



ambition
for
ageing



Looking Back Whilst Moving Forward:

Ambition for Ageing's lessons learned and their implications for future commissioning

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GMCVO

Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester wide cross-sector partnership, led by GMCVO and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aimed at creating more age friendly places by connecting communities and people through the creation of relationships, development of existing assets and putting older people at the heart of designing the places they live.

Ambition for Ageing is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

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Glossary / List of new terms

AfA	Ambition for Ageing
Age-friendly	People of all ages being able to contribute actively in decisions taken in the place they live
Co-production	The process of design with a group from the outset and continuation of this approach through to delivery. Differs from consultation which is more commonly linked with a 'doing to' approach
EB	Equalities Board. A group designed to make Ambition for Ageing inclusive and accessible to everyone
GM	Greater Manchester
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
GMCVO	Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation
LA	Local Authority
LDLs	Local Delivery Leads. Responsible organisations within Greater Manchester local authorities for delivering Ambition for Ageing activity
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans
MICRA	Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing
Micro-funding	Small-scale investments, typically below £2000, provided to projects following a light-touch approval process
Older people	Persons aged 50 or above
ONS	Office for National Statistics
TNLCF	The National Lottery Community Fund

Report overview

Purpose

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) was an ambitious 5-year programme run across eight of the ten localities of Greater Manchester. The £10.2m programme, part of the Ageing Better suite of programmes, was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. It sought to develop creative ways and means for older people to become involved in their local communities, and to combat risks to social isolation.

As the programme has now reached the end of its delivery phase, there is a wealth of evidence for future, similar works to draw upon from Ambition for Ageing. This piece acts as a means of having a legacy and continued positive impact on associated asset-based community development programmes set to take place in the future.

This report seeks to bring together learnings derived from the numerous outputs of the programme. Taking the form of a meta-analysis of AfA published resources and supplementary interviews, this report outlines: the journey and causes of lessons learned; the factors at play in their creation; and how AfA's experience can inform future commissioning and design.

Audience

This report will be of principal interest for those with an interest in commissioning, both those who commission programmes on a larger scale and those commissioning projects with a more defined reach. It would be remiss, however, to not invite the interest of those in policy and strategy roles, or those who engage with the aforementioned parties in their work. Learnings from this report should provide insight for all actors within the commissioning and delivery process of community development work.

What this report contains

This report maintains a focus on the AfA programme and takes its learnings to develop principles for commissioning. The report will detail the programme background from its bidding process and design, through the delivery phase with reflections on changes made at interim phases, before looking at considerations when beginning similar work. Viewed through the lens of AfA and bolstered by relevant external examples and evidence, the final sections will assess the scalability of projects and abstract the transferable takeaways from the programme.

What the report does not contain

This report acts as a meta-analysis of a wealth of resources developed across the 5-year programme. For a deep-dive into the topics discussed within this report, readers are encouraged to seek the original reports from the AfA website, where evidence is available¹.

Similarly, this report does not provide a comprehensive step-by-step guide into commissioning of community development programmes and projects. Due to the profound impact local environmental factors and wider socio-economic factors can have, it would be naïve to provide such a prescriptive method and guide for commissioners. With that in mind, this report seeks to provide principles and learnings for those interested and actively promotes applying critical thought into how (and if) these principles can be applied to upcoming work.

Methodology

This report takes the form of a meta-analysis of AfA in its entirety. As such, the vast majority of evidence contained within this report is from the suite AfA outputs – both internal and external

¹ <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/resources>

evidence - and thereby has been compiled into a literature review. The review sought to adopt a thematic method which has instructed the structure and analysis contained within this report.

Further research to inform the objectives of this piece included interviews with key actors at Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO) as the programme delivery body. Interviews took a semi-structured format, providing opportunity to further explore in greater detail aspects within topics.

Additionally, to complement the findings from within the AfA programme, a further literature review has been undertaken. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), as the authors of this evaluation, instructed The Knowledge Exchange's *iDox Ask A Researcher* service² to undertake a targeted search of literature aligned to the purpose of this report, namely seeking to identify where principles of commissioning have been developed in relation to community development programmes. Staff at GMCA undertook a critical review of sources assessing their relevance. An overview of those selected feature later in this report.

The aforementioned sources were then compiled to develop the full structure for the following overview, analysis, and concluding recommendations and principles

² The Knowledge Exchange: Ask A Researcher service. <http://informationservice.idoxgroup.com/>

Executive Summary

Programme overview

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) is a £10.2 million Greater Manchester wide cross-sector partnership aimed at creating more age friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age. AfA is one part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for older people to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat risks of social isolation.

Led by GMCVO and launched in 2015, AfA is a 7-year programme delivered by a cross-sector partnership, with contractors (between 2015 – 2020) leading on the work in 25 wards across 8 local authorities in Greater Manchester, in addition to a number of targeted programmes across the city-region.

The logic underpinning Ambition for Ageing's is that a series of small changes within communities will bring large scale success in a practical and sustainable sense that will ultimately help to reduce social isolation.

The programme's vision is to connect communities and people through the creation of relationships. Putting older people at the heart of designing the places in which they live, AfA facilitates the development of existing assets within communities and allows older people to act as the major driving force behind the direct investments made in their neighbourhoods. Using this asset-based approach, all projects funded through the programme must involve older people in the design and/or delivery, and older people must be involved in the deciding which projects receive funding. AfA uses the term 'older people' to refer to people aged 50 and above, recognising that, due to inequalities, individuals experience age-related challenges at very different points in their lives.

Ambition for Ageing derived learning and principles

Several key themes shared between stakeholders are evident within the experiences of those participating in AfA and the detail in its outputs.

- **Community knowledge as an asset:** GM's communities hold deep, intimate knowledge of their local area which is rightfully an asset. Incorporating such assets, however, requires investing time and building skills to realise its benefit.
- **Let local lead:** Local communities have and will continue to identify their needs based on their understanding. Co-production and the "*doing with*" model best facilitate achieving their goals.
- **Form and build on relationships and networks:** Underpinning the development of AfA has been its strength derived from relationships and networks forming. Creating space to share best practice, lived experiences, and for feedback and feed-in made for more comprehensive and effective project delivery.
- **Resource drives success:** Community development requires time and resource, and AfA was no different. Creating and retaining sufficient professional resource, and adapting the workforce mix to accommodate changes in priority and programme maturity, allowed for AfA to be responsive and successful.
- **Build-in flexibility:** AfA has embraced its test-and-learn approach, giving way for local circumstance and accumulated evidence to inform decision-making. Avoiding rigidity

and sticking stubbornly to original assumptions has allowed the programme to progress and adapt accordingly.

- **Simplicity in commissioning:** The programme accounted for and adapted to market conditions when commissioning its partners and encouraged proportionality be applied to applications for micro-funded projects. Understanding of local context and potential barriers to application are essential.

Complementary and underpinning factors

Stemming from the extended period within which the programme took place, influence on AfA was exerted by pre-existing and circumstantial factors. This report recognises the degrees to which capital existed within communities at its beginning and the capital which developed throughout. The strength of community capital and the skills held by individuals within those communities determine the pace at which community development work can start, take place, and progress beyond. Parallels were also witnessed within delivery organisations, whose learning throughout the programme contributed to its advancement.

Wider societal considerations, such as living through a period of austerity, communities' histories and their lived experience with similar programmes, and the manner with which societies adapt to changes in their amenities and structure – including the shifting structures and outcomes from devolution – will impose a degree of influence and impact on the nature of the programme and society more widely.

Recommendations

These recommendations have been formed with a recognition of the ongoing situation relating to Covid-19 and the strains it has placed on all aspects of society, from individuals through to organisations and the services they provide. Whilst not all recommendations will pertain to Covid-19 and would be expected irrespective of being in the midst of a crisis, Covid-19 and the uncertain outcomes and period in which we live with its impacts will hold sway and influence in the immediate future.

To commissioners:

- Consider the wider ecosystem and the requirement to think more strategically on what is needed now *and* in the future to support communities. A movement away from solely market-driven commissioning toward placing a greater precedence on those organisations which hold an underpinning and supportive role in communities is needed; the '*best*' provider by traditional means may not necessarily be the '*right*' provider.
- Take calculated risks in your commissioning, accept the uncertainty inherent in test-and-learn programmes against the potential for both direct benefits and indirect benefits. Innovation and learning stemming from this should not be understated.
- Tailor application methods and processes to your market and recognise the skills contained within those interested parties. Knowledge and skill capital may not be as highly developed as commissioners were previously used to, but other capital may be more enhanced. Commissioners should give consideration to applications being submitted via presentations containing a demonstration of intimate knowledge and understanding, rather than follow strictly more formal methods such as structured application forms.
- Create space where the corrosiveness of competition is minimised, allowing for synergies between organisations with shared interests to work together.

- Consider where the burden is deemed to fall and reduce its impact. Framing can invite or deter applications; ask “What could £2,000 do for your community?”, rather than “How can you contribute to your neighbourhood becoming more age-friendly?”. The former holds a money-first focus and instigates consideration without assuming commitment, whereas the latter places the burden on an individual to a greater extent and would likely inhibit participation and innovation. Look to increase the likelihood of wider community design and participation.

To programme and project delivery organisations:

- Become an expert in the community and invest time in generating your understanding, seeking advice from those experts with lived experience. Create opportunity for marginalised communities, whose voices may be seldom heard, to input. Interventions will be better tailored to the needs of the community and run with the grain of what is required.
- Deploy flexibility in your thoughts and working practices. Be prepared to alter how things are delivered according to changes in circumstance and reassess your priorities and assumptions as work matures.
- Acknowledge where expectations have not been met and actively manage perspectives to mitigate damaging future programmes with the same community and retain existing community capacity. Test-and-learn programmes can be more susceptible to this, however, transparency in communication can negate issues arising.
- Ensure resource is in place to deliver comprehensively. AfA has demonstrated the need to support and understand communities, with professional skills and capabilities embellishing local knowledge and capital.
- Recognise the need for partnerships to drive work forward. Build-in time to reflect, be critical of your work, and invite feedback from others, acknowledging the role each stakeholder has and their wider contribution to activity.
- Develop your networks and seek to take learning from elsewhere and how it can be applied to your work. Consider the factors which influence the success and appreciate that direct replication may not necessarily be appropriate.

To communities:

- Recognise your own skills and the value you bring. Developing an understanding of the complexities engrained within your communities and the actors and history at play. Similarly, draw on those external persons and organisations who hold skillsets which can enhance your community and appreciate their standpoint and objectives.
- Continue to embrace the culture of participation exemplified by AfA, create opportunities for the bonding and bridging capital concepts associated with community development, and contribute to your community’s development.
- Manage your expectations and judge each programme or project on its merits, recognising the circumstance within which the work sits, and the approaches and methods taken. Seek clarity and assurance where concerns arise.



Programme overview

Programme bidding process

The bidding process from GMCVO to run AfA started in 2013, with The National Lottery Community Fund inviting interest in the Ageing Better programme and latterly opening up bids. Whilst the process remained comprehensive and compliant to commissioning principles, the form and process taken allowed for greater flexibility which carried through into the sub-programmes' constituent parts.

A funnelling method was used to select providers, with outline plans submitted initially, leading to offers for full tender submissions being offered to successful applicants at that initial stage. Funding criteria dictated that two of Greater Manchester's ten localities (Stockport and Trafford) were not able to be included within the bid and subsequently no activity took place in these areas.

Restrictions on programme delivery remained relatively light-touch, again capturing the desire to avoid prescriptivist attitudes, so as to enable the test-and-learn approach. A theory of change was required alongside the tender submission to underpin and frame the approach which would be pursued by GMCVO and its soon-to-be appointed delivery partners. GMCVO staff noted how the restrictions associated with the programme were more stringent between themselves and LDLs, rather than from The National Lottery Community Fund to GMCVO and The National Lottery Community Fund's other Ageing Better partners. As a result of the flexibility and scope afforded to The National Lottery Community Fund's selected partners, a wider pool of learning could be derived as part of The National Lottery Community Fund's national evaluations.

Assumptions

Key objectives within the AfA programme were to negate the risks of social isolation amongst older people. By means of defining its focus and having further targeted interventions, a set of three objectives were formulated which would underpin programme activity. These assumptions were:

- Transitions in later life can break social connections. Having the ability and means to maintain or develop new relationships where barriers to such connections exist is vital to prevent social isolation.
- The programme seeks to prevent isolation of older people, in particular those at risk of becoming socially isolated, rather than reducing the isolation of those most isolated.
- There is a general decline in high street provision and a retrenchment of public spending.

Assumptions made were reflective of society at the time of bidding for and beginning the programme. Greater acknowledgement of the impacts felt by an ageing society and the need to cater for this transition toward a larger population of older people – both in terms of proportion and absolute numbers – has become more prominent within policy circles. Accompanying this interest, however, was a period of austerity through which a sizeable portion of programmes and organisations, which previously held the capacity to address these concerns linked to social isolation, no longer had the same collective capacity to act upon their concerns. The release of funding for the AfA programme provided impetus to this agenda with a degree of flexibility to assess and learn through testing what works best for who and by what means.

Timeline

The following section provides a brief overview of the major step changes which occurred during the programme, providing context to the changes seen across the 5-years of delivery which are explored in further detail later in the piece.

Developing the programme

On securing the contract to run AfA, GMCVO set to appoint its LDLs within localities through a tendering process. Two rounds of appointments took place, with five LDLs appointed by October 2015 and the remaining three LDLs appointed in April 2016. The need for two stages was the result of bids in three areas not meeting the minimum standards for appointment set out by GMCVO.

Prior to invitations to tender, market provider events were held to provide greater background and allow for consultation to take place with older people who could act as representatives to shape the programme and deliver on co-design considerations. Interested parties were also supplied with lists of electoral wards in which AfA would take place for each Greater Manchester locality. Wards were selected based on their relative need and circumstance. The selection process was driven in part by data obtained from nationally available sources, such as deriving the numbers of older people in wards and the extent of deprivation (e.g. Index of Multiple Deprivation scores), complemented by secondary characteristics such as partner status and those with English as a second language. From this, shortlists were drawn up identifying the top 5 wards most eligible for AfA, with a default position that top ranking wards would be selected unless other external contributing factors were identified. These external factors acknowledged the growth of social prescribing or other programmes running parallel to AfA, thereby raising issues of either inter-programme conflicts or a crowding out / over-saturation of intervention reducing the potential benefits returned.

Following market engagement, tender applications were opened for a one-month period, after which assessment according to GMCVO defined criteria were made and subsequent appointments were made. Appointments were made with a focus on outcome-based commissioning. Reflective conversations with GMCVO staff highlighted that a greater emphasis could have been placed on process at this stage, allowing for bidders to outline the methods through which they would engage and involve older people in design and delivery.

Pursuing its locally led ethos whilst promoting the use of a strong evidence base, AfA's first published piece was a literature review³ on social isolation and older people. This was shared with delivery partners after their appointment and also with the communities in which AfA was taking place to ensure evidence-backed and informed decisions were being taken which also aligned to the needs, wants, and circumstances of those communities during delivery planning discussions.

Alongside the appointment of its delivery partners was the need for governance structures to be formed. AfA convened its programme board, encompassing those with wide-ranging expertise from an array of professional standpoints, to oversee early development and provide guidance on issues surrounding older people, social isolation and equalities amongst others.

³ Buffel T, Rémillard-Boilard S, and Phillipson P (2015) Social isolation among older people in urban areas: A review of the literature for the Ambition for Ageing programme in Greater Manchester. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Buffer%20Tine%20-%20A5%20Brochure%20-%20Social%20Isolation%20%281%29.pdf>

Programme developments: Formative experiences

The first two years of the programme were largely about establishing a foothold in each of the ward areas, raising awareness of the work of AfA, and bringing onboard those who would form parts of the local governance structure, provide oversight, and influence in delivery. To form such ties and generate interest by its very nature takes time and resource, reflected in the lower investment levels witnessed in the early years of the programme. The test-and-learn ethos adopted by the programme was similarly at play in this period, with LDLs and project participants contributing to the evidence of what did and didn't work, plus the respective influences behind project outcomes. Time taken to establish these structures, processes, and interest in the programme is reflected in project numbers across this time period, which rose notably after the first few quarters of its delivery.

At a programme level, the roles and responsibilities of various boards and oversight or scrutiny functions took time to form and deliver their influence on a practical level. Training on key aspects of the programme, such as on equality and how to employ test-and-learn methods, was delivered by topic experts in a period marked by the upskilling of stakeholders across the programme's organisational structure. Arm's length oversight from the GMOPN and Equalities Board likewise took time to generate their preferred working practices and manners of approaching how to influence the programme, with engagement methods and results shifting through time.

Programme developments: Mid-programme reviews

Designed into programme funding, both from Ageing Better to GMCVO and replicated from GMCVO to LDLs, was a 2-year break point in contracts and funding subject to satisfactory delivery on earlier commissioned activity. This breakpoint allowed for LDLs to revisit their initial proposals and adjust according to their improved understanding of how the programme was functioning in their areas and take onboard feedback derived from programme oversight functions through the Equalities Board. With this came a recognition of the need to better engage with those closest to the edge of social isolation – those harder to reach and in marginalised communities – which would require greater investment in resourcing and thereby necessitated diverting funding from project delivery toward LDL staff costs, for example.

Building on the learning process which had taken part in the preceding period, however, LDLs now had the social capital and buy-in from their communities to expand delivery and projects in their respective areas, reflected in the increases in investments evidenced later in the programme.

The experience of GMCVO at a programme level mimicked those witnessed in LDLs to some extent, whereby the increased activity and shift in the programme's focus and maturity prompted the need for additional staffing and alterations in the roles performed. Greater resource was dedicated to communications and influence on the back of derived learnings and principles – detailed within its resource outputs – which could be shared within GM and more widely. Meanwhile, heightened activity within wards and in the latterly commissioned scaled programmes necessitated further contract management from GMCVO.

Greater Manchester devolution deal and the GM Ageing Hub

AfA pre-dated elements of formally central-Greater Manchester coordinated local government action on ageing in the form of the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub. Although age-friendly work was ongoing within the local authority districts of Greater Manchester, the 2017 founding of the GM Ageing Hub within GMCA established a means of collating thoughts and action on a city-region level, removing duplication of efforts where these were best shared.

Greater Manchester authored its first city-region wide Ageing Strategy⁴ in 2018, outlining its objectives, intended actions, and means of monitoring progress in the pursuit of making Greater Manchester a better place to grow older.

AfA supported on elements such as the Mayoral Age-Friendly Neighbourhood Challenge⁵, which resulted in 53 neighbourhoods receiving the accolade. The combined efforts of both the programme and GM Ageing Hub contributed to Greater Manchester's recognition by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as the UK's first age-friendly city-region.

Programme developments: Scaled Programmes

Introduced in the second half of the wider AfA programme, the scaled programmes sought to reach a greater number of older people at risk of social isolation. These were informed by principles evidenced in the programme's formative years and received additional input from views and recommendations from public consultation held with older people in Greater Manchester.

The 10 programmes did not follow a micro-funded approach and worked on larger geographies than wards (which hosted smaller projects). Scaled programmes ranged in focus from employment support for carers (Working Potential), to equalities and a research project for older adults living with learning disabilities (Growing Old with Learning Disabilities (GOLD)). Further detail on the scaled programmes can be found under the "*Resources*" section of the AfA website⁶.

Planning for the legacy of AfA

Previous reports⁷ have discussed the differences in concepts of legacy and sustainability. With funding for the programme set to cease and wind down following the 5-year delivery period, the extent to which the programme was sustainable beyond this time was limited by the abilities of each of the individual projects to build enough resilience, resource, and self-sustaining funding streams within this period in order to continue. With this in mind, a greater precedence was placed on taking forward aspects of the programme such as the organisational and individual knowledge developed, the fostering of age-friendly communities, and the networks formed throughout. The synergies and possibilities stemming from the programme could then endure and continue to hold influence beyond its active life, whether felt within communities, within organisations, or within policy circles as but three arenas in which legacy may be evidenced.

Micro-funding and the test-and-learn approach

Ageing Better aspirations

Detractors from the micro-funding approach point to the lack of evidence collated through its spend, which will be driven to a large extent by the principle of proportionality by means of evaluating on these smaller sums; in-depth evaluation of individual micro-funded projects would require a substantial portion of programme funding to be dedicated to evaluation, therefore a decision was taken that evaluations would assess the programme on a broader

⁴ GMCA (2018) Greater Manchester Age-Friendly Strategy. Accessible online: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/ageing/age-friendly-greater-manchester/>

⁵ Mayoral Age-friendly challenge. <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/challenge>

⁶ <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/>

⁷ Yarker S, Thorley J, North L (2020) Changing a place: Micro-funding, co-production and community development <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Micro-funding%20Full%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

scale. The National Lottery Community Fund, having previously trialled micro-funding approaches on a smaller scale, had interest and intrigue as to how a wider-scale programme would impact on communities. Adopting the test-and-learn mantra to its commissioning, micro-funding was placed as one of the central tenets of the programme.

“We decided we wanted to fund people that Awards for All couldn’t fund; individuals and really small grassroots community activities, non-constituted groups [by] having a process where people “apply”... a very, very light touch process, through an anchor community organisation, which is a residents forum. The applications go to a “panel”, which includes [The National Lottery Community Fund], so we are still involved in decision making. It gives out grants of between £50-£1,000 locally... it was very, very successful. We spent the money in six months which we had planned for a year. We now have a larger programme which is funded via Reaching Communities, and is about £15,000 a year.”⁸

Devolving powers over project delivery using these small pots was seen to improve local community capacity for their development and allow them to take responsibility to deliver their own fit-for-purpose solutions based on local needs. Stringency attached to standard funding revenue streams witnessed in other programmes was relaxed, with its thresholds allowing for further reach into marginalised communities. This also helped to reshape models of service delivery, moving from a transactional model (whereby things are done to people and communities) to a relational model (a doing with approach). AfA staff noted that the diversity of interest and sum of marginal gains made by the micro-funding model promoted a richness within communities.

The test-and-learn approach meanwhile was driven by networking across the localities and staffing resource dedicated to AfA from the LDL level. An induction to the methodology was developed to foster this iterative process of learning throughout. Targeted sessions delivered highlighted key elements which should be incorporated in ways of working exhibited by LDLs and the subsequent cascading of this learning to those involved in project delivery and participation. Sessions included seminars – delivered by academics from MICRA at the University of Manchester or local third sector organisations such as Manchester Cares – who spoke on topics such as equalities, employment, the role of place and infrastructure, and culture.

To encourage active learning, contract officers at GMCVO held quarterly meetings with each of their LDLs to assess their recent work and held conversations, supported by data from the AfA project database. Further networking sessions between LDLs – again organised by GMCVO contract officers – created a space in which LDLs could take a deep-dive into learning around a particular topic and share their experiences in relation to the programme. As time progressed, the Equalities Board scrutinised the reach of the projects delivered within LDL areas to ensure that those more marginalised were being reached by the programme, presenting new opportunities for the test-and-learn approach to be enacted. The relationship between LDLs and the Equalities Board developed over time and, through mentoring on how to involve all groups within communities, resulted in a greater number of “those on the edge of social isolation” becoming engaged in the programme.

Once a host of projects had been delivered and their common themes and processes identified, a series of practice guides were produced to act as guidance documents and outline key elements in delivering similar activity.

⁸ Ageing Better (2020) Learning Paper No.5. Micro-funding: Empowering communities to create grassroots change. Accessible online: https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/ageing-better/Ageing_better_learning_report_5_evaluation_report.pdf

Applying the learning from these interactions with various AfA stakeholders to the work being delivered in neighbourhoods, and then reflecting on those achievements and areas for growth, embedded the test-and-learn approach in the programme. This resulted in a richness of research, evidence, and acquired knowledge by stakeholders across all rungs of the programme's echelons.

Micro-funding and its interaction with place-based initiatives

As Greater Manchester seeks to reform its public services and operate on a place-based footprint⁹, the importance and intersection of place with local knowledge and understanding is paramount. AfA's approach was based on electoral wards as the defining geography through which funding and activity were funnelled. The extent to which these wards were recognised by residents on the ground was subject to some criticism¹⁰, as it was suggested that these types of administrative boundaries don't chime with how people think of their 'neighbourhood' generally.

Despite this, LDLs were able to use both their local understanding of districts, wards and their respective characteristics to build the foundations for micro-funding work to commence. LDLs' roles and remits encouraged relationships and networks to be formed, built upon, or addressed to spearhead community development work. LDLs reported using their pre-existing connections as an advantage, thereby expediting the lead-in process, whereas others reported using their position to address historical disagreements between community groups, with the LDL acting as an objective and independent arbitrator in such circumstances.

Local approaches to micro-funding in Greater Manchester

With LDLs responsible for coordinating the spending decisions taken in each locality, as mentioned earlier in this report, the paths taken to providing investment differed and followed a variety of structures. Typically, older people-led resident boards had a good degree of influence and input into these decisions – both at a ward and a locality level dependent on the magnitude of the investment – enabling the views of local people to be reflected in what was to happen in their immediate neighbourhoods. Contract officers from GMCVO commented on feedback received around the small sums involved representing low risk in the event of a project failing to achieve its goals; innovation and experimentation of projects was given a lease of life as a result, which is reflected in the diversity evident across the 1,400 projects funded throughout the 5-year delivery period. The flexibility afforded by microfunding was a further positive cited by contract officers and paved the way for a positive relationship built on support to be formed between LDLs and their associated contract officer, further detail of which is contained later in this report.

Innovation was also present in the path to distributing funding to projects, examples of which are included in the appendices to demonstrate linearity of approach versus a multi-channel method. In Bolton, for example, spending roadshows formed part of their method of achieving participatory funding and allowed for a larger cohort of people to be involved whilst fostering the principle of inclusivity. The confluence of volunteers and professionals in the Bolton advisory group also drew on the local knowledge and wants of local people whilst engaging the skill and expertise of those interested partners from established, professional organisations. Criteria to funding was also set at a local level, with projects in the Wigan area

⁹ GMCA (2019) The Greater Manchester Model: Our white paper on unified public services for the people of Greater Manchester. Accessible online: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/2302/gtr_mcr_model1_web.pdf

¹⁰ Yarker S, Thorley J, North L (2020) Changing a place: Micro-funding, co-production and community development <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Micro-funding%20Full%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

assessed on the numbers of older people involved in proposals and the ultimate intended outcomes from the project and its ability to realise long-term benefits. Whilst the formalities behind obtaining funding had been loosened to an extent (in line with the proportionality of project reach), justification for projects was still required. Criticism and scrutiny continued to be applied by the funding boards and panels.

As evidenced above, the experience of micro-funding in GM differed between its localities, with LDLs, ward geography, and projects directing the journey to a large extent. In terms of the evaluation of such projects, an additional difference was exhibited through the use of community-embedded co-researchers undertaking roles and producing outputs which fed into the wider programme evaluation. In its *'The value of small community-led equalities research projects'* report¹¹, AfA demonstrated how community driven research could provide greater insight to communities through their increased levels of local understanding and established dissemination channels. This ties into feedback from contract officers in recognising the need for time investments to establish understanding in a community before financial investments can be made. Challenges created in this process, however, related to the necessity to upskill the co-researchers to deliver on this, requiring both financial and time resource in the process¹².



Implementing governance, management, and scrutiny

Governance, management and scrutiny within the AfA programme took place at multiple instances within its structure: between The National Lottery Community Fund and GMCVO; between GMCVO and the LDLs; the AfA programme board; the Equalities Board; and local funding panels, to name a select few. Their existence influenced outcomes from within the programme and created robust processes around decisions made by those various actors.

¹¹ Wilkinson S., Bonetree C., and Berry H. (2020) The value of small community-led equalities research projects. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/value>

¹² Community co-researchers were volunteers from within their community. Their past experience was not necessarily in research, and therefore training in how to undertake this role was required. The advantage presented from this approach was the knowledge, understanding and trust which existed at the point of research being undertaken.

The nature of employing such rigour around these processes to ensure desired and equitable outcomes were reached meant that additional time was invested versus a process where fewer actors with less scrutiny pressed ahead and delivered projects without the same degree of consideration and consultation as happened.

Prime examples of the effective functioning of these oversight and management methods come from the interactions between contract officers based at GMCVO and their LDL counterparts in localities who actively engage with the projects and older people involved in the programme. The establishment of regular meetings, giving space in part for contract management but also reflection and assessment for support requirements, promoted stronger relationships between stakeholders and acted as a springboard to better working practices. Further detail about this will be explored later in the report.

Similarly, and again to be explored in greater detail later, was the role of those a greater distance from delivery, namely the Equalities Board. The scrutiny applied from the Equalities Board at regular intervals held to account the work of those delivering the programme and projects. The nature of the relationship altered throughout the course of the programme, however, with impact felt in the manner through which the programme was delivered and who was reached; an impact which was substantial and provided one of the step changes witnessed across the 5-years of delivery.

The importance of governance, management, and scrutiny at the hyper-local level should also not be understated. Funding panels established within wards and across localities ensured an overview and level of cognisance to provide value to communities. There was a substantial degree of variation adopted by each of the localities, reflecting the partners involved in the area and the expertise present. Common between several was the co-existence of steering groups and advisory groups, with professional expertise able to be drawn upon as and when it was required alongside the recognition and acknowledgement that project design should be directed to greater or lesser extents by older people and those in the community. The frequency of such meetings and methods of engagement again was varied.

Programme results

The impact of the AfA programme will continue to accrue beyond its lifespan. Whilst programme delivery itself has ended, legacy benefits stemming from AfA through subsequent programmes deriving insights and learning, and applying these to their upcoming activity, represent results which are yet to be realised should it be possible to evidence these. In that vein, the following section details in brief the activity which took place during the delivery period, in addition to a summary of the outputs which will hold influence into the future.

Delivery outputs

The following section provides a summary of the AfA programme delivery report¹³, bringing together highlights on the reach and impact of AfA activity as evidenced in questionnaire returns from project participants, project volunteers, event attendees, and case studies submitted by LDLs. Data are drawn from the AfA database, which recorded administrative data alongside subjective measures such as perceptions of age-friendliness and civic participation.

High level project statistics revealed that:

- In excess of **1,400 projects** took place, with over 1,000 of these new project starts
- **458 events** took place across 5-years, with estimated **total attendance of 15,000 people**

¹³ Barker, D (2020), Ambition for Ageing Programme Evaluation report. Available online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ambition-ageing-programme-evaluation-report>

- **£2,118,287** of funding was invested directly into projects, with a sizeable portion of match-funding to bolster investment
- Mean average direct investment was **£1,671**
- Approximately three-fifths of project interventions were **group interventions**, with approximately one-quarter of interventions **wider community development or neighbourhood interventions**

The revealed preferences of communities (or perhaps more strictly the revealed preferences of AfA participants from within communities) can be inferred from project focus and activity. Although it should be noted that some constraints, such as micro-funding budgets, will likely have influenced these, too. Project themes, as defined by LDLs on record entry to the AfA database, helped to identify the revealed preferences. Key themes recorded against projects show¹⁴:

- 41% had an interest in “social action”
- 31% had an interest in “physical activity”
- 20% had an interest in “outdoor spaces and buildings”
- 19% had an interest in “skills and employment”
- 16% had an interest in “physical space”
- 14% had an interest in “intergenerational activity”
- 11% had an interest in “digital inclusion”

Participation in projects could take various forms, allowing for greater or lesser commitment dependent on the choices of individuals. For example, events drew an estimated 15,000 attendees across the 5-year programme, whereas the number of unique project participants recorded was 2,422 and unique project volunteers recorded was 397.. Caution should be applied in interpreting these figures, however. LDLs frequently reported reluctance from individuals to complete questionnaires, in particular those from more marginalised groups. Where questionnaires were completed by those from marginalised groups, LDLs also noted there was a greater propensity to select “*Prefer not to say*” as their answer, skewing the results where “*Prefer not to say*” answers are included, and, when excluded, reducing the sample size and complicating the ability to compare between groupings. The following table brings together a summary of self-reported participant profiles split by engagement type:

Aspect	Sub-category	GM 50+ (2011)	Project participants (n=2,422)	Project volunteers (n=397)	Event attendees (n=2,958)
Gender	Female	53%	67%	66%	72%
	Male	47%	32%	34%	25%
Age	Median	-	68	67	69
	Range	-	21 - 99	16 - 94	11 - 100
Ethnicity	White British	94%	79%	88%	83%
	Asian / Asian British	4%	17%	10%	11%
	Black / Black British	1%	3%	1.5%	2%
	Mixed / Other	1%	1%	0.3%	0.3%
Education	Primary or none ¹⁵	43%	22%	10%	14%
	Degree or higher	19%	24%	31%	28%
Employment status	Retired	50%	70%	67%	69%

¹⁴ Figures will not sum to 100% as multiple themes could be recorded against individual projects. Projects with themes recorded n=1,285; total project themes recorded n=2,586

¹⁵ GM 50+ figures does not match AfA exactly. The figure given is “*No qualifications*” as in 2011 census.

As clear from the above table, the level of diversity within AfA participants was greater than Greater Manchester's over 50 population (as recorded at the most recent census in 2011). There was a small degree of divergence between AfA engagement cohorts, with the ethnicity and education levels of volunteers in particular showing a marked difference from project participants and event attendees.

Participants and volunteers, due to their prolonged engagement with the programme, were asked to record a variety of aspects at baseline, 6-month, and 12-month intervals. Through this longitudinal method, change between baseline and most recent submission can be identified. It should be noted, however, that changes cannot be solely attributed to engagement with the AfA programme and external factors may have influenced results to a greater or lesser extent.

Assessing perceptions of neighbourhood age-friendliness, 28% of project participants reported an improvement in age-friendly neighbourhood perceptions, with 57% holding unchanged views across reporting periods; some 18% within that 57% reported their neighbourhood to be very age-friendly on both occasions and therefore couldn't report an improved score. Volunteers reported similar improvements in their perceptions of neighbourhood age-friendliness.

On civic participation measures, participants reported increased optimism around being able to influence their local area, either through individual actions or as part of a collective. At baseline, perceptions of influence were more heavily weighted toward collective action achieving things, with individuals reporting less agency for change.

On its focus on reducing the risks of social isolation, AfA achieved its goal with participants maintaining social connections. Given the majority of participants were well connected from the outset, potential for improvement in this area was negligible.

Volunteering status and intentions to volunteer amongst project participants remained unchanged between time periods and, of those volunteering, propensity to volunteer increased as educational qualification level increased. Also amongst volunteering attitudes was the increased likelihood to be volunteering on more than one project, perhaps reflective of heightened desires to be further involved in community activity or reflective of people's sense of capacity to take on additional responsibilities.

Organisational capacity

Whilst the section above provides highlights of the quantifiable elements of AfA, the extent to which benefits are realised stretch beyond and into more abstract or intangible elements, such as those which will promote sustainability of the programme past its lifespan and form part of the legacy of AfA.

With this in mind, the framing of how sustainability and legacy could be built into the programme was explored in a GMCVO report on social capital and its applicability to the VCSE sector¹⁶. Encapsulated within this are the theories of bonding and bridging capital promoted by Putnam, with bonding capital distilled to 'people like me', whereas bridging capital seeks to develop further inclusivity and cohesion between groups in wider society; groups are seen to feature on a plain or matrix of the two, indicating they would not typically be exclusive of one or the other. The extent to which benefits from social capital are accrued by individuals or wider groups is subject to interpretation, however. Assuming some degree of benefit dissipates beyond the individual's gain, AfA's work in developing both bonding and bridging

¹⁶ Martikke, S (2017) Social Capital – an Overview

<https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/Social%20Capital%20-%20An%20Overview.pdf>

capital can be seen to have impacted on both those partaking in the programme or those indirectly affected by the programme. Strengthening of these aspects has been a result of the programme, although this again is subject to debate as to whether or not bonding capital produces a net gain for society, drawing on Putnam's commentary of further insularity in groups and the proliferation of alienation; this is particularly relevant when assessing programmes and projects through the lens of inequalities. A further concept under the umbrella of social capital where AfA can be seen to have influenced is through linking social capital, which in essence defines the vertical interactions between different strata of hierarchies; in AfA's case, this can be shown between service users (project participants) and delivery arms (volunteers or LDLs), through the influence of the GMOPN on GMCA via the GM Ageing Hub, or between newly formed groups and the wider VCSE sector.

Incorporating Ambition for Ageing into the wider VCSE sector:

In Tameside, projects funded by AfA were absorbed into the wider VCSE family and Action Together. Support for these projects beyond the lifespan of AfA became available, with further funding accessible through these routes.

Lighter touch networking between project groups, less associated with interactions between levels of vertical hierarchy but spanning that level, were also facilitated by LDLs. For example, a crafting cooperative, drawing together all projects focused on crafting, was organized to boost its potential to sustain on the withdrawal of support via an LDL and their associated employer.

Key to sustaining benefits or having a legacy was the upskilling of local volunteers and organisations who could continue to thrive within their communities beyond the removal of AfA support, either through its financial assistance or the provision of structure and professional staffing resources. Some organisations in the programme existed prior to 2015, whereas other groups came together as a result of AfA. Irrespective of this, all organisations, voluntary groups or informal project teams – a range of definitions are likely held amongst interested parties – had the opportunity to further their skills, their management and governance structures, their income generation activities, and other aspects through their participation. To some, foundations from which to grow that had previously been holding them back were put in place, such as improvements to facilities allowing groups to return “home” from time-limited temporary venues, whereas for others the expertise provided by LDLs in developing their functioning and, for example, the skills to compile successful funding bids, will sustain beyond programme closure. Similar benefits are likely to have been accrued by LDLs in each of the LA areas given the relatively novel approach AfA took to micro-funding and test-and-learn.

The 2018 Mayoral age-friendly challenge also presented an opportunity to expand community capacity and capital. A number of the neighbourhoods in receipt of the award were involved in AfA directly, however, additional neighbourhoods outside of the main AfA project also gained recognition through this initiative. Following the recognition of these non-AfA neighbourhoods, AfA staff have continued their support to build capacity, share learning, and open opportunities in securing small funding pots to continue development work. Many of these neighbourhoods have continued to engage with the programme, either through development meetings, attendance at seminars, or receiving and accessing AfA resources.

New ways of working

Experiences between AfA's stakeholders differed due to their circumstance and position at the start of the programme, which will naturally have altered during the programme, also. As part

of this, new ways of working were realised, either through the programme's design, or through stakeholders identifying a need to adapt their existing methods.

Co-production: Whilst not a completely novel method of working, engagement of older people through co-production on such a scale had not been conducted before in Greater Manchester. The process of establishing these working methods was guided by older people from the programme's very beginnings and was informed by researchers at MICRA as a leading institution in social gerontology¹⁷.

Paramount to co-production is the need for older people to be involved not only in the planning of activity, but to be at the fulcrum of that activity; a preliminary literature review conducted, again by researchers at MICRA, elevated the importance of older people not only as service recipients, but as service givers¹⁸. Services delivered as a result are more likely to be fit and appropriate for their target audience, assuming that the needs and wants identified are relatively uniform amongst those engaging with projects; note that heterogeneity between older people will dictate when individuals wish to engage.

Co-production featured as just one part of the wraparound mantra and ethos employed by AfA in its delivery, however. The culmination of co-production, micro-funding, and devolution of decision-making powers to hyper-local areas heightened the sense of uniqueness attributed to AfA. Instilling this sense of local community interest, building networks, and utilising local knowledge and understanding directed projects and further developed the community and its ability to impact on change, building its resilience and autonomy in the process.

Micro-funding: A further aspect of the wraparound model was that of micro-funding. For many associated with the programme, from those directing the programme at a Greater Manchester-level, through LDLs and right down to project volunteers and participants, micro-funding presented a new opportunity to disseminate and use funds for community development free from the rigours and constraints often built-in to programmes by design. Flexibility in funding and support in establishing processes for decisions were accompanied by trust in local people's understanding and ability to dictate the design of these hyper-local projects. Detailed within its fuller report on micro-funding¹⁹, key lessons derived from the AfA experience promote the following:

- **Support:** LDL staff have vital roles to play in communicating, mediating, and facilitating micro-funding decisions, whilst simultaneously providing oversight relating to (in)equalities and governance
- **Local knowledge:** in-depth understanding of wards and neighbourhoods, including their respective histories, is necessary to seize pre-existing advantages and negate complications
- **Civil society:** relevant to the previous point, pre-existing strengths and community activity at local levels allowed for faster uptake of the AfA programme, with those

¹⁷ Goulding, A (2016) An introduction to co-production for the Ambition for Ageing Programme. Accessible online: https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Introduction%20to%20Co-production%20for%20Ambition%20for%20Ageing_1.pdf

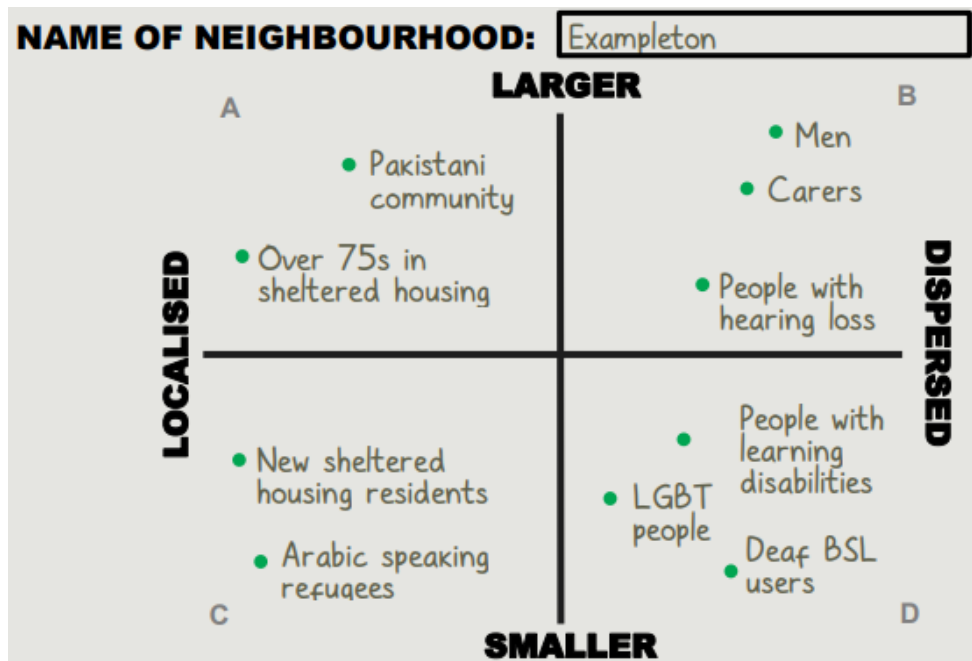
¹⁸ Buffel T, Rémillard-Boilard S, and Phillipson P (2015) Social isolation among older people in urban areas: A review of the literature for the Ambition for Ageing programme in Greater Manchester. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Buffer%20Tine%20-%20A5%20Brochure%20-%20Social%20Isolation%20%281%29.pdf>

¹⁹ Yarker S, Thorley J, North L (2020) Changing a place: Micro-funding, co-production and community development <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Micro-funding%20Full%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

decision-making structures that were knitted into existing groups faster on uptake and delivery

- **Socioeconomic context:** affluent areas typically required support in facilitation and drew on community strengths, whereas deprived areas would typically need support in establishing trust and building community capacity prior to moving focus to delivery
- **Social infrastructure:** the presence (or absence) of spaces to share, meet, and assess proposals encouraged (or inhibited) progression of AfA.

Community characteristics: Underpinning all of the above points are the themes of localism, of shared community values, and of shared space.



Recognising the heterogeneity of communities with shared characteristics and values, AfA developed a visual guide to identifying methods of approaching projects dependent on the makeup of those involved.

The quadrant model²⁰ of working (left), conceptualizes the means by which local communities versus

dispersed communities and their related sizes can be approached, affected, and assisted in community development work. Communities may occupy different positions within the quadrant, with the diagram provided above acting as an example only for the imagined Exampleton. Addressing dispersed communities, whose greater precedence was borne out of discussions with the Equalities Board, moved away from one of the central tenets initially associated with AfA; age-friendly neighbourhoods. Without dismissing the need for neighbourhoods to be age-friendly in and of themselves – inclusion in mainstream activities associated with bridging capital remains prominent – for those in Quadrant D, developing intra-community cohesion among those with shared characteristics and values, despite their dispersed spatial nature, drew greater interest as the programme progressed.

Resourcing: Addressing inclusion of older people specifically marked a shift in working style for some of the LDL partners to AfA. To fully achieve goals of affecting social isolation amongst older people, particularly those who are most marginalised as alluded to above, awareness of and action on resourcing requirements was needed to achieve impact²¹. Facilitation of inclusion and the mechanisms which underpin this necessitates significant time

²⁰ Ambition for Ageing (2020) A spatial approach to working with marginalised communities. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/equalitiesmodel>

²¹ Ambition for Ageing (2018) Asset-based Approaches and Inequalities. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/assetsandinequalities>

resource in the planning stages of projects, including asset mapping and invitations being extended to local equalities groups and organisations to ensure all aspects are covered comprehensively. Whilst not common between all LDL areas, the need to divert some of their funding away from project delivery purposes and into the broader support afforded to all their projects represented a change in working style; this ties into the points mentioned above relating to community capital and the skills which exist within those communities.

TEK Eagles:

TEK Eagles is a project introducing elderly members of the Pakistani community to the basics of using a smartphone, helping them to enjoy the benefits of this technology in their everyday lives. Led by community members in a hands-on, fun and collaborative environment, the sessions cover key aspects of smartphone use for the elderly including communicating with friends and relatives via different channels, using video call facilities and taking photographs.

“At the age of 63 I had given up learning about mobile telephone technology. I have always avoided the mobile phone believing that there was very little benefit in its use and perhaps it was too complicated for me. All my life I have survived by using landlines, we did not have mobile phones in the past and had done relative well.

“The very first lesson the group was asked to give advantages and disadvantages of mobile technology and to my amazement there were only three disadvantages one of them being that people do not talk to each other face to face. However when it came to listing advantages the list grew to over 20. It made me think that there was something useful in this technology. My wife had left me a mobile telephone before she travelled abroad to look after her mother. I avoided even touching the phone at first.

“I thought I would bring it to the first lesson. I was amazed the potential of the mobile and how easy it was to use and phone calls abroad could be free. Before long I was using skype to visually see my wife and her mother and they could see me. It was something out of Star Trek that we used to watch in the 70’s.

“Now we have a group where we share things such as what I have cooked for my daughter at the weekend. My mind was blown when I learnt to watch YouTube clips on the huge TV screen at home. I would start looking at something useful such as an inspirational speech and finish up watching a buffalo being attacked by a lion and then another buffalo rescuing the first by attacking the lion.

“But the greatest thing which happened to me this year was the birth of my first grandson on Christmas Day. I was sending messages and videos to all parts of the world through my mobile phone. I was receiving messages even on the names for the baby. Someone had even suggested little Santa! My daughter sends me photos of the baby every few hours, I feel so proud and it has made me realise that I am now connected to more people than I ever was. Thank you to TEK Eagles for making all this happen and opening the horizon for me through the course.”

Imtiaz Hussain, Jinnah Day Centre Manager

Equalities: Informed in part by the initial literature review undertaken by MICRA, as well as being a result of the programme taking place under the auspices of the latterly formed Equalities Board and GMOPN, equalities became a prominent feature of funding and activity. Awareness of disparities linked to equalities were accounted for, exemplified by a greater proportion of those from marginalised communities engaging with the programme. Through this process, further insight was made into how adaptation to distinct groupings can become involved in projects, such as the TEK Eagles project run by Alchemy Arts²².

Policy and design guidance

Through the activity that took place across the 5-year delivery period and the continued, substantive research running alongside this activity, a wealth of resources has been developed by AfA and its partners. Embedding research into its activity from the outset has provided a platform to the aforementioned legacy benefits. Close collaboration with evaluation partners in academia and local government, in particular with policy and strategy professionals in both local government (GM Ageing Hub) and at the Centre for Ageing Better, has furthered the richness of evidence and promoted its adoption into wider activity in Greater Manchester and beyond.

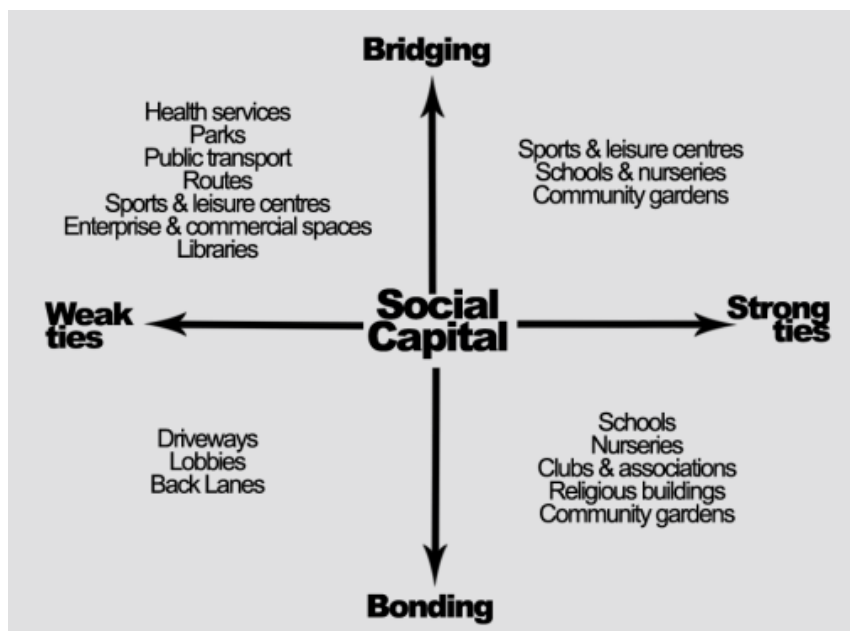
The fertile gerontological environment of Greater Manchester and fervour of its institutions gave way to an engaged audience for learnings from AfA to be shared and on boarded in practice more widely.

Staff at GMCVO recognised the ecosystem in which the programme was operating and took to produce guidance for interested parties whilst inviting their comment and involvement throughout. Guidance was provided through a range of means including: full length reports; shorter briefings drawing out the most pertinent points within reports; frameworks and toolkits for engaging specific groups; seminars and webinars; and videos.

To communicate this guidance, the communications strategy employed by AfA sought to identify its audience and adopt relevant engagement methods throughout, testing its efficacy and exploring alternative avenues for greater impact and wider awareness. An internal review of the communications and dissemination strategy was commissioned to identify AfA's historical methods in sharing its outputs and inform alterations to improve their reach in the lead-up to disseminating the suite of outputs expected as programme closure approached. In doing so, AfA sought to extend its legacy via influencing parties within policy circles and in community organisations.

Social infrastructure features prominently within resources stemming from the AfA programme and has been placed at the forefront of design ideas both within AfA and more broadly across Greater Manchester. By way of an example of where AfA has helped to inform and influence more widely, social infrastructure features heavily in the planning phases of upcoming programmes being run across all 10 Greater Manchester Local Authority districts, with the GM Ageing Hub acting as a pivot and coordinator in this development process. Principles which underpin the work being developed in neighbourhoods within Greater Manchester are set to be disseminated through the Covid-19 instigated community hubs, helping to cascade age-friendly design as the intersection between public service and the VCSE sector is enriched.

²² Alchemy Arts. TEK Eagles programme <https://www.alchemyarts.co.uk/tek-eagles/>



Bonding and bridging capital, prominent within AfA thinking and displayed diagrammatically in the matrix to the left, have been cast to the forefront of thinking of local practitioners who have drawn on the learnings of AfA. Recognising the need for a mix of both characteristics of social capital and their relevance to the populations affected, design of community and neighbourhood interventions has been either directly or indirectly impacted by the experiences stemming from AfA.

Oldenburg's characteristics of third places (1989) is frequently cited within AfA literature²³ and the influence of capturing third spaces has been witnessed in age-friendly neighbourhood work through the *Take a Seat* campaign. The campaign, whereby local businesses and shared spaces advertise their accommodation of older people who wish to rest – sitting and having a glass of water in its simplest form – is being championed by GMCA and its partners across the city-region.

Extending beyond the theoretical concepts and frameworks, AfA has contributed policy and design toolkits for public sector and community sector organisations alike, providing practical means through which future work can be addressed. Addressing the uncertainties from the Covid-19 pandemic, its impact on community development work, and the need for social distancing, GMCVO AfA programme staff authored a suite of documents²⁴ on how to approach community development targeting older people and social isolation in what is seen to be '*the new normal*'. These took a pragmatic form, containing: a full report which drew together its sub-documents and outlined some of the key learnings from AfA, e.g. around bonding and bridging capital, and the known intersections with Covid-19 at the time of publishing, namely around inequalities and how to tackle social isolation given the circumstances; an executive summary for time-poor individuals working in response to the pandemic; a set of design principles for immediate application to Covid-19 response work; and case studies of AfA projects which could be readily applied given the need for social distancing and outdoor activity requirements.

Demonstrating its practical application of the test-and-learn approach, AfA adopted a community co-researcher method for a number of its projects, deriving key principles for commissioners and for community organisations in the process. In *The value of small community-led equalities research projects*²⁵, considerations on how best to employ this method of research are detailed, drawing on the experience of the five projects run under the 'Ageing Equally?' umbrella project. The report, collating the findings of the five projects and their shared characteristics, highlights the advantages of using co-researchers who know and best understand their local communities, whilst acknowledging the support required to derive

²³ Yarker, S (2018) Social Infrastructure: How shared spaces make communities work. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/socialinfrastructure>

²⁴ Bagnall K, Hannen J, Martikke S (2020) Developing social contact models in a time of social distancing: A Response to COVID-19. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/socialcontact>

²⁵ Wilkinson S., Bonetree C., and Berry H. (2020) The value of small community-led equalities research projects. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/value>

the greatest possible value from this approach. Benefits can be accrued by various stakeholders in such research: community organisations can improve their knowledge of those communities whilst also expanding their capacity, connections and networks; individuals involved in work develop skills and have reported improvements in their wellbeing and their perceived value in life; and marginalised communities can raise their status and presence within wider society and benefit from improvements to lived experience as a result. With this, however, comes the need for adequate support and resourcing to undertake the research and (to a larger extent) draw together the analysis of the fieldwork; the coming together of this intimate knowledge of communities and the professional, technical skills in extracting value from such research is the high-level takeaway for those in policy and design of future programmes and projects.

Stronger networking between organisations was not limited to the project level. AfA staff developed close ties to the GM Ageing Hub. Alignment of priorities was coordinated through regular catch-ups between the staff, with GMCVO staff spending part of their working week at GMCA offices. Closer embeddedness in an organisation alters the manner in which influence can be exerted; being fully external is seen to allow greater freedom for more radical views and suggestions, whereas closer ties allows for greater understanding of circumstance and requires more nuanced and tempered views. Conversation with GMCVO staff on these close ties raised the concept of Overton's Window, whereby policy suggestions deemed acceptable at that time, in that environment, and subject to those circumstances fit within a window of possibilities. Extremes at either end of the policy spectrum can only come into view with a movement of the window. AfA staff were constrained to an extent to work within this window but, where appropriate, could apply their influence to nudge toward different positions on the policy spectrum. An additional benefit to its proximity to those in local government at GMCA was that AfA was able to establish wider relationships more quickly and draw on the legitimacy and reputation afforded by being involved with the GM Ageing Hub and its associated capital and agency.

Societal factors

Pre-existing community strengths

The concept of ‘ageing in place’ has featured more prominently in policy circles in recent years, drawing a wealth of research seeking to devise, implement and track changes to how it is delivered. A central element of ageing in place is the need for neighbourhoods to be age-friendly, through both its tangible and intangible assets. AfA, as part of the wider Greater Manchester age-friendly agenda, sought to influence and add to this cause, however, it must be acknowledged that witnessing a step change in society would have been a highly improbable outcome from the programme’s outset, with a multitude of factors feeding in to the functioning of society and the way it operates, including those elements which more explicitly create age-friendly environments. Indeed, as often referenced in AfA literature, different sections of society – whether segmented by age, ethnicity, gender etc. and their intersections – will by their very nature experience things differently. One determining factor identified as part of the AfA programme was the extent to which communities had pre-existing strengths or assets from which the programme could grow.

Covid-19 has cast into the limelight the relative strengths and weaknesses present in communities amongst a host of other aspects. With increased pressures and stresses placed upon individuals, particularly those who are experiencing or at risk of social isolation, factors which contribute to the resilience are increasingly important in adapting to the change in circumstance people of all ages are going through. For those sections of society with less social capital, their risk to the impact of shocks is heightened²⁶. Pivotal to this response is the existence or absence of bridging capital, through which information and resource is more readily shared, encouraging responses which are better equipped to adapt more quickly and successfully; whilst marginalised peoples have high levels of individual resilience, marginalised communities are seen to lack adequate mechanisms through which to thrive.

The extent to which the communities engaged in the AfA programme and their respective strengths and weaknesses in terms of social fabric, social capital, and the balance of bonding-bridging capital held between individuals in those wards, naturally influenced the speed of uptake, delivery, and outcomes stemming from the programme.

As within the catch-all term ‘older people’, heterogeneity between neighbourhoods was evident in seeking to gauge age-friendly sentiments through questionnaire responses of those active in projects. Whilst some neighbourhoods had greater sense of social cohesion at the programme’s outset, through positive social interactions and neighbourly support, others sensed disconnect and segregation within their immediate surrounds²⁷.

“If somebody is needed, they will help, but you don’t live in each other’s pockets”

Communities experiencing shifts in their demographic cited the disruption emanating from the transience of neighbourhoods. For older people who had been resident in an area for a substantial period of time which then had an influx of younger people, who often would spend time outside their immediate surrounds or lead lives more independently of their local

²⁶ Bagnall, K (2018) Resilience in an ageing Greater Manchester. Accessible online:

<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/resilience>

²⁷ Thorley, J (2018) Building Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester – evidence from the AFA programme. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/neighbourhoods>

community, their sense of belonging had been negatively impacted as a result of these changes.

“All younger people live here and go to work and keep themselves busy, all my neighbours have left and gone now and I have lived here 57 years.”

Weak social connections – passing, fleeting, or brief interactions providing light touch support – promote a sense of age-friendliness and engender collaboration from which a springboard for programmes like AfA to launch. Distrust between parties acted as an inhibitor to progress in this sense, on both an individual-individual level and between communities and organisations. Cultural differences, a lack of previous interactions between sub-communities within neighbourhoods, and the resultant lack of understanding, meant LDLs in some localities needed to expend time and energy in fostering improved relations to fully realise the reach of AfA projects. Widening the perceptions of ‘people like me’ necessarily takes time and was seen as a fundamental aspect of the role of LDLs and project volunteers, addressing the dual aims of creating age-friendly communities and promoting the equalities agenda.

“A key role of AfA staff and volunteers is to raise awareness about equalities and encourage conversations about inclusion and encourage groups to think about ways in which they could make their activities more accessible to people.”

For those neighbourhoods which have a diverse yet integrated population, this integration is seen to be an asset and an enabler for faster uptake of community action and cohesion. The converse, where neighbourhoods have fragmented or disconnected populations, presents the need for greater resource to be invested into fostering a collective spirit and develop the ‘people like me’ mantra. BAME communities in particular are at greater risk of social isolation due to pre-existing factors related largely to higher levels of deprivation and the resultant lack of opportunities offered in later life²⁸. Research cited in Lewis and Cotterell’s paper notes that those residing in areas with higher proportions of people from any BAME ethnicity – not necessarily matching their own ethnicity – are at lower risk of exposure to racism or discrimination which positively impacts on their risks of social isolation. It is also noted, however, that BAME individuals’ risks to social isolation will be further diminished should their local population be from the same ethnic minority background, thereby pointing toward bonding capital as a defence mechanism against social isolation.

Where community trust had been eroded due to past community development programmes not fulfilling their aims and the resultant sense of collective resentment held by the local population, a period of regaining trust and garnering positive input and interaction from those willing to engage with the programme was required. Featuring at the opposite end of the spectrum are those areas which built on pre-existing work on the Manchester Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods project. Societal infrastructures, networks, and relationships pre-dating the programme allowed for an expedited journey to delivery and enabled projects to knit into other ongoing activity with a greater degree of congruence.

²⁸ Lewis C, and Cotterell L (2018) Social Isolation and Older Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic People in Greater Manchester. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/social-isolation-and-older-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-people-greater-manchester>

Norman's story:

During a Participatory Budgeting event, Norman from the local reminiscence group did a pitch for an investment and spoke about his knowledge of local history. Some of the audience found this particularly interesting, especially those who were not born in Bolton and had moved into this country as adults, and had never seen the ward back when it was full of mills and had a river. As a result of their interest, Norman arranged to give a dedicated talk to community members at the local Community Centre. The feedback was that attendees found his knowledge amazing, and Norman has now built a friendship with some of the South Asian men who attend the Centre's groups.

Norman said to the Ambition for Ageing staff member:

"I want to thank you for something you said to me some months ago which has really resonated with me and stuck in my thoughts, I told you that people from my community - older white people in this area - are a bit worried about mixing with the Muslim community, not because they are racist but just because they are scared. In response you said to me 'but do you not think the Muslim community may feel the same and may be scared too?' I had never thought of it from that perspective and I went home and told my wife because it really made me think differently, it opened my eyes to how we are all the same and will change my approach to things in the future".

Where consensus on the crossover between bonding and bridging capital is less certain is intergenerational activity. Contrasting takes on the need for interactions between generations, with some older people finding comfort in surrounding themselves with people of a similar age and living in areas with a greater concentration of peers, whereas others posited that stigma and stereotyping of older people could be addressed through multi-generational activity and interaction. As such, for some AfA-impacted areas, existing intergenerational activity was a strength and asset, whereas for others it would not necessarily feature. Assessment of the implications of an age-divide in communities should feature as one of the considerations in future work, should intergenerational working not be one of the primary objectives.

When reflecting on the legacies of AfA, the skills developed by participants and volunteers through the 5-year programme are pivotal in maintaining momentum as a legacy benefit. Evidenced in the variety and number of different roles volunteers held – whether associated with governance, funding, delivery activities etc. – the capacity of older people will have been enhanced. For some areas, these strengths may have existed from the outset depending on the individuals located there, whereas for others the nurturing of such skills was realised through the programme's life course. Where LDLs were required to provide greater levels of support on this development path, the start-up of the programme proper by way of its delivery would have been slower.

In a linked matter on local expertise, the buy-in from organisations external to AfA which could provide support and sponsorship had a determining role in the early success in localities. NHS Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), for example, was closely aligned to Bolton at Home, Bolton CVS, and Age UK Bolton in relation to the AfA programme, with explicit mention of the 5-year AfA programme in its *5 Year Plan for Reform (Locality Plan): Moving from Planning to Delivery*²⁹. AfA's *Building Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester* report highlighted the need for continued buy-in from external partners in spreading age-

²⁹ NHS Bolton CCG (2016) Bolton's 5 Year Plan for Reform (Locality Plan): Moving from Planning to Delivery. Accessible online: <https://www.boltonccg.nhs.uk/media/3027/bolton-locality-plan.pdf>

friendly attitudes, awareness and action. The need to ensure a joined-up approach in Greater Manchester has been championed by a strong local network which forms the wider GM Ageing Hub, a convening of interested parties and organisations on a regular basis – weekly since the advent of the Covid-19 crisis – which are then able to share their current and upcoming work, research and expertise, to generate positive outcomes for older people in the city-region. AfA has remained a long-term active member of this group and has contributed to the growth of the wider group since its inception.

Asset-based approaches to community development

AfA sought to draw upon the pre-existing strengths of the communities with which it worked and recognised those elements which can be seized upon and developed through bottom-up, localised action, rather than identifying gaps and deficiencies which require addressing. In seeking to build the programme on these assets, AfA also undertook research and produced its briefing³⁰ recognising the determinants in succeeding in following an asset-based approach to community development.

Aligned to the spatial model of communities, those who are under-represented or, by virtue of their small size, invisible within communities, are at greatest risk of being missed in conversations and drawn upon as assets. AfA itself acknowledged its lack of representation by those who were already at most risk of social isolation a year into its running, with the decisions made by those seen as assets being those who weren't socially isolated. Successful asset-mapping requires full knowledge and information to capture all views and is something which is not readily achieved. To address this, engaging with local equalities groups and employing co-production techniques (and applying full resourcing to support this) has been promoted as a means of boosting these societal factors affecting such programmes.

Environmental and economic factors

National picture

Dating back to July 2010, the then-Prime Minister David Cameron announced his intention to implement a new initiative titled the “*Big Society*”. At the time of its announcement, the three strands of the Big Society were³¹:

- *Social action*: “The success of the Big Society will depend on the daily decisions of millions of people - on them giving their time, effort, even money, to causes around them. So government cannot remain neutral on that - it must foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action.”
- *Public service reform*: “We’ve got to get rid of the centralised bureaucracy that wastes money and undermines morale. And in its place we’ve got give professionals much more freedom, and open up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies so we get more innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need.”
- *Community empowerment*: “We need to create communities with oomph - neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them.”

Analysis of the initiative posits that momentum had been lost to a large extent by the time of AfA’s delivery period, with references to the Big Society largely featuring only in the media as a

³⁰ Ambition for Ageing (2018) Asset-based Approaches and Inequalities. Accessible online: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/assetsandinequalities>

³¹ HM Government (2010). Big Society Speech. Accessible online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech>

failed policy³², and further criticisms charged government with diverting responsibility for public services and community development away from local authorities, whose budgets reduced by a third to 2015, to the hands of the nation's citizens, its VCSE sector and community groups, and the private sector. Constraints on the capacity of the two former groups to adequately absorb these responsibilities prompted further criticisms with regards an enhanced role for the private sector and the expansion of a democratic deficit³³. During a workshop led by LDLs around the concept of co-production and its challenges, a participant highlighted how the Big Society was "seen as plugging funding gaps"³⁴, adding to concerns mentioned nationally at AfA's hyper-local level.

The impact of a devolved Greater Manchester and AfA's influence

To an extent, AfA contained elements of the Big Society insomuch as it attempted to reduce the red-tape barriers to obtaining funding for community groups, detailed in the Cabinet Office's Structural Reform planning³⁵. Similarly, with heightened interest in localism and the devolution agenda which has accelerated in the past decade, particularly in Greater Manchester, empowering local communities to direct what happens in their area is another shared element.

The GM Ageing Hub was formed during the delivery phase of AfA and worked closely with the programme; GMCVO staff were co-located at GMCA offices for part of the working week, allowing for influence to be applied as relevant topics arose in discussion. One of the key policy initiatives developed during the delivery phase of AfA and continuing into its legacy was the GM Ageing in Place Programme. The foundations of this programme were in part derived from place-based neighbourhood learnings which had been taking place across a number of decades already, however, given AfA's recent experience of place-based projects focused on older people within Greater Manchester, it made for an ideal resource to be drawn upon. The burgeoning public service reform agenda being developed by GMCA on a pan-Greater Manchester scale could use AfA by means of a testbed to inform how change could be delivered in a non-theoretical environment.

As GMCA was able to draw on the assets linked to AfA, so AfA could plug into the already established Greater Manchester family ethos shared between its stakeholders, whether these be found within local government, the VCSE sector, or in communities which don't adhere to these administrative boundaries and hold value in the transience of their populations. GMCVO, as a central organisation for the aforementioned groups, was thereby able to draw on its history and position to broker further networking and influence opportunities. The incubation of a shared spirit across Greater Manchester had taken place over a sustained period of time before AfA came to be and formed an environment in which AfA could use that pre-existing capital (community, organisational etc.) as the starting blocks from which to launch.

³² Gibson, H (2015). Between the state and the individual: 'Big Society' communitarianism and English Conservative rhetoric. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education* 2015, Vol. 14(1) 40–55
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2047173415577886>

³³ Balazard, H., Fisher, R. & Scott, M. (2017). The "big society" in the United Kingdom: privatisation or democratisation of public services. *Revue française d'administration publique*, 163(3), 507-520. Accessible online: <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfap.163.0507>

³⁴ Goulding, A (2016) An introduction to co-production for the Ambition for Ageing Programme. Accessible online: https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Introduction%20to%20Co-production%20for%20Ambition%20for%20Ageing_1.pdf

³⁵ HM Government (2010) cited in New Economics Foundation, Cutting it: The 'Big Society' and the new austerity. Accessible online: https://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/fe562b1ef767dac0af_g0m6iykyd.pdf

How circumstance dictated the direction of AfA

From the initial stages of application to the Ageing Better programme in 2013, through to the planned continuation of AfA in Greater Manchester beyond its 5-year delivery period into 2021, there have inevitably been significant changes and shifts in local, national, and global contexts. The residual impact of the global financial crisis has been felt at all levels in this time and – for the UK – has been marked by an era of austerity politics, placing pressure on local government finances and resulting in a retrenchment of spending on public goods and the social infrastructure discussed in wider AfA literature. An example of the impact caused by austerity includes the closure of libraries, such as in Bury where there were 10 library closures in 2017, leaving only 4 remaining open. To lose such institutions, which act as a fulcrum and hub of community activity alongside the educational services delivered, further raised the barriers to community interactions and heightened risks to social isolation.

The aforementioned changes were outside the sphere of influence for AfA practitioners yet required a response from within the programme. Whilst at a programme level there was a certain level of discretion and direction to delivery, a great deal of requirement in responding to change was needed at the hyper-local level, i.e. within wards overseen by LDLs and by the project participants and volunteers themselves. Whereas professionals trained in change management may be commonplace within organisations, the general public will on average be deficient in holding the capabilities to successfully manage, coordinate and adapt to change as readily and, given the magnitude of populations, time to undertake this process is a necessity. To that end, there was an onus placed on LDLs in responding to these changes; the combination of holding better embedded skills in responding to change and a more comprehensive overview of circumstance in their immediate locality dictated that primary responsibility sat at an LDL level.

In its devolution journey, Greater Manchester has not only gained greater control of its public service delivery and the political structures which underpin how local government actors interact with their populations, but the delivery of healthcare has altered dramatically in recent years. With the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP) taking control of its £6billion annual budget, the manner in which services are delivered are subject to more local discretion in what interventions are most appropriate. Similarly, the national landscape has altered and a shift toward further holistic and preventive models of care, as reflected in documents such as the NHS Long Term Plan³⁶. As part of this shift toward person-centred, preventive and proactive care, there has been a surge in social prescribing activity. Many aspects of social prescribing run in parallel to AfA, encouraging greater interaction and presence in community settings through the voluntary sector whilst attempting to reduce the need for medical interventions. In this sense, social prescribing and AfA may be working with the same cohorts whose capacity to attend both programmes will not have expanded in parallel; it could be argued there was a crowding-out of the market through over-saturation in offerings related to social isolation should both programme streams be deemed substitutes for one another. The extent to which competition exists is clearly subjective, however, it would be remiss to not account for the potential impacts this may have had and, in the context of future commissioning, is a factor which should be addressed where information exists.

³⁶ NHS (2019) <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>



Tracking change and success

Initial programme successes and consistencies throughout

As outlined earlier in this report, significant external factors altered during the course of delivery of AfA which, in seeking to keep the programme relevant and successful, necessitated flexibility and change in accordance with circumstance. This is not to say that internal influences did not lead to change, indeed step changes to the programme were driven for the most part by actors within the AfA programme. The following section of the report looks to assess what changes were made, why they were made, and how changes affected programmes outcomes and the complexities involved in their undertaking.

Firstly, however, it should be noted that some elements of the programme were not altered in response to circumstance; those elements which had longevity and reported success from the very beginnings of the programme.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, conceptual frameworks and principles underpinning the programme were highlighted by staff at GMCVO as remaining unchanged throughout. The principles behind community development and use of assets in the community, as reflected in reports spilling out of the programme, remained consistent. The assumptions set out at the programme's outset were retained and, reflecting on their intention to reduce the risks of older people becoming socially isolated, quantitative data recorded provides support to this when taken as a statement of intent; it is important to note that this differs from having the intention to identify those *most* socially isolated and reduce their pre-existing social isolation risk factors.

Turning to less abstract concepts and identifying their initial success, LDLs reported in early outputs³⁷ of the strength of networks formed with local statutory and non-statutory bodies. Engagement from local government, housing providers, and healthcare services, as exemplified with NHS Bolton CCG earlier, allowed for alignment of strategies and activity. Similar linkages were formed with the private sector, which realised mutual gains for both sides, whereby the undertaking of co-research into age-friendly shopping saw the returned favour by way of the provision of free meeting rooms. It should be noted that not every interaction can be framed in such a transactional manner.

Educational provision at the beginning of the programme was a central aspect to the burgeoning success of projects in all areas. Staff at GMCVO commented on the success of the regular seminar series delivered which, toward the beginning of the programme, sought to build capacity and awareness to enable and capture an inclusive ethos which could be knitted throughout the various strands of the programme. It was noted through initial and follow-up interviews with participants that greater engagement of BAME communities would be of benefit to promote cultural learning for all ethnicities; an early change in the programme witnessed was evidenced in follow-up interviews, where White British participants, who had initially used the term “Asian” as a catch-all descriptor for those from minority ethnic backgrounds, actively sought to design projects to involve all sections of the local community. This example highlights the extension of what could have resulted in only bonding capital was expanded to build bridging capital; conceptual underpinnings realised through AfA projects.

Changes made throughout the programme

The scale of change which occurred throughout the 5-years of delivery were substantial without being revolutionary; ideas and processes were not radically altered to the point that periods preceding were unrecognisable, with iterative changes smoothing such transitions.

³⁷ Goulding, A (2016) An introduction to co-production for the Ambition for Ageing Programme. Accessible online: https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Introduction%20to%20Co-production%20for%20Ambition%20for%20Ageing_1.pdf

Change was not witnessed solely in project delivery and its themes, but within the organisations acting as enablers for those projects to take place. Organisational learning and operational alterations were – in the spirit of the test-and-learn approach espoused by programme leads – necessary to best respond to circumstance and the direction of travel undertaken by the programme.

GMCVO, at the centre of the programme in its coordinating and guiding role, recognised its need to learn from past activity and adapt to make best use of its available resource. Operationally, the internally managed database was adapted to take data from its administrative form to develop insight and act as a resource for the use of its various partners; adaptation to streamline processes in data entry and outputting for evaluation purposes showcase modifications to the data pipeline.

In interviews with staff at GMCVO, it was acknowledged that their perceptions of “*what success looked like*” morphed during the programme, with greater levels of pragmatism adopted once delivery phases had begun. Success latterly placed a larger emphasis on reaching the most marginalised, rather than “*reaching the low hanging fruit*” which, judged solely in terms of raw numbers of those involved, would have represented success of a greater magnitude; encapsulating a more holistic take on “*success*” it could be argued delivered impact which held less likelihood of occurring naturally when accounting for wider societal circumstance.

As the programme and the learning derived from the programme matured, so too did the acknowledgement of the associated workforce resourcing requirements. GMCVO created additional roles to better disseminate its learning and influence and expanded the number of existing contract officer roles to manage the increased workload as project delivery ramped up. The advent of the Communications and Influence Officer role at GMCVO introduced for the second half of the programme in particular led to publications becoming more frequent, more prominent, and pushed AfA more toward the limelight within community development circles and awareness with linked parties. LDLs likewise adjusted their resourcing establishment to provide further support to their wards; a need which became apparent through the earlier phases of programme start-up and initial delivery.

Governance, scrutiny, and oversight were rightly employed from the start of the programme, with those administering at programme level held to account by those who would ultimately realise the impacts which stemmed from those earlier conversations. The programme board – encompassing professionals and academics with their respective expertise, and members of the Equalities Board and GMOPN to give person-centred perspectives – met frequently to assess high-level actions and recommend where changes could be made. The shape of this shifted through time, with a movement toward greater prominence of the latter two groups, with the former’s role (the programme board) regressing in recognition of the need for more user experience perspectives.

As the programme expanded and delivered latterly on its Scaled Programmes, so too did the influence of the Equalities Board. Its position on the Scaled Programmes resulted in roles providing advice and feedback on accessibility and inclusion issues, collating and sharing data on the needs of marginalised communities and identifying and signposting contractors to resources and relevant networks³⁸. At Scaled Programme start-up, the Equalities Board designed equalities inductions for those commissioned contractors and partners. Equalities Board members also held LDLs to account through monitoring data as part of annual reviews,

³⁸ Bonetree C., Wilkinson S., and Berry H. (2020) Widening circles of influence: an evaluation of the Equalities Board. Forthcoming. To be hosted at <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/resources>

resulting in more targeted work with marginalised communities as those “*most at the edge*” of social isolation risk.

External circumstance and factors outlined earlier in this report imposed on delivery to greater and lesser extents within localities. With the programme concerned with various types of capital building, whether this was held by individuals, organisations, or in the wider community, these naturally exhibited change throughout. For example, financial difficulties faced by one of the LDL providers resulted in its folding and the subsequent need for further tender submissions to recruit a replacement provider. Limiting the loss of this organisational learning and the relationships fostered, for example, would need to be addressed to allow for further progression to take place. Similarly, where individual circumstances impacted on their ability to take part in projects, outcomes shifted as a result. Examples include where individuals could no longer devote the level of support to their projects as they had done so previously due to deterioration in health status or alternative responsibilities taking precedence, thereby reducing or removing any capacity to continue in their roles. Where sufficient replacement was not able to support project continuation, these projects unfortunately fell by the wayside along with the assets generated and held by their earlier activity. This is not to say legacy benefits may not bear fruit in the future, however.

Influences of change

With such a broad reaching programme and the dispersal of control and action across 8 localities and their 25 wards, pinpointing all influences of change, many of which would have been organic shifts and minimal in and of themselves although aggregating to substantial movements, is overtly complex. The following changes identified relate to those themes evident throughout the programme and those raised in reflective conversations with staff at GMCVO.

Captured by the desire to have projects as being older people-led and driven by action within wards and localities, LDLs and project participants were a force in responding to change. Intimate knowledge and understanding of their communities allowed for locally identified issues, problems, or opportunities to be redressed. Ownership and responsibility for delivering change was entrusted to those affected by change, thereby prompting wider buy-in to the programme and thrust toward innovation benefitting communities. Where previously older people may have lacked the resource to affect change and had a diminished sense of agency, their realisation created an environment for progress.

The power of people and interactions is a further theme which is evident throughout literature and experience linked to AfA. Value was placed in networking, sharing best practice, and employing the test-and-learn approach to developing workstreams and projects³⁹. Networking was not simply horizontal – from LDL to LDL, or contained between only older people – but also vertical between rungs of programme staff, staff supporting delivery, and those older people readily delivering projects. Creating space for such interactions to happen was a force of change. The journey from these more formal meetings with greater orchestration leading to informal interactions of sharing best practice ultimately informed published guidance and similar supporting documents; in this sense, the process went full circle between formality and informality, helping to inform derived principles.

Contract officers at GMCVO commented on how these relationships matured over time and instigated better functioning within the programme. Once established, burgeoning openness in conversation helped LDL staff to further reflect and unpick from their on-the-ground experiences. GMCVO staff could use the monitoring data to help shape and inform the conversation at quarterly LDL meetings, with positive experiences and outcomes stemming

³⁹ A range of activities took place at the December 2018 Age-friendly Futures event hosted by GMCVO <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/agefriendlyfutureslearning>

from the data's usage and aiding in shifting focus where necessary. The work of the Equalities Board referenced above goes hand-in-hand when discussing shifts in focus to the programme, with the Board's scrutiny and support dovetailing neatly into these conversations.

From the Ageing Better programme level to AfA programme level, funding streams and their junctures played a role. With an in-built 2-year point to reassess before further funding was released, this point allowed for further reflection and instigated a shift in focus for the AfA programme, its LDLs, and the projects delivered. Conversations with GMCVO staff highlighted and promoted the further use of these formal breaks as a prime opportunity to reset what had happened to date and how things could be adapted from prior learning into moving forward.

The impact of changes

Change made at a point in time will naturally carry its influence into future planning and activity. Impact from changes made will continue to be realised beyond the lifespan of AfA, feeding into either the programme's legacy or forming the foundation for its sustainability beyond the funding period.

For communities affected by the programme, and individuals within those communities, an increased sense of community capital and the benefits underpinned by both bonding and bridging capital will be retained. Bridging capital, in particular, has formed or been strengthened by numerous projects, be it through intergenerational activity or through the bringing together of different ethnicities and cultures, as but two examples. Staff at GMCVO also commented how, on individual levels, participants in the programme have gained an increased sense of agency and ability to affect change and have started to become involved more widely within local politics and community activism.

Drawn from the work of the Equalities Board and its influence via scrutinising reach and the subsequent guidance provided to LDLs, those harder to reach communities – the opposite to the *“low hanging fruit”* referenced earlier which yielded the programme's earliest results – have become better engaged and will realise some of the benefits of the community capital point referenced directly above. There was a notable shift in the focus of those the programme attempted to engage with following these reviews and it resulted in greater recognition, appreciation, and engagement with those presenting higher risk of social isolation. Carrying forward the influence of the Equalities Board is being implemented currently as the programme winds down, with the Board set to be subsumed into the GM Older People's Network, which provides guidance, advice, and scrutiny to a range of organisations across Greater Manchester. The Equalities Board will supplement GMOPN's existing skillset and expand its capabilities and function.

Organisational learning has been a prime factor in the programme's progress. Reports from LDLs and from conversations with contract officers at GMCVO reflects the learning which has taken place across the 5 years, with benefits accrued set to flourish beyond AfA's end date. Training provided to LDLs, either through practical engagement skills, management skills, or through improving awareness of topics such as equalities, will carry through into the work of those professionals and should ripple through into their current or future employer's work considerations. This aspect of change featured in strategic planning for the programme and as such was an explicit objective, however, complementing that will have been learning that LDLs gained through their day-to-day interactions and the tasks performed which occurred more organically without being directed from above in a vertical programme hierarchy. The upskilling of staff involved with the programme at all levels will pervade into future work and activity, as it has done throughout AfA.

Stretching beyond the programme's immediate sphere of influence, employing additional resource in the form of a Communications and Influence Officer allowed for better targeting in dissemination of resources and provided more capacity to attend meetings and events to share AfA's research findings and deploy principles and frameworks developed throughout. Targeting of stakeholders through personalised messaging has resulted in greater engagement and recognition of the programme, with emails tailored to pick out the most salient or relevant points to that individual which would not have occurred otherwise had there been no resource or time dedicated to authoring emails in such a bespoke manner. Alongside this, GMCVO staff have provided contributions to national communications, such as featuring in King's Fund's newsletters, and noted AfA's reach into policy circles as references within wider research and briefings. Covid-19 and the need to work remotely has presented further opportunities and expanded reach, such as speaking with more localised parties and their associated interventions, such as attendance at meetings for East Midlands VCSE organisations seeking to address social isolation amongst older people.

Barriers to success

Recognising the need for change and realising change itself take both time and effort to achieve. The following section looks at aspects which inhibited the progress of AfA in one form or another. AfA rightly championed its flexibility and the benefits accrued from this, however, the following points are largely reflective of those aspects which are not readily shifted, or where circumstance dictated their inability or lethargy in shifting.

Frameworks and restrictions put in place in the form of commissioning guidance presented limits to the extent that projects could be carried out as initially intended by those within wards and localities. Staff at GMCVO commented, however, that proposals could be readily made to The National Lottery Community Fund on how AfA were looking to address these without being subjected to a prescriptive and limiting approach. In this sense, whilst some barriers did exist, the '*height*' of these barriers were in fact relatively low and, to that degree, functioned only where absolutely necessary so as not to compromise or contradict The National Lottery Community Fund's legal standing, its *modus operandi*, or its principles.

Proportionality when evaluating micro-funded projects was frequently cited as an inhibitor to conducting work and consuming resource dedicated to the programme, largely associated with the collection and data entry of paper forms at different junctures to drive quantitative analysis. With limited capacity, the results derived from collating and reviewing such data needed to yield results which were not readily recognised as informing the shape of the programme, rather producing monitoring information to be consumed at a programme level for assurance. A greater recognition of qualitative data and feedback, given the size of projects, and a more modular approach to evaluation where certain questions could be omitted where deemed unnecessary would have freed capacity to deliver results elsewhere. Evidence to support the test-and-learn mantra, ultimately leading to further release of funds for programmes, was driven to a greater extent by quantitative data than it otherwise might have been. Similarly, a degree of reluctance or reticence was exhibited by some participants with regards to completing forms, in particular those from more marginalised communities, presenting a misrepresentation of experience when viewed solely through a quantitative lens, and required anecdotal feedback to fully capture the experiences of older people engaged with the programme.

Relationships have been at the centre of a lot of what has worked well for AfA and will continue to drive progress beyond. Establishing such relationships, however, does not take such a linear path and it can take time to subdue any frictions between groups which will naturally occur dependent on perspective. The Equalities Board provided a great deal of lived experience which ultimately shaped the programme to a significant degree and helped to engage those closer to the edge of social isolation, the means through which was engaging

with LDLs and providing scrutiny and guidance to LDLs. This relationship took time to form and function fully, as criticism regarding the reach into marginalised communities by LDLs took time in being addressed, whilst the delivery of such criticism altered between iterations. Whereas toward the beginning friction was more present, as the relationship matured and moved more toward providing guidance, advice and insight, the relationship improved markedly. Were this to have been the case from the outset of the relationship, results could have been achieved sooner.



Guidance for future commissioning

Key learnings from the Ambition for Ageing experience

Ageing Better as a wider programme has outlined its learnings regarding micro-funding⁴⁰, with AfA informing these having been part of the evidence base developed which fed into The National Lottery Community Fund's report. The table below will reflect those findings but also draws on additional input from staff at GMCVO collected during reflective conversations.

Lesson	Detail
Community capacity	Whilst professionals are better trained in change management and able to adapt more readily, the general public has greater diversity requiring additional time and resource to reach consensus on objectives and outlooks or to develop the necessary skills to conduct such an undertaking.
Resourcing to support progress	Linked to the above lesson, there is a need to provide adequate support and resourcing at all levels. Achieving impact is best done through having the necessary skills in place to fully deliver on intentions and realise the breadth of benefits on offer. Examples of this include the expansion of LDL staffing accounting for project growth, and from GMCVO in expanding its staffing to reflect both the growth of the programme and the need to better communicate its findings.
Focus on local	Focus on who is being impacted and how – from all sections of that community – is pivotal to success. The intimacy and accumulation of local knowledge is something contained within a community which professionals could take years to build up and, in the same breath, would only represent a “ <i>doing to</i> ” rather than “ <i>doing with</i> ” model. Correctly valuing this resource and deploying it at necessary stages fosters community spirit, buy-in and capital.
Invest in people and develop an understanding	Tied to the point above, investing time in people and their communities allows for professional skills to come together with an understanding of local areas to deliver the best and most appropriate interventions. Placing trust of those in-situ to know what is best allows for this to blossom.
Fear of failure	<p>Test-and-learn programmes will inevitably have their successes and their failures. It is important to recognise both outcomes from the beginning and take learning forward on how best to apply these to future work. Innovative methods should not be discounted for a safer, better tested option which may yield lesser returns if truly embracing a test-and-learn approach.</p> <p>Management of failure or not achieving expectations should also be of concern, with conscious effort to nullify or negate lasting impact. Failure may deplete community capacity and increase apathy, affecting future community development work.</p>
Relationship building	Establishing successful, open relationships between different partners proved vital to programme success. Being able to hold honest conversation and reflect

⁴⁰ Ecorys and The National Lottery Community Fund (2020) Ageing Better – Learning Paper No.5 – Micro-funding: Empowering Communities to Create Grassroots Change Summary report. Accessible online: https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/ageing-better/Ageing_better_learning_report_5.pdf

	<p>extensively on prior activity paved the way for changes to be made in consultation between stakeholders, with prime examples coming in the form of the LDL-Equalities Board relationship or the LDL-GMCVO contract officer relationships.</p> <p>Processes can help to provide a framework for programme progress, however, GMCVO staff acknowledged that these processes should work to the benefit of relationships, rather than creating friction.</p>
Question your assumptions	Ensuring that assumptions made at the beginning of the programme remain fit-for-purpose is something which should take place periodically and, where necessary, these should be addressed, altered and communicated accordingly.
Evidence-backed decision making	Designing and adapting programmes based on a strong evidence base will lead to better outcomes. It is necessary to use evidence throughout the programme, from design and planning in early stages, monitoring as delivery takes place, through to reflection at programme closure to consolidate learning.
Be flexible	Retain a degree of flexibility when developing programmes and activity. Be informed by the evidence generated and adapt according to local circumstance and external influencing factors.
Simplicity in commissioning	Being driven by process alone will not necessarily result in the best provision. Overly complex processes can deter what would be willing delivery partners and there is a need for commissioners to recognise the local market strength and conditions and adapt accordingly. Pre-existing structures, local histories, and legislation will play a role and can dictate local response.
Plan for legacy or sustainability	Acknowledgement of the art of the possible beyond the lifespan of such programmes needs to be assessed from the outset. Whilst some aspects of programmes may become sustainable beyond the programme, supported by action taken during activity, many aspects will become legacy benefits. Decisive action needs to be made on where planning for sustainability and planning for legacy is the intended outcome, with support provided to achieve both.

Scalability considerations

Latterly breaking away from the micro-funding model, AfA's Scaled Programmes initially sought to take successes realised earlier in the piece and apply these to larger cohorts and geographical areas. The extent to which projects can be – on their most basic level – scaled and realise greater reach with proportionate increases in terms of results, however, is not so simple.

GMCVO's experience of running its scaled programmes points to the need to adopt techniques which function successfully irrespective of size, taking a more abstractly principled approach rather than directly replicating a previously conducted project on a grander scale. There needs to be a recognition of the unique attributes in projects' original forms and circumstances, with assessment of where and how these align, followed by adequate planning to account for similarities and differences. Diffusion of learning and its successful application is how projects can inform and contribute toward scaled delivery.

The achievability of scaling projects and programmes also holds interest in academic circles, with issues relating to the scalability of previously successful smaller projects/programmes

readily discussed. Assessing the scalability of Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) previously conducted, Al-Ubaydli et. al⁴¹ discuss issues associated with scalability and highlight issues such as: the draw of horizontal scalability, which opens itself up to “turning off” those aspects which would impact on scalability and result in greater selectiveness by those instigating that scaling; and the need for those who had initially run the smaller programme to continue and implement the larger programme so as to ensure its fidelity – in practice this may not be readily achievable. Scaling of programmes without adequately assessing comparative factors can lead to policymakers rolling out programmes more widely without proper scrutiny and brings to the fore issues such as statistical inference problems, non-representative populations, or unsuccessful implementation (deviating from the original or supplying the wrong ‘dosage’ of intervention).

Scaling successfully, whilst being increasingly informed by scientific methods to assess its viability, is still subject to a degree of risk and careful consideration should be taken when it is applied. The formulation of overarching principles, as advocated by GMCVO staff, will help to inform larger scale programmes, without the programmes themselves necessarily being scaled versions of previous work.

Sustainability considerations

In conversation with GMCVO staff, it was widely accepted that sustainability is borne from circumstance locally and the ability to integrate project groups into the wider VCSE community where support can be found. Many of the conversations focused on the legacy benefits which could be realised, rather than sustaining projects in their current form or expanding them beyond their current remit. Planning considerations were centred around the legacy of the programme and what could emanate from there, rather than planning for a continuation of projects in most instances. Recognition was given to the fact that the programme itself was a time-limited, test-and-learn, research-focused programme which would go on to inform future work, demonstrating the onus placed on legacy over sustainability.

LDLs were consulted earlier in the programme to seek their take on the foundations needed to provide a launchpad for sustainability. Their suggestions centred on:

- Sharing of resources and linking together smaller groups to pool skills and capital
- Upskilling groups to allow successful pursuit of future funding avenues
- Widening of the stakeholder pool to ensure community buy-in and expanded commitment
- Strength is drawn through older people volunteering their time as a valued resource
- Keeping local needs and community at the forefront
- Share learning and impact to encourage the spreading of age-friendly activity and communities
- Revenue raising activity to provide financial capital for continuation
- Integration into wider aspects, including recognition of local strategic approaches and policies
- Awareness raising and the need to build on momentum created by AfA to push ageing up broader agendas
- Creating space to network, share resources, and communicate effectively
- Community support needs to be fostered and act as an enabler for development
- Improved data capture and literacy to support work and funding applications

⁴¹ Al-Ubaydli O., Lee M.S., List J., Mackevicius C.L., and Suskind D. (2019) How Can Experiments Play a Greater Role in Public Policy? 12 Proposals from an Economic Model of Scaling. Accessible online: https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/BFI_WP_2019131.pdf

Whilst it is true that some projects and groups are adequately established and have the foundations to continue beyond AfA's funding period – examples being the Equalities Board and where local projects have been adopted into the local VCSE family, as seen with projects in Tameside – many of the benefits accrued through the programme will not continue in their current form, but will be realised in their legacy.

Aspects of the programme (and the projects within) will need to be assessed for their sustainability or legacy benefits after a period of time; to attempt to calculate the impact at such an early juncture would be misleading and, given the wide-reaching influence the programme can wield, would be supremely complex in its measurement. Anecdotal evidence over time can be used to assess legacy benefits, whereas sustainability of projects could be drawn from project success and existence in the months and years following the end of AfA funding streams. Resourcing – both financial and in other forms such as time given in-kind – will ultimately define what is and isn't sustainable, the outcome of which will be determined in time.

Shared design and commissioning principles

AfA's design and commissioning principles are consistent with similar programmes and share many of the same aspects. The critical mass of evidence developed supporting these principles suggest that they provide a framework from which success can be built upon.

Unsurprisingly, the wider The National Lottery Community Fund Ageing Better programme promotes the same principles⁴² as AfA. In part this will be due to AfA forming part of the Ageing Better programme, however, this is also a result of other sub-programmes under the Ageing Better umbrella reporting similar experiences and learning. Whilst Ageing Better's principles are to be found in various learning reports focusing on specific aspects, such as commissioning⁴³ or programme start-up and development⁴⁴, common themes can be identified throughout. In brief, these are:

- The need for flexibility and fluidity in form and structure, breaking shackles of rigidity and stoically following initial process, assumptions or governance structures
- Maintain a focus on local need and understanding to drive forward projects
- Create space for networking and collaboration to take place and create synergies
- Retain the value of the test-and-learn approach and use research to shape assessments and changes
- Deploy the correct resourcing to achieve your objectives. Identify where value can be added through roles such as dedicated learning officers or communications officers
- Provide protected time to fully understand an area and develop the programme before a delivery phase
- Address sustainability considerations at an early stage of the programme

Testing AfA's principles outside of Ageing Better circles provides greater validity and assurance that these principles – rather than prescriptive actions – are common amongst similar schemes and stakeholders.

⁴² The National Lottery Community Fund Community Fund learning resources and their constituent principles can be accessed online at <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/ageing-better#section-4>

⁴³ The National Lottery Community Fund and Brightlife. Top Tips – Contracts and Commissioning. Accessible online: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Top-Tips-Commissioning-LR.pdf>

⁴⁴ The National Lottery Community Fund Programme Set up & Development. Accessible online: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Programme-Development-reflections-final.pdf>

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)⁴⁵ places similar precedence on the need to move away from large block contracts for whole services toward a micro-commissioning model in support of existing groups and establishing new groups. Further parallels are to be drawn in the need for commissioning standards to be proportionate to programme size, recognising capacity constraints on smaller organisations. Tellingly, of its six key messages to commissioners, emphasis is placed on local knowledge, local expertise, and local assets both explicitly and as an intertwined thread. AfA's support of local engagement and the need to entrust and empower local actors mirrors these messages.

Interest in local area coordination, as promoted by the Local Area Coordination Network⁴⁶, points to similar neighbourhood and asset-led interventions for the betterment of people's lives, including older people more at risk of social isolation. Value is placed around strengths-based, place-based, and asset-based interventions and providing the capital to progress and forge strong working relationships⁴⁷, all echoing findings from and experiences of participation in AfA from its various stakeholders.

In terms of commissioning, pre-engagement with potential providers is a shared aspect between AfA and a previous The National Lottery Community Fund programme. Whilst AfA held its pre-engagement events with providers and employed co-production at this time and allowed for consultation with older people, similar work around social isolation had taken place in Worcestershire⁴⁸. When tender applications formally open, these kinds of consultative events are more restricted and guidance from the commissioner limited, placing an emphasis on bids being informed prior to this stage.

Holding a person-centred, local-led ethos is similarly important to interventions seeking to address social isolation. In its *Health and Wellbeing Innovation Commission Inquiry*⁴⁹, the International Longevity Centre UK promote these localised investment approaches as means of realising innovation, as witnessed with the micro-funding undertaken by AfA. Further recommendations highlight the need for intergenerational activity, the need to bring together different groups (bridging capital), and the need to provide flexible principles, frameworks, or models which can be applied to systems more widely – rather than narrowly within services – when engaging hard to reach groups.

⁴⁵ SCIE (2018) SCIE Highlights No 3 – January 2018 Tackling loneliness and social isolation: the role of commissioners. Accessible online: <https://www.scie.org.uk/files/prevention/connecting/loneliness-social-isolation/tackling-loneliness-and-social-isolation.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://lacnetwork.org/>

⁴⁷ Lunt N., Bainbridge L, Rippon S. (2020) Strengths, assets and place – The emergence of Local Area Coordination initiatives in England and Wales. Accessible online: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1468017320918174>

⁴⁸ The National Lottery Community Fund (2016) Commissioning Better Outcomes Evaluation: Reconnections Social Impact Bond: reducing loneliness in Worcestershire. Accessible online: https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/research-documents/social-investment/Reconnections-SIB-In-Depth-Review-Report_190320_122442.pdf

⁴⁹ ILCUK (2018) Health and Wellbeing Innovation Commission Inquiry: Social Connections and Loneliness. Accessible online: https://ilcuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Health_and_Wellbeing_Innovation_Commission_Inquiry_-_Social_Connections.pdf

Recommendations

This final section seeks to draw together the critical mass of experiences and the knowledge generated across AfA's lifespan, and provide a summary for the various types of stakeholder involved in similar projects in the future. Whilst these are segmented by stakeholder type, it would be remiss for readers to not engage with the factors affecting their colleagues to better understand complexities driving those decisions.

These recommendations have been formed with a recognition of the ongoing situation relating to Covid-19 and the strains it has placed on all aspects of society, from individuals through to organisations and the services they provide. Whilst not all recommendations will pertain to Covid-19 and would be expected irrespective of being in the midst of a crisis, Covid-19 and the uncertain outcomes and period in which we live with its impacts will hold sway and influence in the immediate future.

To commissioners:

- Consider the wider ecosystem and the requirement to think more strategically on what is needed to support communities. A movement away from solely market-driven commissioning toward placing a greater precedence on those organisations which hold an underpinning and supportive role in communities is needed.
- Take calculated risks in your commissioning, accept the uncertainty inherent in test-and-learn programmes against the potential for both direct benefits and indirect benefits.
- Tailor application methods to your market and recognise the skills contained within those interested parties. Knowledge and skill capital may not be as highly developed as commissioners were previously used to, but other capital may be more enhanced. Commissioners should consider applications being submitted via presentations and demonstration of intimate knowledge, rather than through more formal methods such as structured application forms.
- Create space where the corrosiveness of competition is minimised, allowing for synergies between organisations with shared interests to work together.
- Consider where the burden is deemed to fall and reduce its impact. The manner in which framing can invite or deter applications is seen as key to this. Ask "What could £2,000 do for your community?", rather than "How can you contribute to your neighbourhood becoming more age-friendly?". The latter holds a money-first focus and instigates consideration without assuming commitment, whereas the latter places the burden on an individual to a greater extent and would likely inhibit participation and innovation.

To programme and project delivery organisations:

- Become an expert in the community and invest time in generating your understanding, seeking advice from those experts with lived experience. Create opportunity for marginalised communities, whose voices may be seldom heard, to input. Interventions will be better tailored to the needs of the community and run with the grain of what is required.

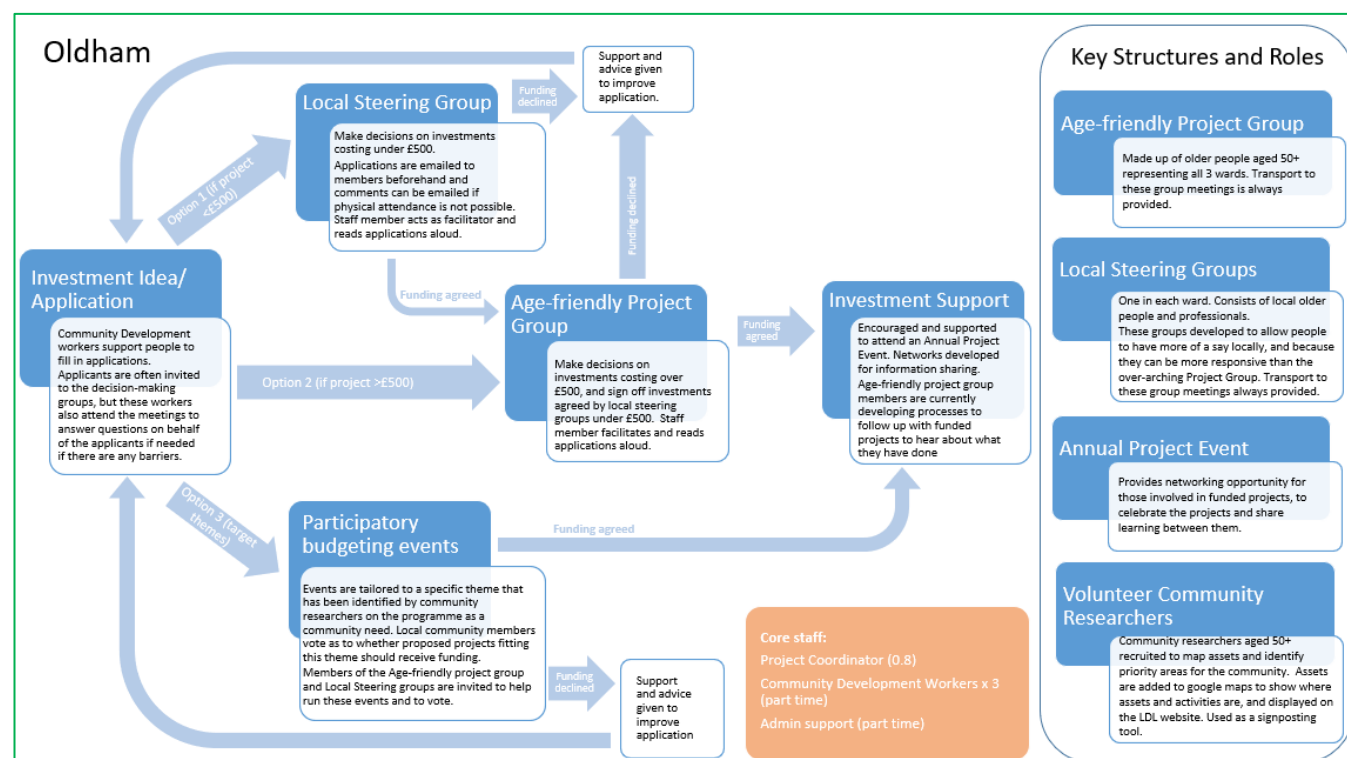
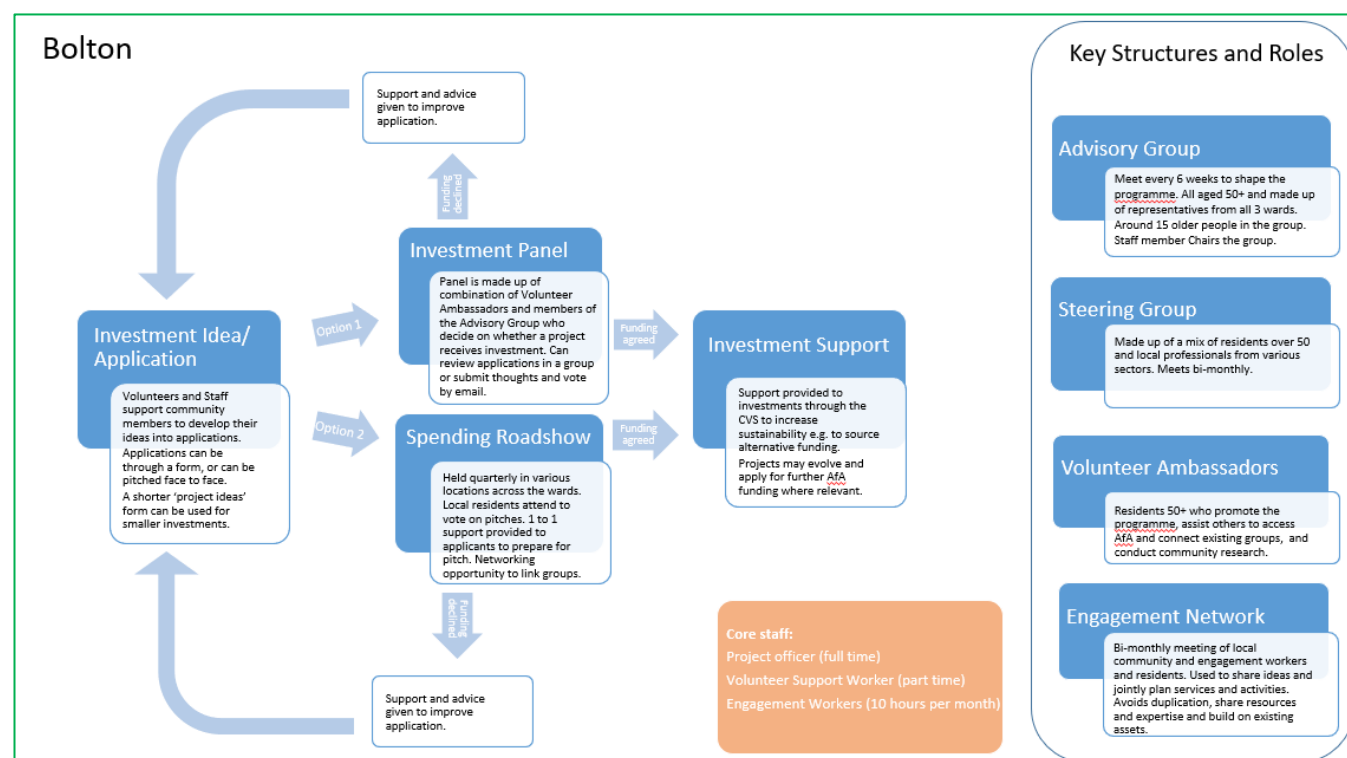
- Deploy flexibility in your thoughts and working practices. Be prepared to alter how things are delivered according to changes in circumstance and reassess your priorities and assumptions as work matures.
- Acknowledge where expectations have not been met and actively manage perspectives to mitigate damaging future programmes with the same community and retain existing community capacity. Test-and-learn programmes can be more susceptible to this, however, transparency in communication can negate issues arising.
- Ensure resource is in place to deliver comprehensively. AfA has demonstrated the need to support and understand communities, with professional skills and capabilities embellishing local knowledge and capital.
- Recognise the need for open relationships to drive work forward. Build-in time to reflect, be critical of your work, and invite feedback from others, acknowledging the role each stakeholder has and their wider contribution to activity.
- Develop your networks and seek to take learning from elsewhere and how it can be applied to your work. Consider the factors which influence the success and appreciate that direct replication may not necessarily be appropriate.

To communities:

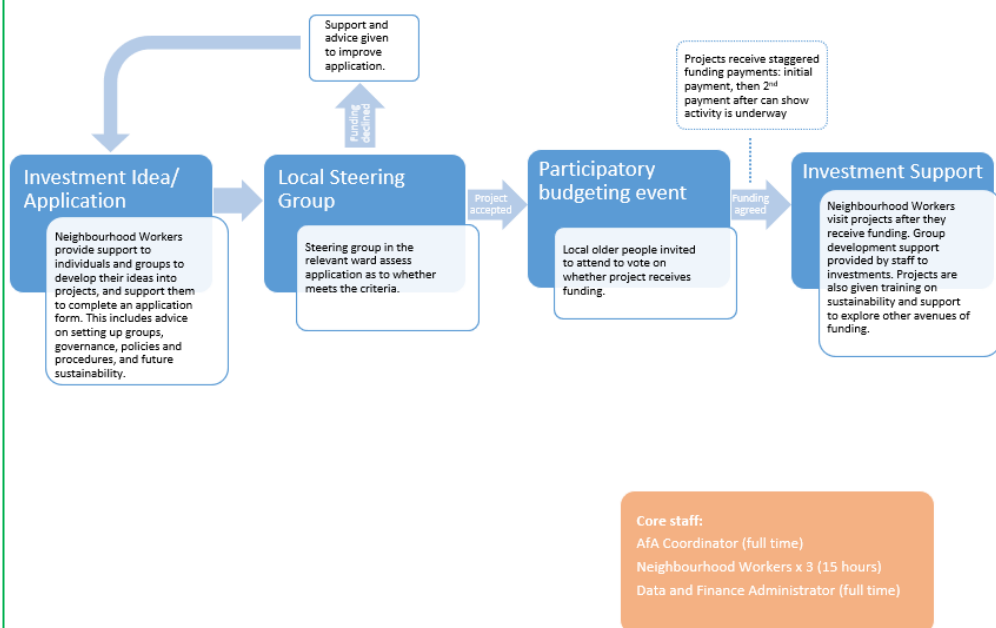
- Recognise your own skills and the value you bring. Developing an understanding of the complexities engrained within your communities and the actors and history at play. Similarly, draw on those external persons and organisations who hold skillsets which can enhance your community and appreciate their standpoint and objectives.
- Continue to embrace the culture of participation exemplified by AfA, create opportunities for the bonding and bridging capital concepts associated with community development, and contribute to your community's development.
- Manage your expectations and judge each programme or project on its merits, recognising the circumstance within which the work sits, and the approaches and methods taken. Seek clarity and assurance where concerns arise.

Appendices

Appendix A: Examples of micro-funding decision models by locality



Rochdale



Key Structures and Roles

Local Steering Groups

One in each ward, made up of local older people aged 50+. Meet at least once per quarter. All processes for deciding on investments were co-produced by those involved. Meet at dedicated, accessible community centre in the wards. These groups also help to develop projects by identifying priorities for their areas based on community research.

Strategic Steering Group

Oversees programme development and delivery. Made up of various local organisations such as VCSE, council and housing sectors.

Community Research Volunteers

Volunteers are trained to conduct community research, to find out what older people in the wards want and need and to map existing assets. Feed this information into the Local Steering Groups.

