

LHC Community Benefit Fund: London and South East

Review and impact report Spring 2021



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1. Introduction

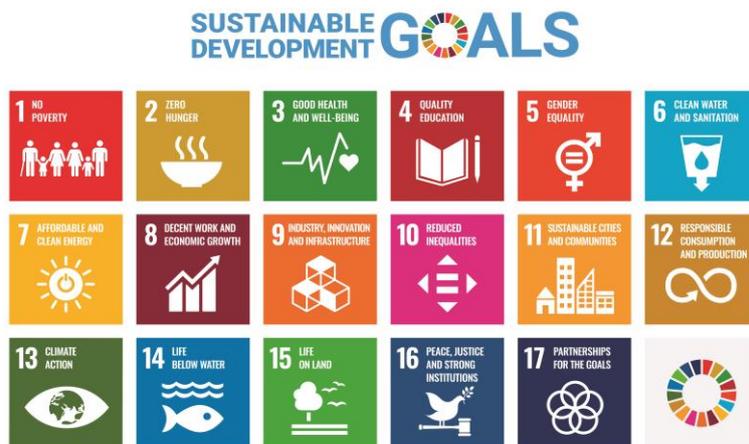
1.1 Overview

LHC is public sector procurement consortium providing specialist technical and procurement services to its members (Local Authorities) throughout the UK. As a not-for-profit organisation, any surpluses generated from LHC’s procurement activity are returned to its members. The newly created Community Benefit Fund (CBF) is a further extension of that commitment. Locality was commissioned in 2019 to act as the independent distributor of the Fund

This report looks back at the impact of the first-year grants at a time when most have completed (having being disrupted by the Pandemic), and looks forward to the second full year of delivery at a point where the second year grants have been allocated.

1.2 Social Impact & social value

There is increasing recognition amongst social purpose organisations and indeed in the public and private sectors of a need to evidence the social impact of our work. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 called for all public sector commissioning to factor in economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts; and for connected purposes. There are many approaches to and frameworks for impact measurement. A key example of an overarching framework that many can seek to contribute towards are the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



2. What is the fund trying to achieve?

A characteristic of the fund, and a challenge in many ways was that, although the allocation of funds should be independent, it would need to reflect the priorities and complement the delivery mechanisms of the member local authorities – all of which were somewhat different.

Therefore, we had to be quite broad in defining what the fund would try to achieve. A set of impact areas were developed that would be mirrored in all local authority priorities:

- I. **Promoting social inclusion, encouraging independence and developing personal resilience**
- II. **Building positive relations between different groups and communities that will maintain the high levels of community cohesion**
- III. **Increasing wellbeing – particularly amongst more disadvantaged communities**

In year two ‘**Widening Participation**’ was added as a theme to reflect the catalysing effect of the Black Lives Matter movement.

In addition, a number of key features were agreed that the projects should demonstrate:

- **Place based** – supporting strong and sustainable neighbourhoods.
- Contributing to **one or more of the Borough or County Priorities** for their communities
- **Social Innovation** – we are interested in innovative projects (but we will not rule out existing projects that can demonstrate further impact).
- **Social Impact** – projects will be favoured which are likely to be able to clearly demonstrate an increase in positive social impact.
- **Match Funding** – we were also interested in the idea of a small investment with a big effect. Projects were favoured where they could attract further

funding, either as part of a wider funding bid, or where the grant would help the organisation to earn income through trading.

A robust application and assessment process was in place including basic eligibility requirements, due diligence, scoring criteria to reflect the above, electronic application form and independent two stage assessment.

3. How did we approach the Fund distribution?

3.1 Approach

Locality identified and developed relationships with key people - 'champions' - within Local Authorities who would have a well-developed knowledge of community organisations in their areas and knowledge of partnership and funding relationships. We then worked with them to identify potential bidders in broadly one of two ways:

- Where there is a well-developed system of grant making, as long as this fits with our standards we will work alongside this in a proportionate way to ensure that the LHC fund adds value.
- Where the local authority prefers to identify and champion projects, we will support that process.

3.2 First year outputs

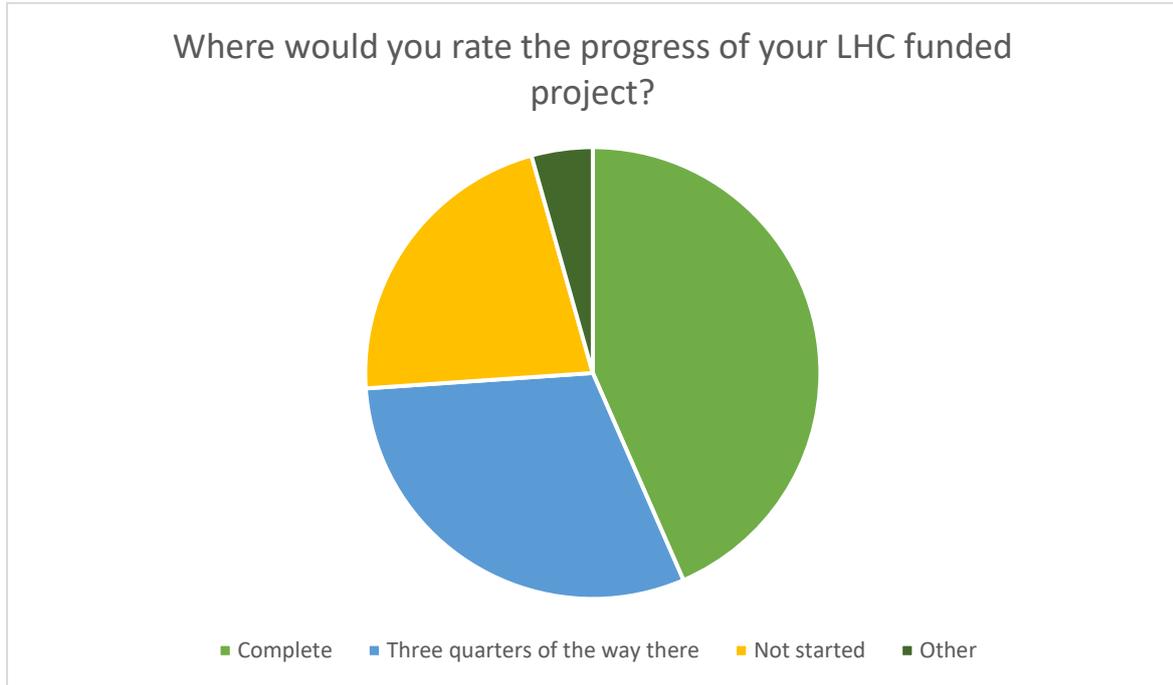
- **In the first year 166 applications were considered**
- **Grants were approved to 23 projects – totalling £118,929**
- **515 people benefited through volunteering on the projects (an average of 36 per project)**
- **3945 people benefited from participation in the projects (an average of 281 per project)**
- **68.5% of the project beneficiaries were from BAME backgrounds (of the projects where it was possible to monitor – 64% of projects)**
- **17% of projects were BAME led or focussed, 9% Disability led or focussed, 22% were youth projects and 13% Environment projects**

3.3 Progress and the effect of the Pandemic

As may be expected the majority of the funded projects were affected by the pandemic. LHC agreed to sign up to the [joint statement](#) by 350 funders pledging to offer flexibility to civil society groups affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

In some cases, projects 'pivoted' to provide direct support, in other cases they were able to adapt their project to the crisis. In other cases, they had to delay.

There are a small proportion of projects that are still to start (e.g. because they are unable to access specialist premises) but most are now complete or well on the way.



4. What changed - what has the Fund achieved?

So far the LHC Community Benefit fund has supported local community groups to deliver in the following areas of benefit:

- Food Poverty
- Social Inclusion
- Wellbeing
- Community Empowerment
- Environment
- Employment and skills

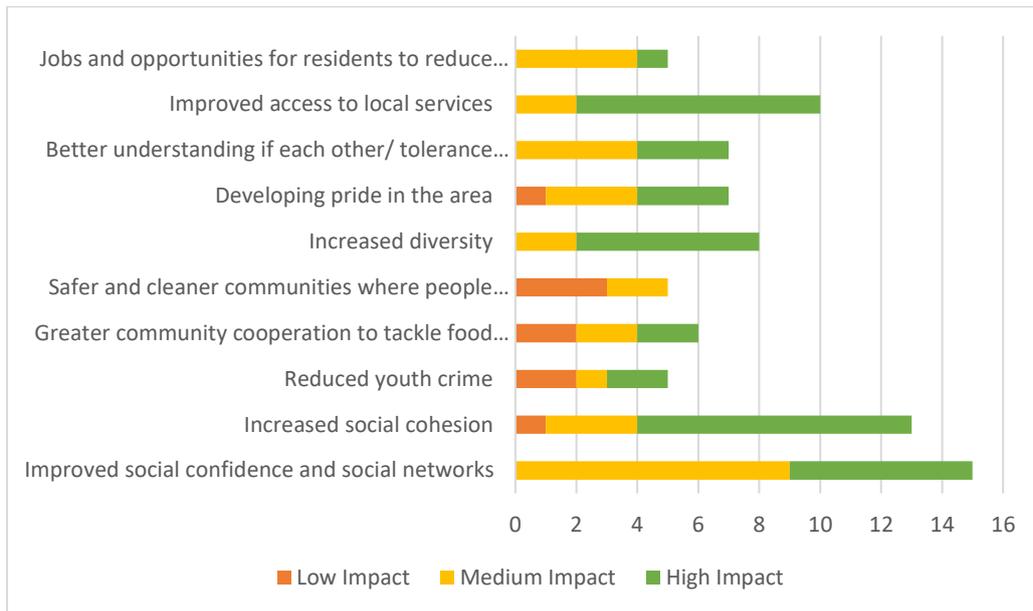
We asked project promoters to assess their impact of their projects over the three impact areas broken down in to sub categories as follows.

4.1 Impact area one: Promoting social inclusion, encouraging independence and developing personal resilience.



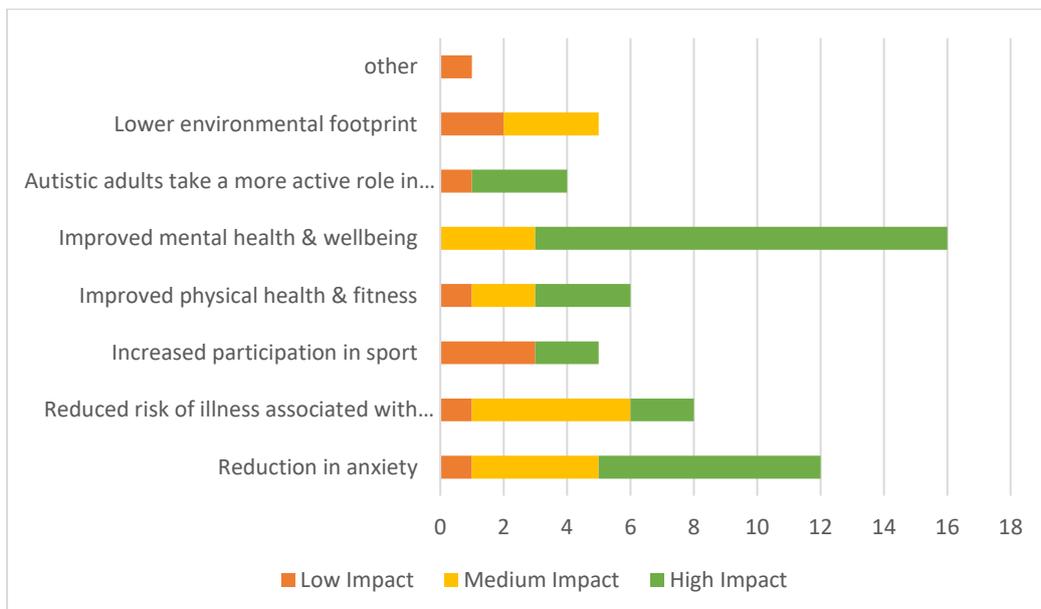
The highest impacts were seen in reducing Isolation and reducing loneliness, followed by supporting and protecting vulnerable people during the pandemic and improving confidence and self-esteem.

4.2 Impact area two: Building positive relations between different groups and communities that will maintain high levels of community cohesion



The highest impacts were seen in increasing social cohesion and improving access to local services, followed by improved confidence and social networks and increased diversity.

4.3 Impact area three: Increasing wellbeing, particularly amongst more disadvantaged communities



Improved mental health and wellbeing and a reduction in anxiety were the standout impacts in this area.

4.4 Match Funding – small investment for a big result

Project delivery organisations were asked if the LHC funding enabled them to raise further funding (or increase your income through trading) and there were several examples of where this was the case, see below:

- *We were able to secure additional funding to set up a peer to peer befriending service for LGBTQI+ people (Wise Thoughts)*
- *We intend to do so once the lockdown is over and we can rent out the edit box. (We Rise)*
- *Having the projector facility will be useful to those groups considering using the building. (Ealing Community Library)*
- *Yes this project contributed to matched funding for the site on which , in total Â£20k was spent. The other funder was the Heritage Lottery who provided funding for the fencing and gates and initial tidy up of the area but not the full circular path. Landscape Partnership Projects from the Heritage Lottery require matched funding to the tune of 34% without which the project as a whole could not go ahead. This small project at Oakside is part of a much larger scheme and this funding has helped us leverage in £2.5m in total over 3 years for the Colne Valley as a whole. (Oakside Open Space)*
- *We secured a small one-off contract of £12500 from the CCG to run a pilot research project identifying the post-diagnostic support needs of autistic adults in Hillingdon. We also secured £50000 from the Youth Futures foundation to deliver further Supported Employment services for 18-25 year olds and £6000 from London Borough of Hillingdon Social Care to provide a pilot supported employment programme for 12 over 25 year olds. (Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support)*
- *It has enabled us to bring in further funding as it provides a clear demonstration of one of the ways in which we work inclusively, by actively reaching out to children and parents who are identified as isolated, and has given other funders confidence to offer us funding for supporting aspects of our project. (Hackney Playbus)*
- *Since securing the LHC grant, All the three centres were able to secure a number of Covid-related emergency grants (e.g. London Community Response Fund wave 1, 2 and 4; Martin Lewis Coronavirus emergency fund,*

National Lottery Covid-19 emergency fund), which enabled us to reach over 1276 unique residents over 11 months through the provision of food and essentials, welfare support and direct support activities (including lockdown doorstep concerts, online coffee mornings, online cooking sessions, etc.).

- *(We're delighted to hear, additionally, that Octopus Community Networks, one of our first investments have gone on to secure £200k from the National Lottery Fund to extend their work on food poverty) (Octopus Community Networks)*
- *For one organisation, Brain Tumour and Injury group they increased awareness of their services which increased fundraising through donations, they also increased their volunteer support which enabled them to recruit a volunteer who focusses on grants and applying for funding, (H4All)*
- *Success in raising funds for and delivering TATI Textiles, has enabled us to apply for other funds, as it showed a track record with delivering and managing projects (Oitij – jo)*
- *It has allowed us to leverage in other monies for the site, ie the Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership Fund which we have for the Regional Park at the moment only pays 66% of the costs of the project and requires partnership funding. Your help has enabled us to do more at Oakside on a local level but adds to the results of the whole programme thus helping us to achieve our £2.5m improvement programme for the Colne Valley Regional Park (over 3 years). (Oakside Open Space)*

4.5 Processes – how project delivery approach can be a benefit in itself.

Many community-based projects, as well as delivering immediate impact from their activity are working in new innovative ways. These approaches are worthy of support in themselves as they have potential to embed social value in mainstream delivery and often save the public purse. As these approaches are being tried by groups across the country there is also potential to link into larger studies of social impact.

Some of these approaches supported through the Fund this year:

- **Social Prescribing.** Summed up in the phrase '*don't give me Prozac, give me a job*' this approach partners clinicians with community projects to offer activities to patients which will improve their health or wellbeing. This approach has potential

to benefit both the person and save NHS money. This year both the Hackney Playbus and the projects supported in Hillingdon adopted this approach.

- **Co-production.** ‘Doing *with* rather than doing *to*’. There has often been a tendency for the public sector to design interventions *for* communities. Co-production or co-design works towards a more genuine partnership with the communities or beneficiaries. When the people who benefit are involved there is a greater chance of the interventions being successful and there is an embedded benefit in people simply feeling included. We can see this in the work that HACS, in Hillingdon are doing with Autistic adults and in the approach taken to environmental improvements in Open Havelock in Ealing.
- **Community ownership or management of facilities.** In recent years local governments have found themselves having to divest long held and taxpayer funded buildings and assets in order to balance the books or because they cannot afford to run them. Often, with appropriate support, there is the potential for these buildings and assets to be taken over by independent community led groups who can lever in external funding and volunteer effort and therefore retain the facilities. This year the Fund has invested in five community led libraries in Ealing who hope to practice this approach.
- **Mens’ sheds.** This has built into a movement born from the realisation that older men have been less willing to come forward with isolation or mental health problems. Men have felt able to come together, drawing on their collective skills in DIY, engineering etc. and this has knock effects on their wellbeing. Aylesbury Men in Sheds is one such project and we are investing in another in year two.
- **Dementia Care.** Caring for people with dementia is one of society’s most difficult challenges. Recent neurological findings continue to support the claims that regularly involving people in activities which stimulate movement, communication and mental engagement will always be beneficial and ultimately enhance their quality of life. With the support of the LHC Fund, Wendover Dementia Alliance purchased a ‘Magic Table’ to do just this and improve hundreds of people’s quality of life.

5. How do we know? – Measurement techniques

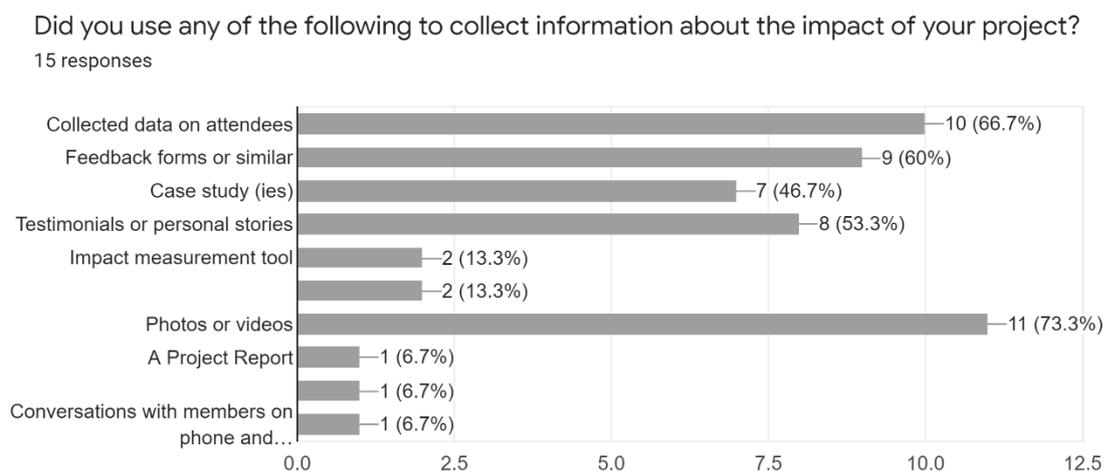
5.1 Our approach

Though notoriously difficult to evidence the social impact of community projects, there are qualitative and quantitative approaches to build up a case that a project has made the intended impact.

Many organisations, including Locality can provide support and advice to groups on measuring and managing their impact. Often approaches are aimed at larger projects than the ones supported by LHC Community Benefit Fund. For example, a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis adopts a rigorous approach, often using financial proxies, revealed and stated preference valuations etc. There are also a range of digital tools on the market which aim to help groups collect impact information. We aim to explore these more with groups during the second year of LHC Fund allocation.

5.2 Methods

Year one groups collected data in a variety of ways:



We have combined some of the stories, testimonials and photos with project promoters own estimate of their projects impact across a number of impact areas. This we hope produces a 'snapshot' of the impact of grant giving which covers a wide range of activity.

5.3 Tools for measurement: (validated tools)

A number of project promoters are experimenting with validated tools, of which there are many available, to measure impact. The advantage of these is that, because they are in wide use by peer projects, there is the potential to benchmark against other projects. These include:

- Loneliness measurement tool developed by the national campaign to end loneliness (Health4All)
- Patient Health Questionnaire which captures individuals Mental Health and Wellbeing by recording Generalised Anxiety Disorder score (GAD7) and depression. (Urban MBA)
- Theory of Change and evaluation framework in partnership with Michelle Stewart & Lambeth Made (We Rise)
- Buckinghamshire Evaluation Framework, tools on www.farmgarden.org.uk, Warwick Edinburgh Mental well being scales (Community Transform)

We will follow up on the results from these and will be looking to develop this approach further in future years.

5.4 Stories and Case Studies

Even where we successful use validated tools and objective measures there is great power in hearing stories from projects and their beneficiaries. Here are some we have collected:

“Client E is an asylum seeker living in Haringey who was referred to us by the Refugee Council. She has mobility issues which make it difficult for her to walk We were able to arrange a weekly food parcel delivery for her and her two children. E wrote the following card to our volunteers: “Thank you for your love and support and well wishes of thinking of me. I appreciate and value all your efforts. Life has its trying moments; for your trust, cordiality and unique support; I say a big thank you.”
(Caris)

“Although I am delivering meals for those at risk while observing COVID isolation. I am acting as a physical lifeline and welfare checker for those without friends; family and without access to technology”.

(Antwerp Arms Volunteer)

“Life has its trying moments; for your trust, cordiality and unique support; I say a big thank you.”

“Working with We Rise is fantastic.”

“It’s an amazing experience. More people should experience what we experienced.”

“It really inspires you to visualise your future.”

“You have to work in a team, meet a deadline, that’s what you call real, real work experience.”

“I’ve learnt so much in this one week”

“It’s really opened my eyes, wow there’s more to media than just film making, you have to go out and talk to people, it’s really interesting.

Doing work experience in normal shops, it’s not really going to help you as much, whereas jobs like this, where you have to work in a team, meet a deadline, that’s what you call real, real work experience.”

(We Rise)

“I am acting as a physical lifeline and welfare checker for those without friends; family and without access to technology”.

(Antwerp Arms Volunteer)

“Thanks to your funding for new meeting rooms at the library (before there were none, it was all open plan) we now have more safe space to provide confidential support to clients on the Help Through Crisis programme. Other community groups will also be able to use our space and offer confidential support. The library also has a bank of 8 PCs giving valuable internet access to the local community and people who can not afford wifi”.

“We are using the library space to support the census project. The library will open to those who are digitally excluded (appointment only) so that they can share information for the census”.

(Ealing CVS/ West Ealing Community Library)

“You have to work in a team, meet a deadline, that’s what you call real, real work experience.”

(We Rise)

Case study: MN has been receiving support from HACS since 2019. MN had previously been advised by social care that he did not meet the criteria for any social care support. He is NEET and other than attending workshop sessions at HACS and a work placement in our cafe, he does not go out or participate in any activities at all, other than online gaming due to his social communication challenges. MN was also unhappy living at home with his family at age 24 because he wanted independence and worried that he will never be able to live independently outside of the home. HACS supported MN to apply for and secure welfare benefits (universal credit and PIP) to start getting him financially independent and enable regular attendance to the HACS centre. We made a social care referral and advocated for him through the process, which resulted in a full package of care support and placing him on the waiting list for a supported living property. In June 2021, despite the pandemic we were able to safely support MN to move into this new supported living property and access local charity funders to support him with furnishing the property. Throughout the pandemic he has regularly attended our twice-weekly fitness sessions which are the highlight of his week!

(HACS)

“This became a lifeline for many of these member who already faced isolation due to their condition”.

(H4All, Brain Tumour Group)

Adapting to Covid

“We began putting recipes in the food parcels that can be easily made even with limited facilities, produced cooking videos and distributed well balanced cooked meals with the recipes”

(Octopus networks)

“.. the Brain tumour and Injury group devised some creative ways to keep their members connected, and from this connection evolved member led social activities organised and coordinated between members vis what's app, a photography competition members had from photos taken on their daily walks. During the weeks and months of the first lockdown this became a lifeline for many of these member who already faced isolation due to their condition”.

(H4All, Brain Tumour Group)

6. How are we learning and improving with the overall Fund delivery?

6.1 Iterations based on learning

In this report we have presented a snapshot of the LHC Community Benefit Fund's impact in communities where LHC works. The combined stories, survey feedback case studies and research show high levels of impact across all the impact areas.

It has been appropriate to develop the fund delivery on a semi bespoke basis because of its size and the fact that it as it is available in specific boroughs. This has had advantages in that it can closely align and add value to borough priorities, sometimes being able to fill a gap, pilot a new idea or act as key money to lever in further funds.

In year two we responded to feedback and made some changes to the process:

- In response to the reevaluation catalysed by the Black Livers Matters we introduced a new impact area of Widening Participation.
- Whilst we built strong relationship with local authorities via the nominated 'champions', feedback told us that some LHC board members wanted more input, so we built in a consultation 'window'.
- To enable us to track impact better we decided to give fewer and larger grants. In most cases just one grant in each borough.

Going forward there is considerable scope for growth in size and coverage whilst still retaining some of the bespoke nature of the Fund and this is of course is closely tied to LHC's core strategy.

It is worth reflecting on LHC as a key stakeholder both from the point of view of its employees and its alignment with LHCs core purpose.

“For all our employees, the Community Benefit Fund and the impact it has on charity partners is very motivating. It supports the purpose we share across the organisation of enhancing local communities. We will continue to promote the impact of the fund and work hard to increase the total value of projects using our frameworks, to build a bigger surplus for reinvestment in local communities in coming years”.

(LHC annual report)

LHCs core purpose is ‘To build better buildings and homes that enhance local communities’. The infographic below from LHCs annual report tells an interesting ‘virtuous circle’ story about the LHC ethos. We can see that the growth of the core activity and the growth of the Fund can feed into each other. How can we steer the Fund in the future towards this aim?



6.2 Future considerations

One consideration is to explore if the fund criteria and deliverables could be more closely aligned to LHC’s core delivery. As an example in year two, in Southwark, we are supporting a programme to encourage more young people from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue careers in the built environment professions. We can see that developing this focus would also increase LHCs Social Value offer and help demonstrate it’s members performance against the Social Value Act.

If a more rigorous social value measure is desired – such as a SROI analysis then there will need to be tighter criteria and common indicators developed across all the geographies.

Appendix one: Schedule of projects with activity, outputs and outcomes

	Project	Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
Hackney	Hackney Play Bus	Social prescribing via play bus	Number of parents participating and getting social prescription referrals	Parents are better supported by their community and better equipped as parents
	Urban MBA	University for street entrepreneurs: 12-week Open College Network (OCN) accredited Business Diploma Level 2	Number of participants Number getting a qualification. Business startups or trial trading	Increased employment/ enterprise skills.
Islington	Octopus Community	Food projects across three hubs	Number of participants	Increased awareness of food Improved cooking, shopping and budgeting capabilities, Improved social confidence and social networks.
Hillingdon	Health4All capacity building	Capacity building mini projects	Number of organisations supported Number of residents participating (60 – 150)	People feeling less isolated and better engaged in their communities
	HACS	social prescribing for autistic adults	Number of sessions, Number of participants	Reduce social isolation, autistic adults take a more active role in managing their Health & Wellbeing, improved confidence and self-esteem
Haringey	RISE	Community empowerment youth group	Number sessions Number of participants	
	Wise Thoughts	Peer support group for LGBT young people	Number of sessions Number of participants	Improved confidence to pursue jobs
	HR Sports	Young peoples sports project	Number of sessions Number of participants	
	Antwerp Arms	Volunteers cook food and deliver during lockdown.	Number of parcels People supported	

	Caris Haringey	Weekly food parcels to families in Haringey with no recourse to public funds and others in priority need	Families supported: 139, New referrals: 34, Food parcels & toiletries supplied: 505	
Ealing	Open Havelock	Towpath regeneration, access improvements and a volunteer engagement programme		Helps Ealing: have small environmental footprint; economy grow - jobs and opportunities for residents to reduce poverty and increase incomes; strong community that promotes diversity. safe and clean where people want to live; people physically and mentally healthy, active and independent; children & young people grow up safe from harm and fulfil their potential
	Ealing Law Centre	Equipment for Community managed library	Number of Study Zone sessions delivered in Year 1 40, Number of volunteers involved in delivery 20, Number of young people benefitting from access to resources in Year 1 120	See research for benefits of community managed libraries and saving a community space
	Friends of Pitzhanger	Equipment for Community managed library	Activities at the library, number of volunteers	See research for benefits of community managed libraries and saving a community space
	Ealing CVS	Equipment for Community managed library	Activities at the library, number of volunteers	See research for benefits of community managed libraries and saving a community space
	Perivale Community Hive	Equipment for Community managed library	Activities at the library, number of volunteers	See research for benefits of community managed libraries and saving a community space
	Northfields Community Hub	Equipment for Community managed library	Activities at the library, number of volunteers	See research for benefits of community managed libraries and saving a community space
Lambeth	We Rise	New Film editing box for young peoples video training project	- Number of people trained on editing software - Increased income as a result of renting out the editing suite	theory of change and evaluation framework developed in partnership with Lambeth Made and Michelle Stewart, a careers specialist who carried out the external evaluation for our Futures Project. We track the number of young people we work with

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of editors who volunteer to work with We Rise - Number of editors who coach young people - Number of local editors who use the suite for community projects - Number of local editors who use the suite for commercial projects 	<p>and measure the impact of our all projects on 12 key employability skills.</p> <p>Increasing young peoples skills for employment</p> <p>A more collaborative culture of community support for young people</p>
Tower Hamlets	Otijo-Jo Project	series of fabric workshops for women	Number of workshops, number of participants	Develop creative skills Improved understanding and tolerance of difference
	Bow Haven	outside meeting places for people with mental health difficulties, communal art project, online platform, online meeting place	Number of participants	Promote reduction of isolation and disadvantage and access to local services, reduce isolation
Buckinghamshire	Community Transform	Community Garden project linked to a community Hub	Number of volunteer hours Size of the harvest!	Social cohesion improved, improvement of individual and community wellbeing. new skills in growing fresh produce, healthy cooking and eating well on a budget. Improvement in mental and physical health and wellbeing, reducing isolation and increasing social networks. • Increased quantity, value and experience of volunteering and neighbourliness, promoting independence, increasing low-level support, developing transferable skills such as team working, negotiating, planning and horticulture
	Oakside Open Space	New path linking the entrance to the woodland. • New interpretation board outlining some of the wildlife present on site. • Assistance given to the creation of a friends of group or residents association. •.	50+ local residents informed and at least 25+ engaged in some way with the site. • 50+ local residents informed and at least 25+ engaged in some way with the site	Increase local people's health & well being Better sense of cohesion within the housing estate Increase children's engagement with the outside world

Men in Sheds	Equipment for a Men’s Shed (a repair service with a difference)	No of repairs No of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local people have the skills to repair and re-use equipment, • Local people have lowered their carbon footprint by reusing equipment. • Wellbeing is improved through learning a new skill and engaging with our volunteers, • Social connectedness is improved for people who make contact with the service, •
Wendover Dementia Action Alliance	Interactive table for use by people with dementia	Number of people using the table (500+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive changes in emotional stability, overall mood and outlook, sense of self worth and belonging, physical effort and energy levels, social involvement and interaction and the ability to share and enjoy group activities.

Appendix two: Detailed Case Study:

Aiesha (not her real name) is a 30-year-old woman of Caribbean heritage living at a Hackney hostel for homeless families with her 2 year-old daughter and 3.5 year-old son.

Aiesha was referred to Hackney Playbus by Family Action's social prescribing team, in late Sep 2020.

Her referrer said that Aiesha -

“is a sole parent of two young children... She states feeling overwhelmed and disappointed with herself as a parent. She hasn't much support around her and is quite isolated. She would benefit from a confidence boost and perhaps befriending support alongside ideas/activities to do with her children.”

How has Hackney Playbus supported the family?

One-to-one telephone support

From early Oct 2020, Aiesha has been in regular telephone & text contact with us, as part of our telephone support programme, which provides an opportunity for parents and carers to discuss any issues they are facing, so that we can help them access the right support, and to talk about parenting and play.

Aiesha struggles with depression. Around the same time she was referred to Hackney Playbus, she was also referred for counselling by her GP, and she has since been prescribed antidepressants. We check in with Aiesha at least fortnightly, expressing care and concern for her and the children's well-being and asking how she is coping. When Aiesha told us she had missed a counselling appointment, we encouraged her to ring the counselling service and, when she worried that her medication was not working, we encouraged her to speak to her GP.

As it was clear that Aiesha and the children could benefit from additional support, we contacted their Health Visitor to confirm that the family had also been referred to the

family support service at their local children's centre. When they were allocated a family support worker, we talked to Aiesha about what to expect from the service and outlined the various ways they could support her.

The challenges of trying to parent two young children in a hostel has been front and centre in our contact with Aiesha from the very outset. Not only is this family of 3 confined to one small hostel room, with a minimum of space for the children to play, but there is a no visitor policy, which cuts residents off from friends and family, and no WiFi. Since we started speaking to Aiesha, we have supported her to complain to hostel management about a string of problems, including the closure of the hostel's small laundry room at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forces residents to drag their laundry to a laundrette (where they are at increased risk of transmission); that the sides were missing from the children's beds, causing them to fall out at night; that the rear hobs on the cooker in Aiesha's room were out of order, forcing her to cook on the front hobs and increasing the risk to of scalds/burns; and the infestation of Aiesha's room with what appear to be flour mites or weevils. As a result, the cooker and the children's beds have been fixed, but we are now directly in touch with hostel management about the laundrette and the flour mites on Aiesha's behalf.

The hostel where the family live is located near the border between Hackney & Islington and, when we first started supporting them, Aiesha's 2 year-old daughter was home with her full-time, whilst her 3.5 year-old son was enrolled at an Islington nursery. Aiesha expected her 2 year-old daughter to be automatically offered a place at the same nursery but, when we called to check, we were told that Islington children would be prioritised. As their Hackney-based family support worker said they could not assist out of borough, we supported Aiesha to address the issue directly with the nursery. She did, and they eventually offered her daughter a place. As the children's care has since been interrupted by Covid-19/lockdown, we are currently talking with Aiesha about the possibility of arguing that her children should be classed as 'vulnerable' and prioritised for places during the pandemic. Given the stigma attached, both to homelessness and to mental ill-health, having these kinds of conversations with mainstream services is something that many parents/carers understandably avoid.

Through our conversations with Aiesha, we learnt that she was not aware of the need to apply for a school reception place for her 3.5 year-old son by a certain date. We provided information about the application process and local schools, which allowed Aiesha to visit some nearby schools and choose which she would like for her son. She submitted the application independently, in good time.

Aiesha and the children had been barely scraping by on meagre benefits. As part of our telephone support programme, we have regularly referred Aiesha to Little Village (for family hygiene packs), the E5 Baby Bank (for winter wear for the children) and the North London National Food Service (for food support).

Participating in sessions

Given the lack of WiFi at the hostel where Aiesha and the children live, and the fact that she also struggles with mobile signal in their room, it has been difficult for the family to participate in our online Zoom sessions. Nevertheless, Aiesha receives a weekly invite to one of the Zoom groups and has managed to join 3 times, along with one or both of the children. The first time, she needed quite a lot of help from the team to work out how to use Zoom. Unfortunately, no amount of tech support from us could address Aiesha's poor internet connection, and this continues to be a real barrier – particularly to our playworkers' engagement with the children during sessions.

Aiesha and her 2 year-old daughter also attended one of the small outdoor sessions we held at one of our regular Playbus locations, just over 10 minutes walk from the hostel, between the first and the second lockdowns. Aiesha was initially nervous about her daughter running off during the session, but the playworkers reassured her and her daughter demonstrated good listening and attention skills – by returning when called back by her mum - which the team reinforced and celebrated by clapping.

Her daughter clearly enjoyed the outdoor space, having the chance to wander on her own, climbing steps and going down the path while Aiesha chatted to the playworkers and to another parent attending the session.

How has participating in Hackney Playbus activities helped them?

We have linked Aiesha up with much-needed material assistance by referring her to other services who could help with food, clothes and hygiene products for her and the children.

Aiesha's family support worker at the local children's centre has been an effective support for the family and, though this is no doubt also due to the high standards of their family support worker, we helped facilitate this by helping Aiesha to form a clear understanding of what they could offer.

We helped to flag the issue of Aiesha's younger child potentially not being prioritised for a place at the same nursery as her older child and supported her to address it directly with the nursery when family support could not help. Similarly, we provided her the information she needed to choose a school for her 3.5 year old son and to submit a timely application. (Missing this date can have serious ramifications for families, such as being allocated a place at a school that is far from home.)

By really listening, and taking Aiesha's concerns seriously, encouraging her to take them to hostel management - repeatedly - and not to give up, we not only helped her to get some of the problems in her room (the broken hobs and unsafe beds) fixed but, perhaps even more importantly, built her confidence to assert herself and to take action to change her conditions for the better.

In terms of her mental health, we have encouraged Aiesha to get help when she needs it and to engage fully with mental health services. The member of our team who is Aiesha's telephone support contact has built trust with her over the past few months, and has been an important source of emotional support - particularly around parenting.

Telephone support and participation in Hackney Playbus sessions - on Zoom and in real life – have contributed to reducing Aiesha's isolation and helped her to feel more connected to other parents/carers. Online sessions have provided the whole family with opportunities to do something fun together and learn new songs and the outdoor session provided the 2 year-old daughter with an unusual opportunity for exploration and learning.

We hope to continue to support Aiesha and to be able to welcome her and her daughter to regular Hackney Playbus sessions once we are able to start these up safely again.

Please describe any observations you noted about changes to the participant's behaviour/attitude/knowledge/skills during the project:

Aiesha has grown in her confidence, as a parent and as a person. It is also notable that, whereas it took many attempts over the course of about 2 weeks to have an initial telephone conversation with her, she now always answers our calls and engages actively with us.

Please include any comments from the participant about their experience of Hackney Playbus services:

Aiesha often thanks us for calling her to check in, following up by text about something we discussed on the phone or referring her on to other organisations for support.

Appendix three: year two grants

	Project	Grant	Activity
Brent	Brent CVS	£10,000	Capacity Building Mutual Aid Groups
Haringey	Sister System	£10,000	Early intervention for females affected by care
Hillingdon	Health4All	£15,000	Capacity Building VCS groups
Islington	Finsbury Park Trust	£10,000	Refurbish kitchen and food project
Lambeth	School Grounds Sound	£6,187	Impact measurement for youth project
	Art4Space	£3,128	Impact measurement for youth project
Tower Hamlets	Outside Edge Theatre	£10,000	Theatre project for people with addiction issues
Buckinghamshire	Wycombe Multi Cultural Association	£6,376	Kitchen refurbishment & expansion
	Oasis Partnership	£6,376	Men's Shed activities as part of new community hub.
Southwark	Open City	£10,000	Workshops and mentoring for young people in the built environment industries