

## **Local Trust Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**

### **Context**

Local Trust was established in 2012 to deliver place-based resident-led change in 150 diverse and unique neighbourhoods through the Big Local programme. Designed from the outset to be radically different from other funding programmes, at the heart of Big Local is a vision of empowered, resilient, dynamic, asset-rich communities making their own decisions on what is best for their area.

Capturing and understanding issues relating to power, voice and agency, and the need to address huge imbalances and inequalities that exist within our society are core to the Big Local programme and Local Trust's organisational mission. The values, principles and practice that underpin Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are critically important to all of those involved in Big Local and Local Trust's work.

The Big Local programme seeks to provide space and a platform for residents of our areas whose voices are not normally allowed to be heard; to put power, resources and decision making into their hands; and to provide them with the support they need to use that to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live.

Often this has required Big Local areas to challenge existing centres of power; sometimes in the face of hostility, apathy or inertia; at other times simply a lack of understanding or knowledge. At the same time, we have consistently sought to encourage and support Big Local partnerships themselves to reflect on the extent to which they embrace and include diverse voices, interests and experiences from within their own communities. The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are therefore deeply connected to Local Trust's mission and that of Big Local.

However, we know that to be as effective in supporting Big Local areas to achieve their goals, we need to reflect on our own performance, and subject our own assumptions, beliefs, choices and actions to scrutiny and challenge. And we recognise that we will be viewed and judged on the consistency between the values and beliefs we claim to hold and the behaviours we exhibit, both inside and outside of Local Trust.

As we approach the final phase of Big Local and Local Trust, we have reviewed our practice and their strategic underpinning to ensure our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion aligns with the changing operational context for Local Trust as an organisation, is integrated with our developing plans for programme delivery and organisational closure, and reflects our increasing focus on the legacy of Big Local and Local Trust.

## **What Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Mean to Us**

Our ambitions stretch across:

- **Challenging discrimination and inequality**, recognising that each person has different circumstances and may need different resources and opportunities to reach an equal outcome.
- **Embracing Diversity** - welcoming all the ways we are different (both visible and invisible) and promoting a wide range of different people and perspectives.
- **Promoting inclusion**, valuing people's unique ideas and lived experiences and ensuring they feel involved, respected, connected, are able to fully participate and have their voice heard.

Some characteristics are provided with legal protection in the UK against discrimination, including age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (including colour, nationality, caste and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage or civil partnership status. Local Trust recognises distinct patterns of experience, identity and exclusion across each of these, but also the depth and breadth of inequality and intersectionality in communities across England, extending to different factors such as class, living in rural areas, neurodiversity, caring responsibilities and veteran status which can influence opportunities and life experiences. We also recognise that people and communities' experiences (and our understanding of them, as well as appropriate responses) change over time.

We understand that treating people equally does not necessarily mean treating everyone the same. We value the different attributes, beliefs and experiences of our people and those with whom we work and for whom we advocate, and actively promote inclusive environments, fostering a sense of belonging and being part of a broader mission.

## **The Story So Far**

Local Trust aims to be catalyst for positive change, and addressing issues of equality, diversity and inclusion has always been part of our mission.

A significant emphasis throughout the programme has been placed on supporting and helping to create partnerships that reflect Big Local areas and giving those people – who often feel marginalised and ignored – a voice.

We expect Big Local partnerships to promote participation and be inclusive. A membership that broadly reflects the range and diversity of people who live in the area is a core criteria for recognition of a partnership (and therefore linked to the agreement of funding for an area).

We consistently seek to challenge and encourage partnerships to embrace positive approaches to inclusion and involvement, and have provided significant support to them to do so. But we know some partnerships have reflected on mixed success in broadening involvement, engaging changing local communities, and that tensions between and within local areas have sometimes impacted on partnership dynamics and progress.

We have invested time and resource to explore the value of place-based action in addressing profound inequalities in power, opportunity and decision-making, using our voice and influence to influence the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

Relevant examples of this include:

- Significant work during the establishment of Big Local and subsequently to support and challenge partnerships to ensure they reflect the communities they are part of, and to understand the differing needs and interests of those living in their areas.
- Providing direct support to Big Local Partnerships through deployment of 'Reps' (now Advisors) to address issues of inclusion and involvement, and more recently providing additional support to partnerships through the 'get inclusive' theme in the *Make it Happen* support offer.
- Launching a dynamic Diversity and Inclusion learning series designed to help make sure our partnerships reflect, include and value their communities.
- Publishing a range of insightful research with an EDI focus that spans our three lines of enquiry: Place-Based Funding; Resident-Led Decision Making; and Positive and Lasting Change.

- Drawing on our wider learning to develop research to identify the 225 most 'left behind' neighbourhoods, and further work to understand the particular challenges residents of those communities face, informing campaigning work to give a voice to their needs, including the recent Community Wealth Fund campaign.
- Creating increasing opportunities for voices from across Big Local areas to be heard in forums in which they would otherwise have access, including within Parliament and with senior government officials and other opinion formers and policy makers.
- Developing the Community Leadership Academy, providing opportunities for individuals from Big Local Partnership areas to explore their own potential and understand the positive change they can make as leaders in their neighbourhoods.
- Seeking to foster an inclusive and curious culture across the staff team, with opportunities to explore issues of equality, diversity and inclusion through training, and less formal awareness-raising sessions and within teams.

In 2021, we commissioned an internal review of our EDI practices, which has informed the development of this over-arching strategy and action plan to provide greater clarity on EDI priorities and ambitions was a recommendation of that that review.

### **Our Future Focus**

Equality, diversity and inclusion run through Local Trust's history, our purpose and our journey ahead. Our ambition is that through our legacy work and the talent and drive of our people, our positive impact will continue beyond our organisational lifespan.

As we enter the final phase of our work, the focus of energy to progress equality, diversity and inclusion will be in three domains:

1. Our relationship with Big Local partnerships.
2. Our external narrative, advocacy and partnership work.
3. Our culture, the way we work as an organisation, and how we might carry this into a future beyond Big Local.

Our delivery across these three domains will not be limited by our timescale. We understand that the action required is dynamic and evolving. We are committed to using the levers, power and influence that we have to achieve lasting change.

## **1. Our relationship with Big Local partnerships**

*We are a relationship-based funder. We recognise the power and potential of our work with and support for local, resident-led partnerships across the Big Local programme. Recognising the different needs and starting points, we will continue to provide support to overcome barriers, and build on our strong track record of amplifying and providing a platform for the voices of those who are marginalised and have the least power.*

We will:

- Support Big Local Partnerships to be ambitious in terms of their diversity, inclusiveness and impact on inequalities, and support them in ensuring that where they have legacy organisations, these also reflect these principles and commitment.
- Ensure the support we provide, and the events and networks we run, are accessible to all and meet and adapt to the changing the needs of Big Local partnerships.
- Ensure our EDI strategy commitments and learning are embedded across our programme delivery activity, updating our programme delivery framework to ensure it fully reflects these.

## **2. Our external narrative, advocacy and partnership working**

*We will build on our strong track record of amplifying and providing a platform for the voices of those who are marginalised and have the least power, with an increasing focus on the legacy of Local Trust and the Big Local Programme.*

We will:

- Continue to promote resident voices, ensuring they are heard by policy makers and opinion formers, in particular through our parliamentary activity, wider advocacy activity, collaboration, learning, including our planned work with new sectors.
- Create a legacy that endures beyond our fixed timescale through the stories and resources we are creating for the future, including evaluations, the Learning from Big Local project, tools and resources, as well as a number of 'people legacy' projects that will help ensure our staff and others involved in Big Local continue to amplify its messages, including those of diversity and inclusion well beyond our organisational lifespan.

- Maximise opportunities to obtain relevant and actionable insight and learning in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion in place based approaches, through research and data analysis.
- Ensure our communications accurately reflect our EDI commitments and our story so far through the language and approaches used and the narrative presented.

### **3. The way we work as an organisation, and how we might carry this into a future beyond Big Local**

*We are committed to a positive working environment, embracing a culture that fosters inclusion and belonging, and to equip our people with skills and knowledge to confidently engage with and act on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion. We are committed to continuous improvement and a learning culture, building on our strengths whilst being honest, transparent and constructive.*

We will:

- Foster an open, inclusive and ambitious culture around EDI, providing our team time and space for impactful EDI discussion and engagement within our organisation.
- Invest in learning and development opportunities that contribute to the Local Trust's people legacy through an effective approach to induction, training and development.
- Embrace inclusive recruitment, talent development and retention, reviewing our approach to consolidate and refine our policies and procedures.
- Appraise and value the commitment and energy of our people in driving this agenda, actively recognising the contribution of staff to taking forward this strategy in our appraisal process.
- Collaborate with our partners and suppliers to ensure our EDI commitments are aligned.
- Make transparent decisions that are fair, equitable and inclusive, ensuring the EDI considerations are embedded in decision-making.
- Ensure the strategy and action plan is given priority, that progress is monitored and evaluated and the action plan regularly updated to reflect progress, changes and learning.

### **Accountability**

This EDI Strategy sits alongside our legacy, closure and programme delivery strategies, each of which have shaped the focus and priorities of Local Trust's business plan for 2023-24. Trustees will retain oversight of progress in implementing the EDI strategy and associated action plan, receiving a substantive annual update.

The Strategy provide a framework that anchors and supports actions for individuals and departments throughout Local Trust. The successful delivery of the activity required within each of the three domains is articulated in the action plan, with a nominated Executive Director as SMT champion, accountable for creating momentum, monitoring and assessing progress. We will create a range of ways for staff to engage and contribute to delivery, and support them to do so, building on the work of our EDI Working Group.

Monitoring our progress will enable us to assess the impact of work to deliver on the strategy's commitments, and inform future activity. The annual progress report will share our progress, learning, and the positive impact achieved, as well as forward plans.

**Approved by Local Trust Board March 2023**