

Early learning from Big Local: An overview of evidence from the first 50 areas, July 2011 to March 2012

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1. Background and overview

1.1 What is Big Local?

Big Local is an exciting opportunity for residents in 150 areas around England to use at least £1m to make a massive and lasting positive difference to their communities. It's about bringing together all the local talent, ambitions, skills and energy from individuals, groups and organisations who want to make their area an even better place to live.

Between July 2011 and March 2012 Big Local was run by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). From 1 April 2012 Big Local is being run by Local Trust, which is working with £200m from the Big Lottery Fund and a range of partners providing expert advice and support for residents.

The four **programme outcomes** for Big Local are:

- Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.
- People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.
- The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises.
- People will feel that their area is an even better place to live

1.2 Aim of this report

The aim of this report is to draw together the evidence to date on the progress of Big Local and to explore this against key learning questions to identify the main learning points from July 2011 to March 2012. It explores:

- The context of the areas
- The extent and type of support accessed by areas and the impact of this
- Who was leading and involved in Big Local in areas and who was not
- How areas were progressing along the pathway and what was assisting with this

It is based on what we know to date from the available data and focuses on wave 1 areas. The areas are not named individually in this report as it draws out themes emerging across the areas rather than presenting the journey for any one area.

The final section of the report reflects on the evidence presented and sums up what has gone well, what has been challenging and what could change going forward.

1.3 Who are the delivery partners?

Local Trust is currently working with a number of delivery partners to support Big Local being delivered. Their roles are as follows:

Community Development Foundation (CDF) – CDF's research team are part of the Big Local learning team who aim to support Local Trust in:



- ensuring that the learning from the Big Local areas is identified and shared to assist Local Trust in developing and the areas in achieving their local vision.
- establishing local area monitoring systems
- providing self-evaluation support
- coordinating data collected across the delivery partners
- supporting analysis of progress and outcomes from Big Local.

Capacity Global - Capacity Global provides a unique link between local community action and policy development that supports individual, community and neighbourhood rights to a clean and healthy environment. For Big Local, Capacity Global:

- offers support and advice on the built and natural environment
- offers support and advice on cohesion, equalities and inclusion
- provides multi-media real-life stories and case studies
- provides environment and inclusion guides and reports
- reviews how well Big Local is doing in terms of inclusion and environmental.

CCLA – CCLA provides specialist investment management for charities, faith organisations, and local authorities. They are managing the Big Local investment for Local Trust and, therefore, for the 150 Big Local areas.

Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) – IVAR works to understand, support and strengthen voluntary and community sector organisation and management by using action research. They are part of the learning team and focus particularly on:

- developing Big Local's theory of change, indicators, outcomes and key learning questions
- developing Big Local's key learning themes
- developing the annual learning report and design process for annual 'learning cycle' – facilitating strategic learning with directors, staff and delivery partners
- continuously reviewing what we can learn from relevant previous practice and research to help to tackle the challenges for strategic learning in Big Local
- analysing data to produce thematic reports (as necessary)
- contributing to the development of Big Local's strategic learning plan
- participating in the learning team.

National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM) – The NANM is responsible for helping the Big Local areas to learn and share knowledge. They are carrying out a programme of workshops that residents and others in Big Local areas can choose to take part in. These have included, for example, workshops on:

- Social media
- Reviving rural communities
- Getting people involved.

Renaisi – Renaisi is a leading social enterprise specialising in the delivery of neighbourhood services, community-led regeneration and employment and local economic growth programmes. Their role includes:

- recruiting, supporting and managing the Big Local representatives or 'reps' who are supporting the Big Local areas. The 'reps' role is to provide support, advice and encouragement to local areas to help them achieve their vision and deliver the Big Local outcomes and principles. This includes guiding local areas through the Big Local



pathway such as providing advice on how to get people involved, community visioning and creating a local partnership.

- producing and maintaining the boundary maps for Big Local areas.

Small Change – Small Change work with clients on social finance, social enterprise, social impact and financial exclusion and are providing advice and guidance for reps and the areas on social investment.

UnLtd - UnLtd is the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs and deliver the UnLtd Star People programme in Big Local areas. This includes:

- providing three levels of Star People funding Award – Try It, Do It and Build It
- offering development support to individuals living in Big Local areas, who have the passion and drive to make a positive difference
- identifying and working with Star Partners within the Big Local areas. The Star Partners will be tasked with finding and encouraging residents in the Big Local areas to try community entrepreneurial projects.

1.4 What do the reps do?

The first 50 areas (wave 1) were announced in summer 2011 and the 50 wave 2 areas in February 2012. A final 50 areas (wave 3) will be announced later in 2012.

The areas are supported by Big Local reps, individuals with experience and skills in community development, regeneration and in working with local communities who provide up to 15 days support to assist areas to work through the first steps on the pathway and establish a partnership. Their role is to talk things through with Big Local areas to help them understand Big Local and make the first steps along the Big Local pathway. Reps are also there to challenge and be a 'critical friend', so that areas test ideas and ensure they will really make a difference. The role of the Big Local rep is extremely important to the success of Big Local. The rep is somebody to support areas in understanding Big Local; encouraging areas to get people involved, explore visions and create a Big Local partnership to create a shared vision and then a Big Local plan for the area, and to act as a mentor, and expert adviser on their journey. Big Local is resident-led and reps continuously look for opportunities to encourage residents to take the lead and be responsible for driving change in their area (supported by people from a range of trusted local organisations as well).

Local Trust assigns reps to work with areas through the early stages of Big Local – typically supporting them through stages 1 – 5 of the pathway until a Big Local partnership has been established. The partnership can then work with Local Trust to select its own Big Local rep from a pool of suitable potential reps to work with over the longer term.

1.5 What is the Big Local pathway?

To help make Big Local a success, areas will work through the seven steps of the **Big Local pathway** that will guide them on their journey. The steps are:

- Getting people involved
- Exploring your Big Local vision



- Forming your Big Local partnership
- Creating a Big Local plan
- Delivering your Big Local plan
- Collecting the evidence
- Reviewing your Big Local plan and partnership.

1.6 Key stages in Big Local's progress July 2011 to March 2012

This report explores the learning from the first nine months of Big Local and reflects the key activities during this time which includes:

- Local Trust was established to run Big Local in November 2011
- The infrastructure underpinning Big Local, such as information and guidance to support areas and communication mechanisms were developed
- The reps were recruited, trained and assigned to wave 1 and wave 2 areas
- Learning events were held for areas
- Most areas spent their Getting People Involved (GPI) round 1 funding from the Big Lottery Fund and accessed GPI round 2 funding from CDF
- Areas started to progress along the pathway
- Outreach work to identify Star People started
- An involvement and diversity workshop was held.

1.7 What is the evidence base?

The data on which this report is based is from all of the delivery partners and the areas as detailed below.

Source	Title
Local Trust / CDF / Big Lottery	GPI Round 1 end of grant reports
	GPI Round 2 proposals from the areas
	Local Trust Governance report February 2012
	Local Trust delivery report February 2012
	Website analytics
	Ten case studies of areas
Renaisi	Monthly reports provided by reps for September, October and November 2011 and January and March 2012.
	Progress reports in September, October and November 2011 and January and



	March 2012. (based on rep reports)
NANM	Attendance at learning events
	Event report: Getting people involved (GPI)
	Event report: Community Buildings and Trusts
	Event report: Reviving Communities
	Learning paper: What makes community buildings and trusts work?
	Learning paper: reviving communities
	Year 1 synthesis report
	Summer 2011 events report
	Key Themes and questions paper August 2011
Capacity Global	Attendance at events
	Learning paper: involvement and diversity workshop
UnLtd	Areas where Star People awards have been made
	Information about the awards
	Characteristics of Star People

The strategic learning approach adopted for Big Local seeks to make effective use of the wide range of data that is generated by areas and partners as part of their delivery of Big Local, rather than being specifically generated purely for monitoring, evaluation and learning. During this start up phase, the evidence listed above comes primarily from delivery partners rather than directly from areas. Going forward, there will also be evidence directly from areas. There are some key strengths, and some limitations, of this strategic learning approach to evidence gathering through delivery partners at this stage.

Strengths

- **Timely** – as the delivery partners are part of the team delivering Big Local, it is possible for the learning team to access information and insights into progress quickly.
- **Relationships** – the evidence is from people who have a relationship with the areas and can therefore contextualise the evidence.
- **Locally tailored evidence** – the issues emerging in, for example, the event reports reflect the priorities and concerns of the people in the areas and are not constrained by being pre-defined by a research tool.

Limitations

- **Objectivity / independence** – most of the data is gathered by people who have an active role in the delivery of Big Local. They will bring a particular perspective and may be less objective than an independent researcher. Moreover, it is not always possible to triangulate the views of one person with others in order to compare perspectives and assess whether a view is more widely supported.
- **Timing** – while some data is collected over time and allows for analysis of change over time, such as the monthly rep reports, some evidence relates to the situation at one point in time and will not reflect any progress subsequently made by areas.
- **Dual purpose** – the data was generally gathered for the purpose of supporting programme monitoring and management by the delivery partners and CDF / Local Trust. Its use as an evidence base for strategic learning is secondary. Consequently, there may be learning questions that are not addressed by the available data.



1.8 Structure of the report

The report draws across all of the available data to answer a range of key learning questions identified through the initial theory of change discussions and identified by the management of Local Trust.

- Chapter 2 provides a context for the areas and explores how far the conditions in local areas affect their ability to respond to the programme.
- Chapter 3 explores areas' progress along the pathway and the activities that they have engaged in thus far.
- Chapter 4 examines the support offered and accessed by the areas including the role of the rep and reflections on additional support that is needed.
- Chapter 5 outlines the progress towards forming a partnership and the extent to which residents are involved.
- Chapter 6 concludes the report by drawing out the main learning messages emerging from the evidence from the first nine months of Big Local.



2. Context of the areas

Key findings

- Areas welcome the opportunity provided by Big Local where local residents decide what is needed in their area and funding is provided for them to achieve this. In putting this into practice, residents and reps are working in a context of reductions in funding and, in some cases, existing relationships and historical tensions.
- The amount of existing expertise varies across areas and those with less previous experience require support to get going. Nevertheless, areas are seeking to build on existing assets and capacity.
- Areas are sometimes developing their plans quickly and not taking the time that they could to do this, given the longer-term commitment of Big Local.
- Some initial issues about the defined boundaries of areas have been resolved by the central team and BIG and reps recommend in future taking account of natural boundaries and predefined administrative boundaries (such as wards) in defining Big Local areas.

2.1 What is the context of Big Local areas?

When considering the progress of the Big Local areas it is worth taking into account the wider context. Firstly, the first 50 areas learned that they were to be Big Local areas nine months before the consortium was in place and Big Lottery Fund regional representatives supported areas while the consortium delivery partners went through the bidding process to manage Big Local and support the areas. From July 2011 the CDF-led consortium took over responsibility for managing Big Local while Local Trust was established.

The context for each area will influence their progress in moving through the Big Local pathway. One of the key features of Big Local is that it is resident-led and that a wide range of residents should be involved. Engaging residents is the main purpose of Step 1 in the pathway. An area with established community and voluntary sector organisations that are well connected with the community may be able to get a wide range of people involved more easily than an area with no such organisation.

In addition, Big Local aims to create lasting change and there is a need to balance the communication of the promise of money, with the message that Big Local is about making your area an even better place to live.

Key aspects of the context of the first 50 areas, and the influence on Big Local, are summarised below.

Areas welcoming Big Local

The evidence from reps indicates that most of the residents in the first 50 areas welcomed the opportunity to have a say in how to make their area an even better place to live and how best to allocate the £1 million to achieve this. Residents were reported to particularly appreciate this as they were aware that their area has not received such funding before or that they were not fully involved in deciding how to spend it.



Community relationships

Although on the whole issues of community tensions were not reported, there were instances where this had influenced progress and relationships in Big Local areas:

- Existing issues had to be overcome in order for people to work together effectively to make decisions. Care was needed to identify and navigate through existing community tensions and suspicions in order to ensure that all residents within a community felt that Big Local was for them.
- There were instances of tensions between the lead organisation, local authority and other VCS organisations in an area that required quick resolution.
- In some areas the expectation of money had initially been the main focus and had detracted from the vision and being strategic, but this was changing over time as people became more realistic about what is possible with the available amount of money.

Assets / capacity

People in areas were beginning to acknowledge and work with the existing assets and build capacity in areas. It was acknowledged that, in particular:

- they had tried to maximise the use of assets, such as community spaces
- community websites had been helpful in progressing things along
- inter-generational work that bridges the experience of older people and the energy of young people had been a useful strategy to engage people and build capacity.

It was also acknowledged that community consultation can take time and initially may focus on problems rather than a vision and not be inclusive enough of residents who are in a minority, but successful strategies to overcome these will evolve over time. The approaches adopted by areas are discussed in Section 4

Funding cuts and reductions in services

Although there is evidently a huge backdrop to much of what has happened in since 2010 including the extensive reductions in public sector funding resulting from the national deficit, and consequent reductions to services funded by local and national government, quite how these will affect areas and how they plan to improve their area remains to be seen. At the early stages:

- areas have recognised the need to be strategic; the funding available through Big Local is not such a huge sum of money and in many areas there were many ideas about what to focus on
- as they worked out their vision and progressed through to their Big Local plans, areas were encountering the challenge of improving their areas while ensuring they are not simply plugging gaps and services resulting from recent cuts.

Existing levels of volunteering / community action / activity / paid workers

Reps have reported a very diverse experience of how existing levels of volunteering and community activity have influenced progress, but the relationship is not necessarily as simple as meaning that high levels of community action means that progress is positive. It seems that one



challenge has been finding a balance between allowing existing community workers to provide some helpful initial direction, with allowing the programme to be genuinely resident-driven.

Low levels of previous experience

The areas had varied histories of community development experience and gradual awareness raising of Big Local is an important part of progress. In areas where there had not been anything similar before, developing communication streams between people in the community and other relevant partners (e.g. the local authority) has taken time. Areas with less previous experience, required some direction to get the area going (e.g. from councillors or voluntary and community organisations).

Dynamics with key stakeholders

- Council interest can be positive, but reps were working with areas to ensure Big Local is genuinely resident-led and to work through any issues arising in relation to council involvement
- Similarly, several reps identified the issue of the individuals who are usually involved in action in the community playing a leading role and highlighted the need for wider community involvement
- Trusted organisations were sometimes said to have taken too active a role, usually in the context of lower levels of engagement from residents in the early stages of Big Local.
- Where areas had appropriate, strong local leadership, this was helpful to progress more quickly.

Taking time to explore the vision and plan

- Big Local differs from many other community regeneration programmes as it is at least a ten year programme and, consequently, areas can spend time establishing their vision and their plan to achieve this. There was evidence that some areas were coming up with too definite a plan too early which may constrain future flexibility
- Similarly, some areas were too fixed on single ideas at an early stage and may need to be encouraged to think more broadly towards, for example, health and employment.

2.2 Big Local area boundaries

In autumn 2011, the majority of Big Local areas were working to the boundaries as set out when BIG identified 50 Wave 1 areas for funding. Four areas were not working to the boundary outlined by the research template, this was because:

- there were differing interpretations of the boundary and consensus needed to be reached
- there were proposals to make the Big Local boundary align with that of the ward
- there was a lack of clarity about how to use, or synthesise a number of different maps
- there was an initial commitment to use the boundaries outlined by the research template but with some considerations to exclude areas, in order to keep within the requirement for a maximum population level.



Other boundary issues highlighted that areas had worked to resolve included:

- some boundaries were not experienced as very natural; on occasion even community buildings that might be of use could be outside of the boundary
- it could be challenging to work to the limits of the designed boundary
- there were conflicting local interpretations of boundaries.

These challenges that areas were experiencing with the boundaries were identified at an early stage and the Big Local delivery partners worked with the Big Lottery Fund to resolve these, as outlined in the Local Trust delivery report. Reps continue to work with areas to explain the boundaries to residents and to explore flexibility, not in terms of extending the boundary but in terms of how activities would work and the potential for wider benefits to other residents nearby.

While some areas were felt to fit with natural local identities and encompass important community buildings, some reps felt that there was some learning that could usefully inform decisions on the boundaries in future areas. These included:

- suggestions for marginal changes to boundaries, so that they included particular roads, community and faith buildings, and green spaces
- changes to boundaries to more effectively engage with local identities, for example including the whole of an estate rather than partially including it
- consideration of ward boundaries and the relationship between this and successfully generating a Big Local area identity
- needing to be aware of, and responsive to, proposed changes to local authority and ward boundaries that could affect local identities in the future.



3. Progress on the pathway

Key findings

- Feedback from the reps shows that the majority of areas have made progress with getting people involved between September 2011 and March 2012. Most areas (84%) were continuing to get people involved while 28% of areas were starting to do this. Only six per cent had yet to start.
- Most areas have also made progress with exploring their community visioning. Four per cent completed this step by March 2012 and in 64 per cent of areas it is underway.
- By March 2012, most areas have started to create their Big Local area profile (only six per cent had yet to start in March 2012). The proportion who were ‘finishing’ increased between November 2011 and March 2012.
- While four per cent of areas (two areas) were said to have established their Big Local partnership, most areas were starting or in an ongoing process. Nevertheless, the proportion finishing this stage increased from none in November 2011 to 12 per cent in March 2012.

3.1 What progress have wave 1 areas made along the pathway?

In considering areas’ progress along the Big Local pathway, it is worth noting that progress is often not linear and does not progress from Step 1 to Step 2 but rather represents a constantly shifting process. Through their monthly reports, reps fed back their perceptions of the progress on each step of the pathway in the areas they worked with.

Figure 3.1: Progress in getting people involved

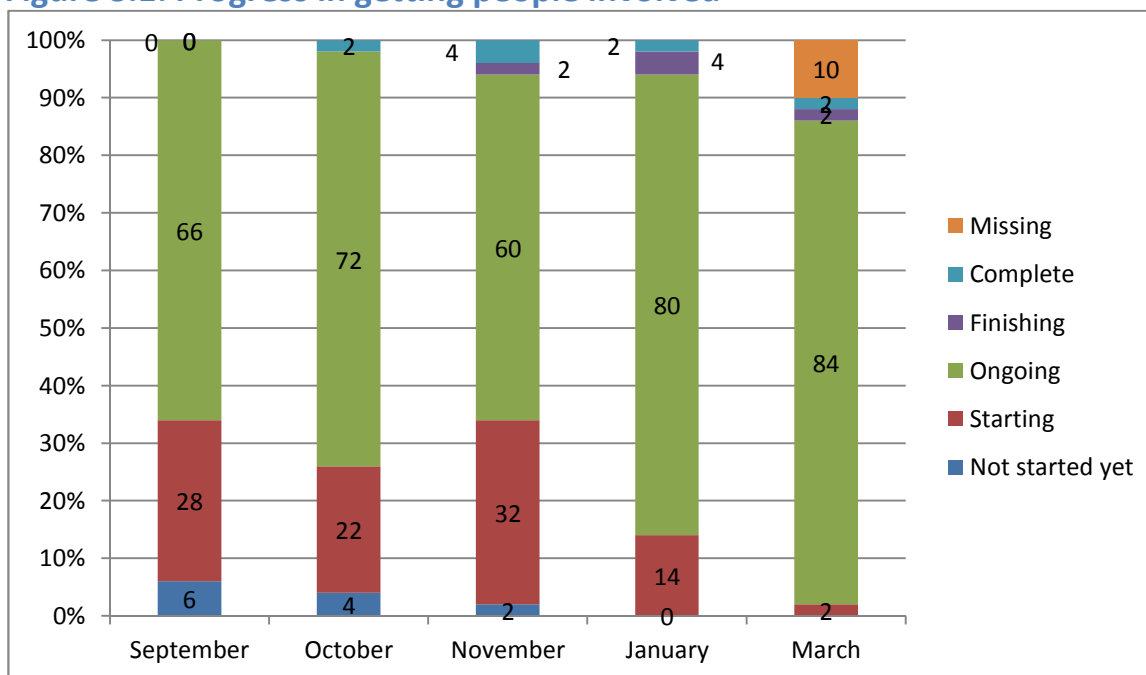
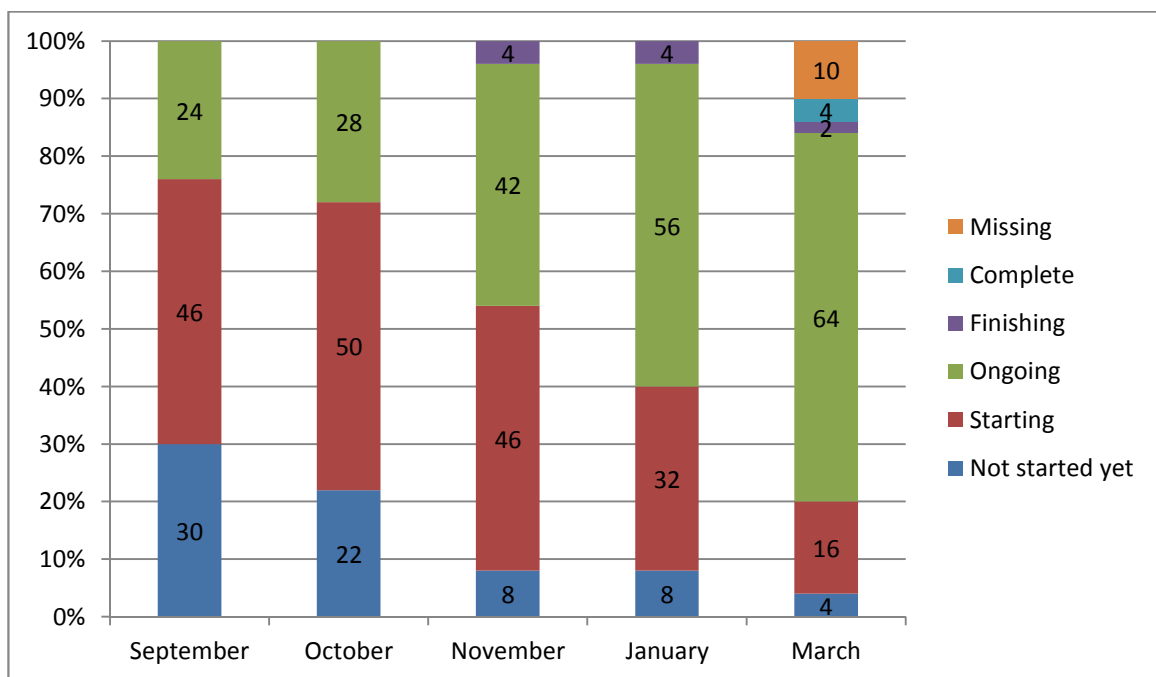




Figure 3.1 illustrates reps' perception of local areas' progression along the Big Local pathway in relation to 'getting people involved'. In September 2011, two-thirds (66 per cent) felt this was on-going, while 28 per cent felt this was just 'starting' and six per cent had not started at all yet. Progression varied across areas, but by January 2012, reps indicated all areas had started (with 14 per cent only at this stage), while the majority felt this was 'ongoing' (80 per cent). Four per cent indicated they were 'finishing' this part of the pathway and two per cent felt this stage was complete in January, which was actually very similar to November's report.

By March 2012, only one area had not progressed 'getting people involved', according to their rep, with the majority of reps indicating this was 'on-going' (84 per cent) and a minority indicating this was finishing or complete (two per cent each respectively), as can be seen in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.2: Exploring community visioning



In terms of reps' perception of local areas exploring community visioning, there was a clear pattern of progression between September 2011 and January 2012 as illustrated in Figure 3.2. In September 2011, 30 per cent had not yet begun this stage of the pathway and nearly half of areas (46 per cent) were just at the start of this process. In October a further eight per cent had started, while by November 2011 there were just eight per cent of the first 50 areas (four areas) that had not yet started exploring their community visioning. In January 2012, while there were still eight per cent of areas that had not begun their community visioning, over half (56 per cent) were in the midst of this process rather than at the beginning, with four per cent (two areas) indicating they were finishing this process by January 2012. By March 2012 progress had continued further, with nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) indicating this was on-going and just a fifth either not started (four per cent), or starting (16 per cent). Two areas had completed this step of the Big Local pathway by March 2012.

Reps explained that they were sometimes beginning to think about the community plan and holding events in unison, combining involving people and exploring visions, with actually starting action planning. Others referred to the involvement of steering or reference groups as part of the



process of exploring community visioning that could include both local organisations and residents and the public sector. Some reps were working through issues with, for example, ensuring sufficient resident involvement in reference groups, or negotiating the dynamics of relationships with other stakeholders and lead organisations in order for the group to function effectively.

Figure 3.3: Creating a Big Local profile

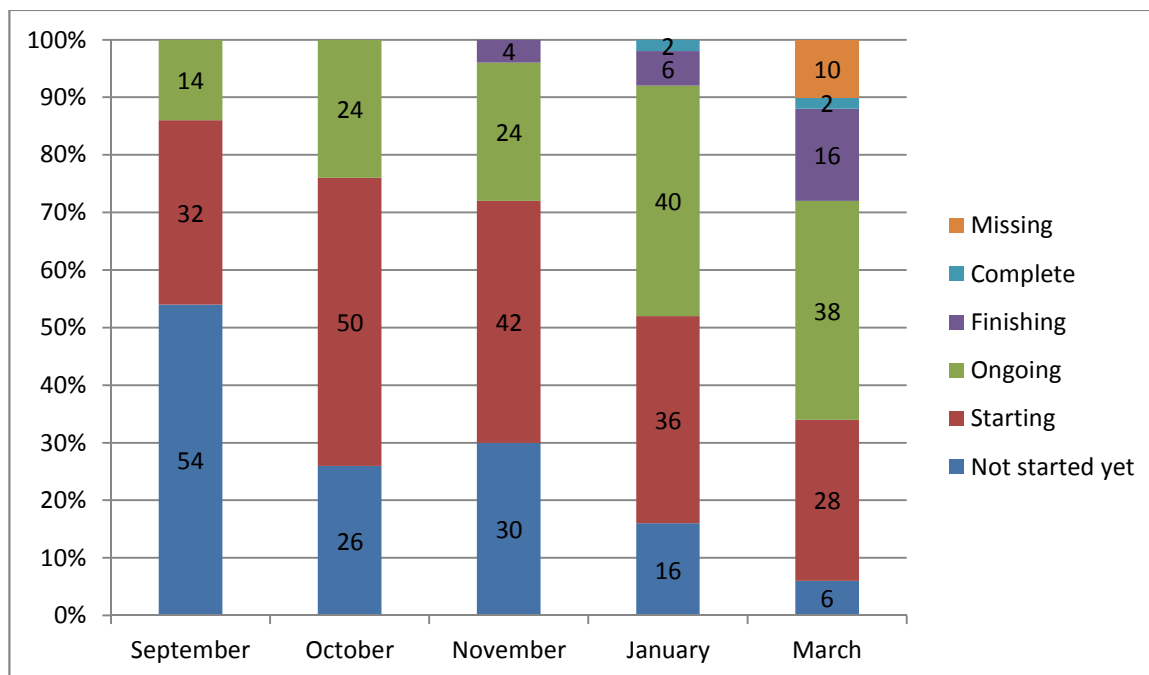


Figure 3.3 illustrates local areas' achievements in creating a Big Local profile. It is clear that there has been consistent progress in achieving this between September 2011 and January 2012, with the proportion that had not started this yet going down from over half (54 per cent) in September 2011, to just 16 per cent in January 2012. In January 2012, 40 per cent felt this was 'on-going', six per cent were 'finishing', while two per cent felt this was 'complete'. Progress continued so that by March 2012 16 per cent of areas were 'finishing' this process and only six per cent had still 'not started' at all.

Several reps referred to the formation of consultative groups, steering groups, marketing and communications task groups and even 'visioning task groups', all of which had been helpful in the development of the Big Local profile. The involvement of community researchers, 'planning for real' exercises and 'appreciative enquiry' approaches had also helped local areas to progress to this point. When areas had been through this process, they sometimes felt that they had a duty to communicate findings back to the community and were seeking a mechanism to achieve this. In some areas, one of the inhibiting factors to completing the Big Local profile was a lack of existing infrastructure.



Figure 3.4: Creating a local partnership

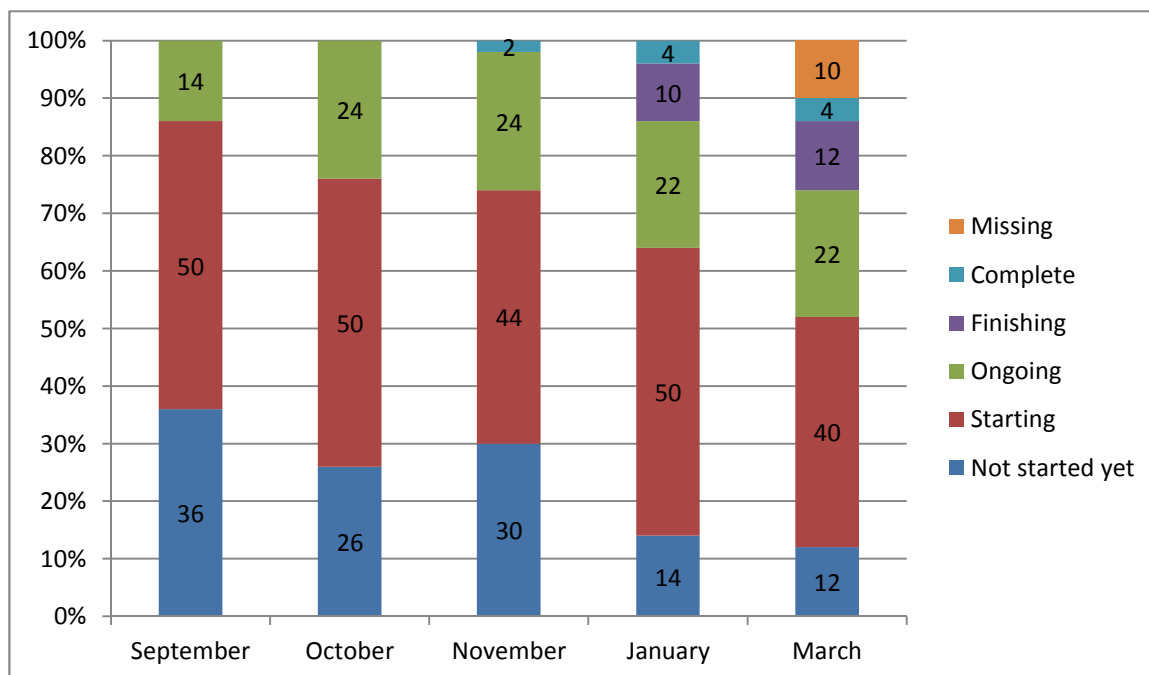


Figure 3.4 illustrates that areas have made some progress in creating a local partnership between September 2011 and January 2012, although the degree of change is not as pronounced as within other steps on the Big Local pathway in this period. Although there were only 14 per cent of areas that had not started this in January 2012, compared to over a third (36 per cent) in September 2011, around half of reps described the local area as just ‘starting’ the creation of a local partnership, which was fairly consistent over the whole period. The proportion that were ‘finishing’ (ten per cent), or had completed this step of the Big Local pathway (four per cent), indicates that some areas had made considerable progress by January 2012 however. The progress towards this stage of the pathway appears to have been fairly stable between January and March 2012 which may reflect the complexity of reaching this stage on the Big Local pathway.

Reps in areas that had reached this point identified capacity building with local residents as being underway, with future training planned on asset transfer and community planning. Other areas were setting up working groups to achieve particular goals.



4. Local involvement in Big Local

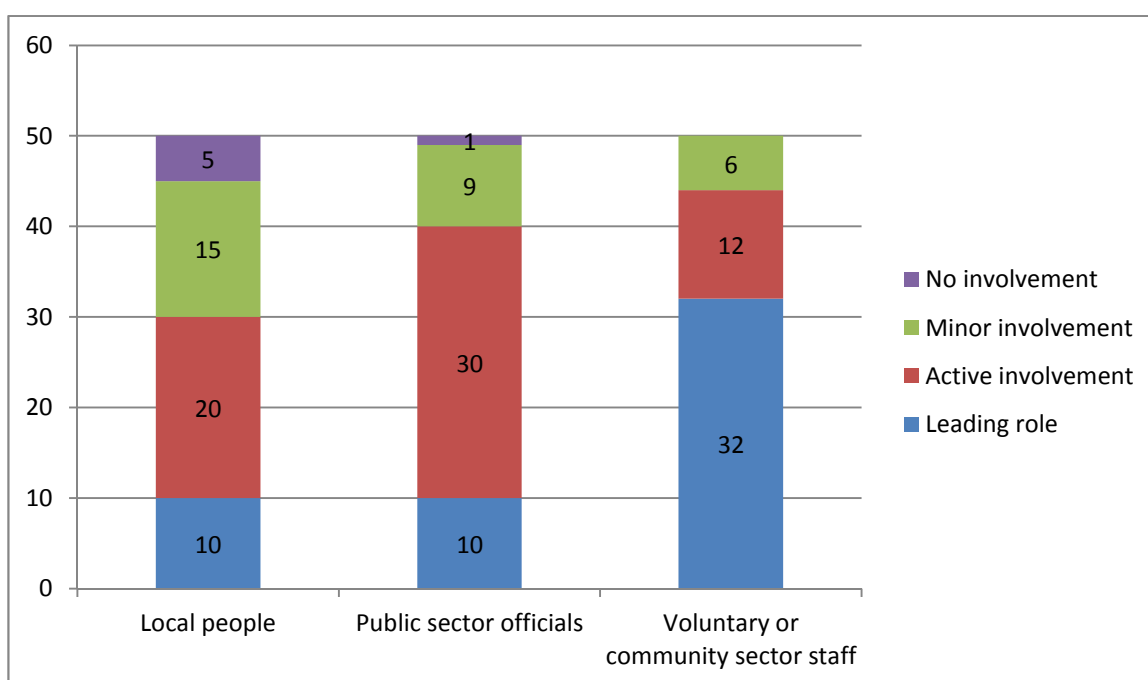
Key findings

- It is evident that local people are increasingly taking a lead role in Big Local in their areas although it is most common for voluntary and community sector staff to take a lead role.
- Although the areas have engaged a wide range of different types of people and organisations, reps consider that there is scope to engage more with some under-represented groups.
- Areas have commonly used promotional activities such as banners, leaflets and notices to raise awareness of Big Local and have used consultation meetings or events and questionnaire surveys to find out what local people wanted to change.
- While these are the most common approaches, other techniques include targeting stakeholders or under-represented types of people in the community, making use of existing community events, developing newsletters and websites and making use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Areas also use their local media to raise awareness.
- The areas have developed a range of creative and innovative ways in which to engage with the community and find out what they wanted to change.

4.1 Who is involved and who is not involved?

In terms of who reps felt were involved in Big Local as of September 2011, it was evident that at that stage, voluntary and community sector staff tended to be in leading roles but that local people were generally involved to some extent with only reps for five areas reporting that local people had no involvement, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Extent of involvement in Big Local at September 2011





As can be seen in Figure 4.1, at the beginning of September 2011, in most areas, voluntary or community sector staff were taking a leading role while local people and public sector officials were less likely to be in a leading role although they were commonly taking an active role.

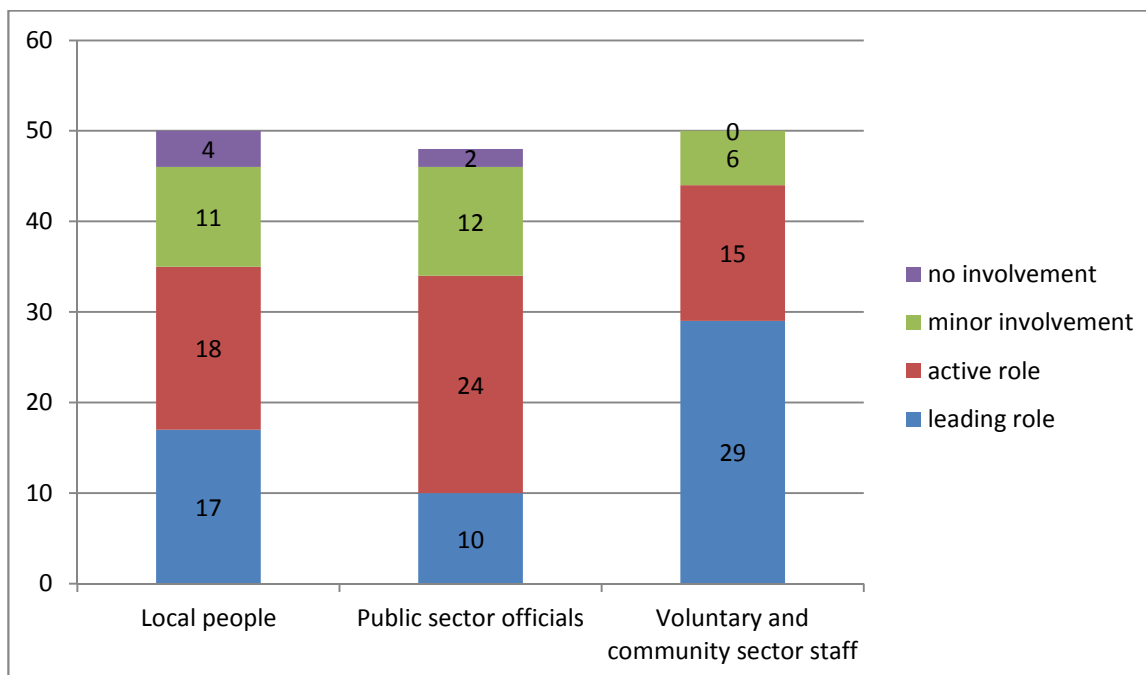
Other organisations and individuals who were characterised as being involved at this stage included:

- Councillors (and one MP)
- Housing associations
- Head teachers and school students
- The Mayor
- Vicars, other faith representatives and organisations
- Health services e.g. primary care trusts (PCTs)
- Football clubs

In September, 19 of the 50 areas (38 per cent) had employed a paid worker to help the area progress.

The design and dynamics of areas changed over a relatively short time and two months on (in November 2011), there were indications of a slight increase in the extent to which local people were in a leading role, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Extent of involvement in Big Local at November 2011



Other organisations and people who were described as having an important role by this stage included:

- Council officers
- Local businesses
- Local faith leaders and faith organisations
- Police
- Credit unions
- Football clubs and trusts



- Libraries
- Housing associations
- Schools
- Health services (PCTs)
- MPs.

A number of areas described in-kind support offered particularly by lead organisations, but also other local voluntary and community organisations and interested stakeholders (including local businesses). In particular, the following stakeholders were identified as being particularly helpful to some areas:

Local councils and councillors: particularly at the beginning stages, local councils and councillors provided an important direction with their working knowledge of areas and often their structured approach.

Local voluntary and community organisations: whether some of these have comprised trusted organisations, or are simply already doing valuable work in areas, these organisations often provided a foundation of activities, volunteers and people that were passionate about their areas who were valuable stakeholders on steering groups.

Local businesses: there is a sense that relationships with these were still developing but in some areas businesses were keen to get involved, help and provide opportunities for the development of Big Local. In particular, some football clubs and supermarkets have been involved. Both businesses and voluntary and community organisations have provided in-kind support e.g. use of buildings to meet in.

Reps identified a number of types of people that they felt were not currently involved and should be, given the makeup of the area. The characteristics of those whom reps observed were less involved at the beginning of the development of local area partnerships included:

- Local businesses (mentioned by reps about 32 areas)
- Black, Asian and minority and refugee communities (mentioned by reps about 31 areas)
- Young people (mentioned by reps about 30 areas)
- More faith groups, because some weren't included (mentioned by reps about 21 areas)
- People with a disability (mentioned by reps about 20 areas)
- Any faith groups, because none were included (mentioned by reps about 12 areas)
- Gypsy and traveller communities (mentioned by reps about 12 areas)
- Older people (mentioned by reps about 10 areas).

Other organisations and individuals that local areas felt should be involved given the makeup of their area included residents associations, social housing tenants, voluntary organisations and residents in specific ultra-local areas.

The nature of the community's involvement was developing and, although it was not necessarily genuine community engagement at the early stages, this was not necessarily seen as a long-term concern, with reps recognising that engagement would develop over time.

Reps characterised the lack of involvement of some organisations or types of people as being down to lack of time, capacity and resource. This was particularly identified in cases where trusted organisations had taken a very active role in Big Local and there was less involvement of residents or other voluntary and community organisations.



Sometimes areas needed to develop mechanisms to gain wider involvement from the community which took time to instigate (such as creating a website), but could then lead to increased involvement of those currently felt to be under-represented (for example young people, people of certain black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (BAME) backgrounds and faith communities). The need to involve a wider range of people in Big Local should be considered in the historical context of each area where those who had traditionally been involved in community action and activities had not always fully reflected the make-up of the area and engaging people with a wider range of characteristics may take time to develop.

Big Local areas recognise that efforts to engage with their community and work with them to explore Big Local visions means they needed to be as inclusive as possible. Reps in several areas mentioned that future activities will include some targeted outreach activities to more marginalised individuals such as those from minority faiths and ethnicities, or even simply younger and older people in an effort to bring them into the heart of Big Local. Areas were considering different approaches to achieve this wider engagement, for example by:

- Working with young people in developing their vision right from the beginning and placing them at the heart of this process
- employing dedicated community development workers or consultants who are experienced in the engagement of marginalised individuals
- using steering, or reference, or other sub-groups to take ownership of these issues and work in progressing the wider involvement of communities of identity in the area.

Although each area is different and consultation exercises have led to different priorities for the visions of Big Local, some of the following themes emerged by March 2012 as result of the areas' engagement in their communities:

- Jobs and support in finding employment
- Tackling crime
- Activities for young people
- Sports and leisure activities
- Local green spaces and food growing
- Economic regeneration
- Health

The emphasis on jobs, support in finding employment and economic regeneration in some areas was seen to fit particularly with the Star People offer and other opportunities for social investment.

4.2 Best practice to gain involvement

The end of grant reports for Getting People Involved (GPI) Round 1 provide some insights into the approaches adopted in 26 of the areas to raise awareness of Big Local and engage the wider community. These included the following:

- **Specific consultation events / workshops** – 16 areas mentioned that they had held events at which they consulted people using a variety of techniques (see below for details). Some areas had held events in more than one location in order to engage with a range of people.



- **Promotional activity** – promotional leaflets, signs and banners were widely used (in 16 areas). This included four areas who said they had developed branding and one that had used promotional materials such as pens and rulers.
- **Questionnaire surveys** – 12 areas had used questionnaires to find out what people wanted to see change in their area. They used a range of techniques including sending them to every home, having boxes to return completed surveys in a variety of locations in the community such as the post office, schools, GP surgeries, miners welfare centre, childrens' centre and churches. Some areas had used an online survey and two areas had provided a suggestion box or board.
- **Using existing events** – six areas had used existing events such as fun days, community picnics or the opening of a new facility as an opportunity to raise awareness of Big Local and seek the views of residents.
- **Targeted briefings / consultations** – five areas had targeted events at specific types of people (older people and younger people) who might not otherwise have participated.
- **Engaging other organisations / stakeholders** – six areas mentioned that they had actively engaged with organisations in the areas who could assist in spreading the message. These included, for example, voluntary organisations, faith organisations, the youth service, schools, the children's centre, mental health networks, housing providers and the local authority.
- **Newsletters** – six areas mentioned that they had used a newsletter to raise awareness and explain about Big Local, these were generally widely distributed to homes and local organisations.
- **Website** – five areas had created a website which, in some cases, included a forum for residents to leave comments.
- **Local media** – five areas said that they had engaged with local media – usually the local newspaper or radio – to raise awareness of Big Local.
- **Facilitators** – five areas said that they had engaged specialist facilitators / community development workers to undertake the engagement and discussions with residents.
- **Drop-in sessions** – two areas mentioned that they had provided drop-in sessions when people could find out more about Big Local.

There were a number of innovative ideas that areas came up with to take creative approaches to involve different members of their community. Below are some examples of the innovative ideas:

- A cab-cam community project, interviewing people in the back of a black taxi
- A 'café libretto' consultation within a café marquee in which the waiters became interviewers
- Fridge magnets to highlight issues (and video these to share publicly)
- Sketchbooks for people to write, doodle or draw their aspirations for the area
- 'Walkie-talkies' – people being paid to spread the word about local issues, but also collect information through questionnaires and consultations
- A 'Big Bus' tour around the area to go and physically visit different parts of the area and meet people
- Getting schools involved to form key venues and be part of steering groups to help reach out to diverse parts of the community and gain buy-in
- Using libraries as community hubs
- Accessing matched-funding to start pieces of work from relevant local funds e.g. community safety



- Community radio as a means of publicising Big Local activities
- An tea for older people held in a school during which they were consulted about Big Local
- A videopod for residents to record their views
- A DVD or film, including one led by young people.
- Training residents e.g. 'community champions' in community research or engagement techniques and empowering them to approach others in their community
- Offering free haircuts in local hairdressers in exchange for people's engagement and ideas
- Using a community café to provide a meeting point for different generations to come together and develop relationships.

In their end of grant report for GPI round 1, some areas commented that, as a result of their activity to raise awareness of Big Local, they had increased the number of residents on their database of contacts, for example one area now had 150 and another now had 300 residents' details. The number of residents who had agreed to be actively involved had also increased in some areas, for example one area that provided details said that this had increased from eight people to 20 and another said that ten new people were now attending meetings.

In some instances, in their end of grant report for GPI round 1, area residents highlighted the context in which they had been working to raise awareness of Big Local and engage residents in what they would like to see change. Four commented that there was a 'lack of trust', 'cynicism' or 'scepticism' among members of their local community that stemmed from a general lack of trust in authorities and from their experience of having been consulted in the past and not seeing the results of this subsequently. In addition, in two areas' reports, the wider context of funding cuts and other priorities, such as housing issues, for communities were more immediate concerns for local residents. In one area's report, the challenge included engaging people who were not used to forward planning and who did not always make regular use of a diary to plan in meetings.



5. Support

Key findings

- Areas have the opportunity to access a range of support and learning events and most (32 areas) did so. It is evident that some areas are making greater use of the opportunities on offer than others and there would be value in exploring further the reasons for this.
- Most of the attendees at the NANM learning events are residents and they particularly value learning from others' experience as well as benefiting from the content of the workshop.
- The Star People awards offered by UnLtd have been taken up in 16 areas. In total, 21 'Try It' and 22 'Do It' Star People awards have been allocated, totalling £77,000.
- Individuals receiving Star People awards plan a range of community-based activities including activities for older people, younger people and families. Community gardens and sustainable produce, community spaces and arts projects and improving access to online opportunities also feature.
- All areas are also supported by a rep whose role includes explaining, supporting and guiding residents and others through the Big Local pathway, providing facilitation, training and development support and informing other stakeholders about Big Local.

5.1 What support have areas made use of?

Areas have had the opportunity to access a number of learning and information events including:

- the Big Local regional events in summer 2011 which were attended by representatives of all but one of the 50 Wave 1 areas
- the launch event for Wave 2 of Big Local in February 2012 which was hosted by one Big Local Wave 1 area and two other Wave 1 areas contributed their experience and learning so far
- access to information and guidance online
- twelve areas were supported to provide case-studies of their experience to illustrate how Big Local was being adopted in the areas
- six areas participated in action learning sets, facilitated by the NANM, that focused on social media and how to make effective use of this in Big Local
- Network Neighbourhoods worked with three areas to support them in establishing websites
- learning events were held by the National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM) and were attended by people from 22 areas. Each event had a different focus as follows:
 - getting people involved in Big Local
 - community buildings and trusts
 - reviving communities
- two pairs of areas received help from the NANM to hold buddying visits at which a small group from each area met up to exchange experiences and learning, in what is hoped to be the start of an on-going relationship.



- two of the areas that were buddied were in the North West and had the same Big Local rep and they were buddied because one had made more progress than the other
- two of the areas buddied were in Yorkshire and were similar and had similar issues.
- Capacity Global has provided a diversity workshop to help areas engage in practices that will enable them to involve a broader range of people.
- UnLtd’s Star People awards were offered to individuals in Big Local areas who could apply for a ‘Try It’ award (of up to £500), or ‘Do It’ award (of between £1,000 and £5,000)
- Small Change offered tools, briefings and guides to social investment that reps and residents in areas can access.

Each of these had provided a different focus in helping areas to develop capacity and progress. Where there is information on whether an area made use of the support on offer it is apparent that people in most areas (32) had taken part in at least one event or activity and people in some areas had accessed more than one opportunity. In eleven areas, people had both attended a NANM event and had a Star People award and five of these areas were also supported to provide a case study (although none of these took part in the action learning sets). People from 18 other areas appear not to have accessed either the NANM events or had anyone receive a Star People award and were not involved in the Capacity Global workshop or the social media action learning set. The reasons for variation in areas’ engagement with the support opportunities offered for Big Local may be worthy of further investigation.

Further details of the access to online resources, NANM and Capacity Global learning events, action learning sets, Star People awards and the social investment tools are provided below.

Access to online resources, information and guidance

Web statistics provide details of access to the online information up to the end of October 2011, although not who was accessing this information. This showed that, at that early stage of Big Local’s development, information was more commonly accessed than guidance or tools with the exception of GPI guidance which was the fourth most downloaded file, as detailed in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Documents downloaded from Big local website July – October 2011.

Document	Number of downloads
List of areas	1221
FAQs	865
Programme overview	777
GPI guidance	710
Big Local announcement press release	649
Networking and learning programme overview	384
Local area profile guide	318
Networking and learning programme detailed	250
Overview presentation	225
Community visioning	210
5 steps to community visioning	152
Learning overview	42



Networking and learning events

Feedback from the networking and learning events indicated that these were valued for the opportunities they provided for learning from others and were described as motivational and inspiring, as detailed below.

Getting people involved in Big Local (NANM)

This event aimed to help areas share learning and develop ways of engaging with communities, as well as use learning and networking opportunities to influence their stakeholders and create a strong programme identity. There were three areas that presented and gave examples of some of the ways that they had successfully navigated some of these issues. These were followed-up by participative workshop sessions.

Of the 28 attendees, most (83 per cent) were residents and mainly came from the region where the event was held. Those that went to the event gained particular insights into:

- how to engage with communities that may have been over-consulted in the past
- techniques to engage communities positively and use asset-based approaches, e.g. asking positive questions to gain positive answers
- community research and how people locally asking other people locally about the area can be a really effective engagement method.

Feedback suggests that hearing stories from other areas was felt to be a really helpful way of learning about what was possible in their own area. The fact that so many attendees were relatively locally based also provided important networking opportunities that could be taken forwards into the future and participants really valued this.

What makes community buildings and trusts work? (NANM)

This Big Local 'study event' was an overnight visit to the Alt Valley Community Trust in Croxteth near Liverpool, in which a very entrepreneurial approach has been taken to grow it since it was established in 1983. Since then it has extended its capacity in helping to develop education and skills (which have remained the Trust's core purpose from the very start) for people in the local area. Participants found the visit very inspiring as it showed how far an organisation could grow in 30 years, having started with just a few hundred pounds rather than £1m. Participants also said they benefited from the opportunity to engage in creative thinking with other Big Local areas about how they could learn from the model. The 36 hour format also made it easier for participants to develop their networks and create new friendships than is possible at a one-day workshop. Although participants were more likely to be from relatively close to the area where the event was being held, ten areas were represented at the event including people from Dorset and Kent.

Reviving communities (NANM)

This event, which was also an overnight visit, came at the beginning of 2012. The event focused on the experience of Newstead in Nottinghamshire which has been part of the Lottery's Village SOS programme. The visit aimed to spotlight some specific mechanisms and tools that could help Big Local areas get people involved, and in doing so aimed to inspire and motivate. This event also focused on support available through UnLtd and how this might influence the development of the Big Local area, introducing the concept of investing in people and assets as opposed to the more familiar model of grants.



The event again focused on the experience of the community where the visit was being held, and highlighted work that had been instigated and continued to be driven by local people. This success of the Newstead Village SOS initiative was felt to be attributed to a culture of volunteering that was supported and encouraged, with people not previously involved welcomed and a broad group of people in the community able to play a part. The area had also successfully identified the potential role of social entrepreneurs and how outside investment may be the impetus, rather than need to be relied on.

In total, 88 per cent of the 24 attendees on this visit were residents and eight areas were able to attend coming from most regions of the country. The networking opportunities of an overnight event were again highly valued. Participants found the example used inspiring and tangible and examples of how areas can develop through social investment was felt to be useful. However, the facilitators noted that a key lesson for the programme is that Big Local areas need to be encouraged to go at their own speed and develop naturally.

Involvement and diversity (Capacity Global)

This event focused on working with people's existing experiences, their awareness of potential gaps in who they had managed to engage in their area, and how they might broaden this out in the future. Participants highlighted the following issues:

- Some were very aware that although lots of people had been involved, others were yet to engage at all
- Diversity could be a difficult issue, particularly in very culturally diverse, deprived areas, that also had a far right political presence
- Young people have been acknowledged widely as a group that people want to engage with, but may be absent from Big Local conversations at present.

The workshop session highlighted why diversity is such an important issue, especially in the context of Big Local. The goal should be 'acceptance and respect', rather than just 'tolerance'. Neutral spaces and other means of reducing barriers were highlighted as ways of overcoming potential challenges. Participants were given some practical tools to help them think about ideas to involve people in their community that might be more likely to include everyone. They focused on:

- Involving the 'hard to reach'
- Getting more young people involved
- Creating more of a shared Big Local area identity
- Keeping people involved
- Making an involvement and engagement plan for their area.

Social media and neighbourhood websites: Action learning sets

Six areas participated in two action learning set sessions to explore how to make best use of social media and neighbourhood websites. The sessions resulted in the following '10 commandments':

- Don't do anything until your partnership has decided what the message is they want to tell people
- If a public agency offers to host your website you should politely decline so that you maintain control of the network keys
- If you have limited time (i.e. 2 hours per week) to manage online activity, don't try to cover all bases but focus your efforts on one or two social media platforms – those where local people are



- Target young people through visual materials such as YouTube, Flickr and perhaps Facebook but Twitter won't be as useful here
- Avoid social media platforms that are used less by local residents, for example LinkedIn and Foursquare. Keep it appropriate and useful
- Don't limit your appeal by just talking about Big Local; include everything local that people will be interested in
- Online activity should be managed by at least two people. It is too much for someone to do single handed
- Make sure you build and design your online activity to that it can be easily passed onto someone else, including keeping password keys safe
- The person leading on social media should be a member of the partnership or close to it as being distant can create challenges, for example getting content.

Social investment

The work of Big Local on social investment started in October 2011, and ran for six months to end March 2012. At this early stage before Big Local plans have been implemented, the main focus was on providing briefings and guides to social investment and developing social investment tools that could be accessed by areas and reps, and supporting Big Local in planning social investment for local areas.

Early feedback on social investment has indicated that several areas may have low levels of previous experience in the social investment, social enterprise and economic development aspects of Big Local. More than the lack of experience in areas, local economics, money, business and credit tend not to be identified as issues by residents, unless they are prompted to explore these issues. Once residents realise that it is acceptable to think and talk about these issues, they are often very enthusiastic and interested. However, economic development has traditionally been seen as separate from community development, which can provide challenges for both reps and steering groups alike to change their thinking. The very simple and accessible guides and introductions to social investment as a part of challenging the way that areas think about local economies aim to provide a useful and necessary first step.

Star people support

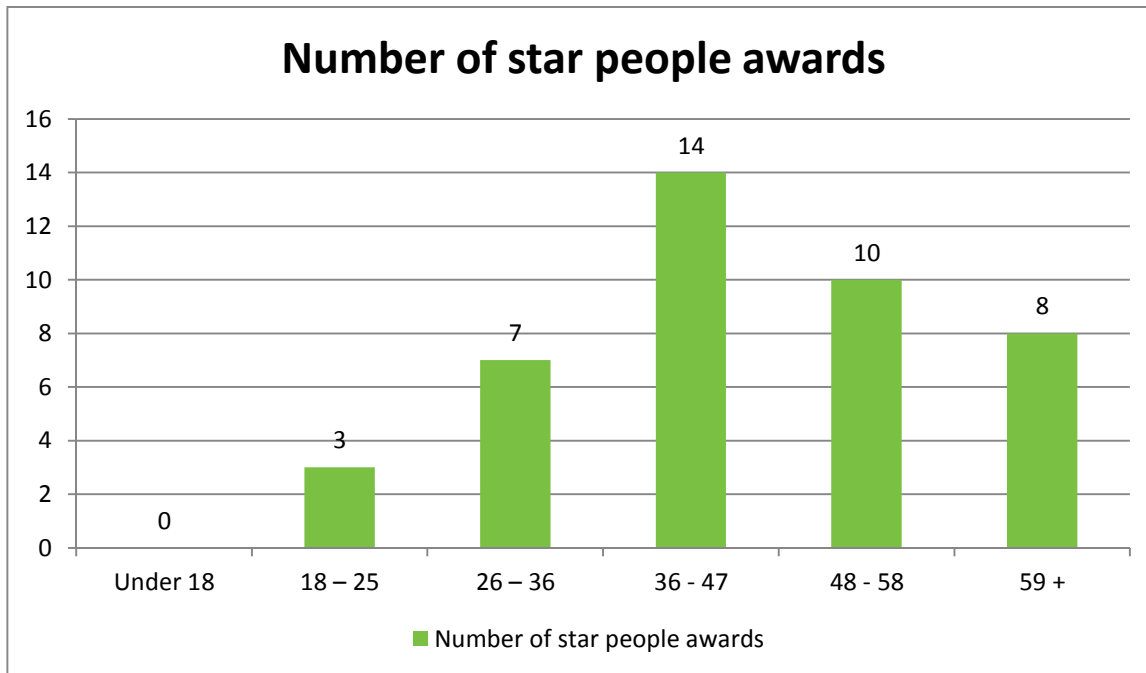
Areas have also been able to access the 'Star People' initiative delivered by UnLtd. The aim of UnLtd's Star People programme is to '*reach out and unleash the energies of people who can transform the world in which they live: our Star People*'. These are individuals with ideas that can improve their area, both big and small, that they are willing to lead. A tailored package of funding and support is provided to help their ideas become a reality.

This support has led to at least one 'try it' award (of up to £500), or 'do it' Star People award (of between £1,000 and £5,000), in 16 of the 50 Big Local areas so far. Reps in 22 Big Local areas have indicated they were contacted by an UnLtd representative about the Star People offer. In total, 21 'try it' and 22 'do it' Star People awards have been allocated, totalling £77,000.

Star People awards have been given to people of a range of ages (See Figure 5.1), although over half of the awards awarded in year zero were to people aged between 36 and 48. The gender balance has been fairly equal, with 25 women and 18 men gaining star people awards up to the end of March 2012.



Figure 5.1: Age of Star People award recipients



Source: UnLtd Star People award monitoring information to March 2012

Star People awards have provided opportunities to people looking after the home or family (five awards), and the unemployed (six awards), as well as to those employed full-time (eight awards), part-time (nine awards) and the self-employed (four awards).

The 'Star People' awards were made to individuals who aimed to deliver a diverse array of activities, funding people to test or expand an enterprising idea that met a social need in their area. Although a number of activities have been funded, they have broadly focused on:

- activities to help older people have opportunities become more active
- activities to deal with specific community needs
- activities for families
- community gardens and sustainable produce
- activities focused on younger people to provide them with opportunities to develop, be part of their community and flourish within it
- arts projects
- the development of community hubs and transformation of community spaces
- improving access to online opportunities.

A number of Star People were running community gardens or 'grow your own' style projects to promote healthy eating and community cohesion, for example by using shared allotments are underway. These sometimes focused on specific types of people within the community, for example older or younger people. Other Star People focused particularly on **older people** including projects such as:

- computer classes for older people in rural, isolated areas
- line-dancing to provide an opportunity for gentle exercise
- new localised groups for older people who have mobility issues and cannot access services in other areas
- training in film, radio and TV to the over-50s to improve employment opportunities



There were also several other projects or ventures that have focused on creating opportunities for the community to interact and improve their health and well-being, including:

- providing healthy eating and cookery classes in local community venues to promote the health and well-being of children
- the creation of a community choir, including people of all ages

Some awards have been allocated to people who were aiming to address **specific needs** in the local area. For example:

- providing support and training for people dyslexia, to help both adults and children
- taster session for intergenerational exercise in an area that has few facilities for this kind of activity
- a fruit, vegetables and household goods cooperative to provide these at low cost (funding for advertising, training etc)
- an affordable handyman service for a local estate

A number of projects or ventures have focused on **opportunities for families** to interact, particularly for parents and children through a range of activities such as:

- family fun days and other big community events encouraging people to get out and spend time in their community together
- creation of a mother and toddler group when none currently existed in the area, leaving some parents isolated and vulnerable
- others focused on helping young parents to come together and share their problems and difficulties in the hope that this can build confidence, improve self-esteem and reduce the potential escalation of challenges

A number of Star People wanted to try out specific types of **community arts projects**. Through these, they hoped to provide opportunities for residents to interact and engage with their area positively, improving health, well-being and their feeling of connection with the local area. One of these was particularly aimed at young people and their parents in order to reduce their potential isolation, while another focused on inter-generational working. Several Star People aimed to create more opportunities for parents to spend time with their children in a positive way to reduce the risk of their isolation, often in an area with few apparent opportunities to do this.

Many projects or ventures focused on creating **opportunities for young people**, or to help young people overcome the challenges they faced. A broad range of projects or ventures focusing on young people were funded including:

- taster 'street dance' sessions to provide positively focused activities that provide an alternative to potentially criminal activities.
- an award given to trial setting up a 'boot camp' for young people and help them overcome personal challenges, with the aspiration to be a preferred provider for offending services / national offender management services
- working with young people at an early age to help prevent anti-social behaviour developing
- an amateur boxing club for young people to help them become more active, with a focus on building confidence, fitness and awareness of nutrition
- sports activities where they did not exist before for younger people, for example cricket
- securing the use of local community sports facilities to develop local football teams and coaches
- a bicycle-focused social enterprise focusing on providing volunteering opportunities, bike-maintenance and road-safety



- a marine awareness project in a coastal area
- mentoring projects using volunteers from local businesses to help develop young people's aspirations at workshops, events and residentials, charging a small fee to schools with the possibility of later voluntary work, or apprenticeships for those taking part
- training in film, radio and TV to younger people to improve confidence and employment prospects.

Some Star People had a strong focus on **using community spaces more effectively**, for example through transforming previously derelict or vacant spaces, or creating other community hubs. Examples of their projects or ventures include:

- the development of community cafes, with the potential to turn into a community hub with other services
- initiating a community project to transform a derelict community space into a youth / training facility. In the long-term this planned to offer a campsite, outdoor activities and eco training that could be offered to corporate organisations and generate income to become self-sustaining

Similarly, other Star People planned to create **online community spaces**, or focused on helping communities have **improved access** to online opportunities. Example of their projects and ventures include:

- creating an online community forum for people to discuss ideas, share inspiration and explore practical ways of achieving things in the area, and other online communities for example 'care coordinating' for people in the local area
- a scheme focused on recycling older computer equipment and providing it to households with no access to the internet, simultaneously providing a training opportunity for the unemployed.

5.2 What is the role of the rep?

Reps have provided on-going support in terms of managing the concerns and expectations of local workers, activists and residents. Their role is light touch and equates to 15 days of support for a wave 1 area to work through the initial pathway steps and establish a partnership. Their role has been to encourage people through the various anxieties and frustrations that arise, as well as guiding them towards developing mutually beneficial relationships with residents and local stakeholders such as Councillors, voluntary and community and other organisations. Reps also provided a number of practical means of support including:

Explaining specific parts of the Big Local pathway

- What is meant by community visioning
- Discussing criteria for the Big Local partnership
- Explaining what is expected of the lead organisation and how to change the lead organisation
- Helping to co-ordinate and support the GPI round 2 proposal.

Training and developing

- Training volunteers in community engagement and consultation
- Helping with the recruitment and subsequent support of paid workers
- Working with areas to evaluate their work



- Advising on other sources of funding available locally
- Advice and assistance in strategic analysis of the data generated from surveys
- Helping to develop residents into greater leadership roles and how to plan effectively, as well as some generic 'behind-the-scenes' work helping to develop confidence

Facilitating

- Setting up community meetings and facilitation of steering and reference groups
- Setting up, facilitating or brokering meetings (e.g. political meetings with Councillors, MPs)
- Engaging with other local stakeholders (e.g. PCTs)
- Helping to develop links with the Star People element of Big Local led by UnLtd
- Encouraging wider participation from minorities not yet involved in Big Local
- Working closely with lead organisations, co-ordinating and providing additional capacity to clarify, support and promote Big Local

Informing

- Listening to local councillors' concerns about the area and their vision
- Explaining what other areas have done as examples
- Promoting NANM learning programmes
- Starting to gauge levels of interest in social investment (52 per cent of areas indicated they were interested in this in January 2012).

In some areas social investments had been developed further and explored. Where there were close links with the credit union, there was a great deal of interest in investing in the area through this. Similarly, in areas where UnLtd has been active there seems to have been more of a drive to investigate possible entrepreneurial activities.



6. Bringing residents into Big Local

Key findings

- Personal motivation, a supportive infrastructure and ensuring that Big Local meetings are engaging and appealing in nature and content and arranged at a convenient time for a range of residents are all helpful in engaging people in Big Local.
- Issues that need to be overcome in order to engage residents with Big Local include overcoming apparent apathy or cynicism resulting from residents' previous experience of consultation with no apparent consequent action, addressing any historical tensions within the community or between the community and other organisations or stakeholders, and the personal constraints for individuals, such as lack of time or existing commitments, that affect their ability to participate. In the early stages, there has not been widespread awareness and understanding of Big Local and this needed to be overcome to engage the community.
- Reps consider that Local Trust could augment its support with additional guidance on a range of issues, continuation and extension of networking and buddying opportunities and ensuring these are accessible to all areas, mechanisms to share practice where areas are working well and additional funding to bridge the gap between GPI round 1 and 2.

6.1 Main factors enabling, or helping residents to get involved

While areas have explored a number of means of engaging with residents, as outlined in Section 3, there are some that have been identified as particularly effective in enabling residents to get involved. Personal motivations, characteristics of Big Local meetings and those leading Big Local, and a supportive infrastructure all help.

Personal motivations

- personal invitations from someone they trust and know was the most fast and effective means to get things going and ensure residents were involved (for example steering group members taking Big Local back to people they knew)
- encouragement was key and vital to gaining and sustaining resident involvement
- helping residents to realise there were a number of different ways they could be involved, that were not necessarily long-term or time-consuming, could help them to take the first step
- supporting and helping residents feel confident that they could do something was important for them to participate
- seeing and doing things together was motivating for residents as it helped them be part of the group and feel 'part of something bigger'
- disseminating knowledge about how residents could benefit as this could be a trigger for their engagement. This sometimes required translating the Big Local goals into something residents understood easily. Examples of where things had worked, such as through video clips, could be inspirational and serve this purpose effectively



- anything that was indicative of creating better opportunities, or improving the environment for young people and children was motivating for parents.

Supportive infrastructure

- links with community organisations were a good way of accessing residents, similarly resident's associations
- experienced community workers could help to build momentum (and could be especially skilled in engaging people of BAME backgrounds and residents)
- similarly when people associated with previously successful local initiatives took on Big Local roles they carried with them the trust and support from residents
- community cafés were identified as a helpful route into engaging with residents where they exist as they act as a hub of information
- co-operation from existing voluntary and community organisations and using existing structures could help speed-up the rate at which residents get involved
- Big Local being visible because of events funded in GPI round 1 such as social events meant residents were likely to continue their involvement.

Characteristics of Big Local meetings

- making engagement fun and creative / keeping meetings informal but still making decisions
- daytime meetings to engage with unemployed / community professionals
- 'piggybacking' onto other public meetings
- doing lots of different events and meetings to provide options for people to be involved (e.g. day and night)
- helping people to feel they have a voice and are being listened to, with tangible evidence that things can happen
- faith and resident organisations can achieve wider community buy-in
- visible resident involvement and a sense of the group being resident led could help people to stay motivated and feel part of activities once they join the group.

6.2 Main factors that have prevented resident involvement

Reps described a number of factors that they felt had impinged on residents becoming more fully involved, which did not all simply mirror the factors that help residents to be active in Big Local. Personal issues, along with challenging dynamics within the group leading Big Local or between key stakeholders in the area were associated with less resident involvement. A lack of understanding of the programme itself also presented a challenge, along with potentially difficult issues of local identity. Levels of previous experience in community engagement affected resident involvement, as well as the time taken to get greater numbers of residents involved. Reps have suggested that any momentum created from round one activities is important to sustain and they have also indicated that if too few residents are involved then it can also lead to them feeling overburdened.

Some of the key issues are summarised below:

'We've been here before'



Reflecting the comments in some areas' end of grant reports for Getting People Involved Round 1, in some areas it was clear that for some residents there was a sense of apathy, either because of consultation overload and negative previous experiences, or because of suspicion and cynicism about the genuine aims and objectives of Big Local and who the intended driving force behind it is meant to be. Reps had encountered problems such as:

- the risk of residents perceiving Big Local as a consultation exercise rather than an opportunity for action
- a lack of encouragement or support for those that do want to get involved, resulting in an on-going lack of confidence
- too few local organisations to help get things going, or a lack of capacity found within the group leading Big Local to engage with residents effectively
- insufficient communication and a lack of awareness about Big Local
- low levels of previous experience of community development programmes and absence of community infrastructure
- a history of difficult local politics and poor experiences of local services leading to dis-engagement
- a lack of current evidence of what Big Local has achieved on the ground
- boundary confusion in the early stages of wave 1 meaning residents felt confused about their potential involvement.

Personal motivations

- personal constraints (long working hours, apathy, doubts and suspicion about the real driving force for the programme)
- lack of personal identification with the larger Big Local area
- residents seeking a range of different kinds of opportunities to be involved rather than only formal steering groups
- no-one taking responsibility, or nothing happening in between steering group meetings.

Challenging local relationships

In some areas, reps were conscious that they were working in areas with histories and existing relationships that had an impact on getting people involved and building a partnership. Specific issues that reps were working through in the areas included:

- trusted organisations sometimes needed to familiarise themselves with taking a community development approach in order to provide effective support
- the level of support from local organisations varied and while in some instances local councils or the local voluntary and community were less engaged, often due to lack of capacity, in others they were taking more of a lead than was needed for the programme to be resident-led and there was a perception reported that community professionals, rather than residents, should be leading Big Local
- there was a need to ensure that the relationships between the trusted organisation and others involved was clear to avoid the risk of confusion
- it was challenging to engage a wider group of residents and extend beyond those who were already active in their community as some residents did not perceive a need to become involved in addition to these individuals. However, the existing commitments of people who were already actively involved in their community could constrain the extent to which they could support Big Local.



- there had been difficult sometimes to engage particular types of people (for example people from minority faiths or young people) particularly where no-one of a similar background or characteristic is already involved so that potential participants can see 'people like me' involved which could encourage them to get involved too
- although the programme is resident-led, there was a need for some leadership to help residents to understand what they could do.

Lack of understanding of Big Local

When reps started working with wave 1 areas in summer 2011, some described a general lack of understanding about the programme's key aims and messages, with confusion about what the money was for and people's tendency to try and 'fit' the programme into models they were familiar with. Some of the issues included:

- routes for involvement not being clear and a general lack of understanding of the programme
- a lack of management of expectations – nothing happened quickly enough
- a loss of momentum between GPI round 1 and GPI round 2 leading to disengagement
- most meetings occurring in the day, which can be excluding
- perceptions that a 'particular type of person' was involved and others felt they did not 'fit'
- lack of a good communication plan to disseminate important information and key messages.

6.3 What can Big Local do?

Reps gave a number of suggestions about what Local Trust and partners might do to help overcome some of the difficulties reps had experienced in developing Big Local partnerships, although several already felt fully equipped to manage the challenges they experienced. Reps touched on the issue of resident involvement and wider community engagement, acknowledging the need to go beyond the initial resident involvement to overcome the risk of being too narrow in focus, and not including the wider community effectively.

Some of the possible ways forward they described were:

- Engendering momentum between the partnership and local trusted organisation so that they will take responsibility for driving Big Local on the ground
- helping with publicity (although it was recognised that the new publicity and guidance should help)
- guidance on promoting the widest engagement of residents possible
- Help joining up disparate rural communities into one area
- events on offer needs to move around the country to make it accessible for all areas at some point
- creating a regionally-based leadership training programme, with group activity and learning sets aimed at partnership chairs and vice-chairs
- guidelines on partnerships to include examples of the specific roles people have in Big Local partnerships
- more support for areas to share best practice – particularly in cases genuinely community / resident-led partnerships were developing.
- greater (as already) promotion of buddying and networking – people only recognise what is possible when someone else has done it



- small budgets to bridge the gap between GPI round 1 and GPI round 2 may have been useful to avoid losing momentum (this has been addressed for wave 2 areas as pathway funding is now available)
- there is a need to ensure that once the partnership is established there is still a mechanism to feed back and engage with the wider community on Big Local issues and decisions. For example, Big Local could provide some guidance on the above to areas on 'involving your wider community'
- some much more focused guidance around engagement and working with particular types of people or organisations for example working with schools or working with young people etc (with different monthly focuses changing the priority).



7. Discussion of the Big Local early learning report

Written by Institute for Voluntary Action Research

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify themes, implications and questions about Big Local that have emerged during the process of compiling a report about the early development of the programme to contribute to the strategic learning for the programme.

Big Local is embedded in years of experience of community interventions. Firstly, in its design and management, it aims to address the factors that have prevented residents in previous community programmes from leading change. Secondly, it places at residents' disposal a great deal of experience in community development, through a programme of support that is 'light-touch' - 'on tap', rather than 'on top'¹.

This experience means that the dynamics of Big Local's initial stages will be familiar to those with experience in the community development field. However, we have included a very few references to other programmes and literature that we feel may be particularly helpful and relevant at the present time to help interpret the evidence in this report and/or to remind ourselves that the challenges and tensions that are facing Big Local are common to many other community development programmes and other forms of community practice. Big Local offers an important opportunity to find out how different areas respond to these challenges over time and what we can learn for the future.

7.2 What are we learning? What does the report tell us?

Over the following pages, we reflect on the implications of the findings presented in this report in relation to strategic thinking and decision-making for Big Local. We conclude with some outstanding questions for the programme.

Context matters

This report shows that context matters. All areas come with a history. Through its design and support, Big Local has already responded flexibly to the diverse needs and aspirations of a wide range of areas with very different levels of prior experience. For example, Big Local has found ways to reconcile natural boundaries with pre-defined administrative boundaries in Big Local areas (See Chapter 2).

¹ We are quoting Tony Gibson who was the pioneer of Planning for Real and has provided many tools for participation in community planning over the years.
http://www.regen.net/Community_Renewal/article/1056403/neighbourhood-sage/



This report suggests that progress along the pathway so far has depended on a range of contextual factors including: previous levels of local experience and organisation; experience of previous consultation processes; and local relationships.

Understanding context will be important in evaluating the programme. Big Local areas will have differing ideas about what success looks like. Over time, it should be possible to identify which kinds of engagement methods, approaches to local partnerships and plans, and specialist support have worked in different areas.

Finally, Chapter 2 of this report reminds us that this investment is being offered at a time of unprecedented cuts in public spending and rising unemployment, especially among young people. It is too early to say how this will affect local plans and their progress but it is likely to be a significant contextual factor in the development of Big Local.

Involving people takes time

At the time of writing, most areas are still working through the initial steps of the Big Local pathway. This report suggests that steps are being taken concurrently in some areas rather than consecutively. This is to be expected. Indeed, all the signs are that, while the pathway provides an essential framework for the development of local plans and action, the Big Local process will be a dynamic and cyclical one, rather than a linear, logical progression. While Big Local specifies milestones along a pathway for gaining Local Trust approval e.g. partnerships must be at least 50 per cent residents, progression along that pathway is likely to be dynamic and cyclical, rather than linear and logical.

This report suggests that it has taken some areas longer than others, and perhaps longer than expected, to move through the pathway. In contrast, not all areas have taken advantage of the time allowed. Is there a danger that moving too fast will leave many local residents behind?

Without more qualitative information it is hard to know why some areas have moved faster than others. But we may want to consider some possible explanations: local people may have the relationships and capacity to take action, the locally trusted organisation may be experienced and well connected to local people already, local people and organisations may be used to grants and programmes where money has to be spent quickly. What is important, however, is that the pace of development is not dictated by external constraints.

Reaching out requires variety, imagination and flexibility

Effective resident engagement is at the heart of Big Local's theory of change. As well as needing time, this requires a variety of imaginative 'ways in' that allow people to get involved at the level that feels most comfortable to them, and connects them with people they trust. It is very encouraging, therefore, to read of the wide variety of ways that areas have adopted to promote local involvement (See examples listed in Chapter 4.2 above). There is a wealth of experience and ideas to draw on among Big Local reps, staff and in the Big Local areas themselves. It will be important to ensure that this is shared across areas and that all areas – especially those with less experience - are encouraged to try out new things.

This report suggests with some confidence that, even where community involvement was limited in the early stages, it would develop over time. The report also underlines the importance of 'being



asked'. But involvement must go beyond existing networks if Big Local is to reach the whole community. This will inevitably take time and patience. Thirty or more reps report on difficulties their areas are having in reaching Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, refugee and other population groups. But this has two implications:

- Firstly there needs to be a conscious process to widen involvement, so that this does not get 'squeezed out' by the imperatives of delivery – this report suggests that a number of local areas have taken this on board.
- Secondly, there needs to be enough flexibility in local plans to allow them to be adapted as more people, and different parts of the community, are inspired to come on board, with new ideas and aspirations. Otherwise, there will always be parts of the local community who feel excluded.

Involvement is likely to go in cycles

This report provides evidence about levels of involvement and who is engaged in Big Local areas. Levels of engagement will vary over time. Local interest may go in waves and there will be natural ebbs and flows in activity. A recent study on individual participation (see box below) finds that people engage in different ways and that their levels of engagement are likely to vary over their lifecycle (see Box One).

Box One: Pathways through Participation

This research suggests that:

Participation starts because of a combination of:

- personal motivations (like helping others, social interaction, personal benefit)
- a trigger (like a personal life event, external threat, being asked)
- resources (practical, skills, social networks, confidence etc.) and
- an opportunity (a group, an event, a space to meet).

Participation continues if involvement is a good quality experience and the resources are available. It stops if it is a bad experience (perhaps because of negative relationships within groups, poor group processes and structures), if resources are lacking or perhaps because of a life event (moving away, illness).

People participate in different ways:

- Consistent and deep over time
- Peaks and troughs
- Consistent but light over time
- Piecemeal and irregular.

People are likely to **participate in different things over the life cycle** as their interests and motivations change.

Policy and **external intervention can affect some of these factors** but not all. Motivation may be difficult to shape but opportunities can be shaped by policy makers and practitioners. Resources cannot be wholly shaped from outside but may be influenced by policy and practice

Source: Brodie, E. et al (2011) *Pathways through participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship*, London: NCVO, IVR, Involve. See study website for report and other materials

<http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk>



But what are realistic expectations? Whilst *Pathways through Participation* maps individual participation, there is little research that takes looks at people's involvement over time. There is thus an opportunity to learn a lot from Big Local about patterns of involvement over time, what can be expected and how to build on this. Programmes like the New Deal for Communities also found, for example, that high initial interest died down over the ten years of that programme and in the long term it was the few who took on most of the work that got the most out of the programme. In part, this decline in involvement was due to excessive government control, but it was also attributed to over-optimistic expectations of what the programme could achieve². Interpreting the involvement of residents in Big Local areas will be supported therefore by understanding the dynamics of involvement over time.

Leading and involving

Residents may want to be involved in Big Local in different ways and at different times. Sometimes, as this report comments, residents are happy to leave involvement in governance and leadership to a very few people.

The variety of ways in that Big Local uses to encourage participation, as well as its search for 'Star People', suggest that it is addressing this issue. But this report raises some concerns about locally trusted organisations and/or community leaders crowding out wider involvement (see Chapters 2.1 and 6.2 above). It also refers to challenging dynamics in locally trusted organisations and other agencies as a barrier to engagement. This can be a significant factor in discouraging involvement (see Box One) and there is much to be learnt over the lifetime of Big Local about how it can be addressed.

There is, in community engagement, an inevitable tension between leadership and widespread participation. Progress along the Big Local pathway requires local areas to each form a Big Local partnership that will be responsible for their Big Local plan. These Big Local partnerships will need to be embedded in informal networks, if they are to be accountable, to promote wider engagement and to build the skills and confidence for resident-led change beyond those most involved. Leaders need to be encouraged to enable others to take part, which can require considerable sensitivity on the part of reps as a part of their role is to facilitate this to happen.

Some important features are already in place that will help to facilitate this. For example:

- Local Trust's determination to minimise bureaucracy and red tape
- Big Local partnerships are not incorporated bodies and will not hold the Big Local investment
- the range of ways of organising within Big Local areas that the report already identifies, including task groups, working groups and so on, as well as opportunities for young people to engage in the ways that make most sense to them.

Support

In Big Local's theory of change, resident-led action is underpinned not only by financial resources, but by 'light-touch' support, specialist expertise and a range of networking and learning opportunities. There is, as we have said, a wealth of experience in Local Trust, among delivery partners and reps and in the local areas themselves.



Big Local's use of light-touch support appears to be working well in terms of finding a balance between external expertise and residents' own knowledge and ideas in developing plans - it is clear that areas have drawn on their reps in a variety of ways. Clearly there will be differences between those areas that already have community development resources and those that do not.

There has been an encouraging take up of learning events, and Local Trust has collected positive feedback. Some areas are also making use of the new forms of support on offer in relation to social investment and social enterprise. But there are 18 areas that have made little use of any of this support. The evidence is currently showing no patterns as to which areas are accessing support and why but we need to know why this is the case. For example:

- Do some Big Local areas already have the expertise offered through Big Local?
- Do Big Local residents have the time and resources to participate in events?
- Do Big Local areas see the relevance and value of the support on offer?
- Do Big Local residents have the confidence to access the support on offer?

Social media and digital technology offer opportunities not only for transmission of information but also for interaction. However, this report suggests its potential is not being fully achieved beyond people downloading basic information. We have found this to be the case in other Programmes in which we have been involved³.

Social enterprise and investment

Social enterprise and social investment are two key features of Big Local's theory of change. This report describes the ways in which these opportunities are being taken up. But it also suggests that issues relating to the local economy, business, credit etc. are not emerging as immediate issues for local residents, unless they are prompted. Few areas, or indeed reps, have experience of working in this way. There is also little evidence of the involvement of local businesses, so far, although residents see this as important.

This raises a number of issues. The first, as we hinted in the previous section, is how to introduce new ideas and expertise without undermining the 'resident-led' core values of Big Local. A second, perhaps more fundamental, issue relates to community aspirations. This report suggests that 'bigger' issues, like health and employment, are not coming to the surface yet in many areas. Previous experience suggests that the issues residents are most likely to identify for action are immediate issues that they feel they have some influence over – clean, green and social – although crime is also a familiar topic on community agendas. The bigger issues, such as health and employment, are likely to come some way down the line and plans need to be flexible enough to accommodate this.

To return to social enterprise and social investment, it is far too early to say whether the focus on Star People and social investment will open up genuinely new opportunities for local areas and help to boost local economies. Many of the activities currently reported open up important new opportunities for local people, but it is not yet clear how far social objectives can be combined with economic sustainability, especially in areas where commercial markets have failed to provide. The levels of interest reported so far are promising and it is hoped that these opportunities continue to stimulate interest in the longer term.

³ Taylor, M., Wilson, M., Purdue, D. and Wilde, P. (2007) *Changing Neighbourhoods: the impact of 'light touch support in 20 communities*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation



7.3 What do we still need to know? Where are the gaps?

In this commentary, we have suggested that there are fundamental balancing acts in promoting resident-led change which are not amenable to quick fixes or written guidelines. There are tensions between leadership and wider participation, between expertise and resident knowledge or ideas, and between formal structures and informal networks. Research elsewhere suggests other areas may also require careful balancing. Respecting diversity while encouraging cohesion between different local communities where it is needed, and working with the system while also being able to challenge it may emerge as important issues in the future. There are also lessons to be learnt about how to combine Big Local's light touch support with professional resources on the ground.

To some extent, experience in relation to these challenges is being shared through basecamp by delivery partners and reps, and rep reports to Renaisi. Monitoring and engaging with the emerging issues provides an opportunity to engage in learning from the programme. Learning events also provide an opportunity for input and peer-to-peer support.

There are specific issues that need to be addressed by Big Local partners in moving forwards. This discussion chapter has identified some areas where it will be important to capture emerging learning: in relationship to leadership, the nature and formation of local partnerships, and social enterprise. It has suggested that diversity may emerge as a significant issue in the next 100 Big Local areas.

A further point that has been raised in comments on this report, concerns the relationship between Big Local and local authorities. This includes whether local authorities are involved in local partnerships, whether they are enabling or controlling and how far Big Local is able to promote more productive relationships with local authorities where this is necessary/advisable. This also touches on the issue of whether Big Local is giving residents more influence and legitimacy with local councils and other external power holders, which may warrant further exploration as the programme develops.

Information is currently being gathered about the structures being used by Big Local partnerships. It will be important to capture the learning from the different arrangements that are evolving if Big Local is to develop genuinely new and open approaches to structure and accountability. In particular, what data will be needed to understand what it means for a programme to be resident led?

7.4 Key implications and questions for Local Trust

As it moves into its second year, the key implications of this report's findings for Big Local programme management are to:

- Ensure that, as partnerships are formed and plans developed, formal structures are embedded in local networks, the momentum of resident involvement is maintained, contact is made with those who are not yet involved and that partnerships and plans are able to remain flexible and open to influence



- ensure that all areas are able to use the learning opportunities; and to understand how learning is being applied
- use digital technology and social media to complement and augment face-to-face learning and help to reach new people
- consider whether some areas need intensive support
- ensure that the learning of local reps and of delivery partners is fully captured and that future reports are able to draw on this material so that Big Local and Local Trust benefit fully from their insights
- ensure that leadership is – and remains – open and accessible.

Below we suggest a small number of questions that may benefit from attention going forward:

- How can those leading the Big Local process engage with and be accountable to local residents as well as nurturing a wider pool of leaders?
- what will make Big Local partnerships different from those that have gone before as part of other community change programmes?
- are there areas that need more intensive rather than light touch support? How can Local Trust respond to this need while retaining its resident led ethos? Is there anything to be learnt about the differences between those areas that are taking up social enterprise and investment options and those that are not?
- is the support and expertise held by Big Local and Local Trust getting to the areas without a history of community engagement?
- what is the appropriate role for Big Local in terms of 'stepping in' and 'challenging' local areas? And when might this be appropriate?