MEAM

Impact of MEAM support

November 2021

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1   Introduction

This report presents research conducted by Cordis Bright in September 2021 into the nature and impact of support that the MEAM team is providing to local areas involved in the MEAM Approach network.

1.1   Research questions

The research investigated:

- The types of support MEAM provides to local areas

- Which types of support are most valued

- The impact this support is having on the people leading work in MEAM Approach areas, on local MEAM Approach partnerships, and on the wider system

- Key strengths and areas for development in the support offered by MEAM

- Whether the support provided is unique and is addressing a gap for local areas or whether similar support could be accessed elsewhere.

1.2   Methodology

The data to inform this report was gathered through consultation with local leads in areas within the MEAM Approach network. This involved:

- **Qualitative interview consultation with 11 local leads** covering 11 MEAM Approach areas. These interviews were co-produced with three experts by experience.

- **An online survey completed by 19 local leads**, covering 20 MEAM Approach areas.[1]

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[1] Some participants took part in both the survey and an interview. In total, we collected data from 23 MEAM Approach areas. Please see Figure 1 in the Appendix for more detail. One local lead who completed an interview and survey is the lead for two neighbouring areas in the MEAM Approach network. In addition, the interview relating to one local area involved two people who share the lead role.

2   Key findings

This research found that local leads in MEAM Approach areas highly value the support currently provided by MEAM. They consider it to be hugely impactful across their work, both on a personal level and in terms of effecting change in their local area. Many of those interviewed had nothing negative to say about the MEAM support and felt that it had been vital to them in their role.

A key impact of MEAM support was the improved focus, motivation and energy it brings to local areas in their work improving services and outcomes for people facing multiple disadvantage. This was one of the most important aspects of the support for local leads. In addition, the support has allowed local areas to build and strengthen partnerships at both an operational and a strategic level. This increases multi-agency working and buy-in to the MEAM Approach.

Local leads also felt supported to maintain or renew their focus on a systems change approach, noting that MEAM's strategic focus on systems and its national vantage point was helping them to drive broader changes within their local areas. In addition, they believed that MEAM support helped to improve the delivery and coordination of services for people facing multiple disadvantage, and to improve co-production.

Local leads emphasised that the support provided by MEAM was bespoke and tailored to each area. However, the support received by most local areas can be categorised into the following four types: 'critical friend' support, partnership support, systems change support, and training and learning. The critical friend support was particularly highly valued by local areas.

The key strengths of MEAM support highlighted in this research were:

- MEAM's national influence and reputation, and the impact this had on local partnerships' ability to have influence in their area.

- The depth and breadth of the expertise within the MEAM team, which provided reassurance, support and problem-solving for local areas.

- The external and national viewpoint offered, which allowed local areas to maintain clarity in their own work and to locate it within a national context to gain perspective.

- The hands-on, non-prescriptive, bespoke approach to support that was available when people needed it, but was not demanding or overbearing for local areas.

Local leads indicated that they would appreciate further support from MEAM in some of the key areas in which they already offer support, particularly around systems thinking, strategic work and networking. A small number of areas also suggested they would like additional support with data collection and making effective use of data.

In addition, it may be helpful for MEAM to develop ways to codify their support offer or provide more of a 'menu' of support to local areas. This might help local areas who are already working with MEAM to better understand and make use of the resources and expertise available to them. It may also help MEAM in recruiting new local areas to the network or in articulating their added value to potential funders.[2]

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[2] During the course of this research MEAM has been revising its support offer for the next phase of the work, with a focus on network, intervention and workforce support activities. A document outlining the support offer has been shared with local areas.

3   Key types of MEAM support and their impact

MEAM provides a wide variety of support to local areas, which was highlighted by local leads in both survey and interview responses. For example, in survey responses about the type of support provided, all local areas (n=19) indicated that they receive at least four different types of support with one in five areas receiving all 13 different types of support included in the survey (see Figure 3 in Appendix B for more detail). Similarly, interview respondents highlighted a variety of different ways in which their local area is supported by MEAM.

MEAM support is bespoke to local areas and its tailored nature can sometimes make it hard to articulate the specifics of support in each area. However, the different elements of support which MEAM offers usually fall into one of four categories:

- **Critical friend support** including one-to-one meetings, providing impartial advice from a national perspective and outside of local dynamics, and guidance on locality-specific agendas.

- **Partnership support** including facilitating multi-agency partnerships within the local area and helping to establish high-level strategic groups.

- **Systems change support** including strategic support to think systemically and to identify and act on systems change priorities, including improved co-production.

- **Training and sharing learning** including establishing links between different local areas in the MEAM Approach network, facilitating networking events across areas – such as local lead or practitioner forums – and upskilling staff in individual areas through training.

This section provides an overview of the support received by areas, and presents findings around the impact of the different types of support for local leads and the local areas in which they work.

3.1   'Critical friend' support

3.1.1   Nature of support

The critical friend support from MEAM partnerships managers was the most highly valued and most widely received support among local leads interviewed for this research. One-to-one and critical friend support was also the most frequently-identified type of support by survey respondents; all local areas who responded to the survey (n=19) reported that they received this support.

This support was provided on a flexible, one-to-one basis for local leads, and also on a more general level in the area, such as by attending strategic board meetings.

3.1.2 Value and impact

> **Survey findings**
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> All local leads who replied to our survey (n=19) reported that MEAM support helped them in their role as local lead for the MEAM Approach work.

Interviewed local leads reported that the critical friend support is particularly important in enabling them to maintain focus and tackle problems, and in sustaining their motivation in an often challenging policy, funding and practice environment.

As this support is so highly valued and is mainly provided by MEAM partnerships managers it is very important for MEAM to ensure that local areas have consistent access to a partnerships manager.

Improved focus and problem-solving

Critical friend support was valued by local leads on both a practical and emotional level. The support allowed them to tackle issues and identify areas for development, which helped them to achieve and maintain a sense of focus and direction in their work:

> *"They hold us to account, take us back to basics and back to our local plan. They help us focus on co-production."*

This support encouraged local leads to broaden their horizons, leading to a more strategic, wider-ranging approach:

> *"I would have had my head down in rough sleeping. Now I have my head up, I take on projects. It has led to concrete, tangible projects and changes."*

Those interviewed also emphasised the value of working in partnership with MEAM, which allowed local areas to maintain their independence and still feel in control.

Maintaining motivation and hope

> *"[My PM] is an invaluable ally."*

On an emotional level, local leads also valued being able to share their frustrations with someone who understood, and to feel supported in the difficulties of their work on both "*a therapeutic and a practical level*". They also felt energised by the positive approach inherent in the one-to-one support from MEAM. Many felt that this was key in helping them maintain their motivation and positivity, and to keep pushing to effect change:

> *"It creates a positive, systems change vibe, rather than blamey, moany, 'locked into current system' feeling. That was most useful to me."*

This was particularly important to interviewees as they often felt like they were one of the key agents pushing for change locally, and that they were doing this in a challenging environment:

> *"It makes me feel less alone in the work I'm doing – sometimes I feel out on a limb when I'm pushing boundaries or pushing systems change when lots of people want to return to business as usual."*

3.2 Partnership support

3.2.1 Nature of support

All local leads we interviewed identified support with building partnerships as another key aspect of the MEAM support. This support took the form of:

- Facilitating partnership meetings and multi-agency sessions with organisations in the local area.

- Helping local areas to develop strategic-level partnerships.

- Sharing knowledge and experience of different sectors.

This was reflected in the survey findings; 84% of local areas which responded (n=19) said they received MEAM support to build partnerships or relationships in their local area.

3.2.2 Value and impact

Interviewed local leads agreed on the valuable impact of partnership support. They noted that the focus from MEAM on both operational and strategic levels of partnership development has led to stronger partnerships within their local areas and more effective structures for multi-agency working. MEAM's involvement also lent gravitas and clout to the work, which resulted in increased buy-in to the MEAM Approach and to partnership working in the area.

Survey findings

All local leads who responded to our survey (n=19) felt that partnership and other support from MEAM helped them build relationships and partnerships in their local area in order to improve support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Stronger partnerships within the local area

There was consensus from local leads that support from MEAM had helped create new and stronger partnerships within their local areas. Without the support from MEAM, many local leads felt that they would have struggled to form partnerships in their area and that services would have continued to work in silos. Support and guidance from MEAM helped local leads to *"build bridges"* with other organisations and to develop a greater shared sense of the partnership work required to improve support and outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage:

> *"What's valuable is the idea we're not just dealing with individuals with multiple disadvantage but partnerships with other organisations. [Our PM] helped us integrate that much easier than it would have been."*

Some local leads found partnerships managers' knowledge and expertise helped them to engage a variety of partners in the MEAM Approach work. For example, one local lead reported that they had been supported to embed MEAM work in a sector in which they had limited experience, thanks to their partnerships manager's in-depth knowledge of the sector. The partnerships manager had supported them as they navigated and established multi-agency partnerships in this sector, which made these partnership stronger:

> *"[Our partnerships manager] has got an extensive knowledge of VCSE to help knit us in to networks we would have struggled to get into. She has been the link into the VCSE sector for me to truly understand how to embed the MEAM framework."*

Local leads reported that these improved partnerships then provide a more solid base from which to plan and implement local improvements:

> *"Without their support we wouldn't have flourished. And now we can go big, we can expand our infrastructures. Nothing of that would have happened without that MEAM support."*

Some local leads also commented that MEAM support had helped them to maintain a focus on strengthening partnerships in the area over time, which enables more of a systems change approach and allowed them to feel less alone:

> *"I would have been much more narrowly focused if I didn't have [my partnerships manager]. I would lose a sense of belonging to a wider partnership of people, who are all facing a mountain from different sides but ultimately looking at the same peak. It would be a much more closed down world I'd be inhabiting, but at the moment I feel part of something much broader."*

Support in establishing strong partnerships also helped to develop the conditions needed for systems change work to take place, as it helped to create a context of

collaborative work and open communication where there had previously been blocks and siloed working:

> *"If I think of us before, we were all in silos thinking this doesn't work, knowing each of us on our own couldn't have an impact. But MEAM brought us together with other organisations. They're like the glue – they were able to connect like-minded organisations that really want to do something different and bring us together to have those conversations."*

More effective multi-agency structures at operational and strategic levels

Interviewees agreed that the presence of a hands-on, neutral partnerships manager was useful in facilitating multi-agency sessions at both operational and strategic level.

They highly valued the logistical and infrastructural support provided by the partnerships managers, which included help to arrange strategic multi-agency meetings and set agendas. Local leads reported this made them more focused and able to align with strategic goals, and that this support brings structure and organisation to their activity:

> *"[The partnerships manager] set up MEAM strategy group meetings. They kept us herded and helped with agenda setting."*

This practical support was seen as vital in creating a space of strategic collaboration, which had previously been lacking:

> *"So many strategies talk about collaboration and integration, but they don't resource how people physically do it. You need someone who creates a space where people can bring things to the table, then what comes from that feels organic."*

This support was seen as particularly useful at the early stages of setting up new multi-agency groups or in introducing concepts for the first time, and interviewees valued how MEAM then encouraged local areas to take the lead going forward. For example, interviewees explained that partnerships managers helped by holding events in the local area. These then led to working groups and test and learn cohorts being set up. Once these had been established, the partnerships managers would step back and take an advisory role.

Improved buy-in to MEAM Approach work at operational and strategic levels

Local leads strongly valued the support from MEAM in helping to create and sustain key strategic partnerships, and many reported that the support increased strategic buy-in in their local area:

> *"I asked my partnerships manager to present with me to the strategic board, which helped to me to get buy-in from senior staff."*

Some local leads commented that MEAM's involvement had improved buy-in to the MEAM Approach and partnership working more broadly, as they lent greater weight than if the local person had been working alone:

> *"MEAM partnerships managers facilitated sessions with partners about what is MEAM and what does it mean for us locally. These sessions wouldn't have been as effective if it was just me doing it."*

The external viewpoint provided by MEAM was useful, as it could cut through any tensions or politics the local area might otherwise have experienced and bring people on board more easily:

> *"We ran some great sessions getting MEAM out there to sectors not previously involved. The neutral perspective of MEAM meant there were no political blocks, as our partnerships manager was from a national perspective."*

3.3 Systems change support

3.3.1 Nature of support

Local areas' experiences of systems change support varied. Some felt a great deal of this support came in the form of one-to-one work with the MEAM team and learning from their approach. Others named more focused systems change support activities provided by MEAM, for example, setting up a systems change group, or developing a specific new programme in an area to focus on systems change.

In general it was difficult to gauge the specific nature of the systems change support MEAM provided to the local leads interviewed. In many cases, this support appears to overlap to some extent with the critical friend and the partnership support, which is perhaps not surprising given the importance of relational and partnership approaches to driving systems change. One local lead commented that more structured systems change support would be valuable.[3] However, most local leads felt well supported by MEAM in this area; several commented that the systems change support was a fundamental part of MEAM support in general:

> *"It's like a template for a systemic approach. The structure of MEAM has enabled that more systemic approach."*

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[3] During the course of this research MEAM has been developing a systems intervention tool to support local areas' work on systems change. A document outlining this has been shared with local areas.

3.3.2   Value and impact

In general, local leads were very positive about the support they had received from MEAM in developing systems change work and felt they had seen progress in this area. This was the case for those interviewed and surveyed.

Local areas felt this support had enabled them to improve their systems thinking and renew and maintain their focus on this, to change attitudes and culture in their local areas, to improve co-production, and to improve delivery and coordination of services for people facing multiple disadvantage.[4]

Improved systems thinking and focus on systems change

Survey findings

All local leads who responded to our survey (n=19) felt that MEAM support:

- enabled them to **think more systemically** about support and outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage

- helped to **identify changes** they would like to make to local systems, processes and policies

- helped to **begin to make some of these changes** to systems, processes and policies.

Many local leads reported that MEAM support had brought a systems-thinking approach to the fore and encouraged them and other local partners to maintain a focus on systems change. Some commented that this was especially due to the way that a systems change focus was 'baked in' to the MEAM Approach.

Most local leads interviewed also felt that the support from MEAM provided them with strategic support and guidance to navigate and structure systems change work:

> *"We had so much to do and had no direction; we were overwhelmed with tasks and every case felt like a battle. [MEAM] said, let's work this out. Let's unpick the priorities in partnership. They were able to clearly map out what our path was, using all our thoughts and not putting words in our mouth."*

Several local leads commented that MEAM support had helped them to identify opportunities for systems change in their own areas that they might otherwise not

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[4] For more information on MEAM systems change work, see the MEAM Year 4 evaluation report, which provides a table categorising the systems change work to date.

have acted upon. Again, this was a place where MEAM's external perspective was very helpful, as one local lead commented:

> *"Sometimes we don't see obvious things we could be doing, because [we are] too close to our own system. [MEAM] help you question what you're doing and ask why."*

Another local lead commented that MEAM support had helped them to have discussions with partners, identify issues and begin to make changes to local systems:

> *"In the early days, we had a great operational group, but we weren't pushing through system change. We were having blocks and barriers coming up because the operational group wasn't strategic enough. [MEAM] came in and said, push forward strategically to the next level. They said there needs to be an avenue to take issues to. We got a working group together with senior leads, and this became where we could take these issues. Through that, we've got improved access to primary care, because of the links made and because we had somewhere to take these blocks."*

A minority of local leads felt that systems change work needed more focus and that their local work still mainly centred on flexing the system at practitioner level rather than more widespread and strategic systems changes. However, there was a sense that this was an area for development that they were working towards with the support of MEAM:

> *"We've still got a practitioner approach at the moment and are learning about being a part of a partnership around the person. Our goal is to think more systemically. But MEAM are supporting us to set out a programme to get some kind of structure for systems change."*

Changing attitudes and culture

Since working with MEAM, many local leads felt that they had witnessed a shift in the attitudes and practice of the people and organisations they worked with:

> *"The culture has shifted to looking through a lens of trauma, and looking through the lens of people [experiencing multiple disadvantage]. This has fundamentally changed the approach, which has shifted from people being an anti-social problem to having a set of needs. The culture shift has filtered down."*

Progress was variable across the network and sectors but most felt they had seen encouraging progress, for example:

> *"Within small parts of each sector, it's been happening – the culture's been changing. Like in some parts of mental health, in some parts of drug and alcohol particularly. But it's been happening to some extent in all parts."*

Survey findings

94% of local leads who responded to this question in our survey (n=18) felt that MEAM support had promoted workforce development and culture change, enabling them to better support people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

All local leads (n=19) felt that the support from MEAM had raised awareness in their local area of the MEAM Approach and good practice in supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Some local leads also commented on how MEAM support had helped improve their local area's approach to strategy and commissioning by building stronger partnerships with commissioners, involving more partners (including commissioners) in strategic groups, and creating a space for reflection when interventions fail.

For example, one local lead described a situation where a client's support package was not working, as the support had required them to move away from their hometown to a place where they were not comfortable. This prompted the strategic group to reflect on this example in terms of the broader system. The lead reported that:

> *"We took the case back to the group and began a discussion on how we can commission services differently, for example, commissioning more in-area placements. This is having an influence on how we work. That person is the best person to decide what their life should be, and MEAM has helped us with what this shift looks like in practice. It's changed the future conversation, as the commissioner was there [in the strategic group]. It went back to, how can we commission differently, how can we use this case to get this on the agenda?"*

Improved co-production

Most local leads whom we interviewed felt that the MEAM support had improved the use of co-production in their work and also their focus on co-production:

> *"Co-production feels at the centre of the work."*

Survey findings

95% of local leads who responded to our survey (n=19) felt that the support from MEAM had improved co-production and/or the involvement of people with lived experience in their work.

Many of those interviewed reported that they received strategic guidance on co-production from MEAM and that this had contributed to their strategic planning for the future in this area. For example:

> *"The co-production manager has joined our strategic steering groups and has input into our overriding vision for county council 2025, mainly in terms of trying to involve the community more."*

By using the support from MEAM to set up partnerships and interventions that include experts by experience, local areas have involved experts by experience in their work and benefited from different perspectives:

> *"We're talking about co-production now where previously we didn't. We always [had] an aspiration to service user involvement but we didn't know where to start. But practitioners and service users are seeing the benefit, because we're looking now at opportunities for them to be involved. Giving a space to have those conversations is really important, especially for systems change stuff. It has a massive impact for people on the ground using our services; we're developing a service focused around the people using it, not around KPIs."*

However, some local areas had received less co-production support from MEAM and some were receiving this support from elsewhere. For another area, which had already progressed well in terms of co-production, the lead reported that the support offered by MEAM on coproduction was initially "too basic". However, they felt that in this case, MEAM had quickly adjusted their support to take this into account.

Improved delivery and coordination of services for people facing multiple disadvantage

Survey findings

All local leads who responded to our survey (n=19) felt that MEAM support is making a difference for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. 95% also reported that MEAM support had helped improve the delivery and coordination of services in their local area for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Like the survey respondents, interviewed local leads were positive about the impact of MEAM support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. They mostly linked improvements to the creation of new, multi-agency approaches to multiple disadvantage that enabled local areas to provide specialist and flexible support:

> *"We've had zero people sleeping rough for nearly a year because we are so swift at getting them off the streets. We've been so successful because of the multi-agency approach MEAM has taken – although there's been lots of contributing factors, the framework they've set up has helped."*

Several local leads also gave specific examples of changes in practice that came about as a result of MEAM support and related local work:

- **Creating a multi-agency steering group that improved access to healthcare.** One interviewee explained that they had been experiencing county-wide blocks and barriers in providing healthcare to people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Part of this was to do with the lack of a broader strategic group that included *"the right people".* With the help of their partnerships manager, they set up a steering group that included senior leads from both the health and homelessness teams. As a result:

  "The group became a place where we could take the issues we were having. Through that, we've got improved access to primary care and nurses are now coming into hostels."

- **Achieving more personalised support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.** One area gave the example of achieving greater flexibility with probation for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, and felt that this greater buy-in and closer working was due to MEAM:

  "Probation in [our local area] are really on board now, and the head of probation is on our strategic board. All of that has been through MEAM influence."

However, a small number of interviewees felt that while support from MEAM was vital in achieving the systems change that would eventually make a difference for people experiencing disadvantage, it had not yet made its full impact on daily delivery. One respondent in a MEAM Approach area at an early stage of its work commented that:

"I don't know at the moment if it has made a difference for people facing multiple disadvantage. They're not seeing what we're doing yet – it's back of house. But the potential is huge, and it will."

3.4   Support with training and sharing learning

3.4.1   Nature of support

The fourth key area of MEAM support is training and learning across the network. This support refers to activities such as the network-wide events which provide opportunities for networking and more informal sharing of learning for local leads, and the training and workforce development support provided by MEAM in local areas.

> **Survey findings**
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> - 95% of local leads who responded to our survey (n=19) said they received support facilitating contact with other areas in the MEAM Approach network.
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> - 84% said they had attended network-wide learning hubs, conferences and events.

- 63% said MEAM had delivered training and workforce development support in their local area.

All local leads interviewed said they had received some form of support with training and sharing learning. There was a strong consensus that engaging with the wider MEAM network was very valuable for sharing learning and problem-solving, with all local leads saying they had attended network events. Most local leads had also received or been offered MEAM training, which was usually found to be high quality and useful for workforce development in the local area.

3.4.2 Value and impact

Interviewed locals leads reported that training and learning support from MEAM gave them opportunities for peer learning and support from other areas in the network, and allowed them to upskill their workforce through high-quality training and other resources from MEAM.

Although this type of support was valued, most interviewees suggested that other forms of support, such as critical friend support, were more valued:

> *"Rather than specific training, the MEAM support we receive has been more to do with conversations, like the co-design conversation or issue-related conversations."*

Opportunities for learning and support from other local areas

Survey findings

All those who responded to our survey (n=19) felt that MEAM support enabled them to build links and share learning with other local areas involved in the MEAM Approach network.

Interviewees agreed that the network events and practitioner forums facilitated by MEAM were useful in building networking and learning opportunities between different MEAM areas. Local leads felt this was beneficial in terms of being able to triangulate learning from other areas with their own and gain new ideas:

> *"So powerful to triangulate it with your learning. For the agenda for change. You get new ideas about ways to do things."*

Networking events were also valued for the opportunity to provide mutual support, to not *"feel so alone"* and to receive information from MEAM on policy and other work:

> *"Every time I've been they've been useful. Hearing what's going on, not feeling so alone, sharing thoughts."* They're great avenues for disseminating info – work, policy, papers they're working on."*

On the other hand, some local leads were more ambivalent about attending networking events, feeling that they did not tap in to the most relevant or important issues for their specific area:

> *"I used to attend quite a lot, but I didn't feel they were representative of [my local area] and didn't get a lot out of them. Some things were very similar with other boroughs but some not. There was not enough on gender/race/sexuality – I would like to talk more about women's services and women's responses and hate crimes. In 2020 there was the George Floyd incident and that should have been captured and given a space to talk about and reflected on."[5]*

Interviewees also commented on the difficulty of holding events virtually and suggested they would be more impactful if they could be held in person again, or in much smaller groups to enable more in-depth discussion, connection and reflection on progress. A further suggestion was to involve experts by experience more closely in network and learning events.

Upskilling and building relationships through training and resources

Many local leads and other local stakeholders had attended training delivered or organised by MEAM, such as training on trauma-informed practice or Homeless Outcomes Star training. Local leads also pointed to more informal training opportunities provided by MEAM through presentations and events. Local leads agreed that the training was of a very high quality and valuable for attendees:

> *"I can always call on MEAM to do a presentation on multiple disadvantage and systems change, for example at events. It's always a really great session, in terms of presenting and facilitating."*

Others had not participated in training but reported that they were well supported by MEAM through resources made available to them:

> *"We got a lot of resources and toolkits and I felt really supported."*

Locally-delivered training had the additional impact of allowing people to network and build connections with people in their local areas and more broadly:

> *"We got really good feedback on the trauma-informed training [run by MEAM]. It was a mixed group who attended – drug and alcohol workers, housing workers, outreach workers. Lots of people that work together. Things together like this always help because it helps build relationships and build partnerships too."*

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[5] MEAM has in fact provided two sessions for network areas in the last year focusing specifically on racism and multiple disadvantage. However, this quotation from an interview suggests that at least this local lead may not have attended the sessions or may not have felt that this level of coverage was adequate.

4   Strengths of MEAM support

This research highlighted the many strengths of MEAM support. Local areas emphasised the unique nature of the offer; most felt that its hands-on practical and personal nature was unlike any support they had experienced previously. The ability of the MEAM team to tailor the support to the areas was also highly valuable, as it allowed them to "meet local areas where they were" and design the most appropriate support for them with their input.

Another key strength of MEAM support was the gravitas lent by working with MEAM. The strength and clout of the national MEAM Approach framework enabled local leads to develop better engagement with partners and have more influence in their local areas. The external, national viewpoint was also useful, as it sits outside local politics and dynamics and can give a broader perspective.

The knowledge and expertise of the MEAM team was highly valued, particularly around specialist practice such as person-centred and participatory approaches, and high-quality training.

4.1   Unique support offer of both practical and strategic support

A key strength of the MEAM support is that it is unique, suggesting that it is filling a gap in support for stakeholders in most local areas.

> **Survey findings**
>
> 84% of local leads who responded to our survey (n=19) felt that MEAM provides unique support to their local area that they would not be able to find elsewhere.

Interviewees also felt strongly that they would not be able to receive this support from anywhere else, highlighting a number of unique aspects to it:

> *"I do a lot of funding bids, get support from different organisations and different pots of money, and we don't get the support like we do from MEAM anywhere else."*

In particular, they emphasised that the level of support from MEAM was greater than that they would receive from other organisations. This was felt to such an extent that one local lead commented that their partnerships manager was viewed as an *"extension of the management team"*. They linked this to the passion of the MEAM team and the fact that they were fully invested in the success of their local area:

> *"The support goes beyond 'tick-box' and helps to make real changes."*

A key strength of MEAM support was its ability to provide both practical support and systemic support, depending on the area's needs at the time.

Local leads appreciated the ability to provide hands-on support, which sets MEAM's offer aside from other, more theoretical support offers. They felt this helped local areas to see tangible changes in their services and systems:

"MEAM offers local support that can unpick what you're doing. Other organisations offer theoretical rather than hands-on support at a micro level."

However, local leads also valued MEAM's support with systems-thinking and strategy alongside the more practical support, and their ability to bring structure and return to a focus on systems change:

"MEAM have now taken to a more strategic level too. They have broadened the remit from where it was [more practical support]. They encouraged us to form our systems change group, and they bring structure and organisation to our conversation."

4.2 Non-prescriptive, bespoke support with detailed knowledge of the local area

MEAM support was in part valued so highly because of its bespoke and locally-specific nature. Local leads felt that this bespoke support was possible because of the way partnerships managers spend time and energy on building up extensive knowledge of the local area and of the area's specific needs. This allows the partnerships manager to provide flexible support tailored to the needs of each area:

"[It's good] having a named partnerships manager, because they get to know you and your area, and your development areas they can support you with. I know I can ring [my partnerships manager] up and say I need some help and [they] would provide very personalised support."

Local leads valued the non-prescriptive approach, which allows them to work towards local priorities and improvements, rather than focusing on arbitrary targets and outcomes:

"They never push on you to tell you this is the way you should do it – they're flexible depending on what's happening locally. This makes them unique from other consultancy types. With MEAM there are no wrong answers, it's always a learning curve – learning is the biggest thing."

The bespoke support means MEAM can assist local leads with a wide variety of tasks and challenges. For example, several interviewees described receiving MEAM support with their Changing Futures bids and commented on how helpful this was, with one stating that they would not have been awarded the bid without this support. Another felt that although their funding bid was not successful, the application process was still valuable as the strategic group formed to oversee

the bid had continued to meet. This enabled them to further progress systems change work in their area:

> *"Our Changing Futures bid was not successful but the conversations MEAM convened became a systems change group. We continue to meet and progress these changes."*

On the other hand, while most areas felt that the non-prescriptive approach was a uniquely valuable asset to the MEAM framework, one interviewee felt that a more prescriptive approach would sometimes be useful:

> *"Sometimes we get a bit stuck going round. So having an external point of view with more direction can be helpful. MEAM is non-prescriptive but sometimes we'd like a more prescriptive approach."* [6]

4.3   National influence and reputation

Many local leads emphasised that the reputation and national recognition of the MEAM Approach increases their ability to influence senior stakeholders, offering them greater authority and increasing buy-in to local work developed using the MEAM Approach:

> *"We have more authority. The framework, evidence base and success of MEAM lends its gravitas and weight. It opens doors to senior people, and says that this is worth looking at."*

Local leads gave examples of this occurring in several aspects of their work, such as when setting up a strategic group or when giving a presentation or pitch:

> *"It helped when I was doing a presentation to strategic stakeholders. I asked [our partnerships manager] to present with me – that helped me to get strategic buy in."*

Others felt that MEAM's reputation was advantageous when running events and training. This had the effect of attracting a wider range of people to sessions, thus exposing more people to the ideas and networks around multiple disadvantage and systems change:

> *"We've done more than a dozen events, for example events on being trauma-informed, mental health, and safeguarding. Having the backing of a national coalition helps take the mufflers off when creating an event."*

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[6] As noted above, during the course of this research MEAM has been developing a systems intervention tool to support local areas' work on systems change. A document outlining this has been shared with local areas.

4.4 Broader, external perspective

For local leads, one of the key benefits of the support offered by MEAM partnerships managers was their *"nationwide perspective"*. Interviewees reported that this enables the MEAM team to bring a broader perspective to local work, drawing on national evidence and on learning and experiences in other areas. This can contextualise local work. They also recognised the value of MEAM bringing an external perspective to their local work, which can be more neutral and less tied in to existing local structures and dynamics:

> *"They facilitate some sessions for us with partners about what MEAM is and what does that mean locally. These sessions wouldn't have been as effective if it was just me doing it, as they brought a national perspective. They give a neutral view but they know the area so well too."*

4.5 Breadth and depth of skill and expertise in the MEAM team

Local leads also valued the breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise within the MEAM team, which helped them to feel supported and reassured. They highlighted partnerships managers' specialist knowledge, along with their ability to draw on the expertise of other MEAM team members with different backgrounds and specialisms:

> *"There is specialist support and expertise on the team, and specialisms from different partnerships managers. For example, the ones I've worked with have been recruited by Mind so they have mental health specialist skills. And if they don't know something they can ask their counterpart."*

Local leads provided examples of MEAM offering support at both an operational and strategic level, and of bringing in different team members to offer specific support as needed:

> *"[Senior MEAM staff member] has been hands on when we needed higher level strategic presence locally. He has come down and met with partners."*

The MEAM team was valued by local leads as a source of information on best practice as well as providing new insight. For example, one interviewee highlighted advice on *"best practice about structural racism"* as encouraging *"fresh, different types of discussions."*

4.6 Level of support tailored to the capacity of local areas

Most interviewees agreed that they did not experience the support and input provided by MEAM as overbearing, and this was valuable for time-poor organisations. One interviewee described the support as *"subtle and consistent"*, enabling integration into their work:

"They're not a beast that you feed – they're not demanding on our time. Usually, we do an hour and [the issue] is sorted. That makes them different from other centralised organisations."

There was a strong consensus that there was nothing MEAM should do less of in terms of the support it provides. Local areas would prefer to receive as much support as possible:

"I've not been spammed by emails or invited to meetings I don't need to be in."

Part of the value of this bespoke support was the availability of the partnerships manager to the local lead – many felt that they were able to call their partnerships manager whenever they needed for guidance or as a sounding board, and appreciated having monthly check-ins:

"Just having a monthly check-in is the most important thing, having them accessible. Even if that person hasn't got a whole hour, it's like a MEAM Wikipedia – they are a fountain of knowledge."

5   Areas for improvement

The findings from this research mostly emphasise the value of the support MEAM provides. As noted earlier, several local leads had no criticisms about the support and felt it was extremely high in quality.

Most suggestions for improvement related to building on existing input offered by MEAM around systems thinking, strategic work and networking, rather than introducing new types of support. The only exception to this was increased support with data and reporting, which was mentioned by a small number of local leads and which was not currently being provided by MEAM in their local areas.

In addition, it may be helpful for MEAM to develop ways to codify their support offer or provide more of a 'menu' of support to local areas. This might help local areas who are already working with MEAM to better understand and make use of the resources and expertise available to them. It may also help MEAM in recruiting new local areas to the network or in articulating their added value to potential funders.[7]

5.1   Building on existing support with systems thinking and strategy

There were three types of support already being provided by MEAM where local leads felt they would benefit from increased or more focused activity. These were:

- **Continued support around systems thinking**. Although many local leads felt they had received a great deal of support around systems thinking and that there had been improvement in their local area's ability to think and act systemically, others felt that there was still some way to go on this. Many felt they had benefited from the systems-thinking support so far, and were keen to maintain and build on this work with ongoing mentoring and help to monitor progress. MEAM is currently addressing this concern through the development of a systems intervention tool to support work on specific system challenges and a national systems leadership programme.

- **Continued support with strategic work**. Some local leads felt they would like further (or in many cases, continued) support with increasing the involvement of local strategic partners in MEAM Approach work.

- **Continued or additional support with funding opportunities.** Some local leads were interested in more support with identifying funding opportunities and writing bids.

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[7] As noted above, during the course of this research MEAM has been revising its support offer for the next phase of the work, with a focus on network, intervention and workforce support activities. A document outlining the support offer has been shared with local areas.

5.2 Further opportunity for networking

Local areas highly valued the opportunity to meet with their peers across the network and share learning and approaches. The informal networking inherent in larger national events has been missed since the onset of the pandemic.

Some local leads suggested opportunities to recreate this, for example by linking up MEAM areas that are focusing on similar issues to enable cross-partnership learning, or by holding smaller group sessions to allow more time for discussion than is viable in large, virtual sessions. One also suggested that the MEAM website could be used to connect with other parts of the network.

5.3 Increased data and reporting support

Some local leads identified a need for further guidance around data and reporting, and ways to use data more effectively to make a difference to people experiencing multiple disadvantage. This included support to:

- Identify the most effective baseline and monitoring data to collect to understand demand, need, efficacy and outcomes.[8]

- Maximising the use and impact of data in promoting existing good practice and successes, such as the impact of the work of navigators/practitioners for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

5.4 Clarifying the support on offer

Several local leads were unclear about how much support MEAM could provide and the range of resources on offer. For many of those interviewed, the feeling was that the support is of such a high quality and so useful to local areas that they would be keen to make as much use of this as possible. Clarifying the available support would allow areas to confirm this:

> *"If MEAM told people 'this is what we offer' it would be useful. I wasn't sure how much support I could ask for."*

MEAM is currently working with areas to clarify the support offer for the next phase of the programme, and to help local areas determine the type of support they require for the next stage of their journey.

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[8] As part of the national MEAM Approach evaluation, participating areas use a Common Data Framework (CDF) to collect monitoring and outcomes data. Analysis of this data takes place annually and can provide areas with information on efficacy and outcomes, though it is not designed to collect data relating to demand and need at a local area level. Some local areas do not participate in this aspect of the evaluation. It may also be the case that some participating areas are providing the data for the evaluation but are not viewing the CDF as a mechanism to collect data for local purposes.

6   Appendix A: consultation participants

Figure 1 summarises the MEAM Approach areas which participated in this research. Local leads in all areas were invited to complete the survey while only a selection of local leads were asked to take part in an interview, based on recommendations from the MEAM team.

Figure 1: Breakdown of research participants by area[9]

Area	Responded to survey[10]	Participated in interview[11]
Adur and Worthing	✓	
Basingstoke and Deane	✓	✓
Blackburn with Darwen		
Calderdale	✓	✓
Cambridgeshire	✓	✓
Cornwall	✓	✓
Coventry		
Doncaster		
Durham		✓
Exeter	✓	✓
Hackney	✓	
Haringey		✓
Hull	✓	✓
Middlesbrough	✓	
Newham	✓	

[9] The same local lead covers Cambridgeshire and Peterborough so their responses were considered to relate to both areas.

[10] Two survey responses were received from one local area and the most recent response was included in the analysis.

[11] In most local areas, one representative (usually the local lead for the MEAM Approach work) took part in each interview. The only exception was the interview relating to North Devon, which involved two representatives from the local area.

Area	Responded to survey[10]	Participated in interview[11]
North Devon		✓
North Lincolnshire		
Norwich	✓	
Oldham	✓	
Peterborough	✓	✓
Plymouth		
Preston		
Reading		
Redbridge	✓	
Redcar and Cleveland		
Rochdale	✓	
Southend-on-Sea	✓	
Stafford	✓	
Surrey	✓	
Westminster	✓	✓
Winchester		
Windsor and Maidenhead		
York	✓	

7   Appendix B: survey responses

This appendix provides a breakdown of survey questions and responses.

7.1   Types of support provided

Figure 2 outlines the types of support received from MEAM by local areas which responded to the survey. Respondents were provided with a list of 13 support types and asked to tick any which they receive.

All areas reported receiving one-to-one meetings and 'critical friend' support from their local partnerships manager.

Most local areas also received a great deal of support building partnerships and relationships within their local area and across the network: at least 80% of those who responded to the survey reported having support to facilitate contact with other areas in the MEAM Approach network, support to build partnerships and relationships in their local area, and help to raise awareness of the MEAM Approach and local work relating to it.

Areas also commonly reported support with changing attitudes and practice at a systems level, and support related to training and learning such as attending network-wide learning hubs, conferences and events.

Every type of support had been received by at least half of areas, which indicates the breadth of support MEAM offers.

In addition, all local areas indicated that they receive at least four different types of support with one in five areas receiving all 13 different types of support included in the survey (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Types of MEAM support received (n=19)

Types of MEAM support received	Percentage of local areas receiving
One-to-one meetings and 'critical friend' support from your local partnerships manager	100%
Facilitating contact with other areas in the MEAM Approach network	95%
Support to build partnerships or relationships in your local area	84%
Attendance at network-wide learning hubs, conferences and events	84%
Help to raise awareness of the MEAM Approach and local work relating to it	84%

Types of MEAM support received	Percentage of local areas receiving
Support to identify and act on local systems change priorities	74%
Support to shape and improve frontline delivery for people experiencing multiple disadvantage	68%
Support to me as a local lead to build my skills and confidence around systems thinking	63%
Support to local partners to build their skills and confidence around systems thinking	63%
Help to raise awareness of multiple disadvantage and good practice in supporting people who experience it	63%
Delivering training and workforce development support in your local area	63%
Support with co-production and the involvement of people with lived experience	53%
Input on specific local projects or activities, such as developing strategies or processes	53%
Other (please state)[12]	5%

Figure 3: Number of support types received by local areas (n=19)

MEAM support received	Areas
0-3 types of support	0
4-6 types of support	3
7-9 types of support	6
10-12 types of support	6
All 13 types of support	4
Total	**19**

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[12] One survey respondent answered 'other' and specified that this referred to support and guidance with funding bids.

7.2   Value and impact of support

Figure 4 to Figure 15 summarise survey responses on the value and impact of MEAM support. Respondents were provided with a number of statements about value and impact and asked the following question: "We would like to understand the impact of the support on you and your local area. Please rate your level of agreement with each statement".

84% of areas who responded agreed or strongly agreed that the support provided by MEAM is unique, suggesting that it is filling a gap in support for stakeholders in most local areas.

For all other impact statements, between 94% and 100% of areas rated MEAM's impact positively (i.e. they agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statement). This indicates that the support is viewed as impactful in helping local areas to build partnerships and approaches that improve services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage.

Figure 4: Unique nature of support (n=19)
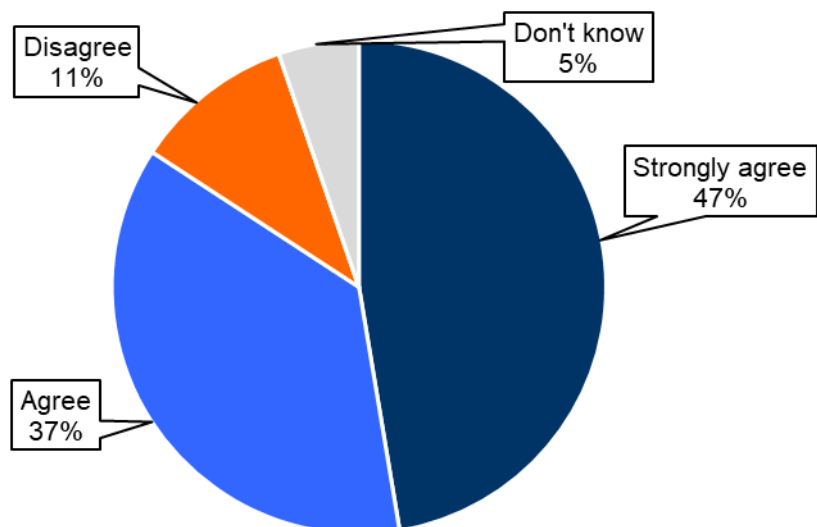
Figure 5: Impact for local lead (n=19)

The support from MEAM has helped me in my role as local lead for the MEAM Approach work.

Strongly agree
53%

Agree
47%
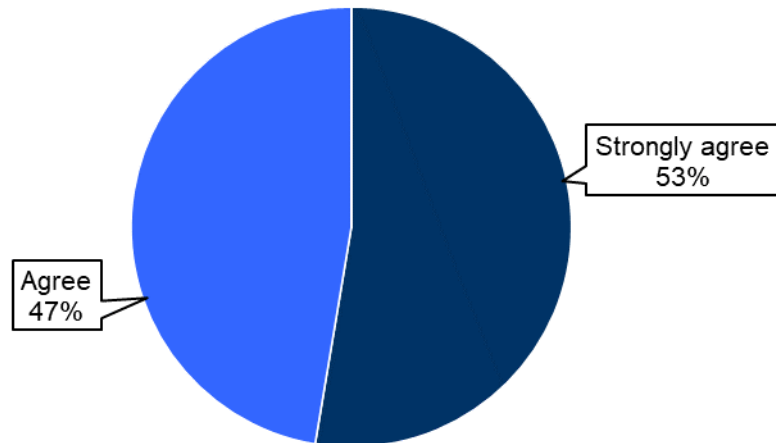
Figure 6: Impact on relationships and partnerships (n=19)

The support from MEAM has helped us to build relationships and partnerships in our local area in order to improve support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.
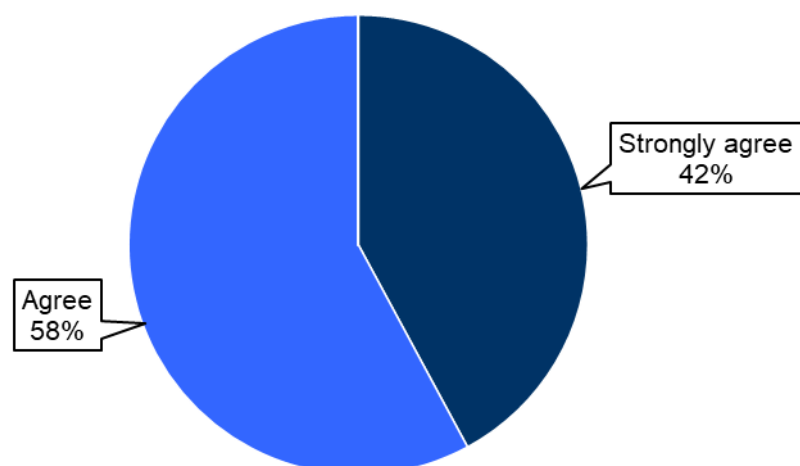
Strongly agree
42%

Agree
58%

Figure 7: Impact on delivery and coordination of services (n=19)

The support from MEAM has helped to improve the delivery and coordination of services in our local area for people experiencing multiple disadvantage

Disagree
5%

Strongly agree
42%

Agree
53%
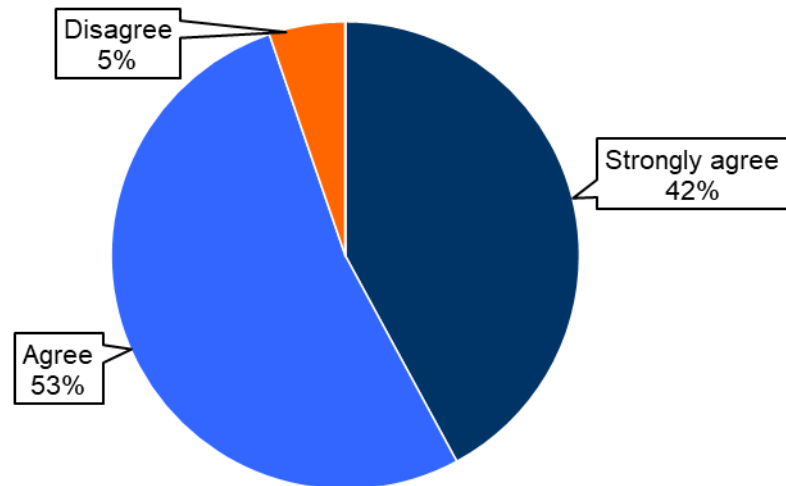
Figure 8: Impact on awareness of the MEAM Approach and good practice (n=19)

The support from MEAM has raised awareness in our local area of the MEAM Approach and good practice in supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Strongly agree
42%

Agree
58%
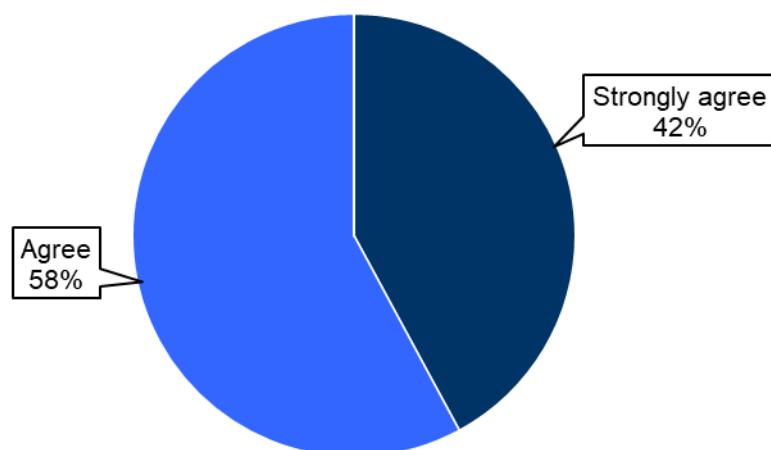
Figure 9: Impact on workforce development and culture change (n=18)

The support from MEAM has promoted workforce development and culture change in our local area, enabling us to better support people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Disagree 6%

Strongly agree 33%

Agree 61%
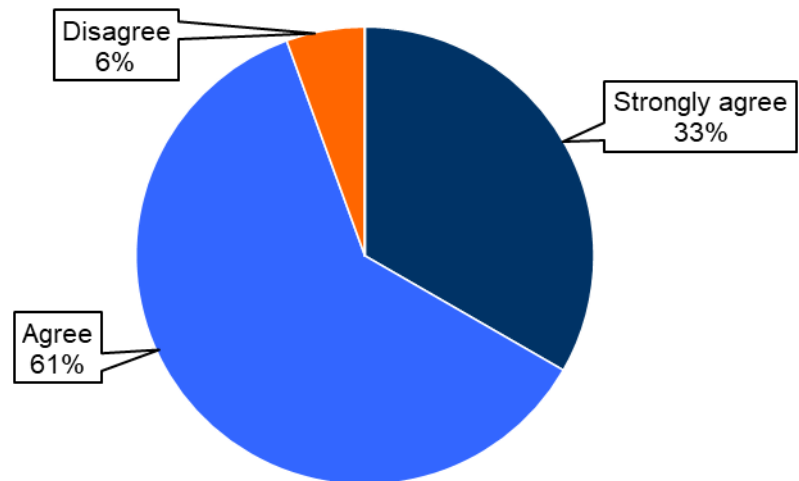
Figure 10: Impact on systemic thinking (n=19)

The support from MEAM has enabled us to think more systemically about support and outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.
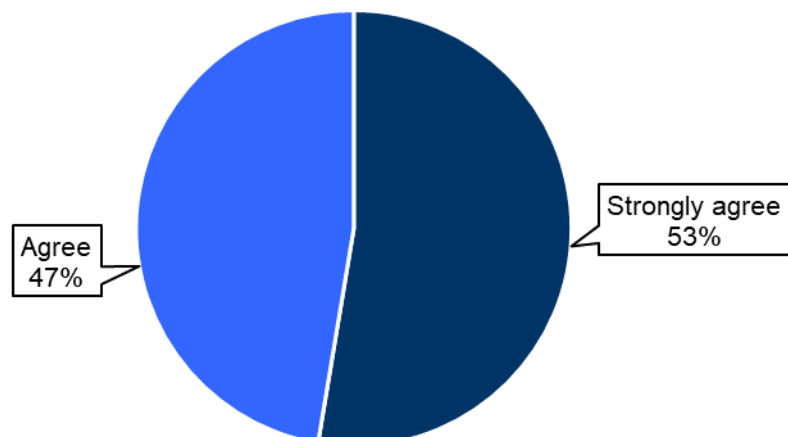
Strongly agree 53%

Agree 47%

Figure 11: Impact on identifying desired changes (n=19)

The support from MEAM has helped us to identify changes we would like to make to local systems, processes and policies.

Strongly agree
63%

Agree
37%
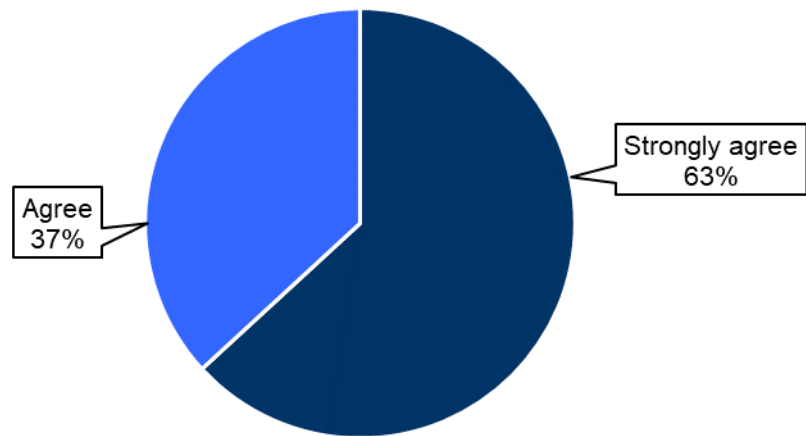
Figure 12: Impact on beginning to make desired changes (n=19)

The support from MEAM has helped us to begin to make some of these changes to systems, processes and policies.
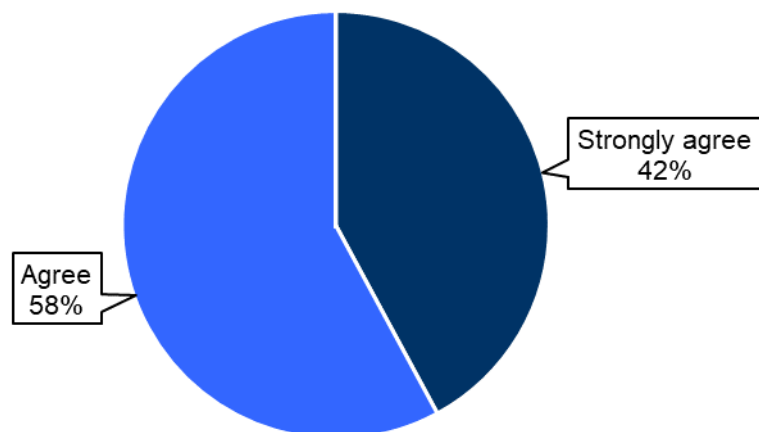

Strongly agree
42%

Agree
58%

Figure 13: Impact on co-production (n=19)

The support from MEAM has improved co-production and/or the involvement of people with lived experience in our work.
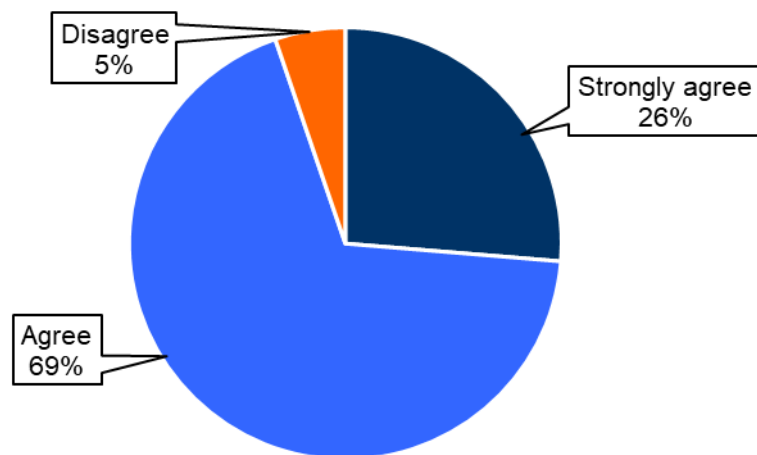
Disagree 5%

Strongly agree 26%

Agree 69%

Figure 14: Impact on building links and sharing learning with other areas (n=19)

The support from MEAM has enabled us to build links and share learning with other local areas involved in the MEAM Approach network.
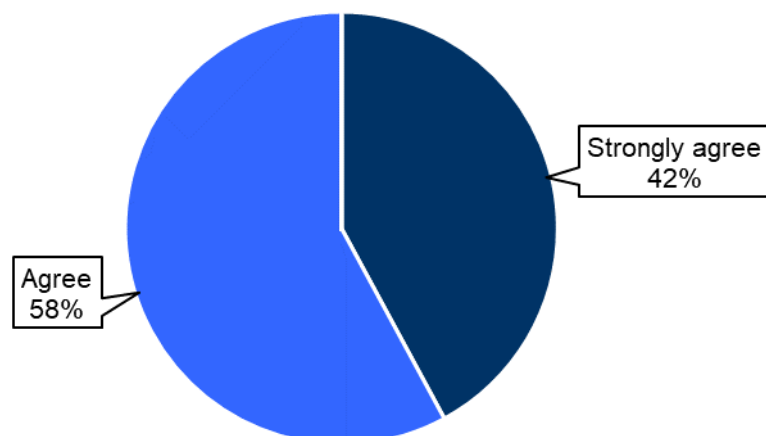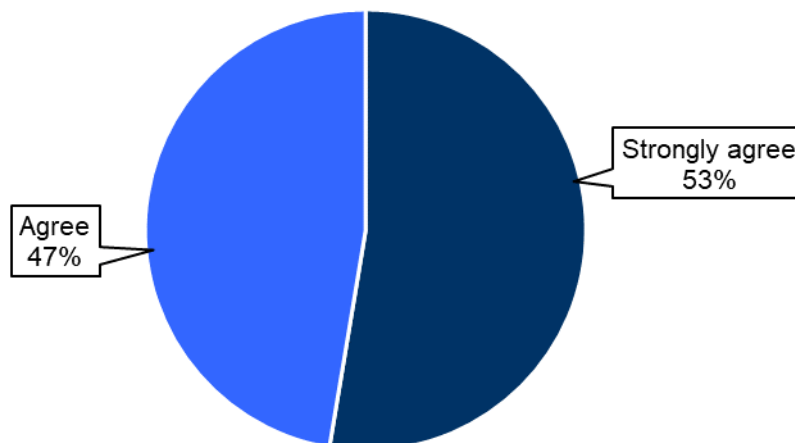
Strongly agree 42%

Agree 58%

Figure 15: Support making a difference for people experiencing multiple disadvantage (n=19)

The support from MEAM is making a difference
for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Strongly agree
53%

Agree
47%

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