

**Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund
(COM Fund)**

Evaluation Report

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Contents

Evaluation Summary	Page	3
Evaluation Full Report		10
Section 1: Introduction		
1.1 Background to the COM Fund		10
1.2 The evaluation		12
Section 2: How community organising has contributed to the community rights and neighbourhood planning agenda		13
2.1 What community organising has contributed		13
• Raising awareness and encouraging interest in rights		14
• Supporting residents in taking up community rights/neighbourhood planning		17
• Building confidence and preparing the ground		20
• Alternative means to the same end		20
2.2 Overall achievements		21
2.3 Preparing for the future		23
2.4 How community organising has helped advance the Community Rights/Neighbourhood Planning agenda		25
2.5 How the Programme has helped with this		28
2.6 The challenges COs have encountered		30
Section 3: Supporting the Community Rights/Neighbourhood Planning agenda		40
3.1 Sources of support		40
3.2 COs' learning		43
3.3 Reporting		44
Section 4: Sustainability		45
Section 5: Implications		47
5.1 To what extent are Community Rights/Neighbourhood Planning useful vehicles for creating more resilient, empowered and capable communities?		47
5.2 Messages for government		49
5.3 And for others interested in this agenda		50
5.4 Messages for future programmes		51

Section 6: Case Studies	54
6.1 COM Fund case study summary: Bordesley Green, Birmingham	55
6.2 COM Fund case Study: Cheetham Hill, Manchester	59
6.3 COM Fund case study summary: Coombe Road, Brighton	62
6.4 COM Fund case study summary: Sneinton, Nottingham	65
6.5 COM Fund case study summary: Warminster	68
Appendix 1: COM Fund theory of change	71
Appendix 2: Glossary of legislative terms	72
Appendix 3: Methodology	73
Appendix 4: Map, location and blog links for the 27 areas	76
Appendix 5: Examples of blog material: publicity and activity around community rights	78
Appendix 6: CO survey on increased awareness and understanding of community rights in Trafford.	81

Boxes

- Box 1: What is community organising?
- Box 2: Working in other areas
- Box 3: Example of community mapping
- Box 4: Examples of CO supported activities
- Box 5: The magic number
- Box 6: Role of the Community Organiser
- Box 7: CO feedback from May workshop
- Box 8: Use of social media
- Box 9: Other activities that COs were engaged in
- Box 10: Learning about community rights and neighbourhood planning
- Box 11: Messages for government

Charts

- Chart 1: Why has the focus changed?
- Chart 2: CO perceptions of residents' knowledge and confidence in applying it
- Chart 3: What COs felt they had achieved.
- Chart 4: CO perceptions of resident confidence in taking action
- Chart 5: What have been the challenges / barriers?
- Chart 6: Which support have you found most helpful?
- Chart 7: Learning about community rights and neighbourhood planning
- Chart 8: How will the work be sustained after the end of the Programme?

Images

- Image 1: Engaging residents in Tulse Hill
- Image 2: *The Cambourne Community-wide Survey* went live online on 9th April
- Image 3: "Volunteering for COMFund project has increased my confidence" (COM Fund volunteer)

Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund Evaluation Summary

The Programme

The Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund (COM Fund) was launched in the autumn of 2015, and followed closely on the heels of the four-year Community Organisers Programme (COP). Funded by the Cabinet Office (Office for Civil Society and Innovation) and the Department for Communities and Local Government, it provided an opportunity to explore the ways in which community organising, as developed under the COP, could increase the take up of the community rights¹ and neighbourhood planning provisions in the Localism Act 2011.

Aims of the Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund:

- 1) Develop the knowledge of community rights and neighbourhood planning amongst community organisers
- 2) Support communities who consider using community rights and/or neighbourhood plans as vehicles to solving local issues they have identified
- 3) Test and explore the potential role of community organisers in mobilising communities, in particular improving our evidence base for 'what works' in relation to the uptake of community rights and neighbourhood planning.

The ultimate outcome would be more resilient, empowered and capable communities able to shape, influence and drive change in their local area and increased community wellbeing and social capital.

The Programme was delivered by The Company of Community Organisers (COLtd). COLtd supported community organisers (COs) in 27 areas to explore the potential for community rights (CR) and neighbourhood planning (NP) over an eight-month period from November 2015 to June 2016. The 27 areas were selected to cover the range of community rights and neighbourhood planning, with five selected because they were aiming to explore more than one right and/or neighbourhood planning. 33 COs were supported by the Fund, with an additional five supported by a supplementary small grant towards the end of the Programme.

Evaluation/Methodology

There are inevitable time and resource constraints in the evaluation of a programme of this size and scope. With the agreement of programme partners, therefore, Imagine took a participatory action research approach to both formative and summative evaluation, which involved building knowledge primarily through the experience and perspectives of the COs as the programme practitioners. This means that the findings draw heavily on the

¹ A glossary of legislative terms is in Appendix 2

perceptions of COs, although in-depth case studies were carried out in a small number of areas to allow other voices to be heard – such as those of local authority officers and residents who were involved. More detail about the methodology, its strengths and limitations is in Appendix 3).

The Findings

The contribution of community organising to community rights and neighbourhood planning

COs had different starting points – some were building on previous community organising in the area, some starting out in a new area. In all areas though, COs have carried out listenings with residents, recruited volunteers and supported local training and engagement events.

They have:

Raised awareness and encouraged interest in community rights:

In some cases the Fund came just at the right time – where local people were already discussing a neighbourhood plan, registering assets, or where a local crisis (like the winter floods or threatened assets) gave the COs a ‘way in’ and enabled them to explore whether community rights and/or neighbourhood planning would be useful.

However, many COs found that residents were completely unaware of the community rights and that the Localism agenda was a dry and quite complex ‘sell’. They needed to communicate it in a more lively way to spark interest.

COs in nearly all areas (92%/24) believe they have increased understanding and awareness of local residents around community rights and neighbourhood planning.

So they used newsletters and social media to get the message out. They held pop-up events,

developed creative ways of running meetings, worked with residents to map community assets, and found ways of linking their conversations with people on the doorstep to the opportunities presented by the Localism agenda.

Prepared the ground:

Many of the COs recognised that there was a lot of groundwork to be done before residents would be able to work together, in an inclusive way, around a particular community right or neighbourhood planning. So they needed to bring people together, build their confidence and map out community needs and aspirations in preparation for the more specific work that the Localism agenda entailed. This was especially true for COs working in areas where they hadn’t done any listenings before and by June 2016, a quarter of the COs (6) said they were still at this stage, bringing people together and gathering information that could be used in pursuing the Localism agenda in future.

Supported residents in taking up community rights/neighbourhood planning:

Many COs, however, were developing work on community rights and neighbourhood planning and a third were at the start of the formal process or some way down the line.

At June 2016: 16 COs (62%) were working on NP; 7 (26%) were exploring the right to build; 9 (35%) the right to bid; 3 (12%) the right to reclaim land; and 5 (19%) the right to challenge.

Explored alternatives:

In some cases the planned focus had changed since the start of the Programme - because new opportunities had presented themselves, because it had become clear that particular rights were not appropriate, or because residents preferred to follow another path. Over half the COs were looking at other ways of transforming services or preserving/increasing access to local assets, either as well as or instead of working specifically on a particular right/neighbourhood planning. These alternatives included using the Our Place approach, looking at community asset transfer, the right to transfer land and money under Section 106, Compulsory Purchase Orders and community shares.

In doing so, they have demonstrated how community organising, and the listening process that is at its core, can support the Localism agenda, through:

- Engaging people face to face;
- Gathering evidence through listenings
- Bringing new people into the process
- Encouraging groups to engage more people from the community and consult more widely
- Raising awareness through 'creative conversations' and workshops.

Examples of alternative action

- Getting car parking charges stopped: *'We never expected our community mobilisation to have such an impact'*
- Gaining publicity about the council's auction of council houses and getting a commitment from the council both to ring-fence the money gained for social housing and to stop further auctions
- Training local partners in community organising.

The door-to-door listening that is central to the community organising approach builds a body of evidence for residents to draw on, COs can bring a flexibility to the work that more formal approaches do not and they can link the issues that residents are concerned about locally to the rights agenda. They can translate a complex process into everyday language that residents more easily relate to and they provide support and information to volunteers whose time and energy is at a premium.

How has the Fund helped?

The Fund has helped not only by providing financial resources, but by giving a focus to the community organising process. Working on the Localism agenda has encouraged COs and residents to link up with other local agencies,

including the local council, and to get to know how local government works. This has given residents confidence and stimulated new ideas.

Achievements

- Large numbers of people have been involved in the work of the Fund - the total number of people involved in the 27 areas (in the core group, as volunteers, or attending events) is reported as well over 3,000.
- By the end of the Programme, COs noted a marked increase in residents' knowledge around the community rights and in their confidence to apply particular rights. Residents who previously knew nothing about the Localism agenda were now getting involved: plans were being developed; neighbourhood forums had been set up.
- In some areas buildings had been registered as Assets of Community Value (ACVs) or applications had been submitted; elsewhere, appeals against an ACV designation by owners had been successfully defended.

Numbers

38 COs were contracted over 8 months. They:

- supported 7,341 listenings (an average of 193 listenings per CO)
- recruited 1,229 volunteers
- organised 270 events
- involved well over 3,000 people (in the core group, as volunteers, or attending events)

Challenges

Some of the challenges were specific to this Programme while others are common to a lot of community engagement activity. COs mentioned:

- too little time for what is a long-term process – the Programme only lasted eight months and many were balancing this work with other commitments and community priorities
- finding enough residents who could commit time
- power issues;
 - local 'gatekeepers' e.g. local leaders (including councillors) who feel that they represent local residents and local interests
 - the power that lies with property owners and developers
- an unhelpful council or lack of expertise in the local council
- key residents moving on or dropping out
- community conflict
- lack of understanding and information, including on the part of local authorities
- defining the neighbourhood plan boundary
- limitations inherent in the legislation and competing government agendas
- the complexity of neighbourhood planning
- parochialism among residents within communities
- the tension between a government programme agenda and a bottom-up community agenda (working at the pace of local residents).

Support mechanisms

COs found ways of coping with many of these challenges – and valued the support on offer from programme staff, other COs and civil servants. But it was clear that these challenges could take a considerable emotional toll, especially those related to community leadership, gatekeeping and conflicted communities. Several COs were working in relative isolation without any support close by. The study findings also suggested that skills development - in understanding local political systems, business planning, fundraising and commissioning – needed to be part of the package offered to COs, along with access to mentoring support and more face to face opportunities for peer networking.

Maintaining momentum

The Programme finished at the end of June and few COs were able to find funding to continue past this time. They suggested a number of ways in which activity might continue without them: through the volunteers they had recruited, the groups they had brought together, new projects that had developed, newly established neighbourhood forums, greater awareness of community rights and neighbourhood planning and through the continued existence of a consortium of community organisers. However, some residents expressed concern about how they would sustain the work without the energy, time and skills of a dedicated CO. Some COs are hoping to find more funding in the future but experience tells us that short funding periods with gaps in between usually lead to a loss of momentum and continuity locally.

Creation of more resilient, empowered and capable communities?

The experience of the Programme suggests that communities are not all ready to use community rights yet and that it is important to focus on capacity building first, while several referred to the time needed (at least two years in the case of neighbourhood planning) and the complexity of bringing them to fruition, as well as to the power of others (e.g. councils, developers) to stand in their way.

Nevertheless, several COs have found that community rights and neighbourhood planning are useful in giving people a voice and some power. They can be a hook on which to hang conversations, gather a group together, engage new people – a stimulus to action. The Programme has broadened the range of people and interests COs are working with (including traders and local

Connections, confidence and capability

Better connected local people, trained in organising and rights taking action on things they care about.

Core group of 25 who mostly did not know [about community rights and neighbourhood planning] before

People have realised what they are capable of – realised they can take action.

Supporting three emerging Neighbourhood Forums that are resident led

businesses, local schools) and provided a team of people who are passionate and skilled in working with communities.

Summary of recommendations

The COM Fund has demonstrated that CO can make a contribution to promoting community knowledge and use of neighbourhood planning and community rights. At several points in the evaluation, we asked COs what their top messages to government would be. These are summarised below:

To promote neighbourhood planning and community rights

- Strengthen the community right to bid by making the community's bid preferential/give it priority
- Allow more transparency: make it easier for communities to find out who owns assets, make a list of council assets; enforce the requirement for councils to have a community asset register
- Support communities by providing better training for local authority officers and councillors on community rights (there is a lot of misunderstanding generally around community rights and the information available on council websites is variable in terms of being helpful or useful)
- Provide more information resources in a simple/easy to understand format
- Fund capacity building programmes for small community organisations e.g. on governance, finance, business planning, getting a tender ready, working together
- Invest in people who have been trained in CO to continue to organise and pass on skills/ be a resource for local groups, rather than corporations like AECOM who don't understand the process and who are parachuted in
- Allow flexibility – if CO is to help to deliver specific objectives, it needs to be flexible and not overly constrained by funding conditions
- Allow for the time needed to bring this agenda to fruition - short-term funding pulls the rug out just as communities are getting going
- Find ways of encouraging communities to work in partnership with others, especially where they don't have the resources or ambition to take on an asset themselves
- Find ways to link programmes to promote the Localism agenda into other community programmes, such as Big Local and Power to Change
- Liaise with other government departments to ensure that other requirements, particularly in relation to planning, take the Localism agenda fully into account

For future support of community organising and community programmes in general

- Allow adequate time and plan for continuity – short-term programmes mean momentum and valuable experience is lost
- The experience of blogs in this Programme suggests that future programmes should consider how to experiment with different ways of reporting on progress and offer social media as an alternative to traditional methods, where appropriate

- Provision for one-to-one mentoring support where this is not otherwise available can help organisers with the emotional stresses of their work as well providing specialist expertise where this is needed
- As community organising is built into a range of programmes, provision needs to be made for further training, particularly in business planning, and understanding/negotiating local political and service systems
- A lot of support can be provided on-line but this should not substitute for opportunities for face-to-face support and discussion

Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund Evaluation Full Report

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the COM Fund

The Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund (COM Fund) was launched in the autumn of 2015, after the close of the four-year Community Organisers Programme (COP), established in 2011. Funded by the Office for Civil Society and Innovation (OCSI) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), it provided an opportunity to explore the ways in which the model of community organising developed under the COP could increase the knowledge and take up in local communities of the community rights and neighbourhood planning provisions in the Localism Act 2011.

The earlier Community Organisers Programme had achieved the Government's aim of training 5,000 community organisers. Some 540 people in 14 cohorts had been funded for a 51 weeks training programme and 60% of these had been match funded to progress through a further year and in some cases two years. These qualified 'senior' community organisers (SCOs) had then, between them, trained over 5,000 volunteer community organisers. Organisers supported nearly 1,500 community projects and knocked on hundreds-of-thousands of doors all over the country, listening to more than 125,000 people and helping people in more than 400 communities work towards the changes they want to see in their own neighbourhoods².

Box 1: What is community organising?

Community organising is described on COLtd's website as the work of building relationships and networks in communities to activate people and create social and political change through collective action...The community organising process involves identifying what people care strongly about in a community through one to one conversations [listenings], building relationships and networks that are strong enough to support a long struggle for change, developing community leaders and mobilising people to take collective action to achieve a shift of power and significant social change.

An important principle for community organisers is that they are independent and their work is led by the concerns and issues raised by residents. They do not go into an area with a preset agenda.

Building on this, the Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund had three main aims:

1) Develop the knowledge of community rights and neighbourhood planning amongst community organisers in order to demonstrate that COs can be successfully trained and supported to use Community Rights and

² locality.org.uk/news/localityrun-community-organisers-programme-positive-impact-communities-independent

Neighbourhood plans as enablers of solutions to local problems and be confident enough to help communities to exercise their rights;

2) Support communities who consider using community rights and/or neighbourhood plans as vehicles to solving local issues they have identified and enable them to create change in their local area; and

3) Test and explore the potential role of community organisers in mobilising communities, in particular improving our evidence base for 'what works' in relation to the uptake of community rights and neighbourhood planning.

Its theory of change is attached in Appendix 1. In brief it was based on the belief that:

- The network of community organisers, trained both in community organising and in community rights and neighbourhood planning would enable residents to feel more capable, confident and connected in order to take action on issues they identified that link to the community rights and neighbourhood planning agenda.
- As a result residents would feel more informed about the tools and processes to influence decision making in general and this would lead to increased social action and increased take up of the rights and neighbourhood planning provisions in the Localism Act.
- The ultimate outcome would be more resilient, empowered and capable communities able to shape, influence and drive change in their local area and increased community wellbeing and social capital.

The Programme was delivered by COLtd, the successor body to the Community Organisers Programme. It supported 38 organisers in 27 areas to promote community rights and neighbourhood planning over an eight-month period from November 2015 to June 2016. There were 44 applications from COs, employers and community groups to the Fund and the 27 were selected to cover the range of community rights and neighbourhood planning, with five selected because they were aiming to explore several rights and/or neighbourhood planning:

- Neighbourhood Planning – 13 (48%)
- Community Right to Bid – 8 (30%)
- Community Right to Challenge – 6 (22%)
- Community Right to Reclaim Land – 5 (19%)
- Community Right to Build – 4 (15%).

The funding was released in three stages: 50% at the start, 40% after 5 months and the final 10% after completion of the grant terms and conditions. A further Small Grants fund was released to seventeen of the areas to support additional work in the final months of the Programme.

COs in the 27 areas were invited to a residential in November 2016 and also had the opportunity to go on specialist training in community rights and neighbourhood planning the following month. They were supported by a Programme Manager and had regular monthly online supervision sessions as well as the opportunity to participate in three webinars provided by COLtd. They also had access to websites supporting community rights and neighbourhood planning provided by DCLG, Locality and other partners³.

1.2 The evaluation

Imagine, the learning advisers to the original Community Organisers Programme, were appointed by COLtd to carry out an evaluation of the COM Fund. We adopted an action research approach to formative and summative evaluation of the Fund. This involved building knowledge primarily through the experience and perspectives of the COs as the programme practitioners. This was seen as the most pragmatic approach to learning lessons about the programme within time and resource constraints. (More detail about the methodology, its strengths and limitations can be found in Appendix 3.) The aim of the evaluation was to test and explore the potential role of community organisers in mobilising communities, in particular improving the evidence base for 'what works' in relation to the uptake of community rights and neighbourhood planning.

Research activities included a contribution to the initial selection process and programme design as well as using a range of methods to assess progress and test out findings in relation to the theory of change:

- Two workshops for the organisers on the Programme – one at the November residential and one in May 2016 to share and reflect on initial findings.
- Two e-surveys, one in December 2015, one at the end of May 2016.
- Telephone interviews with COs from all 27 areas in April 2016.
- More detailed case studies in five areas selected to achieve a range of rights/NP and new/existing areas. These involved:
 - at least two site visits
 - observation of meetings
 - interviews with residents, employers where applicable and other stakeholders
- Interviews with the three Programme staff
- Analysis of Programme data, including CO blogs and COLtd's quarterly reports.

Summary reports of emerging learning from the case studies, from the first e-survey and from the telephone interviews were shared with COLtd and the Cabinet Office during the evaluation period.

³ Please see

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/neighbourhood-planning/>
and <http://mycommunity.org.uk>

Section 2: How community organising has contributed to the community rights and neighbourhood planning agenda

2.1 What community organising has contributed

The Programme remit was to explore how community organising could be used to raise awareness about community rights and to support people to make use of them, particularly in areas (e.g. urban/disadvantaged) where there had been little activity to make use of the Localism Act. This required COs to first bring themselves up to speed on the opportunities for communities to assert more control over their localities and the assets within them, then to impart this knowledge to residents in a meaningful way and bring people together to take appropriate action. In doing so, they needed to reach and listen to as many people as possible, build resident confidence and mediate between different local interests. In addition, the COs' role included analysis of local power dynamics and building relationships with other local actors, all the while working to support a movement that would have a life beyond the time constraints of the Mobilisation Fund.

*... we spent time learning more about the Community Rights and began our project. Since then we have listened to **680** people, have involved **36** people as volunteers and put on **37** activities from public events to campaign meetings. acornnewcastle.wordpress.com/*

In all areas, COs have carried out listenings with residents, recruited volunteers and supported local training and engagement events. Altogether by the end of June, they reported that they had:

- supported 7,341 listenings (an average of 193 listenings per CO)
- recruited 1,229 volunteers
- organised 270 events
- engaged an average of 13 in their core group (ranging from 2 to 40)
- involved well over 3,000 people through listenings, in the core group, as volunteers, or attending events.

At the beginning of the funding period, most of the COs (85%/23) were using their funding to work in areas they knew well and where they had previously carried out listenings and built relationships. Only four (15%) were working in an entirely new area, although since then, a few COs (27%/7) had broadened their intended area or were also working in another area. Two COs (7%) had moved to a different area, partly because there was more positive interest from residents there, partly because other areas had come to them as the 'go-to' person on community rights and neighbourhood planning in the area.

Box 2: Working in other areas

Hearing about our work on the Right to Bid, our neighbours in Romiley (the next village to us) got in contact to ask us to help them. A piece of land, Tangshutt, that they look after and value is under threat of being sold to building developers. They came to us to ask for advice, and having expertise and contacts with My Community Rights, we have been able to open up the eyes of our neighbours to the idea of listing the space an asset.

The group have begun leading the mobilisation and have planned several meetings. A petition is in place, and we hope to help them with the next stages when the asset transfer process begins.

Stockport Blog post

In many areas, COs have raised awareness of the community rights and neighbourhood planning and have begun to work with local residents towards achieving those rights and developing the plans. But they have often also discovered that there is a lot of work to be done on getting people together and building their confidence in preparation for more specific work related to the Localism agenda. In some areas, it has become clear that the specific rights that COs expected to work on were not appropriate or that residents preferred to follow another path. So here the COs have worked with residents to find other ways of realising the spirit of the Act in relation to transforming service delivery and gaining access to community buildings and land.

- **Raising awareness and encouraging interest in rights.**

There were areas where the Fund came just at the right time – where local people were already discussing a neighbourhood plan, registering assets, or where a local crisis (like the floods in Sowerby Bridge, threatened assets in Brighton and Stockport) gave the COs a ‘way in’ and enabled them to introduce a community rights agenda.

However, many COs found initially that residents were completely unaware of their community rights and that the Localism agenda was a dry and quite complex ‘sell’. They needed to liven up information-giving to spark interest. So they used newsletters and social media to get the message out (facebook was particularly effective at making an initial connection with residents in Sale Moor, Trafford; in Cheltenham, the majority of the 100 people who attended an event were attracted through facebook despite hundreds of leaflets distributed). They held meetings and pop-up events, worked with residents to map community assets, and tailored their listening focus to the opportunities presented by the localism agenda.

Box 3: Example of community mapping (more examples in Appendix 5)

The 'Our Sneinton' team in Nottingham worked with Laura Alvarez, a researcher from the University of Nottingham, who carried out a detailed place survey of Sneinton looking for assets and improvement opportunities. She found various public places with potential - underused green areas, underused public buildings and undervalued heritage. She also observed that: "One of the assets Sneinton community value the most is the multicultural character of the population".

Pictorial representation of the patchwork of different communities in Sneinton



One CO said that his team were the only ones pushing the Localism agenda in his area; another asked how, without community organising, local communities would know about community rights and neighbourhood planning:

Without organisers, I'm not sure how residents would find out about the rights and recognising this has made me realise how crucial it is for us to spread the word. (CO1)

Several reported that residents in their area knew nothing about this agenda.

Image 1: Engaging residents in Tulse Hill

Tulse Hill Community Organisers hold their first pop up event - despite the freezing temperature they engaged 23 local people who hung their ideas on a tree.



Nearly all (91%⁴) reported that they had increased understanding and awareness of local residents vis-à-vis community rights/neighbourhood planning:

Raised awareness around community rights – no one had heard of it before. (CO2)

Altogether from Dec 2016 up to March 2016 we have listened to over 170 people at our Neighbourhood meetings and community rights sessions. (CO3)

From our door knocking 119 people have signed up to get involved. (CO4)

Using one to one listening approach I recruited new volunteers and with them I am introducing Localism act to community around different parts of Manchester and organise meetings for steering group to share their practical experience and knowledge with wider community. (CO5)

The COs have been able to interpret the language. It is a minefield. There is lots on the community website but you need someone there to interpret – the COs. People in deprived areas need this support. (COLtd)

Image 2: The Cambourne Community-wide Survey went live online on 9th April



CO blogs provide a valuable window into what they have been doing. Appendix 4 contains a list of blog web links. More examples of COs using blogs to promote local activity in Appendix 5.

Appendix 6 contains a blog from the COs in Trafford which reports on the change in residents' understanding and awareness of community rights over a five month period.

⁴ Percentages for the second e-survey are based on 26 respondents rather than 27 as one CO was on sick leave.

Box 4 gives examples of the wide range of CO supported activities

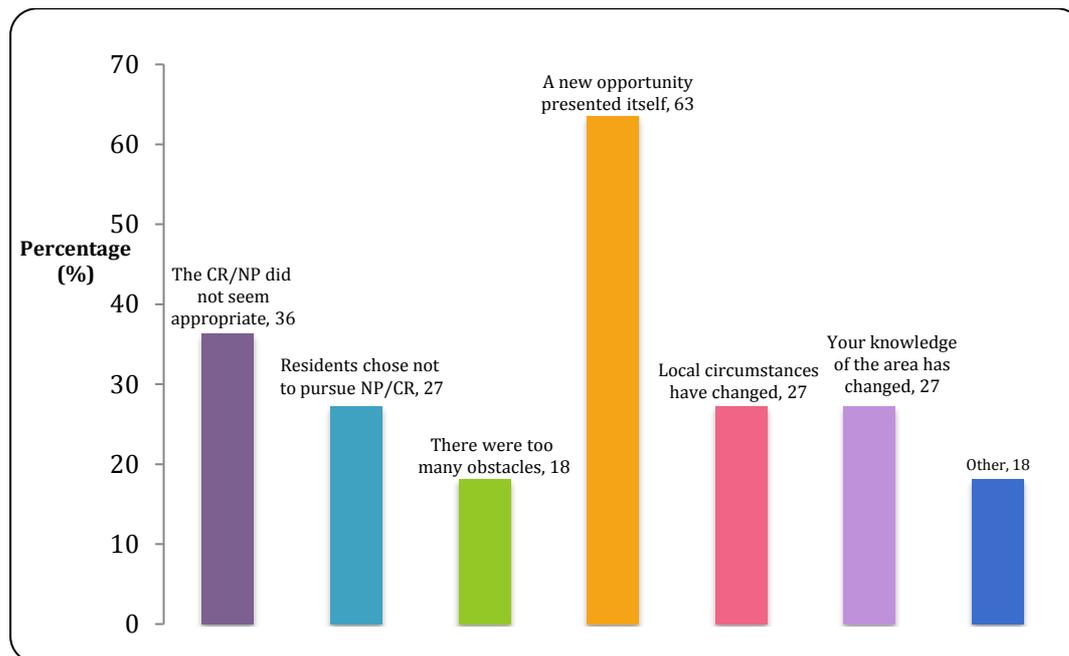
Box 4: Examples of CO supported activities
Leadership training for volunteers
Inspiration visits
The first social event in the village
Play events
Community media event
Visits to schools
Asset of Community Value application
Building networks
High quality newsletters
A bid writing workshop and event
Music in the Marquee
First NF to be designated locally
Training young people to deliver visioning workshops
Supporting minority ethnic groups to start up
Puppet show for kids
Community Rights/Neighbourhood Planning training sessions
Community asset mapping
Submitted Asset of Community Value application
Focus group with young people to see how to involve them
Social enterprise training
Connecting people with the local authority
Planning short films
Community shares issue
Flashmob to save banks
Community organising workshop
Petition against car park charges.
308 visitors to blog
Supporting a very able group to be more inclusive.
Youth forum
Online survey
Community arts/theatre
Pop up consultations at key local asset sites
Tea dance

- **Supporting residents in taking up community rights/neighbourhood planning**

By June 2016, 16 COs (62%) reported that they were exploring NP; 7 (26%) the right to build; 9 the right to bid (35%); 3 (12%) the right to reclaim land; and 5 (19%) the right to challenge⁵. For nearly two thirds this had not changed since their application to the Programme (62%/16). Where it had changed, this was sometimes because a new opportunity had presented itself, sometimes because residents had chosen to go in a different direction.

⁵ Some COs were exploring more than one right and/or neighbourhood planning.

Chart 1: Why has the focus changed?
(Percentage figures based on 26 respondents)



Asked what stage they had reached, the largest group (42%/11) were developing their work on the right/NP/alternative they were focusing on. A third (30%/8) were at the start of the formal process or further down the line with at least one of their groups. Six (23%) were still introducing and discussing the idea. In two cases (8%), residents had decided to go down a different path. In four, the area was either new to the COs or they had expanded beyond their original patch. They were still at the listening stage, capacity building and gathering information that could be used in pursuing the Localism agenda – others would have already done this preparatory work. This represents progress since December 2015 when over half (60%/16) had either not introduced the idea or were just beginning to discuss it.

One team commented on the value of going in at different stages:

Had we gone in earlier we would have needed a lot more time to engage and would have reached more people. Engagement would be more thorough and community led (more diverse). BUT going in later we are skilled and trained enough to be able to handle the existing team dynamics, be resilient and patient. Without CO training people may be tempted to lead and not support.
(CO6, CO7)

Twice during the life of the Fund, COs were asked to rate residents' knowledge and confidence on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high: once near the beginning and again at the end. The ratings covered: residents' knowledge of the community rights/neighbourhood planning agenda in general; their knowledge of the specific right or process they were now engaged in; and their confidence in applying that knowledge. There was a significant improvement in all three ratings (at the 95% level).

Chart 2: CO perceptions of residents' knowledge and confidence in applying it (Figures based on 27 respondents, e-survey 1; 26 respondents, e-survey 2)

		e-survey 1 Dec 2015	e-survey 2 June 2016
General knowledge	Mean	1	3
	Median	1	3
Specific knowledge	Mean	2	3
	Median	1	3
Confidence	Mean	2	3
	Median	1	3

Several COs referred to the fact that residents who knew nothing about the Localism agenda were now getting involved and that some had set up a neighbourhood forum. Some referred to plans that had been written and agreed; others to neighbourhood forums that had been set up:

Supporting three emerging Neighbourhood Forums that are resident led. (CO8)

*Group ready to apply to become a Neighbourhood Forum
Core group of 25 who mostly did not know [about community rights and neighbourhood planning] before. (CO9)*

The neighbourhood plan is underway - eleven members of the community have come forward to volunteer for the eight seats on the NP steering group. (CO10)

[X area residents] were unaware that they had been included in a NP for [the wider area] but have had meetings with the councillors behind it, have members on the board and voted to be part of it. [Y area] has many people interested in becoming involved in the neighbourhood plan and more people are aware. There is now a social media campaign set up for this. The village has also decided to undertake a NP and has 21 people signed up for the committee. (CO11)

Box 5

**The Magic Number,
21 21 21 21 21 21**

After a long hard slog, the magic number of 21 has now been reached!!! Thanks to Jayne's persistence, amazing door-knocking and street walking, information giving and visible passion for what she is doing, we have now just reached our **21** members for the Birkenhead North Neighbourhood Alliance, B.N.N.A.

What an achievement in such a short space of time!! And guess what? We have nearly made a decision on the designated area, bonus!

Blog post May 31, 2016, North Birkenhead

- **Building confidence and preparing the ground**

Many of the COs recognised that there was a lot of groundwork to be done before residents would be able to work together, in an inclusive way, around a particular community right:

I find what we are doing here (thanks to the COM funding) is fundamental. It might be neighbourhood planning in the future but for now, this is much-needed neighbourhood building. (CO12)

As such, they saw their role not as enforcing a top down rights agenda, but as testing residents' appetites for engaging with localism and all that it entails, through starting with community interests:

I've found the majority of people haven't heard of neighbourhood planning or community rights but are passionate about local spaces and buildings. I think the planned events will help to bring a focus and people together to start talking about it and to discover where they feel their community boundaries lie. (CO2)

- **Alternative means to the same end**

By June, over half the COs reported that they were looking at other ways of transforming services or preserving/increasing access to local assets, either instead of or as well as a specific focus on a right or neighbourhood planning. Again, this was either because events had overtaken their original plan or because residents wished to go in a different direction. These alternatives included using the Our Place approach⁶, looking at community asset transfer, compulsory purchase orders and community shares. In some areas, buildings had gained ACV status or applications had been submitted. In two areas, appeals by owners had been successfully defended. Elsewhere residents had managed to stop the introduction of car park charges at a local supermarket, persuaded a local lettings agency to sign up to an ethical lettings charter, or incorporated as a Community Land Trust.

In keeping with the previous section, some COs had decided that community rights and neighbourhood planning were long-term agendas and that they needed to focus on more immediate issues or capacity building as a possible springboard for action on CR/NP at a later stage:

Start from what they are interested in and then link that into the community / neighbourhood planning agenda. (CO13)

⁶ Our Place puts communities at the heart of service delivery in their area and involves local partners within a neighbourhood coming together with local people to identify the issues that matter most to them. (Definition from Locality; <http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/our-place/>)

We are having success with our ethical lettings initiative which local residents are on board with and is a different way of transforming services. It seems less appropriate to go into community right to build because of lack of space, the time it takes to get something of the ground and the community not choosing to pursue this yet. Our group is still relatively new and this had to be considered when we have been exploring the right to build. We have not abandoned the right completely though and have been supporting a local campaign to save a community asset, which has put our new knowledge to good use. (CO14, CO15)

Another reported having:

Set up a social enterprise, which is launching a community newsletter for the area in July. A group of people have started to run a monthly Social Club to informally bring people together for fun, network and connect, which will lead to building relationships. The launch had over 50 people present. We worked together in a campaign to stop the auction of 15 council homes and though we didn't managed to stop the auction we raised the issue and had national coverage, we also managed to get a commitment from the council to stop future auctions and ring fence the money raised for building social housing (CO16)

2.2 Overall achievements

Chart 3: What COs felt they had achieved.
(Percentage figures based on 26 respondents)

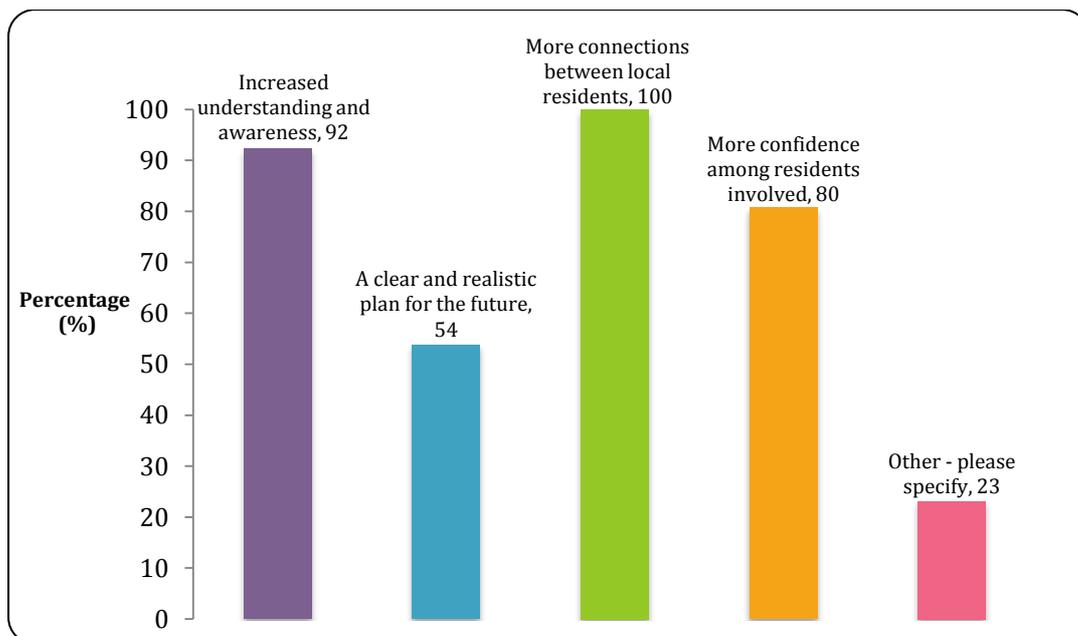


Chart 3 shows what COs felt they had achieved by the beginning of June 2016. They all reported that they had increased connections between residents:

More connections between local residents - I have introduced volunteers from one project to volunteers from two other projects and they have gone door-knocking together. (CO17)

Most (92%/24) had also increased understanding and awareness:

People are talking more about community rights and neighbourhood planning. More people know what these are. (COLtd)

Wider and increased awareness of both the existence of and opportunities afforded by the community rights legislation. (Workshop⁷)

People knowing how to use community rights – some can use them again in other situations. (Workshop)

Many (80%/21) reported more confidence and capability:

People have realised what they are capable of – realised they can take action. (Workshop)

When asked for more detail, several also mentioned recruiting more volunteers:

Better connected local people, trained in organising and rights taking action on things they care about. (Workshop)

In the two e-surveys, COs were asked to rate residents' confidence in taking action and influencing decisions more generally. Both had increased significantly (at the 95% level) by the time of the second e-survey.

Chart 4: CO perceptions of resident confidence in taking action (Figures based on 27 respondents, e-survey 1; 26 respondents, e-survey 2)

		e-survey 1 Dec 2015	e-survey 2 June 2016
Confidence in taking action	Mean	3	4
	Median	3	4
Confidence in influencing decision-making	Mean	3	3
	Median	3	3

⁷ Workshop to discuss interim findings with all COs, 10.5.16

As more concrete examples, COs mentioned newsletters, projects they had helped residents establish as well as neighbourhood forums established, and assets registered as ACVs.

'Other' achievements in Chart 3 included the alternative activities cited in the previous section:

- broadening the COs' area of listening and identifying common themes across this broader area
- getting car parking charges stopped: '*We never expected our community mobilisation to have such an impact*'. (CO1)
- gaining publicity about the council's auction of council houses and getting a commitment from the council both to ringfence the money gained for social housing and to stop further auctions
- training local partners in community organising, community rights and neighbourhood planning.

At one end of the scale, there were reports of change at an individual level:

We are really enjoying watching our volunteers and community leaders progress. Two have gained related employment in fundraising and one decided to stand for students' union election. When we first met her, she was adamant she would never do anything like that. (CO14, CO15)

Working as a volunteer for this project has raised the level of my confidence and improved communication skills. I made contacts with people whom I never met before. All these ... increased my mobility. Couple of months ago, I have successfully passed a job interview and started working as a school dinner supervisor. (Resident)

At the other end of the scale, COs were being invited to spread the word beyond their immediate area. Some referred to invitations from beyond their area to organise workshops and come and talk about the Localism agenda:

Seeing our work on this project has raised awareness among other organisations (e.g. parish councils) and has brought new work, i.e. three potential contracts across [the county] – it has increased demand. (Workshop)

One CO reported that, through community organising, planning applications were now having to be decided at planning committee and residents were more engaged with the planning process.

2.3 Preparing for the future

The COs have worked tirelessly to support neighbourhood development over a short space of time:

Residents are more aware and confident and relationships have been built across the communities and with council officers. (Workshop)

The sheer numbers of people involved in activities (e.g. '90 residents in support of Neighbourhood Plan boundary and constitution' (CO18); '70 plus members on Neighbourhood Plan steering group and 150 new members on their mailing list' (CO19)) should mean that there is a good chance that this interest will continue. Indeed, the total number of people involved in the 27 areas (from the core group to volunteers to those attending events etc) is reported as well over 3,000. One CO estimates that social media activity is reaching 4,000 people in her area alone. But is this enough of a foundation for continued momentum once the funding and the COs disappear?

Some COs have prepared the ground so as to leave the groups and networks in the best possible shape. For example, in Sneinton, COs have tried to ensure that the newsletter project has been structured to attract continued funding and a 'roadmap' has been prepared as an 'aide-memoir' to help steer development of the neighbourhood plan.

In Warminster, where the COs worked with an already established group and came in at the referendum stage of the neighbourhood plan, they have been able to show the benefits and transferable skills that CO can offer with engagement and local officers are confident that this will show in a good turnout for the referendum.

Others argued that, even for a short time, the COM Fund had moved residents' action up a gear:

The interesting thing is that we have some residents that have previously been quite critical and unhappy with the District Council, however this process has given people a new sense of understanding and relationship building. (CO20)

By the time our project enters its next crucial phase the COM Fund will end. But the group know what they have to do and are keen to follow it through. After many years the project is now seeing some end in sight. The COM Fund must take great credit in this. My group have told me how much they have owed to the presence of a CO working with them. (CO4)

The COM Fund work has also given COs the opportunity to work with a broader group of people and build networks and connections. In some areas local businesses have been engaged and links have been forged with between business and residents.

However, most of the COs felt they had only just got started:

One CO had 'invited nearby Neighbourhood Forum Chairs to explain the process they have been going through. All of them have highlighted the HARD WORK it is and HOW LONG it takes. The more residents

have heard about it the less interest in attending the meetings. Who is going to take this on? (CO12)

We will return to this when discussing sustainability in Section 4.

2.4 How community organising has helped advance the community rights/neighbourhood planning agenda

One CO summarised the contribution as follows:

Box 6: Role of the Community Organiser

CRs and NP are complicated and time consuming processes and – as much as we believe that every community has the potential to make use of them – in most cases communities lack the confidence and organisation to take up the task. COs try to listen to as many people as possible, build relationships based on trust and respect and build networks of people. Through this process we challenge residents to recognise their skills, their strengths, their assets, build their confidence and become involved. In today's society, it is professional skills that are mostly regarded as the ones of value – being an architect or planner or having experience in project management or business development. And as much as such skills can give a big boost to a group embarking on a journey to buy a local asset or create a neighbourhood plan and help its success in the long run, community organisers can tap into the local network and find more skills and assets in the community. When organising an event, we can find the people who can play music, those who love cooking and would make the food, those who can do face-painting for free, even those who just know everyone in the estate and will spread the word. Community involvement and engagement is such a crucial part of neighbourhood planning, both in informing the actual plan and in validating it via the referendum, so being able to reach the community is a very important task that should be carefully planned. And COs have the experience and tools to engage with groups who are described as hard to engage, using creative listening to encourage active participation rather than dry consultation and motivate local people to get involved in action.

CO blog: <https://rightinitup.wordpress.com/>

- **Evidence**

Several COs mentioned the listenings they had been able to do and how this informed local plans and agendas and would inform plans in the future. They emphasised the skills in listening and engaging people that CO offers and its ability to enable silent voices to be heard:

*Engagement in the disadvantaged areas has reached beyond NP and brought deprived families out from behind the doors and encouraged them to get involved in other community projects. Knocking the doors we are making connections and reigniting passions in communities.
(Workshop)*

- **Building a foundation**

Others referred to the confidence they were able to build through small wins and events that attracted a good attendance. In one area, the event held was the first in the village. COs referred to volunteer recruitment and training, to

their ability to bring in expert advice and to the groups they had set up. Some had had a slow start, but, as one reported, they had been able to make progress through 'doggedness, determination and knowing that what we were trying to achieve was the right thing to do'. (CO21)

Box 7: CO feedback from May workshop

CO builds trust and relationships – there's no apathy but a lack of TRUST!

- It is empowering because it works with people
- Deep listening and having one to one conversations reaches large numbers of people
- It is sustainable because it trains people so they can keep the work up long term.
- It is going to people, not expecting them to come to us

- **Flexibility**

COs have been able to approach the Localism agenda in a variety of ways and link it into what they know about the community:

We have been able to adapt the project to suit the needs of the community as we have been using an emerging design approach. We were able to be fully engaged with the current issues such as housing in the build up to Mayoral elections. Events have been well attended and have had great feedback. We have been able to bring the community together to discuss issues and ideas, projects have emerged from the gatherings we've organised organically. We've been able to use our funding to support emerging projects. Our events have been very diverse, and have reached people beyond our community.
(CO16)

- **Communication**

As the Warminster case study shows, COs can also be more flexible and imaginative about the way they communicate what the rights in the Localism Act are about – explaining the provisions in a way that addresses residents concerns, that is independent and doesn't feel official:

The value of the community organisers is that they are very open, younger and not in a suit! It is difficult to engage even with the older population... The COs are so good at what they do – they cut through all of that. More money needs to be made available for this kind of work to support neighbourhood planning... to get people to understand what it is about.... It is a lot of involvement for the smallest return, but it is the only way to get the message out, much better than a politician or leaflet. (Council officer)

This includes encouraging interest through social media.

Box 8: Use of social media

- *120 likes on our facebook page in five months. (CO13)*
- *Our facebook page in particular sees residents explaining the Right to Bid and ACV to their followers, showing knowledge. (CO23)*
- *Lots more discussion about CR's locally especially on our social media forums which I have noticed have increased understanding on CR's esp. Community assets (on which we have had lots of discussion). (CO20)*
- *We have had great interest in the project, our social media is reaching around 4k people weekly. (CO16)*

Some have also produced 'user-friendly' summaries of the provisions – either online or in leaflet form – in a language that is more accessible and attractive to local residents.

- **Identifying opportunities**

COs have been sensitive to local issues and therefore been able to be 'opportunistic' when appropriate. External issues such as the winter floods that adversely affected some communities, through to the imposition of car parking charges in another, and the suggested housing development on a school playing field in a third, have sparked waves of action:

Neighbourhood planning is not an easy thing to sell the benefits of - it's a pretty dull subject to address without having some concrete examples of how putting the work in will create community benefit. However the recent planning controversy has provided that concrete example and helped to address that lack of momentum. (CO22)

The local council has very recently launched a consultation over a planning application to take a portion of the local school playing field for a housing development. This has activated local opposition and pushed the idea of Neighbourhood Planning high up the local agenda. (CO22)

- **Support**

However committed volunteers are, there is a limit to how much time they can give and consistency can be a problem, as we shall see later in the report. Having someone to call on and access to the knowledge they need, can make all the difference:

Volunteers are very busy so CO has to do lots of the background work, or volunteers need a lot of support – so can lead to intensive CO role in whatever scenario. (CO24)

Resident volunteers need a resource they can call on. Consistent volunteer capacity is always an issue. CO is like having a paid officer – it enables groups to get access to someone who gets things done so it is not all down to the volunteers. (Advisor)

Communities are expected to be professionals without having had the training. They are just ordinary citizens, with their own skills, but when they need lawyers, planners and to read and internalise legalise, they don't have those skills. (Resident)

This is not to say COs need all these skills themselves, but they do know where to find them.

- **A national network**

This follows from the programme focus. The COs were all working to broadly similar agendas, which helped them to overcome some of the stumbling blocks and frustrations they faced:

...to the rescue came X and Y and stubborn Irish pride and after a period of reflection I got back into it with extra vigour. The committee were great at that time and their enthusiasm drove the project forward. (CO21)

As COs, we also have our own network across the country, a large number of COs with different sets of skills, experience, networks and knowledge we can tap into and help the communities we work in. (CO9)

2.5 How the Programme has helped with this

COs could not have done all this without the resources of the Programme. Having some money for hiring venues, paying for newsletters, buying in expert help and advice, as well as dedicated time from a CO, made a real difference:

Some COs have created newsletters where there wasn't anything before and the COM Fund has provided the resources for this – these have really helped. (COLtd)

Without [the COM Fund] the project would have been slower and possibly less grounded. Despite the great efforts of the village group they are busy people with other commitments. The presence of the CO has concentrated minds and kept focus as well as the very important one of sustaining continued enthusiasm. (CO4)

We had time to dedicate to the issue with the local car park. Previously, we may not have been able to give so much time to the cause, and we definitely wouldn't have had money to pay for the film and resources. Having the time and budget meant that we could put in our all and it ended with a win! (CO1)

In two cases, COM Fund money had been used to hire advisors to help the residents defend appeals against an ACV:

The money has allowed us to speed up the project, because we have been able to hire advisors that built a strong case that ultimately resulted in the current owners of the building withdrawing from the tribunal. (CO24)

Many COs, though not all, also felt that the introduction of community rights and neighbourhood planning into their work had benefited their organising more generally and hence supported the ultimate goal in the theory of change of developing more resilient, empowered and capable communities. They gave the following examples:

- **Focus**

The focus of this funding programme has enabled COs to develop their working practice, to develop more confidence around the work that they do and to be effective beyond their training year. The COs have reached whole new parts of the community e.g. minority ethnic groups, in part because it is easier to have a specific issue to address, such as save your library or neighbourhood planning, rather than an open agenda.

- **Building links with others**

During the earlier Community Organisers Programme, the emphasis had been on working with local residents. COs were discouraged from making links with other local agencies in case these overly influenced the residents' agenda. For many COs, therefore, working with councils, other local agencies and businesses, especially in a strategic way, was a new skill. They valued the fact that COM Fund work had extended their networks, engaged them with different people and built new connections, including with small traders and businesses:

It gave me the confidence to work at more strategic level dealing with officials with delicate issues that needed attending to...I loved it, it was hard work but very rewarding!! (CO27)

It provided a platform to work with local partners and build greater group collaboration in the area, building new relationships in this context has been great. ...Working with local partners has been a real highlight! (CO19)

Getting a seat on Council working groups has given local people a more positive relationship with the Council. (CO20)

It has also increased their profile, although this could create its own challenges:

Using community right to bid and encouraging our group to do this sent a powerful message to councils. (CO2)

Focusing on Community Rights highlighted my position within the community, especially when the local and county councils threatened to sue me....that was scary at the time but funny on reflection and the

local publicity didn't do me any harm. Knocked a few years off my life and turned a few hairs grey but, was so worth it. (CO21)

- **Interest, enthusiasm and increased confidence**

There are examples of how volunteers have benefited from participating in the programme including increased confidence to take up follow-on opportunities e.g. to volunteer or set up their own business:

The volunteers have enjoyed the door knocking, one said “I am very grateful for the opportunity to help shape my community”. (Volunteer)

More confidence among residents shows in the direction that the volunteers have taking, some have joined the other groups that I have introduced them too, one has moved to fulltime volunteering for the library services, one is opening her own business in sewing crafts in denim. (CO27)

Image 3:
“Volunteering for COMFund project has increased my confidence”
(Volunteer)



- **Increased knowledge**

Community rights can help disadvantaged communities rediscover their power – people are better informed about how local government works, they are ‘in the loop’.

COs also found that the COM Fund work had stimulated new ideas and ways forward. In one area it acted as a springboard for further work on neighbourhood democracy; in another it had allowed a CO who had done her organising elsewhere to work in her own community; a third found that the mapping of local assets had been really useful.

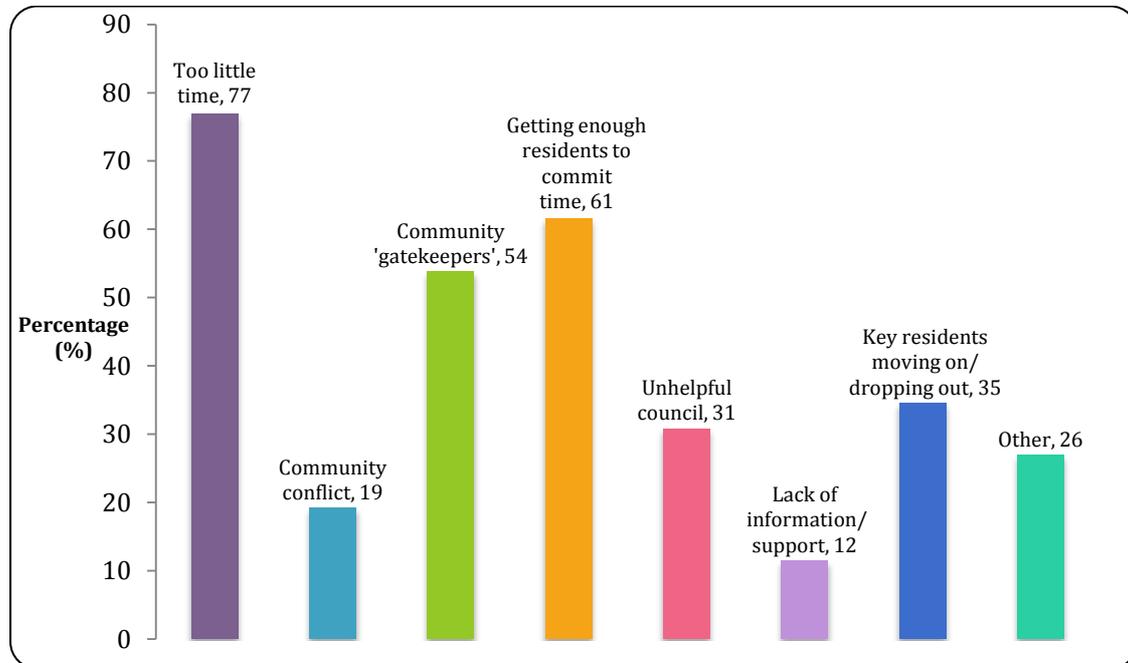
2.6 The challenges COs have encountered

COs were asked in the June e-survey what challenges they had faced and given a number of options to tick based on the issues raised in the telephone interviews:

- too little time was the most common response (77%/20), followed by
- getting enough residents to commit time (62%/16)
- community ‘gatekeepers’ (54%/14)
- a third (35%/9) mentioned an unhelpful council or councillors feeling threatened

- a third (8/31%) ticked key residents moving on or dropping out
- community conflict (5/19%) and lack of information (4/15%) were the least likely to be ticked.

Chart 5: What have been the challenges / barriers?
(Percentage figures based on 26 respondents)



Other challenges mentioned were:

- residents running away with themselves and not listening
- the limitations of the legislation
- the complexity of neighbourhood planning puts people off
- defining the area
- competing time commitments
- parochialism
- the tension between a government agenda and a 'bottom-up' agenda, working at the pace of local residents.

Those challenges relating to time, lack of information, the complexity/limitations of the agenda and balancing a 'top-down' and 'bottom up' agenda were specific to the COM Fund; others, such as gatekeeping and parochialism are more generic issues in community engagement practice and have been previously reported in studies of the Community Organisers Programme.

- **Time**

Asked to elaborate on this, several COs referred to the tension between introducing this agenda and working at the community's pace:

Too little time - there was very little time to discuss the project with stakeholders and potential volunteers at the planning stage before we

put the application in. The entire project timeline has been too short. We have to work at the community's pace. (CO17)

Need to match awareness with local passion and this takes time (CO13)

In our case, [area x] started this journey in January. When we first applied for the COM Fund we hoped to have a designated Forum by the end of June. But a new group needs time to form, build their inner-group relationships and roles and learn how to work together, set out their vision, familiarise themselves with the task and develop their plan. As community organisers, we believe in following the community's pace and not rush people to overachieve. (CO blog: <https://rightinitup.wordpress.com/>)

COs were also frustrated by the fact that the short timescale would not allow them to complete the work they had started - six months being too little time to raise awareness in communities and get something going. Indeed several COs referred to the neighbourhood planning process as being at least a two year enterprise, a view supported by evidence from areas beyond the Programme.

In line with time restrictions, neighbourhood planning is a long process that requires constant engagement with the community. Six months might be enough time to equip the group we work with, with some skills and start the engagement process, but it is not enough to support their entire engagement process. We would say that the engagement during the first 6 months is a good way to raise awareness of the project, get people interested in the group's work and kick-start the process, but not enough to inform the entire neighbourhood planning process in detail. (CO blog: <https://rightinitup.wordpress.com/>)

However, they did feel that residents needed to see something in the shorter-term:

One of the problems is that it's important to do stuff quickly to keep people inspired. Community rights doesn't offer that. (CO14)

Some needed to align their work on the COM Fund with other local agendas because they didn't want to appear to be in competition and this had taken time. Network development was essential, for example with agencies and power holders, but this wasn't necessarily in place, and building relationships between communities and service providers, let alone transforming services, is a long-term activity. Several COs found that partnership working takes a long time and were frustrated that council processes could be so very slow.

They also needed to align work on the Fund with volunteer availability. The process of developing a neighbourhood plan can be exclusive because of the skills, confidence and time needed. People's lives get in the way and their

circumstances change. Some residents balked at the commitment this work demanded and many volunteers just couldn't commit the time:

Getting enough residents to commit time - Volunteers were in the middle of other projects or had other commitments and so couldn't commit to this project straight away. (CO17)

Expressed interest did not always lead to a commitment to take part. COs referred to difficulties in securing regular attendance at meetings and several reported that residents had dropped out:

We have been raising awareness for neighbourhood planning but there is no faith in the planning system nor consultations, former leaders feel powerless, transient population do not care and interested residents are cautious of the long term commitment of intense voluntary work involved in the making of the NP and wonder who is to enforce it. (CO12)

- **Balancing workloads**

COs also had limited availability. Many only had part-time funding from the COM Fund (the median was 20-30 hours, but 10 had less than 10 hours) and had other paid work priorities to deliver. They talked about the high expectations from residents and from the Fund about what a part-time community organiser could do – there were '*not enough hours in the week*'. In addition, for those with relatively few hours, the requirements of reporting, supervision, blogs etc seemed disproportionate.

Some COs were concerned that this put pressure on them to 'lead' rather than community organise:

I have personally been paid for 8 hours per week but on some weeks have done over 30 hours which has impacted on my other work and family life. To think I could oversee newsletters, four events, listen to 300 residents, organise pop up consultations at key local sites, attend meetings with stakeholders, update blogs, write reports, attend supervisions, be a case study, manage a team of students etc all with only 8 paid hours was a tall order and although I have somehow pulled it off I look forward to the project ending because how I have been working is not sustainable and I feel burnt out. All this with the uncertainty of not knowing where my next paid work will come from. (CO13)

Time is also a challenge for us personally as we work on the COM Fund on top of our regular working hours, needing to make up for time on evenings and weekends. (CO9)

For many COs, engaging people through listenings as part of the community rights work led to additional community activity and in some cases a different focus. Three quarters of the COs were working with residents on other activities alongside the COM Fund work. As one pointed out, it was really

difficult not to fulfil the wider CO role while out listening to people. Several COs have talked about feeling pulled in different directions – needing to meet the requirements of their funding but being accountable to local people and their concerns at the same time. For example, in the process of raising awareness about community rights in one area, a women’s walking group formed and this needed some on-going support. Another CO talked about people wanting immediate action around issues being surfaced during listenings such as dog poo and graffiti, and the risk that this would take time away from neighbourhood planning. Box 9 summarises the wide range of other activities COs were engaged in.

Box 9: Other activities or issues that COs were engaged in

- Housing: ethical lettings, maintenance, second homes, overdevelopment
- Traffic and transport
- Green issues: clean-ups, community agriculture and gardening, renewable energy
- Dealing with flooding and flood prevention
- Service cuts
- Health/education
- Social events and clubs
- Community banking
- Disputes over noise levels from a local bar/café
- Foodbank
- Supporting refugees
- Social enterprise: a vegetarian takeaway
- Promoting democracy and a People’ Assembly
- Information session
- Timebanking
- Young listeners

COs addressed this in a number of ways. Some were able to find the time to pursue other concerns because they had additional/match funding to pay for their time outside the COM Fund. In a few cases, they saw these activities as being within the spirit of the Act as an alternative way of transforming local services or gaining access to community assets. But where this was not the case, they felt they had to prioritise COM Fund work and put other issues on the back burner.

- **Understanding and communicating the community rights agenda**

A big issue was the lack of understanding of the agenda in the community (and sometimes in other local agencies). One CO echoed the experience of many in saying:

the local community (or majority) is unaware of community rights and what they can do as a united body. (Workshop)

Initially, many of the COs themselves only had the basic knowledge that they needed for this specific agenda, which meant they had to spend time researching and developing this knowledge. The language, the process and

the 'professional speak' were all new. They have however learnt how to put the legislation into everyday language, though it has been difficult for COs and residents whose first language isn't English to find ways of communicating the legislation to others.

There have also been particular challenges for COs working with transient communities and those whose energy is constrained by personal circumstances. Some COs have experienced difficulty in reaching 'renters' where they are constantly moving on:

[needing] stability to make community rights more accessible to lower income people Instability e.g. finances, may make it difficult to be in a mindset to think about or care about the community in 2/3 years time. (Workshop)

In addition, the community rights agenda assumes that once communities are aware of their community rights, they will want to use them. In many areas however, previous experiences and cultural histories may mean that this will take a long time e.g. some communities may have a poor experience of relationships with the state in their country of origin and find it hard to believe that it might be supportive and that there are possibilities of working together.

In some areas, an additional difficulty is the fact that councillors and officers simply don't have enough knowledge of community rights. In one area, for example, the local council did not have an Asset Register to register a community asset.

- **The complexity of the process.**

The complexity of the process was a common theme. With regard to neighbourhood planning, for example, many respondents commented that even local authorities were not up to speed. The experience of the COM Fund was that if this was to be a process empowering more disadvantaged communities, it needed to be made more accessible, less complex:

Even when the council is ostensibly supportive, the process is difficult and bureaucratic, and therefore slow. (CO5)

COs and other stakeholders also pointed out that sometimes the Localism agenda conflicts with other national or local government priorities and it is difficult for communities to negotiate these overlapping and sometimes competing agendas. Some cited Local Plans as an example (see Sneinton and Warminster case studies):

There are inevitably issues where the needs and interests of communities are out of tune with the local authority and developers. (CO13)

But the principal authorities are the drivers and need you to have your plans prepared for national as well as local requirements. So it is a

lengthy and difficult process beyond the majority of our population's conception. (Council officer)

Government is putting [local authorities] under pressure to produce Master Plans at the same time as things like neighbourhood plans. It wants more houses but also wants local communities to steer what happens in areas. Do these initiatives come from different places in government? And how does neighbourhood planning tie in with the pressure government is applying to release brownfield sites with pre-approved planning permission? Councils are caught between government and communities. (Employer)

One CO found the advice on process confusing:

Advice on timescales was not sufficient, unrealistic and had to be revised several times. (Workshop)

In addition, the timescales of the Fund did not necessarily match with local timescales. COs also cited the 'patchwork nature' of some areas, with some parts falling under different political authorities, which inevitably impacts on the ability to come up with area-wide solutions in relation to neighbourhood planning.

When it comes to the right to bid, residents need to be able to cope with the complexity of managing an asset once acquired. The right to bid – and indeed getting ACV status - was only the beginning of the journey. As one stakeholder commented, groups need to gear up to be able to run a community enterprise and acquire the skills and resources that this requires.

- **Top down vs bottom up**

As we have seen, COs felt the need to work at the community's pace and that this sometimes conflicted with the need to make tangible progress on community rights or neighbourhood planning within the timescale of the COM Fund.. But many also were concerned that, as COs, they should not be imposing an agenda on residents. A few thought that if the agenda didn't work for residents, it could reflect badly on their more general CO practice locally.

However, many had found ways to negotiate this tension, by ensuring the CR/NP was introduced in relation to issues the residents had already identified, for example:

For me, initially it was unclear how community organising would work with an agenda (i.e. to work with communities using community rights), when most of my work was focused on community agendas before. Having now done just that, it is clear that it can be done as community project ideas can often take advantage of community rights in some way. I have seen my role as to inform and make people aware of community rights as well as support people to use them and go through the various processes. (CO11)

We have... learned more about the tension involved in balancing this with community organising. It seems that the best thing community organisers can do, is bring communities together, work with leaders and develop volunteers and enable people to use tools and solutions that best fit the need, whether this is community rights or not. (CO14, CO15)

COs pride themselves on working without an agenda. The Mobilisation Fund however has a clear agenda. There's that conflict between being a community organiser and leading - really driving it forward, whilst still being a community organiser. I think we have got the right balance here somehow. (CO13)

And as we have seen in section 2.5, several COs thought that the Localism agenda had benefited their community organising more generally.

- **Who has the power?**

While the Localism Act does put some power into the hands of communities, those involved felt that ultimately most of the power still lay with property owners, developers and, to some extent, planners. The ACV was a 'poison pill', that gave communities to potential to be a '*flea on the back of an elephant*', but developers could still set their own price and/or to sit tight over the five years and watch their properties deteriorate, in the hope of an eventual capital gain. When it came to neighbourhood planning, meanwhile, residents felt that developers, in the end, had 'a hotline to the Minister'. If owners or developers challenged ACVs, residents found it a very adversarial and intimidating process, even if they were eventually successful (see Brighton case study).

Other challenges were inherent in any community engagement process.

- **Local 'leadership' and gatekeepers**

Local politics, power play, prolonged distrust between local leaders, personality clashes, have all been barriers to progress in the COM Fund work.

When individuals end up having more power than others in this process it can be very divisive. (CO19)

Elaborating on the point about gatekeepers, one CO referred to their resistance to change; another referred to community leaders feeling threatened. This is a particularly sensitive issue. It raises thorny questions about 'who is the community' and what 'resident led' means in practice. Communities are not homogenous and not everyone speaks with one voice.

The COs are offering resources but there may be wariness about outsiders coming in, especially from established councillors and leaders. This is particularly the case where the COs are working in new areas. As the Warminster case study shows, where local leaders have already put a lot of work into developing plans or other initiatives, this wariness is understandable. In other areas, even though the COs may have the evidence

of their listenings in support of their work on community rights/neighbourhood planning, they have occasionally come across resistance or opposition from strong and confident 'community leaders' who feel that **they** speak for the community. This is particularly difficult if COs feel they need to have a mandate from existing community groups/structures before they can carry out their organising work. It can also be difficult for other residents to challenge these leaders, especially those who have a background in local politics and are well known locally.

In some areas it is council officers who have undermined the CO and local people's ambitions for their area. But elsewhere, it is the elected members who have been the barrier, while officers have been really helpful. Some COs talk of having to tread carefully to try to navigate the high level of reluctance that the councillors have about working with or talking about the community rights. These councillors see the Localism agenda as undermining local democracy and the role of the local council. Conversely many residents have little trust in their local authority – they are convinced that councils will overrule what the community wants.

There are several examples of this. In one case, a councillor asserted his control by patronising the COs – when residents asked this councillor if it would be worth asking COs to support them in their campaign the councillor said: *'They are just a couple of kids, they don't really know anything, so not worth it'*. In another case, a local councillor refused to meet the CO and was quoted as stating *'we don't want more people on the group from the wider community – that just makes things complicated and drawn out'*. In a third area, a council officer told residents that the CO had got his facts wrong (he hadn't) and persuaded prospective Neighbourhood Forum members that it wasn't worth their while pursuing a neighbourhood plan.

It is not always outright resistance that is the problem. Many councils are still getting to grips with the legislation. And, ironically, there are times when COs themselves are seen by local residents as part of a council agenda. One CO commented that:

I have encountered hostility from some people who have misunderstood what neighbourhood planning is, believing it to be a 'council' project which is being forced on them. (CO11)

It is important to reiterate that some councillors and officers had been really helpful and supportive. But even so, they have limited capacity to support local residents in the face of dramatic cuts in resources:

The planning officer is an ally, but doesn't have the capacity because austerity measures mean there is now only a three-person team. (CO13)

Councils are facing real challenges with cutbacks – operating at the cusp of critical mass. (Employer)

- **Parochialism and contested communities**

We reported earlier the difficulties of getting residents involved in a complex process. As one stakeholder put it:

Many people only want to know when it affects them (human nature I suppose).

A CO endorsed this:

People think in selfish terms so are interested in issues that have a direct impact to their lives but are less interested in issues emanating from the other side of the area. (CO13)

Sometimes the problem is a lack of interest, but sometimes, it is competing community interests:

This project has brought to the fore the diverse and somewhat fragmented nature of the community – and a multitude of differing interests and needs. (CO13)

In one area, there are some residents who are eager to challenge the council, while others are less confident and do not want to raise their heads above the parapet. Elsewhere, there are voluntary agencies with one agenda and self-styled community leaders with another. The CO is faced with having to negotiate between them all.

- **The need for resilience**

COs found ways of coping with many of these challenges – and valued the support on offer (see later section). But it was clear from CO responses in general that these challenges can take a considerable emotional toll, especially those related to community leadership, gatekeeping and conflicted communities. Several COs were working in isolation with very little support. Some, who had originally worked in teams before the funding ran out, greatly missed the support and understanding of fellow COs on the ground.

And all these challenges crowd in over a short space of time:

Never have enough time, the committee live in the community, gatekeepers with the "it's always been done this way" attitude, frustration/apathy in the community regarding any changes sought, unhelpful council is a given and the loss of two volunteers in February left me feeling devastated... (CO21)

Felt let down by this process – personally hard to deal with not achieving (what I thought were) realistic goals. Proper advice would have been more helpful and resources better spent on a different approach to raising community awareness in community rights as a whole. (Workshop)

Section 3: Supporting the Community Rights/Neighbourhood Planning agenda

3.1 Sources of support

At both the November and May workshops, we asked COs to score the statement: 'I fully understand the contribution that community organisers can make to the take up of community rights/neighbourhood planning'. At the May workshop the scores were much higher. In the second e-survey, COs said that this was because they had learnt by doing and adopted a continuous learning approach, with a lot of reading and research to enable them to answer residents' questions. As we will see they also found the workshops and the network of support and learning provided by the Programme valuable.

I think the network of support and learning provided by the CO organisation as a whole really helps the effectiveness of the COs as well in terms of being able to share issues and best-practice approached to all aspects of the work, as I think this work would be very challenging in isolation if it was being approached by people with no prior knowledge or experience. (CO22)

The COs had access to a range of support (see Section 1). Asked in the second e-survey, what they had used and what been most useful, nearly everyone (89%/23) reported that they had used COLtd and two thirds (69%/18) reported that they had support from other COs in the Programme. Despite the difficulties reported in relation to the local authority, 12 (46%) mentioned support from this source. Similar proportions reported using their employer (although it was essential that the employer understood community organising), their team, Locality staff, the mycommunityrights helpline and web resources. A few had used other local agencies, or national agencies like Community Matters (now disbanded) and AECOM, though again it was essential they understood community organising, which was not always the case. Indeed, COs were critical of AECOM⁸ for this very reason:

What is needed is to build capacity in communities rather than parachute in international consultants. (Workshop)

Asked to rank the most useful sources of support, COLtd came out on top, followed by the CO team (although of course not everyone had one). Third came supervision (as everyone had supervision we did not include this in the earlier question), although there were also a small number who ranked this quite low. Support from other COs in the Programme also had a high ranking.

⁸ AECOM Planning and Environment Consultancy is a 'My Community' Partner in the Neighbourhood Planning work led by Locality.

Other sources had more mixed reviews, with high scores balanced by low scores. This was particularly evident in the case of local authorities.

Chart 6: Which support have you found most helpful?
(Figures based on 26 respondents)

Overall Rank	Item	Total Score based on rankings ⁹	Total Respondents
1	COLtd	177	21
2	Your team if you have one	174	20
3	Supervision	171	21
4	Other COs in the Programme	118	16
5	Your employer if you have one	101	16
6	My Community Rights helpline	83	14
7	Other web resource	81	15
8	Locality staff	73	15
9	Local authority	69	14
10	Other local agency	35	10

Five COs felt they had all the support they needed, but most listed other resources they would have liked to have had available.

A cluster of responses flagged up the need for advice – at local level, and from people with experience of the Localism agenda:

Somehow it feels like every community - and every local planning authority - is reinventing the wheel. (CO12)

One would have found access to legal advice useful, another access to advice on raising capital, a third response highlighted information on community based housing associations.

⁹ COs were asked to rank the most useful sources of support from a list of ten. A total score was calculated based on the ranking – with each rank 1 being allocated 10 points, rank 2 allocated 9 points and so forth.

The COM Fund programme has exposed some gaps in knowledge and skills amongst the COs. The COs have had little formal training since their foundation training year as part of the Community Organisers Programme. As one interviewee said:

It's about transformational leadership – need support for senior organisers to make that transition up to that next level of strategic thinking and working. (Volunteer Community Organiser)

COs varied considerably in the skills they brought to their task over and above community organising, but at this level, they need skills in business planning, in fundraising, in understanding how local political/state structures work, in building relationships with agencies and organisations and in working with power holders and 'gatekeepers'. A lack of knowledge does them no favours when trying to negotiate with councils and other bodies.

COs generally valued the opportunity to share ideas and problems with peers in supervision, but some would have valued a different format. Some argued that supervision groups should have been based on the right/NP the CO was focusing on – however, this would have meant some very small and potentially unviable groups, given that there were often drop-outs or COs swapping sessions. Those working on the less common rights found it difficult to get peer support but then, at the other end of the scale, the same applied to those who were a long way into the rights or neighbourhood planning process. One CO wanted more training on the rights agenda; another wanted more opportunity for local meetings with other COs. However, while COs would have valued the opportunity to visit each other, as the work progressed, few could find the time to do this.

Several took the opportunity to argue again for a longer programme, while one regretted that the timescale had not allowed for adequate reflection:

In reality the timing of evaluation coincides with end of ComFund, Progression year and need to secure future employment or funding. This leaves minimal room for reflection and evaluation, which is a real shame. (CO8)

Earlier, we reported on the emotional toll that community organising can take, especially in very disadvantaged or conflictual communities and especially for lone workers. Few COs volunteered this information but it was evident in their interviews and e-survey responses and it was also a largely unspoken issue in the earlier COP¹⁰. The resources for management and supervision were inevitably limited and all supervision was in groups. Access to mentoring would have been a valuable resource.

¹⁰ See the summary of learning from Community Organisers Programme: *The power of listening: reflections and learning over 4 years*, Imagine 2015.

3.2 COs' learning

Asked what they had learnt from the Programme, many COs said they had learnt a great deal about the community rights and neighbourhood planning and about the time these processes take. They were asked in the two e-surveys to rate their understanding of the community rights/neighbourhood planning agenda and Chart 7 shows a significant increase between December 2015 and the end of May 2015. This might be regarded as one measure of the effectiveness of the support they received on the CR/NP agenda.

Chart 7: Learning about community rights and neighbourhood planning
(Figures based on 27 respondents, e-survey 1; 26 respondents, e-survey 2)

On a scale of 0-4, how well do you think you understand the whole community rights/neighbourhood planning agenda?

	e-survey1 December 2015		e-survey2 May 2016	
	1 - a little	3	11%	1
2 - moderately, but need to know more	14	52%	6	23%
3 - reasonably well	10	37%	17	65%
4 -very well	0	0%	2	8%
Total	27		26	

Several said they had learnt more about how local authorities operate, who they needed around the table, and how power works. The Programme had also allowed them to learn more about the community they were working in, its strengths but also its complexities. And they had learnt more about community organising itself:

I have definitely learnt more about the law around this, the kind of people you need to have on the table to make things progress (social policy experts, cooperative experts, bid writers, etc). I have learnt it takes time and patience and people able to trust. (CO24)

I have learnt more about the Localism Act, and about the community rights themselves. I've appreciated the empowerment and value of enabling members of the community to develop planning policies. I've learnt more about my community, and how it is prepared to take a stand, get active, and be creative to tackle challenges. I've learnt more about planning in general. I've learnt that elected members can be obstructive, even when their council officers are being very supportive. (CO10)

I have a much better understanding of community rights. I also have a much better understanding of power and powerful people since this work has brought me into much more contact with these people, e.g. councillors. (CO11)

I have got more confidence than before in project management skills, volunteer management skills and also more confidence about community organising etc. (CO18)

3.3 Reporting

One comment that was made in our interviews was that the reporting demands of the COM Fund compared very favourably with those of the early Community Organisers Programme, where reporting had been a bit of a bugbear. What was particularly interesting, however, and worthy of note here was the use of blogs. All of the COs were required to post regular blog updates. Some were indeed regular – others had bursts of activity and then nothing for a while. Some were quite polished; some included a range of news about the area; some had lots of photos and links to films; some were quite reflective and very honest:

I started this blog in early December and shared it with the world, but to be honest I am a little scared of it, I haven't done anything like this before so it's all new to me. I have sat at my desk on several occasions trying to create something, anything but I seem to have a block about doing it. I am unsure of what to write, how to present it, whether to add pictures..... (<https://bidstonstjamesblog.wordpress.com> Dec 15)

Many COs used their first blog posts to introduce themselves and provide a bit of information about neighbourhood plans and community rights. For some, the blogs have been an opportunity to put out positive messages e.g.: urging people to focus on the positives of where they live; reporting progress on community rights as well as achievements in terms of numbers of people involved and community activity. For others, they have been a site of protest about the closure of local facilities such as a post office or bank. They have also been a vehicle for advertising meetings and events, consulting on neighbourhood plan boundaries and feeding back to residents on the results of surveys and workshops.

The blogs have proved to be a very valuable resource to the programme – they document the journey that COs and the communities they are working with have been on over the duration of the Programme. They have been a source of tension for some COs in the programme however. In June, the author of the blog above acknowledges that it is a digital record ‘*and for that [reason] I am kicking myself for not ... fully embracing it*’. But adds:

...it seemed like I had another added 'thing' to do, and when I remembered to do the blog, too much had passed to keep it consistent.

Many of the COs said they didn't feel confident at the start in putting something down in writing which would be ‘out there’ in the public domain. While most have since got into a rhythm, there are some who have continued to find blogging a challenge, particularly those COs whose first language isn't English or who aren't confident in their ability to write for others. Perhaps

encouragement to set up and update blogs rather than a compulsory requirement would have been more helpful.

Section 4: Sustainability

One of the key challenges for COs related to the sustainability of the work. What would happen when the Fund came to an end?

Sadly, the funding is running out when momentum is at its peak. This is clearly the most challenging aspect of all. (CO12)

One CO pointed out that there had been a five-year investment in community organising and it was unclear what the long-term outcome would be:

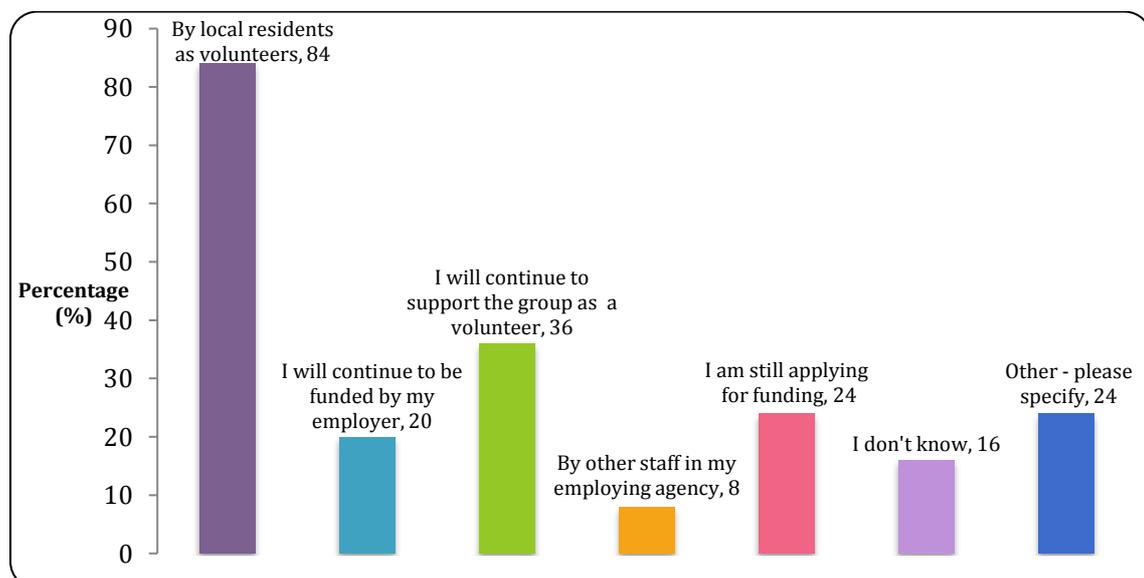
As this project draws to a close, I would like to be confident that the Government is going to maximise the potential of the community organiser resource it has created over the past 5 years. (CO10)

At the time of writing, there are no future programme proposals on the table.

Asked in the second e-survey how the work would be sustained, the most common response was by local residents as volunteers (84%/21) – in nine cases (36%), the CO was expecting to continue the work as a volunteer, although one pointed out that this would limit what she could do:

[I] have really enjoyed the work I have been doing under the COM Fund and will be really sorry when it finishes at the end of June. My efforts after that date will be voluntary but restricted due to other commitments and the fact I live half an hours drive from the area. (CO4)

Chart 8: How will the work be sustained after the end of the Programme?
(Percentage figures based on 26 respondents)



Only five (20%) were going to continue as a paid employee, although in three cases (11%) other staff would pick up the support role (though not necessarily as COs). One had identified further funding to continue the work; six (24%) were still looking for funding – from a wide variety of sources (including Power to Change, Locality, Awards for All, the Big Lottery and the Health Lottery). One planned to form a Community Interest Company. Four (16%) responded to the question just by saying they didn't know.

As we mentioned earlier (in 2.3 Preparing for the Future), COs suggested a number of ways in which activity might continue without them: through the volunteers they had recruited, the groups they had brought together, new projects that had developed, newly established neighbourhood forums, greater awareness of community rights and neighbourhood planning and through the continued existence of a consortium of community organisers. Nonetheless, residents were concerned about the loss of this resource:

[The CO] has contributed a lot – applying for the money, going on courses about community rights – she's got connections. And she's got more energy than the rest of them put together. Without her, we wouldn't have the expertise, enough time or energy. I don't think we could have done what we have done without her – how long would it have taken us? With the new legislation, communities are expected to be professionals without having had the training. We are just ordinary citizens, with our own skills, but when we need lawyers, planners and to read and internalise legislation, we don't have those skills.
(Resident)

... [we] would have struggled if they hadn't been able to pay someone like X to do it. The COs are now very skilled and can be trusted with the work that residents don't have time to do. (Resident and Neighbourhood Forum member)

Their accumulated data is so important – not going back to ground zero, they know the issues. Helps to get things done. This makes the COs stand out from the others – starts with their evidence. (Resident)

X has done a lot of things that no one else wanted to do e.g. the bureaucracy, connecting us to lawyers, the council. Can be undervalued – a lot of effort. She was the one who made connections and brought the group together. She knows where to look for funding, gives us hope, she has moved us forward a lot, will miss her work
(Resident)

The author of the last quote above went on to describe how her volunteer role is to be the enthusiastic person, telling people its possible, teaching others and spreading the knowledge; 'I do the talking, X makes the connections'.

Some COs may find more funding. Yet, however valuable the COM Fund has been, its experience also tells us that short funding periods with gaps in between usually lead to a loss of momentum and continuity locally:

I don't want them just rolling out those kind of programmes over and over and over again. Actually, there's years of work. (CO13)

Section 5: Implications

5.1 To what extent are community rights/neighbourhood planning useful vehicles for creating more resilient, empowered and capable communities?

On this question, the feedback was mixed. Several people said that they were useful, in giving people a voice and power:

They are crucial if residents want to take ownership and look after what's important to them. In a time where there are so many cuts to local services, they are a way for local people to protect what they love. Localism is a good thing, people want to take part and want to be interested in what is happening in their community. (CO1)

COs said that this agenda could get people to the table and act as a stimulus to action. It could bring people together:

Four roads run off the roundabout and historically the four communities kept themselves to themselves. It was difficult to make crossovers as they were quite territorial. For a neighbourhood plan we needed to get the 4 areas together. We have broken down the barriers and have people from all for areas on the Neighbourhood Alliance. (CO25)

It had got more people involved in planning more generally:

They have been to two planning committees now and are becoming a regular presence. This didn't happen before. So people are using the democratic system to voice their views, even if they fail. The more objections there are, the more it shows people care. (CO12)

But others said their communities were not ready to use the rights they were given yet and that it was important to focus on capacity building first so that residents would be prepared to take up opportunities in the Localism Act at a later stage. Several COs commented again on the time needed to progress this agenda and the complexity of bringing it to fruition - rights and neighbourhood planning would only work if able residents could be found with the necessary skills. The provisions in the Act needed to recognise the challenges that the most disadvantaged communities face – some felt it was geared much more to middle class communities. More sceptical respondents commented on how the agenda could be hijacked by local gatekeepers and on the get-out clauses and loopholes that those opposed could use to frustrate the community's wishes:

The right to bid is only useful if the owner desperately wants to rid themselves of a building, it does not empower the local community and in some instances puts them in really challenging, unfair situations in the guise of being inclusive and empowering. (Advisor)

A huge investment is needed by a core group of individuals, which can be undermined overnight by changes in legislation, which further disempowers. (CO8)

One group involved in neighbourhood planning asked how it, as a grassroots group, could go against a developer, who could go straight to the Minister. Group members doubted the ability of their planning authority to stand firm. A CO in another area said the team had been testing the appetite for neighbourhood planning beyond the core group of activists:

*Despite what they say publicly, I'm not sure that there's [an appetite] among the wider community – other life issues are too all consuming. When you mix that with an unenthusiastic – or resistant – council, the result may be very little from a community rights point of view – though that **doesn't** negate other value in the work. (CO26)*

With regard to the Right to Bid, while one respondent recognised that the ACV process was a major step for a government committed to property rights, he argued that, without any provision to set a fair price, owners and developers could afford to sit on it for five years and watch it deteriorate in the hope of a later capital gain. As such, communities were in a race where their hopes had been raised but they were handicapped. In addition, to gain control, they needed to have a legal structure, a vision that they could translate into a business plan and the skills to develop a social enterprise. This was a long-term process and the clock was ticking:

Once you exercise your rights the property acquires a market value – why would any group want to do that? It should be a matter of developing partnerships. (Advisor)

However, as he suggested, there was scope for communities to work in partnership with others – in social enterprise development for example – and some had been looking into this.

More generally, local authorities need to be geared up. If the CO experience is anything to go by, too few local councils have the expertise and skills to support communities in the CR/NP agenda:

If a group manages to find their ACV pages there is nothing there about what an ACV can enable, it is just about explaining the legal right. (Advisor)

Some authorities see the provisions of the Act as being premised on bypassing the local authority and feel threatened. But there are allies who

see its potential and it is important that the legislation enables them to support communities. And although one person welcomed the new powers given to town councils, another felt that the legislation and its application also needed to take more account of the role of town and parish councils.

In summary, as one CO put it:

I think this seems to depend on the locality and on the tool. There are some obvious downsides to [the rights] including the time it takes, which requires a level of volunteer skill, capacity and investment that is unrealistic for some people. Also the fact the saving community assets or using community right to build requires significant sums of money. Lastly, the rights can clash with what local authorities are doing.
(CO14, CO15)

5.2 Messages for government

As this was a programme funded by two central government departments, most of the messages are directed at them. However, there are also messages for local government.

Time and resources

Unsurprisingly, the two most popular messages for government were to allow adequate time (at least two years for a neighbourhood plan) and to provide the independent resources needed to employ a designated worker at an early stage, which would help communities to get up to speed and engage with the process:

Communities need a designated worker, who is free from the council's agenda, to support them to explore their community rights. (CO9)

Without someone on the ground actively engaging people to take action in their community, promoting and supporting the use of community rights, then disempowered communities are less likely to make use of community rights. (CO11)

Promotion

Government could do more to publicise community rights. One suggestion was for a national marketing campaign so that communities knew about the rights and could not be hijacked by unrepresentative bodies or given confused messages. Another was for a matrix highlighting key Neighbourhood Plan (or community right) characteristics, achievements and lessons learnt.

Government also needed to do more to encourage local authorities to participate in this agenda, to work with communities and to ensure that they were up to speed. Frustrated that in some cases, local councils are not sufficiently geared up, one CO urged a more strategic approach at local level:

Encourage local authorities to take a strategic joint up approach in their support and approach to neighbourhood planning and community rights. This would I feel reduce the number of unexpected developments that lead to mistrust between different community groups and the local authority due to sporadic engagement. (CO19)

Legislation

Two comments were directly related directly to this. One was that legislation needed to be strengthened to enable communities and local authorities to stand against powerful developers and landowners:

There needs to be much more detail in the legislation that supports councils to stand against the rich and powerful landowners/developers. The current legislation is too vague when it comes to the community's rights and is bureaucratic and too formal for communities to be able to interact with. (CO23)

Ultimately, it is easy to get an ACV but difficult to do anything with it. Lots of groups have fallen by the wayside. (Advisor)

Secondly, government could do more to encourage partnerships, where communities could not take on assets themselves, as suggested in the previous section.

Training

COs felt they could now train others – other COs and communities but also local authorities – in this agenda. But if government is to promote further training of COs, this agenda should be part of the CO basic training. And if they are to support rights, COs also need training in social enterprise.

5.3 And for others interested in this agenda?

No one said: Don't! But one or two advised others to think long and hard about whether this will give the community what it wants and warned groups against taking over local authority services unless they are clear that these are best run at a community level. The Right to Challenge was a particularly difficult option given potential competition from large private firms while, as we have seen, it is important to realise that getting an asset registered is only the beginning of the process. Groups pursuing this agenda need to map community needs against the asset they have in mind and to have a clear vision of what they want to do with it if they are to bring the rest of the community on board, secure funding or issue community shares. They need to gear up to be able to run a community enterprise. If this is not realistic, they need to consider how else they can gain access to the space they need.

Others were more upbeat. The most common message was to be realistic about the time it takes, take time to build capacity and to take one step at a time: *'slow and steady wins the race'*. COs advised others to do their

homework/ their research, to connect with people who have been down this road and learn from them, also to use all the resources available.

Be prepared for a challenge in a positive and negative way. Read a lot, talk to experts a lot, invite different people to the table, look for similar cases to yours, network a lot! (CO24)

They also reiterated some common community organising messages – not to do for others what they can do for themselves, to keep communicating, to stay connected to the CO network.

5.4 Messages for future programmes

There is considerable learning from the COM Fund that would be of value in future government programmes, although not all would be generalisable beyond the specific aims of this programme. However, there are some general observations that may be helpful.

Time

We appreciate the challenges involved in securing funding for a programme of this kind in times of austerity but familiar messages emerge about the time that is needed to build confidence and capacity in communities and about sustainability. As one programme ends and others start, momentum is lost at community level. Uncertainty about the future inevitably affects the final stages of a programme as those involved look for employment elsewhere. There is also some learning about the timing of a programme. In several cases, work on the programme could only start in earnest in January, because the Christmas period intervened, which gave COs six months to achieve the programme aims.

Reporting

We received different messages about reporting requirements. While some COs found them excessive, others – as we have seen - compared them favourably with the requirements of the earlier COP. We were struck by the value of the blogs COs produced as a way of communicating what they were doing. As evaluators, we found them a really helpful resource. However, we are aware that some COs struggled. Maybe future programmes could consider how to experiment with different ways of reporting and use social media as an effective alternative to traditional methods.

Mentoring

Few programmes give enough attention to the emotional demands of working in disadvantaged, diverse and sometimes conflicted communities. Provision for one-to-one mentoring support, especially for isolated workers can prevent burnout and increase their effectiveness. This would also be useful for COs needing specialist expertise beyond the scope of the programme. COs could either identify a proposed mentor local to them and or draw on a small pool of advisors recruited by the programme.

Continuous development training

The programme also provided valuable information about the kind of training COs will need to step up to the next stage. The principles of community organising as developed through the COP and now enshrined in COLtd will continue to be at the centre of their practice. However, as community organising is used to advance a range of agendas, organisers and the residents they work with need access to other kinds of expertise. These include:

- Business planning
- Fundraising, commissioning and tendering
- Understanding local political and service systems
- Specialist expertise, depending on the Programme
- Social enterprise development and management
- Organisational development

COs have found the opportunities for networking with peers and visits to each other others' areas invaluable in developing their practice. Time and resources for this should be built in to future programmes as part and parcel of approaches to training and learning.

Review

Reflection is a key principle of community organising and the provision for this and for contact with others in the programme was greatly valued. This is a key learning point for other programmes, which rarely allow for this important resource. But, even in a short programme like this, provision for a review of support and supervision mechanisms part way through could also be valuable. And, while internet groupings and webinars are a useful resource, they need to be supplemented by face-to-face contact. The evaluation allowed for this and it was much valued.

Other local provision

Experience of a range of national programmes at local level suggests that they often operate in isolation. There would be considerable value in ensuring collaboration and sharing of experience as well as ensuring that COs are fully aware of the potential of linking into other programmes – Power To Change being a case in point. On a slightly different note, COs and local residents often found that initiatives and directives coming from other government departments (e.g. in connection with planning) contradicted what they were trying to achieve.

Summary of recommendations

The COM Fund has demonstrated that CO can make a contribution to promoting community knowledge and use of neighbourhood planning and community rights. At several points in the evaluation, we asked COs what their top messages to government would be. These are summarised below:

Box 11: Messages to government

To promote neighbourhood planning and community rights

- Strengthen the community right to bid by making the community's bid preferential/give it priority
- Allow more transparency: make it easier for communities to find out who owns assets, make a list of council assets; enforce the requirement for councils to have a community asset register
- Support communities by providing better training for local authority officers and councillors on community rights (there is a lot of misunderstanding).
- Provide more information resources in a simple/easy to understand format
- Fund capacity building programmes for small community organisations e.g. on governance, finance, business planning, getting a tender ready, working together
- Invest in people who have been trained in CO to continue to organise and pass on skills/ be a resource for local groups, rather than corporations like AECOM who don't understand the process and parachute in.
- Allow flexibility – if CO is to help to deliver specific objectives, it needs to be flexible and not overly constrained by funding conditions
- Allow for the time needed to bring this agenda to fruition - short-term funding pulls the rug out just as communities are getting going.
- Find ways of encouraging communities to work in partnership with others, especially where they don't have the resources or ambition to take on an asset themselves
- Find ways to link programmes to promote the Localism agenda into other community programmes, such as Big Local and Power to Change
- Liaise with other government departments to ensure that other requirements, particularly in relation to planning, take the Localism agenda fully into account

For future support of community organising and community programmes in general

- Allow adequate time and plan for continuity – short-term programmes mean momentum and valuable experience is lost
- The experience of blogs in this Programme suggests that future programmes should consider how to experiment with different ways of reporting on progress and offer social media as an alternative to traditional methods, where appropriate
- Provision for one-to-one mentoring support where this is not otherwise available can help organisers with the emotional stresses of their work as well providing specialist expertise where this is needed
- As community organising is built into a range of programmes, provision needs to be made for further training, particularly in business planning, and understanding/negotiating local political and service systems
- A lot of support can be provided on-line but this should not substitute for complement opportunities for face-to-face support and discussion

Section 6: Case Studies

The case studies are based on telephone conversations with the COs, at least two site visits to each area, observation of meetings, interviews with residents and volunteers, employers and other stakeholders as appropriate. Where quotes are unattributed, they are taken from the COs.

Case study areas were identified through a review of all areas based on a purposive sampling framework to identify a range of types of area, stage of progress and focus (e.g. type of Community Right). The sampling framework was agreed by a steering board but was used to guide selection and applied in a pragmatic way in so far as it is possible to achieve a wide range in only five case studies. The case study sites were:

- Bordesley Green, Birmingham
- Cheetham Hill, Manchester
- Coombe Road, Brighton
- Sneinton, Nottingham
- Warminster

6.1 COM Fund Case study summary: Bordesley Green, Birmingham

Background/ context

Bordesley Green in Birmingham is an ethnically diverse area with a majority South Asian population and a high proportion of non-English speakers. About a third are immigrants to the UK, including most recently Romanians. There are few locally based services and amenities and St Pauls Crossover is the only community organisation providing a range of welfare and support services.

Kaneez has been working in Bordesley Green since March 2013. She is hosted by St Pauls Crossover, where she is involved in other activities as well as COM Fund work. When she joined she was one of a team of five, but over the years, her co-workers have left.

Local issues and the COM Fund

Key issues for local residents are the lack of activities, in particular for women, and the local Heritage Park (the Ideal Park), which is the only green space in the area, but has been neglected for some time. As a result, it has been vandalised, subject to petty crime and antisocial behaviour and used as a dumping ground. Residents want to use the park but, while it has improved recently, they still feel unsafe there.

The COM Fund offered an opportunity to support residents in transforming the park, to train them in the potential use of community rights and to find ways that residents could work with a range of partners to improve access and use of the park.

Progress

Since she first started work in Bordesley Green, Kaneez has supported local residents in setting up a gardening group, which is going from strength to strength. Before the COM Fund came into operation she also helped establish a women's walking group, supported volunteers to hold a "bazaar in the Ideal Park" and gathered lots of ideas for bringing the park back into use as a valuable community asset.

The COM Fund has allowed her to build on this by carrying out more listenings, and to make contact with some of the area's newer communities, with a view to setting up a Friends Group. However, after an initial meeting with local residents and other interested parties, she was contacted by a local resident who said he had already set up a Friends Group. Having met with him and some local councillors, it became clear that there were very different interests that needed to be reconciled in relation to the park, particularly between some of those whose homes backed onto the park, the women Kaneez had been working with, who wanted opportunities to come to the park with their children, and the newer communities who were already using the park.

Since then, Kaneez has been trying to find ways of bringing the different interests together and ensuring that the women that she has contacted



through her listenings have a voice. She has continued to support her volunteers, organised a training session in community organising, community rights and the *Our Place* approach, arranged a visit to another community managed park in the city (Witton Lodge) and begun to network with others across Birmingham. She has also extended her Bordesley Green boundary to increase listenings across the area and assess the potential for community use of nearby parks. In addition, using her recently acquired knowledge, she is now considering whether there is any scope for a neighbourhood plan and whether that might help to build relationships across the area.

The contribution of community organising

Kaneez' work in relation to the park is based on some 500 listenings. She has drawn together an informal group of volunteers and has begun to develop links with appropriate agencies, such as the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, the Parks Department, local schools and the community police, as well as with Friends Groups across the city.

She has been able to develop her work with local women. The walking group has linked up with a walking group at a local school and now also has access to a local gym twice a week. Confidence has grown amongst the women – on a personal level but also in their capacity to take action.

It was Kaneez who encouraged us, gave us the confidence to come out. I knew I could do it, but I didn't. If you want to do something, you just have to say you're going to do it. Kaneez played her role, now I have the confidence to speak up in meetings.

Working as a volunteer for this project has raised the level of my confidence and improved communication skills. I made contacts with people whom I never met before. All these have increased my mobility. Couple of months ago, I have successfully passed a job interview and started working as a school dinner supervisor.

I believe working as a volunteer has changed my vision of life and has encouraged others to join in to this mission. The project is a changing agent and has created positive impact on my life and on others who also came forward to volunteer. I would like to make the Ideal park project successful.

(Volunteers)

Opportunities presented by the COM Fund

- **Time and focus:** The COM Fund has made it possible for Kaneez to focus on the issues around the park as well as identifying other local issues.

The funding has covered the costs of putting on training sessions, bringing in a CO from another area to help deliver the training. This has resulted in uncovering issues that St Paul's Crossover was not previously aware of e.g. local youth homelessness, and in recruiting some new volunteer community organisers. The money has also resourced meetings and the visit to a community managed park.

- **Knowledge and tools:** She has gained knowledge about the Localism agenda but also about other approaches that will help to develop work with the park. To this end, she has developed a simplified version of the *Our Place* logic model and operational plan approach to share with local people.
- **Volunteer training and recruitment:** The training session held in May – with the input of a CO colleague from outside Birmingham – has resulted in three young unemployed people volunteering as trainee community organisers.

Ongoing Challenges

Reconciling differences within the community: There are different aspirations for the park. Some residents want it left exactly as it is. Others want to see it better used, with benches, flower beds and facilities for children. Any uses have to be sensitive to those who live adjacent to the Park. There was some resentment in parts of the community when it was perceived that a group of Romanians had started to spend time in the park. Kaneez has sought to broaden understanding of the varying interests through listenings with different community groupings and reports on her blog (<https://idealparkbirmingham.wordpress.com>)

Local leadership: There is a history of friction between existing community leaders and St Paul's Crossover, Kaneez' employer. The Chair of the Friends Group has good links with the police and the Council but local Asian women, who traditionally have not had a voice, find it difficult to be heard let alone to put forward alternative views. Kaneez has tried to furrow an independent role as the CO, building relationships with all community leaders so that differences might be reconciled and a range of voices are heard.

Ownership: No-one seems to know who owns the park, although there is an assumption that it is the council. However, It is unclear who can grant permission for an open day or be held to account for the park upkeep – is it the council, the Friends' Group or someone else?

Support: Kaneez has been isolated, as the only community organiser left in the area, and in trying to balance tensions between groups and organisations in the area.

Resources: After many months, some new relationships are being built, volunteers are becoming more confident, Kaneez is broadening her networks across the area and the city, and the visit to Witton Lodge park was inspiring. However, the visit reinforced the need for a budget for park development and management, in addition to a base of committed volunteers and there appears to be no further funding to take this work forward.

6.2 COM Fund Case Study: Cheetham Hill, Manchester

Background/context

Anna began her community organising in Stockport in 2012. During that time she supported a group of local Polish residents to open a Polish library and community hub in a space at the Welcome Centre - a community centre in Cheetham Hill, Manchester. Anna has supported the group to run activities in the hub, to listen to others using the hub and in the surrounding area, and to develop broader networks. These include Wai Yin, a long established organisation led by Chinese women, which manages the centre, and organisations further afield that are focused around migrant communities.

Local issues and the COM Fund

There is a lack of accessible, affordable housing in Manchester. Some of the Polish residents Anna was working with had a vision of building eco-houses and Anna suggested that they apply to the COM Fund for her support time, as well as funds for training. There is now a steering group of around seven people and their families – Hay Habitat - with support from volunteers, both Polish and English.

The aim was to use the Fund to support the group in a preliminary learning phase: to raise awareness about community rights (especially amongst those with language barriers); to promote the possibilities of eco community led housing schemes; to develop an appropriate legal and organisational structure for Hay Habitat; to engage more residents and develop wider networks; and to build relationships with relevant bodies e.g. the council and finance institutions. This would then set the group up to progress their plans to identify and secure a piece of land and build community housing, maybe using the right to build.

Progress

The CO and some volunteers have accessed a range of relevant **training**, including community rights training, training in building houses with straw bales, and a leadership training programme for ten volunteers run over three weekends and covering listening skills, assertiveness, small group development and leadership skills. The group has also met with the co-housing network at an event in Leeds.

The group has been successful in **engaging more people** – the number of volunteers has expanded and includes more people with relevant skills. Volunteers are helping to spread the word through social media and newsletters, for example, and the group now has over 1,000 followers on Facebook.

The group has begun to **build positive relationships with the council**. Officers there have helped group members to explore what would be involved in putting together a proposal for an asset transfer, which is what they would ideally like to do. The fact that the council would actually consider transferring land to them has been a great boost, although identifying the land will not be

easy (see below). In the meantime, the group needs to develop a business plan and has been working with an accountant who can help with costings.

The group is also developing a **blueprint for the houses** with the help of Straw Works, a building and training organisation, and there is a clearer idea of what the houses will look like and how they will be built.

Incorporation has taken time but the group (Hay Habitat) is now ready to form a Community Land Trust (which isn't a legal entity but ensures an asset lock so that the housing they build is always affordable) and to incorporate as a Community Benefit Society.

The contribution of community organising

Anna's training and experience as a CO has enabled her to build links with a range of groups and officials (unlike many in the Polish community who struggle to feel confident in their dealings with 'the state'). She has been able to encourage the group to believe that what they want to do is possible.

Anna has done a lot of things that no one else wanted to do e.g. the bureaucracy, connecting us to lawyers, the council. Can be undervalued – a lot of effort. She was the one who made connections and brought the group together. She knows where to look for possible funding, gives us hope – she has moved us forward a lot. (Volunteer)

Wai Yin, the centre managers, have been impressed by community organising as helping root the centre in the community it serves as well as providing a bridge between different communities. The plan is for Wai Yin and Hay Habitat to work more closely together, particularly in relation to affordable community led housing.

Anna has also been able to do some of the things that local residents don't have the time to do e.g. funding applications, making connections with other relevant interest groups and networks. Many of the volunteers don't have time during the week to meet with council officers, for example, as their only availability is at weekends and some evenings.

Opportunities presented by the COM Fund

- **Knowledge:** Anna has been able to develop and share her knowledge around community housing and community rights and the funding has enabled the group to buy in training and expertise in relation to structure and legal issues and straw bale building.
- **Events:** It has also allowed them to hold three open days



with Straw Works, which helped to bring in more volunteers.

- **Volunteers:** Anna's listenings in different parts of Manchester have brought in new volunteers who have worked with her to spread knowledge about the Localism Act. She and a volunteer (Asha) now find themselves informing other groups at the Wellcome Centre and elsewhere not only of their rights but also the potential for neighbourhood planning in Cheetham Hill.

Have more knowledge about the technicalities. Can show others how to do it. (Volunteer)

Challenges

The complexity of the right to build: The right to build is not easy to explain to other residents and centre users and residents need a lot of knowledge to take it forward. It also involves a great deal of bureaucracy – planning permissions etc.

They have no experience of anything like this and don't believe they have the skills. They think that it is for professionals, not for them.

In addition, the group has struggled with the council's requirement for a business plan before discussion about land can take place – Hay Habitat doesn't feel it can cost a business plan until it has identified some land.

Time: The timescale of the Fund is too short. The project has gained momentum but there are lots of questions still unanswered and it is not easy to see which way the project will go in the future. In addition, local residents are volunteers and don't have much time.

Access to affordable land and planning permission: There is no searchable database and most of the affordable land auctioned by the council doesn't have planning permission. Straw Works have several examples of local authorities elsewhere turning down applications to register land, while the big social housing providers work with local councils and earmark land for themselves. Hay Habitat is of the opinion that councils need to make land more available to self builders.

It has been difficult to find **support from other organisations**. Even where it is forthcoming, e.g. from the local infrastructure body and the council, it has taken longer than Anna expected, often due to lack of resources.

Cultural issues: Anna has found that Polish people are often distrustful of local authorities and reluctant to build relationships, assert their rights or accept support. They need to see something happen before they will be convinced.

6.3 COM Fund case study summary: Coombe Road, Brighton

Background

Coombe Road is a densely populated area off one of the main routes out of Brighton, with two university campuses situated close by. Parts of the area fall into the 10% most deprived communities in the country. It has seen a dramatic change in its population in the past 10 years with many streets now consisting of up to 60% of Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) - mostly student housing.

Dot Kirk came to Brighton Students Union as a community organiser in 2013 after her training year and has worked across the University of Brighton campuses. She met residents of the Coombe Road area shortly before the COM Fund was announced in the autumn of 2015.

Local issues and the COM Fund

Long-term Coombe Road residents are worried by the population changes in the area and the impact that a transient population has upon community identity, civic pride, local businesses and social cohesion. They would like to see a community hub and communal green space where long- and short-term residents can meet and where activities can take place. But several potential spaces have been lost over the years, including most recently a church building that was converted into flats.



The Lectern pub dates back to 1881 and is one of the last remaining community buildings in the area. It has changed hands twice over the past two years and is now standing empty. In response to plans to sell the pub, local residents formed a Steering Group to try to save the Lectern and apply for ACV status.

Progress

The Coombe Road group achieved ACV status for the LECTERN in mid January 2016. After several attempts, they have managed one meeting with the owners but this was attended only by the agent for the building and residents found it quite intimidating – to the extent that one key group member has since withdrawn. By that time, members had also decided that right to bid was not a realistic option for them. Instead they discussed the possibility of forming a partnership with potential bidders, from local microbreweries to the University or students union. They launched a campaign to Save the LECTERN and carried out listenings and a survey to find out how local residents would like to see the space used.

Group members also decided that, while they would continue to work to save the LECTERN for community use, they would also explore alternative options for community space in the area. There is a large development planned at the old Preston Barracks site nearby and Dot has held some initial conversations with the architects there. She has also involved community media students at the University in making a video about the Coombe Road area and has made contact with the local school, where she will be running a listening session with the pupils.

In May, the group found out that the LECTERN's owners had challenged the ACV ruling. It was given only a week's notice of the oral hearing, which 'came out of the blue', and the Chair was only advised 48 hours before the meeting that the group would have to make a written submission. Dot brought in an expert to help to prepare the submission and the group nominated him as the spokesperson for the group. The hearing was very formal - the owners had hired a barrister as their spokesperson - and the Coombe Road delegation found it 'adversarial, tense and intimidating'.

The ACV status has been upheld. However, the owners may take the appeal further and group members have continued to discuss alternatives. They also realise that if they are to progress their ambition of getting a community space they need to have a clear vision – to put to potential partners and to residents or, indeed, if the owners take them to court. As a first step, they plan to hold an event for the community media students to share their work with local residents.

The contribution of community organising

The listenings and the survey – COs and volunteers have spoken to some 150 people - have provided **a wealth of evidence** on what local residents would like to see in the LECTERN, which Dot was able to present at the appeal hearing.

In addition, community organising meant that group members had **someone 'on their side'**, who was able to help them through some difficult circumstances. Dot has helped to give the group **structure and focus** members on the need to develop a clear vision to support their case. And she has been the conduit for contacts with the community media students, the school, the Preston Barracks architects.

Talking face to face with people is the best way. You can see people and judge the mood of the conversation in a way you can't over social media. It's the best way to discuss things, get opinions...

She's got connections. And she's got more energy than the rest of us put together. Without her we wouldn't have the expertise, enough time or energy.
(Volunteer)

Opportunities provided by the COM Fund

- **Time:** the COM Fund has paid for a few hours of Dot's time in a week. This meant that she was able to put in the time required to research and write the submission for the hearing at extremely short notice. Hattie, who was a VCO, is also working two paid days a week with Dot and, in May, Dot brought another volunteer on board to help with admin.
- **Knowledge:** Dot has been able to research and feed in information about community rights and ACV status.
- **Expertise:** Without the COM Fund they wouldn't have had the resources to state their case in the appeal.
- **Events:** The funding will also be used to put on the planned event on the Preston Barracks site.

Challenges

Time: Dot is managing 5 staff and 20 volunteers in her students' union work. She only has 2 or 3 paid hours a week on COM Fund work.

The legislation: While group members really appreciate the potential of the Localism agenda, they felt that the cards were stacked against them. They fear that there is no effective guarantee against the owners leaving it empty while the ACV is in place or even demolishing it. Right to Bid was too high a mountain to climb – while group members wanted the pub in community ownership, they didn't know where they would find the money or time to run it. Running a community building/pub requires training and expertise in community enterprise, in addition to the expertise in community organising and the community rights that the COM Fund provides.

The appeal process: The group really appreciated the fact that the Council seemed to be on their side. But the appeal process was particularly bruising because of the extremely short notice given to them about the appeal – effectively the group had to get its written submission together in 24 hours and they also had to ask to see the evidence from the other side in advance. Had members known about the appeal earlier, they wouldn't have invested so much energy in trying to meet with the owners.

Participation: The group really needs more committed members if it is to mobilise the community behind its campaign to achieve a community space. Community organising is about residents taking control, but it has taken time to establish the group, gather evidence through listenings and build a strong community base.

6.4 COM Fund case study summary: Sneinton, Nottingham

Background/context

Sneinton is a diverse area. It has high levels of deprivation and a multicultural, migrant and student population at the same time as containing conservation areas, heritage sites and an area of potential development and gentrification near the river.

The two community organisers, each contracted for a day a week to support the Neighbourhood Plan agenda are Steve and Shabana, both COs since early 2012. They have been hosted by Sneinton Alchemy (SA) throughout that time and have already done lots of listening and consultation. The minute that the Localism Act was announced, Sneinton Alchemy realised that neighbourhood planning could potentially work for Sneinton. The community organisers supported the setting up of Sneinton Neighbourhood Forum (SNF), which applied for designation as an area to create a Neighbourhood Plan. This was approved by Nottingham City Council in February 2015. The process was not without its challenges, however; there was political hostility from some councillors, and approval was for an area smaller than that desired by the residents (parts of Sneinton were removed from the designated area).

Local issues and the COM Fund

Neighbourhood planning has been the key driver in use of the COM Fund. Other issues and proposals for action, however, are surfacing through listenings all the time. Lack of community cohesion is a particular issue and further issues in relation to health and the loss of services, such as the library and Sure Start have emerged during the COM Fund period.

Progress

Sneinton Alchemy wanted to raise awareness around the opportunities of neighbourhood planning, build a strong network of residents through the SNF, and collect further evidence to inform the content of the neighbourhood plan. The decision to remove parts of the area was a blow to the Forum, *'took the wind out of our sails'*, and although it had fifty members signed up in early 2015, some had dropped out and the Forum had stagnated in the period that Sneinton Alchemy was without resources to pay for CO support. There was a need to engage and activate potential new Forum members.

In the first week of January 2016, 5,000 newsletters were hand-delivered through everybody's letterbox. These included an introduction to the project, information about the Localism Act and the Neighbourhood Plan and a timeline of activity. A first event, 'I love Sneinton' took place in February and attracted some 130 people. This was followed by further newsletters, events and training workshops. The community events have been made accessible to the whole community through use of a community café and music – bringing people through the door who wouldn't normally attend meetings. There have been lots more listenings, including with existing local leaders, such as the chair of the Tenants and Residents Association and local councillors, as it is important *'to listen to people in authority'*.

Work has also developed around other local issues, including a 'use it or lose it' campaign. This has involved networking and partnership working with other agencies - a researcher from the university is doing a study around how places, cohesion and health interact at the local level, and a Global Health Exchange project piggy backed on an 'I love Sneinton' event and carried out its own listenings.

CO role

The listening process had already identified people and networks prior to the COM Fund and supported engagement in SNF – it had 55 members in Spring 2015.

That feels to me like the hugest success, that's my proudest thing, we've got these 55 people together talking about what we're going to do next...

The COs see their role as engaging people, listening to people, informing people of their rights, waking up the area, facilitating further involvement and mobilising some of the people who haven't been on board. They are known in the area and can give people the full picture. They are the 'go-to' people if anything is needed.

The community organisers have the skills to get people on side. Community organising has become one of SA's most proactive arms and the board now takes on community organising values.

Sneinton has a successful track record in working with volunteers; indeed it piloted the VCO training programme in 2014. This has been developed as part of the COM Fund work and six university students have been trained in CO and helped with the listening and analysing process.

Opportunities presented by the COM Fund

- **Strategic development:** SA see the Localism Act and neighbourhood planning as a way to self-determine how their communities are developed and services are delivered – to create the place they want to grow. It is an opportunity to move from small projects (through listenings) to policy change and more strategic oversight.
- **Time and resources:** Residents want neighbourhood planning to happen but have little time to spare, so the support COs can give them is essential.
- **Revitalisation:** SNF already existed but the Fund has given it a bit of a kick – to mobilise the troops. The Fund has enabled the COs to raise awareness and match this with local passion.
- **Connections:** The COM Fund has enabled the COs to bring together a wider network of support, staff and students from two universities, public health officers and others from the local authority. The councillors now want to meet SNF. They want to talk about how they can work better together as a priority:

All our relationships have got better and better....

.....COM Fund has enabled understanding to be built, and liaison with planners and the council has been vital.

- **Further developments:** The CO work has created the conditions for more developments in the future e.g. there is an appetite for health work to be picked up through different organisations working together.

Challenges

Boundaries: Disappointment about the neighbourhood plan boundary as approved by Nottingham County Council.

Promoting the agenda: Not many people are aware of the community rights agenda or neighbourhood planning, and the COs in Sneinton believe that people stop having a vision if they don't think that they can do anything about it.

Attitudes within the council: Council members and officers would also benefit from a better understanding of community rights and neighbourhood planning. One officer persuaded some local residents that it wasn't worth being involved and this has contributed to the Tenants and Residents Association, who have a close relationship to the council, also being sceptical of the idea of a plan. Where there are local authority allies, this appears to be more individual than organisationally driven, and cuts to local authority budgets have reduced officer capacity to provide support.

A strategic approach: Neighbourhood planning involves big thinking – COs can raise awareness but then this needs to sit in someone's mind until the penny drops. Service transformation requires being both pragmatic and systematic, and it takes time:

Councils are happy to deal with land and property, they're happy to deal with engagement and stuff like that, but that bit in the middle... the service transformation bit is where 'the rubber meets the road' because that's the main bulk of provision for communities. We've got to be able to influence and change the existing services that are here to suit the communities. But there's a lot of resistance around.
(Volunteer)

...Those three strands of work: engagement at grass roots, that bit in the middle and the strategic, every one of them are as equally important for me. Because for the needs at grass roots to become sustainable [people] need to be informed and shape policy. (Volunteer)

Time and resources: Both are at a premium in Sneinton Alchemy and six months of part-time community organisers is not enough.

Participation: Some people in Sneinton are very active and passionate about changing their area for the better. But they are busy and more people are needed. In areas such as Sneinton however, there is also a lot of poverty and many people are more concerned with managing their lives, ('dealing with their mental health and putting food on the table'), than going to meetings about a neighbourhood plan.

6.5 COM Fund case study summary: Warminster

Background

Warminster has a population of some 24,000 but is relatively rural compared to other Wiltshire towns. It has a large military community and is entering a period of considerable growth with nearly 2,000 new houses identified as needing to be built between 2006 and 2026 as part of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, causing considerable pressure on local infrastructure.

The three COs involved have been employed by Wiltshire Community First since 2013, working across the County but not in Warminster until the COM Fund came along. Between them they have 28 hours a week to devote to the Fund – when one of the three left in May, his hours were shared between the remaining two. They have other commitments in the rest of their time.

Local issues and the COM Fund

Four neighbourhood plans in Wiltshire had gone to referendum by the time the COM Fund started, with an average turnout of 33%. The COM Fund offered an opportunity to see whether organising in an area that was at referendum stage could achieve a higher turnout. The aim would initially be to boost engagement with the plan through CO listenings, but also to build a platform for stronger local engagement in the future, with increased turnout in the unitary elections in 2017 a longer term objective.

Progress

At the time the COM Fund application was put in, the neighbourhood plan was with Wiltshire Council for review. The COs anticipated a referendum in May, which would have fitted well with the COM Fund timetable. However, a local landowner complained that he had not been consulted which led to delays. In the meantime, the COs met with the Town Council Neighbourhood Planning Group and, at the COs' suggestion, a smaller subcommittee was established to steer the COM Fund work. Although there was some wariness, at first all went well, but the subcommittee's second meeting coincided with the publication of the County's Master Plan, with proposals for additional housing that appeared to contradict the neighbourhood plan. Members were concerned that door knocking might lead to a negative vote (partly because of confusion with the Master Plan proposals for housing) and effectively waste all the years of work that they had put into the plan.

A meeting with the Town Clerk eased the situation and set clear terms of engagement for the COs:

I didn't want them to try and influence people's voting but to inform them of the process and to see if we could get more people interested so they would come out to vote'.

Since then they have done some 300 listenings between them and met with considerable interest on the doorstep. However, the referendum is unlikely to take place before the autumn. The Town Council have now received the examiners' report on the plan and at the time of writing this report, it is in the hands of the County Council to set a date.

The COs feel they have received 'a very warm welcome in Warminster from residents who have expressed that it is nice to have people knocking on their doors as they do not usually find that this happens in their area'. The overall message is that people do really want to get involved and vote on the neighbourhood plan as it affects them at a local level, but that they lack knowledge of the plan and all it entails. The COs have compiled a list of people who wish to be kept informed to pass onto the Town Council and this has proved very popular, with most of the people they speak to wanting to sign up to it.

The contribution of CO

For the Town Council the opportunity to benefit from the COM Fund programme was a really helpful offer. Through their listenings, community organisers could make the process less formal, more inclusive:

They have been able to get out on the ground, which is something we would not have had the time to do, nor the experience possibly, and talk to people, particularly those who are hard to reach. A wide spread of areas in the town have been covered which reflects a cross section of the population.... They have managed to speak to approx. 300 people on the door, and dropped 1000 flyers.....Their youth and their open and easy going approach has meant that they can engage better than ourselves, who are more mature. (Officer)

Community First – the COs' employer - has also found community organising valuable more generally as a way of 'engaging with the community in the terms that are important to them. ...Its very easy to see community priorities reflected from a councillor perspective or that of the wonderfully called 'community leaders'.

Door to door listening has been crucial – the COs tried a walkabout in the town but people were too busy going about their business to stop. The Town Council valued their independence.

People's interest [and trust] in local government is waning. The community organisers can cut through all of that... It's the only way to get the message out, much better than politicians or a leaflet

The COs have also been able to meet the subcommittee's concerns that residents might confuse the Neighbourhood Plan with the Master Plan's proposals for new housing developments. They have been able to reframe the conversation, explaining that the Neighbourhood Plan is about bringing in new facilities – shops, schools etc. - and that having it may actually help to limit the number of houses built. Without it there would be nothing to stop the County allowing more development.

Opportunities presented by the COM Fund

- **Engaging local people:** Ideally the COs and their employer feel that it would have been best if community organising had been built into the neighbourhood planning process from the start, but the COM Fund has

provided an opportunity to ensure that neighbourhood plans are not just developed by a small group of people who might not reflect the wider perspective. Or that the referendum has such a low turnout that it is subject to challenge by developers.

- **Focus:** For the COs, the referendum has given them a useful focus in their conversations.
- **Spreading the knowledge:** Community First had also run a DCLG funded roadshow and got the COs involved. As a result CF has had enquiries from organisations and communities across the County to ask about how they can get community organisers involved as a route to finding out what people want in their patch. These other organisations appreciate the fact that the COs are independent.

Challenges

Getting local leaders onside: Until the COs came in, the neighbourhood plan was associated with a small group of people who were very invested in it and understandably nervous about the potential response of the wider public. This initially led to problems in getting everyone on board.

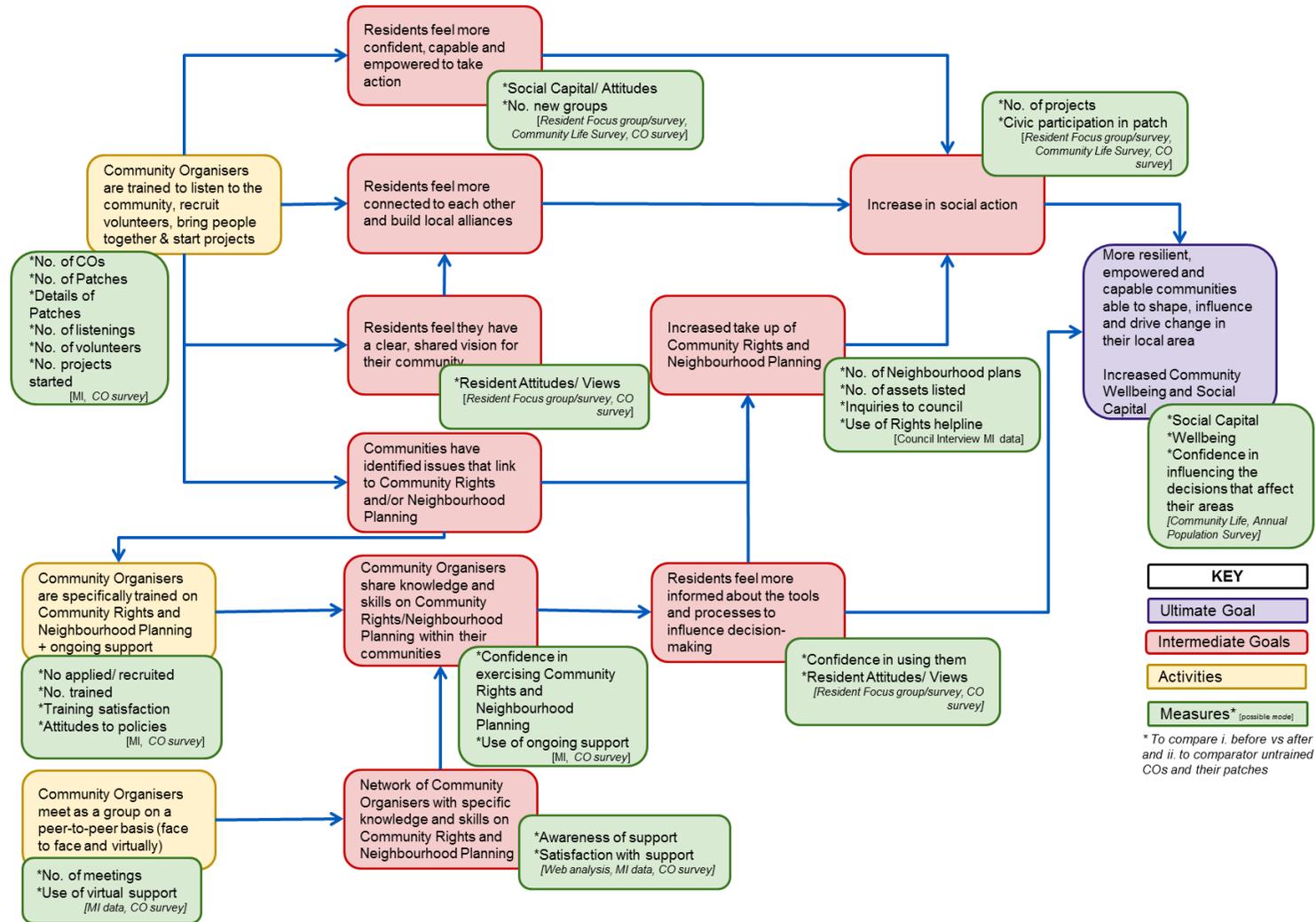
Conflicting plans: The reluctance of some members to engage with the COs and the listening process was exacerbated by the Master Plan. As one of the respondents said: *'People have spent years putting a plan together and then it appears that something like that can just roll across the top of it. It is very disempowering... If a Masterplan is going to wipe out 2-5 years work, you need to know about it'*.

Time: The COs were starting from scratch in Warminster. They were not working full-time on the COM Fund and had little flexibility as they had to fit other projects into the rest of their time. They also had to fit in supervision sessions for the Fund and staff awaydays with their employer. As they have only been doing listenings since May, there has not been time to engage volunteers in the process. However, while the people they are contacting are not interested in door knocking as yet, they would be interested in getting involved in other things. The COM Fund workload does not allow for the COs to pick up on these other agendas and they would have liked the flexibility to be able to do so.

The nature of the process: Neighbourhood planning is a complex process, which has to meet national as well as local requirements. There have also been several delays.

Sustainability: The hope is that the increased interest in the Plan and commitment to voting will be sustained. But, more generally, it is also important to keep listening – *'the world moves on'*. Community First is looking for ways of keeping their COs on as well as replacing the CO who left in May. There is interest from other parts of the County, but there is little funding available to support them.

Appendix 1: COM Fund theory of change



Appendix 2: Glossary of legislative terms

Neighbourhood Plans: Neighbourhood planning was introduced in 2011 through the Localism Act. Neighbourhood planning allows local residents and businesses to have their own planning policies in a neighbourhood plan that reflect their priorities, deliver tangible local benefits and have real weight in planning decisions.

In very simple terms, a neighbourhood plan is:

- A document that sets out planning policies for the neighbourhood area. Planning policies are used to decide whether to approve planning applications.
- Written by the local community, the people who know and love the area, rather than the Local Planning Authority.
- A powerful tool to ensure the community gets the right types of development, in the right place.

A neighbourhood plan is an important document with real legal force, therefore there are certain formal procedures that it must go through.

Community rights: The community rights are a set of powers that give residents a greater say over how their community develops. They can help communities to save local buildings and spaces e.g. shops, pubs, libraries and parks. Groups of people have the chance to deliver local services and develop them into community enterprises.

There are four Community Rights contained within the Localism Act (2012) devolving power from government to communities, local authorities and individuals.

Community Right to Bid: Communities can use the Community Right to Bid to 'pause' the sale of a building or land you care about, giving your community time to develop a bid to buy it.

Community Right to Build: The Right to Build gives communities the power to build new shops, housing or community facilities without going through the normal planning process.

Community Right to Challenge: The Right to Challenge gives local groups the opportunity to express their interest in taking over a local service where they think they can do it differently and better.

Community Right to Reclaim Land: The Community Right to Reclaim Land allows communities to challenge local councils and some other public bodies to release their unused and underused land. As land is held on the behalf of the taxpayer, councils have a duty to use it effectively. The Rights gives communities the power to ensure that they do so.

Appendix 3: Methodology

Imagine took a participatory action research approach to formative and summative evaluation of the Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund programme. This was judged by the evaluators and project steering group to be the most pragmatic approach when taking into account factors such as the purpose and scale of the programme and the time and resource available to undertake this research.

Action research is well suited to formative evaluation and in particular the values and methods of community organising. The strengths of this approach are that it:

- is participatory,
- brings together theory and practice,
- builds knowledge through action and reflection,
- involves practitioners as a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998¹¹) in contributing to this knowledge base and informs their future action,
- is appropriate to people based programmes aiming to bring about social change.

The methods used are detailed in the main report and involved online surveys, participatory workshops, interviews and five case studies. While evidence was gathered mainly from the COs involved in the programme and COLtd, the perspectives of residents and others such as CO employers, local authority officers, VCOs, residents and 'experts' were sought through interviews and observation of meetings in the five case studies.

The time and resource constraints of a relatively small scale programme mean that there are limitations to the conclusions we can draw, which the reader will need to bear in mind:

- The quantitative survey data is based on small sample sizes, reflecting the fact that the overall CO population being surveyed was only 38 individuals.
- The methodology explores in depth the insights collated from the interviews, observations and surveys carried out with COs. However, as noted above, it offers a partial view of the perceptions of other stakeholders. It was simply not feasible to develop case studies for all Community Organiser areas – as such the evidence within this report draws heavily on a small sample of cases which were explored in depth.
- The period of study was too short to allow a rigorous assessment of impact, however, the two online workshops and the two online surveys allowed us to first to establish a baseline of the knowledge and confidence that existed among COs and residents at the outset and

¹¹ [Wenger, Etienne \(1998\). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.](#)

then to assess the distance travelled, as well as to gather feedback on the programme itself.

The evidence in this report should therefore be seen within this context.

Key research questions

The aim of the evaluation was to test and explore the potential role of community organisers in mobilising communities, in particular improving the evidence base for 'what works' in relation to the uptake of community rights and neighbourhood planning.

The high level questions the evaluation sought to address related directly to the programme aims and its theory of change, i.e.:

- The level of knowledge developed by community organisers in relation to community rights and neighbourhood planning
- The contribution of the community organising process to the CR/NP agenda
- The extent to which the network of community organisers, trained both in community organising and in community rights and neighbourhood planning, would enable residents to feel more capable, confident and connected in order to take action on issues they identified that link to the community rights and neighbourhood planning agendas.

Detailed topic guides and survey questions were designed at the start and reviewed as the programme developed in order to identify starting points and context, assess progress in relation to CO's own action plans, identify the contribution of community organising, the role of the Fund, and examples of actions toward social change.

Research activity September 2015 – August 2016

- Contributed to shortlisting criteria for inclusion of Community Organisers in the programme
- Contributed to shortlisting and selection process
- Contributed comments on make up of action learning sets/supervisions groups
- Proposed themes/topic guides for supervision, blogs and e-surveys
- Facilitated planning and evaluation session at COs' induction residential
- Created evaluation dropbox with guidance files and tools
- Designed and collated findings from first e-survey, January 2016 (27 out of 27 COs, 100% response)
- Designed selection criteria for case studies and identified longlist and shortlist
- Designed topic guides for case studies (for COs, volunteers, other stakeholders)
- Selected and negotiated access to five case study areas

- Made a minimum of two visits made to all five areas between March and June 2016; interviews with COs, some residents and volunteers, employers and other stakeholders (e.g. experts)¹²
 - Carried out twenty five telephone interviews (with non case study COs) in April 2016
 - Analysed findings gathered by end of April and produced a summary paper
 - Facilitated May 2016 workshop for COs to discuss and reflect on findings to date, and draw further learning from CO practice in relation to CR/NP
 - Designed and collated findings from second e-survey, May 2016 (26 out of 27 COs, 96% response)
 - Interviews with programme manager and CO action learning sets / supervision facilitator
 - Analysed CO blogs
 - Analysed quarterly reports to programme manager
 - Identified key learning points arising from supervision sessions
 - Drafted final report with case studies
-
- Attended evaluation meetings with OCS, DCLG and CoLtd
 - Liaised throughout with CoLtd

¹² Noted against quotes in text

Appendix 4: Map and blog links for the 27 areas



Location	Region	Blog Links
Cambourne, Cambs	East	http://cambournecommunity.com/
Marsh Farm, Luton	East	https://marshfarmcommunityvoice.wordpress.com/
Sneinton, Nottingham	East Midlands	oursneinton.wordpress.com/
Crinklewood, London	London	http://clitterhouse.com/blog/
Holborn, Camden	London	http://ourholborn.wordpress.com
Tulse Hill, Lambeth	London	https://hightreescommunityorganisers.wordpress.com/
Heaton, Newcastle	North East	https://acornnewcastle.wordpress.com/
North Shields	North East	https://meadowwellmagic.wordpress.com
Manchester, M8	North West	http://opencultureproject.org/
Stretford, Trafford	North West	www.rightinitup.wordpress.com
Rossendale, Lancashire	North West	https://rossendalecomobilisation.wordpress.com/
Broughton, Salford	North West	http://salfordinvolved.co.uk
Stockport	North West	https://stockportcom.wordpress.com/
North Birkenhead	North West	https://bidstonstjamesblog.wordpress.com/
Coombs Road, Brighton	South East	https://reclaimthelectern.wordpress.com/
Brighton	South East	https://bungaroosh.wordpress.com/2015/12/16/the-bungaroosh-story/
Bognor Regis	South East	http://bognorregiscommunityorganising.com
Almondsbury	South West	https://bidstonstjamesblog.wordpress.com/
South Gloucs	South West	https://communityrootscommunityrights.wordpress.com/
St Peters and the Moors, Cheltenham	South West	http://communityrightsbristol.weebly.com/
St Paul's, Bristol	South West	https://glastoco.wordpress.com/
St Mary's and St Benedict's Wards, Glastonbury	South West	
St Just, Cornwall	South West	https://nancherrowyouthproject.wordpress.com/
Warminster, Wiltshire	South West	https://bidstonstjamesblog.wordpress.com/
Bordesley Green, Birmingham	West Midlands	https://idealparkbirmingham.wordpress.com
Shard End, Birmingham	West Midlands	
Highfields and Western Downs, Stafford	West Midlands	https://communityrightsblog.wordpress.com/
Sowerby Bridge, Calderdale	Yorkshire & Humber	https://wearesowerbybridge.wordpress.com

Appendix 5: Examples of blog material: publicity and activity around community rights



Stafford community rights event publicity

Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Begins!

June 8, 2016

Glastonbury’s community-led Neighbourhood Plan – to guide the future development and conservation of our local area – formally gets underway this month, with Mendip District Council holding a consultation on the *physical* area that the plan will cover.



You now have the power to make decisions about how your neighbourhood looks

REGISTER FOR ANY OR ALL WORKSHOPS VIA
<http://communityworkshopswww.eventbrite.com>
 e:mycommunity@high-trees.org or t:0208 671 3132
SPACES ARE LIMITED SO BE QUICK

- Learn how to build powerful networks in the community to give local people a greater say over how their area is run on **Saturday 25th June 10am - 4pm**
- Learn what other rights are available to the community on **Tuesday 28th June 7pm-9pm**
- Learn how to get involved in creating the area you want on **Thursday 30th June 7pm - 9pm**

All workshops are held at High Trees 220 Upper Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2NS

What does it enable you to do?

- Use community organising to put normal people like you at the heart of Neighbourhood plans and to pro-actively foster trust, respect and relationships in the local community
- You can take on buildings in the local community that are under threat of closure.
- You can protect buildings in your community from outside development pressure
- You can help develop guidelines for the types of buildings and shops you would like to see in your area.
- You can help ensure there's funding for the community projects that are important to you.





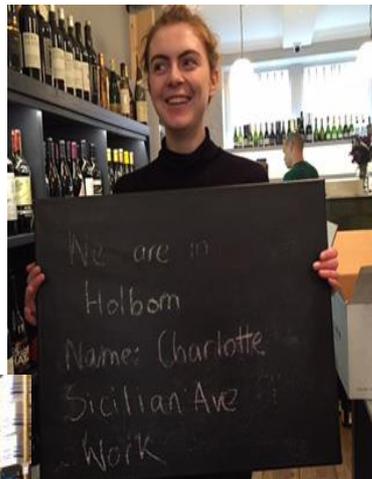
Celebrating achievements posted 6 December, 2015 Clitterhouse Farm,

“By strengthening the networks around Clitterhouse Farm through listening and exploring Community Rights and Neighbourhood Planning, we hope to underpin the Farm’s case for an asset transfer...”

The first COM funded meeting to celebrate this year’s achievements and talk about our future plans. More than thirty people joined us. There was a wide range of ages; several have lived in the area for many years, some had recently moved here whilst others came from further afield.

OurHolborn, Draft Boundary Conversation, adapted from blog post February 2016

Conversations were held with people on the edges of the boundary of Holborn Neighbourhood Forum. The aim was to understand a little more about how local people in the area (working, living and visiting) identify with the neighbourhood. 20 local people completed the sentence ‘We are in...(documented with black boards). This great work was done by two community leaders / volunteers.



Uni-lettings signing. Posted on April 25 by Acorn COs, Newcastle

On Saturday 23rd April, ACORN Newcastle members organised an event to celebrate the first letting agents, Wright Residential, Heaton Property and Uni-Lettings, to sign up to our Ethical Lettings Charter, guaranteeing hundreds of tenants fair treatment and accountability. Several of these have agreed to meet with us to discuss signing up to it.



We launched our renting campaign in December 2015 and already, in just 4 months, we are showing that when the community works together, change can happen! Saturday's event was a follow up to an event we organised on 3rd March, which saw 100 attendees share their experiences renting houses in Newcastle. This shows the strength of feeling in the community.

The Ups and Downs of Mobilising a Community, Safford blog, Posted May, 2016



The volunteers I had previously recruited to help me with the COM fund project to help run the training sessions in community rights decided they would like to come on-board to help and deliver on a green spaces project at the site. It's an idea we have had from the beginning and now it seemed possible to take into action. The site is situated basically outside our front door, so to speak. ...

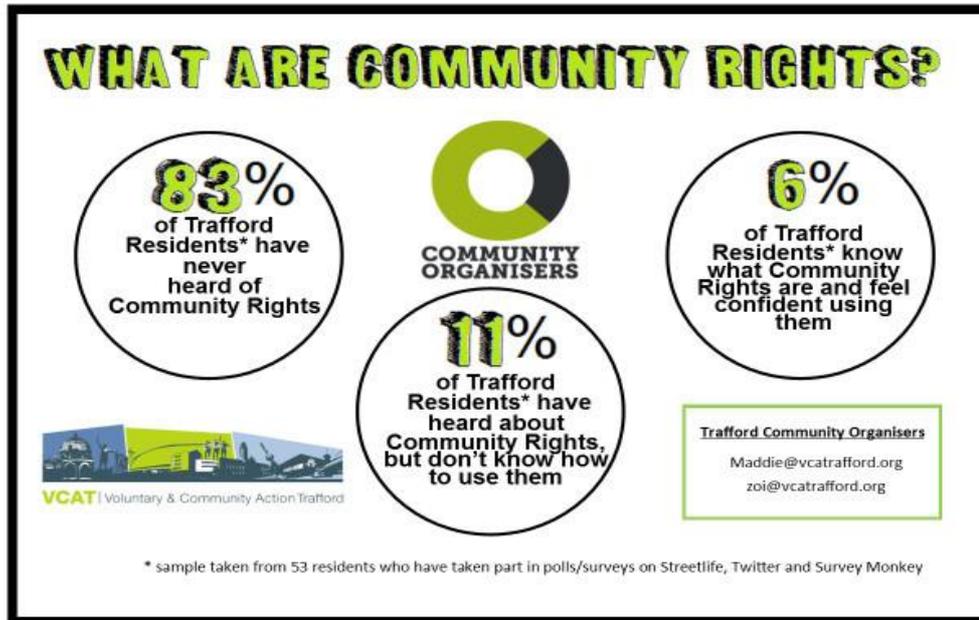
..... We also went on a visit to the Stafford Borough Council and enquired into transferring the area into "community woodland" usage, which the borough envisioned and agreed that the plans could work. We have looked at Stafford towns "Local Plan" and we believe it fits perfectly into place with it....This perfect idea was born sitting around a table having

a break, enjoying a cup of tea with like minded people. Back down to basic grassroots community organising, we decided to waste no time and used the excuse to get out into the fresh air and start to clean up the once beautiful green area. The group is made up of local residents of the area and some volunteers from our community organising work. This is a new story that is just beginning...All in a month of a community organiser mobilising communities...what a job!!

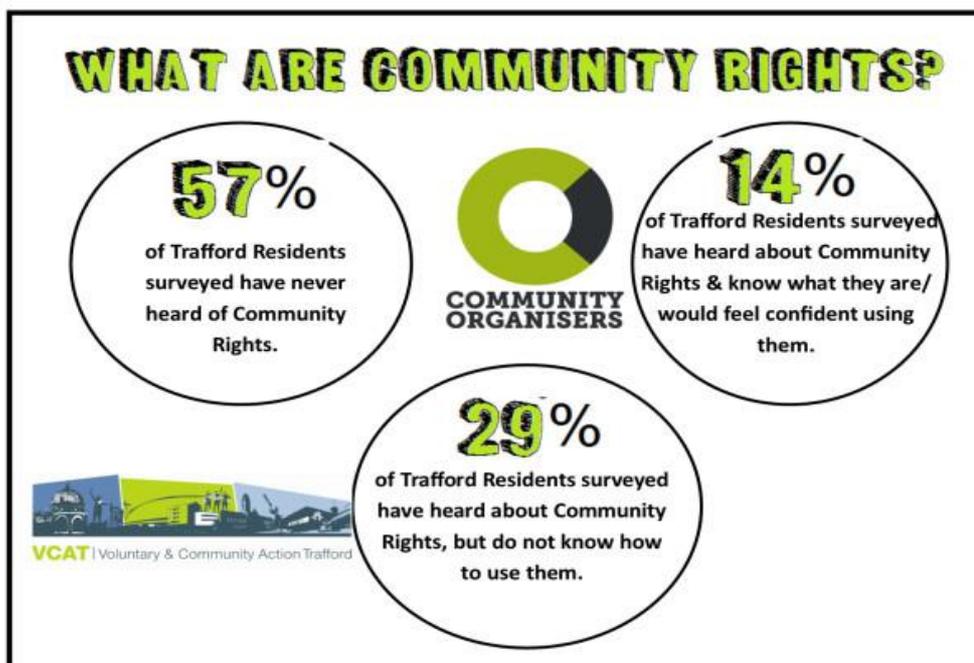
Appendix 6: CO survey on increased awareness and understanding of community rights in Trafford. Blog posted July 2016.

In January we ran a survey on Twitter, Survey Monkey and StreetLife. The question was simply:

“Do you know what Community Rights are?” – These were the results.



Now, 6 months on – we asked the same question, on the same platforms. Here are the results:



As you can see there is a clear difference. It is hard to determine cause and effect. However, it does seem that from the results of the survey, that residents' knowledge of Community Rights has improved in the 6 months.