FIVE YEARS OF **EMPOWERING PLACES**

EVALUATION REPORT

ABOUT **POWER TO CHANGE**

Power to Change is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

ABOUT **RENAISI**

Renaisi is a social enterprise that helps people and places thrive by challenging the root causes of economic and social exclusion across the UK. They do this by empowering people to overcome barriers to employment, enabling social and private sector organisations to tackle socio-economic exclusion, challenging systems that perpetuate exclusion, and embodying approaches that lead to sustainable change.

Power to Change

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INTRODUCTION

Empowering Places was designed by Power to Change as an experiment to explore what happens when local anchor organisations are supported to catalyse community businesses in deprived communities in England.[1],[2]

The programme took much of what Power to Change knew about supporting the development of community businesses in other programmes. It applied this to a place, considering how the interplay between place, people and community businesses could build more resilient and prosperous communities.

The programme hypothesised that building the capacity of specific, existing local organisations could enable them to catalyse and support the growth of new community businesses. In turn, these community businesses would support and develop the social economy of their communities. The programme provided a blend of funding and capacity-building support to locally rooted 'catalyst' organisations in six areas of high deprivation to test this idea:[3]

● B-inspired in Braunstone, Leicester

● Centre4 in Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby

● Made in Manningham, incubated by Participate in Manningham, Bradford[4]

● Real Ideas in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth

● The Wharton Trust in Dyke House, Hartlepool

● Wigan and Leigh Community Charity (WLCC), formally Abram Ward Community Cooperative, in Abram, Wigan

Power to Change's decision to invest in these places was a choice to support and empower local people to shape delivery based on local priorities, meaning the context and the realities of each place play a significant part in how the programme looks and feels in those areas.

This evaluation report is the final in a series of six reports and several short ethnographic films.[5] It also sits alongside bespoke profiles for each of the six areas, which focus on the local context and explores in depth how the programme was delivered in each area. The interim reports have taken a formative approach to understanding and improving the programme. In contrast, this report is more summative, telling an overall story and focusing on crucial lessons learnt throughout the process.

The report has four sections. First, it explores the interplay between the catalysts and the investment and how they have used it. Second it looks at the impact of the programme on the people involved and their places. Third, it looks at the risks and realities of investing in highly deprived communities where residents, who lack opportunities, often need extra time and support to build the confidence, skills and resources that might typically be considered necessary to start a business. Finally, it looks at opportunities for future investment to sustain and maintain work in the six locations, as well as recommendations for similar funding more broadly. The report closes with the conclusions from the study as a whole.

1.
WHAT IS **EMPOWERING PLACES?**

1.1 Structure of the programme

Each catalyst in the Empowering Places programme received up to £1 million from July 2017 to December 2022. This investment was to:

- support the development of new community businesses in their area

- strengthen the catalyst organisations' influence and reach locally, to improve their sustainability and to invest in strategic development.[6]

The Empowering Places programme was delivered by Co-operatives UK, who were responsible for designing and managing the programme, developing and delivering the capacity support programme, managing the 'tech leads' (experts from Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and The New Economics Foundation (NEF) who provided one-to-one guidance and support to catalysts, and developing peer networking and learning opportunities (including facilitating the annual learning camps).

Renaisi was an embedded evaluator.[7] Our role has been to enable Power to Change and its stakeholders to learn how to work well in places and how community businesses can drive local change. We describe our methodology in more detail in Appendix 1.

1.2 Aims of the programme

At the outset, the programme was designed to:

- demonstrate the role that clusters of community businesses can play in creating better places – through increased social capital, local economic development, improved wellbeing and reduced inequality

- support community-rooted 'catalyst' organisations to build relationships with key stakeholders in the wider place to make a case for community businesses as agents of change in their local economies

- test Power to Change's collaboration hypothesis that when community businesses work with others, they can access more resources and offer more products and services that benefit their communities[8]

- engage with other funders and stakeholders to share the learning from Power to Change's place-based funding approaches and increase collaboration within the new economies and local wealth-building sectors.[9]

Adaptations to the programme over time

Since its inception, the programme has adapted considerably from being funder directed (akin to more traditional grant-making programmes with delivery contracts and monitoring reports) to being more place-centred. This has meant taking a flexible and holistic approach to enabling the catalysts to articulate what success looks like and how to achieve it.

"
Our role as a funder has adapted based on what catalysts need, and we have played different roles with different catalysts – mostly flexible, trying not to fall into typical funder/grantee dynamics.
Power to Change staff

For the evaluation, this meant using similarly flexible methods to understand emergent change and context-specific outcomes. This was a shift from the beginning of the programme, where Power to Change placed greater emphasis on testing and developing evidence for specific hypotheses.

1.3 Understanding change

In the third year of the programme, Renaisi worked with the catalysts and delivery partners to reflect on their self-articulated measures of success, triangulating this alongside the research to co-design the 'Empowering Places change framework'.

The framework (see Figure 1) illustrates the programme's desired short- and longer-term outcomes and how these lead to delivering the ultimate vision of the programme. As part of a developmental approach to evaluation, it also illustrates the 'activators' and 'enablers' of change, to tell a comprehensive story about the process.

One of the first and most important things we learnt was that change (and aspirational change) was happening at multiple levels:

- At a **micro-community level,** the programme impacted on individuals who benefited from the catalysts' outreach and the services provided by new businesses.

- At a **community business level,** businesses and the people running them were growing in skills, knowledge and confidence, creating more resources for, and connections within, their local place.

- At a **macro, wider place level,** as the programme matured, we were beginning to see more connected ecosystems of businesses, charities and statutory agencies and a greater understanding of the benefits of community business.[10]

Our research also highlighted that support had to come from the outside-in as well as from the inside-out for change to happen at these levels:

- From the outside-in, the programme provides money, expertise and the reputation of national organisations, as well as flexibility in how these are used.

- From the inside-out, the catalysts needed to create trust to motivate and empower people, providing them with holistic, person-centred support.

- External factors also played a critical role in enabling or restricting success, including local authority support, the availability of additional funding and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
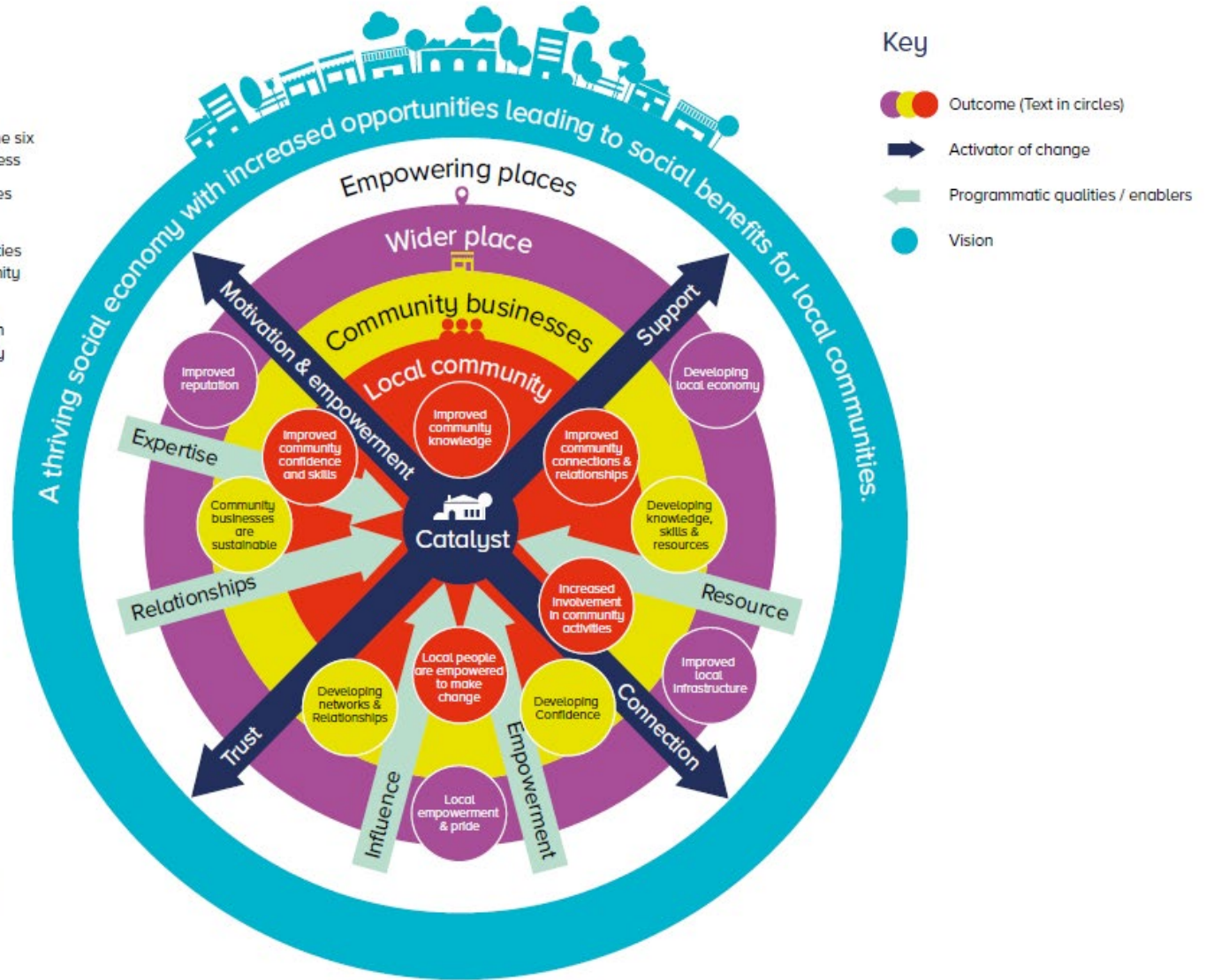
Figure 1: Empowering Places change framework

External context and potential influencers

Ongoing or increased support from the six local authorities for community business

The rate of new community businesses developing in an area

Willingness within the local communities to support and work with the community businesses

Ongoing strong partnerships between the catalyst organisations, community businesses and other organisations working in similar spaces

Additional funding streams

The ongoing Covid crisis prevents businesses from trading

Wider ecosystem

Increased focus at national government level on the benefits of community business

Catalyst

A locally rooted organisation that has strong relationships with both their community and strategic local organisations

Key

- Outcome (Text in circles)
- Activator of change
- Programmatic qualities / enablers
- Vision

A thriving social economy with increased opportunities leading to social benefits for local communities.

Empowering places

Wider place
Community businesses
Local community
Catalyst

Motivation & empowerment
Support
Expertise
Relationships
Trust
Influence
Empowerment
Connection
Resource

Improved reputation
Developing local economy
Improved community confidence and skills
Improved community knowledge
Improved community connections & relationships
Community businesses are sustainable
Developing knowledge, skills & resources
Increased involvement in community activities
Improved local infrastructure
Developing networks & Relationships
Local people are empowered to make change
Developing Confidence
Local empowerment & pride

2.
CATALYSTS, COMMUNITY BUSINESSES AND PLACES

The programme's funding and resources were channelled through the catalysts to reach community businesses and local people. By investing in these organisations, Power to Change has devolved its investment into six places. This section explores who the catalyst organisations are and what their impact was on each place.

2.1 Who are the catalysts?

The catalysts were chosen using Power to Change's criteria for funding urban areas in the 10 per cent most 'deprived' local authorities in England, through a locally rooted 'anchor' organisation with strong local connections in the area, who could support the growth of new community businesses.[11],[12]

Features of the catalyst organisations

By necessity of the programme's design, the catalysts played the role of community anchor or community hub and business catalyser. However, as the programme developed and the catalysts started to learn from each other and respond to local needs, they began playing new roles as well. These included: community outreach and engagement; managing local funding; business coaching; and community wealth building. To varying degrees, all catalysts had already played some of these additional roles, but none had done everything.

There is no 'one size fits all' model for catalyst organisations, and they vary in size, maturity and approach.[13] The following graphs illustrate their variety, and we explore the implications of these features on how the catalysts have delivered the programme in their place later in the report.

Figure 2: Catalyst income, as reported by catalysts

Catalyst income 2021/22

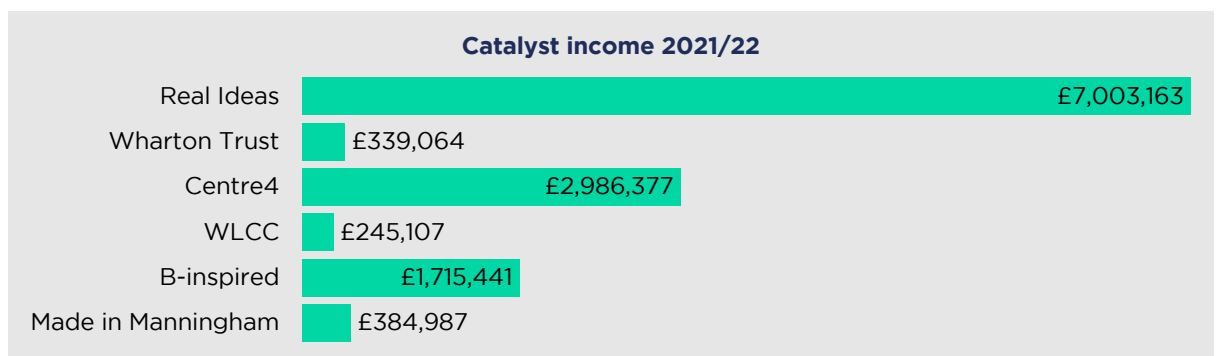|	
Real Ideas	£7,003,163
Wharton Trust	£339,064
Centre4	£2,986,377
WLCC	£245,107
B-inspired	£1,715,441
Made in Manningham	£384,987

Figure 3: Catalyst assets, as reported by catalysts (Although WLCC doesn't report owning assets, it has one significant asset on a 25-year lease from Wigan Council)
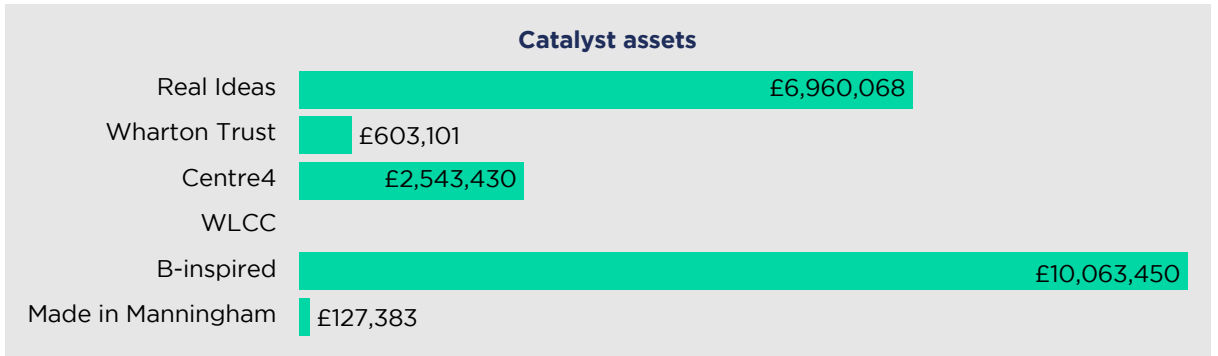
Catalyst assets

Real Ideas	£6,960,068
Wharton Trust	£603,101
Centre4	£2,543,430
WLCC	
B-inspired	£10,063,450
Made in Manningham	£127,383

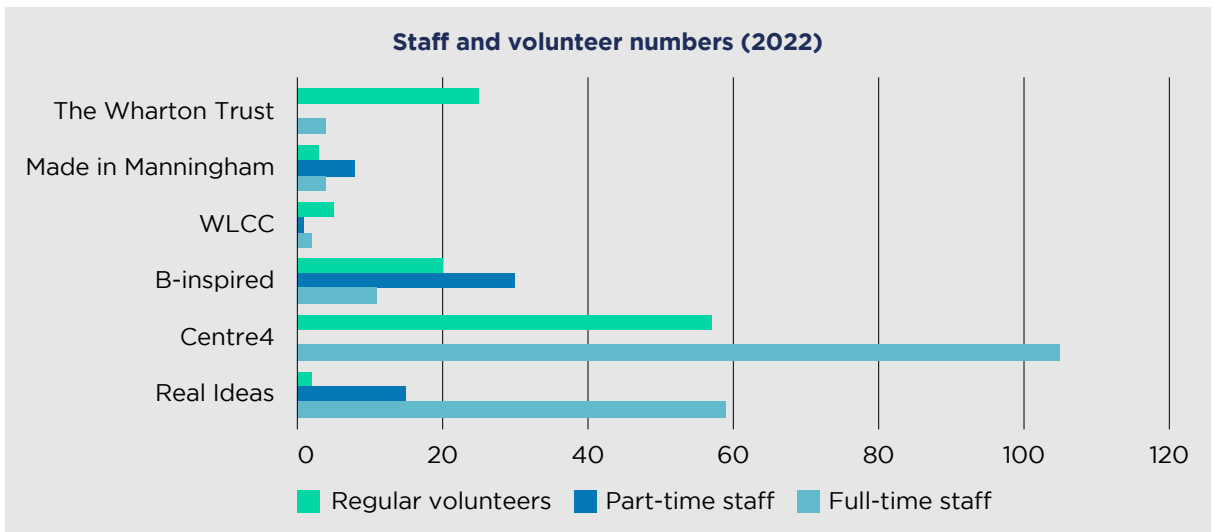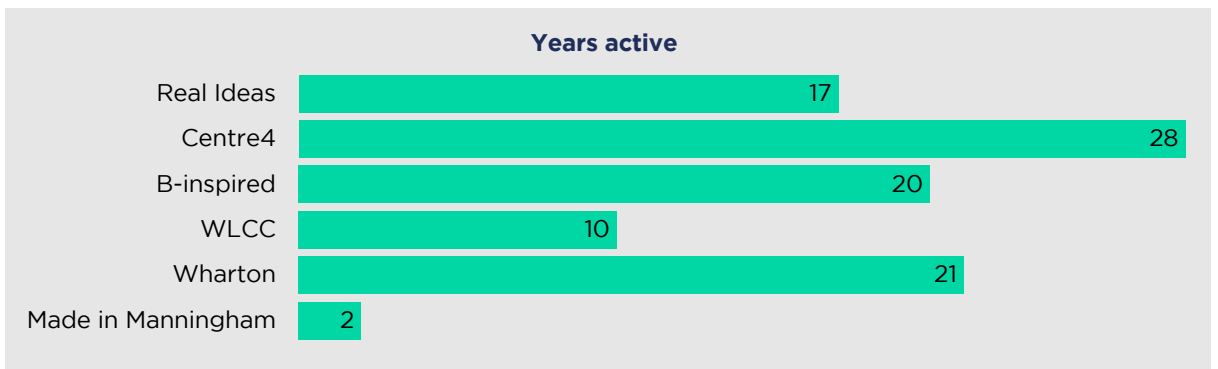Figure 4: Catalyst staff and volunteer numbers, as reported by catalysts (missing data from the Wharton Trust)[14]

Staff and volunteer numbers (2022)

Regular volunteers   Part-time staff   Full-time staff

Figure 5: Number of years catalyst has been active as an organisation[15]

Years active

Real Ideas	17
Centre4	28
B-inspired	20
WLCC	10
Wharton	21
Made in Manningham	2

2.2 What approach have the catalysts taken?

Over the course of the programme, the catalysts supported 95 individuals, groups and organisations to develop their community business ideas and strengthen their models.[16] By the end of 2022, catalysts reported that 21 of these had since closed.[17]
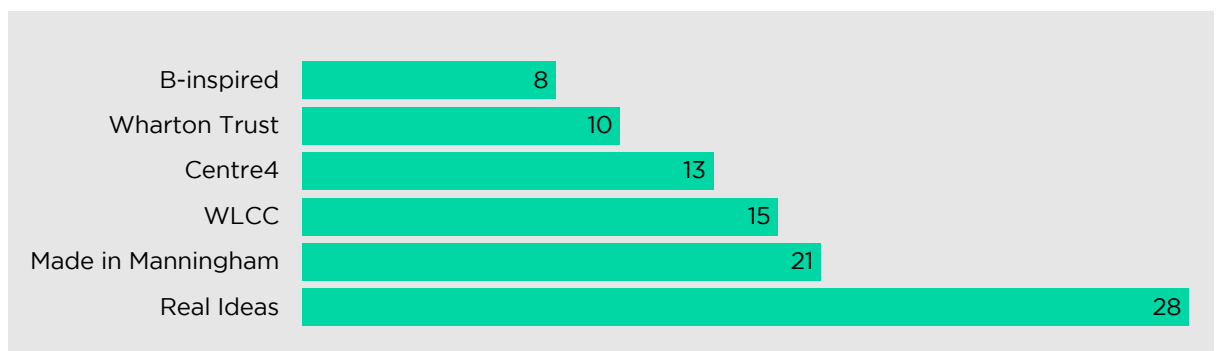
Support has been both formal, using programme resources like seed grants and access to expertise, and informal, through advice and guidance and referrals from the catalyst organisation. Following sections explore how the catalysts have used their grants and delivered support to community businesses.

Using a blend of grant and capacity building funding

The catalysts were provided with up to £1 million in funding and support, consisting of:

- a grant of up to £650,000 over five years to engage with and deliver the programme in their places

- budget within this grant to provide seed grants of up to £5,000 to community businesses

- capacity building support programme delivered by Co-operatives UK, Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and The New Economics Foundation (NEF), which included:

- access to technical leads from CLES or NEF (up to 23 days per catalyst each year)

- access to peer networking opportunities, including study visits and annual learning camps

- up to £125,000 of capacity support, to be used by catalysts and community businesses to access support from a pool of quality-assured expert providers.[18]
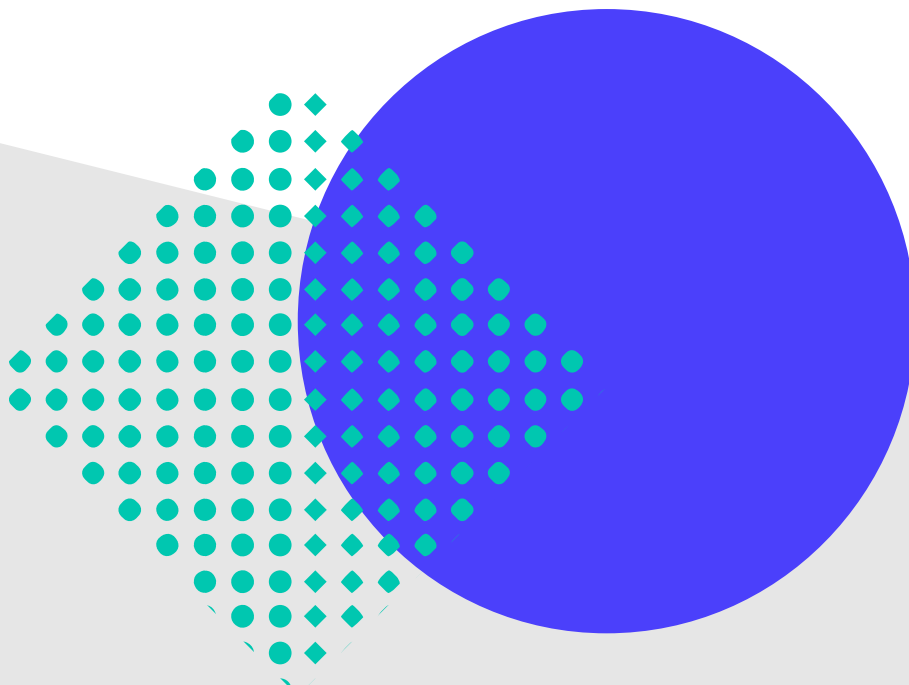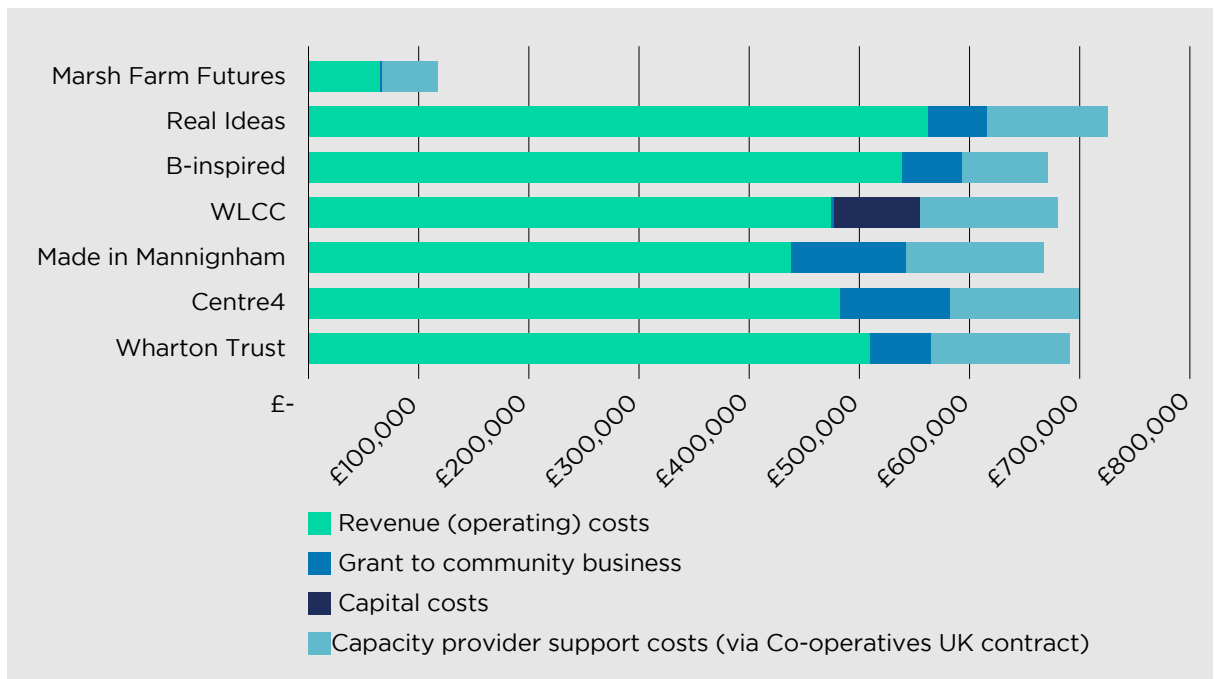
Figure 6: Number of community businesses supported[19]

Catalyst	Number
B-inspired	8
Wharton Trust	10
Centre4	13
WLCC	15
Made in Manningham	21
Real Ideas	28

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Power to Change also managed an additional local collaboration fund on behalf of the catalysts, to build strategic collaborations and support for community business beyond the neighbourhood where the catalysts are based.

Figure 7 shows how each catalyst chose to spend their grant.

Figure 7: spend profile by catalyst[20]

Legend:
- Revenue (operating) costs
- Grant to community business
- Capital costs
- Capacity provider support costs (via Co-operatives UK contract)

The following table outlines what has been learned about the benefits of the different types of support, through qualitive interviews with catalysts, community businesses, tech leads and Power to Change staff, and the catalysts' annual reports:

Type of support	Summary of use and the benefits
Total grant and revenue	Core funding allowed the catalysts to engage new staff specifically for Empowering Places (without compromising other projects). It also permitted them time and resource to understand, refine and articulate their unique offer to people in their place, rather than being forced to continually adapt their services to attract new funding. This core funding has also allowed all the catalysts to access the capacity support, engage in the programme's learning network and devote time to relationship building across their place, including with strategic voluntary and statutory sector power-holders, community businesses and local people.
Capacity provider support – 'tech leads'	The tech lead played a useful role as a critical friend. Their unique offer and small staff teams meant that catalyst leaders sometimes reported that their role could be 'lonely', and it helped to have someone to bounce ideas off, share concerns with and seek advice from.

The tech leads were a huge help in supporting the catalyst to navigate the plethora of (sometimes overwhelming) support on offer from the programme, especially in the early stages.

The effectiveness of the relationships between catalysts and tech leads was determined by the level of trust between them; the key factors that enabled trust to grow were time and one-to-one support.

Tech leads were most valuable when they could offer a specific skill that the catalyst didn't have, for example, community wealth building in Hartlepool or asset acquisition in Wigan. Or when they had a personal or professional relationship with the area; this was most notable in Bradford and Wigan. In addition, the networks, relationships and reputation of the individuals and their organisations supported catalysts to 'open doors' that had previously been shut. |
| **Capacity provider support – expert provider pool** | Throughout the programme the catalysts increasingly made use of the specialist offers of the organisations in the quality assured expert provider pool. Examples of where it was most useful included using consultants for business planning, governance advice, communications, marketing and storytelling.

Formal training was also important for catalyst staff, building their ability to help community businesses evolve and to develop and extend their own offer. In the interviews, several catalysts cited the opportunity to take part in enterprise coaching training as particularly useful.

While at first these were largely national organisations, catalysts soon called for more local organisations and consultants to be included on the list, which led to a greater take up of support. |

Type of support	Summary of use and the benefits
Grants to community businesses	At the beginning of the programme, community businesses could apply for seed grants of up to £5,000; this increased to £15,000 in the final year, following recognition from Power to Change that nascent community businesses were in need of a larger cash injection to help them mobilise. These grants were used to boost and support new ideas – increasing confidence, as well as enabling the community businesses to buy equipment and make other small capital purchases.
Learning network	The peer learning network, managed and delivered by Co-operatives UK, consisted of study visits and annual learning camps, regular online catch ups, an informal WhatsApp group and a formal learning platform. It was considered enormously useful for forging new connections and developing deep friendships across places, learning about new approaches and celebrating successes, as well as supporting each other through the pandemic._ Findings from the Relationships Project (commissioned by Power to Change to support community businesses to improve relationships) found: 'The peer learning approach meant that no one person or perspective was privileged as "the expert", but rather the emphasis was on the collective wisdom among a group of people working in their own communities. We shared stories, offered practical tips, and coached one another when considering challenging situations.'[21]

Responding to local need

The Empowering Places programme was designed to be flexible and responsive to local communities. Power to Change left it up to the catalyst organisations in each area to determine what the local needs were and how to support and develop community businesses that would best respond to those needs. The greatest needs of the community were usually well known to the catalysts but, to ensure accountability, they adopted a range of approaches to understand the nuances of these needs and seek local solutions to them. This included:

● community listening exercises (Leicester)

● community organising using approaches like door-knocking and 'being present' locally (Hartlepool and Grimsby)

● bringing communities together to explore need and develop solutions (Bradford)

● finding ways to reach new parts of the community through engagement with other organisations, such as schools (Wigan)

● creating avenues for the community to come to them with ideas about what the gaps are and to present ideas for how these might be filled (Plymouth, Wigan, Bradford).

The following table identifies some of the needs in each local area, along with examples of the community businesses that have been developed to address that need. It should be noted that there are many more challenges and businesses in each area than are identified here, but it gives a high-level overview of how needs have been addressed in each place.

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Place	Local context	Examples of community businesses or approaches to address need
Bradford	77 per cent of residents are British Asian, with the majority from a Pakistani background. There are some communities that also have limited English which has sometimes made it harder to engage them. Bradford also suffers from high levels of unemployment.	Millan Centre in Manningham provides English language classes for women who haven't had the opportunity or confidence to learn English before. The centre also offers vocational training in health and wellbeing, and hairdressing and beauty, which have been requested by local people and therefore more likely to lead to successful businesses.
Grimsby	High unemployment and skills gaps	The Ethical Recruitment Agency (ERA), helps local people develop the skills required to access employment opportunities, and works with businesses to place them in work. ERA has been highly successful, taken on several contracts and placed more than 108 people in permanent jobs, the majority of which were full time, as well as an additional 180 into temporary work on their payroll.
Hartlepool	Issues with unethical landlords and poor-quality housing	The Annexe Housing initiative provides good quality housing and trains local people in each property (of which they currently have four) to be community organisers, providing people with access to someone they can communicate their housing issues with and contributing to a process of continuous feedback and improvement.
Leicester	Lack of opportunities, activities and support for children and young people	The football club and dance group have provided much-needed opportunities for local young people, both through the activities they deliver and the training opportunities they provide.
Plymouth	The local community is disenfranchised	Real Ideas has supported the local community with asset transfers so that more of the local land is community owned or stewarded. For example, licensing park land around Stiltskin Theatre, which had a dramatic effect on ticket sales and community engagement, as well as restoring nature.
Wigan	Lack of activities and opportunities for children and young people	One of the community businesses that has been developed through the programme – Pianos, Pies and Pirouettes – is now launching the Made in Wigan Minis initiative, which focuses on using music and performance arts to engage young people.

Using three core methods

Evidence from the evaluation indicates that catalysts used **three broad methods to catalyse** community businesses:

- **Incubation:** Catalysts that were typically larger with existing assets and resources, such as Centre4 and B-inspired used an 'incubation' approach, which allowed them to set up and resource community businesses based on what the community told them they needed. This includes paying for staff and their training, providing a space, and absorbing back-office functions such as HR, finance and administration. Two of the businesses to have come out of this approach are arguably the most 'successful' in a trading sense – the bar in Leicester and an ethical recruitment agency in Grimsby.

- **Being community led:** Catalysts that were typically smaller with a greater focus on grassroots community development, such as The Wharton Trust and Wigan and Leigh Community Charity, used a 'community led' model, where they sought ways to engage the community in developing their own business ideas, and provided deeply relational, holistic support. Examples include Make Dyke House Beautiful, which supports residents to take responsibility for creating a nice environment to live in – for example, by picking litter, planting and painting murals – and MissPlaces in Wigan, which supports women to come together in a creative setting and make things to sell.

- **Championing individual entrepreneurialism:** Catalysts that previously provided business support, such as Made in Manningham and Real Ideas, typically had a strong focus on 'individual entrepreneurialism' and trading. For those catalysts, this approach was also enhanced by the context of their places, with Plymouth being a Social Enterprise City and Bradford having a strong history of entrepreneurialism amongst its South Asian population. Both catalysts used enterprise coaching which was an approach later adopted by the other catalysts. Real Ideas had what it termed an 'open door' approach where entrepreneurial community members were encouraged to come and share their ideas. This focus on individual entrepreneurism also included supporting community businesses with acquiring assets to support the sustainability of their own businesses. During the five-year programme they were able to unlock 15 assets for community businesses to operate from.

These approaches were not mutually exclusive and, by the end of the programme, all catalysts were using elements of each. The core approaches have, however, had some bearing on the number of community businesses supported and the intensity of support community businesses received. For example, both The Wharton Trust (Hartlepool) and WLCC (Wigan) focused on nurturing new ideas and providing wrap-around support to fewer businesses. Similarly, B-inspired (Leicester) and Centre4 (Grimsby) prioritised fewer organisations to direct more significant resources into. Real Ideas (Plymouth) and Made in Manningham (Bradford) provided a greater amount of light-touch support to a larger number of businesses.

The following table outlines our key findings about how the different approaches to catalysing community businesses have impacted on the programme's success.[22]

	Positives	Negatives	Risks	Best practice
Incubation	A strategic approach to setting up a community business that fulfils a need. Less risky because it is operating out of, and with the support of, the larger incubating organisation.	It could be considered paternalistic and therefore not as empowering for the staff involved.	In some cases, incubation meant that community businesses paid little or no rent, which was considered useful in set-up but in some cases risked community businesses becoming over-reliant and unsustainable. This in turn had an impact on the financial sustainability of the catalysts.	To prevent reliance on the incubating business, training and support should be available to community business staff to develop routes to sustainability. They should also be encouraged to take agency in decision making.
Being community led	An empowering approach, allowing the community to articulate their own needs and develop their own solutions to tackling them.	In communities with lower social capital, educational attainment and employment, there are higher numbers of people that don't yet have the aptitude or experience to run a business. This can include writing and financial skills, staff management and work experience. This means the approach can be much slower and requires intensive support from the catalyst.	There is a risk that the individual or group is not ready to take on the responsibility of managing a business, which could lead to greater risks to their livelihood and reputation locally.	This is a high risk, slower and more intensive approach. But ultimately leads to more impact for the individuals involved. Best practice requires the catalyst to set aside a lot of time for supporting and hand-holding, and resource to buy in specific skills or provide targeted training.
Championing entrepreneurialism	A supportive approach empowering individuals or groups to take full ownership of their ideas.	Many of the more entrepreneurial businesses worked well as businesses but struggled with authentically addressing the needs of their community.	Because these community businesses were often conceived by people with a strong vision for their business, they were sometimes less adaptable. Which meant they didn't always fulfil all the 'community' objectives of a community business.	To help entrepreneurs develop meaningful community-minded businesses, best practice requires setting expectations for what this means and providing advice and guidance for drawing the community into consultation and decision making.

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Commonalities in approach

Although the approaches differed in starting point and intensity, there were also commonalities that enhanced success. These included:

- Providing early-stage support and seed funding to boost new ideas and confidence.

- Being person-centred and providing holistic support that responded to the specific needs of the person or group, rather than providing 'off the shelf' support. This also included building trusted relationships over a long period and being able to use this basis of trust to play the role of 'critical friend' and challenge constructively.

- Being patient, allowing people to develop their business in their own time, was particularly important during challenging periods like the pandemic, when under-served communities were hardest hit.

2.3 What has been the impact of the characteristics and approaches of catalyst organisations on delivery?

Having outlined what we know about the distinctive characteristics of the catalysts, and how each has individually risen to the challenge of delivering their complex role, this section outlines our learnings about the implications of these characteristics and approaches for delivery. These are grouped into four categories:

- The size and starting point

- Existing skills

- Commitment of the core team

- Existing relationships

The size and starting point of catalyst organisations has implications for how the funding is invested

Both catalysts and tech leads felt that the relative maturity of the catalyst and its associated size had a real impact on the nature of their achievements within the five years.

Unsurprisingly, larger and **more mature organisations, with higher numbers of staff, had a greater capacity to 'hit the ground running'**, and have been able to absorb Empowering Places into their existing offer to community businesses to enhance and expand support.

For example, Real Ideas (Plymouth) and B-inspired (Leicester), the two largest organisations on the programme, were the only two that fully (or almost fully) spent the grant available for operational and staff costs. It could be considered surprising that the others, which are conceivably more in need of larger amounts of money, didn't manage to spend the full allocation. However, earlier in the evaluation we learned that the **smaller catalysts grappled with the programme's flexibility** and took longer to understand how to use the available funds in the most impactful way; as well as reporting being more conscious about cost savings. Staff at Power to Change also reflected that this might also be down to experience and confidence:

**"
(The larger organisations) have looked at what is available and re-purposed it to fit their needs. Others have had higher mental loads and lower capacity, which means they haven't spent it, or they haven't had the capacity or confidence to engage in thinking strategically about how it could be used.**
Power to Change Staff

In addition to this, the needs of the younger organisations have been different from those of the more established ones. For example, WLCC (Wigan) had only been active for five years at the beginning of the programme, used Empowering Places to strengthen its core organisational capacity and improve its community-rooted governance structure and business model. This meant they could more effectively support community businesses in future, rather than focusing on community business development from the outset.

This learning highlights that while 'need' plays a critical role in how funding criteria are developed, often defined by the needs of the community, there is an equally important role for funders in understanding needs both for the funded organisation and the wider infrastructure. Empowering Places' starting point was to set all catalysts the same goal, where in reality their needs were different. The flexible funding structure of Empowering Places meant that this largely wasn't an issue. However, had needs been assessed at the beginning, the catalysts may have felt more empowered to invest more in themselves and their infrastructure at an earlier stage.[23]

Existing skills and attributes helped the catalysts to pick up the role faster

Existing skills and attributes meant that some catalysts were naturally more effective in some areas than others. For example, staff at B-inspired (Leicester), Made in Manningham (Bradford) and Real Ideas (Plymouth) already had a **solid understanding of community businesses** and had been working to nurture opportunities in their areas for more than 15 years. Staff at Real Ideas reported their experience in **spotting whether an idea had potential** to become a business was invaluable.

Community development organisations that provide services, outreach and support through community centres, such as Centre4 (Grimsby) and the Wharton Trust (Hartlepool), were already **plugged in to the needs** of their communities. This enabled them to start developing new business ideas to address local need relatively quickly.

Additionally, **understanding the complex asset transfer processes** has helped catalysts to sustain their own businesses and the businesses they are catalysing. In Plymouth, for example, unlocking assets to trade from was already part of Real Ideas' core offer.

A committed core team with a dynamic leader led to more substantial outcomes

Having a dynamic leader supported by a committed team of individuals with a shared vision meant that the programme was often more embedded in organisational strategy, stretching its ability to achieve more.

The individual leadership at catalyst organisations has been cited by stakeholders, tech leads and Power to Change as the 'driving force' behind the programme's success, enabling the programme to be strategically significant both locally and nationally. The leadership of B-inspired in Leicester, for example, was widely praised by local stakeholders who commented that its chief executive is well regarded as a thought-leader. This was also said of the Wharton Trust in Hartlepool, whose CEO has regularly used his platform to articulate the lived experiences of local people to a wider, often national, audience.[24] This credibility has allowed the organisations to expand their reach and enhance their reputation.

"
**It's usually those one or two people
that are really sort of driving that group
or business forward. If you have that
person, then it's vital, it's like gold dust.**
Catalyst 1

A committed team around a strong leader
was also considered essential for **mitigating
risks and the fragilities of being too
dependent on one person**. Catalysts with a
committed staff team also benefited from
diversity of knowledge and experience
at different levels in their organisation,
including board, senior management,
project leads and project deliverers.

There were a few catalysts of the original
seven (including one in Luton, whose
involvement with the programme ended in
August 2019 following mutual agreement
with Power to Change), who had less luck
retaining strong leaders, embedding a
cohesive core team, or getting all staff
and trustees united around the same
vision. This had a big impact on the
catalysts' ability to deliver the programme
effectively. A shift in senior management
at one catalyst saw Empowering Places
relegated from being an important
strategic workstream, to become a less
well-resourced side project. Staff spoke
of feeling deflated, and seeing lots of their
hard work and strategic connections being
lost, which in turn led to greater turnover
and loss of organisational memory. In other
areas, conflicting visions or organisational
priorities led people in different directions,
causing capacity-intensive rifts and
structural changes that prevented staff
from keeping up momentum and nurturing
existing connections with community
businesses and other stakeholders.

Existing relationships and trust have enabled the catalysts to bridge the gap between community and support services

Time in the area has allowed catalysts to
build deep and trusted relationships which
have been essential for the role. Almost
all of the key staff at catalysts have been
**embedded in their local areas for 17 years
or more.**

Having **strong, existing relationships with
the local community**, including directly
and through other voluntary sector
organisations, helped catalysts reach
and build trusting relationships with those
most in need, as well as develop a nuanced
understanding of the lived experience of
local people and the issue they face. Trust
helped catalysts find an 'in' and allowed
local people to accept help and take risks
in a safe and supported way, meaning the
programme successfully reached those it
had set out to and who might be considered
typically harder to engage, more vulnerable,
or with less access to opportunity.

In its 'Reflections on the learning from
the Empowering Places' paper following
the programme's final learning camp,
Place Matters reflected that:

"
**… the position of the local catalyst in
being part of the community and having
the trust of local people was critical.
One of the distinctive sources of value for
community businesses is that they access
parts of the community that mainstream
services often don't because they are
organisations led by and set up to benefit
local people. Businesses and those that
enable and support those businesses need
to have the connections and trust of the
community to succeed. In Bradford, the
catalyst team talked about the inherent
and distinctive culture of entrepreneurial
spirit in the Pakistani Muslim community.
This is a key "asset" of that community
and therefore investment in community
businesses have a particular importance
to that community.**[25]

Additionally, having **existing relationships with strategic local organisations and those that hold power**, including local authorities, has allowed catalysts to support connections between these stakeholders and community businesses, as well as plug community businesses into wider strategic conversations about the local economy and empowerment, which could be critical to their future success. For example, in Plymouth, the leadership team's connections across the city have enabled them to ensure that community businesses are well connected to support networks as well as potential (and actual) sources of further funding.

> **They're connected in at lots of different levels...at the top end, where some of the decision making is happening, but also at the bottom end, where the grassroots need support as well.**
> Stakeholder 7

In Wigan, the catalyst's CEO has also successfully worked with the local authority to enable community businesses to access public funds, by supporting the council to revamp their procurement processes and award points for being a local provider, employing local people with social aims benefiting the community.

> **He's just a really nice dude that would do anything for anybody and that buys him a lot of credit with a lot of people ... when he phones ... they (the council) make space for him, he's really invested so much time in relationships.**
> Tech lead 4

Physical location had a huge impact on the ability to trade as a new business

Often the most successful community businesses have been those operating from a catalyst's 'hub' or building where other local community businesses are working. This has led to community businesses trading with each other, and their proximity has led to clients being referred to or using new community businesses as a result. The supportive culture between the co-located community businesses has not only led to efficiencies but has also boosted trade for some.

A catalyst having an asset has been fundamental to helping a variety of new community businesses to thrive, and has led to more and better local amenities being available, such as housing, cafés, a bar, a football pitch, shops, a farm, a brewery and community centres.

> **What lends itself really uniquely with Centre4 is the fact that this centre is situated at the heart of a housing estate ... it used to be an old school ... you've got rooms ... you've got a big main hall, you've got the sports facilities, or you've got this field, and then obviously, you have the area where the farm is ... it's got all these different spaces to then be things that are on offer for the community to support them with a host of different services.**
> Catalyst 5

Power to Change

3.
IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

This section explores in more depth the evidence that demonstrates how the programme's investment has contributed to change – for the people and organisations at community businesses and catalysts involved in the programme, as well as on communities and the wider places where they live.

We have consolidated findings from the four years of the evaluation to understand the impact of the investment, and represented it visually to demonstrate the complex nature of such a place-based programme.

This shows not only how inputs from the programme and catalysts have fed into change but also how small-scale change has led to greater shifts and the multiple factors playing a role in delivering impact. It highlights how rich the local ecosystems need to be to support change and, although each area is unique with its own distinct experience of change, it does allow some similarities to be revealed.

Inputs

*Empowering Places programme

**Catalyst organisation

Reputation, credibility and influence of national organisations

Strong leadership

Flexible and targeted capacity support

Peer learning and sharing network

Provision of funding

Listening to community needs

Incubation of new community business, including provision of physical space, staff and volunteer training and in-house support functions

Facilitating asset transfers

Demonstration of impact

Knowledge of the sector and understanding of key issues

Strengthening, building and sustaining relationships

Seed funding for local people with ideas

Enterprise coaching

Clusters of community businesses working together

COVID-19 UK lockdowns

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

Policy shift towards social enterprise/community business

2022

Starting point

Six communities in the highest 10% of deprived areas in England (2015) that lack in opportunities and investment

Local people and stakeholders trust catalysts

People feel listened to and more empowered to act on key issues

People acquire skills, knowledge, incentive and funding to get ideas off the ground

People start community businesses to tackle issues in their community

Increased employment opportunities

People see others starting community businesses and are inspired to do it themselves

Catalysts have the skills and knowledge needed to support others

Community businesses have increased referral partnerships with hospitals/local authorities

Increased funding in the area

Increased networks in places, across the programme and beyond

Enhanced profile for catalysts

Local authorities trust catalysts and want to work with them

More assets for the community to use

Increased amenities in the area

Catalysts have national presence

Catalysts play key part in community wealth building agenda

Area's reputation improves

Change

Stronger communities: Individuals involved in Empowering Places are more confident, resilient, enterprising and willing to take ownership of local solutions

More prosperous places: People have better access to services, increased amenities and more opportunities to get into good work

---

* Empowering Places programme inputs

- A £650,000 core cost grant
- An expert 'tech lead' to guide, advise and support catalysts
- Access to a provider pool of specialists to support with capacity building
- Seed funding to make onwards grants of up to £5,000 to community businesses
- Embedded peer learning network including bi-annual learning camps
- Willingness to be experimental, flexible and adaptable

**Catalyst organisation inputs

Catalysts are locally rooted anchor organisations, with excellent relationships in the community and across wider stakeholders in the place. Their role is to support the growth of new community businesses and improve local opportunities and the local economy.

A note on sustainability

Community businesses

By early 2023 the majority of Empowering Places community businesses are still in the early stages of their life cycle, most still requiring capital and revenue investment to grow, employ staff and sustain themselves.

Catalysts

While the catalysts have grown, secured new assets and successfully diversified their business models, there is still a question of how sustainable some of them will be without the investment of Empowering Places.

3.1 Evidence of impact on the people involved

Evidence shows that the Empowering Places programme has had a range of perceived impacts on the individuals involved. We've used the programme's change framework to categorise these findings into three key areas:

- Developing confidence

- Developing knowledge, skills and resources

- Strengthening networks and relationships.

Developing confidence

From the earliest stages of Empowering Places, confidence emerged as a key area in which individuals and organisations involved in the programme have experienced impacts. There is evidence of **confidence increasing at a personal level for catalyst staff as they have grappled with new approaches and successfully navigated challenges**. For some, working on the programme required a leap into the unknown and making it work has had a huge impact on their belief in themselves.

"
My confidence has grown, came on the back end of a really low point … so many different aspects of the group, partners, friends, the whole experience has been eye opener. I've never been on a job without benefits, first time not reliant on tax credits, doing it myself.
Catalyst 12

Improved confidence is also evident among community business staff who have reflected on how their role in the programme means that they feel as though they have a voice that 'carries more weight.' Some staff felt **more confident speaking up in situations** where they previously wouldn't have.

A growing understanding of the language used in the sector has also helped catalysts and community businesses feel more confident about developing new relationships and even applying for different sources of funding.

"
I've learnt so much doing this, I have gained skills, I've gained experience, and I've gained confidence, absolutely. So I absolutely can say that.
Community business staff 2

Developing knowledge, skills and resources

Closely linked to confidence, individuals delivering Empowering Places felt the programme has helped develop their knowledge and skills, which in turn has had a positive impact on community businesses and local communities.

For community business staff, this **includes learning about different governance models, how to put together business plans and access new funding**. This has led to them running their community businesses effectively and, in some cases, will support their chances of surviving without the catalyst organisations' input in the longer term. The community café in Leicester was an excellent example of this.[26]

The staff member leading the café went on a series of training courses to understand the structure and governance of a community interest company and learn about the legislation for catering and health and safety. This knowledge, alongside the individual's ability to transfer it to other staff has enabled the café to develop a robust business model, meaning the business stands a better chance of surviving on its own.

Developing knowledge and skills has also had notable impacts for some individuals who became involved with the community businesses as volunteers. In some cases, **volunteers have improved their knowledge, skills and confidence to a point where they have either been taken on as staff by the community business** or have found work elsewhere.

"
It gave me the confidence to get back into work and then go in from a volunteer to paid hours and now I have, you know, a secure job, so to speak, what's local and I'm giving back.
Video ethnography participant

Through developing knowledge and skills, catalysts and community businesses have therefore grown the resources available to them, with each place developing an **ever-increasing pool of volunteers** who not only want to support their community but who are also increasingly understanding the value of community business.

Increased resources from the programme – like grant funding or skills and knowledge to leverage more resources by applying for funding or connecting with new people – has helped community businesses develop the capacity of staff. By buying in support to develop business plans, helping them transform physical spaces, securing space to trade, covering repair bills and buying equipment, they have also been able to pool resources, gain new customers and create stronger mutually beneficial partnerships with other businesses.

Strengthened networks and relationships

There is considerable evidence that being a part of Empowering Places has enabled catalysts and community businesses to strengthen their networks and relationships, which has had a positive impact on their ability to grow their businesses.

With the community
Through Empowering Places community businesses have **purposefully enhanced relationships with their local communities** and used these to better understand community needs. In Hartlepool, the Wharton Trust embedded a community organising approach and ethos within all their community businesses. LilyAnne's Coffee Bar, for example, used community-organising to explore its market which resulted in 'socially-prescribed coffees' to help reduce loneliness and isolation to improve mental health. By generating knowledge about the community, the café also raised its profile and, in December 2021, the National Lottery Community Fund awarded a £75,000 grant to continue the work.

Across the place
The c**atalysts have also actively encouraged community businesses to form strong relationships** with each other. In Leicester and Grimsby this has occurred not only because the majority of the businesses are co-located in their respective hubs, but also because the catalysts have encouraged an approach to sharing and learning together. This has resulted in the businesses finding ways of supporting each other as they develop. For example, the café and bar in Leicester being available for users of the dance and football club after sessions, and at more formal events, has increased profits and encouraged more people to come along to spectate.

In Hartlepool, The Wharton Trust proactively built a cluster of community businesses to meet social prescribing needs by piloting a combined approach to tackling mental health. This allowed the businesses to s**howcase and use their complementary skills**, build stronger relationships and create business development opportunities.

Others also reported that working in clusters of community businesses had enabled them to **build a name for themselves** locally and helped some to identify and apply for new funding.

**"
There's an interdependency you can create which is beneficial for everybody. So the community business can benefit by the trading together, which actually improves the offer and broadens the offer.**
Catalyst 7

There is also evidence that the catalyst organisations are **increasingly being asked to join conversations as key economic actors** in their local area. For some, this has been as a result of their work with the community during the pandemic, particularly the anchor organisations Centre4 (Grimsby), B-inspired (Leicester) and The Wharton Trust (Hartlepool). It has also increased reach across the wider area. For example, in Wigan, WLCC has reflected that being part of Empowering Places gave them the capacity and confidence to look beyond their location in Abram Ward to have conversations about community wealth building at a Wigan borough and Greater Manchester level, which has now led to recognition as a key stakeholder in channelling social investment into the local economy through the Local Access Fund.

**"
More people, in a better place, more joined up, which creates a set of unique opportunities which would never have existed before.**
Catalyst 3

Across the programme and nationally
Across the places there is also a strong sense of **gratitude for the networks and relationships that have been formed through the programme**. Forging alliances with catalyst organisations and community businesses in the other places has given the individuals involved in the programme a wide pool of knowledge and experience to draw on. The sense of support and shared endeavour that has resulted from this has helped the catalyst organisations to navigate the programme, learn from each other and take more challenging or risky decisions.

The combined network of the Empowering Places catalysts, and wider partners (including Power to Change, Co-operatives UK, NEF and CLES) has also given the catalysts collective courage to talk about their work at a national level and advocate for greater investment in infrastructure for under-served communities and mass mobilisation of communities.

This included an Empowering Places submission to Danny Kruger MP's Levelling Up report in 2020.[27]

In Hartlepool, the catalyst team also felt that the access to a national platform and networks enabled the Wharton Trust to evolve from a hyperlocal and somewhat isolated community catalyst organisation to one that both serves a local community and has a voice in the national policy landscape. For example playing an active role in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on 'Left Behind' Communities and the We're Right Here campaign.

> **"**
> **I don't think that they [catalysts] just go back to what they were doing before the programme, I think it's fundamentally shifted the way that they think about themselves as places as neighbourhoods as communities, and what the solutions are to the challenges that they face, that's fundamentally shifted.**
> Tech lead 3

3.2 Evidence of impact on the community and the wider place

It has been harder to capture evidence of the impact of the programme on the six local communities and the wider places than on individuals and organisations. There are three key reasons:

- The impacts on communities have taken longer to manifest since they have been reliant on community businesses getting to the point of trading and delivering for their communities.

- Capturing the impacts is more challenging as they are in many ways less tangible than those for individuals and the organisations they work for.

- In some instances it is hard to attribute impacts on community and place to the Empowering Places programme, since so many other factors are in play.

Despite these challenges, **clear impacts have emerged and show signs of increasing** as the programme draws to a close, and the evidence gives us a high degree of confidence that the programme has at least contributed to these.

The programme's change framework identified a range of desired outcomes at the community and wider place levels, and we have considered the emerging impacts in light of some of these key themes:

- Increased involvement in community activities

- Developing the local economy

- Improved local infrastructure

- Local empowerment and pride

- Improved reputation.[28]

Increased involvement in community activities

The hyperlocal focus of Empowering Places has meant that the catalysts and community businesses have been able to develop opportunities for local people that are engaging and relevant for them. Across the places, this has encouraged local people to get more involved in community activity, which has manifested in three key ways.

First, **local people are benefiting from the services and activities that the community businesses are delivering**. In Grimsby, Centre4 has supported several community businesses designed to reach out to local people to support their mental health and wellbeing. This includes Nunny's Farm which has a particular focus on bringing together young people with behavioural difficulties and/or disabilities to volunteer on the farm, as well as providing a space for families and individuals to come together locally. These sorts of businesses provide opportunities for local people to join groups and engage in activities with others when previously that would not have been an option.

Power to Change

> **Bringing these community businesses
> to fruition, it really does make a massive
> impact, because it's really having an
> impact on people's mental health. The fact
> that people are able to come to a group,
> and otherwise they'll just be isolated at
> home, or they'll be lonely or they wouldn't
> have that opportunity.**
> Catalyst 5

In Leicester, new opportunities have opened
up for children and young people. While a
dance group existed before the programme
started, Empowering Places has helped it
to grow and reach a wider group of young
people who were previously not engaging
in activities. Likewise, the football club has
filled a void by providing sports activities
that local children can engage in and, with
six teams active, it allows a large number
of local children to get involved.

Second, **the programme has encouraged
some local people to get involved in their
community by volunteering their skills or
time**. In some cases this has meant offering
a few hours a week to work at one of the
businesses; in others, people have involved
themselves more intensively. This is the
case in Grimsby where a resident stepped
forward to run the community gym.
Likewise, in Leicester, the community bar is
being run by a group of local people, some
of whom have experience in hospitality.

Finally, even if people are not directly
involved with the community businesses
by using or working with them, the
programme has provided a **range of
opportunities for individuals to engage
with the community and share their
views**. Several places have either used
community organising or community
engagement approaches to seek the views
of local residents, providing another route
for people to get involved in their local
community and have their say.

In its paper following a learning camp,
Place Matters cites an example from
Plymouth: 'with greater community
ownership of land and assets, they are
testing out new ways of consultation and
decision-making (in person and online)
on how to use these resources as well as
how to increase and shape community-led
economic development efforts.'[29]

Developing the local economy

Over the course of the evaluation, we
had seen increasing evidence that the
Empowering Places programme is
supporting the development of the local
economy in each place. This is broadly
reflected in five indicators:

1

The programme is **bringing additional
money and resources** into the local areas.
The support that catalysts have received
through the programme has given them
a springboard from which to apply for
other funding. B-inspired, in Leicester,
for example, has a good track record of
securing funding for the area; however,
gaining stewardship of The Grove – an old
council building that is now housing several
community businesses – has opened up
a range of other opportunities to deliver
services and apply for funding.

The **track record and reputation of the
community businesses** developed by the
programme has also been cited by some
community businesses as helping to bring
in additional money for their areas after
successful funding applications. In Wigan,
one stakeholder reflected that the **catalyst's
network** had also served to bring in ideas,
partnerships and funding opportunities for
other local organisations.

2

In some places, established local organisations are starting to **procure services from the community businesses** which contributes to their sustainability and increases income, meaning they are able to deliver more for their communities. In Wigan for example, WLCC's relationship with the local council led to them commissioning Men's Sheds, a community business focusing on social isolation and men's mental health and providing a range of activities from gardening to woodwork.[30] Similarly, in Leicester, the community café is receiving orders from the local school as well as from B-inspired and other community businesses. Catalysts reflected that this type of procurement not only had financial value but also contributed to the confidence and empowerment of the community businesses involved.

"
It was great for the council to promote buying local but also great for Men's Sheds as it brought them much needed income. And of course there was a knock-on effect with the members who were then excited that they could turn that skill that had maybe been hidden for many years into a worthwhile thing, by knowing that they were making products that somebody was buying.
Catalyst 6

3

The six areas were chosen partly because they had high levels of deprivation. However, interviews with local stakeholders in Spring 2022 suggested that while this was unlikely to change in the short term, the programme was **equipping local community members to generate more disposable income in the future** by supporting them with volunteering and training opportunities that might ultimately lead to employment.

4

The programme is also adding **valuable jobs** to the local economy. Many of the community businesses offer paid roles alongside volunteering opportunities so they are directly improving employment opportunities in the local area. In Plymouth, the catalyst Real Ideas has identified around 20 paid employment opportunities that have resulted from the programme. In some cases, community businesses are also offering training as a precursor to employment. The football club in Leicester, for example, runs an academy which leads to paid employment with the club.

In Manningham (Bradford) the hyperlocal booster version of the Community Life Survey reported that there was a statistically significant decrease in the number of unemployed people between 2018 and 2020, compared with a matched comparison group.[31] While it might not be the programme alone leading to this outcome, the data demonstrates that the area is heading in the right direction and evaluation suggests that the programme is certainly a contributing factor.

5

Finally, the community businesses are **creating an incentive for local residents to spend their money locally**. In many cases, the community businesses are offering services that were not previously local available. In Grimsby, for example, the community shop, farm and gym all provide affordable goods and services for the community, while keeping wealth circulating locally.

Figure 8: Employment status between 2018 and 2020 in Bradford, from hyperlocal boost version of Community Life Survey

Economic status = unemployed

	2018	2020
Manningham, Bradford		
Matched comparison site		
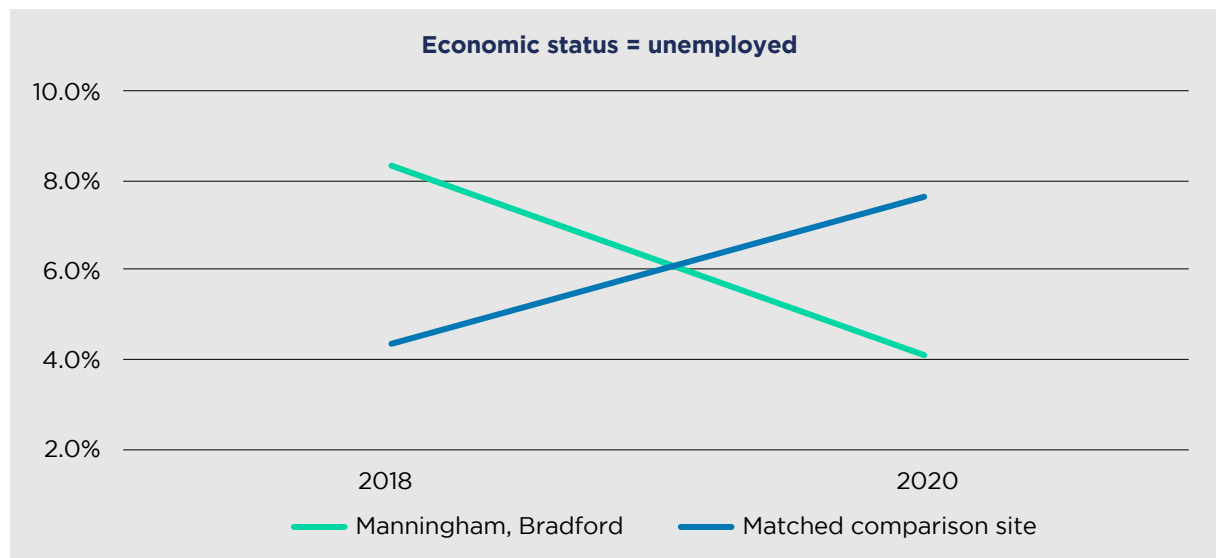
> **They're spending their time, their resources and their finances in the building, which is building not only themselves, but is helping support the community itself by allowing us to be able to continue to provide these offers for them.**
> Catalyst 5

Improved local infrastructure

There is considerable evidence that Empowering Places has had a positive impact on local infrastructure in the six places.

First, numerous examples demonstrate how there has been a **notable increase in the amenities available locally**. In Grimsby, Nunny's Farm has provided a community space where people can come together outside, something previously felt to be lacking. In Leicester, there was previously neither a second-hand shop nor a bar in Braunstone and Empowering Places has delivered both. In Plymouth, The Village Hub provides a much-needed place for local people to come together and delivers a food bank scheme for people in immediate need.

However, the programme has not just supported the development of new shops, services and spaces, but has also **improved existing amenities**. In Leicester, for example, local stakeholders have commented that the development of the football club has meant the park is not only more widely used in the evenings but that it also feels like a nicer and safer place to be for the community as a whole.

In Plymouth, stakeholders spoke about a theatre group which has attracted more people to the local park where they operate, making the area more attractive to visit.

> **People are travelling to the space ... I know lots of families who will travel to the park for the theatre and then will enjoy the rest of the park. It's that whole thing about breaking down barriers to what Devonport is all about. That whole space, that part of the park where they work now, is much more beautiful. And the fact that they have done festivals and activities there that have made it really beautiful has changed the whole atmosphere of the park.**
> Stakeholder 9

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Likewise, the conservation and rewilding community business Pollenize in Plymouth has transformed some of the green spaces in the area and created four new mini meadows across Plymouth.

The programme has improved social infrastructure by providing **more spaces for the community to come together**. In many of the areas, catalyst organisations have supported the **transfer of local assets into community hands**. This has fundamentally changed local infrastructure and meant that previously inaccessible buildings and spaces are now looked after and available for community use. For example, without Empowering Places, B-inspired in Leicester would not have taken on stewardship of The Grove, a previously unused council building. Similarly, the Wharton Trust in Hartlepool used the programme to secure a community shop and housing stock, which are being used to give local people jobs and places to live.

While there has been a stream of individual changes to local infrastructure supported by the catalysts and community businesses, in some ways the impacts go far beyond the individual community businesses and what they offer their areas. This has also been found in other research: for example, in their report on strengthening social infrastructure, the British Academy and Power to Change refer to it as a critical 'seed-bed' for the creation, enhancement and maintenance of social capital, a vital element of the social fabric of our communities.[32]

The **cumulative benefit of the community businesses** is also powerful. In Hartlepool, LilyAnne's community café uses the informality of its space to draw people in and build trust. Where they identify people with additional needs, they can refer them on to other local community businesses, like mental health support group Minds for Men. In turn Minds for Men provides training and work placements in the community shop.

In many areas, the programme has also helped mobilise community businesses by investing in core local infrastructure through the catalysts. This investment has built the capability and capacity of catalyst staff, using the expert provider pool and tech leads, enabling them to grow skills in business coaching and influencing. Also providing them with resources to secure assets, this means the areas can now enjoy long-term access to infrastructure, support and community business hubs.

Local empowerment and pride

Since empowerment and pride are comparatively nebulous terms, it is harder to capture instances of how and where they have improved. However, some helpful examples have emerged during more recent stages of the evaluation.

Across the places, catalysts and community businesses have **deliberately shaped their services to help empower local residents in their area**. In some cases, this is clearly having an impact. In Bradford, for example, Made in Manningham has worked in partnership with local organisations to create a women's enterprise network with the explicit aim of addressing under-representation in the local workforce. This identifies women who aren't in work and gives them a space to talk, build confidence and support each other, empowering them to take steps towards the labour market.

"
The women's enterprise network is a response to the fact that there are a lot of economically inactive women in both Manningham but also with inner city areas. But it's an opportunity to sort of say we need something specifically for women, because why are they so under-represented in the workforce, and potentially, are there a lot of women actually working from home, if they had this network, could build their own confidence by having a peer network like that.
Catalyst 8

Likewise, in Wigan, the community businesses Men's Sheds and MissPlaces provided a space where anyone could go for a creative outlet, to build relationships and access support, empowering them to find solutions to some of the challenges they face.

"
To have a town centre premises where local people could pop in to be inspired to say, I've got a passion for doing this, this and this, and we would be able to help them with their business support.
Catalyst 6

In some cases, increased empowerment and pride is evident through local residents' **willingness to get involved and be part of the solution**. A catalyst staff member at WLCC (Wigan) reflected that, since opening Platt Bridge Community Forum, residents had been coming with proposals to pick up and lead community activities independently, even taking over the management of Community Forum. Likewise in Hartlepool, catalyst staff described how local residents were beginning to identify challenges and needs and approaching the Wharton Trust with ideas about possible solutions and community businesses to help.

"
... people are running, you know, people taking action on it, and recognising it, and doing things and not being reliant upon other people are reliant on themselves and with other people.
Catalyst 7

Improved reputation

There is less evidence available on the impact of the programme on the reputation of the six places, which is more likely to be a longer-term outcome that will become increasingly evident as community businesses develop and awareness increases. However, some catalysts and stakeholders have indicated that there are signs that reputation is improving.

In Braunstone, Leicester, community business development is seen as the latest in a series of the catalyst's activities which have helped to turn the area's reputation around. Braunstone was previously considered to be a 'no go' area and one local stakeholder recalled a conversation with an employer who suggested that they wouldn't employ someone from the Braunstone estate. Now, however, the football club attracts many local children as well as children from further afield. Catalyst staff felt that the fact that families are coming to Braunstone from outside the area suggests there has been an improvement in the area's reputation.

In Grimsby, catalyst staff felt that improvements to the local reputation were slow, with attitudes to the Nunsthorpe estate still acting as a barrier. But they also indicated that change was happening with more, as well as new, people engaging in their events.

"
I'm seeing the change ... it's a slow change I've got to be honest
Catalyst

4.
DEPRIVATION AND RISK

There is clear evidence that the programme's approach to catalysing community businesses has been effective and created a lot of positive change for communities. But in areas that have suffered from continual underinvestment and faced an associated lack of opportunity, social capital and learnt skills, the Empowering Places' approach to identifying local people or organisations to start new community businesses was always going to be challenging.

For catalysts this has meant identifying the unique combination of a spark, passion and potential; the ability to build relationships, persuade, assess and mitigate risk; and providing ongoing, relevant, timely and holistic support. For potential community businesses leaders it has meant dedication, perseverance, a willingness to learn new skills and to take risks.

With the end of Empowering Places funding, this section explores the sustainability of community businesses and catalysts, as well as perceptions of future risk.

4.1 Community business sustainability

Personal challenges

Previous Power to Change research has highlighted instances of community business founders having to borrow money from their families to keep the business going, or of people leaving secure jobs to take on community businesses that haven't worked out, **leaving some feeling more vulnerable than when they started**.[33] Similarly, reflections from Place Matters highlight: 'The journey to creating a viable community enterprise can be long and arduous and made more so because many founders work part or full time in other roles that fund their investment into the enterprise. Many businesses do not thrive because founders can't manage the transition from "side hustle" to viable source of employment.'[34]

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External challenges

Community businesses also have to navigate external challenges, such as **how difficult and time consuming it is to secure assets**. This includes navigating complex bureaucratic systems and licensing laws, raising funds and competing against others. Research with catalysts revealed that challenges with asset transfers absorbed a lot of time in Wigan, Grimsby and Hartlepool, without bringing much return. For example, plans to purchase a plot of land to build community-led housing in Grimsby were derailed when the purchase was not approved by the local authority. Community businesses are likely to face similar challenges with securing their own assets in future, especially those that are smaller and starting up.

Additionally, interviews with catalysts and community businesses indicated that the **local context of some areas could make trading more challenging**. For example, some catalysts and community business staff felt that the external perception of their area sometimes prevented people from engaging with community businesses operating there. In Grimsby, attitudes towards the Nunsthorpe estate were considered to be a significant barrier to people coming to Centre4 where

the majority of community businesses are located.

Additionally, in Manningham, an area with a high Muslim population, the catalyst had to navigate Islamic beliefs about charity and business, as some felt that publicly combining the two could be considered prideful.

Life cycle challenges

In reporting on learnings from Power to Change's legacy programme, the Institute for Community Studies (ICS) uses four stages of community business development to identify key challenge points in a community business life cycle:[35]

The report identifies that community businesses face the greatest risks when they are transitioning between the different stages in the cycle. The report found it was notably **hardest between the inception and growth stages**, when individuals must translate an idea into a financially sustainable business, form governance structures and support volunteers to become paid staff.

Figure 9: The four stages of community business development (Plunkett Foundation, 2015)[36] (See Appendix 4 for more detail)

Pre-venture stage → Inception stage → Growth stage → Scale stage
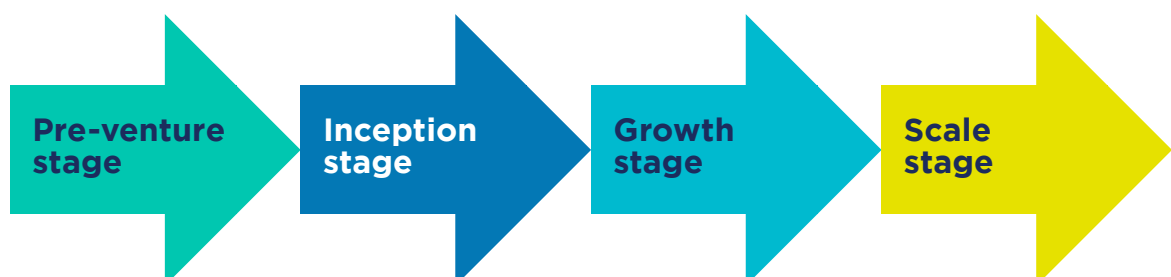
"
**Community businesses at this stage
were found to struggle to increase
revenues, as trading is in its infancy.
This lack of revenue growth represents
a catch-22 issue where if community
businesses struggle to grow, or "get off
the ground" after their inception, with
little growth in financial capital, they
struggle to implement staffing structures
or make necessary investments in the
organisation.[37]**

In Plymouth, for example, community
business Borrowed Parts Brewery Co
is ready to grow and employ a full-time
member of staff, but they have struggled
to secure investment that would allow
them to, meaning they are having to
consider whether to scale down instead.

Using interview data, alongside surveys
completed by the catalysts and some
of the community businesses at the end
of the programme, we believe that about
19 per cent of community businesses
are at the high-risk stage somewhere
between inception and growth.[38]

The few community businesses that are fully
in the growth stage (we estimate 12)[39] – such
as Nunny's farm in Grimsby and The Penalty
Box Social Bar in Leicester – either started
by being incubated by the catalyst or were
existing community groups, businesses
or existing sole traders when the catalyst
started working with them. Only one –
Pollenize CIC in Plymouth – was started
by a person with an idea.

Catalysts estimate that about 21 per cent of
the community businesses are in the scale
stage, including the Ethical Recruitment
Agency in Grimsby and LilyAnne's café
in Hartlepool.[40] Like those in the growth
stage, all were either an existing entity or
were incubated by the catalyst. None were
started by 'a person with an idea'.

Figure 10: Estimated life stage of community businesses
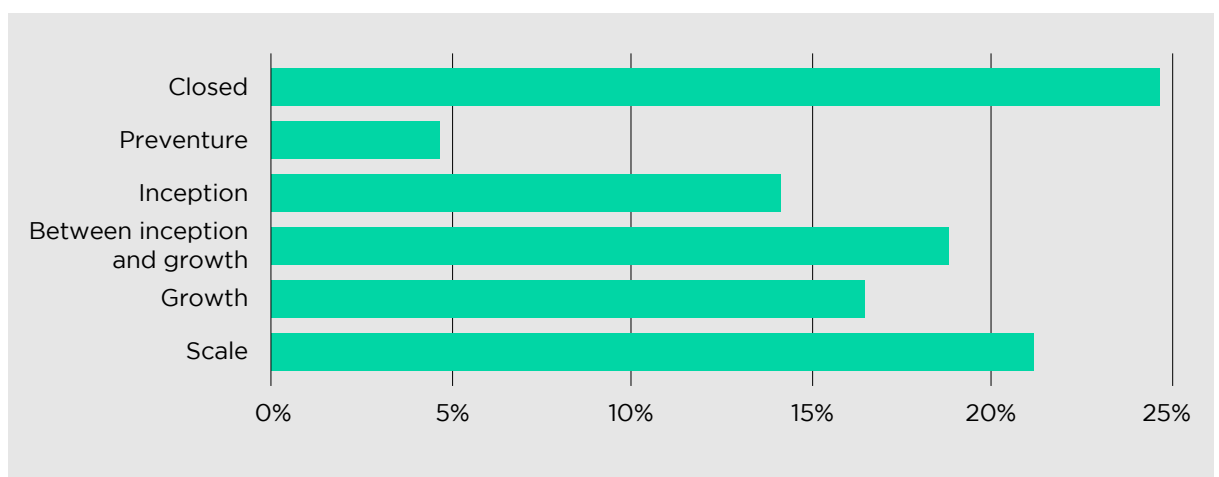
> **ERA (the Ethical Recruitment Agency) has developed a successful business model. With increased demand for their services, they've been able to really hone in on and tighten up the things that are needed for this business to be sustainable.**
> Catalyst 5

When we look at those 21 community businesses that catalysts estimate have closed, the majority (62%) were started by a 'person with an idea'. According to catalysts, the reasons many of these closed was a lack of funding and, for some, losing bids for local authority contracts. Other reasons were the location not working for trading, the pandemic, staff moving away and staff not enjoying the 'formal' side of running the business.

These findings suggest that, in order to catalyse sustainable community businesses in areas with high deprivation, the most effective strategy appears to be to support existing entities (community groups, businesses, sole traders) where the community business lead is already established and they have an invested customer base.

Alternatively, through incubation, where the catalyst safely grows a service to address a predefined need using their own assets – such as buildings, staff, resources. The riskier approach appears to be when people with ideas are supported to start from scratch.

The future for community businesses

Overall, the majority of individuals interviewed from the community businesses, catalyst organisations and wider stakeholders felt optimistic about the sustainability of the community businesses post Empowering Places, due to the demand for the services and the mutually beneficial trading and referral networks across community businesses. In Hartlepool, for example, it was felt that each of their community businesses runs a unique and vital wellbeing service that had a strong trading model including commissions from schools, council and the NHS.

> **Blooming arts are by far and away the single most important catalytic organisation in that creative sector**
> Catalyst 7

However, it is also clear that both **capital and revenue investment are still needed for many community businesses to sustain themselves**. Learning from Power to Change legacy programmes suggests:

> **Power to Change programmes demonstrated that grants or loans of £75,000–200,000 can be the difference between sustainability and failure or a hand-to-mouth existence that inhibits the longer-term developments that are needed for sustainability. For example, revenue grants were effective in providing community businesses with support to cover their initial running costs. This enabled community businesses to see through asset acquisition processes by covering running costs while resources were diverted to acquiring an asset.[41]**

Although Power to Change used to offer a range of follow on funding to support community businesses at various stages (including Bright Ideas, Trade Up and the Community Business Fund), these are no longer available and other funding sources for community businesses are harder to come by. '[A] consistently emerging finding across Power to Change evaluations was that financing the growth of the community business was a major challenge.' [42]

This lack of available funding is pertinent when many community businesses are facing high-risk points in their life cycle, at the same time as the Empowering Places funding ended. Community businesses also feel unable to raise prices during a cost-of-living crisis because their target audience won't have the disposable income to keep up. The outlook for these community businesses therefore feels far from certain and you can find out more about the kind of investment that could help to mitigate some of these risks in Section 3.

4.2 Catalyst sustainability

While the catalysts have grown in many ways, secured new assets and successfully diversified their business models, some remain more vulnerable than others. For the smaller catalysts, such as WLCC (Wigan), there is some concern that the departure of Empowering Places funding, which has paid for a significant proportion of their core costs, has the potential to leave them at risk of closure.

Knock-on effect of unsustainable community businesses

Community business sustainability can also prove crucial to those catalysts attempting to become more sustainable themselves by growing income from starting to rent out incubation space to community businesses that had historically enjoyed it rent-free. This presents a major ethical challenge for catalysts balancing their own financial sustainability with their sense of obligation to community businesses they helped establish to serve the community, but who are not yet financially stable enough to afford rent.

The future for catalysts

Challenges associated with accessing other sources of funding

There is a question around catalysts' role in the wider social economy that is critical to securing new funding. At this point it would seem prudent for catalysts to consider how they could secure reliable longer-term income by positioning themselves to be commissioned by statutory sector organisations like local authorities and NHS trusts. However, we are instead seeing that **catalysts are to some extent re-focusing on their core role as 'community anchor',** through activities like community organising and bringing groups together to build alliances for the local community. Three things appear to be driving these behaviours:

1

The role of the **'anchor' for many of these communities is critical,** and catalysts for the most part have excellent reputations and track records for fulfilling it. However, as they are also often the only local organisation playing an essential role that needed to be maintained, any new endeavour would have to be additional.

Power to Change

2

In some areas catalysts felt **existing power dynamics are preventing them from making inroads with the public sector**. For example, the catalyst in Hartlepool faced ongoing challenges engaging representatives from their local authority. Others noted that the dynamic between the local authority as a funder and the catalyst as a grantee, also meant they didn't feel they had an equal seat at the table. Catalysts also felt that the pace and approach of local authorities had been challenging, especially with agreeing and delivering referral contracts.

3

There is a question about **demand for the 'catalyst' role** from a statutory perspective. While there are clear benefits of working with infrastructure organisations like the catalysts, limited available resources mean decision makers might feel that funding for organisations that are directly providing essential services and meeting immediate needs will have more of an impact than investing in intermediaries. Although organisations like WLCC (Wigan) have excellent working relationships with the local council, they had struggled to make a case for funding from them. Although they have more recently managed to secure some funding to deliver coaching to social enterprises and community businesses, enabling them to continue to provide the support they developed during Empowering Places, this is only in the short term.

**"
I think that's come down to a really tricky understanding of what (the catalyst's) offer is, in terms of sellable services.**
Tech lead 4

Seizing levelling up opportunities
Although funding appears scarce, a **growing interest in social enterprise, levelling up and supporting people to create change themselves** offers opportunities for catalysts to promote their skills and build on their existing work. For example, after becoming part of the Social Enterprise UK network, B-inspired (Leicester) managed to secure funding from the Shared Prosperity fund to support the social enterprise sector in the city. WLCC (Wigan) secured funding from the Local Access programme to do something similar.

Catalysts in Wigan, Bradford and Hartlepool see this national shift in narrative as key to their success. In Wigan, the catalyst is part of an 'anchor network' whose main objective for the coming year is raising awareness and creating a directory of local community businesses and social enterprises for anchor organisations to procure from.
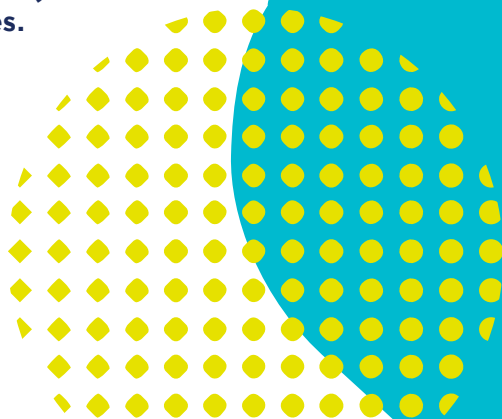
5.
APPROACHES TO INVESTMENT

This programme has been a significant investment in the social economy of six hyperlocal places and offers important lessons for funders, places and other stakeholders looking to run similar programmes in future. This section looks at the most salient.

5.1 What has contributed most to success?

Our evaluation **identified five overarching, transferable enablers of change** that supported Empowering Places catalysts and community businesses to thrive:

- a relational approach

- a good team inclusive of strong leadership and diversity of expertise

- blended grant and capacity building support

- flexibility alongside targeted support

- time.

1

The programme's relational approach has been fundamental to successful delivery
Throughout this report we have talked about the importance of the catalysts' relationships with community and professional stakeholders, but relationships at other levels have been equally as important:

- **Close and sustained relationships with catalyst organisations in other places** facing similar challenges has empowered catalyst staff and given them the confidence not only to deliver the programme but also try new things. For example, the asset-based approach taken by Leicester and Plymouth inspired both Wigan and Hartlepool to explore asset transfers of their own.

- **Close relationships between the catalysts and the key support partners** has meant that catalysts' openness about what help they need has genuinely aided their progression. This was felt most keenly in Wigan, Bradford and Hartlepool where the tech leads were able to bring new perspectives, skills and experience to an existing problem.

Across the cohort, this trust and openness (between all places and support partners) led to deep friendships and a sense of 'being in it together'. This allowed for sensitive topics, issues and struggles to be shared, which was particularly important during the pandemic.

"
Where we got through the course of the programme, was a bunch of people that cared about their places, often working against the tide, in their own places. And they found their tribe through Empowering Places, they found other people fighting the same battles.
Tech lead 4

Many have put the success of the deep relational approach down to the modelling of good relationship building, and the sense of humility and openness fostered by staff at Co-operatives UK and Power to Change. The lack of competition and comparison built into the programme design also helped.

2

The leadership and reputation of the individuals involved has enhanced credibility locally and nationally
The leadership and reputation of the catalysts is one of the key contributing factors to the programme's success. Catalysts also feel the reputation of the national organisations involved in delivering the programme (Power to Change, Co-operatives UK, CLES and NEF) has given them and community businesses a local legitimacy, and had a positive impact on their profile.

Even those that started the programme with a good profile indicated that being part of Empowering Places increased it further. Catalyst staff also spoke about the connections that had been made through exposure to new people that might not have happened without the programme, and how catalysts have been able to 'open doors' with support from the tech leads.

"
Empowering Places has ... enabled him to have those conversations with the of weight of CLES behind him as a bit of a trusted partner ... it's given him leverage ... that's what Wigan has got through this programme, rather than this suite of community businesses ... the big wins in Wigan have been his strategic relationships and what he's been able to do for the reputation of the sector, in Wigan, and broader Greater Manchester
Tech lead 4

Additionally, creating a network of people with a variety of strong complementary skills has led to greater results overall, and ideas have been replicated across places. The combination of strong leaders with different expertise has also supported tech leads, Power to Change, Renaisi and the catalysts to build a greater, more nuanced understanding of the value of everyone's work, which will undoubtedly help all organisation's improve their delivery.

3

An unrestricted grant alongside targeted capacity support, ensured catalysts made the most of the investment
Although the core funding was fundamental for growing robust local infrastructure, it was the capacity support – tech leads, expertise from the provider pool and peer support from other catalysts – that helped catalysts to transition into 'agents for change'. At the time Empowering Places started it was rare for funding programmes to provide such a significant long-term blended investment, particularly where grant funding could be used to resource staff to participate in learning and capacity building.

"
**They engage in learning and capacity
building because they are paid to do so!**
Tech lead 4

'Train the trainer' opportunities, like
Enterprise Coaching for catalyst staff,
were considered particularly effective,
supporting catalysts to extend and develop
their own offer. Additionally, understanding
how to 'unlock' assets to trade from
enabled catalysts to sustain both their own
businesses and those they are catalysing.
Tech leads and learning camps have also
provided inspiration and guidance to help
catalyst staff to navigate complex asset
transfer processes.

4

**The programme's flexible but targeted
approach enhanced the catalysts' ability
to act on important local issues**
Catalysts reported that they felt trusted
by Power to Change to know what was
best for their community and were able
to respond to challenges and opportunities
in their own way. This has meant that
instead of providing 'off the shelf' support
to community businesses, catalysts were
able to go on a journey with people, build
trust and specific skills depending on an
individual's needs and draw on a variety
of resources from the programme to help.

Place Matters reported how, at the final
learning camp, 'Several catalysts talked
about the freedom they had found in
not having pre-defined targets in the
Empowering Places programme and
how their understanding of value of the
programme had emerged in unexpected
ways.'

"
**For example, Plymouth talked about
achieving much more around asset
transfers and employment than
initially anticipated and achieved more
overall from being able to follow the
opportunities that emerged. Bradford
talked about the mismatch between
how public authorities sought targets
and outcomes as a condition of funding
and used contracting models more
suited to service contracting than
entrepreneurship.**

Catalysts have been clear about the
benefits of such freedom and flexibility:

"
**Patience and flexibility have been
huge. It hasn't been a rigid contract or
programme that delivered you a set of
outcomes that it wanted which is invariably
what you usually get. There was a sense of
every organisation being able to do in their
own way. There was no minimum standard
set for them to achieve. The flexibility has
meant that people have been able to
take their time on things, do them at a
pace that was realistic and achievable.
This programme has been liberating in
that respect. If something isn't working,
people have had the flexibility to
change it**
Catalyst 2

The **flexibility of the programme** has also allowed both Power to Change and the catalysts to learn from mistakes. Since the programme's inception, Power to Change has adapted their funding and reporting approach numerous times in response to catalyst and community needs.[43] Catalysts have also been more willing to try new things which has boosted their confidence in their delivery. Examples include:

- engaging the local authority in an area where historic relationships between the council and voluntary sector had been poor

- trialling enterprise programmes with schools

- 'taking a punt' on community business ideas that wouldn't otherwise have progressed and going through asset transfer processes.

"
Power to Change's light touch, relational approach has given us a space to be honest about what hasn't worked, I think has been terrific
Catalyst 7

There are **also important lessons about how to maximise the benefit** of this type of investment, including understanding where the catalysts and community businesses are in their life cycle, and which catalysing approach will be most effective for which community business. We found that although 'incubation' was the safest approach, it also carried a risk of community businesses becoming over reliant on catalysts.

Power to Change also learned that catalysts' needs tended to differ after the first two years of investment, and meant a more bespoke holistic approach was required for each area.

5

Five years to engage, test and deliver
Finally, the time to engage, build relationships and test approaches was considered critical. The five-year programme has supported catalysts in growing relationships organically and informally. It also allowed catalysts to nurture community businesses at an appropriate speed. One catalyst noted that they 'would have lost so many of those community businesses if it had been a year or two's programme.' However, it is notable that even after five years the majority of the community businesses are still in inception stage, or somewhere between inception and growth, suggesting that this was the minimum time needed. Realistically, all catalysts would have benefited from more time to support community businesses to become sustainable.

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5.2 What can catalysts and community businesses do to strengthen and sustain change?

For the most part, catalysts and community businesses feel optimistic about their future role locally, and have identified exciting opportunities to use their new skills, connections and assets constructively. While real challenges for sustainability remain, and there is no 'one size fits all' approach to overcoming them, several insights emerge from the evidence and evaluation that might help catalysts and community businesses minimise risk and maximise opportunity in future:

1

Catalysts and community businesses should **robustly evidence their impact on their place**. As the attention of policy makers and commissioners shifts towards local businesses and social enterprises, local funding will be increasingly made available through public sector routes, which often involve more rigorous monitoring of key performance indicators than traditional funders have required. This may require building more skills in evaluation methodologies, or investing in external evaluations to help.

2

Community businesses and catalysts **should ensure they can align with any emerging social and economic priorities that tend to be a focus for funding**, such as equity, diversity and inclusion, digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and greener solutions. This would not only lead to more efficient and effective ways of working, but also enhance reputation and profile.

3

Catalysts and community businesses have opportunities to **provide consultancy** to cross-subsidise community development work. This could include identifying the distinctive needs of diverse communities often facing social and economic inequity; designing and delivering accessible, inclusive services and support to build the social and economic wellbeing of communities, and resilient and sustainable community businesses.

4

One of the strongest findings from the research has been how important networks are for increasing trade and securing funding. This has been particularly pertinent for community business clusters who have created mutually beneficial trading and referral networks in places. Insight from Power to Change's legacy programmes also highlights the **importance of working more systemically**, suggesting that catalysts and community businesses **should continue to focus on building and strengthening networks across places**.

"
Additional stakeholders should be included in the support for community businesses, including other organisations and local authorities. To be adapted to this point in the development process, hubs would need to be financed with a long-term approach in mind. Additionally, the hubs need to be developed with key stakeholders engaged throughout the development process to ensure that the support needed is provided. [44]

6.
CONCLUSIONS

• • • • • • • • • • • • ◆

Empowering Places aimed to reduce inequalities, create sustainable clusters of community businesses and support the widespread economic development of communities. The catalysts made great strides towards delivering these ambitious aims, delivering a programme that managed to be both person-centred and systemic.

There is perhaps a gap to be acknowledged between the ambition to deliver something of such scale – to reduce inequalities across the place – and the day to day reality of working intensively with only a few people in each place to do so. While the catalysts may not have completely fulfilled the original brief, the impact on the people that have been involved has been undeniably life changing.

For people in communities, the catalysts have helped to provide new opportunities in response to community need, rebalancing power to put local people at the heart of decision making, as well as offering local jobs and much needed local services through new community businesses. For community businesses, the catalysts have supported people to change their lives, growing their skills and providing them with access to support and strategic networks across the place to help sustain the change.

"
What is really key for me, is that there's been a set of new breakthrough projects and businesses that have created new anchors in new sort of hyperlocal communities, and we now have a network that's big and strong enough upon which you can do wider system change.
Catalyst 3

Perhaps the greatest impact has come through the kind of new infrastructure and support mechanisms that give people opportunities for a different future. This has been most notable in areas that had previously lacked these kinds of facilities and support, like Wigan and Hartlepool. These developments also create productive bridges across the social economy; between the public and voluntary sectors, businesses and social enterprise, enhancing the visibility, viability and reputation of community business locally.

However, although it is clear that new infrastructure has great potential to deliver some significant outcomes, in a 'ripple effect' with full results emerging only in time, it is fair to say we may only fully understand the impact of the programme by monitoring developments over the next 5–10 years.

While there is much to celebrate, it is also important to acknowledge that some people were less fortunate than others during the five year programme, and some of the community businesses and catalysts have struggled with sustainability. Although it is clearly unrealistic in planning and budgeting terms for a national funder to be expected simply to continue funding such a programme in perpetuity, many would benefit from sustained ongoing support and it feels like the programme is closing at a critical time; not only for individual beneficiaries but also for the sector. If there is an appetite to continue supporting the evolution of the social economy in the ways we have seen in Empowering Places, then current national funding frameworks may also need to evolve. New programmes might helpfully respond to what's been learned here and elsewhere, in particular about the kind of ongoing funding and support that could effectively enable a sustainable sector in future.

Meanwhile, pending any radical transformation of the funding system, funders could readily apply some key learnings from Empowering Places now:

- **Funding holistically:** understanding the nuance of each place and providing bespoke funding and capacity-building support specific to areas of need – such as infrastructure or asset acquisition.

- **Creating time:** funding to enable innovation by back-filling people's time to explore and test different approaches to addressing need, or investing in listening research to understand people's real needs and how to address them.

- **Investing in relationships:** there is plentiful evidence that building relationships and trust, so that people feel genuinely able to share their experience and raise their issues, has helped with targeting support and led to more effective problem solving, ultimately enhancing the impact of catalysts in their communities.

APPENDIX 1:
METHODOLOGY

The evaluation aims to take **a realist approach to understanding impact and what has contributed to it**, focusing on the experiences of those involved. We draw mainly on interviews and video ethnography with catalysts, community businesses, tech leads and stakeholders in the local areas, and interviews with programme delivery leads at Power to Change and Co-operatives UK. Researchers used detailed notes and an observation and learning log to track relevant findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and impact of the programme.

In addition to qualitative data, we have used some findings from the hyperlocal booster version of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Community Life Survey, carried out in the six areas by Kantar (2018–early 2020).[45,46]

Limitations

Given the complex context in which the programme and the catalysts operate, there are several notable challenges to providing a fully comprehensive evaluation.

As Empowering Places is fundamentally a capacity-building programme for catalyst organisations and community businesses, our primary research has inevitably been with staff and volunteers at the catalysts and the community businesses involved. Although we know community members have benefited greatly from the programme's impact, they are distant from the funding and operation of the programme, which has meant engaging them has been a persistent challenge.

A further limitation is confidently attributing outcomes solely to Empowering Places, when there are such a variety of factors to consider in areas of high deprivation with complex voluntary sector landscapes, facing multiple interconnected challenges that were exacerbated by the pandemic. However, our realist approach to evaluation using methods which focus on contribution rather than attribution means we are confident that Empowering Places has played a significant enabling role in delivering the outcomes we have described in the report.

Moreover, using a 'difference-in-difference' approach in the Community Life Survey hyperlocal booster – where comparable samples for each operational area provide some control for factors outside the programme – meant that although the nature and timing of the survey itself couldn't fully reveal the extent of the programme's contribution to change, our overall methodology has been designed to allow us to attribute some level of causality.

APPENDIX 2:
CATALYST TYPE

Catalyst	Type of organisation
B-Inspired, Braunstone, Leicester	A neighbourhood-based charity with a trading arm which owns several local assets, as a legacy of the New Deal for Communities programme. They work with local people to understand local issues, and forge relationships with service providers as well as their own network of volunteers to find solutions.
Centre4, Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby	A community hub delivering services and activities to the local community. It also provides space for a wide range of tenant organisations and community groups as well as being an incubator space for small businesses and social enterprises.
Made in Manningham, Manningham, Bradford	A community business hub (incubated by Participate Projects), providing one-to-one enterprise coaching, small seed grants for individuals, groups and existing community businesses.
Real Ideas, Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth	A well networked social enterprise that delivers innovative projects, with extensive experience of taking on and redeveloping assets. They provide affordable and flexible office space for SMEs to grow and develop, as well as capacity building support. They are also connected with several Plymouth-wide and national initiatives
The Wharton Trust, Dyke House, Hartlepool	A deep-rooted community organisation actively supporting the growth of resident engagement and community leadership. They also lead on other place-based programmes like Big Local in their locality. Their CEO has a national presence within the UK voluntary sector and has featured in national newspapers numerous times over the last few years.
Wigan and Leigh Community Charity (WLCC), Abram, Wigan	An established community charity that has operated in several guises over the years. Now focusing on nurturing community business and social enterprise across Wigan; providing the knowledge, skills, networks and platforms for social enterprise to thrive. It has close links to Wigan Council and is a key delivery partner for the borough-wide social enterprise initiative the Wigan Borough Local Access Programme.

APPENDIX 3:
COMMUNITY BUSINESSES

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ◆

Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Plymouth	Billy Ruffian's Brewing Co. was its original name. Trading as Borrowed Parts Brew Co.	A community micro-brewery brewing beer with local produce, including waste bread, to support culture, environment and good jobs
Plymouth	Cliik Community Limited	A community space offering a range of support for local residents combining environmental, housing, employment and quality of life initiatives to regenerate north Stonehouse
Plymouth	Column Community Events	Provides local events for the community
Plymouth	Devon and Cornwall Furniture Reuse Charity	Provides reused furniture and supportive social space
Plymouth	Jabulani CIC/ Diversity Business Incubator	Multi-cultural food court supporting local food enterprises, that emerged from the Diversity Business Incubator (DBI)
Plymouth	KARST Charity	Community arts and culture venue
Plymouth	Nudge Community Builders	Creative community-led programmes to improve public spaces and places and connect people; leading the community ownership and regeneration of multiple buildings on Union Street
Plymouth	Pembroke Estate Management Board	Longstanding resident community-led property and tenant management organisation regenerating a local housing estate
Plymouth	Pollenize CIC	Introducing network of community apiaries (beehive sites) to high profile buildings in the centre of urban communities to reverse pollinator decline and increase biodiversity
Plymouth	Red Velvet Cinema	Fortnightly community cinema events for older people, with classic films, tea, cake and conversation at Devonport Guildhall, to help reduce social isolation

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Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Plymouth	Plymouth Scrapstore	Community recycling centre promoting play through craft and sustainability
Plymouth	Snapdragons Plymouth	A group of parents who offer an alternative for children's creative and environmental education and learning
Plymouth	St Saviours	A disused church, not in the Devonport and Stonehouse area but supporting wider place outcomes
Plymouth	Soapbox Theatre (Stiltskin)	Community children's theatre, based in a regenerated wartime mustard gas decontamination centre, now also developing the grounds surrounding the theatre
Plymouth	The Stonehouse Voice Ltd	Community news publication for Stonehouse and wider printing and publications
Plymouth	Street Factory	Use all elements of hip hop – fostering economic development and transforming lives for young people and families from their community hub in Stonehouse
Plymouth	The Firestone Society	Community run rehabilitation service, providing high quality supported housing in and around Plymouth for people recovering from addiction. Currently purchasing the property they have been renting, through community shares and a council loan
Plymouth	The Village Hub CCBS	High street community hub, providing learning and signposting services, and cultural and environmental activities
Plymouth	Hamoaze House	Day support rehabilitation facilities for people and families in the community affected by a problematic use of drugs or alcohol – with gym, yoga and gardening activities
Plymouth	Pillars of Wellness	Provide accessible information on wellness and wellbeing, hosting talks, workshops and classes for the local community
Plymouth	An-Noor Arabic School	Saturday school teaching Arabic language primarily but not exclusively to children and young people
Plymouth	EZ Care	Community handyman and building service

Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Plymouth	Zebra Collective Co-operative	Community organisers working in community development, reflective practice and training. Originally entered the programme as part of a collectives project to re-open the Welcome Hall in Devonport as a community run centre
Plymouth	Yoga Loft Plymouth	Yoga studio offering individual and community classes and workshops, from a building regenerated with community crowdfunded support.
Plymouth	Keyham Shed (part of Keyham Neighbourhood Watch)	Local voluntary and Neighbourhood Watch groups, managing an asset transfer from the local authority to recover a disused former groundskeeper's hut for a multi-use community centre in Keyham
Plymouth	Devonport Property Management Company	Resident-owned housing management company
Plymouth	FabCity	Global network organisation with a core belief that sustainability and liveability depend on collective action and co-designed solutions, supporting the city to transition to producing everything it consumes by 2054, with a particular focus on social enterprise and community business.
Hartlepool	The Annexe	Community hub and ethical housing initiative, providing good quality housing with affordable rents and training local people to be community organisers to improve the area
Hartlepool	BloomInArt	An award-winning creative business increasing community engagement through creative arts projects. They co-produce projects to celebrate place, identity and heritage and create paid opportunities for freelance artists and a platform for local talent.
Hartlepool	Bringing Communities Together	Providing educational and creative services. Taken over by local hospice to diversify support beyond patients and reach into the wider community
Hartlepool	Community Personal Support Service	One-to-one paid-for care provision
Hartlepool	Grayfields Recreation Ground and Pavilion	A large asset transferred to the community with 10 sports pitches and a club house providing sports and social activities for the community

Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Hartlepool	Hartlepool Ambulance Charity	Working in community partnership to improve the quality of life through medical education, enhancing the health and wellbeing of local people and fundraising together to help save local lives
Hartlepool	LilyAnne's Coffee Bar	A social organisation operating a wellbeing café and community hub reinvesting income to support the community. This includes providing a safe space and support hub for those experiencing loneliness, homelessness, mental health problems and others.
Hartlepool	Make Dyke House Beautiful	A ward level endeavour to make Dyke House more environmentally attractive, cleaning up the neighbourhood and planting flower bulbs in new planters. Would have had an anchor contract to look after Grayfields grounds as a springboard to becoming a financially independent community business
Hartlepool	Runfit	Non-competitive running group accessible to everyone regardless of ability
Hartlepool	Minds for Men	Mental health and social anxiety support organisation, offering activities, events, peer support and signposting to professional help for the local community
Bradford	Abilities Together	Working with the local neighbourhood to create health and wellbeing spaces including a community garden
Bradford	Bangladeshi Youth Organisation	A community led charity, dedicated to improving education, skills, employment, health and recreation
Bradford	Bradford Organic Communities Service	Protecting and preserving the environment by reusing, reclaiming and recycling as much as possible, and helping tackle health inequality issues with produce grown by and for the community in its community garden
Bradford	Bradford Youth Development Partnership	Promotes the benefit of young people aged 8–30 years within Bradford by developing and managing youth initiatives, and developing a multi-agency approaches which assist young people to participate fully in the life of the district
Bradford	Cecil Green Arts	Artist led community arts organisation working with local schools and the wider community to create street theatre and events, specialising in large scale lanterns and puppets

Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Bradford	Creche 24	Out of hours/evening crèche for people who work unsociable hours to enhance their career prospects and employment opportunities
Bradford	Equality Together	A local user-led organisation for disabled people, their carers and families
Bradford	Hollins Youth Association	Community organisation helping young people enhance their social and emotional wellbeing through social interaction, enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities.
Bradford	Learning At Home	A service for parents wanting to support their children's learning at home
Bradford	Made in Manningham Markets	Community markets with pop-up stalls in Manningham, providing opportunity for local entrepreneurs to test trade their ideas in front of potential customers
Bradford	Manningham Cricket Centre	Engaging local young people in playing cricket for health and wellbeing
Bradford	Mary Magdalene	Community church creating a space for groups and individuals to transform their neighbourhood, including programmes to reduce anti-social behaviour and criminal activity and prevent young people from getting involved in crime; with mentoring and resettlement support for those leaving custody
Bradford	Millan Centre	Community centre for women and girls in the Manningham and Heaton area, providing a range of educational, social and health-related activities for the local community
Bradford	My Manningham	Working with local people, businesses and landlords, to help make Manningham cleaner and greener
Bradford	North Avenue Youth Centre	Youth sports activities on North Avenue
Bradford	Nutrition Advice, Fitness & Selfcare (NAFS)	A community-based organisation supporting socially isolated women, elderly and people from minoritised ethnicity communities and their young families, to improve their health and wellbeing.
Bradford	Regeneration Bradford	Supporting young people's education, particularly families with autism

Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Bradford	Sunnah Sports Academy Trust Charity	A registered charity that has a plethora of regular inclusive sports activities available for all ages, abilities and experience levels
Bradford	The Sharakat Project	Community project fostering wellbeing and increasing neighbourliness, by providing safe space for friendships across cultural and faith boundaries and activities include English classes, help for asylum seekers, drop in café, cross cultural cooking and crafts.
Leicester	Braunstone Park 18 FC	Amateur sports team for under 18's operating out of the Grove
Leicester	ER Crew	Community-funded volunteer run street dance and fitness group in Braunstone, helping children and young people from around Leicester to stay active and healthy
Leicester	The Penalty Box Social Bar CIC	A community run social bar located in the Grove to provide a social space for local residents to meet and hold events
Leicester	FSD FC	A community focussed independent youth and adult education and sports community hub with a football academy helping young people, especially those from challenging backgrounds, to get ahead in life and maximise their potential, on and off the football pitch.
Leicester	Parkside Community Café	Community café located in the Grove serving lunches, hot drinks and light refreshments, providing support to local community
Leicester	Preloved@45 Community Shop	A place to buy second-hand clothes and bric-a-brac at affordable prices operating from the garage space they used to use for pop events and sales, with income re-invested in community events and services
Wigan	Hub 617	A run-down community space in Platt Bridge transformed into a hub offering a safe space for care-leavers to help them with the transition to adulthood, with personal advisors helping with training and job hunting
Wigan	Betty's Café	Community café operating from a previously vacant facility within Bickershaw Village Community Club

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Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Wigan	Bickershaw Village Community Club	A community club in the village of Bickershaw with rooms that can be hired out for private functions
Wigan	Bicky Lads and Lasses	Craft based activity for young people in the Bickershaw Village Community Club, helping reduce social isolation in the local community, meeting weekly and making products for sale
Wigan	Bom-Ta-Bom	Drumming and music therapy workshops for young people and adults with disabilities, aged 16 and over
Wigan	Made in Wigan shop	Shop and community hub in Wigan town centre providing free services and support to help more people to set up and promote their own community businesses across the borough, and a sales platform for the services they provide and products they make.
Wigan	MissPlaces Ltd	Wellbeing group for women supporting entrepreneurship and developing skills
Wigan	Pianos, Pies and Pirouettes	Supporting the growth of art and culture in Wigan, from music, dance and performance to food, hosting and devising community theatre events, aiming to build engagement and reduce inequalities
Wigan	Platt Bridge Community Zone	Community enterprise hub in Platt Bridge, owned and operated by Wigan and Leigh Community Charity
Wigan	TasteBuds Café	Community café in Platt Bridge Community Zone that cooks with locally grown food and trains local people to cook
Wigan	Tudor House	Community hub and accommodation facility in Hindley
Wigan	Wigan Cosmos	Football club offering wide range of inclusive competitive and social sports opportunities, to build skills, fitness and wellbeing, that has taken responsibility for St John's Street Playing Fields in Abram Ward through an asset transfer
Wigan	Wigan Men's Sheds	Addressing social isolation and men's mental health by providing a range of activities for men of all ages from gardening to woodwork

Unfortunately Wigan Men's sheds has now closed down |

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Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Wigan	Abram Community Centre	Volunteer-run community led facility in Abram providing a multi-purpose communal place as a home for wide range of groups, clubs and classes and reinvesting income into community services and support
Wigan	More Than Words CIC	Community organisation bringing inclusive drama, music, sports and healthy lifestyles to people of all ages and abilities in Wigan and beyond
Grimsby	Callie's Baby Clothing	Selling second-hand and new baby items, with surplus given to babies in community
Grimsby	Community Gym	Bringing together local providers to train and support local fitness
Grimsby	Community Orchard	Using under-utilised and waste land to create an urban orchard and garden that will feed and educate local people as well as serving as a new communal green space
Grimsby	Craft Collective	Local crafters coming together to sell collectively online, at markets and from local premises
Grimsby	Daisy's Wish	Takes and makes donations of sports kit to help remove barriers to accessing sports activities
Grimsby	Ethical Recruitment Agency	Helps local people develop the skills required to access employment opportunities and works with businesses to place them
Grimsby	Musical Arts Stage Theatrical Productions CIC	Theatre group aiming to be accessible to all who want to be involved from performance to back stage, offering learning and support programme for dancing, singing, acting, scriptwriting and all aspects of production
Grimsby	Nunny's Farm CIC	A self-sustaining community petting farm providing local employment and learning opportunities, empowering the local community to be more at one with nature and improving physical and mental health
Grimsby	Social Circular Craftship ELEOS Collective	Working with children, communities and teachers to embed arts in day-to-day lives on a grassroots level, building ownership, skills and understanding about how arts can nurture pride and togetherness Offering mentoring and consultancy to schools, artists, community groups and event organisers

Place	Community business[47]	Community business description
Grimsby	Thrift Shop	Selling second-hand clothes and giving profits to local charities
Grimsby	Tools Library	Lending library of equipment that can be used at home for activities such as DIY, craft or upcycle projects, as a cheaper alternative to purchasing DIY equipment and to reduce waste, and encouraging people to take ownership of their environment and reuse products
Grimsby	Freestyle Academy	Music enrichment project to build confidence through performance, develop social skills and improve mental health in children, young people and adults
Grimsby	Refresh Wellbeing	Provide relief to people who are suffering from physical and emotional issues and improve overall health and wellbeing

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APPENDIX 4:
COMMUNITY BUSINESS LIFE CYCLE⁴⁸

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Pre-venture stage	The pre-venture phase represents a point at which members of a local community become aware of a local problem, need or opportunity, to which a community business could be the answer. This trigger could take different forms: a valued local public asset such as a library or a sports centre could be under threat from budget cuts; a longstanding local business like a pub or a shop could be struggling financially or be subject to plans that would undermine its local role; or a local need might have emerged, for example, a lack of broadband access, that local people themselves are well-placed to meet.
Inception stage	The inception stage is the point at which a community business is formalised, graduating from an idea sketched on a napkin to a functioning organisation. At this phase, organisational structures are adopted, business planning takes place, and things are formalised within the community businesses.
Growth stage	The growth stage is a formative, high-risk stage for any community business. It is the moment of truth that decides whether or not early momentum can be translated into a financially and socially sustainable organisation. Here volunteers may become paid staff, governance arrangements may be made, and the importance of sound financing becomes apparent.
Scale stage	The scale stage is where community businesses have established a sustainable organisation and look at what could be achieved next. Businesses at this stage are doing good work, but find themselves improvising as they may be looking to change sectors or diversify their provision. As they look to their next venture, new challenges await, so novel approaches to support and funding are required.

ENDNOTES

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1 Power to Change describes itself as 'the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test, and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.'

2 Informed by the 2015 English indices of deprivation (the most recent data available at the time): https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015

3 Marsh Farm Futures in Luton was the seventh member of the Empowering Places cohort; its involvement with the programme ended in August 2019, shortly after Renaisi joined as evaluators.

4 Originally incubated by Action for Business Ltd in Carlisle Business Centre, Manningham.

5 You can find the ethnographic films here: https://www.powertochange.org.uk/news/what-weve-learned-from-three-years-of-evaluating-empowering-places/ and here: https://www.powertochange.org.uk/news/community-business-covid-19-diaries/

6 The annual budget allocated changed over time. This information is taken from Power to Change's internal Empowering Places update report, February 2020.

7 We had a dedicated researcher allocated to each area who got to know the area and built trusted relationships with catalysts, so that our research was rooted in context and our findings were strengthened by the openness and honesty.

8 Power to Change (2019) *Register of hypotheses* – October 2019.

9 Hewson, B. (2020) *Empowering Places update report, February 2020,* Power to Change (for internal Impact Committee).

10 The levels are neither hierarchal nor linear, and each supports others to thrive.

11 Catalysts were chosen from long and short lists in line with detailed criteria developed by Renaisi in 2016.

12 Informed by the 2015 English indices of deprivation (the most recent data available at the time): https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015

13 See Appendix 2 for more information about the organisational approach of each catalyst.

14 Centre4 reported overall staff numbers rather than breaking down by full-time and part-time.

15 Estimated information on catalyst websites. Many have operated in different guises in previous years, and this data relates to the time that catalyst organisations have been operating in their current organisational structure. For example, Made in Manningham's 'Year's active' represents only the time they have been operating under Participate Projects, not the time the project was delivered by Carlisle Business.

16 This includes all supported organisations, community groups and individuals, even if they didn't ultimately incorporate as a community business or are no longer active. It is not possible to establish how many businesses are still active from the information available, as it relies on self-reporting. Comprehensive data on business types is only available from respondents to the 'seed grant survey' numbers of which can vary between two and 32 responses per question). We aggregated data from these responses to give some indication of the variety of types of community business.

17 See Section 2 on risk and deprivation for more on why these community businesses closed.

18 The expert provider pool was amended in year 3 to allow use of local support providers.

19 See Appendix 3 for a full list of community businesses.

20 As recorded by Power to Change and Co-operatives UK.

21 The Relationships Project (2020) Relationship Makers Impact Review.

22 Positives, negatives and risks are not a catch all for all community businesses developed using these approaches, but aim to outline overarching learning.

23 The only issue was that a small amount of unspent funding was lost in the first year.

24 https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/may/17/hartlepool-voters-civic-revolution-general-election
https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/23/britain-beyond-lockdown-can-we-level-up
https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/19/could-hartlepool-sever-ties-with-labour-for-the-first-time-in-60-years

25 Place Matters took over the management of the learning network from Co-operatives UK in the final year, and will continue to run 'communities of practice' after the programme ends.

26 The community café sadly closed in early 2023 due to personal challenges.

27 Kruger, D. (2020) *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant.*

28 'Improved community connections and relationships' and 'Improved community knowledge, confidence and skills' are not included here as they are addressed at the individual level.

29 Place Matters (January 2023) *Reflections from the learning from Empowering Places Programme from catalyst teams.*

30 Unfortunately, Wigan Men's Sheds closed down during the pandemic.

31 A hyperlocal version of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's Community Life Survey was carried out in the six Empowering Places areas during the five-year programme. A final report on the findings of the booster surveys will be available in 2023.

32 The British Academy and Power to Change (2022) *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure.*

33 O'Flynn, L. et al. (2022) *Empowering Places: The impact of the programme on community businesses.* Evaluation Report. Power to Change.

34 Place Matters (January 2023) *Reflections from the learning from Empowering Places Programme from catalyst teams.*

35 Haw, S. (2022) *Supports and challenges for community businesses: Lessons learnt from Power to Change's legacy programme evaluations.* Research Report. Power to Change.

36 Plunkett, J. and Swersky, A. (2015). *"What if we ran it ourselves?"* Getting the measure of Britain's emerging community business sector.

37 Ibid.

38 Catalysts estimate 33 per cent of their community businesses are in the growth stage, however, average staff numbers for this group equate to only 1.75, suggesting that they are more likely to be somewhere between inception and growth. Catalysts estimate 16 per cent of their community businesses are in the inception phase.

39 Estimate based on number of staff greater than 1, and catalysts' categorisation of stage.

40 The scale stage is where the community business is sustainable in the long term and where they may have matured or evolved beyond the remit of their original social mission.

41 Haw, S. (2022) *Supports and challenges for community businesses: Lessons learnt from Power to Change's legacy programme evaluations.* Research Report. Power to Change.

42 Ibid.

43 For example, the maximum value of a seed grant that could be awarded by catalysts was increased in the final year of the programme, and allowances were made to repurpose capacity funds in the context of the pandemic.

44 Haw, S. (2022) Supports and challenges for community businesses: Lessons learnt from Power to Change's legacy programme evaluations. Research Report. Power to Change.

45 Kantar's methodology compared key outcome metrics over time in the six Empowering Places areas (2018–2020). This hyperlocal version of the survey uses a 'difference-in-difference' statistical technique which estimates the change over time in these places compared with changes seen in matched comparison areas. This provides an indication of the relative impact of the Empowering Places programme.

46 The original plan was to use the whole-year dataset for 2019–20, but there was a concern that the COVID-19 pandemic would mean that any differences revealed between data collected in the six operational areas in 2020 and that collected in the Community Life Survey from 2019 would be unrelated to the Empowering Places programme. Consequently, Kantar used data from the first half of the Community Life Survey for 2020–21.

47 Community business names and descriptions are based on information provided by the catalysts.

48 Plunkett, J. and Swersky, A. (2015). "*What if we ran it ourselves?*" Getting the measure of Britain's emerging community business sector

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