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Community Contributions in Later Life

Introduction

In this briefing, we will be focusing on the community contributions in later life within the Big Local programme. 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. People in later life are playing a vital role in the programme, as well as being one of the many beneficiary groups.

In Big Local, each area was 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. 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.
- **Resident-led and non-prescriptive:** Residents make decisions about how the money is spent.
- **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.

Background to Big Local areas

Various demographic data is collected about Big Local areas. The most relevant for this submission relates to older residents, who tend to be worse off in Big Local areas, in terms of wealth, loneliness and health, than the national average:

-Pensioners in poverty

- England average: 15.6%
- Big Local average: 27%

-Probability of loneliness for those aged 65+ (closer to zero=higher probability of loneliness)

- England average: -3.9
- Big Local average: -3.6

-People with a limiting long-term illness (aged 65+)

- England average: 53.1%
- Big Local average: 62.4%

The National Institute for Health Research, School for Public Health Research (SPHR) are conducting an independent evaluation, the Communities in Control (CiC) study, which assesses the health inequality impact of the Big Local programme. They highlight that there is a very significant body of evidence documenting the scale and nature of the health inequalities associated with unequal social and economic living and working conditions. Perhaps the most profound dimension of these inequalities are those associated with life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at birth between more and less disadvantaged areas of England. SPHR also note that the vast majority of Big Local areas are relatively disadvantaged, with around a fifth (n= 34; 23%) being amongst the 10 percent most deprived small areas in England and 127 or 85% falling within the 30% most deprived areas.

The main things that discourage or prevent people aged 50 and over from making a contribution to their community

This is a broad group, both in terms of age – the challenges facing 50 year olds may differ to those experienced by people in their 80s – and other intersecting demographic factors, such as ethnicity and income.

It is worth breaking down this age group a little. The Community Life Survey statistics on volunteering suggest:

-Formal volunteering for those aged 50plus tends to be high. For those aged 50-64, 27% volunteer at least once a month; for those 65-74 it rises to 31%, but for those over 75 and over it drops to 24%. The reasons for these differing levels of engagement among the over 50s might be speculated on. The 50-64 age group are more likely to be in work and it might be assumed that those 75 and over might volunteer less because of ill health. But we should be wary about making such assumptions.

-Does type of volunteering matter? The 75 and over group were more likely to *informally* volunteer (36%), higher than the 50-64 group (29%), and not far behind the 65-74 group (38%). So it may well be that the *type* of volunteering activity at a certain age is important too.

(These figures are based on the face-to-face estimates in 2015/16 before the methodology was changed).

The main things that support people aged 50 and over to make a contribution to their community

A key part of the Big Local ethos is to not focus on the deficits of communities, but rather on their strengths – an ‘asset based approach’. The vast majority of the partnership members, the residents who lead on Big Local in the 150 areas, are aged over 45 (see more detail below). Helping the residents overcome barriers, to become engaged and stay engaged, has included:

- a. **Learning, training 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. There are also more formal training opportunities, which help to upskill residents. Going forward, there will be learning clusters developed, focusing on pressing issues in certain Big Local areas, such as housing and gangs. 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.

- b. **Support on the ground:** 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. Many areas employ a support worker to help them. The roles range from administrative support to community development work.¹
- c. **Developing sites of participation:** One early focus of many Big Local areas 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.
- d. **Importance of residents having control:** SPHR note that there is a growing body of evidence on the importance for health of the control people have over decisions that have an impact on their lives. In terms of Big Local, they find evidence supporting a hypothesis that empowerment of residents living in more disadvantaged circumstances may have positive effects on mental health and wellbeing for those who participate. However, impacts are complex. For example, residents most closely involved in Big Local activities also reported challenges and stress from participating in these collective decision making processes. In some cases, these experiences were reported to have had negative impacts on subjective feelings of wellbeing.² In contrast, other residents reported that involvement, particularly social opportunities beyond core decision-making structures, had positively transformed their subjective wellbeing. This points to the need for initiatives to create multiple opportunities to increase the breadth and depth of participation and for evaluations to track the differential effects of these over time.

Examples of effective action being taken to encourage more people aged 50+ to contribute to their community

There are multiple ways that people aged 50plus engage and benefit from Big Local:

- ***Involvement in Big Local partnerships***
People aged 50plus play a key role in Big Local partnerships, resident led groups that consult the local community and administer the delivery of Big Local in their local area. The age categories do not match Centre for Aging Better's exactly, but demonstrate the importance of older people's involvement in this key aspect of the programme.
 - 52% of Big Local partnership members are aged 45-64
 - 26% of Big Local partnership members are aged 65 and over
 - 24% of Big Local partnership members aged 65 and over contribute 10 or more hours a week to Big Local. This is compared to 14% of those aged 45-64, and 12% of those aged 30-44.

¹ See various case studies and resources: <http://localtrust.org.uk/library/>

² Update from Phase 2 of the Communities in Control study (oct 2017): <http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/health-inequalities/news-events/update-phase-2-communities-control-study/> [accessed 10 Dec 2017]

- **Intergenerational activities**

Kids In Communication in Scotlands and Bushbury Hill: This initiative works with and trains young people in local communities to support older residents in using digital technology to connect them with family, friends and the wider community. The project helps to engage young people in local activities that help them to make a positive impact within their community. The project has also reduced social isolation amongst the older generation and challenges the stereotype that all young people are disruptive in the community.

Intergenerational lunch clubs in Kirk Hallam: In two local schools, Kirk Hallam Big Local have started school lunches where a group of local older residents join the children at school each week. The lunches are free for older residents to go to and aimed to make them feel more involved in the community, reduce isolation and break down intergenerational barriers. The schoolchildren help to greet the older residents and serve them food. In an interim report, it was noted that the children look forward to the responsibility they have hosting the lunch as well as the conversations. It said: *“We have to break down activities for older residents, recognising there is a big difference from 50 to 90 years old.”*

- **Having young and older outreach workers**

William Morris ‘Big Local champions’: Two Big Local champions have been employed by William Morris Big Local, one older and one younger person, to link residents to activities and events in the community. This decision was made based on the challenges they were experiencing getting both older and younger people involved in community events. Their job description entails talking to different community members in different community settings, leafleting and posting on social media

- **Older adults as the focus of Big Local activities**

Spring Chicken Fitness in Gannow: Gannow Big Local has partnered with Spring Chicken Fitness to provide fitness classes for older men once or twice a week. The fitness classes are designed to be easy to follow along to at any pace and there is no music played to make you feel like you have to be doing the exercises quickly. For more information about this, you can watch the video below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cElCcaFJjXw&app=desktop>

Friday friends group in North West Ipswich: This is about providing older people with more support. Their website states: *‘As with all our work, local residents lead this group, volunteering their time and being the voice of the community, alongside organisations that can help us achieve our aims’*. Their aims include to provide social activities, music for sing-alongs, supporting lunch clubs, uniting different age groups, bringing together different housing groups and creating a more dementia-friendly community.

Summary

Big Local is a place based programme that puts local residents at its core. There is great scope for personal development for those involved, particularly those on partnerships. Thus far those aged 50plus have formed a key part of this highly engaged group in Big Local. This type of programme can provide a model for this age group to get further involved in their local community in flexible and innovative ways.