Taking Action Locally:
Schools developing innovative area initiatives

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Executive Summary

1. Disadvantaged areas present their own unique challenges and possibilities. Area-based initiatives (ABIs) offer an important way to respond to these, creating opportunities to tailor action to local circumstances. With the growing policy emphasis on localism, schools, local authorities and their partners now have considerable scope to develop their own innovative ABIs. They can build on the best of their existing practice in extended services, children's trusts, multi-agency working and community engagement, to develop locally-responsive, sustainable and long-term strategies. While these are challenging times with respect to funding, ABIs also open up the possibility of working in new ways.

2. Innovative, locally-developed ABIs, are already starting to emerge, offering new ways forward. These initiatives are going far beyond a school improvement approach, suggesting new roles for schools in their local areas. Most importantly, they are developing strategies based on a rich understanding of what is happening in their local areas to create poor outcomes. They are establishing strong partnerships to harness existing resources and create multiple levers for change. And they are creating new governance arrangements to share responsibility for outcomes in their areas.

3. To develop their own innovative ABIs, suited to their particular contexts, schools, local authorities and their partners will need to:

   - *Develop rich understandings of their local areas*. New initiatives must focus on changing the underlying dynamics and characteristics of an area that lead to poor outcomes.

   - *Be clear about the purposes of their ABI and what it is setting out to achieve*. The broad strands of action it will take, how they will work, the outcomes they will have, and over what time-scale, need to be clearly articulated.

   - *Think long-term. Initiatives will need to build capacity locally to ensure their sustainability*. They will need to create feedback loops so that they can learn about their impacts and develop accordingly. And they must also have built-in flexibility so they can respond to changing local dynamics.

4. As they develop their own initiatives, there is much schools, local authorities and their partners can learn about how to be effective from previous area-based approaches. Finding ways to 'bend' existing resources in the area may be more effective in the long-term than relying on additional funds. Having some alignment with broader policy approaches is likely to be an important strategy for attracting partners, identifying multiple levers for change, and multiplying impacts. Local people will also need to be involved. Ensuring that decisions are made on the basis of a real understanding of how local people see their lives and the place where they live, and what they feel needs to happen, may be more effective than trying to recruit them to formal decision making bodies.

Contents

The purposes of this report

1.1 This short report has been written for schools, local authorities and their partners, who want to find new ways to tackle the link between education, disadvantage and place. It is intended to help them think about how they might start to develop their own area-based initiatives (ABIs) in response to the distinct problems and possibilities of the areas where they work. It argues that locally-developed ABIs can be more effective than national-level strategies in meeting some of the needs of disadvantaged areas. They can also offer local professionals a way to take greater control of the emerging policy landscape.

1.2 The report is in two parts. The first sets out why ABIs are important now and explores some examples of innovative, locally-emerging initiatives. The second considers some key issues in designing locally-innovative ABIs. It addresses four core concerns which local professionals will need to consider when starting to develop their own ABIs. These are:

- How to understand areas as a basis for action

- Being clear about the purposes of ABIs

- Learning from past initiatives

- The principles of good design

1.3 Although the ideas in this report are the authors' own, they are indebted to the teachers and head teachers, local authority officers, civil servants, government advisors, and academics and others, who took part in a seminar series on the future of ABIs. This was sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council. This report presents some of the series' main conclusions. For access to a more detailed commentary on the full range of issues covered during the series, please go to:
www.education.manchester.ac.uk/research/centres/cee/

Part 1. Why ABIs matter now

2.1 *Area-based initiatives (ABIs) are important because places are different from one another. They generate different sorts of needs and present different problems and possibilities. These call for locally-tailored responses.*

National-level strategies are important, especially to address universal issues like child poverty, or poor literacy skills. But on their own, they cannot engage with the complex ways in which living in particular places shapes people's life chances. People's identities and relationships, aspirations and opportunities, and health and well-being, are all shaped by where they live and what happens there. This means that initiatives which are able to engage with complex local dynamics have an important role to play in tackling links between education, disadvantage and place.

2.2 Schools, local authorities and their partners, are uniquely placed to engage with these issues. Being 'close to the ground', they can achieve a depth of understanding and engagement which is simply beyond the scope of national policy. While in recent years centrally-driven ABIs like Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, and the City Challenges, have made some gains in their target areas, local professionals have also often found themselves trying to make sense of multiple, fragmented, and sometimes competing strategies, and having to 'bend' their local concerns to fit in with national priorities.

2.3 As support for such big government initiatives is withdrawn, there is now a moment for local professionals to think about what they actually want to achieve for the areas where they work. With less central funding and guidance available, well thought out local action is set to play a bigger role in tackling links between education, disadvantage and place. The new funding environment presents serious challenges, and with core services needing to make significant savings, new ways of working will have to be found. But this also brings with it renewed opportunities to explore how what happens in schools, and what happens beyond their gates, can be addressed holistically – but this time with local professionals more firmly in the driving seat. Government too appears willing to support locally-developed ABIs. As well as offering a route to greater efficiency, they create opportunities to think beyond a school improvement approach which has already reached the limits of its achievements.

2.4 In this emerging policy context, and at their best, locally-developed ABIs can:

- harness resources and tap local knowledge and creativity
- establish new forms of partnerships to tackle issues which cannot be addressed effectively by single services or organisations
- develop innovative approaches which go beyond the standard practices required by national policy
- bridge gaps between professionals and communities by developing shared understandings and commitments
- work in areas defined by their common problems and possibilities, rather than being confined by established administrative boundaries
- create structures which are suited to purpose and mirror local needs.

2.5 Many schools and local authorities are already well placed to act on this. Through their work on extended services, or children's trusts, or multi-agency arrangements for instance, many have already established working partnerships with good local knowledge and a shared commitment to improving outcomes in their local areas. These foundations are too valuable to lose just because national policy is changing. While these are challenging times, local innovation offers a way of building on the best of what has gone before, but also of making it increasingly responsive to local needs.

3.1 *Across the country, innovative area-based initiatives are emerging at a local level, driven by schools, local authorities and their partners. Two examples are given below.*

An academy sponsored by a social housing provider

This academy is an example of where education and housing professionals have come together around a shared analysis of a local area's needs. The housing trust's stock is located within a wider, geographically distinct, residential area, which is characterised by disadvantage. The academy (and the underperforming schools it replaced) serves this wider area. About one third of the academy's students live in housing trust properties.

Importantly, and central to the initiative, is that the housing trust is not simply concerned with its housing stock and tenants, but sees improving the wider area as part of its remit. The trust recognises that its tenants access services and facilities across the area and that their identities and aspirations, and indeed their feelings about their own homes, are shaped by this. Moreover, as outcomes across the area as a whole are poor, issues which affect trust tenants are also issues for the wider residential population, and for services in the area.

This understanding has led the housing trust to decide to use some of its capital to invest in education in the area through academy sponsorship. It sees this as a powerful lever for tackling social and economic disadvantage, improving outcomes both for local residents in general and for the trust — for example, in terms of reducing vandalism to trust properties and problem tenancies.

A strong partnership is developing between the trust and academy and they have – through their respective engagements with local residents – identified a range of concerns they want to work together to address. These include: residents' lack of pride in the local area; a dependency on services to solve their problems; poor attainment and low skills; and a lack of local employment.

Some of the steps they are taking to address these issues include:

- The academy's student and family support team work closely with the youth and family team from the housing trust. This means that difficulties with housing that are hindering education can now be flagged directly with the housing trust at multi-professional meetings. Students who have been behaving anti-socially can be made aware of the implications of their behaviour for the community and potentially on their family's continued tenancy.

- A senior member of staff from the housing trust has been appointed as community development manager in the academy and organises a range of community and adult learning activities in the school.

- The academy is using some of its freedoms to develop its curriculum around entrepreneurship and problem solving. This includes the use of occasional whole-day learning activities, where students engage in 'real world' business scenarios.

- The housing trust is offering extensive work experience to the academy's students – in everything from administrative roles, to joinery and plumbing.

- Both organisations are drawing on their pre-existing partnerships to bring additional resources to bear as appropriate on their full range of activities.

As this partnership develops, what is striking is that because of the housing trust's sponsorship of the academy, neither organisation can 'retreat' when under pressure, which is so often the case with less formal arrangements. The trust and the academy are not only accountable to each other in various ways, but they also have a sense of collective accountability. A very real expression of this was during the academy's recent Ofsted inspection, when senior executives from the housing trust also met with inspectors.

A multi-agency team exploring area issues

This initiative is based in an academy, which is located in the heart of a highly disadvantaged part of large city. Over the years, the area has been the subject of multiple regeneration initiatives. These have had little success, and the area is now also starting to see the consequences of public funding cuts. Plans which had been in place to bring the area's housing stock up to standard have recently fallen through, and there is widespread concern across service providers about what the future holds for the area. Already, for example, there is anecdotal evidence about how changes to incapacity and sickness benefits are negatively affecting some of the area's many vulnerable families.

In this context, the academy is determined to use its resources to become a key player in regeneration efforts in the area. It wants to work alongside a range of other organisations and agencies so that as wide a range of resource is mobilised as possible to address area issues. As the vehicle for this partnership, it is setting up a not-for-profit, limited company, with the specific remit of developing and managing an area-based initiative. That the company is an independent entity, not owned by any one service provider or organisation, is seen as important to ensure that area issues, rather than particular service agendas, drive its actions. The plan is that staff from the partner organisations will work for the company on a secondment basis. This means they will be able to dedicate time to its activities without requiring the company to raise funds to cover staff salaries. Currently, the partners include: the diocese; the housing trust; local authority adult learning, regeneration and leisure services; local primary schools; and volunteers from the resident-run community newspaper.

Some innovative local ABIs

In order to avoid the mistakes of the past, the company will start its work with a process of research and consultation with community, and with voluntary and professional groups. Its current aim is to develop a thorough understanding of the area as the basis for a long-term strategy. The company is buying-in support for this from the nearby university, who will provide training in research and analysis methods. This will enable the partners to generate the evidence they need to supplement their existing statistical data sets, and build their capacity to conduct their own research in future as the initiative develops.

3.2 It goes without saying that, for each of these initiatives, its potential currently exceeds its achievements by some way. In both cases, these are very early days, and there will be many tensions and difficulties to overcome. Even so, they share some features which seem particularly important in developing innovative, local ABIs. Specifically:

- They involve schools closely, but they do not focus solely on school 'improvement'. Similarly, they are not restricted to the resources that schools themselves can marshal, nor are they driven by the priorities of schools. Instead, they take the form of partnerships. Schools are key partners, but they work alongside other agencies and organisations in developing an overarching area strategy.

- The multi-organisational nature of these partnerships means that a wide range of resources can be deployed in support of the strategy. Schools are often restricted to what they can do for students in the classroom, or if funds allow, what extended services they can provide. In these cases, however, many more levers of change are available.

- The emerging strategies are based on something more than a rapid scan of outcomes data or the hunches of head teachers. In each case, there is an attempt to develop a more holistic understanding of the area before embarking on action.

- These emerging initiatives suggest that schools might take on new roles. For example, this might involve rethinking how they relate to the local labour market, and how they can impact on the wider life-chances of their students and on the well-being of their communities.

- The initiatives also suggest that new forms of governance are starting to emerge which can support local innovation. The partnerships to which schools contribute are decision-making bodies. These partnerships are not answerable for the performance of individual services so much as for the overall well-being of the areas they serve. Whilst traditional lines of accountability remain in place, schools also have to answer to their partners and vice versa.

3.3 *What this section of the report has shown is that while locally-developed initiatives need to work on their own terms, responding to the distinct problems and possibilities of their own local areas, they nonetheless have a lot in common. These shared features can inform the development of other local ABIs.*

Part 2. Designing locally-innovative ABIs

How to understand areas as a basis for action

Whilst this report is not intended as a 'how to do it' guide, the following sections consider some of the major issues which local professionals will need to address as they develop their own initiatives. These are:

- **How to understand areas as a basis for action**
- **Being clear about the purposes of an area initiative**
- **Learning from past initiatives**
- **The principles of good design.**

How to understand areas as a basis for action

4.1 There is no single way to think about what an area is, and sometimes trying to define an area too tightly can be counterproductive. Local practitioners and policy makers need to find ways to understand the areas where they work which can support the development of effective local initiatives.

4.2 Different ways of understanding areas typically invite different sorts of action at a local level and all are valuable in some way. For instance:

- Understanding areas in administrative terms can focus attention on how to distribute resources within clearly defined boundaries
- Performance indicators and neighbourhood statistics can focus attention on measured outcomes and on instances where those outcomes are poor
- Speaking to people who live on a particular housing estate about what living there means to them, can provide insights into how places shape people's identities, relationships, opportunities and expectations, and suggest how services might better connect to these

- Trying to understand a particular local phenomenon – for instance, gang membership amongst teenage boys – might involve exploring issues of culture and 'territory' which cross administrative and service boundaries.

4.3 Rather than accessing this wide range of understandings and drawing them together, ABIs have typically been driven by performance indicators and neighbourhood statistics. The people designing the initiative know outcomes in an area are worse than they would like, and set about putting interventions in place to bring about short-term improvements. So poor attendance leads to an attendance strategy; low attainment to extra classes or more intensive teaching; poor behaviour to learning support units; and so on. But this means that little is done to understand, or to try and change, the underlying conditions which give rise to these problems. When the initiative ends and its interventions disappear, little will actually have changed.

How to understand areas as a basis for action

4.4 To become more effective, local initiatives need to be informed by a much richer understanding of how local areas work, which draws together a wide range of different insights. Put simply, it is one thing to know that GCSE results are below national averages, or that few young people go to university, or that there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy. But it is quite another to understand how this relates to local cultures, family dynamics, local employment opportunities, and a whole host of other area factors. Having a deeper understanding of what is actually happening to produce poor outcomes can help those designing initiatives to identify the underlying factors which they can act upon.

4.5 This need not entail a huge amount of additional work or other resources. Local professionals are ideally placed to access a whole range of understandings, from statistical data to anecdotal evidence. Partnership structures can help to bring together insights from across a wide range of services. Local professionals are also in an ideal position to appreciate how, at particular times and in relation to particular issues, areas may need to be understood differently to enable effective action. For instance, in response to particular issues it might make sense to:

- have actions tailored to a housing estate, or to a particular residential area (e.g. on one side of a main road)
- operate within administrative boundaries – possibly at ward level, or local authority level
- define areas around issues emerging on the ground. For example, if new international arrivals settle in an area which spans local authority borders, it might be most effective for the authorities to work together and target their resources at a boundary-crossing 'area of residence'.

4.6 There can also be many different starting points for understanding local areas. It might be that, in the first instance, a school wants to understand why students from particular residential areas have high levels of unauthorised absence. It might be that services which are already part of a partnership – for instance, a ward co-ordination group – choose to explore a common problem, like why residents from some parts of town appear unwilling to access nearby services.

4.7 Importantly, these are starting points. As initiatives develop, there is likely to be an ongoing process of exploration, with understandings being elaborated and refined; revised to reflect changing local dynamics; and broadened to incorporate newly emerging issues. The issues to be addressed, or the solutions which might be most effective, might not be apparent at the outset, but will become more so as the initiative develops.

4.8 Overall, the key message is that:

Area-based initiatives are likely to be most effective where they understand fully what they are trying to intervene in— and therefore how the boundaries of the area are to be drawn, and what interventions are likely to have an impact.

5.1 As well as being based on a rich understanding of local areas, locally-developed ABIs need to be clear about their purposes. Ultimately, initiatives will want to improve outcomes in an area. But they also need a clear set of aims and purposes to guide strategy.

5.2 The table below sets out five propositions about why areas matter in education and the sorts of initiatives these might lead to – and there might be others not included here. This is intended to help schools, local authorities and their partners to think about the sorts of ABIs they might develop in response to local area factors, and to consider the principles they might want to work from.

	Proposition	Key issues	Key elements in initiative design
1	"Schools alone can't compensate for students' social background."	Poor children are held back from education on many fronts (including poor housing, family poverty, conflict, mobility etc). Attainment gaps can't be closed unless these issues are tackled.	Residents and agencies working in the same area need to work together with schools to tackle wider disadvantages, and take on a community education remit.
2	"Schools are subject to their contexts."	Disadvantaged areas create additional challenges and organisational demands and exert downward pressures on school quality.	Additional funding and customised organisational designs for schools in disadvantaged areas.
3	"Area dynamics shape learners' identities and engagement with school."	Area dynamics help shape the formation of youth identity, aspirations and interests. If education ignores this, it is likely to pass some disadvantaged young people by.	Curriculum and pedagogies tailored to local areas.
4	"Different areas need different kinds of educational outcomes."	Education should serve local areas in terms of providing the skills that local employers need and helping to build local citizenship.	Residents and organisations in an area 'visioning' desired futures and working collaboratively towards them.
5	"The development of an area is a shared responsibility."	Local authorities and schools working in the same area have collective responsibility for outcomes in the area.	Instead of behaving competitively, schools and local authorities work together to share resources and practices that lead to best outcomes overall.

(adapted from a seminar presentation by Ruth Lupton)

5.3 Obviously these approaches are not mutually exclusive, but it is clear that some focus on schools, others demand partnerships of schools, and others multi-agency partnerships. Some focus on curriculum and pedagogy, others on organisation. Some demand targeting and redistribution, others are universal in application. As partners work together to develop ABIs, they will need to decide what is most appropriate to their particular area context, and the problems and possibilities it presents. Local partners might feel that one important course of action they can take is to lobby central government about the things that are not locally actionable, as well as taking action on the things they can.

5.4 Being clear about an ABI's purposes will also help to focus attention on the sorts of outcomes the initiative might be expected to have. All the approaches set out above might be expected to make a contribution to narrowing attainment gaps – and some more directly so than others. But they also suggest that other kinds of educational outcomes – for example, building the capacity for active citizenship, or community participation, or progression to skilled employment – can be as important, if not more so, for an area's development. This will have implications for the types of activities that might be pursued within an ABI, and how its impacts are monitored. While attainment is important, partners may need to think beyond this.

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Designing effective ABIs

6.1 Locally-developed initiatives need to work on their own terms, as determined by the areas they focus on and the issues they are setting out to address. This means there is no simple 'recipe' for creating an effective ABI. However, some of the main factors which can limit initiatives are already known. So too are some of the main design principles which are likely to lead to the development of more effective ABIs. These are set out below.

Learning from the limits of past initiatives

6.2 In order not to repeat past problems, it is important to learn from the limitations of previous ABIs. As has already been explored, the need to develop a rich understanding of an area, and to have a clear sense about an ABI's purpose(s), are important lessons. The following also appear particularly important:

- **The use of (additional) resources.** The additional resources available to ABIs have typically been very small, in relation both to the size of the issues being faced, and the amount of resource already available to the services in the area. This suggests that simply targeting more resources at the area is unlikely to make much difference – and in the current climate is even less of an option. *Using whatever additional resources are available to facilitate the 'bending' of existing resources may be more effective.*

- **Having sufficiently broad aims.** Although ABIs try to marshal coherent efforts to tackle disadvantage, it is often difficult to bring together all the agencies and institutions that serve an area. In practice, many education-focused initiatives concentrate their efforts too narrowly on schools. This means they can make little impression on area factors that are beyond the reach of the school. *While the scope of the initiative has to be manageable, it also has to identify and bring together the range of partners who are best placed to make a difference. This will be important too to make best use of limited resources.*

- **Perseverance and long-term planning.** ABIs have typically been short-term – funded for a few years and then abandoned in favour of the next initiative. This has made it difficult to develop long-term strategies, or for small improvements to be built up over time and to lead to more fundamental change. It can also make potential partners unwilling to 'give their all' to an initiative which they know will not last. *Now that local professionals have the opportunity to develop ABIs, it is important that they think long-term. This is not just in terms of building up to bigger outcomes, but also of building the capacity across partner organisations to sustain an initiative over time.*

- **Community involvement**. Although some ABIs have acknowledged the need for community involvement, in practice they have been dominated by the views and priorities of professionals. This often means that they have been unable to develop an understanding of how people live in an area and what they need. Equally, they have been unable to call on the resources of local people to tackle their own problems. *ABIs need to find ways to access the views of local people and to take these into account in constructive ways. Local professionals cannot simply impose what they think are the right 'solutions' for an area. Unless local people support these activities too, they may simply never opt-in to anything the initiative tries to do.*

- **Having some alignment to wider policy.** There is only so much that ABIs can achieve, and many of the issues they seek to address will have their origins outside the area. For instance, initiatives might deal with the effects of economic recession in an area, but 'fixing' the economy is outside their scope. *Given that ABIs typically have small effects, they are highly unlikely to make a difference if they swim against the tide of other social, economic and policy trends. Some alignment of what happens locally and what is happening centrally seems to be important*.

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- **Clarity of design**. Some ABIs have been poorly designed, with little clarity as to their purposes, or how they are going to achieve their desired outcomes. *It is important to have a clear design which shows how an initiative's actions will engage with local dynamics; the outcomes it hopes to achieve (in the short-, medium- and long-term); and how, in practice, it will do this. There is an issue about how far clarity of design is bought at the cost of narrower aims and ambitions, and a compromise will need to be struck that works for issues in the area.*

The principles of good design

6.3 To conclude this short report, the bullet points below set out – in bald terms – the main principles underpinning an ABI's design and the key considerations they raise. Drawing together the points raised throughout the report, they offer local professionals a very broad guide to developing their own ABIs.

- Initiatives need to be based on a rich understanding of the areas they are working in. This means understanding how those areas 'work' to produce poor outcomes. This is a complex task which deserves time and attention in its own right. Looking at statistical indicators is important, but is not enough. It is also important to understand how local people see their area, what professionals from a range of backgrounds understand about the area, what impacts national policies have had on the area, and what has been tried before. Some research may need to be specially commissioned. However, it is likely that there will be considerable insights to be gained simply by talking to people. Some kind of provisional account of the area needs to be developed. It may not be definitive at first, but it can be revisited as the initiative learns more.

- On the basis of this account, an outline strategy needs to be developed. This is very different from an action plan which focuses on short-term objectives and tasks. Instead, it has to set out long-term thinking – perhaps over a five year, ten year or even longer time scale. It has to set out the kinds of outcomes that are aimed at in that time scale, and the broad strands of action that are expected to generate those outcomes. Above all, it has to focus on changing the underlying dynamics and characteristics of the area rather than simply on tackling presenting, surface-level, problems. As with the account of the area, it may at first be provisional, and it needs to be revisited throughout the initiative's lifetime so that it can be elaborated and updated. Only with this strategy in place can more specific action plans be formulated.

- As part of its long term strategy, the initiative will need to plan for its own transformation. It is highly unlikely that the initiative will last in its original form for more than a few years. If nothing else, key players will leave and policy contexts will change. The initiative will therefore need to plan at the very least for a transition from a start-up phase to longer-term sustainability. It might be particularly useful to think in terms of embedding its approaches in the area, so that they are not dependent on the presence of particular individuals or the perseverance of a particular form of organisation.

Designing effective ABIs

- The resources available to the initiative need to be matched to the issues it hopes to tackle. It is likely that partners will need to be brought together from a range of organisations and agencies. It may well be that the original group of partners will need to change and expand as the initiative develops a better understanding of what it needs to do – and who, therefore, needs to play a part. There may be additional funding to support the initiative, but in any case existing resources – particularly in the form of people's time – will need to be 'bent' to sustain its work.

- A governance structure will need to be developed that includes all partners and is not driven by the priorities of one or two. Thought will need to be given as to how to democratise this structure by involving local people. This may be by encouraging local people into formal decision-making processes. However, it may also be by ensuring that decisions are made on the basis of a real understanding of how local people see their lives and the place where they live, and what it is that they want. It may also involve some capacity-building work so that local people can progressively take control of the available resources and bring their own resources to bear.

- The outcomes of any initiative are likely to be uncertain, particularly when the aims are long-term. The initiative will therefore need to develop feedback loops so that it knows what impacts it is and is not having. Formal end-of-initiative evaluations have their place, but they are little help in steering the initiative as it develops. What is likely to be more helpful is some mixture of formal evaluation and intelligence gathering on an ongoing basis. Above all, at regular intervals, the initiative has to review its progress in the light of the evidence and revisit its understanding of the area and its long-term strategy.

- The initiative will need support at national level. As a minimum, it will need 'permission'. National policy makers will need to ensure that any rhetoric in favour of localism is not undermined by regulatory prohibitions, or central mandates, or accountability requirements cutting across the initiative's plans. Beyond this, central government will need to give local initiatives control over funding (even if 'additional' funding is unavailable). They will need to encourage the work of locally-emerging ABIs and acknowledge it publicly. They will need to put initiatives in touch with one another so that local professionals can learn from each others' experiences. They will also need to learn themselves from successful initiatives, making expertise from these available elsewhere, and building policy frameworks based on what they have learned.

Some practical questions

The following questions provide a summary of the points raised in this report and are intended to help guide local professionals' discussions.

1. Starting points
- Are there any 'burning issues', gaps in knowledge, or specific challenges that seem to invite an area-based response?
- Are there particular areas – however defined – that it 'makes sense' to focus on initially?

2. Understanding the area
- What data do different services already generate? (e.g. statistical data, data from community consultation exercises or user groups)
- How can this data be drawn together?
- What are the gaps in this evidence base? How can these be filled?
- Are community voices well represented?

3. Identifying actionable issues
- What are the main issues emerging from the data?
- What factors help to explain these issues?
- Of these factors, which can be influenced locally?
- Who is best placed to influence them? Who needs to be involved in designing the ABI's actions? What partnerships are needed?
- What are the purposes of acting on these issues? How will this shape the initiative?
- Is the anticipated scope of the initiative broad enough and still manageable?

4. Clarity of design
- What outcomes are anticipated in the short-, medium- and long-term?
- What actions will be taken to achieve these outcomes?
- How will these actions work to achieve the anticipated outcomes?
- What evidence would be needed to show if they were working as anticipated?
- Can a realistic timeline and set of milestones be determined?

5. Resources
- What resources can the ABI harness / does it need to harness? (e.g. people, time, finance, facilities, existing relationships)
- What resources does the community already have?
- What structures are needed to bring these together?
- How can these be used most efficiently?

6. Sustainability
- How can the ABI be protected against staff changes?
- How can the ABI be protected against the consequences of wider funding cuts?
- What forms of capacity building are needed to sustain the ABI?
- How can feedback loops be created to monitor the ABI's progress?
- How can flexibility be built into the ABI's design and activities so that they can respond to ongoing feedback?

7. Accountability
- Who is the ABI answerable to?
- If not part of existing arrangements (e.g. if set up as a limited company), how will it be made subject to external scrutiny?
- On what bases will the performance of ABIs be assessed?
- What issues do partners share responsibility for?