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EMPOWERING PLACES: IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY AND WIDER PLACE

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Introduction

Empowering Places aims to build more resilient and prosperous communities by building the capacity of local organisations to catalyse and support the growth of new community businesses. It funds locally rooted ‘catalyst’ organisations in six areas of high deprivation:

- [B-inspired](#) in Braunstone, Leicester
- [Centre4](#) in Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby
- [Made in Manningham](#), incubated by [Participate](#) in Manningham, Bradford
- [Real Ideas](#) in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth
- [The Wharton Trust](#) in Dyke House, Hartlepool
- [Wigan and Leigh Community Charity](#) (WLCC) formally Abram Ward Community Cooperative, in Abram, Wigan

The Empowering Places programme is delivered by a consortium of organisations including [Power to Change](#) and [Co-operatives UK](#), the lead delivery partner, with support from specialist advisors known as ‘tech leads’ at the [Centre for Local Economic Strategies](#) (CLES) and [The New Economics Foundation](#) (NEF).

Each catalyst receives up to £1 million (July 2017–December 2022) to support the development of new community businesses in their area. They also get one-to-one support from specialist advisors and have access to a pool of capacity support providers, grant funding and money to award seed grants to emerging community businesses.

Renaisi is evaluating the programme. The aim is to enable Power to Change and its stakeholders to learn about how to work well in places, and how community businesses can drive local change. Four and a half years into the five-year programme, this report is part of a series of outputs taking a developmental approach to understanding and improving the programme, offering wider learning for future capacity-building programmes.

The report includes an overview of the impact of the programme on the community and the wider place, and highlights what has enabled any changes.

Methodology

The evaluation aims to take a **realistic approach to understanding impact and what has contributed to it**, focusing on the experiences of those involved. We draw mainly on interviews with local stakeholders (in spring 2022), but also on previous research with catalysts and community businesses in the six places, as well as ethnographic filming carried out with community businesses and residents in Bradford, Hartlepool and Leicester during the summer of 2022. Researchers have taken detailed notes and used an observation and learning log to track relevant findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and impact of the programme.

In addition to qualitative data, we have used findings from the hyperlocal booster version of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Community Life Survey, carried out in the six areas by Kantar (2018–early 2020).¹⁻²

Limitations

Given the complex context in which the programme and the catalysts operate, there are several notable challenges to providing a fully comprehensive evaluation.

As Empowering Places is a community business capacity-building programme, for example, our primary research has inevitably been with staff and volunteers at the catalysts and the community businesses involved, and it has been a persistent challenge to engage members of the communities those businesses serve to learn more about the effectiveness of the programme from their point of view.

As the funding from Power to Change is to enable the catalysts' work with community businesses, the community itself may in any case feel distant from the funding and operation of the programme, however much they might benefit from its impact. We had hoped to gather broader community reflections on film, but the majority of those willing to contribute were still community business staff or volunteers.

A further limitation is confidently attributing outcomes solely to Empowering Places, when there are such a variety of factors to consider – these are areas of high deprivation with complex voluntary sector landscapes, facing multiple interconnected challenges that were exacerbated by the pandemic. Although there are many factors to consider when assigning responsibility for driving change, our methodology has helped us feel confident that Empowering Places has played a significant enabling role in delivering the outcomes we have described in the report.

1 Kantar's methodology compared key outcome metrics over time in the six Empowering Places areas (2018–2020). This hyperlocal version of the survey uses a 'difference-in-difference' statistical technique which estimates the change over time in these places compared with changes seen in matched comparison areas. This provides an indication of the relative impact of the Empowering Places programme.

2 The original plan was to use the whole-year dataset for 2019–20, but there was a concern that the Covid-19 pandemic would mean that any differences revealed between data collected in the six operational areas in 2020 and that collected in the Community Life Survey from 2019 would be unrelated to the Empowering Places programme. Consequently, Kantar used data from the first half of the Community Life Survey for 2020–21.

Moreover, using a 'difference in difference' approach in the Community Life Survey hyperlocal booster – where comparable samples for each operational area provide some control for factors outside the programme – also meant that although the nature and timing of the survey itself couldn't fully reveal the extent of the programme's contribution to change, our overall methodology has been designed to allow us to attribute some level of causality. This is likely to be more apparent in the third and final round of the hyperlocal booster survey, which will report on its summer 2022 fieldwork in 2023.

Change framework

Empowering Places was designed as an experiment to explore what happens when local anchor organisations are supported to catalyse community businesses in deprived communities in England.³ This means that while the programme started with some specific aims, it has been delivered in a flexible and iterative way that allows the places themselves to articulate what impact looks like as the programme progresses. For the evaluation, this meant using similarly flexible methods to understand emergent change.

We developed the change framework three years into the programme, using evidence collected throughout the evaluation and in collaboration with catalysts and delivery partners.⁴ It illustrates the ultimate vision as well as shorter-term outcomes at the three levels at which Empowering Places is focused: the community, the community businesses and the wider place.

Because it is hard to attribute impact in place-based programmes, and because the programme aims to **create a process of change, the framework aims to understand not only the outcomes but also the 'activators' and 'enablers' of change** (see Diagram 1).⁵

This report uses the framework to understand change and its enablers or activators at the micro level of the local community (in red on Diagram 1) and macro level of the wider place (in purple).

3 Informed by the 2015 English indices of deprivation (the most recent data available at the time).

4 Including interviews with programme delivery staff, community businesses, people in places and Power to Change; observational data, and data from monitoring reports.

5 The levels are neither hierarchal nor linear, and each level supports others to thrive.

Diagram 1: Empowering Places change framework

Empowering Places Change Framework

External context and potential influencers

Ongoing or increased support from the six local authorities for community business

The rate of new community businesses developing in an area

Willingness within the local communities to support and work with the community businesses

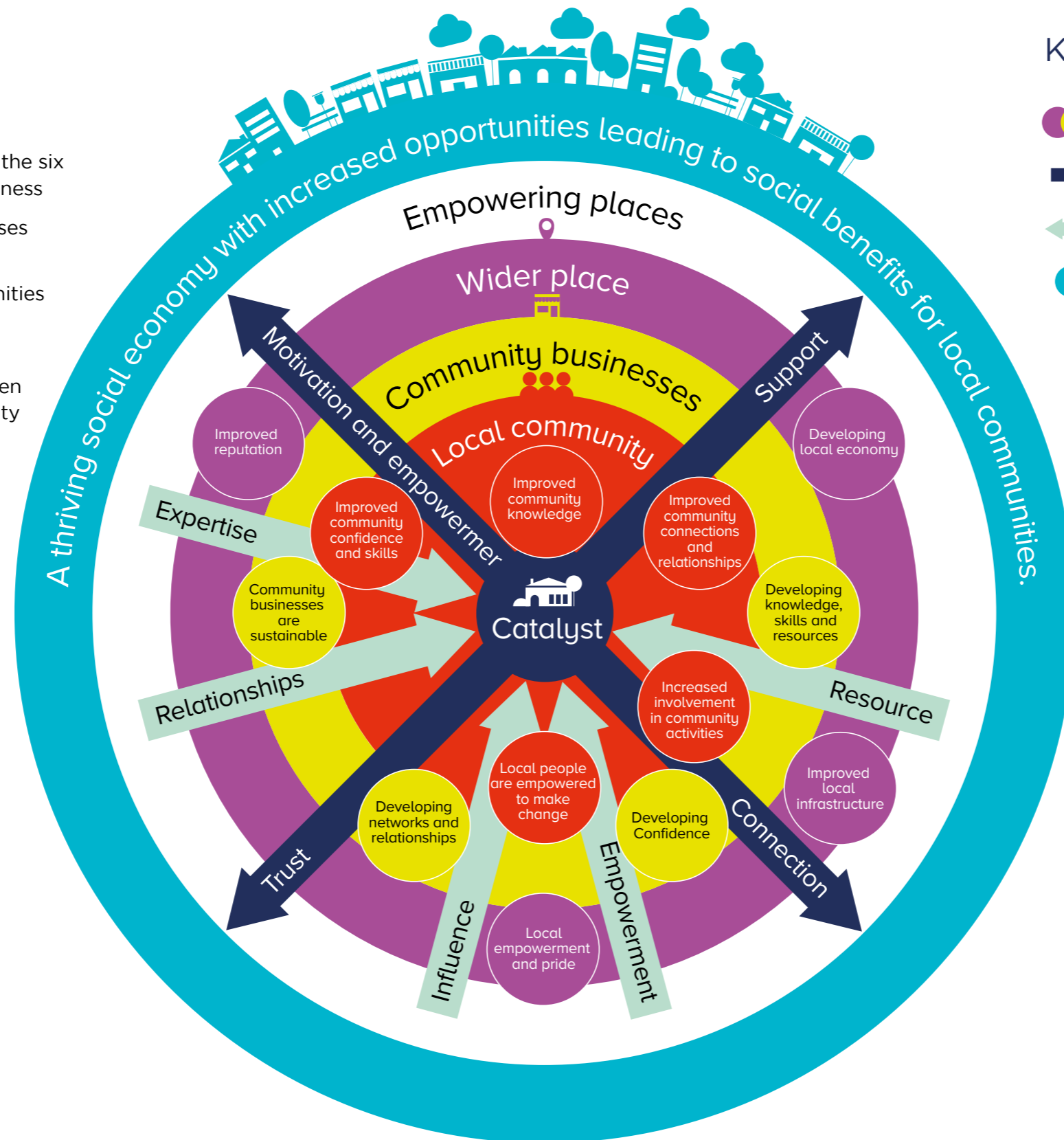
Ongoing strong partnerships between the catalyst organisations, community businesses and other organisations working in similar spaces

Additional funding streams

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis prevents businesses from trading

Wider ecosystem

Increased focus at national government level on the benefits of community business



A locally rooted organisation that has strong relationships with both their community and strategic local organisations

The reach of Empowering Places within each place

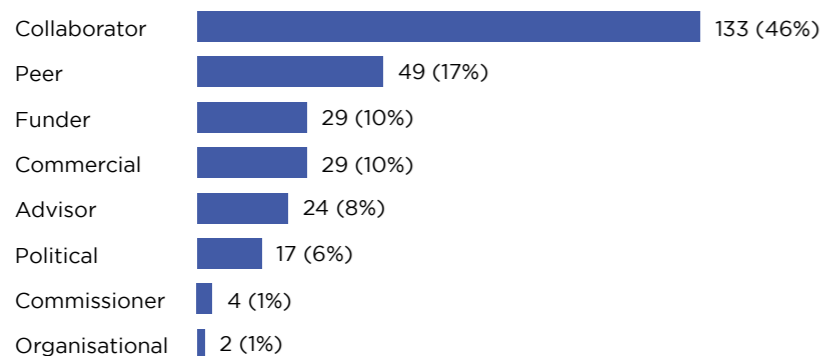
One of the defining features of the programme is that it funds organisations and people that already had strong networks and connections in the six local areas. This section explores the nature and the strength of those relationships, as well as local stakeholders' awareness of catalysts and community businesses.

At the end of 2020, Power to Change commissioned [Shared Assets](#) to help the Empowering Places catalysts map their connections and relationships, using the [Kumu platform](#). Catalysts self-reported the nature and strength of connections in a variety of categories:

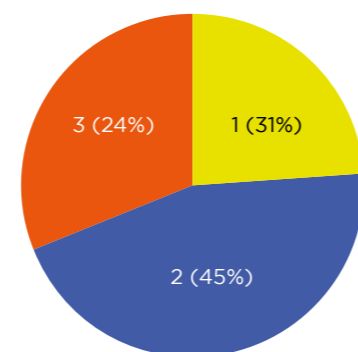
- advisor
- collaborator
- commercial
- commissioner
- funder
- organisational
- peer
- political.

Relationship strength was rated from 1 (low) to 3 (high).

Type and number of relationships reported by catalysts



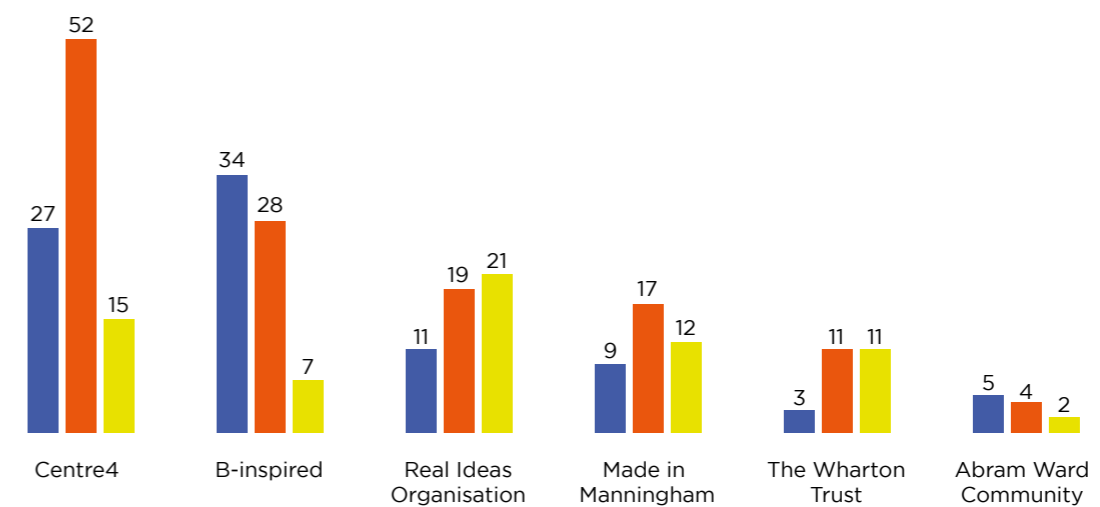
Strength of relationships reported by catalysts (1=low, 3=high)



Although overall the majority of relationships were reported as being collaborative, reporting was inconsistent where an understanding of terms might have differed. For example, the catalyst in Grimsby reported 39 'peer' relationships and only eight 'collaborators', whereas others consistently reported higher numbers of 'collaborators' and fewer 'peers'. Regardless, it is notably positive that so many of the relationships were classed as collaborative or peer-working. Although there were fewer relationships with 'political' organisations, the fact each area has only one local authority means that isn't necessarily a negative finding, and some reported relationships with multiple departments.

Catalysts may also have self-reported with varying degrees of confidence – some listed numerous connections, while others reported much lower figures and, while the majority of catalysts rated the strength of most of their connections as 'medium', the catalyst in Plymouth rated more as strong. What remains clear is the wide variety of connections across the programme.

Number and strength of relationships reported by catalysts



In the most recent interviews with stakeholders (spring 2022), **awareness of the catalysts and the Empowering Places programme was generally but not surprisingly high across all areas** – many of the stakeholders were close contacts of the catalysts. When asked how well known the community businesses were in their local areas, the response from stakeholders was more mixed and there was a sense that many community businesses would only be known by communities in their immediate vicinity, and that most had not yet begun drawing in people from the wider area.

Although the connections established by the catalysts cannot be attributed to Empowering Places, many reported that their relationships had been enhanced as a result of the programme and these connections provide strong foundations to enable catalysts to have a greater impact in communities and across the wider place.

Impact of Empowering Places on communities

This section highlights the extent of the programme’s impact at the community level, and indicates the elements of support that have enabled these changes. We present findings in four areas, aligned with outcomes in the change framework:

- Improved community knowledge and skills.
- Improved community connections and relationships.
- Local people have improved confidence and are empowered to make change.
- There is increased involvement in community activities.⁶

Tables with evidence that supports each outcome – in green where the programme has made particularly notable progress and amber where change, or evidence of change, is not yet significant. Green outcomes should not be interpreted as ‘complete’ or ‘achieved’, as they represent long-term goals that catalysts will continue to pursue long after the programme has ended. As change is far from linear, particularly in place-based programmes, fluctuations will also inevitably occur. And more amber impacts at community level impact is just as likely to reflect the absence of evidence from interviews with local residents as shortcomings in delivery.

Findings cannot represent the position of every place, or the huge diversity between them, and instead give an indication of how the programme is progressing overall and where work still needs to be done.

Improving community knowledge

People learn more about what is available in their community and have increased knowledge about community business	Communities have improved access to support and resources
Catalysts have successfully expanded their reach by targeting activities at new audiences, such as schools.	Most of the community businesses have been set up in direct response to a community need which has given communities improved access to services they need, like English classes.

All the catalysts are using their resources to build a wide range of community skills and knowledge and **wraparound business support has been particularly helpful for people setting up new community businesses.**⁷

⁶ To avoid duplication between outcome areas, we have consolidated ‘improving confidence and skills’, ‘improving community knowledge’ and ‘local people are empowered to make change’.

⁷ For more detail, see [Empowering Places the impact of the programme on community businesses report, Renaisi](#)

Some catalysts have also taken **innovative approaches to expanding their reach and considering the long-term impact for the community.** The catalysts in both Wigan and Grimsby are using schools’ enterprise programmes to connect with young people and support their thinking about different career options. Although outcomes are longer term and won’t materialise for years, a stakeholder in Wigan noted the programme had been really motivating for students, many of whom had faced challenges with mainstream education. Providing space for students to develop their own ideas about social enterprise and think through how it might impact the local economy made students ‘feel special and privileged to take part’. Another stakeholder, not directly engaged in the programme, reported how it ‘lifted the profile of social businesses to young people who are unemployed’.

There is something about trading that young people get, and why you would want to trade, adults don’t have that, they think too much of the process, procedure, risk.

Catalyst (CA12)

Catalysts and community businesses in many areas have **targeted activities to build people’s skills in response to specific needs**, growing knowledge in a way that has an impact on both the individual and their community. For example, the Millan Centre in Manningham (Bradford), provides classes for women who haven’t had the opportunity or confidence to learn English before. In response to local demand, the centre also offers qualifications in health and wellbeing, and hairdressing and beauty, which could lead to local business growth.

I’ve come here to learn English because I need it for my little one, she’s starting school and I, I really want to help her ... And maybe more learning is good for me in the future, to find work.

Video ethnography participant

Many of the community businesses established and supported by catalysts also **help people to support themselves and improve their own quality of life.** For example, people have developed confidence and made connections through dance, football or running clubs or learning woodwork, English or drama. In some cases community members have also addressed mental health issues by accessing support or attending activities to reduce isolation.

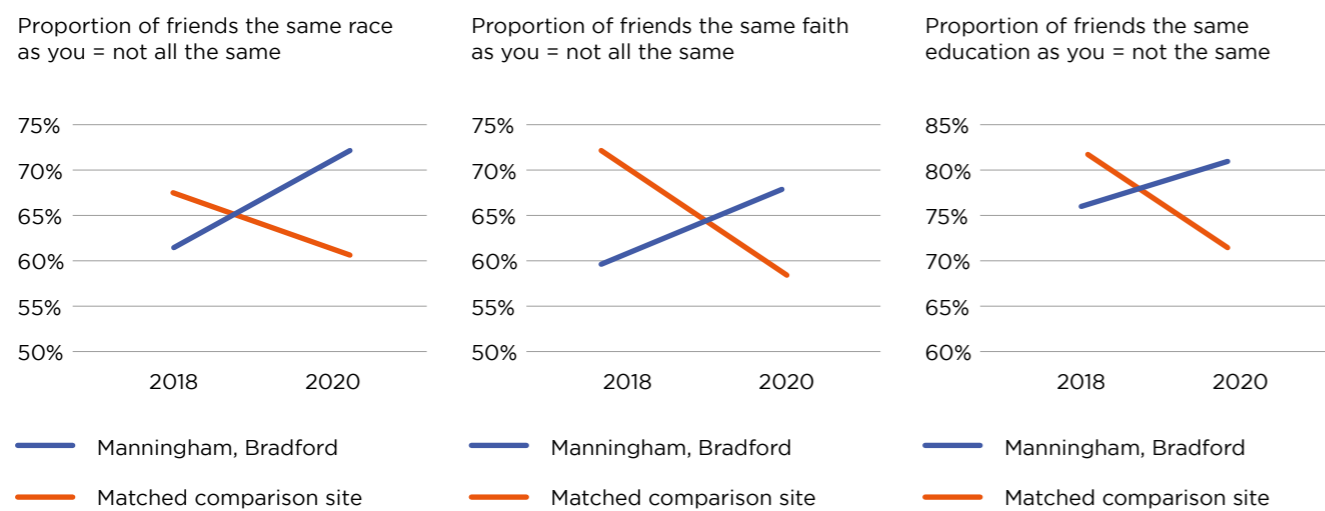
We work with people who suffer from homelessness, loneliness, social isolation, mental health, anxiety, depression, and we basically, we work with other organisations to make sure that they can empower themselves in the community. So we teach people how to cook from scratch again, we teach people how to be able to navigate the services themselves, rather than teaching them how to depend on everything.

Video ethnography participant

Improving community connections and relationships

People make more trusted and better connections and relationships with each other*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours* - People chat to their neighbours at least once a month* - People feel there are others they could call on for company or to socialise with* - People feel that if they needed help there are people who would be there to help them* - People feel there is one person or more they can really count on to listen to them when they need to talk*
In five out of six areas, the hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey indicated that there were improved connections and relationships across diverse groups.	
People feel more connected to large stakeholders in the local area	
In two of the areas there was evidence of better relationships between residents and stakeholders. Anecdotally it was felt that this had improved more broadly.	These outcomes relate to questions in the hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey. Across the six areas there were no statistically significant changes between 2018 and 2020. Except in Stonehouse and Devonport in Plymouth. More people said they borrowed and exchanged favours with their neighbours in all areas except Stonehouse and Devonport in Plymouth. We didn't explore these issues in our research.

The hyperlocal booster for the Community Life Survey identified improvements in connections and relationships in five of the six areas (2018-early 2020), including statistically significant findings on **increased diversity of friendship groups across ethnic, religious and education backgrounds** in Manningham (Bradford).⁸



The catalyst has made a concerted effort to listen to the needs of their community and connect local people across issues. One stakeholder described the Made in Manningham team as 'well known and well respected', enabling them to facilitate positive connections and relationships across communities. They have proactively identified gaps in who they are reaching and bought organisations together to think about how they can extend their reach into communities experiencing inequity.

⁸ All areas except Dyke House (Hartlepool) saw some positive change in community cohesion.

We've got a very strong South Asian community, mixed in with an emerging Eastern European community, which is fabulous.

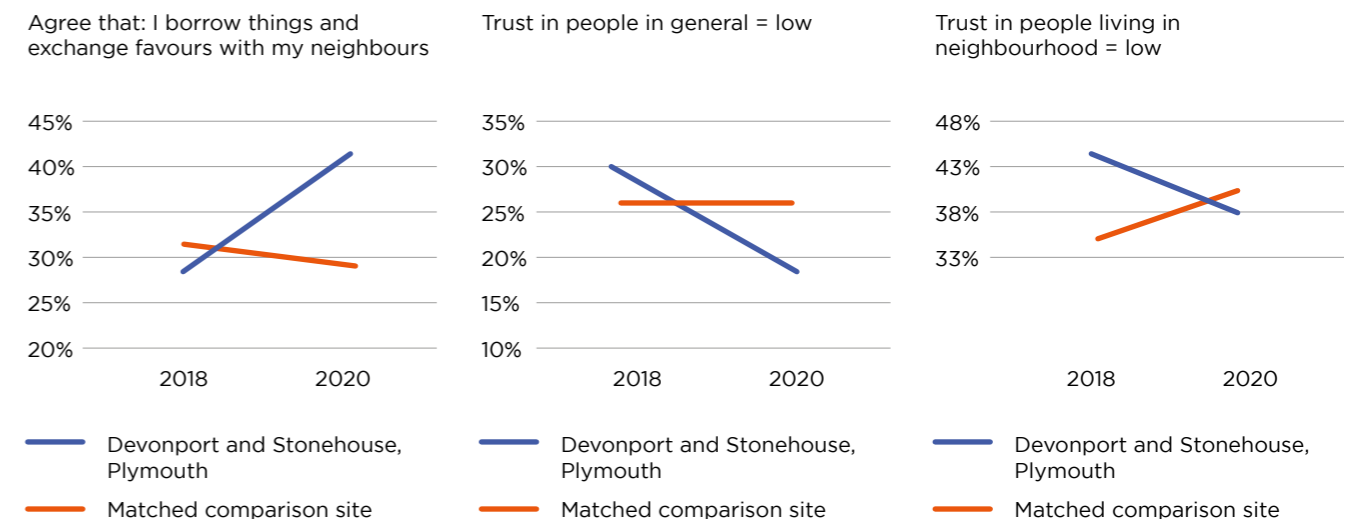
Stakeholder (SH17)

In both Leicester and Hartlepool, interviews with local stakeholders and videos with community business staff revealed how the catalysts' approach to listening had been effective and led to **more trusted relationships between residents and organisations**. Additionally, several stakeholders mentioned the catalyst's role as a 'mouthpiece' of the community, and how 'connecting' business to the community played a critical role in getting local businesses and the statutory sector to think in a more community-minded way, effectively **increasing connections and trust between residents, stakeholders and policymakers**.

(The catalyst) facilitated people to come together to explore what would it mean to make that place a better place, the place where people want to live and thrive and grow and develop and be, a key role it plays is it's not speaking on behalf of them, it's not speaking for them. But it's simply playing a mediating role.

Stakeholder (SH15)

More broadly, in Devonport and Stonehouse, the hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey indicated there had been an **increase in neighbourhood trust, generalised trust and neighbourliness**, with an increase of 14.5% from 2018 to 2020 in people agreeing that they borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours.



Empowering local people to make change

<p>People are confident to come forward with new ideas for community businesses</p> <p>Since the programme started there are 37 active community businesses, indicating that people have felt empowered to develop ideas that support their communities.</p>	<p>Improved collective resilience</p> <p>The programme has improved resilience in the areas by purposefully setting out to listen and understand the issues faced by residents and creating solutions (through community businesses or by creating more effective services) that have addressed them.</p>
<p>Individual people feel resilient and able to play an active role in their community</p> <p>Those that have started community businesses have grown their skills, knowledge and confidence through a programme of support. This has allowed them to feel resilient enough to play an active role in their communities. In addition, several areas have trained people as community organisers to play an active role in engaging residents.</p>	<p>People feel that they have a voice and can influence decisions affecting the local area</p> <p>There are indications that residents feel they have more of a voice and feel more connected to their local communities. However, there is not enough evidence to suggest that people feel more able to influence decision making.</p>
<p>Local people feel supported and enabled by the place they live in</p> <p>Community businesses are supporting people with their physical and mental wellbeing. For example mental health groups, and enabling people to learn new skills.</p> <p>Findings from the hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey also show that people are more satisfied with their lives in two of the six areas.</p>	<p>New forms of citizen democracy through devolution and greater community ownership models</p> <p>Through our research we haven't seen evidence of new forms of citizen democracy. However, through asset transfers to the catalysts (for community use) there are more spaces that the community can take ownership of.</p>

Empowering local people has been a key aim of Empowering Places and catalysts have supported this in a variety of ways, most commonly through **building skills and confidence of prospective business owners**.⁹ Additionally, **catalysts have built the foundations for empowerment by creating better supported and more resilient communities**. In Grimsby, for example, the catalyst organisation was able to support more households to apply for the household support grant from the local council than any other organisation in the area. The grant of up to £250 helps people with essentials like broadband, phone bills, clothing and transport.

They've been purposeful in their work with people. And they've been purposeful in terms of their listening work. They've been very direct. But they've taken a very purposeful role to go out there and have one-to-one conversations with people, building close relationships based on listening

Stakeholder (SH15)

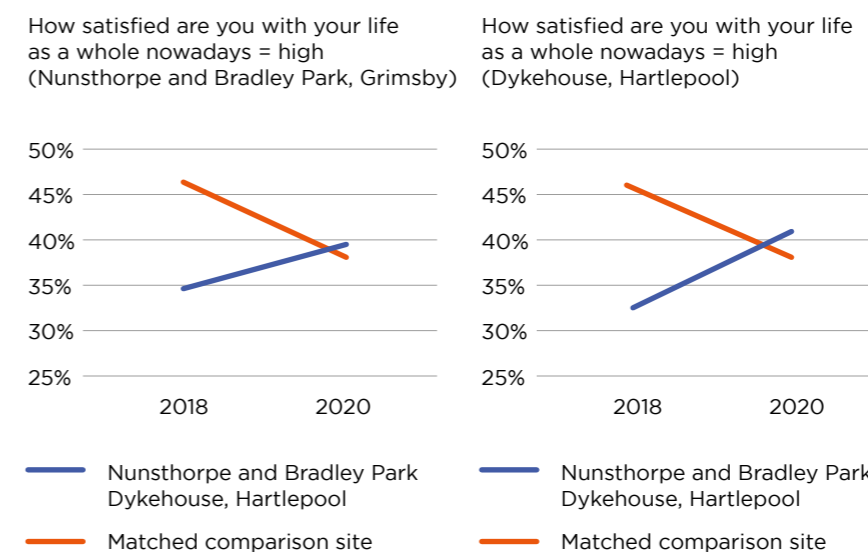
9 For more detail, see [Empowering Places the impact of the programme on community businesses report](#), Renaisi

Demonstrably listening and focusing on important issues identified by local people has also meant that **communities are more willing to be part of the solution**. For example, in Hartlepool a new community business, The Annexe, Wharton Trust, was set up by the catalyst in response to reports that residents across the area were experiencing issues with unethical landlords and badly maintained houses, learned through a community organising approach. The organisation now provides good quality housing and trains local people in each property (of which they currently have four) to be community organisers; providing the community with access to someone they can communicate with about housing issues and provide feedback to inform improvements.

The whole concept of community organisers, and again that kind of outreach element and that people learn to serve others whilst serving themselves. And that being a very transactional approach rather than here is a prescription for your social welfare needs.

Stakeholder (SH16)

The hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey revealed how **people's life satisfaction had improved** in Dyke House (Hartlepool) and Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park (Grimsby) between 2018 and early 2020.



There are also instances of community businesses helping local people to feel more empowered by giving them a **greater voice in the community**. A local resident in Leicester spoke about how becoming involved with the community café helped them feel more connected and embedded in their community:

I feel it, I feel a lot more empowered in the community. I feel like I have more of a voice. I feel like I know a lot more people than I initially knew. I think it's, it's been a great opportunity for me.

Video ethnography participant

One stakeholder also felt that **the development of new community businesses had a knock-on effect in sparking other people to believe they can do the same**. Although hard to prove, this might partly explain the development of 37 community businesses since the programme's inception.

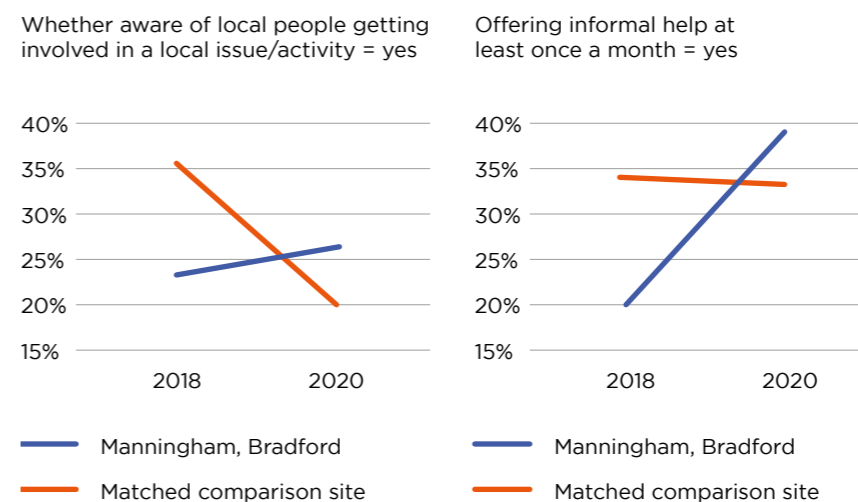
The research has not traced any outcomes relating to the development of new forms of citizen democracy, greater community ownership and residents being able to influence decision making. However, asset transfers enabled by the programme have allowed communities to take ownership of local spaces which we explore in more detail in the section on improving local infrastructure.

Increasing involvement in community activities

People support community businesses	People have a sense of responsibility and accountability for their place
There are 37 active community businesses which indicates that people are supporting businesses, allowing them to continue operating.	There is evidence that people have transitioned from customer to volunteer to staff member at community businesses in all areas.
People get involved in volunteering	People independently take action to support their community
The hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey reported an increase in volunteering in Bradford. A community business survey in 2021 also reported 26 active volunteers (at those community businesses responding). As many didn't respond, the actual number is likely to be much higher.	Although likely to be the case, our research has not found evidence of people taking independent action to support their community.

Although the catalysts and community businesses are not required to keep logs of participants and customers to feed into the evaluation, we can assume that the majority of 'active' community businesses (as reported by catalysts at the end of 2021) have an active customer base. Many are providing **new opportunities for people to connect with each other or get involved in activities or volunteering**. For example, LilyAnne's Coffee Bar in Hartlepool, reported a growing customer base using it as a space to connect with others or seek support in a crisis, with more than 450 people visiting between January and March 2022.

The hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey also reported that in Manningham (Bradford) there was **more awareness of people taking part in local issues and activities, and helping others informally**.



During the ethnographic research, several community business customers and staff also reported that **customers had transitioned into roles as volunteers** at community businesses, as well as some volunteers **becoming staff** – creating community businesses can lead more people to feel increasingly responsible and accountable to their place.

Two of the girls that are coming today started off as participants, and then became junior coaches. So they came on board as staff, and we qualified them. They did an apprenticeship with us, and now they've been working with us now for the last four years.

Video ethnography participant

Similarly, a Leicester resident who had been on universal credit explained how volunteering at the café had helped them grow in confidence and get them ready for paid work.

It gave me the confidence to get back into work and then go in from a volunteer to paid hours and now I have, you know, a secure job, so to speak, what's local and I'm giving back.

Video ethnography participant

As our research went no further than those connected to the programme, there is less evidence of people independently taking action to support their communities.

Factors enabling impact at a community level

The factors enabling impact at community level fall broadly into three categories.

Wraparound support and encouragement

Clearly, the **seed grants and capacity-building support provided by catalysts for community businesses have been key enablers** of positive outcomes for the community but support goes beyond these key features and catalysts have also helped community businesses be more **exploratory in their approach to understanding what works with communities**. This has included supporting founders to feel more informed and able to take risks, as well as encouraging them to help people try new ideas, sometimes with seed grants.¹⁰

Listening

Residents, stakeholders, catalysts and community businesses all identified **sensitive, listening approaches to working with communities**, and providing solutions to address what had been heard, as key enablers. Examples included community organising, facilitating networks and convening community businesses, community groups and residents.

Providing safe and inclusive spaces

Stakeholders suggest some of the community business impacts arose in part from their being **locally rooted, inclusive, and informal spaces**. Businesses like shops or cafés that people can choose to visit might be more effective at providing softer benefits than those offering very specific services to a target group. Similarly, it helps that community businesses have a good understanding of the communities they serve and are able to reach those who may not be interacting with other businesses in the area.

They are operating using local people's language and understanding. They are engaging local businesses who are often separate from the community and mobilising resources.

Stakeholder (SH14)

¹⁰ For more detail, see [Empowering Places the impact of the programme on community businesses report, Renaisi](#)

For example, The Village Hub in Plymouth is open to the whole community and stakeholders singled it out as a space that is genuinely inclusive, encouraging new relationships and holding space for conversations to develop. In Hartlepool, one stakeholder described LilyAnne's Coffee Bar as 'a nurturing space for people to come and be listened to'.

You come in, they'll all be very, very relaxed, just like this conversation has been so that's their style and standard. And you know what, we need more places like that. We absolutely do need more places like that.

Stakeholder (SH16)



Barriers to achieving impact at a community level

Our research did not explore the experience of residents in great depth. Those we spoke to were already engaged in the programme so were able to explain what had enabled them to get involved in community businesses, but we learned little about any barriers to effectiveness. Stakeholders did suggest that at times catalysts could find it challenging to **balance organisational priorities with the needs of the community**. For example, in Grimsby, while some felt that Centre4's approach to community organising had been largely successful in identifying community business ideas, others felt the approach was focused on mobilising resources rather than being guided by the needs of the local community.

The change needs to be driven by local people's interest, not the interest of a service delivery organisation.

Stakeholder (SH14)



Impact of Empowering Places on the wider place

This section highlights the extent of the programme's impact at a wider place level, and what enabled or hindered any change.

Even if some impacts have been relatively easy to identify, stakeholders pointed out how **hard it can be to attribute change to any one thing, especially when looking across the wider place**, and they were understandably reluctant to overstate the role of the community businesses or the Empowering Places programme in developments.

If you're asking me what's the impact of Empowering Places, the honest answer is 'I don't really know', because there's been so much going on.

Stakeholder (SH11)

However, this connection to the wider place and existing work is also one of the advantages of the programme, as catalysts have been able to take advantage of what's already happening, build on assets, align activities and avoid siloed working, to support the sustainable legacy of the programme.

In Plymouth in particular there has been a lot of funding for social enterprise and community business. Local stakeholders in the city pointed out that many of the community businesses funded by Empowering Places are also funded by numerous other grants. There was a sense among Plymouth stakeholders that it's an exciting time for the city and that the Power to Change grant and community businesses were very much a part of the change taking place.

We have seen an increasing amount of activity and conversation in other organisations across the area, that I think are, at least in part, due to the conversations/meetings that we did have and the introduction of ideas around community business/local economy/community organising and empowerment into those conversations. I wouldn't for one moment claim that shift as 'ours' - the world is shifting in that direction to some extent - but I do feel we played a part in that.

Catalyst (CA12)

We have aligned our findings about outcomes with three areas in the change framework:

- improving local infrastructure
- developing the local economy
- improving reputation.¹¹

Improving local infrastructure

Local stakeholders understand the local context and what is needed	Improved services in the local area	An equal seat at the table for community organisations as key economic actors in their local area
The local stakeholders interviewed were sympathetic to the needs of the community and felt that the programme was successfully addressing key issues.	There are more services and facilities for the community including shops, parks, a bar, a football pitch and a food bank.	Although catalysts are increasingly being invited to join conversations about the wider place, this is not the case for community businesses.
Local stakeholders are connected and use each other to create a more effective local ecosystem	Opening up of assets and land to wider community ownership	
There is evidence of more connected services in several of the areas, including more effective delivery between community businesses themselves and with the statutory sector.	Catalysts using or opening up community businesses in all the areas has had a considerable impact on the availability of space for community use.	

It was clear that stakeholders felt that some of the community businesses were having a **noticeable impact on the amenities in their local area**. For example, in Grimsby, Nunny’s Farm has provided a **community space** where people can come together outside, something previously felt to be lacking. Findings from research commissioned by Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens also suggests that community farms have a positive impact on the local economy through local spending, as well as support government agendas for social inclusion, health, education and regeneration.¹²

Similarly, the **community shop** in Braunstone (Leicester) responded to local needs to provide affordable clothes and white goods – previously only available a bus ride away in the centre of Leicester.

¹¹ To avoid duplication we have included findings on ‘local empowerment and pride’ in the ‘Impact of Empowering Places on communities’ section.

¹² <http://www.urbanroots.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/True-Value-Report.pdf>

The Village Hub in Plymouth plays a similar role, providing a **place for local people to come together** and running a **food bank** scheme for people in immediate need. The food bank service in Grimsby was also a valuable resource, and vital for more vulnerable members of the community. Research from the Trussell Trust (which supports over 1,200 of the UK’s food banks) highlights the considerable additional benefit to volunteers, with over 92 per cent feeling they are making a difference to others.¹³

In Plymouth, stakeholders spoke about a theatre group which has **attracted more people to the local park** where they operate, making the area more attractive to visit.

People are travelling to the space ... I know lots of families who will travel to the park for the theatre and then will enjoy the rest of the park. It’s that whole thing about breaking down barriers to what Devonport is all about. That whole space, that part of the park where they work now, is much more beautiful. And the fact that they have done festivals and activities there that have made it really beautiful has changed the whole atmosphere of the park.

Stakeholder (SH9)

Stakeholders in Leicester commented on the fact that the football club has meant the park is not only more widely used in the evenings but that it also feels like a nicer and safer place to be. They liked the fact that what had once been a disused building and underused park were now continually buzzing with activity because of the community businesses in The Grove.

It doesn’t matter what time of day or night I pass it’s always busy and there’s always something going on.

Stakeholder (SH3)

Catalysts and community businesses have also worked hard to create **more effective local ecosystems of support**, by working with other local stakeholders. In Bradford, the catalyst and community businesses have been arranging local coffee mornings with representatives from a range of different services to provide residents with a one-stop shop for support – including local housing officers, street wardens and community development workers who have been signposting people to other relevant services – as well as access to sale racks from their charity shop.

¹³ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/Impact-Report-2022-web.pdf>

All of the catalysts have successfully used or unlocked assets for community use.

This has had a huge impact on the facilities available to communities – including **housing, cafés, a bar, a football pitch, shops, a farm, a brewery, community centres and business hubs**. In Bradford, the catalyst secured a space in ‘Manningham Mills’, a famous Victorian silk factory, which now provides a shared workspace for local people to connect and develop their community businesses. In Leicester, the catalyst has taken over an old council-run community centre and transformed it into a thriving hub that houses several of its community businesses and acts as a focal point for the Braunstone community. And in Hartlepool the catalyst bought a community shop (among other assets), which they used to employ local people from a mental health support group.

The catalyst in Plymouth has also been particularly effective at **supporting community businesses to unlock assets to be used for community space**, having supported eight of their community businesses with the process of transferring or using local assets.

The catalysts are **increasingly being asked to join conversations as key economic actors** in their local area. For some, this has been as a result of their work with the community during the coronavirus pandemic (particularly the anchor organisations Centre4 in Grimsby, B-inspired in Leicester and The Wharton Trust in Hartlepool). For others it was their longevity in communities and strategic positioning over a number of years (Real Ideas in Plymouth and B-inspired) or for new and innovative ideas and strong local relationships (Wigan and Leigh Community Charity, and Made in Manningham in Bradford). In terms of community businesses there are some that are engaging with statutory organisations and becoming embedded in the local ecosystems, and this is especially noticeable in Hartlepool. However, evidence from the interviews suggests that many didn’t consider that their seat at the table was ‘equal’, which some put down to the dynamics of the local authority being a funder.

Improving the local economy

The place has access to wider pools of funding	Places have more opportunities for local people – jobs, skills and connections	Systems are adapted to better meet community business needs
Some stakeholders, catalysts and community businesses felt that the track record built up by the Empowering Places investment, has led to additional money for the area in terms of grants and partnerships.	Many of the community businesses have provided local people with jobs. One business in particular (the Ethical Recruitment Agency) has placed a number of people in to work. In Bradford the hyper local community life survey reported a decrease in the number of unemployed people	Although there is emerging evidence of stakeholders working more effectively together. There is no real evidence of systems change.
Money stays within the community, creating a more lucrative local economy		
The employment of local people has led to more money staying in the area. Additionally, some businesses are bringing money in from elsewhere as people have travelled in especially.		

Some community businesses cited the track record and reputation of those that had been developed by the programme as a contributory factor in **additional money coming into the areas following successful funding applications**. In Wigan, one stakeholder reflected that the catalyst’s network had also served to bring in ideas, partnerships and funding opportunities for other local organisations.

There were also reflections on how the community businesses are providing opportunities for local people to volunteer and train. Stakeholders reflected on the fact that while this may not have an immediate impact, it was **equipping local community members to have more disposable income in future** and ultimately contribute more to the local economy.

While it’s early days for many of the community businesses, stakeholder interviews revealed that there are signs that some of the businesses are already having an **impact on the local economy**. In Grimsby, for example, the Ethical Recruitment Agency (ERA) has placed 40–60 people in jobs over the last 18 months.

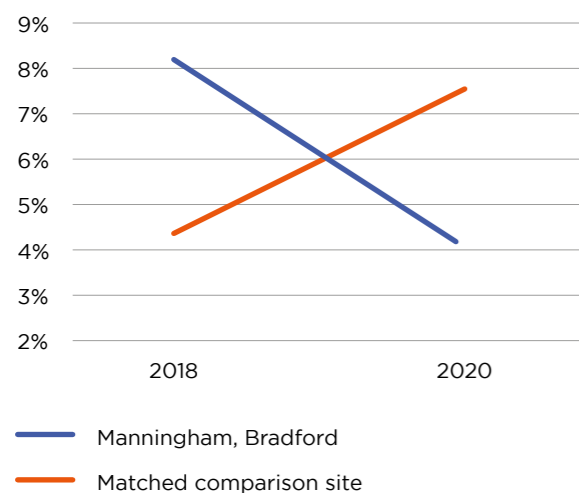
They’ve created local jobs with a local organisation and that’s therefore provided them with money to spend within this area, whether it be at local markets, or local shops ...

Stakeholder (SH13)

Likewise, the Village Hub in Plymouth was seen as adding **valuable jobs** to the local economy and was felt to contribute to the local economy through the various projects it runs in the area.

In Manningham (Bradford) the hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey reported that there was **a statistically significant decrease in the number of unemployed people between 2018 and 2020, compared with a matched comparison group.**

Economic status = unemployed



Stakeholders in Bradford described the city as historically having employment problems and cited the impact of the catalyst in **helping people to adopt a ‘resilience mentality’**, and encouragement to pursue business ideas via an enterprise coaching approach, increasing overall economic opportunities. A stakeholder in Bradford also commented that the catalyst had been able to **reach people they hadn’t previously engaged** such as South Asian women, who faced additional barriers to starting their own businesses, network and connect with each other as well.

Although there are improvements to stakeholders working more cohesively together, it would not be accurate to say that ‘systems’ have been adapted to better meet community need. **The current system of commissioning and referrals has meant that the power still very much sits with large public bodies**, and it would be impossible for the catalysts and community businesses to change this without wider systemic commitment.

Improving reputation

The place becomes more widely known about	People think that their local area has got better in recent years and feel proud of where they live	Catalysts are influencing change locally and nationally
Some stakeholders reported that the reputation of the catalyst organisations was increasing the positive reputation of the place and helping to bring back a sense of community.	The hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey reported that civi pride had increased in Plymouth. Stakeholders also reported that the catalyst organisations were building positive momentum and energy in the places.	It is clear from stakeholders that catalysts are influencing change at a local level. There are some individuals from catalysts that are involved in national conversations. The Empowering Places programme is considered an example of good practice amongst funders looking to run similar programmes. There is not enough evidence at this stage to suggest that the catalysts are influencing national change

All the places selected to be part of the Empowering Places programme have multiple challenges, including high levels of deprivation. In some areas this had translated into the areas having a poor local reputation. Part of the aspiration for the programme was that the community businesses would help to reignite local pride and improve the communities’ reputation in the local areas. There is emerging evidence of this happening. While the size and scale of these impacts vary, they are all considered notable in their local communities and create building blocks for sustaining impacts in future.

In Braunstone, Leicester, the development of community businesses is seen as the latest in a series of activities that the catalyst has delivered which have **helped to turn around the area’s reputation**. In previous years, Braunstone was considered a ‘no go’ area and one local stakeholder had recalled having a conversation with an employer in the past who had indicated that they wouldn’t employ someone from the Braunstone estate. While the community businesses are still new, and their impact is still minimal and hard to assess, there is a sense among local stakeholders that the businesses are providing a channel for local residents to express their pride in the local area, and giving them more to ‘shout about’.

Some of the evidence around improved pride and reputation relates to the community businesses **creating an energy that local stakeholders feel is helping to build momentum** in the local areas, and start to increase community members’ pride in living there. In Wigan, stakeholders felt that this was most evident in the community businesses located on the high street where the businesses were thought to be **helping with bringing back a sense of community**. The shop was singled out for having a good energy and helping to create a buzz in the local area:

Rammed with people doing stuff, creating staff, having meetings about the community

Stakeholder (SH6)

A sense of new energy and momentum was also cited in Plymouth. For example, the local newspaper, Stonehouse Voice, was identified as offering a positive voice for the community and having an impact on how local people perceive themselves and their neighbourhood.

It does feel like there has been a tipping point and that the area that was once ... you would never think to go there, let alone buy a house there, does feel like there's a change, a shift on that and of course if you've got lots of nice things happening there. Good things happening and you keep hearing about those good things, it does change your perception.

Stakeholder (SH10)

In some areas, stakeholders identified that the work that the community businesses are doing may also help to improve community pride and reputation in the future by **enhancing both aspirations and opportunities for young people** in the areas. In Grimsby, stakeholders spoke about how community businesses such as the ethical recruitment agency, ERA, and CLIMB4 (a social enterprise that focuses on creative learning) were in a position to tackle some of the local crime and antisocial behaviour by giving young people more opportunities to engage in other activities. They hoped that giving young people these opportunities would help to bring people in the area together and contribute to a shift in mindset about the area.

Catalyst staff in Plymouth, Hartlepool and Wigan all noted that they **felt part of a national conversation** in which their role would become increasingly visible. This was reflected by stakeholders with all referring to the importance of community businesses in the context of community wealth building. The catalyst in Wigan saw its nomination for the Local Access Partnership work as a reflection of this, with the past five years of the **Empowering Places programme serving as a 'proof of concept' for their offer**. There are also instances of individuals having a national profile, for example the CEO of the catalyst in Hartlepool has been featured in articles for The Guardian and other publications and is also spearheading the [We're Right Here](#) campaign, which aims to shift the government's levelling up policy.

The Empowering Places programme is also looked to as an example of good practice in place-based working. Its iterative, emergent nature and learning to date have been shared through advisory groups and amongst funders looking to develop similar programmes.

Factors enabling wider impact

Interviews with stakeholders explored what they felt enabled Empowering Places, the catalysts and community businesses to have an impact on the wider place. These enablers fall broadly into six key areas.

Trust

First, stakeholders identified that trust in the catalyst and community businesses played a critical role in their ability to instigate changes across the wider place. Trust has been established through truly listening and acting on community needs, as well as being a dependable organisation embedded in the area for some time (for many of the catalysts). But stakeholders noted that **trust had also been earned** by following through on promises. For example, the catalyst in Plymouth was one of the organisations that was felt to really deliver, and its work with asset transfers and community ownership was particularly singled out.

Trust was also established when catalysts and community businesses had made a real effort to **immerse themselves within their communities** and make connections with other local businesses and services. In Braunstone (Leicester), the catalyst's employment of local people in the community businesses was seen to be a key enabler for helping businesses better meet the needs of the local community.

They're very keen, they are very much embedded within Braunstone, all run by local people, they understand the needs of local people and they want to do well and want to provide facilities for people in the local community.

Stakeholder (SH1)

Relationships

Second, the catalysts' **relationships at different levels, and their ability to use these strategically** was seen as a critical lever of success. In Wigan, for example, the Wigan and Leigh Community Charity was felt to be well-connected at a strategic level with both the local authority and the wider region, as well as at a community level. Stakeholders identified the charity as the bridge between grassroots community businesses and anchor organisations, enabling both to achieve more.

So they're connected in at lots of different levels really, where they need to be. So at the top end, where some of the decision-making is happening, but also at the bottom end, where the grassroots need our support as well. So they're very, very well networked within different levels.

Stakeholder (SH7)

In Hartlepool, the Wharton Trust's mediating role in connecting people and organisations was described as providing 'social glue.' Braunstone in Leicester was also identified as being unique in the local area because of the huge amounts of cooperation and collaboration between agencies working together locally, and B-inspired was seen as central to facilitating those partnerships.

They're able to pull together organisations ... so things feel very joined up and connected in the estate and I think a lot of that is down to B-inspired who run initiatives that always involve the councillors, the local partners and they seem to be able to create that shared sense of purpose.

Stakeholder (SH3)

Members of staff at catalyst organisations reported that having **informal relationships with the council as well as more formal working arrangements** had been instrumental to achieving some of the wider place outcomes. For example, the relationship between the catalyst organisation and the council in Grimsby was cited as a helpful 'way in' for community business – e.g. the Ethical Recruitment Agency when they were looking for clients.

Successful relationships with councils have been built through various means, most prevalently by those in leadership roles being present and active in the area over a number of years. One catalyst reported that going on a multidisciplinary leadership course with local authority staff had helped build informal relationships.

Additionally, **purposefully or indirectly being aligned to the strategy of the council** has been particularly impactful in Wigan and Plymouth, where both councils are driving agendas for community wealth building and social enterprise. In Wigan, this has translated into the catalyst's CEO also playing the role of social enterprise network coordinator on the Local Access partnership. There was a sense among stakeholders that there is collective buy-in to Wigan and Leigh Community Charity's vision across the borough which meant that they are now 'pushing on open doors.'

Some also acknowledged that being **willing to work beyond the scope of the hyperlocal area** meant they were being invited to join more strategic local meetings at a wider place scale. For example, Real Ideas in Plymouth is regarded by local stakeholders as being very well networked both across the city and in the wider region as well as nationally. Stakeholders mentioned that Real Ideas was involved in so many initiatives across the city that they popped up everywhere and consequently hold good senior strategic relationships with economic development and strategic planning teams, as well as with community groups on the ground.

Collaboration

Third, the **collaboration between community businesses, and between community businesses and other local business and agencies**, has enabled those delivering services to do so in a much more joined up way. Stakeholders spoke about how there were good levels of communication between the various community businesses and suggested that this had created a culture that helped to support the businesses' development. It was also acknowledged that having a cluster of community businesses helps to create momentum.

Stakeholders in Wigan also held up the **hub model, where several community businesses are co-located**, as an example of good practice. This is also playing out in Braunstone (Leicester), Nunthorpe and Bradley Park (Grimsby) and Manningham (Bradford) where several community businesses are housed in one building. The supportive culture between the co-located community businesses is not only leading to efficiencies but also boosting trade for some of the businesses. In one example, a stakeholder in Leicester spoke about how they regularly referred families in need to the pre-loved shop in Braunstone, and felt that the relationships facilitating this were working well and this made a big difference to the work they delivered.

Power to Change's 'collaboration funding' pot for Empowering Places areas has also enhanced the approaches taken by the catalysts. In Hartlepool, it was used to fund the Tees Valley Community Foundation to run a three-year community business initiative, to support development of community business ideas in the wider Hartlepool area beyond Dyke House (where the catalyst operates) and across other parts of Teesside. The programme provides a range of services to support community business ideas to develop and grow, including tailored consultancy support, training, networking opportunities and grant funding. This has given more capacity to the catalyst to focus on Dyke House, and ability to signpost ideas outside of the hyperlocal area. Both Tees Valley Community Foundation and the catalyst organisation have subsequently been involved in developing the Local Access programme in Hartlepool, which grows social enterprise locally.

Governance and leadership

Fourth, some of the catalyst's success at a wider place level was attributed, at least in part, to the organisation's **good governance and leadership**. The leadership of B-inspired in Leicester, for example, was widely praised by local stakeholders who commented that its chief executive is well regarded as a thought-leader and her connections (both with the community and the statutory sector) are considered to be a huge asset to the organisation. The organisation's governance and processes were also singled out as being very effective by local stakeholders.

I think there's a lot of very positive role-modelling that goes on in B-inspired.

Stakeholder (SH4)

Association with national organisations

Throughout the programme, catalysts and stakeholders have also cited the **association with Power to Change, Co-operatives UK and the national 'tech' leads NEF and CLES**, as adding credibility to their approach building their reputation locally – supporting the catalyst organisations to ‘open doors’ they previously hadn’t been able to. This is also true of the community businesses, of which so many started without a track record, but are now seen as able to manage funding through a reputable national organisation and have been successful in applying for additional funds from other funding organisations.

Visibility and need for service

Lastly, the **physical location** of the catalyst or community business is also instrumental in improving their visibility and engagement with their local community. For example, stakeholders in Bradford reflected that the catalyst’s recent move to the iconic Lister Mills building, has been critical for Made in Manningham to develop collaborative relationships, yielding new opportunities for them to work with other organisations in the building and signpost individuals to other services depending on their needs. Some stakeholders also noted the importance of community businesses having a presence on the high street.

The consistency of the location, and a **welcoming space**, were also important features that enabled the catalyst in Bradford to reach and engage new communities successfully, such as South Asian women.

If you're someone who's got a bit of trepidation about setting up a community business, [a cold and transactional environment] has the potential to put you off. Whereas you walk into [Lister Mills] and it's got a different atmosphere to it. And I think it puts you at ease ... There's some sofas to sit on. And someone offers you a cup of tea ... But those small things can make a big difference and they help you build a relationship with your customer, your client, even before you met them.

Stakeholder (SH17)

On the other hand, where community businesses have a less stable location, stakeholders have expressed some worry about moving, as it could undermine the trust and relationship that they've cultivated with community members. Especially for harder to reach groups, trust not only resides in the relationships with people, but also in a safe and accessible space.

Barriers to achieving wider impact

Interviews with stakeholders revealed their thoughts on the barriers that are currently preventing some of the community businesses from delivering as they would like. These thoughts are supported by evidence from observations and meetings with catalyst organisations and community businesses. The barriers fall into seven categories.

Covid-19 and the wider economic situation

Unsurprisingly, **pandemic restrictions** were raised as a significant barrier for catalysts and community businesses physically convening with other organisations while restrictions were in place. Some stakeholders felt that not being able to get together in person meant that the teams running community businesses were not always as cohesive as they could have been.

The wider economic situation

The wider economic situation, beyond the pandemic, was also regarded as a barrier to some of the community businesses delivering to their full potential. In Grimsby, stakeholders spoke about how the current crisis was not only the increasing cost of living, but reducing the number of employment opportunities locally, which had a knock-on effect on the local businesses through reducing disposable income to spend locally. Similarly in Leicester, the catalyst organisation noted that **fewer families are currently willing or able to spend money on extras such as activities for children**. This not only affects the community businesses’ bottom line but means that their reach and impact is truncated.

Additionally, catalysts’ and community business successes have been somewhat affected by a challenging funding context. This has included:

- A lack of funding generally.
- Funding being linked to specific outcomes that don't necessarily tie in with community needs and can push the catalyst organisations further from their purpose. Linked to this, specific funding pots have led to duplication of services and activities, as organisations have had to transition their aims to go where the money is.
- There have also been instances of competition between organisations where limited resources make it hard for them to always be fully collaborative.

We live in a world where competition is far easier than collaboration. And actually, we live in a world where resources are finite, and very much, and we seek to preserve what we have, rather than, you know, sit alongside one another and work out how best we could do things together.

Stakeholder (SH16)

- Community development work takes time and much of the funding available is for short-term project work, leading to organisations not being able to retain staff, or fully embed themselves in longer-term outcomes.

Differing aims and approaches of partners

While many of the catalyst organisations and community businesses have a good relationship with their local authority, **the pace and approach of local councils** can create challenges for the community businesses. Catalysts across the areas reflected that although their local authority was supportive in principle, often in practice there were barriers that their processes or approaches created that stalled the community businesses' progress. In Wigan, stakeholders reflected on how the speed at which the local council operates could be a significant barrier and felt that leveraging existing networks and the private sector could perhaps be more effective than waiting for the public sector to deliver what is needed.

Time is a different animal to that kind of person ... as much as the council is an opportunity and a platform and a mouthpiece, it can also be the thing that prevents because it doesn't facilitate or accelerate as quickly as you want it to.

Stakeholder (SH6)

Linked to this was a sense among some catalyst organisations and community businesses that in some cases their **local network of partners and support was not quite sufficient to create the opportunities that they needed**. Stakeholders have reflected that this is partly due to austerity measures which leads to greater competition between local organisations and, exacerbated by pressures created by the pandemic, tends to limit the capacity of organisations to think more long term and strategically and focus instead on survival in the here and now. It was felt that if catalysts could establish a stronger network of anchor organisations that supported them and worked in partnership, they would be able to maximise their opportunities more effectively.

Perceptions of the local areas

Third, although there is evidence that the community businesses are playing a role in helping to increase local pride in the six places and enhance the local areas' reputations, **challenges remain around local perceptions of the areas**. In Grimsby, for example, stakeholders reflected on how perceptions of the Nunsthorpe estate are a key barrier to engaging the wider community with the community businesses supported by Centre4, the catalyst. As the estate is still regarded locally as a dangerous area, which people will avoid travelling through unless they need to, there is little footfall in Centre4 beyond those living locally. This means that, while Centre4's connections to the population in Nunsthorpe is strong, the community businesses have struggled to build profile with the wider area in Grimsby beyond those directly referred to their services.

Dependence on an individual

Fourth, while strong leadership was identified as a facilitator for catalysts' success, stakeholders also recognised that there are **risks and fragility associated with an organisation being dependent on the connections, personality and approach of a specific leader**. For example, staff at one of the catalyst organisations talked about how the loss of the people leading the programme had led to a loss of strategic connections and direction for the organisation. In another area one member of staff's previous connection to the council as an employee led to that individual being asked to provide ongoing advice for free and feeling unable to challenge this position. In some areas there are existing power dynamics between the local authority as a funder and the catalyst as a grantee, meaning some haven't felt they have a sufficiently equal seat at the table.

Additionally, in each of these areas the social sector is small and many of the people working in it have been doing so for a number of years, meaning there are inevitably some historic rivalries and personal misgivings.

Lack of clarity around aims and vision

Fifth, there were some indications from stakeholders that it **wasn't always clear what catalysts did** or who they were collaborating with, although this is often the way with multi-purpose organisations. This wasn't helped by what **some perceived to be a lack of transparency**. In Plymouth, for example, some stakeholders felt that while Real Ideas did brilliant, collaborative work across the city, from an external perspective it wasn't always clear exactly how they were delivering projects and who they were partnering with. One stakeholder felt that this could sometimes be to the detriment of the less well-known partners.

Additionally, although connecting with local authority-wide initiatives was considered positive for wider place-making, some stakeholders felt that the **desire to expand provision meant the organisations lost focus on the vision**.

Also, while knowledge of the existence of the Empowering Places programme was high, in some of the places, stakeholders reflected on how it would have been useful to have more information about exactly **what was being funded through the programme**.

I believe every organisation will offer a different kind of support ... and none of our programmes could imagine that we could do everything, so they need a lot more than any of us could deliver. I think it's great that there are so many things going on at the same time. We probably could have coordinated that better and been aware of who was getting what support when. But I think it would have been great if we were more aware of who gets support from Empowering Places.

Stakeholder (SH11)

Challenges to securing assets

Lastly, a number of the catalysts reported the difficulty and time it takes to secure assets. This includes raising funds, understanding and navigating complex licensing laws and policies, competing against others and heavy bureaucracy. For example, issues with the land registry office have held up the purchase of a community centre in Wigan, which they hope to use to rent out to community businesses as a sustainable source of income. Similarly in Grimsby, plans to purchase a plot of land to build community-led housing were derailed as the purchase was not approved by the council.



Legacy of Empowering Places and the future

As the programme draws to a close (with six months remaining at the time of writing in June 2022) all thoughts are turning towards legacy, leveraging the investment and sustaining what has been built throughout the five-year programme. This section explores the **aspirations amongst stakeholders and catalysts** for their areas. Although views naturally varied, some broad themes emerged.

Both catalysts and stakeholders reported being keen to see more **collaboration across the public and voluntary sector**. Several stakeholders noted that there was a need for more peer-learning and less duplication of efforts across the local councils, voluntary sector infrastructure organisations and local community groups. Influencing and utilising the council's convening power was noted as critical to this. The catalyst in Hartlepool noted that a lack of an official Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) or other support infrastructure that could serve as a neutral force, has made the council's role increasingly important in the area.

Building community-leadership and voice via community businesses was an aspiration across places. Catalysts and local stakeholders hoped to see communities taking hold of the opportunities presented by increased funding to drive development in their place. And for community businesses to play a key role in supporting local people to have a voice in economic development, by ensuring that wealth stays within communities and services are developed which meet local needs.

Community organising, which is used by both the catalysts in Grimsby and Hartlepool, was highlighted as a tool to identify and **support community leaders to drive their own initiatives**. Those places adopting this approach hoped to expand community organising and teach others how to use the tool to support community-led development.

Other catalysts noted that the last five years had supported them to **build relationships with community leaders across more diverse groups in their place**, which they hope to build on to support more community business leaders. For example, the catalyst in Bradford noted an ambition to support voluntary sector leaders in the South Asian Muslim community to develop community business which can channel philanthropic practice into the social economy. More broadly, they also highlighted that they wanted to be more intentional about ensuring their activities reflected community voice. To become an organisation that supports 'anyone who comes through their door with an idea'.

Unsurprisingly, catalysts highlighted aspirations around **building the capacity and financial sustainability of local community businesses**. The catalyst in Wigan hoped to support this by acquiring more building spaces for community businesses to operate side by side in. A stakeholder in Wigan believed that facilitating mentoring from private businesses to support community businesses in specific skills, such as accountancy, marketing and legal support could be critical in developing their capacity.

Private sector can be the key to carry the vision of the third sector.

Stakeholder (SH6)

There was a shared desire for community businesses to diversify their income streams, moving away from grant funding.

They're good models there's no reason why they shouldn't succeed, they have a wide enough community around them to succeed, they should do fine ... but we also have to accept that these are people who are new to this and need support to be able to continue.

Stakeholder (SH1)

Catalysts highlighted ambitions for **building the profile of their work, community businesses and the social economy more broadly**. Noting that in light of agendas around levelling up, community wealth-building and the social economy, the timing was right for them to shine a light on the importance of place-based community businesses.

Building on the work that has already been done, some stakeholders also wanted to see **social enterprises and community businesses playing a bigger role in their cities**, arguing that they could support a more equitable spread of power across the place, particularly where businesses emerge in the most deprived areas. Stakeholders in Wigan and Grimsby hoped that local people would support the regeneration of the high street by investing in community business rather than chain retailers, bringing 'the heart back into the community'. Beyond this, stakeholders in Grimsby hoped that community businesses could transform the place into a destination of choice that others would travel to, and residents would be able to spend their leisure time in, rather than being drawn to activities in bigger cities and a place where young skilled people would want to stay.

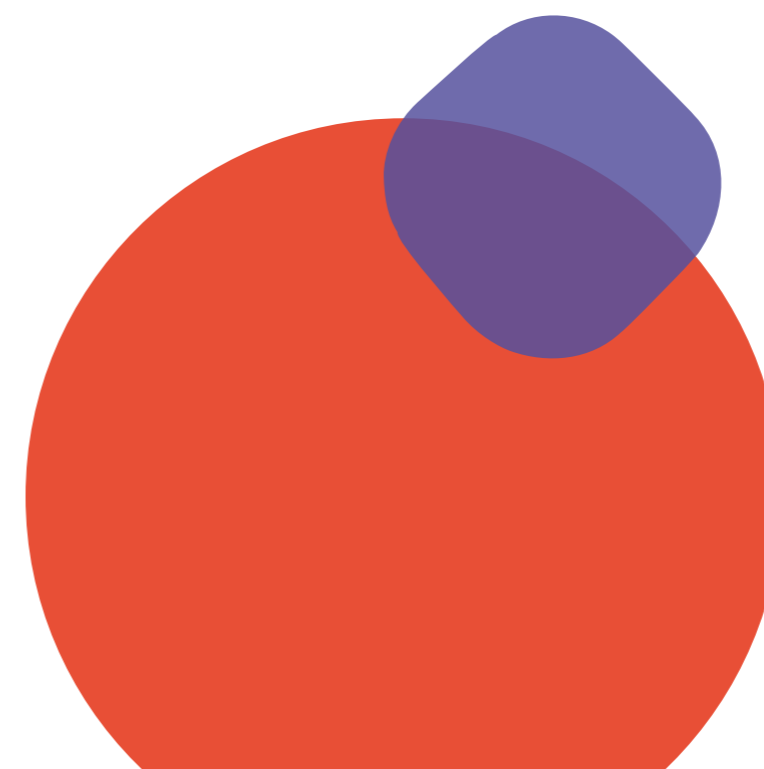
How do we bring little parts of these big cities ... to produce our version of it as a community and our local economy?

Stakeholder (SH13)

In Plymouth, several stakeholders mentioned the **importance of engaging young people in learning about community businesses and developing skills to help develop a fairer economy with both social and environmental goals**. One stakeholder in Wigan noted aspirations around building a generation which will go into careers that create social value and felt that scaling and delivering the Wigan and Leigh Community Charity's 'Wigan Minis' programme could support this. Another stakeholder hoped that young people would have greater ambitions for a range of careers beyond just following in the footsteps of their parents.

... to allow younger people to stay in the town rather than leaving out when they go to university, and they don't come back ... this should be a place where you stay.

Stakeholder (SH14)



Conclusion

Catalysts and stakeholders share visions for developing local entrepreneurship, providing more opportunities for local people to get good jobs and creating places where people want to settle. Evidence demonstrates that Empowering Places has enabled people who haven't previously engaged to participate in community activities, build connections, gain skills, volunteer and even access paid work. This has led to a multitude of positive outcomes for their wellbeing, connectedness and confidence. The programme has also supported an increase in amenities and services for local people and has started to build more effective ecosystems involving community businesses, community services and statutory agencies.

The programme has made a key contribution by using a deep understanding of community needs to design, or enable others to design, people-centred services in response. These outcomes have also been enhanced by a renewed appreciation of 'community', 'localisation' and an appetite for more community-led responses to local needs, as we emerge from the shadow of Covid-19, as well as the government's levelling up agenda. As well as the catalysts' connections, reputation and ability to work both at community and strategic level.

There have been fewer outcomes where individuals and organisations have been able to change the 'system', which appears to have been made harder by those with more power. It feels as though it is beginning to shift, as the catalysts and community businesses continue to grow their reputation and unlock assets which helps to increase their visibility; but long-term systemic change still feels a long way off.

How catalysts continue to play a role in developing confident individuals and generating community businesses to build a more thriving local economy without Empowering Places funding remains a crucial concern. Some have better chances than others such as those with assets, like community hubs, who can continue building their model while receiving a steady income from renting out space. Others like Plymouth and Wigan have opportunities to capitalise on being a 'social investment city'. But while funding for building capacity is hard to come by, investing further in a proven model, or creating a service that can be commissioned, might be the only way of building a sustainable legacy for the programme.

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