Welcome to the Local Conversations Practice Guide

This guide has been developed to support lead organisations, practitioners/workers, and residents to do the best work possible in the neighbourhoods in which they work and/or live. It has been produced with a small group of practitioners to make sure it is easily understood and is focusing on the right thing. Thanks to all of them for their valuable contributions.

The guide is for the following people working on the Local Conversations programme:

- Steering Group members and residents
- Front line practitioners
- Managers and senior leaders

The guide is designed to support you if:

- you're new to a Local Conversation
- you've been doing it for a while but could do with a refresher or some new ideas
- you're stuck with some aspect and would like some help

This guide is a 'live' practice tool which means it will change as you add suggestions or as we all learn and develop.

About the guide

The guide is intended to be easy to follow and is in eight sections:

- **Action** – This section looks at taking action as the driving force for the Local Conversation. It explores the different forms of action that may be required to make progress.
- **Approach** – This section looks at the methods you can use when working with local groups of residents in order to arrive and achieve a local vision.
- **Context** – This section is about the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities around you. It explores the economic, social and environmental characteristics of the neighbourhood.
- **Governance** – this section looks at the lead organisation and the Local Conversation steering group. It explores purpose, integrity, decision making and effectiveness, and diversity and openness.
- **Influence** – This section looks at how you make changes happen by influencing locally and nationally and with a range of bodies, organisations and individuals.

- **Involvement** – This section looks at how you can successfully involve local people so that they have the power to bring about change.
- **Leadership** – This section looks at what makes good leadership, why it is important in community settings and how you might do this.
- **Relationships** – This section looks at the importance of relationships for the success of a Local Conversation including with the lead organisation, local partners and public and private sector organisations.

What is the guide for and when will you use it?

- The guide is for practitioners, residents, steering groups, managers and senior leaders and will:
  - Encourage Local Conversations to think about what they are doing well and what they could do with more support
  - Create a place you can turn to when things are going off-track and you may need some support.
  - Provide somewhere to 'refresh' things when you run out of steam.
- We expect all Local Conversations practitioners to use the guide, and for them to discuss relevant sections within their own organisations and with residents.
- As a funder, we may ask you to work through some sections if we think it would benefit your work.
- You do not need to read the guide in the order it is written. You can start wherever it feels right for you. Each section is stand-alone and will point you to other relevant strands.

Getting started with the framework

Start where it feels most helpful for you to start.

We will be running webinars on each section of the guide over the coming weeks and months. It would be great if you could attend all the sessions, or you can choose which section are most relevant to help your Local Conversation

We will also work on a one-to-one basis with you if needed, or suggest you work through parts of each section with a practitioner from another Local Conversation.

Now we have completed the first edition we want you to help us (and your Local Conversation partners) to 'road test' the guide. We would like you to work through two sections over the next four months and give us feedback on what worked well, what didn't and what we can do to make the second edition more relevant to your Local Conversation. We will work with each of the 13 funded projects to ensure each of the eight sections are being tested.

We'd like to hear your feedback

We will regularly update the guide so it stays relevant so stay in touch with us and let us know how useful you find each chapter - as you use it.

Please send us great examples of practice from your Local Conversation that you think should be included.

Let us know any great tools or references that you think could support this framework, through the Facebook page or your Trust link Officer.

IMPORTANT

Action

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at taking **action**. We consider:

1. What we mean by action
2. Why action is important in the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. What you can do to support action, including some practical examples
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts
8. A final exercise

1. What we mean by action

Action, sometimes referred to as community action or social action, focuses on people coming together to improve their local area. It involves people giving their time for the good of their community, in a range of forms – from volunteering, to challenging structures and processes, to the creation of community-owned services.

It is about communities driving change based on their needs and priorities. In a Local Conversation therefore, action refers to everything that is happening under its umbrella to achieve its vision: from the smaller-scale recreational activities right through to taking collective action on the issues impacting the quality of people's lives locally.

2. Why action is important in the Local Conversations programme

The Local Conversations programme supports residents to act on issues in their local area, in ways that matter to them. Effective action can help bring about the change people want to see in their local community.

There are many different types of action that can be taken within a Local Conversation. The starting point is to bring local people together to discuss the issues that are important to them as a neighbourhood and work out the actions required to address them. There are a number of crucial steps to understanding how, when, and on what to take action,

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including getting to grips with the local context, getting residents involved, and defining your approach.

The types of action we would expect to see in a Local Conversation include:

- Working together to improve [social determinants of the community's health](#), for example developing or maintaining local green spaces, employability (CVs and interview prep) or skills development
- Campaigning and lobbying
- Making contacts, networking and developing partnerships with other organisations in order to achieve shared goals
- Allocating or spending money against residents' priorities
- Applying for funding

All of these create an environment where residents actively shape their neighbourhood and its wellbeing. The key thing is to ensure that listening to people moves on to action. See Section 5 below for ways to tackle the above, as well as the Involvement and Approach sections of this guidance.

There are clear links between a Local Conversation's plans for action and plans to influence. These are the two key ways to really make changes to the longer-term, deeper-rooted issues that cause health inequalities and lead to poorer health and shorter lives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Influencing is about persuading or leveraging others in positions of power to bring about the changes you want to see, and has its own section in the Practice Guide. Action is more direct: things you can do, together.

Actions are different to activities. The activities residents want to do, and want to take place through the Local Conversation, are important. They are great ways to engage the community and to build deeper involvement. Often, they might take the place of activities that came before, or play an important role in developing skills: youth clubs, social activities, or English as a Second Language classes. Actions are more geared towards change – challenging the unequal access to power, money and resources that leads to health inequalities, harnessing the strength of collective control and community power, and looking to make a real difference to the quality of jobs and income locally, the local environment or public transport, local economy, housing, or education and skills.

Examples: taking action around food

Grow N22 is a community project in North London which transforms unlikely, disused and neglected spaces across Haringey into vibrant community gardens and food-growing spaces made for and by local people. Grow N22 started as a hobby, but has quickly grown into a Community Interest Company (CIC).

Good Food Oxford has a mission to connect the people of Oxford through food. They established a partnership with FriendLey's. FriendLey's is a local community group aiming to reduce isolation and loneliness in the local community for older people. The group meets every Wednesday morning for tea and cake, games and talks from local Oxford organisations. This provides a space for social connection, food and warmth.

See www.edenprojectcommunities.com/inspiring-stories

Exercise – the actions we take

Create a table with four columns. Put the examples of actions above in the left hand column and label the three additional columns: past, present, and future.

Ask the Steering Group to discuss each action and think about what they have done (past), what they are doing (present) and any planned activities (future).

- Which of the past and present actions were or are successful and why?

- Are there any actions which were not successful? Why not?

- Are there any actions that you have not tried?

- Are there additional actions to add to the future column, based on what has worked in the past?

- Are there other forms of action that you think are important but which are not listed above? What are these? What more could you do?

3. Some theory and approaches

It is important to support communities to come together and organise effectively so that they can get their views heard and exert influence on decisions that affect them. In DIY Community Action, Richardson characterises community action as: "informal groups of people, acting on a voluntary basis, working together to solve problems by taking actions themselves, and with others."

What stimulates action?

It is suggested in Pathways Through Participation that people become active when they have:

Motivation		Trigger		Resources		Opportunity
	+		**+**		**+**	

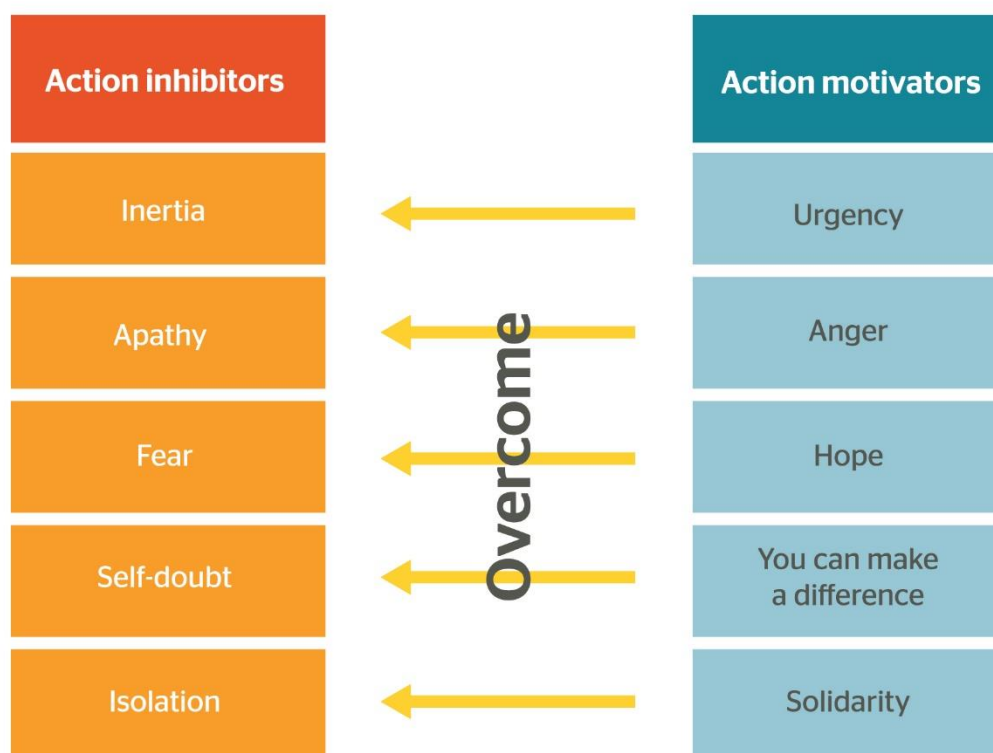Motivations tend to be personal. These might include wanting to meet others, wanting to help others, or wanting to improve local services.

Triggers to do something may stem from an emotional reaction such as anger about a local decision, or just being asked to get involved.

Resources relate to personal resources such as the confidence to join in or skills to offer, as well having the time to become active at community level.

Opportunities may be activities or events in a local community centre, being asked for an opinion, seeing an advert for people to join a local group.

We talked about what helps and hinders people's involvement in the Involvement section of the guidance. When it comes to action, Marshall Ganz, in *People, Power and Change* (see Resources box, below) outlined action inhibitors and action motivators:

Action inhibitors		Action motivators
Inertia	← Overcome	Urgency
Apathy	←	Anger
Fear	←	Hope
Self-doubt	←	You can make a difference
Isolation	←	Solidarity

It is important to remember that to keep people active, they need to have some positive experiences of achieving what they set out to do.

Proactive action and reactive action

A simple way to think about the action your Local Conversation takes, has taken or might undertake is to think about action as either **proactive** or **reactive**. This is a simple but important distinction.

Working **proactively** means identifying what you wish to influence or change and planning to make it happen. You are creating a strategy and tactics to exert some control over what you want to change. As Ganz said, it is about '*figuring out how to turn what you have into what you need to get what you want*'. We all make choices whether to act or not.

Working **reactively** is when you respond to something that has been determined by someone else. You can still act, but your response might not have been in your plans. Delivering both proactive and reactive work is a balance. You may feel that a lot of your Local Conversation's focus was steered more towards the reactive work required by the multiple crises that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is natural and essential in

many cases. You should remember, however, that Local Conversations is a programme designed to change the medium and long-term causes of ill-health and early death. It is appropriate to have a focus on more immediate issues at times, but the Lead Organisation and the Steering Group should regularly review and consider the balance between reactive and proactive work and move to a more proactive position as soon as it is possible. There is no 'formula' for deciding how to balance this, so you need to keep listening and planning.

From talking to doing

How many times have you sat in a group or at a meeting where people talk about what they would like to change over and over again, but never do anything about it? This is where your Community Plan comes in, which is a crucial document for agreeing your plan of action and getting organised.

When people are organised, communities get heard – and power begins to shift, creating real change for good. As a community organiser said, "*It's all about people taking action on their own terms over issues they care about with other people close to them.*" (Locally Rooted, 2020).

See the Approach section of the guidance for further information.

> **Resource:**
> - Marshall Ganz, *People, Power and Resources*

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing. It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[1], ethnic backgrounds[2] and religions[3], disabled people[4], older people[5], young people[6], members of LGBT+ communities[7], people with mental health needs[8], people with

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[1] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)
[2] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)
[3] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)
[4] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)
[5] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)
[6] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)

learning disabilities[9], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[10] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and that you know who lives in your neighbourhood. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, including whether it is designed to be inclusive and centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate.

Lead organisations and Steering Group members need to build the skills, confidence, tools, and techniques to ensure that they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion.

Reflection:

- How do you currently discuss and raise the profile of diversity and inclusion in your Local Conversation?

- Do you need to build confidence and knowledge to hold effective discussions about who is and is not involved? What action can you take to ensure the Local Conversation is equitable, diverse and inclusive?

- Do you need a working group to focus directly on equity, diversity and inclusion?

You should reflect on equity, diversity and inclusion on a regular basis – at least annually. You could also ask residents from minority ethnic groups, LGBT+ residents, or disabled residents, for example, whether they feel involved or not in the Local Conversation, and if the actions you have undertaken or are planning to undertake are priorities for them. Ask if there is anything you can do to further their involvement and to support the action they might desire to undertake. The best way to avoid diversity and inclusion being seen as a tick box exercise is to prove that it isn't one – by showing the changes you are making through the action you are taking.

Making the Local Conversation an attractive and diverse hub will energise the project and help to mobilise people around its vision and priorities for the whole of the neighbourhood – engaging people in actions that will lead to longer term change. This includes running a variety of activities which appeal to different people in the community, providing a pathway to ambitious and important change through action and influence, ensuring that people speak for themselves and not for others, and presenting a public face which reflects the make-up of the neighbourhood. For example, if you prioritise increasing opportunities for social connections because loneliness is an issue in your community, you will need to find out what is appropriate and engaging to different groups of people. For example, some people might like to meet for tea and cake, some might like to play

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[7] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)
[8] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)
[9] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)
[10] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)

dominoes, some might like baby massage classes, some might like to improve their English. Equally, if the Local Conversation Steering Group is represented only by white people over 50, then others are likely to think it is not for them.

Some people will need more support and possibly more resources to be as active as others; it is not about treating everyone the same. Equity, diversity and inclusion is about aptitude as well as attitude - Lead Organisations and Steering Group members need to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to ensure they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion.

Equity, diversity and inclusion is covered in greater detail in the Involvement section of the guidance.

5. What you can do to support action, including some practical examples

When taking action, it is important that you think about what you want to achieve and why, otherwise there is a risk that you could end up with a series of actions that are disconnected and unrelated to the aims and priorities of your Local Conversation.

In Section 2, above, we identified the different types of action you can take. Before you get there, a great deal of work is required which is mainly outlined in other sections of this Practice Guide. These include:

- A strong understanding of the neighbourhood's **context**, held by the project lead, the Steering Group and all who are closely involved and want to bring about change

- A broad level of **involvement** across the neighbourhood, as well as ensuring a number of residents are very closely involved, which will help the Local Conversation identify priorities

- Strong **governance** processes in place

- A clear and defined **approach**, so that you can build a plan and learn from successes as well as challenges

- Related to the context, a close understanding of who lives in the neighbourhood and who operates there; other groups, who holds power, and who can influence change. These are key people to build **relationships** with, which can support you to take direct action.

Identifying local priorities

As noted above, and in greater detail in the Involvement and Context sections of the Practice Guide, it is important to ensure a diverse range of people who represent the make-up of the neighbourhood are involved in the Local Conversation. This ensures that their priorities for action – and the neighbourhood's priorities for action – become your priorities for action.

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Identifying local skills

Try to be strengths-focused; everyone has something that they are good at. Your task is to find out what people are good at and to link people with similar interests and complementary skills together so that they can work on something that they enjoy for the common good. There are lots of ways to go about this, some of which are discussed in detail in the Approach and the Involvement sections of the Practice Guide.
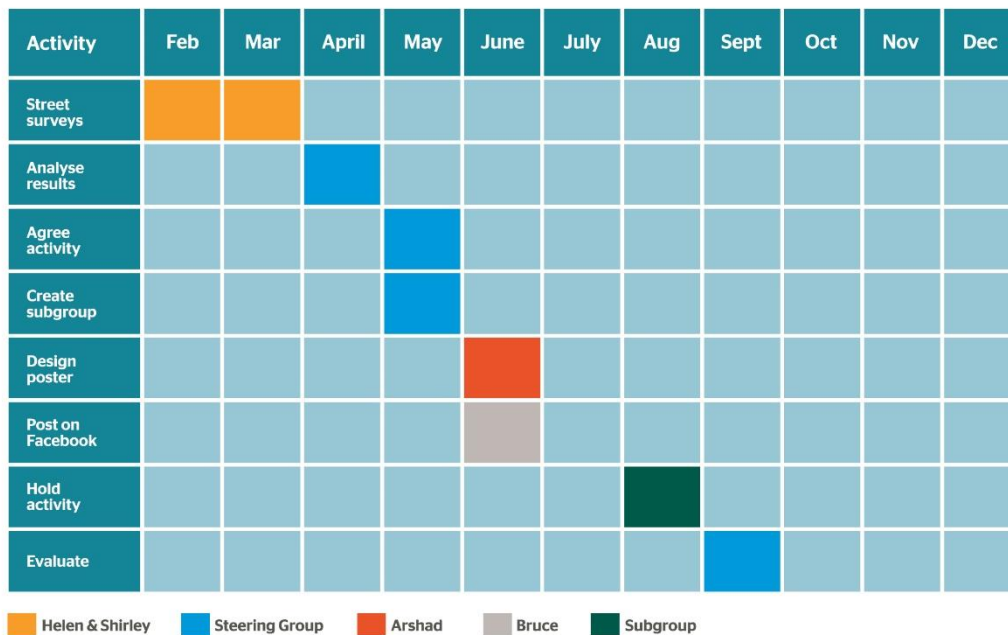
Planning for action

Once you know what people want to change or improve, and the pool of skills you have to do it with, it is time to make a plan. Local Conversations' community plans have been designed with this in mind, to support this with a step-by-step process.

Within Local Conversations' community plans, you have clear priorities and actions you hope to achieve within them. The objectives underneath each action support you to get there. To really get into the nitty-gritty, you might then need to plot what you need to do to achieve each objective.

For example, if you are seeking to start an employability hub, this means at the very least, you need: dedicated people to operate it; a space to meet; CV templates; step-by-step guides; a wealth of knowledge of job websites for varying trades and levels of experience; and good connections with local training providers, businesses and other employers, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and likely the local authority and jobcentre. These relationships require building. You will also need to write, agree or find templates and guides, research relevant knowledge and identify, recruit and support staff and volunteers.

Once you have a detailed plan, you might find it useful to have a visual oversight of what is happening and when. This can help the Steering Group to regularly review what is coming up and to ensure that the actions that are supposed to have happened, have happened. A Gantt chart is a good way of sequencing action over time, which helps you to keep an oversight of what needs to happen, when, in which order, and who is responsible.

You can create a Gantt Chart in Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets by listing dates across the spreadsheet columns and filling in cells with colours. You might use individual days, weeks, or months for tasks. You can also download this template, for example, and change it as you need.

Activity	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Street surveys	■	■									
Analyse results			■								
Agree activity				■							
Create subgroup				■							
Design poster					■						
Post on Facebook					■						
Hold activity							■				
Evaluate								■			

■ Helen & Shirley ■ Steering Group ■ Arshad ■ Bruce ■ Subgroup

It is likely that having someone in charge of each strand of action will help to drive it forward. If tasks are not clearly assigned there is a risk that either nothing will happen or that several people may take action and duplicate what each other are doing. Even worse, you may end up with different people working in ways that contradict or undermine each other! You can also use your Gantt chart to assign responsibility for tasks and actions.

In assigning responsibility, remember to check whether the individuals named are clear about what they are being asked to do and whether they feel comfortable and confident with the tasks. Check whether they need help or support or access to certain resources.

Exercise: design a Gantt chart

- With your Steering Group, choose one of the goals from your Community Plan that you are planning to achieve within your neighbourhood.

- Divide the listed actions and objectives towards that goal into a Gantt chart with each of these listed in the first column.

- Then, together, work out the required steps to get there. These also need to go into your Gantt chart.

- Finally, figure out when you want or need to achieve your goal by, and work backwards.

- Now this is complete, you have a timetable ready to go – and a clear path to achieving your goal.

Campaigning and lobbying

Campaigning can address the root causes of an issue and not just the effects. You might be offering an advice service for people living in poor housing but you might also want to

campaign to improve housing conditions. Campaigns can help those least heard have a voice through supporting them to take action with others in a similar situation. Lobbying is when you try to persuade someone to change a policy or a practice and is part of a campaigning approach.

The key to a successful campaign is planning – you need to be clear about who is the target of your campaign (for example, is it about publicising a cause to the general public, is it about targeting a group of politicians with specific policy responsibilities, or maybe both); you need to be clear what the aims of your campaign are /what you want to change; you need a simple message and sense of humour helps – make it fun!

Campaign tactics can include:

- Writing letters to those with power over decisions and resources

- Writing a letter to the local newspaper

- Monitoring compliance of existing laws or policies, and seek to gain enforcement if necessary. For example, using the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure wheelchair users can access buildings

- Using people's stories and support people to give their personal testimonies of the impact on them now and what could be different

- Organising a petition, either in hard copy or online through change.org or 38 Degrees

- Organising a demonstration such as a march, a rally, a picket or some form of street theatre

See also the Influence section of this guidance regarding making connections with power and resource holders.

There are rules around charities and campaigning so make sure you are within government guidelines.

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Examples: campaigning and lobbying

In Birkenhead, community organisers gathered stories about food poverty and submitted evidence to a Parliamentary Inquiry into Holiday Hunger. They were invited to give oral evidence. A group of mothers went to London - the furthest some had ever travelled. Karen, Dawn, and Ann shared their experience of living with food insecurity. An MP said she had never heard such powerful testimony. One resident remarked: *"I feel 6ft tall as no one that important has ever listened to me before"*.

A bus service in Wirral which served many of the community's isolated and vulnerable residents was removed. Local people door knocked, petitioned and

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called local meetings attended by over 100 people who were passionate about "saving our bus". They lobbied the local MP who agreed to help them hold the private company to account and reinstate the bus service.

From

Widening the scope of the Local Conversation

Once your Local Conversation starts becoming more established, you can begin to plan how you can broaden its scope and move it along the path towards achieving its priorities. This is covered in detail in the Involvement section of the Practice Guide.

Making contacts, networking and developing partnerships

One key action you can take is to broaden your network. To do this, think about the following:

- Who else do you want to get on board to help with the Local Conversation, and why?

- Are there any local residents with links or connections to these people or groups already?

- Can you delegate the task of relationship building to certain individuals?

Many groups work hard to achieve their objectives but in isolation. There may be others trying to tackle the same issues that you could partner with, or indeed local council strategies and policies that could be helpful in furthering your aims through additional funding or specialist support. It is important therefore to do a bit of research about who might be a helpful partner. You may want to team up with another organisation to support your Local Conversation. This might be a short-term arrangement to deliver something specific now, or it might be a longer-term relationship that has the potential to deliver a number of benefits into the future. This is also discussed in the Influence section of the Practice Guide.

Here are some of the reasons you may want to form local partnerships:

- You may want to partner with an organisation who can deliver part of something for you. They may do this for free, because it is part of what they do anyway, or they may want something (whether money or some other kind of reciprocal arrangement) in return

- You may be able to share or exchange resources, for example, the use of a venue

- You may want to partner with an organisation because they have similar concerns or goals to you, and you want to share ideas and campaign together.

Building a strong network of local contacts should help you to build strong partnerships. The Influence and Relationships sections of the guidance take you through approaches to identifying potential allies and stakeholders.

Here are some tips to remember when trying to engage people in your network sphere:

- Make sure you invite the people who you want to build relationships with to key events and activities. Say thank you to them afterwards and acknowledge their contributions in publicity.
- Even if they don't turn up to things that you want them to, keep them informed about what you are doing and the success that you are having.

Allocating or spending money

Another action you can take – to support your other actions – is allocating the funds you have to specific activities. You may need a process for how you are going to agree what you spend your money on within the Local Conversation. Your spending needs to relate to your agreed plan and the priorities set by the community. Beyond this, however, you may need to:

- Agree how you are going to distribute funds across the different priorities – for example, should each priority get the same amount of money, or might some priorities need more funds allocated to them than others?

- You may need to work out the individual costs of a project, taking account of the amount you will need to spend on different items, such as:
  - the cost of staff
  - the cost of venues
  - the cost of equipment that you need to buy or hire
  - the cost of catering or refreshments
  - the cost of any transport or travel
  - the cost of any insurance.

- You may also need to think about whether what you are proposing to do might actually generate some sort of income – for example, if people are going to make a contribution towards the costs by paying a small fee to attend a session or event

See the Governance section of the guidance for more detail on grant-making within your Local Conversation.

Applying for funding

Some of your priorities may require more money than you have available to you. There are a few things to think about when looking for funding:

- What sort of funding are you looking for? Some funders will award small amounts of money to support your core operations, and some will fund specific activities

- Who is making the funding application – you may need to be a constituted

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organisation with a bank account

- You may be able to draw on the help and experience of people who have written successful funding applications before, for example in the Lead Organisation

- Think about who will manage the grant if the application is successful

- Think about how you will report back to the funder

Action and reflection

It is generally recognised that people learn best from their own experience. Kolb saw a pattern to this learning and he showed it as a simple diagram *(Kolb D. (1984) Experiential Learning)*.
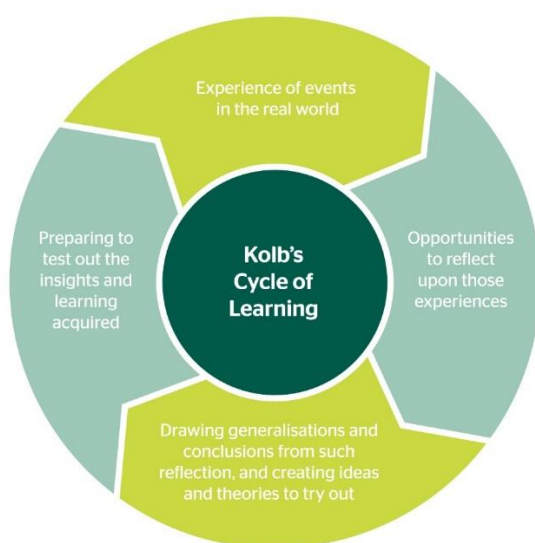
Reflection:

- Take some time to reflect and learn from the actions that you took
- Think about how you might use this new knowledge and experience in future action

Resources:
- Cairngorms National Park: Our Community, A Way Forward- community planning toolkit
- Community Toolbox: Direct action
- Dan Duncan, Asset Based Community Development: Asset Mapping Toolkit
- New Economics Foundation, Building a new economy where people really take control
- NCVO KnowHow: campaigning and influencing
- North East Social Enterprise Partnership: Introduction to the principles of participation
- Stories of Action, Community Organisers

6. Summary

The Local Conversations programme supports residents to actively tackle local issues. Community action is often informal and voluntary and is primarily about collective rather than individual action – people working together to create change. Encouraging participatory action can help bring about the change people want to see in their local community through the life of a Local Conversation and hopefully beyond.

It is the role of the Local Conversation to provide opportunities for action, being aware of those things that can motivate, and inhibit, action. This means involving people in processes - such as listening, building relationships and collectively priority setting - that proactively shape a plan of action. The plan may involve setting up new activities and projects, campaigning and lobbying, and should look to build networks and partnerships that can help with meeting your goals, and particularly your more ambitious proposals for change.

It is important to reflect on action taken and learn from this experience for next time.

This Action section of the Practice Guide should be read alongside Involvement and Influence and particularly complements the Approach section.

7. Helpful do's and don'ts

Do:
- Listen to as many people as possible and support people to speak for themselves

- Recognise that while lots of residents may have the same issues, appropriate solutions may differ depending on who they are and their interests.

- Reflect on whether your priorities will benefit the whole community, not just the more vocal elements

- Value what people can bring to the action – their skills, knowledge, interests and experience

- Make action part of the process - involve residents in creative ways so that can help shape your vision and your Community Plan

- Take every opportunity to ask, 'how can we do this together?'

- Use a variety of campaigning tactics

- Build networks and partnerships

- Review your action and reflect on what you have learnt

Don't:
- Try to develop a plan without the participation of others

- Be afraid of campaigning

- Get stuck - move on from listening and talking to action

8. A final exercise

Exercise: Reflecting on taking action through your Local Conversation

In this section of the practice guide, we have talked about action – its different forms, how to plan for it, and some practical examples.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally. Local Conversations are built upon forming connections and creating shared goals, and ensuring everyone involved is supported to take action to make the change they want to see and to understand the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion is crucial to your success.

Presuming you know your priorities for action, ask yourself, your Steering Group and residents – how do they think your goals are going? What are you close to achieving? Does it feel possible, and are your goals realistic?

Be sure to ask residents what support they might need to achieve the Local Conversation's goals. Are training and resources necessary? There is no harm in saying yes – it simply means you know what you need to be equipped.

Sit down with your Steering Group, and think about your actions and your goals. Are you promoting them clearly? Is your collective voice being heard, and have you mapped the pathway to achieving the change you want to see?

The next thing to think about is success. How do you measure success? How do you make sure things are on track, and what do you do if they're off-track? These are solutions you can find together, as a community.

Have you got any top tips or tricks for taking action that might be useful for other Local Conversations? Is there anything you feel is missing from this section, or that you would like to add? Are there any useful references you're aware of that we could add? Be sure to let us know.

Approach

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section will talk about your **approach.** We consider:

9. What we mean by your approach
10. Why having an approach is important in the Local Conversations programme
11. Some theory and approaches
12. Equity, diversity and inclusion
13. A summary
14. Some helpful do's and don'ts
15. A final exercise

1. What we mean by your approach

Having an approach is about having a clear and systematic way of engaging with communities, as well as identifying and tackling local issues (some people may call this a 'method'). The approach you take will inform all the areas listed above: how you learn about the local context; how and when you encourage wider and deeper involvement; how you plan to achieve good governance and leadership; how you build and maintain relationships, take action and influence decision makers.

This section of the practice guide will support you to think about what you will need to consider in developing or refreshing your approach, how you identify locally agreed goals and priorities, and the models and methods of community development you can use.

2. Why having an approach is important in the Local Conversations programme

There are many ways of approaching your Local Conversation. What is important is being clear about the path you are taking, why you are taking it and the steps along the way.

Having an approach will ensure that you, colleagues or residents are not left guessing about what to do next in a given situation and it means things won't fall through the cracks and be forgotten.

A clear approach will inform the work your Local Conversation carries out and maximise the opportunity for meaningful involvement so that the action you take is strategic (not only about the day-to-day) and reflects what matters most to local people. It is like going on a journey: you need to know where you are going and why, but also how you are you going to get there (car, walk, public transport, bike), and what resources you need to get you there. You also need to be prepared for any difficulties you may encounter on the way. A clear approach provides a map for all those involved to follow or to join along the way.

An approach (or method) helps us to a complete a task in a systematic way. and learn as we complete it. You can apply an approach to the Local Conversation as whole and to its component parts, such as developing or reviewing your Community Plan or agreed priorities.
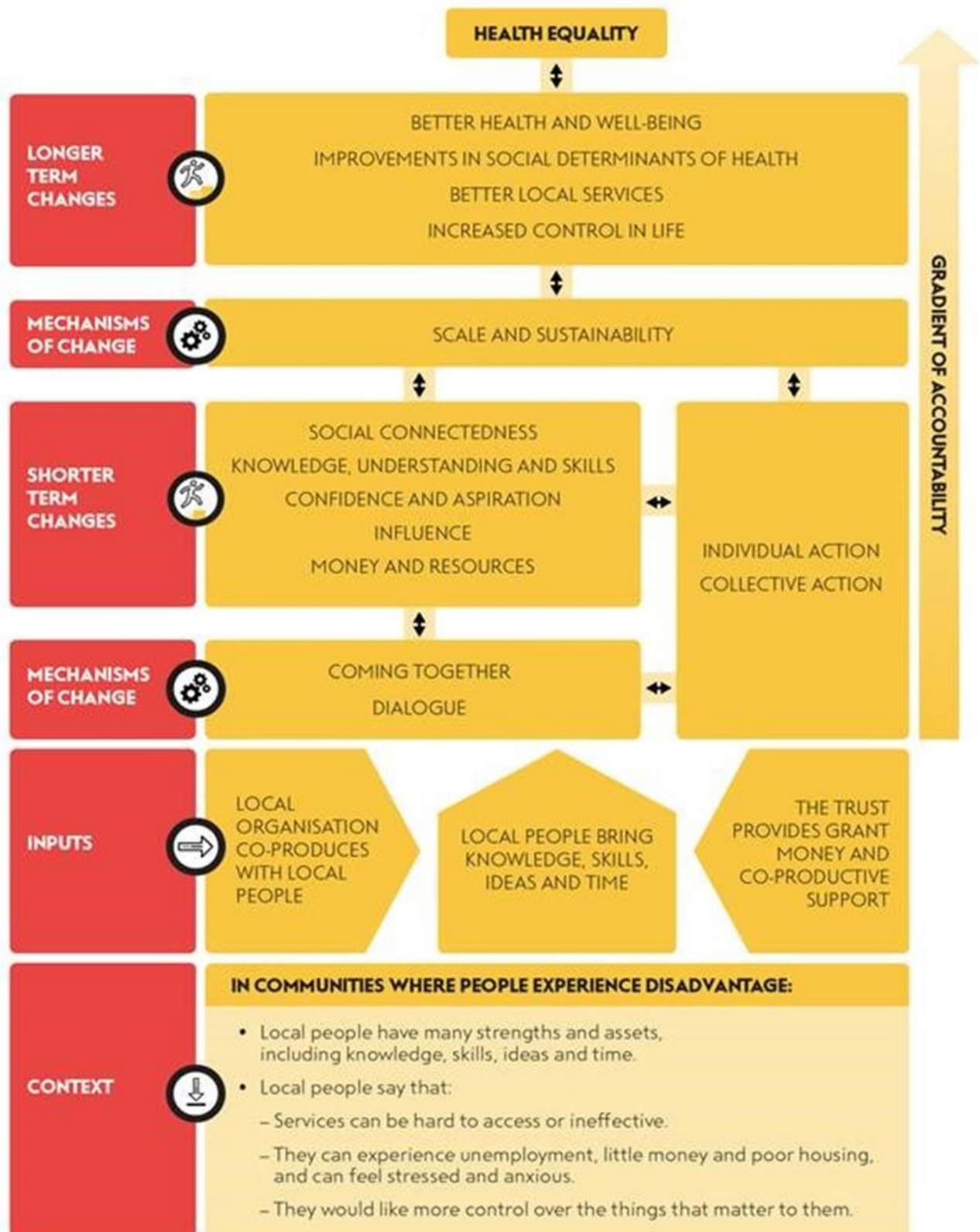
There are various approaches that you can use in your Local Conversation. None of these is necessarily right or wrong. Without an approach your Local Conversation risks being less successful because some of the things that you do may appear random or poorly thought through, rather than being arrived at through using a systematic approach. You need to consider what approach is most appropriate for you to enable residents to make the most of the changes they want.

3. Some theory and approaches

Theory of Change
A 'theory of change' is the roadmap for the journey you will make. Having one helps you to understand why you are doing what you do and how you aim to get there, as well as how you can assess or measure your progress. Starting from the destination you hope to get to, it then identifies the routes of travel on the way and what to look out for to make sure you are on the right path. It helps you to think about the assumptions you are making about your journey and what you need to do to get to your destination, as well as to understand the context within which that journey is made.

This is the Theory of Change for the Local Conversations programme, which was co-produced with funded partners:

HEALTH EQUALITY

LONGER TERM CHANGES
BETTER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
IMPROVEMENTS IN SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH
BETTER LOCAL SERVICES
INCREASED CONTROL IN LIFE

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE
SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

SHORTER TERM CHANGES
SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS
CONFIDENCE AND ASPIRATION
INFLUENCE
MONEY AND RESOURCES

INDIVIDUAL ACTION
COLLECTIVE ACTION

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE
COMING TOGETHER
DIALOGUE

INPUTS
LOCAL ORGANISATION CO-PRODUCES WITH LOCAL PEOPLE

LOCAL PEOPLE BRING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, IDEAS AND TIME

THE TRUST PROVIDES GRANT MONEY AND CO-PRODUCTIVE SUPPORT

CONTEXT
IN COMMUNITIES WHERE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE DISADVANTAGE:
- Local people have many strengths and assets, including knowledge, skills, ideas and time.
- Local people say that:
  - Services can be hard to access or ineffective.
  - They can experience unemployment, little money and poor housing, and can feel stressed and anxious.
  - They would like more control over the things that matter to them.

GRADIENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

To understand the Theory of Change it is easier to start from the top and work downwards:

1.	The issue you and we are trying to address is health inequality, and we wish to achieve health equality.

2.   We have then identified the long-term and shorter-term change we want to see (impact)

3.   From there we have what needs to happen in your Local Conversation in order to get there – the mechanisms of change and the inputs

Having worked back this far, you need to regularly consider:

4.   How far you are achieving are you going to do this? What actions and activities are needed to achieve this at different stages? (inputs and outputs)

5.   What resources and support will you need?

6.   How will you know if you are getting there? (And what are the indicators?)

These questions also help you to explore the assumptions or rationale behind your approach (the Why), so that you can test them out and change direction if they are not supported by what is happening on the ground.

> **Resources:**
>
> - Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Evaluating community projects
> - NCVO, How to build a theory of change
> - NPC, Theory of Change in Ten Steps

Some approaches you can adopt

The Trust is not prescribing which approach you use, only that all Local Conversations need to have one as we believe it leads to progression through the Theory of Change in a methodical way. There are a number of different approaches you can use, but the two options are:

- Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

- Community Organising, or Organising

Approach 1 - Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

As its name suggests, ABCD focuses on identifying the assets, strengths, skills and potential in a community and then building on these. It was developed by John Kretzmann and Jon McKnight in the US in 1993 and challenges more traditional 'deficit' approaches, which tend to focus on what's wrong - the problems, needs and deficiencies of an area.

Asset-Based Community Development is built upon **four key elements**: resources, methods, functions, and evaluation.

Resources (first key element) refers to assets, or those parts of a community which help promote wellbeing. They should be available to everybody within the neighbourhood. Examples include:

- the contributions of residents, and their knowledge, experience, skills and passions
- community groups, associations or clubs
- local institutions, which might include schools and colleges, hospitals, long-term local businesses, local government facilities or meeting places like pubs – essentially, the places that are anchored in the community and support the community
- the local environment, and the neighbourhood itself: the place residents relate to and call their own, as well as everything within it - including community gardens, parks and hubs
- stories, or 'the community way' – how things are, how things are done, and how residents have learnt to survive and thrive within the neighbourhood

Methods (second key element) are the ways in which these resources can be used productively and for the community. There are three key fundamental steps to any method for ABCD:

1. Start with what residents can do themselves as a collective, without any outside help.
2. Then, look at what residents could do with a little outside help.
3. Finally, once these local assets have been connected and mobilised, residents decide together on what they want this outside help to do for them.

You can find out much more about the methods through the links in the Resources section, below.

There are lots of different methods you might wish to use, and you may have developed your own – but those three steps, when built upon and added to, are crucial.

Functions (third key element) - ABCD states that there are the seven key responsibilities (functions) for any neighbourhood - health, safety, environment, economy, food, children and care. It places a responsibility upon communities to work on these and uphold these responsibilities, arguing that where communities fail, no institution or government can succeed.

However, as noted, ABCD is built on a community's strengths. What McKnight describes as three universal and abundant powers are:

- **The giving of gifts –** the gifts of the people in a neighbourhood are boundless. These gifts – talents, skills, experience and wisdom – should be pooled, shared, and exchanged with others for other 'gifts'.
- **The power of association –** when people work together, they join their gifts together and these become amplified, magnified, productive, and celebrated.
- **Hospitality –** we welcome strangers because we value their gifts, and need to share our own. Our doors are open. There are no strangers here; just friends we have not met.

Evaluation – (fourth key element) is key for any work: whether taking action, influencing, or building involvement. In ABCD, it is crucial to evaluate the action you have taken against your key goals, your vision, and the Local Conversations programme vision – to make positive change, to make improvements to the social determinants of health, and to increase community health and wellbeing.
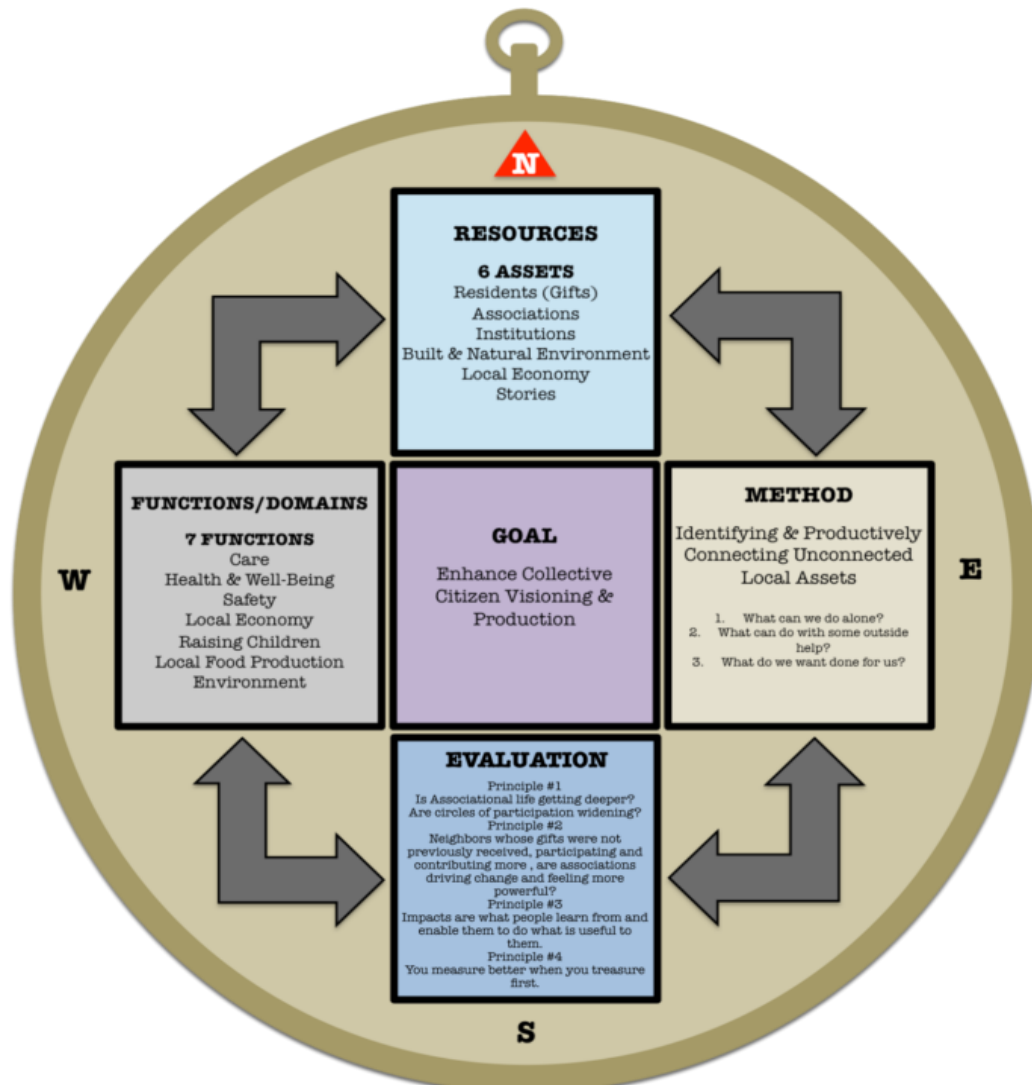
This is not a map, but a compass. Start with any element, but go to every element.

Approach 2 - Community organising

Community organising is a different approach - it focuses on building community power and tackling social injustice. Drawing on the work of Saul Alinsky in the US, it is often associated with campaigning but can and often does support communities to influence how things work in their area in a variety of ways. Community organisers reach out and, through a process of listening and connecting people, motivate them to build their collective power. They help people to organise, take action and effect the changes they want to see. As well as working with community members' own potential, community organising aims to change the external policies and practices that affect the local community. There are different models of community organising: some building collective action up from individual listings (e.g. Community Organisers UK); some taking a broad-based approach, which starts with alliances of organisations and works through these organisations (e.g. Citizens UK); others building a community union with branches and members who pay dues (e.g. ACORN).

The Citizens UK model of community organising is built upon trust and cooperation: bringing people together for face-to-face conversations, mapping their networks of relationships, listening to one another, building mutual trust and finding common concerns.

From there, it is crucial to build local control – shared ownership for those residents taking part – of the group. This closely mirrors collective control, which is a key part of the Local Conversations programme theory of change. In neighbourhoods experiencing disadvantage, where change – to services, to local assets, or to what is built – is often imposed on people, building and fostering power is especially important. The so-called 'iron rule' of community organising is to **never do for others what they can do for themselves**. This should sit in tandem alongside work to build close relationships within the group.

Another key aspect of community organising is to develop alliances between local groups in your neighbourhood who are equally devoted to identifying local issues, working together in the public interest, and developing community leaders. This can include groups of all sorts – faith groups, universities, colleges, schools, trade unions and community groups. Building partnerships is discussed in greater detail in the Relationships section of the Practice Guide.
You can measure the health of these local alliances by considering several things:

- The extent to which listening within and across institutions within the alliance shapes the agenda
- The presence of an effective leadership group of residents
- The payment of dues (this is not applicable for Local Conversations)
- The extent to which community organising is becoming embedded within an institution, which might be through the number of people involved, or the number of people training or trained
- The extent to which the alliance can 'turn out' the numbers of people required to make actions powerful.

As noted above, another key aspect of community organising is the developing of leaders. When community organisers talk about the success of their projects, they talk about the depth and breadth of leadership across the community and how it came to be.

Developing new leaders benefits a community group in a number of ways: it opens up opportunities for people who may not have seen themselves as leaders previously; it encourages those who hold power to lead differently; accelerates the learning of those involved, and helps share the weight of work required.

Leadership is nurtured in a number of ways, including through one-to-one meetings and support, training, encouraging residents to take on public-facing roles, building experience of leading action or campaign teams, and sitting on the steering group (or decision-making body). This is covered in greater detail in the Leadership section of the Practice Guide.

When all these things come together: empowered communities, strong local alliances, and community leaders encouraged and developed, community organisers argue that this tips the balance of power in a neighbourhood back towards those who face injustice and marginalisation.

Resources:

- Citizens UK, What is community organising?
- Citizens UK, Reweaving the fabric of society
- Community Organisers UK, What is Community Organising?
- Community Organisers UK, Our Framework
- Community First, About Community Organising
- ABCD, Citizens UK, Community Organisers UK and ACORN all offer training in their approach and details can be found on their respective websites.
  - ACORN website
  - Citizens UK website
  - Citizens UK, Community organising via a Facebook group

Books:

- Diamond, N. – 'Community Organising Compared: what community organising is and what it isn't'
As well as explaining different models of community organising, this resource also describes other related approaches, their similarities and differences.

- Midwest Academy – 'Organizing for Social Change'
- Saul Alinsky – 'Rules for Radicals'

Reflection:
Think about:
- If you are already using a formal community development approach, such as ABCD, community organising (or something else), why did you choose it over any other? Who else in your Local Conversation understands it and what steps are you taking

to support team and steering group members to understand and use it? It's risky for just one person to hold that knowledge.

- If you are not using a formal community development approach, what can we do together to help you adopt one, and what training would you (and other team or steering group members need) to use it effectively?

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing . It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different ethnic backgrounds, religions and genders, disabled people, older people, young people, members of LGBT+ communities, people with mental health needs, people with learning disabilities, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds. It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. The approach you take should ensure that the Local Conversations is speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate. See further guidance on this in the section on Involvement.

Whether you are using an ABCD or organising approach, it is really important that equity, diversity and inclusion runs through everything you do. Practitioners and steering group members need to be constantly discussing their own unconscious biases and those of the people they are listening to in the neighbourhood. For example, some adults may see people exercising their dogs on a patch of green space as waste land, and want it turning in to a play area so it is an asset for their children and a space where they can meet other parents… but that may negatively affect the older people who see it an asset as it is, and without it they wouldn't have anywhere to take their dogs and meet up with each other every morning and evening. In this instance, you need to ensure both views are heard and try and reach a compromise.

More widely, you and your steering group should be reviewing your Community Plan to assess the impact of what you plan to do on the diverse communities in your neighbourhood and ensure no group is no negative on them. If you don't know… ask them.

Exercise: understanding your community

Ask members of the Steering Group to discuss:

- What different communities are there in the area covered by the Local Conversation?
- How confident are you that your approach enable you to actively listen to the voices of the diverse communities in your neighbourhood, so that you understand what is most important to them?
- Who can help you reach those communities that you have least contact with?
- How regularly are you checking in with these communities to ensure your work is relevant to their aspirations?

5. Summary

Having a clear approach will mean that your Local Conversation can plan effectively, stay focused and make sure that what it is doing is relevant to the wider community and is having a real and tangible impact on the community.

You can use a mix of approaches to inform your plans as well as documentary evidence, for example from the census or more locally produced data. This practice guide briefly describes two formal approaches for working with communities, both to help you ensure that your plans and actions are informed by local residents and to help develop your more detailed strategies. If you feel that you, your colleagues or residents would benefit from further information or training on approaches, please get in touch with us.

In thinking about your approach, it is always important to remember the Theory of Change for the programme and that you are aiming to address the social determinants of health. You will need to think collectively and regularly about what can be done locally by people living in the area and where you will need to influence and work with others (see Influence section of the guidance).

The approach that you take in your Local Conversation should ensure that you are involving and organising people around a clear local vision and supporting communities to make or influence change in their neighbourhood that can ultimately reduce health inequalities.

This Approach section should be read alongside Involvement, Influence and particularly the Action sections.

6. Some helpful Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Reflect on the effectiveness of the approaches/methods you are using to deliver the Local Conversation? Are you, team members and the steering group united in your understanding of what you are trying to achieve in the short, medium and longer term?
- Communicate how you are approaching your work in an accessible way, so that residents people know what is planned, on what basis decisions have been reached, and how they can contribute
- Make sure you have mapped the different communities in your area and taken their views and needs into account
- If you can't address an issue locally, think about who might be able to help
- Plan for regular reviews so that you can take the time to reflect on what you are learning and change tack if necessary
- Consider and allow for the training needs of the models you adopt.

Don't:

- Assume that you can just wing it without considering your approach
- Stick rigidly to plans or approaches that aren't working
- Skimp on the time for reflection and review

7. A final exercise

Exercise: Reflecting on Approach and your Local Conversation

In this section of the guide, we have discussed some of the key concepts that underpin the Local Conversations programme. We have also talked about the importance of not only knowing what you want to change and why – but *how* you will get there.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group or similar.

Sit down with your Steering Group, and ask them to reflect on:

- Whether the approach(es) being used to deliver the Local Conversation are appropriate or do they need refreshing?
- Who in your Local Conversations understands and practices ABCD, Community Organising, or another formal approach to community development? If there is no-one or very few people, then discuss who can be trained by when, so it can help inform your work?

Have you got any top tips or tricks that might be useful for other Local Conversations? Is there anything you feel is missing from this section, or that you would like to add? Are there any useful references you're aware of that we could add? Be sure to let us know.

Context

There are eight key areas to help guide your Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at context: why it is important to understand your neighbourhood and the people living there, and how your Local Conversation connects to this. This section will cover:

1. What we mean by context
2. Why context is important for a Local Conversation
3. Practical methods to help you understand the local context
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. The risks of not understanding the context
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts
8. A final exercise

1. What we mean by context

The context for your Local Conversation means everything that exists around it that will have an impact. For example, this could include a neighbourhood's local and political history, the diversity of the people who live there, and what some of the key challenges and opportunities that the neighbourhood face might be. Context can be considered from a number of perspectives, and the following headings and suggestions are indicative, rather than exhaustive:

Social

Neighbourhoods have histories or characteristics that only the people who live there will fully understand. This is part of what makes each neighbourhood unique. For example, a neighbourhood that is defined by a local council or ward boundary may be very differently defined by the people who live there. This is often the case where a ward boundary has been changed, but people still see themselves as living where they always have lived – regardless of its new name. They may even continue to use older place names to define their locality.

Social context also includes any demographic trends in the neighbourhood, public opinion and reputation, all of which impact on those living there. How neighbourhoods are perceived from the outside is significant for those living in the neighbourhood.

Political

It is important to be aware of the broader political context within which the Local Conversation is taking place and of the impact that this may have upon communities.

Some obvious examples of this are the economic, social and health impacts of the coronavirus, the social tensions of Brexit, the consequences of economic austerity or changes to the benefits system.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The diversity of a neighbourhood is a critical part of its context. It's important to understand which communities make up the neighbourhood in terms of race, age (e.g. are there more younger or older people), levels of disability and mental health needs, the number of LGBT+ members. This topic is covered in greater detail in section four below.

Economic

The economic context will involve you thinking about the local economy, local household incomes, the availability of good quality homes and secure training opportunities and employment across different demographics. The immediate and longer term economic impact of the pandemic is likely to remain a critical issue for many neighbourhoods.

You might also think about the affordability of goods and services to people on low incomes, including significant increases in the costs of power, public transport and council tax, or reductions in state benefits.

It is important to be aware of the past – places have industrial heritages which may have changed or disappeared over time. This is both an important element to consider in thinking about the skills which may be left, the anxiety raised about new industries moving in and being sensitive to some of wounds that there may be about times of previous greater financial prosperity.

Digital

Understanding the scale of digital literacy in a neighbourhood is also an important aspect of context. Access to broadband, devices and data and the level of digital skills amongst residents are important to understand, especially if you are considering and planning activities which require a certain level of digital literacy to deliver. The opportunities afforded by digital platforms in influencing are discussed in more detail in the Influencing section of this guide.

Environmental and social

This will include the impact of climate change, supply chains and environmental issues on the neighbourhood. There may be particular issues faced by residents in respect of litter, fly-tipping, lack of green space, few community meeting spaces, safety, range of shops, how near they are to busy roads or air pollution – all of which affect people.

2. Why context is important for a Local Conversation

The Local Conversation is not taking place in a vacuum. The context in which you are working will be informed by things that have happened before or are happening now. It may be that lessons can be learned from what has worked well, or has not worked well, in the past. It may be the case that a particular building or community space is really well used by the community and that further events could be held there, or it may be that a community has no common or shared spaces, or they're in a location which is far from ideal – which may make getting people together more difficult.

Communities may be united or divided about particular issues, and it is important to be aware of this before opening a discussion or debate. There is a risk that some residents' memories of 'how things used to be…' may be inaccurate and gain validity and affect decision-making. Equally, having that history can be critical to finding a way to move forward together. It is really important that practitioners feel confident in exploring and if necessary, challenging these views, if they are likely to have such an impact.

Things that happen at a global level (such as Covid 19) or a national level (such as Brexit) can have a huge impact locally. Whichever side of the debate that you sit on, for example, there is no doubt that Brexit has caused huge divisions across the country, within communities and within families. Knowing how people feel locally about a global, national, regional or local issue may help you to approach a discussion sensitively, given that it is likely there may be polarising views put forward by some residents.

Another example of the national context having an impact locally is the government's programme of austerity, introduced by the Coalition government in 2010. This was an attempt to reduce the country's debts after the 2007-08 economic crisis, which led to £30 billion worth of cuts to public services. At the same time, the number of children living in relative poverty rose, as did the number of people using food banks, and those who were homeless. Changes to the welfare system and the increased use of financial sanctions against people who are seen as failing to comply with an increasing number of conditions in order to receive welfare support have also led to an increase in hardship. You can read more about this in _The Marmot Review: Ten Years On_ (2020) if you are interested.

This has naturally impacted regional and local contexts. Reduced local authority budgets have meant many local charities and voluntary organisations have struggled for funding over the last decade, and many have closed or cut back their services as a result. Understanding the extent to which these factors are having an impact on your neighbourhood is important context to have. It will help you understand the kind of initiatives that may be needed locally if some popular ones have been withdrawn. This can be a balancing act, though, as it is not the job of community organisations to fill the void of reducing public services, especially with far more limited budgets.

The local, regional and national context in which each Local Conversation is operating can change rapidly, and these changes can have a positive or negative impact on residents' lives. You should be actively facilitating annual steering group reviews of the context in which the Local Conversation is operating, discussing what has changed and what hasn't, and whether that is for better or for worse – and if and how your Local Conversation can respond to these changes. If and when residents' priorities change, it would suggest the context is changing and it's important to be aware of how things may need to shift and adapt to this.

You can find some prompts to support you with this below.

Exercise 1: Understanding more about your local context

With your steering group, consider some of the questions below. This is a useful list of prompts to reflect on fairly regularly – perhaps once a year. Context changes, and so do neighbourhoods.

- Who lives in the area? Consider population data and demographics.
- Consider the diverse range of people who live in the area, including by ethnicity, age, socio economic status, disability, newcomers and people who have lived there for years etc. What do the headline priorities appear to be? For example, is it clear that fly-tipping is an issue? Or maybe the area doesn't have any green space, or activities for young people? Does the Local Conversation's priorities reflect the neighbourhood's?
- What different things matters most to different communities in your neighbourhood?
- What are the neighbourhood's strengths?
- Where do people see their neighbourhood boundaries and why?
- What has and has not worked well before?
- What is already going on? Are there some existing activities or campaigns that you can tap into, rather than having to start from scratch? How can you avoid duplicating what other people are already doing?
- Who are the local influencers and power-holders, or 'gatekeepers'? These are people in key roles such as councillors or the MP/MSP/MS, or organisations who might be able to provide you with access to certain groups of people or community facilities. There is more on this in the Influence section.
- Who puts money into the local neighbourhood, and who funds the local services or community groups?
- What other initiatives are happening in the local area? Do you know the networks that are associated with these?
- What is the history of relationships between different groups in the area. For example, do different organisations get on with each other, or might they have fallen out over something? Can this be resolved?
- Where do people tend to go or meet (for example, a corner shop, pub, café, fish and chip shop, hairdresser, park or places of worship)? Do people have to go outside of the local area to access any of these?
- How many local groups are aware of the Local Conversation and what it is trying to achieve? Are you advertising opportunities to join in through these neighbourhood hubs?
- Is the Local Conversation taking place in an area rich with assets (for example, local buildings, local services, public spaces, local community groups), or in an area where there are no community hubs, or where people find it difficult to connect?
- What are the different forms of communication within the neighbourhood – for example, local newsletters, notice boards, or social media groups that you can tap into? Who is and isn't engaged with them? And if you know of lots, are they still active? Are there new ones?
- How can you connect with schools, GP practices, or voluntary sector groups operating in the area and how do they view the local context?
- How many people in the area have a car, and what is public transport like?

These are just some ideas to consider, and the list is absolutely not exhaustive. You should consider what other things it might be important for you to know and understand about your area and incorporate these into your planning.

Planning for the future

So far, we have considered how past and present context are relevant to a Local Conversation, but looking ahead into the near or even distant future is also an important aspect of understanding context. This is sometimes called 'horizon scanning'. Reviewing the future strategies and plans of Local Authorities, health services or other institutions of power locally can reveal some extremely useful information about development plans in neighbourhoods for example. In some cases this may involve knocking down existing housing and replacing it with something that may not meet the needs of residents. Practitioners can prepare themselves for such impacts by factoring in longer term plans into their own strategies.

While no-one could have predicted the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations are now aware of the impact and the possibility that there may be recurrences in the future. The same applies to economic market fluctuations and the climate crisis and it is wise to consider future scenarios in understanding context.

3. Practical methods to help you understand the local context

a)   Neighbourhood assets

A large part of understanding the context of your neighbourhood revolves around understanding its assets. Assets might include residents and their skills; the facilities and community or public spaces available in the area; activities; and the neighbourhood's cultural history. There is an in-depth consideration of asset-based approaches in the Approach section of the guide, but there are also some methods outlined below to help you identify your neighbourhood's assets.

Doing a 'walk around'

You might have lived in the area for years, so have a really good idea of what it is like to live there. You might, though, have a less clear picture of how other people see it. You will be looking at the neighbourhood through your own eyes, and residents may see the context in which they are living, ageing, working and bringing up families very differently to you, and perhaps, differently to each other.

If you aren't really familiar with an area, say a more distant part of your Local Conversation's neighbourhood, there is nothing quite like walking around it to get a feel for what is it like to live there. Try doing this at different times of the day and weather conditions to get a deeper sense of the place and its meaning to a diverse range of local people.

If you have lived or worked in the area for a while, try walking around with some other people who live in the community - perhaps people you know less well. For example, you could ask a group of younger people to walk you around the area and to point out the areas they like and those that they avoid. You could ask them to take you to spaces that are important to them and ask them to explain why this is so. Doing this with a group of older people, or with people from a minoritised ethnic community, or with disabled people may give you a different perspective too.

You can record what people say about different spaces using your mobile phone and take photos or videos (making sure that you get consent from people before you do this and being clear how you intend to use it). Also, before you record what people say, you need to be clear as to what you promise them regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Some people might be happy to talk to you and to share their views with you, but they may not want you to reveal their identity or the fact that they have spoken to you to anyone else.

> **Resource:**
> You can find out a little more about walking interviews here and here.

Another way of doing this exercise, but without actually having to go out for a walk, might be to get a map of the area and ask people to talk to you about the area, pointing to places on the map as they do so. The goal would be to try and find out how people feel about different spaces and why, just like the walk.

> **Resource:**
>
> This article from Friends of the Earth is broader than simply considering how space might or might not be shared across different sections of a community, but you may find the ideas covered in the concept interesting. It looks closely at building equity (or fairness in terms of experience), bringing the community together and cutting resource use.
>
> Also, the Scottish government's Place Standard Tool can help you interrogate what you know about your local context. It's designed to provide a simple framework to structure conversations about place, and to help you think about the physical elements of a place (for example its buildings, spaces, and transport links) as well as the social aspects (for example whether people feel they have a say in decision making).
>
> It can help you consider all aspects of place in a systemic way, uncovering areas where you need to find out more. Once you've done this, it can help you think about which areas of a place could be improved to help you plan what to do next.

b)   Collective identities and memory sharing

In the introduction we noted that communities often have histories or characteristics that only the people who live there will fully understand. Different communities living in the neighbourhood may have different views on what it is like growing up and living there, and these should be captured and added to the 'tapestry' that illustrates the local context. It's important, especially for practitioners who are not from an area they are working in, to spend time researching this and ask residents to share the stories that connect them to their communities.

Sharing memories and experiences of how the Local Conversation and community has developed over time is also important. Shared memories between those who are involved in the project will highlight the achievements and the journey travelled by the Local Conversation, as well as things that may not have worked so well or ongoing gaps. These memories are useful: they can reveal both collective goals and collective hurts or sensitivities, whether from failed initiatives or something like the loss of housing.

This quote was taken from an evaluation report written in 2016 about Big Local areas and highlighted the importance of shared memories in the projects:

'Shared memories were important in shaping how context and initiative began to evolve together through positive and negative feedback loops. Past experiences impacted on trust, speeding up or slowing down the process of collective action that Big Local put in train. They also influenced expectations, shaping the impact of ongoing experiences. In each area, we witnessed the creating of new memories and narratives through the recounting of stories, both celebratory and cautionary, about the Big Local journey so far. We found that people were keen to look back and see how far they had come. This process of creating new shared memories seemed to be important in moving them forward'.[11]

Exercise 2: Memory sharing - putting this into practice in your Local Conversation

- Set aside time with a variety of different residents to be reflective on the community in the past number of years. What's changed? What's not changed? How do you feel living here now? Why?

- For those more closely involved with the Local Conversation for a longer period of time, what has the Local Conversation achieved? Has this changed anything within the community?

An example may be reflecting on green spaces in the community that the Local Conversation has spent time developing.

- What were the green spaces like ten years ago? If we don't know, who can we ask to find out? Has the Local Conversation changed the way green spaces are perceived in the community? Who has helped to achieve this locally? How do people use these spaces now?

As mentioned in the Involvement pillar, reflecting on your successes is also great for residents' morale.

c)   Local social media and media

In lots of communities, there will be numerous localised social media groups, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Nextdoor, Twitter or Instagram – run by community groups, mutual aid groups, residents, the local authority etc. which can help to paint a picture of local history, local issues and conflicts and local assets too. Connecting with the administrators could be a good way to make these connections, and to see who is especially vocal within the community.

Local newspapers and local websites will also be a useful resource: they are a readily accessible archive of what has gone on and is going on in your neighbourhood.

d)   Data

Another important method for understanding your Local Conversation's context is to get to grips with local data.

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[11] Lois Orton, Emma Halliday, Michelle Collins, Matt Egan, Sue Lewis, Ruth Ponsford, Katie Powell, Sarah Salway, Anne Townsend, Margaret Whitehead & Jennie Popay (2016): Putting context centre stage: evidence from a systems evaluation of an area based empowerment initiative in England, Critical Public Health

Census data

The UK Census is undertaken every ten years, with the most recently published being in 2011. Its purpose is to collect population and other statistics essential to those who must plan and allocate resources. A new census took place in March 2021, and its initial data will be published in 2022 and fully in 2023. Meanwhile, although some of the published 2011 data will no longer be representative of your neighbourhood, lots of it can still be useful.

The Census takes place at the same time in all parts of the UK. In England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the responsible body, and in Scotland, it is the National Records of Scotland (NRS). You can look for and download statistical information about, for example, your neighbourhood's population from the Office for National Statistics or National Records of Scotland websites.

What you can find there, and elsewhere

Using the ONS website as an example, you can search through a filter for different types of information. For example, you can search for information by geographical area, sex or age.

The ONS website can be quite hard to find your way around if you are not familiar with it and, for the purpose of the Local Conversation, you may find this European City database to be easier to use. The database contains information that is not just about cities; you can use it to get more local population data about gender, age, ethnicity and religion - at district, ward and parish level.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation

Another more 'local' set of data you might wish to look at for England is the information held by the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government about the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation is a way of measuring and ranking how 'deprived' any area is in relation to another. It looks at things such as income levels, poverty, the crime rate and access to housing, and uses these to come up with a measure of how disadvantaged an area is relative to others. This data is held in Scotland and Wales, too, as SIMD and WIMD.

You can get this data at a very local level (at what is known as a Lower Super Output Area, typically covering a population of between 1,000 and 3,000 people) by entering the postcode of the area that you interested in. There are 34,753 Lower Super Output Areas in England and Wales, and this site will tell you where your area ranks. In Scotland, these are called Data Zones. Detailed national data is held on the National Records of Scotland website, and population data per Data Zone can be found here. You may already be aware of these, as they are how People's Health Trust designates fundable neighbourhoods.

More local data

Another source of useful data might be your local council's website. These vary quite a lot in terms of accessibility and the ease with which you can find information. Some are easier to navigate your way around than others. You might be able to get some help from the local authority to get the kind of information that you want, and some councils have details for who you can contact for information. You can also contact your local councillor and ask them to help you to identify someone in your local council who can give you the information that you need.

The kind of data and information available from these sources is largely statistical, but it helps you to get an overview of who lives in the neighbourhood, as well as an insight into what some of the key problems or issues might be.

Some examples

- Looking at ONS data from the Department of Work and Pensions, we know that 55.3% of children in the funded neighbourhoods in Gateshead are in single parent households, against an average of 27.2% in England (per 2017 figures). This might suggest youth activities could be especially valuable, supporting those parents who may struggle with childcare while at work.

- Looking at police data, we know that in December 2018 to November 2019, there were 27.9 incidents of criminal damage in the St Mary's areas of Southampton, versus an average of 8.6 in England. This might suggest safety is a priority worth testing with residents, or that a wider range of activities might be welcomed.

- Looking at 2011 Census data, admittedly collected many years ago, we can see that 4.1% of the population of the funded neighbourhoods in Stanwell are Sikh, against 0.8% in England. This might suggest reaching out to the local Gurdwara would support the Local Conversation to become more representative, if it isn't already.

- Looking at data from the 2017 British Population Survey, 23% of residents in the funded neighbourhoods in Longbenton identified in the least-engaged group with the Internet, against 9% nationally. This might suggest that work on digital inclusion might be valued by residents, especially following the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is always useful to gather other contextual information about your neighbourhood, and the sections below are designed to give you some ideas as to how you might go about doing this.

> **Resources:**
>
> - This page created by Locality provides links to data from a number of sources for areas such as crime, health, heritage, landscape, retail, biodiversity, employment and housing.
> - This link also contains a really useful PowerPoint presentation (Locality/My Community) called 'What is my neighbourhood like?' that focuses on using statistical data.

> **Exercise 3: Plugging the data gaps**
>
> With your steering group, open up a discussion about your neighbourhood.
>
> 1. List the Local Conversation's priorities.
> 2. Going through the priorities one at a time, identify and write down your long-term goal for this priority.
> 3. Then, discuss the context surrounding this priority. What does the Local Conversation know, or feel to be the case? What were people saying when the priority was identified?
> 4. From there, think about whether or not there is data that can support the views of residents. Having this data to hand will strengthen your argument for change, whether you are directly taking action yourself or you are attempting to

influence other decision-makers.

5. Collect or find the data! If you don't know where to look, a search engine is a good place to start. To help you, there is an example from a fictional Local Conversation in Bury, Greater Manchester, below.

Example: Improving public transport routes in our neighbourhood

1. One of the top priorities for our Local Conversation is to improve public transport routes in our part of Bury.

2. Increasing the number of public transport routes would be an affordable way to help children get to school and support residents to get to work, shop for food, or to travel without the need for a car. Residents want regular public transport options returned to the neighbourhood. Public transport is environmentally friendly, and it helps people to live fuller lives.

3. Residents told us there used to be lots of buses that went through the estate. Regular transport was available to the city centre, which meant people could access parks, do their bigger food shops, collect their pensions, meet with friends and family who live further afield, and get other buses or trains outside of the area to see more of the world. Not everyone can afford a car, and residents feel the buses come at inconvenient times and there are far less per day than there used to be.

4. We don't have the data to back this up, but it feels like it must be out there. We know the bus timetable now, and we must be able to find some of the older ones, before things got worse. One of our forum members pointed out that surely, the local authority and the bus companies must know how many passengers use the services. And the chair mentioned that the Local Conversation could survey people living in the neighbourhood to ask them what they think about public transport locally, and whether they would like to see it improved.

Collecting the data from different sources

Campaign/pressure group data

If I enter 'Bury bus cuts' on a search engine, I find a BBC News article saying the Campaign for Better Transport has identified more than 3,000 local bus routes across the country that have been lost or reduced since 2010.

On the Campaign for Better Transport's website, they have a useful-looking guide for people who want to campaign to save their bus services. And one of our steering group members could definitely give them a call. This could be valuable.

Data identified by trustworthy sources

On another link from the search engine, I find a local news article which says funding for bus services in Greater Manchester has been cut 28% since 2010. We can use this.

Local authority data

Back to the search. Let's try 'Transport data Bury'. There are a few links that look useful. I find the main reports page for Transport for Greater Manchester, and click on their 2019 spreadsheet. It shows me this:

Table 12 Bury Key Centre Inbound Vehicles 1997, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, Feb 2010, Nov 2010, & 2011 - 2019

Time Period	Year	Cars	LGV	OGV	Buses	M/C	P/C	All	Time Period	Year	Cars	LGV	OGV	Buses	M/C	P/C	All
	1997	3960	328	146	248	10	32	4724		1997	3551	332	149	265	13	15	4325
	1998									1998							
	1999	3714	333	86	240	16	41	4430		1999	3504	357	105	240	9	11	4226
	2000									2000							
	2001									2001							
	2002	3733	293	69	237	23	18	4373		2002	3914	374	107	255	15	7	4672
	2003									2003							
	2004									2004							
	2005	3493	331	105	204	20	43	4196		2005	3551	394	86	222	9	21	4283
	2006									2006							
	2007									2007							
	2008	3693	320	128	211	24	70	4446		2008	3475	363	105	229	19	34	4225
0730-0930	2009								1000-1200	2009							
	Feb-10	3286	281	99	192	8	65	3931		Feb-10	3285	320	102	215	11	22	3955
	Nov-10	3234	317	48	195	15	59	3868		Nov-10	3554	351	82	214	8	33	4242
	2011	3367	242	71	197	15	63	3955		2011	3608	373	62	216	20	38	4317
	2012	3210	289	82	188	14	91	3874		2012	3677	312	74	210	6	37	4316
	2013	3146	284	52	181	11	90	3764		2013	3525	326	58	190	9	34	4142
	2014	3072	254	61	189	13	89	3678		2014	3672	313	85	210	13	51	4344
	2015	3117	241	64	193	13	78	3706		2015	3763	298	83	209	8	55	4416
	2016	3154	271	64	178	9	77	3753		2016	3621	302	96	191	9	41	4260
	2017	3390	275	67	185	9	89	4015		2017	3688	313	83	194	12	27	4317
	2018	3404	233	69	164	8	73	3951		2018	3941	319	75	173	9	30	4547
	2019	3328	238	61	139	6	35	3807		2019	3614	307	71	165	3	18	4178
	2019/1997	0.84	0.73	0.42	0.56	0.60	1.09	0.81		2019/1997	1.02	0.92	0.48	0.62	0.23	1.20	0.97

I can see from the information (highlighted, left) that 139 buses came into Bury before work in the morning in 2019, but we had 193 in 2015. That's 54 fewer buses! And there were 248 in 1997! In fact, in the row at the bottom, in bold, it tells me that bus services have reduced by 44% since 1997.

We can definitely use this in our campaign. That sounds like a great headline stat – they've literally cut the bus numbers in half. We've got the evidence to back up what our neighbours have told us. This would be great on an infographic, or a poster.

But how many people are using the buses? I head back to Google, and I check the local authority's website. It tells me they don't count this, but Transport for Greater Manchester (TFGM) do. Fine – let's go back to TFGM's website. They don't really share any data, or at least I can't find it, because their website isn't the easiest to follow. What I do find is their Freedom of Information page, and legally every public service has to respond to these. It tells me they're committed to being transparent. We can definitely ask them how many people used the buses last year, and how many used them in the last 20 years too.

There, I also find a list of all their meetings which are open to the public – which is very useful for when we're ready to start influencing them. Maybe we could attend some.

National government data

Is there anywhere else I can look for useful data? Transport for Greater Manchester's page also tells me they publish lots of data on www.data.gov.uk. Clicking on transport, and searching 'Greater Manchester', I get 910 results. That's a lot, but it's everything they've ever published. I can refine this by looking at the Publisher. Clicking on 'Transport for Greater Manchester' gets only 38 results. That's not too many to look through the titles of, and to explore the relevant ones.

Within about a minute, I find one listing the Bus Stopping Points in the area, and a map of all the bus routes. These are not the easiest files to work with, but one of the young people who leads our after-school club is great with computers and she's really passionate about the transport issue. Maybe she can help us out. Already, we feel a lot better equipped.

Using the data

Now that you have gathered the data and understand the context better, you are in a stronger position to use that data to influence and bring about the change that you want to see. There is more detail in the Influence section of the guide on how to do this effectively.

Reflection:

- What sources of data are you currently using to understand the context in which your Local Conversation is operating, and how are you sharing this with residents?
- How useful are these data sources?

Understanding what others are doing

Another essential part of understanding context is identifying others already working on similar areas either specifically within the neighbourhood or wider area. Thinking collaboratively, are there priorities that you can work on together, and consider how you can collectively make a difference, rather than duplicate? There is more on the importance of this and collaboration specifically in the Influence section.

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing. It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[12], ethnic backgrounds[13] and religions[14], disabled people[15], older people[16], young people[17], members of LGBT+ communities[18], people with mental health needs[19], people with learning disabilities[20], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[21] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and that you know who lives in your neighbourhood. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which

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[12] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)
[13] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)
[14] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)
[15] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)
[16] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)
[17] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)
[18] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)
[19] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)
[20] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)
[21] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)

help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate. See further guidance on this in the section on Involvement.

It is essential, as part of understanding context, to consider issues of equity, diversity and inclusion. This will help to shed light on the additional inequalities or stigma faced by certain groups of people in the area who have one or multiple characteristics, whether Black refugees who are disabled, older LGBT+ people, young people with learning disabilities and so on.

Knowing the context is also about understanding the power dynamics within neighbourhoods which can impact the ability of certain groups to have their voices heard. Where this is the case, practitioners should acknowledge it and put measures in place to ensure that all residents' voices can be heard.

It is important to understand not just the makeup but also any connections they have to other groups within neighbourhood; are some groups more marginalised than others; are there groups who you have little or no contact with? By understanding this, you can start to work with these groups to understand whether the way in which you work is inclusive of them? If it is not, what are some of the barriers and how do they suggest you can remove them. You can also understand some of the different cultural issues which may prevent people from being more involved and consider whether particularly groups of people sit on your steering group and management team – this is more than being visible, it is about bringing people's real experience to the decision-making spaces.

5. What are the risks if you don't understand the context?

If you (and your Local Conversation steering group members) don't fully understand the context the Local Conversation operates in, you risk falling short on the other seven sections of the practice guide, and ultimately, being able to bring about the changes that residents want in their neighbourhood.

Without understanding the context, your approach might be considered insufficient, another community organisation may have tried it before and, at worst, it might be exclusive and it might offend people. Without context you will struggle to get people involved: if you don't know who you are seeking to engage, what appeals to them, what doesn't, and what has happened before, it is unlikely people will see something for themselves or for their neighbourhood in what the Local Conversation has to offer. Further, context is important to understand relationships in the area. There will always be social dynamics, power imbalances, and conflicts to manage. Everywhere and everyone has a history. The best way to stay on top of this is to be aware of this history, and to manage issues as they arise, rather than wait for them to directly impact the Local Conversation's success.

If you are seeking to bring something positive to the neighbourhood, you need to know what has worked and what hasn't; which services may have existed, but no longer do; what assets the community has – its people, its community facilities, its green spaces, transport links, shops, existing activities, other local groups, and the safety of the area, for instance. Otherwise, it is likely you will be wasting your time and residents' time. For

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example, if residents say there is a real shortage of activities for young people in the neighbourhood, and you start a football activity – but it turns out that one of the few activities that already exists is a local children's football team, this is something you really need to know.

Context is important for action and influence, too. As noted above, data and evidence can be a vital asset. If you are seeking to encourage the local authority to address an issue, you need to be sure this is a real issue. Think about the example of bus services from the activity earlier in the pillar. If, in fact, buses are running more frequently than they were five years ago, you are unlikely to get very far if you say they've been cut back. Having evidence on your side, and knowing the full context of an issue, helps you to sharpen your message and keeps your actions targeted.

6. Summary

Why is it important to understand the context in which your Local Conversation is taking place?

Understanding the context of your neighbourhood – its history, the people who live there, its diversity, what is there and what isn't – is a crucial foundation for project delivery. Your context is something to keep in mind when thinking about your approach, how you get people involved, the relationships and dynamics that exist within the community, the action the Local Conversation takes and the activities it delivers, as well as how it seeks to influence others. Regularly scanning the context and exploring this with residents will ensure that your priorities stay relevant and you are focusing on the right changes to pursue collectively. Understanding context creates an effective baseline and will support effective progress reporting and evaluation and ultimately understanding the impact you are making.

Context changes

This is something to bear in mind. As time passes, things shift. A very visible example of this would be the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on different groups of people within the neighbourhood.

Developing a better understanding of the context

There are lots of ways to do this. Some we have outlined within this section of the guide involve speaking to people, walking around the neighbourhood, memory sharing, checking local Facebook groups, and looking into publicly available data.

You can support a better understanding across the Local Conversation by encouraging residents to lead on these activities, or at the very least to be involved.

- What could be done to help develop a better and shared understanding?
- What can you do with this new knowledge? Does this help the Local Conversation target its work more effectively, and what might you put into a 'Context Plan'?

7. Some Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Take account of all views and perspectives
  Consider the diversity of your neighbourhood
- Draw on a wide range of data sources
- Talk to other organisations working in the neighbourhood
- Think about the future

Don't:

- Make any assumptions – all organisations have things they don't know/do well and an objective analysis of context can help to highlight these
- Don't avoid difficult issues and/or addressing differences in opinions.

8. A final exercise

To bring everything together in this section, we would like you to do one more exercise:

Exercise 4: Getting your Local Conversations steering group to understand the importance of the context in which they, their friends and family live

In this section of the guide, we have talked about Context – including what might be helpful to understand about the local area to support the Local Conversation and some practical resources and exercises.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally. They will be able to fill in some of the gaps in terms of your (and their) understanding of the local context, particularly in relation to issues/histories that have not been formally recorded. They may well be interested in the resources we have discussed and use it to further develop the Local Conversation and exert influence using data and broader research.

As a final exercise please consider how you are going to ensure steering group members have a full understanding of the local context and what three things have you taken away from this section that you can discuss with them to further develop their knowledge of the local context within the Local Conversation and how they might use it? Having done this please let us what we could add to this section that might help others, in terms of exercises to try, sources of information from which to better understand the local context, and how you have shared it with residents.

Governance

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at good governance. It will cover:

1. What we mean by governance
2. Why good governance is important for a Local Conversation
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion considerations
5. Ways you can support effective governance, including some practical examples.
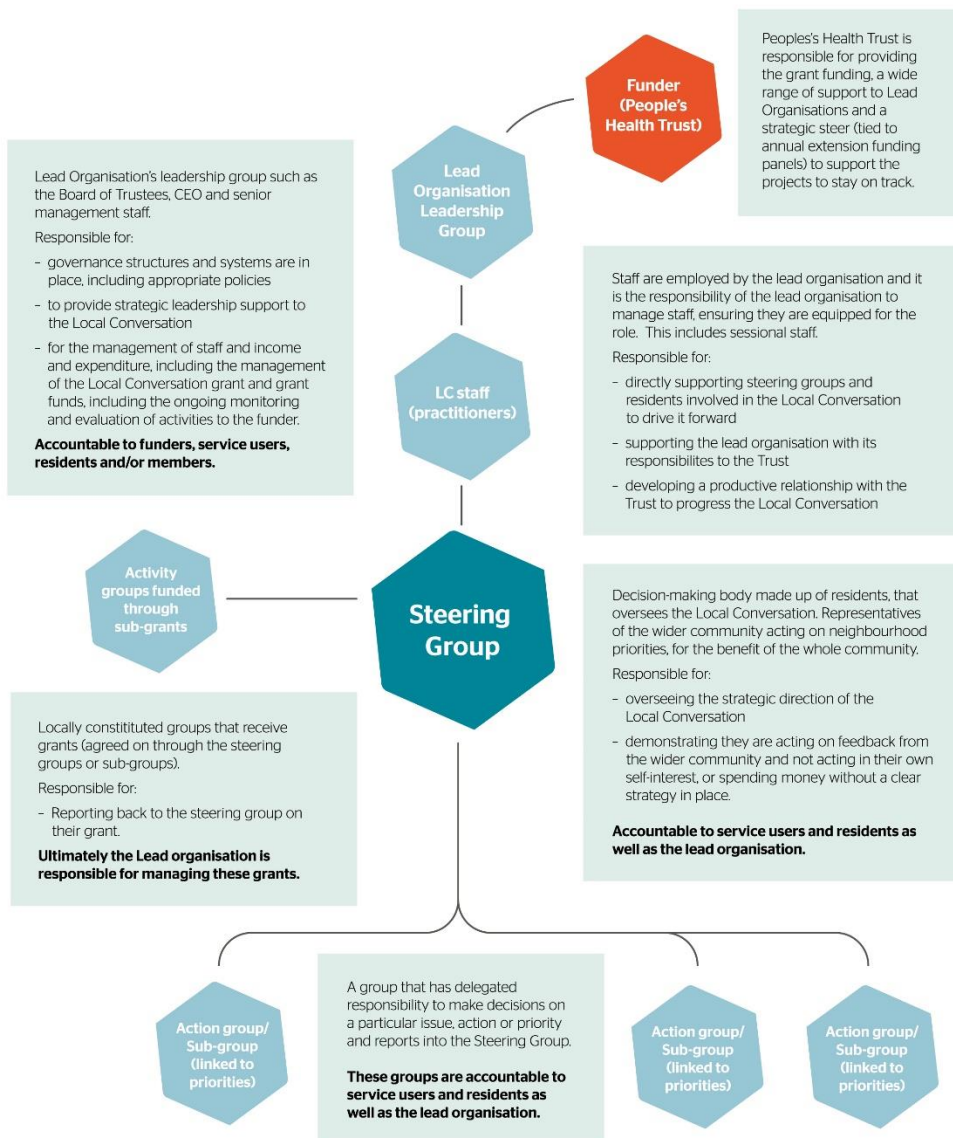6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts.

1. What is governance?

Governance refers to the ability to run your organisation well, and to a standard which gets the very best from all of those involved. It involves systems, procedures and processes which ensure overall direction, effectiveness, legal compliance and accountability, and which can be understood and followed by all staff, volunteers and residents taking part. This helps to preserve an organisation's reputation and promotes a positive culture.

2. Why is good governance important to the Local Conversation?

Good governance means not only doing what you *must* do, but also what you *should* do to make the organisation and the Local Conversation work better, to have a greater chance of succeeding and to ensure that people can fully participate. Local Conversations are using public money for which they are accountable, to the funder but also to the wider community.

People's Health Trust has outlined the flow of responsibilities and where accountability lies:

Funder (People's Health Trust)

Peoples's Health Trust is responsible for providing the grant funding, a wide range of support to Lead Organisations and a strategic steer (tied to annual extension funding panels) to support the projects to stay on track.

Lead Organisation Leadership Group

Lead Organisation's leadership group such as the Board of Trustees, CEO and senior management staff.

Responsible for:

– governance structures and systems are in place, including appropriate policies

– to provide strategic leadership support to the Local Conversation

– for the management of staff and income and expenditure, including the management of the Local Conversation grant and grant funds, including the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activities to the funder.

Accountable to funders, service users, residents and/or members.

LC staff (practitioners)

Staff are employed by the lead organisation and it is the responsibility of the lead organisation to manage staff, ensuring they are equipped for the role. This includes sessional staff.

Responsible for:

– directly supporting steering groups and residents involved in the Local Conversation to drive it forward

– supporting the lead organisation with its responsibilites to the Trust

– developing a productive relationship with the Trust to progress the Local Conversation

Activity groups funded through sub-grants

Steering Group

Decision-making body made up of residents, that oversees the Local Conversation. Representatives of the wider community acting on neighbourhood priorities, for the benefit of the whole community.

Responsible for:

– overseeing the strategic direction of the Local Conversation

– demonstrating they are acting on feedback from the wider community and not acting in their own self-interest, or spending money without a clear strategy in place.

Accountable to service users and residents as well as the lead organisation.

Locally constitituted groups that receive grants (agreed on through the steering groups or sub-groups).

Responsible for:

– Reporting back to the steering group on their grant.

Ultimately the Lead organisation is responsible for managing these grants.

Action group/ Sub-group (linked to priorities)

A group that has delegated responsibility to make decisions on a particular issue, action or priority and reports into the Steering Group.

These groups are accountable to service users and residents as well as the lead organisation.

Action group/ Sub-group (linked to priorities)

Action group/ Sub-group (linked to priorities)

Good governance is not only needed within the lead organisation but should be reflected in the structures throughout the Local Conversation, from

Steering Groups (or similar) to sub groups and activity groups. Poor transparency within groups can cause real friction that can undo countless hours of relationship and confidence building.

Governance within lead organisations

A Local Conversation Steering Group or project needs to be supported by robust governance processes in the lead organisation. This includes oversight and support for financial and project management. This is important to ensure that local people trust and have confidence in the Local Conversation and how it is working in their neighbourhood.

There is a clear responsibility for the lead organisation to ensure appropriate governance structures and systems are in place. These are made explicit in the People's Health Trust General Conditions of Grant which stipulate that the Grant-holder:

a. Has all necessary resources and expertise to carry out the Project.

b. Has and will keep in place adequate procedures for dealing with any conflicts

of interest.

c. Has and will keep in place systems to deal with the prevention of fraud.

d. Has and will keep policies and procedures in place to deliver the project successfully. This must include a complaints policy and procedure (an example policy is available from the Trust if you do not have one)

Additionally, the lead organisation is accountable to both the Trust and residents. It is responsible for timely reporting to the Trust, for overall management of the project and for ensuring the standard and specific terms of grant as set out by the Trust are actioned. Lead organisations are also accountable for any sub grants made and ensuring they are used appropriately.

Governance within Steering Groups

In each Local Conversation, there must be a group of local people that take responsibility for:

- Overseeing the Local Conversation's strategy (including agreeing the vision, priorities and objectives)
- Deciding how resources are allocated in line with the strategy
- Making sure that involvement in the Local Conversation is diverse, inclusive and representative of the wider community
- Supporting and reviewing good governance practice of the Local Conversation (with support from the lead organisation)

Steering Groups can demonstrate responsibility and accountability by:

- Ensuring the delivery of key things they are tasked with, including helping to set up x plan - responsibility
- Communicating impact and activity to the wider community - accountability
- Regularly gathering and reviewing feedback from the wider community as part of its annual planning
- Ensuring regular monitoring and reporting of activities and finances
- Making minutes available, not containing personal information. (See below for more detail on this).
- Managing comment and complaints fairly, sensitively, and efficiently.

Steering Groups can also set up subgroups which can help to engage more people and spread responsibility (see section 5).

3. Some theory and approaches

The governance code supported by the Charity Commission (see Resources box below) is an ideal model of governance, and can be adapted according to the size and complexity of any organisation, regardless of whether your organisation is a registered charity or not.

The governance principles are:

- **Purpose:** Being very clear about aims, what is to be delivered, when, and how this will be sustained. For example, the purpose for Local Conversations is to deliver the local vision, and to address health inequalities by working to improve local social determinants of health. A clear purpose and strong local vision will support residents to take action on the things that matter most to them.

- **Leadership:** Ensuring that an organisation follows an agreed strategy for both the effective delivery of its aims and how it does it. This might include for example: ensuring residents priorities are listened to and acted upon, encouraging resident involvement, enabling community based decision making processes and support for relationship building within communities and with other bodies.

- **Integrity:** Adopting and practising values of honesty, fairness and decency, applying ethical principles to decision making and creating a welcoming and supportive culture. These help to engender public confidence in the organisation.

- **Sound decision-making, risk management and control:** Decisions need to be informed by the right/appropriate level of questioning and evidence to establish a full understanding of what the outcome of the decision will be. This is how you make sure your decisions are sound. There need to be good systems for identifying and managing risks and strong management controls, though risks should be balanced against opportunities.

- **Effectiveness:** Ensuring that organisations have appropriate skills, experience, and knowledge to make clear and effective decisions, in the context of what the Local Conversation is trying to achieve and residents' priorities.

- **Equity, diversity and inclusion:** There should be an agreed approach to supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in policy and practice. This is covered in more detail in section 4 below.

- **Openness and accountability:** The way that decisions are made and money is spent should be transparent. This ensures greater accountability and helps to maintain legitimacy and trust.

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Exercise: The Governance Wheel

NCVO has created a Governance Wheel directly influenced by the Charity Governance Code. It provides a framework to support regular governance reviews. You can score your organisation against each area of the wheel on a scale of 1-10. If you do this regularly, you can track progress against the lower scoring areas. Don't be put off by the word Board – you could swap it for Steering Group.
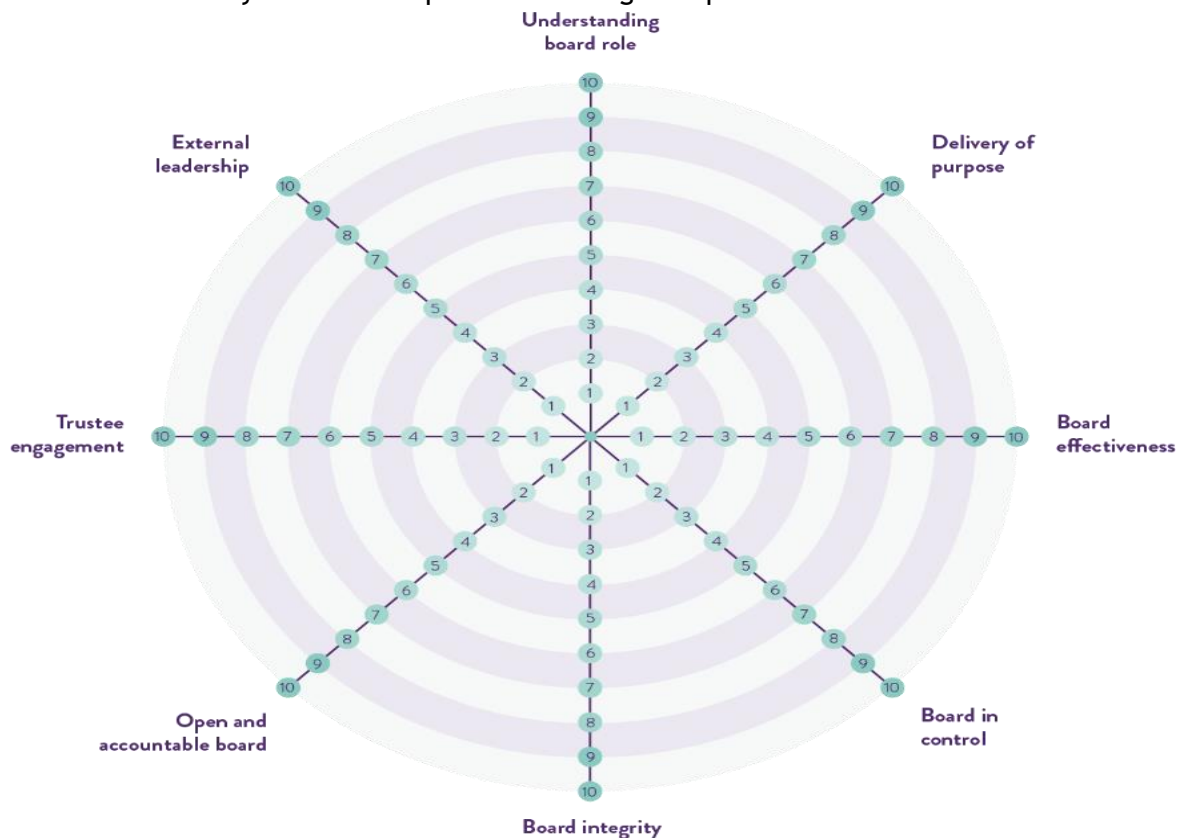
Practising good governance

The principles above are an important guide but it is understanding what is involved in 'doing' good governance that helps us to get it right. The Compass-Cass Business School model of governance identifies what needs to be considered and managed to deliver effective governance. This includes:

Governance			
Structures	**Processes**	**Meetings**	**Behaviours**
• Roles • Size • Working groups • Representation • Membership	• Recruitment • Appointment • Diversity • Induction • Skills/experience • Chair selection • Risk governance • Strategy	• Frequency • Duration • Attendance • Agenda planning • Meeting management	• Use of members' skills • Listening • Team working • Praise / challenge • Openness / trust • Focus • Conflicts of interest

Research by Hudson and Ashworth 2012[22] found that whilst the structures and processes of governance need to be well managed, it is team working and behaviours that are the most significant determinants of effective governance.

Resources:

- Charity Governance Code: www.charitygovernancecode.org/en
- Charity Commission guidance: www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-commission-guidance
- OSCR - Good governance: www.oscr.org.uk/managing-a-charity/trustee-duties/good-governance/
- Charities Aid Foundation: www.cafonline.org/charities/trustees-and-governance
- NCVO Knowledge Bank: Governance
- NCVO's governance and trusteeship consultancy: www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/consultancy/governance-and-trusteeship-consultancy
- Governance Health Check: www.diycommitteeguide.org/download/governance-health-check
- Organisational level strategic planning: www.diycommitteeguide.org/resource/what-strategic-planning
- Tips on governance: Mike Hudson, (2014) One Minute Tips on Governance

Governance policies and procedures

A governing document explains how your Steering Group will be run. It shows that your group is democratic and accountable and that there is a clear procedure for decision-making. A governing document makes it easier for the group to work together to achieve a common aim – it ensures that everyone is aware of each other's responsibilities and it can be a useful reference point should disputes arise.

There are many types of governing document your Local Conversation steering group (or similar) could choose to adopt. The two most common are:

- Terms of reference - set out the group's aims and ways of working. Terms of reference are part of the Local Conversations' agreed governance structure, but ultimate accountability usually sits with the Lead Organisation. The Steering Group should review its Terms of Reference with the lead organisation to ensure responsibilities and expectations on both sides are understood and accepted.

- A constitution - a legal document which gives you the ability to do more things as a formally recognised entity (for example, taking out insurance on a building or applying for additional funding).

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[22] Hudson and Ashworth (2012) *Delivering Effective Governance*, Compass Partnership, Bucks

Terms of Reference	Constitution
Terms of Reference (TORs) describe the group's key procedures. It should include: • The purpose of the group (what it will do, why it was created) The scope of decision-making powers • How members are appointed, how the chair and any other roles are appointed • Meeting frequency and location, meeting procedures, quorum, details about agendas and minutes (how these will be distributed, who prepares them, etc.), communication between meetings • How often the TOR will be reviewed and next review date. TORs outline responsibilities and accountabilities and so are useful in defining the relationship with the Lead Organisation and if the Steering Group has subgroups or working parties.	A constitution sets out the group's aims and the rules it will follow, the scope of its work, its decision-making responsibility, how it reports and how frequently. If your group will be managing **finances and opening a bank account**, a constitution will be needed which includes: • Rules around financial management • A winding-up or dissolution clause With a constitution the group can apply for external funding in the group's name.

The governing document should be taken to a minuted meeting for formal acceptance by the group. Copies of the governing document should be available to all group members, and can be a useful introduction for new members. The content of your governing document should be determined by the group.

Examples of Terms of Reference

Haverhill South People's Forum Terms of Reference with six sections:

1. **Purpose / role of the group:** what it is and what it will do, including production of a Priorities Plan
2. **Membership:** criteria, maximum number, period of membership
3. **Accountability: e.g.** The Forum is responsible to Community Action Suffolk (the Lead Organisation) on matters relating to the Local Conversations programme; individuals representing the Forum can do so only on behalf of the Local Conversations programme; compliance with policies and procedures
4. **Review of TORs**
5. **Working methods / ways of working:** training opportunities, frequency of meetings, sub groups, appointment of chair etc.
6. **In Addition:** additional notes e.g. approval of grants

Stanwell Steering Group Terms of Reference has five headings:

> **Overall purpose of the Steering Group**
> **Size, Membership & Roles**
> **Frequency of Meetings**
> **Administrative Support**
> **Confidentiality, Declarations of Interest and best practice**

A code of conduct outlines how group members should behave towards one another and anyone else both during and outside of meetings, and in any other situation when they may be representing the group or community. It states how you will create a safe and inclusive atmosphere. It will also help you to know how to manage a situation in which someone has been treated unfairly or disrespectfully within your group. The code of conduct needs to be agreed by the group so that it can be enforced if needed.

Example

Local Conversation in Stanwell

Steering Group/Grants Panel Code of Conduct

As a member of the SG/GP you are expected to:

1.   Be respectful of each other's views, follow the set agenda and Chair's guidance. Declare Any Other Business matters at the start of or before the meeting

2.   Maintain confidentiality of discussions and/or individual circumstances

3.   Communicate positively with each other, project staff, partners and other residents

4.   Actively support project activities and events and update the group regularly on participation

5.   Work cooperatively in order to focus our energies on delivering community benefit

6.   Understand that you will not benefit financially from attending meetings. Agree that you will not attempt to influence any decision which might bring you financial or other gain. This means you may have to leave the room whilst certain discussions are taking place and also declare any interests at the start of the meeting or as they arise.

7.   Meetings of the steering and grants panels are not a place to air or try and resolve personal conflict between members, as we want to honour everyone's valuable time. Processes for conflict resolution exist and if you find yourself in conflict, please speak first with the Project Officer. If the conflict involves the project officer, then please refer to the Surrey Care Trust Complaints policy or speak to the Chair.

8.   Operate within agreed expenditure levels as delegated to project staff and members

I have read the above rules and guidance and agree to abide by these during my time spent on the Local Conversation in Stanwell Steering Group or Grants Panel.

I understand that action will be taken according to the Terms of Reference and other relevant project policies and procedures, if a member does not act in accordance with this Code of Conduct.

Name:

Signature: Date

Reflection:

- How do you want people to be treated in your group? What types of behaviour are unacceptable?
- If someone feels harassed, what should they do about it? Who should they tell? What will the group do about it?
- If someone breaks the code of conduct, what will the group do about it? How will you help the group to move forward? How will you support and protect the person who feels harassed or bullied?
- How will you make sure that everyone is aware of your code of conduct?

Resources:

Code of Conduct Templates

- The Ayrshire Community Trust – Code of Conduct

- Hammersmith & Fulham Borough Council - Code of Conduct for resident-led panels

For preventing and dealing with conflict:

- DIY Committee – Preventing damaging conflict

- DIY Committee – Dealing with damaging conflict

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing . It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[23], ethnic backgrounds[24] and religions[25], disabled people[26], older people[27], young people[28], members of LGBT+ communities[29], people with mental health needs[30], people with learning disabilities[31], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[32] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and that you know who lives in your neighbourhood. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate.

Lead organisations and steering group members need to build the skills, confidence, tools, and techniques to ensure that they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion and this needs to be embedded in all aspects of the Local Conversation's governance structures and approach.

Reflection:
- How do you currently discuss and raise the profile of diversity and inclusion in your Local Conversation?

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[23] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)
[24] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)
[25] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)
[26] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)
[27] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)
[28] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)
[29] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)
[30] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)
[31] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)
[32] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)

- Do you need to build confidence and knowledge to hold effective discussions about who is and is not involved, and to take action to broaden involvement where it is needed?
- Do you need a working group to focus directly on equity, diversity and inclusion?

Exercise: How inclusive are you?

How far is your Local Conversation and its decision-making groups inclusive of the following groups/people in respect of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

If not, what can you do to address this?

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Class – specifically working class
- Marital or civil partnership status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

It is also important that you consider how the above characteristics interact. For example, the experience of a Black disabled resident will be different to a non-disabled Black community member.

All lead organisations must have:

- an *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement* for your Local Conversation to demonstrate publicly the group's commitment to building an inclusive, diverse group, welcoming to people of all backgrounds within the community. This can be shared with residents to encourage involvement.

- an *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy* which is a written agreement about how the group will actively support and welcome particular groups, as well as how you will avoid discriminating against people, and create a safe and inclusive environment for all and any new members. This is also useful if the group ever has to manage a situation in which someone felt they had been unfairly treated or discriminated against.

- An *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion* plan – this plan will look at what your organisation does currently, who is within your community (whether you work with them or not), whether the services/activities/actions you take positively or negatively impact on marginalised groups, how you can adapt what you do to make what you do more inclusive. It is also critical

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that you consider how you can work to break down some of the barriers which exist in all organisations and neighbourhoods and prevent people from fully participating, influencing and accessing the services or support they need.

Exercise: who is and is not involved?

- Do a wide range of people take part in your activities and meetings? Who do you think is missing?

- Are there practical things that might stop certain people using your group and attending your meetings (such as the time of day of your meetings, or the venue you meet in)?

- Does your group ever treat people differently, or not include people as much, because of any particular characteristic, such as gender or race?

The statement, policy and the plan show the commitment of the organisation to being inclusive and provide means through which others can hold you accountable to those commitments. It is important that statements, policies and plan are kept under regular review, are reported to the Steering Groups and boards, and that the commitments contained within them can be seen in action across all aspects of the Local Conversation governance structures and approach.

Resources:

Support for your Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement
- NCVO - Guidance on Equality and Diversity

Example equality and diversity policies
- Resource Centre – Equality and Diversity policies for small groups
- Northamptonshire Community Foundation – Equality and Diversity policy

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5. Ways you can support effective governance, including some practical examples

In Section 3 above, we looked at what makes for effective governance. Here, we explore how to build and improve good governance through structures (subgroups or action groups); processes (grant-making); meetings (making them effective) and behaviours (accountability and managing conflict).

Structure: The benefits of subgroups / action groups

Small task focussed groups are a good way to involve people and spread responsibilities. Local Conversations may want or need to establish different kinds of subgroups to oversee the strategy for a neighbourhood priority, lead on particular actions, tackle specific

projects, or investigate new areas of work. It is important to be clear from the start about the scope of decision making powers and lines of accountability.

The Steering Group's governing document (Terms of Reference or Constitution) needs to confirm that it has the power to establish subgroups / action groups and to delegate some of its responsibility to them. For example, a clause like this could be included:

"The [steering group] may appoint such sub-committees, advisory groups or working parties of their own members and other persons as they may from time to time decide necessary for the carrying out of their work, and may determine their terms of reference, duration and composition. All such sub-committees shall make regular reports on their work to the [steering group]."

The steering or leadership group is responsible for all decisions taken by any subgroups so members should satisfy themselves that these are set up effectively, with TORs appropriate for their purpose and a clear way to keep track of their work and progress.

For groups with a relatively significant amount of responsibility, such as a subgroup overseeing the strategy for a particular priority or managing its own budget, the group will need Terms of Reference. These will likely be similar to those we described above for Steering Groups (written guidelines that clarify the role, purpose and responsibilities given to the group), but will relate specifically to the work of the subgroup.

Exercise: **Developing Terms of Reference for subgroups**

The governing document for the Local Conversation gives the Steering Group the power to set up subgroups and you're now planning to establish a group.

1. The first step is to bring together the Steering Group and people who have shown initial interest in being part of the subgroup. Work together to define the purpose and role of the group and how it will work. This will be described in its own Terms of Reference.

2. Work through each of the points below, answering the questions in the right-hand column.

3. Once you've got these answers, you're ready to draft the Terms of Reference for the group.

Name of group	For example, Environment Action Group, Youth Forum, Safety Subgroup, etc.
Membership and appointment	Who can be a member (e.g. residents of the local area, Steering Group members and non-Steering Group members)? How and when are they appointed? How long can someone be a member of the group?

Chairing	Will there be a Chair for this group? If so, who can be Chair? How will they be appointed? If it is the role of a member of the steering or leadership group to act as a chair for a particular subgroup then that should be detailed in the role description.
Frequency of meetings and quorum	How often will the subgroup meet? How many votes are required to carry a motion?
Record of meetings	How will minutes be recorded? Who will be responsible for taking these?
Reporting mechanism	How will the subgroup report to the steering or leadership group? Oral or written reports? By whom? How frequently?
Functions and delegated authority	Specify the role and purpose of the subgroup. Specify limits to their authority, for example, are they advisory only? Specify when they can make decisions or act without the specific approval of the Lead Organisation or the Steering Group. Will they oversee a budget assigned to them by the Steering Group? How will they be supported to monitor and report on this by the lead organisation?

Source: adapted from the DIY Committee Guide to Sub-Committees
https://www.diycommitteeguide.org/code/principle/sub-committees

Avoiding potential pitfalls with subgroups
Some key things to keep in mind when you are considering setting up different subgroups for the Local Conversation are:

- Too many subgroups could make it difficult for the Steering Group to maintain oversight
- Ensure that delegation and the decision-making process do not become blurred between the Steering Group and the subgroup
- Make sure that the decision-making process does not become unnecessarily lengthy or overcomplicated
- Maintain good channels of communication and transparency between the Steering Group and subgroups to avoid the potential for conflict – make sure each knows what is going on and why decisions have been made. It's good practice for a representative of the subgroup (ideally a nominated lead person) to attend Steering Group meetings to provide updates in person wherever possible.

Reflection:

- How are subgroups reporting on their progress?
- If they have a budget how is spend being monitored?

- Is everyone clear about where decision-making lies?

Grantmaking

People's Health Trust makes a grant to your Local Conversation. In some cases, Local Conversations wish to use some of the grant to make further sub-grants. It is not essential to make sub-grants but a Local Conversation may wish to as part of its overall approach.

The community grantmaking process - For more information on what to consider within the community grantmaking process please contact People's Health Trust.

Terms of Reference checklist for the grant-making group of the Local Conversation (based on the principles of effective governance)

- **Purpose:** The purpose of a small grants group is to support the Local Conversation to act on the things that matter most to local people (their priorities) through the mechanism of small grants.

- **Leadership:** The group may have one chair or a rotating chair, but all the members of the small grants group can play a leadership role. They report back to the steering group for endorsement of decisions taken.

- **Integrity:** Members of the grants panel should represent the values of the Local Conversation and provide the community with confidence that fair decisions are being made to benefit the community. It is important that there is a culture in which open and diverse dialogue can take place safely and with care.

- **Decision-making:** Decisions made by the group need to be informed ones. When agreeing Terms of Reference, be sure to include the quorum (the number of people needed to agree a decision). Facilitation by a staff member (who is impartial) may also be important, especially in the early stages to support productive discussions, creation of opportunities, and spot risks. To ensure decision-making around which projects should receive funding is fair and fulfils the purpose, assessment criteria should be agreed up front, used in every meeting, and be publicly available to the wider community.

- **Effectiveness:** Ensuring that those involved are equipped with the skills, experience and knowledge to make decisions, and the panel is provided with the training and tools to enable effective decision-making. This involves introductory training for members on the purpose and process and ongoing discussions about whether the process is effective. Any reading or preparation for the meetings should be provided well in advance.

- **Diversity and inclusion:** Members of the group need to come from as wide and as representative a background as possible. This affects characteristics but it is also about diversity of thought and decision-making. Always be mindful of the accessibility barriers involved in grant-making – for example, if there's a lot of preparation involved or when/where and how the meetings

take place and the costs involved (always reimburse people).

- **Openness and accountability:** A democratic approach requires transparency about decisions and how they were arrived at. It is a fundamental principle behind the Local Conversations programme and is vital for a small grants group when local relationships are involved. Grants awarded should be promoted by the Local Conversation, for example on its website or via its newsletter, to keep the wider community informed of these investments.

Effective meetings

Although most people prefer not to sit in meetings, these are important spaces for collective discussion and decision making. Here are some pointers to making them as effective as possible:

- **Frequency** – you should be meeting at least once every six weeks in order to keep momentum going. Beware however of adding in extra meetings on a regular basis or before you know it you will be meeting every week and people will get fed up and drop out.

- **Duration** – most people can only concentrate for a limited amount of time. Two hours is probably long enough though you may wish to add in time for refreshments, informal chatting and networking.

- **Attendance** – you should be aiming for at least 80% of members being present at all your meetings. Think about a quorum – the minimum number of people who can make a decision, and include guidance about how to deal with members repeatedly not turning up to meetings in your terms of reference or constitution (e.g. if a member misses more than two consecutive meetings they should be contacted to find out why, though ultimately may be asked to leave the group).

- **Agenda planning** – it is important that people know what is being asked of them when they come to a meeting. Agendas should therefore be constructed well in advance of a meeting. This might be by the chair and secretary, through discussion with the lead organisation and / or through a more collective process. You could identify future agenda items at the end of each meeting or ask people to submit agenda items on a local noticeboard or Facebook page. So that meetings do not run on for hours, it is a good idea to suggest how much time an agenda item will need.

Circulating the agenda in advance means that people can think about the discussion points and the decisions to be made in advance and will be better prepared when they come to the meeting. The agenda items need to be written up in enough detail that they are self explanatory, for example, 'Café' as an agenda item does not say enough. To one person it means 'oh no, I promised to help out last Saturday and forgot'; to another it means 'they want to discuss the cash flow projections and I haven't finished it'; to a third it means 'that must be when lunch is'. A fuller explanation would be 'Café – the pros and cons of opening for longer during the day'.

- **Meeting management -** this is usually the responsibility of the chair, though everyone should be mindful of the role they can play in making meetings effective.

Chairing or facilitating a meeting	
The tasks	**Roles and attributes**
- Explaining the agenda and timings to the meeting - Ensuring all who attend share responsibility for smooth running - Getting through the business of the meting efficiently and effectively - Briefly introducing each item or the person who will - Clarifying or seek clarification of unclear statements - Summarise what has been decided at the end of each agenda item - Assisting groups to search for ideas and solutions that reflect everyone's point of view - Keeping the discussions moving towards completion - Encouraging full participation - Drawing people out and helping everyone to feel heard - Taking responsibility for finding ways of reaching agreed outcomes and decisions - Ensuring you are true to aims and objectives - Making sure you follow your code of conduct / governing documents - Ending the meeting on time.	**Friendly** Chairs have considerable influence over the tone and feel of a meeting. For a start, the chair is the most looked at person! Being friendly enables people to be at ease which ensures a better quality of contribution. But a good chair also needs to be… **Firm** There will always be time limits. The chair is responsible for moving the discussion on, though sometimes a minority will resist. **Focused** Every meeting needs a focus—the agenda. Each agenda item needs to stay more or less on track. Staying focused can mean being firm. At the same time, it is important that the chair is… **Flexible** Certain discussions will deviate from the original agenda item. Chairs need to use their judgement as to when to go with this and when to pull it back. **Fair** Everyone should be treated in the same way and be given equal access to 'airtime'. Chairs must put their own views on hold until everyone else has had their say. A chair's first duty is that of enabling open discussions to take place

- **Recording meetings** - it is essential to have a written record of meetings. Minutes keep members informed if they are unable to attend a meeting. They should be made publicly available with appropriate consideration for GDPR requirements (removal or personal or other identifying information). Meeting minutes do not need to be long or overly detailed, but should cover what was discussed, what was agreed and who is responsible for any actions. Someone should be nominated to take minutes at every meeting. These minutes should be written up as soon as possible after each meeting and shared with the group for agreement – or to make changes if needed.

Minutes should be checked for accuracy at the start of the next meeting, any matters arising should be picked up and discussed (so that the points are not lost) and they should be signed and dated by the Chair as an accurate record. Each meeting's minutes must note that the previous meeting's minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record or issue corrections.

Behaviours

Accountability, Openness and Transparency

Effective engagement with residents is fundamental to building collective control. All Local Conversations need to be open, responsive, and accountable to the wider community. Steering or leadership groups need to actively engage with people about the Local Conversation's work. Doing this well requires thinking through how accountability, responsibility, and transparency will be achieved at the beginning and continually reviewing how well it is working, or what may need to be changed.

The DIY Committee Guide outlines ways in which groups can achieve openness and transparency in the way they communicate and work with others in the wider community. The ideas they share are presented in the box below.

Resource: How Steering Groups can create openness and transparency with the wider community

Communication:

- Regular newsletters
- Publishing updates from steering group meetings
- Publicising the community plan and priority strategies
- Social media updates and discussions
- Publishing activities and actions – and how to join in – on the website
- Publishing articles in the local press

Publishing the community plan and priority strategies; updates from Steering Group meetings; and news about activities and actions across different communication channels including:

- Newsletters
- Social media
- Website

- The local press
- A local noticeboard.

Consultation:

- Hold community planning meetings for strategic planning and strategic reviews
- Facilitate voting (online or postal) on key issues
- Hold open meetings to discuss issues and actions
- Promote mechanisms whereby local people can provide feedback to the group on its activities (evaluations, feedback forms, or comment cards, for example).

Involvement:

- Consider how marginalised groups can be represented in the leadership group and subgroups
- Create advisory groups to involve stakeholders and partners in planning and decision-making
- Co-opt individuals into leadership groups for specific periods or purposes.

Co-production

- Consider how people can be involved in an active and equal way in planning and shaping actions and activities of the Local Conversation (and local services where you are working with partners and stakeholders)
- Consider how people can be involved in deciding how resources are allocated towards the priorities
- Consider the role local people can have in co-delivery of activities or actions (and local services where you are working with partners and stakeholders)
- Consider how people can be involved in evaluating activities or actions (and local services where you are working with partners and stakeholders)

Source: Adapted from DIY Committee Guide - Communication

Resources:

- Charity Commission - Running, planning and recording meetings
- OSCR - Minute taking template
- Seeds for Change - Minutes
- DIY Committee – A secretary's role at meetings

Promoting mutual understanding and fostering inclusive solutions

Agreements and decisions are more likely to be long lasting if they are built on a foundation of mutual understanding. This means enabling different perspectives to be

shared and weaving together different viewpoints. However, misunderstandings are inevitable and conflict in groups is common. This is always stressful for everyone involved. Helping groups to survive the difficult periods when working towards a shared vision can be a struggle.

Managing conflict

Every group will face periods of conflict. Disagreements may be about directions and policies, conflicting roles or personal differences. Conflict can be healthy – different viewpoints are a significant benefit to community decision making and addressing conflict constructively can be an important step in building and maintaining relationships. However, unhealthy conflict diverts energy, demoralises people, and prevents you from getting on with what you really want to do.

Pointers for dealing with conflict include:

- Don't panic when conflict arises – see it as an opportunity for growth.
- Recognise that people and cultures see and handle conflict in different ways.
- Try to look at things from each person's point of view – take their feelings seriously.
- Try to separate people and personalities from the situation – consider issues only.
- Make time to talk about it.
- Focus on mutual interest and emphasise common concerns and points of agreement - are there reasonable options available that could reach some accommodation with the different views.
- Look for options where there are mutual gains
- Consider how decision-making is conducted. It is important to be clear regarding how decisions are to be reached on governance matters (whether by consensus or voting) and that any delegated decision-making is clarified in writing with appropriate reporting mechanisms. Your governing document may provide specific rules on these matters.
- Remind members that they are bound by the decision of the committee, even where they disagree, and must continue to carry out with integrity their responsibilities to act in the best interests of the organisation. Highlight the damage that can be caused to the organisation by factional conflict

Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest can arise if a person who is part of decision making such as on a steering group or sub-group, or trustee, as well as staff, have an interest or responsibility outside of the group which conflicts with the ability to make fair decisions. A conflict of interest also includes if a group member, or their relative/friend, stand to benefit personally from an action or decision made by the group. Some possible examples are:

- The group member's partner wants to apply for a paid job role with the organisation
- The group member receives payment for some work they undertake for the organisation

It is important to have a clear policy for declaring and managing these situations, so that decisions can be made in an objective and transparent way and all members of the group understand their obligation to declare any potential conflict of interest.

Declaration of interest forms should be issued to all members of the group and must be updated if circumstances change. In this way the Steering Group can maintain transparency, avoid potential conflict or criticism and maintain residents' trust. Many groups have a standing item on their agenda for declarations of interest.

Resources:

Conflict of interest policy templates

- Merton VSC - model policies, including a conflict of interest policy:
- NICVA – Conflicts of Interest

Comments, complaints, and serious disclosures

Although there may be informal methods of getting feedback, there should also be a formal process for people to comment, complain or raise serious concerns about the Local Conversation. This will normally be through the existing complaints policy of the lead organisation, but it is really important that residents know this exists, can access it (it can be publicised in newsletters or through social media, for example) and that it is straightforward for them to follow. The lead organisation is responsible for guiding groups in managing complaints and will take the lead in investigating and resolving these.

People's Health Trust has procedures to deal with serious disclosures (sometimes known as 'whistleblowing') which include:

- Serious financial malpractice or fraud
- Serious failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutes
- Serious dangers to Health & Safety or the environment
- Conduct which is a breach of the law
- Improper behaviour or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these.

4. Summary

This section of the guide has looked at governance. We have explored why and how good governance within both the lead organisation and in a Local Conversation enables the overall direction, effectiveness, and accountability of the project.

There are seven key principles of governance which underpin effective and successful oversight, management and decision-making in a Local Conversation. Good practice in governance should be evident in structures, processes, meetings and behaviours.

We have also explored why it is essential that equity, diversity and inclusion considerations underpin these governance structures.

Finally, we have explored a range of mechanisms through which the Local Conversation can effectively deliver its purpose in an involving, transparent and open way, ensuring accountability to residents.

Reflection:

- Why is it important to consider governance within an organisation or a Local Conversation? What are the risks if you don't have strong governance within an organisation or Local Conversation?
- Does everyone involved in the Local Conversation understand and recognise the importance of governance within the Local Conversation?
- Who needs to be involved and how?

7. Some helpful do's and don'ts

Do:

- Make use of the resources embedded in this document. Although each Local Conversation is unique and will require governance structures and arrangements to meet its needs, there are some very useful generic resources and templates available. You don't need to reinvent the wheel.

- Keep governance arrangements under review and have a process for looking at how governance is being practised in the Local Conversation

- Have a governing document, which outlines how the Steering Group operates, including how people are elected and how long their terms last, how conflicts of interest will be managed, how often meetings take place, who can attend, who can vote, and the minimum number of members that need to be present for votes to be taken and decisions made

- Adopt a code of conduct for those involved

- Have a clear 'Comments, complaints and serious incidents' procedure

- Ensure you have other key policies in place, such as safeguarding, health and safety, that are reviewed regularly etc.

- Ensure meetings are formally chaired, have a quorate (ruling majority) of members present, an agreed agenda and supporting information circulated in advance and minutes recorded that note any declarations if interest

- Learn from other organisations

- Have processes to ensure accountability to the wider community, such as a communications plan and the regular review and reporting of impact, outcomes and learning

- Be mindful of the group's membership and recruitment process, including ensuring the group membership is transparent, representative, diverse, and inclusive

- Have clear and transparent criteria around how sub-grants are made, including guidance information for applicants and published assessment criteria upon which decisions are made, and public information about what funds have been awarded.

Don't:

- Underestimate the time required to set up effective governance arrangements.

- impose governance arrangements on a Local Conversation. They should be tailored and agreed in partnership with steering groups and residents.

- Hide from conflict.

8. A final exercise

To bring everything together in this section, we would like you to do one more exercise:

Exercise 4: Strengthening governance

This section of the guide has looked at governance. We have explored why and how good governance within both the lead organisation and in a Local Conversation enables the overall direction, effectiveness, and accountability of the project.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally. They will be able to fill in some of the gaps in terms of your (and their) understanding of governance. They may well be interested in the resources we have discussed and use it to further develop the Local Conversation and exert influence using data and broader research.

As a final exercise, please consider how you are going to ensure Steering Group members have a full understanding of governance and what three things have you taken away from this section that you can discuss with them to further develop their knowledge of governance within the Local Conversation and how they might use it?

Additionally, you could set aside some time for a governance review

- Ask everyone to read through this guide
- Where do you think your Local Conversation is strong in its governance?
- Identify three things can you do now to strengthen governance within the Local Conversation
- Set a timescale for action and who will do what

Having done this please let us what we could add to this section that might help others, in terms of exercises to try, sources of information from which to better understand governance, and how you have shared it with residents.

Influence

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at **influence**. We consider:

1. What we mean by influence
2. Why influence is important in the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. Ways to influence – what you can do including some practical examples
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and do not's
8. A final exercise.

1. What we mean by influence

Influence is about the **power to change** or affect someone or something. If you have influence, this might mean you have made an impact on a person, on a group of people, or on something tangible – on a service, a way of working, a place, or a policy for example.

At the simplest level, influence is simply the effective combination of three elements:

1. *A communicator* -- the person or group who wants to influence someone
2. *A message* -- what the communicator wants the audience to do or believe
3. *An audience* -- the recipient (or recipients) of the message.

(From Community Toolbox)

You can influence in several ways. Some examples of direct forms of influencing include:

- **Persuading** – Convincing those individuals or groups who have the power to make significant change to do so. This is sometimes known as lobbying.

- **Amplifying** - Making sure the voices of people who are not often listened to are heard through good external communication, targeting specific groups or people with power.

- **Campaigning**, organising or taking **direct action** – Picking up a specific cause or issue, being clear about what you want, and taking action or campaigning publicly for that change.

2. Why influence is important in the Local Conversations programme

The Local Conversations programme was set up to help local people come together and develop their priorities towards the things that residents want to see delivered locally. Importantly, this process should change the way things are done and influence what happens locally.

The key principles of the programme are:

1. The purpose of the Local Conversation programme is to improve health by addressing the social determinants of health, including the local environment, jobs and income, the local economy, housing, and education and skills. Community power and social connections are also critical social determinants that cut across all of your work.

2. Lead organisations support residents to build social connections and to take greater control locally so that they can improve things in ways which are meaningful to them. This must be through a collective and transparent process where residents can understand and shape what is happening.

3. Residents increase their collective control and influence over things that matter to them locally and which address one or more of the social determinants of health in 1 above. Residents are supported to make key decisions on priorities for the neighbourhoods and the way in which the Local Conversation money is spent. This can include taking decisions to respond to changing circumstances, for example, changing priorities or spending.

Improving, shaping or changing the way things are done can mean anything from the kind of neighbourhood services which are delivered, to changing the opening times of the local community centre. It could mean influencing the way a housing programme works, to helping groups of people who are opposed to each other to get along better and become more cohesive for the sake of the neighbourhood. It could also mean campaigning to have more local people hired by big businesses in the area, or pushing for employers to bring their businesses to the area so that local people can benefit.

Reflection:

- Think of some examples of direct influencing that you have done. Did you seek to persuade, or lobby, people? Were you amplifying the voices of those who are not often listened to? Did you campaign? What was effective in your experience?

Exercise: influencing change

- Ask your steering group (or similar) to share examples of when people have made their voice heard – this might be locally, nationally or globally. Write each example onto a flipchart on the wall and then identify:

  - What they wanted to change
  - How they went about it
  - The ways in which they were successful.

3. Some theory and approaches

For change to take place, residents first need to understand what the problem or issue is and identify the changes they want to happen. The next step is to develop an approach that will convince other residents, partners or decision-makers to help achieve that change. You can read more about ensuring residents' voices are heard and amplified in the Involvement and Approach sections of this guide.

Understanding how influence works

Influencing often involves changing someone's mind or getting those who have power over an issue to give it more priority/change their practice. You could have totally different views or ideas and therefore your task is to change someone's point of view so that they understand and agree with you.

In order to change someone's mind and behaviour, you have to understand some of the ways in which changes come about. This section looks at some of the theory behind what you do. If you can understand the theory, you may start influencing people more effectively.

Herbert Kelman[33] noticed three key ways in which conflict and disagreement may be resolved:

- **Compliance** - This is where someone agrees to do something because they are told to. This usually happens because they either want to earn a reward or they want to avoid a punishment. To resolve conflict in this way, you usually need to be in a position of power and be able to reward or punish. The person who agrees may or may not actually agree with the final outcome, but they agree to go along with it in order to secure the reward or avoid the punishment.

- **Identification** - This is where someone agrees to do something because they admire you and what you are trying to do. They want to be seen to be like you and so go along with what you say. Again, the person who is influenced may or may not actually agree with the influencer, but they see themselves as having something to gain from agreeing.

- **Internalisation** - This is where someone takes on board the arguments and values in full, and agrees to do something because they genuinely see it as the right thing to do.

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[33] *Kelman, H. (1958). Compliance, identification and internalization: Three processes of attitude change, Journal of Conflict Resolution. **2** (1): 51-60.*

- Has an issue you're trying to change been addressed in other communities?
- What form of persuasion do you think they adopted in order to change minds? Can you learn from this in your neighbourhood?

Spheres of Influence

A useful starting point is to consider what is known as your Sphere of Influence. You could look at this at either a personal (individual) level, or at a group (or organisational) level. In most cases, there are three levels of influence:

- **The sphere of control:** These are things that you can make decisions about and make happen on your own. You don't need to involve anyone else. This is your 'sphere of control'

- **The sphere of influence:** Here, you might need to be able to get other people or organisations to physically do something or to agree to something being done in order to achieve the outcome or result that you want. This is your 'sphere of influence'

- **Everything else, which is outside of your control or influence:** Here, you feel like you cannot control or even influence what is going to happen.
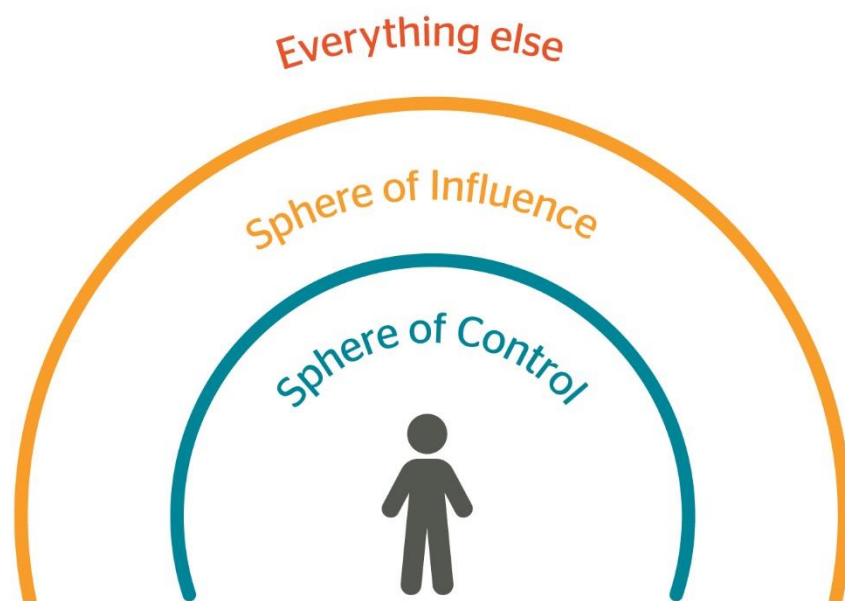
This way of looking at the world is, perhaps, a little simplistic. It is not quite as clear-cut as this. Where the analysis is useful, however, is in helping us to understand that often we cannot simply make things happen and we need to think who else we need to involve or influence in order to achieve what we want.

Often the problems that happen over and over again in our lives can seem unchangeable. These would be 'everything outside our sphere of control or influence'. In these cases, we

need to get creative and think about how we might extend our sphere of influence to make the changes we want.

Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when, as a group, you have had to find another way to influence someone, or to be heard, when you felt you had no influence?

Stakeholder mapping and power analysis

One way we can look at our sphere of influence is to map who is important, and for what reason. This helps us to know who it is we need to influence, and to develop a more targeted approach. This exercise is sometimes called stakeholder mapping.

Exercise: Mapping significant people and organisations

Step 1 - Identify stakeholders
Identify all of the individuals or organisations who have an interest in what you are doing (the stakeholders). With organisations, try and be specific about whose mind it is you want to change. So, rather than identifying 'the council', think about who you want to reach within the council – for example, if it is a parking issue, you might want to influence the Director of Highways or a councillor with transport responsibilities. Once you have noted down all of your stakeholders, you can then note down the different ways in which they are involved. In doing this, you should think about:

- **Their level of interest** – how involved they are, how important what you are doing is to them and, if applicable, if it is part of their legal responsibility
- **Their level of influence** – whether they are people who have the power to make decisions or change what you are trying to do. They might also be able to support you to carry out the work.

Step 2 – Mapping interest and Influence
By mapping who has interest and who has power, you can direct your energy to where it can really make a difference. Think about the level of interest and the level of influence that each of these stakeholders may have over the issue that you are wanting to address.

```
                        Local MP

                              Private sector landlords

                                          Borough Council
  HIGH                                    Local

  councillor

                                      Parish Council

                 Headteacher
                 GP

                                    Housing association

                                      Local tenants'

  groups

                                      Local Conversation

  LOW                                 Our housing project
                                      Local men's shed

  group
        LOW              Level of interest          HIGH
```

Level of influence
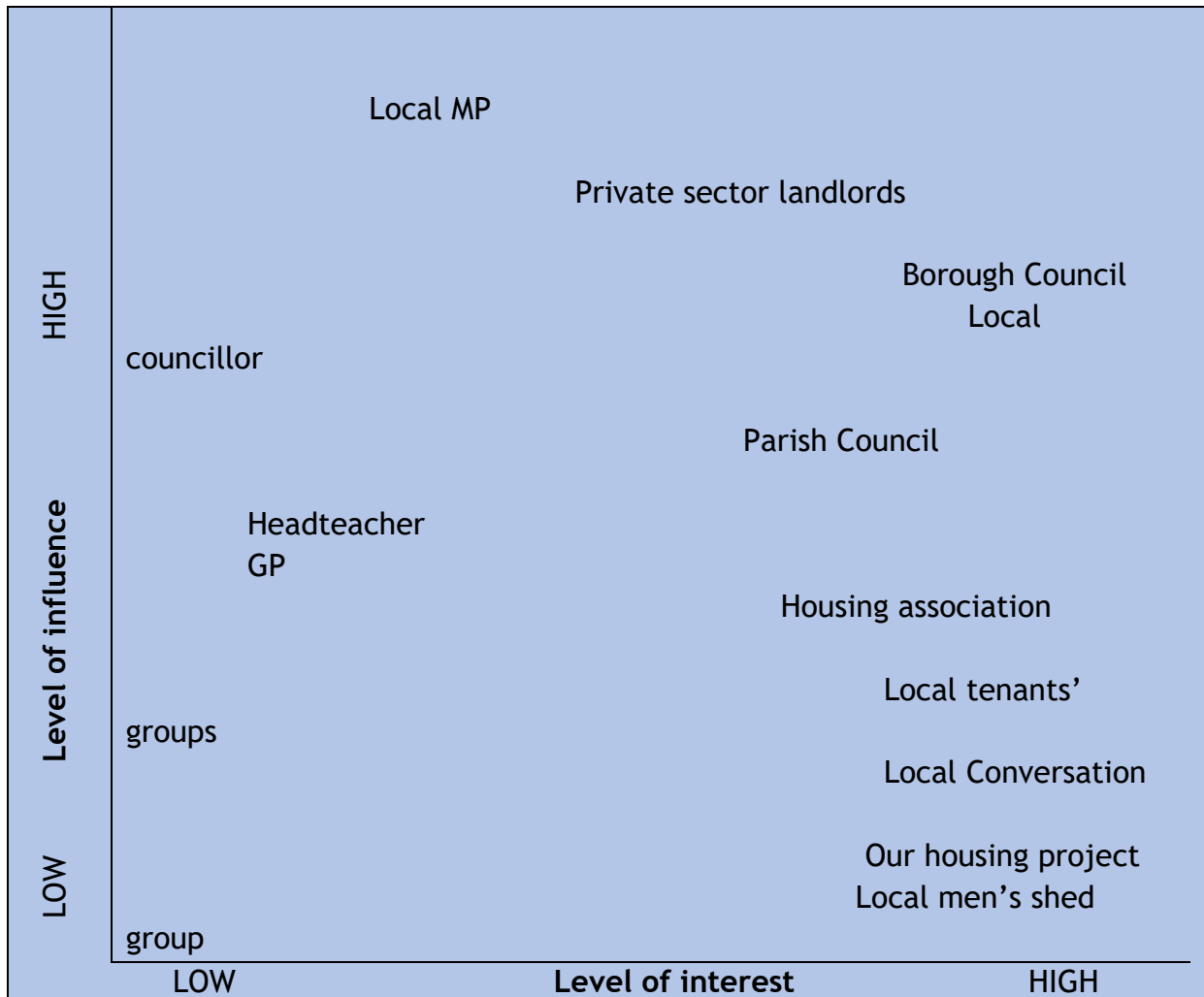
Step 3 – Getting in touch
From the people/organisations above, start to think about who you already have connections with, and who you might need to develop connections with:

- Who knows them?
- Are there existing public meetings you can attend and ask them a question?
- Can you get them to come to meet you to hear what you have to say?
- Can you write to them setting out your concerns?
- Do you have a proposal to put to them?

Step 4 – Influencing
Now you need to think about how you might go about influencing these people or organisations. It is important to:

- Work out exactly what you would like them to do – what is the change you would like to see happen, and what do you think they can do (your view)
- Work out what the person you want to influence can actually do (their view).

Look for where you have common ground – they are more likely to support you if you show them how what you are trying to do fits with what they are doing and will be helpful to them in achieving what they are wanting to achieve. If they see what you are doing as

being opposed to what they are trying to achieve, they are more likely to either ignore you, or worse, to actually try to put blocks in your way.

Step 5 – What next
This will depend upon who your stakeholders are, and their positions. If a stakeholder shows interest in meeting and hearing your concerns, respond positively. If you have a selection of stakeholders who are interested, it is worthwhile inviting them all to a meeting of your Steering Group or sub-group and developing a plan together. But make sure that you are clear what it is that you want to happen.

If your stakeholders are hesitant, or disagree with you, but are happy to meet, then you should still take the opportunity. This is the chance to highlight the importance of the issue, and why something needs to be done. Remember to showcase your Local Conversation's strengths: a representative voice of the community, which is led by residents, and takes action to make your neighbourhood a better place to live. You have a collective voice and collective power.

If they ignore you, contact them again. See if residents can organise for a number of letters to be sent concerning the issue. Use social media, or your newsletter. Think about who they do listen to and see if they will use their influence to represent your views. Ensure your voice is heard, and demonstrate the strength and size of your coalition.

Reflection:

- Who in your neighbourhood has successfully done this kind of influencing before? Who might have skills and experience and could be useful to talk to, or involve.

Example: Local Conversation in Lozells, Birmingham

The Lozells Neighbourhood Forum has supported residents to discuss topical issues and ways forward with heads of departments in the council as well as elected officials. The Neighbourhood Forum and councillors' surgeries are now held in the Aspire & Succeed offices. It was recently decided with local residents to do a survey of the local GP services in the neighbourhood and what residents feel needs to change. This will be presented to the local CCGs, GPs and the hospital trust.

Example: A scenario showing different viewpoints, and common ground

- You want to do something about a housing development in the neighbourhood. You establish from stakeholder mapping that the MP is the best person to talk to. You want her to make the developers pay attention, and make adjustments based upon your concerns within the next couple of months (your view).

- The MP wants to make sure that her constituents, who voted for her by a very small majority, see that she is working hard for them. She *has now got the power* to influence the future of the development. She can raise the issue in parliament,

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and represent and promote your views with other decision-makers locally and through the press (her view).

- **Common ground:** You both want to do something to make life better for residents.

- **Short-term** help could be you asking the MP to:
  - write to a number of councillors and the developers highlighting the worst of the issues, the suffering the housing changes will cause individuals and the neighbourhood and asking them to a meeting with her. People with power (councillors, the local authority, the developers) respond to the MP faster than they will to residents.
  - talk to the councillors and the local authority about the powers they have to take some action.

- **Longer-term,** the MP can also consider the current powers that the local authority has to deal with developers and resident concerns, and whether it is adequate. She can begin to work to understand the issues (by meeting with residents and other stakeholders) and looking at ways to change the law to ensure that the developers cannot provide substandard housing.

- **What is the lesson?** Your stakeholder mapping, above, showed your MP as having more influence in terms of **direct** action than she actually may have had, but she did have much stronger interest than you thought - and was keen to impress you. This, coupled with her ability and position to try and change the law, **supports your learning to grow for next time, and means real action can be taken on the issue.**

Resource:

Mapping of stakeholders can be done as a visual exercise with you at the centre. This short video clip shows how you can go about doing this.

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing . It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[34], ethnic backgrounds[35] and religions[36], disabled people[37], older people[38], young people[39], members of LGBT+ communities[40], people with mental health needs[41], people with learning disabilities[42], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[43] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate. See further guidance on this in the section on Involvement.

Lead organisations and Steering Group members need to build the skills, confidence, tools, and techniques to ensure that they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion. It is critical when thinking about equity, diversity and inclusion that all Local Conversations should be taking an anti-oppression approach. This means that they not only support the equality and inclusion of groups but that they also take an active stance opposing the systems and behaviours which cause harm, for example through anti-racism work, anti-ableism work, anti-misogyny work. People's Health Trust will be providing more guidance on this.

It is also important to acknowledge and to understand the additional inequalities or stigma faced by certain groups of people in the area, such as people from a minority ethnic community who are also disabled. These additional inequalities and stigma are significant in terms of the potential for these groups to influence. If you are to influence, it is important that you really understand the views of people from all groups or you could unintentionally cause harm, for example, by asking for a change which is inaccessible to some people and further marginalises them.

In terms of influence, power dynamics within neighbourhoods are significant as they can impact the ability of certain groups to have their voices heard. Where certain groups are traditionally marginalised and isolated it is important to mitigate the power imbalance and enable these residents to voice their views as part of wider neighbourhood influencing.

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[34] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)
[35] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)
[36] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)
[37] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)
[38] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)
[39] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)
[40] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)
[41] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)
[42] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)
[43] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)

- How confident are you that you have actively listened to the voices of the diverse communities in your neighbourhood and you understand what is most important to them?
- How regularly are you checking in with these communities to ensure your work is relevant to their aspirations?

5. What you can do to support influence, including some practical examples

Choose your issue

Bombarding an organisation, such as the council, with lots of things at the same time rarely works. You will be more effective if you can pinpoint a key change you want to see and express this is in a clear and concise way. If you can suggest what might make a difference, and how you can help, you are more likely to be successful. Additionally, once you are clear about what you want to change, the easier it is to target the most relevant and appropriate people – allies as well as decision makers. We have covered how to identify significant stakeholders above.

Building pressure and influence

There are many approaches and tactics you could adopt and you might use some of them at the same time, (also see the Action section of this guide):

- **Do your research:** there may be a lot of information available which will support your case – try to find it and use it. For example, if you want to reduce the speed of traffic on your road, find out the number of road traffic accidents which have been recorded or the number of speeding tickets which have been given out.

Example: Local Conversation in Claremont, Blackpool

Residents have been attending the Police and Community Together and the Local Neighbourhood Partnership meetings. They are now calling the council when rubbish gets dumped (in addition to the alley cleans that residents are doing themselves). This is resulting in prompt removal of larger items, which is helped by residents having a good relationship with the local council worker.

Claremont residents are now developing a system for reporting anti-social behaviour, which will involve incident reports being compiled by a Steering Group member and patterns of incidents and reporting being taken to police through the North Central Business Action Group. The project has links through a resident on both groups.

- **Emails and letter-writing:** Ask people who agree with what you are trying to achieve to write to the people that you are trying to influence (such as the Chief Executive or Chair of an organisation, the local MP, or the local councillor). You can help people to do this by providing them with a letter they can copy or some points showing the kind

of things that you want them to include in the letter, and telling them the name and email/postal address of the person that you want them to write to.

- **Petitions:** You could get people to sign a petition to show that they support what you are doing. Make sure that the words of the petition are clear and unambiguous however, otherwise the recipients of it may be able to say that it is not clear what the people who signed it actually want. You can do these online very easily, and they are free.

- **Storytelling:** You could get someone who has been directly affected by something to tell their story. This can be a very powerful way of getting a point across and often helps you to win the emotional side of the argument. The person's story could either focus on what the problem is and why something needs to change, or it could highlight what you are doing to help and why this is so valuable and needs further support. Or it could do both. You could tell the story at a live event, by someone talking about their experience at a meeting or by making a video or audio recording and using social media. There are lots of things to consider in doing this, not least that a story can go far and wide, but it can be a good way to influence.

- **Surveys:** Use surveys locally to build your case and show how people feel. It adds weight to your argument. It's easy for someone in power to dismiss one person, it's more difficult to dismiss the views of 200.

- **Campaigning:** It is always valuable to have an online and offline campaigning presence. Strong campaigns require strong evidence, a passionate argument, and a uniting brand as foundations: from there, you can focus on building recognition of the issue in order to grow your movement of supporters and increase pressure on those who the campaign is targeting.

- **Lobbying:** As outlined at the start of this section of the guidance, and in the scenario from ACORN that focuses on housing, lobbying is working to persuade decision makers (for example, MPs/MSs/MSPs or councillors) to take action on an issue.

- **Networking:** always look for opportunities to form new connections. This broadens the potential for greater influence – who you know, and who they know, matters. People are always more willing to listen to and help someone they consider a friend or an ally. Even if someone who doesn't know you is willing to talk, he or she probably won't listen as well as they would if you had a strong connection.

- **Organising:** Forming relevant committees / working groups of people with direct experience of the issue to focus specifically on the change you seek. Organising can be

effective in surfacing issues and building momentum towards using some of the techniques described here to have an influence.

- **Offering your expertise:** volunteer to be part of commissioning processes as a local expert or to work with service providers to redesign and shape services.

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Example: West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission

The West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission found that there was not enough information about the support services available in the area. Members worked with council officers to update the council website so that it was more user friendly and offered up to date information. From this they developed a Navigator Project designed to help people navigate their way to local sources of support.

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- **Events:** These can bring the issue to the attention of the wider public.

- **Show and tell:** for example, photographs of lots of people helping to clean up a park can show how much support you have. With participants' consent, you could use the photographs to produce a newsletter, or you could put them online, to raise the profile of what you are trying to achieve with the people you are seeking to influence, as well as mobilising more residents to get involved.

When the going gets tough…

Shaping and making change can be hard work. Be prepared to take a break if your attempts to influence change do not seem to be having the desired effect. You may feel like banging on the town hall door but that is unlikely to win you many friends. Instead, assess the situation and review your approach – are the people you are trying to influence the right people, are there other local allies who can help, do you need to present information in a different way, can you identify some common ground and present the change you want to see as a win-win – where all parties will benefit?

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Example: Ethical Lettings Campaign in Bristol

ACORN (Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now) supports members to deliver campaigns to address local housing issues. Its Ethical Lettings Campaign in Bristol enabled members to build power and leadership and influence local decision makers. This sparked a series of campaigns that have significantly improved living conditions for local tenants.

One in three renters live with damp and poor repair, according to ACORN. Such conditions can have a negative effect on health and wellbeing, often leading to people feeling powerless and isolated. Costs, agency fees and eviction fears can also prevent people from speaking out.

Initially, members campaigned to implement the Ethical Lettings Charter, a code of conduct to raise rental standards. Members helped design activities and led on different aspects of the campaigns such as outreach activities, research and communications.

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Within the first six weeks of the campaign, three letting agents and six landlords, who deal with over 500 local private tenants, had signed up. Soon after, it was incorporated into housing policies for Bristol City Council and various other local authorities.

The project's scope broadened as members gained more knowledge, skills and confidence. This encouraged them to run a number of other successful campaigns to make rental housing more affordable, increase voter registration, and promote a ban on unfair agent fees. These achievements significantly improved living conditions for local tenants.

Project members formed support networks and meaningful friendships within their volunteer teams and also with members of the wider community through the activities. For example, the group held advice sessions and networking events, encouraging local renters and homeowners to come together, bridging divisions and misunderstandings.

The 'Big Housing Conversations' programme, a community forum facilitated by ACORN and Bristol City Council, was also set up to improve the dialogue between local authorities and tenants.

The Ethical Lettings Campaign, run by ACORN, was a project funded by People's Health Trust, based in Easton, a neighbourhood in Bristol with a high proportion of private housing tenants. More information on this story is available on our website here.

Resources:

There are lots of places you can find useful guidance, toolkits and information to support influencing, and how you pitch your arguments. Some include:

- New Economy Organisers Network (NEON)'s campaigner resources
- Lloyds Bank Foundation's Change Maker's Toolkit
- Campaign Bootcamp's resources, including guides to setting up petitions, lobbying, fundraising and campaigning
- Sheila McKechnie Foundation's Social Change Project
- Act Build Change's learning community for change makers
- Working Narratives' 'Storytelling and social change: A strategy guide'
- Community Toolbox Influencing People. This online resource also has sections on influencing policy and conducting research to influence policy.

6. Summary

Influencing is one of many things that Local Conversations will do. It is a way of making change happen for the better. You can influence in a small way (about very local matters), or in large way about bigger issues which affect you.

To be able to influence, you have to understand who all of the people and organisations who have an interest in the topic are, and who has influence (often called 'stakeholders'). You can map the stakeholders to work out who they are. You need to then work out what their level of interest is, as well as the extent of their influence.

You should ensure that your influencing 'agenda' isn't determined by only those with the loudest voice or greatest agency in your area. It should also respond to the influencing priorities of those people with least power or confidence, whose views are often overlooked by the majority. You need take positive steps to reach out to them, to present what you are trying to achieve in a way they will understand, and to ensure that they can see that what they have said has been taken on board.

To do this, you need to think about:

- What you want from them (your viewpoint)
- What they want / can do (their viewpoint)
- What the common ground is, and whether you can work together.

It helps if you understand how people's minds are changed. The examples above about compliance, identification and internalisation might help with this. Some people will be more persuaded by evidence: facts and figures, while others will be more swayed by the emotional appeal of an issue, and people's testimonies. It is always useful to have both prepared, and built into your resources and your strategy.

Think about the best method of influencing. Meetings, emails, letters, online 'noise', peaceful demonstrations, petitions, storytelling, documenting and networking are just some of the ways which you can help build your influence.

7. Some helpful do's and don'ts

Do:
- **Stay calm.** If you have a meeting with someone with power to change something, stay calm. Even if you get passionate about your point, don't get angry. Shouting, not listening, and talking over someone are all ways to lose your audience.

- **Use facts as evidence for your position.** Gather some important information before you meet. Surveys, statistics and quotes from relevant people and results are useful arguments to deploy in support of your case.

- **Ask questions.** Use questions to understand the viewpoint of others. If you understand where others are coming from you are more likely to be able to address their concerns.

- **Use logic.** Show how one idea follows another.

- **Be emotional (wisely).** As well as logic you can use emotion to appeal to people, 'Shouldn't we all be working to make the roads safe for our children?'. Tell the stories of how this has impacted on people you know.

- **Listen carefully.** Many people are so focused on what they are going to say that they ignore what other people think, say or feel. Don't assume what other people think or feel. Take time to find out.

- **Be prepared to back down when a good point is made.** Don't argue every point for the sake of it. If other people make a good or valid point, be prepared to acknowledge this. Equally, stand your ground when needed.

- **Look for a win-win.** Be open-minded to a compromise position that helps everyone win.

- **Be realistic with time.** Influencing can take time. Be realistic about how slowly something changes.

Don't:

- **Get personal.** Direct attacks on someone are never good! Attack the issue not the person. If the other party attacks you, then you can take the high ground, for example, "I am surprised at you making personal attacks like that. I think it would be better if we stuck to the main issue here rather than attacking individuals."

- **Get distracted.** Your opponent may try to throw you off the scent by introducing new things. Try to remain focused and be firm. "That is an entirely different issue, which I am happy to discuss later. For the moment, let's deal with the major issue at hand."

- **Water down your strong arguments with weak ones.** If you have three strong points and two weaker ones, then it is probably best to just focus on the strong ones. Make your points convincingly, and ask for agreement. If you carry on and use the weaker arguments, then the person you're trying to influence may use them against you and make your overall case look weaker.

- **Give up.** Negotiating and changing minds takes time. Don't be down-hearted if you don't win people around immediately.

Reflection:

In this section of the framework, we have talked about influence – including what it means, some theory, and some practical examples.
- What three things have you taken away from this section that you can use to support greater influencing in your Local Conversation?
- What could you add to this section in terms of theory around influence?
- What practical examples or tips around influencing could you add to this section?

8. A final exercise

To bring everything together in this section, we would like you to do one more exercise:

Exercise 4: Enabling your Local Conversations Steering Group to understand the power of influencing and how they can exert it to bring change to their neighbourhood

In this section of the guide, we have talked about how the Local Conversation can deliver both shorter and longer term, structural change by influencing the local social determinants of health.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally.

Having read through this section of the guide you should now feel (even more) confident about supporting residents to use their collective voice to influence people and agencies that have the power to address some of the social determinants of health.

As a final exercise and using the tips, resources and case studies in this section, we would like you to support your Steering Group (or one of your subgroups - if you have them) to design a focused influencing plan that relates to one area within the agreed Local Conversation priorities. As you go through this process, please note what worked well and where you/they struggled.

Having done this, please let us what we could add to this section that might help others in terms of exercises to try, or sources of information from which to better understand approaches to influencing.

Involvement

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at **involvement**, and how to encourage local people to get involved with the Local Conversation. It will cover:

1. What we mean by involvement
2. Why involvement is important to the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. What you can do to increase involvement, including some practical examples
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts
8. A final exercise

1. What we mean by involvement

This is about the involvement of community members in activities, projects and programmes aimed at providing community and public benefit. Effective community involvement is essential in improving the quality of life in a local area because residents know their communities best, what works well and what could be better. They should therefore be involved in shaping decisions about where they live. People can become involved in a variety of ways such as through participating in a local activity, joining a community group, contributing and responding to community Facebook groups, providing feedback on local services and influencing change in their neighbourhood.

Involvement opportunities can lead to:

- **Active citizens:** people with the motivation, skills and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed

- **Strengthened communities:** community groups with the capability and resources to bring people together to work out shared solutions

- **Partnership** with other groups and agencies to improve neighbourhood services and enhance democracy.

Involvement requires a flexible approach: a range of ways to reach all of the groups of people who make up the local neighbourhood, and to encourage their participation over time.

2. Why involvement is important in the Local Conversations programme

Local Conversations is a resident-led programme and cannot succeed without the active involvement of residents. They cannot achieve the vision for the neighbourhood unless a large proportion of residents are supported to connect and work together to address or influence changes they want to see in their communities. The process of involvement should happen throughout the lifetime of the Local Conversation, to make sure that as many people as possible can meaningfully participate. The more diverse and representative of the whole community the Local Conversation is, the more shared its priorities are and the better it can serve the neighbourhood.

People will have become involved in different ways, at different times, and for different reasons. Some may be involved because a friend mentioned the Local Conversation and they go along to an activity, while others will have been closely involved in helping to shape your vision for the neighbourhood. Some people might provide feedback, where others do not. Some people might work together on particular projects within the Local Conversation, but not all. Others will be deeply involved, taking on leadership roles and responsibilities. All levels of involvement are needed for the Local Conversation to succeed.

3. Some theory and approaches

Principles of involvement

There are certain principles that should underpin any community involvement work you engage in. These include:

- The need to understand the communities you are working with – who lives there, their needs, priorities, tensions, strengths, and existing networks

- The need to support and invest in participation at all stages of the process

- Sensitive structures in place so voices can be amplified and people get together – building effective groups and structures which strengthen communities rather than divide them (ensuring all voices can be heard, and equality of opportunities to be involved)

- Opportunities for a wide range of (formal and informal) ways in which people can participate – enabling community ownership and control
- The need to celebrate involvement and to recognise influence – for example, evidence that communities have been heard

- The recognition that people participate from a variety of starting points and cultural experience and that this has implications for how people learn and contribute.

Why people get involved

We need to understand what motivates people to be involved and how they can be encouraged to stay involved. Their reasons for involvement may relate to personal circumstances, beliefs, direct experience of a service, or seeing community needs or opportunities that are not being met.

Example: Reasons for involvement - community activists share their stories
This is what people said when they came together to share their stories about what led to their involvement:

- **Personal qualities:** believed in myself; passions; enthusiasm; giving something back; knowledge, skills and experience; want to make a difference; can do attitude

- **Belief in people:** people can make a difference to self and others; people can achieve their potential; all have a right to a good quality of life

- **Values:** recognise need for equality and diversity; should all have a say in the things that affect our lives; passion for community involvement; inspired by Gandhi, '*even if you are in a minority of one, the truth is the truth;* have rights which we need to be aware of and fight for

- **Personal circumstances:** problems on the estate; children started school and I wanted to volunteer; wanted something to do when stopped working; born disabled so wanted to be given justice; grew up surrounded by racism

- **Spotted flaws in the system:** money not being used properly; concerns about inconsistency in services; statutory officers do not always share information – why?

- **Opportunities:** attended National Autistic Society meetings and became a branch officer; started a Home Start volunteering course; helped by Voluntary Action

Re-imagining Community Involvement Project, 2010

Enablers to involvement

There are some fairly basic things that can help people to become, and stay, involved:

- **Timing** – it must be convenient for the people you want to involve
- **Place** - people need to feel comfortable about the venue, which must also be accessible
- **Consider caring responsibilities** – whether you need to provide a crèche or carers' costs
- **Relevance** - start with people's own concerns and wants, and the issues relevant to them

- **Go to where people are** - schools, clubs, places of worship, work or coffee mornings, for example, rather than expecting them to come to you
- **Structure** - task or theme-based working groups can be more focused and involving. Also, informal approaches to running meetings through facilitation and smaller group work can be more engaging for people, especially those less confident to speak up in a larger group
- Be **realistic and honest** about what can be achieved with the time and resources available
- **Be aware of people's participation needs** - you may need an interpreter or a signer, and to consider levels of literacy
- **Cover participation costs** – ensure that the costs of participation (travel, or buying lunch, for example) don't prevent people from being involved
- **Have fun!**

Barriers to involvement

There are lots of reasons why people do not get involved, some of which may be do with your group, and some not. It is helpful to be aware of these:

- **Satisfaction** – people may feel they are happy with where they live and their community and not see a need for change
- **Lack of identity with the group –** people may not feel the group is for them, for example if it is too white, too middle class, or too old
- **Lack of identity with the neighbourhood** – people may have stronger allegiances to communities of identity which may be town or city-wide, rather than to where they live
- **Lack of time** – people may feel they are too busy with work or family life
- **Lack of interest** – your publicity might not be appealing or relevant
- **Disillusion** – people may have been involved in community activities before and not feel that anything changed as a result
- **Fear** – people don't have the confidence to join something that they don't know a lot about, or don't know the people involved
- **Formal structures and too many meetings** - formal structures may keep momentum going, but they are not enough to maintain involvement alone
- **A lack of visibility** – people might not know about the Local Conversation (however many leaflets you have put through doors!)
- **Transience** – people do not think they will be living in the area for very long, and so may not commit

Keeping people involved

There will always be ebbs and flows of involvement. This is normal and it is rarely constant. Everyone needs to take break, and whilst paid staff take holidays, volunteers often don't. There are also many reasons for people wanting or needing to change their

involvement. There may be conflict in a group and several members might leave; people may need to move out of the area; people get new jobs, or find themselves with caring responsibilities and are not able to give the same amount of time as they could before; people might get bored and fed up with long processes, or not see anything tangible happening. These things are all normal and part of life, and turnover of people can be a positive as new people bring fresh perspectives. Nevertheless, it is important to understand both why people stay involved and why they drop out if we want to build involvement.

Levels of involvement

Different strategies can be used to promote involvement. It helps to think about the level at which you want to involve people, recognising that this may change over time. One way of beginning to understand and think about involvement is to look at the work of Sherry Arnstein, who came up with the idea of a ladder of participation. The ladder of participation points to different levels of involvement. Many organisations work in communities, and most of them would say they involve local people and/or local communities. Arnstein's ladder is useful as it helps us to understand what this involvement looks like and how deep-rooted or how genuine it really is.
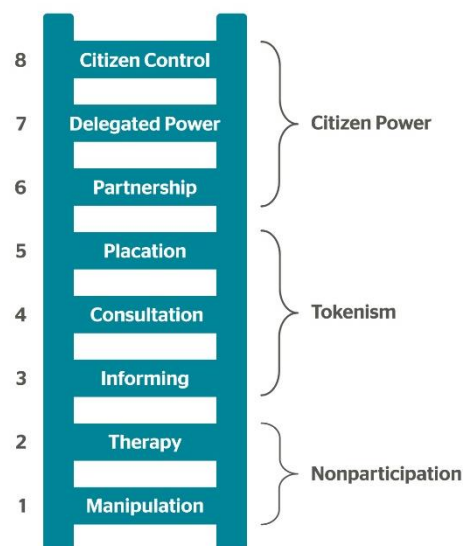
At the bottom of Arnstein's ladder is **manipulation**. We've all come across so many 'consultations' where the outcome is already decided and there is a 'PR' exercise to bring the public around.

At the top of the ladder, Arnstein describes approaches where **citizens are given real control** over the decisions that are being made. This is similar to the aims of the Local Conversation. **Citizen control** might be seen in some models of partnership or **co-production** where the people who design a service, the people who deliver it and the people who use it work together to reach a collective outcome.

In the middle rungs of the ladder, are **informing, consulting and placating**. Arnstein describes these as tokenistic forms of participation:

- Being given **information** about what is going on is clearly an important part of involvement but if the process stops there, you haven't participated in it. You are simply being told what's going on, without having any real way of influencing or controlling what is happening.
- Similarly, being **consulted** about what you want to happen is not the same as having control over what happens. What you say might shape what happens next, but it also might not.
- **Placation** occurs when people are granted a limited degree of influence but their participation is largely tokenistic. It may be, for example, that one or two people are co-opted onto a committee without any accountability back to the community.

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This model is a conceptual tool and has some limitations. It is a hierarchical scale which does not represent the complexity of communities and their involvement (for example, who is and who is not involved from the community) or the fluctuating power dynamics within communities and with other organisations. For example, community control can be exclusive to a few community leaders rather than an indication of broad community involvement. It leads to seeing the lower levels as negative and higher levels as positive, which is not necessarily the case. Different approaches will be appropriate in different circumstances and often people in communities will be involved at different levels at the same time. The key point to remember is that involvement should be a continuous process with a variety of opportunities for involvement.

David Wilcox (1994[44]) adapted Arnstein's ladder to illustrate the range of ways in which communities can be involved:

Information	Consultation	Deciding Together	Acting Together	Supporting Local Initiatives
'here's what we are going to do…'	*'these are the options what do you think?'*	*'we want to develop options and decide together'*	*'we want to carry out joint decisions together'*	*'we can help you achieve what you want within guidelines'*

Local Conversations' Steering Groups and their Lead Organisations need to consider what is appropriate in different circumstances, such as the resources available and the extent to which people want to be involved. For example, if people are primarily involved as beneficiaries of services, then they are likely to need up-to-date information on the services and facilities available, whereas 'acting together' and 'supporting local initiatives' generally take longer and demand more of people such as group work or working in partnership skills. For more, read the Approach and Leadership sections of the Practice Guide.

Example: providing different opportunities to get involved

The Local Conversation in Haverhill South has a specific tab on its website labelled 'Get Involved'. It portrays a range of people involved and suggests different ways to join in.

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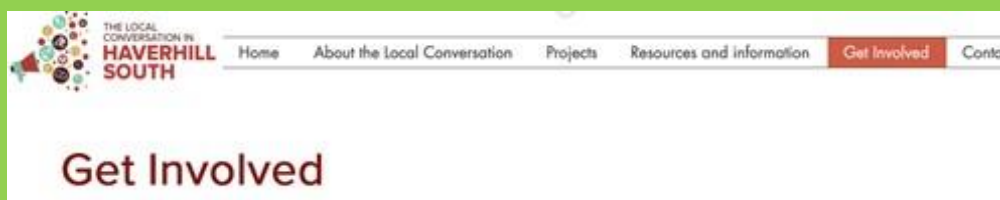
44 Wilcox D, 1994 *The Guide to Effective Participation* (Partnership Books, Brighton, Sussex)

This project is run by residents for residents. Whether you have a particular focus that you would like to get involved with or a general interest in making this area a better place to live, we would love you to join us! There are lots of different ways to get involved:

Come to a forum meeting

The best way to find out more is to come to one of our forum meetings that are open to the community. At these, residents come together to hear from the community, brainstorm ideas such as when, where and how we should spend money and develop our new projects. These are at the Leiston Community Centre from 18:30-20:00 on Mondays once a month or join us on ZOOM contact us for the log in details.

Join an action group

Action groups are focused on a specific project such as the BMX Pump Track, community activities or the community allotment. We are currently forming new action groups based on the resident ideas.

Join our steering group

The steering group oversee the project. They lead the operations, manage the grants and ensure that the priorities are being achieved.

Please get in touch to find out more:

Get in touch

Exercise: supporting greater involvement

With your Steering Group:
1. Think about and list different activities in your community

2. For each activity, consider whether people are involved as:
   - Beneficiaries and users of services
   - Consultees and representatives of opinion
   - Participants in decision making processes
   - Partners in making things happen
   - Initiators of plans and services.

3. Could people be more closely involved?

4. What support and resources will be required to enable people to get more closely involved?

Resources:

- A [summary introduction to the Guide to Effective Participation](#) (Wilcox, 1994)

If you are interested in exploring co-production further, you can find resources here:
- Involve – [Resources: Co-production](#)
- Alliance Scotland – [Co-production](#)

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing. It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[45], ethnic backgrounds[46] and religions[47], disabled people[48], older people[49], young people[50], members of LGBT+ communities[51], people with mental health needs[52], people with learning disabilities[53], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[54] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and that you know who lives in your neighbourhood. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-

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[45] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)

[46] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)

[47] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)

[48] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)

[49] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)

[50] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)

[51] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)

[52] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)

[53] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)

[54] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)

represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate.

Lead organisations and Steering Group members need to build the skills, confidence, tools, and techniques to ensure that they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion.

Reflection:

- How do you currently discuss and raise the profile of diversity and inclusion in your Local Conversation?
- Do you need to build confidence and knowledge to hold effective discussions about who is and is not involved, and to take action to broaden involvement where it is needed?
- Do you need a working group to focus directly on equity, diversity and inclusion?

In Section 3, we looked at the concept of citizen control. If the point of involvement is to ensure residents can act and decide together about where they live, then diverse voices need to be a part of this. Diversity should be embraced through encouraging and enabling a range of people with differing interests and identities to be involved. It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations should be taking an anti-oppression approach. This means that they not only support the equality and inclusion of particular groups but that they also take an active stance opposing the systems and behaviours which cause harm and offence.

Resource:

If you are unsure how to find out who lives in your neighbourhood, which is a crucial first step to knowing how representative the Local Conversation is, you can find out more on NomisWeb, which publishes population data from the Census as well as profiles of each parliamentary constituency.

There is more information about understanding who lives in your neighbourhood, and getting to grips with data, in the **Context** section of the Practice Guide.

You should reflect on equity, diversity and inclusion on a regular basis – at least annually. You could also ask residents from minority ethnic groups, LGBT+ residents, or disabled residents, for example, whether they feel involved or not in the Local Conversation. Ask them if there is anything you can do to further their involvement. The best way to avoid diversity and inclusion being seen as a tick box exercise is to prove that it isn't one – by showing the changes you are making. If the Local Conversation is not diverse enough and not inclusive enough, say so. Be clear and honest that your goal is to give voice to everybody who lives in the neighbourhood, and to work together to bring about the real, long-term change residents want to see to make it a better place to live.

The benefits of broadening involvement

- You will be reflective of the whole community
- You will stand to gain broader support
- You will have a broader array of interests, skills and talents
- More perspectives will inform decision making
- New community relationships will be built which can spark new initiatives that might never have otherwise existed

Reflection:

- Do you think your Local Conversation is inclusive and representative of different groups of people in the community and their interests? What information might be available to help you understand the make-up of the community even better?

Exercise: inclusion and exclusion

In pairs or small groups, discuss:

- What you think exclusion means, when thinking about your communities? Who might be excluded, and from what? How?

- If your community described itself as inclusive, what would you expect to be doing and what would you see?

- Ask each group to feed back to the whole group and then discuss what you might need to do to be more inclusive - this might be making contact with other community groups, faith bodies and networks, and thinking about what the Local Conversation has to offer them.

- Building on this, create an involvement action plan together.

5. What you can do to increase involvement, including some practical examples

Community involvement is not a quick fix and it rarely just *happens*. It is built over time and requires a planned and resourced approach if it is going to be effective. People need to be able to see the potential benefit to getting involved, either for themselves or for the wider community, and to clearly understand how they can contribute. And remember, no-one wants to join a group to have a bad time. Meetings don't need to be boring, activities should be fun, and trips and events help build community spirit and bring people closer together.

Why did you get involved and what do you have to offer?

If you are trying to attract new people, then think about why you got involved. The things that attracted you might well attract others. People commit to a group because they gain something from their involvement. Be proud of the benefits of being involved, and work to give others the same opportunities to make new friends, learn new skills, and work on the issues important to them.

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How do people know who you are and what you do?

Community groups could often be better at communicating what they do. People need to know what they are getting involved in. You need to have a clear message about your purpose, which you can share in a range of ways – for example on posters, leaflets, or social media. Think about the type of publicity that would appeal to you and ask others what works best for them. You should be open and adaptive to people's participation requirements which may be visual, hearing or language based. Being open and adaptive ensures that the Local Conversation is genuinely inclusive and welcoming of involvement from all.

Example: keeping people informed through social media

- Many residents from **Lozells** are using a WhatsApp broadcasting group to communicate about Neighbourhood Forum meetings and to find out about community events and activities. The group ensures privacy and numbers of members are not visible. It has proven to be a very quick way to mobilise local people!

- The **Local Conversation in Caia Park** ensures that there is always an event set up on Facebook for community discussions and meetings that are open. Transparency is important locally, for example notifying residents when a small grants decision making is taking place and of the decisions made, as well as posting them online.

'Local Conversations' may mean very little, as a name, to residents. You should think about developing clear messaging about what the Local Conversation is about that will encourage residents to get involved. It is important to think about the different reasons residents may want to get involved, and the different ways they might wish to take part. Residents' initial questions are likely to be around how getting involved will benefit them, their friends and family, or how much time they'll need to give up. Holding informal conversations with different people will help you tailor this messaging appropriately. This messaging needs to continue over the entire life of the Local Conversation, not just at its start, so new people get involved in different ways all the time. This keeps the Local Conversation fresh, and it helps those involved from the beginning not to burn out.

Exercise: defining your offer through the what, why, how and who of involvement

Four sheets of flipchart paper are placed on the walls or on tables. Each has a heading:
- Who are you?
- What are you doing?
- Why are you doing it?
- How are you doing it?

Split into four groups, with each group being given one of the headed pieces of flip-chart paper and asked to respond to the question on post-its. After a few minutes, groups should gradually move around the flipcharts until everyone has had an opportunity to contribute to all the questions.

Each group then takes one of the flip-charts and comes up with a statement which

reflects the common themes noted on the post-its.

The statements can them be summarised further into one short paragraph, by pulling all the four elements together.

The process of this exercise should help you think through why people might want to be involved and how, as well as producing a clear purpose to attract others.

What is it that people want to do and why they might want to be involved?

Make sure activities, events or meetings address **local interests** and priorities. You can find out what people would like to see in a number of ways, including:

- Listening to people about their hopes and concerns – you could start with conversations with neighbours, friends and family members

- Identifying target groups that are currently underrepresented and asking to go along to places where they meet for a conversation – for example, places of worship, mother and toddler groups, local cafes, or a stall at a community fair

- Put a suggestions box in the local supermarket

- Create opportunities to get to know what people want and to encourage their involvement.

Examples: making it fun

- The **Local Conversation in Holyhead** has an events group (Cybi Events). They offered free attendance for residents to an open air cinema event, but each resident had to complete a questionnaire to receive a ticket.

- The **Local Conversation in Govanhill** used a safari trip organised by the residents' Forum to engage with 103 people, including 30 who had not previously connected with the project. This gave them the opportunity to talk to people about the Local Conversation in Govanhill, to hear about what is important to them, to encourage them to join up as a volunteer, Forum member, or just to come along to an event or activity.

What will make people feel welcome, and want to come back?

Be friendly, warm and welcoming to new people when they walk through the door. It can be quite daunting to enter a room of people who all know each other and are chatting away in small groups so make an effort to offer them a cup of tea, introduce them to others and build a relationship. If you are having a meeting, make sure that everything is explained so that new members can contribute to discussions and decision making. These things can give new people a good feeling about coming along and encourages them to stay involved. You could formalise welcoming through creating roles of 'meeters and

greeters' or setting up a buddy system for new people but the main thing is to create a welcoming culture.

Many people are 'doers' rather than meeting goers. In addition, everyone wants to feel valued so it is a good idea to offer people a role or a job early on, even if it's small. Find out what people enjoy, what they have done in the past, what they do in their spare time and what they are interested in doing in the future. See if you can match their interests to some work that needs to be done. People are more likely to stay involved if they think they are being useful and can see they are making a difference.

Equally, most people do not choose to spend their leisure time sitting in meetings. So try not to have meetings too often and don't let them drag on too long - try to keep focussed on what you are trying to achieve and try to make sure that some progress is made between each meeting, so that momentum is maintained.

Group enthusiasm is infectious and will rub off on others. A good way to motivate people is to reflect on what has been achieved, celebrate it and acknowledge hard work and success. Celebrations help bring everyone closer together, build identity and unity, and ensure people involved feel valued for their contribution.

Finally, think about where you meet and how accessible it is. The cost of getting somewhere should not be too large in terms of money, time and effort. Is it somewhere people are familiar with, does it feel safe, is it easy to get to? Consider the timing and format of meetings, including refreshments and how appropriate they are.

You can't please everyone all the time. There needs to be enough **flexibility** in your projects to respond to different attitudes, different cultures and different priorities. Flexibility means that you respect differences whilst emphasising common values. If you make people feel like outsiders they won't engage with your group.

There is more information about supporting people to be active in the Action section of the guidance.

6. Summary

There are different levels of involvement which suit different people at different times. There should therefore be a variety of ways in which people can become involved and opportunities for them to remain and become further involved. Information and consultation are pretty passive forms of involvement whereas decision making, taking action and supporting new initiatives illustrate greater community control. People need to enjoy their involvement and to feel that their contribution is valued.

Example: Bridgend Inspiring Growth

Bridgend Farmhouse in South Edinburgh is a community owned and run charitable organisation which bought and developed a once abandoned farmhouse and, through the community getting together, transformed it into a hub and learning centre for the surrounding communities. Since it started, the members of the local community have taken control of every aspect of the project, campaigning for a £1 asset transfer of the land from the council, raising the money to renovate it, and developing the hub entirely

through volunteers' hard work.

The project hosted weekly activity sessions involving 30 participants in a range of projects to create a welcoming space, learn new skills and develop the hub. Activities included cooking, wood working, vegetable growing, arts and crafts, painting and decorating. Throughout the project, people of all walks of life came together, regardless of life experiences, ethnicity, background or difficulties they faced.

A monthly volunteers' forum ensured all volunteers could make decisions and drive the project. People are now actively involved in what happens in their community and at the hub. The project has led to many new ideas, initiatives, partnerships and friendships, and has nurtured an active community.

It is important to reflect on the methods you have used to get people involved, and if there are any others you can try.

Reflection:
- How have you tried to involve people in the Local Conversation and related activities so far? What worked and why? What did not work and why?
- Are there different groups of people you have struggled to involve? What can you do differently next time?

7. Some helpful do's and don'ts

Do:
- **Ensure there are lots of different ways for residents to get involved.** This means taking a flexible approach

- **Support people to increase their involvement over time.** The people most closely involved tend to build the strongest social connections, develop the highest feelings of control, have more confidence, develop more skills and deeper understanding, and improve their overall wellbeing

- Remember that **supporting these outcomes helps Local Conversations make real positive change**, as the power of the residents involved grows.

- **Think about the potential of co-production.** Working in partnership with other groups in the community, or with decision-makers, can give you a louder voice and can help get things done

- **Continuously review and widen membership**, and think about how new people and their interest can be integrated into the process

- **Reflect on the barriers stopping people getting involved.** Are you advertising widely enough? Are there other ways you could try? Are meetings at convenient times?

- **Take time to support the Local Conversation to improve its diversity and its inclusivity.** An effective Local Conversation reflects the makeup of the whole

neighbourhood.

- **Tap into people's skills and talents and encourage residents to deliver their own activities.** This can take time as confidence grows, but it supports the development of leadership skills, social connections and greater control. It also supports the sustainability of the Local Conversation.

- **Celebrate your success!** Build in visible early successes to develop the confidence of participants. Take the time to look back at how far you've come, and all the hard work you have put in. This brings people closer together, and ensures they feel valued for their contributions.

- Make sure people are **having fun**

Don't:
- **Forget that some forms of 'participation' can be tokenistic.** Giving people information is important, but that is not where the conversation should end, and consultations aren't the same as giving people power over what happens.

- **Forget to reflect on who you are not reaching.** There will be groups of people you are not reaching, but there are always ways to involve them.

- **Underestimate people.** Give them support and the tools they need to manage complexity

- **Underestimate the power of people's existing networks and contacts.** You can reach people through schools, GP surgeries, places of worship and other local clubs or activity groups. Speak to the organisations themselves. And don't forget the friends, families and colleagues of those residents who are already involved. Ask them to actively spread the word.

- **Become disheartened.** Spreading engagement, and getting more people involved, is not always straightforward. People want to see benefits for themselves. They want to know what is expected of them and see that: you have realistic goals, people already involved are enthusiastic and keen, people they might already know are involved, and they'll have fun along the way.

- **Ask residents to pay out of pocket.** Reasonable travel costs, administrative costs such as printing and copying, or putting on refreshments should always be funded by the Local Conversation.

9. A final exercise

Exercise: Reflecting on involvement, inclusion and your Local Conversation

In this section of the practice guide, we have talked about Involvement – including what it means, some theory, and some practical examples.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally. Local Conversations are built upon connections, and ensuring everyone involved is supported to help increase your reach and to understand the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion is crucial to your success.

Getting people involved is not easy and, as we know, it ebbs and flows. Ask yourself - what three things have you taken away from this section to build greater involvement in your Local Conversation?

Sit down with your Steering Group, and ask them to reflect on who is involved, and who is not. It is also important to ask why that might be – might some groups not see themselves within the Local Conversation? Is there a disconnect? The first steps to addressing this are to understand why it might be.

Once you have reflected on this, ask whether residents feel equipped to deepen and broaden participation across the neighbourhood, with marginalised and harder-to-reach groups in mind. If not, what might help?

Have you got any top tips or tricks for involvement that might be useful for other Local Conversations? Is there anything you feel is missing from this section, or that you would like to add? Are there any useful references you're aware of that we could add? Be sure to let us know.

Leadership

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at **leadership**. We consider:

1. What we mean by leadership
2. Why leadership is important in the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. What you can do support effective leadership, including some practical examples
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts
8. A final exercise

1. What we mean by leadership

Leadership is about making things happen in an accountable and transparent manner. Whilst much of the discussion around leadership tends to focus on formal roles and individual qualities, it is also about community building and the informal and often unrecognised activity that goes on all the time in communities. It involves creating and promoting a clear vision, collective decision making and relationship building through to chairing a meeting, organising litter picks, and encouraging more people to volunteer. It is not about a heroic individual but a collaborative effort in which everyone can play a part. Leaders inspire others, working with them to realise their aspirations and bring out the best out of everybody.

2. Why leadership is important in the Local Conversations programme

The Local Conversations programme is based upon a belief that local people know their communities best and should direct change in their local area. As experts about where they live, this involves sharing power, so that all voices are heard, and collective ideas are pooled and acted upon. Good leadership means sharing power and playing to people's strengths.

Experience of the Local Conversations programme tells us that good leadership is an important factor in the success of local projects. Projects that are well led are more likely to engage more local people, more likely to deliver the kinds of things that people want, more likely to bring about real change, and more likely to exist for the long term.

Running a group is a team effort. It isn't just about the amount of work to do, but also about shared responsibility. Leadership therefore is part of the process of developing an effective group and connecting with others who can help. Many people would not necessarily describe themselves as leaders but they play significant roles in driving the group's agenda forward, sorting out disputes and making sure things get done. And there will be countless others who could also play a leadership role with the right support to develop their confidence and skills.

Exercise: Building on Steering Group strengths

1. In small groups remind yourselves:
   - How you got involved
   - Why you got involved
   - What you have enjoyed most about being involved
   - Anything you have found difficult about being involved
   - Other activities you are involved in

2. Making the most of what you bring – in pairs help each other to identify:
   - The skills, knowledge, and experience you bring to the Local Conversation
   - The roles you play

Reflection:

- Think about who are the current and potential leaders in your community and those who work with you? Firstly, who has a formal leadership role (e.g. a local councillor, a community worker, the chair of your grants panel), and secondly, who else helps to make things happen - even if this is not a recognised role (e.g. the person who makes sure everyone feels welcome at meetings, someone who questions when others are afraid to speak up, the resident that makes sure their neighbours know about the project)? What do all these people bring to your Local Conversation and how do they do it? You might want to map out all these people and different roles so you can see how to build leadership further within your area. Are there some key action points?

3. Some theory and approaches

Current thinking has moved away from seeing leadership as the preserve of individuals who control and manage to a more dispersed approach which *"emphasises relationships and interaction rather than leader behaviour" (*Pigg <u>(2000</u>*"[55]*). This is especially pertinent for community leadership where people rely on networks and influence rather than formal authority derived from a position of power. In this vein, the concept of 'Liberating Leadership' defines leadership as *'A process of inspiring, supporting, working with and influencing others in a group, team, organisation or community, based on an agreed set of principles, to achieve common goals and social change'* (Skinner and Farrar 2009[56]). In *Building Strong Communities[57],* Skinner stresses that this understanding is important because it:

- Places leadership in the community as well as in groups, teams and organisations

- Promotes working with people, rather than attracting followers

- Bases leadership on a set of principles – there is a strong values base – that many definitions of leadership do not have

- Aims to achieve common, rather than individual goals, and social change, rather than just changes within the organisation.

Leadership styles

Much has been written about leadership styles, mostly related to leaders as individuals and therefore based on personal qualities and attributes. The models outlined below all have relevance for community leadership – where the aim is collective action to achieve shared aims.

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[55] (Pigg. K.E (2000) *Community Leadership and Community Theory: A Practical Synthesis, in Journal of the Community Development Society,* Vol30, Issue 2
[56] Community Sector Coalition (2009) *Liberating Leadership: A fresh perspective from the community sector.* Based on the Liberating Leadership Toolkit – written by Steve Skinner and Guy Farrar, edited by Hazel Capper
[57] Skinner, S. (2020) Building Strong Communities: Guidelines on Empowering the Grass Roots, Red Globe Press

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership, sometimes called shared, dispersed or collective leadership, is concerned with the practice of leadership rather than specific leadership roles or responsibilities. It is concerned with enabling all members of a group to use and develop their skills and interests, and to take responsibility for their actions. Each individual group member has a leading role which they can carry out with "purpose, confidence and authority"[58]. It recognises that people can learn from one another, and builds capacity for change and improvement.

> **Example: Local control**
>
> Since 2015, residents on the **Old Fold and Nest estates in Gateshead** have been involved in a Local Conversation project, supported by local community organisation Edberts House. The local residents got together to identify priorities that matter to them, such as activities for young people, employability, health, and community cohesion. The project uses the two community hubs, Edberts House and Pattinson House, to bring the community together and begin to address these concerns.
>
> Over the past year, the Local Conversation has been continuing their work to place control back into local residents' hands. Local men at the Pattinson House site decided they wanted a space for themselves where they could come together to develop their cooking skills and take part in outdoor activities. Together, the residents created their own group to meet their own needs and were so successful they are now working to expand the group into a bike garage for the local community, all without any staff support.
>
> The Local Conversation is completely led by residents through a steering committee which shapes the project and ensures local priorities and needs are addressed and keeps the control of the funding in local people's hands to meet the real needs of the local area. Most activities run through the project are led by local people, and due to the practice of controlling and shaping the project, now feel they can have more control over their personal situations.

So, in addition to formal roles such as Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer, this model of leadership recognises a whole range of different roles that people can contribute to their group's development. These roles may be carried out by residents and/or paid workers in the community. Examples of such roles are below (based on Skinner and Farrar[59]).

Role	Activities
Facilitator	Consulting and involving others in the group in discussion and decision making, encouraging participation, and finding creative ways to engage and involve people.
Representative	Being informed about local needs, advocating around needs and issues, feeding back and being accountable to the group.

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[58] Kirk, P. and Shutte, A.M., (2004) *Community leadership development*. Community Development Journal, 39 (3)

[59] Skinner, S, and Farrar, G. *Liberating Leadership Toolkit*. Community Sector Coalition.

Leadership builder	Supporting people to get involved in activities and encouraging them to take on aspects of leadership which will build confidence and skills.
Questioner	Challenging ways of working which may undermine the group's aims or marginalise people.
Bridge builder	Making connections, networking, building relationships and partnership working across the communities and with other organisations.
Campaigner	Organising for action to raise issues and meet your aims.
Visioner	Developing a clear idea about what the Local Conversation is about, what it is trying to achieve and how.
Catalyst	Helping to motivate people and identify changes needed to meet your aims.
Team builder	Creating a team that works well together, building mutual respect and helping to resolve any conflict in the group.
Entrepreneur	Coming up with new possibilities for ways of working, developing new ideas, promoting potential for the group's development and helping to make any agreed change happen.
Coordinator	Taking a lead in planning and organisation for activities, events and projects.
Governor	Ensuring that there is appropriate oversight of the Local Conversation and robust systems in place to manage it, keep it accountable and focused on local priorities, and make sure decision-making is transparent and led by local people.

Exercise: Shared leadership

Think about what distributed leadership looks like in your Local Conversation.

Using the roles and activities above, think about who plays these different roles, noting that some people may play several roles.

Discussion prompts:
- Who plays these different roles in your group?
- Could these roles be more broadly shared out amongst several people e.g., through a working group?
- Can people be supported to develop skills to take on new roles?
- Are there any roles that are missing in your group and if so, how can they be filled?
- Are there any roles that people currently play in your group that are missing from the above?

Other concepts in leadership

Systems leadership is similar to understanding distributed leadership. Increasingly, problems and solutions are complex. No one individual and no one organisation can provide all of the answers. Yet trying to work across different organisations or systems is not easy. Each will have its own people, its own ways of doing things, its own targets and objectives.

Systems leadership is about how you work across boundaries. As a Local Conversation you will have limited capacity and limited resources. A good leader will be able to work with others, and identify a range of people, groups and organisations who may be working in the same geographical area or on the same kinds of issues as the Local Conversation. Key to systems leadership is collaboration and the ability to build and sustain relationships, as well as to use these relationships to persuade and influence others.

Host leadership[60] is based around roles and relies on being able to flexibly move from one role to another as is necessary. The roles of a host leader comprise: the initiator – having a vision; the inviter – encouraging people to be involved; the space creator – making a space for discussion and deliberation of the vision and how to achieve it; the boundary setter – making sure that people understand the way things work and what is expected of them; the connector – networking people in the community and linking with other groups and agencies that can help achieve the vision; the co-participator – joining in the action alongside everyone else.

Servant leadership[61] is an approach in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. A servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. The most important characteristic in being a servant leader is making one's main priority to serve rather than lead.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership. There is a tension between these two styles but they are not necessarily opposites, there is usually a bit of both going on. Transformational leadership concerns sustained working towards a long term community vision whilst continuing to inspire and motivate people to join the movement. On the other hand, transactional leadership is more about the day to day tasks required to achieve objectives in a structured and systematic manner.

Reflection:
- Which of these understandings of leadership appeals to you and could be helpful in developing leadership in your Local Conversation?

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

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[60] Mark Mckergow And Helen Bailey, (2014) *The Six New Roles Of Engagement,* https://www.hrreview.co.uk/analysis/analysis-hr-news/mark-mckergow-and-helen-bailey-the-six-new-roles-of-engagement/54146
[61] F. Gandolfi, Seth Stone, *Leadership, leadership styles, and servant leadership* in Journal of Management and Research, 2018

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing. It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[62], ethnic backgrounds[63] and religions[64], disabled people[65], older people[66], young people[67], members of LGBT+ communities[68], people with mental health needs[69], people with learning disabilities[70], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[71] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate. See further guidance on this in the section on involvement.

Neighbourhoods are made up of people with different, though sometimes cross cutting, interests and identities and preferences, and it is often the case that some voices are louder than others and some voices are listened to more than others. A challenge for Local Conversations is to ensure that they welcome and reflect the range of community needs, issues and views and that they promote diversity through their leadership.

Leadership is not about the dominant voices getting what they want or assumptions that some people know best and directing community development based only on majority needs. Community leaders need to promote equality, to welcome different perspectives and to model fairness. They need to reach out to ensure that the most marginalised voices such as those of younger people or black and minority ethnic communities are not only heard but are actively supported to play a part in contributing to all the distributed leadership roles described above, including the prioritising of resources and decision making.

All residents should have an opportunity to get involved in the Local Conversation and to contribute to its development. Their legitimacy comes from their links in the community, to speak up for and represent different views and to feedback into the community. This can be a challenge and there may need to be some harmonising of diverse interests in order to build some community solidarity in the longer term. It raises questions about who leads when there is conflict, and it raises issues about power in the community.

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[62] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)
[63] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)
[64] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)
[65] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)
[66] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)
[67] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)
[68] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)
[69] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)
[70] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)
[71] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)

- Think about who plays a leadership role in your group. Are there interests and identities that are under-represented? How might you go about changing this?

Example: Local Conversation in Lozells, Birmingham

Lozells is an area in the west of Birmingham with a lot of ethnic diversity, including established Bengali and Pakistani residents, smaller numbers of Caribbean, Irish and White British residents, and newly arrived migrants from countries including Yemen and Syria. Local engagement in collective action has grown throughout the Local Conversation area.

The Local Conversation has also continued to try to engage underrepresented groups in the area (e.g. recent migrants, as well as women and girls) through targeted outreach, such as projects specifically targeting young women and girls, which has significantly increased their representation in the project. Women are now more involved in participating in and managing activities than in previous years. English classes continue to be a significant source of social connectedness, particularly for women. The confidence people gain through these classes has also increased their ability to act in their communities. Other residents have also continued to similarly deepen their involvement over time, for example moving from the steering group into leading projects themselves.

5. What you can do support effective leadership, including some practical examples

Building shared leadership is a hard and slow process. It often needs to start with engagement and participation in community activities – fun ways that people can come together rather than formal meetings. Once you have engaged with people, make sure you explain what Local Conversations is all about – the fact that residents can make decisions about where they live can build further engagement and confidence that some change is possible.

There are many ways in which people can lead and many ways into leadership. Some people are doers rather than thinkers – they would rather get on with practical activities than spend their time deliberating over plans and priorities. However, once engaged they might be encouraged to join a working group of interest to them and slowly become more involved in community leadership. Progression routes to leadership development are important.

Learning to lead – skills building

Taking a collaborative approach to leadership means that we can identify roles and skills that can be built in communities in order to carry out the tasks required for effective community development. Community leaders need interpersonal and group skills – they listen and make sure all voices are heard; they persuade and they influence; they identify others' strengths, share responsibilities and inspire greater involvement; they are problem-solvers and bridge builders; they collaborate and facilitate a collective community vision; they are accountable; they get stuff done.

Perhaps the most significant leadership characteristic is that of encouraging, training, mentoring and supporting others to become leaders. No one is born with leadership skills. Different people in the community naturally find themselves playing different roles and contributing different skills. With the right support people can recognise the skills they bring, build on them and develop new ones, and thereby provide collective community leadership.

A community leadership development framework developed in South Africa has three components: leading change through dialogue, connective leadership and collective empowerment. In the context of the Local Conversation this is useful in thinking through how to develop leadership skills in the community.

- **Dialogue** recognises that leadership is about process not people and refers to collective thinking and discussion so that groups and organisations can listen to each other and better understand one another.

- **Connective leadership** is about creating a space for team working, identifying how to effectively collaborate to achieve a common goal whilst at the same time meeting the needs and concerns of the individuals involved. Collective empowerment is about helping individuals to find their place, their role, their identity and their voice in the system.

- **Collective empowerment** "*comes from the interconnection of individuals in all parts of the system who have a clear conception of their roles. Through the process of collective empowerment individuals develop fruitful relations with others, and clarity about purpose, meaning and value in their work*". [72]

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[72] Kirk, P. and Shutte, A.M., (2004) *Community leadership development*. Community Development Journal, 39 (3)

Exercise: Building leadership

Leading change through dialogue: Have a go at working on the different elements of this model through discussion and dialogue to bring out the collective thinking of the community. Through listening to the community and involvement in different discussions highlight 10 or 12 priorities or areas that people would like to collaborate about or change. Write each one on a different index card and then place each index card on a larger matrix (this can be drawn on a flipchart paper) which splits into three rows labelled now, soon or later.

Connective Leadership: As a group look at the index cards and map ideas of how you can collaborate to achieve this priority area. Think about the how, why, who and when. Set some targets for collaboration around this goal. You might want to start by taking the top three in the now section from the first exercise or you might want to have a community voting system to highlight the top priorities, or you could just agree them with those involved in your group.

Collective Empowerment: Think about how different members of your group will be involved and contribute. What are the different roles you have and the different support you need to work together? Can you help each other to build confidence? Once you have an initial plan, put in checkback points to come together as a group and review progress.

Once you have worked on the first two or three priorities you can review how it goes and what you can do differently or change. You might want to take on some of the other priority areas then as well.

Example: Local Conversation in Longbenton, Tyne & Wear

Justice Prince, the lead organisation supporting the Local Conversation in Longbenton, has developed a community development training course. Since 2019 it has supported 10 local people to achieve a Level 4 qualification in community development, including Local Conversation Steering Group members and action group representatives.

Justice Prince strengthen the involvement of those involved in the Local Conversation by transferring power to them - enabling core volunteers to increase their control by taking on key leadership roles within the community. The community development training is central to their approach of development by way of tackling the social determinants of health.

The approach values peoples lived experience and local knowledge and the process equips volunteers with the necessary skills, knowledge and space to develop local solutions to local concerns. Knowledge is power and underpins local leaders' ability to influence decisions that affect them and/or how things work in their community.

Reflection:

- What training or support might you need to be an even better leader yourself, or enable others to become leaders?

6. Summary

Local Conversations is about residents making decision about their communities. This should not be the preserve of a few, and understanding leadership as something that can be shared rather than thinking about leaders as charismatic individuals is helpful.

Anyone can become a community leader and there is room for lots of community leaders. Leaders may be doers or thinkers or both. Community leaders rely on their connections and networks to achieve agreed aims, rather than formal roles and authority. People may need help to recognise that they are playing a leadership role and they might need support in developing their confidence, skills and knowledge.

7.   Some helpful do's and do not's

Do:

- **Engage your community:** this will help make sure you have a clear and shared vision and are open to collective decision making to build ownership.

- **Be flexible around ways people can get involved:** remember there are all kinds of leadership roles and community contributions.

- **Offer fun and open ways to engage communities:** people won't automatically sign up for leadership roles you need to get to know them, build relationships and make sure that people feel safe and included. This will help you develop shared ownership which is a foundation for leadership.

- **Distribute leadership across the group:** remember to work with everyone to see what they want to offer to share and collaborate for a better Local Conversation. Remember it is not about a heroic individual but a collaborative effort where everyone can play a part.

- **Treat everyone as an expert of their own experience:** remember everyone is an expert on where they live so in designing leadership opportunities make sure that all voices are heard, and collective ideas are pooled and acted upon.

- **Create support and training to build leadership:** think about the support and training you can give community members to build their confidence. This will lead to including more people in your Local Conversation and more willingness of people to take on a range of roles. With the right support people can recognise the skills they bring, build on them and develop new ones, and thereby provide collective community leadership.

- **Remember that not all roles are formal:** ensure you have a range of ways people can be leading and remember many of these are informal roles like welcoming people or talking to a neighbour to signpost them to a local service.

Don't:
- **Have a narrow definition of community leadership:** let the community members tell you what roles and responsibilities they want to contribute and ensure your Local Conversation is open enough to accommodate different levels of confidence and input. It all counts.

- **Just listen to the loudest voices:** make sure you include underrepresented and underserved communities and work to support leaders from a wide range of diverse communities.

- **Assume everyone wants to sit on a committee or be an overt leader:** some may want to contribute practically instead. For example, helping others or engaging a group you find hard to involve.

Reflection:

In this section of the practice guide, we have talked about leadership – including what it means, some theory, and some practical examples.

- What three things have you taken away from this section that you can use to support greater leadership in your Local Conversation?
- What can you add to this section in terms of theory around leadership?
- What practical examples or tips around leadership can you add to this section?

8. A final exercise

To bring everything together in this section we would like you to do one more exercise:

Exercise: Understanding leadership in your Local Conversation

In this section of the guide, we have talked about leadership. Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally. Their understanding of leadership and who the local formal and informal community leaders are may be very different to yours. There may well be current or future community leaders in very close proximity to the Local Conversation (or even taking part in its actions/activities) who you and/or your Steering Group have overlooked. The risk of overlooking local talent is likely to increase the less diverse your Steering Group members and sub group leaders are, and even more so if your Local Conversation as a whole is not reflective of the diversity of your local neighbourhood.

As a final exercise we would like you to facilitate a session on leadership with your Steering Group in which you discuss the importance of understanding leadership, and summarise the different types of, and approaches to, leadership described in this section. Once you have introduced the topic you should then encourage the Steering Group to discuss the extent to which its leadership (and that of any subgroups) represents the diversity of the neighbourhoods and what the future leadership of the Local Conversation might look like. This exercise should help you and your Steering Group consider diversity within the leadership of the Local Conversation and contribute to its future sustainability as they look at future leadership.

Having done this please let us what we could add to this section that might help others, in terms of exercises to try, sources of information from which to better understand leadership, and how you have shared it with residents.

Relationships

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at **relationships**. We consider:

1. What we mean by relationships
2. Why relationships are important in the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. What you can do support relationship building, including some practical examples
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts.

1. What we mean by relationships

A relationship is the way in which two or more people, or groups, are connected. The strength of a community lies in its connection and building relationships is therefore central to community development. Opportunities to build relationships between residents helps create a collective sense of identity – people feel better when they know their neighbours for example. For community groups, a web of relationships with other community and voluntary groups and those organisations and agencies that hold influence and resources, provides the base for making change.

Example: Local Conversation in Caia Park, Wrexham, Wales

This is an area of over 5,000 households in Wrexham. The Local Conversation identified that most people felt that organisations working in the area didn't listen to their needs and weren't working effectively together. Through the Local Conversation some residents got involved in volunteering to develop skills, experience and extend the reach of the community based services.

"Being involved has built my confidence. Now I can help others who feel isolated in the community to feel part of it and have a voice" Rhian Jones, resident.

A network of volunteers and supporters is growing, and the project is helping to build relationships and links in the community, and bring people together who wouldn't normally meet or talk. Community groups are offering each other support, local businesses

are getting involved, there's an increased sense of hope, and people feel more empowered.

Within a Local Conversation, there are many important relationships to consider. Four key examples include:

- Relationships between members of the Local Conversation

- Relationships between members of the Local Conversation and the anchor organisation

- Relationships between the Local Conversation and other organisations embedded within the neighbourhood (whether local activity groups, charities, campaign groups or community organisations; this is fairly open-ended, and can include universities, colleges and schools)

- Relationships between the Local Conversation and local decision-makers (the local authority, local MPs; GPs, the local CCG etc)

Reflection:
- Think about the above categories of relationships for your Local Conversation. Which group do you spend the least and most time building relationships with and what can you learn from this?
- Can you think of two or three things you could do to make contact with the groups where the relationship is weaker, or less frequent, over the next week or two?

2. Why relationships are important in the Local Conversations programme

Positive relationships are vital to a Local Conversation's role in supporting residents to come together, discuss their local needs, assets and aspirations, and find common ground and common goals. For them to go on and get involved in the activities and actions to address these issues, the relationships associated with the Local Conversation need to be strong.

Good relationships also support a Local Conversation to grow and develop. If an anchor organisation has strong relationships with a wide network of residents living in the neighbourhood, this will lead to a larger, more representative and diverse Local Conversation, which is better equipped to make and influence the changes the community wants. A connected, representative and diverse Local Conversation is often attractive to decision-makers, who are often keen to engage with and listen to organisations who represent a strong, local and collective voice.

You can find more on building a representative and diverse Local Conversation in the Involvement pillar of the framework.

Additionally, a Local Conversation that has good relationships with other local organisations, decision-makers and service providers is in a better place to influence

positive change. They are crucial to success.

For example, you need good relationships with other community groups and organisations in the neighbourhood if you wish to collaborate on a project. Collaboration expands your reach and can increase the capacity for action. A positive collaboration will also grow the social networks of the residents involved with both the Local Conversation and collaborating partners as they meet and work together, and support them to take greater control over whatever the project may be.

A Local Conversation that can and does influence positive change is also more likely to engage new residents, as they will see the Local Conversation as a vehicle to reach those in positions of power.

Example: Local Conversation in Govanhill, Glasgow

Govanhill is an area of Glasgow, situated to the south of the River Clyde. Govanhill is a suburb familiar with immigration. About 12 years ago the Roma community from Eastern Europe settled and now there are around 3,500 Roma people all living within a few blocks. Many people live in poverty, work in low-paid and largely unskilled jobs, and live in poor housing conditions. The latter is especially acute for newly arrived Roma people, who experience overcrowding, disrepair and questionable or illegal landlord practices. Many Roma people also do not speak English fluently, which restricts their ability to access services and employment, as well as the amount of control they can exercise locally.

The project approach has focussed on relationship building, with the first task being a door knocking exercise to build trust and ask neighbours questions to find out about their aspirations and ideas for the area in a really informal but engaging way. One of the things that came out of these conversations was the importance of social and cultural activities to celebrate heritage and strengthen connections.

The Local Conversation now has a men's group, a volunteer group, a youth group, a sewing club and a dance group. *"I really enjoy being part of the men's group. I have met other people from Govanhill and we are now friends, even like one big family supporting each other. There is nowhere else to go for us in this area if you don't have extra money, but here it is all free."* Junior Balog, project member.

The Local Conversation has also helped to broker relationships with public services and other community groups. This includes helping a group write a letter about picnic benches in the local park, supporting the community to stand up for rights around housing and introducing residents on the same street to address rubbish issues through relationship building with the Slovakian and English-speaking communities.

Human beings are naturally social creatures. The better our relationships are, the happier and more productive we tend to be. Good working relationships also give us several benefits: our work is more enjoyable when we have good relationships with those around us; people are more likely to go along with changes that we want to implement; and we're more innovative and creative.

What's more, good relationships give us freedom: instead of spending time and energy

overcoming the problems associated with negative relationships, we can, instead, focus on opportunities.

Good working relationships will be key to the success of the Local Conversation.

Reflection:
- What part do relationships play in ability to influence change? What relationships have you built, or could you build to make this happen?

3. Some theory and approaches

A reason to connect

Building positive relationships between different and diverse groups is vital for the well-being of the whole community. It is often the little things that matter – knowing your neighbours, being able to chat and ask for help when you are stuck, being surrounded by friendly faces rather than hostility or fear. But for that to be the norm, you need relationships – and for that, you need to have a reason to connect, an opportunity to do things together[73].

Defining a good relationship

There are lots of books and theories written about organisations, teams and working relationships. Between them these identify several common characteristics that make up good, healthy working relationships, including:

Trust – This is the foundation of every good relationship. When you trust your colleagues, you form a powerful bond that helps you to work and communicate more effectively. If you trust the people you work with, you can be open and honest in your thoughts and actions, and you don't waste time and energy worrying about lack of trust.

Mutual respect – When you respect the people who you work with, you value their input and ideas, and they value yours. Working together, you can develop solutions based on your collective insight, wisdom and creativity.

Mindfulness – This means taking responsibility for your words and actions. Those who are mindful are careful and attend to what they say, and they don't let their own negative emotions impact on the people around them.

Welcoming diversity – The Local Conversation should be attracting people from very different backgrounds and with very different experiences, and these differences should be embraced. When friends, neighbours and colleagues offer different opinions from yours, it is good to take the time to consider what they have to say, and factor their insights into your decision-making. Diversity is about listening to and increasing the voices of people who might not always be heard, and ensuring you are representative of all the

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[73] Wilson, M.and Zipfel, T. (2008) *Communities R Us: new and established communities working together* **hact.** https://www.hact.org.uk/communities-r-us

different people who live in the neighbourhood. This will also bring new and different ideas and approaches, which is an asset.

Open communication – We communicate all day, whether meeting face to face at the school gates or shops, or on messaging apps on our phones. The better and more effectively you communicate with those around you, the richer your relationships will be. All good relationships depend on open, honest communication.

Example: Keeping in touch in Gateshead

The **Local Conversation in Old Ford and Nest estates** is led by residents through a Steering Committee which shapes the project and ensures local priorities and needs are addressed and keeps the control of the funding in local people's hands to meet the real needs of the local area.

As a result of the lockdown, the Local Conversation shifted its aims slightly and moved into a place of emergency response to the pandemic. They had to stop using the community centres but were still determined to keep the community spirit alive, and keep people supported. They leafletted residents, trying to reach people who might need support and invited them to get in touch. They also worked with the local school, preparing packed meals to distribute to families who may not have access to enough food.

"When we put local people in the lead, we start to see effective, sustainable change. Love, trust and relationships are improving health and wellbeing in our area – between local people and between the agencies that serve them." Sarah Gorman, Chief Executive Officer

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Some theory on relationship development

Groups often go through stages of development. Tuckman[74] described these as **forming**, **storming**, **norming** and **performing**.

The stage of **forming** takes place when team or group members first meet one another. Tuckman explains how group members will explicitly attempt to avoid conflict in fear of giving off a bad first impression. According to Tuckman, very little work on the project at hand gets completed during this stage. This stage is more important for becoming acquainted and learning to work together.

The second stage is known as **storming**. There is a double-edged definition within storming because not only does brainstorming of different individuals' ideas take place but the disagreements and arguments regarding these ideas also happen. Tuckman explains that this stage is a test of group members' maturity and ability to compromise with others' opposing ideas, two major necessities when in a team setting.

The third stage is **norming**, probably the simplest of the stages. Norming takes place when storming completes. At this stage, the group has a shared sense of identity and purpose. It is ready to assign roles and can begin to work productively.

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[74] *Tuckman, B (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin.* **63** *(6): 384-399.*

The fourth stage, **performing**, is when the group or team really begins to work as one cohesive unit in an efficient and productive manner. There is very little argument or hesitation; the project closes in on completion as the individual members become properly synchronised within their roles.

In reality, groups may jump backwards and forwards between stages, especially between norming or performing and storming as new members join, people become more confident to express their views or new challenges emerge. Working together can be messy! The stages are useful however in helping you to understand where you are up to as a group, working on the Local Conversation. Don't be surprised if arguments start to develop as you move into the storming phase. This is normal. The key is that you recognise that the group is storming, and that you manage a way through this - ensuring that disagreements do not become personalised. At this stage, you need to hear what everyone has to say and focus on developing rules and processes for resolving disagreements.
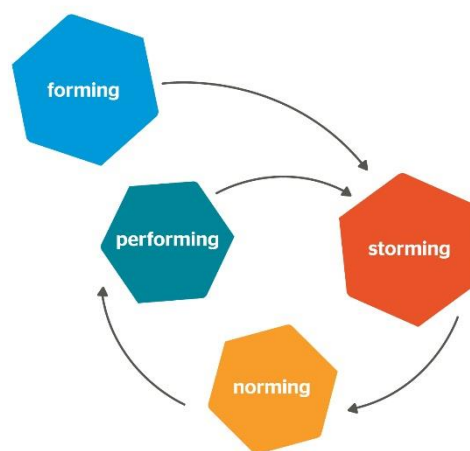
Exercise: Agreeing principles

One of the ways of supporting your Local Conversation group is to set a group agreement that you can come back to which has your agreed ways of working set out. These will help you to build trust and navigate when you do storm.

Have you thought about how you all work together? Have a go at coming together either to discuss this (if nothing is already in place) or to review this (if you have an agreed way of working). As a group exercise you could ask all present to suggest three key things that would help you work together and feel safe and included in the group. These could be captured on post it notes and discussed so you end up with a group of ways of working you can all sign up to. Some community groups then ask all member to sign them either on a flipchart when you develop them together or separately afterwards.

It is also beneficial to discuss different ways to manage these principles so that all groups members can be confident about holding others to account and you can all continue to build your relationships and work better together.

Reflection:
- Can you apply the framework of forming, storming, norming and performing to your group? What has been the impact on your relationships?

Types of relationships

Relationships may be formal or informal. Both sets of relationships are important in embedding the project in wider policy developments, seeking allies and practical support. Formal relationships are usually associated with paid roles and organisations whereas informal but purposeful relationships tend to be built through community action,

community groups and networks. Informal connections reflect our experience of community as emerging from common concerns which are raised and discussed through informal interactions: *"The key is to be aware of the different functions played by formality and informality in different situations and to understand how these can be combined or balanced to achieve the desired goals"* (Gilchrist[75]).

Additionally, at the Community Leadership training delivered by Citizen's UK for the Local Conversation's programme in 2021, the trainer highlighted the importance of distinguishing between public and private relationships. Each type of relationships has a different aim and a different nature. For example, you would reasonably hug you family member, as a private and personal relationships, but with your manager you may not, as this is a public relationship with terms and boundaries. These distinctions are also important in consideration of influencing. For example: if your local councillor is part of group of people you are trying to influence, then would it be a good thing if they encourage you to be on first name terms and use language and mannerisms as if you are good friends?

While this could seem tempting to build a personal relationship, arguably, it means that it is harder to keep boundaries of their role in place, build respect and possibly harder to call them to account or make formal requests when needed.

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing . It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders[76], ethnic backgrounds[77] and religions[78], disabled people[79], older people[80], young people[81], members of LGBT+ communities[82], people with mental health needs[83], people

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[75] Gilchrist, A. (2015) Blending, Braiding, Balancing: strategies for managing the interplay between formal and informal ways of working with communities. In *The Plowden Papers, Rethinking Governance?*

[76] LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, *Confronting Gender Inequality*, London School of Economics (2015)

[77] Cabinet Office, *People living in deprived neighbourhoods*, Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)

[78] Welsh Government, *Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019* (2020)

[79] DWP, *Disability facts and figures* (2014)

[80] Public Health Scotland, *Older people* (2021)

[81] Public Health Scotland, *Young people* (2021)

[82] Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey* (2017)

[83] NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016)

with learning disabilities[84], and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.[85] It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and that you know who lives in your neighbourhood. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate. Lead organisations and Steering Group members need to build the skills, confidence, tools, and techniques to ensure that they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion.

A group's networks can be built to diversify its range of relationships. On the other hand, networks can be exclusive and based on 'who you know'. The following assessment checklist[86] for considering equality in networks, and for that matter community groups, might be helpful.

- How does the network / group promote equity – what is the range of members involved, do they reflect different perspectives?

- Are members supportive of new networks emerging to meet different needs?

- Do all members feel some ownership of the network/group?

- Do all members contribute to the network/group's activities?

- Do all members benefit from being part of the network / group?

- How does the network / group avoid exclusivity and the development of cliques?

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[84] Public Health England, *Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health* (2018)
[85] Cabinet Office, *Socio-economic background (SEB)* (2019)
[86] Skinner, S. and Wilson, M (2002) *Assessing Community Strengths*. CDF

Exercise: Assessing equity, diversity and inclusion

- Place flipcharts around a room, each with a different heading taken from the checklist above.

- Ask people to form pairs and to move around the flipcharts and write onto post-its their responses to the questions

- Give each pair one or two of the flipcharts and ask them to look at the responses and cluster the post-its into themes

- Each pair feeds back to the whole group

- Facilitate a discussion, noting where there is good equalities practice and where more proactive work needs to happen. Create an action plan around this.

5. What you can do support relationship building, including some practical examples

Building good working relationships

There are many reasons to build relationships. For example:

- To create a sense of identity and belonging
- To get mutual support
- To collaborate in events or activities where you have a shared interest
- To gain greater understanding of other things happening in your community
- To provide a joint service
- To campaign together
- To influence decision about your community.

For relationships to succeed, they need to be mutually beneficial to all those involved.

Reflection:
- Who are the key people you need to have a good relationship with?
- What you need from these people?
- What do they need from you?

Exercise: In order to make the Local Conversation work… Who are the key people that you need to have a good relationship with? *This might include residents, the Steering Group or forum, sub-groups, and other local organisations and decision-makers*			
Who you want to build a relationship with	What does the Local Conversation need from these people – what can we gain?	What do these people need from us - how can the Local Conversation benefit them?	Potential issues and challenges to be aware of

The exercise above is a helpful way to list out your existing and any future relationships, and to think about your offer. The two columns in the middle are the starting point for a useful to-do list as you seek to strengthen, maintain or build new relationships.

Exercise: Relationship planning

- **Your goals.** What is it that you are trying to achieve? Are you clear about what you want to be different? Do you have a shared vision?

- **Your offer.** What is the contribution that you can make together to improving the area? Do you have a shared view of this? Are you clear about the things that you will not do, as well as those that you will?

- **Ground rules.** What are your expectations of each other? Have you agreed what contribution you expect from each other? Have you agreed how often you need to attend meetings and how you will communicate with each other? How will you set deadlines and allocate tasks? Have you agreed how you will make decisions and resolve disagreements?

- **Playing to each other's strengths.** Do you know what each party is good at? Do you know what each of you brings to the table in terms of experience, skills, interests and contacts?

- **Shared problems.** What are the problems that you share as a group? List these. What can you do as a team to try to overcome them?

- **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.** What EDI considerations (referring to section 4) have you made?

Relationship principles

In all relationships we should aim to be:

- **Strengths-based** – focusing on the strengths, skills, interests and expertise (including lived experience)

- **Based on principles of equity, diversity and inclusion** – see section 4

- **Respectful and supportive –** ensuring that people are involved, listened to and heard

- **Honest and transparent**

- **Flexible –** people should be encouraged to contribute in whatever ways they feel able, recognising that some people will more time or more experience than others

- **Developed in the spirit of partnership -** the Local Conversation should focus on what people have in common and on helping each other to achieve shared objectives and goals

- **Recognise power differences –** local organisations and decision-makers may have access to resources that can make or break a project.

- **Polite and professional –** differences and disagreements should be acknowledged, but should not be allowed to jeopardise the prospect of working together.

Reflection:

- How does your Local Conversation work within these relationship principles? Where are you strongest and where do you need to focus for improvement?

Relationship goals

As outlined at the start of this section, there are many important relationships to consider within the Local Conversation. While it is not possible to anticipate or define them all within this text, below are some of the key relationships that might exist and the key characteristics that should help to define and shape them. It is also important to set goals for your relationships.

Relationships with the local community

Relationships between the Local Conversation and the local community should be:

- **Inclusive** – People from all parts of the community should feel able to have a voice and able to contribute. This will include people of all faiths, abilities, ethnic groups, genders and ages, as well as people from different social backgrounds or sexual orientations. Some people may have specific needs that they need to have taken into account in order to feel included.

- **Visible** – People from the local community should know that the Local Conversation is something that is happening. They should know, broadly speaking, what it is about and how they can get involved. You can read more about visibility in the Involvement pillar of the framework.

- **Co-owned** – The local community should identify with the priorities for the Local Conversation. They should feel that the Local Conversation is tackling issues that they care about.

> **Example: Local Conversation in Haverhill, Suffolk**
>
> Through the Local Conversation, residents in Suffolk have identified that their local surroundings have an impact on residents health, and that having an accessible green space available to the community and creating good air quality helps enable people to build social connections and be physically active. The allotment, owned by Jubilee Allotment Association and rented by the Local Conversation in Haverhill, is a hub of community activity, and has become a lifeline during the pandemic.
>
> Although the changing government regulations and social distancing restrictions to combat Covid-19 have impacted on the project, residents have managed to keep those already connected with the community work engaged, and the Local Conversation's allotment proved to be the 'go to' place for the project during summer 2020 as it allowed people to meet outside whilst remaining socially distanced.
>
> Early in summer 2020, the project put procedures in place such as a track and trace log and Covid-19 risk assessment in order to keep all visitors and community members safe. As a result of this preparation, the Allotment Group has been able to invite other local groups to use the space, enabling them to continue to meet even while the other community spaces have been closed.
>
> By hosting other groups at the allotment, relationships and connections have been built which led to holding the first Haverhill South Allotment Partnership meeting. This meeting with members of the local community and other local groups meant that vulnerable and other sometimes hard to reach people beyond the Local Conversation could also have the opportunity to benefit from the allotment and have their say in its development.

Building relationships in your community opens up communication, and when people know what others want or need, you can start to work together to make it happen – which can be mutually beneficial. The challenge is ensuring clarity about the roles people play. For example, the same person might be a resident, a councillor and a member of the local playgroup management committee. When they interact with the Local Conversation, it needs to be clear which role they are speaking from.

Networks and networking

Networking is about building relationships for mutual benefit. Networks can enable access to information, expertise, support and help to create collective responsibility. They can be formal (where there is a clear membership) or be a set of informal connections – the key thing is that enough common ground exists to work together around shared agendas. On the whole, networks are *less dependent upon structure and tend to function through personal interaction between people who know (or know of, each other (Gilchrist, [87])*. Networks are deemed to be important because amongst other things they can:

- provide the space for strong and dispersed methods of communication
- develop a sense of common purpose
- be a forum for exchanging information, skills and learning
- coordinate activity and so avoid duplication

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[87] Gilchrist, A. (2013) *The well-connected community: A networking approach to community development.* The Policy Press

- facilitate collective action and alliances
- underpin multi agency partnerships
- support community engagement
- help to diversify relationships

Most of us have wide ranging networks. It is useful to map your networks and connections as a group so that you can think about who you might want to strengthen ties with. See also stakeholder mapping and power analysis tools in the Influence section of the guidance.

Exercise: mapping your network and building links

- Draw a map of your network. Put yourself or your group at the centre, and then mark other individuals and organisations with whom you have contact. Use the distance from you to indicate the importance of the contact and use the width of the line to indicate the frequency of the contact: distance = importance; width = frequency

- Review the map and note where you might invest in building stronger relationships

Working with power holders

These are sometimes referred to as vertical relationships, as opposed to horizontal relationships which are those you form with your peers – neighbours or other community groups.

In the Influence section of the guidance, we discuss the importance of identifying your sphere of influence and undertaking a stakeholder analysis. This will help you to understand the relationships that you need to pay special attention to. Realistically, this will include the people who have a stake in your success or failure. Forming a bond with these people will help you to ensure that your projects stay on track. Such organisations might be your local council – parish or town, district or county council.

You will need to find out who the most relevant people are, they may be council officers or council members. There will be particular council departments that might be the most appropriate such as a communities or neighbourhoods directorate, or the Public Health department. There may also be strategies in place that are particularly relevant to the Local Conversation and associated partnerships that you feel you should be part of. Other stakeholders include GPs and health centres, the local NHS Trust, voluntary organisations and charities, and the private sector – locally based businesses and companies that you see as an ally and can help support your aims and deliver your activities, for example provide free printing of posters and leaflets or sponsorship of an event.

6. Summary

People tend to get involved in a community group or activity because they know someone else who is involved. The more people you have relationships with in your community, the greater the opportunity to involve more people.

Secondly, if we are going to achieve our aims, we need to draw on the support and influence of others. This requires some relationship building. Those with the power and resources to help make things happen are more likely to listen and engage with community agendas if a relationship is already there.

There is a lot of crossover with other sections of the Practice Guide in here. This is because relationships touch on every other section. Strong governance and good leadership are not possible without positive relationships, either. And all of this forms the foundations for action and for influence. This underlines just how crucial relationships are in a Local Conversation – as they are in life.

7. Some helpful do's and don'ts

Do:
- **Understand your local context:** map out the different communities in your area along with the voluntary and community groups and public services so you can see how you can build contacts, trust and involvement as well as break down barriers.

- **Help people identify:** this might be with your local area or communities of

interest. Remember people feel less isolated and more included when they know their neighbours. Offer opportunities for people to meet each other.

- **Show your appreciation whenever someone gets involved or contributes:** Everyone wants to feel that their time and effort is appreciated. So, genuinely compliment the people around you when they do something well. This will support positive relationships as well as model an assets based approach for all those involved.

- **Make time to build relationships both with your Local Conversation community and partners:** Devote time to relationship building, even if it is just a few minutes a day. For example, you could pop in to see someone over a coffee, reply to people's postings on Twitter or LinkedIn, or arrange to meet someone. These little interactions help build the foundation of a good relationships.

- **Be open and transparent:** This helps build trust in relationships which is key when representing or advocating community views and perspectives. Remember to go back to those who have shared their needs and update them so they feel empowered, informed and can contribute on an ongoing basis.

Don't:
- **Be intimidated by those you see as in authority or holding more power than you:** these people need you on side as much as you need them. Communities are the experts about where they live, and this is what you bring to a relationship.

- **Contribute to conflict:** Ensure that you are balanced and when community disputes or relationships difficulties are raised you are able to mediate and support those involved. If this is within the Local Conversation you can refer back to any group agreements. Different stakeholders with the Local Conversation will often have different views and opinions and working to resolve conflict can be critical in helping to maintain a productive working environment.

- **Ignore the consequences of poor communication or relationship management:** You need to take responsibility for any actions that might hurt someone's feelings. It is best to address this head on and apologise directly. People are usually more willing to forgive and forget if you make an honest attempt to make things right.

Reflection:
- What three things have you taken away from this section that you can use to build greater relationships in your Local Conversation?
- What can you add to this section in terms of theory around relationships?
- What practical examples or tips around relationships can you add to this section?

9. A final exercise

To bring everything together in this section we would like you to do one more exercise:

Exercise 4:

In this section of the practice guide, we have talked about Relationships – including what they mean, some theory, and some practical examples.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section – not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally.

Having read through this section of the guide you should now feel (even more) confident of supporting residents to build and cultivate relationships to address some of the social determinants of health.

As a final exercise and using the tips, resources and case studies in this section we would like you to support your steering group (or one of your subgroups - if you have them) to design a plan that relates to one area within the agreed Local Conversation priorities. As you go through this process, please note what worked well and where you/they struggled.

Having done this please let us what we could add to this section that might help others, in terms of exercises to try or sources of information from which to better understand relationships.