![power to change | business in community hands]

![COMMUNITY FUND]

Empowering Places

Enablers and barriers to delivering place-based change through the Empowering Places programme

A report prepared for Power to Change
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01. Executive summary

The Empowering Places programme funds locally rooted 'catalyst' organisations in six places, over five years to empower communities to develop community businesses. Through the development of new community businesses, the programme aims to provide benefits and opportunities to local people and create more resilient places.

The programme, delivered by Co-operatives UK, resources catalysts with grant funding, money to award seed grant, access to an expert 'tech lead' from Centre for Local Economic Strategies or The New Economics Foundation, and access to specialist tailored support from an approved pool of providers.

Over nearly two years, the evaluation has collected data about what is seen to work and what the challenges are for the successful delivery of the Empowering Places programme. This report identifies a number of key strengths and challenges to delivering place-based change within this context.

The key strengths of Empowering Places are:

— **A relational approach, between the delivery partners and catalysts, amongst the different catalyst organisations, and between catalyst staff and the developing community businesses. Rooted in trust, this approach is helping to build catalysts' and community businesses' confidence and ambition, by expanding their horizons, challenging them to think bigger and allowing them to be open and exploratory around challenges.**

— **The programme of iterative and responsive wrap around support focuses on the catalysts' needs and has helped catalysts and community businesses to make the most of the potential resources, as well as give them access to a wide range of skills and knowledge.**

— **The structure of the programme is underpinned by a catalyst-centric approach which means catalysts are trusted to use relatively large amounts of money in ways that will best support their place and their delivery of the programme, guided and supported by the delivery partners and Power to Change. They are also resourced to take part in learning which has supported them to evolve their ideas and try new things.**

The key challenges to delivering Empowering Places are:

— **The time and resources needed to create sustainable community businesses that provide opportunities for local people and consequently contribute to a thriving local economy is a long-term endeavor, as well as being even harder to achieve in highly deprived areas that have limited social capital.**

— **The risks to individuals are high, starting a community business can mean leaving paid work or secure benefits, but cannot guarantee an income in itself.**

— **The complexity of the programme and the number of different actors, as well as the definition of a 'community business' means the programme is sometimes difficult to comprehend, and this has in some cases acted as a barrier to involvement.**

— **The Covid-19 pandemic has also meant that some of the catalysts have suffered huge challenges with their trading income, and it has slowed down the progress of most community businesses. Catalysts have also been prevented from doing a lot of community engagement and outreach. Additionally, the point around risk to individuals is exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 on the economy.**

The challenge for the remaining term of the programme, and beyond, will be how catalysts can best embed their learning from the programme into their area to help encourage longer-term change that supports better places. This includes retaining networks (nationally and locally) that have been enhanced by the programme.

02. Introduction

Empowering Places aims to build more resilient communities by catalysing and nurturing community businesses to provide benefits and opportunities for local people. The programme funds locally rooted 'catalyst' organisations in six places to help empower communities to develop community businesses:

– Abram Ward Community Cooperative **(AWCC) in Abram, Wigan**

– B-Inspired **in Braunstone, Leicester**

– Centre4 **in Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby**

– Real Ideas **in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth**

– The Wharton Trust **in Dyke House, Hartlepool**

– **Made in Manningham, incubated by** Participate Projects **in Manningham, Bradford**

Between July 2017 and September 2020, the Made in Manningham team was incubated by Action for Business Ltd, which operates out of the Carlisle Business Centre in Manningham. Since November 2020, Made in Manningham has transferred to a new host organisation, Participate Projects, where it operates independently as a catalyst for community businesses in Manningham. As a result, there are references to Action for Business, Participate Projects and to Made in Manningham as a nascent organisation in this report.

The Empowering Places programme is delivered by a consortium of organisations led by Co-operatives UK with support from expert 'tech leads' at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and The New Economics Foundation (NEF). The catalysts also have access to a capacity support provider pool, grant funding and money to award seed grants to emerging community businesses in their areas to deliver a five-year plan. Each catalyst receives up to £1m (between July 2017 and July 2022).

This report summarises the interim findings from an independent evaluation of the Empowering Places programme, delivered by a consortium led by Renaisi. The aim of this evaluation is to enable Power to Change and its stakeholders to learn about how to work in places, and how community businesses can drive local change. This paper is part of a series of outputs aiming to take a developmental, learning based approach to understanding and improving the programme, and to support with wider learning for similar programmes in the future.

The first in this series of outputs was an [interim report](#) of evaluation findings published in August 2020. The second is a set of profiles of each place, looking at the context and approaches to delivery in each area. The third builds on the first interim report, drawing on findings from the profiles, highlighting similarities and differences between the places and approaches, as well as drawing out impact to date. This fourth paper focuses on learning gathered throughout the first three and a half years of Empowering Places, to understand the key enablers and barriers to delivering the programme successfully.

03. Enablers and barriers to programme delivery

Over nearly two years, the evaluation has collected data about what is seen to work and what the challenges are for the successful delivery of the Empowering Places programme. This paper draws on findings from depth interviews, as well as from our four evaluative outputs to date. The purpose of this paper is to present views and experiences of what enables the programme to achieve change and where the barriers are, from those most involved in delivery.

Programme enablers

Factors that are considered to enable the delivery of the Empowering Places programme include:

– The focus on relationships
– Trust
– A strong peer network
– The structure of the programme
– The delivery partners
– The programme support
– The local context
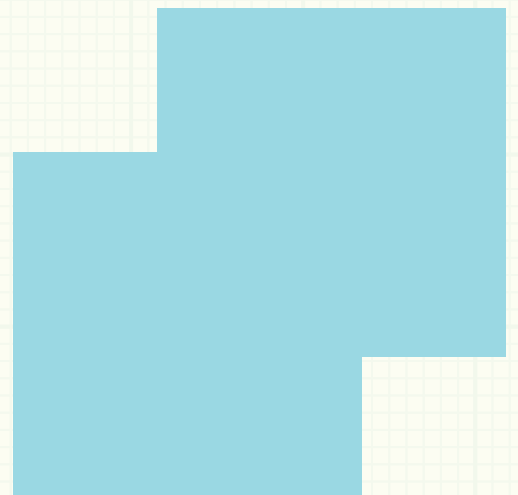
The focus on relationships

The Empowering Places programme is coordinated and managed by Co-operatives UK who work closely with the lead at Power to Change to develop, guide, administer and support the programme. The programme staff made a conscious decision to take a highly relational approach to the programme, encouraging strong relationships at all levels: between catalysts, programme staff and Power to Change, between the different catalyst organisations, and between catalyst staff and the developing community businesses. Evidence from depth interviews suggests that this relational focus is paying off, and that solid relationships are being built across the programme network. Catalysts and tech leads reflected on how these relationships are helping to build catalysts' confidence and ambition in relation to both the programme and their own individual workstreams. Through contact with their peers, catalysts and community business staff are being exposed to new contexts and ideas which they are using to inform their own approaches. The ongoing engagement with a wider network is also helping those involved in the programme to feel as though they are part of something bigger than what is happening in their individual areas.

The partnership's really great, and so to form a lot of bigger networks and relationships with a bunch of other people has been fantastic, be that the other catalysts or part of the support team — **Catalyst Staff, CA2**

I think we've all sort of, in some way benefitted from that cross-fertilisation of different ideas, and I think that's what's led us to be far more ambitious about the theory and the practice of Empowering Places as something that could be part of a broader movement really — **Tech Lead, TL1**

The strong focus on relationships within the programme has also been fundamental in generating a high level of trust among the programme network and in supporting the development of a robust peer support network. These two factors are essential to the programme's successful delivery in their own right and so are explored individually below.

Trust

The relational approach has helped to generate high levels of trust which are evident between programme staff and Power to Change, between programme staff and catalyst leads, between catalyst staff, between catalysts, between community businesses, and between catalysts and their community businesses.

There are three key ways in which a high level of trust is helping to facilitate the programme. First, trust that exists between programme staff (including Power to Change) and the catalyst organisations, means that there can be open and honest discussion about what is and is not working. During diagnostic sessions for example, many catalyst staff feel comfortable flagging which elements of the programme they are finding more difficult and this leads to genuine and useful learning for the programme staff which they can then apply to other places. This sort of honest appraisal has led to changes in the nature and frequency of reporting requirements as well as changes to the structures and processes surrounding the support provider pool, among others.

Second, the high levels of trust between the catalyst organisations help to facilitate shared learning, confidence and ambition. Without such high levels of trust, there is a risk that the programme could feel competitive. However, tech leads and catalysts have reflected that there is little or no organisational rivalry between the catalyst organisations and instead, there is a generosity of spirit based on mutual trust that is not always found on grant funded programmes of this type.

It's like there's enough to go round so no one needs to be stabbing each other in the back **– Tech Lead, TL1**

Finally, the levels of trust that exist between some of the catalyst organisations and their local communities is helping both to engage local residents and support the development of the community businesses. Community businesses we spoke to reflected on how some of their local communities are willing to either engage with, try out or volunteer for community businesses because they trust the catalyst organisation, and therefore the community business, to be acting in their interests.
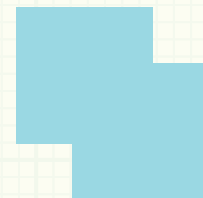
A strong peer network

One of the key benefits of the strong peer network is that the catalyst organisations are continuously learning from each other. They often share experiences or approaches either during learning camps or regular meetings and this helps to build other catalysts' confidence and aspirations as well as sharing new ideas. It has also helped catalyst staff to appreciate that they are not alone in some of their approaches or in the challenges that they have experienced along the way, which has been reassuring. One catalyst spoke about the benefits of each organisation coming from a different perspective; some having a history of community organising for example, while others are stronger at enterprise coaching. Catalysts also provide valuable support for each other. Some of this support is generated by the more informal engagement that happens during learning camps and through the programme WhatsApp group.

While programme staff had high aspirations for the peer network, it has exceeded their expectations in many ways. They attribute this in part to the space that the programme allows for relationships, as well as the personalities of the catalyst staff and their willingness to invest time into the programme and learn from each other. But the shared pressures experienced by the catalyst organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for a supportive network are considered to be a factor in its ongoing success too.

Power to Change
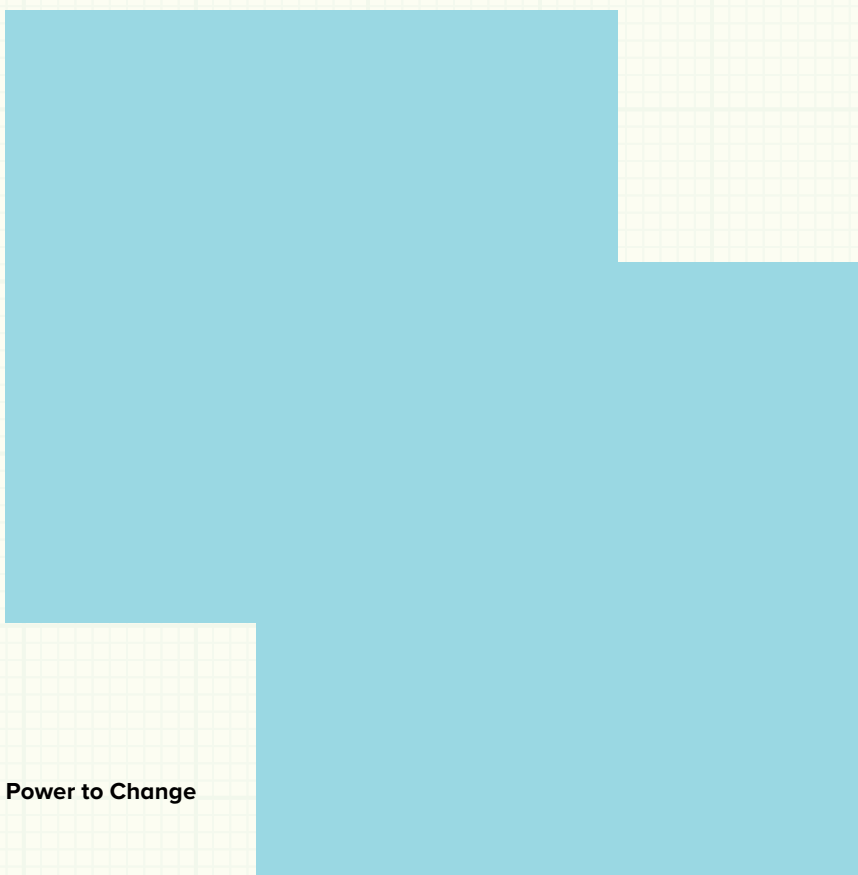
The structure of the programme

The way that the Empowering Places programme is structured is also credited with facilitating its delivery. While participants in our interviews spoke about the programme's structure in broad terms, they also identified three specific features of the programme that they considered to be facilitative.

First, the programme's flexibility is considered to be highly beneficial. The way that Power to Change has chosen to deliver the grant is seen to be more flexible than many other grant funders, and while the grant is 'well-managed' it is not ring fenced to the same degree as other programmes. Catalysts are trusted to use relatively large amounts of money in ways that will best support their place and their delivery of the programme. Additionally, while some programmes fund a single role full-time who is then focused entirely on that programme, Empowering Places allows catalysts to dedicate parts of staff roles to the programme. Catalysts feel that this adds value as not only are a greater number of staff involved in the programme, but these staff are then also able to relate the programme to the organisation's wider activities.

The programme has also been flexible about changing the way it approaches specific elements in response to feedback from the catalyst organisations. Examples of this include: changes to the capacity support provider pool to make it more accessible, by creating a call-out process and allowing catalysts to use local providers; loosening the definition of what constitutes a community business, to include developing community activity that may result in a business eventually; and changes from the yearly reporting and re-application for funds process, to the provision of funding for three years with wider spaced reports and fewer grant claims. Programme staff felt that these changes helped to increase confidence in the programme and build trust that has enabled catalysts to try new things and be open to learning, as well as reducing administrative burdens.

Second, linked to flexibility is the programme's catalyst-centric approach. Rather than dictating what the catalysts should be doing in their areas, the programme staff have, to a large degree, allowed them to forge their own path and learn along the way, writing their own five-year vision. The programme staff actively seek catalysts' views and experiences on many aspects of the programme and give them considerable ownership over the programme's direction. Consequently, the programme has evolved considerably since its inception. While this makes it harder to explore the programme's impact, staff and catalysts feel that this approach has allowed catalysts to approach the programme in the way that best responds to their area's needs, to try new things and ultimately, to have more ownership over and investment in the programme.
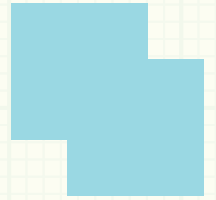
It's been definitely one of the best programmes we've ever done... because it has been a joint venture, they're not a traditional funder at all... we were part of the development of the programme, the fact that we've got a dedicated capacity support stream completely there for us and we've got people like CLES and so on... the whole thing is just set up to make it work, that's how I feel – Catalyst staff, CA1

Finally, the level of resource that Empowering Places provides is seen to be highly beneficial both in terms of the level of funding and in terms of the level of support. Tech leads felt that the catalysts were engaging with each other and with the learning that the programme offered because the programme paid for this, allowing catalysts to further their development and learning opportunities.
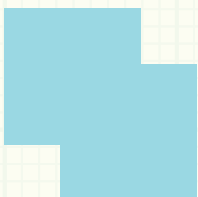
The programme delivery partners

The consortium of Power to Change, Co-operatives UK, CLES and NEF is seen as being beneficial to the programme's delivery because of the wide range of skills, knowledge and networks that it brings. Catalysts spoke about how having contact and guidance from these national organisations had helped to expand their networks and improved their profile.

*When CLES are involved we are not just *the catalyst organisation* – Catalyst Staff, CA11*

This sentiment was reflected by developing community businesses who felt that their involvement with the programme had created opportunities and developed relationships that they otherwise would not have had.

The moment I was introduced to Power to Change, that just opened up everything for me, like opening a door really – Community Business Staff, CB3

Tech leads echoed this view and felt that one of the benefits of their role was the wider network and perspective that they could bring to each place:

Just having us as tech leads from national organisations kind of working alongside and bringing that different kind of power is really, really beneficial – Tech Lead, TL1

Beyond the organisations involved in delivery, it is also clear that the individual programme staff are also seen as playing a significant role in supporting its delivery. The lead staff at Co-operatives UK are well regarded and credited with developing high levels of trust, energy and engagement within the programme network.
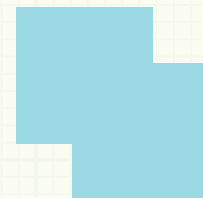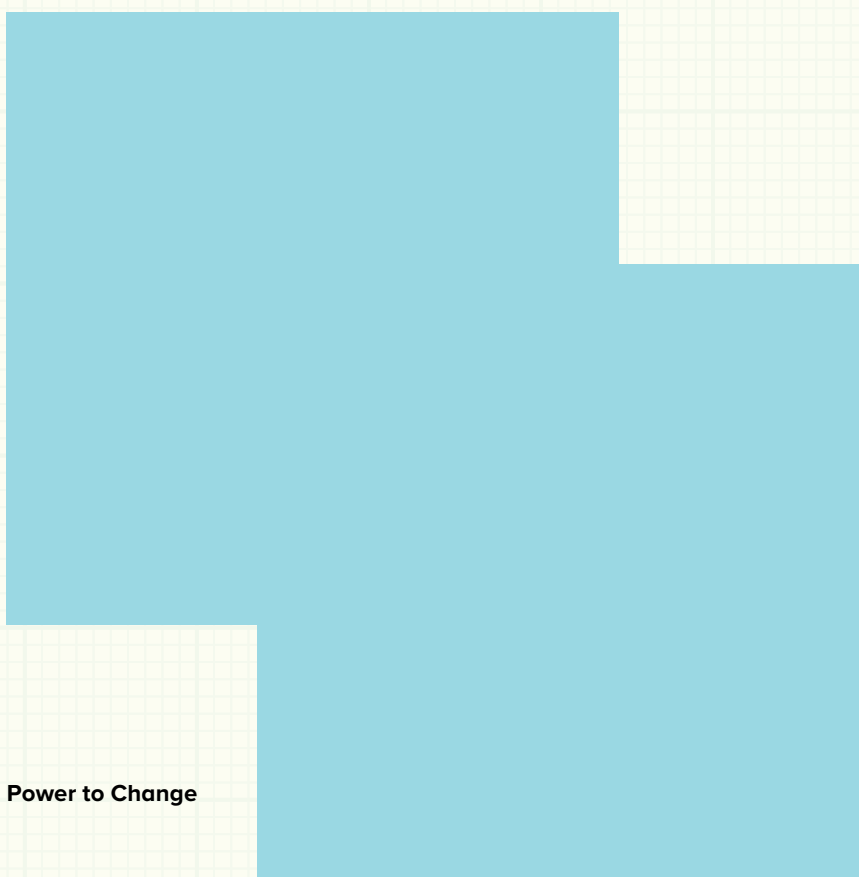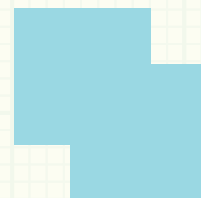
The programme support

The support package overall is regarded as being a key facilitator of the programme. When asked what had enabled them to deliver Empowering Places locally, catalysts across the places spoke about the value of the tech lead role and the objective but tailored, practical support it provided, as well as the value of the learning camps and other peer networking opportunities and the financial and learning support available through the programme.

Without it you wouldn't have been doing that and there wouldn't have been that opportunity, so there wouldn't have been that support there to enable us to do that, you know and given us the time or the skills by accessing other pots within the programme to be able to gain those skills to help them – Catalyst Staff, CA3

Community businesses also spoke about how this support was fundamental and had attracted them to get involved in the programme. Some already had an idea and garnered local support but what they lacked was help to develop their thinking, knowledge and skills as well as provide some funding. The programme was able to plug this gap and provide them momentum they needed to take the next step.

It opened a network of expertise and mentorship to you, and it also really allows you to really be in that environment of like that real business world. And it definitely helped you put your business cap on in that sense – Community Business Staff, CB4
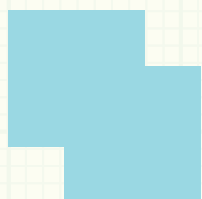
The local context

In some of the six places, the specific local context is considered to facilitate the delivery of the programme. Plymouth for example, is a Social Enterprise City with a local council that is supportive of the idea of social enterprise and community business; this status has led to investment from other organisations such as the Rank Foundation. Plymouth catalyst staff feel that the Rank programme and investment from other funders means that there is a critical mass of activity in the city that helps provide working templates and reduces the risks for developing community businesses.

Plymouth's unique combination of high level of social enterprise activity, varied funding sources and support and development opportunities, make it something of an anomaly among the Empowering Places cohort. However, there are other places within the programme that have some contextual factors that facilitate the catalysts' activity to some degree. In Wigan, for example, the catalysts' strong relationship with the council is considered to be highly facilitative. In Leicester, the catalyst organisation is exceptionally well networked and established in the local area, and has been able to draw on both its knowledge of the area and the community's trust in it as an organisation, when delivering the programme.

However, contextual factors can hinder as well as support the programme delivery and this is an issue for many of the places. This perspective is explored under barriers, below.

Programme barriers

Factors that are considered to hinder the delivery of the Empowering Places programme include:

– The local context
– The time and resource needed for change
– The programme flexibility
– The risks to individuals and communities
– The complexity of the programme
– The Covid-19 pandemic

The local context

While contextual factors can facilitate the delivery of the programme, there is also potential for them to act as barriers. As identified above, the catalysts' relationship with their local council is significant to what they are able to achieve in the local area. Where this relationship is less productive, which is the case for some of the catalyst organisations, it can prevent them from making progress with plans such as taking over local assets or developing buildings, and can also influence the profile of the catalyst organisation locally.

Each of the Empowering Places areas has been chosen in part because it experiences high levels of deprivation. While this makes the places' need for the programme greater, it also presents a range of challenges. Residents of the local areas often lack the skills, resources or social capital that are needed to set up a business. This means that the catalyst organisations have to deliver significant amounts of capacity building just to get communities' confidence and knowledge to a point where they could even consider developing a community business.

Community businesses can also experience challenges with finding their place among other local organisations from the charity or voluntary sector. For example, one community business spoke about how a local branch of Mind was advertising paid roles that were very similar to voluntary roles that the community business relies on, making them feel as though they were in competition with the charity.

**The time and resource needed for change**

Empowering Places is a five-year programme that is well funded and offers considerable levels of financial and non-financial support to those delivering it. However, even with that level of resource, the objectives of the programme to create community businesses in deprived places that will support stronger communities, remains highly challenging within the given timeframe.

Catalysts applauded the length and approach of the programme which they felt recognised that change is incremental, but pointed out that achieving change in their communities is a longer-term endeavour and one that ideally requires whole system change. Catalysts need to not only earn the trust of the community but also to build the community's capacity. This is hard to do in highly deprived areas that have limited social capital and can take a significant amount of time. Some catalysts felt that the successes that they had had to date were often with the wealthier, more skilled or educated members of the community. To reach those who have fewer resources and experience not only takes longer but can be a challenging journey.

Likewise, for many of the catalysts, developing community businesses is a new activity and it has taken them time to learn and understand what approaches, skills and knowledge are required by both them and the local residents they're working with. Catalysts are also having to convince their communities about the benefits of doing things differently, often without having any direct experience of community businesses to draw on or share.

In a place where people are struggling to get through the day you can't be predetermined about what is going to happen, you just have to give it time – **Catalyst Staff, CA8**

Despite the relative length of the programme, there is still a sense among catalysts, tech leads and programme staff that it is hard for catalysts to spend down all of the capacity support funding that is available to them during the programme term. Part of the reason for this is that it has taken a long time for the catalysts to get to a point where they know what additional support they or their community businesses need and so ideally would be spending that support fund over a longer period of time. There has also been an element of transition for the catalyst organisations who are all adept at managing on small budgets and need to adjust to having access to pools of money to spend on training or other support.
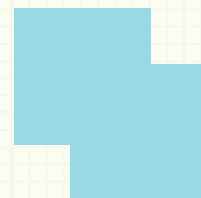
The challenges associated with running the programme over a five-year period and spending the available resources within that time period have led some of the programme staff, catalysts and community businesses to suggest that future programmes of this type might benefit from being run over a longer period of time even if that was with the same level of funding attached to them.

The programme flexibility

While the flexible and iterative nature of the programme is considered to be a facilitator of its success, there is also a concern among some interview participants that the high levels of flexibility and catalyst ownership within the programme can be limiting. For example, some have expressed concerns around the high levels of autonomy that catalysts have around which ventures to support and how to spend the programme resources. There is a sense that this level of autonomy risks compromising the impact of the programme for local communities in some cases.

In our heads it was going to make a visible difference and we're worrying as we're getting half way or just over half way, that there's not enough visible, lasting impact for that money, that it's paid for a lot of people's time and it's paid for a lot of advice and thinking and all of that sort of stuff but actually you know, it's like some of the people that… [the catalyst] have supported through the places programme, they saw an opportunity to get a little bit of money to kind of develop their idea but really… would it ever be a community business and would it ever really contribute back, I'm not sure — Catalyst Staff, CA6

There was a sense among some of the interview participants that not all the places were focused enough on what the local community needs and that, in some cases, catalysts were investing in some really exciting projects that did not have a clear social purpose.

For me that's the difference between a community business that is created to meet a need and to sort of service the area versus a community business that kinda looks great but actually does it make any difference, really? — Catalyst Staff, CA6
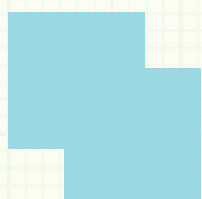
Risks to individuals and communities

While the aim of Empowering Places is ultimately to support the development of better places, interview participants identified that there are a range of risks to developing and supporting community businesses in local communities. First, there is a risk to the individuals involved in running the businesses. Encouraging someone to set up a community business may involve asking them to leave a paid job (or secure benefits) behind with no guarantee of a sustainable salary in the future. As explored earlier in the paper, this is exacerbated by operating in areas with high levels of disadvantage as well as the impact of Covid-19 on the economy.

It's potentially putting someone in quite a precarious position because as we all know starting a conventional business in a fairly affluent area where you have social capital and certain networks to plug in is really difficult and it's really hard and it's like a massive risk, and normally when people do that they have the support of their family or the support of a partner and they have a network **– Programme Staff, PS3**

There is also a theme around there being potential risks to the community. The catalysts are well connected to their communities and some have undertaken community organising activities with the intention of exploring what the communities want and need in the area. But in setting up a community business that is designed to address a local need, there is always a risk that the business ends up providing a service that parts of the community do not agree with or indeed dividing the community in some way. Both programme staff and catalysts are conscious of these risks which can encourage them to be cautious in delivering the programme.
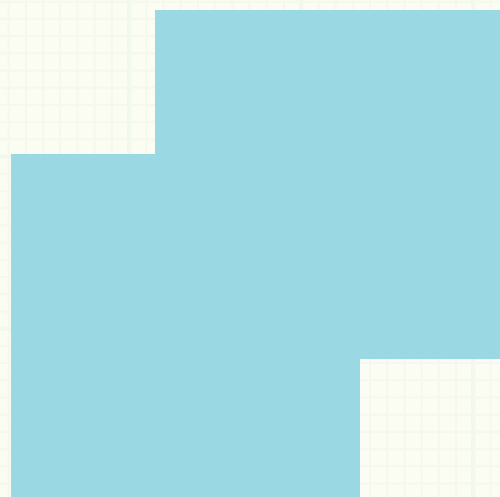
The complexity of the programme

Empowering Places is a large and complex programme, and while this has many advantages, its complexity can also act as a barrier. There are two different ways in which this manifests.

First, the programme can be hard to communicate and understand. The evolution of the programme in response to learning and catalysts' suggestions means that the programme is better adapted to the places it is working with, but harder for both external audiences and those involved with the programme to understand.

For some community businesses, the complexity of the programme acts as a barrier as they are unable to fully engage with it or understand what purpose or vision their individual community business is contributing to.

Empowering Places.... is quite a complex consortium of different things going on with ever-changing goalposts and a lot to juggle. Every individual I've ever met from Empowering Places or the consortium partners has been wonderful on a one-to-one basis, but just in terms of how the system functions, in terms of the design of the thing, it doesn't seem to always produce the best results. There seems to often be conflicting criteria, conflicting desired outcomes, it's not black and white about what is a community, what is a community business. There's a lot of lateral interpretation that occurs and I think that's partly because if you design this weird abstract thing on paper and then that has to match up with reality, it's not always going to match up with reality, and there has to be a two way process there **– Community Business Staff, CB2**
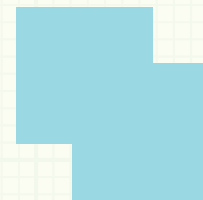
Second, the specific criteria around what constitutes a community business is seen to act as a barrier to engagement by some catalysts. While some catalysts felt that the definition had been relaxed a little during the course of the programme to acknowledge the early-stage nature of many of the community business ideas, others felt that the programme would benefit from even more flexibility in this respect. There was a sense that it would be beneficial for the programme to be more inclusive of those members of the community who are really passionate about social purpose, but whose legal structure or trading aspirations do not fit the Power to Change definition of community business. Having a narrower definition was seen to prevent the catalyst organisations from effectively delivering for the communities they are trying to support in some cases.

Linked to this, some catalysts felt that there were also some inconsistencies in what Power to Change is looking for when it comes to community businesses; on the one hand wanting communities to decide what is needed, while on the other indicating that as an organisation they are particularly interested in specific categories of community businesses, although this type of contradiction was recognised as applying to other funders too.

I think it's one of those interesting ongoing conflicts that you have, they say they want them to be community businesses ... and grassroots, but actually 'we want them all to be on high streets this week'...that happens across all sorts of grant programmes all the time – Catalyst Staff, CA2
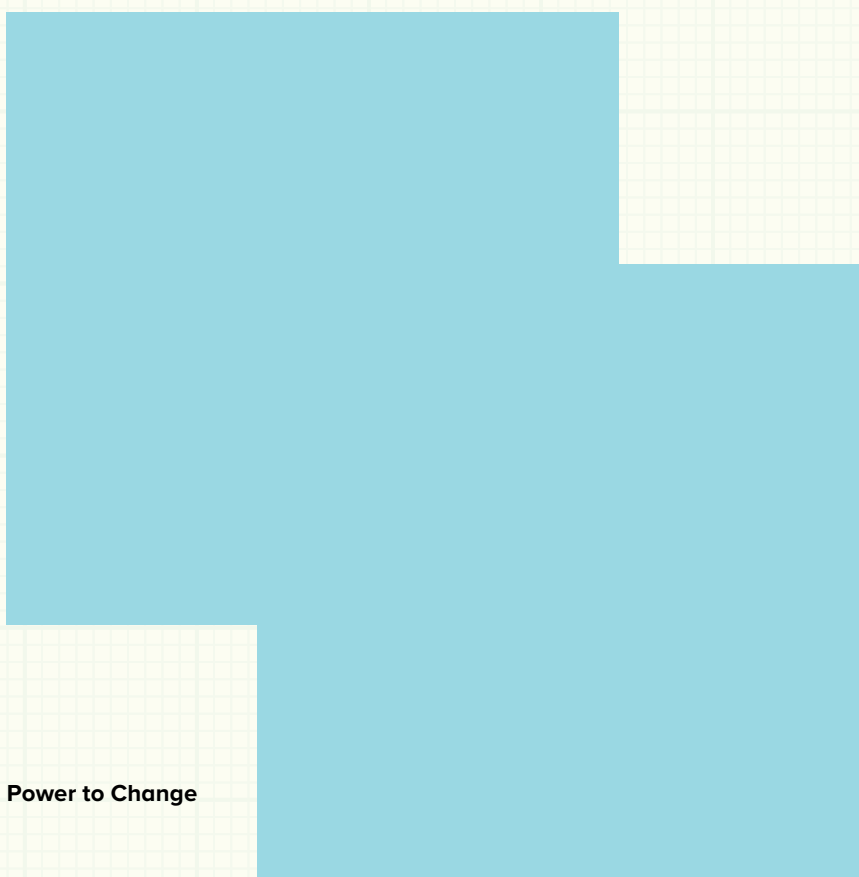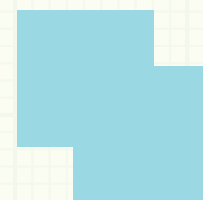
The Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has been an obvious barrier to delivery, and has affected each of the areas within the Empowering Places cohort differently. Some of the catalysts have suffered huge challenges with their trading income, while those who are more reliant on grant funding have experienced less financial impact in the short term. Some community businesses have been able to pivot or adapt to carry on trading while others have had to suspend all activity. The pandemic has also been cited as a catalyst for the changes taking place in Bradford, with Made in Manningham now moving to being incubated by a new local organisation, Participate Projects.

While Covid-19 has brought about some opportunities, such as raising the visibility of the voluntary sector, the pandemic has also prevented catalysts from doing a lot of engagement and outreach, as well as slowing down progress of developing community businesses. Not only have some had to stop trading which has led to considerable financial challenges, but others who were on the cusp of receiving funding or changing their legal status to formally become a community business, have had to stall that progress and have essentially been left in limbo.

Although the Empowering Places areas have demonstrated enormous resilience and have strengthened their outward facing relationships, as well as arguably their relationships with each other during the crisis, Covid-19 has inevitably taken its toll. At a point when the programme was just starting to gain traction, with catalysts building their confidence and skills, the peer network growing in strength, and community businesses developing their learning and skills, a lot of that momentum has been lost. How much the pandemic ultimately affects programme delivery remains to be seen, but the impact is likely to be significant.
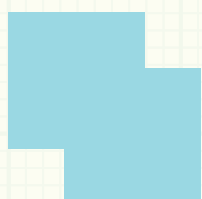
04. Conclusions and implications

There are a number of key strengths and opportunities within the Empowering Places programme. The relational approach, high levels of resource, considerable flexibility, and iterative and responsive focus on the catalysts' needs all support the programme's delivery and are helping catalysts and community businesses to make the most of the potential that the programme presents. Catalysts feel listened to and supported and this enhances their passion to deliver not only for their local areas but for the progamme as a whole. The strong peer network helps to foster innovation and learning and the integration of national organisations into the programme helps to elevate it and supports and encourages catalyst organisations to become part of more strategic conversations. The programme's strengths have been particularly evident during the pandemic when the high levels of trust and flexibility have enabled catalysts to articulate what they need and allowed the programme to respond to those needs.

All of this makes Empowering Places considerably bigger than the sum of its parts, and the evidence to date suggests that the programme is going beyond supporting individual places; it is supporting organisations in those places to understand their place in the sector and the role they can play and the potential opportunities that brings.

However, the characteristics that strengthen the programme also have the potential to challenge it. The complex set-up and flexible, iterative nature of the programme can, at times, make it hard to articulate and understand, and this coupled with the strong relationships between the places and the programme team risk a sense of exclusivity that could limit the programme's ability to share learning more broadly. As with all place-based programmes, Empowering Places is also at the mercy of the local contexts it operates within. Exactly what each place can deliver is dependent to a large degree on the infrastructure, buy-in and approach of their local area and catalyst organisations are both supported and hindered by the wider narrative within their place. The focus on capacity building and the confidence, skills and networks that the catalyst organisations are developing are helping to mitigate this to a certain degree. The challenge for the remaining term of the programme, and beyond, will be how catalysts can best embed their learning from the programme into their area to help encourage longer-term change that supports better places.
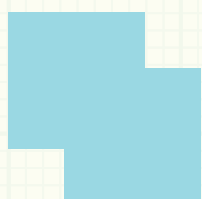
Findings from the exploration of Empowering Places' enablers and barriers have the following implications for the programme:

— **The strong peer network that the programme has created has been fundamental to catalysts' and community businesses' confidence and learning. During the final stage of the programme, it may be worth exploring how this network could be maintained or indeed extended beyond the programme's lifetime.**

— **Likewise, the structure and support of the programme has enabled catalysts to enhance their networks and become a part of wider local and national conversations. Maintaining catalysts' place in these conversations could be one of the legacy impacts that the programme seeks to deliver and during the remaining term of the programme it could work with the places to explore how this could best be achieved.**

— **Although the length of the Empowering Places programme is one of its strengths, catalysts and community businesses have essentially lost at least a year to the pandemic. Catalysts have had to turn their attention to the immediate needs of their communities and community businesses have had their development paused, and in many cases lost a valuable opportunity to start trading while still supported by the programme. At the same time, many of the places have struggled to spend down on the capacity support available to them because their focus has been elsewhere and those involved in the programme point out that real change takes more time and resource than even Empowering Places has provided. While the programme has already been highly responsive to the places' changing needs, there may be a case for exploring whether some elements of Empowering Places could be extended to account for the lost time and opportunity.**
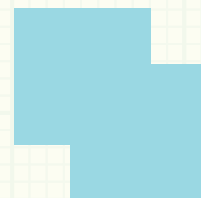
Implications for Power to Change more broadly include:

— **The success of programmes like Empowering Places is partly dependent on the appetite of local leaders to consider the benefits of social enterprise and community business. Power to Change's ongoing role in supporting the conversation about community business and advocating for its role at a national level, therefore remains vital in helping to create the types of local context in which this sort of programme will flourish.**

— **Likewise, although Empowering Places has the potential to deliver some real impacts, to truly develop better places requires more systemic changes than can be achieved by one place-based programme alone. As part of its extended activities, Power to Change will need to continue working with a range of stakeholders from all sectors to help facilitate cross-organisational working and develop a shared vision for the Empowering Places areas (and indeed all the places it operates in), to support the programme and the outcomes it seeks to achieve as well as wider change in these areas.**

— **Many of the impacts of Empowering Places, and certainly those that might take place at a community level, are not likely to be felt until programme funding has ceased. Power to Change may therefore want to consider how any longer-term impacts and learning could be captured beyond the term of the programme.**

— **Empowering Places was designed in part to be an experiment and, as such, a considerable portion of its value lies in its learning. During the remaining term of programme, Power to Change may want to consider how it can use data from this evaluation and other learning activities to not only inform its development of future programmes but to disseminate learning to wider partners and stakeholders who might benefit from the rich insights that this programme delivers.**