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# Partnership members survey 2020: The effects of COVID-19

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*A version of this paper was published internally by Local Trust in 2021. This version has been lightly edited to make it accessible for a general audience, with core terms and concepts explained wherever possible. Please refer to our website for more information about the structure and goals of Local Trust.*

*This brief presents findings from the 2020 partnership members survey. The survey was conducted from June to August 2020. It asked Big Local partnership members about their experiences as part of the decision-making group in their Big Local area.<sup>1</sup> In total, we received 1,018 responses across 148 Big Local partnerships. This brief focuses on responses to survey questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

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## Key points

- Half of respondents said they had been directly impacted by COVID-19 either through illness (directly, household or family member), furlough, or loss of household income. Younger, less educated, and non-white respondents were more likely to say they were directly impacted.
- A vast majority of Big Local partnership members said their partnership supported more people than usual during the pandemic. 42% of respondents said they had seen an increase in volunteers.
- Those directly impacted by COVID-19 were statistically less positive about their Big Local experience.
- A majority of Big Local partnership members have changed how much time they spend on Big Local. 32% of respondents said the time they spent on Big Local increased, 31% said it had decreased and around 29% said it remained the same. A small portion have completely stopped their involvement. The 2020 partnership reviews also showed a decline in the total number of partnership members. These findings show that in many Big Local partnerships, a smaller number of partnership members took on the responsibility of leading Big Local during the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Big Local areas are neighbourhoods selected by the National Lottery Community Fund to receive at least £1m. Local Trust is working with 150 Big Local areas.

# Introduction

[Big Local partnerships](#) are resident-led groups of people who drive the overall direction of [Big Local](#) within areas. In summer 2020, a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>2</sup> Local Trust conducted a voluntary survey of Big Local partnership members; the third biennial survey conducted since 2016.

1,018 partnership members completed all or part of the survey and told us about themselves, their involvement in Big Local, how they felt about their community, what they were proud of and what they were struggling with. Many of the questions in the survey were the same ones asked in previous surveys. However, several new questions were added relating to people's experience of the pandemic.

This briefing paper highlights the findings from these COVID-19 questions, focusing initially on how all respondents answered the questions about COVID-19, and then comparing responses between those who said they had been personally affected by COVID-19 and those who had not.

## Findings

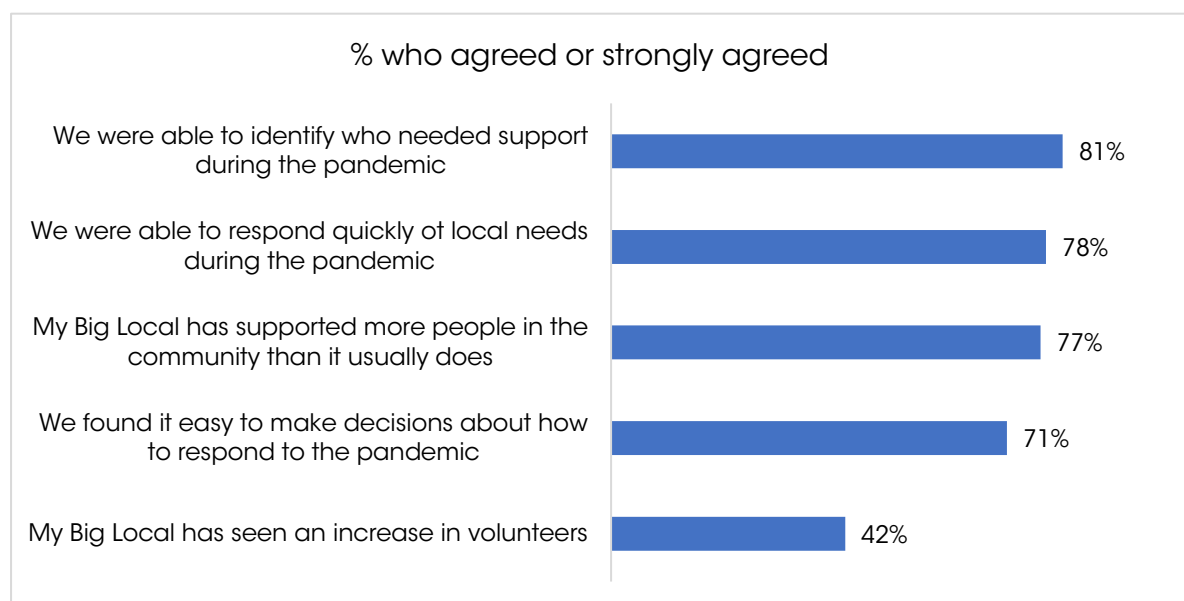
### 1) All respondents and COVID-19

#### Big Local partnerships during the pandemic

[Previous research has shown](#) that Big Local partnerships have been very active in responding to the pandemic. To find out more about this, the survey asked respondents about their activities during this time.

Over three quarters (77%) of respondents said their partnership supported more people than usual during the pandemic, and 42% said they had seen an increase in volunteers. Also, the majority of respondents felt that their partnership was able to identify who needed support (81%), were able to respond quickly to local needs (78%) and found it easy to make decisions about how to respond (71%).

**Graph 1.1: Big Local partnerships during the pandemic**



<sup>2</sup> Partnership members could complete the survey online, by paper or by phone. The survey started on 1 June, 2021 and ended on 31 August 2021.

In addition, the majority of respondents said their partnership changed the way it made decisions during the pandemic (63%) with many moving decision-making online. Despite the pandemic, 83% said all partnership members had the opportunity to take part in decision-making during this time. This suggests that, despite the challenges around them, partnerships were able to identify the support their communities needed, respond to this need (and quickly), and ensure that, in most cases, all partnership members still had opportunities to be involved in decision-making.

### Individual respondents' activities during the pandemic

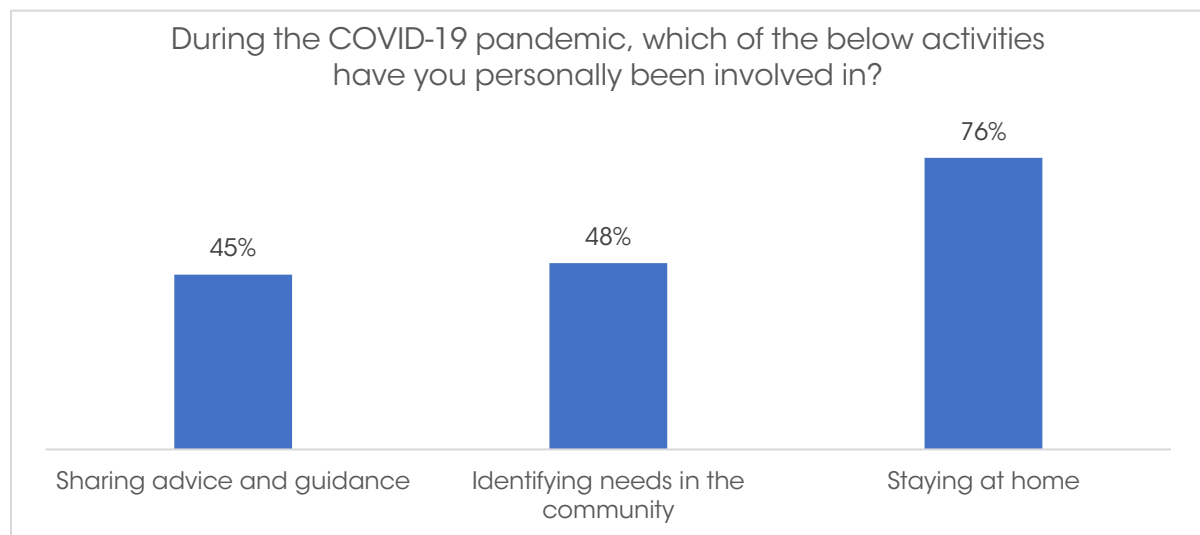
To better understand their circumstances and activities during the pandemic, we asked respondents several questions about their employment status in February 2020 and in the week prior to completing the survey. We also included questions about their personal activities and experiences during the pandemic.

For some, there were changes in their personal circumstances between February 2020 and the summer during the pandemic. In February 2020, the highest proportion of respondents were in full-time paid employment (36%), retired from paid work (26%) or in part-time paid employment (21%). The remainder were engaged in other non-paid activities (7%), unable to work due to long term sickness or disability (5%) or were looking after the home or family (4%).

In summer 2020, the proportion of respondents in paid employment or retired had decreased, whilst the proportion of those looking after the home or family or engaged in other non-paid activities had increased. Additionally, 5% of respondents were on furlough. The proportion unable to work due to long-term sickness or disability remained the same at 5%.

In terms of the activities, they were personally involved in during the pandemic, at the time of asking, most respondents (76%) were following government guidance and staying at home. However, respondents were still active locally in other ways. Almost half of respondents were involved in identifying needs in the community (48%) and shared advice and guidance with others (45%).

**Graph 1.2: Big Local partnership members' activities during the pandemic (1)**



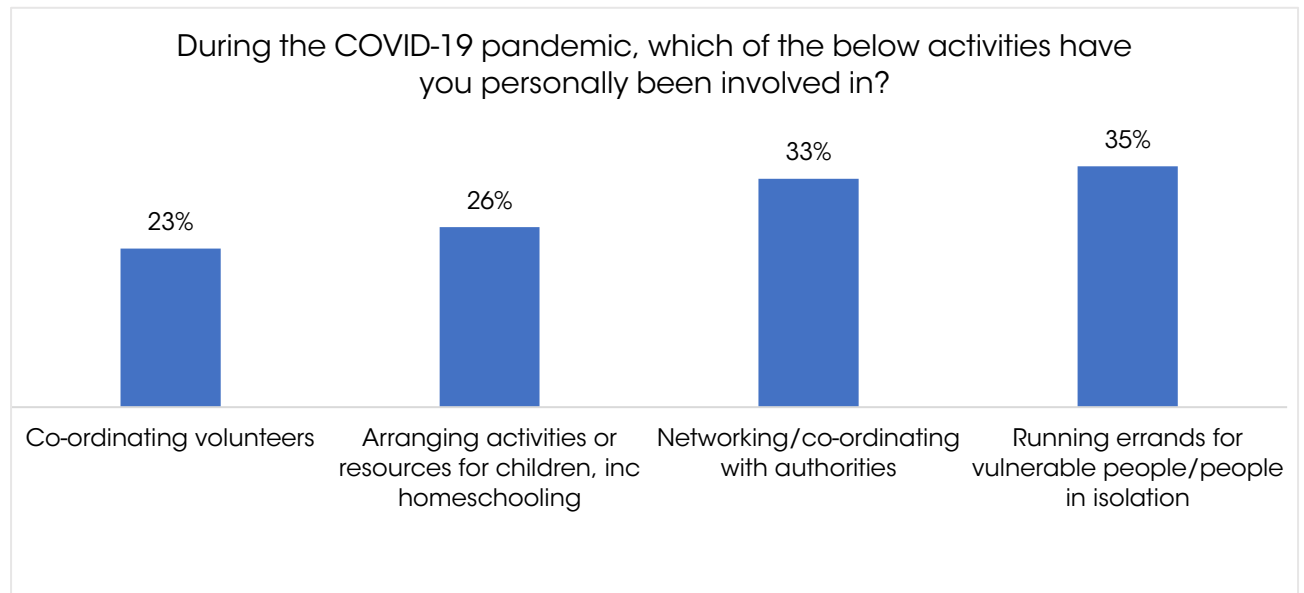
60% of respondents said they were still involved in decision-making in the Big Local partnership. This is in contrast to the 83% who said all partnership members had the opportunity to take part in decision-making during this time. As we'll see later, this is likely

due to partnership members reducing or stopping their involvement with Big Local during the pandemic.

A significant number of respondents directly supported more vulnerable members of their communities and those isolating. The most common ways in which they did this was by running errands for people (35%), making sure people had access to food (35%) and arranging activities and resources for children (26%). These direct acts of neighbourly support and actions have been discussed in [other research](#), and highlight the personal, local and immediate ways that residents supported each other. Connected to this work supporting vulnerable residents, a third of respondents were networking and coordinating with authorities during the pandemic (33%), something we have learned more about in other [research with Big Local areas](#).

As stated earlier, 42% of respondents also said they saw an increase in volunteers during the pandemic, and nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) said they were personally involved in coordinating these new volunteers.

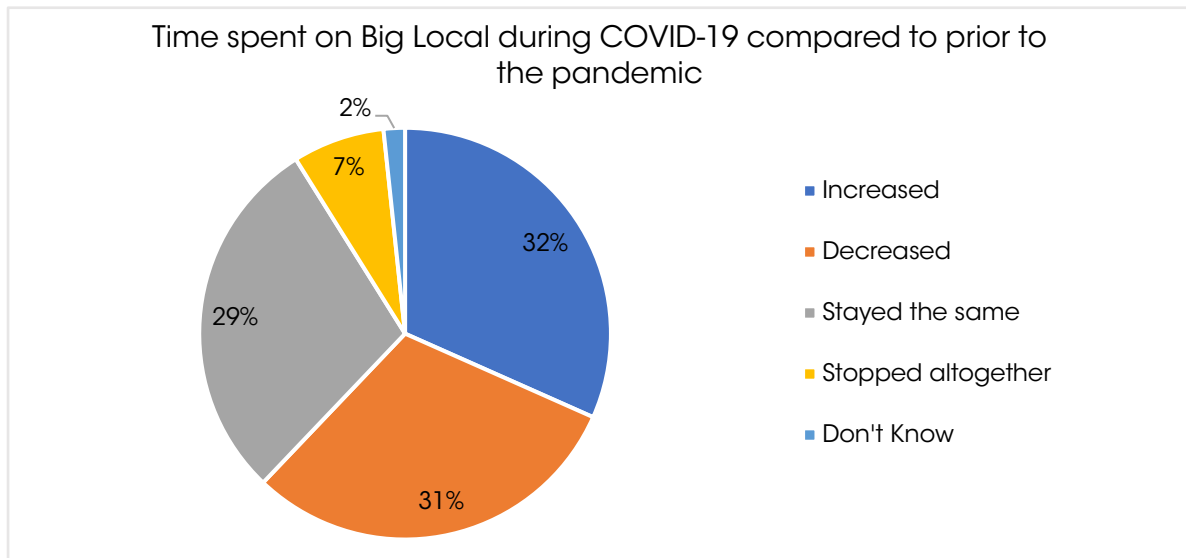
**Graph 1.3: Big Local partnership members' activities during the pandemic (2)**



### Time spent on Big Local

The survey asked about the amount of time respondents spent on Big Local to get a sense of whether this had increased, decreased, stayed the same or stopped altogether. A similar proportion of respondents' time on Big Local increased (32%), decreased (31%) and stayed the same (29%) with the remaining 7% of respondents having stopped Big Local activity altogether. We also know that 60% of respondents were still involved in decision-making during the pandemic. This aligns with the proportion whose time on Big Local has increased or stayed the same. This likely shows that, while many Big Local areas increased and pivoted their activities during the pandemic, and saw an increase in volunteers, this responsibility likely fell on a smaller group of partnership members. This is reinforced by the results from the 2020 partnership reviews which showed a 13% drop (1664 to 1455) in partnership members across the Big Local programme.

**Graph 1.4: Time spent on Big Local**



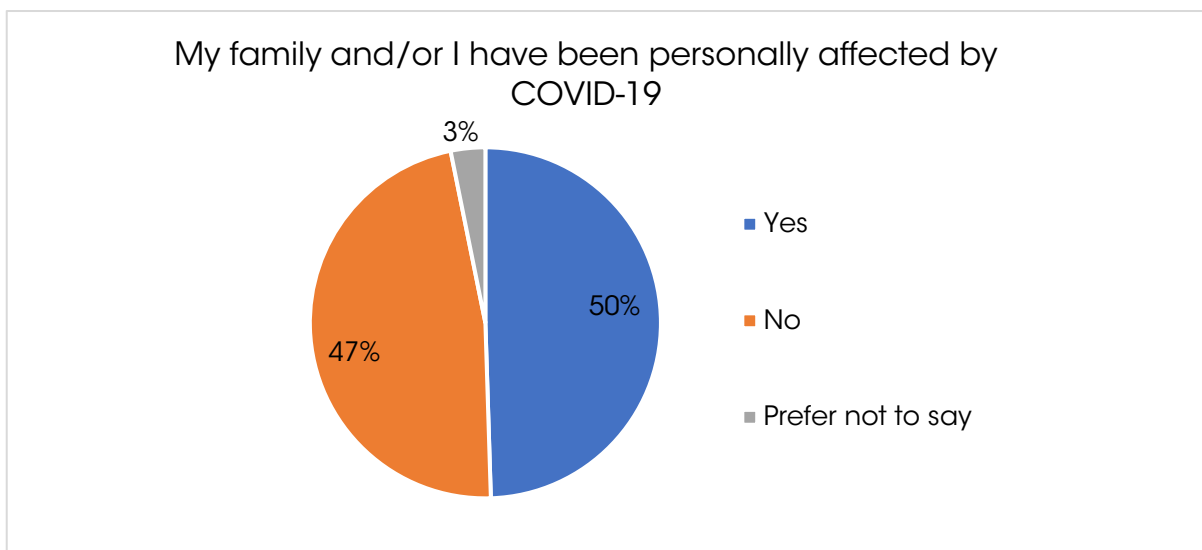
### Summary

Four months into the pandemic, the majority of Big Local partnerships were supporting more people in their communities, identifying local needs, responding to these needs quickly, and making decisions as a partnership about how to respond. Most respondents were following government guidance at the time and staying at home. However, they were also involved in a range of local activities as part of their response to COVID-19 - in particular, taking part in decision-making in the partnership, identifying needs, and sharing advice and guidance. Despite the range of activities taking place, some respondents decreased or stopped their involvement in Big Local activity, suggesting that many partnerships would have been relying on fewer partnership members.

## 2) Respondents personally affected by COVID-19

Respondents were asked whether they or their family had been 'personally affected by COVID-19', i.e., through illness, furlough, or loss of income. 50% of respondents said they had been personally affected in some way - equating to 500 respondents.

**Graph 2.1: Respondents personally affected by COVID-19**



In this section, we compare responses of those affected by COVID-19 with those not affected to see how they differ, and how this might have influenced how they responded to other questions in the survey. All findings highlighted below are statistically significant, unless stated.

## Demographics

### Regions

There is no evidence that respondents from particular regions were more or less likely to have been affected by COVID-19.

### Gender

Similarly, there is no evidence that a respondent is more or less likely to have been affected personally by COVID-19 depending on gender.

### Age

When looking at the respondent's age, however, there is a significant difference in age comparing those affected by COVID-19 (through illness, furlough, or loss of income) and those not. While those affected by COVID-19 made up 51% of respondents, younger respondents aged 29 and younger were most likely to be affected (63%), and older residents aged 65 and over were less likely to be affected (38%). These differences could be grouped as between working age respondents and those who are older, and more likely to be retired or no longer in the paid workforce.

**Table 2.1: Age of those affected and not affected by COVID-19**

	Affected by COVID-19	Not affected by COVID-19
<b>29 and under</b>	63%	37%
<b>30 to 44</b>	54%	47%
<b>45 to 64</b>	57%	43%
<b>65 and over</b>	38%	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>49%</b>

### Education and qualifications

There is a significant relationship between the level of a respondent's educational qualification and them being affected by COVID-19. Respondents with no qualifications (73%) or educated to a trade, technical or vocational training level (61%), were more likely to say that they have been affected by COVID-19. In contrast, respondents educated to school/GCSE level (59%) or higher school/sixth form level (59%) were less likely to be affected. There were smaller, insignificant differences amongst respondents educated to college/ university or degree level.

**Table 2.2: Age of those affected and not affected by COVID-19**

	Affected by COVID-19 (50%)	Not affected by COVID-19 (50%)
<b>None</b>	72.7%	27.3%
<b>School level - for example CSE, O Level, GCSE or equivalent</b>	40.7%	59.3%
<b>Higher school / Sixth form level - including AS or A Level</b>	40.3%	59.7%

College/university credit or qualification - not a degree	52.9%	47.1%
One or more degrees	50.9%	49.1%
Trade/technical/vocational training	61.0%	39.0%
All respondents	<b>51.0%</b>	<b>49.0%</b>

### Minoritised communities

Over the course of the pandemic much has been said about its disproportionate impact on people from minoritised communities.<sup>3</sup> Partnership members from minoritised communities were more likely to say that they were affected by COVID-19. In fact, 65% of respondents from minoritised communities had been affected by COVID-19, compared to only 49% of White respondents.<sup>4</sup> Breaking this down further, the majority of respondents from 'mixed, multiple ethnic groups' (71%), 'Asian/Asian British' (65%) or 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British' (63%) have been affected by COVID-19.

**Table 2.3: Ethnicity of those affected and not affected by COVID-19**

	Affected by COVID-19	Not affected by COVID-19	Total
Asian / Asian British	64.9%	35.1%	100.0%
Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
White	48.9%	51.1%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>49.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Health and wellbeing

As part of the survey, we asked respondents a set of questions about their health. Unsurprisingly, respondents who said they have been affected by COVID-19 scored lower on these questions. Those who said they had been affected by COVID-19 were more likely to say their health was 'bad' (+3%), 'very bad' (+3%) or fair (+7%) compared to those not affected by COVID-19. Respondents not affected by COVID-19 were more likely to say their health was 'very good' (+14%).

<sup>3</sup> There is ample evidence that demonstrates the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minoritised communities, especially those from a black or South Asian background. See [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00949-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00949-1/fulltext) and <https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.m4921> for examples.

<sup>4</sup> There were small sample sizes for each listed minoritised group in the survey. To do a statistical analysis, all minoritised groups were combined and compared to those who identified as 'white'. Table 2.3, which lists each minoritised group, is not statistically significant due to the small sample sizes.

**Table 2.4: self-perceived health of respondents affected and not affected by COVID-19**

How is your health?	Affected by COVID-19	Not affected by COVID-19	% difference
Very Good	23.3%	37.1%	-13.8%
Good	41.5%	40.2%	1.3%
Fair	24.5%	17.8%	6.6%
Bad	7.9%	4.6%	3.3%
Very Bad	2.8%	0.2%	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

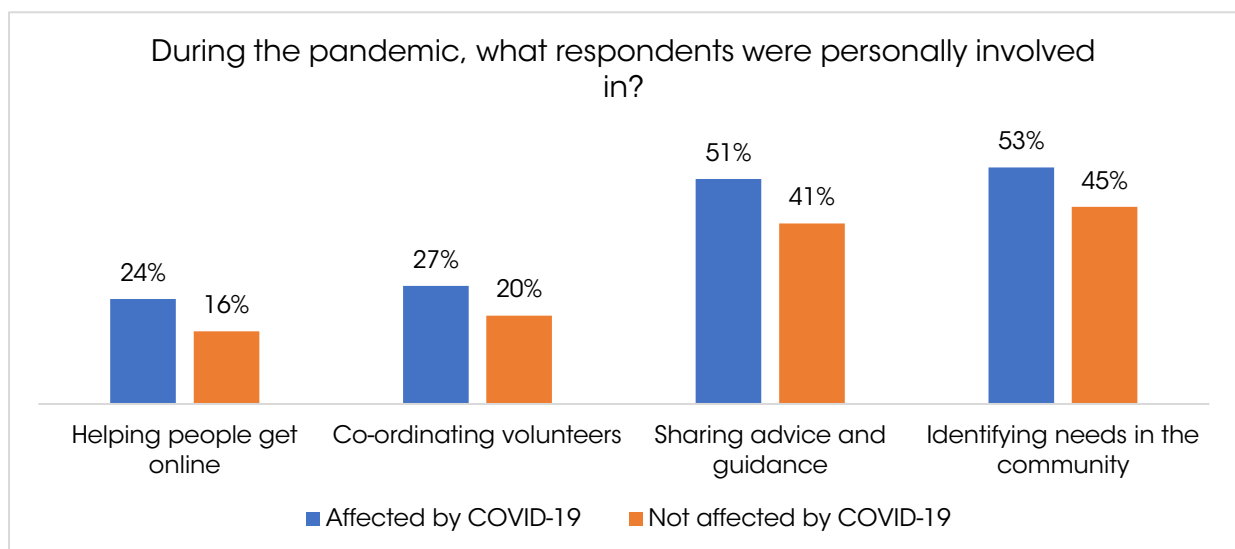
Further, when asked how often they felt relaxed, those who have been affected by COVID-19 were more likely to say 'rarely' (+4%) or 'none of the time' (+1%) and less likely to feel relaxed 'all of the time' (-6%). This also seemed to impact on respondents' ability to make decisions, with those affected by COVID-19 more likely to feel they were able to make up their own mind about things 'rarely' or 'none of the time', (+2%).

### Activity and involvement

#### Respondents during the pandemic

Above we explored the activities and involvement of Big Local partnerships and of respondents themselves. When we look again at the activities that respondents were personally involved in, we can see that respondents affected by COVID-19 were more likely to have been involved in certain activities than others. For example, those affected by COVID-19 were more likely to help people get online (+8%) coordinate volunteers (+7%), share advice and guidance (+10%) and identify community needs (+8%). This suggests that despite being affected by COVID-19, they were still able to find ways to be active in their communities and support those around them. Being affected may have motivated their increased involvement or those who lost work or were furloughed due to the pandemic may have had more time to participate in Big Local.

**Graph 2.2: What respondents were involved in during COVID-19**

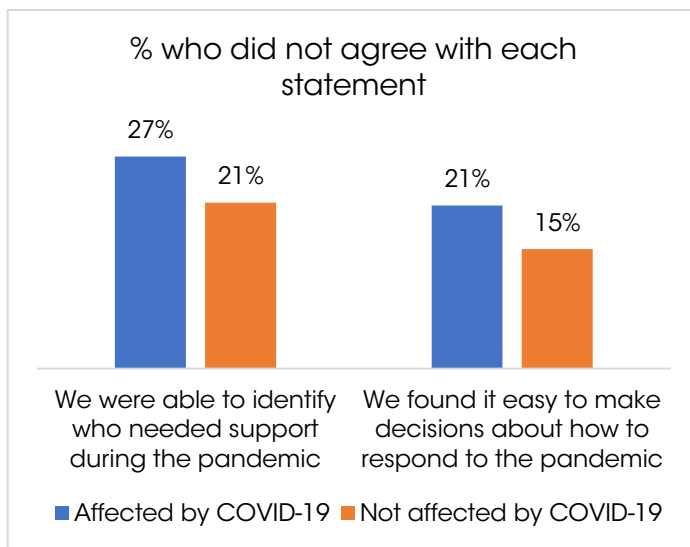




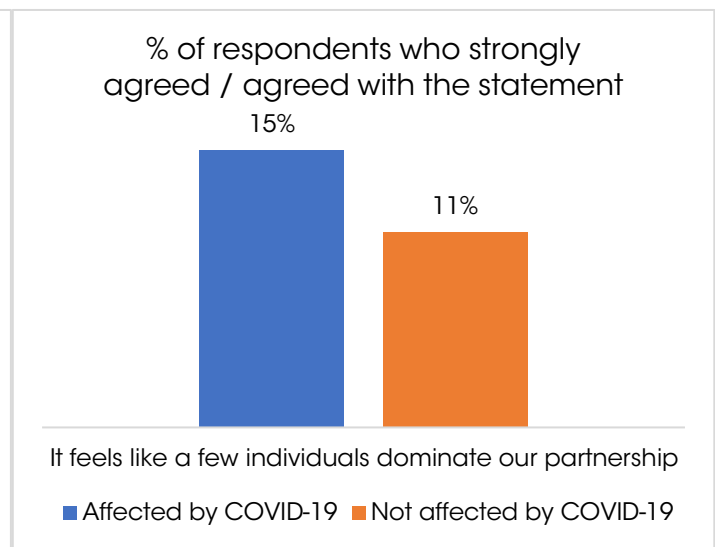
## Big Local partnership during the pandemic

Respondents affected by COVID-19 were more likely to 'not agree' that the partnership found it easy to make decisions about how to respond to the pandemic (+7%). Similarly, this group was more likely to 'not agree' that all members had the opportunity to take part in decision making during the pandemic (+6%). When asked whether decision-making on the partnership was dominated by a few individuals, those affected by COVID-19 were also more likely to agree (+5%). These findings suggest that being affected by COVID-19 made it harder for respondents to participate in decision-making and to make decisions with the partnership. This could be for several reasons, such as through their own illness, feeling less able to make decisions, looking after or supporting family or the general impact of COVID-19 on those who have been directly impacted.

**Graph 2.3: Decision making during the pandemic**



**Graph 2.4: Partnerships dominated by a few individuals**



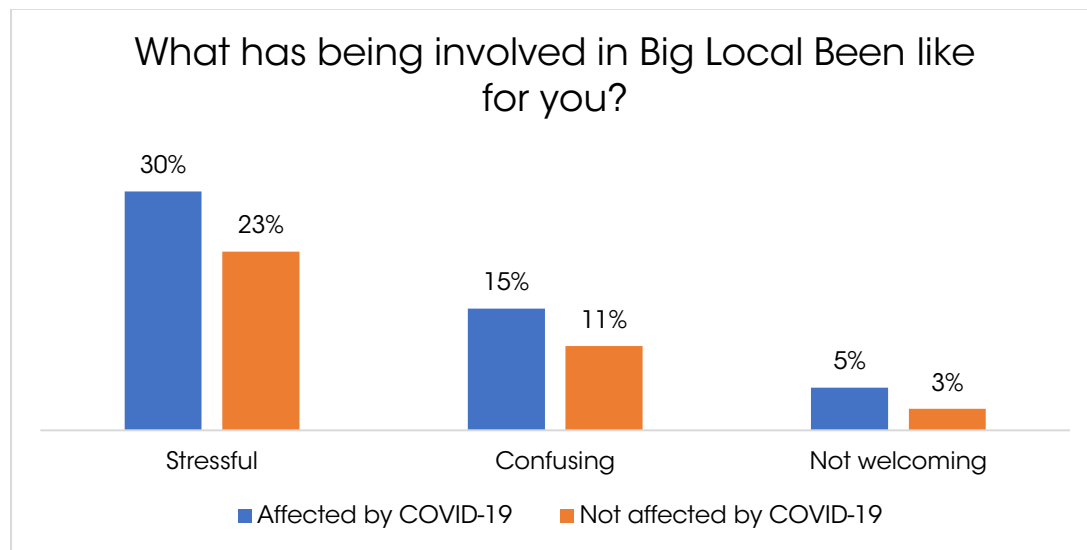
## Time spent on Big Local

Respondents directly affected by COVID-19 were more likely to have increased their time spent on Big Local (+6%) or, to a smaller extent, to have stopped altogether (+2%).

## Experiences of Big Local

As well as asking respondents about their activities, we also asked them about their thoughts and feelings about being involved in the Big Local programme in the year leading up to the survey. Respondents affected by COVID-19 were more likely to think their involvement in Big Local had been 'stressful' (+8) or 'confusing' (+5) in the last year. In addition, they were more likely to say it was 'not welcoming' (+3).

**Graph 2.5: Involvement in Big Local**



Finally, when asked whether they would continue to take part in Big Local, those impacted by COVID-19 were more likely to say they would not continue (+4). This could highlight that COVID-19 affects how people experience Big Local, or that people directly affected had some other common experience that explains their relatively negative experience.

### Summary

Echoing UK-wide trends,<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted on respondents from minoritised communities and those with lower levels of education. These respondents also reported poorer physical and mental health and wellbeing. The findings also show that some of those impacted by COVID-19 have remained active in their community and, in some cases, have even increased their involvement in their community and Big Local programme. However, this is a mixed picture with a significant number of respondents impacted by COVID-19 reducing or even stopping their involvement on Big Local.

We also saw how those directly affected by COVID-19 reflected slightly more negatively on their involvement in Big Local over the past year. It is hard to say if this will have an impact on their future involvement, but it highlights the potential challenges partnerships will face in the recruitment and retention of partnership members in the near future.

## Conclusion

The findings demonstrate the impact of COVID-19 on partnership members, their experiences of Big Local, and subsequently on the activities of Big Local. In general, respondents thought their Big Local had reacted positively to the pandemic, reaching more people, getting more volunteers and making decisions quickly to support their communities.

However, a deeper look shows that the personal challenges brought about by COVID-19 has had a direct impact on respondents. Those directly affected by COVID-19 reported worse physical and mental health and perceived poorer experiences of their involvement in Big Local. We've also seen that COVID-19 was more likely to affect younger, less educated and ethnic minority respondents.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See [Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the severity of the effects of COVID-19 would likely have been higher for older partnership members than younger ones, reflecting who is most vulnerable to COVID-19. We did not ask partnership members if they had experienced, for example, hospitalisation, bereavement or serious illness.

The impact of these meant that a significant portion of respondents reduced or even stopped their involvement in Big Local, meaning even fewer people were responsible for the decision-making and delivery of Big Local. This likely increased the burden and responsibilities on those that remained involved.

While it is hard to say how this will translate as the pandemic recedes, the reduced number of engaged members, the potential loss of members in the near future due to the direct effects of COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact on young and ethnic minority members raises future challenges about how resident-led and reflective Big Local partnerships are and on the demands of those who remain as partnership members.

For Local Trust, these findings directly affect the support to partnerships during, and after, the pandemic. Local Trust must consider the decreased involvement of many members and the subsequent increased demands on those that stay involved. Also, while efforts to support existing partnerships to retain and recruit new members are already in place, these should be focused on retaining and recruiting from a broad range of demographic groups to ensure the core values of resident-led and reflective remain at the heart of each Big Local area partnership.

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of local communities, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding through our work supporting local communities make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place

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