

Investigating health and social outcomes of the Big Local community empowerment initiative in England: a mixed method evaluation

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Plain language summary

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The Communities in Control study is looking at the health impacts of the Big Local community empowerment programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and managed by Local Trust (a national charitable organisation). Residents of 150 English areas have at least £1M and other support to improve the neighbourhoods. There have been three phases of the research. This report shares findings from their third phase, which began in 2018. First, we used data from a national survey and data from national health and welfare services to compare changes in mental health between people living in Big Local areas and those in similar areas that did not have a Big Local partnership. Furthermore, we also used publicly available data on crime in the neighbourhoods. We found weak evidence that Big Local was linked with improved mental health and a reduction in burglaries. Second, we used data from a survey conducted by Local Trust to look at health and social impacts on the most active residents. We found an increase in mental well-being in 2018 but this was not maintained in 2020, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, we did interviews and observations in 14 Big Local areas to understand what helps and what does not help residents to improve their neighbourhoods. We found that partnerships need to have legitimacy, the right balance of support, and learning opportunities. Residents suggested that creating social connections and welcoming social spaces, improving how people view the area and tackling poverty contributed to health improvements. Direct involvement in Big Local was both stressful and rewarding. Finally, we did a cost-benefit analysis by putting a monetary value on residents' increase in life satisfaction due to Big Local and comparing it with the costs of Big Local. We found that the benefits exceed the costs by at least £60M, suggesting that Big Local provides good value for money.

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