



PBSA – Learning from crisis response

Learning Paper 3

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October 2020

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Introduction

The Place-Based Social Action (PBSA) programme is funded over seven years (2017-2024) by The National Lottery Community Fund (the Fund) and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

The PBSA programme provides support to local partnerships in ten places to develop social action approaches that address issues and priorities that matter to people in their community, and encourage new ways of working, so that people have greater ownership and influence over local services. The local partnerships are made up of local residents, civil society organisations, public sector bodies, service providers and businesses. A civil society organisation in each place leads each partnership.

The purpose of this paper is to document how the PBSA areas responded to the crisis and to draw out key learning that could help support this type of work in future. It is the third in a series of papers that Renaisi has produced since May 2020. We developed an evaluation framework to guide the learning approach during the COVID-19 crisis phase and beyond. This covers several different areas of focus including community needs, PBSA approaches, collaboration, community engagement and learning phased over three distinct phases – the immediate crisis, the recovery period and adapting to the ‘new normal’.

The first two learning papers were primarily based on ongoing discussions with places and insights shared informally during programme calls. This learning paper develops the themes from the first papers further and has been informed by in-depth qualitative interviews conducted between July and August 2020.

In total, 24 individuals were interviewed including staff and volunteers from the ten lead organisations, as well as representatives from local authorities, a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and community organisations that supported the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the places. Some of these discussions were carried out in groups of up to four to support collective reflection. Interviews were recorded and researchers took detailed notes. These were then analysed using a thematic framework. Interviewees were informed that their contributions would remain anonymous and the direct quotations used in this report have not been attributed to specific partnerships.

This paper looks at four thematic issues: community needs, adapting social action approaches, local collaboration and adapting volunteering to longer-term social action. It also includes an overview of the partnerships’ responses and explores overall learning. It concludes with some insights on the two key hypotheses outlined at the beginning of the crisis period:

Hypothesis 1 – looking back: Existing connections and relationships that PBSA partnerships developed through the first two years of the programme influenced the role and responses they took during the immediate crisis.

Hypothesis 2 – Looking forward: The role that partnerships took during the crisis will have a significant influence on how place-based social action and the partnership is perceived by the community and other partners in the local area going forward.

Community needs



Shifting need within the communities

Across the partnerships, the **initial need** created by the COVID19 pandemic was extreme but also very obvious to those working closely with communities in their places. The response to needs in the PBSA places was similar to many other communities across the country. In the early stages of the pandemic, this response included the delivery of food and medicine and befriending for isolated people.

Beyond this initial challenge, there were a range of conditions that presented more varied challenges for PBSA partnerships continuing or adapting their activities:

- The **closure of face-to-face services and physical spaces**. This included libraries, charity shops and some statutory services. Communities struggled without the free use of computers or access to the internet, no access to cheap clothing for families, and opportunities for social interaction taken away. The partnership in Hartlepool, with a specific lens on housing and homelessness, had to increase their support for street sleepers who could no longer use 'drop-in' services or access any public facilities or toilets.
- Many **voluntary organisations stopped operating or reduced their responsibilities** from the outset, increasing the burden on other already stretched services. For example, in Watchet, the partnership had to provide the Meals on Wheels service, which was previously being delivered by a local housing association.
- COVID exposed the **digital divide**, exacerbating the problem of isolation and making it more challenging for people to stay connected and do basic things like schoolwork, in households without wifi and where a mobile phone is the only digital device.
- Several partnerships in urban areas with high levels of deprivation, such as Bristol, East Marsh and Coventry, noted that local health indicators such as obesity and heart disease were already a concern. This led to **increased fear** around the virus and large numbers of vulnerable people shielding in their communities. This was felt in a different way in rural areas, with higher numbers of older people isolating.
- Voluntary sector organisations working on the front line during the crisis period experienced issues with **'burn out' amongst staff and volunteers**. Where services have slimmed down, and staff are on furlough, partnerships reported working 12 hour shifts without a break, managing large numbers of calls and having few days off.

We don't have the capacity or resources... Volunteers are running out of steam after three months. PBSA Partnership. I1

This situation is affecting our personal lives massively. PBSA Partnership. I3

Emotionally draining for those members of staff. PBSA Partnership. I4

Following on from the initial crisis period, the impact of the lockdown began to manifest itself in an economic way and in a non-COVID health-related way. Many of the partnerships operate in some of the most deprived parts of the country, where the primary sources of employment are in manual labour, hospitality and food industries. Many people who were on zero-hour contracts lost their jobs or were given reduced hours and had to apply for Universal Credit for the first time. Need in communities shifted from crisis to more chronic need, such as **long-term unemployment, mental health issues and concerns around people's welfare.**

As soon as lockdown went all the normal signposting bits whittled down. People would only be reached if we contacted them, but that didn't make them come to the phone. There are still people that are being missed, they're the ones that don't want to have interaction because they've had something happen in the past or something has gone on and they're not fully trusting.
PBSA Partnership. I11

It is a real mental health crisis now. About a month ago was absolutely huge, from overdosing to first episode of psychosis, all from people not known to our system at all. All the stuff that engages people, makes them feel part of something and reduces level of anxiety which could go on is absolutely critical.
PBSA Partnership. I4

Adapting roles to identify need

As issues such as mental health and isolation have grown, community organisations have come under increasing pressure to engage people who might not necessarily come forward. PBSA partnerships outlined two key enablers for identifying people in need:

Networks of contact and relationships: Partnerships used their longstanding knowledge of the community to connect with vulnerable people already known to them, and through other local organisations to reach out to new people. Referral systems were the backbone of the model in several areas, meaning that many people sought support from PBSA partnerships as a result of being signposted from elsewhere. Traditional routes like sending letters and leafletting were felt to be the most effective way of engaging people who were not linked to services in some areas.

Data and information collaboration: This has played an important role in the response and allowed greater collaboration between organisations, supporting more effective referral systems. Two partnerships reported centrally compiling their existing data, including names of individuals that use services, buildings, community transport etc. Public data also provided invaluable local knowledge which allowed the partnerships to understand how to target those in need. For example, the local authority in Colchester found their bin collection data was helping to highlight where the most vulnerable residents were.

Adapting social action approaches



Approaches during the crisis period

The PBSA programme was originally informed by a typology of social action which includes nine approaches: 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 table below outlines the five broad approaches taken in the crisis period, aligned to the existing typology, (approaches were not mutually exclusive):

| Approaches taken during crisis | Type of social action | Places |
|--|--|--|
| 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 |
| 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 and Hackney |
| 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 |
| 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 |
| Developing programmes of wellbeing activities to address growing concerns around mental health and isolation, by distributing | Co-production | East Marsh, Hartlepool, Halifax, |

| | | |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| activity packs, 'art drops', 'time capsules' on memory sticks, seeds and grow pots, as well as arranging online social events. | | Coventry, Sefton and Lincoln |
|--|--|------------------------------|

Looking across the range of approaches, it is apparent that most activities were supporting people to do something for themselves. However, it is important to note that some of these sit further away from social action and were more focused on responding to immediate needs emerging from the closure of services and spaces – for example, delivering support packages could be seen as a type of charitable activity rather than empowering people directly.

Community asset ownership, co-operatively owned services and time credits were approaches from the existing typology that were not adapted in crisis. It is likely that these three areas did not play a part in the immediate response due to their longer-term nature and the time commitment involved in setting these up.

Some of these activities were carried out by organisations working independently and do not necessarily reflect the formal PBSA partnership aims. It will be interesting to observe whether there is a shift in approaches and towards longer-term community owned solutions as partnerships come back together.

Factors that have enabled an effective response

Capitalising on expertise

Identifying skill sets, expertise and experience that have been able to add value, and understanding where others have more appropriate skills to tackle specific issues has been the key to building effective systems of referrals. Partnerships have worked with organisations such as Age UK to support older people's needs, Mind around mental health issues beyond initial isolation, with local law centres around immigration issues and have forged links with local pharmacies. They also worked with local councillors to identify vulnerable residents and signpost them to support.

Some examples of expertise the partnerships contributed themselves 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. Halifax used trained Community Organisers instead of volunteers to deliver food parcels, 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.

The social action is about the relationship that you can nurture face to face, it is really hard online. PBSA Partnership. 18

Being flexible

PBSA partnerships found that mutual aid groups had a preference to do things organically, rather than to be part of formal structures. This posed some difficulties in terms of safeguarding and accountability. In Hackney, they managed this by offering flexibility alongside providing advice and support on GDPR, handling money and safeguarding.

Stopping to reflect

The response to the crisis was fast and allowed the partnerships to test new approaches and work as part of new collaborations. However, the challenge of working at speed means that inevitably some approaches are less effective. The partnerships have found that making time to reflect collaboratively, has helped them learn from what has gone well and less well, adapt accordingly, and re-prioritise activities.

Our biggest learning was accepting that it is ok to step back... we had all these fantastic new things popping up. I struggled to put time in the diary to go back over things...we had to have a breather and its highlighted for me you need to take that time and its beneficial, you aren't taking time away from something else, you are actually adding value to it. PBSA Partnership. I3

I think we did too much and now trying to slow down and now see where we can focus and give ourselves that little break to try and make sure that we calm down and now look at things on a level where every partnership looks at what they are doing and what we can do. PBSA Partnership. I10

Supporting into the recovery period

The transition period between lockdown ending and adjusting to the uncertainty of the recovery period necessitated a move from tackling issues quickly to considering how to manage long term needs sustainably.

PBSA partnerships had to think strategically about the needs of their communities, creating processes that could react flexibly to change and ensure that people still felt supported, whilst simultaneously removing intensive support measures to free up more time. This meant making the decision to cut support services that existed during the crisis. In Watchet, the emergency call centre went from seven days to five days. In Bristol, the partnership moved from a weekly call to vulnerable residents to a monthly call.

Areas are also thinking about how they can provide long term access to food by setting up things like growing projects and pivoting a food hub into a social supermarket in Coventry, where people pay £4 to get food worth £15-20 allowing people to regain independence and not to be reliant on handouts, as well as creating a service that is sustainable.

Food and provisions shortage should only ever be for crisis points and short-term. There needs to be better access to the basics in all situations. PBSA Partnership. I6

Communicating changes in the transition period have been important to get right. Partnerships spoke of the value in being honest, transparent and visible. Three of the partnerships called everyone they had been supporting, to understand how they were, to communicate changes to services and ask if they needed on-going support to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Sustaining organisations

With increasing concern around not being able to rent out space, or cover the cost of running buildings and working with compressed staff teams, a challenge for many organisations has been around their sustainability. Some partnerships had to make difficult decisions that inadvertently affected others. For example, in Sefton, they had to ask social sector tenants to start paying rent again following a rent freeze. They managed this by having open and transparent discussions with tenants and used a strategy to subsidise smaller rents to give less robust organisations more options.

Four key learning points – approaches

- **Skills, experience and expertise around specific issues** have enabled the partnerships to lead. It has been important to understand where skills can add value and where signposting or supporting existing services is more effective.
- **Reflection and re-prioritisation** has been critical to adaption and will continue to be with the ongoing recovery and rebuilding process.
- **Giving resident-led groups, like mutual aid, flexibility** to manage themselves but guidance to keep them on track has enabled them to retain their organic and fluid nature.
- Ensuring all communication, especially around changes to services where people are directly affected are clear, **open and transparent** and that the organisation remains visible and reachable, has allowed the community to feel secure in a period of transition.

Local collaboration



The pandemic meant that local statutory and voluntary sector organisations needed to work more closely together, to make most of local assets and resources, and create systems that are accessible for their communities. These relationships have the potential to lead to further work, formalised referral systems, and potentially less risk-averse and heavily bureaucratic systems in the future. In both Colchester and Hackney, the partnerships are working with stakeholders such as GPs, GP care advisors, the CCG, the local authority and the voluntary sector on social prescribing offers. In Hartlepool, the partnership is working with specific agencies to think through longer-term responses to particular themes including digital inclusion, mutual aid and grief, loss and emotional health.

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.

The Local Authority are now building relationships with voluntary sector and understanding the sector can act and transform places... Lots of the bureaucratic barriers and risk aversion of local authority has been swept away, we must try to retain this. PBSA Partnership. I9

'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. I1

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. I3

What it gave was the confidence, with [PBSA lead organisation] we have now realised a quite exceptional relationship with voluntary sector, link with borough is really strong that isn't the case in all areas. I felt very confident to devolve the responsibility of shielding patients and the health needs & prescriptions. Local Authority. I5

Challenges, obstacles and opportunities

One of the challenges to a multiple agency response during the crisis has been around **duplication**. It was common to find groups such as mutual aid, food hubs and food banks all providing similar services and reaching some of the same recipients, as well as some more vulnerable residents receiving multiple calls for support. Two of the PBSA partnerships resolved this issue by bringing delivery organisations together to understand who was receiving what support and where the gaps were. Another partnership mapped services in advance of starting any new initiatives to know whether they were needed or whether it would be more beneficial to support an existing service.

Interviews revealed an ongoing struggle with **local perception**. Two partnerships mentioned that they were perceived as very 'grassroots' with one reporting that members of mutual aid would go 'over their head' to the local authority, and another acknowledging they had to act in an 'aggressively professional' manner to be taken seriously. Others spoke more generally about not being recognised as a vital service, and just being seen as a pop-up hub. This suggests a long term structural challenge about how different organisations and groups are perceived and understood. Changing this will require a concerted effort from many institutional, local and political stakeholders.

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 partnerships have highlighted factors such as new staff members starting in key roles, forums for group conversations across multiple agencies, and the ability to have frank and honest conversations around coordination and people's expertise as helping to improve collaboration, build trust amongst partnerships and solidify relationships.

Increasing diversity amongst partnerships and bringing in alternative perspectives, is providing an opportunity for the partnerships to enrich their local knowledge and connect with new people and communities. In Lincoln, they are talking to a Bulgarian group, a mental health steering group and local nurses. In Bristol, they have opened up their partnership to an organisation specialising in supporting women who have suffered domestic violence and a creative organisation that uses web and newspaper communications.

Partnership working in a way that is genuine – recognising the expertise of different people. PBSA Partnership. I13

It's not about me finding people but about whole partnership finding people. PBSA Partnership. I12

Four key learning points – collaboration

- Building and **maintaining good relationships** has been crucial. Using existing relationships with voluntary sector organisations, the local authority, councillors and local people has allowed partnerships to engage more residents.
- **Bringing organisations together to talk and plan**, using online forums, mapping local services, as well using opportunities to connect with new staff in key organisations are all enabling factors to effective collaborative working.
- Partnerships have struggled with a lack of visibility or poor visibility amongst some partners. This is structural challenge that can only be addressed through **longer-term systemic approaches**.
- **Increasing the diversity of formal and informal collaborations** is allowing PBSA partnerships to reach new communities and address key issues, such as domestic violence; diversity of organisational skills and contacts will remain important going forward.

Adapting volunteering to longer-term social action



The volunteering response in places was unparalleled during the crisis, with a shift from 'traditional' volunteers to new groups of people volunteering in different ways, revealing social capital and hidden skills. Across the PBSA areas, there is an effort to retain the energy of new volunteers, but with a focus on transitioning from 'transactional' volunteering, to sustainable social action.

*Volunteering opened up the work into a much bigger question about how we support people into a safety net. These volunteers were starting to engage in a whole range of issues – it's revealing something wrong with the care system.
PBSA Partnership. 11*

Learning from working with volunteers in the crisis period

The partnerships have learnt that conditions that have motivated people to volunteer and to stay volunteering have been **flexibility, access to IT, and additional training in issues like mental health awareness**. Providing a package has allowed volunteers to feel supported and empowered. In Bristol, they also used volunteer coordinators to provide support, advice and guidance to all volunteers on a monthly basis.

Challenges highlighted by the PBSA partnerships were:

- Some volunteers only wanted to do 'nice' jobs such as food drops, where they would be more useful for tasks such as cleaning or using professional expertise.
- Amongst some volunteers there was an uncomfortable use of 'aid model' language about other residents needing help and reports of some volunteers being apprehensive about face-to-face visits with people from BAME communities, due to BAME people being disproportionately affected by the virus.
- Large numbers of volunteers have not wanted to transition into longer-term roles. This has been particularly identified among younger people.
- Some felt that using the term 'volunteer' still held quite negative connotations.

Three key learning points – working with volunteers

- Cultural education needs to play a key role in onboarding new volunteers.
- Partnerships should focus on empowering people who have skills and ideas and want to mobilise, rather than focusing on people who are less invested.
- Volunteers work well when they are empowered. This includes building their skills, providing support, understanding how they want to be communicated with and using inclusive language.

Methods of adaptation

The five approaches outlined below focus on how the partnerships are harnessing and adapting the energy that developed around volunteering in the crisis period, into longer-term social action:

Listening and using community-led approaches to understand what people want and need from their community is helping partnerships to design systems, approaches and activities that will motivate people to get involved in the future. At least six of the PBSA Partnerships are **running community consultation exercises** locally. Through listening, the partnerships are

supporting people to build the confidence to influence the change they want to see. For example, in Bristol, they are planning a consultation exercise, where they will use existing volunteers to take on more significant roles in managing consultation and championing the work.

Good neighbour schemes are providing coordinated routes from volunteering in to a more formal exchange of support and skills sharing. Some partnerships have linked mutual aid groups directly with voluntary sector organisations. For example, in Hackney, they have been working with the Policy Team at the local authority to transition volunteers in to long term roles.

Online platforms are being trialled as a way to engage more people in social action. In Hartlepool, the partnership are working with the [Aple Collective platform](#), which enables people with lived experience of poverty to influence how issues are being dealt with locally. In East Marsh, the partnership has connected with the local authority around using the [Simply Connect App](#) to match local people to formal opportunities.

Formalising standalone groups that were initially set up by residents in response to the crisis has helped to strengthen the sector and endorse the power of local people. Four of the partnerships have supported with policies, procedures, writing constitutions and assisting groups to apply for funding. The local authority in Lincoln has also offered indemnity insurance to 350 newly formed groups across the county.

As part of being involved in local discussions on Black Lives Matter, we saw that two residents who had previously been supported and trained in community organising were trying to establish a local group. We have since been giving them more support to run the group and get involved in social action, sharing contacts, making introductions and giving some reinforcement of the community organising approach/training. PBSA Partnership. 17

Building paths for local people in to social enterprise has the potential to build local economies and create opportunities for local people. Although conversations are only developmental at this stage, at least three partnerships are engaging other local partners around this.

New economy is much more natural than people realised. It's about activity rather than distinguishing between business and community. PBSA Partnership. 11

PBSA Partnerships



Financial impact of the pandemic

The partnerships were asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their organisation, responses varied, with most suffering some financial loss. One organisation reported furloughing staff. Two partnerships also shared that they had been successful in applying for emergency funding.

Overall, the PBSA partnerships have been able to continue operating. They are adapting plans to be more responsive to communities, formalising new connections and diversifying their memberships to create more mutually beneficial and efficient systems to sustain themselves within. However, there is growing concern about the future, with worry that the funding sector has spent out in the crisis and that the rent lost from empty rooms and properties will soon be insurmountable.

Implications for PBSA partnerships

Insights from the PBSA programme in the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic show how quickly and efficiently communities were able to mobilise in response to the crisis and social action has taken a variety of forms during this period. Flexible approaches have been key to the success of the community response and informal partnerships and groups have supported essential needs and provided acts of neighbourliness.

Although the pandemic has significantly disrupted PBSA activities and plans as they were originally conceived, there is ample learning that can be used to move partnerships forward. Priorities for PBSA partnerships over the coming months include:

- **Revising plans post-immediate crisis** responding to needs that have been identified by the community through exercises like consultation and listening
- **Maintaining and supporting informal groups and partnerships** that helps to support overall crisis recovery whilst maintaining the flexibility, autonomy and energy of these approaches.
- **Capitalising on expertise, lived experience and a diversity of ideas** by harnessing people's skill and creativity. This will be vital to how places can effectively shape their social action opportunities over the remainder of the programme.

Implications for funders



As the country enters a second period of lockdown, it is important for funders to use learning from community led initiative such as PBSA to support them to direct funding into the critical ongoing recovery and rebuilding process. Key points for consideration are:

- Changes to models of social action were characterised by rapid adaptation, and flexible and informal partnership working, with many of the places reflecting on the progress they had been able to make and the new collaborations they hoped to retain. **Sustaining anchor organisations** that have been able to act quickly without associated bureaucracies of larger organisations, through core cost funding or capacity building will enable them to continue with this work.
- Changes to models of social action include increased role of digital delivery, online platforms, effectively using and mapping data, social enterprise, and approaches based less on formal volunteering and more grounded in mutual aid and flexibility. It will be critical for funders to **provide resource to build capacity** around approaches that have been proven to work. For example, by providing skills based training around specific issues and providing opportunities for learning to increase the effectiveness of collaboration building, enabling peer-to-peer or ‘co-learning’ across communities.

Implications for evaluators



There has been a large amount of adaptation to social action delivery during the crisis. To understand this properly it is vital to focus on gathering evidence on how these approaches work, and what difference they make. This might include:

- Understanding what has enabled groups like mutual aid to have worked successfully, and how this learning on community support networks can be used to tackle social and geographical inequalities that places face.
- Understanding the key factors that have enabled a move to systemic working inclusive of the statutory sector, the voluntary sector and local businesses.
- Understanding learning around multisector responses that aim to tackle the root cause of multiple and complex issues in communities, rather than funding the fall out.

Conclusions



The pandemic has opened up a new way of thinking, with more value being placed on flexibility and being led by the needs of the community. PBSA areas are thinking more strategically. They are also stretched and, in many instances, exhausted by the last six months. The crisis has confirmed the real value in community-led approaches, providing evidence that people do want to be involved in their local communities, that effective systems working is achievable and more efficient. Although most of the organisations felt they were doing this anyway, the shift seems to be from setting up services and finding people to come to them – to finding people, understanding their needs and responding to these in a way that empowers them.

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. 14

At the beginning of the crisis period, Renaisi and the fund outlined two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 – looking back: *Existing connections and relationships that PBSA partnerships developed through the first two years of the programme influenced the role and responses they took during the immediate crisis.*

The response in each area was bespoke to each community, depending on existing services, the local authority, mutual aid groups, existing connections and strength of PBSA partnerships. The need to react quickly meant that where PBSA partnership structures were not already strong, they tended to work as independent organisations.

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. The local authority in each area had to originally endorse the PBSA plan, and it appears this existing connection may have led to strengthened relationships. However, whether wider relationships can be directly attributable to PBSA remains unclear. Many were well connected before PBSA - a reason they were chosen initially.

Hypothesis 2 – Looking forward: *The role that partnerships took during the crisis will have a significant influence on how place-based social action and the partnership is perceived by the community and other partners in the local area going forward.*

At this stage, we know that the role some of the partnership organisations took in responding to the crisis period has led to greater visibility and increased trust in their communities. Some of the partnerships have expanded membership, which suggested awareness is greater than it was, as a result of the work during the crisis. Some, such as Bristol, East Marsh and Hackney did not work in their formal partnership structures during the crisis. However, in these places there is renewed enthusiasm for the PBSA programme due to more organisations recognising the value in collaboration.

Aligning to the ambitions of PBSA, Danny Kruger's review '[Levelling Up our Communities](#)' responds to the Government's request to maximise the role of volunteers, community groups, faith groups, charities and social enterprises. With calls to give local people power over design and delivery of services, greater collaboration between the statutory and voluntary sector and celebration of community and volunteers, it appears that the crisis has enabled the country to put a greater value on building local power. This comes at a time when PBSA partnerships are growing in recognition, size and ambition and despite challenges, this is a period of significant opportunity. It has enabled them to re-consider and for some, fundamentally shift, the makeup of their partnership, as well as what they are aiming to achieve.

There are people who have now found their voice through this lockdown partnership whose voice will continue to be heard and have a lot to offer in the future. PBSA Partnership. 12