

**Local Trust**  
trusting  
local  
people

# Together We Plan!

INSPIRATION, REFLECTION  
AND ACTIVITIES FOR A  
BRIGHT BIG LOCAL FUTURE



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Useful questions, practical tools and facilitation tools.

# INTRODUCTION

THIS HANDBOOK OFFERS USEFUL APPROACHES TO SUPPORT YOUR BIG LOCAL PARTNERSHIP IN DEVELOPING AND PLANNING ITS WORK DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND FUTURE UNCERTAINTY.

It aims to support you and those working with you to reflect on what you have learned so far in different ways:

- **Focus outwards** and look at what you have learned about your community and ways of working during COVID-19.
- **Focus inwards** and think about the needs of your partnership, building your strengths and skills in the way you work.
- **Explore how you can use what you have learned** to make plans for the future which meet new community needs.

The handbook draws on work done by [Just Ideas](#) for Local Trust from July to October 2020. That work, which looked at the experience of Big Local areas and brought together examples of successful approaches to responding to personal and economic change caused by COVID-19.

Use whichever bits of the handbook are most relevant to your needs. In [Section 1](#) you'll find stories of national issues revealed by COVID-19 and recorded in our rapid research, and examples of successful responses from Big Local partnerships. In [Section 2](#) you'll find tools or guides to discussing, learning and planning in your partnership. Many other resources have been developed and much research undertaken since the beginning of lockdown in March 2020 – where relevant, we link to existing resources and to research in and outside Local Trust as well.



# SECTION 1A

WHAT IS GOING ON IN BIG LOCAL  
COMMUNITIES AND HOW ARE BIG LOCAL  
PARTNERSHIPS RESPONDING TO COVID-19?



Our conversations with Big Local partnerships and review of national research suggest that it is useful to take two perspectives in relation to responses and how to plan for the future:

1. **What is going on in communities?** – the challenges and changes that people are facing.
2. **How has COVID-19 changed the way in which Big Local partnerships work?** It is useful to break this down into:
  - Thinking from the partnership **outwards**: how is the partnership engaging with the community, what are the changing ways in which people interact with the partnership?
  - Looking **inwards** at the partnership: what has changed? Are there more or fewer people involved as members or volunteers? What support needs do partnership members have as a result of the pandemic?

# What is going on in communities?

COVID-19 has had social, economic, health and environmental impacts. Big Locals have existing awareness of these issues, but the pandemic has put disadvantaged people in communities under greater stress. The full impact of these changes is constantly evolving, with local responses and lockdowns and the [government's tiered response](#). Themes are emerging that are highly relevant to Big Local areas as local responses are further developed. Some questions are identified to frame these themes within the Big Local context.

## INEQUALITIES

Particularly, the inequality in the impact of COVID-19 depending on ethnicity, poverty, financial security, health, housing and age. What can this tell us about inequality in our communities, and how can we talk about it and tackle it? All of the issues listed above relate to one another and increase inequality and disadvantage in communities.



## DIGITAL EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

Are people being 'left out' as communication goes digital?  
How can we tackle this?



## MENTAL HEALTH

Who is suffering increased mental health challenges? Have there been any mental health benefits for people? What have we learned about how to support better mental health in our communities? And how do we support those with different challenges - grief, loneliness and isolation, anxiety and stress?



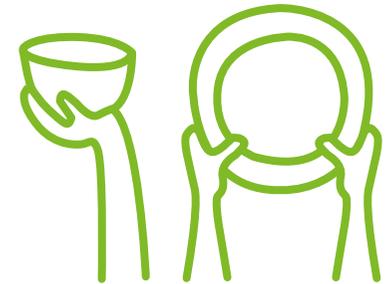
## GREEN SPACES

How can we look at the changes in the way people have used the outdoors to maximise health and wellbeing? What is the stress on these spaces, how can we look after them and what are the opportunities?



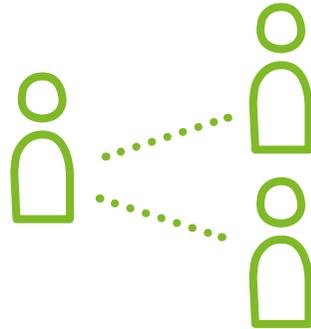
## FOOD AND FOOD POVERTY

What do we know about the way people in our communities do or don't get what they need to eat? How can we support our communities to feed themselves healthily, happily and affordably, without stress and stigma?



## TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY

How have the restrictions of the pandemic affected people's ability to move around within the community and connect with others - for example, the safe use and availability of public transport?



## EMPLOYMENT

How has rising unemployment affected the community? What are the impacts of changes to government support to local companies? Who is most affected by these changes and what support do they need?



# Changes to how we work, engage and respond to community need

These things are less tangible and more about the way we do things. Themes that seem to be emerging from our engagement with Big Local areas and further research are:

## RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

The importance of partnerships and relationships when responding in a complex and unpredictable context. Trusted relationships, with voluntary and statutory organisations within Big Local partnerships, with locally trusted organisations and with communities, have helped Big Local areas as they respond to the crisis.

## COMPLEXITY

Understanding that there are complex and interconnected things going on in communities. It is also important to look beyond the emergency response to the continuing need. For example, foodbanks are a response, but beyond that there is so much to consider when trying to support sustainable access to good food in a community, and so much more that accessing that food can bring – friendships, sense of community, sense of contributing, and growing your own produce. Big Local partnerships are already acting on this, for example, through increasing access to community gardens.

## POWER AND BOLDNESS

Reaching where no-one else can, and beyond what you thought you could do. Some Big Local areas have found themselves able to develop ideas into action really quickly in crisis and reach members of their community who would fall through the gaps of statutory services. The ongoing challenge is how to harness that boldness and integrate it into an everyday way of being.

## WAYS OF FINDING OUT WHAT THE COMMUNITY NEEDS

We heard of effective approaches to consulting the community during the crisis – going online, going door to door, using the space created by adapted activities. How can the way you have adapted to communicate with people in your area influence the way you do this in the future? What has worked, what can you use to build community engagement?

## Conclusion: what this means for Big Local areas

There will always be complexity and uncertainty in our communities even as the crisis recedes. Significant future issues include reduced funding for voluntary and community organisations, resulting in closures and diminished services, rising unemployment and increasing individual financial insecurity. The crisis has also accelerated uncertainty around the impacts of climate change and the local environment, as well as creating new challenges for access to education.



The way we plan needs to be more adaptive. There is a lot we can learn from how Big Local areas have adapted during COVID-19 that can help us tackle ongoing issues in our communities.

Local Trust has responded to the challenge by supporting a more flexible planning and funding process while maintaining accountability. Big Local partnerships have come together on [Workplace](#) and [Zoom](#) to share their experiences.

[Research](#) is being undertaken by the Third Sector Research Centre, working with over twenty Big Local areas, to look at how communities react to, cope with and recover from the crisis. These resources do not aim to create an additional layer of planning for Big Local areas but aim to support existing plans using lessons we have learned. The case studies and tools that are part of this handbook can be used when revisiting plans and when thinking about activities in the community – either as part of a formal plan review or as a regular or one-off reflection.

# SECTION 1B

THE KEY ROLES PLAYED BY BIG LOCAL  
AREAS DURING LOCKDOWN

**We have brought together examples of how Big Local areas have responded and adapted their plans in light of the pandemic as a resource for all areas – to share learning and encourage new ways of thinking about common challenges.**

We have discovered further evidence of the themes identified in Local Trust’s recent research into [The role of Big Local partnerships during lockdown](#). Partnerships have often played one or more of these key roles:

Success has also relied on **using the flexibility of the Big Local programme** to adjust and vary plans and budget allocation. Many partnerships reported plan reviews coming up or being deferred. Partnerships highlighted a **need for community consultation and engagement** to better understand the changing needs in their community.

We have used the three categories above to group some responses from Big Local areas. They are a helpful way of seeing the different types of response, and, of course, there is lots of other activity happening that we didn’t hear about. If your Big Local area has an inspiring story to share, please update us on [Workplace](#).

## LATCH FORD

- Activities have been brought online to support mental health. Residents who use the hub are keeping engaged via coffee mornings, 'Grub and Game' sessions and an online book club. This is balanced by phone calls.

## PODSMEAD

- Has founded a street champions scheme which helped identify people in the community in need of support during lockdown.

## CENTRAL JARROW

- Works with MIND to do online and telephone referrals.
- Works with [Groundwork](#) to give out growing packs and encourage people to do activities. They have included recipes in food boxes.



## GAUNLESS GATEWAY

- Has a web-chat service running seven nights a week.

# Doers

## CARS AREA, SMITH'S WOOD - SOLIHULL

- The partnership has agreed to introduce a new priority to its existing five. Priority 6 (Get the train back on the track) is going to be exclusively for post COVID-19 recovery. This will focus on providing money advice, employment support and help with mental health for those affected.
- A project to assess and address issues related to IT exclusion highlighted by the lockdown.

## RAMSEY MILLION

- Youth Club is running Facebook live sessions for younger kids who enjoy feeling like they're on TV. Zoom sessions are held for older kids who do not want to be on any kind of public arena on social media.

## HACKNEY WICK

- Set up online training and support to prepare their volunteers for difficult conversations with people who have lost loved ones as a result of the pandemic.



## GAUNLESS GATEWAY

- Asked 30 organisations three questions to ascertain their needs post lockdown to be included in their new plan.

## PAR BAY

- Plans to hold a post COVID-19 community Thanksgiving Day commemorating the loss of lives and livelihoods and looking forward to a brighter future together.

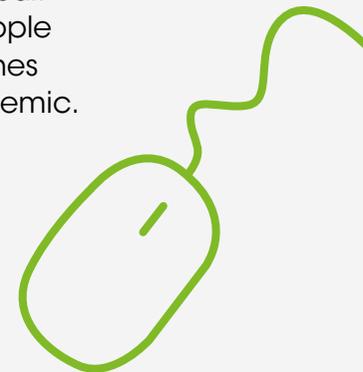
## PLAISTOW SOUTH

- Launched two small grant funds, one for arts and culture, and one for community resilience which was developed as a result of the needs in the community related to the pandemic.



## HACKNEY WICK

- Set up online training and support to prepare their volunteers for difficult conversations with people who have lost loved ones as a result of the pandemic.



# Connectors

## BRADLEY

- Is exploring the potential to map Big Local responses to mental health, gathering baseline data to be shared with NHS England to showcase what is happening at the community level. Local commissioning will take place in 2021, and Big Local areas could be positioned for future investment, delivering community-based mental health provision. Mapping the ground level could bring an opportunity to connect and show the work being done with funding and support from Big Local.



## FIRS AND BROMFORD

- Is planning a social-distancing awayday in late September to complete their plan review process.



### BIRCHFIELD

- Is developing a social enterprise consortium to deliver on health and wellbeing priorities.

### SELBY TOWN

- Is developing a funding strategy to attract external funding to each of the elements of its plan.

### SALE WEST

- Has worked with their local authority to be a local response hub, coordinating local agencies.



### PODSMEAD

- Has applied for, and been successful in taking a lead role in the development of a community economic plan, for which it will be paid. This initiative has been led by the chair.



Collaborators

#### Other types of activities across more than one Big Local area were:

- Training for residents to be counsellors in community cafes.
- Signposting local telephone numbers, through social media and leafletting, that people can ring for support. Local numbers feel more personal than a national helpline.
- Supporting members and wider community members/partners to access IT hardware and licences – tablets, laptops and cameras – to facilitate access to online meetings.

# SECTION 10

CASE STUDIES

# DY10 Big Local Community Recovery Planning

## CONTEXT

Early in 2020, DY10 was thinking about its Big Local legacy. The partnership appointed a fundraising and development manager, Stuart, to support the thinking about **legacy** and drive that work forward. He was tasked with establishing a new legacy organisation and bringing in new people and new funding. From the March 2020 lockdown onwards, it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic was going to have a huge impact on the community, both now and in thinking about the future.

## THE PLANNING RESPONSE

Stuart supported the partnership through a process of community recovery planning, starting with a reflection session in May. Working with a range of partners, DY10 Big Local and the legacy organisation, HBG+, identified areas where COVID-19 would have an influence, now and in the future. These areas were: employment, health and wellbeing, financial resilience, community cohesion, the environment, co-ordination and safety. A concise plan was produced from this, looking at what problems were coming up under each, and what actions might be needed to support the community to deal with or recover from them.

## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

The partnership has been following up actions identified in the plan. One of the key actions was to form a Voluntary and Community Sector forum which helped coordinate action to support vulnerable people. This aimed to deliver better outcomes with and for the community by bringing people together to pool knowledge, learn about each other, spot gaps and avoid duplication. It also raised the profile of DY10 partnership which has become seen as the go-to organisation for the area. People and organisations are consulting them and inviting them to regional level meetings and this has positioned them more strongly with partners.



## NEW PARTNERSHIP GROWING OUT OF THE APPROACH

The forum was so successful that the partnership is now working to grow a similar forum for organisations working with young people, having identified youth unemployment as a priority. Recently they met with a range of organisations from Worcestershire County Council to Kidderminster College to a community housing group, and discussed how DY10 could support young people to apply for employment or access schemes run by other partners. There was real appetite for collaboration, recognising the flexibility and scope of DY10 and the legacy organisation HBG+ to reach people other schemes can't.

## HOW THIS FITS WITH BIG LOCAL PLANNING

DY10 is about to review its Big Local plan. The work that has been done on recovery planning will be useful for thinking about priorities and actions for the next year.

The partnership has always been good at thinking ahead about what might happen, where it wants to go and how. They commission people, get forums together and co-ordinate. Part of that strategic approach is thinking about what is going to happen next and what to do about it.

This is a great example of where bringing together community recovery planning, legacy and Big Local planning can help your partnership respond to an ever changing and uncertain future, and ensure priorities remain relevant.

### Stuart's TOP TIPS

#### for using recovery planning to drive change

- Start small and start somewhere. A brief draft of a plan-on-a-page is better at getting people talking and planning together than coming up with all the answers and a complicated document.
- Find your USP - your unique selling point - what you can do that others can't.
- Work with partners NOW to set the foundations for the future.



## OVER TO YOU

Using the example from DY10 as a model, your partnership could make a similar framework to help your partnership think about what issues might come up and what you could do now and in your next plan to address them.

### The DY10 Community Recovery Plan

THEME	PROBLEM	ACTION	
<b>Employment</b>	<p>Mass unemployment will adversely affect those aged 16 -19 with few qualifications and experience.</p> <p>Some industries such as hospitality, traditional retail and face-to-face service industries may contract. Others, such as warehousing, delivery services and supermarkets may expand.</p> <p>Lack of job opportunities for those with additional health issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteering opportunities</li> <li>• Online job clubs</li> <li>• Online careers support and signposting to retraining opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with employers and Wyre talent to target training to employers' needs</li> <li>• Spread localism agenda in terms of jobs</li> <li>• Start-up and self-employment support</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	<p>Prolonged lockdown is adversely affecting mental health and loss of jobs affecting self-esteem and mental health.</p> <p>Lack of food due to economic crisis.</p> <p>Loss of loved ones – lack of opportunity for traditional funerals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing Forum</li> <li>• Social prescribing</li> <li>• Online forums</li> <li>• Virtual support networks</li> <li>• Luxury packs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community asset mapping</li> <li>• Extra support for foodbanks</li> <li>• Virtual garden of remembrance through social media</li> </ul>
<b>Financial Resilience</b>	<p>People falling into debt and uptake of doorstep loans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debt support, financial planning, leafleting to warn against loan sharks, credit union</li> </ul>	
<b>Community Cohesion</b>	<p>Social distancing means many traditional community activities will not resume for some time – for example, pubs, concerts, sports, parties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual replacements</li> <li>• Themed online activities</li> <li>• Wyre Forest Wikipedia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure activity is resident led</li> <li>• Community asset mapping</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	<p>Need to ensure the local parks and woodland are a resource for everyone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer opportunities for young people at parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual directories to local environment</li> </ul>
<b>Co-ordination</b>	<p>Need to ensure we do not waste money duplicating activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the online forum and increase its scope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote localism</li> <li>• Ensure activity is resident led</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<p>Ensure community services are carried out safely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with local authority to train people in best practice with regards to distancing and delivery</li> </ul>	

# Marsh and Micklefield go online with their consulting and planning

## CONTEXT

Back in March 2020, Marsh and Micklefield Big Local were about to launch their all-singing, all-dancing community consultation with a series of events to develop their new three-year plan and reinvigorate the partnership. They had identified a process for widening engagement, and worked out what everyone would contribute, all geared towards a new three-year plan to be submitted in October.

Along came COVID-19 and things had to change. The staff team worked closely with those of the partnership still able to engage in supporting the community in this terrifying time. In partnership with schools, they were able to get laptops to families struggling to learn and supported their local community tutoring project to move online and provide learning resources to local families. They also funded their local community cafe to become a food preparation and distribution hub for the area. Converting their newspaper, The Mayfly, into an A4 digital and print-at-home format, they started producing it every two weeks instead of every three months, pushing out stories and community opportunities into people's homes. The website events pages and social media were rapidly transformed to share information about support available for residents. But in this flurry of new activity, what happened to the consultation?

with style by Wye Dene residents. We have the pleasure of announcing the winners of the fancy dress competition on our back pages!

the survey there are plenty of other ways to get involved!

If you would like to put anything in The Mayfly, we'd love to hear from you, get in touch at [themayfly@marshandmicklefield.com](mailto:themayfly@marshandmicklefield.com)

### A Strong Start!

Planning the next stage of the Marsh and Micklefield Big Local Project



Maddy Howe, Marsh Resident, Chair

If you were one of the 123 people who took part in the Marsh and Micklefield Big Local online survey and said Yes! to finding out more about getting involved with planning the next 3 years of activity here, you'll know that we held our welcome Zoom meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October and what a great evening it turned out to be!

So many new and enthusiastic faces appeared on the screen to hear the early results of the survey and take part in discussions about how we might make ideas a reality over the next few years. Thanks to everyone who was able to take part.

Don't worry! We know that some people couldn't make that evening, or perhaps missed the survey - and this is just the beginning; the door is still wide open with lots more opportunities to get involved so please let us know what suits you.

Come along to our next Zoom on 12<sup>th</sup> November at 7pm, have a chat on the phone or even over a socially distanced coffee with one of the team. We really want to know what you have to say.

Visit [Marshandmicklefield.com](http://Marshandmicklefield.com) to find out more!



Zoom meeting 22nd October

To attend the Zoom meeting please contact: [Carol@marshandmicklefield.com](mailto:Carol@marshandmicklefield.com)

Turn to find out the results of the M&M 5 year resident survey



# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

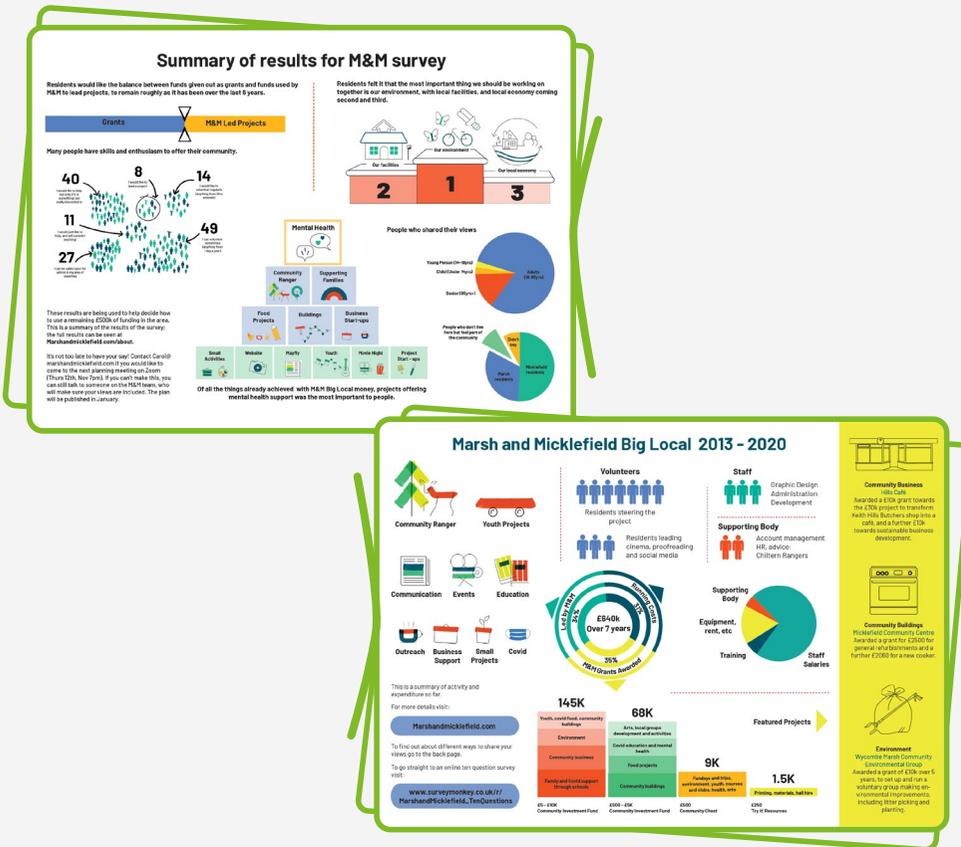
All those who had indicated on the survey that they would like to get involved in making final decisions about the plan were called or Zoomed and invited to a series of evening Zoom events to look at the survey results and make a plan.

This group was not the partnership but included some previous partnership members.



The staff and chair worked hard to think about how to make the experience of developing the plan enjoyable and engaging – creating hand-painted and graphic representations of the survey results rather than sending out formal or text-based documents. Zoom sessions were planned to be interactive, with each session involving experimental uses of Miro, a V-wall, breakouts and warm-ups, and limited to one hour and 15 minutes.

Our rep and leads from the LTO, along with residents and the vice chair, also helped to run smaller group activities. Lots of work went on by phone and email to keep everyone on board, including finding bespoke ways for those who couldn't attend meetings to give their opinions. Meanwhile, progress was shared with the wider community through The Mayfly, the website and social media.



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The 20 or so new community members who have participated in the Zoom consultations are all keen to be involved in decision-making and volunteering in the future. Some may form part of the new partnership, others may contribute one-off or specific volunteering. The three-year plan will reflect the changing priorities of the community on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic and build on what they have learned to create a flexible, appropriate and engaging plan for the future.

Lisa and Maddy from Team Marsh and Micklefield have some **words of advice** for Big Locals adapting their planning and consultation to an uncertain world where engagement will have to be online as well as face-to-face.

“ Keep it personal and enjoyable. Back up all the digital stuff with 1-2-1 phone calls, and create ways for each person to get involved that works for them. Use non-digital/more personal things - like drawings, on Zoom, to keep the 'community feel'. Keep everyone informed, always. This takes time and it can feel like a lot of work, but it pays off. ”



## OVER TO YOU

Using the example from Marsh and Micklefield, think about how your Big Local might use what you have learned during COVID-19 about remote or online communications to increase the range of people and voices involved in your area, and reflect new priorities.



# SO18 Big Local collaborates on the SO: Let's Connect project

## CONTEXT

The story starts in the middle of the pandemic. As experienced by many across Big Local areas, digital access and skills became increasingly important to help people stay connected with their families, access benefits or healthcare and learn. And with that came the realisation that those not online were being further isolated and excluded.



## THE PLANNING RESPONSE

SO18 Big Local has experience of supporting people to get online and improve IT skills, having run Tea & Tech and, more recently, the Townhill Helping Hub, but these were on hold because of COVID-19. So, when SO:Linked (a local organisation linking people with local services and activities) approached them about getting involved in a digital inclusion project, the timing was perfect and the pilot for SO:Let's Connect was born. SO:Let's Connect is a new project starting in Southampton, with the aim of reducing isolation by getting more people connected digitally. The first pilot is being run in the SO18 Big Local area (Townhill Park, Harefield and parts of Midanbury).

Following substantial investment from local organisations, including their LTO TWICS and commitment from volunteers, SO:Let's Connect was able to provide IT equipment, internet connectivity and support to enable more residents to get online. The project is supported by the clinical commissioning group (CCG) and the local authority as a way of supporting people to access digital health care and other services.



**SO:Let's Connect**  
*Helping you to get connected!*

Do you want to learn how to use a computer/tablet to chat "face to face" with friends/family?  
Perhaps you want to access your GP surgery online, pay bills or order groceries?  
Do you feel you're missing out because you're not online?

Our friendly volunteers can help you learn how to use a computer/tablet and to access the internet, guiding you at your own pace to support you to access what's important to you.

Equipment can also be provided in some cases.

**Interested, or have a friend/relation/client that you want to refer?**  
Contact SO:Linked on 023 8021 6050 or soccg.solinked@nhs.net and quote "SO:Let's Connect"

*SO:Let's Connect is currently available in Townhill Park, Harefield and parts of Midanbury but will be expanding. If you are in other parts of Southampton and would like to be placed on a waiting list, please contact us.*



**SO:Let's Connect**  
Let's Connect

**SO:Linked**  
Supporting Southampton People & Communities

**COMMUNITY FUND**

**SO18 BIG LOCAL**  
Helping to overcome isolation in Midanbury & Harefield Park

**TWICS**  
Taking You Work & Communities

**DR P THE MASK**

**Jamie's Computers**  
Professional & Ethical IT Recycling

The project has had a fantastic response from local volunteers able to support people to connect in a way that suits them. This has involved dropping off equipment and making video calls to help people get set up. "Our team of volunteer digital connectors are here to provide support - for example, teaching people to video chat with their family, order their groceries, access their GP online and more. They can support even the most tech-anxious people, and we can also provide equipment for those that need it."

The first few participants recruited to the project have reported what a massive impact it is having on them: <https://youtu.be/oKk9ZhcBkFU>. There is now a second pilot being run in nearby Mansbridge, funded by Abri (formerly Radian Housing Association).

## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Iane (SO:Linked and TWICS) and Jo (SO18 Development Coordinator) recently spoke at a national NHS conference (Transforming Healthcare Together November 2020), sharing their story with 80 participants, which really lit up the session on digital inclusion. They heard recently that the project will get an additional £25K funding from the CCG to pay for the roll-out of the scheme to mental health service users over the winter.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

SO18 Big Local is taking advantage of the [Measuring Change](#) offer and working alongside WSA Community Consultants to look at how to measure the difference this project makes over the next year. This will help them plan for their own work on digital inclusion in the coming years, and it is also hoped that the evidence will enable the project to be rolled out across Southampton and beyond.

Jo from SO18 Big Local has **some words of advice** for those looking at working in partnership on projects to meet current and future needs...

- **“Use your local assets** – partnership working has definitely been the key to the success of this project. We have a really committed steering group of people that all bring something different to the table – we have community development organisations, IT organisations, organisations already working with the more vulnerable/isolated in society and more, all round the table and all bringing different expertise.
- **Start small** – trying an idea out in a small area to demonstrate that it works, and that there’s a need, is an easier (and less daunting!) way of kicking off a project and will also help secure funding from other sources.”





## OVER To You

Using the example from SO18, think about what your Big Local area might plan to help people adapt to a world where, whatever happens with the pandemic, aspects of life are going to be more online. From a tiny tweak of an activity to adding in a bit of technical support or access to a device, to a full-on partnership project - whatever you can do to support your community to be able to communicate online as well as face-to-face can only help in an uncertain future.



# SECTION 2

NAVIGATING THROUGH UNCERTAIN TIMES  
- SUPPORT AND TOOLS TO LEARN FROM  
COVID-19 AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.

This section is intended to help your Big Local partnership look at what you have learned about your community and your partnership throughout the pandemic – using the themes identified in [Section 1](#) – and to use what you know to shape plans.

## How to use this handbook: three top tips

### 1 BUILD IT IN

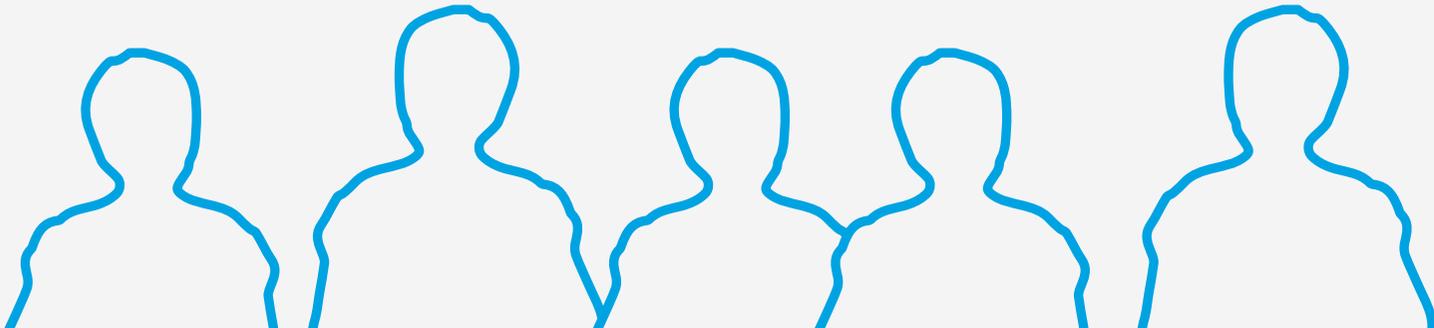
Learning from COVID-19 and thinking about what might happen in an uncertain future can be part of your regular reflection and planning activities. If you don't have a new plan submission coming up, you can use these tools to look at whether you need to tweak the action plans you already have to deliver on your priorities. You'll see from the [DY10 story](#) that what starts as a recovery plan becomes part of strategic thinking about planning and how to address your community priorities.

### 2 BUILD THE SKILLS

The set of checklists, tools and activities in this handbook are designed to be used by and with Big Local partnerships and those who support them. You may want to ask your rep or worker to support you to explore these tools – as well as encouraging others on the partnership to co-facilitate or help – so that a group of residents gains the confidence to do this kind of activity in the future. Get stuck in and have a go!

### 3 BUILD YOUR OWN

These questions and ideas are only a starting point – and you don't have to discuss them all. You're bound to come up with your own locally relevant questions to ask and activities to try. Make sure you share any good ideas you come up with on [Workplace](#).



**In this action-focused section of the handbook you will see:**

1. A checklist of questions to investigate how your partnership is responding to the current situation **31**
2. A checklist of questions to find out what you know about your community in the light of COVID-19 **34**
3. Activities to help you plan for the future: **37**
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**A note for Big Local reps**

Your partnership/s may have experience of facilitating their own planning and development activities, or they may benefit from your insight into the process or your facilitating the activities. The handbook contains support for running each of these sessions. The aim is to build the skills and confidence of partnerships to use the tools. If you have any adaptations or alternatives that your partnership found useful when planning please share on [Workplace](#) to help inspire others. Thank you!

# 1. Questions about your partnership

These questions are to support your partnership to look at how the experience of the COVID-19 crisis has affected the way you work together, how you engage with people and what you are able to do. Some changes may have been positive – such as the members of the partnership discovering they are able to connect and communicate online via [Zoom](#). On the other hand, you may have found challenges during the crisis in keeping the partnership together, making decisions and adapting or moving forward with your plans.

You may well have used Local Trust's existing '[Tools for Stronger Partnerships](#)' activities to help you map and build on your strengths and understand roles and power, as well as identifying areas that will benefit from further work.

You may like to ask the questions in a partnership meeting on Zoom, or during a walk-and-talk meeting, or at a specific online or socially distanced workshop event where you can also use the activities below.

## TIMING AND TIPS

You will need about one hour to dive into these questions, depending on the number of people involved and how deep you want to go. They may be useful to consider if you are aiming to develop or refresh your partnership on an annual basis as a reflection tool, or if you are aiming to engage or induct new partnership members.



## WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS THE COVID-19 CRISIS MADE TO OUR PARTNERSHIP?

### Consider:

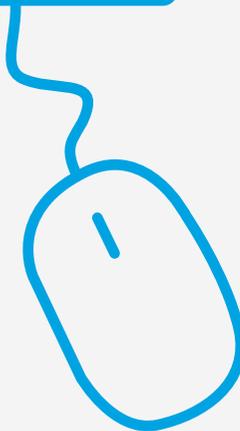
1. **Membership** – Have new people got involved, or have people left or not been able to join meetings? Are you low on numbers and energy, or revived and energised?
2. **Equality** – Does your current partnership include members from communities affected particularly badly by crises such as the pandemic? If not, how could you make them welcome at your meetings to see if they might be interested in joining the decision-making body of your Big Local?
3. **Volunteering** – Have new people got involved with the Big Local activities more broadly? If so, how and why? How can you keep supporting them to engage and reach more people?
4. **Online communications** – Are there things you have learned to do that you want to continue even when you can meet again? Who has been able to join in digitally? Who has been excluded?
5. **Flexibility** – How did you adapt your plans and activities during lockdown and changing needs? What worked well and what didn't? What did you learn?
6. **Supporting the doers in challenging times** – How have you looked after yourselves, your partnership members, your volunteers, your workers and your local community organisations during this challenging and draining time? What can you learn about being kind to yourselves and others?
7. **Working in partnership with other local organisations** – What new relationships and connections have developed? Which relationships would you like to invest in to meet your needs and collaborate in the future?
8. **A 'yes we can' attitude!** – What have you achieved that you never thought would be possible? How might you harness that boldness and bring it into future plans and actions?
9. **Ways of finding out what the community needs** – How can the way you have adapted to consult people in your area and find out about needs influence the way you do this in the future? What has worked, what can you use to build community engagement in Big Local? Have a look at the [Marsh and Micklefield story](#).
10. What do you want to **celebrate** about how you have adapted to the current crisis? How will you acknowledge these achievements?

And finally...what is **the most important thing** you would tell a resident-led community group in your area about dealing with crisis or uncertainty in the future? What advice would you give them?

## SUPPORT FOR YOUR PARTNERSHIP

These questions may raise issues that would benefit from additional support. The following potential sources of support are always on hand:

- You can contact your Big Local rep anytime
- The Local Trust programmes team can offer help and guidance
- You will find Big Local people sharing their experience, challenges, and celebrating success on Big Local Workplace. Local Trust also uses Workplace to publicise training, networking events, conferences and support clusters.
- You may find other sources of support in your locality such as a Council for Voluntary Service, Community Foundation or MyCommunity.



## TIMING AND TIPS

It may be best to devote a partnership meeting to these questions, (up to two hours) although they could be introduced in a shorter time period. The questions will be useful in contributing to a refresh of your Big Local Plan, as a 'pause and reflect' session, or to help new members of the partnership have a better understanding of the community (and contribute to that understanding).

## 2. Questions about your community and your Big Local plan

These questions are to support your partnership to explore how COVID-19 has changed things in your community, and how priorities, plans or activities might need to adapt in light of what you now know. You may like to ask them in a partnership meeting on Zoom, or during a walk-and-talk meeting around your area, or at a specific online or socially distanced workshop event.

We found the [COVID-19 Measuring Change Resources](#), produced to support Big Local areas' understanding and approaches to measuring change in their area, useful in developing these questions:



1. How are you hearing about changes or issues in the community as a result of COVID-19? Is this online, during activities, going door to door?
2. Who have you been hearing from so far during the crisis?
3. Who are you not hearing from?
4. How could you best reach the people you are not hearing from – through existing organisations, leaflets, social media, door to door?
5. How is COVID-19 affecting the community? What are the most significant challenges or problems the community is facing as a result of COVID-19? (see [Section 1](#) for a reminder of the issues we found preparing this resource – pick and choose which questions are most relevant to your community).
  - a. Who is affected most severely by the pandemic in your community? How can your Big Local tackle **inequality** and provide additional support or opportunities for those communities?
  - b. Who is **digitally connected** and who isn't? Digital connections will continue to be important into the future – how can your Big Local support more people to get comfortable online, and/or find other ways of including them?
  - c. Who is likely to need more support around **mental health** during and after the current pandemic? How can you find out? How can you encourage conversations about mental health and support the wellbeing of your community? Here are some resources from the recent [Mental Health and COVID learning events](#).
  - d. How can you use the **outdoor spaces** in your area to support people to get out and about? See the [SO18 story](#) for a great example.
  - e. What do we know about people in our community getting **what they need to eat**? Who's going hungry, or feeling stressed? What's out there already to help them?
  - f. Who in the community struggles to **travel** safely around the area?
  - g. How have rising **unemployment** and job insecurity affected the community?
6. Having looked at the questions above – who needs your help most? Has this changed since your Big Local plan was developed or reviewed? If so, how?
7. How do these priority needs fit with your existing and future plans?

8. Which activities will you focus on? It could be helpful to think of these activities in the short term (the next three months), medium term (over the next year), and long term (more than a year).
  - What immediate change can you help to bring about?
  - Is there any long-term change you can contribute to?
9. Partnership working plan:
  - What can your Big Local do itself?
  - What can you work with others to do? Who/which organisation?
  - What do you need specialist organisations to do (for example, mental health support, specialist advice and information, and so on)?
  - Where will you get the information and support you need?
10. What feedback or data would be useful to collect to see the difference you are making?
  - How can you collect that?
11. How can you use or communicate the difference you have made?



# 3. Activities to help you plan for the future

These activities encourage you to reflect on the past and incorporate what you've learned into your plans for the future.

Check back on the top tips [here](#) on how you may be supported to use the activities.

## IDEAS FOR FACILITATING ACTIVITIES:

### TRY DOING MEETINGS DIFFERENTLY

How about mixing up the daytime Zooms with a walk and talk – walk around the area to remind yourselves of who and what you are doing this for – and to get a breath of fresh air and some exercise at the same time.



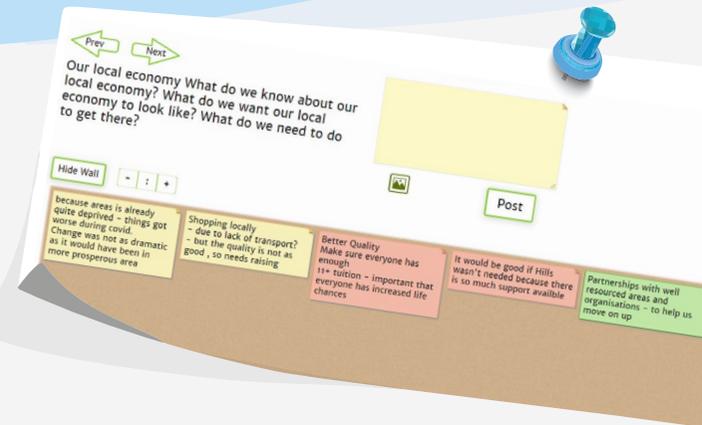
### BRING SOME HOSPITALITY TO ONLINE SESSIONS

Doing meetings by Zoom doesn't mean you can't share a cuppa and a biscuit. Perhaps for a special partnership meeting or workshop, try sending everyone (through the post or hand-delivering) a tea bag, sachet of coffee and even a mini pack of biscuits. You could include some workshop essentials like a pack of sticky notes and a pen. Or go one step further and order everyone pizza to be delivered at the same time to share at the end of your meeting!

For a range of online tools you can use the [Digital Toolkit For Communities](#)

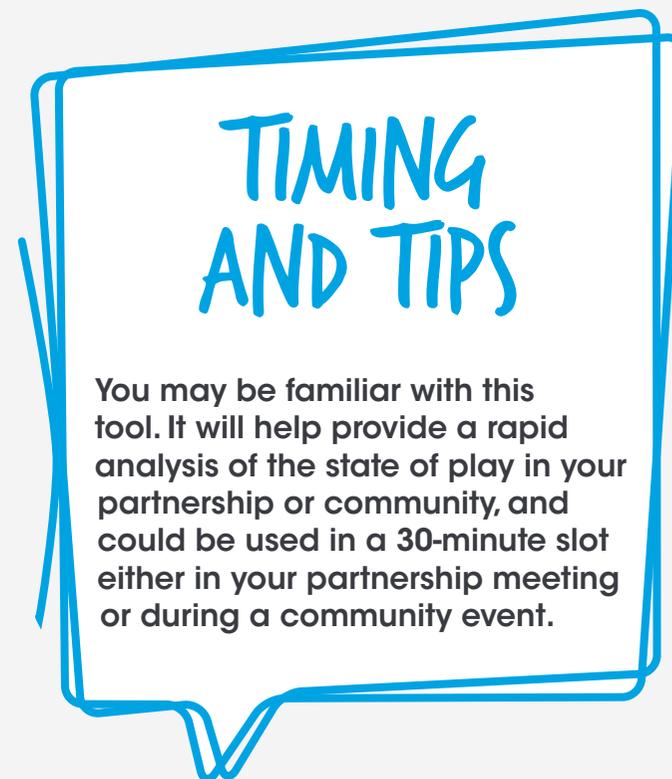
### VIRTUAL POST-ITS

If you want to recreate the feeling online of post-its on a flipchart, a tool like [vWall](#) could be useful to help you to share and group ideas. You can ask a question and participants post their ideas using a smartphone, tablet or computer. Do it in pairs or nominate a scribe if anyone might struggle. You can send out the link to people before the session or do it live and then look at all of the ideas together. This would work well with the [SWOT activity below](#). Here's a vWall Marsh and Micklefield recently used in their community consultation meeting:



## A. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

A strengths, weaknesses opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis will help reveal positive changes and where the challenges lie for your partnership, as well as helping you work out what you can do about it.



Having discussed some of the questions in [Section 1](#) and [Section 2](#) above – and selected those most important for you – you can use this activity to pool your ideas. There are many ways you can facilitate a SWOT session both in person and online. During a face to face meeting, -place four pieces of flipchart paper with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in different areas of a room. Give everyone a pen and sticky notes. Encourage them to move around the room listing all the SWOTs they can think of. A similar approach can be taken online, asking people to write lists and share their ideas or you could try out a [Jamboard](#).

Look particularly at the threats and opportunities. As a whole group, think about what you can do to make the most of the opportunities, and try and avoid or cope with the threats. How might you change the way you work? What might you add to or tweak in your action plan?

## B. STOP, START, CHANGE

Using the findings from your SWOT analysis, try to prioritise the action that will help you deal with any weaknesses or threats.

You may find that the ideas you came up with when thinking about opportunities provide some potential solutions. A simple way of **deciding what to take action on** is by asking the following questions:

- What should we stop doing?
- What should we start doing?
- What should we do more of or change?
- What will happen if we don't take action?

These questions can be aligned to the priorities that you come up with to address the weaknesses or threats to your partnership, or other aims the partnership has.



## TIMING AND TIPS

Stop, start, change follows on from the SWOT approach and can be run in a 15-20 minute slot (longer if more detail is required) in your partnership meeting, or during a community event when the context allows.

## TIMING AND TIPS

You might find this scenario-planning tool useful as you look ahead strategically (that is, over the next three years) or as you consider what legacy Big Local will leave in your area. For this reason, it is difficult to give a timing for the activity - each scenario could be considered within a 15-minute session (so a total of 45 minutes) during a partnership meeting or community event, when restrictions permit.

## C. SCENARIOS - WHICH DIRECTION MIGHT WE GO IN?

Local Trust recently did some scenario planning to look at different ways in which our nation and communities might emerge from the pandemic. If you're interested, you can find more [here](#).

Have a look at each spectrum (or line) and use each as a starting point to discuss where you think your community is and where it might be heading. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer - people will have different perspectives and experiences, and all are valid. And within one community there will be many different responses which may change over time. Take the discussions out to your community, particularly to those you have identified as not currently having much of a voice in your Big Local, or who have been particularly badly affected by COVID-19.



1. There has been a lot of talk about **community spirit** during the pandemic. How does this feel from your experience of your community?

**A:** Our community are kind and supportive to those who are vulnerable, sharing ideas and welcoming conversations.

Where are we on this line?

**B:** It feels like 'every person for themselves' – people are isolated and struggling, not open to ideas and conversations.

2. There have been great examples of more **collaboration between organisations** and groups locally – but also many organisations (charities, community groups and local authorities) are struggling for funding and with workload. While Big Local areas are in an unusual position of having secure funding until 2026, many organisations are competing for limited resources. What does it feel like in your community and partnerships? How can you use your privilege of security as a Big Local area to help other organisations doing valuable work in your area?

**A:** Organisations and groups are working together to pool resources, ideas and energy, sharing volunteers and supporting funding bids for the benefit of the community.

Where is our ecosystem of local organisations?  
Where do we want to be?  
How do we move in the right direction?

**B:** Local organisations and groups are closing – those still open are defending their territory and not collaborating. This leads to duplication, gaps and stress.

3. **Inequalities and inclusion:** COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities in our communities. There are people whose experience and situation make them more vulnerable both to the virus and to the long-term effects, such as unemployment, financial insecurity and poor mental health. On top of other disadvantage (such as underlying health conditions) or discrimination (such as racism) this can lead to a damaging widening of existing inequalities. We can take this opportunity to become more aware of inequality and do something about it by including more voices and ensuring opportunities reach everyone.

**A:** We now understand who is most vulnerable and excluded from opportunities. We are tackling inequality and discrimination, and ensuring all voices are heard. Diversity leads to more creative ideas.

Where are we?  
Where do we want to be?  
How do we move in the right direction?

**B:** We don't know much about inequality in our area. There is stigma attached to being poor, vulnerable and needing food banks. There is discrimination and conflict between different groups. Inequalities are widening and no-one wants to do anything about it.

## D. DESCRIBING A VISION OF A PERFECT SCENARIO AND HOW TO GET THERE

Having discussed where you think your Big Local area is within each scenario, ask people to consider what might next happen in the area and in the programme.

- What might a kind, connected, inclusive response, as described in the A scenarios, look like in your area?
- What might it look like if you move towards the isolated, divided, unequal scenarios in the B examples?

Take one scenario at a time and discuss activities that might push your area towards your A vision, and away from your B nightmare.



Give people time to think on their own or in pairs, and then feedback all suggestions. No idea is silly, and may spark off another idea even if it is not feasible itself. You might want to use images or objects to encourage people to think creatively. Even on Zoom this is possible, for example: 'Go and find an image or object that says something about your vision for collaboration and hold it up to the camera.' Or ask people to draw an emoji or write a word that summarises what they aspire to. [vWall](#) might be useful here too.

### Further reading

- [Digital Toolkit](#) – Working online doesn't need to be difficult: This interactive guide offers quick and easy steps you can take and tools you can use to get the most out of these online resources – all low-cost and high impact.
- [Digital Pathway](#) – COVID-19 has accelerated a trend towards digital that was already in motion. Our guide to help you stay connected in an increasingly digitised world.



# JUST THE BEGINNING

This handbook is designed to help you draw attention to the things that matter to you, in your community. Whether you're looking at local issues or national campaigns, remember that using your voice and using your community's power can make a lasting difference.



## About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of local communities, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding through our work supporting local communities make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

localtrust.org.uk

 @LocalTrust

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