Elephants Trail

Evolution Plan for 2022-2023

"When there's an elephant in the room, introduce them."

1.   The challenge

Some neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester face major problems. All of the money and talking over a long time has changed little for people who have the hardest lives. They often feel ignored, powerless and a long way from where decisions are made.

Professionals can find it very difficult to prevent or tackle severe and multiple disadvantage. This is when clusters of problems happen in people's lives. It is hard to change complex systems. How organisations work, often doing things to or for people, can make things worse.

The most difficult issues are often avoided. These 'elephants in the room' include inequalities in power and wealth.

Most of the time, people try to find ways to overcome these challenges alone. Sometimes they have blamed each other for these challenges. We think blaming each other makes things worse.

People with lived experience and professionals need to work together. They each have different skills, knowledge and experience to offer.

2.   The Elephants Trail

The scale and complexity of the challenge demands that we really try something different and experiment.

The Elephants Trail has built on the learning from the Elephants project in Greater Manchester in 2016-2017. It is about people with lived experience and professionals working equally together to solve the challenges that people face. This is sometimes called 'co-production'.

With each small team of local people and professionals, we aim to create 'Elephants spaces'. These are spaces where everyone feels relaxed and informal. They can then leave their 'labels' at the door.

March 2022

The Elephants Trail starts with exploring and building **relationships** between people from very different backgrounds and life experiences. Getting to know each other enables discussion about power, wealth, inequality and the most difficult issues.

Each team then shares influence and makes **decisions** together. This includes deciding what they will work on. The Elephants Trail makes use of approaches such as Deep Democracy. This means 'leaning' into situations where there are differences and tensions and saying what needs to be said, rather than using power, wealth and rank.

The teams actively **work together for practical change** on issues that directly affect the lives of people with the hardest lives. The aim is to create long-term solutions in which people believe and trust.

Along the way, the teams **learn** together about not only the issue and each other, but also how to work together effectively. Some people have described their Elephants Trail experience as "life changing" and "the best thing that has ever happened to me."

3.   When and where

The Elephants Trail has run from April 2019, with a local focus on practical activity in Bury and in Rochdale.

4.   Partners

The Elephants Trail is a partnership between local people, Creative Inclusion, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Lankelly Chase Foundation, Mama Health and Poverty Partnership, and Unlimited Potential. Our learning partner is Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University.

Greater Manchester is also one of the areas involved in the Place action inquiry, supported by Lankelly Chase Foundation. This inquiry asks: how do we support places to build the desired system behaviours? It aims to support a small number of places to build the desired system behaviours and to support them to make changes to improve the way that those systems function for people who face severe and multiple disadvantage.

As well as Greater Manchester, the Place action inquiry also involves other areas such as: Barking and Dagenham; Birmingham; Gateshead; Oxford; and York.

5. Key principles – Elephants Trail [1]

Everyone has **strengths** that are needed to produce solutions.	• everybody has strengths and weaknesses • everyone has skills, knowledge, experience and other qualities to offer • everyone is needed to produce solutions that work
All types of **power** must be shared, and unequal power addressed.	• it is difficult for either local people or professionals to challenge how things are alone • all types of power must be shared • leadership, support and resources must come from everyone involved • unequal power needs to be recognised and addressed
Good **relationships** are crucial. They need time, respect and trust.	• good relationships are crucial for working together • positive relationships require time, respect and trust • everyone needs to feel safe, valued and wanted • the process must feel fair, open and honest to everyone
Diversity of people is important for high quality thinking.	• diversity of people is important for high quality thinking • the process of working together and the language must make sense to everyone involved • inequalities must be identified and talked about; these might link to age, class, disability, education, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation
There are different types of **knowledge**. Lived experience is valuable.	• there are different ways of "knowing things" and all of them are valuable • first-hand experience is as valuable as professional or academic knowledge • knowledge of what does or does not work in the real world must be recognised and valued
It is important to **test** new ideas. There is no failure, just learning.	• finding ways to reduce disadvantage is difficult and complicated • it is important to test new ideas early on and continue to test them • there is no failure; if things don't work out as expected, make time to learn from this and change what you do

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[1] Working Together to Tackle Disadvantage (Elephants project, November 2017)

6.   Progress to date

In terms of social innovation, the Elephants Trail has been through 'ideas generation' (the original Elephants project), 'proof of concept' (April 2019 to September 2020) and 'development' (October 2020 to September 2021) phases. From October 2021, we have started to move towards 'mainstreaming'.

7.   Practical local activity

In order to create learning that can influence decisions at local and regional levels, both practically and strategically, the Elephants Trail has continued its practical activity with local people and others in both Bury and Rochdale. It has:

1.   continued to develop the 'Elephants spaces' in each locality
2.   facilitated relationships between local people and people from local agencies, including through the use of creative approaches (such as community reporting and legislative theatre / theatre of the oppressed)
3.   clarified the local focuses to work on in each locality, and what changes are most wanted
4.   worked together for practical change on the issues that directly affect the people with the hardest lives

The relationship between the two localities has involved:
• separate, different activity, at different times and places (with no competition)
• some interaction, through practical activity (such as social media and community reporting)
• sharing of opportunities and offers (other than those clearly limited or specific to a locality)

8.   Capturing the learning

The Elephants Trail has captured learning from the practical activity, with a 'feedback loop', in order to have wider influence at both local and regional levels, as well as feeding back to both Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Lankelly Chase Foundation as its funders.

Within the memorandum of understanding for the Elephants Trail (see appendix 1), all participating organisations committed to generate learning at these different levels:
• personal development – participants develop the skills, confidence and networks to benefit both personally and professionally
• policy and practice – through Elephants spaces, participants will seek to generate new solutions to issues of severe and multiple disadvantage

- work systemically to secure change in the systems, structures and cultures that drive disadvantage by demonstrating in practice how pervasive power imbalances can be challenged and addressed
- collaborative leadership with people across organisational boundaries at different levels in the system to co-produce shared learning and solutions
- individual and collective focus on behaviours and values that enable co-production

To ensure change, the Elephants Trail has:
- evaluated the process and outcomes as it goes along – not waiting until the end
- checked what has been achieved against what the project aimed to do
- highlighted things that have not worked and what has been learned from this
- recognised things that were unplanned or unexpected

Ongoing support, including from [Newcastle Business School](#) at Northumbria University, has supported the Elephants Trail project and its participants to document our learning.

The Elephants Trail has also contributed to the ongoing learning of the Greater Manchester Lankelly Chase Learning Community, which has met monthly since February 2021.

9.   Progress and benefits - participants

During learning review sessions in September 2021, the participants in Bury and in Rochdale reflected on their progress with the Elephants Trail. While each person's progress was individual, the key themes that emerged were:

- increased confidence and mental health
- opened up my mind and what is out there in the world
- value of voice and opinions; being valued and listened to
- project provided a focus and something to commit to
- found a real sense of purpose
- learning with others about social issues
- working in a team of like-minded/experienced people, achieving goals together; no longer battling alone, contributing to something bigger
- making or finding new supportive networks
- belief that things (including systems) can change
- developed new skills, knowledge and creativity
- belief in being able to work again and develop a career
- set up new projects, groups and organisations
- understanding collaboration and co-production

10. COVID-19 situation

The COVID-19 situation affected everyone in society, although in very different ways. It has emphasised our responsibilities to each other. This has been a time when change is possible, necessary and desirable. There remains an opportunity for bold collective action to make things significantly better in the future, socially, economically and politically.

For the Elephants Trail project, the COVID-19 situation both:
* presented challenges – especially for engaging local people and communities, and for practical activity by and with them (with some lack of energy, people being 'Zoomed out', etc.); and limited engagement and buy-in from some professionals and agencies
* created opportunities – with existing inequalities exposed to wider social, political and media perspectives, and a 'window of opportunity' to influence longer-term strategy and planning

11. Our core messages/assertions – 'let's talk Elephants'

We have a social innovation approach to offer that is recognised and can create solutions to significant challenges faced both by local communities and by agencies.

We have a clear and consistent narrative of what we have got out, relevant for dispersal to different audiences. We distinguish between learning about:
* system change (the 'what')[2]
* co-production with local people and communities (the 'how')

We recognise that there is a distinction between what local people and communities have agency to decide and do themselves, and the strategic or political decisions that organisations can make at a structural level, which local people and agencies can seek to influence.

From learning by participants and the core group, these are the core messages/assertions from the Elephants Trail that we want to promote in all future communications and campaigns, around which narratives can be framed and developed effectively.

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[2] Our focus is on system change, not people fitting within or assimilating into the existing system, or just improving existing services.

Core message	Outline narrative
System change (the 'what'):[3]	
What can communities do themselves?	
• organise	gather and share local strengths (knowledge, skills, awareness); come together to take action on things that matter to communities; set up groups, organisations, enterprises
• take collaborative action	create trusted responses and social/emotional support that the usual services cannot meet; mutual aid – practical support, sharing resources, etc. (including in crises); community-run activities that improve well-being; build wealth – including through social/mutual ownership of assets
• spread with others	reach out and build trust with people 'not on the radar' or who do not want to engage with services and organisations; work alongside young people ('young Elephants'); spread the Elephants Trail approach through spaces in other localities
What needs to be done at a system level?	
• focus on prevention, rather than reaction	break the cycles that lead to disadvantage, poverty and trauma; help and support people long before they get into trouble and hit rock bottom; support people to develop life/social skills and political and economic literacy
• increase power held by communities[4]	provide flexibility, and shift/share control, resources and budgets to communities, so that they can do more for themselves
• build social/mutual ownership of wealth by communities	redistribute wealth socially to change people's economic status; so that local investment is realised, and communities generate income within and outside 'the system'; shift procurement and funding towards communities, away from extractive outsiders who 'helicopter'/'parachute' in and out to produce 'outputs'; with more high-quality jobs for local people
• work mutually alongside communities	reach out, see in person the reality on the ground for diverse people, beyond the data and the 'gatekeepers'; develop a culture of genuine co-production with local people; have real transparency and accountability at all levels about whether or not things are changing, and whether or not people feel more control and influence

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[3] This applies equally to the public, private and VCSE sectors.
[4] Power is not finite, so this does not necessarily mean a reduction in power held by professionals/agencies.

Co-production with local people and communities (the 'how'):[5]	
• value and invest in people and communities	appreciate the value and *strengths* already in communities (skills, *knowledges* and experience) – turn disadvantage into an advantage (lived experience); encourage *diversity* of backgrounds, life experiences and mindsets for high-quality thinking; invest time, energy and resources, and recognise that this needs to be different for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage; engage people throughout the process to develop ownership; ensure practical benefits for participants (such as personal development, life opportunities, and payment for specific tasks/roles)
• focus on a clear purpose – change	start with a very clear core purpose (system change, not fitting within the system or a 'sticking plaster' approach); reach consensus on direction, focus and priorities; work together and collaborate for practical change; be honest about *power*, how the system works and how to 'play the game'; *power* is critical - increase the power held by local people and communities, so they have more agency to do things together for themselves, and can lead on their own issues, without having to wait for others
• create a supportive environment and trusting relationships	create a gentle, caring, thoughtful environment/space in which people feel safe and trusted, and can be authentic and understood; from the start, enable the *diversity* of people to get to know each other, and nurture and value trusting *relationships* between them; early on, establish ground rules, including how conflicts or inappropriate behaviour will be addressed; encourage and support honest speaking, deep listening and structured team building; create and facilitate spaces for people to grow, develop and act together; connect, engage directly and build *relationships* with professionals and agencies for mutual understanding, co-production and collaboration
• support and share action learning	accept the complexity and let it run; exchange of ideas in a democratic environment; prioritise *relationships* and principles (not performance indicators and outputs) to enable *testing*, experimentation and capture of learning (rather than 'success' or 'failure'); enable local people to contribute their narratives and *knowledges* on their own terms, while learning how to present effectively to 'the system'

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[5] These core messages sit alongside our six key principles for co-production: strengths; power; relationships; diversity; knowledges; and testing.

12. Our purpose - system change

From October 2021, the Elephants Trail project has started to evolve so that it cuts across all parts of the system in Greater Manchester and its localities, in order to change systems that perpetuate severe and multiple disadvantage in Greater Manchester, complementing the wider work of [Greater Manchester Systems Changers](#).

We want a world of justice, compassion and liberation. In order to do this, the Elephants Trail will continue to work to prevent and tackle systems that create injustice, indifference and oppression.

By **systems**, we specifically mean how decisions are made, by whom, in whose interests, with whose evidence and with what values and assumptions. They include societal, economic and institutional systems.

The Elephants Trail therefore focuses on power and wealth, culture, mindsets and relationships, all of which are key to understanding the dynamics of complex interlocking systems.

Our aim is not just to challenge existing systems, but to create spaces for very different systems to be created. We support action that reveals → dismantles → reimagines → heals → renews systems.

Our goal is the creation of systems of justice, compassion and liberation that enable people subject to marginalisation to live with dignity and opportunity in supportive communities.

13. Our aims and indicators for success: system behaviours

We want to spread both:
- system change (the 'what') in order to prevent and tackle severe and multiple disadvantage
- co-production with local people and communities (the 'how') - applying the key principles

If successful, we will see:
- more Elephants spaces across Greater Manchester
- the use of co-production with local people and communities spread across Greater Manchester
- more communities in Greater Manchester being proactive
- the Elephants Trail process becoming sustainable
- policy and services for the public that devolve power to local people and communities

To achieve these, we must address and pay constant attention to imbalances of power and wealth, and also recognise who is missing.

Our indicators for what success would look like are set out as nine '**system behaviours**'. [6]

These core behaviours support thriving communities and systems. Our learning suggests that:
- they need to be present and continually promoted in every part of a system
- some may be easier to cultivate than others
- they may not all exist at the same time, and some surely must be missing

The nine 'system behaviours' are about perspective, participation and power. These are detailed overleaf.

14. Evolution and sustainability

In order to fulfil the original aims of the Elephants Trail, we agreed to evolve the project from October 2021. This is not an extension or a continuation, but a conscious intent to develop in order to share our learning, to spread the approach and to affect wider influence for system change, not only on preventing and tackling severe and multiple disadvantage but also on genuine co-production with local people and communities.

Within the memorandum of understanding for the Elephants Trail (see appendix 1), all participating organisations agreed that the project has three lines of enquiry:
- in neighbourhoods
- to reflect and share learning
- for strategy and policy

To reflect this, we are keeping with our three key focuses:
- **local activity** – ensuring that developments in Bury and in Rochdale are well grounded and sustainable without the Elephants Trail
- **sharing the learning** – drawing together all of the learning that has been done, and presenting it openly for others to use
- **wider influence** – spreading the influence of the Elephants Trail across communities and with organisations/systems, and facilitating links between the two

This requires appropriate structures and leadership to support and develop the ideas that have emerged.

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[6] https://lankellychase.org.uk/system-behaviours/

System behaviours – indicators for success

PERSPECTIVE	
• We are part of an interconnected whole	We are connected to each other and the planet in a web of life. Our individual actions are part of a hive of activity that is made up of the contributions of many people.
• People share a vision	People gather around a shared vision and appreciate each other's views. We all want the whole system to work, even if we know we can't control it.
• People are resourceful with many strengths	We make up an intelligent network of people who have both strengths and weaknesses, and continually learn and grow with each other.
PARTICIPATION	
• Open, trusting relationships enable effective dialogue	People feel safe to ask the difficult questions, voice agreements and disagreements and deal with the conflicts and uncomfortable emotions that may surface.
• Leadership is collaborative and promoted at every level	There are different styles of leadership which call on a variety of skills and strengths. Everyone has the potential to be a leader wherever we are in a system.
• Feedback and collective learning inform adaptation	The understanding of a 'problem', actions taken to 'change it' and what we learn from this interaction continuously inform each other. A culture of experimentation exists where we embrace failure for what it will teach us.
POWER	
• Power is shared, and equality of voice actively promoted	We can all play our fullest role in creating an effective system. Unequal distribution of power, including structural inequality, is continually challenged.
• Decision-making is devolved	People closest to a complex situation are free to use their initiative to engage and take responsibility for their own change.
• Accountability is mutual	People are encouraged to be accountable to each other and our actions without fear of failure and judgement. (System improvements are driven by accountability to the people being 'served.')

We want to be alongside local people as they try to develop agency and autonomy to bring about change themselves. The Elephants Trail will continue to embrace the existing participants from Bury and Rochdale, so that their skills, knowledge and experience can help them to fulfil their individual and collective potential.

15. Local activity

From the fertile soil that has been created by local people with the Elephants Trail in Bury and in Rochdale, we want to ensure that the developments made are sustainable, optimising the longer-term benefits both for the participants and for local communities.

The Elephants Trail will:
1. support people to be able to do their own work, with a sustainable income (if wanted), including through personal development and mentoring
2. seek out concrete examples and learning materials from local activity – including both what local people have agency to do themselves, and what needs engagement with 'the system'
3. clarify with agencies in Bury and in Rochdale about next steps to sustain the approach locally, and their insights from experience so far
4. involve people in the development and roll-out of the Elephants Trail – sharing the learning, and wider influence – as desired

This has been informed with participants through a joint event between the Bury and Rochdale groups, including:
- shared decision-making to create a timed action plan (including next steps in both localities, and an eventual transition from the Elephants Trail project); and exploring possible involvement in wider influence / system change in the morning
  - considering appropriate local opportunities and possible resources, such as the homelessness partnership and Public Health in Bury, and Changing Futures in Rochdale
- celebration (perhaps including workshops on different methods used)

16. Sharing the learning [7]

We will draw together all of the learning that has been done from the Elephants Trail, and present it openly for others to use.

There is learning to share about both:
- system change (the 'what')[8]

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[7] The summary learning from the participants and from the core group is in appendices 2 and 3 respectively.
[8] Our focus is on system change, not people fitting within or assimilating into the existing system, or just improving existing services.

- co-production with local people and communities (the 'how')

We want to **spread the word, our story, and our learning**, including with:
- other communities in Greater Manchester
- organisations in the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector
- organisations in the statutory sector
- mission-driven organisations in the private sector
- the networks supported by Lankelly Chase Foundation, such as the Greater Manchester Lankelly Chase learning community, and the other places involved in the in the Place action inquiry

Mainstreaming means building wider influence within Greater Manchester and beyond, in the public, VCSE and (mission-driven) private sectors, as well as with politicians, the media, 'think tanks', and campaigns, and also the other projects and activities being funded by the Lankelly Chase Foundation in Greater Manchester and beyond.

Framed as a **call for action**, with consistent messaging, the Elephants Trail will:
1. create a story of the Elephants Trail journey (of everyone involved, and reflecting their personalities) that appeals to people and draws on the wisdom produced, for optimum effect
2. gather together all the existing materials from the project
3. arrange the materials and the list of core messages/assertions, with values intertwined, so that people (at every level) can participate in actively testing the approach in practice
4. present our learning and the evidence/materials in one space (a webspace, on the Greater Manchester Systems Changers website, with other media driving people towards it), for background, illustrations and deeper understanding – framed/linked to framework of key messages and principles
5. present the story of and learning from the project in a variety of formats appropriate for different audiences, both physically and virtually, framed as a call for action, so that the learning is used to optimum effect; this might be written, printed, digital, audio, video, launch, presentations, showcasing, events, social media, etc.

The Elephants Trail will also spread its learning **through the media, 'think tanks' and campaigns**, using its key messages as a 'call to action', illustrated by practical achievements. It will create a communications plan, including:
- map our networks of allies and spheres of influence who could be advocates with different audiences
- create for different audiences thought-provoking and fun content (both practical activity and policy making)

- promote through the media, including the Elephants Trail's film as part of the [Made in Britain](#) project as a platform, and ongoing work with [The Guardian Foundation](#)
- link into campaigns and movements such as the Greater Manchester Movement for Community Power and [Greater Manchester Systems Changers](#) (might we co-create a vision for Greater Manchester? How can we best articulate what 'the system' should look like, and what is the best framing of this?)

This activity might include strategic use of novel, dramatic, unorthodox and non-institutionalised forms of expression to shape public opinion and pressure those in authority.

17. Wider influence

In terms of social innovation, the Elephants Trail is now moving into its 'mainstreaming' phase, with a longer-term view to having wider and mainstream impact. For some people, the Elephants Trail is now 'the benchmark' for co-production in Greater Manchester.

We will consider and describe **the Elephants Trail as an approach**, rather than as a project. This means supporting others to adopt an Elephants-style approach, as well as us doing work directly.

The means spreading the influence of the Elephants Trail across communities and with organisations/systems, and facilitating links between the two. This includes opening up the policy environment and influencing policy-makers.

This is to impact on:
- power, wealth and system change for effective, long-term approaches to preventing and tackling severe and multiple disadvantage
- co-production with local people and communities

With clear framing and narrative/discourse, the Elephants Trail will honestly spread its influence for system change, including legitimate demands on holders of power and wealth.

This will be done using a repertoire of actions, **with two primary audiences**:

1. in unity **with local communities** or existing groups (collectives of people in communities with a shared interest, but not 'formally established' groups) across Greater Manchester:
   - map our networks of allies and spheres of influence who could be advocates with different audiences (taking particular account of diversity and inclusion)

- invest in participants with lived experience to engage with local people from other places to create Elephants spaces of their own
- sharing the Elephants Trail approach with communities in boroughs beyond Bury and Rochdale – including both what local people have agency to do themselves, and what requires engagement with 'the system'
- linking with other projects and activities in Greater Manchester funded by the Lankelly Chase Foundation, through Greater Manchester Systems Changers, such as the people and groups supported by the Spaces fund and the Greater Manchester Lankelly Chase learning community

2. **with 'the system'** – agencies, professionals, politicians, policy-makers, funders – and people in the middle tier – across Greater Manchester for development of public policy for wider impact (not just for public services, but also for economic development, infrastructure, etc.)
   - map our networks of allies and spheres of influence (local and city-region) who could be advocates with different audiences
   - identify issues and opportunities with need and room for system change
   - take account of any 'windows of opportunity' within 'the system', including any programmes to which the Elephants Trail approach could add value, and which are consistent with Elephants principles
   - building on key strategic opportunities, such as the Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission and Build Back Fairer in Greater Manchester: health equity and dignified lives (Institute of Health Equity)
   - raising profile and influence by showcasing and giving presentations, highlighting power, wealth and agency, with clear asks, at key meetings and forums, including every governance group at Greater Manchester Combined Authority (such as the Inequalities Board), and perhaps Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership, etc.
   - inputting into the development of the new Greater Manchester Strategy
   - engaging with and influencing current and forthcoming practical developments, such as Changing Futures (especially with the four participating boroughs to invest in people rather than a 'service' response), Homelessness Prevention Strategy action planning, and GoodLivesGM (the Greater Manchester Social Innovation Network)
   - sharing and promoting the Elephants Trail approach with agencies in boroughs beyond Bury and Rochdale – what can be created and achieved with a relatively small investment in creating new spaces for co-production and system change
   - create a resource for transformative co-production that can be bought in by agencies for learning and development

This can be done alongside existing participants who are interested. This should involve assessment of existing skills/talents to facilitate the Elephants Trail process as it spreads, and any needs for upskilling.

We will create a 'package' to enable spreading of the Elephants Trail approach, wherever invited. This is so anyone in Greater Manchester can pick up the approach themselves, supported by guidance, coaching and excellent facilitation, as a 'critical friend'. The package should be clear about:
- the approach
- creating spaces and environments
- what we mean by co-production (and the terms of engagement)
- identifying Elephants triggering factors
- describing the necessary conditions (including resources) that the approach entails
- the realities of how challenging this approach: the likely challenges, including around the key issues of power and wealth
- how to hold and resolve conflict well
- the financial costs

We will go to where the energy is. We will seek out people who might be interested and run sessions to sow the first seeds.

18. Governance

As roles might need to change to take things forward and to spread the Elephants Trail to other communities and neighbourhoods, **the governance of the Elephants Trail (including membership, diversity and capacity of the core group) needs to be reviewed**, keeping in mind the three main focuses for the evolution of the Elephants Trail project, and the strengths (skills, knowledge and experience) to maximise its impact.

This will be done through an independently facilitated process to explore what is the governance of Elephants Trial. This will include evaluation of what has worked well and what has not.

Existing arrangements will be extended while the new governance arrangements emerge to take things forward. This will require a period of transition from current to the new governance arrangements.

The core group or equivalent should have clear aims and objectives, figuring out **what key roles and skills are needed**, and then who to bring in.

19. Resources and funding

We thank [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) and the [Lankelly Chase Foundation](#) for their support and funding for the Elephants Trail.

There is a budget heading of £100,000 in [Lankelly Chase Foundation](#)'s budget for Greater Manchester for 2022-2023, and potentially a budget for 'seed funding' next year (£50,000 GM System Changers and £50,000 Greater Manchester Combined Authority) for the subsequent year.

There are other sources of funding merging (such as from Rochdale Council (£60,000 over three years) and possibly Oldham Council), but we need to be very explicit about what any next phase might involve.

Resources need to be allocated appropriately between the three main focuses (local activity, sharing the learning, and wider influence), as well as project management and support.

Appendix 1

Elephants Trail - Memorandum of Understanding

This MoU is an agreement made between these parties:
- Centre for Local Economic Strategies
- Creative Inclusion
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Lankelly Chase Foundation
- Petrus Community
- Shelter
- Unlimited Potential

1. SUBJECT

1.1. This memorandum is a description of how we commit to work together in the Elephants Trail project.
1.2. It has been created as a clear statement of how we will relate to each other towards the best possible outcomes from the project.
1.3. It will last for the whole period of the Elephants Trail project.

2. PRINCIPLES

We will work together in line with these principles for co-production:

2.1. Strengths
- Everybody has strengths and weaknesses.
- Everyone has skills, knowledge, experience and other qualities to offer.
- Everyone is needed to produce solutions that work.

2.2. Power
- It is difficult for either local people or professionals to challenge how things are alone.
- All types of power must be shared.
- Leadership, support and resources must come from everyone involved.
- Unequal power needs to be recognised and addressed.

2.3. Relationships
- Good relationships are crucial for working together.
- Positive relationships require time, respect and trust.
- Everyone needs to feel safe, valued and wanted.
- The process must feel fair, open and honest to everyone.

2.4. Diversity
- Diversity of people is important for high quality thinking.

- The process of working together and the language must make sense to everyone involved.
- Inequalities must be identified and talked about. These might link to age, class, disability, education, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.

2.5. Knowledge
- There are different ways of 'knowing things' and all of them are valuable.
- First-hand experience is as valuable as professional or academic knowledge.
- Knowledge of what does or does not work in the real world must be recognised and valued.

2.6. Testing
- Finding ways to reduce disadvantage is difficult and complicated.
- It is important to test new ideas early on and continue to test them.
- There is no failure. If things don't work out as expected make time to learn from this and change what you do.

3. COMMITMENTS

The Elephants Trail project has three lines of enquiry:
- in neighbourhoods
- for strategy and policy
- to reflect and share learning

We commit to:
3.1. Build on the learning from the Elephants project (2016-2017).
3.2. Expand the reach of the project to engage more participants, in several neighbourhoods.
3.3. Embed closer engagement with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority from the outset of the programme to increase the potential for the project to influence system change in Greater Manchester.
3.4. Meet regularly as a core group, including to make decisions about: project design; project delivery; project learning; how learning is shared; and how change/impact is captured and evaluated.
3.5. Generate learning at these different levels:
- personal development – participants develop the skills, confidence and networks to benefit both personally and professionally
- policy and practice – through Elephants spaces, participants will seek to generate new solutions to issues of severe and multiple disadvantage
- work systemically to secure change in the systems, structures and cultures that drive disadvantage by demonstrating in practice how

pervasive imbalances in power and wealth can be challenged and addressed
  - collaborative leadership with people across organisational boundaries at different levels in the system to co-produce shared learning and solutions
  - individual and collective focus on behaviours and values that enable co-production

3.6. Share knowledge and learning with others in an open source way.

4. POLICIES

4.1. For simplicity, the project will work to the policies and procedures of Unlimited Potential.

5. AMENDMENTS

5.1. This Memorandum of Understanding may be amended if all parties in the Elephants Trail core group agree to the amendment.
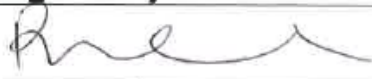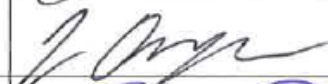
6. BREACHES

6.1. If any party does not fulfil its commitments, in the first instance, efforts will be made to resolve the issue.

6.2. If resolution is not possible, or the breach is serious, the matter will be dealt with under the relevant contract.

The parties affirm to know, understand and agree to all articles of this memorandum, as negotiated together.

7. SIGNATURES

Party	Signatory	Date
Centre for Local Economic Strategies		13/9/19.
Creative Inclusion	M Kidd	15/9/19
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	Jacob C. Bdm.	15/9/19.
Lankelly Chase Foundation		15/9/19
Petrus Community	C. Woodward	15/10/19
Shelter		15/10/19
Unlimited Potential	Chris Dobbs	15/10/19

Appendix 2

Learning from participants – September 2021

Three learning sessions were held on 7, 8 and 9 September (two in person, one online) with 13 participants from Bury and Rochdale.

Aims:
- to discover people's progress through the Elephants Trail
- to explore people's views on the key messages
- to identify people's interest in involvement in the evolution of the Elephants Trail

This appendix summarises the key themes and messages that emerged.

1. What has been **your progress** with the Elephants Trail?

While each person's progress was individual, key themes were:
- increased confidence and mental health
- opened up my mind and what is out there in the world
- value of voice and opinions; being valued and listened to
- project provided a focus and something to commit to
- found a real sense of purpose
- learning with others about social issues
- working in a team of like-minded/experienced people, achieving goals together; no longer battling alone, contributing to something bigger
- making or finding new supportive networks
- belief that things (including systems) can change
- developed new skills, knowledge and creativity
- belief in being able to work again and develop a career
- set up new projects, groups and organisations
- understanding collaboration and co-production

2. Our learning about **how** to do things:

People reflected on their experience with the Elephants Trail.

what has worked well? [in order of mentions]

- coming together with a community focus, but to collaborate on improving and changing systems to tackle social inequity
- leadership – friendly, supportive, encouraging, flexible; providing choice without pressure
- environment / vibe – gentle, caring, thoughtful; diverse group of peers
- learning – exchange of ideas in a democratic environment, and training opportunities

- meeting regularly at a set day/time, including online during the COVID-19 pandemic
- encouragement and support to speak honestly and being listened to when you do
- being valued: personal development, investment and one-to-one support for future steps in life, independent of the Elephants Trail
- meeting and building relationships with policy-makers and professionals
- support in making things happen and setting up groups and organisations

<u>what should we do differently?</u> [in order of mentions]

"Elephants Trail was an experiment, and it certainly was! But I'm still very grateful for everything, I'm definitely wiser around how to try and work with people!"

- one-to-one introduction, explanation of the Elephants Trail and clear expectations before joining
- clear explanation/training of co-production, its principles, implications and roles at first meet-up, develop clear aims and objectives early on, with structure of what is and is not possible
- more structured team building at the start, getting to know each other's skills, backgrounds, characters and support needs
- establish ground rules early on, together with deep democracy and deep listening training
- have clear plan/arrangements in place to resolve any conflicts or inappropriate behaviour, and implement it swiftly to address issues
- clarity on what work is paid and unpaid, ensuring that this is fair for all
- regular one-to-one reviews with participants for updates, feedback, support and dealing with any concerns or personal difficulties
- regular engagement with agencies on co-production and the project, in order to build bridges and understanding
- clarity about roles and responsibilities of participants
- achieve consensus on direction, focus and priorities more effectively
- greater racial and other diversity

3. What are the key issues to tackle disadvantage?

<u>what can communities do themselves?</u> [in order of mentions]

- coming together collectively to collaborate and take action with community power around things that matter to communities
- reaching out and building trust with people 'not on the radar' or who do not want to engage with services and statutory organisations
- mutual aid – practical support, sharing resources, etc., including quickly around crisis issues
- casual, informal social/emotional support when needed

- setting up community groups, organisations and enterprises
- seed mini-Elephants spaces in other localities and with young people (normal part of schooling, baby Elephants)
- community regeneration – including through community ownership, asset transfer, etc.
- gathering and sharing local knowledge, skills and awareness
- creating trusted responses that the usual services do not or cannot meet
- community-run activities that improve well-being

what needs to be done at a system level? [in order of mentions]

- reach out, be on the ground, see reality, listen beyond the 'gatekeepers' to diverse people; don't rely mainly on data
- shift funding from helicoptering outsiders and business that makes money out of disadvantage to funding local communities to take action themselves
- break the cycles that lead to disadvantage, perpetual poverty and trauma; support people to adjust and build life/social skills
- more routes and incentives for people with lived experience into employment (especially paying the real Living Wage or above)
- help and support people long before they get into trouble and hit rock bottom
- work mutually alongside communities, with transparency at all levels
- support new people from different cultures to acclimatise and host communities to be more accepting
- more local growing of food and more selling of healthy food through community co-operatives and social businesses
- more safe, homely, social housing
- more paid co-production by local people (an 'Elephant' in each borough?)
- more activities for a sense of purpose and well-being

Appendix 3

Learning from the core group – March-August 2021

This appendix summarises the key themes and messages that emerged from discussions at four core group sessions held on 2 March, 25 May, 22 June and 17 August, 2021.

1. Our learning about **how** to do things:

	Key principle
• Turn disadvantage into an advantage: value the skills, knowledge and experience of local people and invest in them, how they can help each other, and what they can own, rather than a (procurement) system that favours external consultants parachuting in and out to produce 'outputs'. Pay people for specific tasks/roles.	strengths
• Appreciate the value already in communities; invest time, energy and resources into building trust and relationships, and recognise that this investment needs to be different for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage.	relationships
• Prioritise relationships and principles (not performance indicators and outputs), to enable testing, experimentation and capture of learning (rather than 'success' or 'failure').	testing
• Encourage diversity of backgrounds and mindsets in order to have high-quality thinking. (Both moderates and radicals are needed).	diversity / knowledges
• Create environments in which people feel safe and trusted, can be authentic and understood, have the resources to share their skills and knowledge, and the conditions to grow and develop.	relationships
• At the start, be clear about the core purpose, and provide time to get to know each other and to create trusting relationships, with emotional support.	relationships
• Engage with people all the way through the process (including creative activities and difficult conversations), building confidence and skills, developing ownership and knowing when to get out of the way.	power
• Be honest about power, how the system works (including both enablers and barriers – organisational interests, etc.), and how to 'play the game'.	power

• Change the dynamic: engage directly and equally with key professionals from funding/strategic agencies (rather than middle people), in order to help understanding, learning and enabling.	knowledges
• Support and resource collective/mutual action to realise its power.	power
• Enable local people to contribute their narratives on their own terms, while learning how to present effectively to 'the system'.	knowledges

2. **What** are the key issues to tackle disadvantage?

We recognise that there is a distinction between what local people and communities have agency to decide and do themselves, and the strategic or political decisions that organisations can make at a structural level, which local people and agencies can seek to influence.

<u>what needs to be done at a system level?</u>

- Focus on changing the system, not assimilating into it or just improving existing services.
- Promote political and economic literacy amongst local people.
- Increase the power held by communities, so that they have more agency to do things for themselves. (This does not necessarily mean a reduction in power held by professionals and agencies).
- Wealth underlies power: it is fundamental to change people's economic status. Increase ownership, so that wealth is redistributed, local investment is realised, and income can be generated within and outside 'the system'.