Live Well Communities Fund

Year One Prototype Learning Pack

Live Well everyday support in every neighbourhood

together we are GREATER MANCHESTER

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this Learning Pack – which reflects the creativity and commitment of hundreds of people across Greater Manchester, who have been helping us explore how we could build a Live Well Communities Fund.

Our shared belief is that the places where we live, learn, work and play make a big difference to our health and wellbeing. If you live in a neighbourhood where it's easy to take exercise, come together to help each other, and find activities to improve your wellbeing, you will have better health and live longer. For too many, disadvantage, exclusion and lack of opportunity make this much harder – and we see the impact in the health inequalities experienced by too many of our citizens.

The answers lie with our people and communities. There are people across Greater Manchester ready to make a difference in their communities, with their neighbours. They know what people need and want to do to be happier and healthier.

Live Well as a movement is seeking to make great everyday support available in every neighbourhood. The Live Well Communities Fund is part of our collective endeavour to work with people and communities to grow that support and to change lives – so that everyone has a full and fair opportunity for a healthier future. We want the Fund to bring in more resource for communities, and to make more impact on inequalities with that resource. In this first year we have worked with VCFSE colleagues in every locality, and with GM=EqAI who have been supporting work to reach people from geographically dispersed groups. We have been exploring how this Fund could operate to maximise its accessibility to people experiencing inequalities. The results have exceeded our expectations as you will read in this report. With initial seed funding of £1m, plus additional monies of £300,000 we secured from NHS England, we have funded nearly 500 groups, reached 13200 people, and over 2100 people have been directly involved in determining where that funding has gone.

As you will read in this pack, the work that has been led by our VCFSE colleagues has also built confidence and strengthened relationships. We are just at the beginning of our journey to build a long-term sustainable partnership for this Fund, but with the GM Mayor's Charity now offering to contribute in their fundraising expertise, I am excited to see what we can achieve in Year 2 and beyond.

Zoe Porter
Associate Director
Live Well and Neighbourhoods
NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care

“Everyone’s enthusiastic and there’s a real willingness to learn and try new ideas — whether it be videos, new ways of voting, or just doing it differently. That’s the heart of Live Well.”

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Executive summary

The Live Well Communities Fund – Year One Prototype

The Live Well Communities Fund was established to explore how funding can be deployed and distributed in ways that are more accessible, inclusive and effective for communities experiencing health inequalities across Greater Manchester. In its first year, the Fund has tested how a community-led and system-enabled approach to funding can shift power, strengthen relationships and enable local action that supports health, wellbeing and prevention.

This Learning Pack reflects on the design, deployment and distribution of the Fund during its Year One prototype phase. It brings together learning from local infrastructure organisations, community partners, residents, Community Researchers and system leaders to capture what was tried, what worked, what was challenging, and what this means for the future development of the Fund.

With initial seed funding of £1 million, alongside an additional £300,000 secured from NHS England, the Live Well Communities Fund supported nearly 500 community groups and reached over 13,200 people. More than 2,100 residents were directly involved in shaping decisions about how funding was allocated in their local areas. These figures represent not only scale, but a deliberate shift towards participatory, relational and place-based approaches to funding.

> "The answers to health inequalities lie with our people and communities."

Why the fund matters

Health inequalities in Greater Manchester are shaped by social, economic and structural factors that cannot be addressed by services alone. Communities already hold knowledge, relationships and assets that support wellbeing, but too often funding systems create barriers that exclude smaller, informal or marginalised groups from accessing resources.

The Live Well Communities Fund was designed to respond to this challenge by:

- making funding easier to access for groups who do not traditionally apply for grants;
- supporting community power, voice and decision-making;
- enabling local systems to work in more flexible, relational and preventative ways; and
- learning how funding can better support long-term community resilience rather than short-term projects.

Year One was not about creating a perfect model, but about testing approaches, learning together and understanding what it takes to shift how funding works in practice.

What was tested in year one

During the prototype year, funding was allocated across the ten Greater Manchester localities through Local Infrastructure Organisations (or equivalent arrangements), with an additional pan-Greater Manchester allocation delivered by the GM Equality Alliance (GM=EqAl) to support geographically dispersed and racially minoritised communities.

Localities were encouraged to build on existing strengths and take at least one step further towards community-led and participatory funding. This resulted in a wide range of approaches, including:

- simplified and flexible application processes;
- multiple routes to apply, including conversations, videos and supported applications;
- participatory decision-making panels involving residents and people with lived experience;
- proportionate and relational due-diligence processes;
- tiered grant models, including micro-grants and staged funding; and
- learning-led monitoring focused on stories, reflection and impact rather than compliance alone.

Alongside this, Community Researchers gathered insight into how funding was experienced by communities and how deployment and distribution processes worked on the ground.

What we learned

Across Greater Manchester, several consistent themes emerged.

Community-led approaches build trust and relevance.

Where residents and community organisations were meaningfully involved in shaping criteria and decisions, funding was seen as fairer, more transparent and more closely aligned with local priorities.

Flexibility reduces barriers.

Shorter forms, conversational assessments and multiple application routes enabled groups who might otherwise be excluded – including unconstituted groups and individuals – to access funding.

Relational working takes time and capacity.

Supporting co-design, participation and learning requires dedicated resource and realistic time-scales. Where time was limited, this placed pressure on both infrastructure organisations and community participants.

Power-sharing creates learning, not just outcomes.

Participatory funding processes became sites of learning in their own right, strengthening skills, confidence and relationships across communities and systems.

Short-term pilots limit long-term impact.

While Year One generated rich learning, the constraints of one-year funding cycles and late confirmations limited opportunities for deeper collaboration, sustainability and system change.

What this means for the future

The Live Well Communities Fund Year One prototype demonstrates that community-led and system-enabled funding is not only possible, but valuable. It shows how funding can become a relationship rather than a transaction, and how learning, trust and shared power can strengthen both community action and system practice.

As the Fund moves into Year Two and beyond, the key priorities are to:

- build longer-term, sustainable partnerships;
- secure multi-year investment to support continuity and learning;
- strengthen capacity within local infrastructure and communities;
- embed participation and power-sharing as standard practice; and
- ensure learning feeds back into system change, commissioning and policy.

This Learning Pack is intended as both a reflection on Year One and a practical guide for those seeking to develop more inclusive, community-led approaches to funding. It offers insight, examples and tools to support future funding distribution — in Greater Manchester and beyond — that centres people, place and equity.

INTRODUCTION



Learning pack intention

This Learning Pack is a reflection on Year 1 of the Live Well Communities Fund. In this first year we explored how a grant fund could work in a way that made it easier for marginalised communities who don't traditionally bid for funding to access the monies.

By working with members of the community to understand systems, processes and approaches, the collaborative relationships, understanding and support across the system is strengthened.

This Learning Pack is a practical and reflective guide for local partners working towards health equity and inclusion, via community-led and system-enabled funding deployment and distribution. We hope that it will tell the story of the distribution process and be a useful guide to support future funding distribution and embed participatory, collaborative and community-led approaches.

Read on...

Learning pack intention

What is Live Well?

Live Well is Greater Manchester's (GM's) commitment to ensure everyone can access great everyday support in every neighbourhood. It's about tackling health, social and economic inequalities by changing how we work with people and communities, and in public services. Led by and with communities, Live Well means better connected and supportive services, opportunities and help.

As well as redesigning services, Live Well focuses on growing community action, power and wealth, so that everyone:

- has access to a wide variety of activities, support and information;
- is heard and enabled to contribute;
- has the resources to make change happen.

The Live Well Framework promotes community-led prevention that successfully improves health and wellbeing outcomes for residents across GM by:

- creating approaches that are rooted in and that encourage community;
- enabling action, power and wealth to flourish within communities;
- enabling a system where barriers relating to purpose, leadership, power and accountability are identified and shifted.



What is the Live Well Communities Fund?

The Live Well Communities Fund is being built to attract more resources for the communities of Greater Manchester and is ensuring that that funding has the biggest possible positive impact on health inequalities. Over the last year, we have been prototyping this Fund and building partnership support. In 2024/25, a £1 million fund from NHS GM and GMCA was made available, and agreement was reached about the best way to disperse it to help us learn how the Fund could work in the future.

The design was intended to grow impact, trust, and collaboration across the system and communities. The funding was distributed through the 10 GM localities, via Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) or their equivalents, and with a central pot for dispersed communities convened by GM=EqAI. Allocations were weighted by population and deprivation to tackle inequalities.

In this Year 1 prototype, we worked with a group of infrastructure, community and system partners and Community Researchers to gather shared learning. The focus was on generating useful data and insights to inform how the GM system measures progress and impact in the longer term, shapes future funding distribution and captures community-led and system-enabled change.



ROOTS + REALITIES





Context and background of the funding landscape

This section grounds the Live Well Communities Fund in its purpose and audience. It explores why the Fund exists, the context it responds to, and how it complements wider system priorities.

What is funding deployment?

Deployment refers to how the funding is used once it is allocated to localities.

Examples: Allocating spend to local needs, co-designing how money will reach beneficiaries, administering grants, monitoring progress, adapting use of funds.

What is funding distribution?

Distribution refers to how the money is divided and shared out between recipients (Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) organisations.

Examples: selecting grantees, allocating money to projects, participatory budgeting, community decision-making, releasing grant payments, supporting projects to start.

Read on...

The roots

The initial ideas for how the Live Well Communities Fund could work were developed through conversations with lots of different people and organisations. The Fund needed to work as an inclusive partnership across Greater Manchester and so it was important to agree how everyone, including potential funders, partners and grant recipients, could see the potential benefits.

Learning was also drawn from best practice already happening within Greater Manchester and other national programmes.

Engagement took place through events, workshops and conversations including:

- Funders and Commissioners Workshops and meetings, including VCFSE partners
- conversations with national innovators, such as London's Propel Fund
- conversations with GM System Changers
- engagement at Live Well Events







Launch of Live Well

Attended by everyone from politicians to funders, GM social justice and action networks, people running leisure centres and museums, all 10 local authorities, hospitals and medical practices and policy makers and commissioners.

And at the centre of it all, voluntary, community and faith groups, social enterprises and grassroots initiatives that are growing health and wellbeing in communities every day.

Attendees could browse the community marketplace, take part in workshops, experience immersive audio performance and contribute to community reporting, all bringing the experiences, stories and ideas of GM residents to life. A Live Well Living Room hosted a chat with our system leaders about what it would take to spread, grow and enable community-led action, power and wealth to become 'the way we do things' in Greater Manchester.

Growing community wealth, opportunity and ownership

This event brought together people and organisations creating community wealth, funders doing things differently, and commissioners from different sectors to share practice and learning about growing community wealth, ownership and opportunity and what it takes to enable it to thrive.

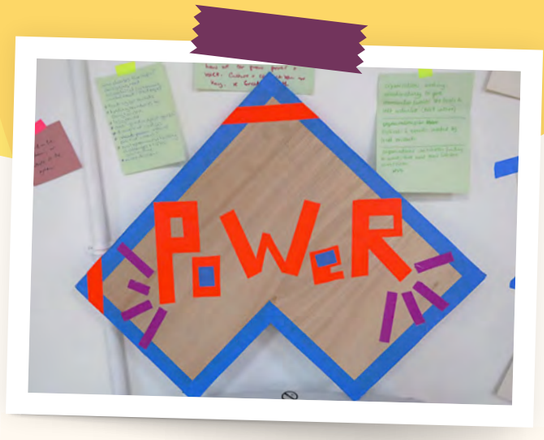
Participants enjoyed lightning talks, collaboration with other movement builders, journeys through communities, designing new ways forward and more.

Live Well event: Growing community power and decision-making to tackle inequalities

Five hundred people from across Greater Manchester came together to talk about growing community power and decision-making. The event harnessed the strength and creativity of the GM Live Well movement and highlighted how public services were moving towards a powerful ambition to further transform neighbourhood working and prevention.

With 12 breakout sessions, panel debates, lightning talks, a choir and a youth band, walking tours, legislative theatre, a power map and community reporting, and even the living room themed furniture was community-powered.





Growing great everyday support in every neighbourhood

The fourth face-to-face event in the #GMLiveWell series brought together people from across Greater Manchester – residents, public services and community groups from every locality – to shape the future of everyday support in our neighbourhoods. The energy, inspiration and ideas were fantastic – it was a day of brilliant conversations, connections and content.

Driving Change: The BIG GM Live Well Bus Tour

The tour, led in partnership with Local Trust, Locality, and the We're Right Here campaign for community power, showcased pioneering community-led spaces in Greater Manchester, and highlighted the amazing work of local community organisations across the city region.

Those on the tour left with a clear idea of the crucial role community organisations play in shaping a happier, healthier and fairer future and with lots of ideas to support the development of Live Well centres, spaces and offers.



The reality

- The ambition to develop a new place-based funding distribution model with multiple partners was seen to bring many possibilities and opportunities, not least the chance, if the Fund were to grow significantly, to incentivise further investment in sustainable local infrastructure and community reach. However it also came with anxieties, challenges and complexities including that:
- New funding could unintentionally replace rather than complement already stretched local grant budgets;
- Uneven local investment in infrastructure to support community-led and system-enabled health could require a minimum capacity threshold before funds are devolved;
- Additional pressure would be placed on localities to 'innovate' within already stretched capacities.

These concerns made it all the more important that the development of the Live Well Communities Fund should prioritise seeking to achieve sector-wide consensus on purpose and operations, across the system, services, infrastructure and community. It was recognised that relational structures and opportunities to co-design had to be built into the prototype process and deployment processes.

Those involved with the early conversations were clear that Fund decision-makers and the community organisations receiving the funds needed to be diverse and representative, and this may need targeted work to ensure the beneficiaries are those who will most benefit.

To respond to these opportunities, concerns and realities, clear shared principles and co-designed processes were needed to guide decision-making, ensuring transparency and alignment across partners.

> "It was recognised that relational structures and opportunities to co-design had to be built into the prototype process and deployment processes."

To support and guide this work, we developed a set of core aims:

We generate more funding for community-led health:
The funding we generate will bring in new resource and complement existing pots.

We agree a clear long-term aim:
We will agree a clear common purpose — e.g. to make a stepped difference to long term health outcomes, reaching communities most impacted by inequalities — Live Well for a Healthier Future.

Together, we will make a real difference:
By bringing together statutory, philanthropic and VCFSE partners we will get more value for available funding.

We will shift power to communities:
We will devolve decision making to communities — they know what works best — and make it easy to access for marginalised groups who don't traditionally bid for funding.

We will enable innovation:
We will help people and communities try new things — and be prepared for failure.

We will strengthen and build on our VCSFE Sector:
We will build on the existing strength and expertise of the VCFSE sector.

We will build on and complement what already is in place that works:
We will work in partnership with locality and other GM grant making processes, aligning, connecting and complementing.

FOUNDATIONS



Community-led, system-enabled co-production

Here we outline the principles that shaped the Live Well Communities Fund prototype, collaboration, co-production, and locality-based learning.

The section explores how shared values, relational working, and equitable design underpin the Fund. It highlights how local approaches are building stronger, more responsive partnerships between communities, funders, and systems across Greater Manchester.

Read on...

The model

Deploying and distributing the Live Well Communities Fund builds on what is already in place, whilst generating new learning and development about how we best get funding to people experiencing inequalities.

The Fund, in 2025, was allocated to each of the 10 localities, via their Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO) or other agreed routes where they don't have a designated LIO, plus one allocation to GM=EqAI who could make the funding available to groups who are non-geographically based.

The localities were asked to describe partnerships and processes currently in place to support a community-led and participatory funding distribution journey and to build on these through the opportunity of this new funding. We categorised the kind of things to consider and reflect on as:

Distribution journey

Before – strategic and operational foundations

Understanding priorities: knowing what is most important to communities, and what is most needed, so the resource is targeted to where it has best impact.

Integration: developing collaborative work together across the system to support community-led health and wellbeing.

Funding Pack: gathering best practice from across GM and beyond to support LIOs in a guide to submitting a proposal of how they will deploy and distribute the prototype fund.

During – how funding is allocated and decided

Awareness and information: People and groups hearing about available funds and opportunities and knowing how to access/apply.

Process: It is easy to apply or get involved and the process does not impose unnecessary barriers.

Support: There is support to develop projects and access funding – including support for collective and participative practices.

Decision-making: Decision-making is fair, transparent and reflective of local priorities.

Afterwards – how we sustain and learn

Implementation support: There is support for projects and work to succeed, sustain and develop.

Impact: We understand the difference we are making in a way that works for communities, and helps grow the evidence base to attract more resources.

Learning: We learn from what we do, and this learning helps us all evolve together.

How did community research process gather learning about the distribution journeys in each locality?

Learning in localities

The community research process

1

Gather team
Community Research team established, led by A Brilliant Thing CIC and involving GM System Changers and Live Well team (January 25).

2

Design community research
Community research team and Live Well team design community research Framework and Research Conversation Tool (January 25). Live Well event, contributing to Community Researcher team understanding of the funds aims. (March 25).

3

Community research engagement
Community Research team use Framework and Tool to engage in localities. Engagement gathered 3 submissions through conversations with LIO leads, visiting events and attending coproduction sessions. Perspectives, understanding of different stages and experiences through the deployment/distribution journey was identified. (April-June 25).

4

Design video story
Video team established led by Brave Day Films and involving Community Researchers and Live Well team in design of storytelling methods (July 25).

5

Sensemaking
Sensemaking session bringing together LIO's,10GM, Community Researchers, Live Well team, Video Story team and wider partners, to review and contribute to the research gathered and build a collective story of the work. (July 25).

6

Video story engagement
Video Story team capture stories in localities, interview people involved and share the community-research led video story process. (October-December 25).

7

Production
Learning Park produced detailing community research, insight from partners and learning to inform future funding distribution processes. Suite of Videos Stories produced sharing the funding journey (October-November 25).

DESIGNING TOGETHER



Co-design in Bolton

This section details how the Live Well Communities Fund was designed with partners and residents, focusing on accessibility, trust, and flexibility.

It explores power-sharing and accountability within participatory design. Practical examples show how co-design processes produced a funding model that values relationships, reduces barriers, and honours lived experience as evidence for change.

The Live Well Communities Fund was designed with partners and residents from the outset, so the Fund architecture reflects the realities of neighbourhood life as much as funding mechanics. Three design anchors shaped every choice: inclusion, trust, and flexibility and the design sessions were where power-sharing and accountability were made practical, not theoretical.

Read on...

Inclusive first steps



First, we spoke to a diverse range of people, gathering best practice in participatory funding from local regional and national sources, as well as people's lived experience of giving and receiving funding. We presented these examples alongside information about the Fund and its aims as a Funding Pack which was shared with localities.

The best practice examples advocated for multiple ways to apply for money, including:

- short, plain-language forms;
- assisted applications via phone or in person; and
- options to submit voice notes or short videos instead of pages of text.

Proactive outreach to share funding opportunities was encouraged through local VCFSE infrastructure, inclusion networks, resident networks, and community leaders so opportunities to apply travelled beyond the "usual suspects".

Co-designing grant programmes, using micro-grants to stimulate activity and staged routes were described; encouraging localities to start small, learn together, and then scale.

We then asked organisations acting as convenors (LIOs and GM=EqAI) to propose how they would run a grant programme using this allocation of funding, and answering the following questions:

- Who are the people and organisations who will be involved in how you deploy the Live Well Communities Fund? What are their roles?
- What will your approach to distributing the funding be? How will you target or prioritise this? How has this been decided?
- How are you going to try to further develop the ability of your grant-making to reach people and communities experiencing inequalities? How will you do this?
- What will your costs be?
- How will you gather and collate learning about what happens, what is being learnt, and what difference the funding makes?

Each was asked to use the funding to take one step further towards community-led and system-enabled funding distribution that would better reach people experiencing inequalities. This would look different in each place, based on their current infrastructure, experience and priorities and distinct local character. Each convenor also agreed the priorities for their own grant pot, based on identified inequalities.

Some localities used funds to strengthen grassroots capacity, training micro-groups, developing community leaders, or supporting volunteer coordination so that change could continue beyond the funding period. Others invested in inclusive spaces and community hubs, focused on accessibility for disabled residents or used the funding to support underrepresented groups. At a city region level, GM=EqAI's members and stakeholders wanted to support focused, community-led responses to rising visible racism and its impact on mental health across several boroughs in Greater Manchester.



Trust-building processes

In some localities, local design groups brought together residents, small grassroots groups, VCFSE leads, and system partners. In places that had already experimented with community panels, they leaned into mixed panels and consensus methods, reducing over-reliance on traditional scoring of funding applications alone.

Decisions were documented so that communities could see not just what was funded, but why.

Flexible practices

Designing in flexibility meant designing for variation across localities without losing coherence. The Funding Pack and initial engagement set the purpose, principles, light-touch assurance, and reporting expectations, while allowing place-based tailoring of priorities, thresholds and timelines.



Power-sharing and accountability

Supported by the convening organisations, residents helped shape criteria ("what good looks like here"), joined selection meetings, and participated in after-action reviews.

At the same time, convenors undertook proportionate due diligence (safeguarding checks where relevant, basic financial checks) to protect people and public value without unnecessary barriers. Here are some examples of how this was done:

Tameside – co-creating criteria

In Tameside, through a series of engagement and storytelling workshops, the Live Well Leadership group co-designed seven Community-led Wellbeing Principles, describing the behaviours, hopes and values that are intrinsic to community-led prevention.

The Live Well Leadership Group was widened and became the decision-making panel for the fund. Residents took part in early workshops to agree local funding priorities and plain-language criteria focusing on fairness, inclusion and lasting community benefit. These words replaced formal scoring descriptors. Community members then joined selection meetings, using these shared values to guide decisions collectively.

Stockport – proportionate due diligence

Stockport designed a tiered due diligence process. Very small grants required only ID and a named bank account, while medium grants asked for a simple safeguarding statement.

For larger awards, a pre-grant conversation replaced paperwork, helping groups talk through risks and support needs. This "right-sized" approach ensured governance without deterring new or informal groups.

Wigan – community-led coaching

Wigan felt a strong need to bolster the capacity of small grassroots groups to take up an ambassador/stewarding role within their place-based communities across the borough. They are doing this through trust-based payments to groups/people, to support them to access a community-led coaching and listening programme over six months.

Trafford – regular reviews

As part of the distribution, people were asked about how the grant making process was for them and this information is being folded into making the process more accessible to people. Having a flexible approach to applying for funds and the opportunity for applicants to present and share their work creatively to a diverse panel (including people with lived experience), helped to reduce barriers.

One successful applicant commented:

"We have been very satisfied with our experience. Communication was excellent; our questions were answered quickly, and it was made clear what kind of projects were required. Payment was prompt. We really appreciated the opportunity to meet with the representatives of other local community groups who had been allocated funding."

Rochdale – building on existing foundations to test new ideas

As a Live Well Accelerator area, Rochdale had been working on shifting power and addressing the root causes of poverty.

Through this they have built up a 'Foundation Group' – a diverse group of community leaders with a wide range of lived experience. The Live Well Communities Fund was used by the Foundation Group to explore further and test their ideas about how they address the root causes of poverty.

Thinking about what was not currently funded, what would expand local learning and insight and doing something bold led to Rochdale prioritising funding for activities that would build life and educational skills for 16 – 25 year olds, and wellbeing support and coaching for VCFSE leaders.

Reflecting on the process, a participant said:

"This was a process where we found out what was possible when we let ourselves to get to place where everyone in the group felt happy with what had been achieved, rather than the result being dictated by a timetable or other external force."

GM=EqAI

GM=EqAI designed a 'check in' tool to help organisations that received micro-grants (up to £1,000) and Unified Project / Larger Grants (up to £5,000) evaluate their journey. The tool draws out whatever feels most important right now to the organisation: the progress organisations and groups were proud of, what they were learning from their community, and anything they need to help their work thrive.

Taking a low-pressure, supportive approach aligned with the desire for GM=EqAI to gather lived experience, insight and honesty, and encouraged organisations to pause and reflect on their journey so far.

Design choices

Choices were made about how funding distribution would work and these choices primarily came from what communities said. They included:

- **Different types of grant**, including quick-decision micro-grants for fast ideas; small grants with a brief chat and simple budget; and larger grants with a conversation-based assessment and peer reference rather than formal bid writing.
- Targeted work to **broaden who was eligible to apply** in order to enable non-constituted groups and, in Bolton, schools, to apply.
- **Relational assessment:** short applicant conversations replaced long narrative forms, enabling assessors to hear about context, constraints, and community assets directly. Some areas like Salford and Stockport offered the option of sharing video proposals. This worked well in Salford as there was support for groups to create the videos, whereas there wasn't uptake of this option in other areas where there was no video support.
- **Learning-led monitoring:** instead of lengthy reports, some groups captured outcomes through stories, photos, and brief learning logs. Regular check-ins focused on “what changed”, “what we learned”, and “what we’ll try next”, not just what had been spent. Several localities talked about working in a more relational way – for example speaking with applicants on the phone rather than by email.
- **Access costs eligibility:** translation, childcare, and accessibility adjustments were treated as legitimate grant costs, reinforcing inclusion rather than penalising it. GM=EqAl also paid a small group of assessors to assess the applications received, noting the value of their time.
- **Feedback loops:** panels summarised patterns from each round (who applied, who missed out, where barriers remained) and adjusted outreach or criteria accordingly, closing the loop between decision-making and improvement.



Decision-making

In each locality, decision-making aimed to shift and share power by involving local people. Here are two examples of how this was done:

Bolton – embedded decision groups and tiered pathways

Bolton used the Live Well Communities Fund to embed decision-making in existing local networks, such as neighbourhood forums and voluntary-sector partnerships.

- Forums nominated a decision group that included local residents, smaller community organisations, and strategic partners.
- The process operated through tiered pathways: micro-grants decided by residents directly, small grants through mixed panels, and larger grants reviewed jointly with the council.
- Clear feedback loops were built in, ensuring communities could see not just what was funded, but why, fostering local ownership and trust.

Salford – values-based scoring and learning panels

- Salford drew from its “Salford Stories” learning to develop a values-based decision model.
- Panels included lived-experience representatives and system partners trained in trauma-informed and equity-focused assessment as well as community members already engaged in Live Well work.
- Instead of numeric scoring, members used values prompts such as “Does this proposal build connection?” and “Does it remove barriers?”
- A learning panel met after each round to review patterns in decisions and recommend adjustments to outreach or criteria.
- This iterative, reflective process demonstrated how decision-making can itself be a site of learning and relationship-building.

Evaluating the deployment and distribution

Multiple perspectives and experiences contributed to the design of the fund deployment and distribution in localities, and there was a wide range of local ambitions for the Fund. Therefore the evaluation of the Live Well Community Fund pilot needed to also involve multiple partners and learn from cross-system perspectives.

We wanted to understand:

- What was tried in terms of evaluation and what that involved;
- What was learnt about what worked well and what didn’t work well for different scenarios or organisations;
- What this could mean for how the Live Well Communities Fund develops;
- What the fund could achieve collectively across Greater Manchester;
- What this means for the broader Live Well ambitions.

Assumptions:

- Community-led and system-enabled working is the best way to tackle inequalities;
- Shifting and sharing power will strengthen communities;
- Inclusion, trust and flexibility create sustainable impact.

LOCAL PATHWAY



Application and decision-making processes in each place

Focusing on the application process in each place and decision-making about funding allocation, this section shares how two localities distributed funding.

Both Bury and Oldham demonstrated how Live Well's community-led, system-enabled principles were realised, despite having different starting points and using different routes. In both cases, residents' voices moved each locality one step closer to transparent, inclusive, and locally rooted decision-making.

Bury built on existing grant-making infrastructure, simplifying processes and embedding community assessors to create fairer, more accessible decisions.

Oldham re-imagined the funding distribution process through design jams, co-design, and prototyping, using community research as the foundation for a participatory funding model.

Read on...

Bury – community assessors

Bury Voluntary, Community and Faith Alliance (VCFA) reflected:

> "In this first pilot phase, a streamlined application was used. The form's format and questions were built on learning from previous grants programmes, alongside the Bury Pulse Check, feedback, and co-production with VCFSE leaders."

> "Following due diligence checks, a panel of community assessors were involved in scoring and making the final decision on investments. Community assessors included a rep from a local charity and a young person who had been through our volunteer youth assessor course."

Bury VCFA's approach centred on improving quality of life, aligned with the borough's LET's Do It Strategy and Anti-Poverty Strategy. Their design process linked funding decisions to lived experience and data, focusing on food poverty, finance, work, childhood poverty, and digital inclusion.

From the Community Research, we learnt:

Residents described funding barriers as *"too much form-filling"* and asked for *"simple applications that don't feel like tests"*. Several respondents said they wanted *"panels with people who understand local life"* and *"a fairer process that includes people who have actually used services"*.

This feedback directly mirrors Bury's light-touch form and diverse assessor model.

The design built on Bury VCFA's research and community-centred approaches which highlighted that younger people and smaller groups had felt unseen in previous funding rounds. The inclusion of a youth assessor and targeted outreach to under-represented communities (including d/Deaf people and people with disabilities and those facing poverty) explicitly addressed this gap.

Bury's decision-making process embedded community input from design to delivery, using proportionate checks and a focus on accessibility. As one funded group (Rammy Men) later reflected:

> "The application and grant management process [was] straightforward and supportive… the ability to contact Bury VCFA for guidance [was] particularly valued."

Oldham – prototyping

Action Together Oldham reflected:

> "The main focus has been involving residents in a co-design process linked to our Accelerator work… engaging 80 residents and grassroots community leaders from across East Oldham in a whole-day co-design session."

> "We have been supporting them to work across three prototype groups focusing on co-designing approaches to community engagement, community research, and participatory grant-giving."

The timeline shows this process clearly:

- **March 2025:** Design Jam 1 brings together residents, grassroots leaders, and partners.
- **Summer 2025:** Prototype groups meet regularly, guided by coaches.
- **September 2025:** Design Jam 2 shares learning and plans for implementation.
- **October–December 2025:** Delivery of the co-designed participatory funding model.

From the Community Research, we learnt:

Residents repeatedly expressed a desire for *"more open conversations, not long applications"*, and for funding decisions that feel like shared choices rather than reviews. Others emphasised trust and transparency, noting that *"you don't always know why some groups get it and others don't"*.

These insights informed Action Together's prototyping of decision-making experiments where residents, community researchers, and system partners tested criteria and reviewed methods together.

Oldham's approach demonstrates how community insight can evolve directly into new funding processes, and participation into accountability. The publication of Design Jam videos and continued resident engagement in prototyping ensured transparency and sustained trust.

DOING, LEARNING, ADAPTING



Learning from community research

This section explores how the community researchers gathered information and what common trends and themes there were across Greater Manchester.

Read on...

Learning from community research

The Community Research team learnt about what localities did differently with this funding by designing and using a 'Conversation Compass' tool.

The tool has six 'zones' – **Hello**, **Why**, **What**, **How**, **Limits**, **Visions** and associated prompt questions to use if needed. The tool allows conversations/ research to be gathered in sensitive ways, where everyone in the conversation has the ability to steer the direction of the conversation. The tool ensures the conversation stays focused, while enabling it to unfold organically, meaning insights gathered are meaningful and honest.

The Community Research team found that across Greater Manchester, partners redesigned funding systems to centre community power, trust, and lived experience. LIOs created co-design groups, reviewed past funding rounds, held one-to-one conversations, mapped informal networks, and used participatory and neighbourhood-based decision-making.

New processes were piloted, including flexible applications, video submissions, informal interviews, tiered grants, community voting sessions and local brokerage. Many areas aligned funding with existing community hubs, brought statutory and community partners together and removed tokenistic consultation in favour of genuine shared decisions.

Why they did it

The work responded to widespread feelings of exclusion from funding systems, unclear routes to support, and a desire for fairer, more transparent, and person-centred processes. Partners recognised historic underinvestment, entrenched inequalities, and the need to shift power from institutions to communities, particularly those facing poverty, mental health challenges, refugee experiences and other structural barriers.

Localities aimed to stop designing solutions without the people who experience the problems, broaden participation, and ensure funding reached those closest to the issues.

How they did it

Localities used co-production methods, community-first approaches, and flexible engagement. This included informal conversations, design sessions, steering groups, trusted community spaces, community brokers, and existing local networks. People could apply in multiple ways like videos, interviews, PowerPoints, or written proposals, allowing them to express needs in their own words.

Processes were simplified, proportionate, and equity-focused, with narrative evidence prioritised over organisational status. Tiered grants matched different scales of community activity, and partners invested in relationship-based support, brokerage, and capacity-building. Participatory voting and hyper-local decision-making strengthened transparency and ownership.



Limits

Across the areas, several barriers persisted:

- Limited awareness of opportunities and difficulty navigating traditional processes.
- Rigid eligibility criteria that excluded informal or emerging groups.
- Digital exclusion and inconsistent outreach, particularly in marginalised areas.
- Time pressures, short application windows and tight delivery timelines.
- Limited funding relative to the scale of need.
- Austerity's long-term impact on community infrastructure and readiness.
- Cultural tensions where partners were unfamiliar with co-design or hesitant to share decision-making.
- High community interest without clear ongoing channels for involvement.

Vision

Across Greater Manchester, the shared vision is for long-term, community-led funding systems embedded into local infrastructure, not one-off pilots. Partners want to build neighbourhood leadership, invest in trusted relationships and create a culture where communities act as architects of solutions rather than consultees. This includes empowering residents to make funding decisions, strengthening networks of care, embedding prevention and wellbeing and making community power the default.

The ambition is to create resilient, equitable, transparent systems that evolve with ongoing community feedback and support future generations of local leaders.

FINDING SOLUTIONS



Balancing community flexibility and system accountability

Focusing on Salford and the work in Little Hulton, this case study explores how communities, partners and funders worked together to test new ideas and approaches through the Live Well Communities Fund.

It highlights examples of change and collaboration, where shared learning, creativity and trust enabled locally-led solutions to complex health and wellbeing challenges to take root and grow.

Read on...

Salford: Testing new ideas together

In Little Hulton, the Live Well Communities Fund became a space to experiment with shared decision-making between community organisations, funders and public-sector partners.

Salford CVS, the local VCFSE infrastructure organisation, partnered with CommUnity Little Hulton, an established anchor group, to pilot participatory grant-making — a process that placed funding choices directly in the hands of residents.

The call for proposals was hosted on the CommUnity Little Hulton website, with multiple ways to apply including online forms, supported applications and drop-in sessions. The range of applicants reflected the area's diversity, from cultural and faith groups to after-school programmes and projects tackling food poverty and mental health. As one meeting attendee summarised, *"We had more applications than money."*

A mixed panel of community leaders, Salford CVS staff and council officers reviewed bids, discussing how to prioritise need while maintaining accessibility. The team quickly realised this meant rethinking their usual processes. There was also a strong commitment to finding solutions to getting funding to unconstituted groups through using CommUnity Little Hulton as the accountable body.

Balancing structures and trust

The experiment revealed a creative tension between community flexibility and system accountability. As Simon Robinson reflected, Salford CVS had to adapt from its traditional, formal funding systems to something much more dynamic and responsive.

> "It's about aligning the needs and wants of communities with what the funder is saying they want… It's a clash of cultures, but a productive one."

Community organisations were equally adaptive. CommUnity Little Hulton led outreach, ran briefing sessions and prepared the community to make informed funding decisions. They hosted open meetings, discussed due diligence expectations and co-designed mechanisms to help residents rank applications and decide collectively where money should go.

The process culminated in community voting events, where residents watched short videos of the proposals and voted on which ones should be funded. This had an added benefit of creating opportunities for the community to come together and build connections. The approach created transparency, widened participation and built excitement. The approach mirrored what the Live Well Communities Fund aimed to achieve across Greater Manchester — moving one step further toward community-led, system-enabled funding distribution.

> "Our experience at Salford CVS isn't in participatory grant-making. It's a leap, to go out to groups and not crush innovation, while still needing to undertake due diligence and make sure public money is being managed well. It comes with the territory of letting go and being okay with that."
>
> **Simon Robinson – Grants Manager – Salford CVS**



Shared learning and change

The Little Hulton experiment surfaced valuable lessons. One was the importance of time: running participatory funding in compressed timelines challenged both the funders' planning habits and the community's capacity to mobilise.

> "If we'd had more time to plan, it might have looked different. But we've learned to trust the process and the people."

Another learning was around authentic participation. The team recognised that real co-production goes beyond inviting people to panels or voting days — it requires support, payment, and preparation for those involved. As Robinson observed,

> "It's easy to run through a process and have people smiling in photos. What matters is whether people had meaningful input — and whether we've created something that communities can build on."



A culture of collaboration

Despite challenges, the Little Hulton pilot demonstrated that when communities and funders trust each other to experiment, creative and inclusive approaches emerge. Funders like Salford CVS learned to share power and tolerate uncertainty, working more relationally with applicants through the funding process for this work by for example picking up the phone and having a conversation, rather than sending an email. Community organisations like CommUnity Little Hulton showed they could hold responsibility with integrity and energy, and residents experienced a tangible role in shaping local investment.

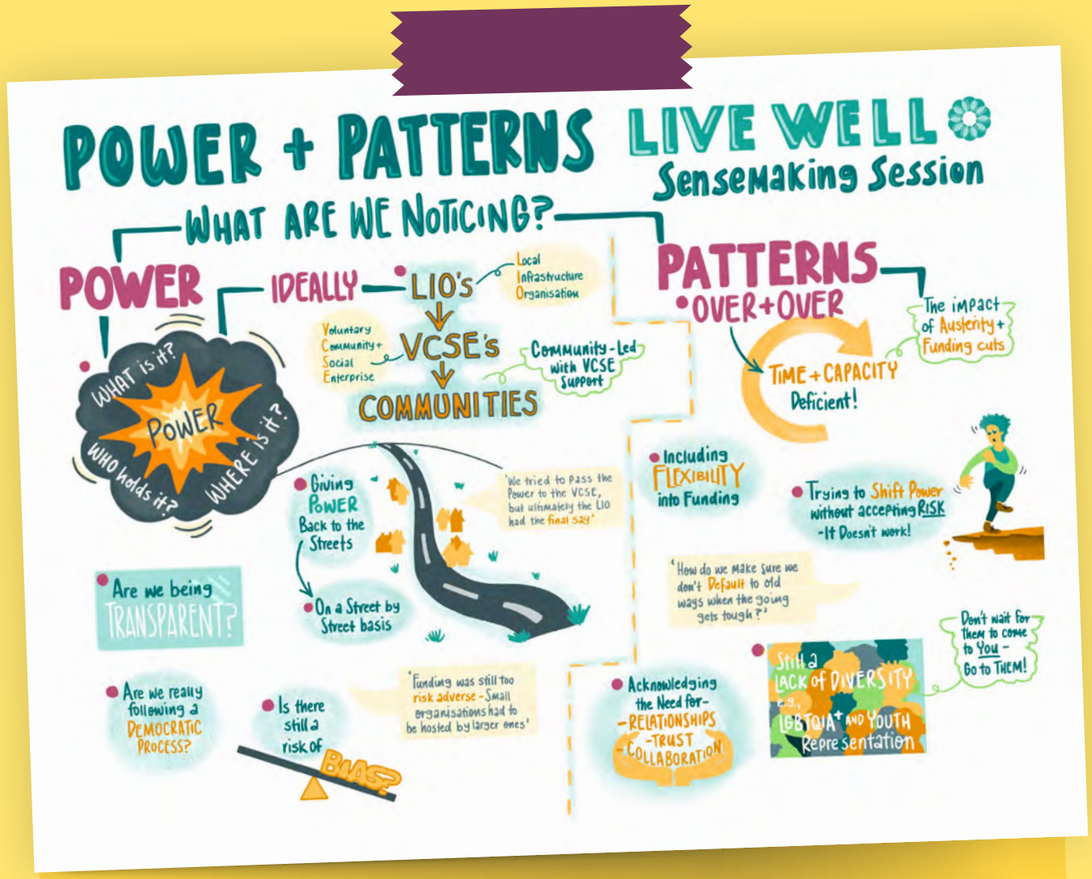
As one reflection from the pilot summed up:

> "Everyone's enthusiastic and there's a real willingness to learn and try new ideas — whether it be videos, new ways of voting, or just doing it differently. That's the heart of Live Well".

Legacy

The Little Hulton experience is now informing other boroughs in Greater Manchester. It illustrates how shared learning, creativity, and trust can enable communities to take ownership of funding and wellbeing. By letting go of rigid systems and building capacity locally, partners are discovering a new balance — where funding becomes a relationship, not just a transaction.

STORIES of CHANGE



Learning from lived experience and impact

This section captures the human side of the Live Well Communities Fund development in the stories behind the funding. Across these stories, we see power shifting through relationships, not systems.

Small grants opened big possibilities, sparking confidence, connection and change. Patterns emerge of trust replacing control, and how shared learning and belief in local strength create change.

Read on...

Stories from localities

A Story from Manchester, "It's about doing things together"

In Manchester, community researchers working with local partners uncovered a quieter but powerful shift. Residents in Manchester described how the Live Well design sessions and informal conversational gatherings gave them permission to contribute ideas without feeling out of place.

One researcher captured the sentiment:

"People didn't just share ideas about projects — they started sharing what makes them feel well, what they already do to help each other. That's where the design began."

These workshops brought together grassroots groups, local health workers and small VCFSE organisations. They found that further work was needed to reach residents and so worked to build relationships with residents' groups and attended local activities. They began to identify what shared wellbeing could look like in practice with safe spaces, creative meet-ups, shared meals and mutual support networks.

A local participant reflected:

"For the first time, it didn't feel like we were being asked to fill a gap. We were being asked what we already do that works and how you could help us do more of it."

These early design relationships are already shaping how the next wave of Live Well funding will operate in Manchester — slower, more relational and centred on people's lived experience as the foundation for system change.

A story from Wigan, "we're building the stewards of the future"

Wigan Borough Community First – a newly formed Infrastructure organisation who are working to build an Alliance model for the borough – recognised that their area lacked the kind of rooted community groups found elsewhere. Instead of distributing small grants right away, they used their Live Well Communities Fund allocation to invest in people; the connectors, listeners and doers at the heart of each neighbourhood.

They offered trust-based bursaries to eight residents and groups to take part in a six-month community-led coaching and listening programme, co-designed with Northern Heart & Soul. Participants met regularly to share experiences, strengthen confidence and develop new skills in organising and participation.

"We hope that we'll end up with a group of neighbourhood stewards who can continue to activate communities, avoiding us only engaging with the sector."

Alice Coren – Wigan Borough Community First

Through conversations and peer support, participants began to see themselves as leaders and collaborators rather than service users. The Wigan team described this as "funding readiness rather than funding delivery", building the human infrastructure needed to sustain future community-led funds.

By trusting people and paying them for their time and expertise, Wigan's Live Well Communities Fund redefined what it meant to "build capacity". It wasn't about forms or frameworks; it was about creating belonging and belief.

A story from Bury, "funding to healing"

When Rammy Men received a £5,000 grant from the Bury Live Well Communities Fund, they used it to run an initiative called "Encouraging the Future." What started as a small, local project to support young adults in Ramsbottom quickly grew into something far deeper and a space for healing, purpose and community connection.

The project offered informal vocational sessions linked to real career pathways, alongside wraparound support such as counselling, housing advice and life coaching. But what made it special was its tone — it wasn't a programme for people, it was a community with people.

One young woman living with anorexia started attending regularly. She joined Tai Chi sessions, took up graphic design and began building friendships. The project report notes that she became "a regular attendee who has found new confidence and reduced isolation".

"We didn't just help people find work, we helped them find themselves again," said Rob Moss, from Rammy Men. "Sometimes the best thing we can do is make a space where people feel safe enough to show up."

Funded by the Live Well Communities Fund and supported by Bury VCFA, the project exemplified what the programme set out to achieve: a small grant with a disproportionate human impact. It showed how flexible and locally decided funding can enable relationships that change lives.

Bury's approach – using a streamlined, co-produced application process and community assessors to make decisions – meant that grassroots organisations like Rammy Men could access funding without bureaucracy getting in the way.

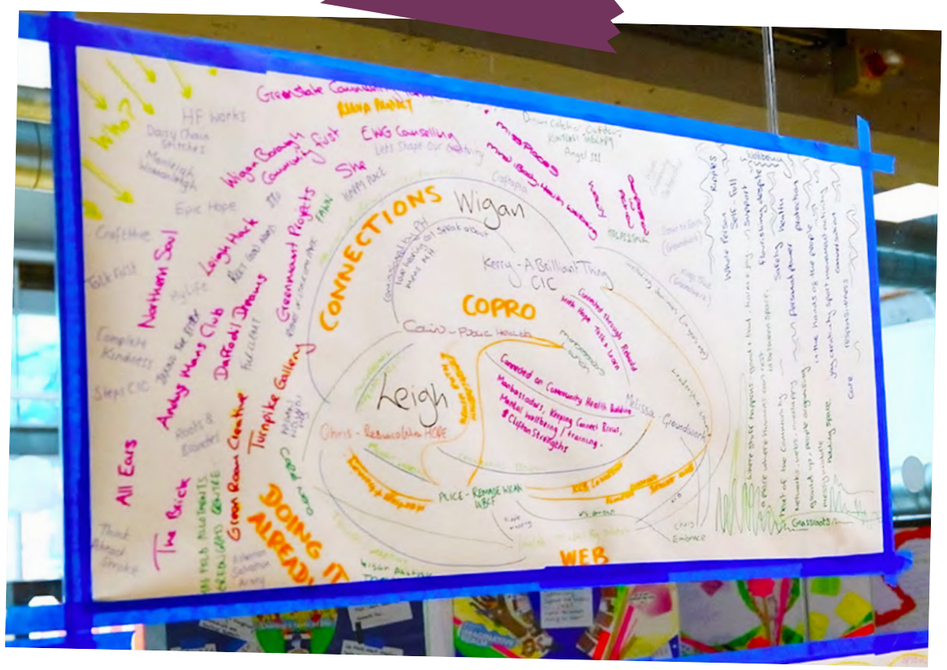
The ripple effects have included new partnerships with Bury College, Connexions and North Lancs Training Group which have grown out of the project, creating sustainable employment and learning pathways for young people who might otherwise have been excluded.

"It's about having someone believe in your idea", one participant shared.

"That's what the funding did, it said, we trust you."



GROWING STRONGER



Building capacity, learning and networks

Though the impact of the Fund in communities will not be fully understood until funded projects have delivered their work, the deployment and distribution of the Live Well Communities Fund has grown both skills and social capital.

The deployment and distribution of the Fund has also identified vulnerabilities that still need to be addressed in future rounds of the funding, to enable sustainable community-led and system-enabled change.

Read on...

Skills strengthened

1. Community leadership and stewardship

- Confidence in leading local initiatives, meetings, and participatory panels.
- Skills in representing lived experience and facilitating discussions.
- Development of “neighbourhood stewards” and ambassadors (Wigan, Oldham, Salford).
- Peer mentoring and co-coaching for community connectors.
- Exploring the differences between co-designing, co-production and being consulted with (GM=EqAl).

2. Co-design and facilitation

- Running and participating in co-design and design jam sessions (Oldham, Manchester).
- Translating research insights into priorities and practical action.
- Facilitation and listening skills for inclusive, balanced decision-making.
- Significant investment in training and support/ development opportunities for panel members, like assessing applications (GM=EqAl).
- Skills in designing fair, transparent processes rooted in local language and values.

3. Funding and financial confidence

- Community members and small groups’ understanding of grant processes, budgetary pressures and due diligence in proportionate ways.
- Due diligence being approached with more support and a more relational approach, and as an opportunity to engage groups with development opportunities.
- Improved confidence among small groups to apply for and manage funding.
- Peer-to-peer grant-writing support and support for the use of storytelling to evidence impact through initiatives like Bury’s “Telling Your Story” workshops and Tameside’s storytelling toolkit and training. GM=EqAl used a mix of in-person, online, multilingual, and creative methods to design and support people to make grant applications.
- Enhanced understanding of how public money flows through local systems.
- Testing remuneration for participants’ time and sharing of lived experience, and adjustments to internal systems for remuneration.
- Feedback about the learning is also feeding into national discussions with Locomotion and The Poverty Truth Commission on remuneration.

4. Research and learning

- Community researchers developed interviewing, analysis and reporting skills.
- Ability to capture lived experience ethically and feed it into design.
- Data interpretation and reflection practices integrated into local learning sessions.
- Confidence to speak publicly about findings and influence system partners.

5. Communication and storytelling

- Skills in narrative reporting, case study writing and social media storytelling.
- Production of short films, videos and creative outputs (Salford, Manchester, Oldham and Bolton).
- Capacity to articulate impact through accessible, human-centred language, and through informal check in sessions that capture rich qualitative stories.
- Increased number of spaces and platforms to share the impact of locally delivered wellbeing work.

6. Partnership and collaboration

- Negotiation and partnership working between funders, councils, VCFSE, and residents, facilitated by LIOs and GM=EqAl.
- Co-ordination skills for running local decision groups and panels.
- Relational engagement between small grassroots organisations and statutory systems, In Trafford, funded groups came together to access training and support but also to build connections with each other which will hopefully support future collaborations.
- Confidence to hold constructive conversations between community and system partners.
- Support developed to help panel members to manage conflicts of interest in decision-making. Some localities provided specific training on this.

7. Inclusion and trauma-informed practice

- Increased understanding of accessibility, inclusion and equity principles within collaborative work.
- Practical application of trauma-informed and healing-centred approaches in community design.
- Awareness of how to create safe, relational spaces for participation.

Networks strengthened

1. Place-based networks, forums and steering groups

- Strengthened collaboration between local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) and micro-groups including those who are not constituted.
- Creation of a cross-borough learning space through 10GM for LIOs to reflect on funding deployment.
- More consistent relationships between VCFSE, NHS GM and local authorities around Live Well.

2. Community connectors and peer support networks

- Development of local “community power coaching” cohorts in Wigan.
- Emergence of active resident panels and ambassador networks across GM.
- Expansion of mutual support networks between funded groups and new applicants, and willingness to collaborate and fundraise together.

3. Research and learning networks

- Cross-locality network of community researchers, sharing findings and tools.
- Regular engagement linking funders, practitioners, and residents.
- Informal “learning loops” between design groups, panels, and delivery teams.

4. Creative and cultural networks

- Collaboration between wellbeing groups, artists, and youth organisations to explore identity, belonging and connection.
- New relationships between local colleges, training providers and community hubs (Bury’s Rammy Men partnerships).

5. Health and wellbeing ecosystems

- Closer integration between VCFSE, health partners and community initiatives.
- Local examples of preventive health practice shaped by lived experience.
- Strengthened links between small groups and formal health structures through co-commissioning discussions.

Cross-cutting capabilities strengthened

- **Relational capacity:** the ability to build and sustain trust across difference.
- **Learning agility:** confidence to adapt processes based on feedback and reflection.
- **Collective confidence:** groups feeling seen, capable and connected in shaping local wellbeing.
- **System awareness:** deeper mutual understanding between funders and community actors about how change actually happens.



Challenges to be addressed

Challenge: sustaining genuine community-led decision-making in system-led environments

- Some localities are still learning how to share power without defaulting to system control. Funders noted tension between "trust-based" language and accountability frameworks.

> "It's always difficult aligning the needs and wants of the community with what the funder says they want out of it."
>
> **Salford CVS**

- In places where participatory grant-making was piloted, participation sometimes stopped at the point of allocation rather than extending into monitoring and future design.
- Community researchers observed that some voices remain underrepresented, especially those most affected by poverty, disability or racial inequality.

What's needed:

Long-term support for communities to lead with autonomy; consistent payment for lived-experience contributors; and structures that embed power-sharing as standard practice, not a one-off experiment.

Challenge: Short timeframes and late funding approvals

- Almost every locality referenced the difficulty of short delivery windows, late fund transfers and rushed recruitment or outreach.

> "Timing was the biggest constraint… we could have gone on longer, but you have to draw a line somewhere."
>
> **Little Hulton team**

- Annual or pilot-year cycles create uncertainty for planning and continuity.
- Evidence collected by GM=EqAl suggested that short pilots create delivery pressure, often reduce depth and can limit the opportunity for collaboration.
- Micro-groups struggle with cash flow and financial risk, particularly when payments are retrospective or monitoring is unclear.

What's needed:

Multi-year funding commitments, realistic timeframes for participatory work and earlier financial planning to reduce pressure and maintain relational quality.

Challenge: reaching the people and places that still feel unseen and ensuring inclusion

- In several localities, applications were not submitted from priority areas/causes despite outreach efforts. Earlier outreach was needed to build awareness and trust.
- Digital exclusion and literacy barriers still prevent equal access to funding.
- Community researchers reported that application processes still feel intimidating for some, even when simplified.
- Some groups remain "too informal to fund" under current rules, highlighting the need for alternative routes and community intermediaries.

What's needed:

- Investment in outreach, translation, and relationship-building, including with other trusted places in communities eg schools; health; funding readiness programmes for grassroots groups and greater flexibility for informal initiatives.
- Consideration of whether there should be ringfence of micro-grants in future years for areas or communities with a low level of uptake.

There was also some discussion within the learning space about the challenge of setting a threshold for turnover of applicants. For some, this supported the funds going to micro-groups, whilst other localities noted that it excluded groups with a larger turnover, who are locally rooted and currently struggling to find funding.

Challenge: burnout and bandwidth across systems and communities

- Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) reported limited staff capacity to support co-design, data collection and grant administration simultaneously. Often a dedicated coordination role was needed to handle finance, partner liaison and reporting — separate from the convenor role. Some areas have reframed the due diligence process as a development opportunity. However more lead-in time would be useful to support groups to access these opportunities.
- Small groups face volunteer fatigue and lack of safe spaces for reflection and learning, and providing these takes time and considerate effort.
- Across GM, there are too few micro funding opportunities (for £500 – £1,000), so when they are offered, they are greatly oversubscribed, further increasing the pressure for both the applicants and the people who assess applications.
- In some areas, the same people are leading multiple initiatives, which risks over-reliance and burnout. Shift to more relational working within grant making potentially means increased emotional labour for staff.

What's needed:

Stronger peer support between LIOs, a shared resource pool for communications and monitoring and structured time for collective learning and wellbeing.

Challenge: turning local learning into shared system change

- Several localities are still working out how to capture and share learning without overburdening small groups.
- Community researchers and LIOs called for more connected evaluation frameworks across Greater Manchester, something "light but meaningful".
- There's a risk of learning staying local, rather than feeding back into policy, commissioning and future funding design.

> "It's easy to run through a process, fund some projects, and call it a success but the real value is in what we learn together."
>
> **Salford CVS interviewee**

What's needed:

Consistent storytelling and shared evaluation templates, cross-borough learning spaces and recognition that narrative and relationship data are as important as numbers.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT



Tools and resources for community-led funding distribution

This section outlines the most valuable tools, frameworks and approaches that the Community Research Team found were used to enable community-led and system-enabled funding distribution.

It highlights the range of practical, accessible guidance that helped localities and partners navigate funding deployment and distribution, with confidence and assurance.

Read on...

Tools and resources for community-led funding distribution

1. Co-production and community-first methods

- Co-production toolkits (e.g. Think Local, Act Personal's *Making It Real*; Co-Production Oxfordshire Toolkit).
- Community research frameworks (participatory appraisal, peer-research training packs).
- Person-centred design canvases (e.g. empathy maps, journey maps, community impact canvases).
- Facilitation guides for running co-design workshops and listening sessions.
- Power-shifting frameworks (e.g. Participatory Grant making Community of Practice resources).

2. Flexible and informal engagement

- Conversation guides for 1:1 relational meetings and story-gathering.
- Pop-up engagement kits (portable boards, prompt cards, visual decision tools).
- Community conversation methods (World Café, Open Space, Liberating Structures).
- Accessibility and inclusion checklists (for neurodiverse-friendly, low-barrier engagement).

3. Design sessions and steering groups

- Co-design session templates (agendas, worksheets, decision matrices).
- Shared decision-making tools (traffic-light voting, dotmocracy, consensus tools).
- Statements of Intent to guide collaborative work.
- Digital collaboration tools.

4. Trusted Community Spaces and Brokers

- Community connectors or brokers to connect people in who wouldn't usually get involved.
- Community mapping tools (asset maps, social network mapping, place-based mapping).
- Local partnership agreements with hubs, libraries, faith spaces and neighbourhood venues.
- Training packs to equip brokers with outreach, safeguarding and inclusive engagement knowledge.

5. Flexible application routes

- Simple application forms with narrative prompts rather than technical questions.
- Guidance sheets for applicants making video or audio submissions.
- Drop-in support sessions for people to develop ideas in real time.
- Digital storytelling tools.
- Alternative format policies, setting out multiple routes to apply.

6. Proportionate, narrative and equity-led processes

- Equity assessment frameworks (e.g. Public Health Wales Community Resilience Matrix).
- Proportionate assessment rubrics that weight lived experience and community value.
- Narrative-based decision templates for reviewing stories rather than forms.
- Bias checklists for panels to reduce institutional or professional bias.
- Simplified due-diligence packs for small and informal groups.

7. Tiered grants and scaled processes

- Tiered grant structures with matching assessment levels (micro = trust-based; medium = light-touch; large = narrative plus conversations).
- Eligibility flowcharts to help applicants self-identify their tier.
- Menu of support (capacity-building, bookkeeping help, coaching for new organisers).
- Micro-funding manuals (learning from civic funds, mutual aid funds, and micro-commissioning).

8. Relationship-based support and brokerage

- Community broker role profiles.
- Relational practice guides.
- Peer mentoring models connecting experienced groups with new or informal groups.
- Support logs to track who needs help and what follow-up is required.

9. Participatory and local decision-making

- Community voting platforms (paper ballots, token voting, digital participatory budgeting tools).
- Facilitated deliberation guides to help residents assess proposals together.
- Hyper-local grant panels with community induction packs.
- Transparency tools (public dashboards, simple impact updates, videos explaining decisions).

Next Steps

The ambition of the Live Well Communities Fund is to bring more investment to the people and communities of Greater Manchester and to work collaboratively so that every resource has the greatest possible impact on reducing inequalities.

In its first year, the Fund has focused on exploring how best to channel funding to those who are best placed to take action and make a real difference. As we move into Year 2, our priority is to learn how to build a strong, sustainable partnership—one that can endure for the long term and attract even greater resources into Greater Manchester.

We are thrilled to welcome the Greater Manchester Mayor's Charity as the philanthropic lead for the Fund "Powering the Live Well Communities Fund". Their involvement will help drive investment and strengthen partnerships, amplifying the impact we can achieve together. We are excited about the opportunities ahead and look forward to growing this collaboration to create lasting change. In Autumn 2026 the Fund will launch again with resources deployed to localities and one pan-GM partner, helping enable communities to grow opportunity, connection and care for all.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to **Kerry Tottingham – A Brilliant Thing CIC** – for all her work in designing, co-ordinating and producing this learning pack.

Thank you to **Selva Mustafa** for the graphic illustrations and to the amazing Community Researcher team, for gathering and sharing insight:

- **Edenamiuki Aiguobasinmwin – Elevate Young Minds**
- **Nadia Siddiqui and Ammara Jamil – Women's Voices**
- **Nika Muthra-Shah**
- **Nicky Iginla and Olajesu Cole – Caring and Sharing Rochdale**
- **Ehinor Otaigbe-Amedu – Wonderfully Made Woman**
- **Foláshadé Alonge – De Butterfly CIC**
- **Karl Brown**

Graphic Design by **Bruce Mytton**

Character Illustrations by **James Fox-Neville**

Thank you to VCFSE partners, particularly the Local Infrastructure Organisations and GM=EqAI who did so much fantastic work to show what is possible and shared their learning so honestly and openly.

Thanks to GMCA, NHS GM and NHSE for their vital support and seed funding for the Fund.

Lastly, thank you to the citizens and groups who power our communities and who shared their insights and expertise in this first year.

Appendix

Live Well is Greater Manchester's commitment to making sure everyone can access great everyday support in their neighbourhood – so, together, we can tackle inequalities and create a city region where everyone can live well.

To stay involved:

Find out more – Live Well – Greater Manchester Combined Authority

#GMLiveWell

GMLiveWell@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Sign up to the GM Live Well Newsletter

GMCA – GM LIVE WELL

Live Well Communities Fund Year 1 Funding Pack

Fund draw-down form

Live Well YouTube channel

Live Well Podcast

Greater Manchester Participation Playbook and Additional Resources

Greater Manchester Mayors Charity

Powering community-led prevention – a new chapter for the Live Well Communities Fund and Greater Manchester

10GM

10GM's Co-Designing Change: Local Infrastructure Lessons from the Live Well Communities Fund

GM VCSE Accord / Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Policy

Live Well

everyday support in
every neighbourhood

together
we are
GREATER
MANCHESTER