

Big Local is not about the money. But sometimes it feels like that's all we talk about. The end game is not a building, structure or set of procedures. It's all of us taking responsibility for clearing up our own mess, not waiting for someone else to do it.

Why did I get involved in Whitley Bay Big Local?

I have lived here for over 30 years. I got involved with Big Local in 2011 when unprecedented cuts in public services were on the horizon. Residents felt neglected and angry. In 2014, just as our Big Local Plan was agreed, our Council won a £3.7 million Heritage Lottery bid and obtained compulsory purchase orders on 3 of the most rundown buildings on the seafront.

There was a sense that the tide was turning. But it has been hugely challenging in the years since to keep focused on Big Local outcomes rather than the money. In some ways it feels harder than ever to transform public services.

**Communities will be better able to identify local needs
and take action in response to them**

How would we deliver our Big Local Plan without a whole infrastructure to replace services cut?

Is transforming culture and brokering different ways for the Council to work with the community key to leaving a legacy? If so, where's the resource for that?

**People will have increased skills and confidence so that they can
continue to identify and respond to local needs in the future**

How would we avoid being perceived as there to 'rescue' vulnerable people and services?

Surely skills and confidence rely on opportunities and resources to respond to needs?

The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises

Many people in Whitley Bay have strengths and skills developed through paid work in public, private or voluntary sectors. Would they do the same things as volunteers?

Did public service and community action only 'count' if it was 'branded' Big Local?

People will feel that their area is an even better place to live

How would we develop leadership and resilience in local people so they would continue to improve Whitley Bay long after our grant was spent?

How would we change from the attitude 'that's someone else's job' to being a whole team?

There's a lot about Whitley Bay that I love and there are things that I still hate. Regeneration and partnership working is helping. But it takes time.

My personal drivers come from a desire to put any skills I have to community use. This is my home. I want it to be a place where everyone, my family especially, can thrive.

If Big Local 'works', I believe we will not just leave community centres, street festivals, tidy gardens and profitable shops, important though all of these are. Our legacy will be a place where people sense that *we do things differently here*.

We can't solve the problems of how we live together just at grassroots. There has to be commitment and strategic leadership from the top. If we want a country *that works not just for a privileged few, but for everyone* then we all have a job to do. Families, communities, churches, voluntary organisations, local councils and central government have to keep challenging. We have to find better ways to know each other, build trust between people, unlock and share our collective resources fairly.

National government needs to demonstrate determination to build more than just opportunities. Those are meaningless without the personal capacity to grab our chances when they come around. That comes when everyone: MPs, councillors, the police, local businesses, providers of transport and housing as well as family, friends and neighbours collectively form a community anyone can turn to. And when we work hard together every day to make sure everyone does.

That's Big Local for me.