evidence so far

- 20. We are still at an early stage in both the delivery and evaluation of what was designed as a 10-15 year programme. There is therefore a need for some caution in drawing significant conclusions either positive or negative from what has happened to date. However, a great deal of evidence is collected on the programme, both internally and from other agencies and this feeds into two independent evaluation programmes that will report during the course of the programme. ¹² Local Trust is also, separately, investing in a Knowledge Programme to capture wider learning from the programme as it is delivered.
- 21. Evidence of the impact of Big Local on engagement is, however, starting to emerge:
 - 150 partnerships have been formed each with a minimum of eight members (although most have more), and all with a majority of local residents, developed a plan outlining what they propose to deliver over the next few years and leading the delivery of that vision. This is one of the few requirements of the programme, and represents an achievement in itself in some areas, especially where there may not have been a significant history of successful community engagement or involvement. The Communities in Control research found that being in control mattered particularly where residents felt they had been powerless to change things in their area in the past. What might be seen as modest achievements in terms of engaging the community can in fact be, considering the community's starting point, a significant shift. This is like 'value added' measures used in education. These do not just judge a school by the exam results of children towards the end of their schooling, it considers their journey by comparing their end results to their educational level at the start.
 - Residents feel more in control: Initial evaluation from the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) states: 'In Big Local, residents decide upon any changes that they feel need to happen, design how change will take place, and determine appropriate timeframes for affecting change.'¹⁴ In a survey of those involved in Big Local Partnerships; 80% of members strongly agreed or agreed that residents are leading Big Local in their area and 78% strongly agreed or agreed that Big Local is giving residents more control over what happens in their areas.¹⁵
 - **Health benefits:** The programme is the subject of a major independent public health study funded and conducted by the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR), which suggests some evidence of measurable positive impacts of civic engagement and participation on health and well-being: 'residents felt involvement was improving their own mental and, to some extent, physical, health by expanding their social support systems and increasing their sense of identity and self-worth, their personal power to manage their own wellbeing and their feelings of having something to look forward to.'¹⁶ However, the ongoing study also found that involvement can be challenging and stressful for those more intensely involved, such as partnership members. We look at some of the challenges facing partnership members shortly.

 $^{12\} Various\ evaluations\ and\ research\ on\ the\ programme\ can\ be\ found\ here:\ \underline{http://localtrust.org.uk/library/research-and-evaluation/library-and-evaluation/library-and-evalua$

¹³ SPHR. (2017) Big Local and health inequalities: What are we learning? — Update October 2017. Online at: http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/health-inequalities/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/10/CiC-Big-Local-and-health-inequalities-Update-Oct2017-webversion.pdf p. 1.

¹⁴ McCabe et al., Big Local: Beyond the Early Years, p. 47.

¹⁵ Results from the partnership survey were published in a series of blogs: http://localtrust.org.uk/library/blogs/are-residents-leading-big-local

¹⁶ School for Public Health Research. (2017) Does community empowerment have the potential to improve health in disadvantaged areas?. To be presented at Public health England conference (Warwick University) on 12th September 2017. For information about the study: http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/health-inequalities/home/

• The longer timescale is helpful: In surveys of partnership members 84% agreed that the Big Local programme has given them the freedom to do things to a timescale that works for them. 70% agreed that they are satisfied with the pace of their progress with Big Local. As one partnership member stated: 'the 10-year funding gives time to achieve something lasting.' Our experience of the programme so far is that in areas with little previous history of community involvement or activity, or where there is not a clear pre-existing sense of collective and shared identity, it can take several years of patient support and engagement to establish the trust, skills, confidence and vision needed for local people to start to take on the responsibility for making decisions about their own neighbourhoods. The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) outlines the importance of the timeframe in avoiding short-termism: 'Most programmes emphasise the way in which capacity and community confidence in taking control builds over time. It also takes time to build trust – across communities and between communities and their partners. Conversely, short-term programmes, despite significant achievements, have been hampered by the need to demonstrate success over a limited period.' 18

Challenges

- 22. That is not to say that Big Local has been easy or straightforward. Whilst some local communities have achieved amazing things in a very short time with the resources made available to them, as noted above, others have had to work hard to get themselves to the point where they are able to take on the challenge of delivering change in their areas.
 - It can take time to establish new civic structures from scratch particularly in communities that have not historically had significant local infrastructure to support engagement and local participation and decision making.
 - Resources can bring conflict as well as releasing potential. Some areas initially struggled to reach agreement on priorities, or to get their plans off the ground. In other areas, those 'sticking their head above the parapet' to try to organise and change their communities have found themselves the subject of challenging treatment. Where a Big Local area boundary failed to reflect 'natural' communities, or brought together multiple areas with distinct identities and interests, considerable time was sometimes needed to overcome initial suspicion and create a shared vision. Local Trust has invested heavily in providing support for areas to overcome their difficulties and resolve local conflicts.
 - Sustaining engagement is important as some of our areas reach the mid-point of their programme, some are having to work hard to maintain impetus and involvement, and consider issues around how they renew core partnership members and avoid individuals being burnt out by the expectations and commitment that can come with leading and driving forward work at a community level. In some areas, those with the time to become involved have tended to be older than the general population, as younger people with jobs and families struggle to find time to sustain involvement. However, this in itself presents challenges to sustainability as local partnership members age.

¹⁷ Local Ttrust partnership survey results: http://localtrust.org.uk/library/blogs/are-residents-leading-big-local

¹⁸ Baker, L., Hennessy, C. and Taylor, M. (2013) *Big Local: What's new and different?* Online at: https://www.ivar.org.uk/research-report/big-local-whats-new-and-different/. p. 3.

Conclusion – An adaptable model for rebuilding civil society?

- 23. Big Local represents a distinctive and radical approach to tackling many of the issues being focused on by the Inquiry. It shifts the centre of gravity away from grant makers and funders towards communities they are best placed to identify local need they can build and rebuild civil society in areas where it has disappeared or never emerged.
- 24. As noted by the Inquiry, while the funding in many contemporary place based programmes may be significantly less than the regeneration programmes of the late 1990s and 2000s, their contribution in part lay in fostering engagement. Crisp *et al.* 2016 (cited by the Inquiry) summarises this: 'Community led approaches are often as much about the process of mobilising individuals and communities as pursuing a clear defined set of outcomes.' While this mobilisation is the essence of Big Local, the programme is also achieving focused outcomes *as defined by the residents* in relatively small areas. Focusing resources on hyperlocal areas, smaller than those in programmes such as *New Deal for Communities*, can maximise impact. Big Local and other placed based programmes cannot solve all the issues resulting from the withdrawal of government funding, but can equip communities to react, upskill and focus on tangible change on a micro-level.
- 25. Long-term, non-prescriptive funding also enables vital adaptability. Plans can adapt to the changing broader climate, which is the most feasible model in long-term funding. Whilst Big Local was launched in 2010 at a time of relatively generous public funding settlements, it has developed during a time of increasing pressure on the public purse. Big Local therefore provides an interesting insight into approaches take by some communities to identifying and self-commissioning solutions to long term and previously intractable issues they face, and an evidence base around both the potential for communities to respond to challenges arising from the withdrawal of the state from some areas of activity, but also the considerable support that is needed to get communities to the point at which they can confidently take on that sort of challenge.
- 26. Big Local is still at an early stage in its development, with nearly a decade left to run. Therefore the information and evidence in this submission should be viewed as emergent and partial. But Big Local is likely to represent an important source of evidence and learning over the next five to ten years. Local Trust will continue to invest in sharing learning both positive and negative as an ongoing contribution to policy making and developing practice around civic engagement, community empowerment and neighbourhood renewal and regeneration.

Submitted by Local Trust, 31 October 2017

¹⁹ Crisp et al. (2016) quoted in Civil Society Futures Inquiry. (2017) Civil Society Futures, p. 28.

APPENDIX

Examples of initiatives in Big Local areas

- 27. Taking an active role in decision making is an act of citizenship itself. There are numerous specific examples within Big Local areas around promoting engagement. We have outlined these below:
 - a) Developing green and open spaces in Grassland Hasmoor: In Grassland Hasmoor the presence of Big Local stimulated the Green and Open Spaces working group who were working closely with the relevant local authorities to improve pathways and make them more accessible, something which local rangers see as a great opportunity for facilitating change. They have also harnessed volunteers to deliver their summer holiday and food projects, leading to a reputation with councils and others that residents can make things happen.²⁰
 - b) Facilitating new housing in Lawrence Weston: Lawrence Weston Big Local has worked closely with its Locally Trusted Organisation (Ambition Lawrence Weston) on various projects. This includes developing the large area of derelict land in the middle of the estate. There are plans for a new supermarket, new housing (including shared ownership and intermediate market rent) and local services, including a GP surgery, in a community hub. They have worked with a number of local authorities, including in Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, which has attracted Coastal Communities Fund monies and brought other investment in the area including a supermarket. They have also helped develop wind turbine and a solar farm which result in greener energy and a financial return on investment.²¹
 - c) Tackling anti-social behaviour in St Oswald and Netherton: The area made
 Citizenship one of the priorities in their Big Local plan. They defined it specifically in
 terms of tackling anti-social behaviour. In order to achieve this, they worked with
 services offering provision to NEET's (Not in Education, Employment or Training) to
 encourage community awareness and respect. In order to reduce anti-social behaviour
 they wanted local people to be able to access positive, affordable, local activities and to
 become engaged, involved and take ownership of their projects. This included providing
 volunteering opportunities for young people and the long term unemployed.

²⁰ For more detail see: McCabe et al., Big Local: Beyond the Early Years, p. 76.

²¹ For more detail see: McCabe et al., Big Local: Beyond the Early Years, pp. 43-44 and https://www.bigissue.com/news/bristol-residents-plan-community-housing-project/