Learning from Phase 2 of the Place Based Social Action programme

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Executive summary

The Place Based Social Action (PBSA) programme which runs from 2017 to 2024 provides a £4.5m investment for local partnerships to develop social action approaches, by addressing issues and priorities that matter to people in their community. PBSA is funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund (the Fund) and is in its fourth year of seven.

PBSA supports ten partnerships with funding for a wide range of activities including staff salaries, training, volunteer expenses, management costs, premises costs, monitoring and evaluation and overheads. The programme also provides access to a learning partner (Renaisi) to build skills in evaluation and support contractors (a consortium led by Locality) to build social action capacity in places.

Much of the first year of Phase 2 (in 2019) was spent embedding plans, strengthening partnerships and developing ideas. In March 2020, the majority of this was put on hold as PBSA partnerships had to pivot their role to respond to the Covid-19 crisis in their communities.

Funding partners provided PBSA partnerships with flexibility in terms of reporting and delivery plans, and enabled support providers Renaisi and Locality to provide additional support through an enhanced peer network and a series of short papers uncovering learning from places and providing rapid insights to support places to develop their approaches.

Although the shape of delivery has been altered during the Covid-19 crisis, it has also inspired more people to engage with social action. Over the autumn 2020 partnerships had begun to find ways to harness this momentum and create conditions to empower residents to lead.

In Phase 2, PBSA partnerships are beginning to make a difference, by:

- **Empowering people to take action -** by galvanising people around a theme of interest of common issue (such as the appearance of a local area) and supporting people to take action around it. Partnerships are also supporting residents to grow their confidence by delivering small activities themselves, such as wellbeing groups and growing initiatives. There are also examples across the programme of providing training and developing people's skillsets to enable them to feel equipped to lead change.

- **Understanding social and economic issues and opportunities**, and providing activities that respond to these, such as projects focussing on poverty, sustainable food supplies and mental health.

- **Collaborating with organisations and the community,** to increase the reach of partnerships to people they have not previously connected with – for example, by creating connections with more diverse partners such as a women's refuge in one area, mutual aid groups, and local businesses. Two of the partnerships have created BAME

networks. Partnerships have also enhanced their relationships with local authorities to create more effective referral systems to reach those in need, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic.

- **Co-producing local services through social action projects**, such as supporting people to formalise and constitute new groups, as well as supporting people to set up their own social enterprises. This is helping to strengthen the sector and endorse the power of local people.

- **Creating a greater sense of influence and ownership for local people in the areas they live in**, by securing assets as a partnership and/or helping others to uncover local assets, providing a tangible place for the community to use and take ownership of, as well as providing greater visibility for PBSA. Partnerships have also used media to elevate the voice of the community and support them to demonstrate the impact of their work to a wider audience through accessible visual mechanisms.

Learning from the programme has identified **three approaches which support social action to thrive**, these are:

- **Community engagement**, including listening to the community through methods like Community Organising, open space events, community consultation and listening exercises. This is enabling partnerships to develop an understanding of what people want and need, and giving people opportunities to share and develop ideas. This sort of community engagement has also helped partnerships to design systems, approaches and activities that will motivate people to get involved in the future.

- **Developing and empowering people,** by providing structures and support that allow people to thrive. This includes understanding people's motivations and building on them, being flexible, developing strong and trusted relationships which bolster people's confidence, providing advice and guidance, and equipping people with new skills.

- **Relationships and collaboration** with other voluntary sector organisations, statutory organisations and businesses, through building on existing connections, understanding each other's individual contributions and value. Partnerships are also using data, evidence and research to secure and retain new partnerships.

The next phase of the programme, beginning in January 2022, focuses on building 'resilience and legacy' to help the partnerships think about how to embed their approaches beyond the lifetime of the PBSA programme. The funders hope to support all ten places to move forward to the next Phase.

Ahead of Phase 3, Renaisi will develop a refreshed learning framework that reflects the stage the PBSA programme is at and supports understanding of change at four levels - foundational, enabling, programme level and population level.

1. Introduction

1.1 The aims of the Place Based Social Action programme

The Place Based Social Action (PBSA) programme was launched in 2017 by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund (the Fund). It represents £4.5m of investment over seven years, of which DCMS contributed £122,362.50 to the first two years of the programme, with the Fund contributing the remaining amount.

PBSA aims to support ten local partnerships to develop social action approaches to address issues and priorities that matter to people in their community, by:

- Supporting **local communities, public sector organisations, service providers, civil society organisations** and **businesses** to work together to address local priorities

- Increasing the **capability and ability of local people and organisations to take action** on the issues that matter to them

- Encouraging **new ways of working**, so that the people who live and work in an area have more **meaningful influence** and **ownership** over local services[1]

1.2 Key features of the PBSA programme

Local PBSA partnerships include a **broad range of actors** – such as local community members, representatives of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and statutory organisations. The lead organisation in each area is required to be a registered charity, community benefit society, community interest company or social enterprise.

The PBSA programme was designed with **two key elements of support** for partnerships: a support contractor and a learning partner. Although elements of these roles overlap, the focus and activities for each is as follows:

- **Learning partner role (Renaisi) -** supporting partnerships to build skills in evaluation, develop evaluation plans and tools to capture insights, and develop processes of learning to embed reflection and adaption. This included a dedicated point of contact for each place to support partnerships with their evaluation approaches, as well as generating key learning at programme level.

- **Support contractor role (Locality, New Economics Foundation and Co-operatives UK)** – supporting partnerships to build social action capacity by playing the role of critical

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[1] From the PBSA programme initial [guidance](#)

friend, supporter and facilitator. Helping them to strengthen relationships, develop and deliver plans, and prioritise activities. The **Relationship Management** has been used as dedicated point of contact for each place to guide and support partnerships through each stage of the programme.

PBSA is made up of three stages, which are summarised in Table 1 below:

Phase and timings	Programme activities
Phase 1: Development Jan 2018-Dec 2018	Up to £5,000 was available for 20 partnerships to create a shared vision and plan. Match/in-kind funding of at least 33% was required for partnerships to be eligible for Phases 2 and 3. 19 partnerships submitted proposals, and the Fund and DCMS chose 10 successful partnerships to go on to Phase 2.
Phase 2: Delivery Jan 2019-Dec 2021	Grants of up to £240,000 were awarded to 10 partnerships to implement their social action plans. Funding was for a wide range of activities supporting the programme aims including staff salaries, training, volunteer expenses, management costs, premises costs, monitoring and evaluation and overheads. In September 2021, the 10 partnerships will be required to submit revised plans for Phase 3, which will be assessed by representatives from the Fund and DCMS with the view of supporting all 10 partnerships in to Phase 3. The partnerships will be required to demonstrate how they have built social action capacity to date, articulate how they will manage a reduction in funding and provide robust plans for embedding learning and evaluation in Phase 3.
Phase 3: Building resilience and legacy Jan 2022-Dec 2025	Grants of £120,000 are available for up to ten partnerships to develop and expand their social action activity to sustain local outcomes beyond the duration of the PBSA programme.

Table 1: Stages of the PBSA programme

More information on Phase 1 can be found in the Phase 1 evaluation report published in May 2019, which captures the experiences of participants, funders and delivery partners involved in the first phase of the programme.

1.3 Methodology

This report presents findings from the first two years of Phase 2, from January 2019 to January 2021. It aims to summarise some of the key findings from this period to build an overarching picture of Phase 2 delivery to date for those who were directly involved, and for others working on similar approaches who might be interested in early learning that has arisen from the programme. The report covers:

- An overview of Phase 2 delivery

- Emerging change - understanding how PBSA is beginning to make a difference

- Key learning - understanding what is needed to embed social action

- Looking to the future of PBSA

This report has been authored by the learning partner for the programme (Renaisi) and is informed by:

- Conversations with partnerships during one-to-support and learning gathered at the PBSA Learning Event in Lincoln in February 2020

- Peer networking sessions throughout 2020

- In-depth qualitative interviews conducted in August and December 2020 as part of an additional piece of work commissioned by the Fund to understand the Impact of Covid-19 on PBSA places and partnerships response

- An analysis of monitoring reports submitted to the Fund throughout Phase 2

- An end of year survey submitted to the Fund regarding their view on support contractors (Locality, New Economics Foundation and Co-operatives UK) and evaluation advisors (Renaisi).

2. A learning programme

2.1 Learning framework

The aims of the evaluation and learning approach are:

- **To generate and share key learning at programme and project level** – focussing on the outcomes in figure 2 below, and exploring the journey of places on the programme

- **To capture the difference PBSA is making in places** – at individual, community and wider system level

- To build **evaluation capacity** in places.

The PBSA programme aims to build the evidence and demand for social action so that local public services and other funders support social action at a local level in the future. The learning approach is seeking to understand the experiences of the ten partnerships about the conditions that enable social action to flourish; and to understand what is distinctive about this programme's approach to change.

During Phase 1, a set of **overarching outcomes** at **place** and **programme** level were developed (see figure 1 below). These will be refined ahead of Phase 3 to incorporate the Covid-19 Emergency Framework (outlined below), as well as learning collected throughout the programme to-date.

Place level outcomes
Local communities and organisations from different sectors feel more **empowered**, and increasingly able to take action on issues that matter to them   - Partnerships increase their understanding of the **social and economic issues** and **opportunities** in their areas, and what is needed to embed social action projects at place level   - Organisations and communities increase their capacity and ability to **work together in different ways** – creating new spaces for collaboration and engagement across sectors based on more equal relationships   **More services at a local level are co-produced** through the social action projects   - Residents feel they have a **greater influence** and **ownership** over the places where they live

Programme level outcomes
Increased understanding of **what the PBSA programme approach enables** – in particular, the support, local conditions and approaches that can allow place based social action to thrive

- Increased understanding of the **impact social action can have** on individuals, communities and organisations – and effective ways to capture and measure this
- The programme explores **what works at what scale** for place based social action
- Improved knowledge about how approaches to place based social action **change local systems**

Figure 1: Place level and programme level outcomes from the PBSA programme

During the pandemic, Renaisi put together a Covid-19 Emergency Framework to complement the programme's existing framework, this focused on:

- The most prevalent **needs** triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic

- **Key approaches and adaptations** PBSA partnerships took in their local area (e.g. frontline immediate relief filling a known gap, community-led actions etc)

- The role of **collaboration in places** in responding to Covid-19

- **The role of the community** in responding to Covid-19

- The **impact and learning** for those most closely involved.

This initially set out three phases:

- **Short term** (March-June 2020) – addressing the immediate crisis and acute need

- **Medium term** (July-December 2020) – the 'recovery' period – continuing to respond to evolving needs and vulnerabilities as lockdown eases, and planning for the future in collaboration with others in the local area

- **Longer term** (2021 onwards) – adapting to the 'new normal' and focussing on community resilience.

Since developing the framework in April 2020, it has become clear that the medium and longer term 'recovery' and 'adapting to the new normal' phases required some adjustment. However, they continued to provide a relevant structure for understanding the work of the PBSA partnerships during a time of significant change, focusing on how delivery had transitioned and adapted, how momentum around social action had been sustained, and how PBSA areas have been able to support community resilience.

2.2 Embedding learning practices into Phase 2

The Phase 2 applications demonstrated a **strong commitment to learning** at a local level (within partnerships and across the area), and more widely across the PBSA programme as a whole. There was also a willingness amongst partnerships to test, fail and adapt – reflecting the emergent nature of many of the proposed social action activities themselves. Renaisi and

Locality, alongside funding partners, developed a **programme of learning events and initiatives,** which included:

- **Induction to Phase 2 event in March 2019:** This brought representatives of all 10 partnerships together with staff from the funders and support providers to reflect on Phase 1 and to share ideas and updates on Phase 2.

- **Two-day Learning Event in Lincoln in February 2020:** This was delivered by support providers Renaisi, Locality, NEF and Coops UK, which aimed to create a sense of collective identity and pride across the PBSA Programme, highlighting synergies within the cohort and strengthening understanding of the purpose and ambitions of the programme.

- **Development of a Peer Network**: This includes a programme of regular online 'open' sessions for the cohort to provide a space for partnerships to share their experiences and targeted sessions led by partnerships around a topic of expertise. A Facebook page has been set up for people involved in the programme to share resources, advice, opportunities and learning. Feedback captured from five of the ten partnerships, in a questionnaire sent out by Locality, suggested that the cohort sessions had been very useful in helping partnerships understand how others in a similar position had been overcoming challenges. Sessions also allowed PBSA main contacts to get to know each other better and build on the peer-networking element of the programme that was started at the face-to-face event in Lincoln.

- **Video ethnography:** This has examined the delivery of PBSA in 2020, starting at the Learning Event in Lincoln, and tracking progress throughout the rest of year via the submission of video diaries from partnerships. A ten-minute film has been produced with key reflections from the year which will be shared with partners in May 2021.

- Renaisi were also commissioned by the Fund to carry out **additional learning and evaluation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic**, to capture how partnerships have responded and show the value of what social action can achieve through incredibly challenging times. This included reflective interviews with partnerships and a series of accessible learning papers that synthesised the issues that places were facing. The papers were designed to support places as they continued to adapt and respond to the pandemic.

3. Overview of Phase 2 delivery

Much of the first year of Phase 2 (in 2019) was spent embedding plans, strengthening partnerships and developing ideas. At the Learning Event in Lincoln in February 2020, partnerships were beginning to implement their Phase 2 plans and the event provided a platform to learn from experiences so far across the programme. However, in March 2020, plans had to be put on pause, as places inevitably were involved in the community response to Covid-19.

The role of PBSA in ongoing community rebuilding shifted throughout the pandemic from one that was supporting residents through hardship to then creating the conditions to empower residents to take the lead, embedding the principles of social action. This was achieved by working through broader partnerships, engaging more residents in finding solutions at a local level, and making the most of assets and skills. Table 2 below shows the evolution of PBSA plans during Phase 2:

Partnership	Original Phase 2 plans	What changed during Covid-19
Community 360 (Colchester, East)	The partnership comprising of voluntary, statutory, housing, education and health partners planned to support residents with dementia through a referral and support pathway to create a "dementia friendly borough".	The partnership used their **referral and support pathways** to work with partners across the borough connecting with mental health organisations, foodbanks and GPs surgeries. They also carried out **listening exercises with the aim of building a collective narrative that responded to community needs**, with a particular **focus on inclusion** and working with BAME communities. They are also developing programmes of **wellbeing activities** to address growing concerns around mental health and isolation, such as a virtual advent calendar.
Grapevine Coventry (Coventry, West Midlands)	The partnership planned to focus on children and young people by creating a series of ongoing activities to help them and their families become more integrated into the local community.	During the early stages of the pandemic the partnership worked with local **mutual aid groups** as a route to connecting with local volunteers, as well as developing a food hub and delivering a programme **of wellbeing activities** to address mental health and isolation, including online social suppers. Grapevine used **community organising** approaches to listen to the needs of community and inspire local people to create their own solutions, they also employed a local resident with the right skills and experience to be a paid Community Organiser to lead on movements to tackle loneliness and isolation.

Halifax Opportunities Trust (Calderdale, Yorkshire and Humber)	The partnership in Halifax sought to bridge divides between West Central and North Halifax by bringing the two communities together through social action and connecting organisations in the two areas.	The partnership set up a **food hub** at the beginning of the pandemic and worked with other local partners to distribute food, including setting up a 'community fridge' at a local Mosque. They also supported people to set up **social initiatives** such as a community garden. They used **community organising** approaches to listen to the needs of community, sending trained community organisers to deliver food to people in need, allowing them to continue to connect face-to-face even with restrictions. They also sought opportunities to continue Community Organising online. They have been **training community journalists and reporters** to collect stories and perspectives, to powerfully demonstrate impact through visual mechanisms, allowing them to make inroads and build skills in specific communities, such as BAME communities.
Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership (Bristol, South West)	The partnership's focus was on bringing diverse communities together through a friendship scheme for new residents, the improvement of green spaces alongside new build developments and enhancing local facilities.	The partnership **pivoted the use of their asset to become a central emergency hub**, responding to the immediate needs of the community, including inbound and outbound call centre facilities, coordination of volunteers, provision of food parcels and befriending services. They also worked with other local organisations to create **referral networks** to efficiently serve the needs of residents and supported people to set up **social initiatives** like wellbeing groups. The partnership held a large **community consultation** exercise at the end of 2020 and as a result have revised their plan and plan roll out an asset-based community development model, and a digital transformation strategy. They are also working on a **community led film** about their place.
Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust	The partnership planned to use social action to create a range of solutions to local social and economic challenges and help	In the immediate wake of the pandemic the partnership's primary objective was to **work with the local authority** and other local bodies to **get homeless people housed**. They also worked on a number of **cross-organisation initiatives such as a digital inclusion** project that provided local people with technology and dongles. They

(Hartlepool, North East)	people escape poverty, including programmes to support, strengthen and better connect existing social action initiatives, as well as identify new initiatives and making it easier for people in Hartlepool to engage in social action.	also developed **programmes of wellbeing activities** to address growing concerns around mental health including the distribution of 'grow packs' and seeds, as well as 'guerrilla gardening'. The partnership have adjusted their approach to focus on **systems change**, and have co-created a local working group with funding from the local authority to develop this.
Lincoln City FC Sport & Education Trust (Lincoln, East Midlands)	The partnership sought to increase community cohesion through the delivery of activities such as a street art project, regular litter picks, the maintenance of green spaces and the Sincil riverbank, as well as developing a timebank.	The partnership in Lincoln **worked closely with the local authority**, and local mutual aid groups to respond to the pandemic, and have since spun off a **'Good Neighbour' scheme**, managed by local people, supporting residents to retain the connections made in the crisis period. After the crisis period the partnership carried out a **community survey** to understand the opinions of the local area and see whether perceptions have changed in response to the crisis. They have also carried out **initiatives that aim to build pride** in the area such as litter picks and art trails. Much of their work is **inclusive and multilingual**, reflecting the diverse population in the Sincil Bank area. They are also working to set up BAME networks to help with engagement going forward.
North East Lincolnshire VCSE Alliance (N.E Lincs)	The partnership aimed to promote community action to address local issues such as drug dealing, anti-social behaviour and slum landlords, working with local people to support neighbourliness, to increase well-being, reduce health inequalities and create a central community hub.	Unlike other PBSA partnerships, the lead organisation in N.E Lincolnshire is an Alliance made up of senior representatives from other local organisations and therefore during the crisis period, most people were occupied with crisis response in their own organisation and PBSA was largely on hold. However, the partnership did send out **activity packs to local families.** Since the crisis the partnership have come back together to re-plan and re-prioritise and are in the process of **developing a ten-year Neighbourhood plan** for the area, which PBSA will fit in to. The PBSA coordinator has also worked with a number of local organisations to bring forward a **community led housing project**, as well as working with three social housing providers delivering home maintenance in East Marsh.

Onion Collective CIC, Watchet (West Somerset)	The partnership aimed to address five main issues: tackling transport difficulties faced by people at risk of social isolation; increasing training and education opportunities; helping local people find a voice in local decision making; supporting young people and promoting existing opportunities and support to the community.	The partnership **pivoted the use of a local newsagent to become a central emergency hub**, responding to the immediate needs of the community, including inbound and outbound call centre facilities, coordination of volunteers, provision of food parcels and befriending services. They also used their **community transport** scheme to ferry people to and from doctors appointments, and later for vaccinations. They worked closely with their **mutual aid group** which formed quickly due to the existing connections and relationships created through PBSA. This later transitioned this into a **Good Neighbour Scheme.** The partnership have also commissioned a project to look at **'power mapping'** outlining what social capital looks like across the area, and understanding who is working towards the same long term goals and which community groups, organisations, charities, businesses and Councils are connected to each other.
Safe Regeneration (Sefton)	The partnership aimed to bring together local organisations to deliver volunteering and social action activities to help local people contribute to the regeneration of Bootle. Funding was also earmarked to tackle social isolation and enhance the role of public and private business in supporting community engagement.	The partnership was able to **pivot the use of their asset to become a central emergency hub** and linked with a local foodbank to provide food parcels. The lead partner SAFE Regeneration also **provided support to smaller partnership organisations** during the crisis by helping them to apply for funding. The partnership had to **cancel their annual community festival as well as close their community pub**. They moved a lot of social activity online including pub quizzes and karaoke nights to continue to support people to feel connected. The SAFE hub also focused on **developing pathways for people in to social enterprise**, and supported a growing number of people to start-up businesses during the pandemic. They also **trained community journalists and reporters**, to collect stories and perspectives, to powerfully demonstrate impact through visual mechanisms, allowing them to build inroads with local young people.
Volunteer Centre Hackney (Hackney, London)	The partnership aimed to establish a new community hub in Hoxton West providing a safe space for people to meet, talk and share their experiences. As well as	The Volunteer Centre in Hackney **partnered with the local authority early on in the crisis period** to support **mutual aid groups**. They used this as a route to engaging new volunteers and getting to those in need quickly. Following the crisis period, the partnership worked with other local organisations to get **mutual aid volunteers in to longer term more skilled roles**. They

| | encouraging residents to develop their skills with a view to eventually running activities for themselves. | have also undertaken a **neighbourhood engagement exercise**, to find out the views of residents on Covid-19 and its impact on their lives, experimenting with techniques such as door knocking on particular estates, working with the local college and using social media to reach young people. They **trained up community researchers** to engage with local people as part of this work. |

Table 2: Original Phase 2 plans and adorations to delivery made in response to Covid-19

The PBSA programme was originally informed by a typology of nine approaches to social action (produced by the New Economics Foundation for the Office of Civil Society). These were: advocacy and social movements, befriending and helping, community asset ownership, community organising, co-operatively owned services, co-production, formal volunteering, peer support and learning, and time credits. The broad approaches partnerships have taken during the delivery of Phase 2, aligned to the existing typology, are included in Appendix 1.

4. Emerging change – how PBSA is beginning to make a difference

As outlined earlier, a set of outcomes at both a place and programme level are part of the learning framework for the PBSA programme. The PBSA evaluation approach explicitly recognises the **long-term nature of work in communities** and the dangers of overclaiming the contribution that one programme can make – as a result it is not setting out to demonstrate or prove impact. The Fund does not require partnerships to report consistently on outcome measures, and instead asks for some basic monitoring information and reflections from partnerships on their approaches and learning.

With a diverse programme such as PBSA it can be challenging to capture the breadth of what is taking place and identify common threads and themes. Through the combination of data submitted by places (outlined below), and qualitative data collected through interviews, observations and learning sessions, we are able to begin to draw together a picture of the **difference PBSA is making in the ten places** at this point in the programme and **the types of approaches and ways of working** that have been effective. This section describes these changes relating them to the relevant place and programme level outcomes.

4.1 Feeling empowered to take action

One of the outcomes from PBSA is for local communities and organisations to feel increasingly able to **take action on issues that matter to them**.

In their annual monitoring for The Fund, partnerships were asked to estimate the number of people they reached during the year. These figures are hard to meaningfully compare as they are self-reported and have been gathered and calculated in different ways, by the places. For example, Hartlepool have estimated helping over 15,000 people which suggests they have included the fill range of activity delivered by organisations in the partnership. Bristol have estimated 30, counting those who have been directly supported by PBSA funded activities.

A further consideration when looking at these figures is that the partnerships are working across different sizes of area and taking different approaches to engagement. For example, the Colchester and Watchet partnerships report relatively high levels of volunteer engagement, which is largely due to galvanising volunteers throughout the crisis period to support with community hub activities such as welfare calls, prescription pick-ups, food delivery and social prescribing services and more recently at vaccination centres, in Colchester.

Other places have engaged volunteers through more intensive approaches that aim to build the skills and capacity of local people over an extended period of time. For example, the partnership in Halifax reported training up 10 volunteers as community reporters, and the partnership in Coventry empowered their 10 core members to lead on managing a range of social action

activities throughout the year – including connecting to families in lock down, developing a community cycle group and facilitating online support for young people during school closure.

Table 3 provides an illustration of the volume of activity in Phase 2 in the ten areas.

Place	No of volunteers	No of beneficiaries	No of activities	No of public meetings
Colchester	234	913	66	29
Coventry	68	488	157	184
Halifax	53	300	39	20
Bristol	18	30	12	6
Hartlepool	60	15,565	61	19
Lincoln	15	152	41	64
NE Lincolnshire	13	56	11	10
Sefton	76	7,791	423	58
Watchet	115	1,500	7	39
Hackney	41	527	56	24

Table 3: Number of people reached throughout the year, estimates by the lead partner

However, numbers alone do not tell us anything about the experiences of those involved, and the journeys they might go on from initial engagement to feeling more empowered to take action. From the ongoing conversations and learning shared by places, it has been possible to draw out more detail about the **nature of these social action activities** and the ways in which they are empowering local residents. Examples include multiple instances of partnerships supporting residents to deliver smaller activities such as a community wellbeing and growing garden in Halifax; 'Quay notes' ukulele club which started in the community pub in Sefton; and an interactive online Christmas calendar for people in care homes in Colchester which included a murder mystery radio play produced and performed by a local community theatre group, and seated exercises delivered by a personal trainer and games of Boccia (seated bowls).

There are also many examples of where partnerships have used **topics of local interest** to galvanise their communities. Prior to the pandemic, several areas were addressing **issues around the appearance of the local area**. This was considered to be a key motivation in Lincoln, Sefton, and Coventry, all of which used community clean ups to get people involved in **collectively restoring pride in their local area**.

In Lincoln, the partnership used this process to engage local investors in funding this work and created additional but meaningful changes such as updating old street signs, taking down 'To Let' signs, removing wheelie bins and installing CCTV to create a safer and more pleasant environment for local people. In Coventry, the partnership empowered local people to take part in a radio broadcast that called on stakeholders like councillors to work together to bring about a collective change in mindset around waste disposal. The partnership reported a number of impacts such as raising the energy and empowerment of the local community as well as creating a nicer place to live.

Some of the partnerships have used **training courses to develop the skills of people in the community and inspire them to develop solutions to local problems**. In Hartlepool and Coventry, the partnerships have run social action leader courses. 'Change Maker University' in

Coventry has engaged seven local residents in modules that 'intentionally build relationships, start movements and take action' the partnership report that participants have been able to use newly developed listening skills to build deeper relationships in their service delivery roles. The partnership in Halifax provided Community Organising training to a local Labour Women's group to support them to get more people involved set up a 'Stand up to racism' campaign.

PBSA was also characterised by some as being an **essential factor in enabling the elevation of local voices.** For example, one respondent to the end of year survey reported that PBSA had facilitated a resident group to be more involved in strategic conversations and vision mapping.

4.2 Understanding the social and economic issues and opportunities in areas

PBSA plans were required to demonstrate a **solid understanding of issues and needs in the local area** with partnerships indicating how their approaches would be shaped accordingly – this was built into the design of the programme and initial application stage. During Phase 2, understanding and responding to local needs has become even more significant with poverty levels further exacerbated in many areas by the pandemic.

There are many examples across the programme of how PBSA partnerships can play an active role in **providing opportunities for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds -** particularly through **projects that address poverty** and disadvantage. For example, The Action Lab's primary long-term focus is to solve poverty in Hartlepool. Prior to the pandemic their £1m challenge helped residents save money on their food and energy bills, and access benefits they were entitled to. Since the pandemic they provided advice on access to benefits, energy advice, fuel bank vouchers allowing people to heat their homes over the winter months.

During the immediate crisis period caused by the pandemic (and beyond), many partnerships saw an increase in demand for services such as foodbanks. Some partnerships responded by **establishing food hubs for delivery and pick up**. It is estimated that in **excess of 2,300 parcels were delivered or given out** by PBSA partnerships in Coventry, Colchester, Halifax and Sefton to support the immediate needs of local people. [2] Some partnerships also set up **longer term food initiatives** to support people to support themselves, such as growing projects, community gardens and cooking projects. In Coventry, their growing project was set up to provide a sustainable food source for the food hub, as well as engaging volunteers in the setting up and running of a local supermarket. The partnership in Hartlepool worked with Edible York to send out 100 growing packs of seeds and cook books; and in Halifax, they helped a local mosque to set up a 'community fridge'.

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[2] In September 2020 Sefton reported 104 parcels, Colchester reported 407 parcels and Watched reported 900 parcels; and in October 2020 Halifax and Coventry reported 180 people per week and 46 people per week (respectively) at peak, the peak numbers have been multiplied by four. Though as the crisis period was longer than four weeks it is likely that numbers exceed the estimate.

Early on in the crisis **isolation and wider mental health concerns** were also identified as being some of the biggest social concerns - caused by a variety of factors including an inability to leave challenging home circumstances, job loss, problems with debt, home schooling, and loneliness. Partnerships in Bristol, Colchester, Coventry, Hackney, Lincoln and Watchet set up **outreach and befriending phonelines** which provided essential contact for people who are on their own and unable to leave their homes – offering friendship and providing support. Local people got involved as volunteers and worked to establish whether people had enough food, offered to collect shopping and prescriptions, and referred people to more specialist support where needed. Estimates gathered through interviews with partnerships suggest that **at least 12,500 calls were made by PBSA partnerships during the crisis period**.[3]

An unexpected and positive outcome in Coventry was that the partnership were able to use the crisis and the anonymity of a phone call to ask about financial needs in a way that was not possible or appropriate previously and provide signposting, advice and support to address this. Other approaches used to respond to mental health challenges were socially distanced walks, online peer support groups and even virtual excursions.

4.3 Collaboration between organisations and communities

The PBSA programme has been designed in a way to **encourage organisations from different sectors to work together** and increase their **capacity and ability** to do this in an effective way. The intention was for new spaces of collaboration and engagement based on more equal relationships.

During the pandemic, there was a significant emphasis on collaboration in PBSA areas and arguably the experiences of 2020 have encouraged this to happen more quickly than it might have done otherwise. PBSA partnerships expanded to include **new and more diverse partners** from different sectors and different communities.

The mid-year reports submitted by PBSA places in October 2020 revealed that **eight of the ten partnerships had increased their membership** as it became more important to a) reach people who were potentially isolated, by reaching wider subsections of the community through those with existing links and b) respond to complex and multiple needs revealed by the pandemic, by drawing on the expertise of specialist organisations such as those supporting mental health. Some of the new partners include **local businesses** in Watchet and Sefton, **women's refuge and domestic violence support** in Bristol, **health focused organisations** in Halifax, Hackney and Colchester, **a mental health steering group**, in Lincoln, **mutual aid groups** in Hackney and Watchet, and a **housing association** in Colchester and Sefton.

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[3] In September and October 2020, Colchester reported making 6,820 welfare calls and Watchet reported almost 1,500 inbound calls were received; four of the partnerships recorded overall numbers per week as 300 in Halifax, 451 in Lincoln, 400 in Bristol. Weekly totals have been multiplied by four. Though as the crisis period was longer than four weeks it is likely that numbers exceed the estimate.

"I have found the depth of enthusiasm inspiring…Working with other organisations I feel this area can be and will be once again a healthy enjoyable area to be in. I am sure the impetus will continue, with such dedication of people who live and work in the area why should it not, with the continued help and advice from our residents, Council, and other agencies…I feel quite hopeful." PBSA Partnership

It is apparent that cross-sector working can add considerable value and that organisations fulfil different functions, capitalising on their respective skills, knowledge, expertise and resources. Across the programme, it has been reported that:

- Community organisations **bring connections, relationships and an in-depth understanding of the issues in their areas**

- Voluntary sector organisations bring **expertise in mental health, domestic violence, or disabilities**

- Statutory services **provide access to local data**, as well as helping set up mass operations, such as call centres and pivot staff to support in different roles.

"Partnership working in a way that is genuine – recognising the expertise of different people." PBSA Partnership

There is evidence in the majority of places that **local authorities have reacted nimbly** in their work with voluntary sector organisations. In some cases, there have been notably quick responses to issues that had previously been considered hard to make progress on. For example, in Hartlepool those who had been previously hard to house – were 'housed within 20 mins of presenting to the local authority'. Many partnerships noted that local authorities have been more willing to be led by the community, they have been less rigid and more flexible, and have enhanced relationships with the voluntary sector. There have been examples in Hackney and Lincoln where the local authority has partnered with the voluntary sector to submit successful funding proposals. Both partnerships noted that this might not have happened pre-Covid.

It is clear that **local authorities have also benefited from these relationships**. For example, to ensure they are reaching the most vulnerable they have had to work with other organisations to access people who have not previously received statutory support.

"'Power' organisations are much more appreciative of what the community can do. District council has been brilliant and have seen themselves in support mode and disseminated information." PBSA Partnership

"Positives are that things are changing, doors we have been knocking down previously, we have now been able to get through. The Council trust us, so do service users and other agencies." PBSA Partnership

Some partnerships have worked with other agencies to **commission specific roles supporting early intervention or dedicated community cohesion workers**, supporting the alignment of strategies and increasing the knowledge of multiple stakeholders. In both Colchester and Hackney, the partnerships worked with stakeholders such as GPs, GP care advisors, local Clinical Commissioning Groups, the council and the voluntary sector on social prescribing offers.

> **The partnership in Colchester** worked with both Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council, as well as with health services, schools and the local university to prioritise health and wellbeing and prosperity outcomes in the borough, by using exploratory methods such as pooling staff and budgets and even co-locating to improve outcomes for residents. The strength of this cross sector working relationship is evidenced through funding received from the council and local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for their organisation and for onward grants.

Across the PBSA programme, places have defined the boundaries of their places differently from local neighbourhoods and wards to a town-wide level. In some areas these boundaries have extended, which has been positive in enabling PBSA areas to work more effectively. For example, the partnership in East Marsh have linked with the Flourishing Towns pilot and the 'Building Back Better' campaign, across the wider Grimsby area and in Hackney, the partnership has expanded the reach of their 'Our Place project', to work with the local authority and CCG around social cohesion across the borough. Whilst the potential downside to this might be a larger area of focus and grant spend spread more thinly, the upside is **increased profile, more cohesive and multiple relationships with organisations in the wider area and access to additional funding**.

4.4 Co-producing local services through social action projects

There are emerging examples of PBSA partnerships facilitating residents to co-produce local services.

Several partnerships are **supporting groups to formalise as standalone entities**, helping to strengthen the sector and endorse the power of local people. Partnerships have supported groups with policies, procedures, writing constitutions and assisting groups to apply for funding. Some examples of this include:

- The Grow Project in Hartlepool which came out of a partnership initiative that sent seeds and cookbooks to local people and ended up being so successful that it built its own online community who are in the process of constituting themselves as a Community Interest Company (CIC).

- In Bristol, the partnership supported a local resident to start running drama classes with 8 to 13-year-olds and supported with funding applications that would enable her to offer more sessions to local children.

- In North East Lincolnshire, East Marsh United (one of the partnership organisations) incubated a new CIC - East Marsh Construction, to deliver home maintenance and small-scale construction work locally, and has since been able to provide six local people with employment and on the job training which will lead to recognised qualifications.

Three of the partnerships are **supporting people to setup their own social enterprises** by helping them develop their ideas, apply for funding, set up governance structures and bank accounts and provides business advice. For example, Sefton have seen a growth in people wanting to develop their own enterprises, due to people losing work, or re-assessing their priorities during the pandemic. This avenue has the potential to provide long-term solutions to tackle local social issues, build local economies and create opportunities for local people by providing one or more people with an income.

4.5 Influence and ownership over places

The PBSA programme aims to encourage residents to feel a **greater sense of influence and ownership** over the areas they live in. Many of the partnerships have focused on galvanising interest around a **community asset** to increase relationship building with both local residents and the statutory sector, and provide a tangible place for the community to use and take ownership of. For example, the partnership in Halifax have carried out a number of Community Organising activities that directly targeted groups with an interest in assets, such as a save our pool group, community pub and friends of the park group, to support them with registering buildings as assets of community value.

In cases where partnerships have their own asset, this appears t**o have led to greater visibility of PBSA locally**. For example, in Lincoln, the partnership engaged people through community classes at their Hub which led to more people going in for advice, guidance, signposting and referrals. In Watchet the partnership's 'Book stop' (formerly a derelict bus stop) received a lot of positive publicity locally and resulted in further local authority and local resident backing of PBSA. In East Marsh and Sefton they are using models of community led housing which has also led to increased funding for their areas from government.

Some of the partnerships are using **media to elevate the voice of the community** and enable them to take ownership, for example by providing training in community journalism for people to grow in confidence, develop their skills and collect stories from others, they have been able to demonstrate the impact of their work to a wider audience through accessible visual mechanisms, but also to make inroads and build skills in specific communities, such as young people in Sefton and BAME communities in Halifax.

Some of the partnerships have also focused on **targeting or engaging with specific groups**, to support agency building in communities they are less engaged with. For example, the partnership in Colchester held a Citizen's Conference with BAME Communities, focusing on BAME hate crime and inclusion. Similarly, the partnership in Lincoln have set up a BAME network.

"We can talk about integration and citizens voice but that will only happen if it's truly a representative meeting, heard, seen and actioned by the system itself rather than sitting outside of it." PBSA Partnership

4.6 Understanding the impact of PBSA at different levels

In Phase 2, partnerships have been focussing on developing the **foundations and enablers for change** (for example, reinforcing networks, upskilling local people, and formalising new groups), rather than capturing all the different impacts on individuals, organisations and communities. As outlined at the start of this chapter, this has also been a deliberate part of the programme wide evaluation design – avoiding the risk of overclaiming at this stage.

However, there are some indications from the feedback from partnerships of the impact PBSA can have on individuals in partnership organisations. In the end of year feedback survey, some places **highlighted how involvement in PBSA can help support the development of highly relational skills**, such as managing and facilitating challenging meetings with outspoken individuals and organisations with different agendas, both in person and virtually, as well as managing to guide groups and individuals in a more positive and structured direction, while enabling them to follow their passions. Additionally, individuals within the partnerships reported increased confidence following the crisis period, having transitioned in to roles they would not normally do. Other skills listed by partnerships were capital project development, refurbishment, volunteer co-ordination, evaluation, business planning, working with young people, newspaper creation and distribution, digital mapping.

In terms of the impact that PBSA can have on individuals in communities, partnerships have reported how many of the initiatives and activities have helped to **build confidence, skills, resilience, and ownership.** This is through new groups starting, and running on their own; people getting involved in social action activities like cleaning up their neighbourhood; and people moving from mutual aid in to skilled volunteering opportunities, and/or paid organiser roles.

5. Key learning - understanding what is needed to embed social action

The previous section focussed on describing what has been taking place as part of the PBSA programme in Phase 2 and the difference that it is making. This section summarises the learning so far on what **helps social action to thrive** and the approaches across the PBSA programme that support this. The focus is on understanding some of the **enablers and challenges** that have arisen so far on the programme in three main areas:

- **Community engagement** – the ways that places have reached people in their areas and mobilised the resources, skills and assets of communities.

- **Developing and empowering people** – the approach that places have been taking to empower people – supporting them to volunteer and lead social action.

- **Relationships and collaboration** – what has worked well and less well in terms of the spaces and channels that have been created for organisations and people to work together around shared social action goals.

Where relevant learning from the first year of Phase 2 and laying the foundations for place-based change is highlighted, but this section draws heavily on the experiences of places during the pandemic.

5.1 Community engagement

In the early stages of Phase 2, places were generally consulting and engaging with local residents through Community Organising, social media, open space events, community festivals and food and fuel fairs. At the Learning Event in Lincoln in February 2020, common challenges were discussed around reaching people who do not usually engage, sustaining engagement, and using social media more effectively.

Listening exercises

Since the pandemic, at least six of the PBSA partnerships have run **community consultation and listening exercises to understand the needs and priorities of local people. Multi-platform consultation** has been useful for engaging larger numbers of people from a variety of backgrounds. Partnerships have used a mixture of: surveys, social media polls, attending existing meetings and forums, and getting people involved in hyper local neighbourhood conversations, such as a partnership event in Bristol which bought local residents and organisations together to discuss priorities around their four key themes 'You're welcome', Pride of Place, Children and young people and Health and wellbeing.

Some of the partnerships found that **inviting other organisations to join consultations**, **or 'piggy-backing'** on existing initiatives allowed there to be more scope to align strategies and

ensure that the community's voice was at the heart of these. For example, the PBSA partnership in Colchester bought local partners together as part of a 'listening exercise' which helped them develop a collective narrative. Since this initial meeting, teams have formed around specific themes and members are individually meeting around social changes they want to see.

The partnership in Hackney worked with the local Healthwatch to train up residents as community researchers, teaching various research and outreach methodologies such as surveying, observations and direct engagement. Researchers identified people to engage with such as neighbours and friends and then used a snowballing technique to engage with others.

A common challenge with these types of engagement is that partnerships could find that l**istening exercises often raise more questions than they answer.** Bigger structural issues in local areas generally need more resource to tackle than PBSA partnerships have at their disposal, which has the potential to create disappointment rather than galvanise people.

Some PBSA partnerships also reported concerns that listening exercises can still risk engaging more with the **'usual suspects'** and not gaining fresh or diverse perspectives. In Colchester, the partnership specifically tried to address this by adapting their approach from looking at the whole population, to an approach which championed the diversity of individuals by creating platforms for people who had not had previous opportunities to input, such as an event on Latin American culture with leaders sharing stories. Some partnerships also referenced the difficulty of trying to authentically engage with new groups from communities that they were less familiar with.

Community organising

Community organising has been another common thread amongst some of the partnerships on the PBSA programme. Partnerships in Halifax, Lincoln and Coventry have used these principles to harvest ideas, listen to their communities and co-produce solutions. Prior to the pandemic there was interest from several other places to begin deploying similar techniques. However, the prevention of face-to-face interaction meant that this has been much more challenging, and usual ways of engaging people such as door knocking and being visible in public areas like supermarkets, has not been possible. As social distancing begins to ease many of the partnerships are thinking about how they can reignite this.

Partnerships using community organising have found that **creating feedback loops** to demonstrate that people have been heard has been a good method for building trust, even when the issues cannot be acted upon straight away. In Halifax, the partnership did this by using a community newsletter to feedback findings to those who had been consulted. Another method for building trust was to **provide safe spaces for conversations,** and one partnership reported that they did this by engaging people through trusted services such as a local mothers and babies playgroup.

Additionally, being able to provide seed grants to fund new ideas and having Community Organisers that have the confidence to hold people to account has been a good enabler to inspire

people to persevere with project ideas. There have also been examples of community organising being an effective tool for identifying potential new leaders and organisers, and finding people with creative ideas or useful networks.

One PBSA partnership reported that **having the capacity to act on everything** that came up as part of Community Organising was challenging, as well as **maintaining a professional and distanced relationship** from people who are in need of support. **Evidencing the impact of community organising was noted as a challenge** because so much of the work relies on trust building and listening which takes place over time.

The partnership in Halifax used trained Community Organisers instead of volunteers to deliver food parcels during the pandemic, which allowed them to continue connecting with residents, ask wellbeing questions, provide immediate support, or refer people on to services. Unlike many PBSA areas who reported lack of face-to-face as one of their biggest challenges, they were able to continue with this.

Key messages:

- These engagement approaches have enabled partnerships to develop an understanding of what people want and need, as well as where the assets and resources lie in their areas – which has been particularly valuable during the pandemic at a time of acute social need and change.

- Being heard, listened to and given the opportunity to share and develop ideas helps to build confidence amongst people to influence change in their local areas.

- Community engagement has helped partnerships to design systems, approaches and activities that will motivate people to get involved in the future.

5.2 Developing and empowering people

At the start of Phase 2, PBSA partnerships were thinking about the role of volunteers and empowering people to take leadership around social action. Examples included bringing local artists and residents together to paint street art in Lincoln, shifting attitudes to volunteering and helping people recognise the skills they had in Hackney and time banking in Colchester.

The pandemic has undeniably had an influence on the dynamics of the relationships with local residents. During the pandemic, most places saw an influx of people volunteering. Their contribution was initially largely reactive to needs with partnerships setting the direction. In some of the PBSA places, partnerships helped to facilitate mutual aid groups during the pandemic. For example - Hackney, Watchet and Coventry **provided structures for mutual aid groups to work through**, which included guidance in safeguarding, money handling and GDPR, helping the groups to build legitimacy, at the same time supporting them to flourish autonomously. In

Hackney, the partnership reported that as a result of their work with mutual aid groups, people from other areas have since approached them to set up their own local projects.

However, by the end of summer 2020 **volunteer numbers had generally dropped**. Despite this recent shift, the experiences of places on the PBSA programme provides learning on the factors that do support people to engage and for those who want to, be empowered to take more ownership. Many partnerships have highlighted that successful engagement with residents in their areas came about when they **understood their motivations.** This often starts with making activities fun or beneficial to get involved in, or engaging people around a topic or event of interest like a community festival or an arts project. These types of activity provide a 'way in' to volunteering on a more regular basis, and have the potential to get people involved in leading their own social action projects.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, **the partnership in Sefton** worked with volunteers to arrange a Music Festival. They identified that a key element of their success was to divide up the workload and distribute different jobs to a range of people, spreading the responsibility and allowing more people to feel involved and proud of their achievement. This also avoided over burdening a few key individuals.

Partnerships have learnt that certain conditions help encourage people to stay volunteering. These include: **flexibility, access to IT, cultural training as well as equipping those involved** with skills and knowledge that build their confidence to make change. There are examples from across the programme of partnerships delivering training in community journalism, mental health awareness, social action leadership, events planning, community organising, and community researchers.

Many places are now focussing on how to sustain the momentum and engagement in social action over a longer period, supporting volunteers to transition into more active agents of social change. Some of the PBSA partnerships are **building their befriending offer and developing Good Neighbour schemes**, enabling local people to help their neighbours to enjoy a better quality of life. These provide a route from volunteering in the crisis period to a more formal exchange of support and skills sharing. Some partnerships also **linked mutual aid groups directly with voluntary sector organisations to transition volunteers into long term roles.**

Key messages

- Relationships are central to PBSA because in order to make change happen, people need to feel trusted, supported and confident in their abilities. This can often take time and includes a process of listening and developing people over time.

- Social action appears to be most effective when people's interests and talents are nurtured, and when people are supported to learn new skills that help them develop confidence.

- The pandemic provided an opportunity for many PBSA partnerships to engage with new volunteers (for example, through mutual aid groups), learn new ways of working with local people to support empowerment and ultimately help to increase the profile of social action.

5.3 Relationships and collaboration

Early on in Phase 2, there were discussions around using 'stories of change' to engage local partners and focusing on a single issue like health and wellbeing to bring diverse organisations together. Some partnerships also reported challenges with collaboration such as overcoming **risk adverse cultures in local authorities** especially when it can be hard to provide evidence of impact around social action in a short time frame.

As outlined in the previous chapter, during the pandemic, collaborative approaches had a renewed focus – with expanding networks, new referral systems and new voices bring brought into PBSA partnerships. This has understandably led to some challenges but has also revealed some critical learning points that could support PBSA partnerships and others in the future.

> *"Community is less a physical group of local people that just is and more in terms of the concept of cohesion, a conscious practice of cooperation and collaboration that can grow or retract depending on conditions. It enables resilience in times of shock and means that larger ambitious projects can be achieved and maintained longer-term through collaborative working." PBSA Partnership*

Successful collaborations have come about when **partners agree on a clear purpose,** can offer **resources or additional benefits** to organisations collectively coming together, are **representative and inclusive**, and **where roles and contributions are identified and defined**, including individual **skill sets, expertise and experience.** Examples of expertise different organisations bring to PBSA partnerships have been a track record in managing volunteering, service user involvement, working with people with disabilities, advocacy work, utilising food waste to tackle food poverty and community organising.

Data and information pooling has also played an important role during the pandemic facilitating greater collaboration between organisations. Two partnerships reported centrally compiling their existing data, with voluntary and statutory sector services, **supporting more effective referral systems**. Additionally, the partnership in Colchester **commissioned research** which captured the lived experience of people with dementia and carers during the first six months of the pandemic. These findings have contributed to broader insight work across the borough and county helping services to understand different groups' experience of the pandemic, as well as feeding into a planned review of priorities and the future direction of the pan-Essex Dementia Strategy in 2021. Discussions with statutory sector organisations also suggested that being able

to **provide data and evidence to demonstrate the impact of social action initiatives, significantly reduced their risk aversion** and increased their willingness to work with voluntary sector partners.

However, there have also been some challenges for partnerships with relationships. Increased numbers of organisations working together has meant that **planning becomes more complex**, and priorities can become blurred by trying to incorporate different perspectives. In partnerships where organisations are at different stages of their development and have diverse interests, collaborative sessions can be harder to run.

Another challenge reported by partnerships was that operating within the context of **fewer volunteers and scarce funding** has meant competition amongst local organisations has been common. Organisations have been **reluctant to invest critical short-term resources** in collaborative approaches.

More positively, some partnerships reported that they overcame risk aversion in the statutory sector by **building relationships with specific people** (such as councillors, commissioners, key people in procurement etc) through joint training opportunities or attending open access forums. These ways of coming together helped to support a culture of trust.

> **The partnership in Hartlepool** have bought together a group of people who have the drive and ability to change the way services are run locally. The group includes PBSA partners, the local authority, health organisations, probation services, the police and other voluntary sector organisations. They have developed a clear purpose which cuts across a variety of local issues, and created a safe and trusting space amongst partners. Facilitated by an external consultant, the group are exploring barriers and levers within the system and how each organisation fits in to that puzzle. This has been underpinned by a commitment to share relevant data with each other and use storytelling to help them with collective influencing.

Key messages:

- Learning from the crisis period suggests one of the most valuable assets has been the partnerships existing relationships with residents, voluntary sector and statutory sector organisations, which enabled them to connect quickly with those experiencing the greatest needs.

- Whilst this was developing early on in Phase 2, the pandemic period has given a renewed impetus for organisations to formalise their partnership working and increase their local networks.[4]

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[4] This was highlighted by the end of year feedback survey

- Data and evidence building have been key enablers to securing and retaining new partnerships, especially with the statutory sector, because it helps them to justify spending, and demonstrate accountability.

6. The next steps for the PBSA Programme

6.1 Overview of Phase 3

The original ambition for Phase 3 (starting in January 2022) was to 'scale and sustain' with the five most promising partnerships moving forward with a grant of approximately £240,000 to continue delivering their local action. However, consultation with partnerships revealed a desire to eliminate the element of competition and instead proceed with all ten partnerships, but with half the grant amount available in each area (£120,000 instead of £240,000).

Since the pandemic, the funders have also moved away from a model 'scale and sustain' and towards building 'resilience and legacy' to help the partnerships think about how to embed their approaches beyond the lifetime of the PBSA programme. Within this context funders are also keen to provide flexibility in terms of the format of plans as long as they demonstrate the following points:

- Demonstration of capacity, partnerships, and organisational relationships built so far

- How the plan is informed by engagement with local people and communities

- What impact there has been, and how this will be built on

- How the reduction in funding will be managed, including clear plans or sources of match funding where necessary

- How support and technical advice will be found (as Locality's contract comes to an end and Renaisi's support will be reduced to half)

- How learning and evaluation will be embedded

Plans are due for submission between July and September 2021, and final decisions will be made by funders at the end of September 2021.

6.2 Potential challenges

There is ongoing uncertainty about what the future looks like in the context of the pandemic, and which issues will be most significant for places as we move towards recovery. This section outlines some of the potential challenges that could get in the way of partnerships 'building resilience and legacy'.

Towards the end of 2020, places were generally finding that existing issues such as poverty, long-term unemployment, mental health issues, loneliness and isolation, domestic violence, and antisocial behaviour, were becoming more prevalent and more extreme. **Levels of vulnerability caused by the pandemic have grown** and **one of the most significant shifts has been in the**

number of people experiencing poverty for the first time, as the reality of longer periods of unemployment become more apparent.

"People who are isolated are more isolated over the last month, people who were hungry are hungrier." PBSA Partnership

"There is a new layer of people coming into the system." PBSA Partnership

PBSA partnerships have seen **knock-on effects for other services** including: an increase in families seeking childcare support, where parents have had to start working several jobs; having to support more people to claim Universal Credit; access advice; and use foodbanks. This poses a challenge in terms of capacity, but also in terms of the resilience of communities.

"Those that were struggling are better equipped to deal with hardship. People who have lived in poverty before are more resilient than those that haven't." PBSA Partnership

Building on this, PBSA partnerships have identified **concerns around the additional levels of 'hidden need'**, particularly in people newer to poverty, who have not accessed services before, or where support has dropped off due to face-to-face services closing. One PBSA partnership referred to their biggest concern at the end of 2020 as being '*not what we are seeing, but what we aren't seeing.*'

This means that more services will be over stretched and although relationships have been strengthened, there are concerns around **retaining new relationships and collaborations**. With less money, staff and local capacity, there is a danger that organisations may revert to delivery of core services to tackle specific issues, rather than using longer-term, more joined-up approaches that focus on improving systems for individuals. The implications of all this for the PBSA programme is that flexibility around the timeframe and plans are critical and that plans are likely to change.

6.3 Support for places

A survey sent out to PBSA partnerships in April 2021 requested feedback from the partnerships on their views and experiences of being a part of the programme, and eight of the ten partnerships responded. The survey asked about grant management and delivery provided by the Fund and support provided by the support providers. Findings from the survey are grouped into two sections below summarising overarching feedback and recommendations to move forward with.

Grant management and delivery

Overwhelmingly, the partnerships fed back that the **flexibility afforded by the funders** has been essential for their ability to adapt to the needs of the community during such a difficult year. This was mentioned both in relation to plan delivery, and reporting.

"The funders have been very supportive during the Covid period about the change seen in plans - there has been no pressure to feel like things have 'failed' and funders have been understanding to change." PBSA Partnership

"The flexibility in response to the pandemic has been greatly appreciated too as it acknowledges how we have had to adapt for the residents we work with." PBSA Partnership

Places also reported positively about the **ability to use PBSA funding for core costs**, such as staff posts, which has enabled PBSA partnerships to engage with the community, as well as provide leadership and structure to the programme delivery locally.

"The core funding of the Community Partnership Manager post is key to the success of the programme, as it is that post which is the thread that enables, supports and connects the partnership activities and events." PBSA Partnership

Additionally, partnerships mentioned the value of a **non-competitive system** moving forward, in encouraging them to seek/offer advice to others on the programme and share best practice. Reporting requirements that focus on qualitative reflection rather than 'hard evidence' were also welcomed.

Recommendations

The most prominent feedback from places with regards to moving forward was around a **clear timetable and expectations from funders for Phase 3**, and an approach to planning that is **not too prescriptive and that empowers the places to focus on their individual approaches**, using '*the same adaptable approach as other phases'.*

"It would be really helpful if like Phase 2, we were entrusted to build on the work we have done so far, take forward learning gathered and be supported to take steps that we believe will help strengthen, expand and sustain our programme." PBSA Partnership

A handful of responders suggested that more could be done by the funders and support partners in terms of **providing constructive feedback on reports, plans and ideas**.

Support providers

PBSA partnerships were asked to provide a rating for each element of the programme support provided by the support providers. As illustrated in table 4 below **the most popular element of support was Learning event in Lincoln**, followed by reflective interviews during the Covid-19 period, and accompanying learning papers. The targeted sessions as part of the Peer Network were considered to be more useful than the open sessions.

Overarching programme support provided by support providers	Score out of 40
Learning event in Lincoln held in February 2020	37
Interviews to support reflection on the Covid-19 period	32
Learning papers	30
Peer network focused sessions	29
Peer network open	27
FAQs and tools (such as quick reflection guides)	25

Table 4: PBSA partnership rating of support provided by support providers

When asked to provide more detail, as well as specifics around the role of relationship managers and evaluation advisors, much of the feedback was not distinct to one role or the other but captured the intrinsic crossover of both. Many of the partnerships drew out the **value of having a critical friend to develop ideas with**. They also highlighted the benefit of having **facilitated sessions such as visioning, theory of change development, and developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks.**

A large proportion of respondents talked about the **value of the peer network**, including 'being able to meet other PBSA grant holders', especially throughout the crisis period. One partnership mentioned that the meetings helped familiarise them with using video as a means of communication.

> *"The peer support through the monthly calls has been the most valuable impact, offering connection and affirmation, plus challenge." PBSA Partnership*

Many drew out the value of the **reflective interviews** provided by both Renaisi and CloseUp Research, as being highly beneficial, again particularly during the pandemic.

> *"Reflection has been fundamental to our learning so far, our evaluation is being collected from participants so it feels very open and honest." PBSA Partnership*

Recommendations

The learning event, as well as the peer network have been highlighted as strong elements of support. Additionally, much of the qualitative feedback suggested that **partnerships would benefit from solidifying connections** with other PBSA areas facing similar challenges. Therefore, it would be prudent to think about how this networking element can be incorporated online and in person, into the final stages of Phase 2 of the programme, as well as in to the design of Phase 3, particularly since Locality will no longer be supporting the programme.

> *"It would be useful for the funders and support providers to act as brokers between the places, given the overview they hold - noting similarities and alignments and doing a bit of 'match-making'." PBSA Partnership*

"I would like to learn from other areas about what is working and why, equally what is not working, understand how other areas are embedding the work and what their starting point was." PBSA Partnership

Some of the partnerships reported that the **reflective nature of the interviews** with Renaisi and CloseUp research, as well as the **learning pieces** that were developed, have allowed the them to take time to think and develop more strategically. The interviews also provided a valuable opportunity for the Learning Partners to collect in-depth qualitative data from places in a consistent way, and look at key issues and trends across the programme. Therefore, the inclusion of further depth interviews (on a less regular annual basis) could support richer learning, as well as support the demonstration of progress in places.

Another element of support that was identified as critical moving forward was around supporting places to understand other **options/avenues to explore for larger amounts of match funding.**

"With the decision to fund all 10 places but reduce the amount of funding given, it's a large shortfall to explore and the Lottery are one of the main funders who currently seem to support the Place Based/resident led outcomes approach." PBSA Partnership

Measuring change

In terms of effective ways to capture and measure change, we know that PBSA areas have **struggled at times to demonstrate the value of the activities they are investing in**, because the difference made through interventions like listening, building trust, and growing partnerships take time and change is often influenced by a variety of local contextual factors rather than one intervention.

Renaisi have been providing support to places to **help them capture meaningful indicators that help them to track change against their outcome areas**. Although there is no one size fits all approach to doing this, we have found some effective methods appropriate to the nature of the PBSA programme are:

- Developing a Theory of Change that identifies short and long-term outcomes, alongside an evaluation framework that aims to track progress in a proportionate way.

- Understanding who PBSA partnerships are reaching by using information that is already being captured through monitoring reports for various funders– e.g. on age, gender, demographics.

- Being creative about understanding difference using participatory approaches in groups, building up case studies and stories, and calculating volunteer hours by the cost of the Living Wage.

Ahead of Phase 3, Renaisi will develop a refreshed learning framework that reflects the stage the PBSA programme is at and supports understanding of change at four levels - foundational, enabling, programme level and population level. A key area of focus moving forward will be to

reflect more explicitly on how PBSA approaches are influencing local systems – building on what we have seen so far during the pandemic in opening up new ways of thinking and more value being placed on collaborative systems led by the needs of the community.

7.Conclusion

In 2019, PBSA Phase 2 plans were developed and beginning to be delivered. In 2020, places had to rapidly adapt.

The learning from this period has been invaluable in understanding the role a programme like PBSA can play in a time of crisis. The response in each area was bespoke to each community. PBSA partnerships on the frontline were able to get up and running quickly - they had intelligence on what they could do at a local level and **draw on partners from across statutory and voluntary organisations** to provide advice on additional services; they had **spaces that they have been able to repurpose**; they could **target their activities because they were aware of their local community strengths and assets**; and they were already connected to people and organisations operating services across different hyperlocal geographies and were able to make referrals.

Emerging findings suggest that all partnerships have increased their reach through:

- Engaging new volunteers through mutual aid groups and community hubs

- Undertaking proactive outreach to communities that partnerships had not previously engaged with.

Across the two very different years of Phase 2, two main learning themes have emerged:

Developing partnerships and networks

Emerging findings suggest that the role played by PBSA partnerships throughout the pandemic has already had a significant impact on how they are being perceived locally with new partner organisations engaged formally and informally.

The pandemic has meant that PBSA partnerships have been operating under extreme amounts of pressure and have had to act out of necessity to support their communities. The PBSA structure, as well as the existing relationships of partnership organisations, appear to have bolstered this response and supported more working across the local system, using 'place' as a tool for collaborative social change.

PBSA partnerships have created combined solutions to structural problems by recognising the skills and experience of multiple stakeholders and acknowledging that there is no single, simple solution to improving conditions for everyone. We have learnt these approaches have been enhanced through approaches like multi stakeholder consultations, and data sharing.

Elevating the voice of the community and empowering them to lead

The difficulties experienced throughout the pandemic have meant that partnerships have gained a much deeper understanding of the socio-economic issues and inequalities in their communities,

as well as uncovering 'hidden' or new needs. Although partnerships were already basing their work on a close understanding of their local areas, the depth of engagement with people during the pandemic has undoubtedly helped partnerships to improve their work, and target resource more effectively. Because of this, partnerships have put much more focus on using the priorities of the local community to support with strategic planning, rebuilding, future proofing. They have also strengthened connections with diverse groups and bought in new voices to be more representative of their communities.

The pandemic appears to have enabled a shift from setting up services and finding people to come to them – to understanding local needs and responding to these in a way that empowers local residents to lead different social action activities. This can be demonstrated by the more intensive capacity-building support that partnerships have been doing with local volunteers, such as helping them to run activities, formalise new groups, set up social enterprises and secure assets.

"In the past we have been more inclined to tell people what to do, now we're trying to understand how communities and voluntary groups have mobilised naturally, then figure out what to support." PBSA Partnership

The future

The biggest concern moving forward will be retaining relationships that were built during pandemic, as well as retaining the energy of volunteers and transitioning volunteers into longer term agents of change when capacity, energy and resources are low.

Feedback from the partnerships highlights the value in cross programme learning. Funding and delivery partners should be encouraged to support this through the ongoing peer network, as well as to support the development of new relationships based on similarities across the cohort. Over the course of the rest of the programme Renaisi will continue to draw out learning about the conditions that are helpful for allowing social action to flourish, through a learning framework that aims to understand the foundations and enablers of change, as well as collecting instances of systems change.

Appendix: Overview of activities mapped to social action typology

PBSA Activities	Type of social action	Places	When in Phase 2
Using **community organising** approaches to listen to the needs of community and inspire local people to create their own solutions. Supporting people to set up social initiatives such as a community garden.	Community organising	Halifax and Lincoln	Throughout, gaining more traction during Summer 2020 onwards
Developing **programmes of wellbeing activities** to address growing concerns around mental health and isolation, by distributing activity packs, 'art drops',' time capsules' on memory sticks, seeds and grow pots, as well as arranging online social events.	Co-production	East Marsh, Colchester, Hartlepool, Halifax, Coventry, Sefton and Lincoln	Throughout, with outdoor areas proving to be very popular over the Summer and Autumn months, and a more recent push over the festive period
Developing pathways for people to develop solutions, such as social enterprise or standalone groups	Co-operatively owned services	Sefton, Lincoln, Halifax, Bristol	Throughout, with more traction being built from Autumn 2020 onwards, as partners seek to re-balance power
Pivoting the use of assets to become **central emergency hubs**, to respond to the immediate needs of the community, including inbound and outbound call centre facilities, coordination of volunteers, provision of food parcels and befriending services	Befriending and helping Formal volunteering	Bristol, Halifax, Sefton and Watchet	Primarily during the crisis period, later places had to think about how to open hubs safely
Working with and supporting **mutual aid groups,** as a route to engaging new volunteers and getting to those in need quickly. Working in close collaboration with the groups to connect with more people and avoid duplicating support.	Advocacy and social movements; Befriending and helping; Formal volunteering; Co-production	Coventry, Hackney and Watchet	Primarily during the crisis period, but since adapted to create formalised volunteer pathways like Good Neighbour schemes
Working with other local organisations to **create referral networks** that efficiently serve the needs of residents and avoid duplication, such as connecting with mental health organisations, foodbanks and GPs surgeries	Peer support and learning	Colchester, Coventry, Hartlepool and Watchet	Throughout, with more recent efforts to diversify connections and reach new people in the latter half of 2020
Sustainability planning using community consultation to guide longer term visions.	Co-production	Lincoln, Bristol, Sefton, Colchester, East Marsh	Autumn 2020 onwards