

Submitted by Local Trust, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018

# Social Housing Green Paper

38. In addition to sharing positive stories of social housing residents and their neighbourhoods, what more could be done to tackle stigma?

Tackling stigma is a key part of the Big Local programme. Big Local is a 15-year programme to support community development and civic engagement across 150 neighbourhoods in England funded by an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund. The Big Local programme puts over £1m of funding directly in the hands of local residents in each of these neighbourhoods, enabling them to make decisions on how the money is spent to improve their local area.

An independently funded research project by the School for Public Health Research looks at social determinants of health in Big Local. Part of the study looks at area reputation and related stigma. In a forthcoming article for the Lancet,<sup>[1]</sup> the researchers outline how residents reported that negative media coverage affected reputations of their local areas and how an area's reputation was also shaped by the attitudes of public officials, local politicians, estate agents, and the public. The study found the following helped to positively influence the area reputation:

'Direct collective action taken through Big Local included publicity work to resist negative portrayals of areas in local newspapers. Indirect actions included festivals and neighbourhood improvements to increase the likelihood that visitors would view areas as safe and desirable places to visit. Findings also highlighted the civic roles of residents, challenging stereotyped images of communities living in disadvantaged areas.'

Empowering residents to take positive action helps create a virtuous circle in terms of positive community activities, reinforced by "good news" messages and visible local change. This is not just about changing the tone of media coverage of local areas. Placing resources in the hands of local residents can change the way they are regarded and related to in key local networks, for example with local authorities, other public bodies and local businesses, helping local people move from being seen as drivers of complaints and demands for funding towards being seen as equal partners in designing and delivering solutions and partners in achieving positive change.

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[1] Ruth Ponsford, Emma Halliday, Michelle Collins, Matthew Egan, Courtney Scott, Jennie Popay. (2018) 'Area reputation as an under-acknowledged determinant of health inequalities: evidence from a systems evaluation of a major community empowerment initiative in England'. Lancet, forthcoming.

## 25. Are there any other innovative ways of giving social housing residents greater choice and control over the services they receive from landlords?

Big Local is a simple concept – in 150 communities across the country, local residents have been given £1 million each to use over ten-fifteen years on resident-identified priorities. Many of these communities have high levels of social housing, and a significant number are on housing estates managed by a single social landlord.

Big Local is place-based funding. In basic terms, place-based funding is about supporting places, not projects and organisations. Funds committed over ten-fifteen years, in contrast to shorter-term regeneration and community programmes of the past. Often these gave residents only a limited say in how the funding should be spent and provided little opportunity for community capacity and confidence to be built and sustained during the lifespan of the programme.

By committing funds directly to local residents over a long time frame, Big Local has enabled local areas to build new partnerships and lever in other sources of funding. It has also enabled areas – often previously low on civic/social capital – to increase civic engagement amongst people living in their neighbourhoods. In Big Local areas across the country we are seeing a massive increase in volunteering, with local residents collectively giving 1,000s of hours a week, with over a third of the 2000 local residents directly involved in Big Local not having taken part in activity of this sort in the past.

By placing significant funds directly in the hands of local residents, Big Local models a different approach to tackling change in communities, maximising the value-add that the community can bring to initiatives delivered by local partners, including landlords and local authorities, and providing communities with the scope to commission their own solutions where they feel their needs are not being met. There are already examples of social landlords working productively in partnership with Big Local areas:

In Dover, Southern Housing Group has collaborated with Dover Big Local in the delivery of services to residents of their estates in the Dover area, including sharing a community development worker with the community-based partnership delivering the Big Local in their neighbourhood.

In Newton Le Willows near Warrington, Torus Housing Group has worked effectively with the Wargrave Big Local around co locating services to residents in the community centre around which the Big Local is based, enabling both landlord and local community benefit from joint working on shared problems.

So how would the Big Local model translate into a social housing environment? Big Local boils down to providing residents with *meaningful* control over an *asset of substance* over the *long term*. A million pounds is a lot of money compared to small grants, yet it is relatively minor when compared to a local authority's social care budget - typically Big Local amounts to some £10-15 per household per year over the period of the programme. Big Local has been used to buy buildings and build play parks; it has also been used to build small flower beds or put in a bin; in some areas access to the funding has underwritten

bigger projects such as the establishment of a local energy company or the building of new community-owned homes; in others it has funded community-based family support or skills programmes for those conventional state delivered programmes have not reached. Critically, Big Local enables communities to commit resources to the areas and issues they want to change and improved, without the bureaucracy associated with other forms of getting involved. There is no need, for example, for residents to become a TMO or needing to get bogged down in the bureaucracy of housing management in order to achieve change in their areas.

At a basic level, applying Big Local principles to social housing could simply mean where possible, some budget being delegated by housing associations to residents over the long term to improve their local area with less constraints than might be applied to other funding into an area such as housing management or tenancy support. This might be provided alongside some support to help local residents build the confidence to make decisions and oversee delivery of their priorities. A more ambitious approach might involve landlords looking to deliver regeneration delegating more extensive budgets to local residents to deploy locally themselves, rather than simply consulting on how resources should be spent.

A key factor in the success of Big Local as a model is the support provided alongside funds for local areas. A significant amount of the Big Local Trust's endowment is also allocated to learning events and specialist advice from partners. Support to local residents is also provided by a 'Rep' - typically an experienced community development professional - who provides guidance and challenge, and a Locally Trusted Organisation, selected by residents to administer funds on their behalf. Critically, all support is designed and delivered around the principles of being 'light touch' and 'resident-led'.

Some providers of Social Housing appear to be designing their support to communities along similar lines. For instance, the Bromford Neighbourhood Coach model seeks to provide a local and consistent source of support to their customers<sup>1</sup>. Many social housing providers have small grants pots, with some exploring how they can let residents decide how funds are allocated, for example by using Spacehive<sup>2</sup>, although to date these tend to be relatively small scale and short term compared to the Big Local programme.

These examples are promising, and show that many of the principles of the Big Local programme are compatible with the other functions of social housing management. Social housing providers could benefit from further experimentation in delegating funding to local communities: by making a long term commitment to support residents to take more control over the investment being made into their homes and neighbourhoods.

#### 44. How can we encourage social housing residents to be involved in the planning and design of new developments?

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://medium.com/purposeemagazine/q-a-darrin-gamble-bromford-9b3d40638cb3>

<sup>2</sup> <http://innovationlaunchpad.org/portfolio/spacehive/>

Around 33% of housing in Big Local areas is social rented housing, compared to the England average of 18%, with some Big Local areas with as much as 84% social rented housing in their areas<sup>3</sup>.

The Big Local model has helped to upskill individuals in the community, unlocking greater participation in the planning and design of new developments.

For instance, Neighbourhood Planning powers created through the Localism Act 2011 have been used by several Big Local areas.

Lawrence Weston produced a Neighbourhood Plan to support their overall community strategy, which was driven by the closure of a key asset that helped to connect their area to the wider city region. The Neighbourhood Plan was hard work to develop and drew on significant in-kind contributions from consultants. The community use their £1m of Big Local funding strategically. It's led to significant benefits to the community, including closer working with housing associations and other developers, better decisions made on how CIL (community infrastructure levy) funds are spent locally, and an innovative local lettings policy.

The People's Empowerment Alliance of Custom House (PEACH) bypassed the formal routes communities can use to influence the built environment. Residents placed in temporary accommodation in Custom House organised through Big Local to highlight problems with the management of their homes. While some improvements to their service have been made, they have thought more strategically about the need for social housing in their area and produced an alternative regeneration plan for Custom House. The plan has since been picked up by the new Mayor of Newham, who is working with the community to develop a plan for the regeneration of the area.

The Big Local model has enabled social housing residents to upskill and grow the confidence to act on housing and planning issues. However, there are some challenges.

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<sup>3</sup> Shows the proportion of housing that is rented from a Local Authority, Housing Associations or Registered Social Landlords. The tenure of a household is derived from the response to the 2011 Census question asking whether the household owns or rents its accommodation and, if rented, from the response to the question asking who is the landlord.

Rate calculated as = (Social rented households)/(All households (census KS402))\*100

**Date:** 2011

**How often updated:** 10 yearly (published January 2013)

**Source:** Census 2011 (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks402ew>)

Inner East Preston Big Local have felt that neighbourhood planning process is “promising more than it can deliver”<sup>4</sup>. While they were made a statutory consultee for all planning applications in the area, they’ve yet to successfully influence any planning decision. Residents have now mostly stopped engaging with planning applications.

The Northfleet Big Local community is surrounded by the new Ebbsfleet Garden City development. The scale of the project makes it difficult for the community to understand how to shape the design of, or process for, the development.

In Southampton, SO18 Big Local have been attempting to shape regeneration of several housing blocks in their area. Their efforts have been frustrated by a lack of Local Authority capacity to engage with residents and a lack of clarity about the community benefits the regeneration will provide.

The Big Local programme has supported social housing residents to upskill and to shape the built environment. As a result some barriers to resident involvement in the built environment have been revealed. As a response government should reflect on the extent to which resident involvement initiatives are being designed around the principles of long-term support to residents and genuine community control over resources.

#### 46. How we can boost community-led housing and overcome the barriers communities experience to developing new community owned homes?

The Big Local programme shows that local communities, given the capacity to act, can improve their local housing situation.

Goldthorpe Big Local, near Barnsley, wanted to improve the quality of housing in their area. They’ve purchased a number empty neglected properties and refurbished them drawing on the skills of a local partner, Barnsley Community Build.

In Pendle, Bradley Big Local want to influence the local housing market by delivering a demonstrator scheme of a new type of housing for the area: two to three bed family homes in an area characterised by one to two bed terraced homes. The Local Authority have transferred a piece of land to a newly set up Community Land Trust, in the corner of a larger site they expect to be developed by private developers in future.

Distington Big Local, near Workington, have purchased a site in the heart of the village which they are planning to use to provide community-owned dementia-friendly older people’s housing with support from the Community Housing Fund, enabling older people to stay in the area as they need more care, rather than having to leave their community in order to receive the support they need.

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<sup>4</sup> The Journal of the Town and Country Planning Association

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<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/journal>

Community priorities are rarely focused on just one issue. Other Big Local areas have looked to develop housing as part of a broader ambition to secure space and resources in the long run for their community.

In Lincoln, Birchwood Big Local wanted to improve a large area of green space whilst providing much needed housing for older people. The council transferred ownership of the land to them, on the understanding that by developing a corner of the site, they'll generate an income capable of maintaining the rest of the land.

Both Whitleigh Big Local in Plymouth and Whitley Bay Big Local near Newcastle are looking to develop housing alongside new community spaces. Across England, community spaces have been lost over time, highlighted in Dan Gregory's work on social infrastructure<sup>5</sup>. Big Locals have identified housing development and lettings as a potential new stream of funding for community spaces.

The Big Local programme is designed to build on the unique assets of each neighbourhood, and so attempts to draw commonalities between the areas should be treated with caution. However, Big Local groups are encountering similar challenges when developing community owned homes.

The Big Local model recognises that communities need a consistent offer over a long period of time to create lasting change. The Community Housing Fund provides much needed support to communities, but delays have sapped the momentum in many Big Local areas necessary to deliver to housing project. The most damaging effect of delays has been the substantial revision to the time period the Fund will be available to bid into. According to the National Community Land Trust Network, the fund was originally envisaged as a five year fund, but will now only be open for 18 months for bids<sup>6</sup>. Our experience of the Big Local programme is that this will in all likelihood discourage many community housing groups from having the confidence to start the lengthy process of engaging the community and developing a housing scheme.

Ultimately, it is important to recognise that communities are often interested in more than just housing. By providing capacity building to communities across the country, alongside encouraging landlords to devolve funding to local communities, it could unlock a wave of interest in community-led change. In some areas, this may include community-led housing, delivered with creativity, and creating positive social outcomes, in others it may help sustain and improve neighbourhoods in a wider range of ways, drawing on the energy and potential of local people that can be released when they are provided with time, support and resources to deliver on their ambitions.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://localtrust.org.uk/library/research-and-evaluation/skittled-out>

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/about-the-network/our-campaigns/community-housing-fund>

