

**RESEARCH INTO THE IMPACT OF BIG
LOCAL:
IMPACTS FOUND**

May 2016

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1. SUMMARY

Introduction

Resources for Change was commissioned to undertake research “To capture the impact, achievements and learning of some of the earliest plans to be endorsed to demonstrate what the Big Local model has been able to achieve and draw out learning for other Big Local areas moving into delivery”. Additionally, the researchers investigated how areas are measuring impact.

20 Big Local areas were chosen from the first 50 endorsed plans, and researchers agreed a focus topic for the impact research with each area, e.g. children and young people, environment, economy and employment. The research team reviewed relevant documents and made a one day visit to the 20 areas, focussing on hearing from end-users/beneficiaries, but also from partnership members and workers. Targeted work on how areas measure impact was conducted using a short questionnaire and follow-up interview.

Summary of findings

Research respondents reported a wide variety of types of impact. In terms of impacts for individuals, the most frequently reported were:

- Skills development and learning.
- Confidence development.
- Involvement in the community.
- Employment and enterprise.
- Social and inter-personal benefits.

The most frequently reported collective/community impacts were:

- New services/facilities available and being used.
- Organisational benefits.
- Improved community spirit.
- Making the area nicer and people’s improved perceptions about the area.
- Having a voice.

A number of factors which had helped Big Local areas to achieve impact were noted, including (presented in no particular order): the Big Local partnership; skills, knowledge and experience available; working in partnership/a collaborative way; the availability of staff time; on-going engagement and communication with the local community; having a clear understanding, and consensus about what is needed; planning for activities, and gathering support for them; taking time to build a network and relationships with a wide variety of individuals and organisations.

Action points for consideration

The researchers propose a small number of action points for Local Trust.

Making the connection between delivery and impact

Areas have been asked to do a major piece of strategic planning. In their plans, they are articulating a vision, i.e. the impact they want their Big Local to achieve, as well as intentions for a variety of activities through which they intend to bring benefits to their area. It feels as if most areas are failing to retain this 'golden thread' between their activities and their vision, with the result that they are not asking enough about whether the activities are contributing towards achieving their vision as originally intended. In other words, there is a disconnect between the big strategic aim and the many small activities. In future, areas should be encouraged through all Big Local messaging and requirements such as the plan reviews to remember this linkage. Also, we wonder if areas are questioning whether they have chosen the RIGHT things to do in order to achieve their vision – an activity might bring about benefit, but is it the benefit they want? Or is it the best way to achieve their aims?

Raising the game – making impact a priority

It isn't that there is no impact, it's that areas are not thinking enough about it. It would be helpful to consider the routes that could be used to change this, including Local Trust guidance, Local Trust requirements for reporting, locally trusted organisations support, rep support, content at Spring Events and regional networking/training events etc. It is evident that messaging, and skills and knowledge development, have changed as the Big Local programme has moved along the pathway; now the time has come for a focus on impact.

Asking for more information about impact, supporting quality responses

This is relevant for areas and Local Trust. Areas can do more to ask more about impact, e.g. in the reporting back from commissioned services, in evaluating their own activities. As a community led programme, this will enhance the partnership's confidence in providing accountability back to their community about what has been achieved with the Big Local funding. Local Trust can place more emphasis on impact within the reporting it asks for from areas and reps, as well as its informal communications with areas without compromising the light touch approach. However, asking for information does not mean it will actually be received. There is a skills gap at partnership level, and probably amongst some of their service providers and many of their beneficiaries (e.g. community groups in receipt of a small grant), so the question arises about what Local Trust and others such as locally trusted organisations and reps can do to close the gap and enable quality recording and analysis of impact. The Big Local programme's existing mix of support, knowledge transfer and training mechanisms is the best place to start. Through these multiple routes, it will be possible to show that impact is highly important and relevant, and to equip areas with the tools, guidance and information that will help them to understand what impact is, why it is important, and the tools and techniques available for assessing the impact their Big Local is

making.

Conclusion

All of the areas included in this research described positive changes that have come about because of Big Local in their area.

The changes described so far are the 'right' ones, in terms of moving towards achieving Big Local's intended outcomes.

Some of the factors that Big Local areas explain are helping them to achieve impact are core elements of the Big Local model, i.e. the skills and knowledge within the partnership's membership, strong and on-going community engagement, taking a planned approach.

Each Big Local partnership is resident-led. The findings show considerable positive personal impacts for residents who have chosen to take an active role in their Big Local by becoming a partnership member, particularly those for whom this has been their first experience of such a role.

The Big Local areas present a clear sense of being on a ten year journey. This means that they are not always expecting impact yet, although they are keen to know that they are making progress. This research prompted the participating areas to carry out targeted reflection, all of whom completed their involvement with a recognition that they had achieved more than they had previously realised.

Area partnerships demonstrated in their behaviour, comments and documents that they have a very strong sense of commitment and accountability to their community. This is an impact in itself.

2. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the findings, analysis and recommended action points from our research into the impact of the Big Local programme. It sits alongside a series of three blogs which covers findings about how Big Local areas are measuring impact and 'top tips' for measuring impact.

Although Big Local's set up phase officially ran until March 2016, Local Trust wanted to find out about early impact of the programme. Some areas have had plans endorsed since October 2012.

2.1. PURPOSE OF THE WORK

In the brief, the purpose of the work was described as follows:

"To capture the impact, achievements and learning of some of the earliest plans to be endorsed to demonstrate what the Big Local model has been able to achieve and draw out learning for other Big Local areas moving into delivery".

Additionally, at the inception meeting, the added value of investigating how areas measure impact was discussed and agreed, and the workplan was tweaked to include this in the research.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

The approach was designed to build on the existing self-reporting from the areas, providing triangulation through aiming to hear first and foremost from the beneficiaries of activities funded by Big Local, as well as those people actively involved. Also the methodology was designed to seek depth about impact through focussing on one or two themes of activity, rather than looking at everything being done in a Big Local area.

The workplan followed a logical process from planning and preparation, through to information-gathering, then collation, analysis and reporting.

Research planning

Inception meeting to confirm research goals and understand the context.

Choosing 20 areas from the first 50 endorsed plans.

Preparing research materials.

Approaching areas to introduce the work and secure their agreements to take part. agree the area/theme of impact to focus on, and plan the visit.

Information-gathering

Review of each area's relevant documents, e.g. plans, plan reviews, rep reports, spend reports, and each area's website and social media.

One day visit to each area, focussing on hearing from end-users/beneficiaries, but also from partnership members and workers.

Follow-up work, including additional phone interviews and reading information supplied during the area visit.

Short questionnaire on how areas measure impact provided to the person with lead responsibility for this in each area.

Follow-up impact measurement interview with lead person, either by phone or face to face.

Collation, analysis and reporting

Write-up of each area's impacts, using a standard template.

'Freestyle' write-up of each area's impact measurement.

Production of SurveyMonkey questionnaire summary report.

Internal Resources for Change team analysis workshop.

Initial write-up.

Validation and learning workshop with Local Trust – feeding back headline findings about impacts found and areas' impact measurement, discussion about learning and action points.

Reporting – impacts found, impact measurement, blog. First drafts, Local Trust comments, revised final report and blogs.

2.2.1. Area visits

Area visits formed the core of the information-gathering activities, through which the researchers aimed to get direct input to the research from beneficiaries, service users, volunteers and participants, as well as Big Local partnership members, locally trusted organisations (LTO) and paid workers. The information-gathering techniques used depended on the theme being investigated and the choices and recommendations from the areas themselves. They included: informal conversations; facilitated discussions; workshops; interactive exercises; attending and observing partnership meetings; attending and observing activities funded by Big Local. Overall, the researchers heard directly from around 320 people.

2.2.2. Areas selected

The area selection process was based on several criteria: A wave 1 area, i.e. one of the first 50 Big Local areas to be announced; spend to date of over £100,000; a spread around England; not currently involved in any other Big Local research.

Big Local Area	Location
1. Allenton	Derby
2. Barnfield	London
3. Barrow Island	Cumbria
4. Clarkfield	Oldham
5. Fratton	Portsmouth
6. Greenmoor	Bradford
7. Harefield	Southampton
8. Heart of Pitsea	Essex
9. Kings Wood	Corby
10. Kingsbrook and Cauldwell	Bedford
11. Leigh West	Wigan
12. Mablethorpe	Lincolnshire coast
13. Marsh and Micklefield	Wycombe
14. North Brixton	London
15. North West Ipswich	Ipswich
16. Par Bay	Cornwall
17. Rudheath and Witton	Northwich
18. South Bermondsey	London
19. Warsop Parish	Nottinghamshire
20. Winterton	North Lincolnshire

2.2.3. Impact themes covered

The themes were selected by the areas themselves, based on activities that they thought would best demonstrate impact or that were a particularly important part of their on-going delivery. The aim was to get a spread of different themes, in order to cover a good selection of the sorts of activities typical in Big Local plans. The advantage of this approach is that the researchers – and the respondents in each area - were able to focus in depth on the chosen theme for that area; however, the disadvantage was that it was not possible to capture the overall impact of Big Local in an area.

- Children/families and young people (x 4).
- Training, employment, economy (x3).
- Environment (x2).
- Community hub/activities for older people.
- Community and community hub.
- Community hub and garden.
- Health and wellbeing.
- Advice services.
- Money/debt advice services and community.
- An attractive place, Traders' Association, community festival event.

- Community gardening and community cinema event.
- Recreation.
- Local issues - bus services and estate regeneration.
- Food and social eating.

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The core research questions were very straightforward, although the questions and ways of using them were adapted to suit different situations and audiences. The core questions were:

- What's changed?
 - Positive or negative.
 - Expected or unexpected.
 - For whom?
- What's helped and hindered in achieving these changes?
- How do you know what's changed?

Examples of how we adapted and probed around these questions include:

- What difference has it made for you?
- What changes do you think it has made for the area?
- What differences do you think the activities have made for the people who've got involved?
- Have there been particular things that really helped with making the activities a success?
- What has made it more difficult to make change happen?

3. FINDINGS

This section describes the variety of impacts that researchers heard about during the course of the research. (No analysis or value judgements are made here; these are presented in Section 4).

The priority for this research was to find out the types and range of impacts that the respondents had experienced or observed as a result of activities funded by Big Local, as well as what had helped or hindered the achievement of these impacts. There was no intention to assess different perceptions of impact, e.g. if partnership members identified different sorts of impacts to those identified by beneficiaries.

Also, it should be noted that the impacts that were discussed had not been quantified in the majority of cases. Respondents who were partnership members or workers frequently told us about the work they are doing to capture the impact that their activities are having, however they also stated that they were in the process of setting up impact measurement processes. This is discussed in the blog that accompanies this report.

In the information-gathering, researchers deliberately asked open questions. They used wording suitable for the audiences, including 'impacts', 'changes', 'differences', aiming to ensure that they were clear in expressing themselves and being clear about the information they wanted to know. Researchers asked people to think about impacts for themselves, their communities and in the areas.

With multiple responses from over 300 people, the findings about types of impact have been categorised in order to provide a useable and meaningful presentation format. The categories chosen were impacts for individuals (Section 3.1) and collective/community impacts (Section 3.2). Commentary on potential alternative categorisations is provided in Section 4. See Appendix 1 for a full listing of responses.

3.1. IMPACTS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Research respondents reported a wide variety of types of impact for individuals. The most frequently reported were:

- Skills development and learning.
- Confidence development.
- Involvement in the community.
- Effective preparation for, and getting into, employment and self-employment.
- Social and inter-personal benefits.

Other impacts for individuals included: personal wellbeing; changing behaviours; building aspirations; improved personal financial management; awareness and engagement with Big Local.

Skills development and learning covered some very specific skills, such as cooking skills (children and adults), garden plants and planting, IT/computers, first aid and use of a defibrillator.

There were also more generic skills, such as learning to take responsibility and anger management, as well as skills for the workplace e.g. confidentiality and professional boundaries, IT, project management.

Some qualifications were noted, i.e. the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card to enable people to get into construction work, the Security Industry Association (SIA) 'badge' which enables people to gain security work.

"Didn't get on in a college environment but thriving here".

Confidence development was described in terms of people's own experiences and their observations of others. Growing confidence was described in general terms, e.g. children and young people becoming happy and confident, as well as more specific illustrations, e.g. children learning to become more independent from families prior to starting formal pre-school. People also gave examples relating to individuals, such as someone having attended a leadership programme and having gained confidence from that, another respondent talked of one of their fellow partnership members now being prepared to speak in public, a mother described how her child with learning difficulties was now confident enough to go to the youth café.

"His communication with other children is better. He was very timid but now he's more confident".

"I've grown in confidence since volunteering here".

Others talked of their own experiences, e.g. about now feeling confident enough to answer the phone and to make calls.

Involvement in the community was noted in relation to Big Local and non-Big Local activities. Examples were given of people going on to attend other activities in the community as a result of having attended something funded by Big Local, and several

respondents talked about volunteering. This included people describing how a Big Local activity had provided an opportunity for them through volunteering to share learning, teach or in some way help other people locally, as well as an example of a former service user becoming a volunteer. There were also mentions of a more positive attitude in the community to volunteering and more of an “I could do....” attitude.

Employment and enterprise was discussed in both specific and general terms. Specifically, researchers were told about individuals who got jobs or work as a result of a Big Local funded activity, e.g. a security job, a recording contract with Island Records, self-employed paid work for local residents. In other cases, comments were more generic, e.g. providing more options for future jobs, gaining apprenticeships, having the opportunity to work, providing relevant experience and something to put on the CV. There were some impacts that related to preparing people for work, e.g. getting people into accommodation so they can access jobs, enabling previous apprentices to go to university and from there to jobs in cultural industries, getting out of a cycle of occasional agency work into a proper job with prospects, referrals to other industry programmes. Also, instances were noted where the Big Local partnership had provided work/contract opportunities for local people and businesses, including an electrician and an architect.

Social and inter-personal benefits were described for families, e.g. better relationships between parents and children, parents forming friendships, grandparents providing childcare having an opportunity to socialise, as well as more general benefits within the Big Local community, e.g. meeting people, making new friends, having fun, helping other people, children caring and looking out for each other, improved relationships between young people and statutory agencies such as the police.

“Parents have a chance to talk to other adults”

“It’s made a lot of difference to me, it’s great to meet new people, in a small group. It’s given me quite a lift”.

Personal wellbeing impacts were wide-ranging, including feeling healthier, feeling happier, fitness improvements, feeling valued in the community, coping with bullying, feeling good about yourself because of doing something for yourself and the people around you, building support networks for the future.

“I felt lonely, not appreciated, vulnerable and depressed (suicidal) – now I feel valued in the community, I’ve got a place in society, I’ve got strong views and I express them. I get bored easily if I’m at home.”

Changing behaviours were noted primarily in relation to children and young people, including becoming more enthusiastic at school, better school attendance, helping more at

home, staying out of trouble, reducing risk-taking behaviours related to drink, drugs or sex. Comments were also made about parents attending school activities which they had not done previously and people getting help with basic behaviour issues to enable them to access training and employment.

Aspirations included comments about parents having more aspirations for their children, providing a role model and enabling people to see what is possible.

“Meeting people who inspire me”

Improved personal financial management related to two Big Local areas within this research in particular. Impacts that respondents noted were people coping with money management issues better, averting crises and reduced reliance on doorstep lenders.

Finally, there were some impacts reported about awareness of and engagement with Big Local. Researchers were told about raised awareness of Big Local in the area, people wanting to get engaged in delivery, having been participants previously, new people getting involved as trustees/partnership members, more people expressing interest in getting actively involved in activities.

3.2. COLLECTIVE/COMMUNITY IMPACTS

The most frequently reported collective/community impacts were:

- New services/facilities available and being used.
- Organisational benefits.
- Improved community spirit.
- Making the area nicer and people’s improved perceptions about the area.
- Having a voice.

New services and facilities available and being used included a wealth of examples, such as access to advice, access to computers, better facilities and resources for children and young people, new benches which opened up access to the beach for less physically able people, a community room back in use, new curtains for a community room which has increased the range of groups and numbers of people using it, a new savings scheme for children. The creation of new spaces was described also in terms of providing safe, neutral spaces for people to meet. The services and facilities provided new opportunities for a variety of activities – volunteering, socialising, learning, community activities – as well as new experiences, e.g. children and young people going on a residential, seeing a pig for the first time.

“I’m not sitting inside bored”

“If we can give them something where once a week they have a really happy time, we have done a good job”.

Organisational benefits were described in terms of building awareness about other organisations locally, and also building and strengthening networks and partnerships between them, building the capacity of local organisations, improving organisational management.

“Big Local has helped to bring things together. We meet people from other organisations that we can now join in with or help”.

“A catalyst for bringing groups together”.

Improving community spirit is a way of describing how people described feeling part of a community, getting to know other people in their area, a new sense of positivity, local people having fun together, and people feeling useful in their community.

“It gives you an oomph. It’s community spirit. You’re with like-minded people”.

Making the area nicer/improving the area related to a variety of comments around how people felt about the area or how the area now looked, and how certain events had changed things for the better. These included general comments such as showing the area in a good light, starting to make the area by the shops look more visually appealing, starting to change people’s thinking about the area to be more positive, as well as comments relating to particular places in their area, with people no longer taking drugs there, people no longer fly tipping, reduced anti-social behaviour.

“It was hell before and now the area has changed”.

Having a voice was an impact that respondents described in relation to some specific instances and also in a more general way. Example of the former are getting the bus company to take the community and their evidence seriously, to enter into dialogue, and ultimately to reinstate services, and, having a say in how a local café is run. Examples of the latter include a greater ability to negotiate with the council, now being listened to, improving communication between residents and external bodies.

“Barnfield was the forgotten estate, now we’re being listened to”.

Community cohesion and new social interactions were noted, in terms of Big Local having provided new spaces and neutral spaces to meet, as well as activities which had brought

different types of people together or simply enabled people to meet their neighbours for the first time. Comments were made about improved racial harmony, as well as showing that big events could happen “without a ruckus and with respect”.

“It’s the first time the cultures mixed together. They all came out”.

Local green/open spaces improvements included people making more use of local open spaces because of lighting and because they saw more other people using the spaces, improving the look of the spaces, providing new opportunities to do gardening, and helping people to think positively about the local woodlands.

“Seeing people’s faces when they walk by the garden”.

3.3. NEGATIVE IMPACTS

In 11 areas, respondents did not name any negative impacts. In other areas, the following specific negative impacts were noted.

Respondents from three areas told researchers that they believed statutory/Council spending is being spent in other parts of the District/Borough because the area has Big Local funding.

The other comments were particular to each respondent’s area.

- Decreased sales on event day for one trader.
- The Big Local partnership hasn’t been able to do as many other things because of the time needed for developing the community hub.
- Campaigning residents feeling that they are not making progress and therefore becoming disheartened. [Although after the visit, we subsequently heard that the campaign had been successful].

3.4. UNEXPECTED IMPACTS

In 6 areas, no unexpected impacts were noted. In other areas, a variety of specific unexpected impacts were described, all of which were positive.

Some of these relate to a particular area of activity, such as a new opportunity for young people to travel abroad, meet and work with other young people, a club funded by Big Local which has developed project management skills and created a Community Interest

Company, setting up a children's saving scheme in school, improved relationships between some of the young people attending sessions and statutory agencies such as the police, increased financial management capacity of a community group.

Other unexpected impacts were more general, such as services being able to liaise and talk to each other in an accessible way, residents in one area reported to be talking to neighbours that they would normally avoid, and in another area, beginning to learn and share between traditional residents of the area and people of Eastern European heritage.

In two areas, respondents were delighted to report that against all local expectations, there had not been any anti-social behaviour or drinking in public during their community event/festival.

3.5. FACTORS THAT HAVE HELPED AND HINDERED ACHIEVING IMPACT

In each area visited, members of the partnership and people running projects were asked for their views on what factors had helped or hindered them in achieving impact.

3.5.1. Helping factors

The factors noted by respondents that helped Big Local areas achieve impact were (in no particular order):

- The Big Local partnership, through its engaged and hands-on members, stability, having supportive Councillors and through growing local credibility.
- Skills, knowledge and experience of partnership members, the Chair, the LTO workers, the project provider, and contractors.
- Working in partnership/a collaborative way, including with other local organisations, including schools.
- On-going engagement and communication, including sound consultation about priorities, putting communication at the heart of the work, engaging young people, outreach into the community, using different ways to communicate, e.g. newsletter, website, Facebook, local newspapers, making an ongoing effort to let people know what is being done and what is happening.
- Having a clear understanding, and consensus, about what is needed.
- Planning for activities.
- Gathering support for delivery of activities and on-going advice, whether from the LTO, the Big Local rep, key local organisations such as housing associations, the CVS (Council for Voluntary Service), key individuals such as Councillors, local traders, or partners/commissioned delivery bodies.
- The availability of staff time to provide advice, plan, organise and help with delivery, and support volunteers.

- Taking time to build a network and relationships with a wide variety of individuals and organisations, making it possible to gain in-depth knowledge about the area and open doors to other people and organisations.
- The nature and context of the community itself, including willing and active groups and individuals.
- Considering impact, so that impact is measured regularly and there are opportunities for the partnership to assess the impact regularly

In addition, a number of factors specific to particular activities were noted. Please see Appendix 2.

3.5.2. Hindered

The factors noted by respondents which had hindered Big Local areas to achieve impact were (in no particular order):

- The difficulties of engaging people. In some cases, this related to the context and history of the area, but comments also noted that people were unwilling to take part in activities or commit to the partnership.
- Time/capacity issues, in terms project/activity establishment taking longer than anticipated, the time needed to establish local credibility, unexpected delays, and more generally, the effect these things had had on showing that something is happening with Big Local in the area.
- Community related issues, such as the Big Local area not matching the 'natural community', patchy public sector support, reticence from some local established groups to work with Big Local, an attitude that doubted whether something could be done and a lack of community spirit, the complexity of reaching out to an ethnically diverse community.
- Internal Big Local issues, including turnover of the development worker role, the LTO's lack understanding of how Big Local works, inexperience of partnership members, a poor relationship with the Big Local rep, lack of staff, partner or volunteer time to take an idea forwards.

And as with the factors helping to achieve impact, a small number of activity specific issues that had hindered impact were noted. See Appendix 2.

4. REFLECTIONS & ANALYSIS

4.1. CATEGORISING IMPACT

As noted at the beginning of Section 3, researchers chose to present the findings about type of impact according to a categorisation of individual and collective/community impacts. In the researchers' view, this offered the most straightforward and yet comprehensive way of ordering the multiplicity of responses provided by the many respondents.

However, there are alternatives which also offer the potential for describing different types of impact, e.g. tangible and intangible impacts, physical impacts and social capital impacts. In these categorisations, impacts such as supporting local businesses or improving local green/open spaces would fall into the broad category of tangible and physical impacts, while impacts such as improving community spirit or raising aspirations would be within the category of intangible or social capital impacts.

4.2. SOME QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This was a qualitative research project, but it is possible to carry out a limited amount of quantitative analysis, based on our categorisation of the types of impact (as described in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 above). Please note that this analysis is based on a subjective allocation of descriptions of impacts into 'best fit' categories; it is not statistically rigorous.

Based on this analysis, the categories of impact with the most frequent mentions are as follows, shown in descending order with the most frequent first.

Most mentions	Category of impact
1	New services and facilities available and being used
2	Skills development and learning
3	Confidence development
4=	Employment and enterprise Involvement in the community
6	Social and interpersonal benefits
7	Organisational benefits
8	Personal wellbeing
9	Improving community spirit
10=	Making the area nicer and improving perceptions about the area Awareness and engagement with Big Local Changing behaviours

The data can be broken down to show the five most frequently mentioned individual and collective/community impacts separately.

Most mentions	Individual impact
1	Skills development and learning
2	Confidence development
3=	Involvement in the community Employment and enterprise
5	Social and interpersonal benefits

Most mentions	Collective/community impact
1	New services and facilities available and being used
2	Organisational benefits
3	Improving community spirit
4	Making the area nice and people's improved perceptions about the area
5	Having a voice

4.3. REFLECTIONS ON EMERGING IMPACT IN RELATION TO BIG LOCAL'S FOUR INTENDED OUTCOMES

BIG LOCAL'S FOUR INTENDED OUTCOMES:

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 future.

The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises.

People will feel their area is an even better place to live.

The purpose of this research was not to find out whether Big Local areas are achieving the programme's four intended outcomes. However, it is possible to review the findings 'through this lens', so that some indication about progress can be provided.

The descriptions of types of impact experienced individually and collectively provide considerable evidence in relation to the first, second and third objectives. It is clear that people are beginning to show increased skills and confidence, and Big Local communities are taking action in response to the local needs they have identified and that these actions are making a difference. Also, there are many examples that can reasonably be interpreted to mean that people feel their area is an even better place to live.

However, at this stage, this research has not yielded clear evidence of communities – or individuals – being better able to identify local need, but it should be noted that the design of our research is unlikely to lead to finding this out.

4.4. REFLECTIONS ON TYPES OF IMPACT

The nature of the impacts that people described are exactly the sorts of things that the researchers expected to hear, based on their experience of Big Local to date and other community development work elsewhere. However, there were some noticeable points arising from a consideration of the findings.

Looking across the areas, it is striking that they are reporting some impacts which are common to several areas, but which have been brought about by different types of activity. For example, community spirit has variously been improved by holding a fun event, creating a new community building, the process (and subsequent success) of a bus service campaign.

It is also notable that several of the areas included in the research sample are working on similar themes, but delivering quite different activities and in different ways. For example, work with children and young people includes in one area the partnership organising events and in another area funding local groups to do targeted activities.

Big Local is a community-led programme based on an asset-based community development model, which encompasses all aspects of community. Three of the areas within this research project chose economy, employment and training as the focus for the research, and the findings show that Big Local has had firm impacts within this area of activity, including getting local residents into employment, apprenticeships, training and university.

Partnership members from Big Local areas frequently said that they feel it is still early days and that they expect to see more impact in the future. Our understanding is that they are often anticipating impact particularly at a community level (e.g. once a community hall/hub building is fully operational, there will be multiple benefits for the community from the activities hosted there). However, the danger is that the achievements along the way – which are particularly for the participating individuals – are ignored. So, continuing this example, the research revealed positive changes for volunteers involved in these buildings in terms of skills and confidence development.

4.5. REFLECTIONS ON THE SCALE OF IMPACT

We found evidence of impact across all of the areas included in the research.

As noted above, most of the areas in the research felt that they were still in the early stages of their work, and therefore there would not be much impact at this point. This is valid, but is not always the case in reality. This belief has had some significant implications, in particular that areas do not necessarily feel the need to measure impact because they do not expect to see it yet, and also that they do not realise their achievements along the way, which are impacts in their own right.

There are no programme targets for 'amount of impact' to be achieved; this is not a measurable, quantifiable thing. However, each area has articulated its own vision, so the potential is there in the future for assessing the extent to which they feel they have achieved their vision.

Scale of activity is not necessarily related to impact. A very small project in financial terms may lead to some changes which people describe as very significant.

Different impacts are not comparable. It is not possible to say that an impact for an individual (such as getting into employment) is a 'smaller' or 'bigger' impact than a collective impact (such as creating a sense that people from the area are capable of moving into more skilled employment). The achievement for one person of getting into employment may be different to that same outcome for someone else because they will have started from different positions and be experiencing completely different situations.

4.6. ACTION POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Having reviewed and analysed the research findings, this section presents a number of suggestions from the researchers for Local Trust's delivery of the Big Local programme.

Making the connection between delivery and impact

Areas have been asked to do a major piece of strategic planning. In their plans, they are articulating a vision, i.e. the impact they want their Big Local to achieve, as well as intentions for a variety of activities through which they intend to bring benefits to their area. It feels as if most areas are failing to retain this 'golden thread' between their activities and their vision, with the result that they are not asking enough about whether the activities are contributing towards achieving their vision as originally intended. In other words, there is a disconnect between the big strategic aim and the many small activities. In future, areas should be encouraged through all Big Local messaging and requirements such as the plan reviews to remember this linkage. Also, we wonder if areas are questioning whether they have chosen the RIGHT things to do in order to achieve their vision – an activity might bring about benefit, but is it the benefit they want? Or is it the best way to achieve their aims?

Raising the game – making impact a priority

It isn't that there is no impact, it's that areas are not thinking enough about it. It would be helpful to consider the routes that could be used to change this, including Local Trust guidance, Local Trust requirements for reporting, LTO support, rep support, content at Spring Events and regional networking/training events etc. It is evident that messaging, and skills and knowledge development, have changed as the Big Local programme has moved along the pathway; now the time has come for a focus on impact.

Asking for more information about impact, supporting quality responses

This is relevant for areas and Local Trust. Areas can do more to ask more about impact, e.g. in the reporting back from commissioned services, in evaluating their own activities. As a community led programme, this will enhance the partnership's confidence in providing accountability back to their community about what has been achieved with the Big Local funding. Local Trust can place more emphasis on impact within the reporting it asks for from areas and reps, as well as its informal communications with areas without compromising the light touch approach. However, asking for information does not mean it will actually be received. There is a skills gap at partnership level, and probably amongst some of their service providers and many of their beneficiaries (e.g. community groups in receipt of a small grant), so the question arises about what Local Trust and others such as LTOs and reps can do to close the gap and enable quality recording and analysis of impact. The Big Local programme's existing mix of support, knowledge transfer and training mechanisms is the best place to start. Through these multiple routes, it will be possible to show that impact is highly important and relevant, and to equip areas with the tools, guidance and information that will help them to understand what impact is, why it is important, and the tools and techniques available for assessing the impact their Big Local is making.

4.7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All of the areas included in this research described positive changes that have come about because of Big Local in their area. The changes described so far are the 'right' ones, in terms of moving towards achieving Big Local's intended outcomes.

Some of the factors that areas tell us are helping them to achieve impact are core elements of the Big Local model, i.e. the skills and knowledge within the partnership's membership, strong and on-going community engagement, taking a planned approach.

Each Big Local partnership is resident-led. We heard about considerable positive personal impacts for residents who have chosen to take an active role in their Big Local by becoming a partnership member, particularly those for whom this has been their first experience of such a role.

The areas present a clear sense of being on a 10 year journey. This means that they are not

always expecting impact yet, although they are keen to know that they are making progress. This research prompted the participating areas to carry out targeted reflection, all of whom completed their involvement with a recognition that they had achieved more than they had previously realised.

Area partnerships demonstrated in their behaviour, comments and documents that they have a very strong sense of commitment and accountability to their community. This is an impact in itself.

APPENDIX 1: LISTING OF TYPES OF IMPACT REPORTED

INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS

- Awareness of and engagement with Big Local
 - People wanting to get engaged in delivery, having been participants previously.
 - Created a willingness amongst a small number of traders and others to get actively involved in organising the event next year.
 - Pulled local groups in to help, e.g. Scouts for event stewarding.
 - New people are getting involved as trustees.
 - Raised awareness of Big Local.
 - Bringing people into Big Local's hub and raising awareness of Big Local.
- Involvement in the community
 - Parents going on to attend other non BL activities run by the delivery organisation.
 - Opportunities to teach and help other young people.
 - Previously a service user, now a fulltime volunteer.
 - Created more of an 'I could do...' attitude.
 - People picked up a more positive attitude to volunteering.
- Confidence development
 - Child with learning difficulties confident to go to the youth café.
 - Attended leadership programme and gained in confidence.
 - Children happy and more confident.
 - Children learning to become more independent from families prior to starting formal pre-school.
 - Spoken in public.
 - Confident in answering the phone and making calls.
 - Increase in young people's confidence.
- Skills development and learning
 - Cooking healthy affordable meals.
 - Contributing verbally in a group setting.
 - Children's cooking skills.
 - Learning about plants and planting.
 - Learning about all types of creative industries including 'behind the scenes'.
 - Real work experience.
 - Gives young people evidence for portfolios to get into college.
 - Getting CSCS card to enable people to get into construction work.
 - Improving IT skills to apply for jobs.
 - Anger management.
 - Learnt about professional boundaries, e.g. confidentiality.

- Security SIA 'badge' enabling people to gain security work.
- Defibrillator use.
- Computer skills.
- Project management.
- Learning to take responsibility.
- Understanding the planning system.
- First aid.
- Personal wellbeing
 - Feeling healthier.
 - Feeling happier.
 - Fitness improvements.
 - Health benefits.
 - Feeling valued in the community.
 - Coping with bullying.
 - Given people something to do.
 - Feeling good about yourself because of doing something for yourself and the people around you.
 - Something positive for volunteers who have many other things to deal with as well.
 - Building support networks for the future.
- Social and inter-personal benefits
 - Better relationships between parents and children.
 - Parents forming friendships.
 - Meeting people.
 - Improving family relations.
 - Grandparents providing childcare have an opportunity to socialise.
 - Made new friends.
 - Had fun.
 - Helping other people.
 - Children caring and looking out for each other.
 - Improved relationships between some of the young people and statutory agencies such as the police.
- Changing behaviours
 - Children more enthusiastic at school.
 - Better attendance at school.
 - Children helping at home.
 - Parents attending school activities when previously didn't.
 - Parents communicating better with schools.
 - Young people staying out of trouble.
 - Keeping young people busy so they are not involved with crime.
 - People getting help with basic behaviour issues that enable them to access

- training and employment.
 - Reducing risk taking behaviours such as drink, drugs, sex.
 - Getting kids off the streets, mixing ages and abilities.
 - Helpful changes in young people's behaviour.
 - Young people reducing risky behaviour.
 - Young people who were previously disaffected getting back into education and reducing their offending behaviour.
- Aspirations
 - Parents having more aspirations for their children.
 - Raises people's aspirations.
 - Providing a role model.
 - People saw what was possible.
- Improved personal financial management
 - People coping with money management issues better.
 - People managing their finances better and crises averted.
 - Reduced reliance on doorstep lenders.
- Employment
 - Previous apprentices have gone to university and got jobs in cultural industries.
 - Lots of options about future jobs.
 - Got a recording contract with Island Records.
 - Getting people into jobs.
 - Getting people into accommodation so they can access jobs.
 - Getting the SIA qualification and consequently employment.
 - Gaining an apprenticeship.
 - Having the opportunity to work.
 - Getting out of a cycle of occasional agency work into a proper job with prospects.
 - Provided relevant work experience and something to put on the CV.
 - Money spent with local businesses, e.g. architect, electrician.
 - Work as a volunteer for BL has led to paid work from other residents.
 - Linking with networks with information about job opportunities.
 - Referrals to other industry programmes.
- Other
 - Able to continue degree course and maintain housing because of employment opportunity.
 - Being able to engage with nature.

COLLECTIVE/COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- Having a voice
 - Greater ability to negotiate with the council.
 - Now being listened to.

- Having a say in how the café is run.
- Hearing what people think.
- Getting the bus company to take them and their evidence seriously, and to enter into dialogue.
- Being able to take action in a variety of ways about something that matters.
- Showing that things can happen when you do something.
- Improving communication between residents and external bodies.
- New opportunities available
 - For volunteering.
 - For socialising.
 - For community activities.
 - Alternative pathways for learning.
 - Makes work accessible for local young people.
 - Providing a place/way to come together for people who might otherwise struggle for social activity, and providing something meaningful to do.
 - New experiences for children and young people, e.g. going on a residential, seeing a pig for the first time.
- New services and facilities available and being used
 - Access to advice.
 - GP practice able to help with non-medical problems that may underlie health issues.
 - Roller skating.
 - People having access to credible, reliable services that have their interests at heart.
 - Gives young people a sense of the workplace.
 - One to one support for people that other agencies won't deal with e.g. ex-offenders, substance abusers, people with mental health problems.
 - Access to computers to apply for jobs.
 - Better facilities and resources for children and young people, including a parent and toddler group.
 - Defibrillators installed and local volunteers trained to be competent in using them.
 - Gave people confidence to take on new projects.
 - New benches, opening up access to the beach for less physically able people.
 - Gazebo has made it easier to run events.
 - Getting some early morning and late afternoon buses reinstated, enabling school pupils to arrive on time and stay for after-school activities.
 - Young people have somewhere safe to go.
 - Community function room back in use and regularly used by local people.
 - More young boys taking part in football.
 - A new children's saving scheme in school.

- New spaces created
 - Created a central, neutral space.
 - Giving young people a safe place to go.
 - The only place young people can meet face to face outside school.
 - A place to come and enjoy the outside.
 - Provides a safe place.
 - Gets people out of their local territory.
 - An old building is opening a new chapter in its history.
- New social interactions
 - A neutral space to meet.
 - A new space to meet.
 - Meeting people.
 - Bringing different types of people together.
 - Beginning to learn and share between traditional residents and people of Eastern European heritage.
- Supporting local businesses
 - Tai Chi teacher.
 - Handyman.
 - Allows local businesses to expand in an affordable way.
 - Improving the local economy.
 - Improved trade on the day of the event, and to some extent afterwards.
 - Showcased local traders.
- Making the area nicer/improving the area
 - Reducing anti-social behaviour.
 - People no longer taking drugs in a particular place.
 - People no longer fly tipping in a particular place.
 - Taking 'problem people' off the street so improving quality of life for other local residents.
 - Showing people outside the area what the area has to offer.
 - Showed the area in a really good light.
 - Starting to make the area by the shops look a bit nicer.
 - Beginning to change people's thinking about the area to be more positive.
- Improving local green/open spaces
 - More use because of lighting.
 - New opportunities to do gardening.
 - More use because of more other people using it.
 - Improved the look of the area.
 - Helped people to think positively about the local woodlands.
- Improving community spirit
 - Feeling part of a community.

- A new sense of positivity.
- People had fun.
- Provided a way of feeling useful.
- Created a very positive atmosphere.
- Organisational benefits
 - Partnership building between organisations.
 - Services being able to liaise and talk to each other in an accessible way.
 - Building the capacity of organisations in the area.
 - Broken down barriers within host organisations about taking on disabled volunteers/placements.
 - Helped to connect community groups and their activities more.
 - Helped to meet people from other organisations to work with or help.
 - Helped to strengthen other groups because of the enthusiasm.
 - Community groups have learnt of one another's existence, and in some cases, this has led to co-operation.
 - Helped to build and strengthen local relationships.
 - Local club managing their finances better and able to make plans for the future.
- Community cohesion
 - Improved racial harmony.
 - Brought people together.
 - Showed that something could happen without a ruckus and with respect.
 - Showed that you can have a great evening, with people you live alongside but don't know.
- Other
 - A sense of ownership.
 - Young people on the apprenticeship scheme are good role models for others.

APPENDIX 2: FACTORS THAT HAVE HELPED AND HINDERED ACHIEVING IMPACT

Helping factors

- Planning
 - Planning for it.
 - A planned approach to activity implementation.
- Partnership
 - Partnership members who are prepared to be hands on and do far more than attend meetings.
 - Strong and engaged partnership.
 - A largely stable partnership.
 - Having Councillors on the partnership, helping with contact with the Councils and getting their endorsement along the way.
 - Gaining local credibility as a partnership.
- Skills, knowledge and experience
 - With the partners.
 - LTO workers.
 - Provider.
 - Working with organisations that have a proven track record of delivering successful projects/activities.
 - An experienced Chair, stable and experienced staff.
 - Use of a very experienced, local events management company who could deal with all the services they needed, and who were prepared to go the extra mile.
 - The enthusiasm, drive, knowledge and experience of the residents leading projects and taking part in them.
 - The time, experience and organisational skills of the Project Manager, e.g. for project management of the cinema event, technical landscaping knowledge for the community gardening project.
- Partnership working
 - Good partnership working with sports promotion project.
 - Partnership with the schools.
 - Working in partnership with other organisations.
 - Good partnership working.
 - Entering into partnerships with existing organisations allows them access to statistical information, from which they could assess their impact.
- Considering impact
 - Measuring the impact regularly.
 - Holding awaydays for the partnership to assess the impact of what they've done.

- Engagement and communication
 - Solid consultation to ensure that the priorities are the ones that the community want.
 - Putting talking to people and checking how they are doing at the heart of the work.
 - Sophisticated and ongoing community engagement.
 - Small but strong group of young people are engaged in the project with young people.
 - Good communication with the community through a newsletter, the web site and Facebook.
 - General community outreach outside Asda – succeeded in accessing skater community re development of skate park.
 - Newsletter is helping to communicate to/from local residents and the partnership.
 - Local media presence, e.g. attending quite a lot of events, printing press releases.
- The need
 - Consensus on what is most needed.
 - Clear understanding of community needs.
 - General commitment from all parties about the need to work with young people.
- Support for delivery
 - Enabling and supportive social landlord.
 - Willingness of services to participate - the housing association, the CVS, the British Legion, local Councillors, etc.
 - Input from key individuals, e.g. a trader with tremendous motivation to make the Festival happen and networks within the local music scene, another trader with strong links into the Asian community, Board members with experience of events and business management.
 - Support from the LTO, including secretarial and financial management.
 - The rep – asking questions about why they are choosing to do certain things.
 - Individuals committed to bringing others in – dragging them in off the streets.
 - Having a ‘lynch pin’ advice agency there who can be super responsive and stay with cases for as long as needed, while providing a service that is tailored to the support levels required by individuals access their services.
 - The LTO, providing insurance, help and advice with policies, as a source of contacts.
 - Commissioning a local agency to manage the whole process of recruiting employers and apprentices and then managing the apprenticeship process.
- Staff time
 - Having a worker in place.
 - Staff time and ability to organise the Festival, including doing all of the fundamental ‘backroom’ work which underpins the organisation e.g. street

- closure paperwork, noise management plans.
 - Having a development worker in post is speeding up the process and making more things happen.
 - Support and guidance from the Big Local community development worker for the volunteers.
- Networks and relationships
 - Taking time to build a network and relationships with a wide variety of individuals and organisations.
 - The time spent networking and building relationships, which has helped to build in-depth knowledge about the area, and has opened doors to reaching out to some people.
 - Having someone who people can trust who is a link to make a relationship with Local Trust.
 - The people involved in developing the hub all know a few people – a resource of knowledgeable, well connected people.
- Activity specific factors
 - The community awards participatory budgeting events, which provided an opportunity for networking between community groups. Also, the presence of the local MP at one acted as an endorsement of the process.
 - Gathering evidence which supports the bus campaign, e.g. numbers and types of people using the buses.
 - Well placed entertainment and music performances, creating a fun atmosphere.
 - No alcohol on the street, but available at local pubs.
 - The CAB employee is very skilled at working with hard to reach individuals. This is a challenging role, which had to be started from scratch and shouldn't be underestimated. A different individual might not have been so successful.
 - Taking a firm line with the Social Club, which meant they sought additional support in terms of committee members.
 - A fund that allows for great freedom to residents to put their ideas into action.
- Attributes and context of the community
 - Legacy of previous initiatives.
 - Willingness to take in to account a wide range of views and listen to technical support.
 - Some active groups that are starting to come forward to work in the BL area.
 - “A community I've never met the like before – willingness to get things done and to do things”, although “it's a relatively small proportion of the community, as always”.
 - Accessible jobs because of being connected to other parts of London – for wide range of skills levels.
 - Having the venue at reasonable cost.

- Other
 - The profile of Big Local, so that both the bus company and the Council are prepared to take them seriously.
 - Not starting the project until they had enough people so the programme was full and better value for money.
 - Good allocation of funds in support of core objectives.
 - Having a permanent shopfront presence in a good location for two years, with someone there. This meant that BL had a ‘face’, they could provide advice on how to apply for the community grants, they could promote other activities in the communities.
 - Visits to other halls and social enterprises, and joining the Mid Cornwall Halls Group, which has helped them to bring other ideas in and to feel more confident.
 - Perseverance.

Hindering factors

- Engagement difficulties
 - History of the area, so small numbers of people engaging.
 - Some people being disheartened by their failure to recruit.
 - Local residents unwilling to participate in activities.
 - People not wanting to get involved.
 - Residents unwilling to commit to partnership.
 - Long standing unwillingness of residents to work across the Big Local area.
- Time/capacity issues
 - Set-up of projects taking longer than expected.
 - With the estate regeneration, the Council’s way of working, so that it can be hard to keep to a timescale.
 - Project delays.
 - Taken time to establish local credibility.
 - Short term nature of the grants that they are making.
 - The amount of time that it has taken to get Big Local off the ground, to show that something is actually happening.
- Community related issues
 - Patchy public sector support.
 - There was reticence from some local established groups to work with Big Local.
 - “People didn’t believe it would happen” or that it could be done, in particular closing such a main road.
 - The community is very ethnically diverse, so it’s difficult to reach out to all of them. Literacy can be an issue, so other methods than leaflet, posters etc. need to be used.
 - Lots of initiatives have happened/are happening in the area – makes it difficult to

- create an identity for the BL project.
- It's not a natural community.
- Lack of community spirit currently.
- Big Local issues
 - Turnover of development worker role – had two already who have left and waiting for a third to take up the post.
 - LTO took a while to understand the way that Big Local is different to other projects and programmes it manages.
 - The residents on the partnership are not very strategic; the group is inward looking and unwilling to travel to attend Big Local events.
 - Issues around the relationship with the Big Local rep.
 - Dealing with issues have distracted the partnership from delivery and commissioning activities.
 - No existing partner or dedicated member of staff to take an idea forwards, and insufficient LTO staff member time.
 - Previously not having a worker in place.
 - An unwillingness to spend unwisely and therefore not rushing into spending too soon.
 - Not planning to measure impact in the first place.
- Activity specific issues
 - With the bus campaign, dealing with a situation where rules require a commercial service. Also feeling as if there are unanswered questions, in particular why a nearby seemingly very similar estate has not been subjected to cuts and has a much better service.
 - Difficulty of working with schools.
 - Having significant changes to the original project (Money advice).
 - Discovering the capacity of the Social Club was not as great as was thought originally.
- Other
 - “Having to make it up as we go along”.

APPENDIX 3: REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

We have a few observations about the research process itself.

Most areas were very welcoming towards us, and made a real effort to accommodate us within our very tight timescale. One of the reasons they agreed to take part seemed to be that they saw potential value for themselves; we have tried to ensure this through helping out with any queries they had about impact measurement during our visit, as well as thinking about how our reporting from the research could be actively useful to them in the longer term.

In terms of our own research methodology, focussing on a theme enabled depth, but in reality, the context and linkages with other work elements mean that a theme cannot be considered in isolation, and other important impacts may be left out. Areas were keen to tell us about their other activities and impacts from them, and in some cases, expressed concern when this additional information wasn't included in the template write-up (which focussed on the agreed theme).

Our intention to focus on hearing from beneficiaries and service/facility users was not entirely straightforward either, as we found that there was not always a clear distinction between them and people running Big Local/Big Local funded activities, e.g. some people who were active in the partnership or running a funded activity/project also reported personal impacts.