

Influences on the development of Big Local areas

Final research report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Big Local is an exciting opportunity for residents in 150 areas around England to use at least £1m in each area to make a lasting positive difference to their communities. It is 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. 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.

Big Local is run by Local Trust, working with an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) and partners providing expert advice and support for residents. The delivery partners are:

- Community Development Foundation (CDF)
- Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR)
- Living Space Project (previously Capacity Global)
- National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM)
- Renaisi
- Small Change
- UnLtd.

Details of the delivery partners and their roles are available on the Local Trust [website](#).

Big Local is a new approach to communities achieving lasting positive change in their areas and achieving the four Big Local outcomes. It is resident-led and residents choose a locally trusted organisation to hold their funds, with residents in the lead. This locally trusted organisation is typically a local charity, council for voluntary service, local authority or housing association but in the absence of an organisation that is trusted locally, some areas have chosen Local Trust to fulfil this role. Residents choose their own timeline for submitting their vision and plan, and spending their funds, that meets their needs, provided all money is spent by February 2026. They will work with a range of organisations to deliver their plan. Big Local is more than just a grant-giving programme. It also includes support to develop social investment and social entrepreneurship within these communities. Each Big Local area is assigned a contact (rep) to support them and once they have an endorsed partnership they can select their rep from the pool of reps quality assured by Renaisi, should they so wish.

People in the area create a Big Local partnership to guide the overall direction of Big Local in their area and to ensure a diverse range of residents and local organisations are actively involved. The majority of members (at least 51%) have to be residents and the membership should be reviewed annually and is expected to change over time. It takes time to establish this

partnership and, in the meantime, there is generally a group of residents and others to get Big Local started. This group has different names in different Big Local areas and in this report it is referred to as a steering group.

The 150 Big Local areas were selected by the Big Lottery Fund because they had historically received below average amounts of funding from Big Lottery Fund which could reflect a lack of capacity in the areas to apply for funding. The 150 areas were announced in three groups of 50 areas in:

- July 2010
- February 2012
- December 2012.

Appendix A provides a timeline of the launch of the 150 Big Local areas. From this starting point, the areas can progress at a pace that suits their needs and there are no specific deadlines set by Local Trust except the end date of February 2026. As they progress, areas follow a pathway as a guide to the key stages and steps they will make on their journey. The pathway has seven steps:

- 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.

To support people in areas in the early stages of Big Local, Getting People Involved round 1 and round 2 funding was made available to the first 50 Big Local areas and Getting Started funding was available for the next 100 areas. The guidance¹ explained that the funding could be used on *'activities that help you start the conversation in your Big Local area – spreading the word about Big Local, making sure people locally know how to get involved, and begin gathering ideas on how your area might change for the better'* and to support them as they progress through the pathway.

To help Local Trust to learn from areas' experience of Big Local to date, and to inform the development of their strategies, Local Trust commissioned the Community Development Foundation (CDF) to undertake exploratory research in a sample of Big Local areas. The research was undertaken between June and November 2013, which was between six months and three years since Big Local was launched. For some areas, therefore, the research was conducted when they were at an early stage in their journey while others had been going for more time and this should be taken into consideration when exploring the findings. This research is not an evaluation of these areas, rather it was undertaken to provide an insight into how areas are progressing and what influences this, as detailed in the next section.

¹ <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/big-local/resources/>

1.2 About this research

1.2.1 Aims

The evidence from the early stages of Big Local ('year zero') suggested that development was influenced by an area's context, history and particular individuals. This research aimed to explore how far the nature and characteristics of the area influences the progress and development of Big Local areas. This will help Local Trust, partners and these Big Local areas to understand what environmental factors and characteristics affect the progress of Big Local. For example why some areas appear to progress at a faster pace while others are slower; why areas choose different ways in which to make their area an even better place to live and why Big Local is becoming resident-led more quickly in some areas than others. In exploring these issues it will begin to examine what success will look like and the way in which Big Local's Theory of Change² is working in practice.

In more detail, the aims of the research are to:

- identify the **main influential factors that support or hinder progress** of Big Local areas – what influences the progress and development of Big Local in an area (including people, organisations, history and context) and what influences it most?
- explore the **extent and nature of support and their influence** on the areas – what difference does support make in different circumstances and why?
- investigate the **impact of these influences on Big Local areas** and any differences across areas – what difference do the various influences make to the progress and development of Big Local. How, if at all, does the support provided affect the extent and nature of the influences on an area? Are areas better able to manage and make the most of influences because of the support provided?

1.2.2 Methods

To meet these aims, we used mixed methods of qualitative focus groups and interviews in a sample of 14 case-study areas and an online survey of residents.

Sample

As the visits to case-study areas involve exploring in depth, we decided to select a sample of 14 areas that we could focus on in detail. This represents nearly 10% of all Big Local areas and we aimed to make sure a spread of experiences was included by selecting a sample that met a variety of key characteristics³ as follows:

- **Launch date:** we selected five areas that were launched in July 2010, five that were launched in February 2012 and four that were launched most recently in December 2012. This helped to make sure we could explore areas' experiences at different stages in the journey.⁴
- **Region and geography:** the areas are broadly representative of the spread of areas across regions for all 150 Big Local areas so the findings reflect Big Local as a whole.

² <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2013-04-29-Big-Local-theory-of-change.pdf>

³ The sample was identified in June 2013 and the characteristics reflect the situation at that time

⁴ See Appendix A for details of the timeline of Big Local and the different launch dates

To take account of the nature of the area, the sample included eight in urban areas, four in rural areas and two in rural/coastal areas.

- **Big Local rep:** the 14 areas were supported by 14 different reps. By not including any rep more than once, we limited the influence of the rep on the sample.

We also made sure that the sample included Big Local areas with different types of locally trusted organisations, broadly reflecting the types of organisations fulfilling this role across all areas. We included two areas that had submitted their Big Local plan and it had been endorsed by Local Trust and included seven areas that had at least one star person supported by UnLtd. Finally we looked at whether the areas had received support directly from Local Trust and included some that had more support, and some that had less, so the residents we interviewed will have experienced varying levels in the type and amount of support from the central team at Local Trust. A map showing the 14 sample areas is provided in Appendix A.

By choosing the sample in this way, we can be confident that the views and experiences of those we visited reflect a range of experiences and are not skewed towards any one type of area.

Visits

We visited each of the 14 areas between June and October 2013. Before each visit we reviewed the information that Local Trust had on each area such as their applications for Getting People Involved or Getting Started funding and their profiles and plans where these had been submitted. We contacted the rep who provided some background details on the area and the stage it was at and gave us contact details of key people in the area.

Although the detail of who we interviewed was different in each area, depending on how Big Local was working in their area, for each visit we typically conducted interviews and focus groups as shown below.

Focus group of actively involved residents: we did a focus group with between two and five residents in each area. These were usually members of the Big Local partnership, or an interim steering group or sub-group. Across the 14 areas, 44 residents took part in a focus group. They provided some background information which showed that:

- they had generally been involved since Big Local was launched in their area
- while most (40) had been involved in volunteering in their community before they became involved with Big Local, four had not
- most (40) planned to continue to be involved in Big Local in future while four, all of whom had been involved in their community before, were not sure.

Interviews with locally trusted organisation representatives: in each area we interviewed a representative of the locally trusted organisation where one was in place. Across the areas, these organisations included:

- four councils for voluntary service (CVS)
- two housing associations
- three local charities
- one local authority
- three other private or public sector organisations.

One area had yet to appoint a locally trusted organisation.

Interviews with paid workers: some areas (five) had a paid worker supporting Big Local. These workers were sometimes paid for using some of the Big Local funding, and sometimes funded by a supporting organisation. In total we interviewed four paid workers.

Interviews with representatives of other supporting organisations: areas were also supported by other local organisations and, where this was the case, we interviewed a representative. These organisations and individuals included council officers, councillors, school head teachers and charity staff. We interviewed 12 people in these roles across the case-study areas.

Interviews with star people: Seven of the areas had at least one star person in June 2013 and we interviewed six star people in different areas.

We used visual prompts and followed a topic guide for the focus groups and interviews that was broadly similar for different types of interviewees, while including some tailored questions for some interviewees. The questions we explored in the interviews and discussions included:

- views of the area
- the timeline for the Big Local journey so far and what had helped and hindered this journey
- the individuals and organisations that had influenced how Big Local had developed in their area
- perceptions of what resident-led means in practice
- views on the Big Local pathway
- views on their progress to date and how they see Big Local developing in future.

Survey

Having completed the visits, to explore how far some of the findings in the case-study areas were experienced more widely, we developed an online questionnaire survey. This was sent to an actively involved resident in 145 areas⁵ in October/November 2013. The survey explored:

- the resident's role in Big Local and how and why they got involved
- the experience of the partnership or steering group and how it operated
- the support they had received, where this came from, how useful it was and other support they need
- their views on the Big Local process and their progress along the journey.

We received 101 responses by the deadline, which is a response rate of 70%. Of the 101 responses, 28% were from areas that were launched first, 35% were from areas that were launched second and 38% were from the final 50 areas to be launched. The findings in this report are based on these respondents.

1.3 About this report

This report is based on the findings from the interviews and focus groups in the 14 case-study areas and the responses to the survey. This is the first larger scale piece of research that presents the voice of residents in Big Local areas. It shows how Big Local is experienced at an early stage by the active volunteer residents on the ground who are putting into practice the Big Local model and thereby testing how the Theory of Change of Big Local is working in practice.

⁵ No resident contact details were available in five areas

Alongside the voices of the residents, this report provides an insight into the views of those who are supporting them in the areas, such as the locally trusted organisation.

- Chapter 2 explores how Big Local is viewed by residents and others supporting Big Local in the areas.
- Chapter 3 looks in detail at the influences on the development of Big Local by examining the people, place and programme-related factors that made a difference to how Big Local is evolving and the relationship between these different elements.
- Chapter 4 examines how Big Local areas are progressing, whether progress was slower or quicker than people involved had expected and how they see it evolving in future.
- Chapter 5 presents the findings on the support residents have received and other support that is needed to help them continue to progress.
- Chapter 6 concludes the report by summarising the learning points arising from the research including key messages for Local Trust, delivery partners and for areas.

2. Perceptions of Big Local

Key messages for Local Trust

- Residents who are actively involved generally understand what Big Local is about and how it is different. They see it as a resident-led, long term opportunity to bring hope and change to their communities.
- Given that people involved in Big Local on the ground have changed, and will continue to change, it is important to continue to convey these key messages to residents in areas so the message does not become diluted over time.
- Some residents have misinterpreted some of the messages such as how much of the funding can be used for grants and loans. Local Trust may wish to review what they communicate to residents in different ways to check residents' understanding and to ensure their interpretation is in line with Big Local's aims.

Key messages for areas

- While actively involved residents understand that the programme is over a long time, providing opportunities to invest and recycle the funds in the Big Local area, residents in the wider community who are less involved have not always understood this and the implications. Areas may wish to explore how they can use their networks and a range of communication methods to increase people's understanding of Big Local.

2.1 Introduction

Big Local is different from previous programmes that aimed to improve areas in its structure and approach in a number of key ways. As set out in 'new and different'⁶ it aims to focus on assets not deficits, to include a willingness to take risks, to allow time for development and to provide light touch support and peer review.

This chapter explores how Big Local is perceived in the Big Local areas and how far these different qualities are recognised by residents, locally trusted organisations and others involved in making Big Local happen in the areas.

2.2 What do residents think of Big Local?

In general, what the actively involved residents and others are saying about Big Local in the areas is in line with the messages that Local Trust has been conveying, as outlined below.

That Big Local is **resident-led** is widely recognised by residents and other interviewees. The message from Local Trust that the money is '*theirs*' to decide about is important and helps residents to have the confidence to assert this when councillors, agencies or statutory services are felt to be trying to take over. One resident's interpretation of the message illustrates this:

⁶ IVAR (2013) <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Big-Local-Whats-new-and-different-IVAR-LT-FINAL.pdf>

'If you read what's on the Big Local website, they are insistent that it's led by the community and don't let any powerful interest groups come and take your money – it's your money'.

Residents generally view Big Local as providing them with '**hope** for a better future' and will lead to significant change in their areas. They tend not see this simply as a result of more money being available in their area but from the process of working together with Big Local as a focus. As one resident said: *'the money over 10 years isn't that much, but the process is really important in terms of changing the community'.*

The **longer-term** nature of Big Local, and the new opportunities this presents for investing the funds, is recognised by residents. Their vision and aim is generally to make the money last as long as possible, sometimes beyond the initial 10 years as the following quotes from residents illustrate:

'hopefully it will last for 20 or 30 years which is our aim – to make it sustainable'.

'some people would use the money to go out and buy something but we are more reluctant'.

The locally trusted organisations generally focus on the longer-term possibilities offered by Big Local to get people involved over time and to invest and reuse the funds. As the locally trusted organisation in one area, where they are aiming to ensure sustainability and encourage social enterprise, said:

'...we can try and find projects that are sustainable, and that we can look to loan money to try and recycle that money constantly into the area, rather than just throw money at it and then nothing happens with it to try and make sure it is sustainable over the longer term'.

To some extent, residents and locally trusted organisations have also understood that Big Local will help people in **communities have their say** not just in relation to Big Local but on wider issues affecting their area which Big Local funding might not be able to resolve or might be the responsibility of statutory services. They envisaged that, in future, they might be lobbying the council or simply that *'the community gets to have their say in what happens rather than the council or whoever'.* The locally trusted organisations believed that through Big Local helping to empower residents, it had the potential to make a significant change in relationships, as this quote shows:

'[Big Local] gives them real responsibilities...I think that is quite a fundamental shift...changing that power balance so that the statutory partners and others go to them and say "okay residents...we want to help. What best can we do? What do you need from us?" Rather than "this is what we're going to do, do you like it or not like it?" which is how it, kind of, works in those places at the moment'.

That Big Local is about more than just funding but about **building confidence and networks** tends to be recognised by residents and locally trusted organisations. Over time they imagine that more people will get involved, there will be more connections and people will feel that they can *'do something'* and volunteering to help your neighbours will become *'the norm'*. This is reflected in this comment from a resident:

'It's about creating self confidence and the longer I was involved with this, the less concerned I became with actual projects in concrete terms because increasingly I feel the

real legacy is the extent to which you can increase the self confidence of the community to go out and look for ways of doing things themselves and accepting that it doesn't all have to be decline, you can turn things around if enough people get together'.

While in general, the message of how Big Local is different is recognised and understood, there are some indications that there are instances where this is less the case. For example, some residents in one area perceive it more as a grant pot that they will be administering, and a resident in another area believes that the money can only be loaned and paid back with interest. Further details of how the Big Local message is conveyed are provided in Chapter 3. It is also apparent, that these key messages about Big Local are less well understood by residents in the wider community. As will be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4, the actively involved residents are experiencing challenges with:

- other residents' perceptions of Big Local as being, for example, 'the council's money'
- the discussions over the Big Local vision and plan being perceived by residents as 'another consultation' which will not result in any change
- the desire among residents in the community to spend the funds and make quick changes, rather than take a longer term view.

2.3 Is Big Local different?

Where locally trusted organisations have experience of applying for funding and delivering projects funded through for example, Single Regeneration Budget or New Deal for Communities they are able to compare their experience of Big Local so far with these initiatives. They identify a number of key differences as follows:

- **Resident-led local decision-making:** interviewees in nine locally trusted organisations highlight that resident-led local decision-making is a distinctive feature of Big Local. They contrast this with just consulting residents while decisions are '*officer-led*'. They value that Big Local '*gives you scope to do what you need to do in your area*' rather than being told what the focus should be. However, some interviewees caution about the challenge of managing residents' expectations, and observe that the funding is not as much over 10 years as residents may perceive it at first. One also questioned whether, in practice, the partners or agencies will '*really let go*' once the residents have developed the plan. They wondered whether they will be willing to give their permission, or agree to be involved, where the residents' vision needed this.
- **Having the money up front:** five locally trusted organisations note the difference in being assigned the funding and then needing to identify what to do with it, rather than identifying an issue and then seeking funding to address it. This presents new opportunities for exploring different ways to use the funds and, as one locally trusted organisation interviewee explained he was '*keen to tell [the residents] there is a difference between spending money, investing money and generating income*'.
- **Flexibility:** four of the locally trusted organisations interviewed feel that the flexibility that Big Local offers with flexible rules and not being '*stuck with a structure*' is different. In the view of one locally trusted organisation, who noted that no one person was leading it in contrast to council-run programmes, this can present challenges. However, another valued the freedom and '*refreshing willingness to say "if that's what the residents want"*'.

- **Longer-term:** as outlined in Section 2.2, three locally trusted organisations consider that the long-term nature of Big Local is one of its unique features. They report that it is more common for funding to be shorter-term and Big Local provides the possibility for greater impact over a longer time.

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, the evidence from the visits indicates that the key messages about the distinctive features of Big Local are generally understood by residents and others involved on the ground. This is the case across areas launched at different times so even the more recent areas understand Big Local. There are some instances where there are misunderstandings so there is a need to continue to convey the message clearly and to work with reps to ensure that residents and others involved on the ground have understood. The opportunities presented by a programme of funding being resident-led, long-term and having funding up front are welcomed by interviewees and how this translates into practice in Big Local areas is explored in the rest of this report.

3. Influences on the development of Big Local areas

Key messages for Local Trust

- Factors relating to the Big Local programme and the people and places in Big Local areas combine to influence how a Big Local area develops.
- Influential programme factors identified by Big Local areas include the rep and the locally trusted organisation who provide much valued support. What is required from these differs between areas and the combination of the rep, locally trusted organisation staff and other supporting organisations are generally able to flex to these needs.
- The rep and locally trusted organisation can provide an objective perspective on the area and facilitate new and different thinking.
- How well a rep 'fits' with an area is important and seems to be more about how they relate to people than their knowledge and expertise.
- Locally trusted organisations that talked about their motivation to be involved said they want to achieve the same goals as Big Local, essentially making the area an even better place to live.
- Locally trusted organisations experience a tension between supporting a resident-led process and stepping in when they feel things are not progressing.
- The programme design which requires residents to invest £1million in their community over 10 years is also influential. It requires people to work in a different way and presents the opportunity for residents to really make a long term difference.
- Star people are influential in their areas, for example by supporting vulnerable people, but this is not always connected with Big Local as a whole. Areas and star people see great potential for this relationship to develop and some are already working on this.
- Areas have great assets on which to build Big Local. This includes place related assets such as green spaces and people related assets such as community leaders and groups.
- The history of relations and community activity in an area influences how ready an area is to start the Big Local process. Difficult community relations or difficult relations with authorities can make it harder to get started. Having a strong history of community activity has provided a foundation for some areas to build on but has been more problematic in other areas.
- The boundary of Big Local areas influences how people identify with it and therefore who gets involved.
- The main source of communication from Local Trust is through the reps. This can

lead to some variability as the messages pass through the chain.

- Another source of messaging about Big Local is through area to area contact. Areas find this useful but it can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.
- Residents outside of the steering group or partnership are sometimes unsure about what Big Local is, so areas use different ways to make it clearer and easier to identify. These include creating a brand, creating a physical base or having a dedicated worker.
- Areas believe that what they choose to do is mainly influenced by residents through consultation – however they acknowledged that it is difficult to get people to think of innovative ideas rather than the usual suggestions.
- Areas are creating support networks across multiple types of organisations including schools, councils and tenants and residents associations. Relationships with these organisations are generally based on relationships with individuals that are passionate about their community.
- Many residents are familiar with working with the community although new people are getting involved. This creates a blend of experience and the potential for new thinking.
- Partnerships and steering groups contain knowledgeable and skilled people who can draw on their wider network. However, steering groups and partnerships are more confident about the consultation and planning stage than they are about their ability to deliver Big Local.
- Areas generally believe they are resident-led but display mixed levels of empowerment and permission seeking. Residents in some areas are comfortable making decisions whereas others look for permission from elsewhere. For example, they may look to the rep or the locally trusted organisation to make decisions or for reassurance.
- Members of steering groups and partnerships work well together, voicing their views and providing healthy challenge. They are aligned on what they are trying to achieve but less aligned on how they will do this.
- Areas value a dedicated worker, where they have one, and feel they are making better progress with them. However there is no clear evidence that they are making greater progress than areas that do not have a worker.
- The combined skills, knowledge, experience and confidence of residents working on Big Local and their ability to develop and use an extended network, is important for the area's long-term success.

Key messages for areas

- Areas can increase how resident-led they are by understanding their permission seeking behaviour. Who do they look to for permission and for what purposes? What would enable them to feel more comfortable making these decisions themselves?
- Areas are developing networks across multiple organisations. How well do they understand what support this network can offer and how well do they use it?
- Areas can be more active in making contact with star people and understanding how they can benefit Big Local more widely.
- Areas can explore more ways of getting people to think differently about what their area really needs.
- Workers may be a short term solution unless they are growing resident capacity by getting more people involved or developing resident capacity by transferring skills.

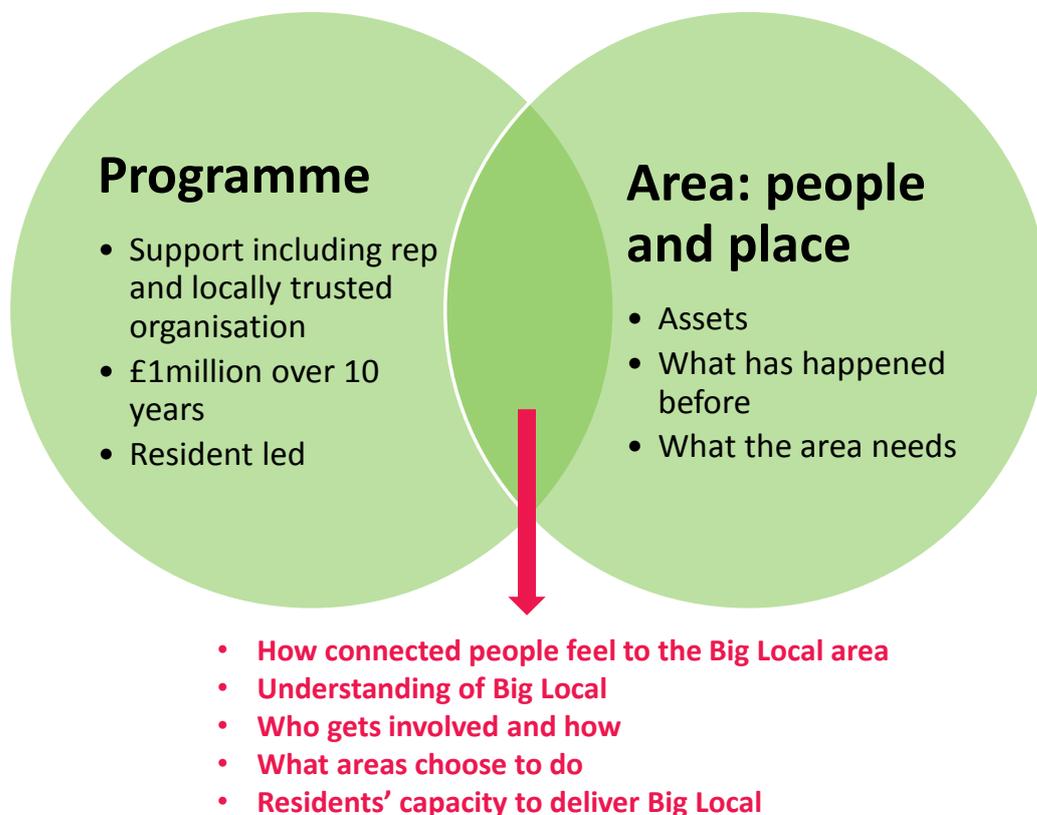
3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the many factors that influence the development of Big Local areas. To make this more manageable we have firstly looked at influential factors that relate to the programme design, then factors that relate to the people and places within the areas selected to take part in Big Local. Finally we look at how these programme, people and place factors interact and impact on the development of Big Local areas. Specifically we look at influential factors relating to:

- **how connected people feel to the Big Local area** – how boundaries and existing territories affect how people relate to a Big Local area
- **understanding of Big Local** – how clear residents are about what Big Local is, requirements of the programme and how to make it work in their area
- **who gets involved and how** – what motivates and encourages individuals and groups to take part in Big Local and what effect different people can have on it
- **what areas choose to do** – the methods used and priorities chosen
- **residents' capacity to deliver Big Local** – how Big Local is put into practice.

Figure 3.1 provides a summary of influences on Big Local areas

Figure 3.1 Summary of influences on Big Local areas



3.2 Programme related factors

Formal supports

The two most commonly used formal supports in Big Local are the rep and the locally trusted organisation. The reps are there to help guide areas through the Big Local pathway (outlined in Chapter 1), represent Local Trust within the Big Local areas and help areas to achieve their vision⁷. The locally trusted organisation's role includes holding funds, ensuring the grant is used for the right purposes and maintaining financial records. In addition, the reps and the locally trusted organisations provide varied support which is outlined below. There is a lot of cross-over in the ways they work with residents in the Big Local areas and these are presented below under the heading 'rep and locally trusted organisation'. Further details about the nature of their influence is discussed in Section 3.4.

The rep

As discussed further in Chapter 4, areas tend to see the reps as a great support in delivering Big Local. This was supported by survey data in which 79% of areas said the rep was 'very helpful' and a further 18% said the rep was 'quite helpful'. They are seen as the voice of Local Trust and, as is intended by the programme, they provide a wide range of other support with areas describing them as '*indispensable*' and '*very loyal*'. The types of roles fulfilled by the rep include:

- **establishing a core group of residents** – connecting with people in the area to get Big Local off the ground and working towards a partnership
- **guidance on Big Local** – what can and can't be done. They also provide a reference point by sharing the knowledge and experience they have gained from other areas
- **development** – for example training on managing and reviewing applications or supporting residents to start taking over Big Local roles and responsibilities
- **managing meetings** – ensuring there is a plan and structure when residents get together and chairing the meetings where a chair has not yet been established
- **project management** – ensuring things are happening and '*moving things along*'
- **specific knowledge and expertise** – filling in gaps in the partnership or steering group's knowledge and expertise. For example, this has included providing advice on registering a local asset, participatory budgeting and links to other funding.

The majority of areas are very positive about their rep and particularly appreciate them being easily contactable and available. How well the rep 'fits' with the area appears to be important. This rep-area 'fit' is not about how well they know the area or even their expertise but more about how they relate to people. Using plain English, showing belief in people, listening and ensuring everyone gets a chance to have their ideas heard and respected are all appreciated by residents. This helps to build a trusted relationship. Residents also reflected that the rep role is about '*offering guidance but not being pushy*'. A locally trusted organisation described how their rep '*is very supportive – he's not trying to run it – he's trying to nudge it to start being independent and run it ourselves*', and a resident said of a rep that '*he doesn't push you with the money, he pushes you with the ideas*'.

Although areas are generally very happy there are a small number of issues that residents and reps are working to resolve. For example, the amount of time the rep can give and their physical distance, the tendency of a rep to take over during meetings and the extent to which reps are

⁷ <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/big-local/resources/big-local-reps/>

having conversations with organisations, specifically the locally trusted organisation, without involving the residents. One area had found it challenging to work with a new rep whose style was quite different to the person they had been working with previously. These are not widespread issues amongst the visited areas.

The locally trusted organisation

Locally trusted organisations provide varied support and are highly valued by areas. The specific additional roles they play include:

- **connecting areas to specific communities** – for example, if the organisation is connected to a particular group of people such as young people, the elderly, or a particular faith group. One Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) acting as a locally trusted organisation described how they can really help connect to specific communities of interest through their members such as their local branch of Age UK.
- **providing a worker** – this can be a dedicated resource or more informal support and can be paid for with Big Local money, provided at no cost or included as part of the grant given to the locally trusted organisation. More detail about workers is provided in Section 3.4.5.
- **providing resources** – for example, one locally trusted organisation provided an area with a double decker bus to enable them to consult with residents in as many parts of the area as possible
- **links to other projects and funding** – because of the types of organisations that locally trusted organisations tend to be, for example CVSs and housing associations, they are often well connected in the voluntary and community sector and can share this network with residents
- **acting as a point of contact** – two areas described how they are able to provide support answering emails and phone calls.

Big Local areas generally see the locally trusted organisation as an asset that is influential in the area, in which they typically have a good reputation. On occasion, locally trusted organisations receive part of the grant from Big Local, and to some extent they feel they are providing over and above what they are funded to do. They are generally happy to do this although some locally trusted organisations described challenges with meeting the demands of Big Local and fulfilling their other duties or managing costs. The cost of things was described as an issue for one locally trusted organisation, for example printing, but they find it difficult to say no as *'residents trust you and want you to be there'*.

This raises the question of the locally trusted organisations' motivation to take part in Big Local. Where locally trusted organisations commented on why they became involved, it was because they want to achieve the same goals as Big Local, essentially making the area an even better place to live. One housing association, acting as a locally trusted organisation said they felt they had a *'vested interest'* in supporting the project because *'of the impact this could make on the area...it is one of our more densely populated areas there, so it does fit really well for us to have involvement in there'*. A local authority similarly described how it fits with what they do as a council. One resident group, that had a CVS based outside of their area acting as the locally trusted organisation, felt unclear about motivation and *'what's behind their help. What do they want out of it?'* which led residents to question some of their suggestions and inputs. This reinforces the benefit of being clear about a shared vision across those involved in a Big Local area.

Rep and locally trusted organisation

There is a cross-over between the type of support offered by the rep and the locally trusted organisation. Both provide facilitation, make suggestions about how to go about different parts of the Big Local process and provide general advice about working with the community. They are able to challenge people's thinking, act as a sounding board and help residents to articulate their needs. One area described the relationship as '*a bit of a double act*' and another area described how the relationship works really well because the rep, locally trusted organisation and the residents are all '*on the same wavelength*'.

The locally trusted organisations' staff are very conscious that Big Local should be led by residents but sometimes feel a need to step in when things are not progressing. For example, one locally trusted organisation described how they felt they are sometimes having to make decisions because there is nobody else to make them. Another locally trusted organisation described how they are '*conscious of trying to strike that balance between making sure it's supported and delivered but making sure it's resident-led as well. But I don't want it to fail either*'. Some felt that reps also experience this challenge of having to step in when things are not happening on occasion. This was a perception expressed by locally trusted organisations as we did not interview reps as part of this research.

At least £1m over 10 years

As described in Chapter 2, having access to the money up-front and conducting a project over at least 10 years makes Big Local different to the type of funding that interviewees are used to. People involved in the Big Local areas are realistic about what £1m can achieve in the time frame and a number of areas see the money as a catalyst for activity, believing that the real opportunity lies in developing the confidence and capacity of their community to take action for themselves. However, the wider community does not have the same level of understanding about Big Local and expects things to happen more quickly. One locally trusted organisation described how '*things that happen behind the scenes are not always apparent to residents*'. This is made more difficult by the type of media attention that Big Local attracts which tends to be focused on the £1million rather than the planning and groundwork that is being done to ensure that the money is used in the best way possible, lasting for 10 years or more. This provides a tension between planning for the future and keeping people engaged. There are instances of residents expressing frustration that they are not having a quicker impact on the community and one response is to choose to run small grants to keep people interested.

Star people

Interviewees see the potential that star people⁸ can have on Big Local but do not feel that they are having a big influence on the development of Big Local at this stage. They are positive about the star people scheme and are keen to develop relationships with star people to find out how they can work together. One locally trusted organisation described how there is a '*real partnership possibility there*'.

This is not to say that star people are not influential or having a positive impact in the Big Local area, rather that the impact is not always explicitly connected to Big Local. A council worker in one area described how the star people could have an effect on how Big Local is running

⁸ <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/big-local/star-people/>

because ‘*you can actually see things moving*’. However, she was unsure that star people realised the connection between getting the award and what Big Local is about. This was echoed by the residents in the same area who felt that, although UnLtd awards are given because of Big Local, the partnership is not fully aware of who has received them. They felt that the projects could be something for the Big Local area to ‘*shout about*’ and that they should all be working together.

There are indications that areas are starting to develop the relationship between star people and the steering group/partnership. For example, one star person has made initial contact with the partnership about providing support for people trying to get into employment.

Of the seven areas that we visited with star people, three said they had star people on the interim steering group or partnership, bringing them closer together. We interviewed six star people who provided insights into the positive effect they are having in their area including:

- keeping money in the area by getting people to spend locally (‘sticky money’)
- encouraging entrepreneurship in others
- supporting vulnerable people
- supporting other social enterprises through collaboration and supplier relationships
- providing shared office space for other social entrepreneurs
- providing meaningful activities for young people
- developing the personal and social skills of young people.

Resident-led

As described in Chapter 2 the message that Big Local is intended to be resident-led is well received by residents and in general the areas we visited feel they are resident-led. This is reflected in the survey data in which 77% of areas said that Big Local is resident-led. Residents and locally trusted organisations see this as a real opportunity to engage people with their community and to support them in making a difference. They believe that resident-led means that power and decision making lies with residents; with help but not interference from outside organisations. In practice areas display different levels of being resident-led which is discussed further in Section 3.4.

3.3 Area related factors: people and place

This section looks at influential factors relating to the people and places in the Big Local areas: what assets exist in the Big Local area, what happened before Big Local and what the area needs. These are the foundations on which Big Local is being built. These factors will be discussed here as context for the next section where we look at how these have interacted with the programme related factors identified by interviewees.

Assets in the Big Local area

Big Local areas have existing assets relating to both the place and the people that influence how Big Local started and has developed.

Place

The Big Local areas that we visited vary from small high rise estates in inner cities to coastal villages with more dispersed communities. Key influential factors relating to the physical nature of the area include:

- **Natural assets** – some areas identified beaches and green spaces as important resources which are sometimes underused. In some cases this is because the areas are not looked after and in others they are not always easily accessible to residents. The desire to make more of these areas has an influence, alongside other factors, on where areas focus their energy. In some areas there are established groups who look after these assets, for example ‘friends of’ groups that are connected to the partnership or steering group.
- **Layout** – the physical layout of the area affects the types of issues faced and how easy it is to engage with the community. For example, two estate based areas have a large number of cul-de-sacs which means that people from across the estate rarely come into contact with each other. One area described how there are lots of ways to get in and out of the area, particularly on foot or bike, which provides lots of escape routes ‘*where criminal or antisocial behaviour can take place and people can get away very quickly*’.
- **Physical assets** – some areas have community buildings where people can come together whereas others do not. This affects how easy it is for areas to get groups of residents together, for example at open meetings. The lack of a community ‘hub’ is a dominant issue for some areas without suitable meeting places.
- **Significant other development** – large scale projects, unrelated to Big Local, are proposed for some areas. It was said that these will bring new challenges and opportunities to the area, for example a proposed new supermarket and a large scale re-development of a dock area. Residents were considering the implications of these on their Big Local plans.

People

Interviewees generally described the people who live in their area as an asset. In particular, they described how the following have a positive impact on their area:

- **Community spirit** – community spirit was generally something interviewees felt their area is proud of. Examples of this included that people are welcoming and know one another, a sense of neighbourliness, good communication and few tensions. Some areas however described an absence of community spirit as a result of the physical layout of the area, described above.
- **Community groups** – several areas feel they have a well established network of community groups which one area described as a ‘*stepping stone for Big Local*’. Some see Big Local as an opportunity to bring these groups together.
- **Community minded individuals** – areas described key people that are working to make a positive difference in their areas – sometimes described as community leaders or champions. These people included both active residents who are engaged with their communities through various initiatives or groups, and professionals such as council workers, housing association staff and charity workers. Often, the perceived value of these people is less about their formal roles and more about individual characters. People who demonstrate their interest in the community and lack of personal or organisational agenda are respected and valued by residents. These people are, or have the potential, to be highly influential as they tend to be well known in the area with good connections. Those with specific knowledge, such as a council worker, are able to put this to best use as they have developed trusted relationships in the community. The quality of these relationships influences an area’s ability to get

things done as this network of people, if aligned with Big Local, brings a network of vast experience and connections into the community.

What has happened before

Big Local is being established within a context and history of community activity and relations in areas.

- **Relations in the Big Local area** - relations are generally described as good with some experiencing tension, for example, due to difficulties between young people and older people. Tensions can also occur where Big Local areas are made up of more than one place. Reasons for this include that residents feel '*territorial*' about their area, people in some areas felt that others had received more support in the past or areas were labelled as '*posh*' or '*problem*' areas.
- **Relations with the local authority** – people in Big Local areas were sometimes described as '*sceptical*' or mistrusting of the local authorities by interviewees. This is usually because of negative past experiences and is described in more detail in Section 3.4.

The combination of these two factors influences how ready areas are for Big Local. Generally, those with better relations have fewer obstacles to overcome when trying to get people together.

- **The history of community activity/development** – although it may appear logical that those with a relatively strong existing level of community activity are best placed to establish Big Local, in reality the impact is mixed. Some areas are able to effectively build on what has gone before whereas others are finding it more difficult. Where it is working, areas described a sense of alignment and working towards one vision. Where it is more difficult, Big Local can be seen as something external – '*them*' rather than '*us*'.

What the area needs

Areas described their views on the issues faced by residents in their areas and, where they had them, the priorities that had been agreed. These are summarised below.

Common issues

A number of areas recognise that the problems they are facing are '*the same as most places*' and these include:

- poor transport links
- persistent low level crime and anti-social behaviour
- a lack of things for young people to do
- an untidy environment – e.g. dog fouling
- debt
- unemployment and low income
- drug use
- poor quality housing
- lack of community spirit
- low aspirations
- lack of support for older people.

In addition to these common issues, there are examples of areas describing more specific issues that they are facing. These include areas having a bad reputation, for example being labelled as 'a *chav area*' which '*therefore depresses the housing market and people see it as a cheap place to live for a short time but might not look to stay*'. Two areas described a very specific problem with '*irresponsible*' and '*absent*' landlords not looking after properties. This is causing a poorly cared for environment which is having a negative impact on house prices in the area. Another area described how they get a lot of bad press even though people are proud to come from the area and they said that '*the press would give us bad publicity any time of the day or night but we try and publicise good things like the carnival but we're still having problems*'.

Some issues are more obvious than others and a number of areas described hidden issues such as mental health and child poverty, some of which they are able to understand better through openly available data. A locally trusted organisation described how residents were '*quite shocked by how much unemployment was in the area, how many cars were stolen. How many kids were underachieving and what exam results were like for kids 16 plus*'.

Other issues may be hidden in the available statistics, such as unreported crime. For example, one resident described how people in his area do not always report crimes because they have become despondent as a result of nothing happening in the past.

There are examples of areas that have existing knowledge relating to the needs within the areas from prior consultation or area plans and are building on this knowledge whereas others are starting fresh. Some areas believe they are required to start this process from the beginning rather than building on existing information and feel like this has not been the best use of their time. One area specifically said that they tried not to have predetermined idea of what was needed.

In summary, issues are identified in three ways, through the experience of the people involved, through existing data and information about the area and through consultation with residents. The extent to which areas are able to make use of all three sources of information influences what they decided to focus on.

3.4 Factors related to delivering the programme in the area

3.4.1 Influential factors relating to how connected people feel to the area

Big Local areas do not necessarily fit with existing boundaries such as towns and villages or administrative boundaries such as electoral wards, councils or Local Authorities. They vary from a small number of roads, to estates and multiple villages. Where the lines are drawn and how these are used in practice affects how people feel about the Big Local areas and who gets involved. Influential factors include:

- **the ability to influence the boundary** – some areas chose to change the boundary to one they felt was more fitting with the area. For example, an area identified that '*the map wasn't truly reflective of the wider community*' so they negotiated changes to the boundary with Local Trust through their rep. Others are not completely comfortable with the boundary but have not instigated a change.
- **the name of the area** – some areas feel the name does not accurately represent the area. For example, one area is named after two villages but also includes parts of two

others. Residents feel that people in the two areas not covered by the name will not feel Big Local is for them and therefore not engage with it.

- **the mixture of housing included** – one area described how people in ‘*more affluent*’ parts of the area do not associate with Big Local as they believe that it is for deprived areas and they do not think of themselves as deprived.
- **how the boundary is used in practice** – A number of areas described a desire to treat the boundaries as flexible rather than a strict guide on who can and cannot be involved. It should be noted that areas cannot make the boundary smaller and there was no suggestion that areas wanted to do this. The flexible boundaries arose because, in reality, communities do not sit neatly on either side of the boundary. For example, children may attend a school inside the area but live outside of it. One locally trusted organisation described the limitations of only working within the boundary as service providers and businesses that work with residents within the boundary, but are based outside, would be useful connections.
- **lack of identity** – in some cases, different geographical areas that do not usually connect are joined together and labelled as a Big Local area where in reality they do not identify as one area. This influences who is involved and, in one area, led to the creation of an area brand specifically to connect these areas.

Residents with more than one distinct area (for example multiple villages) within their boundary felt this had influenced their ability to get started as they had to deal with relations across the communities, difficulties with physically getting people together and dealing with multiple parish councils. However, they see the benefit of working across the existing boundaries, describing the opportunity ‘*to support each other, to share activity, to share equipment, to share good practice, just to try and balance things out*’.

In summary, there is a tension between developing a Big Local area identity and the identities associated with the territories that already exist. This influences how easy it is to get people from across the area involved and how long it is taking areas to get underway.

3.4.2 Influential factors relating to understanding the Big Local programme

Messages from Local Trust

The main source of information about how Big Local works is the rep as there is minimal direct contact between residents in areas and Local Trust. However, direct contact does happen through spring events, the website or when areas choose to get in contact. This means that the message is generally filtered through the reps and can, at times, become varied between areas. One resident described this as ‘*you teach something to your representatives – or your missionaries – and they go out and they interpret it in their way*’. Several areas mentioned aspects of the programme where they have some confusion. Specifically, areas expressed a lack of clarity about:

- what the money can be spent on and how the funding works
- the process, for example, how to go about forming a partnership
- who is responsible for Big Local

Areas that were launched as part of the first 50 were in place before Local Trust was formed. In the meantime, Big Lottery Fund staff were the main point of contact and some of the messages given at an early stage were changed once Local Trust was in place. For example, the locally trusted organisation in one area described how they were told by *'the Lottery'* that they would have a paid coordinator as part of the project.

Areas also had mixed views about the clarity of written information received from Local Trust, which is discussed further in Chapter 5. One locally trusted organisation felt they would benefit from more guidance about the role they play in Big Local and clearer information about *'what would be expected for a locally trusted organisation to do...in terms of the money side'*.

Area to area messaging

Areas are generally very keen to talk to other areas. This happens through direct contact with other areas either at organised events, visits or email; reps drawing on their knowledge and experience of other areas or residents looking at other areas' websites or information on Local Trust's website. As shown in Chapter 4, residents in Big Local areas assess their progress against other areas and use them as a source of ideas including using a *'cab cam'* to get feedback from residents, setting up a shop and taking on a paid worker.

Areas find this extremely useful and, in particular it helps them feel more comfortable about their decisions and progress. One area described how they were:

'having this real problem with engagement, getting people involved and [a resident from another area] said don't worry about it – people drop in and out over 10 years. If you're doing something they're really interested in they'll get involved. Don't stress'

However, this 'unmonitored' form of learning about how Big Local works has potential for misunderstanding:

- It is possible that areas could draw incorrect conclusions about what is happening in other areas. For example, one area regularly reviewed other areas' websites and believed that an area had given all of their money to the Eden Project and another to the Local Council. In reality, these organisations were locally trusted organisations and were holding funds for Big Local areas.
- It is possible that approaches that do not align with what Local Trust wants will be replicated across areas. It is unclear if this is currently happening but there are times when areas influence each other's approach, for example, the decision to take on a worker.
- Areas compare their progress and pace with other areas. Generally this helps to reassure them about the progress they are making but there is the possibility that it may result in an unnecessarily slow rate of progress.

These two types of messaging can also be combined when reps pass on information about other areas that they are working with or have had contact with.

Intangible nature of Big Local

To some extent, areas expressed a difficulty in clearly expressing what Big Local is because they feel, in the early stages, that it is quite intangible. This affects their ability to communicate about Big Local and therefore get people involved. Residents described how *'Big Local isn't clear so people don't know what they're signing up to'* and *'a lot of residents still don't really understand*

Figure 3.3 Summary of focus group relational maps

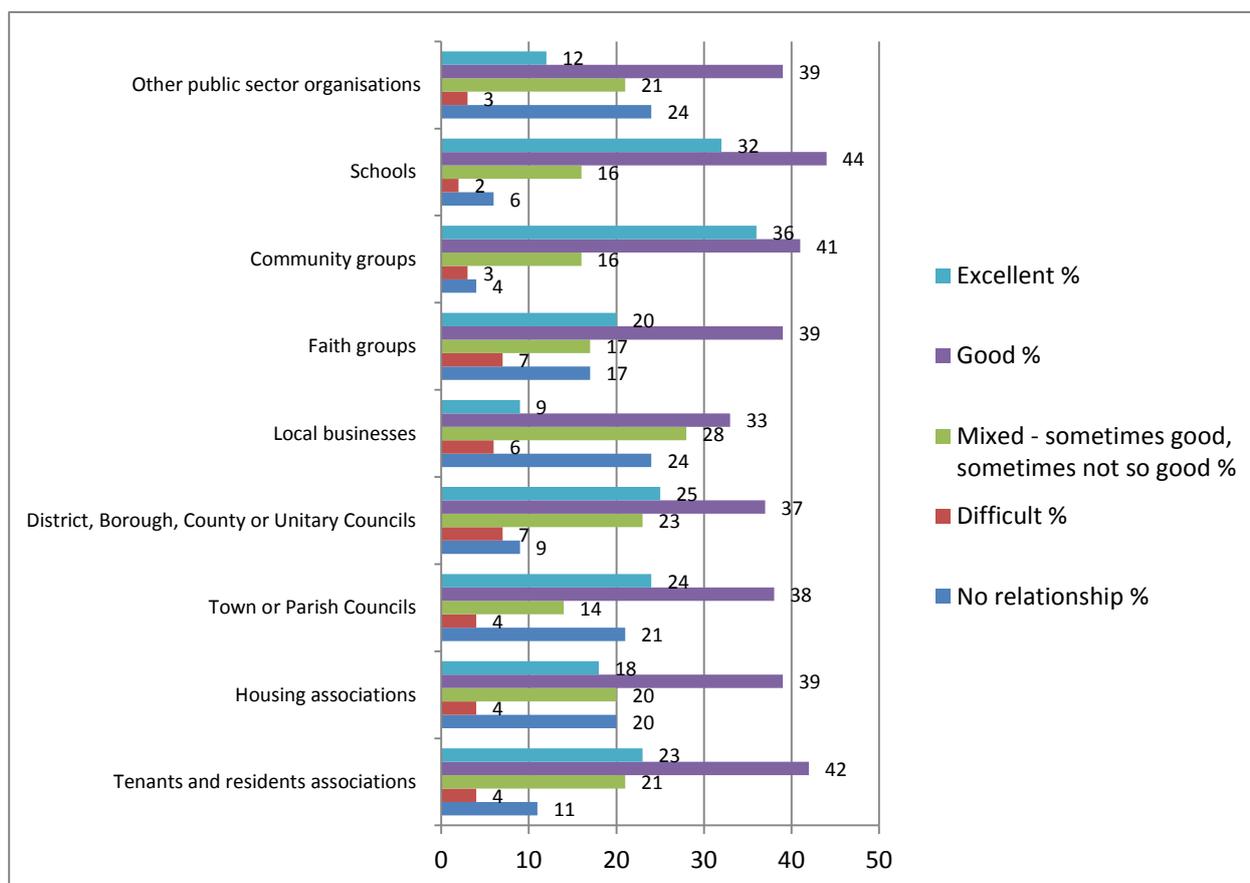
Key	People / organisation	High influence (no. of areas)	Medium influence (no. of areas)	Low influence (no. of areas)
	Resident partnership or steering group	11	1	
	Rep	11		1
	Locally trusted organisation	9	1	2
	Council	6	1	2
	Community groups	5	4	2
	Dedicated worker	4		
	School	3	1	
	Other residents	2	2	5
	Councillor	2		2
	Faith groups	2	2	
	Voluntary and community sector organisations	1	1	
	Housing association	1	1	1
Local Trust	Local Trust	1		1
	Businesses			2
	Other public sector organisations		1	2

Connections with existing community groups in the area

Big Local areas' steering groups and partnerships typically contain people who have already been active in their community (as shown in Figure 3.7 below). However, as shown in Figure 3.7, partnerships and steering groups are often made up of a mixture of people who have already been active in the community and people who have not (49%). In some areas this level of prior activity means that it has been easier to establish an active group of residents for Big Local. For example, in one area a 'friends of' group was established as part of a previous project in the area and they felt this had helped them to get going more quickly. In other areas, the starting point for Big Local was through existing groups, sometimes alongside an open meeting. This means that residents involved in Big Local are connected to a network of other organisations, including a local neighbourhood partnership, tenants and residents associations, faith groups and schools.

In two areas there were some initial difficulties in integrating Big Local with well established community organisations. In one area, an existing tenants and residents association felt there was no need for Big Local in the area because of the work they are already doing. They are used to being reactive to the needs of the community and felt that the Big Local process 'zapped energy'. Another area that described themselves as 'very organised' felt that something new was being created when there was no need. They believed that established groups were not seen as exciting enough.

Figure 3.4 The relationship between the steering group/partnership and other organisations



N varied for each item from 72-95

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

A series of single response questions. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

In addition to the groups that residents belong to are other agencies and charities, which are active in the area, and choose to get involved. Areas described high interest initially when the money was first announced with some groups dropping off as they learned more about the long term process and that Big Local is not simply a grant based programme. However, in general, a network of groups remain to provide support to the residents. One area described how *'it's not that they've flown in because of the £1million, they are here everyday'*. As shown in Figure 3.4, there is a wide range of organisations that are supporting Big Local. These groups provide access to specific parts of the community, for example, areas described particularly good relationships with schools, which are very effective at engaging young people. One area has two young residents on their *'residents' forum'* as a result of a highly engaged teacher from the local secondary school. As can be seen in Figure 3.4, many areas also have good or excellent relationships with community groups, faith groups, councils, housing associations and tenants and residents associations, all of which provide support and access to residents. These relationships tend to be formed through individuals that are passionate about working with the community. A number of the visited areas said they would like to connect more with local businesses and public sector organisations such as the police. This is reflected in Figure 3.1 as these groups show the highest level of 'no relationship', although there are still 'good' or 'excellent' relationships with these groups.

Among the areas visited, the partner organisations we interviewed included councillors, charities, schools, housing associations and a Business in the Community (BITC) business connector. These organisations have supported the residents in the Big Local areas by:

- helping to set up Big Local in the area by establishing the initial steering group
- providing access to their networks
- providing resources such as venues and laptops
- offering expertise and specialist advice.

Areas visited and survey data suggest that Big Local areas are successfully engaging a wide range of organisations. Although some may have initially been attracted by £1million, those that have stayed are a great source of support, led by people who are passionate about their community. These organisations and groups are not restricted to those that are based in the area as the best support may be available elsewhere. Access to groups may also be limited in, for example, small residential areas.

The relationship with the council

The majority of areas visited engage with the local authority in some way and survey data shown in Figure 3.3 supports this. This can be with elected councillors or council workers, for example a housing officer. Relationships between Big Local and councils are very mixed and appear to depend on the following factors:

- **Level of engagement** – some councillors are very active and supportive, some are connected but less engaged and some have chosen not to be involved at all. Council workers, such as housing officers or community action officers offer great support to areas and are seen as a great resource by residents, but this does not necessarily mean the area has a positive relationship with the council that the worker is representing.
- **The value the council brings** – areas described a number of ways in which the council add value including wider knowledge of the area, facilities, networks,

negotiating 'hoops' with other agencies such as the police, providing data and research. One locally trusted organisation also described how engaging with the council at a strategic level, for example with the chief executive, could be beneficial for access to match funding or to share ideas.

- **How trusted the council is** – there were instances of areas describing the need to make it clear to residents that Big Local is not a council initiative due to the scepticism associated with these. This included people thinking the money would get taken away or spent on something that the council wants to do rather than the residents. The factors that reduce trust can be summarised as follows:

- councillors who appear to be representing their own or the council's agenda
- councils who are perceived as unreliable in terms of delivering in the past
- councils that are not transparent about why decisions have been made, for example, knocking down a popular community building
- councils that do not appear to respect the residents' skills and ability to improve their community
- councils that are perceived as waiting for the project to fail.

The factors that build trust are:

- councillors or council workers who are connected to the community, either as residents or by being active and visible in the community
- council workers who are based in the community, working regularly with residents
- consistency of workers. Council restructures or cutbacks mean that areas can lose council workers that have taken time to get to know the area and the people living there.

The ability to engage across communities

In line with guidance from Local Trust, areas are keen to engage as many people as possible from within their Big Local area, but they typically expressed the difficulties of doing so and Big Local areas therefore tend to be built on a small focused group of individuals. This is discussed further in Chapter 4. Areas described the following factors that influence their ability to engage people across the community:

- **people do not know about Big Local** – areas described challenges in consulting with hard to reach groups
- **people do not understand Big Local** – as described in Section 3.4.2 Big Local is perceived to be fairly intangible at the early stages.
- **people do not want to be involved in Big Local** – for example, working parents with little time to give
- **people are sceptical about Big Local** - as discussed earlier, past events have led to mistrust in some areas. One locally trusted organisation described how '*people have been let down in the past by agencies and so you do understand why they are negative*'
- **people are unable to be involved** – for example, barriers to involvement such as the time of meetings, not physically being able to get to them or childcare issues. Areas are working hard to remove these barriers. For example, the rep in one area and a council employed community officer in another were physically taking people to and from meetings.

People found the following methods of engagement effective:

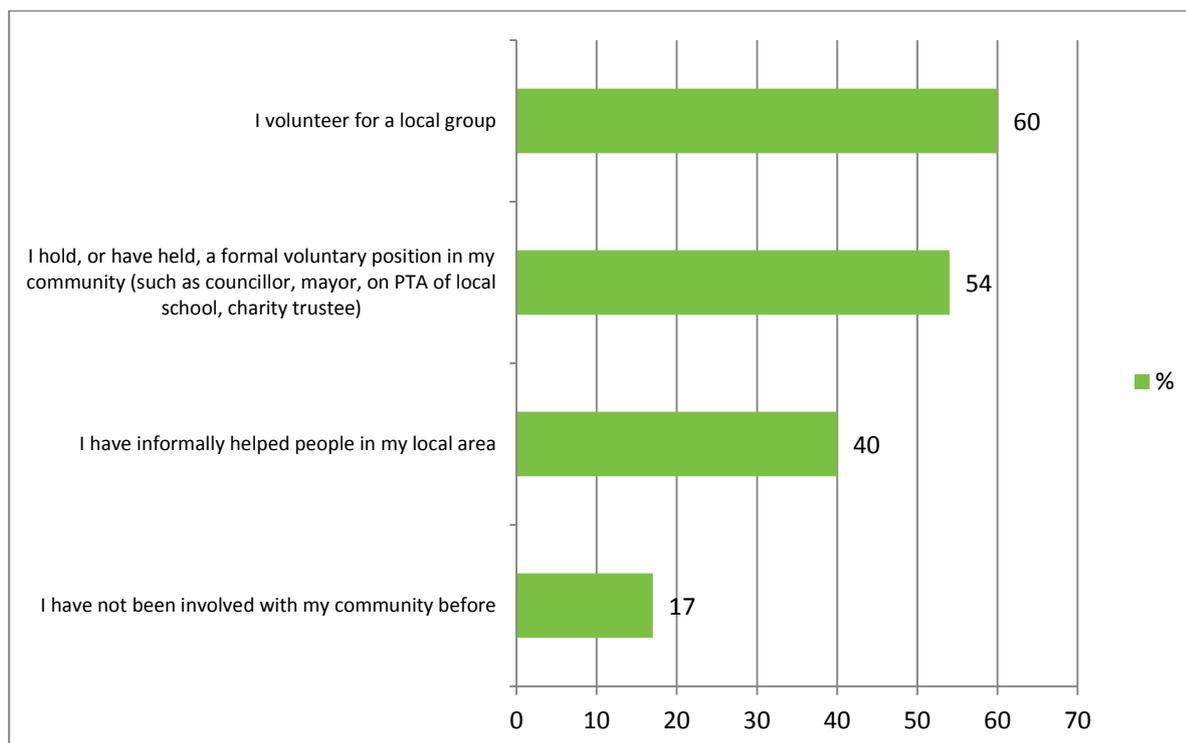
- **word-of-mouth** – getting out and talking to people, particularly on estates
- **mobile methods of consultation** – ‘Cab cam’ and a Big Local bus were successful at getting to different parts of the community because they can travel the whole area
- **events** – holding carnivals and fun days or having a stall at another community event
- **fun and engaging methods** - for example using Lego to get people to create their visions of the future.

The extent to which residents feel they had been successful in engaging with different communities influences how confident they feel about their priorities and the development of their plans.

The level of experience of people running Big Local

The ‘*dedicated few*’ described in the previous section typically have some level of experience of working with the community. This is reflected in the survey findings which show that most have had some involvement with their community already. However, 17% of respondents said they had not been involved with their community before Big Local (Figure 3.5) which demonstrates that, although a small percentage, people who are new to community activity are getting involved.

Figure 3.5 How have residents been involved with their community in the past?



N=92

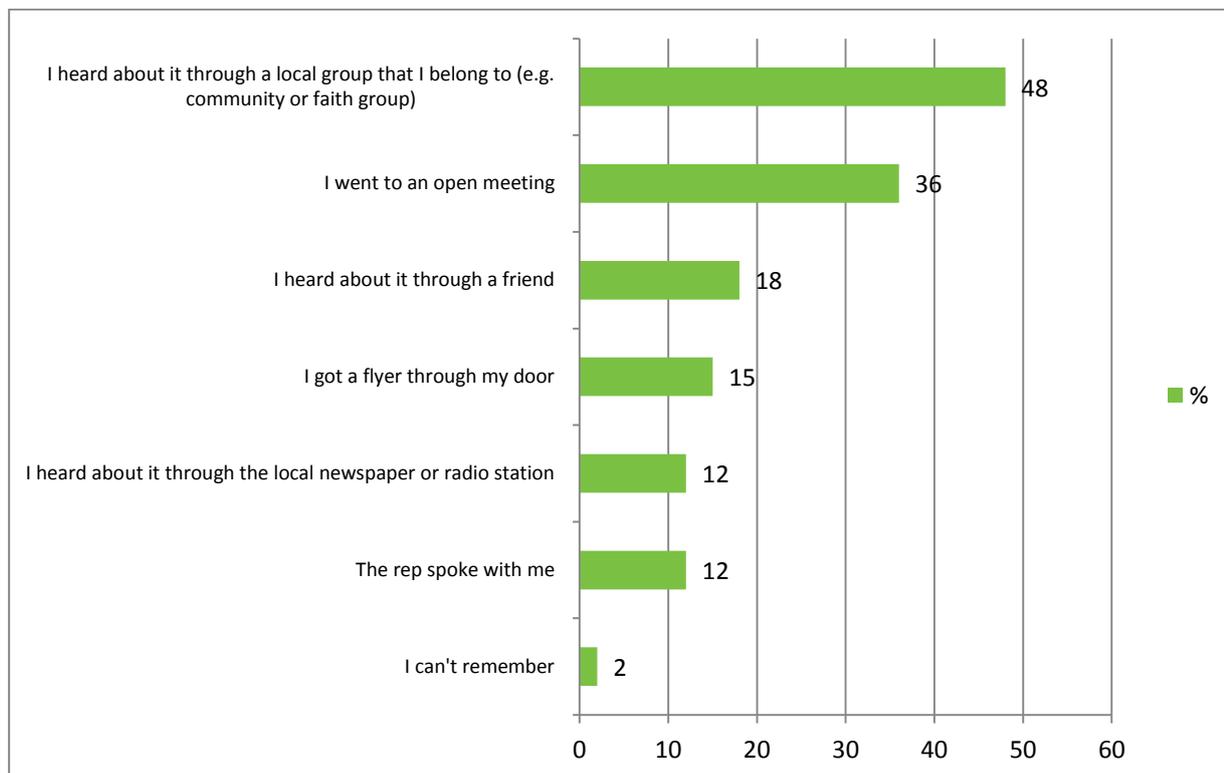
Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

This level of experience within Big Local is reflected in the way people on the steering group or partnership got involved, with 48% of residents surveyed saying they heard about it through a local group that they belong to (see Figure 3.6). Nevertheless, using approaches that are open to all yields results as around a third of residents surveyed said they had attended an open meeting.

This is particularly effective for recruiting people who are new to working with the community with 50% of this group saying they got involved through an open meeting. Other effective ways of targeting those who might not already be connected to community groups include word of mouth, leaflets and using local media.

Figure 3.6 How did residents first get involved in Big Local?



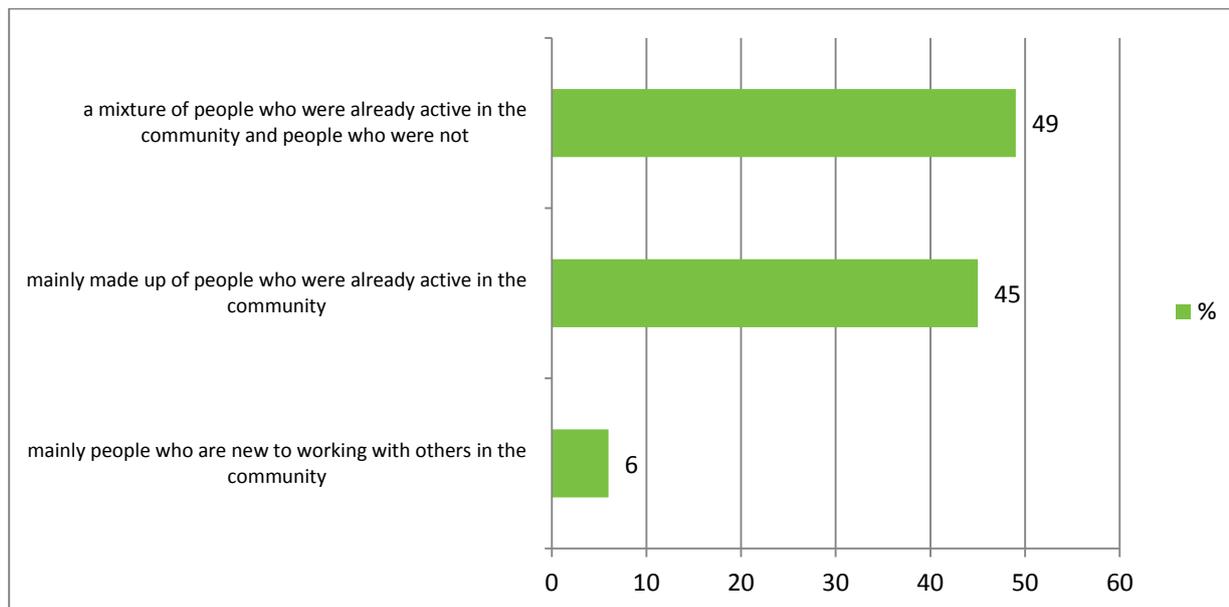
N=83
 Source: Big Local residents survey 2013
 More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Steering groups or partnerships are made up of a mixture of people who are already active in the community and people who are not and can work well within the Big Local model as they have the experience to make things happen alongside the fresh thinking that may come from people who have not yet experienced working with their community. One steering group said this is a strength of Big Local as it has started to get new people involved, which they described as ‘getting new blood in’. Another described the desire to move beyond the typical volunteers whilst acknowledging they are vital to delivering Big Local:

‘It’s the usual suspects every time and fair enough, they bring experience and they bring care and concern but we need some young people. We need some of the people who are causing the problems to get involved with solving the problems and that’s always the hard one; it’s always the real trick.’

Getting new people involved has the potential to change the dynamics of the group, providing new ideas, different ways of thinking and creating new relationships. This may also start building future capacity in the community; people who can learn from working alongside the more experienced members of their group.

Figure 3.7 How active were the steering group/partnership members in the community before Big Local?



N=100

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

A single response question. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

The benefits of Big Local starting with people who are experienced in working with the community are:

- they are usually known to, and respected by the community. One locally trusted organisation described them as '*community champions*'. Another described how without their '*hard core*' of volunteers nothing would change
- they are easier to connect with in the early stages of the programme as they are already part of a community network. One locally trusted organisation said they did not know how they would have managed if their tenants and residents association did not exist
- they have links to other groups and the resources, knowledge and connections that go with them.

One area expressed concern that '*the usual suspects*' can have negative connotations but believed that the most important thing is that they are residents, regardless of how much or how little they have done in the community.

The potential disadvantages of being mainly led by people with prior community experience are:

- **integrating the old and the new** – Big Local takes a different approach compared to other initiatives which means a shift in thinking and practice is needed
- **lack of innovation** – there is potential for things to be done in the traditional way rather than looking for new approaches.

Areas described some ways to mitigate against these potential risks:

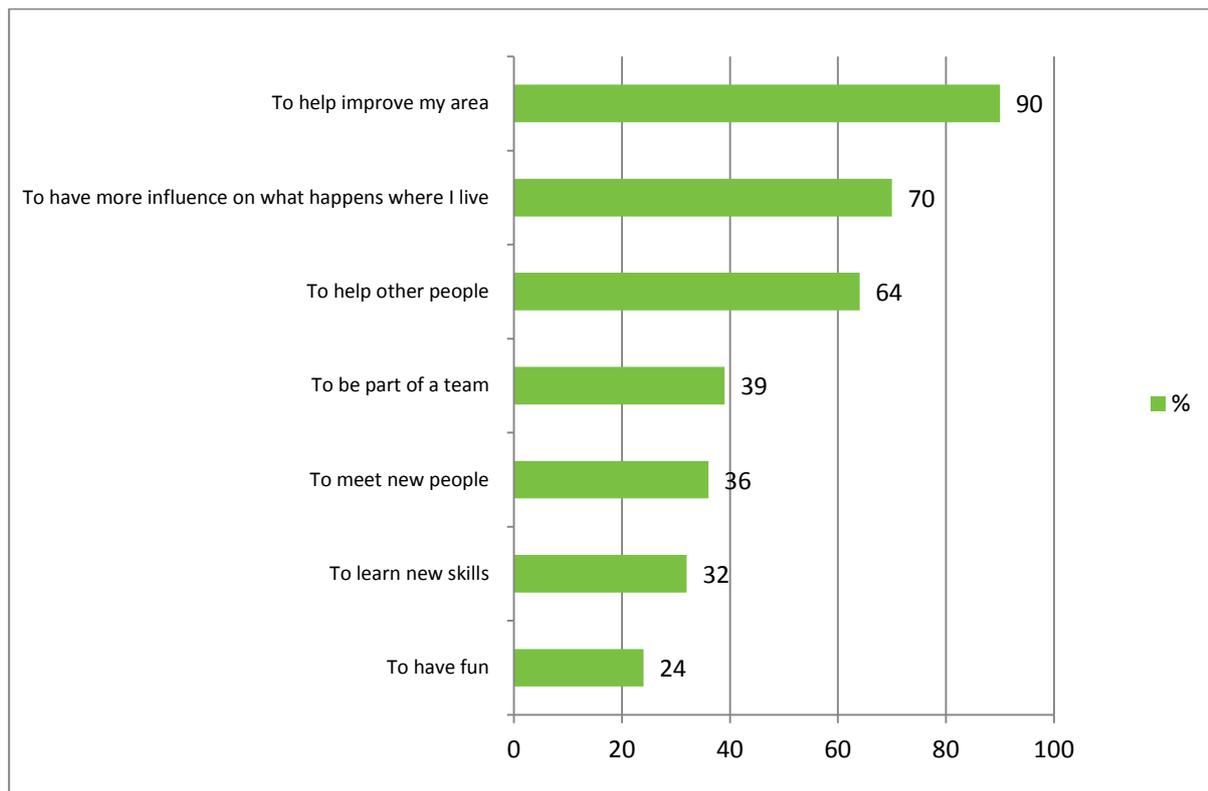
- **group self-awareness** – for example, one area was very aware that their steering group is predominantly made up of white, middle-class women and as a result are

keen to ensure they are consulting with people that will bring different perspectives. One way that they did this was to engage with the local youth leaders

- **self-policing** – residents can provide healthy challenge within the group, particularly in groups with a mixture of experience
- **open-minded consultation** – not making assumptions about what people in the area want
- **looking at the evidence** – using data about the area, for example housing or crime statistics, alongside data collected through consultation
- **facilitation** – the rep and the locally trusted organisation can provide a more objective perspective on the area and facilitate new and different thinking in the resident group.

The commitment of the residents is reflected in their responses to the survey, which explored their motivations to get involved. As can be seen in Figure 3.8, residents are more often motivated to be involved by the desire to help and affect their area, than they are by their own social or personal development needs. 90% want to help improve their area, 70% want to have a greater influence and 64% to help other people whereas being part of a team, meeting new people, learning new skills and having fun provide motivation for fewer respondents.

Figure 3.8 Why did residents choose to get involved in Big Local?



N=100

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

Perceived capacity in the community

When recruiting residents, areas have different pools of people to draw on. This is affected firstly by the size of the population, with smaller areas having a limited number of people to engage

with. Generally, areas have belief in the potential of their residents and believe they can draw on highly skilled and capable people. However, one estate based area, described how residents often have low skilled jobs and low self-esteem. They felt that asking them to do jobs such as the chair role was a mismatch. Another area described how some residents may be intimidated because of the language or worried that they will get into something they're not comfortable with. Some areas noted that the language and structures that tend to be associated with Big Local can be intimidating. This includes language like 'chair' and 'partnership'.

3.4.4 Influential factors relating to choosing what to do as part of Big Local

At the time of conducting this research, most areas (11 areas) had not yet developed their plan and were still consulting on, and developing their ideas about how they would use the £1million. The factors discussed so far in this chapter are all influential in residents thinking about how to deliver Big Local, in particular, the following:

- **the rep and the locally trusted organisation** provide challenge around identifying 'the real issues' and help areas to understand what is realistic with £1million
- **the money and timeframe** is getting residents to think differently about how they will spend the money, particularly in terms of sustainability and investment of the £1million
- **existing assets, or lack of them**, in some areas, as discussed in Section 3.3
- **the issues faced by the community** inform decision making about priorities and the process of developing a profile helps to focus people in on these
- **messages about how Big Local works**, and what other areas are doing, influences how areas are thinking about their priorities. In particular, the message that the money should last longer than 10 years through social investment and match funding is strongly influencing how some areas are thinking about spending their money
- **who is involved** and the skills, experience and ideas they bring with them.

However, the strongest influencers, according to most steering groups and partnerships are the residents in the wider community. Although Big Local is generally being led by a small number of residents, it is the wider resident group that is influencing through consultation and visioning exercises.

People in Big Local areas noted that it is difficult to get people to think innovatively and people often list the same issues – for example dog fouling – rather than more innovative changes as '*it's really hard for people to pluck something out of thin air*'.

3.4.5 Influential factors relating to residents' capacity to deliver Big Local

Building on the influential factors outlined throughout this chapter, residents described how the capacity within the group, the structure of the group and how the group worked together influence their ability to deliver Big Local.

Knowledge, skills, experience and confidence

Interim steering groups and partnerships vary in terms of their knowledge, skills, experience and confidence. Some areas have professionals involved, including people who have written town plans, set-up social enterprises, been a councillor and worked in community development.

Others bring different technical experience such as web design or social media. Some areas have residents that feel confident to take on formal roles such as the chair position whereas others are reluctant to take on these positions as they do not feel they have the skills.

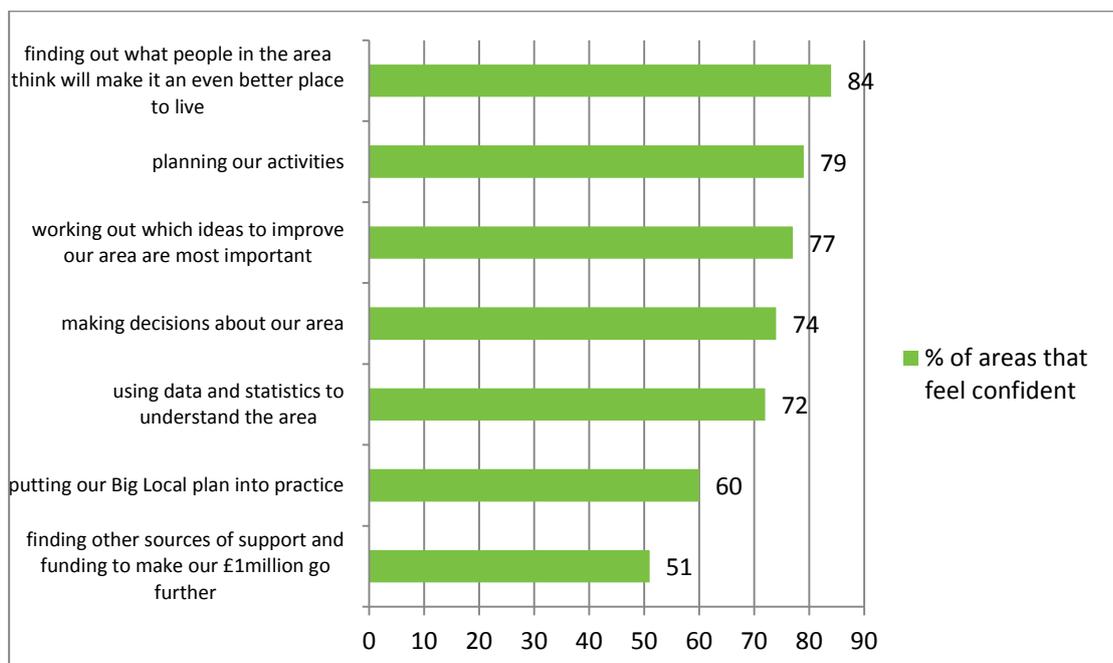
Where possible, the groups are acting as flexible units in which, if the residents are not able to fulfil these roles, it will be picked up by another member of the extended team. This can be, for example, the rep, locally trusted organisation staff, the worker or a council worker.

Residents also draw on an extended support network, with examples including:

- a community foundation ‘doing the legwork’ on proposals
- using students to support with research
- free training from CVS
- town clerk to advise on legal issues and insurances
- a housing association providing a designer for branding.

The people who are supporting residents expressed the desire to transfer skills to residents over time. This development is as much about helping residents to build confidence as it is about developing skills and knowledge. Some residents expressed a lack of confidence, particularly in speaking up in meetings, and had training to deal with this. One resident described empathy with this as she remembered her first experiences of working in the community, ‘*I think mainly a lot of that is confidence – I think I can’t do that – I can’t stand up and speak to people – where as it’s something that comes with time*’. She described her experience of chairing her first meeting with 100 people and how it ‘*scared me to death, but when you’ve done that you think I can go on, I can help in the community*’. This is what some of the residents are experiencing and one described how she would find it helpful to hear from people like her who have been able to fill these roles.

Figure 3.9 Steering group/partnership confidence



% of areas that feel confident represents ‘very confident’ and ‘quite confident’ responses. See Appendix C for full details
 N varied for each item from 100 to 101
 Source: Big Local residents survey 2013
 A series of single response questions.

The survey data presented in Figure 3.9 shows that partnerships or steering groups feel most confident in their ability to do the things that are required of them at this early stage of Big Local, such as to ‘find out what people in the area will make it an even better place to live’ and ‘working out which ideas to improve our area are most important’ but feel less confident about the longer term challenges of ‘finding other sources of support and funding to make our £1million go further’ and ‘putting Big Local into practice’. One case-study area described the step change necessary to go from consultation and planning into delivery and the different type of leadership they felt they needed for this new phase. The first 100 areas to be launched were more confident than the final 50 who began their Big Local journey more recently. This suggests that resident confidence is developing as they progress through Big Local.

There are areas who feel a skills audit would be valuable and some areas had conducted this exercise. One area felt that their skills were not recognised, and that they had not been asked what their skills were. The group included, for example, someone who had created town plans in their previous job role. Although they had not initially explained their relevant skills to the rep or locally trusted organisation, they were beginning to feel that they could now do so, suggesting that they feel more in control of Big Local.

Moving to resident-led

How empowered residents feel is related to the skills and knowledge of residents. It is apparent in the behaviour of some residents that they feel comfortable making or challenging decisions. For example, some areas felt confident approaching Local Trust about changes to their area boundaries or names whereas others felt they had to keep them despite feeling they were problematic. This reflects how residents in some areas show a greater need to get permission to do things. Residents sometimes look to Local Trust, the rep or the locally trusted organisation for this permission through an expressed desire for greater rules or guidelines, or from reassurance that if other areas are doing something, they can too. This desire for more clarity is one of the support needs identified by some areas discussed in Chapter 5.

Where residents have not yet fully grasped the reins of Big Local, the rep and the locally trusted organisation feel it is their role to support them through the transition. One locally trusted organisation described how:

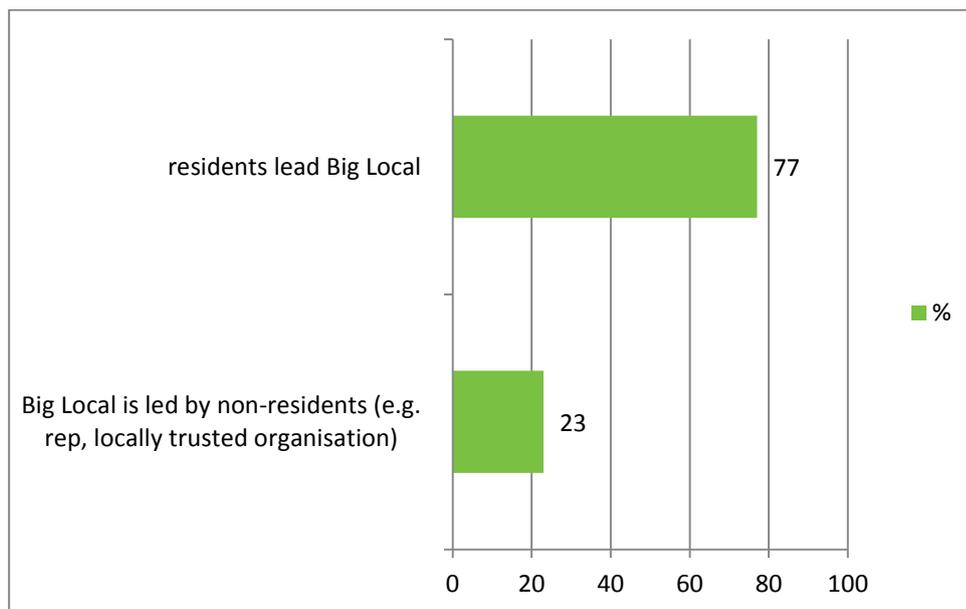
‘we’ve put a lot of effort into it, into supporting it in the background and I am aware that it is a resident-led partnership but I would also say it couldn’t have happened if we hadn’t been able to smooth edges along the way.’

Another locally trusted organisation described the transition saying, in the future:

‘we would still exist, we are still there when they need advice and need support but it is very much about pushing [residents] to the fore, and the agencies step back.’

Although residents still need support and reassurance, the majority of areas that we visited feel they are resident-led. This is largely reflected in the survey findings, however, Figure 3.10 shows that almost a quarter of respondents (23%) feel that their Big Local area is being led by someone other than the residents. It may be that these areas are at an earlier stage in the Big Local journey and have not yet transitioned from the initial stages where, for example, the rep may still be heavily involved in Big Local.

Figure 3.10 Who leads Big Local?



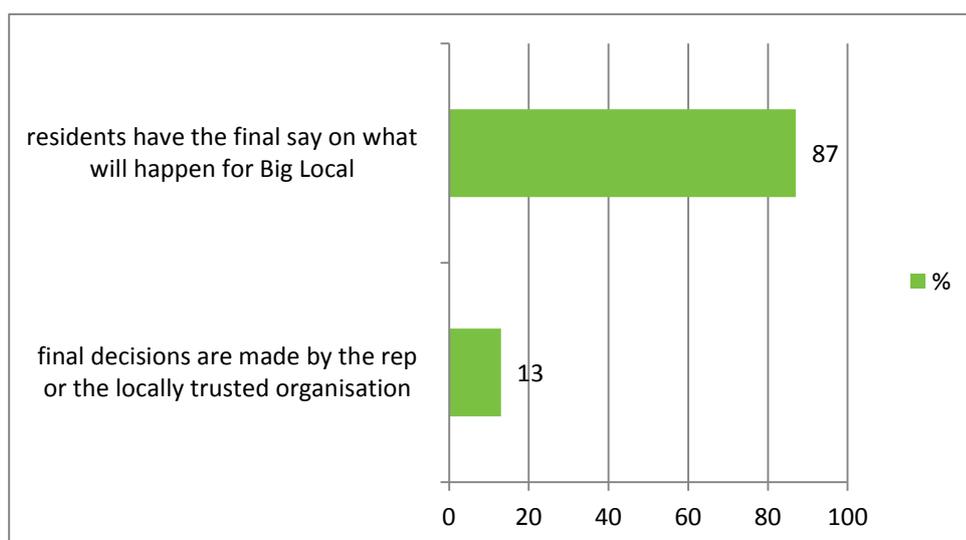
N= 100

Source: *Big Local residents survey 2013*

A single response question. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

Figures 3.11 and 3.12 suggest that, while the majority of respondents believe that residents have the final say in what happens on Big Local (87%), they are less likely to feel that residents are ‘in charge’ as 39% feel someone else is in charge. This may suggest that they see Local Trust as in charge of the programme overall, or it may be that the majority feel they lead and make the decisions but perhaps that this can be over-ridden by someone else. The general pattern shown in Figures 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9 is reflected across areas launched at different times, although the first 50 areas were slightly more likely to say that residents lead Big Local (82%) than those from the second 50 (74%) and the third 50 (76%).

Figure 3.11 Who makes decisions on Big Local?

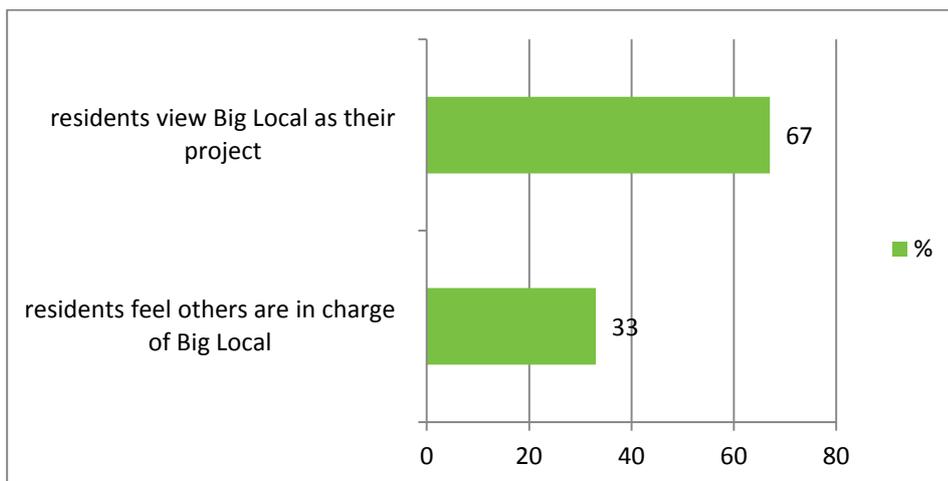


N= 98

Source: *Big Local residents survey 2013*

A single response question. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

Figure 3.12 Who owns Big Local?



N= 100
 Source: Big Local residents survey 2013
 A single response question. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

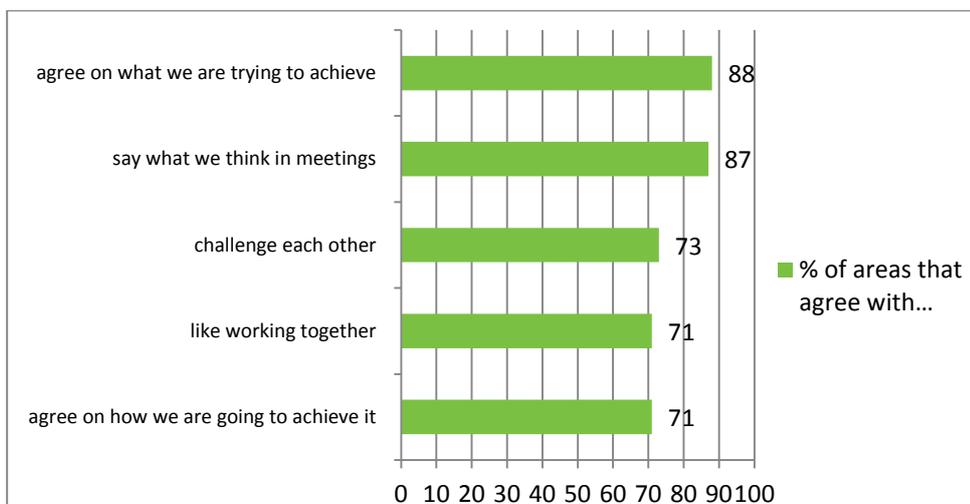
Group interactions

The types of structure adopted by groups tend to take the traditional committee form with a chair and regular meetings. Areas find it useful to form sub-groups that focus on specific topics such as branding or finance and feel this influences their ability to make progress between meetings.

The way residents interact with each other, and the relationships they developed also influence their ability to deliver. For example, one locally trusted organisation described how:

‘we are still at the stage where we see each other but we still need to get to know each other a little bit more than we do at the moment. And understand what makes us each tick and break down, so when we have, as we think we will going forward, probably some more difficult discussions, and decisions and what is a priority and less a priority, how we can manage those because we know people’s personalities a bit more’.

Figure 3.13 How the partnership/steering group works together



% of areas that agree with each statement represents ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ responses. See Appendix C for full details
 N = 101
 Source: Big Local residents survey 2013
 A series of single response questions. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

Figure 3.13 shows how surveyed residents generally believe they work well together as a group, providing healthy levels of challenge and expressing their views. Although residents are aligned on what they are trying to achieve, they are slightly less aligned on how they are going to achieve it, which reflects the stage of Big Local that most areas are at – consultation and planning – and may also reflect the expectation that decision-making may become more challenging in future, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Dedicated worker

There are dedicated workers funded in five of the 14 areas and four further areas plan to get one. The decision to take on a paid worker was influenced by:

- the rep or locally trusted organisation suggesting it
- what other areas are doing
- lack of progress
- history – where a worker was already in place in the area.

The decision to get a worker is generally described as an obvious choice when there is *'loads of work and no one to do it'*. Seeing the dynamics between one area and their worker helped another area to be clear about what they wanted, *'someone to facilitate rather than someone to take over and run it.'*

Without exception, the areas with a worker felt the worker improved their ability to deliver Big Local. This is generally because the worker is able to put in time that the volunteers cannot. For example, one locally trusted organisation worker described how *'things have definitely moved on with him there. I think the steering group that we had was well-intentioned but lacking in time and resources'*. Some workers also bring specific expertise that is not held by the steering group.

The types of roles being filled by dedicated workers vary and include:

- administration
- leading on/writing the profile and plan
- community development and engagement
- project management/leadership.

One area was keen not to take on a worker as they believe they can do it themselves as they have highly skilled residents involved.

Although the areas feel they are making more progress with a worker there is no clear evidence to say that they are making greater progress than those that do not. However, it is possible that areas that do not feel the need to recruit a worker can fill the roles above with residents and their support network including the rep and the locally trusted organisation.

At this early stage, it is mainly small numbers of residents working on Big Local in areas. This means it is likely that there are gaps to be filled for which a worker can be a quick and effective fix. However, in the long term there is the potential for areas to become dependent upon workers – particularly if there is a lack of focus on transferring skills to residents, or if residents feel they are responsible for keeping a worker in employment.

3.5 Conclusion

There are many factors that influence the pathways that areas take on their journey through Big Local. The most influential supports in the design of the programme at an area level are the rep and the locally trusted organisation. In addition to fulfilling their respective intended purpose,

these two roles work closely together to flexibly meet the needs of the resident group as they develop into the roles required of them. Areas are required to work in a different way, taking a longer term perspective on how to make their community an even better place to live, with residents leading from the front.

Factors relating to the area – the place and the people – interact with the programme to influence how people identify with the Big Local area, as distinct from their estate or village, who gets involved and in what ways, what residents choose to do and their ability to deliver Big Local.

In particular, the combined skills, knowledge, experience and confidence of the core team working on Big Local and their ability to develop and utilise an extended network, influence the development of Big Local in their area.

4. Progress in Big Local areas

Key messages for Local Trust

- It is more common for residents in areas to feel that they are progressing more slowly than they had expected than either to be progressing as they expected or more quickly. While in general the residents are happy with their rate of progress they generally acknowledge that other residents in the area are frustrated by the slow progress. There may be value in Local Trust supporting areas by providing them with examples of how to keep their communities informed of progress to help them to manage this risk of frustration among other residents.
- Although every area is on their own individual journey, there are some common points in their journey – they usually get a group together, raise awareness and consult with residents more widely. The next steps are to put this information together into a profile and plan. These steps reflect the Big Local pathway. Alongside this some choose to engage a worker, and/or to offer small grants and/or to take part in training.
- Progress is helped by the residents – their skills, networks, commitment, effort and characters are key to areas progressing. There may be value in Local Trust recognising and rewarding their contribution to help maintain interest and momentum in areas and to demonstrate to residents that Local Trust is aware of, and appreciates, the work they are doing.
- The rep, locally trusted organisation and paid worker (where there is one) help progress due mainly to their approach, manner and time they give.
- The simplicity of the process, lack of rigid deadlines and the Getting Started funding are the structural features that some find help progress. At a local level, having a sub-committee, a centre where people can meet and small grants to be visible in the community are also all said to have helped.
- Progress is hindered primarily by constraints on the time that resident volunteers can give, together with difficulties getting people involved. These issues arise from Big Local being resident-led and there may be value in Local Trust exploring how far they can support residents to address these in order to support residents who welcome the programme being resident-led in putting this into practice.
- On occasion areas' progress is inhibited by having to procure through the 'standard practice' of partner organisations. Local Trust may wish to explore how far they can help cut 'red tape' for areas and help minimise this barrier.
- The language and amount of documentation provided by Local Trust is a challenge to residents in some areas. Local Trust may wish to consider establishing a panel of residents who could review documents from a resident's perspective and ensure they are accessible. Local Trust might also consider other ways to share information (e.g. video).

- The pathway has generally been helpful in setting out the steps and enabling residents to check their progress and see what to do next and there is no clear evidence it needs to change. People respond more favourably to it where they see it as a guide rather than a rigid structure. Local Trust may wish to restate that it is a guide and that areas can progress through the steps in different orders so that some residents and other organisations do not perceive it as a rigid structure.
- The Big Local process helps areas to think further ahead and to get people involved and is generally not said to be too inflexible or more difficult than other funding.
- Areas are not always clear on how much consultation with other residents was 'enough'. Local Trust may wish to help share examples from other areas that residents can use as a guide.
- Decision making has been largely unproblematic to date however interviewees feel that it might be more difficult in future. There may be value in Local Trust providing guidance on managing conflict and feeding back on difficult decisions or signposting residents to existing information in preparation for future decision-making that may be more challenging.
- Looking towards the future, interviewees anticipate they will see a tighter knit community in their area and have a better reputation. They feel there is potential for Big Local to lead to people having more ownership and that the specific issues they have identified as priorities will improve.

Key messages for areas

- Some areas are hindered because Big Local is said not to be visible enough and, where it is visible, people do not always make the connection between an event or activity and Big Local or between an outcome and something they had said in consultation. Areas may want to think about how they can make Big Local visible and make sure people see the connections.
- The pathway is a guide to the steps areas will go through on their journey. It is flexible and does not have to be followed in order.
- Although decision making to date has not been a significant problem, interviewees expect that it could become more so in future. Areas may wish to think about how they can plan for this, manage the risk, and have a plan for providing feedback to the community.

4.1 Introduction

Big Local is a 15 year programme and each area can progress at a speed and timeframe that fits with their situation and vision for their area. Areas can choose their own timeline, provided that the £1 million is spent by February 2026, and are guided through their journey by the Big Local pathway, as shown in Chapter 1. This sets out the key steps that areas will progress through, and the points when they need to provide information to Local Trust to endorse.

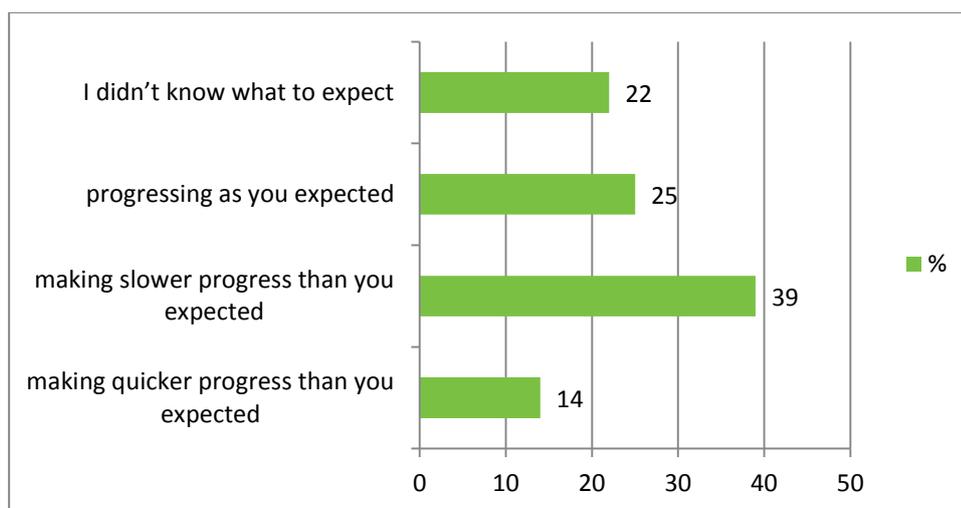
As noted in Chapter 1, the areas were launched at three time points: July 2010, February 2012 and December 2012. Therefore when we visited the areas between June and November 2013, and surveyed areas in November 2013, it was between six months and three years since they became 'Big Local areas'. This, together with the areas moving at their own pace, means that they were at different stages in their journeys when they took part in this research. Two of the

areas we visited that had launched in July 2010 had submitted their Big Local plan, and it had been endorsed by Local Trust, and a third area had submitted their plan and were awaiting feedback when we visited. While the different start dates for the case-study areas did not necessarily dictate the stage the areas had reached when we visited, it is worth considering this when exploring the areas' progress in their Big Local journey.

4.2 How are areas progressing and are they content with this?

As areas can progress to suit them, we asked whether they were progressing more quickly or slowly than they expected, or whether they were making progress as they had expected. Residents in all but two areas felt able to comment and their responses reflect their own views of progress. Across the case-study areas there were mixed views in the resident focus groups, as they typically feel that the progress is either slower than they had expected (six areas) or as they had expected (six areas). It is notable that areas that were announced first, which was before Local Trust was established, are slightly more likely to say they are making slower progress. Overall, locally trusted organisations also typically feel that progress is slower than expected or as they had expected. The survey of residents reflects these case-study findings to some extent as it is most common for residents to say that Big Local is progressing more slowly than they expected, as can be seen in Figure 4.1, but a quarter are progressing as expected.

Figure 4.1 Residents' views of the progress in their areas



N=97
 Source: Big Local residents survey 2013
 A single response question. Due to rounding percentages may not sum to 100.

Around half (53%) of the residents surveyed are happy with their rate of progress while 28% say they are not (the remaining 19% do not know). The comments of respondents to the survey reflect the views of the residents who took part in the focus groups. In some cases, these interviewees feel that their rate of progress is reasonable and that there is a need to take time to think it through and get it right. However, residents also recognise that the wider community are frustrated that nothing appears to have happened and are sceptical about whether any change will happen in future. Some residents who are actively involved feel progress is slow, and attribute it to difficulties in getting more residents involved and needing time from volunteers for whom Big Local was not their main priority. The complexity of the process and the time taken from the initial launch of Big Local to having access to some funds to help them get started are

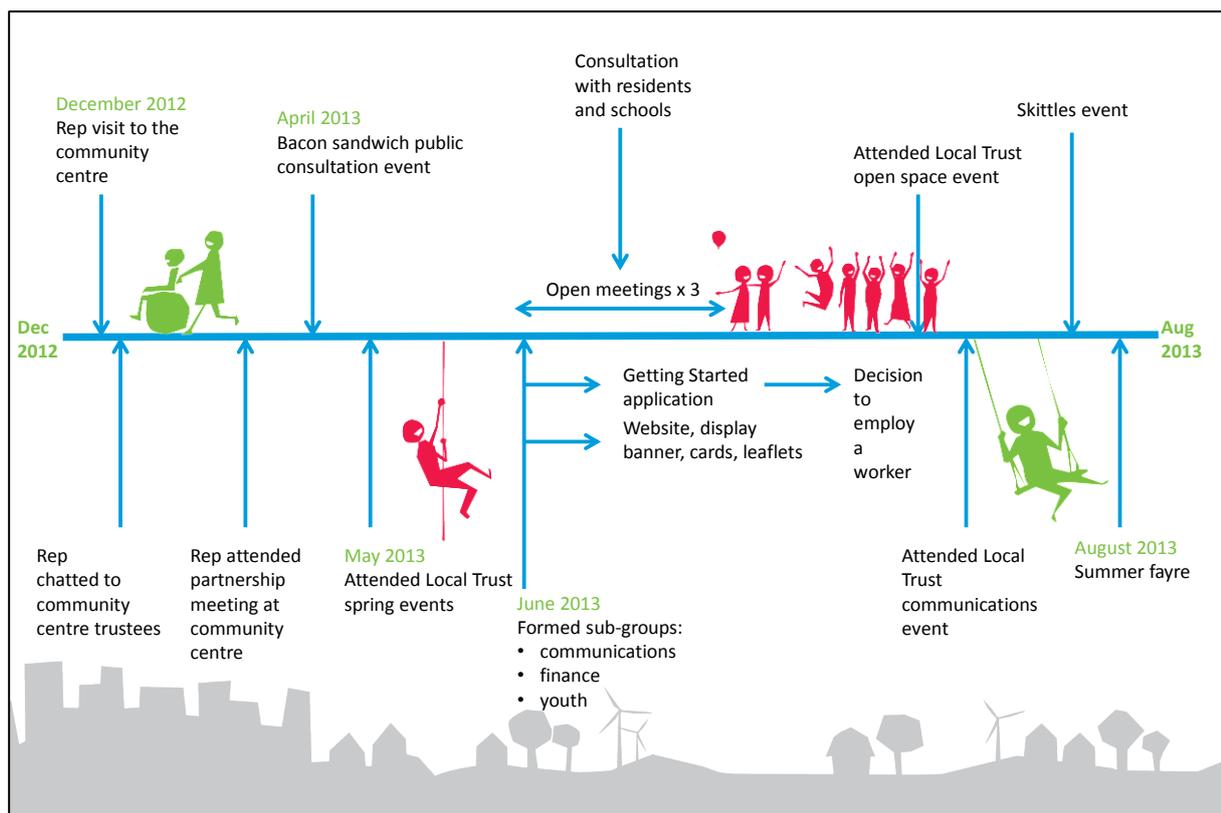
also noted as reasons for slowness. In some cases specific individuals or agencies are said to have slowed down progress.

Although interviewees feel that progress has been slower than they expected, some explained that they had been concerned about this until they compared the stage they are at with other Big Local areas and find that they are at a similar point or even ‘ahead’ of other areas. This reassures them that they are progressing satisfactorily, and these residents who are part of the steering groups or partnerships generally understand that progressing towards their plan will take time. However, reflecting some of the responses to the survey, they typically observe that people in the wider community are ‘frustrated’ at the perceived lack of progress and, as residents living in the community, some took on the role of explaining and reassuring their fellow residents that Big Local is progressing. The factors that help or inhibit progress in areas are outlined in Section 4.4.

4.3 What was the typical timeline of progress in the areas?

Residents and other interviewees in each area discussed the timeline since Big Local was launched in their area and the key events, activities or decisions made in a timeline exercise. An example of the timeline for one area is shown below.

Figure 4.2 Example timeline from a Big Local area focus group



While every area is unique and different in nature and the way they have approached Big Local, there are some similarities in their timelines and the key events they identify. These key points on their timelines will not be a comprehensive list of everything that areas have done but the points that they consider significant.

- **Getting a group together:** At the start of Big Local in an area, a key first activity is generally to get a group of people together to make it happen. There are two broad approaches to this, used either individually or together, which are:
 - the rep or Big Lottery Fund staff approach key organisations, such as a residents association, or individuals such as a local priest
 - an open meeting or launch event is advertised and held and anyone can come and volunteer.

Some areas report that large numbers of residents attended launch events or open meetings and from this they 'recruited' volunteers to become the interim steering group.

Using creative approaches to engage residents

In one area the rep helped to engage residents at an early stage by using Lego in an interactive session with residents to think about their vision. The session was filmed and the residents really enjoyed it. This approach helped to set Big Local apart from the start by making it *'fresh and different'*.

- **Developing Getting Started proposal and sending to Local Trust:** submitting the Getting Started proposal (or Getting People Involved proposal for the areas launched first) is a key point noted particularly by locally trusted organisations. This is said by some to help to motivate as well as provide the funds to be able to do the other activities on the timeline.
- **Developing a brand and logo:** residents in two of the areas said that creating a brand and logo is an important step on the journey. In both areas, residents said that they need a clear 'identity' and other residents need to be able to identify them at events.
- **Recruiting a paid worker:** across the areas visited, five have a paid worker whose time on Big Local is usually funded through Getting Started funding. Locally trusted organisations in two areas, both in the group of areas launched first, mentioned the recruitment of a paid worker as a key point in the timeline. This is mainly because they note the need for someone centrally to coordinate and because *'I just can't do that in my day job'*, as one said. The role of the paid worker is discussed more in Chapter 3.
- **Raising awareness and having fun:** some areas mention events they have used to raise awareness of Big Local and to have fun, such as fun days and parades, with the aim, as one resident explained, of residents recognising the brand and saying *'Oh, Big Local, I've heard of that'*.
- **Consulting widely:** residents and other interviewees commonly mention the events and activities that they use to reach out to residents in the wider community, raise awareness of Big Local and find out what people think, as a highlight in their journey to date. All but two areas (both of which were areas launched most recently) have provided a chance for other residents to say what they thought and these are generally popular and well attended, which *'boosts you a bit'*, as one locally trusted organisation interviewee said. They typically adopt a variety of approaches to this, as

outlined in their Getting Started proposals¹⁰. These include using existing events, knocking on doors, consulting school councils, using questionnaire surveys and comments postcards, using Planning for Real¹¹ and reaching out into the area by using a bus or 'Cab Cam'. Residents in one area feel that they have been helped by their rep to use more creative techniques to consult than they might have otherwise. This included using Lego, magnetic boards and paperchains and they said this had helped engage with residents and made Big Local seem different from the start. Some areas take an approach with an initial consultation to get ideas and then develop a questionnaire based on this that can be used to consult more widely with residents.

It is common for the core group of residents who form the steering group or partnership to feel that they need to be confident that they have the support of the residents in the area and that their decisions reflect what people in the area want. This is typically their reason for consulting as widely as possible, although they are not always sure what would be '*enough*' consultation. As a locally trusted organisation said: '*we might end up with the same bunch of activists but we have to show Big Local that we have really got out there to find out what people feel it is like to live round here*'. The challenge of achieving this is one of the issues that some areas feel affected their ability to progress, as will be explained in Section 4.3.

- **Analysing and developing a profile and plan:** three of the areas, all of which were launched in July 2010, have completed consulting, analysed the information and developed their Big Local plan and profile. Reaching this point in their timeline is seen as a significant milestone that they reached between two and three years since Big Local was launched and around one to two years since Getting People Involved funding was made available. A fourth area is keen to submit their profile but have been advised by their rep to do some more community consultation before sending the profile to Local Trust.
- **Offering small grants:** three of the areas visited have chosen to use some of their Getting Started funds to offer small grants to residents and charities to do something to help the community. The aim of this is usually to offer something visible so that residents are able to see the value of Big Local to their area. It also provides an opportunity as a '*pilot*' for residents to develop their skills and processes for grant-giving that they can use when offering small grants as part of their Big Local plan.
- **Training and workshops:** residents in three areas said that a key event on their journey is training they received – in confidence building, grant making and attending NANM events. One of these areas has also received training in health and safety, child protection and chairing a meeting. Residents in two other areas have also taken part in workshops where they discussed strategy or where statistical information for their area had been provided to help them develop their profile and plan. The training and workshops are generally considered useful. For example, an interviewee for the locally trusted organisation for the area where residents had taken part in confidence building training had seen the results in the meetings where the residents are more willing to challenge and to tell the 'professionals', such as the rep or locally trusted

¹⁰ <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/2013-06-11-Getting-Started-second-50-report-FINAL.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.planningforreal.org.uk/>

organisation *'you're not talking [plain] English'* when they do not understand the language being used.

- **Visiting other areas and spring events:** a key point for residents in five areas is the opportunity to visit another area, including through the spring events. The visits help them to compare how they are progressing with other areas and *'realise we're doing OK'* and *'galvanised them'* as a locally trusted organisation put it, because they can see people in other areas working together. The value of seeing how something can be achieved is also noted by a sixth area where residents had visited a place that was not a Big Local area but was already running a community-managed centre, which they aimed to do through Big Local.

From the journeys of these areas we can see that there are some common points that they see as significant steps on their journey. Although they are at different stages, it is possible to see that Big Local areas commonly get an initial group together, raise awareness and consult with residents in the wider community and, when they reach the stage, they develop their profile and plan and send it to Local Trust. To a great extent these key points map to the steps on the Big Local pathway. Alongside this, some choose to offer small grants, some to engage a worker and some to learn through taking part in training and visits to other areas. In addition to these common patterns, there are some key events that are more unique to one area and their circumstances. These include:

- changing the locally trusted organisation after the initial one had to close
- residents choosing and appointing the locally trusted organisation
- facilitating a meeting to address difficult relationships between parish councillors within the Big Local area and their influence on how Big Local would operate
- holding a vote at a meeting that agreed that councillors could not sit on the Big Local partnership, which is described as *'keeping it in the community's hands'*
- developing a directory of what is available in the area to identify what Big Local could add, and to inform the development of the plan.

4.4 What has helped or hindered progress to date?

4.4.1 What helped progress?

Residents and locally trusted organisations reported that their progress has been helped primarily by **people** and **structures**, as discussed below.

People

The residents are one of the main assets that have helped progress in areas. Their skills and networks are helpful in enabling them to do activities without having to use external consultants and, in one area, the project management experience of a resident on the steering group has helped them to keep on track. As well as specific skills, the effort, commitment and characters of the residents are also highlighted as helping progress, particularly by the locally trusted organisations. They mentioned residents *'putting the effort in...turning up, having a say'* and people being *'willing to step up'* as a result of Big Local *'giving them the authority'* and their willingness to challenge each other while not having a *'blame culture'*. Although this commitment and effort helps progress, one locally trusted organisation interviewee observed that this is limited to a few people when they commented that the area was *'moving forward because of the dedication of a few people, rather than lots of people in the community, which I feel the*

programme was designed to do. This difficulty in getting more people involved is mentioned as one of the hindrances to progress, as discussed below.

The rep is widely reported as helping areas to progress. As discussed in Chapter 3, the rep has a key influencing role and the comments of residents and locally trusted organisations showed that their manner, approach, experience and networks have helped areas along their journey, as the following comments illustrate:

[the rep] *'is positive and knows when to step in and step back'*

[the rep] *'has been the face and voice of Local Trust, accessible, residents warmed to him, he's inclusive'*

[the rep] *'is very experienced and knows people'*.

The locally trusted organisation is also widely mentioned as supporting areas to progress. Their reputation, relationships with residents in the area and taking a *'bottom up'* approach are the main reasons identified for their role helping progress.

The paid worker, in areas that had one, has helped progress by being a dedicated resource with time to give who can also be a single point of contact for the wider community. As one locally trusted organisation said *'without [worker] we would have just stood still'*.

Structures

There are also some structures that are mentioned as supporting progress in areas, albeit less frequently mentioned than the people outlined above. These include processes related to Big Local and those related to decisions made locally:

National

- having a simple process *'without all the usual bells and whistles you have to go through'*
- Big Local not being *'deadline driven'*
- having some funding through Getting Started.

Local

- having sub-committees who could meet more frequently than the whole steering group and focus on a specific issue or activity
- having a centre where the steering group can meet
- offering small grants *'so people can see what's happening'*.

4.4.2 What hindered progress?

While these people and structures have helped the progress in the areas, interviewees also identified a number of factors that they feel have hindered their progress to date. These issues, summarised below, are inter-related and to some extent reflect the issues that help areas outlined above.

Capacity and time of residents: the reflections of some residents showed that they have embraced the resident-led nature of Big Local:

'it's all volunteer-led at this stage'

'we have chosen to be resident-led and resident-engaged, which slows the process down'.

However, as the last comment indicates, there are implications for progress arising from being resident-led, principally the time constraints for residents. Typically steering groups or partnerships meet once a month which, as some point out, means that they had only met 12 times in a year and some said not much activity takes place between meetings. In addition, the time constraints for residents means that sometimes different people attend meetings – *'dipping in and dipping out'* as a locally trusted organisation expressed it. This results in time being spent updating or reiterating points that had been made before and sometimes revisiting decisions that had been made, which slows down progress. Resident volunteers who are members of the steering group or partnership have also changed sometimes due to ill health of themselves or family members or bereavement. In other cases, the demands of working full time, or shifts, or family commitments, has meant residents have to end their involvement and this change in people can also slow down progress.

Some of the tasks and activities that the groups have undertaken as part of Getting Started, such as organising events or conducting a questionnaire survey, have been time consuming particularly when *'we haven't got Whitehall resources'*, as a locally trusted organisation said. There are limitations to how much you can expect residents to do. For example, a locally trusted organisation interviewee said he has *'got as much as he could out of the group of residents as volunteers'*. As well as time and capacity of residents, their ability and confidence can also affect progress as reflected in the comment of residents in one area that:

'it's a lot of responsibility...its having the confidence isn't it? In our own little lives we have confidence but in the wider aspects such as this we haven't got confidence...we haven't done it before'.

Lack of involvement from the wider community: alongside the aspects which make working through residents challenging, another inhibitor is the difficulty of getting a wider group of people from the Big Local area more actively involved. This is summed up in the observation of one resident that a driver of progress is *'the enthusiasm of the few but equally an inhibitor has been the lack of enthusiasm of the most'*. Residents on steering groups and partnerships sometimes feel that they are working hard, including working harder than they had expected, to get people involved but there are fewer people involved than they had hoped. They, and locally trusted organisations, understand that there are a range of reasons why this might be the case. They mentioned that residents have been promised things and let down in the past – *'we've had so many false starts here'*. They said that people do not feel capable of taking on roles that are described as 'chair' and 'treasurer' which they do not feel capable of doing and, similarly, *'come to a meeting'* does not appeal to all people. This reflects the need for residents to identify a range of ways in which other residents can volunteer and support Big Local including more and less formal roles. *'To a certain extent, passivity'* was mentioned as a reason in one area for the lack of wider involvement and, in another, a resident observed that other people will come to an event or activity *'if you do it'* but do not want to be more involved. One reason suggested for this in another area is that *'money doesn't always solve problems'* so engaging with Big Local is not necessarily a priority for residents as they have other problems to worry about.

'Standard Practice': residents in two areas mentioned that they have been constrained in making progress by having to comply with the *'standard practice'* of organisations they are working with, mainly in relation to procurement. For example, residents in one area working with

a local authority have had to gather a number of quotes before making a purchase which residents feel has significantly delayed their progress. A second area has had to comply with the locally trusted organisations' procedures which residents feel prevent them from getting a *'quick fix'*. Residents are particularly frustrated by this as they had understood Big Local is *'resident-led'*.

Visibility: interviewees in five areas considered that the lack of visibility of Big Local in their area affects people's perceptions of the progress made. Interviewees noted the lack of a base or a shop front means that Big Local *'isn't tangible'* and that people need to *'see visible change or they don't think anything is happening'*. Even where something visible does happen, residents do not always know it is related to Big Local. One locally trusted organisation observed that there is a long gap between a resident taking part in a consultation *'and seeing something coming out the other end'*.

Language and 'paperwork': the quantity and content of the Big Local documents is said to have impeded progress by interviewees in three areas. Residents in one area feel there is too much information for volunteers to read through and feel it is written *'in a complete other language'* while the locally trusted organisation in the same area feels that a verbal explanation would help as *'the penny drops because of things you talk about, it doesn't drop because you've got a 15 page document in front of you'*.

Nature of the area: in three areas difficult relationships between parts of the area has held up progress. Meetings or events need to be held in a neutral place or in different parts of the areas to address a perception of the money only being for one part of the area.

Programme structure: interviewees in three areas mentioned aspects of the structure of Big Local that they feel inhibit their progress. Other than residents in one area mentioning not having specific deadlines as a challenge, the remaining comments were from locally trusted organisations and paid workers. These interviewees feel that the open nature of the programme with *'no agenda'* means they are starting from scratch and, while this is good because you are not being told the priorities for your area, it is a slower process. This perception fits with the philosophy of Big Local that it proceeds at the pace of the area. For one paid worker, the lack of clarity between the steps in the process, the role of the rep and the need to get sign off from the rep before moving to the next step has inhibited progress to date.

Lack of coordinator: residents in one area that does not have a worker, and the worker and locally trusted organisation in a second area that has not had a worker from the start, feel that the lack of a central coordinator has inhibited progress. As one resident who suggested getting a paid worker said *'there aren't these leaders with the time commitment and great ideas rushing forward'*. Interviewees acknowledge that a paid worker might not always be required but that the *'grassroots approach is necessarily a slow process'* and this is particularly the case where you do not already have *'a community that is willing to drive things forward'*.

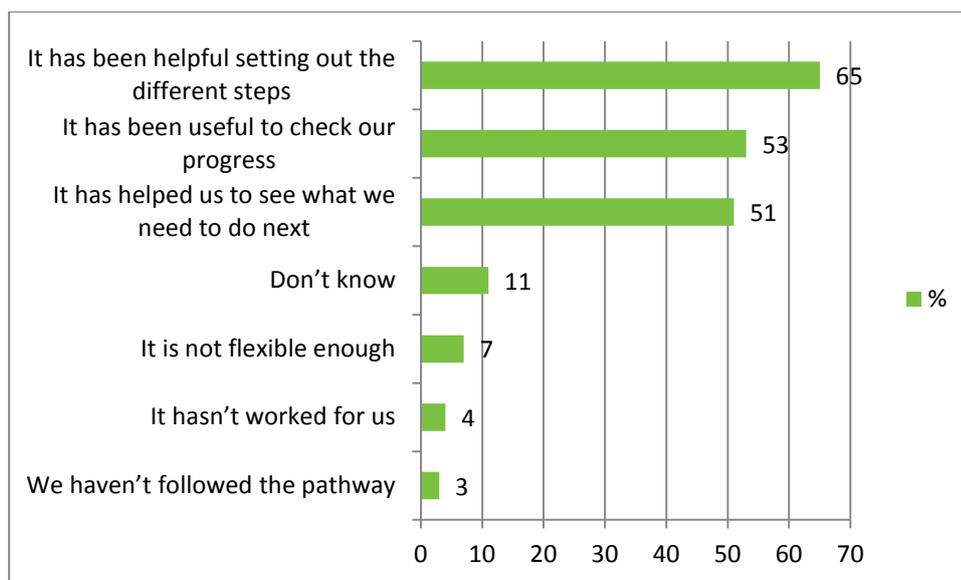
Overall, every area has experienced some form of hindrance to their progress, as might be expected with a programme that has some unique characteristics and is led by volunteer residents with the support of a network of reps and various locally trusted organisations. There is no clear pattern suggesting why some areas have experienced fewer hindrances than others. The skills, knowledge and experience of the individual residents, and their commitment and amount of time they have varies and may explain why some areas feel the language and 'paperwork' is hard to understand and others have not experienced difficulties. The difficulty in

engaging the wider community actively in Big Local is a widespread experience that may continue through the life of the programme. There does not appear to be one solution to this issue although the approach of the areas tends to be to have an active core of residents as far as possible, many of whom are people already actively involved in the community, and to then reach out and engage and consult with other residents who, for a range of reasons, are less able to be actively involved. Adopting this approach can provide residents on the partnership or steering group with the confidence that their decisions will reflect what others in the community want while enabling them to progress.

4.5 What has been the role of the pathway in progressing?

Big Local areas have a pathway which sets out the main steps they will go through in their Big Local journey as a guide. The survey and focus groups explored how helpful they have found the pathway as a structure to guide them through their journey. The survey shows that the pathway has been helpful to most residents that responded. As shown in Figure 4.2, half or more have found it helpful in seeing what to do next, checking their progress and setting out the different steps. Only a minority said they have not used it, found it inflexible and it has not worked for them.

Figure 4.2 Helpfulness of the Big Local Pathway



N=97

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

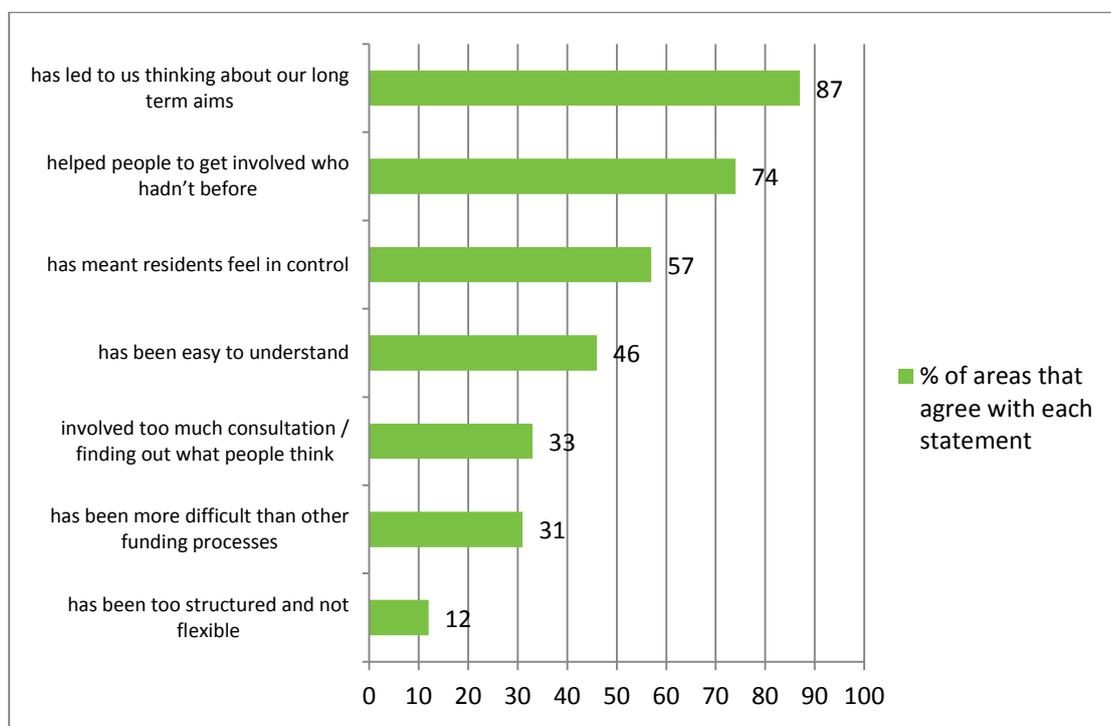
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100.

The focus group discussions provide an insight into why residents find the pathway helpful or not. Overall, there is no consensus over how helpful the pathway has been among those who have a view, although it is slightly more common for people to find it helpful than not helpful. Those that do find it useful generally use it to check where they have got to and what else is needed. Their comments reveal that whether people find it helpful relate to:

- **whether they see it as a flexible guide or a set of steps to which they have to stick rigidly:** those who see it as a guide to *'this is where you are heading'* and recognise you can move between steps at the same time are more positive than those who see it as *'too linear'*
- **people's character and preferences:** some interviewees recognise that it does not suit their personal preferences: *'I'm the sort of person who doesn't find it helpful'* and *'personally, I don't work well with things like that'*
- **whether they could see the relevance:** some people see it more as a monitoring process for Local Trust, and that they *'need to do it'*, than as a useful tool for developing Big Local in their area.

In the focus groups, the residents refer to the Big Local 'process' by which they mean more than the pathway, they mean the overall experience of progressing from hearing their area was going to receive £1m to the stage they had currently reached. For some, this stage is beginning to get a group together, for others getting people involved and, for a few, reaching the stage of their plan being endorsed. The survey of residents aimed to explore how the Big Local 'process' fits with residents' plans for their Big Local areas. Figure 4.3 shows that the majority of residents who responded said that the process has led them thinking about long term aims (87%) and helped new people to get involved in their community (74%). Most did not think that the process is too structured and inflexible, only 12% agreed that it is and, although most did not think it is more difficult than other funding streams, just under a third (27%) feel this is the case. Around half (57%) feel that the Big Local process means residents feel in control but slightly fewer think it has been easy to understand (46%) and a notable minority of a third of residents (33%) consider the process so far has involved too much consultation.

Figure 4.3 How the Big Local process fits with what areas are trying to achieve



% of areas that agree with each statement represents 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses. See Appendix C for full details N varied for each item from 84-97
 Source: Big Local residents survey 2013
 A series of single response questions.

Overall, the survey findings suggest that the Big Local pathway, and the process residents go through, is working for them, is sufficiently flexible and, indeed, is helping them think in the longer term and get more residents involved. However, this is not the case in all areas as some feel there is too much consultation and are finding the process difficult to understand. Although based on small numbers, there are indications that the stage the areas are at may be influencing their views on the process. For example:

- Areas that were part of the first 50 to be launched were slightly more likely to agree that that the process has been more difficult than other funding processes (42%) than those in the second 50 (22%) or third 50 (30%). This may be because the process was being refined after the first 50 had begun their Big Local journey.
- Areas launched in the second 50 were more likely to think that the process involved too much consultation (41%) compared to those in the first 50 (29%) and third 50 (29%). This may be because they are more likely to be in the consultation phase of the process.

4.6 What is their approach to decision-making?

At the time of the visits, the main decision-making points that residents felt they had encountered were:

- deciding what to do for Getting Started
- developing and agreeing the plan
- agreeing distribution of small grants
- appointing a paid worker.

Nearly all areas had submitted a Getting Started proposal, and undertaken activities for this phase. Some (three areas) had developed their plan (and two of these had it endorsed) and four areas were awarding small grants. In general, the steering groups and partnerships said they have not encountered any significant difficulties or issues in reaching decisions between them. Indeed, it is common for the residents to report that they typically reach a **consensus** (seven areas). Sometimes this came after someone, usually the rep, has made some suggestions or they looked at examples from other areas. The residents then explored and discussed different options or just had a common view, so there was no debate. They attribute their ability to reach consensus to having a common vision and that they '*all want to do good for the area*' and their manner and relationships: '*we're very gentle with each other, we don't go head to head*'. This perspective is matched by the views of locally trusted organisations who consider that the nature of the people helps them to reach a consensus noting, for example, that '*there is no one person causing problems*'.

Interviewees in five areas said that they hold a **vote** on occasion, where a consensus cannot be reached, or where they feel it is needed for a specific decision such as on a logo or budget headings for the Getting Started proposal. Votes are usually by a show of hands and they take a simple majority.

The other approach to decision-making has been to form **sub-groups** or sub-committees of people who have responsibility for a specific activity. This can be a one off activity such as an event, or an on-going activity such as marketing and communications. In these cases relevant decision-making is 'delegated' to these groups who then usually report back to the steering group.

While on the whole interviewees did not report any difficulties in decision-making, or *'not enough to pull the group apart'*, where there have been disagreements they have usually been resolved by someone backing down.

Decision making for Getting Started proposal

One area's approach to deciding about how to use their Getting Started funds exemplifies the suggestion – discussion – suggestion – consensus approach. The rep met with a 'finance' sub-group and suggested some areas they would like to allocate their Getting Started funding to. They discussed these *'a few times and things got changed around'* as some residents felt too much was allocated to one area and not enough to another. The finance group then shared this with the wider steering group who approved it. They felt it was important that it was not *'set in stone'* and so had kept some flexibility in the proposal.

Although this section has shown that decision-making to date has not been difficult or contentious in general in the areas visited, interviewees sometimes observed that they anticipated that it might become more difficult in future. They noted that when they begin to make decisions about *'how to spend the million'*, which most had not yet done at the time of the visits, they might find there were more disagreements and more debate needed between members of the partnership. Some interviewees also feel that other residents in the wider community might challenge the partnership members more about their decisions and that they might *'take more flak from residents'* in future and they will need to be able to explain their decisions. As one locally trusted organisation interviewee said *'I think the challenging times are ahead – we are getting to the point where it's real and it's serious'*.

4.7 How will Big Local evolve in future?

Reflecting on how they imagined Big Local would evolve in future, some interviewees feel that it is not possible to say. Sometimes this comment is based on their view that *'Big Local will evolve as the people evolve'*, as a resident expressed it, and that a resident-led programme should change and not be fixed. Others reflected on the wider issues and context that will influence how Big Local evolves in future specifically cuts in local authority funding, changes to the welfare system and the difficulties with the economy. These interviewees feel that these wider issues will have an unpredictable effect on Big Local and, as three mentioned, an area with Big Local funding might not receive other funding from the local authority because they will allocate their scarce resources elsewhere perceiving that the Big Local area already has funds.

Although some interviewees found it hard to predict how Big Local would evolve, others' views either related to changes in the area they hoped to achieve through Big Local, or to their approach to Big Local itself.

Approach to Big Local

There are different views on how they will spend the money. Residents in four areas, and locally trusted organisations in four areas (three of which were different to the four residents' areas) were clear that they aim to make the money work for them and to have some left at the end of the 10 years.

'at the end of 10 years, it shouldn't be that the money has run out, there should be a legacy for that area'

'we don't want to spend £100k a year and then it's gone, we want to be able to have money left at the end'

'if you didn't have a million quid where would you go to make this happen and then if we bring the million quid back in then...we have something to bring to the party and funders may look at you with a heck of a lot more interest'.

They recognise a tension between this aim and what the residents in their community want which was to 'see results quickly' or, as one resident described it, to 'fritter' the money. Strategies being considered to address this are to engage with the residents and help them to think more longer term by explaining 'you've got to imagine in 10 year's time when your two year old is 12...it's going to be their future'. Another strategy is to attract more money: 'if we can get some match funding then maybe we can be more liberal' said a resident in one area while another had already got some matched funding from a local community foundation for the small grants they planned to give out.

In contrast to the aim in these areas to 'bring money back in' and have money at the end of 10 years, residents in another area are considering spending most at the start of the 10 year period to have greatest effect. As a resident said: 'we can have real influence by spending quite hefty chunks of money sooner rather than later and then being there to support'. However, the perception within an area of how they will approach spending the funds is not always the same. In one area, where residents said they aim to have money remaining at the end, another interviewee in the same area said they imagined the money will 'all be spent' before the end of the 10 years. Interviewees in two areas said that they expect some or all of the funds to be distributed in smaller pots for 'quick fixes' and for projects that do not require much funding that could benefit from 10 years of funding of two or three thousand pounds a year. One of these interviewees also expected there will be a mix of these smaller grants and 'big physical projects so people can see the difference'.

Interviewees in six areas talked about how people in the community will be more aware of Big Local in the future and some of these think the Big Local partnership and its role in the community may evolve in future into a hub or forum. For example, residents in one area suggested the partnership will be 'a respected group to help and support' others in the area. In another area, residents imagined it would be a 'forum' for people in the area that will connect networks, while a community organisation representative in another area hoped it will lead to everyone knowing what is going on in an area.

Another theme is the ambition that Big Local will involve more young people in future. Interviewees in four areas mentioned the value of involving younger people now because they will be experiencing Big Local during their formative years as they grow up and this could be influential. One interviewee mentioned involving young people aged 10 as 'they have hope at that age', have lots of ideas and would be 20 when Big Local came to an end, while residents in another area reflected a similar view when they suggested engaging with students at secondary school as they would be in their twenties after 10 years and would 'grow up valuing the community'.

Changes in the area

Interviewees talked about the changes they hope to see in the future in the Big Local area which may reflect their priorities and vision for Big Local.

- **A tighter knit community:** 10 interviewees in nine areas, including six resident focus groups, explained that they hope as Big Local evolves it will '*put the heart back*' into their community. For example, they mentioned having a '*proud community*' and a '*good reputation*' in future with '*kids pleased they come from here*'. As part of being tighter knit, they hope to see more connections between people in the area and people more engaged with each other in future. The longer-term nature of Big Local was said by one locally trusted organisation interviewee to have '*the potential to snowball*' as residents who were currently not engaged with it might, in time, see it as '*something they want to get involved in supporting*'.
- **Local ownership:** five interviewees across six areas hope that, in future, Big Local will have led to residents feeling they have more ownership, including running organisations that have been set up by residents in the area. Alongside this, there is a hope that residents will feel that their views are important and it '*doesn't matter where you live or your accent*' and that they will be making decisions and will be trusted, although some residents in one area are cautious about whether this will happen in practice.
- **The issues in their area would improve:** interviewees across areas frequently identified specific issues that they hope will improve as Big Local evolves. These reflect their priorities discussed in Chapter 3 and include:
 - more employment locally – including opportunities for young people to become skilled (five areas)
 - feeling more safe – with less drug use, burglary and anti-social behaviour and feeling safer to walk at night (four areas)
 - a community hub – (four areas)
 - better housing (two areas)
 - more green spaces (two areas)
 - more wealth (two areas).

Overall, these views can be summed up in the comments of a locally trusted organisation interviewee who said:

'I hope that it will make a real difference in improving things. I think it's a big ask for that amount of money to, you know, change the face of an area, but I think that it will lead to improvements that will make things better for people.'

4.8 Conclusion

Overall Big Local areas are making slower progress than they expected but they are generally content with this as they recognise the need to take time to consult and to plan. However, the resident-led nature of the programme means that the amount of time the volunteers are able to dedicate to meeting, and to taking action between meetings is limited and this is reflected in the progress they have made. Big Local is flexible and areas can set their own timeline, as long as they complete by February 2026, so the residents can progress at a rate that suits them. However, it is evident that the actively involved residents encounter some frustration from people in the community who do not see any outcomes yet for the £1m the area has been awarded. This tension of the need to take time to plan, and to find time as volunteers to help the programme progress, with the need for people in the community to see outcomes is a particular challenge for the residents and the supporting organisations in the areas.

5. Support for Big Local areas

Key messages for Local Trust

- The rep, who represents Local Trust in the areas is the most widely used source of support. Nearly all areas indicated the rep has been very or quite helpful, suggesting that the rep model of support is effective.
- The locally trusted organisation is also a key source of support to residents, helping provide connections, project administration, linking residents to training and development and helping when things get tough. The role of the locally trusted organisation extends beyond holding the funds. It is evident they also provide additional support to residents in areas and Local Trust may wish to explore whether they can make more use of locally trusted organisations as an additional source of support for residents in Big Local areas.
- While most areas do not have a paid worker, those that do find them helpful and they perform a range of roles, typically project management and administration, helping to generate ideas and connecting people to other networks.
- Opportunities to meet Local Trust at spring events are valued for clarifying, explaining and inspiring.
- Residents generally value meeting with other areas to share experience, gather new ideas and for reassurance and there is value in supporting them to do this.
- There may be value in areas learning from outside their Big Local areas and Local Trust may wish to consider how to support residents further to do this.
- Learning events with a specific focus have been helpful for their content but also the opportunity to meet other areas.
- Areas have a varied range of future support needs. The two types of support that are most commonly identified are help in getting people involved, and making the most of the money. Local Trust may wish to focus on these areas of support across areas. Other support needs were less widely needed and so can be targeted at specific areas. This suggests a need for a blend of the flexible resource of the rep and targeted support.

Key messages for areas

- The locally trusted organisations can provide more services than just holding the funds and there may be value in exploring whether they can link residents into other networks or direct them to learning and development opportunities, if they have not done so already.
- There is value in being in contact with other Big Local areas who can provide inspiration and an opportunity to learn from their experience.
- It is worth areas exploring through the rep or locally trusted organisation whether there are organisations or groups not in the Big Local area or another Big Local area who could inspire or provide ideas.
- If an area has a support need that Local Trust cannot meet, explore within the network

of other Big Local areas to see if someone has the skill, knowledge or experience you could draw on.

5.1 Introduction

Local Trust and the delivery partners for Big Local offer a range of support for people in Big Local areas. Some of this support, such as the rep, is provided on an equal basis to all Big Local areas. Other support can be accessed by areas as they choose, such as:

- the networking and learning events provided by the NANM
- visits to other Big Local areas or buddying with another area
- the spring events that followed the second and third launches of Big Local areas
- support with developing their environment from the Living Space Project
- guidance and support on social investment provided by Small Change and the specialist social investment reps
- support for star people and star partners and social entrepreneurship provided by UnLtd.

The central team at Local Trust also provide ad hoc support as needed in, for example, managing the media as well as information, guidance and templates through their website.

In addition to the support provided by Local Trust and the delivery partners, residents in areas may also access support from their locally trusted organisation, or from other local organisations such as a CVS or the local authority. They can also choose to use some of their funding, or their £1m allocation, to pay for a worker or for consultants or training.

This chapter will explore what support the residents in case-study areas, and those that responded to the survey, use and how helpful they find it. It will then present what other support they expect they would like in future.

5.2 What support have people in Big Local areas had?

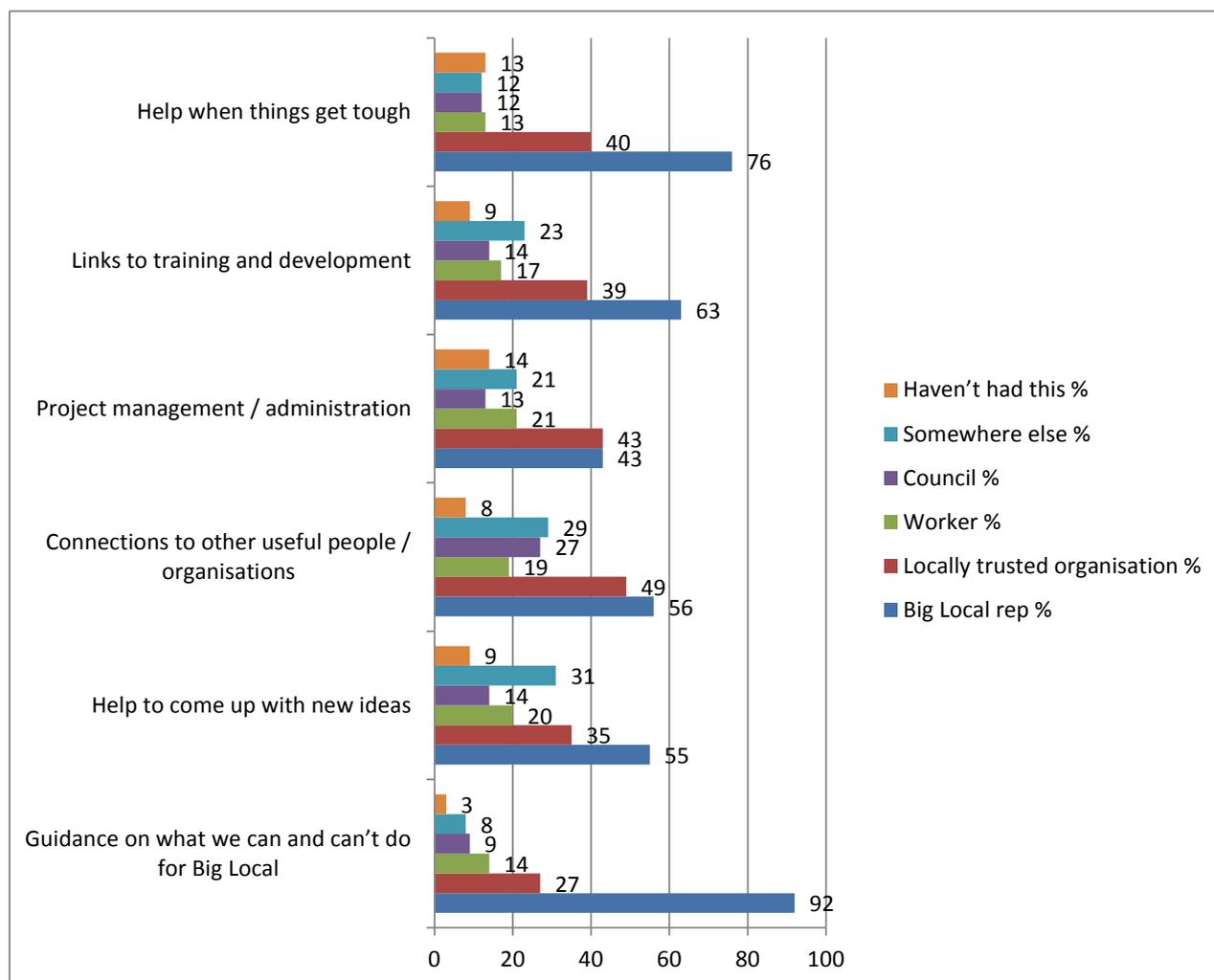
As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, residents in areas have typically been influenced and helped on their Big Local journey so far by their rep, their locally trusted organisation, a paid worker where they have one and in some cases, by formal training. This is reflected in the wider experience of residents, as can be seen in their responses to the survey in Figure 5.1.

5.2.1 Sources of support received

The responses from residents show that 96% have received at least one type of support. Their responses indicate the importance of the rep as a source of guidance and support. The reps are the most common source of help with what residents can and cannot do, providing help when things get tough and providing links to training and development opportunities. As discussed in Chapter 3, the networks that the locally trusted organisation and the rep bring are also helpful for residents, in around half of the areas surveyed, by providing connections to other useful people and organisations. The locally trusted organisation's role is most frequently providing contacts in other organisations and supporting with project management and administration. The networks of the council are also used by residents in about a quarter of areas and the council provides other forms of support for a minority of areas.

While not every area has a dedicated 'Big Local worker', among those that do, the worker fulfils a range of support roles, most commonly project management and administration and coming up with new ideas. Many areas say they have received some support from somewhere else. For example, 31% have help coming up with new ideas from somewhere else and 29% have help with connections to other useful people or organisations. This other support comes from a variety of sources including residents, friends and family, other voluntary and community sector agencies and statutory organisations such as the NHS.

Figure 5.1 Where residents get help and support from



N= 99

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

A multiple response question: more than one answer could be given so totals do not equal 100.

5.2.2 Other sources of support received by case-study areas

Residents and other interviewees in the case-study areas also highlight other sources of support and guidance they have used. Residents in four areas, and locally trusted organisations in two other areas, mentioned that they have attended one of the **spring events** run by Local Trust when new areas were launched. They found these 'inspiring', valued the opportunity to 'think differently' and said 'it opened my eyes'. For some, the events had helped to make Big Local more clear as one resident's comment illustrates:

'I think anyone who wants to get involved in BL should go to one...it explains it...if you don't want people taking minutes put your dictaphone on the table and record it...Big Local are happy with that...as long as it's clear and transparent'.

They usually also value the opportunity to meet people from other Big Local areas, commenting *'it's actually the talking, the networking that's valuable'*. They gave examples such as being reassured by seeing the different stages areas were at, taking part in a useful group session that had been arranged for areas at a similar stage, rather than from a similar geographical area, and being inspired by what other areas are doing such as taking over a shop, or making clothes and selling them.

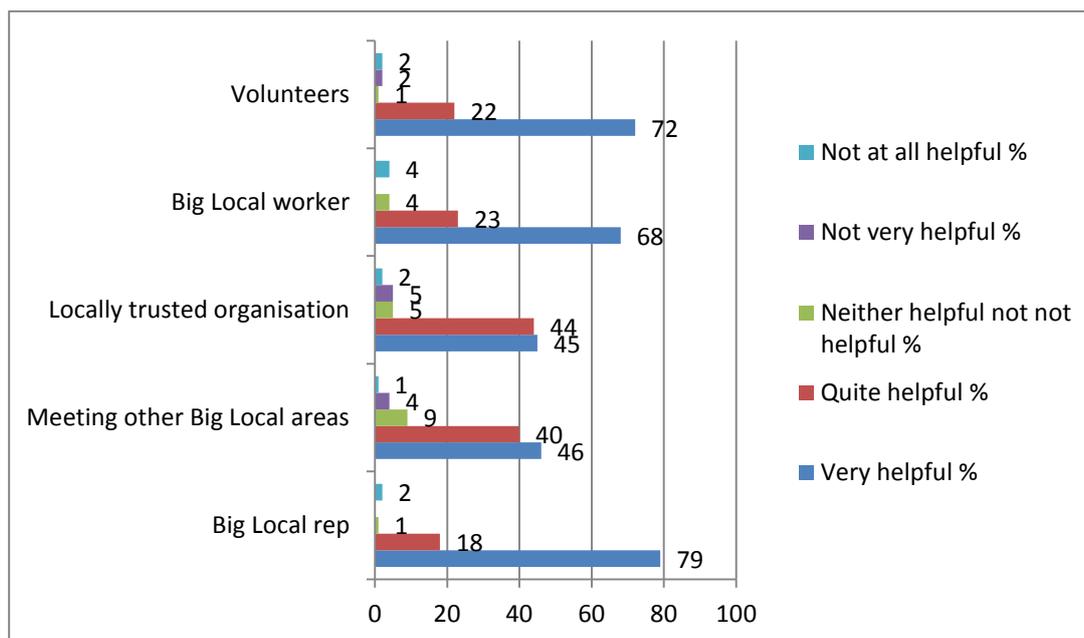
Similar views were expressed by residents in three areas and one locally trusted organisation that have **visited other Big Local areas**. Such visits are described as *'enormously important'* and have helped residents to see that *'there is no right way'* and that *'we're doing OK'*. Residents in one area that was considering getting a paid worker had valued seeing how the paid worker in another area was working to help them refine how they wanted one to *'facilitate rather than take over and run it'* in their area.

Residents and locally trusted organisations in two areas mentioned that people from their area have attended **networking and learning events** run by NANM on social media and on social investment. As well as the content of the event, the residents who attended, again say they appreciate meeting people from other areas who have experience and help them to make decisions. For example, residents in one area decided that it was possible to start to pay a resident, who had previously been volunteering their time, after discussing this with another Big Local area. This example illustrates the benefit of networking with other areas not only to stimulate ideas but also to confirm decisions.

Locally trusted organisations for two areas mentioned that the steering groups have made use of **external experts** to help inform and guide them. These include for example, community banking experts and environmental experts. In a third area, the locally trusted organisation was planning to bring the local credit union in to meet with the steering group once they had a clearer idea of their plans.

5.2.3 Helpfulness of support received

Figure 5.2 What has been helpful so far on the Big Local journey



N differs for each item from 76-97

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

A series of single response questions. Due to rounding, responses may not sum to 100

The responses to the survey again reveal the value of the Big Local rep to residents in the majority of areas. Only 2% of residents who responded feel their rep has not been helpful. Locally trusted organisations are also felt to have been helpful by most areas and, where they have a paid worker, most have found them very or quite helpful and, as discussed in Chapter 3, they were together with the rep and the residents themselves, the most influential on areas' progress. As well as these formal roles, volunteers in an area are widely regarded as having been very or quite helpful, illustrating the critical role of volunteers in Big Local. Generally, residents have found most types of support they use helpful, although it is evident that a minority have not found visiting other areas or their locally trusted organisation helpful. Further analysis shows that areas from the first 50 to be launched were slightly less likely to say that their rep was 'very helpful' (64%) than areas from the second 50 (88%) and third 50 (83%), however when 'very helpful' and 'quite helpful' responses are combined there is little difference across the three groups. This difference may occur because areas that were launched first may be less reliant on reps than those launched at a later date. This difference is unlikely to be related to characteristics of the rep as they often work in a number of areas that were launched at different times.

5.3 What more support would people in Big Local areas like?

Reflecting on what further support they might need, the observations of interviewees suggest that the needs are largely unique to each area and on the whole no common themes of the support needed emerged from the interviews. In addition, to some extent, as one locally trusted organisation said '*I'm not sure that they actually know what help they need yet, or haven't articulated what help they need*'. The varied areas of additional support requested include the following:

- **More clear guidance:** residents in four areas want clarification of what they can and cannot do and for guidance to be more clear and in plain English. Residents in one

area put this request in the context of their sense of responsibility and *'fear of getting it wrong'*.

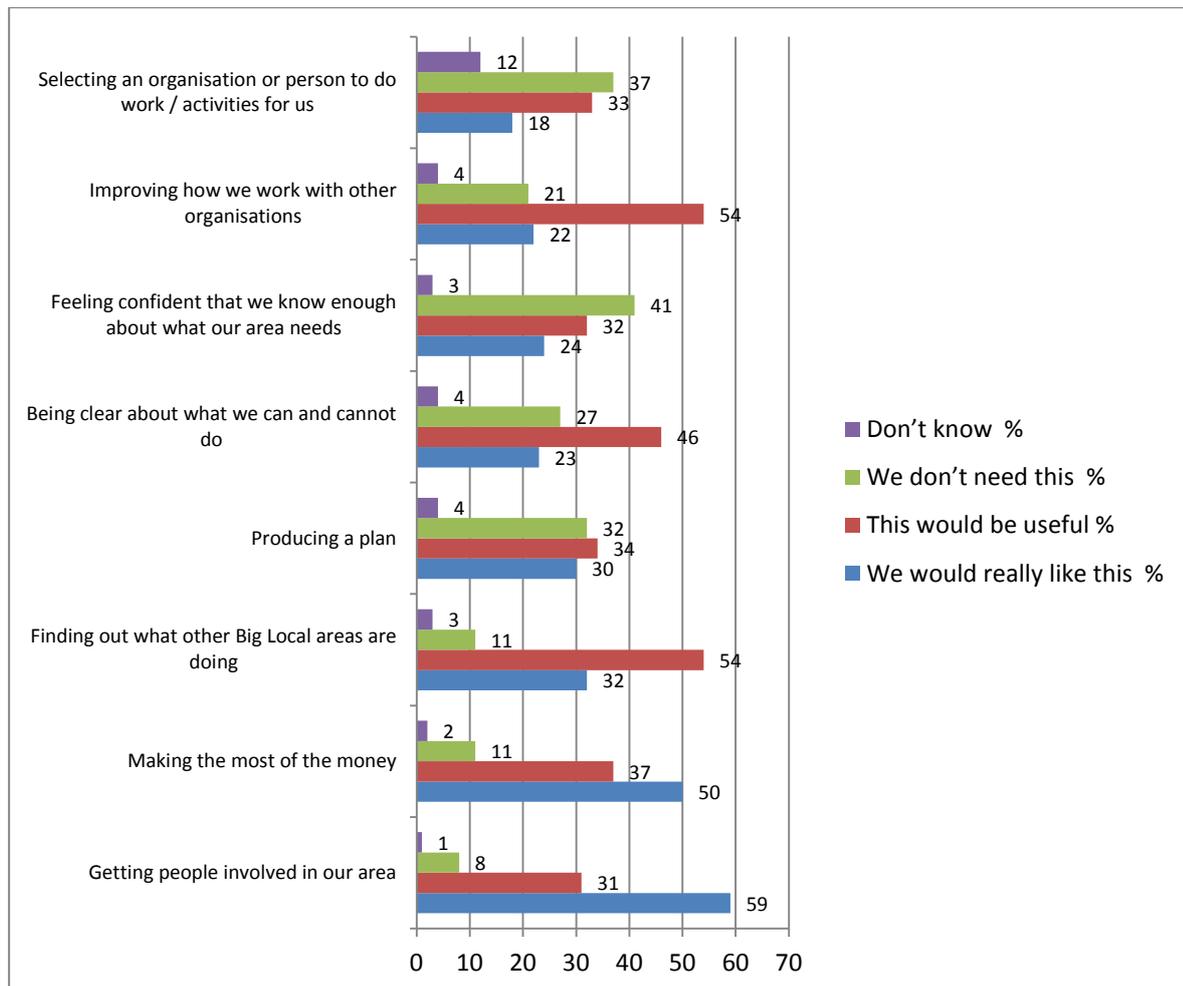
- **Help with local authorities:** residents in two areas would like support with working with their local authority. In one area, the residents want more help understanding the council's remit and what they can do with Big Local that is outside this remit, which they see as a *'grey area'*. As they explained, where their aim is *'as amorphous as "heart of the community"'*, it is not easy to be clear about what the council is required to do to support that aim. The second area, where relationships between the residents and the local authority are fragile, residents want a third party such as Local Trust to be an advocate for them to help the council to *'see we are worth helping'*.
- **Sharing practice:** Interviewees in two areas feel there is value in sharing practice. This included them sharing with other areas so they *'don't make our mistake'* of using different questions to consult with different groups so they then cannot compare responses, and learning from other areas of what has worked well, what has worked less well and what have other areas done in what timescale.
- **Someone to coordinate:** residents in two areas (both in the final 50 areas) that do not have a paid worker feel that having someone paid to coordinate would help them.
- **Managing relationships and expectations:** residents in one area, and the locally trusted organisation in a second area, said they would like more support with managing the expectations of residents and managing difficult relationships in meetings, where residents are expressing negative views. The residents are conscious that, having consulted, residents in the community might ask for something, such as a train station or swimming pool, that is not achievable with the Big Local funding and they want to know how best to feed back that something is not possible.
- **External experts:** one locally trusted organisation considers that people in areas themselves should look outside of their area and *'draw on very innovative people...and groups who are outside the Big Local area'* for guidance and inspiration.
- **Social investment:** in one area the locally trusted organisation feels more support on social investment would be helpful to get people to think about this when planning what to do with their funding.
- **National brokerage:** the paid worker in one area feels there would be benefit in Local Trust using its position nationally to leverage support from large corporate organisations. They could be asked to provide mentors or contribute some funds which could form a central pot and distributed to Big Local areas.
- **Complex problems:** the paid worker in one area feels more help is needed in working out how to address some of the very difficult and complex problems in an area such as unemployment.
- **Practical support:** an interviewee in an area that is moving into the plan delivery phase mentioned the need for support with project management and budgeting.

It is evident that areas have varying support needs when asked an open question. The survey asked residents to identify from a pre-determined list what they would like more help with. As can be seen in Figure 5.3, **help with getting people involved and with making the most of the money were the two most commonly required areas of support** as half or more of the respondents say they would really like some help with this and around a third think it would be useful. The need for guidance on what they can and cannot do, which was mentioned by residents in the focus groups, would be helpful to most areas but around a quarter do not feel they needed this. Areas that are at different stages in their development may need different

types of support. There are mixed views on whether residents in these areas would value more help with producing a plan. While around a third would really like help with this, a similar proportion say they do not need it. Analysis of the responses from areas that launched at the three different time-points showed that those from the first 50 to be launched are less likely to want support with developing a plan (29% said ‘they would really like this’ or ‘this would be useful’) than areas from the second 50 (77%) and third 50 (80%).

There is support for finding out what other Big Local areas are doing but this is more often seen as something that would be useful rather than really needed. The type of support that is least needed is help in feeling confident that they know what their area needs. 41% of respondents say they do not need support with this. This suggests that residents in Big Local areas are making progress towards one of the outcomes which is that ‘communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them’. There appears to be less of an essential need for help working with other organisations and with selecting someone to do work for the area but this may reflect the existing relationships with other organisations, which may already be good, and whether an area is considering asking someone to do work for them.

Figure 5.3 What residents would like more help with



N varies for each item ranging from 94 to 97

Source: Big Local residents survey 2013

A series of single response questions. Due to rounding, responses may not sum to 100

5.4 Conclusion

The role of the rep as the voice of Local Trust in areas appears to be functioning well as they are the main source of guidance on what residents can and cannot do and nearly all residents surveyed consider their rep has been very or quite helpful as a source of support. The need for a flexible resource such as this, who can be responsive to the needs of an individual area, is supported by the evidence of the wider range of support needs identified by areas who were visited. The varied range of needs reflect the different contexts, local issues, existing skills and capacity of the residents. Nevertheless, the responses to the survey suggest there are some common areas where support would be valued, particularly support with getting people involved and making the most of the money.

6. Conclusion

6.1 What does this mean for the development of Big Local in areas?

The learning arising from this research makes a contribution towards Local Trust's understanding of the journey areas take through Big Local. It helps to inform whether the Theory of Change¹² is working in practice and provides some evidence to assess Big Local areas' progress towards the intermediate outcomes:

- increased knowledge
- new connections or networks
- residents having greater influence.

It also provides an assessment of what components of the Big Local model have contributed towards Big Local areas' development.

What influenced the development of the Big Local areas?

Key components of the Big Local model include that it:

- is explicitly resident-led
- involves residents in the area who are not usually involved
- supports residents to build their capacity and skills
- has a central team at Local Trust who manage and guide the programme, oversee the other partners who support the programme, and provide direct support to residents in Big Local areas
- has a rep to support areas
- provides networking and learning events
- has specialist delivery partners providing support in social entrepreneurship, social investment and environment
- uses a locally trusted organisation to hold the funds so informal groups of residents can lead the programme
- has light touch rules and flexibility for residents in areas to follow their own priorities and timeframe
- has a pathway as a guide
- has a resident-led partnership that will work with a number of different organisations as needed to deliver their plan.

The evidence from the visits and survey shows that some components of the model have been very influential on how areas have progressed and other elements are still evolving.

The rep

The rep is widely valued as a source of guidance and support. The reps are seen in these initial stages as being among the most influential people on areas' development. This is more the case

¹² <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2013-04-29-Big-Local-theory-of-change.pdf>

where their manner and approach entail an appropriate balance of guiding and supporting and leading where needed. Where the rep has been less effective, for example in one area where there had been a break between one rep ending their involvement and a new one starting, there has been less progress. It appears that in some cases, the rep is needed as someone to get Big Local going, sometimes '*chivvying*' resident volunteers to keep it on track. Different levels and types of support are needed in areas with more and less capacity, whether this is in confidence or time. However, this cannot be predicted by whether residents in an area have prior experience of community activity. In most areas the steering group is built on members of existing groups, but despite this previous experience to some extent they either lack time or confidence to manage a longer term programme with a large amount of funding and some find this a daunting responsibility. The flexible resource of an experienced rep, who can adapt to different circumstances, appears to have been an important and valued part of the model.

The locally trusted organisation

While a key part of the role of the locally trusted organisation is to administer the funds for the residents in the area, their role extends beyond this and they are the second key source of support in an area. Some locally trusted organisations receive income through Big Local to fulfil their role administering the funding and supporting the area, but this is not always the case. The role of the locally trusted organisation is evolving in different areas and becoming a key source of information and support to residents.

The locally trusted organisations role is developing to include signposting residents to useful resources and linking to their networks. Through this support they could contribute to residents developing new ideas and solutions. The locally trusted organisations could be a useful additional conduit for information and guidance from Local Trust to residents.

Paid worker

The third key source of support (in areas that had one) is a **paid worker**. Choosing whether to have a paid worker is a local decision and it is evident that residents are on occasion deciding to do so. Five of the areas visited have a paid worker (albeit not always paid for by Big Local) and four were considering paying someone to support them in the future at the time of the visits. This could be seen as a resident-led solution to the issue of needing someone to coordinate Big Local on the ground, and the evidence from the case-study areas suggests that this is sometimes the case. However, it is also influenced by the locally trusted organisation or the rep in some places, from looking at what other areas had done, or from the history of the area where they have previously had someone else in such a role.

The paid workers in the case-study areas fulfil different roles and have different amounts of time to do so, ranging from a few hours a week to two days a week. In some areas it is largely administrative, in others they are completing the key documents required for Big Local such as the profile, plan or Getting Started proposal, while in others they are leading consultation, keeping Big Local on track, managing meetings and making connections. Getting a paid worker tends to be adopted as a solution to the problem of volunteer residents not having enough time as volunteers to 'do' Big Local. There are examples of residents in areas describing how they explored whether the volunteer residents could do the work that was needed without paying a worker and deciding that they could not.

The programme provides flexible funding so it could be argued that paying someone may be needed to get things going. However, there is no clear cut evidence that areas that have a paid worker have made more progress or were further into delivering their Big Local plan in the area and reaching their vision of making the area an even better place to live, compared to areas without a worker. For example, if you use reaching the stage of submitting the plan as a key measure of progress, of the five areas who were launched first, three had a worker and one of these had submitted their plan and had it endorsed while the other two had not. Two of the five areas who did not have a worker had submitted their plan and one had been endorsed. Nevertheless, areas who have a worker value this role and generally feel that they would not have made the progress they had without the worker. In other words, compared to other areas they might have been much further behind.

The risk of having a paid worker is that this one individual 'does' everything and does not build capacity alongside this and there is no skills transfer (where the issue is lack of skills, rather than just lack of time). There are indications in some case-study areas that, at this stage, this scenario is occurring. Consequently, there is a risk that adopting a paid worker approach may not help to build capacity in areas where this is lacking, which is one of the key outcomes required from Big Local. In addition, once the funding ends the worker leaves. So there is a challenge in helping people in areas address the very real issue that some lack time and confidence and strategic planning skills to do Big Local, by helping them to find solutions that do not just involve paying a worker but using the funds this would cost in different ways.

It may be possible to encourage areas who feel they need a paid worker, to build into their requirements for that worker, the need for them to have an approach to sharing or transferring their skills, or working alongside an 'apprentice' to help build capacity in the area. It may also be worth exploring in more detail how areas that are progressing without a worker are doing so. From the case studies, it appears that such areas have people with time (for example they are retired or not working) and with skills and confidence (for example project management or planning skills). This is coupled with a determination to use the Big Local money as much as possible to benefit the area and to try to avoid paying someone who may not be a resident to come in and do it for them.

Being resident-led

That the Big Local programme is resident-led is an important message that is generally recognised and welcomed by residents. People in some areas reported a level of cynicism and disenchantment with 'the council' not doing what people in the areas wanted and Big Local is seen in these areas as a valuable opportunity for residents to be in control. However, the residents who are actively involved are volunteers and it is clear that while they are doing what they can, sometimes they have insufficient time.

Although residents are expected to direct Big Local in their area, they are not necessarily expected to do the work they have outlined in their plan, but to work with other organisations and agencies to deliver the plan. It may take time for this resident-led programme to evolve and residents may not yet have all the skills and confidence to make Big Local happen in their area. The support of the rep and locally trusted organisation is important in helping build capacity but they are not in a position to create time.

The programme design allows for residents to take time and progress at their own rate and the aim is to gradually change attitudes and increase skills among residents in the Big Local areas,

so the perceived slowness (from a resident perspective) may not be an issue. However there is a risk that Big Local will lose momentum in communities. At a local level, the actively involved residents have to manage the consequences which can include frustration from the wider community, and residents ending their active involvement in Big Local due to the lack of obvious progress. As the process is taking more time than was generally expected there may be value in ensuring that the likely timeframe is communicated to the wider community, alongside the reasons for this, and for there to be some shorter-term visible outcomes, clearly linked to Big Local, that the community can see.

The importance of characters

Across all of these roles, what emerges as important and influential is the individual people and their characteristics, skills and networks regardless of the role they are playing. For example, a resident who is able to give the time, has the skills and is committed to driving Big Local in a certain direction can make a difference to how it evolves. Similarly a rep whose approach builds trust, is non-directive and supportive and can bring energy and ideas from their wider experience will affect how Big Local starts and evolves. Councillors who have good relationships within the community and are actively involved with residents can help bridge the relationship between the residents and the council. Overall, the approach, character, relationships and networks of the individual, or group of individuals, is one of the key factors that can make a difference between whether Big Local works or not. It could be argued that success is likely to relate to whether people in an area can initially find the 'magic people' who are community minded. Those people who want to do something good for their community, whether they are a resident, paid worker, councillor or locally trusted organisation representative can all be helpful. At the same time, Big Local areas will need to find and encourage more of those people to become the active residents for the future.

Progress towards the intermediate outcomes

In the Theory of Change, Local Trust set out the indicators of what they might expect to see if residents are increasing their knowledge, developing new connections or networks and having a greater influence. This research provides some insight into progress towards these outcomes.

- **Increased knowledge:** the sample of residents we spoke with have sometimes, but not always, accessed learning events. Where they have, they found them useful and all opportunities for meeting with people from other Big Local areas are valued. The survey findings suggest that in most cases, meeting areas is helpful. There are some early indications of residents increasing their knowledge, particularly in relation to thinking about how to invest the money and make it work. The survey findings show that this is an area where residents would appreciate more support. It is not the case in all areas that residents are thinking of how to attract more funds or invest to get a return and it appears that the rep and the locally trusted organisation are important in encouraging this thinking and inspiring residents to think differently. The locally trusted organisations could, therefore, be an important ally in helping to increase knowledge of the opportunities that a £1m fund over at least 10 years can bring.
- **New connections and networks:** in many cases the process of establishing an interim steering group has entailed bringing together representatives from different community groups, parts of the area and, in some cases, statutory services too. This shows that the process of Big Local has led to improving connections between

different individuals and groups in an area. Alongside this, the reps, locally trusted organisations and paid workers are also said to be using their networks to bring advice, guidance and ideas to the Big Local steering groups. This suggests that Big Local on the ground is, in some places, a catalyst to make connections between people and organisations. The connections between areas are developing as people attend spring events, learning events and visit other areas and have an opportunity to meet and learn from others' experience. These opportunities are generally valued and could be said to be enhancing the networks of people across different Big Local areas.

- **Residents having greater influence:** the ability of residents to have influence over their area and what happens within it is likely to evolve over time. While there are some early signs of residents feeling empowered to be in control, such as in one area voting against councillors having voting rights in their partnership, there are also instances of residents feeling that their progress is being hindered by statutory organisations and having to comply with existing processes. There is also some evidence that residents are sometimes cautious about what they are allowed to do and over time it will be interesting to explore whether they move from feeling they need to seek permission to feeling more empowered to lead and direct change in their area. At this stage there is no clear evidence of the residents generally having greater influence, but it is apparent that some see this as a future goal and believe Big Local can help them to have more of a voice in future.

Appendix A:

Big Local timeframe 2010-2013

Month	Event
2010	
July 2010	Big Local announced by Big Lottery Fund, along with the first 50 Big Local areas (1-50)
November 2010	CDF-led consortium named as preferred bidder by the Big Lottery
December 2010	Getting People Involved round 1 funding becomes available to the first 50 Big Local areas
2011	
March 2011	CDF submit Big Local Trust business plan and manual of regulations
July 2011	CDF-led consortium awarded grant to manage Big Local and start implementation
July 2011	Getting People Involved round 2 funding becomes available to the first 50 Big Local areas
July 2011	First star people award given
September 2011	Reps assigned and start work in the first 50 Big Local areas
November 2011	Local Trust registered as a Company
2012	
February 2012	Launch of Local Trust
February 2012	The second 50 Big Local areas (51-100) announced
February 2012	Reps assigned to the second 50 Big Local areas
May 2012	Getting Started funding becomes available to the second 50 Big Local areas
December 2012	The final 50 Big Local areas (101-150) announced
December 2012	Reps assigned to the final 50 Big Local areas
2013	
March 2013	Getting Started funding becomes available to the final 50 Big Local areas

Appendix B:

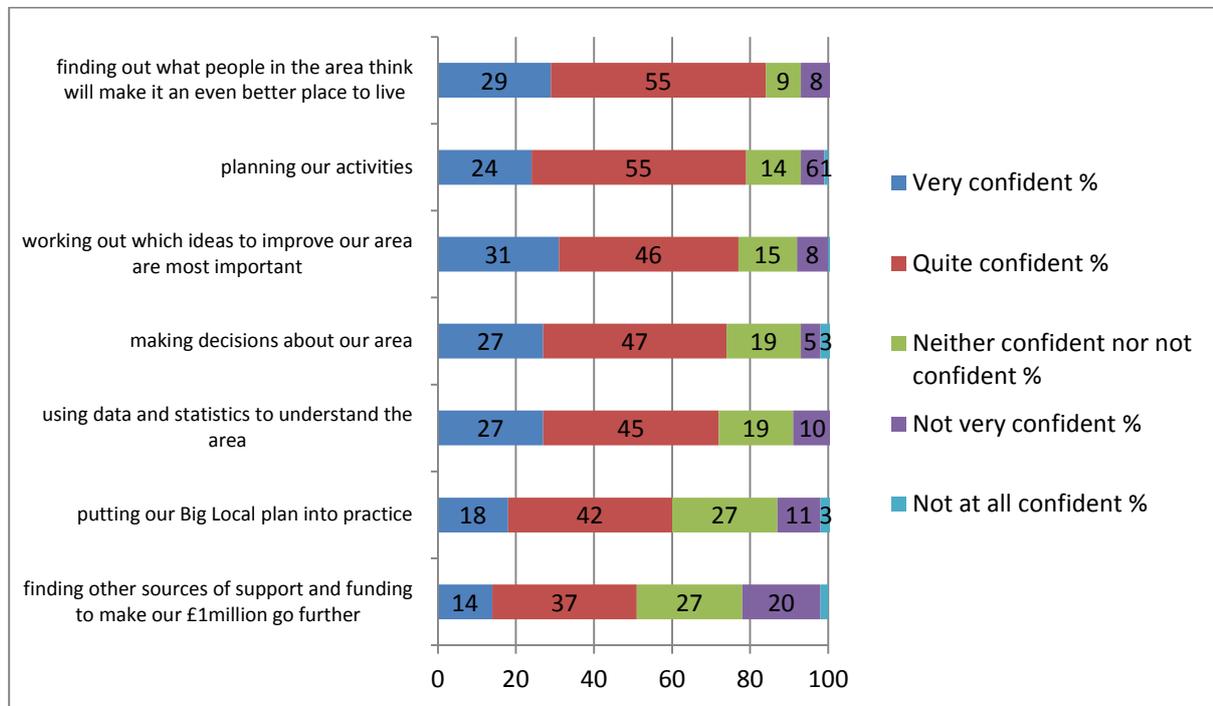
Map of 14 sample areas



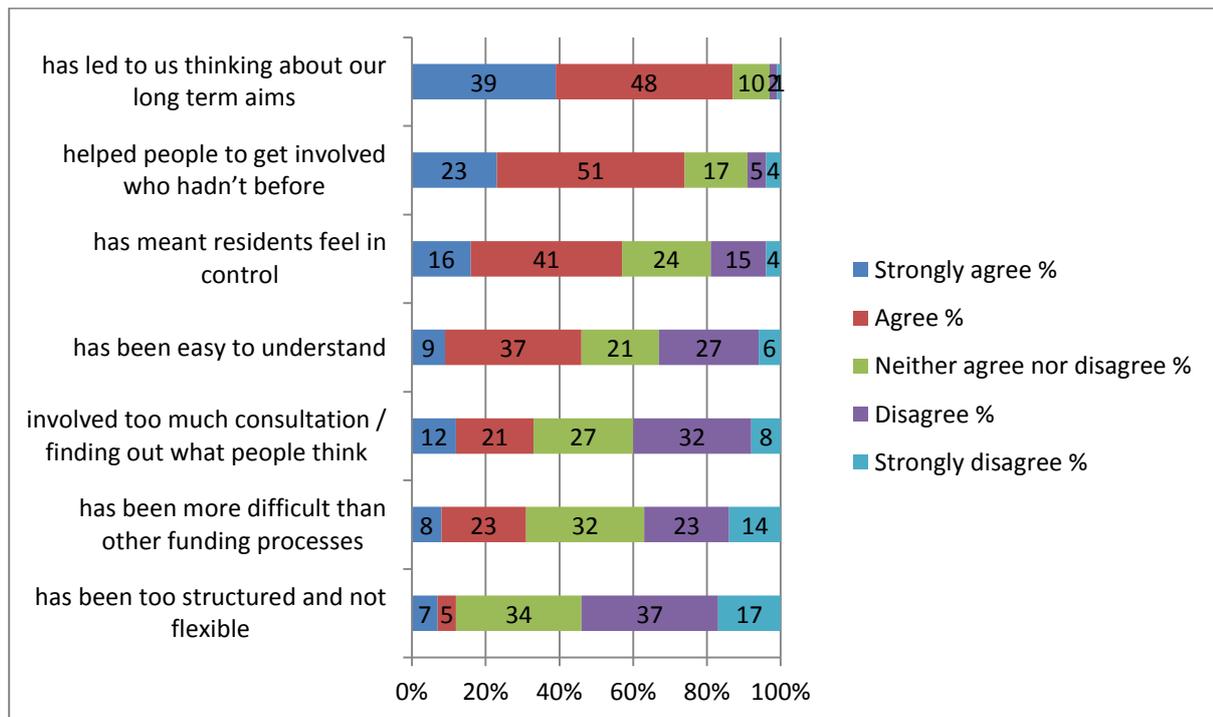
Appendix C:

Additional charts

Steering group/partnership confidence



How the Big Local process fits with what areas are trying to achieve



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The endowment for the Big Local programme is held by the Big Local Trust and overseen by Local Trust. The Big Local Trust was established by the Big Lottery Fund with a National Lottery grant of £196,873,499.

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