Place Based Social Action: Learning Review

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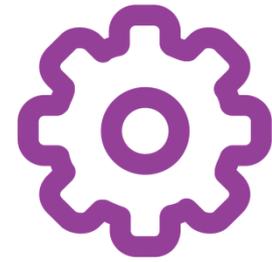
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1. Introduction and context

The Place Based Social Action Programme

The Place Based Social Action (PBSA) programme is a joint £4.5m programme between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Big Lottery Fund (the Fund). Working with an initial 20 places across the country, the PBSA programme aims to enable different place based partnerships to address local priorities through social action - a key area of focus for government. The aim of this programme is to test new approaches that support people in a local area to take action on issues they have identified as being a priority.

Enabling communities to have more meaningful control over the development, decisions and services available in their area, and encouraging greater civic activism have been important strands of government policy in recent years (see the Localism Act[1] and associated community rights, neighbourhood planning revisions[2], Social Value Act[3], City Devolution[4]) along with the introduction of a number of resources, publications and programmes to promote this (for example: the Community Organisers and Our Place programmes[5]; Enabling Social Action toolkit[6]; the My Community website[7]; DCLG's neighbourhood planning in deprived communities initiative[8]).

Over this time there has also been a renewed focus on *place* as a site for public service delivery, investment and control, both from government and funders (for example the Big Lottery funded Big Local programme[9], NESTA's Neighbourhood Challenge[10], Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Bradford programme[11]). Typically, this has meant either:

- **Scarcity:** a funder/ government department choosing places to fund a particular policy due to reasons of scarcity, but not necessarily with a clear rationale
- **Agglomeration:** investing multiple streams of funding into single areas

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[1] Overview of the Localism Act 2011 and its associated community rights see: https://mycommunity.org.uk/resources/localism-policy/
[2] Some of the provisions of the Localism Act centred around neighbourhood planning: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2
[3] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources
[4] For guides explaining the powers being transferred to English regions from central government and new mayoral responsibilities see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/devolution-and-mayors-what-does-it-mean
[5] For more information on the Community Organisers programme see: https://www.corganisers.org.uk/; and for more information on the Our Place programme see: https://mycommunity.org.uk/2016/11/23/evaluating-our-place/
[6] For more information see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance - this guidance was influential in the design of the PBSA programme.
[7] https://mycommunity.org.uk/
[8] For more information on Renaisi's involvement in this programme see: http://www.renaisi.com/neighbourhood-planning-deprived-areas/
[9] For more information on Big Local and the 150 Big Local areas see: http://localtrust.org.uk/our-work/big-local/about-big-local
[10] For more information on Neighbourhood Challenge, a collaborative project between Nesta and Big Lottery see: https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/neighbourhood-challenge/
[11] For more information on JRF's work in Bradford see: https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/working-neighbourhoods-bradford

- **Decision making:** handing over design and control to an area, and the means of control, for that area to develop ideas and approaches itself.

This final approach can be seen as the most genuinely place based, fitting the definition of the British Academy's recent work on place based social policy which describes place based policy making as "aligning the design and resourcing of policy at the most appropriate scale of place, in order to develop meaningful solutions, which improve people's lives".[12] It is this approach to delivery that is the focus of the PBSA programme and of the research and examples cited in this review.

The aims of this review

This review, an initial output from the evaluation of the PBSA programme, is designed to bring together existing evidence of practice in this field to guide and support the work of both the evaluation, and the areas delivering the programme. Its objective is not to replicate recent enquiries into the opportunities (and challenges) place based approaches to fostering and promoting social action present, but to instead build on the wide range of literature that exists on social-action and place based working and make it digestible and relevant for this programme and its stakeholders.[13]

> **The learning objectives of this review:**
>
> - Provide an understanding of existing approaches supporting and measuring place based social action, and to consider the merits and limitations of these approaches. This will help inform our approach to evaluation and learning
> - Give a focus to the challenges/difficulties of demonstrating the impact of PBSA initiatives
> - Provide an opportunity to begin to consider some of the overarching, programme questions we hope to be able to answer over the next seven years.

However, the challenge of this brief is that the evidence does not exist in way that would be used in a literature or evidence review for a what works centre, for example. This is typically for two reasons:
- The outcomes desired from the work are often not defined in advance, nor binary in terms of being achieved, and so measuring a single and replicable outcome or success indicator can feel reductive to many programmes, and not applicable to their work
- Partly because of the above, experimental measures to robustly test causation cannot be used, and so 'standard of evidence' approaches do not apply

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[12] British Academy (2017), Where We Live Now: Making the Case for place-based policy, https://www.britac.ac.uk/tag/where-we-live-now
[13] For example of this see: Lankelly Chase / IVAR (2017), A Historical View of Place Based Approaches; Crisp, R., Gore, T., Pearson, S., Tyler, P., et al (2014) Regeneration and poverty: Evidence and policy review, Final Report, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economics Research; Crowley, L., Balaram, B., and Lee, N. (2012) People or place? Urban policy in the age of austerity, London: The Work Foundation; IVAR (2016) Place based funding: A framework for independent trusts and foundations, London: IVAR; CASE/LSE's Social Policy in a Cold Climate series.

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Therefore, this learning review attempts to bring together examples of PBSA practice from across the UK, with their own evidence of success, and structure them within a framework that can be useful for others and for this evaluation. The focus being not to necessarily promote one way of working or evaluating over another, but to share insights into the approaches adopted and to draw out learning that may be of help to others exploring PBSA approaches to working in their own areas and communities.

Taking a wider programme lens we also begin to consider how we as evaluators can work with places to not only help them understand the impact their initiatives are having in their own places, but to draw out lessons from across the programme about this particular approach to working. This means collecting data, not just about impact in places, but also on the processes of programme implementation, and capturing some of the specific aspects of programme or local context that might impact on programme outcomes. It also means exploring the specific approaches or operating conditions in a place that might be a factor in creating change.

This document is intended to be a practical, living resource. A range of examples and relevant programmes are profiled in the review and are accompanied by a database of projects that can be added to over the course of the programme - hopefully by places themselves, as well as ourselves and other programme partners.

2. How has place based social action been defined?

Having introduced the approach to this learning review, this section explores how place based approaches to social action have been defined and delivered. It aims to provide a coherent, concise and accessible definition of: **place** (and by extension '**place based'**); '**social action**'; and the convergence of these two concepts in '**place based social action'**. It also explores the important role power will play if new, collaborative approaches are to be formed.

The last decade has seen a marked increase in the popularity of 'place based approaches'. Place is a popular, but problematic, concept in public policy: while the phrase itself has grown in currency and usage, there is a lack of consensus on its precise meaning.[14]

Partly to keep in line with the aims of this programme, and partly because PBSA – as a specific descriptor – was first employed by the Big Lottery Fund and DCMS themselves, we have started from their definitions of social action.[15] However, it is important to remain mindful of how other groups and organisations undertaking projects that could be philosophically aligned with the 'place based' approach are describing themselves, their methodologies and – perhaps most crucially – their understanding of 'place'.

The problem with place

The question to ask when defining place is not 'what is a place', but 'what *makes* a place'. Too fluid and abstract a concept to be adequately captured in a single thought, 'place' becomes a problematically broad parameter to distinguish between programme approaches. Is place a community or a geographically-bounded area (such as a district, town, ward, city, county etc.), a local youth centre, a neighbourhood, a postcode? The very fact that these all satisfy the question 'what is a place' points not to the inadequacy of the answer, but to that of the question itself. It assumes that an authoritative agent, such as a funder, evaluator, or local authority, ought to decide what constitutes a place, and beneficiaries are those that happen to fall within that designation. This has been a criticism levelled at previous government funded area based initiatives.[16]

When we talk of place based social action – where those living and working in an area are the agents driving change in their communities. The difference between what place is and what

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[14] https://dartington.org.uk/beyond-the-buzz-what-is-a-place-based-initiative/
[15] https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/place-based-social-action and
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance
[16] Baker, D., Barrow, S., Shiels, C. (2009) How effective are area-based regeneration initiatives in targeting socially excluded individuals? Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal, 2, 4;

makes it a place is subtle, but important: it is the place-users themselves who make this decision.[17] PBSA requires that local stakeholders themselves determine what makes – or could make – their 'place' somewhere people want to be, somewhere they can benefit from, and ultimately give back to. If ownership of projects and places is at the heart of PBSA, then ownership of the original designation is critical.

Inevitably practicalities will temper theory at times: local charities, service providers and residents will have to work with local authorities to legitimise their 'places' in the eyes of funders – but as noted in IVAR's work in this field, the boundaries of a place should be meaningful for the people living within them.[18] Mindful of this, the guidance documents for the PBSA programme intentionally avoided defining 'place', applicants were asked to define scales of operation and activity that were meaningful for them and the local people they will work with and serve – the response to which showed that 'place' is widely interpreted. This is important, but not without its challenges as later sections will discuss, particularly when the boundaries of a place are cast wide.

Exploring place

Firstly, for the purposes of this review, and the programme more widely, we can assume that a place is **locally-rooted** and it has – or has the potential for – **broad community impact**. A place eligible for intervention and funding will **define its own boundaries**, delineated in relation to the systems, people, or **challenges** each place is seeking to improve. For some it may be a neighbourhood or cluster of streets, others may delineate their place as being borough wide or spanning across established boundaries.

What does it mean to **intervene in a place based way**? The British Academy defines place based policy as "aligning the design and resourcing of policy at the most appropriate scale of place, in order to develop meaningful solutions, which improve people's lives"[19] - which is valuable for its focus on both design and resourcing. There can be no 'one size fits all' approach to place based working - a service delivered in fifty different communities through fifty different local funders, but delivered in the same way, is <u>not</u> place based. Even when appropriate scale is a major consideration for service delivery, therefore, it is still a service-based policy, because of how it is designed. **Place based delivery is built up from questions about that place**; its community, needs, assets, services and 'what-makes-it-what-it-is' are all considered *before* prescribing an intervention.

Ultimately, place based delivery or funding is another strategic approach to funding projects: it provides a framework for the development, organisation, management and delivery of different interventions towards a specific aim. In this case, those aims will emphasise the importance of place and the communities that make it.

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[17] H. Nabatu and A. Evans. (2017). Historical review of place-based approaches, p. 42
[18] IVAR (2016), Working in Place: A framework for place-based approaches, p. 10
[19] British Academy (2017), Where We Live Now: Making the Case for place-based policy

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Lessons for place based approaches (from the reviews conducted by IVAR and Lankelly Chase)

- **The importance of building trusting relationships between delivery agents, local people and service users, alongside programme partners.** All parties should be clear on their roles and responsibilities and power should be distributed evenly, with local people seen as genuine stakeholders in the design, delivery and ongoing evaluation of an initiative. The importance of selecting and working with partners that share the values and aims of a project and of local people is also important to long term success and allow for the open and frank discussions needed.

- **Recognising that place based social action takes time**. It can be 7-10 years before a place based intervention can begin to demonstrate impact. Partnerships should not underestimate the time it takes to raise awareness, involve local people and to design and implement interventions. This can be particularly true when working with vulnerable groups or service users.

- **There should be established markers or milestones set across the lifetime of a programme to track and evaluate progress.** A 'year zero' to develop project ideas and establish partnerships is advised, as is giving some consideration to building 'quick wins' into a project design to raise morale and spread awareness. Building in mechanisms to regular celebrate successes, reflect and share learning, and communicating these with the wider community should be a priority.

- **An awareness of context and the need to interact with different scales of operation.** Some place based projects will operate at scales or with resources that mean they cannot expect to enact change at the neighbourhood level through that intervention alone. There are often a multitude of factors at play that will have an impact on the social, economic and physical wellbeing of places and those that live and work in them. These all impact on the scope, complexity and time pressures on meeting the project's objectives. There may be times when there is a need to link local activities or decision making with the wider political and economic systems they are embedded in. Local and regional authorities or bodies can be important allies in helping programme partners to achieve their aims.

- **Places, funders and evaluators should be mindful that place based initiatives do not take place in a vacuum,** and local and national context over the course of a programme can have a considerable effect over the lifetime of a project. Welfare reform, population spread, employment trends and political change are all examples of contextual factors that could affect the project's outcomes and journey.

- **Programmes should seek to build in legacy and sustainability from the start,** whilst recognising the importance of building in opportunities for reflection and redesign along the way. Throughout the literature the challenge of sustaining programmes beyond their initial funding period is highlighted, a challenge that has been all the more heightened in recent years through reductions in public sector funding. If place based initiatives have ambitions to continue beyond the lifetime of a funded programme it is important to consider how additional sources of revenue or investment can be obtained and what the appropriate legacy vehicle is to sustain or expand operations.

Encouragingly the PBSA programme design shows some awareness of these challenges and has put in place provisions that should, to some degree, help to counter them. This includes a year one planning phase which encourages local partnerships to form and collectively design an approach for their area; capacity building work with partnerships to help them understand and navigate differing scales of operation; and a seven-year duration for some of the selected places. With regards to legacy it will be important to encourage all places to consider this in their planning stages as well as throughout, places that do not make it through to phases 2 or 3 of the programme may benefit from some support linking them to alternative or complimentary sources of funding to realise to realise their ambitions for place based social action.

Exploring social action

Having explored definitions and reflections on place we now move on to offer a similar exploration of the term place based social action. Social action is defined by The Office for Civil Society as **'people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities**. It can broadly be defined as practical action in the service of others, which is (i) carried out by individuals or groups of people working together, (ii) not mandated and not for profit, (iii) done for the good of others – individuals, communities and/or society, and (iv) bringing about social change and or value.'[20]

As a concept, social action has superseded the traditional notion of 'volunteering' to encompass the wide-ranging ways in which individuals choose to give back to society. To demonstrate the breadth of activity that can be encompassed by the umbrella of 'social action' NEF and DCMS developed guidance for 'Enabling Social Action' and in doing so proposed nine typologies of social action. These are by no means meant to be exhaustive, or to claim that all types of social action activity can be neatly defined, but do offer an insight into the wide range of activities and opportunities social action presents:[21] Figure 1 on the next page presents the typology from the NEF/DCMS guidance.

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[20] For more information on the typologies and the design of this framework see: Cabinet Office. (2015). Social action: Harnessing the potential: A discussion paper. Retrieved from: www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-action-harnessing-the-potential
[21] Department for Culture, Media & Sport. Enabling Social Action Section A: A description of social action:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591797/A_description_of_social_action.pdf

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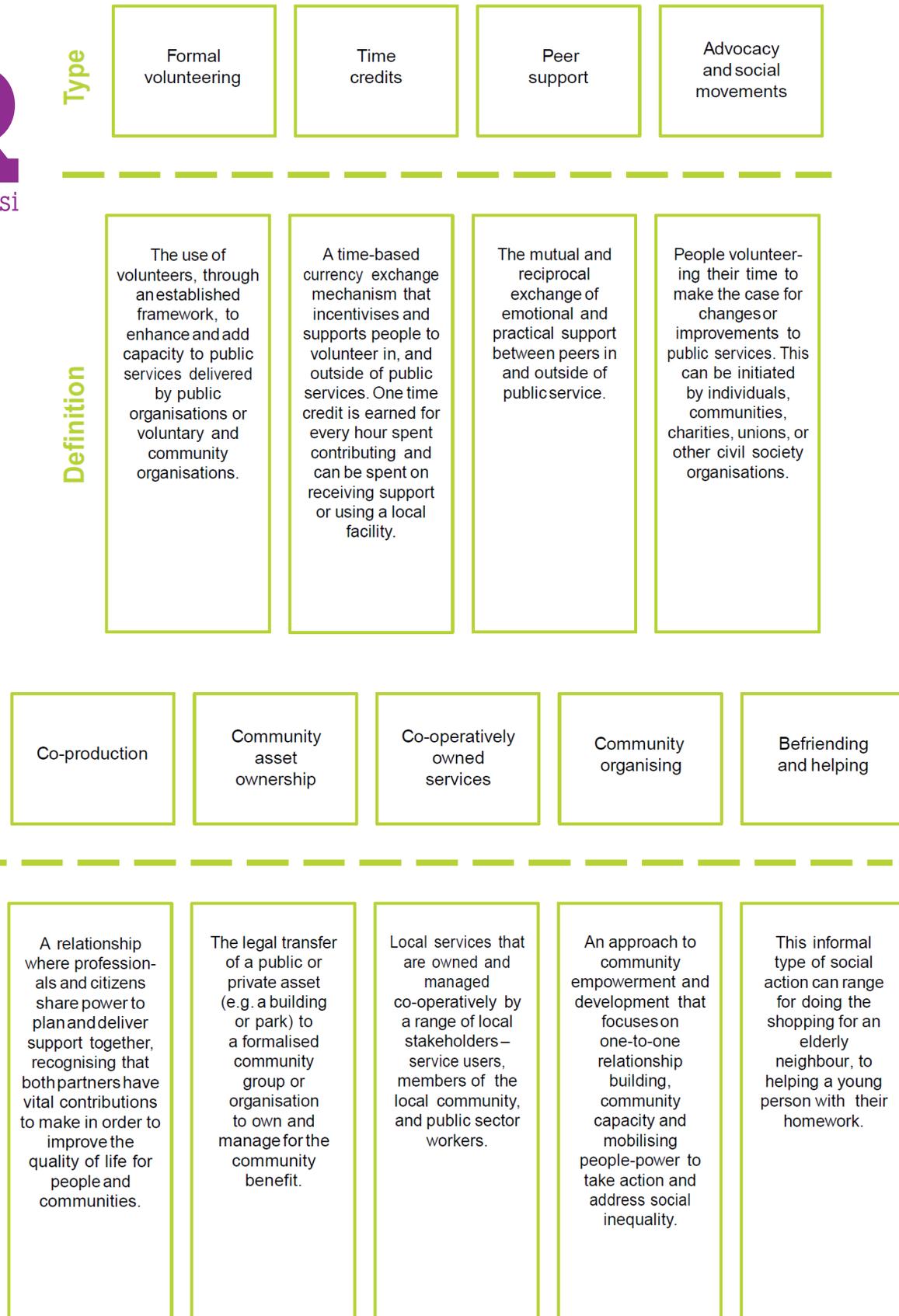
Type			
Formal volunteering	Time credits	Peer support	Advocacy and social movements

Definition

The use of volunteers, through an established framework, to enhance and add capacity to public services delivered by public organisations or voluntary and community organisations.	A time-based currency exchange mechanism that incentivises and supports people to volunteer in, and outside of public services. One time credit is earned for every hour spent contributing and can be spent on receiving support or using a local facility.	The mutual and reciprocal exchange of emotional and practical support between peers in and outside of public service.	People volunteering their time to make the case for changes or improvements to public services. This can be initiated by individuals, communities, charities, unions, or other civil society organisations.

Co-production	Community asset ownership	Co-operatively owned services	Community organising	Befriending and helping

A relationship where professionals and citizens share power to plan and deliver support together, recognising that both partners have vital contributions to make in order to improve the quality of life for people and communities.	The legal transfer of a public or private asset (e.g. a building or park) to a formalised community group or organisation to own and manage for the community benefit.	Local services that are owned and managed co-operatively by a range of local stakeholders – service users, members of the local community, and public sector workers.	An approach to community empowerment and development that focuses on one-to-one relationship building, community capacity and mobilising people-power to take action and address social inequality.	This informal type of social action can range for doing the shopping for an elderly neighbour, to helping a young person with their homework.

Figure 1: NEF/DCMS Typology of social action

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Social action engagement is also positively related to civic participation and activism. People are more likely to 'give back' to their community when they feel they have a stake in their local area, they trust local authority to take decisions in their interest, and that their voice, experience and opinions are both heard and actively sought by those making decisions. An interesting insight in to public involvement and perceptions around social action and civic participation is offered by the national Community Life Survey. The Community Life Survey collects information on social action (which it defines as people getting together to support a community project in their local area) and on three forms of civic engagement.

- **Civic participation** is defined as engagement in democratic processes, both in person and online. This might include signing a petition or attending a public rally, but not including voting;
- **Civic consultation** is defined as taking part in consultations about local service, both in person and online;
- **Civic activism** is defined as involvement in decision-making about local services, both in person and online.

Whilst the sample size is not extensive the survey does provide some interesting insights into people's involvement in social action and civic engagement in the UK, and the extent to which they believe they can and do influence local decision making.

The most recently published figures, for 2016-17, show the most common form of civic engagement undertaken by respondents was linked to 'civic participation', with 41% saying they had undertaken some form of participation in the last year (an increase of 8% on the previous year's survey), with 5% saying they had participated at least once a month. Of those surveyed 18% said they had engaged in civic consultation in the last year (a rise of 2%) and 8% had engaged in civic activism.[22]

Respondents are also asked about both their awareness of and involvement in social action over the past twelve months in their local area - interestingly 38% of adults said they were aware of others getting involved in social action, but only 16% said they had been involved in social action themselves, a consistent pattern since this iteration of the survey began in 2013-14. Breaking those numbers down by age groups goes on to highlight disparities in both awareness and involvement in social action between older and younger respondents, with 50% of adults aged 75 and over stating they were aware of social action in their local area in last year compared to 27% of those aged 16-24, and 20% of over 75s reported being involved themselves, compared to only 11% of 16-24 year olds reporting to. Reflecting some of the barriers to involvement (time, awareness, confidence) and serving as a reminder of the importance of the need to create opportunities for participation that meet the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders.

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[22] Figures taken from: DCMS (2017) Community Life Survey Statistical Release 2016-17, available here:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/638534/Community_Life_Survey_-_Statistical_Release_2016-17_FINAL_v.2.pdf

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More concerning is the response to questions around the extent to which people are aware of and exercise opportunities to influence decision making in their areas. In the 2016-17 survey 58% of respondents stated that they agreed it was important to be able to influence decisions and 51% said they would like to be more involved in decisions made by their local council, however despite this feeling only 27% of respondents agreed they could personally influence decisions affecting their local area - a trend that has remained fairly consistent since 2013-14 when 26% agreed with this statement. A challenge government and funders alike are aware of, the recently launched Civil Society Futures commission being an example[23], exploring ways in which civic society actors can come together to strengthen communities and devolve economic power and decision-making back into the hands of local people, the hope being, that this will lead, in time, to a fundamental shift in our conception of civil society, from policy-driven top-down to user-led bottom-up models of intervention and community organising.

Barriers to participating in social action

Common barriers inhibiting participation or take up of social action opportunities cited throughout the literature include:

> **Barriers to participating in social action**
> - **Lack of time to participate** or concerns that the demands of involvement do not align with an individual's other responsibilities.
> - **High turnover of volunteers** – common causes are volunteers feeling underappreciated or underutilised; the demands on volunteers are too high; or a lack of support or guidance available to volunteers.
> - A perception that they lack the **skills, experience or knowledge** to make a meaningful contribution;
> - **Lack of awareness of social action activities** taking place locally, and opportunities to participate;
> - **A lack of trust**, or aversion to working with certain groups, agencies or public bodies; linked to this is a perception of powerlessness, that participation will not lead to meaningful change and is therefore futile;
> - **Bureaucratic barriers** - for example, confusion over whether volunteering can impact on benefit claims.

Recommendations to increase social action

The design of a programme or project looking to increase participation in social action should consider what partners can do to reduce these barriers.

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[23] For more information on the Civil Society Futures Commission and to access a range of reports and submissions see:
https://civilsocietyfutures.org/

Recommendations for increasing social action
- **Build the confidence and capacity of volunteers** through training and volunteer management. Invest in volunteers and find opportunities that align to their interests, skill set and availability.
- Take the **time, or invest in specialised support** to help partners and local people understand policy or programme processes and guidance so that they can be active participants in the design, delivery and appraisal of programmes;
- **Ensure local initiatives are well communicated,** transparent and opportunities to contribute are shared over a variety of mediums;
- **Offer local people a range of ways in which they can participate or contribute;** think about the timing and location of meetings, the demands being placed on volunteers and other socio-cultural factors that could influence and individual's ability or desire to participate.
- **Track volunteer time**, demonstrate 'in kind' contributions.

Further recommendations will be offered over the course of this literature review as we explore a range of examples of place based social action over subsequent sections.

Place based social action

What it means to intervene with place based social action is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. The term 'place based' is currently used to describe a range of approaches, from light-touch grantees funding projects wanted by targeted communities, to collaborative partnerships co-designing services from the grass-roots.[24]

These approaches recognise the need to **reimagine the existing configuration** of charities, government, the private sector and local communities; to **develop open and reciprocal relationships** that can begin to address underlying causes of community challenges. Place based approaches put the community's capacity to **take charge of its own future**, to advocate for itself, and to build social capital, at the heart of its objectives.

This aligns with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of community participation as: "a process by which people are enabled to become actively and genuinely involved in defining the issues of concern to them, in making decisions about factors that affect their lives, in formulating and implementing policies, in planning, developing and delivering services and in taking action to achieve change."[25]

For place based approaches to social action to be effective there needs to be some meaningful sharing of or shift in responsibility and/or power. Much has been written about the importance of power sharing to achieve effective community participation and empowerment, with power guiding the forums in which people are able to participate, and the extent to which they are able to exert influence.[26] This review does not intend to explore

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[24] Anheier and Leat (2006); Association for the Study and Development of Community (2007).
[25] WHO Regional Office for Europe, Community Participation in Local Health and Sustainable Development: Approaches and Techniques, (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2002), 10.
[26] Cornwall, A and Coelho V. S.P (2007) *Spaces for change? The Politics of Participation in New Democratic Arenas*.

theories or debates on power in any great detail (a number of excellent papers on this are included in footnote 13 above). However, given that a focus on this programme is on creating new opportunities or 'spaces' for community involvement and engagement in the design, delivery and evaluation of local services we include one model for consideration that may prove useful for guiding discussions in and with participating places on the PBSA programme, as well as wider audiences looking to adopt place based approaches to social action.

The 'Place, Space and Power framework' or 'powercube' was developed by John Gaventa and the Institute of Development Studies as a framework to analyse how power operates in the spaces and places for civic engagement at global, national and local political levels.[27] The model builds on a view that engagement/debate/information sharing with communities or civil society takes place in invited or claimed 'spaces', spaces being physical or digital points of contact. *Invited space* includes provided space (sometimes referred to as **closed** space if it is strictly controlled) such as official parliamentary or local authority led consultations as well more open *invited space* such as public consultations, local forums, or engagement events. For this reason, '*Invited*' space is often described as controlled *'from above'*. '*Claimed*' space, on the other hand, refers to space which communities or civil society creates for itself (or *'from below'*), for example through grassroots movements or lobbying, campaigning, education, etc. Fittingly for the PBSA programme these spaces are seen as **arenas for collaboration**, not just contestation. All three spaces (invited, claimed and closed) can provide **opportunities for engagement and coproduction** – but the extent to which these spaces are generally collaborative or lead to new ways of working are governed by the ways in which spaces have been set-up and presented, and how power has been distributed across places.
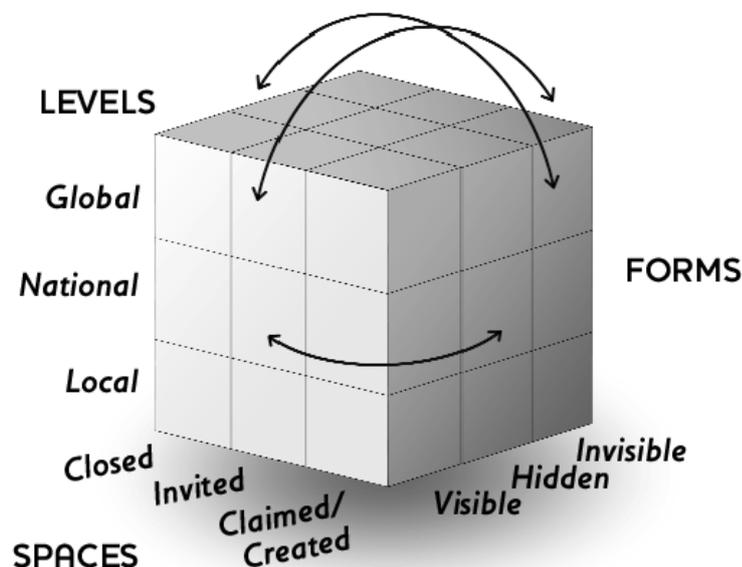

Figure 2. The Space, Place and Power Framework (also referred to as the Powercube)[28]

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[27] Gaventa, J, 2005 *Reflections of the Uses of the Power Cube approach for analysing the spaces, places and dynamics of civil society participation and engagement'.* CFP Evaluation Series no 4.

[28] For a more in-depth introduction to the Powercube and to access a range of practical resources that can be used with community groups to explore the model and conceptions of power see: https://www.powercube.net/

In the model, power is categorised as: 'visible' (i.e. the formal rules, structures and procedures which govern engagement), 'hidden' (i.e. the actual influence those engaging have over others within the engagement space) and 'invisible' (i.e. the power dynamics assumed by participants from societal norms, meaning the extent to which people have become accustomed to believing how much or how little power they have in a situation). For example, a local planning consultation led by a local authority may at face value appear to be an opportunity (or invitation) for local people to engage around a proposed development, with a clear agenda and framework for discussion. However, the venue chosen for the discussions, the language used by perceived professionals, the format of the session and the extent to which local people could genuinely influence the development at that stage of the project lifecycle can all have a large bearing on where power is held (or perceived to be held).

If the PBSA programme is to be genuinely coproduced in places, with local people and organisations shaping the design, delivery and evaluation of projects collaboratively there will need to be acknowledgement of the role power can play in both realising and inhibiting social action ambitions. We think this conceptual framework could be a helpful tool to use with places, provide the terminology for classifying different spaces for collaboration and public engagement, helping them to discuss power relations, their levels of operation and developing their understanding of spaces that can be genuinely collaborative and supportive.

From an evaluator perspective, it would be interesting to explore how different partnerships in places engage in plan development and implementation at different levels (perhaps reframing the levels of the cube to the neighbourhood and local authority levels) and how the wider enabling environment (power structures, local politics, socio-economic drivers etc) influence the approaches to social action chosen.

3. What is the extent and scale of existing approaches to place based social action?

The following section presents some examples of place based social action being delivered in the UK. Place based approaches to social action are wide-ranging and varied. To better understand cross-over between approaches, and derive learning from resultant similarities or differences, we have compiled a live database of PBSA examples, past and current. Available here each project is tabbed by four categories: (i) **social action typology**; (ii) the intervention's **issue** or **theme**; (iii) **partnership structure**; and (iv) type of **place**. We intend for the database to be a live repository of examples of projects that places, partners or anyone interested in exploring PBSA further can draw on for insights and inspiration for their own delivery. A number of examples are included already and we will be asking places and partners to update and share examples of good practice over the lifetime of this programme.

Live examples of existing approaches to place-based social action

#	Place and Title	Date	Description	Place Type	Social Action Typology	Theme	Partnership
			that benefits are kept for the enjoyment of the community.				
3	Angler's Rest Pub in Bamford Village	2013	Anglers Rest Pub: The Anglers Rest became first community pub in Derbyshire in 2013 when it was purchased collectively by over 300 people. It is now run for the benefit of the community by the Bamford Community Society and houses the Anglers Rest pub, a café and the Post Office.	Community hub	Community asset ownership	Community hub	Community asset (shareholders)
4	Manchester Chinatown	2015 - 2018	Manchester Chinatown: A community organiser helped people living in Manchester's Chinatown to organise themselves and set up projects such as a Councillor Question & Answer for the Chinese community and non-English speakers to engage with local and national decision-making. City Centre Councillors came to Chinatown to meet the community half way, which helped shift power towards residents. For the first time, the Chinese residents had a chance to meet their local political representatives, and its success led to meetings becoming a regular fixture.	Neighbourhood	Community organising	Political engagement	Resident collective / Civic partnership (i.e. they had support from a community organiser)
5	North and South London	2010 - present	North and South London Cares: North and South London Cares is a community network of young professionals and older neighbours coming together for social connection: friendship, to share experiences, to seek and give help and advice. It has grown out a local challenge of social isolation and loneliness in two social groups: young professionals and their elderly neighbours.	Borough	Befriending and helping	Social isolation	Local Authority / Local people and volunteers / Charitable foundation / Charity

Figure 3: The live database of PBSA examples

The four examples below have been chosen to reflect the broad range of activities that can fall under the heading of place based social action. They share commonalities both in scale and activity with the places selected for the PBSA programme, but each has its own unique combination of social action, issue, partnership structures and place. Examples cited here are UK based, but we will look to collate international examples in the online resource (with the caveat that initiatives take place in different cultures and contexts). We have included an overview of their activities, some insights into their reach, and where possible an overview of the approaches that have adopted to capture outcomes and impact.

1. **The Winch, North Camden Promise Zone (2015)[29]**

Social action typology	Peer support; Formal volunteering
Issue or theme	Child poverty
Partnership Structure	Local charity (lead organisation); Professional services (social workers, education and health providers, businesses); community groups; local people
Place	Promise Zone – targeting families in the North Camden area

Originally a North Camden youth club, The Winch is now a local charity committed to improving the life chances of the one-in-three Camden-born children who live in poverty. This place based social action project has established the North Camden Promise Zone (NCPZ) and is described by their charity partner, Lankelly Chase as: "a cradle-to-career, cross-sector, collective impact initiative to improve the life outcomes of children and young people."[30] The project aims to radically change how support is provided to children and young people facing multiple and severe disadvantages, and so better support them achieve their potential. Formed in 2015, the partnership consists of a lead charity – The Winch themselves – supported by the Lankelly Foundation, who provide access to funding and research opportunities. The NCPZ also works in partnership with civic and professional partners, who provide peer support. Civic partnerships comprise councillors, civic-minded volunteers, and community groups. Professional partnerships engage, support and train cross-sector professionals to redesign systems of support to intervene earlier, more collaboratively, proactively and intelligently. The resulting co-produced agenda seeks to holistically improve long-term outcomes for children's education, mental health and wellbeing in the area.

Annually, The Winch works with 1,200 children, young people, and their families, delivering 2,071 hours of frontline services with 100 volunteers and 25 members of staff. To more precisely monitor its impact, The Winch tracks close to 100 different metrics of its children and young people.[31] Its programme has been evaluated by external consultants, who employed the Big Lottery Fund's 'Reaching Communities' ECOTEC evaluation toolkit,[32] alongside stakeholder surveys, focus groups and internal report reviews. These are measured against The Winch's Theory of Change framework.[33] Its successes are therefore well-documented in multiple reports, with partner organisations and beneficiaries rating the organisation's impact as effective and excellent.[34] As an organisation, The Winch is proud to

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[29] http://thewinch.org/
[30] https://lankellychase.org.uk/project-summary/the-winch/
[31] http://thewinch.org/our-impact/
[32] The Big Lottery Fund (2008). Evaluation of Reaching Communities in England and Northern Ireland. ECOTEC evaluation toolkit template available here: https://uk.ecorys.com/sites/default/files/cmf_toolkit_3.3.docx
[33] External Evaluation, including Theory of Change: James Baddeley Consulting (2015). The Winchester Project: Benefits and Impact Report. http://thewinch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/JBC-WP-Evaluation-Report-vF.pdf
[34] Ibid.

be 'impact-led', and invests in best practise in order to share its learning with government and across sectors who interact with children and young people.

Through surveys conducted with parents, The Winch decided to invest in improving its facilities, develop new 'future relevant' activities (like technology, environment, and science), and introduce dedicated parents support for children and teenagers at critical 'transition points'. By maintaining high standards, listening to partner feedback and practising resilience, the organisation can adapt itself to what its users need. Demand for The Winch's services are strong, and 95% of partners will refer users to the charity within the next 12 months.[35]

2. Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network[36]

Social action typology	Co-production; community organising
Issue or theme	Economic development; regeneration
Partnership Structure	WCEN (lead organisation); Professional Services (depending on intervention type); community and faith groups; local people and volunteers
Place	Wandsworth - borough

The Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network (WCEN) was first established in 2001 as part of the government's Community Empowerment Network programme, one of 88 such partnerships to emerge under the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Today the network continues to work to improve the lives of people in areas of multiple disadvantage, but has over time moved away from its initial public sector driven, top-down, approach to something more collaborative. WCEN brings together community groups and organisations from a range of sectors to pool skills, resources and learning to test and deliver a range of projects that address social welfare challenges, often trialling innovative approaches that would not typically being delivered through mainstream provision, for example psychological therapies; training community leaders in Systemic Family Therapy; and cardiovascular health and dementia co-production initiatives. The results of this collaborative, grass-roots and community research-led initiative are genuinely co-produced solutions that draw on local people's knowledge of their place. Community-led co-production shares responsibility and resources more equitably, and ensures greater local ownership of projects.

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[35] Ibid, p.15.
[36] http://wcen.co.uk/

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WCEN's main objective is effective co-production. They use innovative research and evaluation methods, which include: **multi-site ethnographies**; **Participatory Learning Appraisals** (PLA) workshops, focus groups and **organisation power-dynamic mapping**,[37] site case studies and co-production snapshots to demonstrate working practice (see the table below for descriptions). WCEN's Co-production methods are based on best practice and are rigorously researched. They have improved on these practices by explicitly acknowledging the imbalanced power dynamics between communities and partner organisations, and then empowering communities to engage with these organisations in more effective and appropriate ways. The success is shown by the 86% of users across WCEN's projects that are satisfied with the co-produced services.[38]

Multi-site ethnographies: MSE is a method of data collection that tracks a particular social problem through a range of different geographic and/or social sites. Typically, it employs a variety of collection methods, such as surveys and structured interviews For more information on this method click here.

Participatory Learning Appraisals: a focus group discussion with a wide range of members and/or stakeholders, where they work together to complete activities, such as: organisational mapping; 'pairwise ranking' (where members think they have impact); and power-dynamic Venn diagrams (see below). Participatory Appraisal approaches empower local people to reflect, share and develop their own knowledge, and come up with better and more relevant community-based solutions to their specific challenges. For more information on Participatory Appraisals, click here.

Organisational power-dynamic mapping: As part of the WCEN's workshops, participants created Venn diagrams and maps exploring the power dynamics between individuals, community groups, Local Authorities and other organisations. These are used to "to understand how participants view the power relationships inside and outside the network, to help clarify its structure". For reference, some examples of different approaches to stakeholder mapping are available here, here, and here.

Table 1. Descriptions of evaluation methods used by WCEN.

WCEN are also an interesting case study for the work they have done to counter two barriers to expansion that co-produced or place based initiatives may encounter at some stage in their development: overcoming the risk adversity of funders; and developing shared language and objectives across partnerships that are often made up of multiple stakeholders and organisations. Genuine community-led co-production may be seen as strategically or financially risky in the eyes of funders due to the aforementioned challenges in demonstrating the impact of place based initiatives. Funders may be reluctant to cede control to communities when substantial sums of money have been invested in a programme, but this reluctance undermines the value and outputs of co-production. To mitigate such risk adversity WCEN have developed clear accountability structures and mechanisms between parties, and have also formalised and streamlined their services: they will not develop any new services until at least 2022 , and will instead focus on strengthening what they already offer.[39] This has the additional benefit of reducing 'burn-out' of already over-stretched volunteers. To encourage coproduction, WCEN's model aims to break down perceived boundaries between

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[37] Dr Rochelle Burgess and Natasha Choudary (2017). "Coproduction from
 Theory to Practice: Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network, An Evaluation Report", p.13.
(http://wcen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Coproduction-Report-14-08-17-1.pdf)
[38] Ibid, p.43.
[39] Ibid, p. 53.

statutory agencies, professionals, and communities to encourage discussion as equal stakeholders. They also continue to distribute leadership and even out capacity across each site. WCEN has also built resilience strategies[40] into its co-production framework; namely taking an active attitude to building relationships and capacity. This ensures that the responsibility for ensuring that all stakeholders understand, practise and promote WCEN-style co-production is shared between multiple people throughout the organisation.

3. The People in Place programme [41]

Social action typology	Advocacy and social movements; community organising
Issue or theme	Social welfare
Partnership Structure	Corra Foundation (lead organisation); local services; local people and volunteers; local authorities
Place	Rural communities in Scotland

The People in Place programme, launched in Scotland in 2017, aims to reach communities facing multiple complex challenges in a climate of increasing pressure on the national social welfare budget. Funders work with local authorities to identify areas that are struggling to provide basic public services, but whom also receive little to no charitable funding. The partnership works with local people and organisations to organise themselves and create solutions to local issues with few resources: the activities and projects that emerge grow out of what people want to see happen. The diversity of the work means that agency and responsibility is spread between groups and organisations, and that learning is also shared between the supported communities.[42] For example, the Place based Working Project organises regular conferences and cross-sector discussion with sector experts, central and local government, to analyse its grantees' annual reports alongside other recent place based research. The findings are presented to stakeholders and compiled as working tools and resources for the grantees.

Learning that has emerged from across the sites show that: engaging people who are seldom heard in their community can only be achieved by concentrating on actively designing open and accessible platforms; funding is often not taken up because the community lacks the resources, skills, confidence or capacity to apply; that building community resilience should be among the first steps of community engagement and investment; and that developing effective and trusting relationships take time and the best emerge organically.[43] This collaboration and solidarity is showing signs of building a unified social movement, and

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[40] Ibid.
[41] https://www.corra.scot/people-in-place/
[42] Corra Foundation (2016). People in Place – Annual Update: North Ayrshire, p. 7-8. https://www.corra.scot/blacklands-annual-update/
[43] Corra Foundation (2016). People in Place – Annual Update: South Lanarkshire, p. 6 https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Fernhill-Annual-Summary-2017-1.pdf

demonstrates some of the benefits that can come from ceding more direct control of local authority funding to smaller, marginalised communities.

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In 2017, 8579 people engaged in their communities through Corra's People in Place micro-funding initiatives; this translates into almost 2000 hours of volunteering and 29 new projects developed and delivered by, for and in communities.[44] The monitoring and evaluation methods employed to capture impact across the programme vary in scope and scale, much like the projects themselves. In order to track some of the programme wide outcomes 'People in Place' request annual reports from each grantee, not asking them to report on programme wide metrics but asking them to share their intentions and impact through case studies and any insights or data they have gained from their own, tailored, monitoring tools and approaches.[45]

One challenge for People in Place is community selection. One example is Blacklands in Ayrshire: initially the area did not qualify for attention under Corra's strict social deprivation-centred guidelines.[46][47] However, the decision to meet with local authority helped People in Place to better understand the local perspective, and that the national data failed to capture the sharp wealth gap in the area. Local conversations revealed that an affluent estate, Whitehurst Park, is skewing the data. People in Place is committed to distributing funding to communities who are not reached by either governmental or philanthropic funding, which means that these 'feet-on-the-ground' approaches to discovering pockets of deprivation are vital.

4. Marsh Farm Outreach (MFO)[48]

Social action typology	Co-operatively owned service
Issue or theme	Economic development; regeneration
Partnership Structure	Resident collective
Place	An estate in Luton

Marsh Farm Outreach (MFO) is a collective of proactive residents who aim to develop inclusive economic development and achieve local regeneration for their estate community. By supporting community-led and -owned businesses, they increase their ability to improve the local economy, reduce unemployment, and guarantee that benefits are kept for the enjoyment of the community. In 2015, a new project – 'The Organisation Workshop' – established seven new social enterprises on the estate, to help local unemployed people

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[44] Corra Foundation (2017). Impact Review 2017, p. 3. https://www.corra.scot/impact-review2017/

[45] For the most recent annual reports from the People in Place grantees: https://www.corra.scot/getting-alongside-communities/

[46] The People in Place project identifies areas of deprivation that are currently being missed through desk research and collaboration with funders, Local Authorities and the SIMD indicators from the improvement Service. To see how Corra describes their journey of identifying communities: https://www.corra.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Journey-of-finding-a-community.pdf

[47] Corra Foundation (2017). People in Place – Annual Update: North Ayrshire. https://www.corra.scot/blacklands-annual-update/

[48] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591797/A_description_of_social_action.pdf

facing multiple disadvantages learn new skills and earn a living. The Marsh Farm Outreach has been financially self-sustaining and independent since 2014 and lists the aims of the project as to:

- transform the lives of the participants in terms of their ability to access jobs and their overall wellbeing;
- improve the local environment and strengthen the community;
- impact on the local economy by developing community-based enterprises and services as a direct outcome of the Outreach Workshop.[49]

As a community-developed and –led outreach project, MFO have developed a successful model delivering on these aims: it is financially self-sustaining and is currently developing and/or supporting no fewer than fourteen distinct projects, from social enterprises to environmental improvement projects, street mobilisers to increase participatory democracy and a new family visitors centre. The project also explored how much money earned locally through the programme and through other economic activity stays within the local economy, with findings indicating that the money spent invested in Marsh Farm (by public agencies and by the local community buying services) is £95m a year.[50] To celebrate and build upon this positive news, the partnership started a public awareness-raising event with interactive displays and local enterprise exhibits. A follow-up survey of 650 households asked residents to suggest new community businesses that they would want to access on the estate, to ensure that profits made are returned to the community, to 'plug' any remaining economic leaks.[51] MFO also decided to invest in a Community Enterprise and Resource Centre set up specifically to employ and train local people.

Evaluations are typically informal, usually based on satisfaction surveys, door-to-door talks, and community meetings. One of their Organisation Workshops was evaluated by the DWP in 2015 and found that 44% of workshop participants had been able to find long-term (at least eight months) mainstream jobs. By September 2015, 13 people (28%) had used their skills and interests to start new small businesses, including: bee-keeping, catering, and IT services.[52]

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[49] Imagine (2016). Marsh Farm Organisation Workshop: Evaluation report, p. 2. https://coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/115/2016/07/Final-Evaluation-Document_Summary.pdf Marsh Farm's original aims listed here: http://www.marshfarmoutreach.org.uk/about-marsh-farm-outreach/
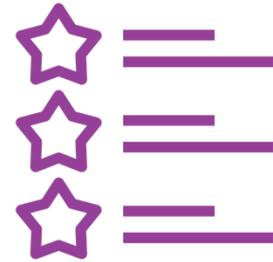[50] http://www.marshfarmoutreach.org.uk/about-marsh-farm-outreach/plugging-the-economic-leaks/
[51] Ibid.
[52] Imagine (2016). Marsh Farm Organisation Workshop: Evaluation report, p. 2. https://coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/115/2016/07/Final-Evaluation-Document_Summary.pdf

4. Evaluating place based social action

In the case studies in the previous section we highlighted some of the impact these initiatives have made to date and shed light on any attempts to evaluate or refine their activities so far. However, as previous literature reviews have found, the evidence base for place based working remains limited, particularly when trying to evidence place outcomes or effects of an initiative on a whole area as opposed to measuring the impact on an individual. This also holds true for larger scale, government-led or assisted programmes.

A range of methods have been employed to evaluate such programmes including: case studies; interviews; statistical analysis; the use of and comparison of national indicators; participant numbers or take-up rates; and policy analysis. The Lankelly Chase review has highlighted that there has been considerable criticism of the evaluation approaches adopted for some of these in the past, with common criticisms being that they are largely summative rather than developmental and for failing to take a longitudinal approach to evaluation that extends beyond the lifetime of a programme.

Challenges in evaluating PBSA:

- **Proving impact.** Positive impacts on individuals can be captured, and infrastructure and physical realm improvements can be seen, but systems change and soft or 'whole place' outcomes are difficult to prove, particularly when evaluations do not extend beyond the lifetime of a programme. Some of these changes may take years, or even decades to become apparent.
- **Attribution.** The importance of recognising that place based social action often takes places within and alongside different scales of operation and political and socioeconomic factors has been emphasised. This makes it very difficult to attribute change to one particular intervention, particularly so when an intervention is rolled out over a large boundary and/or several years.
- **Power imbalances and engagement challenges.** It is important to involve people throughout, rather than one off consultation.
- **Context:** Other factors may also help or hinder the outcomes an intervention is trying to achieve. Changes brought about through social mobility; political change; neighbourhood churn; employment rates; welfare reform; etc. may influence the reach of an intervention, or have consequences that far outweigh the changes a place based initiative might hope to bring about at an individual or geographic scale.
- **Complexity** is another factor - particularly when a range of funders are involved. Priorities and personnel change and over the duration of a programme different stakeholders may also want different things and there may be a tension between national and local objectives.

Existing evaluations of government initiated approaches to place based social action

This section draws out further insights and lessons from a number of government and Big Lottery funded projects that most closely align with the principles of the PBSA programme.

As the PBSA is a joint government/Big Lottery funded project being delivered on a national scale we have looked at similar large-scale initiatives for insights that may inform this evaluation, including recent government initiatives to encourage wider community participation and empowerment such as the Community Organisers programme, Our Place, the associated Neighbourhood Community Budget pilots, and Big Lottery's Big Local and Fullfilling Lives programmes. Two of these examples – Our Place and Big Local – are explored in more depth below.

1. Our Place

Project overview

In July 2013, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched Our Place (previously known as Neighbourhood Community Budget pilots), a government programme described as "a fundamental part of the government's approach to localism, transforming public services by making sure that they are focused on the user, not the organisations".[53]Through the 'pooling, devolving or 're-wiring' of local authority and agency funding to local partnerships the aim of the programme was to help communities design and deliver local services that focus on local priorities at the same time as reducing bureaucracy and (in the long term) costs. 141 organisations took place in phase one of the programme, with Our Place areas receiving packages of support from Locality, as well as access to grants and further training and specialist advice.

The evaluation

Shared Intelligence were commissioned to evaluate the first round of the programme which spanned from January 2014 to August 2015. This involved research and fieldwork between November 2015 and April 2016, which included desk research, telephone interviews with four stakeholders (staff at DCLG and Locality), online surveys of 71 lead contacts and 65 partners, 11 in-depth case studies, two workshops with Locality, DCLG and representatives from Our Place projects. Questions the evaluation sought to explore included: patterns of take-up and progress made by projects; the impact the package of support had in areas; and to get a better understanding of whether budgets and services could be 'rewired' or redesigned effectively at a local level. The study also set out to understand 'the circumstances in which the design and delivery of the programme works best to accelerate decentralisation' and 'possible relationships between characteristics (or types) of partnerships and implementation of operational plans'.[54]

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[53] Shared Intelligence (2016), Evaluation of the Our Place Programme available at: https://mycommunity.org.uk/2016/11/23/evaluating-our-place/
[54] Ibid, p8

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Learning from the Our Place programme:[1]

- **Early support is appreciated.** Programme-wide surveys and feedback highlighted an appreciation of the **relationship manager support**, and the value of some **initial funding to help places come together and form a plan**.
- **Community priorities are project priorities**. Where the programme had been successful it had more commonly been led by **community-led organisations** rather than the local authorities – although local authority support and involvement was still seen as important. The programme tended to be **most successful when the services or propositions being developed had been identified as a priority by the community**.
- **Shared visions need close relationships.** where statutory partners (health, policy, local council, etc.) had been closely involved, the programme acted as a catalyst to bring a range of organisations and stakeholders together to pursue shared objectives. Questions were however raised over the extent to which the approaches could be sustained or scaled up through mainstream public sector budgets, citing a reluctance from statutory investors to invest in the approach, or decommission their own services.
- **Sustainability needs funding.** Existing concerns were only intensified by the financial pressures brought about through austerity measures and a perception that it could take some time for providers to change well-established funding and commissioning processes. This meant places would require funding from other sources to continue to pursue their ambitions.
- **It takes time.** Time was also an important consideration when looking at impact at an individual place level. Echoing earlier discussion in this review, the evaluators found that a 12-month window was not sufficient to understand the 'whole process' places went through, and this should instead be viewed as the start of a journey that could take five or more years. The Our Place evaluation cites some projects that took 24 months to begin implementing their plans – particularly when a range of partners are involved, or where buildings and assets are involved.

Our Place: Neighbourhood Community Budgeting Pilots (NCBs)

To capture snapshots of the impact the programme was having *in places* the evaluation included the production of a set of 11 detailed case studies, formed through face to face interviews, desk research and site visits. The findings from two case studies of neighbourhood community budgeting pilots – Shard End and Castle vale - were of particular interest to us given the focus of this programme and literature review. The NCB case studies were based on a half day workshop with local councillors, residents and representatives from community organisations and city council officers to discuss outcomes and learning from the programmes.

The Shard End NCB pilot was led by the city council to enable the area to take a community budget based approach to families with complex needs and to open up greater dialogue with residents. As part of this, the group encouraged local residents to engage and work with professionals and local businesses to negotiate local employment support. **Castle Vale** NCB Pilot focussed on the transfer of a local football stadium into community ownership and provision of services to address health conditions relating to smoking and obesity. The partnership took the leisure centre and football stadium into community ownership and developed a local obesity strategy action plan 'Fit for the Future'.

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The evaluation of these specific projects showed that **there are different ways to gauge community priorities:** Across both NCB pilots, workshop participants agreed that the **community budgeting process** had been a catalyst to address key priorities in each area. In Castle Vale, **the resource mapping process** during the pilot was seen as potentially useful but was difficult to complete because neither the city council or NHS disaggregated much of their service budgets and spend data to a small enough geographical level. Although the wider institutional context was sometimes seen as overly bureaucratic and inflexible, the **engagement of local councillors** was generally positive. However, there were some concerns from the pilots about getting partners around the table and **taking the lead on particular issues** and themes.

2. Big Local

Project overview

Big Local is a multi-year, £200m programme supporting 150 communities across the country to make important and lasting difference to their communities with a grant of £1m to each area, putting local people in control of the decisions about how the funding is spent. The programme is administered by Local Trust and funded through an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund.

A number of evaluations have been carried out for this programme to date, covering the early year's findings, area approaches to legacy (i.e. what they plan to do beyond their funding), and attempts to understand influences on the development of Big Local programmes.[55]

Of particular interest to this programme is the Our Bigger Story evaluation - a multimedia evaluation of Big Local which aims to record positive change in Big Local areas and understand how those changes come about and how they can be sustained. Led by the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) at the University of Birmingham, who work with 15 Big Local areas across England to record change as it happens – change in individuals and in Big Local communities itself. The evaluation supports residents in Big Local areas to record their experiences, through community research, blogs, photos, digital stories, films and other media – much of which is then shared on the Our Bigger Story website.[56]

A summary here of the content on display on the website (and also shared through a Big Local film festival held in 2017[57]) would not do justice to the videos, blogs and photos shared by participants, with the programme clearly having made a difference to the lives of many volunteers and beneficiaries of the programme. There are also numerous examples of physical transformations that the funding has allowed for, with parks, homes and community spaces undergoing transformations. Beyond this, the videos and accompanying report do not

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[55] These and several other evaluations, commentary pieces and parliamentary submissions on Big Local can be found here: http://localtrust.org.uk/library/research-and-evaluation/?page=1

[56] See: http://ourbiggerstory.com/index.php

[57] See: http://localtrust.org.uk/library/blogs/big-local-film-festival-highlights for a write up of the event which proved to be an engaging way of sharing insights into the early years of the programme.

demonstrate wider change in a place but perhaps they should not be expected to, given the relatively small sums of money places are granted, and guiding programme outcomes that are aspirational rather than outcomes that can be rigorously tested.[58] This approach will serve as a unique digital record of change in communities over a ten year period and offers an alternative to more traditional qualitative and case study approaches – something that may appeal to places on the PBSA programme keen to capture the impact their service is having on individuals and parts of their communities.

Participatory action research has been an important strand of Big Local evaluations. In December 2016, IVAR published a research report evaluating Big Local areas focussing on health and wellbeing[59]. Their evaluation methodology followed a 'participatory action research' approach, which included focus group discussions with Big Local areas, facilitation of meetings between Big Local areas themselves and their local health agencies and provision of advice, information, resources and ideas to areas.

The findings of the evaluation found that Big Local partnerships play a role in improving health and wellbeing locally, in six ways: structure and support, resources and time, a fuller picture of local health and wellbeing, bringing people together, test beds for new ideas and activities and health promotion. [60]

Enablers and barriers to successful PBSA programmes

Given the wide range and varied nature of place based social action initiatives, it can be difficult to draw out common themes from existing evaluations around enablers and barriers to successful development, implementation and sustainability. However, there are some key themes that appear to occur across the evaluations investigated above, which are detailed below. An important strand of this evaluation will be to work with and across places to understand conditions, support and arrangements that are helping (or hindering) their approach to PBSA and we will continue to build on and share these findings over the duration of the programme.

Having **community infrastructure already in place** can ensure successful development and implementation of place based social action. Castle Vale had long-established community-led regeneration vehicles, plus a history of community engagement and partnership working, which meant the role of Our Place was to develop new ways of delivering services rather than putting these processes in place (as was the case in Shard End).

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[58] The four Big Local outcomes are: Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them; People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future; The community will make a difference to the needs it priorities; and People will feel that their area is an even better place to live.

[59] IVAR (2016) People, places and health agencies: Lessons from Big Local Residents, available here: https://www.ivar.org.uk/research-report/people-places-and-health-agencies-lessons-from-big-local-residents/

[60] For further insights into participatory action research also see this recent report on *community-led action research by the Scottish Community Development Centre - http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/Knowledge%20is%20Power%20May%202018.pdf*

Across both Our Place and Big Local, it is possible to see how **support from partners** is vital to success, both for development and implementation, and sustainability. Castle Vale and Shard End both reaped the benefits of political support city wide, particularly when attempting to make sustained progress on devolved budgets and decision-making. BCMake found attracting and maintaining support from a wide range of public and private sector partners helped the project's aims and activities maintain momentum, and Ivar (2016) note the need for finding allies in local health agencies to encourage involvement with Big Local.

However, the ethos and culture of some partners can also have negative impacts on the progress of place based social action programmes. Many examples show how a **lack of risk culture** in public sector partners can lead to stagnation in growth (BCMake) and projects struggling to get off the ground. Over and above this, **local authority cuts** make it difficult for public sector partners to get involved or, when they are able to get involved, maintain sustainability (Big Local).

Employment is key: finding the right person for the job can help drive a project that otherwise might not succeed. For example, BCMake's success was, to some extent, attributable to its entrepreneurial, enthusiastic and knowledgeable Our Place project lead, who was committed to the aims and ethos of the project, even in a difficult financial climate. In Castle Vale and Shard End, employment could sometimes be an issue, with staff turnover affecting the continuity and credibility required to build partnerships and maintain community engagement.

Through our work, the peer network and the shared database we will continue to develop and share insights on this, building to some guiding principles around good practice in initiating and sustaining PBSA.
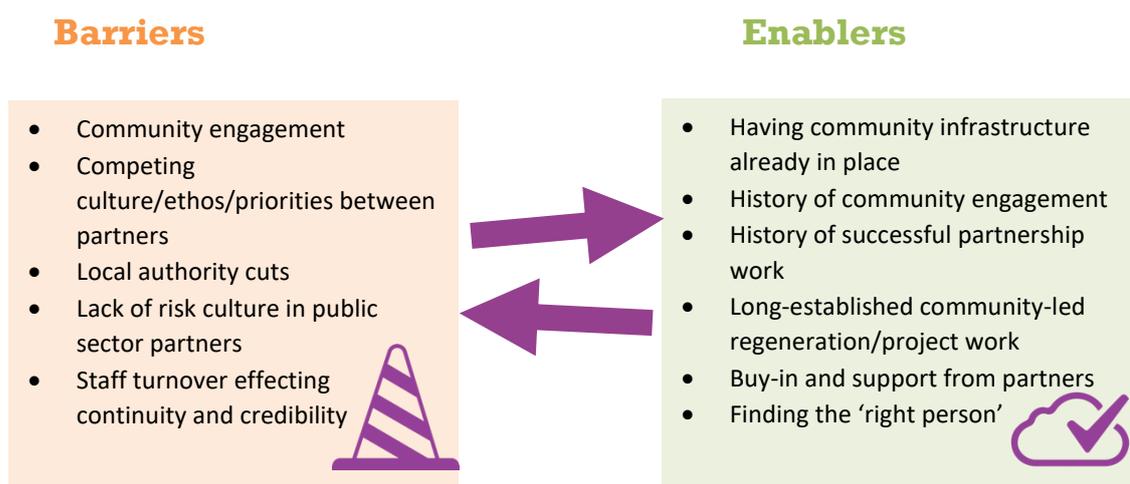

Barriers

- Community engagement
- Competing culture/ethos/priorities between partners
- Local authority cuts
- Lack of risk culture in public sector partners
- Staff turnover effecting continuity and credibility

Enablers

- Having community infrastructure already in place
- History of community engagement
- History of successful partnership work
- Long-established community-led regeneration/project work
- Buy-in and support from partners
- Finding the 'right person'

Figure 4: Summary of barriers and enablers to PBSA from the literature

5. Informing the evaluation approach to the PBSA programme
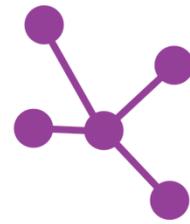
This final section seeks to bring together some reflections, based on this learning review, that could help the development, delivery and evaluation of the programme going forwards. The evaluations covered above have demonstrated approaches that can be used to capture the impact of place based approaches on individuals; to explore the journey of organisations or partnerships taking place in a programme; to appraise the usefulness of packages of support and funding made available; and to identify financial savings or improvements. There appears to be less empirical evidence about what place based social action can 'do' to places.

Given the emergent nature of place based social action, the evidence base remains sparse, and will take time to develop. Through this review we have drawn attention to the challenges of evaluating place based approaches, and recognised that a degree of caution should be employed when attributing changes to a place to one particular programme or intervention. Places are more complex than that, and a programme of this size and investment should be realistic about the level of transformation it can achieve in a place.

We do have an opportunity to shine a light on the potential social action has to improve the skills, confidence and engagement of local people; to explore ways in which local agencies, civic organisations and local people can come together to develop innovative projects, change local systems and increase levels of social action; and to better understand the support, local conditions and approaches that can allow place based social action to flourish and inspire a movement of PBSA approaches across the country. With this in mind the final sections of this report consider steps that can be taken, by the funders, programme partners and the places, from the outset of this programme to best capture and demonstrate the impact of their work.

Capturing impact in each place

From the above it is clear that we need to build in learning and monitoring from the start of the programme, both with individual places, and at a programme level. Lankelly's recommendation of adopting a theory of change process that involves all stakeholders, including the community, in both setting the learning objectives and planning and capturing learning is a good one, and encouragingly something that is already built in to each places Social Action Journey. This also proved effective in the Our Place model. Early workshops with places around their theory of change should look to establish what success or positive change looks like for all parties and how they can work together to achieve this – ensuring a shared vision, collectively owned outcomes and an agreed approach.

Linked to a common agenda should be **collectively owned outcomes**. Clear responsibilities for capturing and storing data and insights should also be agreed ensuring shared approaches

wherever feasible, or desirable. It is important that both the desired outcomes and the tools to capture impact are consistent with the resources partnerships are working with, and appropriate for the scale they are operating on.

We should adopt an iterative approach to delivery, ensuring **ongoing reflection and adaption** throughout the course of the programme. Remembering to celebrate successes along the way, and revisiting priorities and the theory of change as programmes develop. Shared learning across the programme is to be encouraged to widen the evidence base on place based working, but this must be tempered with a recognition that local context will play an important part in the success of an initiative.

With 20 places taking part in phase one of the programme, this provides for some rich opportunities for **peer learning**. With an online forum in place, a series of webinars and opportunities for places to meet over the course of the programme places will be given the opportunity to share with and learn from places. Peer learning has proved to be a valuable resource in programmes such as Big Local where learning clusters, site visits and engagement via an online forum are common practice – allowing partnerships to share not only what has worked, but also approaches that were not successful. These insights, and a sense of connectedness to others undertaking a similar journey can be invaluable to places, and a useful resource for evaluators looking to understand how a programme is rolling out in places. Where possible a culture of openness, and support should be fostered.

Assigning one or more partnership members as a **Learning Champion** to liaise with evaluators on behalf of the partnership may be an effective way to manage limited time and resources. Learning champions have proved to be an effective way of linking partnerships to programme support and delivering key messages and insights back to the partnership. The hope is that through this programme we can develop a network of learning champions, not only liaising with ourselves on behalf of their places but linking up with each other to share insights, advice and best practice across the programme.

Make evaluation fun and interesting, for volunteers as well as service recipients. Previous sections have introduced a number of creative and participatory approaches to evaluation. Further guidance on citizen research, video case studies and participatory research will be shared with places over the coming months alongside tailored support provided to each place.

Capturing learning across the programme

Despite the challenges discussed above we are keen to capture the impact PBSA is having on individuals and on their perceptions of their places and the programme. In line with the good practice featured above we will use case studies, site visits and stakeholder interviews to capture these insights. Case studies can be used to raise the profile of PBSA further and this will be discussed further with the Big Lottery and DCMS to clarify the intended audience for these outputs.

We will adopt a realist approach, looking to understand not only whether or not particular approaches worked (meaning both approaches in places, and the programme itself as an

approach) but some of the reasons behind this – why they worked, who they worked for, what was unique or similar about their circumstances etc. It's this learning and insights that can help all involved to grow PBSA as a movement. It may also be helpful to understand the varying starting points of places (i.e. how established partnerships and/or projects were before this programme commenced) to see what insights this may offer into the enabling conditions necessary for PBSA to thrive. We also want to capture some of the unanticipated outcomes across the programme and will do so through interviews with stakeholders and through surveys and the online forum.

Given the above discussions about power we are keen to ensure that places feel they have some ownership over the evaluation process and the questions and areas we will explore. Over the coming weeks and months, we will look for opportunities to coproduce the evaluation with places, as well as the wider programme team. Through our initial contact with places (both through the forum and in face to face and phone conversations) we will look to understand how they are approaching evaluation in their own projects and partnerships, get a better understanding of what they hope to achieve and learn through their involvement in the programme, and begin to establish the processes by which they can shape and feed-in to the evaluation whilst being sensitive to the capacity, time and resource pressures in each place.

We also hope to work with places to foster an environment of trust and peer support - encouraging places to share what isn't working well, alongside what is. There is an important role for ourselves, the funders and programme partners to play here in promoting the message that there is as much value in sharing what isn't working as well as what is. This needs to be reiterated throughout programme communications, but as we have seen above also needs to be reflected in programme processes, selection criteria and reporting mechanisms. As the programme advances through its various phases we will look for opportunities to liaise with and meet with places to shape, test and refine our evaluation approach – reflecting the iterative approach places will be taking with their own projects.

Questions or areas of interest to explore collaboratively:
- Establishing an understanding of **how places developed and implemented their plans** and what aspects or enabling conditions (local or structural) influenced the approach they chose and the issues they pursued.
- Assess the **extent to which local people have contributed t**o the design, deliver and appraisal of activities. Identifying what has worked well and what has not in citizen engagement.
- Identify the **enabling and hindering factors** which affect some stakeholders ability and willingness to play an effective role in developing and delivering PBSA, including the enabling environment, capacity constraints and other key issues determined during the evaluation.
- Using an **adapted version of the Powercube** we could explore with places the extent to which they feel new spaces for collaboration and engagement have been created and how genuine, and ultimately successful this has been.
- Identify **lessons learned** and provide recommendations for future support to other paces or funders considering adopting the PBSA approach.