Learning from Phase 2 of the Place Based Social Action Programme

Subtitle: Executive Summary

Report Author: Eleanor Langdale, Lily O'Flynn, Kezia Jackson-Harman

Date: June 2022

RENAISI

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

COMMUNITY FUND

Difference made by PBSA partnerships in Phase 2

At this stage in the programme we are able to begin to draw together a picture of the difference PBSA is making in the ten places and how places have begun to achieve this. The changes described are related to the relevant place level outcomes.

Empowerment of local people and organisations

- Partnerships **supported residents to deliver services and activities themselves,** which ranged from community gardens, seated exercise, a ukulele club, and online disco.

- Partnerships also used **topics of local interest** to galvanise their communities, for example using community clean ups to **collectively restore pride in their local area.**

- Those who adopted a **community organising approach** empowered residents by supporting them to take direct action on issues that matter to them. For example, partnership in Halifax provided Community Organising training to a local Labour Women's group to support them to involve people in setting up an Anti-racism campaign.

- Some used **training and capacity building to develop the skills of people in the community and inspire them to develop solutions to local problems**. For example, in Hartlepool and Coventry, the partnerships have run social action leader courses.

- Some PBSA partnerships have also **facilitated the transformation of the COVID-19 community response into longer-term community-led groups**. In Lincoln and Watchet, partnerships evolved the crisis response into a 'Good Neighbour Scheme'.

- A small number of places have also been engaged in **purchasing of land for community leisure and housing**.

Increased understanding of **social and economic issues** and **opportunities** in their area

During Phase 2, poverty levels were exacerbated in many areas by the pandemic, with places shaping their approaches accordingly, building on their understanding of local need. In particular, this is evident by:

- PBSA partnerships playing an active **role in providing opportunities for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds** - particularly through projects that address poverty and disadvantage. For example, Hartlepool Action Lab provided advice and vouchers, to support people to access benefits.

- During the pandemic crisis period (and beyond), partnerships responded to increased need by establishing **food hubs for delivery and pick up.**

- Some partnerships also set up **longer term food initiatives** to support people to support themselves, such as growing projects, community gardens and cooking projects.

- **Isolation and wider mental health concerns** were addressed by many areas through initiatives such as **outreach and befriending phonelines**, socially distanced walks, online peers support groups and activities. Local volunteers worked the phonelines, and also used the calls to identify additional needs they could support with (such as prescription pick-ups),

and signposted them to more specialist support where needed. Estimates suggest at least **12,500 calls were made by PBSA partnerships during the crisis period**.

- Some areas have also used learning from social action work, to **raise understanding of local social and economic issues among local service providers** and to influence their approaches.

Organisations and communities increase their capacity and ability to **work together in different ways**

The pandemic impacted on staffing levels, health and wellbeing, and consistency in PBSA partnerships and collaborating organisations. Despite this, during the pandemic, there was a significant emphasis on collaboration in PBSA areas and the **experiences of 2020 may have encouraged this to happen more quickly than it might have done otherwise**.

- **Eight of the ten partnerships increased their membership** as it became more important to reach people who were isolated, and respond to complex multiple needs revealed by the pandemic.

- **Cross-sector working evidently added considerable value, with organisations capitalising** on their respective skills, knowledge, expertise, resources and connections.

- **In the majority of places during the crisis period, local authorities reacted nimbly in their work with voluntary sector organisations.** 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.

- Local authorities have also benefited from these relationships. For example, to ensure they were reaching the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis period local authorities have had to work with other organisations to access people who have not previously received statutory support.

- Some partnerships have **worked with other agencies to commission specific roles** supporting early intervention or dedicated community cohesion workers.

- Other partnerships have intentionally **built trust and relationships between communities, agencies and services**. For example, through convening on topics of shared importance, or through Community Organising.

- **In some areas PBSA boundaries have extended, which has been positive in enabling PBSA areas to work more effectively, through increased profile, and more cohesive and multiple relationships with organisations.**

More services at a local level are co-produced

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

- Several partnerships are **supporting groups to formalise as standalone** entities, helping to strengthen the sector and endorse the power of local people.

- Three of the partnerships are **supporting people to setup their own social enterprises** by helping them develop their ideas, apply for funding, set up governance structures and bank accounts and provides business advice.

- Covid-19 certainly made this more challenging. For example, as residents were struggling during Covid-19 they were more likely to want to take part in activities than lead them.

Residents feel they have greater influence and ownership over the places where they live

PBSA partnerships have started to achieve this in a number of ways:

- **Galvanising interest around a community asset (for example parks, and a community pub) has supported partnerships to increase relationship building with both local residents and the statutory sector.**

- Some partnerships are **using media to support residents to use their influence locally**, for example by providing **training in community journalism**.

- In some areas, **forums or platforms have been created for residents to have say** in their local area. For example, regular meetings to share ideas and bring residents and stakeholders together.

- In some areas, **PBSA have engaged local residents to shape local services and programmes**, through large community consultations.

- There has also been a shift towards creating platforms **targeting or engaging with specific groups** to support agency building in communities they are less engaged with. For example, one area held a Citizen's Conference with BAME Communities, focusing on BAME hate crime and inclusion and another have set up a BAME network.

- In some of the PBSA places, partnerships helped to **facilitate mutual aid groups** during the pandemic, providing structures for them to work through. Some then supported these to transition into Good Neighbour Schemes.

Enablers of change - Key factors that have enabled change

Phase 2 generated learning about what **helps social action to thrive** and the approaches across the PBSA programme that support this. The pandemic created many challenges in supporting social action, for example stretched resources and staff capacity, and increased need in the population. However critical learning points were identified as:

- **Really listening and acting on what's been heard**, for example through community consultation and listening exercises, using a range of methods. This was a useful tool for engagement, and most successful when feedback loops were created or the impact was tangible.

- **Meeting people where they are,** focusing on accessible topics, meeting people on the platforms where they are, and treating people as individuals with unique perspectives.

- **Resourcing social action with money, time, advice and guidance.** In particular, having paid staff to support social action was vital, including Community Organisers.

- **Creating enabling conditions** for social action and volunteering, for example by providing structures and guidance for mutual aid groups to work through in the pandemic; and supporting people to volunteer through training, and confidence-building. Collaborations worked well when partners had clear purpose and defined role and were inclusive.

- **Creating mutually beneficial systems for collaboration,** for example evidencing the value of social action to build trust with local authorities; building relationships with specific individuals in the statutory sector; data and information pooling; and stakeholder mapping.

- Lack of diversity in some partnerships was a challenge, but **targeting diverse communities** helped some partnerships to identify need in the community (for example people with ESOL), some partnerships reflected on the need to take a more active approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, to increase their impact going forward.

About Renaisi

We're passionate about creating the conditions for strong, inclusive communities to thrive.

We're constantly learning from the different perspectives we see working directly with communities, with the providers of services and the investors in communities. It gives us a unique perspective on how systems work and how to improve places equitably.

The combination of our research and evaluation consultancy with employment & advice programme delivery, makes Renaisi a uniquely well-rounded learning partner for the voluntary and community sector.

Find out more at renaisi.com

Follow us on Twitter (@Renaisi) or on LinkedIn and get in touch at:

Contact details:

T   +44 (0) 20 7033 2600

E   info@renaisi.com

Unit 13 (entrance on Valette Street), 290-296 Mare Street, London, England, E8 1HE