

Business plan 2026-27

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1. Our priorities for 2026-27

Big Local Trust will be dissolved in February 2027 and Local Trust's closure will follow shortly after. These deadlines set the context for the ambitions and focus of this business plan, setting realistic priorities to maximise impact.

- 1.1 During 2026-27 we conclude all remaining activities, and finish documenting and sharing what we – and Big Local areas – have delivered and achieved over 15 years of activity and effort. This includes completing work critical to securing our legacy.
- 1.2 Given the limited time remaining, we view this document as 'live', to be reviewed every quarter with trustees as part of the business plan monitoring process. It will be important – within the reducing budget envelope – that we are able to pivot and respond to a dynamic operating environment. Without the benefit of time, we will need to regularly review and monitor the progress of our plans, making sure we are balancing realism with a continuing commitment to having maximum impact in our window of operation, and beyond.
- 1.3 Our priorities, which are explored in the sections that follow, are:
 - **Influencing those with power to effect change** in policy, practice and funding now and in the future and thereby securing the legacy of Local Trust, through the sharing of evidence, resources and insight on neighbourhood and community renewal
 - Effectively and efficiently managing the **dissolution of Big Local Trust and planned closure of Local Trust**, ensuring that our legal and fiduciary duties are met appropriately.
 - Maintaining and supporting a **high performing and engaged team** that can deliver on Local Trust's mission and ambitions through to closure.
- 1.4 It is noteworthy that this is the first Local Trust business plan, which does not have – as its core objective – the effective delivery of the Big Local programme given its successful conclusion in March 2026.

2. Our legacy

The success of Big Local and the learning from the programme is a key point of interest for policy makers, funders, practitioners and researchers across all sectors and at national, regional and local levels. Our ultimate goal is to inform those with power to effect change and make improvements – now and in the future - through the sharing of evidence, resources and insight drawn from our experience in neighbourhood and community renewal. This will ensure a lasting legacy for Local Trust.

- 2.1 The Big Local Trust Deed expresses the wish that Local Trust should “promote learning from the local schemes more broadly, to policymakers, funders and communities involved in similar efforts at improvement as the areas of benefit.”
- 2.2 We want the legacy of Local Trust’s work to last well beyond the end of Big Local. The announcement of the Government’s Pride in Place Programme (PiPP), which embeds significant elements of our learning, is a major testament to the success of the programme. While we recognise the case for the ‘why’ of hyper-local, resident-led control over resource might have been made and heard, there remains a gap in people’s and organisations of the ‘**how**’ - understanding how to implement principles and values into actions, behaviours and ways of working. In our final year, drawing on learning from the Big Local programme, this will be the main tenet of what we share and where we seek to inform.
- 2.3 To achieve this, we work to ensure:
 - A clear evidence base - expressed in terms that are relevant and accessible to key audiences - that shows the importance of long term, flexible and supported funding where there is resident and community-led decision-making over resources.
 - There is a wider understanding within the funding system of the central importance of robust and vibrant locally-led institutions and infrastructure as the foundation of powerful communities and successful neighbourhoods.
 - Public and civil society organisations and those working directly with communities increasingly seek to embed relevant insight in how they work, prioritising building and strengthening the social infrastructure of communities through all aspects of their work.
- 2.4 We know our work has created and harnessed insights that are of value to a range of organisations and stakeholders, but we are also aware that we have a better chance of embedding that if we work with and through others. Over the last few years - and as part of our closure planning process - we have been **working to ensure activities and projects that were initiated as part of our legacy would be maintained and continue to have impact following the end of Local Trust.**
- 2.5 Reducing timeframe and capacity ahead of closure **inevitably limits flexibility to respond or adapt to new opportunities or changing context to Local Trust's legacy** during 2026. This may result in failure to mobilise capacity and resources to maximise legacy of Big Local

and Local Trust. Major legacy allocations are complete, and some significant projects are on an established path, an agile development and delivery approach in some areas (such as Beacons, PiPP, work with funders) and a focus on close external partnerships should result in ability adapt and flex in response to changing context and opportunities, including the deployment of staff time and skills – providing some mitigation against a risk that reduced.

- 2.6 Strong stakeholder relationships and the reputation Big Local remain the foundations of our legacy ambitions. Unexpected deterioration of established relationships or negative media regarding the effectiveness of Big Local could reduce or limit our impact. However, interest and support remains positive, and the likelihood of new media stories about individual areas are subsiding as the programme closes.
- 2.7 A focus on deepening established relationships to maximise our influence – as well as continuing to promote learning and insight to our key audiences (funders, policy-makers, researchers and community practitioners) is reflected in our communications plans for 2026/7.

Goal 1: A clear, relevant and accessible evidence base that shows the importance of long term, flexible and supported funding where there is resident and community-led decision-making.

- 2.8 Local Trust has worked hard to be a learning organisation with an **evidence base** that can speak with credibility, authority and relevance to a range of audiences. As we move towards closure we are focussed on consolidating our learning, ensuring our materials are accessible, evergreen and faithfully capture the entirety of the programme and its outputs.
- 2.9 We have now launched the **Learning from Big Local** site, as a trusted source of information about the programme, its successes, and the learning and insight that has been captured over 15 years. We will be handing guardianship of this rich resource over to C4 in July, once the final articles and area summaries are uploaded.
- 2.10 We will continue to work with others to **synthesise available evidence** to ensure that the key insights about the programme and its impact can be shared, while also creating a narrative that adequately captures cumulative learning and achievements across the programme.

Goal 2: There is a wider understanding within the funding system of the central importance of robust and vibrant locally led institutions and infrastructure as the foundation of powerful communities and successful neighbourhoods

- 2.11 Last year we launched a new programme of activity that tried to better connect Big Local areas (and those like them) to civil society organisations and networks, and inform the funding system of our experiences.
- 2.12 Our **Beacons** activity was scoped last year, with the intention of supporting and building connections between organisations which have developed out of Big Local, to help them sustain their work, grow their impact and raise the profile of the legacy of the Big Local programme.
 - The London Beacon project (6 areas) will focus on making the case for community-led approaches to addressing health inequality and improving health outcomes, based on experience and learning from the Big Local programme, as well as strengthening connections between London legacy organisations and wider health sector partners.

- The Liverpool Beacon project (5 areas) will seek to collectively demonstrate the value of community-led approaches to health, connection and wellbeing, with the ambition of influencing public services and policymakers to adopt, embed and invest in these approaches across the Liverpool City Region.
- The Black Country (6 areas) will focus on developing and providing support for young people, including the development of skills and capabilities for leadership and employment.

2.13 As well as having a strong focus on practical support to deliver on the legacy ambitions of areas, existing and emerging networks have been engaged to ensure Big Local learning is embedded among those who have a stake in community-led renewal in the future. Last year, with Funders Together, we launched a comprehensive **programme of learning modules in London**, which seeks to support those interested in hyper-local, long-term funding within the voluntary and community sector to learn from Big Local (and other programmes), and supporting them to test and implement new practices. This learning programme will continue until Autumn 2026.

2.14 Given the initial success of the London learning programme we have identified and are now working with other organisations to **deliver the modules across other regions**, adapting its content to account for local context and experiences. The organisations we will work with in 2026-27 are: Voluntary Organisations Network North East; Voluntary Sector North West; Yorkshire Funders, and the West Midlands Funder Network

2.15 In Yorkshire this will be complemented through a programme of support for **six mainstream funders, to move along the continuum from theory to action, by embedding fully-fledged resident leadership in grant-making** within their core strategies. Over time, this work aims to inspire their peers across and beyond the Yorkshire and Humber region through the 'open and trusting' grant making community that IVAR facilitates.

Goal 3: Public and civil society organisations and those working directly with communities increasingly seek to embed insights from Big Local in how they work

2.16 At the end of 2025-26, with This Day and MHCLG, we convened a series of regional events across England bringing together local authorities and organisations involved in delivering the **Pride in Place programme**. These events created an opportunity to share learning about community-led neighbourhood change and to build interest in the principles underpinning the programme. In discussion with others, we are now looking to provide practical support to those responsible for establishing Neighbourhood Boards – and eventually independent Chairs – to create strong foundations for the programme's long-term success.

2.17 The **Centre for Community Connectedness (C4)** launched and is now setting out to generate high-quality evidence to inform the design, funding and delivery of effective interventions that are embedded in the lived experiences of communities. As one of the lead institutions in C4, Local Trust will ensure that the centre draws and builds on our evidence base and methods so that it is of use and value to policy makers, civil society organisations, academics, and community development practitioners, now and of the future. This includes work already started on the expansion of the Community Needs Index (CNI) to the whole of the UK, being a repository for key Local Trust policy reports, as well as hosting the Learning from Big Local and Our Bigger Story websites.

- 2.18 Established two years ago, the **Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON)** will continue to work to influence government to address the significant challenges faced by the country's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. ICON will build on existing research, generate new insights and propose concrete actions to improve the lives and prospects of people living in these areas.
- 2.19 **3ni** is a learning network with direct support to local government officials wanting to develop and implement a neighbourhood approach, and we will maintain a close and collaborative working relationship with the team delivering the programme. Our input will be focussed on growing the evidence base and supporting the sharing of learning.
- 2.20 Through our **Neighbourhood health project with the NHS Confederation** we continue to support local communities, including Big Local areas, build connections with their local health services. The areas participating directly will get the opportunity to build a better service for people locally and strengthen local relationships for the future. We will seek to share the learning and insight with people working in communities, and continue to use this programme of work to raise awareness and advocate for neighbourhood working within the NHS.
- 2.21 We will continue to support the journey of **Amazing Communities Together** to establish itself as a credible, inclusive and sustainable network that has grown out of the Big Local programme, providing a national forum for practitioners and champions of resident-led renewal. A priority for ACT's independent Board is establishing an effective business model beyond Big Local and Local Trust funding.

Goals	Targets
1. A clear, relevant and accessible evidence base that shows the importance of long term, flexible and supported funding where there is resident and community-led decision-making.	1.1 LfBL visitor numbers continue to build across 2026
2. There is a wider understanding within the funding system of the central importance of robust and vibrant locally-led institutions and infrastructure as the foundation of powerful communities and successful neighbourhoods	2.1 At least 75% of Big Local legacy bodies engaged in Beacons areas report they have developed local connections which will support growth/sustainability
	2.2 Over 75 funders actively engage in events and discussions on learning from Big Local
3. Public and civil society organisations and those working directly with communities increasingly seek to use our insights in their work, prioritizing building and strengthening the capacity of disadvantaged communities.	3.1 Adoption of practice in the Pride in Place Programme areas
	3.2 Local Trust's influence can be seen in the 'what works', methods and community engagement strands of C4 delivery.

3. Closure

To effectively and efficiently manage the dissolution of Big Local Trust and the closure of Local Trust, ensuring that our legal and fiduciary duties are met appropriately.

- 3.1 Achieving a successful closure in 2027 of both Big Local Trust and Local Trust is critically important, and something that we have planned for over a number of years (Appendix A).
- 3.2 The Closure plan, developed with the staff team and trustees, was first approved in November 2023 and since then we have revised and updated it on a quarterly basis. It sets out how we will responsibly prepare for the dissolution of Big Local Trust in February 2027 and the closure of Local Trust shortly after (April 2027), whilst maintaining our ability to support Big Local areas (up to programme closure in 2026) and deliver our wider legacy ambitions.
- 3.3 The Plan responds to key risks identified in relation to closure, including that **mishandling or inadequate planning of organisational closure** means Local Trust does not meet its fiduciary or legal responsibilities. We mitigated this risk by increasing staff capacity focused on effective closure last year, updated the budget to take account of closure costs, worked closely with our auditors and prospective liquidator. Trustees receive regular reports on progress.
- 3.4 Our external communications regarding organisations are being carefully planned to minimise risks of perceptions of failure, and ensure a seamless journey for audiences seeking information and insight following closure. A range of events across the year will celebrate the success of and learning from the programme, and encourage those who have been involved to continue to champion the Big Local principles across networks and sectors.

Goal 4: We fully and accurately complete all our funding programme administration, delivering an orderly and tidy closure of the programme.

- 3.5 Throughout the life of the programme we have sought to maintain the highest standard of grant making, while ensuring the values of the programme as resident-led are upheld. During the last 12 months we will be closing grant agreements and completing administration of the Big Local grants still open. We will make sure that all funding and activities are completed and confirm areas have closed out. This includes completing all the related administration and reporting for all areas.
- 3.6 We will also need to ensure that we have satisfactorily and appropriately closed relevant contracts for the organisations and people that have provided support to areas, ensuring that there are no outstanding liabilities as the year (and programme) comes to an end.
- 3.7 We will also:
 - Make decisions on who will hold the residuary functions of the Trust after closure

- Ensure that appropriate agreements and handover plans are in place with organisations that will ‘carry the Local Trust flame’ through our legacy projects and grants
- Comply with all the legal requirements upon us as we close (i.e. GDPR and the transfer of data)

Goal	Targets
4. Effectively and efficiently manage the closure of Local Trust and dissolution of Big Local Trust, ensuring that our legal and fiduciary duties are met appropriately.	4.1 BLT dissolved by 13 February 2027 deadline
	4.2 BLT fully spent out by 13 February 2027
	4.3 All remaining Big Local grants are closed by October 2026

4. Our people, culture and performance

We will support an engaged and high performing team that can deliver on Local Trust's mission and ambitions.

- 4.1 Our greatest resource at Local Trust is the **people**, and it will be important to maintain a high performing and engaged team, and an inclusive and positive culture that can deliver on our ambitions, through to closure.
- 4.2 The context of a planned and purposeful closure is unusual, and the organisation is likely to experience and need to respond to a range of unforeseen events. It will be important for the organisation to remain anchored to our values, confident in the range of skills, expertise and experiences across the organisation, adaptable in terms our capacity and attention, and focussed on our ultimate goals.
- 4.3 For this we will need:
- Local Trust to be governed, led and managed effectively
 - A confident, resilient, and motivated staff team with a collaborative, inclusive and purposeful culture in which all colleagues feel valued, especially as staff numbers reduce across the year.
 - Systems, processes and information that form the basis of good decision-making, supplemented with appropriate assurance that we are carrying out our legal and fiduciary duties appropriately
- 4.4 Local Trust's **governance** is strong and an independent Protector provides ongoing assurance that the Big Local Trust Deed is effectively administered and well governed.

Goal 5: Local Trust is governed, led and managed effectively.

- 4.5 In the next 12 months Local Trust Trustees, Executive and the Protector will continue playing critically important roles in ensuring Local Trust's operations, including those relating to closure, are subject to those same high standards of governance and oversight to the very end.
- 4.6 We will retain a commitment to **transparent decision making, with appropriate consideration of fairness and inclusion throughout the organisation**, consistent with our EDI Strategy. As such we will continue to invest in and developing the remaining, broader cohort of managers within Local Trust so that there's a consistency and confidence in leading a demanding programme of work and key transitions through to closure.
- 4.7 Our financial plans are set out in the Budget. We continue to plan for full spend-out of the £281m provided by the Big Local Trust endowment fund by February 2027. We were required by the Trust Deed to spend a minimum of £220m by the end of the programme in 2026-27 and we have already passed this milestone in terms of committed funds and cash spent.

- 4.8 We are confident that we can comfortably meet the demands of this business plan, whilst being able to respond to unexpected events.
- 4.9 The budget for 2026-27 shows:
- Maximum £100k Big Local grant payments to be made after 31 March 2026: £190.2m grant funds fully spent by March 2026
 - £7.1m funds allocated to support and delivery costs
 - £875k has been earmarked for final closure (staffing, liquidation and legacy) and will be transferred to Local Trust in Q3/ Q4.
- 4.10 We are proud of our successful custodianship of the Big Local endowment, with consistently positive audits and effective finance and grant systems. However, we remain vigilant to the risk that decreasing staff capacity may result in poor **financial management** which could result in loss, fraud or misappropriation of funds during our final phase of operations. Robust mitigations are in place and we will continue to ensure our systems, policies and processes are appropriate; that there are checks and balances built into financial processing; that Board and Committee receive high quality reports; and, that we have appropriately qualified staff with sufficient capacity to manage finances effectively in place.
- 4.11 As we approach closure – and aiming for full spend – our approach to budget management will be more dynamic to ensure funds are appropriately allocated, whilst maintaining awareness of areas of potential underspend and ensuring that all our resources are used to further the ambitions set out in our strategy and this business plan.

Goal 6: We maintain a confident, resilient, and motivated staff team

- 4.12 In March 2026 Local Trust had **44 members of staff** and that number will reduce over the year. We are confident that we have the range of skills, experience, expertise and attitudes to ensure the successful delivery of this plan. Each member of the staff team has an important and defined contribution to make to our success, and we will work hard so that everyone understands what we individually and collectively contribute.
- 4.13 Local Trust has consistently sought to promote an open, inclusive and ambitious culture. This is integral to our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, including a commitment to continuous improvement and learning, and building teams' confidence in engaging in our ambitions of our EDI strategy.
- 4.14 The staff surveys carried out during 2025-26 showed that:
- People are satisfied with their job
 - Are motivated to see Local Trust succeed
 - Have developed new skills and experience through Local Trust that will help them with their future career
- 4.15 We will seek to maintain this commitment to quality to the very last day of our operations but we recognise that changes to Local Trust's structure and staffing profile could have potentially negative impacts on **staff motivation, morale and efficiency** as people increasingly focus on their futures beyond Local Trust. This could result in a disruption to the delivery of business plan; sooner than expected departures or turnover of staff; and increased pressure on remaining staff that might affect mental or other wellbeing. We

have a staff closure communications plan, ensuring sensitive, transparent and timely internal communication with colleagues through their final months with the organisation.

- 4.16 The loss of **key staff** will continue to be a risk as we get closer to the proposed end date of the organisation, and a resultant lack of capacity and skills in the organisation to deliver strategy and business.
- 4.17 So far, we have seen relatively few unplanned exits, but where this happens, we review how this interacts with our medium- term planning for closure. We will continue to engage with staff to redesign approaches to delivery, sharing tasks and roles more flexibly between teams and individuals and exploring other ways to deliver, including use of secondees and short-term contractors or consultants where relevant. It may also include opportunities for development within the existing staff team.
- 4.18 In April 2026, in line with its practice in previous years, Local Trust has awarded a cost-of-living uplift to staff consistent with the most recent published CPI inflation rate of 3%. Ongoing benchmarking of salaries through our independent benchmarking agency 3r-Strategy suggests that this approach has broadly kept us aligned with pay levels for comparative roles in other organisations.
- 4.19 Mindful of the impact that the closure of the organisation could have on people we implemented a new approach to staff health and wellbeing last year, that gave them access to more tools and resources to support them through this period. This included an increasing emphasis on training and development, asking staff to review and make any requests throughout the year and at least quarterly so that they can prepare for their future career. We will continue with this approach.

Goals	Targets
5. Local Trust is governed, led and managed effectively.	5.1 A clean audit
	5.2 All legal and fiduciary duties met by closure
6. We maintain a confident, resilient, and motivated staff team	6.1 Pulse colleague survey results maintain the core 5 questions with a net positive score of above 80%
	6.2 A staff team of between 5 and 7 people are in place in January 2027

5. Status of this document

This section of the Business Plan sets out its status in the context of the Big Local Trust Deed. Following legal advice on the content of the Deed, a similar statement accompanies every Business Plan prepared by Local Trust. By approving the Business Plan, trustees are confirming that they are content with the statements made within the chapter in relation to both 2026-27 Business Plan and accompanying Budget, and the spending plans included within it.

5.1 This document sets out Local Trust’s Business Plan for 2026-27. Together with the documents referred to at paragraph 1.2, it forms the “Big Local Business Plan”, replacing and superseding the document referred to in the Big Local Trust Deed and any subsequent business planning or strategic documents prepared for Big Local Trust and Local Trust.

The Big Local Deed

5.2 Delivery of this plan is primarily supported by funds from the Big Local Trust. Further information on the use of funds is included in the Budget that accompanies this document.

5.3 The Big Local Trust Deed contains the following Objects:

5.1 The Objects of the charity are:

(a) the advancement of community development; and

(b) the relief of unemployment;

for the benefit of the public, in particular, but without limitation, in the localities in each region specified in Schedule 6 [Big Local areas].

5.4 The work of Local Trust focuses overwhelmingly on the delivery of 5.1(a) – “the advancement of community development”, defined by the Charity Commission as including (inter alia):

- the promotion of civic responsibility and good citizenship
- the promotion of urban and rural regeneration
- the promotion of volunteering
- the promotion of the voluntary sector
- promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of charities and the effective use of charitable resources
- the promotion of community capacity building

5.5 The Big Local Trust Deed further provides that:

5.2. *Objects 5.1(a) and 5.1(b) are to be achieved in particular, but without limitation, by:*

(a) making Distributions to Recipients; and

(b) conducting research and disseminating the useful results of such research.

5.6 In approving the Business Plan and Budget for 2026-27, Trustees are content that all proposed expenditure contained within it is covered by cl5.2(a) and cl5.2(b) without need for any recourse to the “without limitation” provision.

5.7 Trustees have noted in particular the relevance of the Wishes of the Founder set out in Schedule 8 of the Deed, that

The Charity should also promote learning from the local schemes more broadly, to policymakers, funders and communities involved in similar efforts at improvement as the areas of benefit

This has informed Local Trust’s decisions to invest resource into the creation of a policy team and the commitment of resources to communications and research within this and previous Business Plans and Budgets - and underpins a significant part of Local Trust’s plans to secure a long term legacy from its work.

5.8 Clause 5.2(b) necessarily requires the commitment of resources to fund activities outside of Big Local areas, and Clauses 4.2 and 4.3 of the Deed require that money spend outside of “areas of benefit” (Big Local areas) may only amount to what trustees reasonably considered might be “minor” when compared to – respectively – the total value of the fund and (to the extent that resources being applied is drawn from the income of the endowment) the total income accrued to the fund. Trustees have considered the allocation of resources in the 2026-27 Budget and Business Plan in furtherance of Cl 5.2(b) and concluded that they are content it could not be reasonably considered anything but minor in the context of the tests outlined above.